

PESACH: ROTE AND RENEWAL

“THE months that we count are the months of the *Omer* ... but the years that we count [equal] the solar year.”

Thus begins the Rambam in his discussion of *hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh*. It is the background for what will follow, that it is the discrepancy between the two that forces us to engage in all aspects of *Kiddush Hachodesh*. We cannot simply count 12 lunar months and end up with a “year” [as do the Muslims], nor can we divide a year into 12 to get a month. Each one of these is a separate entity and only by great manipulation can we get them to function in tandem.

Had this happened by itself, then we could understand it. After all, two people’s schedules rarely coincide. Each one has his own life with its rhythms and events. But it is Hashem who created both the sun and moon together. Why not align them? Why the disharmony and complications?

More so, the *passuk* describes the reason for the creation of sun and moon as “for signs, and for days, and for years.” Rashi explains that the moon is there for *Moadim*, while the sun is there for years and days. But if the sun is also necessary for *Moadim*, why not synchronize it?

The Rambam labels his opening section of “*Avodah Temidim uMussafim*” — which translates as “the constant sacrifices [daily] and the special sacrifices [Yom Tov]. This confluence is based on the fact that the *Tamid* is integrated in the *parashah* of the *moadim*. This seems an odd, almost oxymoronic confluence. *Temidim* are the constant unchanging *korbanos*, whereas *Mussafim* represent the extraordinary and unusual sacrifices.

The explanation is that the world rests on two pillars: continuity and constant renewal.

We articulate this in *davening*: “He Who in His kindness constantly *renews* the world.” This is true with regard to a person’s character as well. A person whose kindness is erratic, dependent on mood or whim, cannot be said to be a kind person; yet, on the other hand, a person who is always kind, but the kindness has a mechanical and rote flavor to it, is also not really kind. The ideal person can always be relied upon to do a favor, but each time it is with a new *he’aras panim*, with a new interest, with a fresh smile.

This duality lies at the core of our calendar. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created two different mechanisms of time. One mechanism produces the regularity of time, the never-changing ticking of the clock. And then there is the mechanism of renewal — the sun is the master of regularity (*shannah* means regularity and repetition, *k’shanos hachalom*, *sheini*, *Mishnah l’melech*, etc.), while the moon is the master of renewal (*chadash*). The month is not always the same; it is sometimes longer, sometimes shorter.

These two forces had to be created separately, as they are fundamentally distinct. They have nothing in common in essence, and therefore cannot be on “one grid.”

But *Klal Yisrael* is unique. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave us the task of merging these two dynamics, for it is only the two together that make a person an *oved Hashem* in the real sense of the word: consistently and constantly renewing.

Pesach is the Yom Tov that Hashem framed through the lens of “*hachodesh hazeh lachem*.” It is *Klal Yisrael*’s sacred instinct that emphasizes keeping the *halachos* and *minhagim* exactly as they used to. It is the sense that if Pesach is the birthday of *Klal Yisrael*, it is our faithful keeping of the *mesorah* that has given



us survival to this very day.

Yet, mummies also survive a long time. But it is a freezing of death, not the eternalizing of life. *Chiddush* is what expresses life. It is for this purpose that *Chazal* introduced new and puzzling behaviors, so that a child opens his eyes in amazement and asks, “*Mah nishtanah?*”

But how are we as adults to produce *chiddush*? For us the *Mah Nishtanah* has also become rote.

In all of observance we eschew *chiddush* except for our *talmud Torah*. Understanding is always new. Each time we learn something and our eyes and ears are opened, we experience something new. If we would take some time before Pesach, and learn some of the *inyanim*, pay-

ing attention with our hearts and minds, we would surely perceive *chiddush*; the same words will mean something different for us.

So, in preparation for Pesach, let us dust off the old *bechers* and *ke'aros*. Let us preserve faithfully our holy *masores*, which connects to *Pesach Mitzrayim* in one long enduring immutable tradition.

And then, let us open our eyes anew, and infuse *chiddush* and *hischadshus* into our *Seder*, merging the *Temidim* and *Musafim* that is *Klal Yisrael's* unique *avodah*.

“*Hachodesh hazeh lachem!*” ■

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