



The Blind Mashiach

The month of Iyar is the month of light. Even its name, Iyar, is cognate to the Hebrew word for 'light,' *or*. In the Bible, the month of Iyar is called the month of Ziv, which also means 'light.'

How did this month merit such a luminous name? First of all, Iyar comes to us after a long, cold, cloudy winter. The month of Nissan blazes the trail to the spring, followed by Iyar, which is all light. We thank God for the light of the sun, but it is upon us to be mindful of the spiritual light, as well. Light is a wondrous allegory for Divine revelation, God's illumination and benevolent abundance.

The Torah is also equated to light, "For a mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light."¹ This is particularly true of the concealed, inner dimension of the Torah, the wisdom of Kabbalah of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in his book, The Zohar. This is another connection to Iyar, for Lag Ba'Omer, the day of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's passing, is on the 18th of Iyar. In addition, on the 14th of Iyar we commemorate the day of passing of Rabbi Meir Ba'al Ha'nes in Tiberias. The redemption is also likened to light, and at the Pesach seder we bless God for taking us out of "darkness to a great light." In the merit of the Torah and the secrets of the Torah the redemption emerges.

Love in the Soul

While all of this is very nice, the fact is that there is still much darkness in the world – hatred, wars, troubles and illnesses. Even in our own communities, the situation is far from perfect. The same is true of our interpersonal relationships and even in our relationship with ourselves. This state of affairs can make it seem like we are light-years away from the redemption.

How do we emerge from the darkness of the exile to the light of the redemption? The main rectification for this time period is love for others. The students of Rabbi Akiva died during the days of the Omer - which we count during the entire month of Iyar - because they did not act with respect toward each other. It is upon us to rectify that

¹ Proverbs 6:23.

blemish and to fulfill Rabbi Akiva's teaching: "Love your neighbor as yourself – that is a great principle in the Torah."²

How can we truly love our fellow man – even those who seem to be so different from us? Are we supposed to be blind and not pay attention to the distance between us and even the shortcomings and faults of others? Yes! We are supposed to be blind to those shortcomings!

Sometimes, it is good to close our eyes. This world is full of passing sights, replete with smoke and mirrors, old news, breaking news and a flood of input. It is all dizzying, blinding, confusing, superficial light. Stop! It is ok to release the tension, to step off the speeding train and relax. Close your eyes and take a look inward.

A blind person does not see superficial colors and shapes. This is specifically why he can sense something much more internal and essential. Quite a few Jewish Torah giants were blind and it was they who could sense the footsteps of Mashiach:

The Talmudic sage Rabbi Sheshet, who was blind, was the first of his colleagues to perceive when the king was coming by. It was the blind Talmudic sage Rav Yosef who declared: "May the Mashiach come and may I merit to sit in the shadow of his donkey." (The numerical value of Rav Yosef equals 'Mashiach'). Isaiah the Prophet says: **Who is blind, but My servant? Or deaf, as My emissary whom I send? Who is blind as he who is wholehearted, and blind as God's servant?**³ God's servant, His emissary, the Mashiach, seems blind and deaf because he is focused inward.

The blind person sees the inner light, the light of the soul and the redemption. There is a deep connection between the Hebrew words for 'light' (*or* -אור) and 'blind' (*iver* – עור). The blind person sees the light beneath the surface. It is no coincidence that in Aramaic, a blind person is called '*sagi nahor*,' which means 'much light.'

This is the way to love our fellow man: We must ignore his external appearance and focus on the inner dimension that unites us, seeing the connection between all the souls of Israel. This love banishes darkness and melts estrangement and hatred.

May this be an illuminating and healthy month for all!

² Leviticus 19:18, Sifrei *ad loc*, Jerusalem Talmud *Nedarim* 9:4.

³ Isaiah 42:19