

# Tammuz: Seeing Things As They Are

## Section 1: Mixed Blessings

*Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Formation) is a work of meditative Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) with strong magical elements. It is the earliest extant work of Kabbalah and it is traditionally attributed to Abraham (18<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) and/or R' Akiva (2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE). In it, each month is associated with a Hebrew letter, a constellation, a part of the human body and a human emotion, sense, or faculty. What does this passage teach us about our month's psycho-spiritual opportunities and challenges?*

**Sefer Yetzirah 5:8** (translated by R' Aryeh Kaplan)

He made the letter Chet king over sight  
 And He bound a crown to it  
 And He combined one with another  
 And with them He formed Cancer in the Universe  
 Tammuz in the Year  
 And the right hand in the Soul  
 Male and female

**ספר היצירה ה:ח**

המליך אות ח' בראיה  
 וקשר לו כתר  
 וצרפן זה בזה  
 וצר בהם סרטן בעולם  
 ותמוז בשנה  
 ויד ימין בנפש  
 זכר ונקבה

*R' Tzadok haKohen Rabinowitz of Lublin (1823 – 1900), usually referred to as Rav Tzadok, was a major figure in Polish Chasidut. He started life in a prominent Lithuanian rabbinic family who were opposed to Chasidut, but was won over to Chasidut by R' Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica, known as the Mei HaShiloach. His classes on Shabbat and festivals were transcribed by his students and compiled in Pri Tzadik after his death. What do we learn from him about Tammuz and sight?*

**Pri Tzadik on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 1:1**

The first seeing mentioned in the Torah is about light, in the verse, “And G!d saw that the light was good [and G!d separated the light from the darkness]” (Gen. 1:4). And wherever something is first mentioned in the Torah, that is its root.  
 ...  
 And the light was recognized in its differentiation from the darkness.

**פרי צדיק לראש חודש תמוז א:א**

וראיה ראשונה שנזכר בתורה  
 הוא על האור בפסוק  
 וירא הא' את האור כי טוב  
 ובכל מקום במה שנזכר פעם ראשונה בתורה  
 שם הוא שורש הדבר  
 ...  
 והיינו כדי שיהיה האור ניכר  
 כהבדל האור מן החושך

*The Zohar (Splendor or Radiance) is the foundational work of Kabbalah or Jewish mysticism. The Zohar first appeared in Spain in the 13th century, and was published by R' Moses de Leon (1240 – 1305). De Leon ascribed the work to the tannaitic sage R' Shimon bar Yochai (2<sup>nd</sup> Century Israel), an attribution which some take literally, others deny, and still others find to be partially true. Despite this controversy existing from its inception, the Zohar became extremely influential, even in matters of Halachah, and profoundly influenced the Chasidic movement. What do we learn here about the spiritual DNA of Tammuz?*

<p><b>Zohar 2:78b</b> (translated by Daniel Matt)</p> <p>Jacob obtained in his mystery two months – Nisan and Iyar – and he is included in the month of Sivan, which is Gemini (Twins). Esau obtained in his mystery two months – Tammuz and Av – but [then] he is not to be found and vanishes; for Elul is not his, not even Av – just nine days belong to him and no more.</p>	<p><b>זוהר ב עהב:</b></p> <p>יעקב נטיל ברזא דיליה תרין ירחין ניסן ואייר ואתכליל איהו ברזא דסיון דאיהו תאומים עשו נטיל ברזא דיליה תרין ירחין תמוז אב ואיהו לא אשתכח ואתאבד דהא אלול לאו דיליה הוא ואפילו אב ט' יום אינון דיליה ולא יתיר</p>
<p><i>As the above passage suggests, Tammuz begins a challenging period in our calendar leading up to Tisha B'Av, the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av. On that day, the spies sent by Moses (Numbers Ch. 13) returned and delivered their damning report on the land, the people despaired, and G'd decreed that the entire generation would die in the wilderness. On this same day down through the generations, both temples were destroyed, and many other calamities befell us. Here is a classic rabbinic framing of this period. What questions do these two next teachings raise for you?</i></p>	
<p><b>Mishnah, Ta'anit 4:6</b></p> <p>Five events befell our ancestors on the 17th of Tammuz, and five on the 9th of Av. On the 17th of Tammuz, the Tablets were broken, the continual offering was ended, the city walls were breached, Apostamos burned the Torah, an idol was placed in the temple courtyard. On the 9th of Av, it was decreed upon our ancestors that they would not be allowed to enter the Land of Israel, the first and second temples were destroyed, Beitar was captured, the city of Jerusalem was plowed over. From when the month of Av starts, we reduce in joy.</p>	<p><b>משנה תענית ד:ו</b></p> <p>חמשה דברים ארעו את אבותינו בשבעה עשר בתמוז וחמשה בתשעה באב בשבעה עשר בתמוז נשתברו הלוחות ובטל התמיד והבקעה העיר ושרף אפוסטמוס את התורה והעמיד צלם בהיכל בתשעה באב נגזר על אבותינו שלא יכנסו לארץ וחרב הבית בראשונה ובשניה ונלכדה ביתר ונחרשה העיר משנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה</p>
<p><b>Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 29a</b></p> <p>And this is taught in a tannaitic source: On the 29th of Sivan, Moses sent the spies. And it is written: “And they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days” (Numbers 13:25).</p>	<p><b>תלמוד בבלי - תענית כטא:</b></p> <p>ותניא בעשרים ותשעה בסיון שלח משה מרגלים וכתיב וישבו מתור הארץ מקץ ארבעים יום</p>
<p><i>R' Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov (Poland and Hungary, 1783 – 1841), also known as the Bnei Yissascher, was the founder of the Dinov Chasidic dynasty, and a student of R' Elimelech of Lizhensk and the Chozeh of Lublin. Here he builds on a teaching of the highly influential Tzfat kabbalist, the Arizal, (R' Yitzchak Luria, 1534 – 1572) that every month relates to a permutation of the Divine Name, through which the Ein Sof (Infinite One) interacts with the world.</i></p>	

<p><b>Bnei Yissascher on Tammuz and Av 1:1</b></p> <p>The permutation of the Divine Name which governs Tammuz is Heh Vav Heh Yud... This means that the permutation for Tammuz is completely backwards, which signifies Din (Judgement)...therefore Din holds sway over this month. And even before the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, these days are the days that the spies journeyed, so these are not really days of overwhelming Rachamim (Compassion).</p>	<p><b>בני יששכר מאמרי תמוז - אב א:א</b></p> <p>צירוף הוי"ה השולט בחדש תמוז הוא הוה"י ... והנה צירוף השם של חדש תמוז הוא למפרע לגמרי והוא מורה על דין ... על כן שליטת הדין בזה החדש ואפילו קודם י"ז בתמוז להיות הימים ימי הילוך המרגלים אין הימים הללו בהתגברות הרחמים כל כך</p>
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**Section 2: Look Both Ways**

*After the sin of the spies, and the people who listened to them, sets in motion its disastrous consequences, we are given the mysterious mitzvah of Tzitzit (fringes). Why might this be?*

<p><b>Numbers 15:38-39</b></p> <p>Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. This shall be fringes for you, and when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the Eternal to perform them, and you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you are going astray.</p>	<p><b>במדבר טו:לח-לט</b></p> <p>דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית עַל-כַּנְפֵי בְגָדֵיהֶם לְדֹרוֹתָם וְנָתַנּוּ עַל-צִיצִית הַכָּנֹף פֶּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹת יְקוֹק וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא-תָתְרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם</p>
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*R' Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040 – 1105), known by the acronym Rashi, was a French scholar and author of the most authoritative commentaries on both the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) and the Talmud. Both of these works are a centerpiece of Jewish study and identity, and have long been printed with standard editions of their subjects. What does he add to our understanding of Tzitzit here?*

<p><b>Rashi on Numbers 15:38-39</b></p> <p>“Make for themselves fringes” – It is called Tzitzit because of the threads that hang down from it. Similar is, (Ezekiel 8:3) “and he caught me by the curls (tzitzit) of my head” (from Menachot 42a). Another explanation is: it is called Tzitzit because of the command associated with it: “and when you see it” (Num. 15:39). Similar is, “looking (metzitz) from the lattice” (Song 2:9) (From Sifrei Bamidbar 115).</p>	<p><b>רש"י על במדבר טו:לח-לט</b></p> <p>ועשו להם ציצת על שם הפתילים התלויים בה כמו ויקחני בציצת ראשי  ד"א ציצת על שם וראיתם אותו כמו מציצ מן החרכים</p>
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<p>And you shall not wander after your hearts – the word for 'wander' is like, “from scouting the Land” (13:25). The heart and eyes are the spies for the body. They are its agent for transgressions: the eye sees, the heart covets and the body commits the transgression. (from Midrash Tanchuma 15)</p>	<p>ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם כמו מתור הארץ הלב והעינים הם מרגלים לגוף מסרסרים לו את העברות העין רואה והלב חומ והגוף עושה את העברה</p>
<p><i>In Resisei Layla (The Damp of Night), Rav Tzadok offers instructions for Divine Service and ideas about festivals and the calendar. Here he describes how the eyes might exert so much influence over the rest of us. Can you relate to his words from your own experience?</i></p>	
<p><b>Resisei Layla 52</b></p> <p>And so the power of the eye affects the heart, as the midrash says, “the eye sees and the heart covets.” Meaning that when the eye is absorbed in something, the thought is also absorbed in it. And it is known that wherever a person's thoughts are, there the entire person is. And through this their heart is fixed, and from that follows every other part of them.</p>	<p><b>רסיסי לילה נב</b></p> <p>וכן בכחות העין פועל בלב על דרך שאמרו עין רואה ולב חומד שכאשר העין נשקע באיזה דבר המחשבה נשקע בו וידוע שבכל מקום שהמחשבה של האדם שם הוא כל האדם ועל ידי זה הוא נקבע בלב ואחר כך גם בכל האברים</p>
<p><i>Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772 – 1810) was the great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidut. He originally attracted a small, ardent following, but his followers are now a large grass-roots mass-phenomenon with great influence across the Jewish world. Likutei Moharan is a collection of his teachings, which are renowned for their creativity and psychological insight. How does the following teaching help us to understand those above? Does it strike you as accurate? What are its implications for how we use the gift of sight?</i></p>	
<p><b>Likutei Moharan 1:76</b></p> <p>Vision involves direct light and returning light. The direct light spreads out our vision, and the returning light allows us to see the desired object.</p> <p>... Know that looking at something creates a container, meaning boundaries and time. For before you looked at the object, it had no boundaries, and when you look at it, that gives it boundaries.</p>	<p><b>ליקוטי מוהר"ן א:עו</b></p> <p>הנה בהסתכלות יש אור הישר ואור החוזר דהתפשטות הראות הוא אור הישר ובהגיע לראות דבר שחפץ הוא אור החוזר ... ידע שהסתכלות עושה כלי דהינו גבול וזמן כי מקדם ראותו הדבר הוא בלא גבול וכשרואה הדבר נעשה לו גבול</p>

*Given all the above, how might wearing some strange tassels prevent us from making bad decisions? Consider these hints towards specific practices from the early rabbis...*

<p><b>Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 43b</b></p> <p>How is turquoise differentiated from all the colors?          Because turquoise is similar to the sea, and the sea is similar to the heavens, and the heavens are similar to the Throne of Glory, as it is stated, “and there was under their feet the like of a paved work of sapphire stone, and the likeness of the essence of heaven for clearness,” (Exodus 24:10) and it is written, “a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone” (Ezekiel 1:26).</p>	<p><b>תלמוד בבלי - מנחות מג:ב</b></p> <p>מה נשתנה תכלת          מכל מיני צבעונין          מפני שהתכלת דומה לים          וים דומה לרקיע          ורקיע לכסא הכבוד          שנאמר          ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר          וכעצם השמים לטהר          וכתוב          כמראה אבן ספיר דמות כסא</p>
<p><b>Midrash Tanchuma on Parshat Shelach 30:1</b></p> <p>When Israel look at those Tzitzit (fringes) of turquoise, it appears to them as if the Shechinah is dwelling between them.</p>	<p><b>מדרש תנחומא על פרשת שלח ל:א</b></p> <p>כשישראל מסתכלין          באותה ציצית של תכלת          נראה להם כאילו שכינה שרויה ביניהם</p>
<p><i>We saw how using our eyes in a certain way can draw the Divine into our world. What does this teaching from the Zohar add to this picture?</i></p>	
<p><b>Zohar 3:130a</b> (translated by Daniel Matt)</p> <p>Were it not for the supernal eye gazing upon and bathing the lower eye, the world could not endure for a single moment.</p>	<p><b>זוהר ג קלא:</b></p> <p>וְאֵלְמַלְא עֵינָא טְבָא עֲלָא          דְאִשְׁגַח וְאִסְחִי לְעֵינָא תַתָּא          לֹא יְכִיל עֲלְמָא לְמִיקָם רְגָעָא חַדָּא</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Conclusion: Reuben – See the Difference</u></b></p> <p><i>Rav Tzadok brings here a key teaching of the Arizal which will help guide our journey this month.</i></p>	
<p><b>Pri Tzadik on Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5:3</b></p> <p>The Arizal...thought the tribes followed the order of the banners [from the camp in the wilderness] and thought that Reuben related to Tammuz, and Simon to Av.</p>	<p><b>פרי צדיק לראש חודש אייר ה:ג</b></p> <p>האריז"ל...חשב          השבטים כסדר הדגלים          וחשב ראובן לחודש תמוז          ושמעון לחודש אב</p>

*Let's explore some of Reuben's key moments and how they were interpreted. What does each source say about our opportunities and challenges this month?*

**Genesis 29:31-32**

The Eternal saw that Leah was unloved and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben; for she said, "The Eternal has seen my affliction, for now my husband will love me."

**בראשית כט:לא-לב**

וַיֵּרָא יְקוֹק כִּי־שָׁנוּאָה לְאֵה וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחֲמָהּ וַיִּרְחַל עֲקָרָהּ וַתֵּהֵר לְאֵה וַתֵּלֵד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי־רָאָה יְקוֹק בְּעַנְיִי כִּי עָתָה יֵאֱהַבֵנִי אִישִׁי

*Another way of understanding 'Reuben' is 'See the difference!' and this brings us to a key spiritual theme of this month: the power of a good eye to invert challenge into blessing.*

**Rashi on Genesis 29:32** (from Brachot 7b).

And named him Reuben – Our Rabbis explained it thus: she said, "See (רא) the difference between (בין) my son and my father-in-law's son [Esau] who himself sold the birthright to Jacob [and yet wished to kill him afterwards]. My son did not sell [his birthright] to Joseph, yet he did not protest him being regarded as the first-born, and not only did he not protest, but he even wished to take him out of the pit [and so rescue him from death]."

**רש"י על בראשית כט:לב**

ותקרא שמו ראובן - רבותינו פרשו אמרה ראו מה בין בני לבן חמי שמכר הבכורה ליעקב

וזה לא מכרה ליוסף ולא ערער עליו ולא עוד שלא ערער עליו אלא שבקש להוציאו מן הבור

*Our final episode from Reuben's life is his attempt to save Joseph from death, as mentioned above.*

**Genesis 37:21-22, 29**

But when Reuben heard it, he saved him from their hands. He said, "Let us not take his life." And Reuben went on, "Shed no blood! Cast him into that pit out in the wilderness, but do not touch him yourselves" – intending to save him from them and restore him to his father. When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes.

**בראשית לו**

וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיִּצְלָהוּ מֵיָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נִכְנֹו נַפְשׁ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים רְאוּבֵן אֶל־תִּשְׁפְּכוּ־דָם הַשְּׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל־הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בַּמִּדְבָּר וְיָד אֶל־תִּשְׁלַחוּ־בּוֹ לְמַעַן הִצִּיל אֹתוֹ מֵיָדָם לְהַשִּׁיבּוֹ אֶל־אָבִיו וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל־הַבּוֹר וַהֲנֵה אִיּוֹסֵף בַּבּוֹר וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־בְּגָדָיו



*This midrash is quite surprising in several ways. For example, Reuben misses the chance to save Joseph because he is fretting over the past, but that failure does not seem to bother G!d at all. What is the metaphorical pit that Reuben returns to, and what does he achieve there?*

**Genesis Rabbah 84:19**

When Reuben returned to the pit – and where had he been [while his brothers sold Joseph?]  
 R' Eliezer said he was occupied with his sack-cloth and fasting. He turned and went to look at the same hole, as it is written: “Reuben returned to the pit.”

Then the Holy Blessed One said to him: “No one ever sinned before me and made Teshuvah. You were the first! By your life, your descendant will stand and open in Teshuvah first!” This is Hosea, as it says: “Return, O Israel, to the Eternal your G!d...” (Hosea 14:2).

**בראשית רבה פד:יט**

וַיֵּשֶׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל הַבּוֹר  
 וְהִיכֵן הָיָה  
 רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר בְּשָׂקוֹ וּבַתְּעִנִּיתוֹ  
 כְּשֶׁנִּפְּנָה הֵלֵךְ וְהִצִּיץ לְאוֹתוֹ בּוֹר  
 הִדָּא הוּא דְכַתְיִב  
 וַיֵּשֶׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל הַבּוֹר  
 אָמַר לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא  
 מֵעוֹלָם לֹא חָטָא אָדָם לְפָנַי וְעָשָׂה תְּשׁוּבָה  
 וְאַתָּה פְּתַחַת בְּתְשׁוּבָה תִּחְלָה  
 חַיִּיךְ שָׁבוּ בְּנֵיךְ עוֹמְדִים וּפּוֹתְחִים בְּתְשׁוּבָה תִּחְלָה  
 וְאַיִזָּה זֶה הוֹשֵׁעַ  
 שְׁנֵאמַר שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֶלְקֶיךָ

*R' Hayyim ben Solomon Tyrer (Ukraine and Israel, 1760 – 1816), also known as Chaim of Chernowitz, was a leading disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch and of R' Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov. He wrote many books, and his best known is Be'er Mayim Chaim, a Chasidic commentary on the Torah. What can we learn from this passage about the process and goal of refining ourselves?*

**Be'er Mayim Chaim on Numbers 5:7**

Reuben was occupied with his sack-cloth and fasting for the sin of disturbing his father’s couch. He was attentive to return his guilt to its origin, and he returned to the pit – the primal pit – to fix the sin of his soul, which was blemished at the time of the sin of Adam, and which fell into the pit of the Kelipot (evil husks), full of snakes etc. And he fixed everything that happened from then until his present moment, because that [primal sin] is the original cause of what happens in the present – the sin of desecrating his father's couch. Therefore he saw the story unfolding, and he remembered the right response: he needed to raise Joseph up from the pit. For it is all one sin...

**באר מים חיים על במדבר ה:ז**

ראובן כאשר עסק בשקו ותעניתו  
 על חטא בלבול יצועי עלה  
 נתן לב להשיב את אשמו בראשו  
 ושב אל הבור הוא הבור הראשון  
 לתקן חטא נשמתו  
 מה שפגמה בעת חטא אדם הראשון  
 שנפלה לבור הקליפות המלאה נחשים וכולי  
 ומאז ועד עתה נתקן הכל  
 כי הוא הגורם מה שבא עתה  
 לחטוא לחלל יצועי אביו  
 ועל כן ראה מעשה ונזכר הלכה  
 שצריך להעלות את יוסף מן הבור  
 כי הכל חטא אחד הוא