

# PARSHAS PINCHAS - A MONTH TO REMEMBER

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

## **A Month To Remember<sup>1</sup>**

*At the beginnings of your months you shall bring an olah to Hashem: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs in their first year - unblemished.*

The very first mitzvah given to Bnei Yisrael as a whole concerned Rosh Chodesh. It should not surprise us that this modest and understated event takes on huge importance in this parshah. Rosh Chodesh is the centerpiece of all the holiday korbanos. The pattern of animals included in the Rosh Chodesh olah acts as a template for the special days of the calendar. There are some changes on some of the days, but the numbers specified on all days are based on the basic pattern in our pasuk.

You have to go no farther than the word "chodesh" to sense why Rosh Chodesh ties in to all holidays. In English (and other languages), the word "month" derives from "moon." This makes sense; the twelve months essentially mark twelve revolutions of the moon around the earth. But the word "chodesh" does not call attention to the moon per se, as much as what a fresh revolution of the moon signifies: renewal, a new beginning.

To many of the ancients, the world suffered from an essentially fixity. The world, they believed, was eternally old, and its laws were immutable and unchanging. Existence itself was a property of this universe, somehow woven into its essential fabric. Human existence was not any different, not in the larger sense of what life was all about, nor in the smaller sense, of what an individual could do to change crucial aspects of his experience

The Torah completely rejects this idea. The world sprang into existence through a beginning, by way of a Creation willed by G-d. He manufactured newness, by creating something that had never been. Within Hashem's bold move lies the possibility of change, of starting things anew. That possibility is accessible to Man. Man, the culmination of Creation, need not be held prisoner by an unyielding and unforgiving order.

Man benefits from all the blessings G-d bestowed upon the world with him in mind. Most importantly, though, Man is blessed through this capacity to emulate Hashem's creativity. Man is not stuck in a predetermined position. Rather, he can free himself of all that we call evil, all the lesser forces that keep him small and unaccomplished. He can strive to lift himself upwards, towards a more G-d-like existence, shaped by ideals and morals sourced in the Mind of G-d. Moreover, Man has many opportunities to do so. Like the New Moon, when one is missed, the next is not so far off.

Rosh Chodesh beckons to Man to take advantage of the constant possibility of change and renewal.

Each month, the olah of Rosh Chodesh reminds us of the form that our striving higher should take. Three numbers figure in the olah formula, and three different types of animal. The numbers one and two speak of an important duality in Jewish life: the role of the individual, the one, and the role of the plural, of two and beyond. The young bull is a work animal, at the peak of its youthful strength; the ram is a lead animal. Putting this together, we have a statement of principle of the Jewish collective, represented here by the two young bulls. The core value of that community is service. The Jewish nation is made strong by the willingness of all its members to work, to toil with youthful energy and determination, to serve Hashem's interests and goals. When Jews fulfill that expectation, they become the ram, the one to whom all else turns to for guidance. In its fulfillment of its designated purpose, the Jewish people become a united leader of men. They are the ones that teach the world how they, too, should participate in the G-d given mandate for mankind: elevation through serving Hashem alone. When this happens, all of human history becomes nothing more than the seven sheep. Sheep are followers, trusting in a leader for direction and guidance. Seven is the presence of the invisible One as the point of reference for the tangible, visible six. The story of civilization - at least once all become satisfied that they need to dutifully follow the dictates of our Creator - becomes the discovery of Hashem's presence within everything - animating everything, sustaining everything, guiding everything.

This credo for Israel - and in time, for all of mankind - was available to us on the threshold of our becoming a nation, already implicit within the Rosh Chodesh mitzvah that would be fleshed out later in its specific avodah in the Mishkan. Whenever Klal Yisrael relives an important milestone of its past by observing a Yom Tov, the Torah builds on this credo. Looking at its freedom, or its receiving of the Torah, or its miraculous protection through the years in the Wilderness, Klal Yisrael incorporates the Rosh Chodesh paradigm into its avodah. It recognized that those great events occurred for a reason. They represent Hashem's investment in us. The return on that investment is living by the ethos of these korbanos, and becoming living examples of what they symbolically express.

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1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Bamidbar 28:11-14; Vayikra 23:18

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