

# Tishri I

**The Catechism of the Jew consists of his Calendar—The Dual dating of the Years and Dates. Tishri, a Divine Herald with a Message of Earnestness and Joy, Trepidation and Peace, Warning and Comfort.**

The catechism of the Jew consists of his calendar. On the pinions of time which bear us through life, God has inscribed the eternal words of His soul-inspiring doctrine, making days and weeks, months and years the heralds to proclaim His truths. Nothing would seem more fleeting than these elements of time, but to them God has entrusted the care of His holy things, thereby rendering them more imperishable and more accessible than any mouth of priest, any monument, temple or altar could have done. Priests die, monuments decay, temples and altars fall to pieces, but time remains for ever, and every new-born day emerges fresh and vigorous from its bosom. The priest can visit only a few—priests and monuments, temples and altars must wait till you come to them—and you are most in need of them precisely when you do not come to them, when you do not feel yourself drawn to the Sanctuary, or when misery dooms you to isolation. Not so the children of Time. They do not wait till you come to them; they come to you unannounced and you cannot refuse them; they are able to find you when immersed in the busy mart of life or in the full career of enjoyment, in the lonely stillness of the prison or on the painful bed of sickness; and everywhere they hand to you the word of God, admonishing and warning, inspiring, comforting. Ubiquitous like the Deity Who sends it, Time approaches all contemporaneously and in one moment in the East and the West, in the South and the North; it fills millions of all ages and all stations with one and the same feeling and thought.

Consider the month Tishri, this month of "beginning" and "redemption!" How it stands before you like a Divine herald, what a store of thoughtfulness and joy, of trepidation and peace, of warning and comfort it will bring to you!

The Jewish calendar has a dual year, and it also recognizes a dual

day. One year commences with autumn, and after ploughing its way through winter to spring and summer it closes again with autumn. The other year starts with spring, and although summer is followed by autumn and winter, it leads back again to smiling and rejuvenated spring. In the same way there is one day which begins with night, when the veil of night is spread over the cradle of creation, a day which, however great the promise of the rosy dawn and the midday brightness which follows, nevertheless ends again with night; and another day which breaks with the morning and advances to midday and after traversing the shadows of the night leads again to morning.

The night-day, which leads from night to night, is the day of the creation by which in all places you reckon the periods of your earthly pilgrimage. But in the Temple of God, in the Mikdash, the Sanctuary, the day of light, the day which leads you from morning to morning is the unit; everything there begins with the morning and everything ends with the morning.

The autumnal year, the year which begins with Tishri, entering with the harvest and closing with the harvest, is the year of the creation of the earth. By it you count the years of the world, the years of your world, of your doings, of your occupation with the things of the earth. But the spring-year, which commences with the spring month of Nisan, and ends with the same month of spring, is the year of Judaism, the year of the redemption of Israel and mankind; by it you count your Jewish life, your Jewish months and festivals.

This dual reckoning of years and days, does it not strike you as the trumpet call of death and life, of annihilation and resurrection, of transitoriness and eternity? Must it not ever awaken in you the living consciousness of your dual existence, of the combination of the earthly and the transitory with the Divine and enduring in your own nature, in all your relationships, in the whole life of man upon earth.

Eliminate from your life everything which makes you a Jew, strike out from the life of mankind everything which Judaism has given to it, everything which ripens at the call of Judaism—then you count in fact from night to night, and the history of mankind counts from night to night with you. All existence is a blossomless autumn, and in a cheerless autumn it fades away and dies. No matter how high the sun of prosperity climbs above the earth, the shadow of night finally envelops everything in its veil; and no matter how brilliantly the tree of the earthly life bedecks itself, the most fertile summer is followed by the

autumn, the stormy season comes and the richest foliage is stripped away. What has sprung from dust becomes dust again, "all goes to the pasture of death," and the flotsam and wreckage of Time proclaims all to be transitory.

Woe to you if you let this transitory life deceive you, if you believe that youth will last for ever, that the blossoms will endure, that strength will never wane, that greatness is permanent, that joy and pleasure are unassailable, that wealth is secure, that earthly greatness is eternal! Woe to you if you embrace these things as your earthly gods, "if you walk after vanity and perish." Woe to you if you learn to reckon your years from Tishri only at the end of your days, when it is too late.

But woe to you above all if the Jewish spirit does not teach you the spring-reckoning of your earthly years, if the earth becomes for you a cemetery in which graves stare at you from all sides, in which lurking death casts the fear of extinction over everything, in which cheerfulness becomes for you a sin, pleasure a trespass and joy a folly, so that you cast yourself on the ground in despair, and with hollow eyes and frozen heart can only sigh, "All, all is vanity."

For mark this: in the Jewish spirit, in the Jewish holiness there is nothing without value. The Jewish sanctuary was not built over graves; death and the signs of death remained far from its precincts. Its halls were not to be trodden in sadness, it was built for joy. Within its circuit, time was reckoned from morning to morning.

The Jewish spirit reckons by springtime. The spring paradise—not that of the other world—is placed by it at the very beginning of human history. It also pictures the spring paradise as the goal of history, in order to teach of a life upon earth in which there will be nothing transitory, in which everything will be eternal, infused with an everlasting, eternal and joyful Godliness. It teaches thus of a way of life in which even toil and labour, mourning and pain are transformed into blessed cheerfulness, and the most short-lived germ, the most fleeting moment is comprehended by the Divine spirit in man as an everlasting blossom in the garland of perfection. It teaches of a life in which already here on earth salvation flourishes and makes its home, and in the midst of storm and night enjoys a perpetual springtime and daytime rejuvenation. To teach men how to count and live from morning to morning and from springtime to springtime—that is the sum and substance of the Jewish message of salvation.

But before the true idea of salvation can find entrance in the mind, the false idea must be eliminated. The message of spring must be preceded by the autumn trumpet, you must have taken to heart the Tishri reckoning if you wish to count and live years of spring. It is for this reason that Tishri confronts you at the beginning of each year of your earthly pilgrimage, seeking to end the deception and banish the illusion. It aims at teaching you, in the midst of the transitory and perishable, to build the tabernacle of your life in gladness and happiness on a soil cleared of deception and illusion.

Once upon a time the tables of the Divine Law lay in fragments on Sinai. Our misguided ancestors had set the visible and transitory above the invisible and permanent, they had turned their hearts from the Eternal Creator and Ruler to the perishable creature, they had deified visible nature in the shape of the golden calf; אלה, this world perceptible to the senses, this Cosmos, and its earthly governing powers, are thy gods, O Israel!—such was the cry which arose in sensuous jubilation from the dancing crowds.<sup>1</sup> That was why the tablets of the Divine Law lay in fragments. For where the consciousness of his own higher Divine nature has vanished from the breast of man, where his inner consciousness does not raise him above the perceptible world to the only invisible and ever-present Highest and Nearest, where the lack of this consciousness prostrates a man at the feet of sensuous Nature, that Nature of which man has been sent by God to be the lord and master, not the slave and servant, then there is no basis on which the Divine Law can be established. There is no soil for producing on earth a Divine-human life which, permeated throughout by God's spirit, can transform the whole life of the senses into a hymn to the glory of God and build upon earth a sanctuary where God's majesty can dwell and inspire. The tables of the Divine Law lie in pieces.

But the delusion passed, the veil was rent asunder, those who worshipped the transitory were swept away, the deified image of the transitory fell into dust, and the spirit of our ancestors again turned to the Eternal, and the grace of God proclaimed from heaven "I have forgiven" סלחתי; the knot was tied again, the Tablets of the Law returned and the erection of the Holy Tabernacle was once more prescribed.

→ It was on the tenth of Tishri that the word סלחתי sealed the resur-

<sup>1</sup> Ex. 32, 4.

gence of the people from the idolatrous degradation into which it had sunk, and this fact consecrated the month of Tishri for all time with the stamp of the deepest earnestness and the holiest joy. תרועה and תשובה, סליחה, כפרה, טהרה and אמונה, שמחה, trembling and repentance, forgiveness, atonement and purity, trust and joy—these form the cord of seven colours which the New Year herald brings at Tishri to every Jewish home, every Jewish breast, purifying and consecrating, strengthening and inspiring. תרועה and תשובה, סליחה, כפרה and טהרה, שמחה and אמונה, that is the tree of life which Tishri is ever implanting anew in our midst, and which invites all without exception into its shade. תרועה and תשובה are the root, כפרה, סליחה and טהרה the trunk, שמחה and אמונה the sustaining and health-giving fruits of life. If you wish to pluck the fruit, you must not shun the root. If you want the fruit to ripen, plant the root diligently in your spirit.

→ The trumpet-call of the תרועה must dispel the dream, the illusion and deception with which the senses lull us in their arms; it must shatter the image which we erect to sensuality in our hearts; it must awaken us and summon us to the God Who awaits us. And the days of תשובה teach us to find again the way which leads us back into the arms of our Father and conducts us to יום הכפורים. This, in turn, destroys the bridge with the past and along with כפרה, סליחה and טהרה gives us a new and virgin soil on which we are able on the festival of Succoth to erect calmly and confidently, cheerfully and joyfully the tabernacle of our lives.

יום תרועה, the day of the blowing of the trumpet, goes in front. With the sound of the shofar, God once called us together on Sinai, with it He will once again gather us together. The sound of the shofar used to call the slave to freedom, the poor man to his property, the dispossessed to his home. Even so the sound of the shofar at every Tishri, calls us all to God, it calls the slave of sensuality to Divine freedom, it calls poor and rich to true riches, it calls the most distant wanderer to his own home, it calls every heart and spirit to a glorious jubilee.

The תקיעה blast used to summon our fathers to the leader; the piercing תרועה was the signal for striking tents and for war; while the concluding תקיעה blast bade them go forward to the new goal where God was awaiting them, and to which the cloud of His grace and the ark of His covenant were already advancing. Even so, the תקיעה of Tishri calls us back to the Shepherd Whom we have deserted; the תרועה summons us to leap up and fight, to break away from every position,

every connection on which the blessing of God does not rest, and to fight against everything which interposes itself between us and our God. While once again the *תקיעה* beckons us to the spot where the Divine Law is ensconced under the protecting and beneficent cloud of Divine Mercy.

The basic note of the day is, however, *חרוּעָה*, the piercing summons to strike tents and fight. In vain do you present yourself at its call before your God and your Leader if you are too weak to follow His *חַרְוּעָה*, if it does not shake you out of the sleep in which you lie dreaming on the edge of the abyss. In vain it calls you if, bewitched by the Sodom flowers which bloom by the abyss, you fail to hear the warning voice which seeks to save you, so that you do not tear yourself from the bonds of the transitory which you adore, and have not the courage to shake yourself free from your favourite thoughts, plans, resolves, connections, conditions, ties, advantages and pleasures in which God does not dwell; if you have not the courage to fight against habits, passions and impulses which fasten on you the yoke of this world; if you have not the courage to fight for God against the world, though you have the courage to fight for the world against God. Alas for you if your God, to Whom the *תקיעה* summons you, is only a far-off potentate to Whom you would like to show yourself just once in the year, concerning Whom you feel that at least you ought to pay your respects on the New Year. Alas for you if you fail to give ear to His warning *חַרְוּעָה*, with which He demands your whole being, your whole life-time, your whole strength, the whole range of your thoughts, feelings, enjoyments, words and actions, with which He penetrates into all recesses of your whole being, seeks to transform and re-shape everything, and bids everything to be destroyed which does not pass muster before His scrutiny, which does not conform to His word. His purpose is to rescue you, your whole self in all its relationships, for the domain of eternity, and not to leave even the most fleeting moment of your earthly activity to the life of the present which leads to the grave.

The day of *חַרְוּעָה* is followed by the week of *חַשְׁבוּנָה*, with return, regression, for its watchword.

“Return, regression”—who dares to mention such words in our age of progress, who dares to counsel return, regression, where everything pays homage to progress? Who dares? Plain and simple! It is your God Who dares do so, Who summons you to repentance. Are you not a fool to make bogies out of names? Suppose you have made a

mistake, suppose your progress has been a retrogression, will not your regress be in truth a progress? If you persist in your present course, will you not perpetually be making progress in retrogression, will you not merely be perpetually progressing on the road which leads you ever farther away from the goal of your perfection, on which in your fancied progress you have turned your back? For everything depends on whether you have your true goal before your eyes or behind your back. Continual progress so long as you are on the right way, continual return to the right path as soon as you have left it—this is the epitome of wisdom in the conduct of life. You have only once in a moment of weakness to stray from the right path, and if you do not turn back you will wander ever farther from your Divine goal. Will you then not pull yourself up, will you not halt on the wrong path? And when God calls "Back" will you merely smile superciliously and declare "I never go wrong?" Will you never admit the possibility that you may be on a wrong, a dangerous path? Will you not learn the lesson of the day of תשובה, to scrutinise your whole course of life, all your mental and physical activities, all your thoughts, feelings, words, actions, enjoyments, endeavours, your house, your marriage, your education, your family, communal and civic life, and giving full heed to the Divine admonition, will you not ask yourself whether in every respect you are on the right way, on the direct way to the goal which God desires, and whether you need only to continue in your present course in order to make sure of reaching your goal? And if you have lost the right way, will you not with all speed turn back?

But how is one to recognise the right way? How is one to know where is the true goal? What compass have we for the wide open sea? What guide have we for a journey where error and delusion, passion and frivolity set up their signposts in a thousand directions, where there is no false road without its false priest to recommend the wrong road as the right one?

You cannot lose the way! Your Ark of the Law is the Ark of the Covenant; on your Divine Law rests the Covenant of God; and where the Ark of the Covenant goes in front, there your God's Pillar of Cloud also proceeds, there lies your way, only there lies the blessing, only there salvation for you and yours. Go forward where the word of your God lights the path before you; go back to Him when you no longer see His light.

But, you say, you can no longer go back. You have angered your

Father in heaven too much. He can no longer forgive you. And even if He does forgive you, you think, it would no longer help you, for all your doing and not-doing, all your house and your business, your marriage, your education, your family and individual life have been completely built on sin; and where wrongdoing is sown no welfare can blossom; and where lying has been practised the curse cannot keep away. And if you did wish to turn back, you could no longer do so, because you are tied down by false shame; you have not the courage to appear as a renegade turncoat before your wife, your child, your friends, your companions, and to endure their pitying gibes. Worst of all, you have no longer the mind, you have long ago forfeited the feeling for what is holy, moral and Divine. You are apathetic, you are a stranger to the blessed consciousness of a duty performed; passion fires your blood, and you are helpless against the enemies in your own bosom.

And yet, return! **יום הכפורים** is here! You may have grown old in sin, every thought, every word, every action up to now may have been a defiance of your God, the tablets of the law of your God may long have lain shattered in your house, you may in misguided frenzy have danced around the golden calf of a deified sensuality, you may everywhere have sown only curses for yourself and extinguished in yourself every spark of purity and stainlessness of thought and feeling, yet **יום הכפורים** is there! The God who once uttered the word **סלחתי** speaks it again. He forgives, He atones and purifies. Only you do your part; repair what can still be repaired, cast out of your house the unjust penny, make peace with the injured brother, restore the man you have wronged, remove what is unlawful and ungodly in your married life, in your education, in your business and pleasures, and then come to Him, the Father Who never rejects, Who proclaims eternally "as I live, I desire not the death and the downfall of the sinner, but that he should return and win new life," Who is as gracious as He is just, and as omnipotent as He is gracious. He thus not only forgives in His grace, but when He has forgiven, He with His unrestricted power lays hold on the spokes of the wheel of destiny, on the fabric of your being, and with His forgiveness He uproots every seed of curse which you have yourself sown in the field of your destiny, and with His purifying and sanctifying force plucks out every poisonous grain of sin with which you have defiled your soul and made it troubled, sick, ill and lifeless,



and calls out תטהרו "Be clean again"<sup>2</sup> to all who in His presence seek to be pure again with a new spirit and a new life. The whole future is again yours; the whole past has been taken over by God.

And if you have been awakened and roused and brought to God by the sound of the shofar, if you have won תרועה and כפרה, תשובה, חסידה, סליחה, if יום הכפורים has found you in the bosom of your Father in heaven, then He will place you once again for the second time on His earth and teach you to build the tabernacle of your life calmly and courageously with purified will and renewed strength on a soil which has been cleansed and freed of all trace of sin. He will teach you to perform the task of your life in cheerfulness and gladness with earthly goods and means, to rejoice, ושמחתם, to rejoice upon earth in the presence of your God.

אמנה and שמחה, trust and gladness, these are the treasures with which your Father in heaven enriches you. With אמנה you build tabernacles and with שמחה you exercise your powers and enjoy your life and activity.

המנוח, the building of the tabernacle, teaches you trust in God. Whatever may be your station in life, whether you are richly or poorly endowed with the goods of this world, you are neither dazzled by abundance nor frightened by want. The goods of the earth are not your goods. It is מפתולה גורן<sup>3</sup>, with that which others reject and despise that you build this tabernacle of your life. You know that whether men live in huts or in palaces, it is only as pilgrims that they dwell; both huts and palaces are only דירה עראי<sup>4</sup>, form only our transitory home. You know that in this pilgrimage only God is our Protection, and it is His Grace which shields us. You would not be daunted even if you had to wander through deserts with wife and child. You know that the God who for forty years led our ancestors through the wilderness with their wives and children, sheltered them in huts and fed them with manna, you know that this same God is your God, and accompanies you also in your wanderings through deserts, knows every soul in your tabernacle and can distribute the manna of His grace to each one.

We may in the quantity of our possessions be divided into a thousand grades. One may build his walls of hewn stones and the other

<sup>2</sup>Levit. 16, 30.

<sup>3</sup>See Deut. 16, 13 and Succah 12a.

<sup>4</sup>Levit. 23, 42; Succah 1a.

of modest planks, while a third is able to make only two partitions שנים טפח כהלכתן ושלישית אפילו טפח and merely to indicate the third.<sup>5</sup> But in respect of our actual protection, of that which covers and shields us—the סכך<sup>6</sup>—we are all equal. This is not anything which bespeaks human craftsmanship, not anything which is מקבל טומאה,<sup>7</sup> which has to fear the breath of transitoriness. In the walls we may differ, but in the סכך we are all equal. For it is not human wealth or strength or skill, but the grace and blessing of God which protects us and covers palaces and huts with the same love.

Not troubled and careworn, not sad and gloomy, not מצטער<sup>8</sup> is the life which we lead in the tabernacle built by the trust in God and covered by the love of God. Why should it worry you that it is only a דירה עראי, a transitory hut, that one day it will leave you or you will leave it? The walls may fall, the covering may wither in the storm, God may call you outside; but the sheltering love of God is everywhere and constantly with you, and where it bids you dwell, where it protects you, there תשובו כעין תדורו<sup>9</sup> you dwell, were it only for a moment, in the most fleeting and transitory dwelling, as calmly and securely as if it were your house for ever.

God, however, is not content that you should be only calm and secure. He has destined you for joy, for pure, human, unalloyed joy. Not for nothing does He cause the flowers to bloom and the fruits to ripen. He has “created the earth לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה<sup>10</sup> not to be a waste,” a vale of tears and sighing, but to be a joyful and gladsome dwelling-place for joyful and gladsome beings, where each one can be glad that he is alive and enjoy his activities. It is true that if you deify the earth, if you allow yourself to be so intoxicated by sweetness and so overcome by its charms that you forget your God and your own Divine mission, then indeed the earth is your enemy, its blossoms, its good things, its enjoyments are your enemies, and all lead you to sin, and sin undermines your salvation. Nevertheless, when God’s חרועה has driven the earthly gods from the altar of your heart, if you have returned to the Eternal, if you honour Him alone, build only on Him,

<sup>5</sup> Succah 6b.

<sup>6</sup> The סכך or roof is the most important part of the tabernacle.

<sup>7</sup> See Mishnah Succah I, 7 and Tractate Kelim.

<sup>8</sup> Succah 27 and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, ch. 640, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Succah 27a.

<sup>10</sup> Isa. 45, 18.

recognise the performance of His will as the sole task of your life, if you seek only to serve Him at every moment with all your strength and wealth, in all your actions and enjoyments, and if the consciousness of this task and its fulfilment and of the nearness of God constitutes your happiness, then God himself hands to you the garland of earthly blossoms and says: **לקחתם לכם** "Ye shall take to you"<sup>11</sup>—only take, do not shun what I cause to ripen for you, take for yourselves and learn to enjoy them in My presence. It brings you joy when it is **לכם**, when it is fairly and honestly yours, when you have acquired it with good, honest toil, when you can grasp it with clean hands and in the presence of God call it yours. It brings you joy when you do not selfishly keep it for yourself and the earth, when in your hands it becomes only a means of spreading blessing to your whole environment in east and south and west and north, when you only think of yourself last, and when you first dedicate it to Heaven and to earth for Heaven. It brings you joy when you move wholly one in the sphere of the Divine will and of God's word, when His law, His word and His will remain the pivot round which all your actions revolve. Joy, perpetual, unalloyed joy, is your lot when you acquire and take, when you use and enjoy the blossoms and fruits of the earth in the way in which you are taught by the "taking," "shaking" and "circuits" of the lulab<sup>12</sup> (**לקיחה**, **לענוה** and **הקפת**).

The whole series is closed by **עצרה**, the festival of abiding, of staying behind, of remaining with God, **עצרו מלצאת**<sup>13</sup> in order that you may once more gather before your God, and hold fast to all the thoughts of dedication, of consecration, of encouragement and inspiration which these days and weeks have brought to you. These you may carry over with you into the workaday part of the year which now commences, in order that, rejoicing in the Torah, in the word of God which brings you such treasures and salvation and blessing, you may vow to yourself and to God to cleave firmly to Him, to let nothing tear you from Him, and in the year now opening, whatever storms and trials it may bring, to preserve the spirit of self-restraint, of consecration, of trust and joyful activity in the service of your God.

<sup>11</sup> Levit. 23, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Referring to the movement prescribed in connection with the taking of the "lulab."

<sup>13</sup> Sifri on Num. 29, 35.