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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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# SHABBOS HACHODESH

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## NISSAN AND THE NEW MOON

### CONTENTS:

Part I. The Nation of the Moon - 5

Part II. The Sin of the Moon - 10

Part III. Celebrating the New Moon - 15

## Part I. The Nation of the Moon

### Shabbos HaChodesh

On Shabbos HaChodesh we read *maftir* from Parshas Bo (12:1); the Bnei Yisroel are going to be leaving Mitzrayim very soon, and Hashem is speaking to Moshe and Aharon. He's telling them the first *dinim*, the first Torah laws, that the people are going to be commanded to keep as a new nation; about Rosh Chodesh Nissan and the various *dinim* for preparing the *korban Pesach*.

Now, Rashi at the very beginning of the Chumash, in Bereishis, says the Torah could have begun right here: with these *pessukim* in Parshas Bo. After all, the nation was being born right now, and they were being commanded for the first time by their Creator. Rashi explains a certain reason why it's

not that way, but actually it's right here in Parshas HaChodesh where the Torah begins.

### A New Beginning

And so, it pays therefore to take especial note of what's written here, what the Torah 'starts' with: הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לְכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה – Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells us that from now on the first month of our calendar, of counting months, will always be the month of Nissan.

From now on, all the years that we find in the Tanach are calculated according to the Exodus of Mitzrayim. When Hashem wants to tell us that Shavuot falls out on a certain date, He says “in the third month” – it means the third month from Nissan. When He wants to tell us that Rosh Hashanah is the first day of a certain month, He says “on the first day of the seventh month” – the seventh month from Nissan. So you see that even Rosh Hashanah is not called the first month. The Torah doesn't count from the creation of the world; all the calculations of the years are from the Yetzias Mitzrayim.

And why is that? What's Nissan more than Tishrei when the world was created? Because *this* month, *that's* the beginning of time. Bereishis, that's when the history of the world began, but for the Am Yisroel, it was right now. “You're becoming a nation now,” Hashem says. “You're going to leave Egypt to serve Me and therefore, הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה – *This month, when you went out to freedom, לְכֶם רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לְכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה* – *that's the beginning of your history (ibid.)*.” The creation of שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, the entire universe, that's important but it's nothing compared to the creation of a people to serve Hashem.

### The Mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh

But it wasn't only the lesson of Chodesh Nissan that the Am Yisroel was being taught now. It's much more than that because at this time הָרָאָהּ וְאָמַר לוֹ בְּשֵׁהִירָח, לְבִנְיָהּ בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָרֵאשִׁית – *Hashem showed Moshe the moon in its renewal, וְאָמַר לוֹ בְּשֵׁהִירָח, מִתְחַדֵּשׁ יְהִיֶה לְךָ רֵאשׁוֹן הַחֹדֶשׁ* – *and He told him, “When the moon renews itself like this, that will be the beginning of the month for the Am Yisroel” (ibid. Rashi)*.

It means that the entire principle of Rosh Chodesh, of the Am Yisroel counting according to the moon, was being taught to them now. Yes, the principle of Nissan being the first month, that's true, but also Rosh Chodesh in general. A new idea, a new mitzvah, for the Am Yisroel: Your months are calculated according to the moon.

The nations of the world don't make any fuss about the new moon because they follow the sun in their calculations. January, February, March, April, they're all sun months. The truth is that even the gentile word 'month'

from the word moon is just a borrowed term from us. The Gentiles don't have a moon month; it's a sun month.

### The Jewish Calendar

Whereas for the Am Yisroel, our month is a lunar month. That's why every year, our year, the moon year, falls eleven days behind the sun year. Every once in a while, by a certain arrangement, there's a leap year, an extra month to make up for that. But our calendar is moon-based; the moon is our criterion of time.

That's what we say in *Barchi Nafshi*, עֲשֵׂה יָרֵחַ לְמוֹעָדִים – Hashem made the moon for the festivals (Tehillim 104:19). *Moadim* means אֲלֵה מוֹעָדֵי ה'. A remarkable statement! עֲשֵׂה יָרֵחַ – Why did Hashem make a moon? לְמוֹעָדִים – So that the Am Yisroel should utilize it to know when Rosh Chodesh is and calculate our *yomim tovim* according to that. And so the moon is like a Jewish calendar hanging in the sky.

### The Jewish Moon

Imagine that you would see a great calendar suspended in space with pages of light – inscribed with stars instead of letters – and telling you when Pesach will fall out, when Shavuot and Sukkos will fall out. That's the moon – it's there for the Am Yisroel.

Now that may seem very chauvinistic or parochial, very narrow-minded. Here is a little nation down below, looking up at the moon. “It's our moon,” they say. “It's a Jewish moon.”

The whole world would laugh at such a thing. The New York Times will have a cartoon about that. It'll show a *Yid'l* in the *velt'l* pointing to the moon, “It's my moon.” They'll put a *yarmulkah* on the moon and ridicule us. “Ha! A Jewish moon! The Jews want to own everything for themselves. Ha! Ha! Ha!” A big guffaw.

So they can laugh but that's the plain truth; it's our moon. I'll tell you more, it's our sun too. All the stars are ours. The universe is ours. Everything is for the Am Yisroel. But the moon is especially ours – it's our calendar. There's a *luach* hanging in the sky for us.

### The Moon Nation

But we're going to say something now, an additional point. Not only is the moon for the Am Yisroel but we are also compared to the moon. We find that reiterated in a number of ways in the *seforim*. That's why when we go outside once a month to thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for renewing the moon, so when we make the *bracha* we say as follows: וְלִבְנֵה אָמֵר – Hashem

spoke to the moon; it means He gave the command, שְׁתַּתְּחִיךְ – that the moon should go through phases. The sun doesn't wax and wane; the sun is a sun all the time. But the moon becomes smaller and then it disappears. עֲטָרָת בָּטֶן תִּפְאָרֶת לְעַמּוּסֵי בָטֶן – And it does that as a crown of glory for those who are carried from the belly. 'Those carried from the belly' means the Am Yisroel, like the *possuk* says about us: הָעַמּוּסִים מִנִּי בָטֶן – The ones carried by Hakadosh Baruch Hu from our inception; from the beginning of our history, the moon symbolizes us.

And so not only do we count according to the moon, but we are also symbolized by the moon. And we have to study that analogy and gain the information that it wishes to provide us; what it means that we are like the moon not like the sun.

### Interpreting the Allegory

You know, the sun is most obvious in the world; the entire world is bathed in the light of the sun. Whereas the moon is many times overlooked, it gives off only a little light, and sometimes it disappears entirely. And so Rosh Chodesh signifies an important principle. It's a symbol that the Am Yisroel was especially made to be a small people. We are a minority in the world. And we are going to remain a minority. The nations of the world, no matter how diverse they are, all together they comprise one vast majority in opposition to the Am Yisroel. It makes no difference whether they are Mohammedans, or Christians or Buddhists or evolutionists, all together the nations are standing in opposition to us.

Now, it doesn't mean that we fight with them, no. And on certain issues we can even ally with the good gentiles; in fighting against immorality and wickedness. Certainly, we can. But fundamentally, we stand alone against all the nations of the world. We are a unique people because there's nothing in the nations of the world that can equate what the Jewish people stand for. The Jewish people stand for Hashem Who gave us a Torah at Sinai. That's a Jew summed up in one sentence. We are the nation that accepts the obligation of obeying the Word of Hashem that was delivered at Sinai.

### United Nations

And this, no creed in the world follows. Some say there never was a Matan Torah at Har Sinai and the others say it was abrogated later. Others say there never was a Sinai. Some say there's no God at all. *Hatzad hashaveh she'bahen*, the common denominator is that we are the only one that upholds the Toras Hashem from Sinai. You could be Chassidic or Misnagdic, it doesn't make any difference. Sefardi, Ashkenazi, no difference. All together

we were *mekabel* the Torah at Sinai and we are standing faithfully by that. That's the Jewish nation.

And because of that we're the one nation that doesn't mix. The Jew doesn't intermarry. The Jews have certain moral principles. And therefore, all the nations of the world feel estranged from the Jew. The fact is that even today, when there are so many Jews who have lost their identity, there are still a lot of traits in them that don't permit them to mingle. They're misfits in gentile society.

That's why the world doesn't like us. They can't agree on anything but this one thing they know, that we're dirty Jews. The Negro will call you "a dirty Jew". The WASP will call you "a dirty Jew" and the Irishmen will also call you "a dirty Jew". They all unite for that. You're a dirty Jew to everybody, no matter where you go. In all languages you're a dirty Jew, worse than a dirty Jew. Don't expect anybody to side with you. You're a minority. You're a *me'at*. You're the smallest of all the nations. That's what it means to be like the moon.

### **Kiddush Levanah**

So you'll say if we're so small, so disregarded, what's going to happen to us? What's going to be?

And that's why every month when the moon renews itself after disappearing, we go outside on the street and we say, *עֲטֹרַת תְּפָאֲרֵת לְעַמּוּסֵי בְּטָן* – *It's being renewed as a crown of glory to the Am Yisroel*, *שָׁהֵן עֲתִידִין לְהִתְחַדֵּשׁ* – *to remind us that we too are going to be renewed*. That's what the moon is saying to the world.

Of course, the Gentiles will put up a protest about that: "What kind of business is this? You hear the arrogance of these people? Orthodox Jews standing outside in the street, they say, the reason the moon is now renewed, it's a symbol that they too will reappear once again as a great nation! Ignoramuses! Living in darkness! Don't they know the moon has phases? The moon orbits around the earth, and therefore its appearance changes according to the changing angles of sunlight. It's a natural thing. So what's this business about a symbol?"

### **Revealing the Secret**

And so we say to the world, "Oh, you poor, ignorant fellows. You never learned Parshas HaChodesh. So we'll tell you the secret. Everything has a natural purpose too, but we live on a higher plane than that, and we know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu says it's for us: 'There is a higher purpose. I made it this way to be a message from Me to you, to My nation that is symbolized

by the moon, that You will someday reappear and become the greatest in the world.”

Right now, we are like the moon. Until the end of days, we're going to be a minority, like the moon is so small compared to the sun. Sometimes we don't even see it at all because it's so small. But the moon in its phases is a symbol of what's going to happen eventually. Someday we will be renewed. Eventually the truth will be demonstrated to all mankind. Eventually, the nation of the moon will grow full again, and we'll become the great nation recognized by everyone.

“Someday the world will discover the truth,” Hashem says, “and then you're going to shine. **וְהַמְשֹׁכְלִים יִזְהָרוּ כְּזוֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ** – *And those who had seichel, those who understood someday they'll shine with the splendor of the firmament.* You're going to shine then with a light, with a splendor that'll make the sun look inconspicuous. The sun will be lost in your brilliance someday.” But until then, until the end of history, we live with the knowledge that we learned when we came out of Mitzrayim: “My people,” Hashem says, “Rosh Chodesh means that you're like the moon; you'll walk through history as the small one, the ones who live in the shadows of the night.”

## Part II. The Sin of the Moon

### The 'Chatas' of Hashem

Now, when it comes to Rosh Chodesh there's a queer remark in the Torah in Sefer Bamidbar (28:15). It's talking there about the *korbanos* that are brought in the Beis Hamikdash every Rosh Chodesh and it says, **וְשִׁעִיר אֶחָד חֲטָאת לַה'** – *one he-goat is to be brought as a sin offering for Hashem.*

Now that's an unusual expression that we don't find by any other *korbanos*. Every offering is made to Hashem but on Rosh Chodesh it says **לַה' חֲטָאת** – *A sin offering for Hashem.* Actually, it doesn't mean that, but it's written that way for a reason; the Gemara (Chulin 60b) explains that Hashem is saying, **הִבְיֵאוּ כִּפְרֵה עָלַי** – *Bring a sin offering every Rosh Chodesh to atone for Me.*

Now what sin, *kavayachol*, did Hakadosh Baruch Hu do?

### The 'Sin' of Hashem

So listen to the following story that everybody knows. It's not a true story; the Ramchal says these things are *meshalim* but it's very important to understand what it's telling us. **אֶת שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים** – *In the beginning*

Hashem made two big luminaries in the sky, the sun and the moon (Bereishis 1:16), and according to this story the moon was as big as the sun in the beginning. And so the moon appeared before Hashem and said, “O’ Creator, is it right that there should be two equal lights? Does it make sense that two monarchs, the sun and the moon, should rule side by side?”

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, “Well said, Moon. So go now and make yourself small.”

So the moon put up a protest, “Because I said a proper thing, I should be punished?”

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, “Well said again, Moon. I sinned by making you small. So from now on My people will bring a sin-offering on My behalf every month.” In the beginning of every month when the moon looks so small – compared to the sun it’ll remain small even when it’s full, but at the beginning of the month, that’s when it’s smallest – so Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “Rosh Chodesh, that’s the day to bring an offering to atone for what I did.”

### **The Nonsense Sin**

Now, actually there’s nothing to atone for when it comes to a small moon. At nighttime when somebody wants to give you a night lamp, he won’t give you a huge lamp that illuminates the room like the sunshine. It might be a good thing in certain areas where you’re afraid to go at night, but naturally a nightlight has to be small. You want a mild little light that you can use, but in case you want to sleep with the light on, you could sleep too. Suppose there was light by day and by night. No one would ever go to sleep. They would drop dead from overworking. And so it’s a great blessing that the moon is little, that the light of the moon is sparse.

Also, if the moon emitted a light every night just like the sun, then the earth itself would be ruined within a few days. The sun is busy pumping up from the earth all the materials – minerals and water are pumped up by means of the sun’s energy into the vegetation, into the trees and plants. And if the moon at night had the same power of the sun, so the earth would be overworked, over exploited. All the organisms that live in the earth, the fungi, the bacteria, would all perish, and the precious topsoil that supports life all over the earth would become a desert. And so night is very important for the earth to recuperate from its exertion during the day.

And so we have to be grateful for that wonderful creation, אֵת הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן, לְמַנְשֵׁלֵת הַלַּיְלָה – *the small luminary that rules over the night*. It’s a salvation for the world that there’s a small moon. And yet it says here that Hakadosh

Baruch Hu said, “That’s My misdeed *kavayachol*. Bring an offering for me because I made a small moon.”

### **The Moon’s Mystery**

So we understand right away that this is a mystical story – there are secrets here and I’m not able to explain everything. All the things are too deep for my little head, but something we can explain right away. Maybe you have your own explanation, but listen to this.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu created this world in such a way that the Jewish people, they are *the* people; גוי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ – they are *the* one nation in the world. He made the world for them. Now if you’re a real American, a democratic American, such a thing is going to grate on your ears. It’ll rub you the wrong way to hear that He made the entire creation for the Jews. But that’s not my fault. I’ve been speaking here for years about it – you should have come earlier. But keep on coming, I’ll explain it again someday. The world was made for the Am Yisroel! The world was not made that it should be inhabited by squirrels. The world was not made for rabbits. It wasn’t even made for men. It was made for righteous men, the best men, and that’s the Am Yisroel, a righteous nation.

And so we should be as big as all the nations combined. We should have North America and South America. We should have Europe and Asia. The *umos haolam*, they should be in Africa somewhere. That’s how it should be. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s plan calls for a certain system that the righteous nation should always be in a minority, that we should be the מֵעַט מִכֵּל הָעַמִּים. “My people, go and make yourself small,” Hashem says.

### **Jewish Suffering**

So the Jewish people say, “Ribono Shel Olam, is that right? We, the best people, should be the smallest?” You know, it’s not easy to be a minority. The minority suffers and many Jews are misled because of that. For so long Jews have been insulted, vilified, calumniated and they’ve been belittled by the world, so today people are ashamed. They don’t see how great their nation is.

Why is it that so many Jews are ashamed of being Jews today? Why do so many Jews try to identify with the Gentiles? Because they see that the Gentiles are the powerful ones. And therefore they tend to go to the power holders. That’s the secret of all the assimilation. Why do people move away from Jewish neighborhoods? Why do people intermarry? Because they are ashamed of their people.

## Universal Suffering

And the world suffers too because the Am Yisroel is so small. Had we been a huge nation, a big empire, then we would have illuminated all the world with our Torah. Everybody would have learned the great principles. There's so much to learn in Torah. So many noble ideals that mankind could have flourished under the splendor of the Torah's idealism.

Isn't it a great tragedy that Rashi – Rashi, that man, a genius, the brilliant thinker – was unknown in the world. In Rashi's time, who was famous? Kings and monarchs. Knights on horseback and generals. The world didn't know about Rashi. They didn't know about Rabbeinu Tam. Our great men are overshadowed in the world, and that was a big loss for the world.

We have real Jews who are brilliant men. Our Gedolim have excellent minds. We have teachers! Reb Yisroel Salanter *zichrono livrahcha*, he could have taught philosophy in the universities. No question about that. Instead of him there were *shikurim*, beer drinkers, who taught philosophy. And not only our great men could light up the world. Our plain mothers and fathers would be models for the world. Our little boys and girls could be models.

## A Light Unto the Nations

And so not only does that cause weaker Jews to be deceived, but it causes a darkness that deprives even better people. I'm sure there are millions of good gentiles in all the generations that could have gained had they known what Judaism was teaching. The Mesillas Yesharim alone is a handbook of righteousness, a beautiful book that can inspire millions. The Chovos Halevavos would open the eyes of millions. Rabbeinu Saadya Gaon, such a clear thinker, he could have inspired nations. The Rambam! And so we could have been a light to the nations.

But the world was deprived of that great benefit. There's no question that the better ones of the nations of the world who could have converted to us lost that opportunity. Some of them became monks, nuns; some became priests of various religions. Some are bowing down to wooden Buddha idols in India, ruining their lives. I'm certain some of them were good people but they went wrong because we're so small.

And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "Bring for Me an atonement for making the moon, the Am Yisroel, so small. They suffer because of that and they aren't as proud as they should be, and also I deprived the gentile world of this great light that could have been a benefit for them." And so every month there's a *הִקְטָאת לֵה'*, a he-goat offering brought on behalf of Hashem.

## The Kindness of Katnus

Now we know Hakadosh Baruch Hu does not need any *kapparah*. צְדִיקָה ה' בְּכָל הַרְקִיּוֹ וְהַסִּיד בְּכָל מַעֲשָׂיו – *He is righteous and kindly in all of His ways and all of His acts.* So if He made us small, it's for our benefit. Just like we said that the world cannot exist with a big moon – all the processes cannot function if the moon is as bright as the sun – same thing with the Am Yisroel.

The Am Yisroel has to be small, otherwise the entire purpose of the world is vitiated. The world would lose its purpose if there would be too much light. I'll repeat that last sentence because it's so important. *The world would be ruined if there was too much light!* If the Am Yisroel would have a great empire and it would spread over the world just like Christianity did or just like Islam did, the world would lose inestimably.

## Free Will and Failure

And we'll explain that. The world was created so that man should have free will to choose; every human being should have the choice of doing this way or that way. Human beings are not machines, they're not computers who do things according to programs; they do things according to their own choice. And that's their success, or *chas v'shalom* their failure. That's what we're born for, that's what we live for, to choose. And in order that there should be free will, it's imperative that there should not be any pressure on them to choose righteousness. If there's a pressure, that's not choosing. And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu made this world a place of darkness – only a small insignificant moon is shining – and the Am Yisroel is ignored and despised in this world.

That's our benefit, our success! If we had power in the world, we'd be missing out on that glorious opportunity of being persecuted. We needed to be surrounded with enemies, ideological and other kinds, in order to become great. When the Jew was surrounded on all sides by churches in Europe, all sides nothing but Christians, everybody believed in all the fairytales of the Christian religion and the Jew was considered a demon, a devil who killed their savior and everybody hated the Jew and still the Jew did not give up his identity, he remained loyal to his Torah in every detail, that was his greatness!

The Am Yisroel is little in order that the world should be tested and so many Jews should say, "Well, it doesn't pay to be a Jew. Let's join the majority." And they'll drop off. Now you know why the nations exist. Of course you can't go and tell it to the world, but between ourselves we know nations exist only to test us. And some Jews yielded. Some Jews got lost! The Tzedukim yielded and got lost! The Karaites yielded and got lost! The

first Christian Jews yielded and got lost! The Reformers yielded and got lost!  
And many today are getting lost!

### **The Moon Makes Us Great**

And they're losing the great opportunity to succeed in this world. It's the Jew who says, "Nothing doing! If it's hard to be a Jew, I'm going to choose. If it's a disadvantage to be a Jew, I'm going to choose. If it's not easy to obey the Torah, I'm going to choose to obey it." It's when you fight against the environment, that's your great success. "I'll live among Jews! I'll live where it's densely populated with *frum* Jews. And I'll call myself with a Jewish name and look like a Jew."

And that's the remarkable lesson of Rosh Chodesh that the Am Yisroel had to learn right now when they were leaving Mitzrayim to go out into the world and begin their history. We are the nation of the moon! We have opponents all over the world – nations that oppose us politically, nations that oppose us ideologically, ideas and theories that are against us, teachings that oppose us, religions against us – and all of them are created for one purpose: to give us the opportunity to become great. Hakadosh Baruch Hu has made all these arrangements just for that one purpose – in order to bestow on His people the opportunity to choose greatness!

## **Part III. Celebrating the New Moon**

### **Rosh Chodesh: Recalibration Day**

So we come back now to Parashas HaChodesh and we understand why Rosh Chodesh Nissan is so important, why it's the first month of history. When the Bnei Yisroel went out of Egypt, they were beginning now a career of accomplishment; they were being born now for the all important function of being **מַעֲט מְכַל הָעַמִּים**.

Now, a nation that is going to have to undergo that test of being the **מַעֲט מְכַל הָעַמִּים** and pass that *nisayon* successfully, needs to be reminded from time to time about its function in this world. And that's why, besides for Rosh Chodesh Nissan, they were taught the *dinim* of Rosh Chodesh in general. Because what better time to recalibrate, to take stock, than Rosh Chodesh, the symbol of our smallness and our greatness.

### **Don't Squander the Chodesh**

But there's more. Rosh Chodesh is an important day for a nation being born now because of all the principles we discussed but also because it

teaches us about time, about not squandering our one chance in this world to accomplish what we were born for. That's one of the most important purposes of counting months – to remind us that time is passing.

A month is a big slice of life and when we count months we're reminding ourselves that we have too important a function in this world to let time just go by. And so Rosh Chodesh means, "What have you done for Me lately? I gave you a function in this world," Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "and what did you accomplish with this past month, with this great gift of life that I gave you?"

### **The Watermelon of Life**

Rosh Chodesh is like the woman who has a lot of children and the father brought home a watermelon. It was a big watermelon and she wanted the children to appreciate it. She knew that if she would just put the whole thing on the table it would be finished up and forgotten about so she cut it up into little slices and gave each one a little piece. "Tomorrow," she said, "is another day and we'll sit down and enjoy it all over again." And so she intentionally handed out little pieces each day so they should appreciate it more.

Life is the biggest watermelon there is! There's no bigger fun than being alive. Practice that tonight when you walk out; you're walking down Ocean Parkway thinking how much fun it is to be alive. To walk, to breathe, to see! Ahh! But not only fun. It's an opportunity! It's an opportunity to make something from yourself. Achieving, that's the best fun of this world!

### **A Slice of Life**

But the trouble is if it's dished out in in one long monotonous string, one big watermelon. Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives you seventy or eighty or ninety or a hundred years in one big chunk and you might feel it's nothing. It's easy to swallow up the whole thing without paying attention and before you know it it's almost finished.

So what does He do? He dishes it out in portions. Life is chopped up in small portions, so that we should make the best use of it. He cuts it up first of all in years. Every year you feel, "Oh, it's another year I'm getting. Baruch Hashem, an additional year." And you take stock.

But even that is too much. It's too big a portion. So He chops it up in months. A month! Thirty days! That's a nice slice of life! And it's renewed constantly so it should be an opportunity for us to appreciate it. That's why He made a moon – the new moon says, "Wake up sleepyhead! Another month just passed you by and another one is heading your way."

## The Gift of Rosh Chodesh

That's why we say in Mussaf Rosh Chodesh, **רָאשֵׁי חֳדָשִׁים לְעַמְּךָ נָתַתְּ** – You, Hashem, gave to Your people Roshei Chadoshim. *Nasata* means that You gave it to us as a gift. And what is the gift of Rosh Chodesh? There are many reasons why it's called a gift but the first thing is what it says in the *siddur*: “You gave it to us as a **זמן כפרה לכל תולדותם** – a time when they make atonement for all that happened to them.”

On Rosh Chodesh you bring *korbanos*, offerings, that atone for everything that happened in the past month and therefore when Rosh Chodesh comes, it's intended as an opportunity to stop and think, to take stock of your life. It's not done but it should be done. Stop and think, “What did I do in the past month? How much did I accomplish in the past month?”

That's why *erev* Rosh Chodesh some people use it as a *yom kippur katan*. In many places they used to fast the day before Rosh Chodesh and say special *tefillos*. Now, I'm not saying everyone must do that but there's no question that everyone should utilize Rosh Chodesh itself as an opportunity to make a little pause and think about the past month.

## A Day of Atonement

*Zman kapparah* means that the Jew who lives with an awareness of his function in the world thinks back over the past month and he considers whether he committed any errors, whether he forgot about Hakadosh Baruch Hu, whether he was in any detail disloyal to the Torah, he wronged his fellow man. It's not for the entire year – that's Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – but at least in the month that has ensued, we review it, we look back.

And if you look you'll discover. If you don't look, you never have any errors. People can live with a clear conscience all their lives although they committed sometimes serious things. But if you look back, and you spend more time on it, you'll be surprised how much you'll discover that needs to be rectified: mistakes made between yourself and your neighbors, members of your family, the wrong things you said, the way you reacted. And also to people on the street, how did you behave. How did you behave when it came to your obligations in giving *tzedakah*, or dealing with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, did you think about Him enough.

There's a great deal of work on Rosh Chodesh, to look back since the last Rosh Chodesh. What happened; what happened in our *tefillah*. What happened in our *bein adam laMokom*, *bein adam lachaveiro*, what happened in the families. It's a very good idea to give an accounting to yourself of what happened in the past month. In general, a Jew lives with *cheshbon*.

“באו חֶשְׁבוֹן” a Jew is told. “Come and make calculations.” A bookkeeping of life is just as important — much more important — than the bookkeeping of business, and Rosh Chodesh was created for that.

### Plan Ahead

And *cheshbon* includes the future too. So on Rosh Chodesh he sits down by himself for a few minutes and he thinks, “What am I going to do with my coming month?” Because Rosh Chodesh is a new beginning, a fresh start, and a nation that lives for a purpose — not for pastimes, not for entertainment and restaurants and baseball — makes sure to utilize that day as a preparation for a new beginning; it’s a chance for a new start.

So let’s say you were discouraged last month and you didn’t accomplish much. So now you look back and you say, “I was a flop, a failure, but no matter! I’ll start all over again.” And Hakadosh Baruch Hu is going to aid you. He’ll help you make that new beginning because that’s His system with those who try to make a beginning; He’s going to help them.

### Pray Ahead

Now, when you take stock of the past and plan for the future, included in that is to *ask* for the future. Because now you appreciate what a month means and you want the upcoming thirty days to be successful. That’s why when the Rosh Chodesh *bentchen* used to take place, Jews used to weep. Yehi Ratzon is a serious time in the synagogue, on Shabbos Mevorchim.

And so Rosh Chodesh is a day when we ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu to prosper us for the month to come; that we know from Yaaleh V’yavo. Today everybody is confident and they just rattle it off but you’re missing out because it’s important to prepare for the month ahead with *tefillah*. We want to be remembered for *tovah* and *bracha* and *chayim tovim* and *yeshua v’rachamim*. We’re asking for a lot! And so when you say Yaaleh V’yavo next time, remember that the month depends to a big extent on how you asked for it.

Not only in Yaaleh V’yavo. Yaaleh V’yavo symbolizes all of our *tefillas* for the coming month. All day long you should be busy speaking to Hashem asking Him that the month that’s coming should be a successful month, that the next month should be a month of good health, a month of success in *parnassa*, a month of *aliyah*; we should make progress in serving Him and in knowing Torah more.

There’s a lot of things to ask for! And we shouldn’t generalize! Ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu that the month that’s coming should be a month free of automobile accidents, free of illnesses — a million things could happen *chas*

v'shalom, and we don't want any one of them to happen. And therefore it's so important for a person to pray ahead of time. If you usher in a new month with the proper prayers, Hakadosh Baruch Hu listens to your requests, you have much more opportunity of being successful.

### **Don't Forget to Say Thank You**

And of course we can't just merely beg always and say give me. You have to say thank You too. And so a big part of Rosh Chodesh is thanking Hakadosh Baruch Hu for the past month. And that's what Hallel says; Hallel is to thank Hashem that you lived to this Rosh Chodesh. "Another month I lived! Oh Hashem, I thank You so much!"

You know when you're being served something that's delicious so you don't say, "I'll wait till the end of the meal and then I'll say thank you to the host." Every dish that he hands you say "thank you." Every separate course you say "thank you." And so we don't wait only till the end of the year. Every Rosh Chodesh we say Hallel because we're thanking for the past month.

We should put work into that, effort into thanking, and the Hallel should be with great gratitude. Thirty days of happiness, thirty days of life. Thirty days that you ate meals almost every day. Maybe every day. And so there's a lot to be grateful for. Thirty days that you wore clothing. Thirty days that you were able to sleep. Thirty days that you breathed. Breathing thirty days! There's a lot to be grateful for.

Hallel means to thank Hashem that you lived to see another Rosh Chodesh. Suppose a man was sentenced to be put to death and he received a reprieve for one month, a month is a gift. Many people pay big money in order to live another month. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu certainly deserves a great Hallel for a gift not of a minute. A minute? **יש קונה עולמו בשעה אחת** – In one minute, a person can do *teshuva*. And the next minute if you'll get busy, you could become a *ben Olam Haba*.

And therefore we sum up now; besides for all the secrets, the allegories and lessons of Rosh Chodesh, there are also three elements to the day. Number one is the element of *zman kaparah*, to atone for the past month which means retrospect, to go back and consider what happened, mistakes we made or the progress we made in order to hold onto it. If you started good things, you have to consider what good things you began in order to hold onto it. Second, to beg and ask that the month should be a month of happiness and success. And number three, to thank Hashem for the past month; to express our gratitude that we lived to see another Rosh Chodesh.

## The Ancient Holiday

And so you understand now why Rosh Chodesh was so important in the ancient times. Although the Torah did not forbid any work on Rosh Chodesh, it's remarkable that our forefathers voluntarily refrained from work on Rosh Chodesh. During the entire time of the first Beis Hamikdash, our forefathers refused to work on Rosh Chodesh. You see that everywhere in Tanach. It was to them like a regular festival, a holiday, a *yom tov*.

And it's easy to understand why. Parshas HaChodesh is the beginning of the Torah! That's when we became a nation! Rosh Chodesh Nissan is the beginning of our history! And how did we survive history? How is it that we'll remain standing until the end of time? Because we're a nation that lives with all the lessons of Rosh Chodesh, all the attitudes and principles that can be gained by living according to the lessons of the new moon.

And that's the best way to go into Nissan, the month of Pesach, the month when we were born – by recommitting ourselves to live by the lessons that Moshe Rabbeinu taught the nation on that first Rosh Chodesh of our history.

**Have a Wonderful Shabbos**

## Let's Get Practical

### Don't Waste the Slice

In Parshas Hachodesh, we learn about the very first mitzvah given to the newborn nation. We are taught to count months, to live by the moon, and to remember that time is being handed to us in portions. A month is not just another page on the calendar; it is a slice of life given for a purpose.

This week, *bli neder*, once each day I will pause for a few seconds and remind myself: Today is a slice of life that will never return. I will try to do at least one small act – a mitzvah, a kind word, or a moment of self-control – simply because I do not want the day to pass unused.

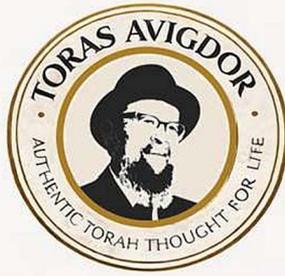
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### Bringing the Shechinah into the Home

The Israelites worked hard in the *midbar* to build the Mishkan, and when they finished, Moshe Rabbeinu blessed them for their efforts. He said, "May the *Shechinah* rest in the work of your hands; may the pleasantness of Hashem, our God, be upon us..." (Rashi, *Shemos* 39:43) Now, let's ask a question: Did the Israelites do Moshe Rabbeinu a great personal favor by building him such a nice Mishkan? Was it even a voluntary act? The Torah emphasizes that the work of building the Mishkan was an obligation: "*Moshe saw all the work, that they did it as Hashem commanded, so did they do it, and Moshe blessed them.*" (*Shemos* 39:43) It is clear that had the Israelites been negligent in the building of the Mishkan, it would have been considered a grievous sin. Nevertheless, after they had done all the work properly, Moshe Rabbeinu smiled upon them. He blessed them fervently that Hashem's pleasantness should be upon them!

The message from this is clear. The wife works to prepare the home nicely. Sometimes this entails great effort – for instance, on *erev Shabbos*, when there's so much to cook and clean and prepare. Sometimes a husband feels: After all, isn't that a woman's role? And then he may neglect to smile at her and bless her that the pleasantness of Hashem should rest upon the work of her hands. Let us learn from Moshe Rabbeinu, who blessed the Jewish people for fulfilling their obligations and gave them the greatest and most pleasant blessing of all: that the *Shechinah* should be with them.

When should the wife be blessed and thanked? This, too, we can learn from Moshe Rabbeinu. He blessed the people when they completed the work, as mentioned above, and he blessed them again when he and Aharon actually used the Mishkan and offered *korbanos* there. (See *Vayikra* 9:23 and Rashi) Thus, a man should express his appreciation to his wife when everything is finished Friday afternoon. And he should thank and bless her again at night, after partaking of the meal.

Indeed, the Jewish home is a miniature *Beis HaMikdash*.

This is surely so on *Shabbos Kodesh*, which is like the *Beis HaMikdash* in so many ways. It is only appropriate to bless the wife when she prepares the *avodah* of the home and again after we have actually performed the *avodas ha-kodesh* of the *Shabbos* meal.

This brings Divine protection to the home. *Chazal* say that Moshe Rabbeinu blessed the people as follows: "*May it be Hashem's will that the enemy will never touch the work of your hands.*" (*Midrash Aggadah, Shemos* 39:43) And in fact the Mishkan was never captured by the Gentiles – it was hidden in tunnels under the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Surely, a Jewish home in which the husband smiles abundantly upon his wife and blesses her—and the children, who each contribute in their own way—will merit Heavenly protection!

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## QUESTION

**Is there anything wrong with looking at the moon?**

## ANSWER

Now, in the olden days, it was considered reprehensible to gaze at the moon because in those days there were moon worshippers, so a *frum* Jew wouldn't do such a thing. He didn't want to be suspected of idolatry. Today, however, it's a dead issue, so to look at the moon, if it's just wasting time, so better look in a *sefer*. But if you look at the moon in order to see the *chasdei Hashem*, then you're doing a good thing. It all depends on the *kavanah*. If you look at the moon today with the intention of recognizing the kindness of Hashem, you're doing a good deed, and you'll be rewarded.

The moon has very many beneficial effects on this earth. Do you know that the moon controls the tides? Very important for us. It controls many functions of the earth. Besides, it's a night-lamp – not too strong; it allows us to sleep, but just enough to help us out if we have to go out on the street to go to the *beis hamedrash*. And so, we enjoy the beauty of the moon: ברה כחמה יפה כלבנה - it's beautiful. You look at the moon and you thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for His creation.

That's why when a person says the *birchas ha'levana*, it's considered במקבל פני השכינה. It's a remarkable thing! It's like he's greeting Hashem? How can you say such a thing?!

The answer is, when you understand the *chasdei Hashem* that the moon represents, then you're getting a new *hasagah*, a new feeling in the presence of Hashem. And so if looking at the moon will teach us about the *chasdei Hashem* and make us more aware of Hashem, that's called מקבל פני השכינה. When you see the new moon, it's like greeting the Face of Hashem because the moon is a messenger, a harbinger of the kindness of Hashem

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