

# The Month of Iyar According to Sefer Yetzirah

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*According to Sefer Yetzirah, to each month of the Jewish calendar there corresponds a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a zodiac sign, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, a sense, and a controlling limb of the body.*

Iyar (commonly spelled אייר, after the Aramaic) is the second of the twelve months of the Jewish calendar. In the Bible, the month of Iyar is called the month of *Ziv* (זיו), meaning "radiance." The name Iyar is also cognate with the word for "light" (אור).

The month of Iyar is commonly referred to as the month of (natural) healing because its name is an acronym for the words "I am God your Healer"<sup>1</sup> (אני יהוה רפואתי).

## Letter: Vav (ו)

The *vav* is the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As a word, the name *vav* means a link or connection. The letter *vav* acts as the conjunctive "and," in Hebrew. In relation to the month of Iyar, Iyar lies between the two months of *Nisan* and *Sivan* and connects them together into one whole by the power of the Counting of the Omer (*Sefirat Ha'omer*), which begins on the 16<sup>th</sup> of *Nisan*, the second day of Passover, continues through *Iyar*, and concludes on the 5<sup>th</sup> of *Sivan*, the day before Shavu'ot. Thus, Iyar binds together *Nisan*, the month of the redemption (celebrated on Passover), with *Sivan*, the month of the giving of the Torah (celebrated on Shavu'ot). Indeed, in the Pentateuch, the months of *Nisan*, *Iyar*, and *Sivan* are the only ones mentioned ordinally as "the first month"<sup>2</sup> (*Nisan*), "the second month"<sup>3</sup> (*Iyar*), and "the third month"<sup>4</sup> (*Sivan*), all in reference to the exodus of Israel from Egypt.

## Mazal: Taurus (Ox)

The "ox" (שור) is the left face of the four faces of the angels in the Divine Chariot. It represents the spiritual origin of man's animal soul (נפש הבהמית). It follows that the focus of Iyar is the rectification of our animal souls by refining each of our innate character traits. This is the spiritual work associated with the Counting of the Omer, which



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prepares us for receiving the Torah on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, the holiday of Shavu'ot. Each day of the 49 = 7<sup>2</sup> days of the Counting of the Omer corresponds to one of the emotive *sefirot* inter-inclusively (from loving-kindness of loving-kindness to kingdom of kingdom). The word for “ox” in Hebrew also means to look, or to observe. Indeed, Iyar is the month of introspection for the sake of self improvement.

### **Tribe: Isaachar**

Isaachar is the scholarly tribe of Israel. The great court of sages, the Sanhedrin, was mostly composed of sages from the tribe of Isaachar. In particular, the tribe of Isaachar is considered the master of the secret of the Jewish calendar, as in the verse, “And from the sons of Isaachar, those who know the understanding of times.”<sup>5</sup> Isaachar’s innate nature is contemplative and he served as the advisor to his brothers, the tribes of Israel (and in particular, to their kingly leader, Judah).

### **Sense: Thought**

The sense of thought in *Sefer Yetzirah* thought implies contemplation and introspection. It also signifies the power of calculation (as in the complex astronomical calculations needed to compute the Hebrew calendar). As noted, Iyar is the month during which most of the Counting of the Omer occurs. In Hebrew, the root meaning “to think” (לְהַשׁוֹב) is equivalent with the verb “to mathematically calculate” (לְהַשְׁבֵּי), from which stems also the Hebrew word for “mathematics” (מְשָׁבֵי).

### **Controller: Right Kidney**

In the Bible, the kidneys are a symbol of innate wisdom. Thus, the sages say that “the kidneys give advice.”<sup>6</sup> In particular, the right kidney relates to spiritual advice or introspection. As King David describes, the kidneys act similarly to the moral conscience of our minds, “By night my kidneys chastise me.”<sup>7</sup> This again refers to the moral introspection that the month of Iyar is particularly suited for.

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1. Exodus 15:26.

2. Ibid. 40:17.

3. Numbers 9:11, 10:11.

4. Exodus 19:1.

5. I Chronicles 12:33.

6. *Berachot* 61a.

7. See for example Psalms 16:7.