



came upon them because they took it through deception and theft, and that it is not true—HASHEM forbid—that everything belongs to the Creator.

For this reason, the Children of Israel argued that no stumbling block should arise from that gold they took from Egypt, but rather honor. And since that gold was used for the offering of the *Mishkan*, it necessarily had to be recognized that it had not come into their hands through theft, and that the sin of the Calf could not be considered proof to the contrary.

For Israel said: “He to Whom everything belongs—and by Whose will the gold and silver of Egypt came into our hands, just as He Himself commanded us—it is precisely for that same reason that He must atone for the sin of the

Calf, so that no stumbling block comes upon us because of that money, nor will the nations say that we are thieves.

“On the other hand, if He grants us atonement and no stumbling block befalls us because of that gold, then all the nations will recognize and say that we took the gold and silver of Egypt because everything belongs to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*; and the proof will be that no harm came to us because of it.”

As for the fact that Israel made the Calf, it must be said—as taught in the first chapter of *Tractate Avodah Zarah* (5b)—that Israel only made the Calf to open a door for those who wish to repent, or for other reasons mentioned by the commentators.

(Zera Shimshon, Parashat Ki Tisa, Art. 19)

## Parashat Hachodesh

### Why the Mitzvah of Sanctifying the Month was Commanded Before the Exodus from Egypt

**“This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year.” (Shemot 12:2)**

An appropriate explanation can be given as to why it was necessary to tell Israel the section regarding the sanctification of the month before they departed from Egypt. We must also carefully analyze the meaning of the words: “This month shall be **for you**.”

We find in the *Mishnah* (*Eduyot* 2:10) that the judgment of the Egyptians lasted twelve months. The *Midrash* (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:12) says that each plague lasted a quarter of a month, while the remaining days at the beginning of the month served as the warning period.

At first glance, it would seem that the judgment of the Egyptians lasted only ten months, as there were ten plagues. The *Maharsha* (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a) explains that there must have been intermediate periods during the year in which there was neither plague nor warning; therefore, when the Sages say the judgment of the Egyptians was twelve months, they mean that twelve months elapsed from the beginning of the plagues and their warnings until their conclusion.

However, even according to this explanation, it is necessary to understand why the process was structured this way and did not simply consist of ten consecutive months of plagues without interruption.

It can be explained as follows: the Divine Name *Havayah* (the Tetragrammaton Y-H-V-H) expresses that Hashem is the One who gives existence to all things. Just as He created the world out of nothing and granted it existence and permanence, that very principle was denied by Pharaoh, who maintained that everything stemmed from fate, the stars, sorcerers, and the like.

For this reason, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* desired that the punishment of Egypt last twelve full months, so that the judgment would be extended throughout that entire time. In this way, Pharaoh could not say: “If this

month had passed, the fate or the influence of that [next] month would have saved me.”

Therefore, his judgment deliberately lasted twelve months, corresponding to the twelve signs of the zodiac, and also corresponding to the twelve tribes—who are compared to the stars and constellations—as well as the twelve diagonal boundaries that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* established in the creation of the world, which was created through His Name.

These also correspond to the twelve combinations of the Divine Name *Havayah*, for in each month a different combination of the Name and one of the twelve constellations dominates. All of this corresponds to the twelve tribes and the twelve boundaries of Creation. Therefore, Egypt was punished and judged under all the combinations of the letters of the Divine Name.

Now, twelve times the Name *Havayah* (26 times 12) has the numerical value (*Gematria*) of the word *chodesh* (חדש—‘month’, which equals 312). Therefore, at the conclusion of that judgment which the twelve combinations exercised over Egypt—since the wicked convert the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Justice—Hashem gave Israel the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the month and said to them: “**Hachodesh hazeh (החודש הזה) ‘This month’ shall be for you.**”

That is to say: those twelve combinations, whose numerical value corresponds to that of *zeh* (זה: ‘this’, which equals 12) and *chodesh* (חדש: ‘month’, which equals 312), which acted with judgment against Egypt, shall be for you a source of goodness and mercy.

Based on the above, it can also be explained that the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the month was commanded because when a person sees the renewal of the moon and recites the corresponding blessing, they are proclaiming the renewal of Creation, which is one of the foundations of faith. Thus, one recognizes the Divinity of the Creator of the World, who renewed Creation in the same way He renews the moon each month, as Rabbeinu Bachya writes (*Shemot* 12:2).

And this is precisely the opposite of the belief held by the wicked Pharaoh.

(Zera Shimshon, Parashat Bo, Art. 6)

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