

Standing Right (1)

**Repentance should have less to do with God,
and more to do with ourselves, and one another.**

By Ariel Bar Tzadok

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There is an interesting saying found in the Talmud (Berakhot 61a). “It is better to walk behind a lion, than to walk behind a woman.” Now, apparently, this is a statement about modest behavior. In other words, a man should take extreme measures to prevent himself from gazing at, and fantasizing about, women. However, there are other, more abstract ways, to understand this saying.

According to another interpretation of these words, the saying is not talking about modest behavior, and really has nothing to do with either, men, women or lions. Rather, following in their traditional use of metaphors and symbolisms, the Talmudic Sages are offering us here important wise advise.

Ancient symbols, well known and used by the Sages, are for the most part, forgotten today. In modern times, it is often overlooked that the twelve months on the Hebrew calendar align with the twelve signs of the Zodiac. While, we are not believers in, or followers after the stars, nevertheless, their existence is noted, and used to symbolically represent certain psychological human element.

The Hebrew month of Tishrei bares the sign of Libra, the Scales. It is no wonder then that the first day of Tishrei, Libra, is Rosh HaShana, the first of the year, which is also embraced as Judgment Day for the entire world. Rosh HaShana is not considered to be just a “Jewish” holiday, it is considered to be a time when all fall under its influence.

The month previous to Tishrei is Elul, which bares the sign of Virgo, the virgin. This entire month is traditionally embraced as a period of repentance, in preparation for Rosh HaShana. During this month, represented by the image of the pure and righteous virgin, we are called upon to internally embrace our own purity and righteousness, just like hers.

The month previous to Elul is Av, which bares the sign of Leo the lion. This month is not normally associated with the Rosh HaShana period at all. Indeed, in this month the destruction of the Jerusalem Temples is mourned. The ninth day of Av is the only fast day, similar to Yom Kippur the day of Atonement, which is observed for an entire 24 hours. Av has its own contemplations over bad behavior, and our commemorations over past tragedies.

And yet, our Sages advise us, “it is better to walk behind the lion than behind the woman.” Now, in light of these astrological symbols, we can understand what it is that the Sages were saying. Essentially, the Sages were suggesting to us that the self-reflection process normally beginning in Elul, should be extended to also include the month of Av, and all the significances that this month entails.

In other words, Elul suggests to us to look within ourselves and to seek out our personal betterment. Whereas, Av is a time of national mourning. Av is a time when instead of looking within the individual, we instead must look within the entire nation, and address matters of social, political and economic concerns!

Rosh HaShana preparations must include addressing both personal issues within each individual, and collective issues facing the nation in general. This is what the Sages meant when they said to “better follow the lion that walk behind the woman.”

