

Kiddush Hachodesh-The Moon Symbol of Am Yisroel by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Shemos chapter 12 we begin with the well know phrase, *Hachodesh Hazeh Lachem*, This month will be for you. The main subject of this chapter is Nissan the month Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim is to be the first month for us in terms of how we order the months and the special mitzvos of Pesach which falls in that month. Chazal also understood this verse as the source for Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the new month which is marked by the appearance of the new moon. Hashem showed Moshe what the moon looks like at this time each month and on this basis the new month begins. It is the job of the Sanhedrin to then sanctify the month. Rashi also brings that Moshe was having difficulty understanding the *molad*, the rebirth of the moon. So Hashem showed Moshe on Rosh Chodesh Nissan exactly what this new appearance of the moon will look like. Rashi also addresses the issue of how Moshe was able to see this new moon since he only received prophecies in the daytime. He answers that it was just before sunset when the moon appeared that Moshe was given this mitzvah to give over us.

The Vilna Gaon points out that there were three mitzvos Moshe had difficulty with. The molad the half-shekel and the menorah. Interestingly he points out that each of these three mitzvos spell out Moshe's name. Menorah for *Mem*. *Shekel* for *shin* and *Hachodesh* for *Heh*. The Kedushas Levi explains that the reason Moshe Rabbeinu had difficulty with the mitzvah of the *molad* was because Moshe thought that our going out of Mitzrayim would be an event big enough to restore the moon to its original size and the moon would no longer be the same moon that we are familiar with.

The Sefer Hachinuch, as he explains the details of this mitzvah, tells us that the one who sanctifies the moon must be a *musmach*[following the line of hand *semicha*, ordination back to Moshe Rabbeinu]in Eretz Yisroel. Only if the greatest *musmach* is outside of Eretz Yisroel and is bigger than the *musmachim* in Eretz Yisroel can *kiddush hachodesh* be done outside of Eretz Yisroel as was the case of Chanan Ben Achi Yehoshua and Akiva Ben Yosef. Neglect of this Mitzvah is a violation of a positive Mitzvah.

The Sefer Hachinuch, among other Rishonim, discusses the issue as to whether or not the mitzvah is the calculation of the molad or the testimony of it. In our times we are relying on the calculation which we have since we do not have the Sanhedrin to officially sanctify it for us on the basis of witness's view of the moon. This calculation has been figured out by Rabbi Hillel II. And is the basis for our knowledge of when to observe Rosh Chodesh. We will be using this system Till Eliyahu Hanavi arrives.

Rabbeinu Bachaya , in his commentary on Chumash asserts his position that the Sanhedrin is to proclaim Rosh Chodesh on the basis of the calculation of when the new moon is supposed to appear. He supports his position by asking how did Am Yisroel observe Rosh Chodesh in the desert? There was no sun or moon. There was only the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. We were completely sheiled from the sun and moon. Yet, we kept all of the Yomim Tovim in the Torah. So we must have relied on the calculation. The Mishana in Rosh Hashanah [2:8]also gives a case where one saw the moon in the east in the morning and in the west in the afternoon and Rabban Gamliel accepted the testimony because according his calculation the moon was to be in the .

Rabbeinu Bachaya also discusses making a bracha over the moon as we do. The moon testifies Hashem's creation. Just as the moon renews itself each month, so does all of Hashem's creation.

Furthermore, the moon symbolizes Am Yisroel and the sun symbolizes the other nations. The sun is seen only in the daytime. The moon can be seen by day and by night. The other nations of the world focus primarily on this world. Therefore they use the solar calendar. [While there are other cultures that use a lunar calendar such as the Moslems and the Chinese, Rabbeinu Bachaya was most likely referring to the Christian world in which the greater number of Jews lived in his time. However, we see today that the majority of the world uses the solar calendar. So his idea still holds true.] By using a lunar calendar we are showing that we believe both worlds are important and not like some extreme religions that dismiss this world entirely. All of what we do in this world potentially can be part of how we serve Hashem. The way of the Torah is to use this world to do Hashem's mitzvos and get closer to Hashem. It is up to us to use this world properly to reach this lofty aspiration.