

## The Privilege of Time

### Commentary on Parashat Shabbat HaChodesh

*"This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year"*  
(Ex 12:2).

This coming Shabbat, the final Shabbat in the Hebrew month of Adar, is also known as Shabbat HaChodesh. An additional *Torah* scroll is taken out on this Shabbat and Exodus 12:1-20 is read, announcing the arrival of the month of Nissan. *Shabbat Hachodesh* is the last of four special *Shabbatot* that surround the festival of Purim. Shabbat *Shekalim* and Shabbat *Zachor* precede Purim, and Shabbat *Parah* and Shabbat *HaChodesh* follow Purim.

The first day of Nissan (*Aviv*) is a historic day for the Jewish people. It was the day when we received our first commandment as a nation: *sanctify the new moon*. In Israel the new moon (month) could only be declared by a *Sanhedrin* (*Beit Din*) after hearing the testimony of two witnesses. This monthly ritual had a profound spiritual and historic significance for Jews living all over the world. The establishment of when *chagim* (Biblical Holy Days) fall, how many days they encompass are and when they are celebrated in and out of Israel all relate back to this commandment. By virtue of this commandment, the Jewish people are given mastery and privilege over the reckoning of time. From that moment the calendar with its cycle of *Shabbat*, *chagim* and festivals could exist only when human witnesses declared the new month. This signifies more than control over the determination of time and the everyday events of daily life. It represents the potential for change and renewal, for rebirth and growth, and for the waning and waxing of the moon each month.

The concept of Rosh *Chodesh* is one that connects holiness with time. Sanctifying time and marking it is central to our lives as Messianic Jews. As Abraham Joshua Heschel states, "*Judaism is more concerned with time than space*" and *Judaism is " a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time."* Thus, the *Torah* tells us in Exodus 12:2 how to mark our time so we can keep our appointed times (our times of intimacy with Him). They are not based on the Catholic (Gregorian—Pope Gregory the Great) calendar, nor on whenever we feel like it. He gave His Bride instructions on these special dates and we should be persuaded to keep them sacred. The next new moon—usually the first new moon in the springtime—is to be unto us the beginning of months (moons). This is the start of what is called *Adonai's sacred year*—the first day of *Aviv*. Modern Jewish calendars refer to this month as Nissan—the first month of the year. Not *Tishrei*, not *Yom Teruah* (*Rosh Hashanah*), but Nissan (*Aviv*). If the sages believe the world was created in *Tishrei*, then why is Nissan considered the first month of the year? *Moshe Maimodenes* (*Ramban*) understood the rationale of this law in the following way:

*"The children of Israel should mark this month as the first, and should count months in relation to this one; the second, the third, to the 12th month. This is to ensure that we remember the great miracle (of yetziat Mitzrayim - the Exodus) for whenever we mention the month, we will (effectively) be mentioning the miracle. That is why there are no names of months in the Torah, but the Torah will say (for example): "And it came to pass in the third month" (19:1) or "In the second month of the second year" (Bamidbar 10:11). This is the same notion as our counting the days of the week in relation to Shabbat. And this is why it says in the verse 'it shall be the first of the months of the year FOR YOU'. It is the first month for you as it is a remembrance of our redemption."*

It is interesting to note that following the Greek conquest of the land of Israel, three observances of the Jewish people were forbidden: (1) Circumcision, (2) Sabbath observance, and (3) The sanctification of the New Moon. Evidently our enemies always understood that these three observances, all time related (circumcision on the 8th day, Sabbath observance on the 7th day), were/are fundamental to the existence of Israel as a nation. Forbidding these three *Mitzvot* contributed to the revolt of the *Chashmona'im* and the victory of *Chanukah*.

## **For You**

Ramban sees this commandment in *Shemot* 12:2 as marking the centrality of the Exodus experience in the overall Jewish frame of mind. In the same way, the days of the week have no names in Modern Hebrew. Sunday is called *Yom Rishon*, Monday *Yom Sheni*, etc., leading up to Shabbat and emphasizing the prominence of Shabbat in our week. Similarly in the *Torah*, the months are pointing straight to the month of Nissan and to the month of *Tishrei*. *Aviv* is a month of miracles and redemption. This is the month when we celebrate Pesach, freedom, ridding ourselves of *chametz* and eating a lot of *matzah*!

In fact, the establishment of the calendar can be seen as a vital step in pursuit of freedom—all sorts of freedoms, both collective and personal. A slave is not a master of his or her own time. When I create my own weekly calendar, I am stating without reservation that I control my time. I can control my work times, my quiet times, my holidays, my family and friend times, and my work/life balance. It enables me to honor time and mark it. I am in control of my life. The establishment of a Jewish month system is most significant especially if our calendar begins at, and points to, a month of release and redemption.

The verse states, *La'chem* – “*this month is for you.*” It is our very own personal gift of time. Maybe it is implying that something new can happen during this month: a new discovery, a new release, a new learning, a new opportunity for relationships, a renewed sense of ourselves and our understanding of time. Nissan is a month “for you,” for us and for Jews all over the world.

So often, the pursuit of “making a living” becomes the purpose of our lives. We forget that making a living is the MEANS to the end. *Shabbat Hachodesh* reminds us that the mastery over time that *Elohim* has given us can be accentuated by bringing into our lives the sanctity and intent of all time related events. We must experience Pesach, the holiday of redemption in such a way that we, too, are redeemed. The *Haggadah* says; “*B'chol Dor Vador, Chayiv Adam Liroht Et Atzmo K'eelu Hu Yatzah Mimitzrayim* (in every generation it is one's duty to regard himself as though he PERSONALLY had gone out from Egypt).” The same is true of the holiday of *Shavu'ot*, when WE too must receive the *Torah* and the *Holy Spirit*, and also the holiday of *Sukkot*, when WE must experience and acknowledge *Adonai's* many blessings.

In marking Shabbat *Hachodesh* in our calendars, we are not only reminded of the coming Passover season, we are reminded that it is within our power to sanctify (bless) and become sanctified (blessed) by becoming closer to *Elohim*. We have the power, through our words (*b'rachot*), to connect to *Elohim*. All *b'rachot* (blessings) can be divided into three categories: blessings of pleasure; blessings of *Mitzvot*; and blessings of... praise, thanksgiving, and supplication, so that one be ever cognizant of his Creator and be in awe of Him.

Our divine gift of speech gives us the ability to sanctify and bring into reality both objective and subjective principles. Time, holidays and historical events can be observed in both word and deed. By blessing the New Moon and establishing a calendar we are connecting the past to the present. Just as the new moon starts off small and gets visibly stronger each night, then slowly wanes only to renew itself again, so, too, do the Children of Israel have their cycles. It is one of the manifestations of our longevity and vitality.

May we all experience the mastery of time through the consecrations of the Passover season. May we all observe the historical aspects of our calendar and celebrate the renewal that it brings us individually and collectively. And may we all bless *Adonai* for the great bounty He provides for us and in the process, and may we be blessed.

## ***A Public Demonstration***

In addition, today we read special readings to emphasize the fact that in this next new month is the festival of Passover. Passover is unique from all the other festivals of Israel. For during Passover *Elohim* established His covenant people. Passover challenged not only the Hebrews who were in Egypt, but also all the other people who were in Egypt during this time to respond to *Elohim* by receiving the blood of the lamb.

It is significant that to receive the blood of the lamb one had to do so in a most public manner, apply it to the outside of one's home upon the door posts and lintel. This fact reminds us that we need to be public about our faith in our Passover Lamb—Messiah *Yeshua*. In the same way that by receiving the blood of the lamb each household was spared from death, so too those who receive *Yeshua's* blood are spared from the consequences of death. Remember that immediately after the people kept the Passover, *Elohim* gathered them and brought them out of Egypt—the place of bondage—to freedom with Him. He began the journey that led the people into the land that *Elohim* had promised them. So too, after we receive *Yeshua*, *Elohim* begins a journey for the believer that will end with entrance into His Kingdom. Through the Blood of *Yeshua* we escape sin and the spiritual death that it brings and receive eternal life.

Passover is called the festival of redemption and redemption involves a transfer of ownership. Passover should remind each believer that he has become a purchased possession of *Elohim* and therefore needs to submit to His Master's instructions. All too often we tend to emphasize the freedom of Passover as giving us the opportunity to do what we want, rather than remembering that Biblically-speaking, Passover gave the people the liberty to serve Him. How does your life reflect the fact that you are a servant of The Most High? Can other people see the effects of you receiving the blood of the Lamb?

Make no mistake about it—the Egyptians knew immediately who kept the Passover and who did not. For those who did not, their house had death within it. Remember that Biblically speaking, death is related to sin. Therefore those who reject *Yeshua*, the true Passover Lamb, are going to be living in the midst of sin, while those who have received *Yeshua* are going to be leaving sin behind, just as the Children of Israel left Egypt in a hurry. If one reads carefully the story of the Exodus from Egypt he will find that there was a joy in the homes of those who had kept the Passover and whom the Angel of death had not visited.

Is there freedom in your life? Do you live with a great sense of gratitude for the deliverance that you have received? May the joy and freedom of knowing the Lamb of G-d, strengthen you this Passover Season as we look forward to our very own freedom experience. Remember, it is “for you” to be the beginning of months!