

KIDDUSH HACHODESH: MOONLIGHT

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

The Mitzvah:

The proclamation of kiddush hachodesh sanctifying the new moon was pronounced by the grand rabbinic court in Jerusalem following the testimony of two eye-witnesses (Exodus 12:1-2).

This, the first mitzvah given to the nascent Jewish nation in Egypt, forms the basis of the Jewish lunar calendar wherein is found the festivals. That the emergence of the chosen people should be made with the commandment relating to the moon is curious.

Why should the moon feature a monthly sanctification? What is the symbolism of this satellite body, the luminary of the night, vis-à-vis the Children of Israel?

By establishing their calendar around the moon, the Jewish nation lives and is strongly identified with the smaller of the two luminaries.

The sun whose imposing rays shine and rules over the day symbolizes the gentile nations whose counting follows the widespread Georgian, solar based calendar. Their lives focus on the here and now. Their sights are on this ephemeral world - "the heat of the moment" encompassing an existence of enjoyment and pleasure, but not necessarily in the pursuit of anything higher.

That the moon serves as a model for and of the Jewish people is not without reason. Significantly smaller than the sun, the most resilient of nations are not really at home in this world. They do not belong. (Have you been following the relentless demonizing of the State of Israel?) Just as the moon's illumination is only reflecting the rays of the sun, similarly everything that the chosen nation has in life is not their own. Rather it is a reflection of the sovereignty that the other nations have over this world.

The Jewish nation's (dare I use the phrase) "occupied presence" can be likened to a salesman who finds himself in a foreign country. The purpose of his visit is not to bask in the bright brilliance of this land. He acquaints himself with his surroundings but only so that he can acquire precious wares to take away, commodities that are extremely valuable in his home town (Noam HaMitzvos).

This explains the moon's symbolism as a model for the Jewish nation.

The Exodus elevated them to earn the epithet of "holy". Their intrusion into this world was to fulfill Torah and its commandments, which may not carry much worth in Wall Street, but are nonetheless priceless in the currency of the hereafter - back in our home town, in the spiritual world to come.

Their lives - as in their calendar - are structured around the moon that is, not surprisingly, "sanctified" every month by the Children of Israel. This underlines their involvement in the physical world ruled by the sun as a backdrop to concentrating on the development of their "souls" - their holy essence affirmed just prior to the Exodus from the impure Egyptian environment.

And it is in the midst of such darkness, in a universe where the brilliance of the sun is universally pervasive, that the downtrodden people of G-d still offer some measure of radiance as they light up the night. And they await the future epoch, where the moon's light will be on a par with the sun (Isaiah 30). Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene and **Torah.org**.