

THE SECRET OF THE NEW MOON

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Sanhedrin 5:5-6:1

Orach Chaim 570:3-571:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 58

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shevi'it 26

In this parashah we find the conclusion of the Ten Plagues and also the first commandments that Hashem gave to Bnei Yisrael as a nation. These were the mitzvah to sanctify the new moon, the mitzvah of Korban Pesach and the mitzvah to eat matzah. R' Dovid Bornstein z"l (died in 1942 in the Warsaw Ghetto; see page 4) observes:

Kabbalists teach that the Ten Plagues paralleled the Ten Utterances with which Hashem created the world, as taught in Pirkei Avot chapter 5. This is why the first mitzvah after the Ten Plagues is the commandment to sanctify the new moon, for the waxing and waning of the moon is a constant reminder of Creation.

Our Sages say that Moshe could not comprehend the new moon until Hashem showed him: "Like this you shall see it and sanctify it." In light of the above, R' Bornstein explains this as follows: The Midrash states: "To tell man about the greatness of Creation is impossible, so He told His nation the

greatness of His ways." This seems contradictory at first, but it actually means that it is impossible for man to grasp Creation except through the eyes of the Torah. Man, being material, cannot fathom something as esoteric as G-d's Creation unless he looks at it through spiritual lenses. Even Moshe could not understand the secret of the new moon except through the Torah - through the mitzvah of sanctifying it.

If we understand the Ten Plagues and the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon as alluding to Creation, we can understand why those sections are followed by mitzvot that involve eating. When we recognize that Hashem created us, we necessarily recognize that we are His servants. It is part of the "contract" between a master and a servant that the servant will be fed. (Hashem would not have created us if He did not intend to sustain us.) This is incidentally why the introductory portion of Birkat Hamazon refers to G-d as Elokim (as in "nevaraich l'Elokenu" / "we will bless our Elokim"). "Elokim" is the Divine Name associated with strict justice, and strict justice requires that a master feed his servants. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Chasdei David p. 5)

"Pharaoh said to [Moshe], 'Leave me . . . Al tosef / Do not continue to appear before me, for on the day that you appear, you shall die.'

"Moshe said, 'Well have you spoken, for I shall not again appear before you'." (10:28-29)

R' Yaakov z"l (author of Ba'al HaTurim; 14th century) notes that the expression "Al tosef" ("Do not continue") appears in only one other place in the Torah, i.e., in Devarim (3:26), where Hashem says to Moshe, "Al tosef / Do not continue to speak to Me about this matter [i.e. Moshe's request to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael]." This, says the Ba'al Haturim, demonstrates the principle: "Even the curse of a lowly person should never be taken lightly." Because Pharaoh said to Moshe, "Al Tosef," Hashem too said to Moshe, "Al Tosef."

This requires explanation. Firstly, what is the connection between these two, seemingly coincidental uses of the phrase "Al tosef"? Secondly, why should Pharaoh's statement have the effect of a curse on Moshe? For what error was he being punished?

R' Yehoshua Laib Diskin z"l (died 1898) explains: Tzaddikim are judged by a meticulous standard and are punished even for missing an opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem / sanctification of G-d's Name. When Pharaoh said, "Do not continue to appear before me [lest I kill you]," Moshe should not have agreed ("Well have you spoken"). Rather, he should have said, "If Hashem orders me to appear before you again, then I will do so, and you will be unable to harm me." Moshe missed this chance to sanctify G-d's Name.

For this he was punished. When he needed Hashem's help, Hashem was unwilling to provide it. Instead, He rebuffed Moshe with the same words that had led to Moshe's error. (Maharil Diskin Al HaTorah)

"It is a Pesach-offering to Hashem." (12:11)

If Bnei Yisrael needed some merit with which to be redeemed from Egypt, why did Hashem give them this particular mitzvah and not a commandment that somehow encompasses all of the 613 commandments? R' Meir Yechiel Halevi Halstock z"l (1852-1928; see page 4) answers that the mitzvah of Korban Pesach does allude to all of the 613 commandments. Specifically, the "full gematria" of the word "Pesach" ("peh samech chet") is 613, the number of commandments. ("Full gematria" means the gematria of a word when each of the letters of the word is spelled out the way that letter is pronounced. Thus, the "full gematria" of "peh samech chet" = $85+120+408 = 613$.)

This may explain as well why Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the mitzvah of Matzah while they were still in Egypt. The "full" gematria of the word "Matzot" ("mem tzadi vav tav") also is 613. ("Mem tzadi vav tav" = $80+104+13+416 = 613$.)

R' Halstock observes further: Hashem had told Avraham that his descendants would be in a foreign land for 400 years, yet Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt for only 210 years. They were redeemed 190 years early in the merit of the mitzvah of Matzah. The "full" gematria of the word "Matzah" ("mem tzadi heh") equals 190. ("Mem tzadi heh" = $80+104+6 = 190$.) (Meir Enei Chachamim Vol. III, p.54)

"[The story of the Exodus, as recorded on the parchments of the Tefilin] shall be a sign on your arm and a reminder between your eyes . . ." (13:9, as interpreted by Rashi)

The Gemara (Berachot 11a) reports: R' Abba bar Zavda said in the name of Rav, "A mourner remains obligated to perform all of the mitzvot of the Torah with the exception of Tefilin, for these [the Tefilin] are called 'Pe-er' ('splendor')." (See Yechezkel 24:17.) R' Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (1865-1935) explains the above halacha in light of one of the purposes of the mitzvah of Tefilin: Splendor or beauty is intended to make an impression upon another person or being. Similarly, performing a mitzvah in a beautiful way allows the person's mind to influence and make an impression upon the person's emotions. [The fact that a mitzvah is precious is an emotion, but that feeling is enhanced by the mind's knowledge of the high price of the Etrog, Tefilin, or other mitzvah-object.] Tefilin are also intended to make an impression on others, as the Talmud teaches (Berachot 6a): "'All the nations of the world will see that the Name of G-d is upon you' (Devarim 28:10) -- This refers to the Tefilin on one's head."

In order to influence others, one must be joyful and strong, so that his joy will draw others to him. However, when one's soul is sad -- although this sadness may benefit the soul itself [as is the case when one is mourning] -- it cannot and should not influence others. This is because the spreading of sadness does not generally bring a blessing. Accordingly, at one's saddest moment [as a mourner], the beauty of the Tefilin does not befit him. At such a time, says R' Kook, a person should turn inward rather than radiate his influence outward, until such time as Hashem lights up the mourner's

darkness. "Light is planted [away] for the righteous, and for the upright of heart, joy." (Tehilim 97:11) (Chavash Pe-er, p. 72, section 3)

"When your son shall ask you, 'What is this?' you shall say to him, 'With a strong hand G-d took us out of Egypt, from the house of slaves.'" (13:14)

R' Chaim "Brisker" Soloveitchik z"l (1853-1918) asks: Since we fulfill the mitzvah of remembering the Exodus every night [by reciting the last verse of the third chapter of Shma], why do we need the additional mitzvah of reading the Pesach Haggadah? He explains that there are three differences between the daily performance of this Mitzvah and its performance on Pesach.

1. A person fulfills his daily obligation by recalling the Exodus privately, but on Pesach, a verbal question-answer format is required. Thus, even a person who conducts the Seder alone is required to "ask himself" appropriate questions and to read the Haggadah aloud.
2. Our daily obligation is simply to recall that the Exodus occurred, while on Pesach night we must "begin with shame and conclude with praise." [This means we must mention that our ancestors were idol-worshippers and that G-d chose Avraham from among them, as set forth in the haggadah.]
3. On Pesach we are required to discuss the mitzvot associated with the Exodus (the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, Maror), while the daily obligation does not include this detail.

(Chiddushei HaGrach HaShalem, p. 25, No.40)

R' Shmuel Yom Tov Halevi Brot z"l

R' Brot was born in Lodz, Poland on 29 Av 5645 / 1885. At a young age, he lost his father, R' Michoel Yechezkel Brot, and he was raised thereafter by his grandfather, R' Shlomo Plato, a Radzhiner chassid. Shortly after his bar mitzvah, the future R' Brot was accepted into the yeshiva of R' Meir Yechiel Halevi Halstock, the rebbe of Ostrovta, where he remained for five years.

At the age of 22, R' Brot was named rabbi of a town called Brisk (not the famous Brisk D'Lita / Brest-Litovsk, which was the home of the Soloveitchik family). This position was followed by rabbinic positions in several other Polish towns. In 1929, R' Brot was the Mizrahi-backed candidate for the rabbinate of Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, while the Agudah backed R' David Bornstein, son of the author Shem Mi'Shmuel. When the balloting tied, R' Bornstein withdrew and relocated to nearby Pabianice, but R' Brot refused to accept the position until he had received the approval of his opponent.

Once R' Brot was installed as rabbi of Tomaszow, he instituted many changes designed to

increase the stature of the rabbinate. For example, it was customary at that time that a rabbi received a meager salary which he had to supplement with fees for performing weddings, adjudicating disputes, and performing other rabbinic tasks. R' Brot demanded that this system be abolished, and that the rabbi be supported in an honorable fashion. R' Brot's activities in this area led one of his colleagues to remark that "R' Brot raised the stature of the rabbinate and the honor of the Torah in Poland."

R' Brot was active in the Mizrachi and eventually became president of the Polish branch of that movement. He also was elected to the Polish parliament, where he spoke out on behalf of Jewish nationalism.

From Tomaszow, R' Brot was elected rabbi of Antwerp, Belgium, replacing R' Moshe Avigdor Amiel, who had been elected Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv. R' Brot remained in Antwerp until the Germans occupied that city in 1941. He was then chosen to serve as rabbi of the Moriah Congregation in Manhattan, and he obtained a visa to enter the United States. He remained as rabbi of Moriah for nine years before settling in Israel, where he was appointed to the Bet Din Hagadol / the Rabbinical Court affiliated with the Chief Rabbinate. R' Brot passed away on 8 Nissan 5723 / 1963.

R' Brot authored Sugiot B'Kodashim, studies of the laws of the sacrificial service.

Sponsored by Martin and Michelle Swartz in memory of Martin's grandmother, Elise Hofmann a"h

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