

# PARSHAS BO: MESSAGE OF THE MOON

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

*"Hachodesh Hazeh lochem Rosh Chodoshim." This month (Nissan) will be the first of all months [of the year] (Shemos 12:2).*

So begins the first mitzvah directly given to Klal Yisroel (see Rashi, Bereishis 1:1) - the sanctification of the New Moon, and the primacy of Chodesh Nissan as the first of the months of the year. Although other mitzvos were referenced in earlier parshiyos (such as milah and gid ha'nasheh), this was the first one given as a direct commandment to the Jewish people.

Upon reflection, it is not immediately evident why this mitzvah was selected as the first one and why it was given to the B'nei Yisroel at this particular moment - as they began their destiny as the Am Hanivchar (the Chosen People of Hashem). While the theme of Chodesh Nissan is certainly congruent with the instructions for the preparation of the korban Pesach, knowledge of the halachos of kiddush hachodesh were not a prerequisite for the mitzvos of the korban. In fact, the full spectrum of kiddush hachodesh - establishing the new month based upon the actual sighting of the moon, was not put into effect until we lived in Eretz Yisroel and the Sanhedrin was functioning.

I would like to propose that Hashem might have selected this moment to share the concept of kiddush hachodesh with His people in order to share with them two powerful lessons that can be gleaned from the careful study of the moon.

The Gemorah (Chullin 60b; and referenced by Rashi, Bereishis 1:16) relates that the moon was originally equal in brilliance to the sun, but after the moon complained and questioned the value in having "two kings wear the same crown," Hashem reduced its light and established the dominance of the sun among the celestial bodies.

After 210 years of galus in Egypt, the Bnei Yisroel were in the midst of a meteoric rise - in prestige, power, and financial success. As with all blessings, there were challenges associated with acquiring these brachos. Penniless slaves have little reason to envy each other. Moreover, there is a natural bond created among people who share a common enemy and suffer depravation together. These relationships - and the value systems of individual members of Klal Yisroel - were about to undergo a rigorous test as they were showered with the allure of freedom, the bounty of the Egyptians, and eventually, the acquisition of each family's portion in Eretz Yisroel. (Some meforshim comment that the fear of the challenges of sudden wealth was the reason that Moshe was initially reluctant to have his people 'borrow' the valuables of the Egyptians.)

Perhaps this is what Hashem was hinting to them as he directed the attention of Klal Yisroel to the New Moon. Remember the importance of humility, proclaims the levanah. Frowning upon the success of others diminishes your own stature - in so many ways. Appreciating their success will elevate you and make you a spiritual being; a true Eved Hashem.

This may offer us a homiletic insight into the phrase that Hashem uttered to Moshe as He showed him the new moon. "K'zeh r'eiy v'kaddeish", look [at the image of the new moon] and [when you see it in this position in the sky] proclaim it to be holy [Rosh Chodesh]." Hashem is instructing Klal Yisroel that looking at the moon and remembering its message of the importance of humility will elevate your kedusha.

Another, related message of the moon may be found in its monthly cycle of waxing and waning. While the sun remains in its full glory day after day, the moon undergoes change - from its humble beginnings each month as a mere sliver in the evening sky, to full strength in mid-month, only to fade and eventually disappear from sight altogether.

The gemorah (Succah 29a) compares the Jewish people to the moon. And, in fact, throughout our history we were fortunate to enjoy periods of glory - and times of horrific churban. Hashem directed Klal Yisroel to look at the moon and realize that their newfound freedom and power may not last forever. Our strength as the Am Hanivchar needs to be much more than the power we possess and the financial success that we achieve. Enjoy the blessings I have given you, says Hashem. But at the same time, realize that you will need to live meaningful lives; lives devoted to the eternal principles of our Torah - as you earn the title "Yisroel asher b'cha espo'eir"

Best wishes for a gutten Shabbos.

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