

# EMUNAH ON SEDER NIGHT / THE MOON AND REJUVENATION

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #930 – Eating Matzo An Entire Pesach – A Mitzvah? Good Shabbos!

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## Who Knows Why We Sing "Who Knows One?"

There are a series of "songs" at the end of the Pesach Seder. (I hate to refer to them as merely "songs" because they each contain great depth and profound allusions. The Vilna Gaon wrote an entire commentary on "*Chad Gadya*," so they are certainly more than just "songs.") One of the last ones is the popular composition known as "*Echad mi yodeah?*" [Who knows "One?"]

There is a very basic Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo. I do not consider myself an expert in Ramban, but I suggest that this Ramban is, if not the most important Ramban in Sefer Shemos, at least among the "Top Three." In a lengthy comment, the Ramban there explains why there are so many mitzvos designated as being "*zecher l'yitziyas mitzrayim*" [in commemoration of the exodus from Egypt].

The Ramban beautifully explains that the whole purpose of miracles is to dispel the myth that there is no G-d (Heaven forbid) or that there is a G-d but He does not know what is going on in this world or there is a G-d who may know what goes on in this world but He does not care about what goes on in this world. This was the philosophy of the Egyptians. They either denied the existence of G-d or they denied Divine Providence. Therefore, G-d made open miracles which over-ruled the "laws of nature" to establish once and for all that He is the Master of all and that He knows what people are doing and that He cares what people are doing and that He punishes people who disobey Him and rewards those who listen to Him.

The Ramban explains that by revealing open miracles to humanity, Hashem is demonstrating to us that our entire lives are miraculous. "From the open miracles one can come to recognize the hidden miracles of life. Life itself is a miracle." The Ramban says a person who denies that G-d performs hidden miracles for us (*nissim nistarim*) on a daily basis "has no portion in the Torah of Moshe."

For this reason, the Ramban explains, there are such severe punishments for violating the laws of

the Holiday of Pesach. A person who eats *chametz* on Pesach is *chayav kares* [the punishment of being "cut off" from his people]; likewise, a person who does not bring the *Korban Pesach* is *chayav kares*. This holiday involves the fundamentals of our faith. That is what the exodus from Egypt was all about.

The ultimate purpose of reading the *Haggadah* every year on the Seder night is to leave the Seder bigger *ma'aminim* [believers]. The four questions and all the various interpretations of the four sons, and everything else we say are all very nice, but the bottom line of the entire Seder experience is that we are supposed to have more *Emunah* [faith in G-d] at the end of the night.

We are all familiar with the concept of word association. If I say "day" what word comes to mind? "Night." If I say "black", you say "white". I say "fork", you say "knife". These word associations automatically come to mind.

The Seder is supposed to implant certain automatic word associations into our minds. When we hear the word "*Echad*" [One], our automatic reaction should be "*Echad Elokeinu she'ba'shamayim u'ba'aretz*" [One is our G-d in the Heaven and the earth]. When we hear the word, "two" we think "the Two Tablets of Stone." "Three?" The Three Patriarchs. "Four?" The Four Matriarchs. "Five?" The Five Books of the Torah. This means that on the night of the Seder, we become so attuned to *Emunah* in the *Ribono shel Olam* that our word associations become hard-wired such that everything we hear brings to mind the basic components of Judaism.

This is why at the end of the Seder, we recite this popular composition "Who knows One?" It reinforces to us after a whole night of Seder, matzah and wine that we are to become bigger believers. Maybe the number seven means other things to us on other nights of the year, but on the night of the Seder the number seven means "Seven days of the Sabbath cycle" and the number eight means "Eight days of circumcision". This is the natural word association of a true believe and this is what the Seder experience is supposed to accomplish.

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## **This New Moon Is For You -- HaChodesh Hazeh Lachem**

The first mitzvah in Parshas Bo is the mitzvah of "This month for you shall be the first of the months." This is the commandment to the Jewish court to establish the new month and to implement the lunar calendar system, which is the basic mechanism of tracking the Jewish holidays.

Our Sages say that the Greek-Syrians (*Yevanim*) tried to uproot three basic Jewish commandments: *Shabbos*, *Milah* [Circumcision], and *Kiddush haChodesh* [Sanctifying the New Month]. If we were to take a survey as to what are the "Top Ten Mitzvos" in the Torah, many of us would say *Shabbos* and many of us would say *Milah*, but I don't think any of us would say that *Kiddush haChodesh* ranks up there in the top hierarchy of Torah commandments. And yet, the *Yevanim* did focus precisely on this

mitzvah (along with *Shabbos* and *Milah*) in their attempts to eradicate the fundamental practices of Judaism from their empire. Why was the mitzvah of *Kiddush haChodesh* so fundamental that it was so important to abolish it?

I saw a very interesting interpretation by the Arugas haBosem. The Arugas haBosem asks: Is it not peculiar that the *Ribono shel Olam*, who is the essence of that which is eternal and is the essence of *Emes* [Truth], should create a celestial body like the moon, which waxes and wanes. The moon is here, it gets smaller, then it disappears and then it comes back again. This is sort of "out of character" for a Divine creation. The sun is always present, the forces of nature are always present, and gravity is always present. What is it about the moon that it is present, it grows, it diminishes, it disappears, and then it reappears? Why would He make something like that?

The Arugas haBosem answers that there is something about the moon that is fundamental to the Jewish people and fundamental to every single Jewish person. The moon is a symbol to us that people go through life with periods of growth and decline. They go through periods in which they are ascendant and then they go through periods in which they are descendant. However, just like the moon waxes and wanes -- it becomes big and diminishes and almost disappears, it always reappears -- "*HaChodesh hazeh lachem*": This rejuvenation cycle of the moon is crucial to what being a Jew is all about both collectively and on an individual level.

During our history, we experienced so many times when the Jewish people were ascendant, like in the times of Shlomo or like in the period of the "Golden Age of Spain." And yet we also experienced periods when we have been the most down trodden and beaten up people on the face of the earth. When people are in that type of situation, it is so easy for them to give up hope.

That which is true on a national level is true on an individual level as well. There are periods in life when things go very well. A person feels his future is bright and big. Then people suffer reversals and go through periods of decline. However, "*HaChodesh haZeh lachem*" -- Chazal say that the Jewish people resemble the moon. This is why the Master of the World made such a celestial phenomenon. He wanted it to provide His people with an ethical lesson -- a model for their destiny.

This is how the Arugas haBosem explains the text of the blessing of the New Moon: "*Poel Emes she'peuloso Emes*". G-d who creates Truth and his actions are Truthful (and Truth is always forever), nevertheless "*v'la'levanah amar she'tischadesh atares tiferes l'amusai baten*" -- to the moon He commanded that it should go through these cyclical patterns as an ethical lesson (*mussar haskel*) to the Jewish people "*she'hem asidim l'hischadesh k'mosa*", for they are destined to renew themselves as it does. Even though it is "out of character" for the Almighty to create something that is not static and is not stable, He did so because the lesson is so vital to the Jewish people, for they are destined to emulate the pattern of the moon and rejuvenate themselves as well.

This is the reason why the nature of the moon is such and this is the reason why the *Yevanim* wanted to nullify not only *Shabbos* and *Milah* but also *Kiddush haChodesh*. Even if they were successful in

uprooting Shabbos and stripping it away from the Jews and even if they were successful in eradicating circumcision, if the Jews still had the concept of *Kiddush haChodesh*, they could look at the cycles of the moon and they would not give up hope. The Syrian-Greeks were not only attempting to strip the Jews of these *mitzvos*. They were also attempting to take away the possibility that the Jews would rejuvenate. The *Yevanim* wanted them to lose hope. Therefore, *Kiddush haChodesh* was so crucial to the *Yevanim*. It was not because of the mitzvah itself, but because of what it represented.

Rav Matisyahu Solomon once mentioned a thought he heard from Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zt"l, which the latter always said when he recited *Kiddush LeVanah*. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz once met a holocaust survivor and asked him "How did you hold out? How was it you were able to not give up?" The Jew told Rav Chaim that in the camps, they could not fulfill mitzvos. Not Lulav, not Succah, not Chanukah, nothing. However, there was one mitzvah they performed regularly. Even on the pain of death, they left the barracks at night to fulfill this mitzvah. This was the mitzvah of *Kiddush LeVanah*. There was always a moon.

"We looked up at the moon and we took to heart the lesson of 'they are destined to be renewed like the moon.'" This is what gave this Jew hope. That is why *Kiddush LeVanah* and *Kiddush haChodesh* is so crucial. It is the story of the Jewish people and it is the story of individual human beings, waxing and waning, growing and declining.

There is an amazing Gemara [Shabbos 147b] that I always had trouble understanding and I still don't fully understand. Rav Chelbo stated that the wine of Purgeesa and the water of Deyumsis corrupted the Ten Tribes. There is a place where the wine is terrific, extremely intoxicating and extremely alluring. There is another place that the hot springs are other worldly. The Gemara says that the Tanna Rav Elazar ben Arach went to these places with the superb wines and the superb baths and was drawn after them. He started really enjoying them to the extent that he forgot his learning. When he returned, he misread the *pasuk* "*HaChodesh haZeh Lachem*" [Shemos 12:2]. He read the words as "*Hachresh hayah libam*" [their hearts were deaf]. Simply, the great Tanna got so into the physicality of the wine and the hot springs that he forgot how to read Hebrew! The Gemara concludes that the Rabbis prayed for mercy on his behalf and his learning was returned to him.

The Arugas HaBosem comments on the symbolism of the story.

Out of all the *pasukim* in the Torah, why did he misread "*HaChodesh haZeh Lachem*" as "*Hachresh hayah libam*?" The answer is that *Chazal* are trying to tell us that the words "*Hachresh hayah libam*" also contain "*HaChodesh hazeh lachem*." The capacity to get so low that one cannot even read the words right does not mean that all is lost. With only the slightest modification to "*Hachresh hayah libam*," the words turn into "*HaChodesh hazeh lachem*." Therefore, as low as Rav Elazar ben Arach sunk, he was able to return. The power of "This New Moon is for you" is the power of the celestial sphere that is emulated by the Jewish people. They are destined to renew like it. The capacity of

rebirth, the capacity of rejuvenation, and the capacity of renaissance, define the Jewish people. We all have that capacity.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Bo is provided below:

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- CD# 131 Sephardic vs. Ashkenazic Pronunciation Is There a Correct Way?
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