

IT'S ALL IN THE PREPARATION

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This coming Tuesday is the first of Sivan, the day on which Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai. We read (Shmot 19:1), "Ba'chodesh / In the third month from the Exodus of Bnei Yisrael from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai." The midrash Pesikta D'Rav Kahana comments that "Ba'chodesh" (literally, "In the month") also can be read as two words: "Ba Chodesh" / "The month has arrived." The Midrash explains: When Hashem appeared to Moshe Rabbeinu at the Burning Bush, He told Moshe (Shmot 3:12), "This is the sign for you that I have sent you: When you take the people out of Egypt, you [plural] will serve Elokim on this mountain." When the time came and Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai, Hashem said: "Ba Chodesh" / "The month to which I have been looking forward has arrived." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Tzaddok Hakohen z"l (1823-1900; Chassidic Rebbe of Lublin) asks: The Torah was not given until the sixth [some say, the seventh] of Sivan. Why does the Midrash emphasize, "Ba Chodesh" / "The month has arrived," implying that something special happened starting with the beginning of the month?

He explains: At the Burning Bush, say our Sages, Moshe asked Hashem, "What merit do Bnei Yisrael possess in which they can be redeemed from Egypt?" Moshe knew that Bnei Yisrael were destined to receive the Torah and that Hashem is able to uplift and purify the Jewish People so that they

would be worthy of receiving the Torah. But Moshe asked: "What merit do Bnei Yisrael possess?" What will Bnei Yisrael do to make themselves worthy? Hashem answered: When you take the people out of Egypt, they will serve Me on this mountain. Hashem was not referring to receiving the Torah; rather, He was referring to the days before the Giving of the Torah--the five days beginning with the arrival of Sivan, when Bnei Yisrael prepared themselves to receive the Torah. It is the preparation to receive the Torah which is man's primary Avodah / Divine service, and that is what made the arrival of the month of Sivan special. (Pri Tzaddik)

"The Land will give its fruit and you will eat your fill; you will dwell securely upon it. If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? -- behold! we will not sow and not gather in our crops.' I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period." (25:19-21)

R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the Alter of Novardok) asks: When does the Torah anticipate this question being asked? Before the harvest of the sixth year of the Shemittah cycle, the Sabbatical year is not yet on the horizon and, at first glance, it is unlikely anyone would ask this question. On the other hand, after the harvest of the sixth year, when the Shemittah year is about to begin, the three-fold blessing of the sixth year will already have occurred, so no one would have a reason to worry!

The Alter answers: In fact, human nature is to start asking, "What will we eat during the next Shemittah?" immediately after the previous Shemittah. Human nature is to worry now about things that will not be needed for many years down the road. The Torah is predicting that as soon as Bnei Yisrael enter Eretz Yisrael and till the soil for the first time, they will start to worry: "What will we eat when the Shemittah comes?"

This worry, the Alter observes, actually defeats the purpose of the Mitzvah of Shemittah, which is to instill in a person the understanding that it is not one's efforts during the six years of farming that put food on his table; rather, the entire world belongs to Hashem and He provides for us. During the Shemittah year, even Sefichim / plants that grew wild from seeds scattered accidentally during a prior season are prohibited so that a person will not take any credit for producing what he eats. [A person might think, for example, "It's a good thing I accidentally spilled that bag of seeds two summers ago," as if that is the only reason he has food now.]

In this light, the Alter continues, perhaps the verse, "The Land will give its fruit and you will eat your fill," is not a blessing, but a command: "Eat your fill" in the years preceding the Shemittah. Do not save up for the Shemittah year, for that demonstrates a lack of Bitachon / trust in Hashem. And, if you will say, "What will we eat in the seventh year?" -- after all, preparing for the future is common sense! Do not worry, "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period."

One might ask: Why did this promise need to be in the Torah? Moshe should have told it privately to

the generation that entered the Land and, once they saw during the first Shemittah that Hashem kept his word, no one would ever worry. The answer is that this promise is not an absolute one, because Hashem only provides in a supernatural way for those who trust in Him to a supernatural degree. Hashem's Hashgachah Peratit / Divine oversight of people's lives is proportional to their trust in him. Tehilim (121:5) says, "Hashem is your shadow." Our Sages explain: If you move one finger, your shadow moves one finger in response. If you move your entire hand, your shadow moves its entire hand--i.e., Hashem acts proportionally. Therefore, if someone does worry for six years and does save for the Shemittah year, he will not see Hashem's miracle and will need what he hoarded for the Sabbatical year. But, he won't realize why; instead, he will take what he sees as proof that he did the right thing to save. Regarding such a person we read later in our Parashah (26:23-24), "If you behave with Me with Keri / as if it is a coincidence, then I, too, will behave toward you with Keri." (Madregat Ha'adam: Darchei Ha'bitachon, ch.6)

"I will remember My covenant with Yaakov and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham I will remember, and I will remember the Land." (26:42)

Why are the Patriarchs listed in reverse chronological order in this verse?

R' Saadiah Gaon z"l (Egypt and Bavel/Iraq; 882-942) explains: The Tochachah / rebuke and curses in this week's Parashah refers to the events surrounding the destruction of the First Temple. Our verse, near the end of the Tochachah hints that, for most of the Second Temple period following the Babylonian exile, the Jewish People would experience religious freedom but not political freedom, just as the Patriarchs practiced their faith unhindered but lived in the dominions of other nations and kings. [For most of the Second Temple period, Eretz Yisrael was under the control, successively, of Persia, Greece, and Rome.]

R' Saadiah continues: This verse also hints that the Second Temple would stand for the same number of years that Hashem had a covenant with the Patriarchs. Yaakov lived 147 years, all of which were after Hashem made a covenant with Avraham. Yitzchak lived 180 years, which also were after Hashem entered into His covenant with Avraham. But, only the last 93 years of Avraham's life, R' Saadiah calculates based on verses, were after the covenant. The sum of these numbers (147+180+93) is 420, exactly the number of years that our Sages say the Second Temple stood. The names of the Patriarchs are listed in reverse order to hint that we should look for that which distinguishes Hashem's covenant with the second two Patriarchs (Yitzchak and Yaakov) from His covenant with Avraham. The only difference between them is the fact that Yitzchak and Yaakov's years were entirely within the covenant, while only some of Avraham's years were within the covenant. (Commentary to Daniel: Introduction)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935), in 1922, when he was Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael. In the letter, R' Kook responds to concerns that the establishment of a yeshiva for studying the laws of the korbanot / Temple offerings would be viewed by the world as a challenge to Arab control of the Temple Mount.

In response to your honored letter, which came to me with a clipping from an English newspaper, regarding the establishment of a yeshiva named "Torat Kohanim," I am honored to provide the following details:

1. It is true that Yeshivat Torat Kohanim was established here with the goal that Kohanim who are Torah scholars will study the [Talmudic] Order of Kodashim, the source for clear knowledge of the Temple service.
2. The institution is just starting out. Therefore, only a small number of scholarly Kohanim and Levi'im who are devoted to studying this subject are found in the yeshiva building at the set hours. Other members are dispersed in various places, each studying in his own location. The goal is to unite them at fixed times in order to glorify this great Torah subject.
3. Despite the many secular manifestations [of the yearning to rebuild Eretz Yisrael], the revival of our nation necessarily must be founded on its holy source--i.e., the nation's yearning to return and to be "built" with all the trappings of holiness. The eternal yearning for the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash speedily in our days must be expressed straightforwardly and with great faith, at all times, with no interruption or weakness.
4. Our faith is strong that days will come when all nations will recognize that the place that Hashem chose for eternity, the place of our Temple, must return to its true owners, and that on it will be built a great and holy house, which, through us, will be a place of prayer for all nations. [See Yeshayahu 56:7] . . .

Although this yeshiva is entirely a pure Torah-endeavor [and not meant to be political], it does send a message to the whole world that no nation should think that we have given up hope for even an instant of realizing our rights to our holy place, the cornerstone of all holy places--the place of our Temple. (Igrot Ha'Reiyah Vol. IV No. 1,127)