

INSIGHT ON INSIGHT

Sidra Tazria, Parshas Hachodesh

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The opening chapter of Sidra Tazria, about the birth of a child, the purification after giving birth, the circumcision for a son, is a most fitting introduction to the reading of Parshas Hachodesh. A new baby brings new realities into parents' home, a thorough transformation in the complete household. The father is now a new personality, and so the mother. The siblings are transformed into the infant's siblings. According to the Talmud (Kidushin 30b) there are three partners in the creation of a human: father, mother, and Hashem Who blows into infant's nostrils a Neshama of life. It's mind-boggling just to imagine the amazing awe of a G-d conscious parent at the birth of a child, mindful of this third Partner.

At the Bris (circumcision) of the new son, "all assembled" have a role in offering a blessing (Shabos 137b), "Keshaim Shenichnas... just as the infant entered into the covenant, so may he ENTER to Torah, chupa and good deeds". The emphasis on ENTERING into these three milestones seems to focus with special attention on the beginning of these experiences. The richness inherent in this wish is to experience meaningful beginnings in all endeavors. This means to be often refreshed, feel rejuvenated even in the middle of activity, optimistic as in the beginning.

This brings us to the Maftir Parshas Hachodesh. It is the fourth of the four special Parshios, in which the Torah prepares us for a new beginning with Rosh Chodesh Nissan, and the laws of Pesach. Though the solar system is given its due consideration, Pesach always observed in the spring (Shemos 13:4), this very holiday, as all holidays, is appointed by the lunar system. The reason for this choice is spelled out in the Kidush Levono service, once a month, when the moon begins to shine brightly. In the very BRACHA it states "to the moon Hashem said that it should renew itself as a crown of splendor for those... who are destined to renew themselves like it..."

The choice of the lunar system for holidays, then, clearly is meant as a gift to Israel, to possess the stamina of renewal, the monthly energy of restoration. Twice in the passage Hachodesh Haze'eh is mentioned the word LOCHEM, for you. No doubt a divine precious gift: Hashem, Who is L'MA'ALOT MIN HAZMAN, above time, Creator of time, giving Israel the gift of a timed cycle renaissance.

So basic is this capacity of monthly renewal in the fabric of all creation that Rashi in the very first passage in Beraishis, quotes the Midrash that the Torah could have begun with this passage of monthly renewal.

In addition to regulation of holidays, Rosh Chodesh is embodied with sanctity, as is clear from the conclusion of the Bracha in the Rosh Chodesh Musaf: "Blessed ... Who sanctifies Israel and the New Moon". This special sanctified day is, thus, "a ZEMAN KAPOROH atonement for all (your people's) offspring" (Musaf *ibid.*). Before entering this new cycle of opportunity, many communities observe "Yom Kipur Koton", a miniature Yom Kipur, on the day before Rosh Chodesh. Though Rosh Chodesh itself is a time of repentance and forgiveness, there is an advantage in rectifying wrongs before the end of the outgoing month.

In the Birchas Hachodesh, on a Shabos before Rosh Chodesh, the Chazan exclaims "Chaveirim Kol Yisroel". The word "Chaver" has two translations: a) a scholar; b) a friend, i.e. all Israel become comrades. This second translation may refer, homiletically, to the fact that the new moon possesses the capacity of renewal not only for oneself, but to the neighbor as well. On Rosh Chodesh he becomes my chaver (friend) even if on the previous day he was not.

In the Kidush Levono, recited monthly under a radiant moon, it is customary to turn to three individuals who stand nearby, greeting them Sholom Aleichem. One suggests, somewhat facetiously, that it is to the same person, seen every day, but who is now, under the new moon, seen in a renewed favorable light.

In Megilas Esther we read, "To the Jews there was light and joy" (8:16). Light is a reference to Torah enlightenment. Jewish hashkofoh regarded

Rosh Chodesh, the renewed light of the moon, as a special day of opportunity for new Torah insight, similar to Shabos. "One is obligated to visit his Rebbe (teacher) on Yom Tov (since even this applies even to Shabos and Rosh Chodesh), as it states (II Melochim 4:23) the Shunamite's husband asked her "why do you go to the prophet today, which is neither Shabos nor Rosh Chodesh". This visit to one's Rebbe, obviously, is meant to learn Torah insights from him (Ramban Shemos 20:18). There is a special emphasis on a "new insight" in honor of Shabos. One who is on that level to come up with his own chidush, a new insight of Torah, it is a privileged gift. If one is not capable to author a new insight in honor of Shabos, he should learn something he never did before (see Shaarei Teshuva, laws of Shabos 290, in the name of Ari zal). The Zmiroth of Shabos morning, Asadair, by the Ari zal, includes the stance: "Reveal even secrets and proclaim new thoughts..." According to the question of the Shunamite (above) the same applies to Rosh Chodesh.

The Talmud relates about a Tana who reviewed his learning every thirty days. It is obvious that this was not only for protection against forgetting the gained knowledge. It was also because of the heavenly Rosh Chodesh gift of deeper insight into what he learned earlier.

Rosh Chodesh Nissan connects, evenly, Purim (two weeks earlier) and Pesach (coming two weeks later). The Purim'dig "Ad d'Lo Yoda" not knowing, is an eloquent harbinger to the "Yoda" of Pesach, as prepared in advance on Rosh Chodesh, (as above). There are four expressions of redemption (Shemos 6:67) for which we need four cups of wine on Seder night. A fifth expression, for which we pour the cup of Elijah, is "Vehaivaisi" (I'll bring you into the land). The Netziv, however, counts the fifth expression, the word "V'yedaatem", and you will know. For that too is Elijah's cup (ibid 6:7). For Eliyahu is a teacher. The thirst to know, realizing the temporary Lo Yoda, that insight is the drive, the thrust, the propulsion, to the V'Yedaatem, the real insight.

