

BO – 5773
Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

“HA-CHODESH HA-ZEH LACHEM ROSH CHADASHIM” [12:1] “This month shall be for you the first of the months”

In his commentary on the first word of Bereishit, Rashi quotes Rabbi Yitzchak, who questions why the Torah did not begin with this “first” commandment, rather than with creation. However, this is not so. The sanctification of the new moon was not the first mitzvah of the Torah. Rather, the mitzvah of procreation, and five other Mitzvot were given to Adam HaRishon. However, the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon marks the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people in Mitzrayim at the dawn of their freedom and independence as a nation. It is the **first national mitzvah**, one that declares the month of Nissan as the first month of our ritual calendar.

There is a great significance in the statement, “This month shall be for you”. For here the rabbis were invested with the awesome authority to set the calendar- to add a month to the year when necessary and to adjust the lunar calendar with the solar calendar. Each and every month the rabbis would declare when a month ends- whether it be 29 days or 30 days. In doing so, they set the ritual calendar as well. The Beit Din would ascertain whether Pesach arrives early or late each year, whether we eat Matzah or bread in middle of the month, or whether we fast or feast on a Yom Kippur date that has been postponed on a leap year. Thus, our rabbis have been granted immense authority.

According to Rav Soloveitchik, this great sublime authority gave the rabbis and the people whom they served, the happiness and inspiration to recite Hallel on Rosh Chodesh as a new minhag in Bavel [Babylonia], [See Ta’anit 28b] which we observe to this very day. The Gemara tells that Rav, who was the talmid [student] of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi in Eretz Yisrael, came to Bavel as the chief rabbi of the community he saw that they were reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. He had never seen this in Eretz Yisrael and never even heard of such a thing as saying Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. To the best of his knowledge Hallel was recited after miraculous events, such as Kri’at Yam Suf [splitting of the Red Sea], or seeing the one day supply of oil remained lit for eight days, those were events that warranted the recital of Hallel. But Rosh Chodesh, what great event happened on that day? So his first instinct was to suppress this recital and teach the people of Bavel that they are wrong with what they are doing and as the Mara D’Atra he is compelled to stop them. However, the Gemara continues, when he saw that they did not say the

complete Hallel but left out the two paragraphs [as we do by chatzi Hallel] he surmised that they were saying Hallel not as a Din, a requirement, but only as a minhag [a custom]. And that he permitted. What prompted this minhag to begin? It was the inspiration and joy in the fact that HaShem had invested us, the Jewish people, with the authority of setting our own calendar, “HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem”

This minhag of saying Chatzi Hallel on Rosh Chodesh is observed universally by all Jews to this very day. Tosafot comments [ibid] that we learn from here, whenever Chatzi Hallel is recited then the recitation is not a Din but only a minhag..

Hopefully, this Chodesh Shevat will bring only Besorot Tovot, good tidings for us and to all people of Israel.