

*“Work at not needing approval from anyone and you will be free to be who you really are.”*

*- Rebbe Nachman of Breslov<sup>1</sup>*

## THEMES OF CHESHVAN

- *Sifting through “the muck”*
- *Putting faith in your efforts, believing they’ll blossom*
- *Following through on our intentions*
- *Grounding and breakthroughs*

1. The homegirls At The Well would not put a teaching from a dude in our newsletter unless we knew he was a total righteous brother. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov is this guy. Known for merging the Jewish mystical elements with the ancient traditions in the Torah, the Rebbe invited us to speak to God as if we were talking to our best friend. So, in the spirit of this teaching, imagine if God really was just “one of us, on a bus, trying to make her way home.”

## SPIRITUAL ENERGY OF CHESHVAN

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The cooler air and changing leaves inspire a natural turning inwards right about now; the spirit of the Hebrew calendar is in sync with this energy of introspection, but also some spiritual hustle as well. The month of Cheshvan has a rolling up your sleeves and making good on all of last month's hard spiritual work flavor to it. We just left Tishrei, the holiest of holies of the Hebrew months when we celebrated our New Year (Rosh Hashana), forgave ourselves for the moments we were less than our best (Yom Kippur), feasted on the autumn harvest (Sukkot), and danced with joy for the teachings of the greatest book club of all time, the Torah. (Simchat Torah). Last month, we honored ourselves, our humanity, and our many opportunities to enjoy direct access to the Divine. Jewish teaching suggests that over the last month we, like our ancestors, ascended to receive life's gifts and take full advantage of elevated states and experiences. Together, we created a month's worth of energy that was deep, powerful, honest, emotional, and joyous. Go us! Now, we have Cheshvan, the only month in the entire Hebrew calendar with no holidays. Building on the stillness of this month, there's even a tradition of foregoing celebrations such as weddings during Cheshvan. In essence, this month gives us ample room to experience the fullness of the let down.

The let down: we all know that feeling. At some point, huge highs necessarily turn to deep lows. They always go together. You spend a weekend visiting your best friends, laughing, catching up, being together...and then the weekend ends. You go home, back to the grind, and probably feel the withdrawal of the palpable love that was all around you. This was probably true for early Jews returning from Jerusalem after making sacrifices at the Temple during the harvest holidays of Tishrei, and for our

ancestors returning from spiritual pilgrimages to visit their Rebbes. Tishrei created the ultimate high, the moment of being closest to the Divine. When the pilgrimage was over and the people journeyed home, it was most likely a time of mourning and shock, a time of depression, or at least a little slumping, as they waded back into the "muck" of life. Our Hebrew calendar is smart, and intentionally designed. It knows this depressive feeling follows a big high, and urges us to honor this time and be in the thick of this next feeling. Cheshvan asks us to land. We're invited to use this month as a spiritual tool to bring ourselves back down, planting our feet firmly on the earth.

Though our new year came last month, Cheshvan is when the real work begins. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we loved our families, fasted to release ourselves of our collective failures, and made promises to do better this year. In Cheshvan, we honor those intentions and take the first steps towards making them real.

In Judaism, we believe every person and every moment has a chance to become holy. We believe what we do and experience has a chance to change the fabric of our lives and the world. Like the Butterfly Effect. Cheshvan is all about figuring out what we can do to breakthrough the thick of it, taking ourselves to a new and better place.

The lotus flower is a Buddhist symbol and the following is a Buddhist teaching, but we love it and feel excited to borrow it because it helps us understand better what type of spiritual work we are doing this month. We hope this teaching helps you blossom this Cheshvan into reflection-fueled action.

“Get into the habit of singing a tune. It will give you new life and fill you with joy. Get into the habit of dancing. It will displace depression and dispel hardship.”

—Rebbe Nachman

## Spiritual Energy of Cheshvan Con't

*"The lotus flower has long been a symbol for the unfolding of spirituality. It is one of the most elegant illustrations of the meshing of our human and Divine natures. The lotus seed is planted and grows in muddy waters, below the surface of the lake, far from the light. Though the light is murky and unclear, the flower blossoms by drawing energy from within. As the bud passes through the muddy waters, it lifts its face to the sunlight and finally emerges. Miraculously, not a trace of soil remains on the flower. It lives in the mud yet is unaffected by it. This is an example for us to be in the world but not be adversely affected by it. The lotus flower teaches us that no matter how muddied the waters of our consciousness may become, clarity can always emerge from our spirit if the Divine Light guides us - even if it is only one tiny lotus blossom at a time."*

*-Excerpt from "The Secret Power of Yoga"*

Jewish tradition believes deeply in the presentness of this life. We are not angels in heaven; we are humans living on land. We are earthly, fleshly beings, the lowest form of divinity, and designed to exist IN this physical world... "the muck." We do not separate ourselves from society; rather, we connect fully with our communities and neighbors.

As Jewish spiritual questers, our work while on Earth is to elevate ourselves and bring goodness to our time while alive. Our job is to manifest love, unity, peace, and joy, and to know that what we say and how we act matters. Bringing food to a sick friend is holy because it sparks the light. Avoiding gossip and negative speech is holy because we are choosing to stay clear of unkindness. But this act, this being human, is complicated. We have to work hard if we want to break the surface unaffected by the muck of life. Our inner worlds can be messy, and our minds are designed to keep a strong hold on to the negative. Which is just to say it takes work, it takes commitment, and it takes intention to live the Derek--"The way, the truth."

The "muck" is the point. The "muck" is the journey of life. Noticing and being in the "muck" is what makes us human. Cheshvan is designed to give us the time to let ourselves experience the challenges of the muck also known as our humanity.

Last month, we promised to be better. But our ego is not into change. We must go beyond ourselves to be who we want to be. This month, allow yourself space to notice any resistance you have to change and to making the improvements you promised you'd make in Tishrei. A teacher of At The Well's has a saying: "Our minds are like Teflon for positive thoughts and Velcro for negative ones." Humans are designed to hold a negativity bias; even when we don't want to, we cling to the darkness, a habit that can amplify itself when we're trying to make real change. It's important to stay clear and awake to your intentions during this time. Don't let your mind keep you mired in the muck.

Faith is when you step forward without seeing clearly where exactly you're going. Cheshvan asks us to have faith, to find time for engage in personal reflection, to gauge our progress, and to (mud)wrestle with spiritual growth. Cheshvan was not designed to be easy or comfortable or even ecstatic in its discomfort, as Tishrei was. This month, have faith. Plant your lotus flower, and grow towards the light.

What if we all did this? Us sisters from At The Well believe we can, and that, our futures are beautiful.

### *Possible Group Discussion:*

*Go around your Well Circle giving each woman space to share what she plans to work on this month. Invite each person to share what her "mud" is, i.e. what's holding her back from becoming her best, most lotus-like self. Make sure to encourage a culture of deep, present listening.*

*Perhaps use the ritual of "Dibarti/Shamanu" so that nobody gets interrupted, and listeners know when to offer support. Make sure to let each person speak fully. When she is done, she says Dibarti (I have spoken) and her listening loving crew answers Shamanu (We heard you).*

## POEM

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*Tyler Knott Gregson*

*Sometimes you look up and there just seems to be so many more stars than ever before. More. They burn brighter and they shine longer and they never vanish into your periphery when you turn your head. It's as if they come out for us and to remind us that their light took so long to come to us, that if we never had the patience to wait, we never would have seen them there, tonight, like this.*

*That as much as it hurts, sometimes it's all you can do, wait, endure and keep shining, knowing that eventually, your light will reach where it is supposed to reach and shine for who it is supposed to shine for.*

*It is never easy, but it is always worth it.*

*At The Well*

## GET CREATIVE, GET EXPRESSIVE:

### *Make a Vision Board*

Dream, process, and manifest what you want in life with a vision board, a visual representation of what you'd like to invite in. Clearly identifying our goals and translating them to something we can see encourages us to bring our attention to our dreams. And, as we learned from Rebbe Nachman, "You are where your thoughts are. Make sure your thoughts are where you want to be."

We are where we place our attention. So, roll up your sleeves, get creative, and visually design the life you want. Once you've finished, hang your vision board somewhere you'll see it all the time. That way, you can bring your conscious efforts back to what you want everyday.

### *Supplies:*

Poster board

Glue

Magazines, photographs, quotes

Markers, colored pencils, glitter

Any other inspiring art-making materials

Optional: a picture of yourself, a vision boarding soundtrack to play while the group works.

### *Directions:*

1. Clearly define what you're envisioning. For example: new job, people or actions you want more of in your life, things you want to let go of, a theme for this new year, etc.
2. Open magazines, sift through old photos, and check out any other materials that might inspire you.
3. Start by ripping out images and words that catch your eye. Don't worry about whether your attractions make sense or whether some new word or image "fits." Just drift and pull out elements that call to you. Gather a big pile of interesting things. Have fun.
4. Sift through your images. Is an unexpected theme emerging? Let your creative momentum carry you in whatever direction it wants. Throw away anything that doesn't feel exciting.
5. Take your poster board and start playing with the images you chose. Pssst, this is when your intention for your vision board begins to take shape. Get in the flow of, and try laying out the pictures and words in different arrangements that inspire you.
6. Begin to glue the images down. With each paste, feel yourself reaching for that dream.
7. Adorn your vision board. Add glitter, elements from the natural world like leaves or small shells, more words, or a photo of yourself. Make your vision board beautiful.
8. When everyone has finished, pair off with someone else in your Well Circle to share boards. Perhaps explain the process of creating the board, as well as intentions and surprises you encountered. Agree on a time, and set a timer. One partner talks about her board and during that time, the other partner deeply listens. Save some time at the end and perhaps asks questions or offer reflections about what she sees in the board. After her time is up, the partners switch. Putting words to feelings and desires, and being witnessed as we express them, help us get clearer about what it is we truly want.
9. This last next step is very important. Hang your vision board in a place that you'll see it all the time. The more you're reminded of what you want to do, how you want to grow, and what you want to manifest in your life, the more likely you will make it happen.

## WHAT WOULD BIBLICAL WOMEN DO

This month in the Torah we read the story of two matriarchs, Rachel and Leah. Their story is about the forces of sisterly allegiance and female competition within the cramped quarters of a love triangle. It's amazing that a story 3,000 years old can hold so much wisdom for women in contending with romance, female rivalry, and sisterly love, even today. Have you ever heard your own story in this Torah? Check it out:

Rachel and Leah were sisters. Eventually, both became the wives of Jacob. To start, Jacob and Rachel were in love. Though Rachel's father Laban promised the two could marry, the couple worried Laban would try to trick Jacob into marrying his eldest daughter Leah instead. To prevent a sneaky switch, Rachel and Jacob decided on a secret sign Rachel would make from beneath the veil at their wedding. As they suspected, Laban switched brides on the day of the wedding. At the last minute, out of love for her sister, Rachel taught Leah the secret sign. Rachel didn't want her sister to lose face. Later, Rachel married Jacob too, but the soap operatics don't stop there...

Rachel, who was beauty and was loved by Jacob, suffered in trying to conceive. Leah had many children, but was never known for her looks and unloved by Jacob. As a result, the two sisters spent their lives locked in a grueling, painful competition to see who could give their shared husband the most children, and, by extension, win the bulk of his favor.

Rachel and Leah's story hints at a complicated relationship between two women rife with jealousy and turmoil, but laced also with fierce love. Interpersonally, the women's envy destroyed them both. It almost destroyed their family too—their children internalized their mothers' jealousy and turned against

each other. Rachel and Leah's story warns us what can happen when women cut each other down rather than support each other, in solidarity, from love.

Jealousy is a complicated emotion that everyone struggles with at some point, especially women in relation to other women and, all too often, when it comes to romantic involvements. On one hand, jealousy can tell us powerful things about our own hearts' true desires. However, without careful monitoring, jealousy can seriously stifle our abilities to practice unconditional love. Jealousy twists the heart into weird shapes. From a jealous place, we inflict pain on others. That said, jealousy is never about the other person; it is only ever about yourself. Perhaps what Rachel and Leah were missing was an honest conversation about jealousy: what it is, why it shows up, and how to let it go.

“The worst part of success is trying to find somebody who is happy for you”

– Bette Midler

### *Possible Group Discussion:*

*In what instance do you find yourself feeling the most jealous of other women?*

*How has jealousy toward other women held you back?*

*How has jealousy toward other women held our collective womanhood back?*

*Think back to an experience where you were envious and you missed your chance at being your best self.*

*Can you share that story now, let it go, and forgive yourself?*

*What does jealousy teach us?*

*How can we move beyond jealousy?*

## HEALING QUALITY OF MONTH

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This time year, we can do a lot of healing through one of our five sensory doors: SMELL

Our minds and emotions tell us a lot, but smell informs us of the essence of things. It's no coincidence that when we feel something isn't right, we say it "smells fishy." Jewish spiritual teachings say fragrance is connected to the soul, hence the ritual of inhaling the aroma of spices to signify the end of

Shabbat at Havdallah. On Saturday night, we smell spices to kickstart ourselves into the dynamism of a new week, much like the way the deep introspection of Tishrei is followed by the steps we take towards making good on our intentions for the new year in Cheshvan. Use aromatherapy this month to kickstart your soul as it moves towards your dreams and settle into trusting faith.

### *Aromatherapy Pro Tips:*

Buy an essential oil diffuser and tea candles. Combine water and drops of oils on top of the diffuser. Light tea candles and breathe deep.

#### AT THE WELL'S ESSENTIAL OIL RECOMMENDATIONS:

**LAVENDER:** If you can only afford one oil, this is it! Lavender is balancing, calming, and relaxing. Additionally, it has anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial qualities. Use lavender to stimulate your immune system, or to just chill out.

**GERANIUM:** This smell will bring grace, harmony, and uplifting energies to any room. Geranium is sometimes called the "women's oil" because it helps balance fluctuating hormones. Use this oil to feel grounded, especially when healing deep wounds.

**FRANKINCENSE:** This spiritual oil invites us to "be here now." It will both calm the nervous system and help regulate a heavy menstrual flow. If you're experiencing lung congestion, burn this oil to clear up infection.

**LEMONGRASS:** If you're looking for a refreshing scent, lemongrass is perfect. It's cleansing, bright, and a great counterpoint to depression.

**CINNAMON:** This ancient spice has many uses. Enjoy its scent and witness an increase in awareness of spirituality. Watch your exhaustion shift into strength.

**ORANGE:** This is known as the cheerful oil. It helps ease depression and encourages us to be joyful. Put this oil in your diffuser and try taking yourself less seriously.

**PATCHOULI:** This oil is associated with the harvest time because of its rich, fruitful, and abundant qualities. Patchouli is often used to treat digestive problems and vaginal infections. Light this oil and rekindle your desire.



## RITUAL FOR CHESHVAN

### *Red Thread*

Tying red thread around your wrist is an ancient kabbalistic ritual to ward off the evil eye, or, in the case of this month, deep seated thoughts and beliefs that hold you back from becoming your truest self. This ritual is connected to Rachel, whose death occurred in this month, and whose tomb was annually wound in red thread seven times. In the spirit of staying grounded and true to Rosh Hashana promises, bring a ball of red string

and a pair of scissors to this month's Well Circle. Have each participant tie a length around her wrist and knot it seven times to ward off jealousy and any negative moments. Every time you look at it, allow the string to bring you back to your intentions for proactive self-improvement this month.

## MEDITATION FOR CHESHVAN

Hitbodedut is an unstructured and spontaneous style of Jewish meditation. Its main goal is to develop a more personal relationship with the Divine and gain clearer understandings of one's personal motives and desires. Hitbodedut is a solo practice, a verbal stream of consciousness conversation with God. As Rebbe Nachman encourages us, imagine the Divine Source as your best friend. Just let it out. A Hitbodedut meditation can be very cathartic, helping us uncover wounded parts of ourselves. Rebbe Nachman claimed Hitbodedut is best practiced in nature. He famously said, "When a person meditates in the fields, all the grasses join in [her] prayer and increase its effectiveness and power."

Find a spot outside where you are alone and feel free to begin speaking with the Divine. Open your heart and pour out your worries, sorrows, desires, gratitudes, and dreams to the higher universe. You might feel silly and resistant, but who's watching? See if you can let your ego guard down. Feel free. And don't forget to shout.

### *Personal Journal Questions:*

*What are your goals from Tishrei? How do you feel yourself snagging as you work towards bringing those dreams to fruition?*

*What's holding you back from being your best self?*

*When you tried Hitbodedut, what happened? What did you notice? How did it feel?*

*In what ways do you experience your fullest spiritual self?*

*Unconditional self-love is when we can be with ourselves fully without feeling we need to change. Where and how can you bring unconditional love to yourself?*



## RECIPE

### *Mushroom and Bean Soup*

Recipe from Sarah Newman of [NeeshNoosh.net](http://NeeshNoosh.net) – *A Jewish Woman's Journey to Find Faith in Food*

We begin Cheshvan by saying the prayer for rain. Sky water is desperately needed in Israel and the West Coast, and for farmers everywhere, whose fall and winter crops depend on it. The ingredients in this soup grow in the earth and the muck of dark places, thriving even while sunlight hours dwindle. As the weather cools and we prepare for winter, we spend more time inside, perhaps becoming more insular and reflective while we still grow towards the light

1 celery stalk, thinly sliced  
2 carrots, thinly sliced  
1 yellow onion, chopped  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
2 cups mushrooms, chopped  
3 cups cooked white beans  
(try a mixture of gigantes & heirloom beans)  
1 cup vegetable or chicken stock  
2-4 cups water  
Olive oil  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Parsley, finely chopped

### *Preparation*

1. In a large, deep pot, combine 1 tbsp olive oil, the chopped celery, carrots, and 1/2 the chopped onion. Saute over medium heat for 10 minutes. To prevent sticking, periodically add vegetable broth.
2. Remove the pot from the stovetop and blend the sauteed vegetables in a blender with 1 cup of the cooked beans. Set aside.
3. Add 1/2-1 tbsp olive oil to the same pot and the second half of the chopped onions. Cook for about 10 minutes over medium-low heat until translucent and starting to caramelize. Add mushrooms and garlic. Cook for another 10-15 minutes. Slowly add broth as needed to prevent burning.
4. Once the onion-mushroom-garlic mixture is finished, add the bean/vegetable blend to pot and the remaining 2 cups of beans. Mix well. Add the remaining broth and slowly pour the water into pot. The amount of water you use depends on how thick or thin you prefer your soup. Simmer over low heat for about 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste.
5. Ladle soup into bowls. Drizzle a bit of olive oil on top and sprinkle with freshly chopped parsley.

B'tayavon!



## SARAH'S INTENTION

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*A little window into why I share a personal intention each month: I hope that you're using this material within your Well Circle. I hope you find spaces to be seen and heard and that you take time to see others. I cannot, however, expect you all to be truly vulnerable unless I first show my vulnerability to you. That's why I open myself up and pour a little piece of my heart out to you all each month. Thank you for seeing me.*

If you've been with us At The Well, you know very well that I have my "mud" just like everyone else. Like, really, really deep, dirty muck that has, in the past, held me back, and, to this day, trips me up. I am an emotional eater. I have a hard time with self care, I work a lot, and I'm currently recovering from a majorly difficult year full of injuries that left me feeling weak, over my comfortable weight, and in a fearful mentality. These shortcomings show up in my internal self-talk.

*I'm not X enough for...  
Because I'm not X, therefore I don't deserve....*

I don't think this kind of self-sabotaging inner dialogue is unique to me; it's part of being human, and, perhaps, part of being a woman, at least based on how we've been taught to relate to ourselves. I falsely compare myself to others, become jealous, somehow convince myself of my less-than-worthiness, lose sense of my own strength, and then hold myself back. WHY? Enough! I'm so tired of it.

This is 5777 and I'm ready to change. I find comfort in the fact that Judaism believes I can. This month, I'm committing to making good on what I want for myself: physical therapy every damn day. Clear separations of work and social life. Feeling sexy in my body, no matter my pant size. Enacting a willingness to be bold. Check back soon; I'll show it to you —all on my vision board, gorgeously mapped.

### Resources:

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