

The Month of Av:

Tub'av and the Rise of the Feminine

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A Secret Holiday for Women Dancing in the Vineyard

Tub'Av is a day veiled in secret, not much attention has been given to this holiday until recently. When we inaugurated Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin with our first *Tub'Av* seminar 17 years ago, no one had hardly heard about this mystical holiday. Yet, *Tub'Av* is mentioned in the Bible. The book of Judges calls *Tub'Av* "a yearly feast for Hashem in Shilo when the daughters would go out and dance in the vineyards" (*Shoftim* 21:18-21). Likewise the Talmudic lengthy discussion of the occurrences on this holiday centers around the theme of women and circular dance. What is the connection between *Tub'Av* and feminine dance? As mentioned in *Mesechet Ta'anit*, the daughters of Jerusalem used to go out on *Tub'Av* and dance in the vineyards while young men watched and chose whoever pleased them most. Although, in the secular Israeli pop culture, *Tub'Av* is known as 'the holiday of love,' such a spectacle would surely seem unacceptable today, according to religious standards of modesty – (*tzniut*). Yet, according to the Talmud, "There was never days as good for Israel as the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur when the daughters of Jerusalem would borrow white dresses and go out ..." (*Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit* 26b). *Tu b'Av* is the holiday that celebrates the Inner Feminine Lights, it is not accidental that it marks the birthday of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin: Holistic Torah for Women on the Land. Since its inception our Midrasha has celebrated *Tu b'Av* with bonfire and dancing in white borrowed dresses in our vineyard. Click here to donate in honor of the birthday of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin.

Marriages on *Tu b'Av* – Completing Adam

To appreciate the inner sanctity of *Tub'Av* we need to tune into its inner dimension. *Tu b'Av* is exactly 45 days prior to Rosh Hashana when אדם/Adam – the first human being was created. This mystical holiday, therefore, marks the spiritual essence of Adam whose numerical value is 45. The completion of the human being is to be married, just as originally Hashem created the first human being as both male and female (*Bereishit* 1:27). This fits in with the fact that *Tub'Av* occurs exactly 40 days before the first day of the Creation of the World (the 25th of Elul). Our soulmate is declared on high 40 days before conception as Chazal teach, "40 days before the formation of the fetus a heavenly voice comes out and proclaims "the daughter of so and so is created for to so and so" ... (*Babylonian Talmud, Sota* 2a). This is one of the reasons why, marriages traditionally are celebrated on *Tu b'Av*. From Biblical times, it was established that every year on *Tub'Av* the daughters of Israel would go out and dance and whoever did not have a wife would find one then. Therefore, the day that the tribes were permitted to intermarry the first year after conquering the Land of Israel was explicitly on *Tub'Av*, likewise, on this day the tribe of Binyamin was permitted to intermarry with the rest of the tribes after this tribe had been ostracized, due to the terrible incident with the concubine in Givah (*Shoftim*, chapter 19-20), (*B'nei Yissaschar, articles on Tamuz, Av*, article 4).

Arousal from Below

What is the intrinsic inner connection between *Tub'Av* and Yom Kippur? Rabbi Raphael Moshe Luria explains that *Tub'Av* begins the season which culminates in Yom Kippur, wherein we prepare the Inner Lights (אור פנימי/*ohr penimi*). This occurs according to the kabbalistic concept of "Arousal from below" – which we perform by purifying ourselves from every impurity in thought, emotion, and deed. These are "good days for Israel" since there is nothing as good as that which we earn and deserve through our own hard work (*Ori v'Yishi, Teshuva u'Tefila* page 15). This implies that *Tu b'Av* marks the beginning of the period of repentance in preparation for the High Holidays – a period where we begin to work harder on ourselves to integrate the insights we have gained the last six months into our character.

The Generation of the Desert versus the Generation Entering the Land

Whereas the holiday of *Tub'Shvat* marks the beginning of the masculine season of the "Arousal from Above," represented by the Generation of the Desert, the winter season beginning with *Tub'Av* corresponds to the feminine "Arousal from Below" represented by the generation who entered the Land of Israel. This is the time period when we really integrate all the lights of the summer and build proper vessels for them so we can keep them during the darker months of the winter. The summer season beginning with *Tub'Shevat* corresponds to the generation of the desert who merited to experience revealed miracles through Surrounding Lights, (אור מקיף/*ohr makif*). In the wilderness the Divine Lights shone only outside of the vessels, such as by the Clouds of Glory that surrounded them. However, the Lights did not penetrate inside of their inner vessels, since they had not yet purified them, meaning they had not integrated the lessons of Hashem's miracles into their psyche. Therefore, despite witnessing such great revelations, the generation of the wilderness, repeatedly sinned. In contrast, the generation who entered into the Land, most of which were women, were righteous as it states about them, "They served Hashem all the days of Yehoshua and the elders" (*Shoftim* 2:7). They also did not require open miracles, for the Divine Lights shone from within their vessels. From the time of *Tu b'Av*, when the nights grow longer, we too, must build proper vessels by removing negative habits and increasing our Torah learning and mitzvah observance.

Preparing the Inner Vessels

The season of "Arousal from below" begins on *Tub'Av* and culminates with the awe of Yom Kippur. *Tu b'Av* thus leads up to the High Holidays which are called *Yamim Noraim* in Hebrew, literally 'The Days of Awe.' Although 'Love' is a greater level than 'Awe' we need the attribute of 'Awe' in order to prepare the vessels to radiate the Lights from within. The High Holidays is about crowning Hashem to be King over the world and over ourselves through our awe of G-d. We build awe of G-d by taking new mitzvot upon ourselves, by being careful with our actions, for example increasing the level of our *tzniut*, removing laxness, refining our speech and in general becoming more accurate in how we keep the mitzvot. This purification process builds a dwelling place for the Divine Light, through crowning G-d to become the "King of the whole land." Only through Awe of G-d is it possible to purify oneself from negative character-traits, which block and prevent the

Divine Light from entering inside of us. Therefore, in the book of *Devarim*, which was directed at the generation who entered the Land, it states, “And now Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you except fear of G-d” (*Devarim* 10:12).

Purifying Intellect, Heart and Liver

There are three levels in this process of purifying our inner vessels, corresponding to the three inner vessels of intellect, heart, and liver. In Hebrew the initials of these three organs: **Moach**,- Brain, **Lev**- Heart, **Caved**- Liver, spell out the word מלך/*Melech* (King). Rosh Hashana is the time for purifying the intellect, as is indicated in the word ראש/*Rosh*, which means head. During the Ten Days of Repentance we purify our hearts by means of *teshuva* (repentance) which includes חרטה/*charata* – regret, וידוי/*vidui* – confession and קבלה לעתיד/*kabbalah l’atid* – accepting in our heart to better ourselves in the future. On Yom Kippur we purify the liver which represents our physicality, by abstaining from the physical including refraining from eating, drinking, wearing leather shoes, marital relations and using oil or creams on our skin.

The Onset of Our Purification Process

The process of preparing for Rosh Hashana by purifying our inner vessels of the intellect begins on *Tub’Av*. As tradition prescribes, we need to increase our Torah learning during the nights, which now begin to lengthen. The preparation process of the Ten Days of Repentance when we purify our hearts begins with the month of Elul whose initials are alluded to in the verse “*U’mal Hashem Elokeicha et Levavcha v’et Levav zareicha*” (“And Hashem will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children”). During this month we increase prayer which is the service of the heart. The custom during the Ten days of Repentance is to rise early and pray long supplications. This completes the purification of the heart and begins the purification of the vessel of the liver, which is completed on Yom Kippur, by fasting. The time from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur is also when we increase good deeds. For bestowing kindness to others purifies our drive for physical pleasures and materialism.

Building *Malchut*

Preparing the vessels for the Inner Lights is connected with building the *sefira* of *Malchut* – referred to as “the daughters of Jerusalem” and represents the feminine aspect of the Divine, the indwelling presence of the *Shechina*, in contrast to the masculine aspect of the Divine which is beyond the world, and therefore associated with Surrounding Lights. This is why *Tub’Av* has special significance for women. For the woman is the *Malchut* and the mainstay of her home. The reason why the daughters get dressed up in white dresses on *Tu b’Av* is to indicate that now begins the period of preparing the vessels and the garments, which must be white and pure, worthy for the Divine dwelling place. The matter of dancing in the vineyards is the circle dance that shows that we are like this circumference and vessel for the Inner Lights, to become a vineyard of G-d. The vineyard also alludes to the Inner Lights, as wine is found inside the grapes. Likewise the Land of Israel is also known to be the aspect of *Malchut*. Therefore, the women who were devoted to the Land of Israel made up the majority of the generation who entered the Land.

A Home for the Inner Lights

Bringing redemption is not through exterior fanfare and Surrounding Lights of Love, since "Grace is false and beauty is vain, a woman who fears G-d she shall be praised" (*Mishlei* 31:30). *Tub'Av* marks the beginning of the darker winter season when the Divine Lights are manifested and concealed within the vessels, which become as a home for the Light. "All the honor of a King's daughter is inside." (*Tehillim* 45:14). In the merit of the righteous women and with G-d's help, we will merit the building of the Divine Home and the complete redemption.