

Seasons of the Moon – Metamorphosis



Nebi Mussa, Judean Desert 2005. Linhof Technikardan, Schneider Super Angulon 90mm XL Lens, Maco Infrared film with Wratten 87 filter.

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It's amazing how a project can metamorphose like a caterpillar into a butterfly; how it can start out as one thing and end up completely different.

My first book of photographs – *Seasons of the Moon* - contained not one photograph when I first started the project.

Seasons of the Moon began as a free monthly A4 sheet with an article dealing with the mystical connection between the astrological sign of that month and the corresponding events in the Jewish calendar¹. A poem appeared in the middle of the back of the page which related to the article in some way, and in the same position of the front was a picture.



Beit Shearim 2004. Linhof Technikarden, Schneider Super Angulon 90mm XL Lens, Maco Infrared film with Wratten 87 filter.

When *Seasons* started, I didn't even take those pictures. The first edition (which happened to be *Libra*) boasted a very un-glorious freeware clip-art drawing of a set of scales – not the most creative of beginnings.

From small acorns...

After about a year later, I made the blindingly obvious link between my writing for *Seasons* and using my own photographs. I don't know why it took so long for it to occur to me, but every idea has its time.

Now I had something that really excited me, a fusion of mystical essays, poems



Tzipori 2005. Linhof Technikardan, Schneider Super Angulon 90mm XL Lens, Maco Infrared film with Wratten 87 filter.

and photographs blended into a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts.

Fast forward some eight years, at this point I had written about 75,000 words and I was thinking that *Seasons* would make a great book. I had the concept for the book, but no way to fund it. I am a firm believer that G-d runs the world and it 'just happened' that at the same time that I was trying to fund the book, the dean of our College, Rabbi Nota Schiller was interested in using *Seasons* as a fund raiser. He managed to find a sponsor, Mr. Neil Auerbach, and I had to go to work in earnest.

It worked out to be a win/win/win deal. Mr. Auerbach did a big *mitzva* (good



The Old Jewish Cemetery, Prague 2005. Linhof Technikardan, Schneider Super Angulon 90mm XL Lens, Maco Infrared film with Wratten 87 filter.

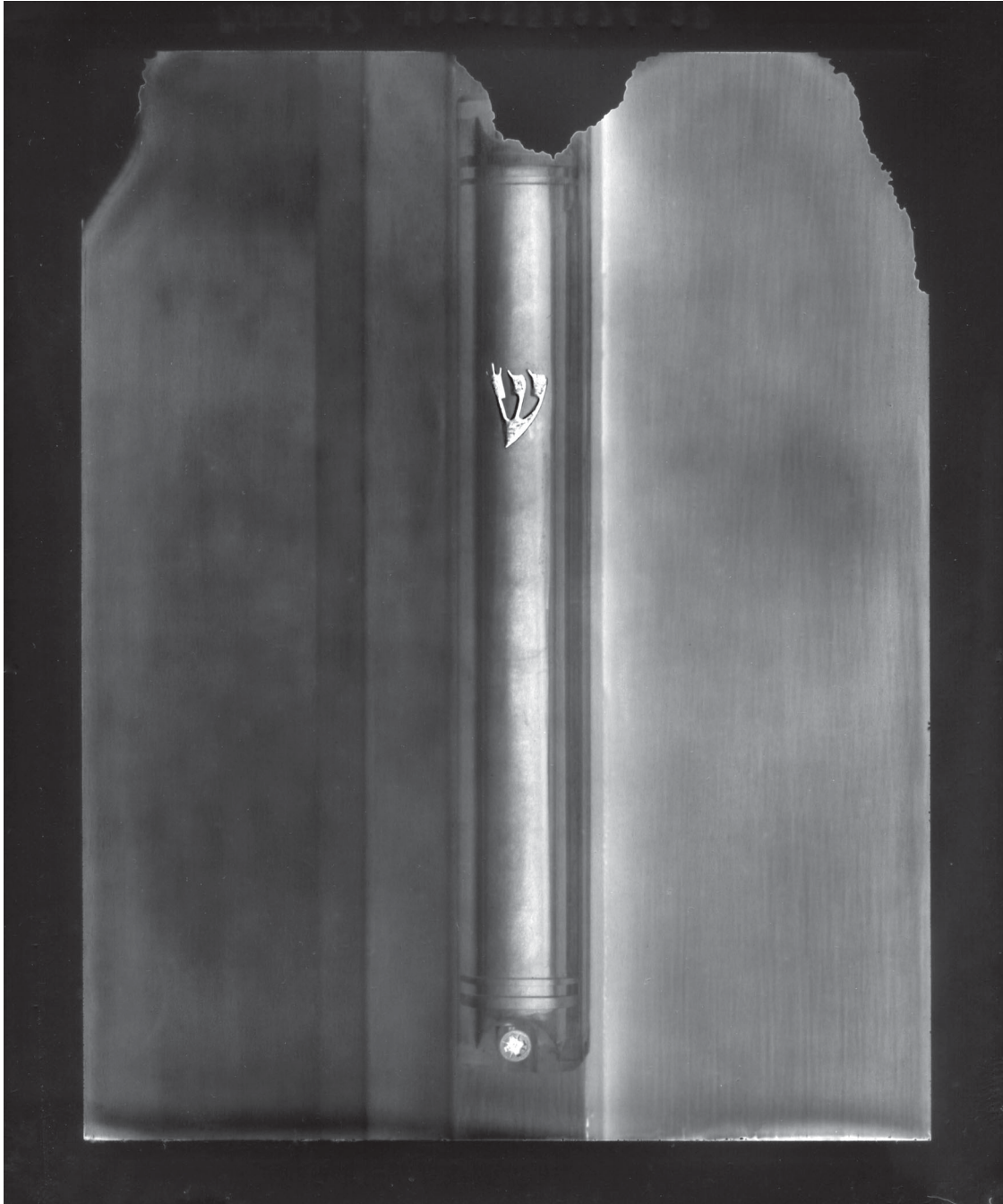
deed) giving charity to the Yeshiva and supporting Torah and those who study it - and he got the kudos of having the book named "The Auerbach Edition;" the Yeshiva had a very nice sum even after covering the publishing costs - and yours truly got his book published. One of the great drawbacks of publishing a book is that you can go into deep-pocket debts of \$50,000 and more without having to try at all. And unless you have a guaranteed market, the sponsorship route has tremendous advantages and virtually no drawbacks. The only thing is - you have to find a sponsor. But if you think creatively, you might find an angle that an individual or a company would want to sponsor in return for the kudos of being associated with the work or theme of the book.



Roman Water Cistern, Tzipori 2003. Linhof Technikardan, Nikon 150mm lens and APX 100.

So there I was with 75,000 words. After painstaking, not to mention painful, editing, I got the book down to about 45,000 words. At this point, I decide I want the book to be more 'serious' and so I cut many of the photographs. Of forty-five articles, only twenty have photographs, plus twelve more to represent the Seasons of the Moon at the beginning of the month.

The book, I thought, was finished. And then I tried to find a printer. It's ironic but printing black and white seems to be much more difficult than color, and try as we might, we couldn't find anyone in Israel that knew how to do really high-



The Sentinel, Jerusalem 2005. Linhof Technikarden, Nikon 150mm lens, Polaroid Type 55 P/N film (reversed).

end black and white printing. I looked at printing the book in Germany or in China. I put a message on the Large Format photography forum and I got a reply from David Spivak at Focus publishing. (www.focusmag.info).

Now the name David Spivak rang a big bell with me, because my father's family name was originally Spivack – and my father's first name was David. It could be that this influenced me, but together with David's enthusiasm and his very competitive prices, we decided to go with him. It turned out that David was much more than a vanity publisher. He worked tirelessly on the book as though it was his own baby. One day he said to me, "Rabbi, you know, if you are doing a photography book, why are there so many more articles than photographs? I think you should consider who this book is for, and maybe adjust the balance."

It's amazing how a few words can change the course of a whole project. I decided that rather than do a book of Torah ideas aimed at the religious Jewish market with a few nice photographs, I would change Seasons into a Fine Art photography book with a Jewish theme with an across-the-board appeal to Jew and non-Jew, religious and non-religious alike. The 35 photos grew to over 70 and I cut the articles from nearly 50 to 18, and left the poems almost as they were.

I hope I have succeeded. In any project that seeks to bridge two worlds and include everybody, you always have the danger of falling between two stools and pleasing no one - but yourself.

And now it's finished and out. David Spivak and Bob Tursack at Brilliant Graphics (www.brilliantgraphics.com) did a 'brilliant' job of printing the book in quadtone. I was very impressed by the quality. At the time of writing, we are looking for a major distributor to put the book into bookshops, and we are selling well over the Internet.

Looking back, I can't say that publishing the book was easy, but I learned a tremendous amount. Probably the biggest lesson was perseverance. Very often the difference between success and failure is the point at which you are prepared to give up.

(Footnotes)

1 For example, Libra, the sign of the Scales of Judgment: Judaism teaches that on the first day of this sign, G-d judges the entire world for the coming year.

Technical Notes

The concept of many of the photographs in my book "Seasons of the Moon" is to create the atmosphere of seeing sacred places in Israel under the light of the moon.

Mystical sources compare the Jewish People to the moon - for just when the moon seems to vanish from the sky, it returns and waxes again, so even a cursory view of history shows the Jewish People rising time and time again from the scrapheap of history, as Mark Twain wrote in Harper's Magazine, March 1898, *"The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his*

energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

One of the techniques I employed in these photographs, I learned from my friend Neil Folberg. Neil used Photoshop to combine infrared landscapes with panchromatic star photographs taken through a telescope under the clear night skies of the south of Israel. When I saw his work, I knew that this technique would be ideal for my book, a synthesis of photographs and mystical ideas in Judaism. I felt that infrared film, which reveals light not perceived by human vision, was the perfect medium to reveal the hidden deeper world of the Land of Israel. Although I was not so interested in the depiction of actual stars and constellations, I used Neil's technique to create night skies in many of the photographs.

Another technique I use is 'painting with light' in Photoshop, using several adjustment layers and "brushing in" different areas of light, shade and contrast with the Photoshop paint brush or eraser tool.

Some of the photographs in the book are extensively manipulated others are hardly touched apart from the basic adjustments of light/dark and contrast. Interestingly people often think that the most manipulated photographs are 'natural' and vice versa.

For infrared, I used Maco infrared film with a visually opaque Wratten 87 filter. When used with this filter, the film has a speed of between 3-6 ISO - so you need a good firm tripod! I had an old Manfrotto, which I traded in recently for a carbon fiber one.

I started off with a Toyo CX 4 x 5 camera and a Nikon 150mm lens and slowly expanded my lens collection. Now I have a 58mm Schneider, a 75mm Rodenstock, a 90 Schneider XL (massive overkill for my work!); the Nikon 150mm; a Rodenstock 210 (nice and sharp) a Nikon 300mm and a 450mm Fujinon. 90% of the time I used either the 90mm or the 150mm. Photographs in the book were also taken with a Hasselblad, several Canon 35mm cameras, and, more recently, a Canon 5D and a 20D converted to infrared

My film exposure method is pretty basic. I meter the deepest shadow that I want to record and stop down a couple of stops.

For development I used Rodinal diluted 1:100 or 1:50.

For some reason, I had a lot of trouble with fingerprints on the Maco film. Maybe it was me, but I never found the same problem with my other films Agfa APX 100 and Ilford FP4. At any rate, with Photoshop's clone tool and the healing brush, the fingerprints were not an unsolvable problem.

My prints are made on an Epson 2100 with Piezography Split Tone inks, printed on Hannemuhle Photo Rag 308 g/m².

To see more of Rabbi Sinclair's work, please visit, www.seasonsofthemoon.com or www.rabbisinclair.com

5. *“Silver Peak Dunes, Nevada”*

6. *“Chelsea Embankment”*

Legend:

1. *Pier light by night”*