From My Desk 2026-11 The lesson of Marcheshvan

The month of Cheshvan (which ends on November 11th, this year) is known by another name- *Mar*cheshvan. The meaning of "*mar*" is unclear, and our sages have offered several meanings. Mar carries the connotation of sadness or bitterness, as we recall from the **Mar**or (bitter herbs) of Passover. It is the lack of Jewish holidays during this month that causes our sadness. After all, Tishrei was packed with holidays- Rosh Ha-shanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. Cheshvan has none.

But Mar can also mean "master", or one who is highly regarded. That is reflected in the use of the term as an honorific for several Talmudic scholars. These two are the most commonly accepted suggestions among several.

Our tradition links several Biblical events with this month. The first is the great Flood of Noah's generation. Cheshvan is the beginning of the rainy season in the Middle East, so there is a natural connection between the flood and the season. God utilized this very month as the beginning of a process to repair the world. According to Chassidic thought, the flood was a sort of mikvah to cleanse the entire earth. The earth was corrupt, and the flood allowed for a complete washing and elimination of the moral filth that had degraded humanity. In its wake a new humanity arose which had the opportunity to learn from its mistakes. In that sense, mar reflects the bitterness of the punishment,and the opportunity for humanity to master its evil impulses and create a better world.

Our national matriarch Rachel is said to have died during this month. That certainly was a bitter time for Jacob, her loving husband. Yet, her death is not forgotten. We know where she is buried, and Rachel's tomb is a center of pilgrimage to this very day. With *mar* carrying the sense of "highly regarded", today's Jews venerate Rachel's memory, drawing inspiration to build and beautify Eretz Yisrael.

This is the historical story of the Jewish people. We experience a period of sadness or bitterness. But we do not allow the tragedy of the

moment to stop us from looking forward. Indeed, the only response to tragedy is to mourn briefly, and to pick up our lives and move forward, dedicating our finest efforts, often, to the memory of those who perished. (Of course, it is also a good idea not to base opportunities to rebuild based only upon tragedies. We can use births, B'nai mitzvah, weddings and other simchas as stepping stones to enrich Jewish life.) But, when sadness enters our lives, it is important to remember the lesson of Marcheshvan. Sadness should not define your life. King David said it well in Psalms. "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy accompanies the dawn."

May we be blessed with many happy occasions in the future. And, if God forbid, sadness touches us at some point, may we recover and rebuild our lives, knowing that the outlook of the Jewish people is characterized, in part, by Marcheshvan. Ultimately, with God's help, nothing will stop our progress, and we will enjoy the happiness that we cherish.