
פרשת בא

פרק יב פסוק ב

הַחֲדָשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשׁ חֲדָשִׁים רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֲדָשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:

חז"ל

כל המברך על החדש בזמנו כאילו מקבל פני שכינה, כתיב הכא (כאן) החדש הזה וכתיב התם (שם) (שמות ט"ו) זה אלי ואנוהו. (סנהדרין מב).

מושג

כל המברך על החדש בזמנו כאלו מקבל פני שכינה.

Translation:

All who bless the new moon in its appointed time are considered as if they greeted the face of the שכינה.

Explanation:

The first Mitzvah given to the Jewish people is the command to use the new moon to set our calendar. Hashem commands us to look up to the newly emerging moon as an אות, a sign or metaphor, for our own lives. It is to teach us that just as the new moon comes out of the darkness and renews itself, so too we have the ability to change negative behavior traits and renew our relationship with Hashem. Thus, witnessing the emergence of the new moon signals an appointment or meeting with the Shechinah¹.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The fact that the first half of the Pasuk seems to be repeated in the second half, forces us to explain that the Pasuk is not simply informing us how to use the moon to set our calendar, but also how to use the moon as a model for spiritual renewal, לכם. Additionally, the Gemoroh in Sanhedrin uses the seemingly extra word הזה to draw a parallel to the word זה א-לי (from ישיר), which refers to a clear recognition of Hashem². And, the fact that the Torah saw a need to tell us, in the previous Pasuk, that Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon in Egypt, also leads us to interpret that this Mitzvah as a rejection of Egyptian culture and as teaching a fundamental spiritual lesson.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Hashem commands us to set our calendar by the cycles of the moon and use the sighting of the new moon as a catalyst to spiritual renewal, as if we were greeting Hashem.

Understand: We reject the notion that our past habits fashion behaviors that cannot be changed. By focusing on those negative habits at regular intervals, and by using the emerging moon as our model, we ensure a constant rejuvenation of our spiritual selves.

Think: A deep and novel understanding of our Pasuk is achieved through examining the Torah text for extra words (הזה), redundant phrases (ראש חדשים-ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי), and superfluous information (בארץ מצרים).

1 See note #1

2 See note #2

NOTES

1. It is indeed difficult to understand the idea behind our Musag. Why would blessing a new moon be considered a קבלת פני שכינה, a greeting of Hashem³? Additionally, why would this only be true if one made the blessing “in its proper time”?

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch provides a penetrating and beautiful commentary on our Pasuk. In his commentary he seeks to explain:

Why is this Mitzvah the very first given to the Jewish people?

Why is it important for the Torah to inform us that this Mitzvah was given בארץ מצרים?

The first half of the Pasuk ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה and the second half לכם ראש חדשים and the two seem to convey the same message; why the redundancy.

Why is there such a great stress placed upon consecrating the New Moon by sight and not by astronomical calculation⁴?

Rav Hirsch explains:

Then, while still in the land of Egypt, G-d gave Moses and Aaron a new mission to their own people, whose success was to be made more certain. Until then, Moses and Aaron had been the messengers of G-d to Pharaoh, on Israel's behalf. Henceforth, they are to be G-d's messengers to Israel; and this mission is in close relation to their mission to Pharaoh. Up until now their vocation had been to perform אותות ומופתים in Egypt. These were to bring the Egyptian people back to what they had completely lost - a consciousness of man's duty to G-d and to his fellow man - and to try and bring about a change, a fresh start, a rebirth in Pharaoh. But erroneous ideas and depravity had held sway for too long over his heart for these means to work the change. Only by the influence of dread and terror could submission to the will of G-d be forced upon him. Released from this dread, his heart remained in its old, hard, unimpressionable state. G-d took this point up, and - so that erroneous ideas and depravity which even terror-bringing miracles would not be able to eradicate, should never embed themselves in the hearts of what was to become His people - He began the construction of the inner life of His people by the institution of an אות. This regular, periodically recurring sign was always to draw the looks and thoughts of the people afresh to Him. It was to summon them to ever fresh rejuvenation of the the darkness of error and depravity, and so to ensure a constant rebirth to truth and purity that would for ever protect Israel from Egyptian spiritual and moral insensitivity...

Each time the moon finds the sun again, each time it receives its rays of light afresh, G-d wants His people to find Him again, and to be illuminated with fresh rays of His light, wherever and however, in running their course, they have had to pass through periods of darkness and obscurity....

Hence the command מצוה לקדש על פי הראיה, that the objective astronomical certainty is not sufficient, but the subjective taking note of it, is what is desired....

It is only after all this, that the words הזה לכם ראש חדשים get their real meaning. “This renewal of the moon shall be a beginning of renewals for you”. i.e. noticing, realizing, the fresh birth of the moon shall induce you to achieve a similar rejuvenation....

3 This idea of קבלת פני שכינה is echoed in the Tefilah of קידוש לבנה in which we quote the words of דבי ר' ישמעאל אלמלי לא זכו ישראל להקביל פני אביהם שבשמים פעם אחת בחדש דים (סנהדרין מב.).

4 The Gemoroh (ראש השנה כ.) teaches מצוה לקדש על הראיה. The setting of a new month was done in two ways. The optimal way was for two witnesses to see the new moon and come to בית דין הגדול to testify. In order to reach the court to provide this testimony the witnesses were allowed to be מחלל שבת! However, this would only be true if they would reach the court on the day immediately following their observation, which would allow for the new month to be consecrated in accordance with their testimony. The court would wait for the entire 30th day of the month for witnesses to come (the cycle of the moon is approximately 29 and a half days, therefore it is not possible to see the new moon before the night of the 30th), which would allow them to set ראש חודש on that day. If they did not come, the court would immediately announce the new month to begin on the following day. Thus, there were months which were 29 days long and months which were 30 days long, depending on the appearance of witnesses. Today, we no longer set the months by testimony, but by calculations alone. With few exceptions, we stagger the 29/30 day months. When we have a 30 day month, the 30th day is considered ראש חודש of the following month, as well as the next day, the first of the next month, resulting in a 2 day ראש חודש.

The Jewish consecration of the New Moon is an institution for the periodical fresh spiritual and moral rejuvenation of Israel by finding itself again in conjunction with its G-d. Our sages put the whole idea in pithy brevity in their explanation of **החדש הזה להם** by **דוגמא לכם**, this renewal of the moon gives your “your model”...

So **חדש** proclaims the salvation from sin and evil, and that is why this institution stands at the commencement of the building up of our nation. The truth which it teaches forms the foundation stone of our Jewishness and it is this which differentiates it most sharply from all paganism⁵...

Therefore, **בארץ מצרים**, in the land of the most consistent paganism, in the land in which this pagan immutability extended even into the state system of social life, and created the chains of caste, in Egypt, G-d called the future leader of His people into the open, showed him the narrow crescent of the moon struggling out of complete darkness into new light, and proclaimed, “This is your model”. The idea thus behind our monthly **קידוש לבנה** is, in effect, a monthly meeting with the Shechinah; a chance to reacquaint ourselves with our G-d and to renew our spiritual mission. **הז"ל** termed this meeting a **הקבלת פני שכינה**, a monthly greeting of **כלל ישראל** and **שבשמים**⁶. Our Musag now becomes easily understood. One who blesses the new moon in its time; who uses the emergence of the new moon as a spiritual metaphor for the renewal his own of his relationship with **הקב"ה**, is, in effect, as if he greeted the **שכינה**. Additionally, we now understand why the blessing we make on the new moon is called **קידוש לבנה** for the word **קידוש** connotes an infusion of holiness into a specific object or into a specific time. By blessing the moon we are not actually sanctifying the moon, but, rather, using the moon as an **אות** to remind us anew of the need to infuse our own lives with holiness.

2. According to the idea presented above, the parallel created through the word **זה** becomes extremely powerful. For at **יום סוף** Hashem created a miracle which would serve as an immediate and perpetual reminder that Hashem controls nature and can change it at will. Thus, those who live their lives with this recognition in mind will never feel encumbered by the burden of habit, and will possess the ability to renew themselves at will. It is this clear and unequivocal recognition of Hashem in our lives, **זה קלי**, which allows for this renewal to take place. The **אות** which is created by the sighting of the new moon conveys an identical message.

Questions for further discussion:

- a. Are there other events in the Jewish calendar which urge us to focus on renewal?
- b. The waxing and waning of the moon is the natural result of the moon lacking its own light and only reflecting the light of the sun. Does this somehow impact the message our Musag teaches?

5 After we recite the **קידוש לבנה** we conclude by saying **עלינו לשבח**. The commentators wonder why we add **עלינו** to the **קידוש לבנה**. One answer given is that we wish to make clear that we are davening to Hashem and not to the moon. According to Rov Hirsch's words the **עלינו** prayer, in which we say **וכו' שמנו כמשפחות האדמה** and **שלא עשנו כגויי הארצות ולא**, effectively conveys the message that Hashem sought to teach Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt. We thank Hashem for giving us this gift of renewal which so clearly sets us apart from the nations of the world.

6 We can now readily understand the continuation of **דברי ר' ישמעאל**'s words: **הלכך צריך למימרא מעומד**. Since the blessing of the new moon is a meeting with God it must be said standing.