

# From the Rabbi's Desk

November 2018

As you receive this *Bulletin*, we are well into the month of *Cheshvan*. The month is sometimes referred to as *Mar-Cheshvan*. *Mar* has a couple of meanings. It can be connected with the increasing rains in Israel during this month. As it is stated in Isaiah 40:15, *Chein goyim ki'mar mi'di'li*, "the nations are but a drop in a bucket." But *mar* is more commonly understood to mean "bitter." Bitter, because this month lacks any festivals. Adding to this bitterness is that *Cheshvan* possibly should have had a festival of its own. It was in this month that King Solomon's workers completed the First Temple. The Temple was built of hewn stones, cedar and cypress planks, gold overlays, and magnificent bronze. The bronze-works were so large that they had to be cast in molds dug into the earth. It took seven years to complete the Temple and this was as much a regional effort as Israelite. Hiram, the Phoenician king of Tyre, offered his expert coppersmiths and eventually received the tribute, 20 towns in the Galilee in return.

The construction was completed in the month of *Cheshvan*. We must imagine that this was a joyous moment. Yet, the Temple was not dedicated then. Rather, it stood locked and empty for nearly a year until the next High Holy Festivals in the month of *Tishrei*, adding to that month's stature at the bitter expense of *Cheshvan*. Yet, after the Holy season, which stretches over two months, perhaps we need a month without a holiday. The sacred festivals really began with spiritual preparations back in the month of Elul and did not end until Simchat Torah. We need a little time to regroup, recharge, recall our latke recipes and get ready for the Festival of Lights.

All the more so, the break in activity is an opportunity to reflect and give thanks. In some years when *Chanukah*, recalling the rededication of the Second Temple, is particularly late in our secular year, *Cheshvan* gains our national holiday of Thanksgiving. Although this occurs only a handful of times in the seventeen-year calendrical cycle, perhaps it gently reminds us of a theme at this time of year. Our prayers direct us toward thankfulness, morning, noon and night. In the early morning it is a personal supplication, *modeh ani lifanecha*, "I give thanks to You," for the gift of my soul. By the time of the recitation of the Amidah, that theme of thankfulness transforms to the communal *modim anachnu lach*, "We thank You," not only for our lives and our souls but also for Your wondrous works and Your continuous compassion and lovingkindness.

Only one benediction follows in the 19 thrice-daily benedictions of the Amidah, and that benediction is for peace. Thus, thankfulness and peace are, by design, on our lips and in the forefront of our minds as we take leave of our prayer spaces and return to the places where our prayer really matters. The synagogue is our sacred space, our respite. However, the purpose of prayer is realized only outside of the temple where we transform prayer from thought to action. I suggest a mindset of thankfulness is the essential fuel for that action. This action, if our prayer has been focused, transforms our world from what it was and is, to what it can be – a righteous house of prayer for all people and a dwelling place worthy of God.

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