

Tammuz and Baddies

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

We have entered the Hebrew month of Tammuz, named after the Babylonian and Sumerian god Tammuz. Tammuz begins the Summer solstice and in ancient times this meant that the god of plenty died as the fierce summer heat took control of the skies. God Tammuz died and good pagan women went into mourning. Look at [Ezekiel 8:14](#) for confirmation.

You may wonder whether it is coincidence that we Jews now begin mourning in the month of Tammuz for the loss of Jerusalem, the Temple, and our land, twice in history, precisely during Tammuz. Bad things happen in Tammuz. And frankly in the homeland of Tammuz, as I write, Muslim clerics are ordering their thugs to kill innocent human beings simply because they protest, peacefully, at the abuses of said clerics. If this is what religion stands for they can keep it!

No doubt neophyte academics eager to make a reputation will suggest the actual invasions and destructions of 586 BCE and 70 CE never took place and it is all a myth. Awkward that non-Jewish archaeology confirms the events, but that's never got in the way of a good theory before. Still, what is a Sumerian god doing amongst the Jewish months? Indeed, if you look at what months are mentioned in the Bible and which are not, and which came to be officially recognized some 1700 years ago when we fixed our calendar, you can only conclude that external factors were an influence on language and usage.

Judaism has never existed in a vacuum, not even in the Wilderness. We always have been, and we still continue to be, influenced by external forces and cultures in one way or another. Thankfully our abuses or religion are less lethal. According to the great Jewish historian, [Jacob Katz](#), and [Israel Yuval](#), medieval Jews reacted to Christian Piety and monastic revivals by adopting a even stricter code of dress and ascetic custom. Maimonides created new theological responses to Islamic pressure. The Hassidic adoption of Polish baronial dress, complete with fur hats, was hardly a Mosaic custom. And the tendency to withdraw behind ever-increasing strictness was a response to the challenges of assimilation and reform.

Now it seems the Torah world is trying its best to rival Islam for severity. Fifty bus routes in Jerusalem now enforce sexual segregation with women at the back. That's interesting. Why not men at the back? But we all know that is a stupid question. I lived in Jerusalem for six years at various times between 1957 and 1967. And I travelled on urban and interurban buses all the time. Not once did I ever come across a segregated bus.

Even down in holy Meah Shearim, where I lived for the last four of those years, did I ever notice a Charedi man object to getting on the unsegregated buses that went through Meah Shearim. Yes, they objected to semi-nudity and looked the other way when secular exhibitionists seemed to think their effulgent boobs were something that others might want to admire. And I did

often notice men try to sit down next to other men (and in those days no one thought anything about that, but of course times have changed on that issue too).

So are we to assume that all those religious and saintly men and women were wrong and repeated their sins year in and year out for tens of years and only now the truth has emerged and purity can only be achieved by segregation?

One of the delights of living in Meah Shearim was being able to read the almost daily anonymous wall posters, [pashkevilin](#), that would appear, complaining about anything from Zionism to nudity (or one rebbe excoriating another as a low-life heretic). They would always start off with the same formula, "Woe to the ears who have heard it and tingle the eyes who have seen it and weep", and go on to declare that, say, a brand of apple was known to be infested by Zionist bugs or some such catastrophe.

But things are getting worse, not better. Where is evolution? Why are we becoming so incredibly petty and small-minded? Why do we see danger in every new invention? Why after tens of years of eating the Israeli junk food, [Bamba](#), are we suddenly caught up in a war between rabbis who argue as to whether one should bless this way over it or that?

Why? It is simply because if our Muslim brothers are going madder and more extreme, we cannot be left behind. And believe me dear reader it might be buses today but it will be chadors and burkas tomorrow. Actually, I believe burkas have already arrived in parts of Beth Shemesh and Safed. And the more the secular world uncovers, the more we need to wrap our cloaks around us tighter and tighter. See that's what happens—you start with Tammuz and you end up with naked elbows. The descendants of the very good Jews who were seduced by the Midianites into sexual depravity dare not see a woman for fear they will not be able to control themselves.

Modesty is terribly important, as a mental and physical state, all the more so as much of secular society believes everyone should have every pubic hair on the human body shoved in one's face and rolls of naked flesh are beautiful and should be flaunted. I approve of halachic limitations on how much you show in public. The imagination is almost always more attractive than the reality. I do not believe in ["doing it in the road"](#) or "letting it all hang out". But neither do I believe in the ostrich mentality that seeks to lock women up behind closed doors because men don't know how to control themselves. Ah, that feels better. Now back to mourning.