



# Rosh Hodesh Heshvan

Sunday, November 3, 2024 @ 11:00 am

Program Facilitator: Barbara Spector

## Agenda

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| 2. Reflection on Tishrei Holidays                   | Pages 3-4 |
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## Introductions and Opening Blessing

Introduce yourself! We invite you to use your first name and your mother's first name. It doesn't matter if your mother isn't/wasn't Jewish.

### **Blessing:**

*Commentary by LilyFish Gomberg:*

The reference to children in the blessing can apply to biological or adopted children, and it can also apply to anyone we nurture and teach within the community, the next generation of Jews we collectively hope to inspire.

The prayer is intended to be inclusive, speaking to our shared responsibility in helping to shape the future of the Jewish community.

In Sanhedrin 99b, Reish Lakish says, "Anyone who teaches someone else's child Torah is regarded by the Torah as though they have made them." R. Elazar adds that it is as though the teacher has "made" the child in terms of Torah, highlighting the importance of the role of teaching and mentorship in Jewish life.

**May it be Your will, my God and God of my ancestors, to be gracious to me and to all my family and to give us, and all Israel, a good and long life. Remember us with goodness and blessing, and grant us salvation and mercy. Grant us abundant blessing, and fortify the places we call home. May Your Presence dwell among us as we gather here today. May we be blessed with wise and learned disciples and children, lovers of God who stand in awe of You, people who speak truth and spread holiness. May those we nurture light the world with Torah and good deeds.**

**Hear the prayers I utter now in the name of our mothers Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. May Your light, reflected in these candles, surround us always. And let us say, Amen.**

## About Heshvan/Cheshvan: A Month Without Holidays

**Sign:** Akrav (Scorpion)

**Other Names:** Mar Cheshvan, Bul, Hachodesh HaShmini

Heshvan/Cheshvan (also known as “MarHeshvan/MarCheshvan,” or “Bitter Heshvan/Cheshvan”) is a month with no holidays. It immediately follows Tishrei, a month that was jam-packed with holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simhat Torah.

This pause in the calendar gives us a chance to reflect on the Tishrei holidays, which we’ll have a chance to do later on.

### Important Dates During Heshvan

From OU.org (Orthodox Union), <https://www.ou.org/holidays/cheshvan/>

4 — RAMBAN (Nachmanides) Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman (Died in 1279)

11 — Death of Rachel Imeinu, Wife of Yaakov (Jacob)

12 — Assassination of Yitzchak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel 1974-77/92-95

15 — Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass (Nov. 9-10, 1938)

17 — Balfour Declaration: British Gov’t Agreed to Jewish Homeland (1917)

King Solomon completed the seven-year building of the Sanctuary during Cheshvan, and there should have been a festival. Though all Israel waited for G-d’s command concerning this dedication, G-d waited until the next Tishrei (11 months later) before he finally commanded the dedication. Yet our sages tell us (Yalkut Melachim 184) that Mar-Cheshvan will be repaid by G-d for its loss in the world to come.

Learn more  
about Heshvan



## Text for Discussion #1

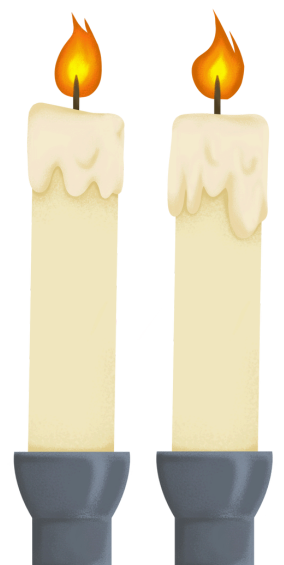
Excerpted from "Women and the Jewish High Holidays: It's a Lot of Work," by Dr. Sharon Ufberg, HuffPost Sept. 28, 2011, updated Nov. 28, 2011. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/women-and-jewish-holidays\\_b\\_985915](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/women-and-jewish-holidays_b_985915)

The Jewish High Holidays are a lot of work for women. It is probably the same for all religions, but my only direct experience is with the Jewish holidays. Women shoulder the brunt of the holiday experience, diligently carving lasting memories into their children's psyches about what a holiday represents and the importance of certain days and times of year. Traditions passed down from one generation to the next, from the Old Country to the New World, from mother to daughter, are weaved heavily through each and every Jewish holiday on the calendar. Each holiday tied inextricably to specific melodies, foods and behaviors. These special family traditions and expectations are both a blessing and a burden for Jewish women, who while lovingly connected to their cultural heritage are also deeply engrossed in a full secular life...

... Look inside their homes and you will surely find these women frantically making sure the kids' shoes, dresses and jackets still fit since the last "simcha" or celebration requiring appropriate holiday attire. They are setting their tables with their finest linens and polishing their grandmother's silver. They are making arrangements for someone else to attend their office meetings while they go to services and they are very busy shopping and cooking all those special dishes...

... Women look for ways to create a holiday experience that feels reminiscent of their original family holiday. A certain recipe, song or activity will evoke memories and stories that are told and retold to the next generation. The re-creation of the family celebration is what makes most of the additional work worthwhile.

The extra effort of a holiday gathering can be daunting coupled with the emotional charge often attached to important family moments. But women have chosen to be the keepers of the flame of tradition for generation upon generation. While the burden is great, the blessings and joy of the cultural connection to one's roots and the pride of heritage keep Jewish women, and I assume women from all cultures, willing to continue to bring the family together to celebrate and remember, year after year.



## Discussion Questions

1. How did Dr. Ufberg's text resonate with you? Did you feel as if you were primarily responsible in your household for preparing for the holidays, or did you have help from family members?

2. Answer whichever of these is relevant to you:

a) If your parents celebrated the Tishrei holidays, which of their traditions have you been maintaining, and which have you reimagined?

b) If you and your partner grew up with different ways of celebrating the holidays, how have you determined whose traditions take precedence?

c) If you grew up without a Jewish background, what resources are you turning to in developing traditions for your household?

d) If you are in an interfaith family, how did you navigate the Tishrei holidays?

e) If you live alone, how did your holiday celebrations go?

## Text for Discussion #2, Page 1/3

Excerpted from Aish.com ([https://aish.com/the\\_bitter\\_month/](https://aish.com/the_bitter_month/)):  
By Rabbi Ari Goldwag

**Cheshvan is when darkness reigns, yet growth begins deep beneath the surface.**

... Cheshvan is classically referred to as Marcheshvan.... In Hebrew, [mar] means "bitter," which some homiletically connect to the fact that there are no special occasions that occur in this month. Even Av, the month when we mourn the destruction of the two Holy Temples, is not referred to as "bitter," because the sad days of the year offer us an opportunity for introspection, to contemplate where we have gone wrong. Thus, both the festive days and the negative days can be used to connect to spirituality. A month that is bereft of any significant days, even sad days, is more bitter than anything, because there are no moments that arise to give us pause.

It is significant to note that the original name of this month was not Marcheshvan.... The original Hebrew name for the month was Bul, which denotes the idea of "drying up," as the leaves begin to decay with the approach of Autumn...

### Two Key Events

If we search further, we find two other events that occurred in the month of Cheshvan. The first was the flood in the times of Noah. The flood began on the 17th of Cheshvan, and the waters receded by the following year on the 27th of Cheshvan... One explanation of the name Bul is that it stems from this month as the beginning of the rainy season in Israel; it is thus connected to the word mabul, flood – an overabundance of rain.



... [The] flood was originally intended to begin on the 11th of Cheshvan. However, Methuselah passed away, and thus the flood was delayed in deference to the seven-day period of mourning that followed his death... The second important event that occurred in Cheshvan ... was the death of Jacob's wife Rachel, as well as the birth of Benjamin, which occurred on the 11th of Cheshvan. [Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin.] It was precisely the same day as Methuselah's death, the very day that flood had originally been slated to begin. As there are no coincidences in the Torah, we must ask: What is the connection between these two events, and what do they reveal about the essence of the month of Cheshvan?

## Text for Discussion #2, Page 2/3

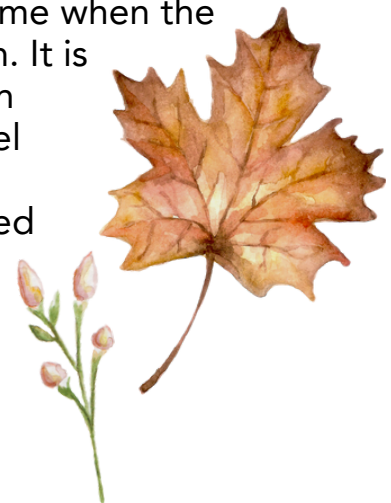
In thinking about what the matriarch Rachel and her son Benjamin stand for, respectively, we can see that Rachel represents the Jewish people in exile, and Benjamin represents the completed state of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Rachel spent her entire life outside of Israel, and passed away just as Jacob and his family entered the holy land. As our Sages tell us, her spirit accompanied the Jewish people as they went into Babylonian exile, and it is she who cries for her children in exile until the final redemption comes. In contrast, Benjamin is the last son of Jacob, the twelfth of the tribes, whose birth marks the completion of the people of Israel. He is also the only son of Jacob that is born in Israel, and thus represents the Jewish people's perfected state in the land of Israel... Saul, the first king of the Jewish people, came from the tribe of Benjamin. Furthermore, the miracle of Purim, which immediately preceded the return of the Jews to Israel and the building of the Second Temple, was brought about through the vehicle of Mordechai and Esther, who came from the tribe of Benjamin.

### Deep Hibernation

Exploring further, we see that the very death of Rachel resulted in the birth of Benjamin. This would correspond to the idea that the exile itself is that which births the redemption. The descent into darkness creates the potential for the future light.

This theme can be seen in the flood, as well. Although the world in its previous state came to an end, at the same time, there was a new beginning which was being sown in the person of Noah. The very passing of Methusaleh opened the curtain for Noah to assume leadership of the next generation. The death of the previous order gave rise to a new potential for growth.

Now we can explain the essence of the month of Cheshvan ... Cheshvan is a time that is "bitter," for there seems to be no opportunities for growth and spiritual connection. It is a time of deterioration, as the leaves wither and the world enters a state of deep hibernation. And yet, it is also a time when the rains begin, when the potential for future growth is being sown. It is a time when spiritual darkness reigns, yet when spiritual growth begins deep beneath the surface. It is the moment when Rachel passes on, when all seems bleak, when the darkness of exile closes in; and it is the moment of the birth of Benjamin, the seed of the Jewish people's perfected state, which is sown in that very darkness....



## Text for Discussion #2, Page 3/3

The message of Cheshvan is that despite the darkness, and even because of the darkness, there is future growth that awaits us. We have the opportunity to nurture that right at this moment. It is now that we gather the seeds from the holidays of the month of Tishrei, plant them, and carefully water them through the winter months. With God's help, we will soon marvel at the beautiful spring bounty that we merit to cultivate.



### Discussion Questions:

1. The name *Bul* relates to "drying up." Yet starting with Shemini Atzeret [at the end of the previous month, Tishrei], we insert the prayer for rain in the Amidah, because the rainy season is about to begin in Israel. But Heshvan marks the beginning of Noah's Flood (which we read about in the Torah yesterday). In our day, dryness is causing wildfires, while hurricanes like Helene and Milton are causing deadly floods. Will the prayer for rain hit you differently this year?
2. Rabbi Goldwag concludes by saying that "despite the darkness, and even because of the darkness, there is future growth that awaits us." Given the massacre of October 7 and the war that has followed, what is your reaction to that thought?
3. Our matriarch Rachel died in childbirth, yet her son Benjamin marks the beginning of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Women have traditionally visited Rachel's tomb outside Bethlehem to say prayers for fertility and childbirth. What are your thoughts about the mixture of incredibly tragic loss and hope for a bright future?



## Meditation for the New Moon

by Ruth Lerner

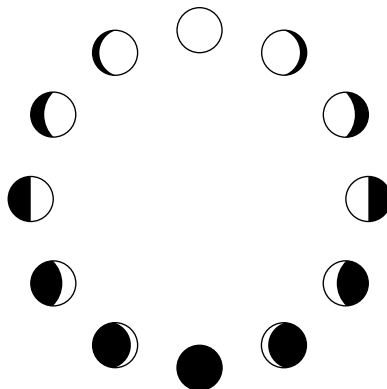
there are as many ways to view the new moon  
as there are days in our lives.

to view a moon  
a poet's moon  
you need only three things:  
a silent spot inside you  
a willingness to wait in the dark  
and a wily nature that refuses to accept the "Man-in-the-Moon"  
as the ultimate authority.

here is one way to observe the new moon:  
settle upon a path from which to grasp  
the handle of white gold waiting above  
find a quiet spot inside your sight.

in the darkness, close your eyes  
and cover them, as if blessing the Shabbos candles  
"Praised are You, O Shechinah  
who parts the days of the month  
calls attention to our covenant and helps us to be  
a light upon the earth."

then, slowly open your eyes  
and behold the beginning  
of time.



Join us next month for Rosh Hodesh Kislev!

**Tuesday December 3 @ 5:30 pm**