

THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

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Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Parshas Bo

January 31, 2020

A Taste of Torah Monthly Charge

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshia Freeman

The first mitzvah given to the Jewish People as a nation was *kiddush hachodesh*, sanctifying the renewal of the moon and declaring the start of a new month. As the verse states in this week's parsha (Bo 12:2), "This month shall be to you as the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year." The concept of this mitzvah is essentially the establishment of the Jewish calendar. The obvious question is, why was this chosen to be the first mitzvah given to the Jewish People as a nation?

The simple answer to this question can be understood with an analogy to one closing a real estate deal. When one wishes to sell a house to another person, the deal is usually sealed by handing over the keys to the buyer. This is an act of transferring ownership, showing that the new owner is now in charge.

Similarly, when Hashem gave the Jewish Nation the mitzvah of establishing the Jewish calendar, He was handing them ownership over a significant portion of Judaism. The Jewish People are empowered and commanded to declare the start of the new month. Practically speaking, this was done for millennia by the Sanhedrin, the body of 71 judges that served as the highest court of the Jewish Nation, and they did this as representatives of the Jewish Nation. When it was no longer practical for this to occur as the troubles of exile deepened in the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple, the Sages, led by Hillel II, created a permanent calendar and essentially sanctified all future months until a Sanhedrin could once again convene. Numerous

mitzvos and details of Judaism are dependent upon the calendar, and, by extension, upon the Jewish People. It is for this reason, says the Talmud (Pesachim 117b), that we conclude the special festival blessing recited in *Shemone Esrei* with the sanctity of the Jewish People, as we say, "Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctifies the Jewish People and the festivals." The Talmud explains that this text is based upon the fact that festivals occur only through the sanctification of the month, which is declared by the Jewish People themselves. The aforementioned passage of Talmud states that on Shabbos, however, the blessing merely concludes "Who sanctifies the Shabbos," with no mention of the sanctity of the Jewish People, since Shabbos arrives without any intervention from the Jewish Nation.

This idea can be further developed with the opinion of the Rashbam (Pesachim 102b s.v. *Shmuel*). Generally, at the departure of Shabbos, spices are smelled during *havdala* to comfort the soul for the loss of the extra soul present in a Jew during Shabbos. But if Shabbos is followed by Yom Tov, spices are not smelled. The Rashbam explains that this is because on Yom Tov, a person has an extra soul, as well. Tosafos (ibid. s.v. *Rav*) asks that, according to the Rashbam, spices ought to be smelled upon the departure of Yom Tov, which is not the case. The Ramban (ibid.) answers that although one loses the extra soul at the departure of Shabbos, the extra soul gained during Yom Tov remains.

The Sfas Emes (Rabbi Aryeh Yehuda Leib Alter; 1847-1905) explains that the

Stories for the Soul

Who Am I?

A devout *chassid* of Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitz (1742-1810) by the name of Reb Yoel of Tshopli was once seized by a great desire to hear words of Torah from his teacher's mouth. He got on his horse and set off to visit his Rebbe in Lechovitz.

Upon arriving, he tied his horse to a pole outside Reb Mordechai's house, and approached the door.

Unbeknownst to Reb Yoel, another follower of Reb Mordechai, Reb Asher of Stolin, had just left the Rebbe's home and was getting some fresh air in the side yard. Neither man was aware of the other's presence.

Reb Yoel knocked loudly on the door, and Reb Asher, startled by the sudden noise, exclaimed, "Who's there?"

Reb Yoel answered, "It is I."

Suddenly, the voice of Reb Mordechai was heard from within the house. "What creature in the entire universe can refer to itself as 'I'?! Our Sages teach (Pesach Haggada) that when G-d said (Bo 12:12), 'And I shall pass through the Land of Egypt,' He was saying 'I am G-d - I, and no other.' Only G-d Himself may say 'I' - and no other!"

Reb Yoel had heard the teaching he had come for. He untied his horse, mounted it and rode home.

Kollel Happenings

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

SFAS EMES: A PIERCING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

It is one of the most widely-studied works of our time. Sfas Emes gives us a glimpse into the infinite depths of Torah and Jewish thought. Kollel Scholar Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky is an expert in this great work, and a master in bringing its timeless lessons into daily life. Join Rabbi Karnowsky on Thursdays, 8:15-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

Parsha Quizzers

The six items below can be found in Rashi's commentary to this week's parsha. Can you figure out where they are? (Answers on bottom)

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|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) Mars | 4) Withdrawal sacrifice |
| 2) Error of astronomic proportions | 5) No questions asked |
| 3) Point out the moon | 6) Best time to leave |

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk - Part X

Reb Meir Simcha was involved in several controversial issues during his lifetime, and did not shy away from making his position known. The late 1800s and early 1900s were a very tumultuous time in the Jewish world. Many new movements, some Jewish such as Zionism, some universal but with strong Jewish leadership such as communism, were popular in the Jewish world. While some of these movements drew widespread opposition from the traditionally Orthodox world, others drew varied reactions that sometimes varied widely. Other political issues of the day that affected the Jewish communities also produced different reactions from Torah leaders.

How to relate to the Zionist movement was an extremely contentious issue. Political Zionism was quite anti-religious. However, there were many Torah leaders who supported the idea of Jews returning to Eretz Yisrael and the

creation of a Jewish state. The Religious Zionist movement attracted many religious Jews, and some Torah leaders supported elements of the movement at varying levels. Others vehemently opposed the movement, while yet others were ambivalent. There seem to be varying opinions regarding Reb Meir Simcha's support for the idea of creating a Jewish state.

In 1917, the Balfour Declaration was issued by the British government, stating, among other things, that "His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." This statement was greeted with great excitement by many in the Jewish world, who saw this as a harbinger of their dream of a Jewish homeland. It seems clear, even according to those who claim he was against every aspect of the movement, that Reb Meir Simcha greeted the news with enthusiasm.

A Taste of Torah

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reason for this distinction is due to the fact that the Jewish People determine the festivals. On Shabbos, where there is no involvement in creating the holy day, the extra soul is a free gift, and it leaves just as easily as it came. On Yom Toy, however, when the Jewish People actually bring about the special day and

its attendant extra soul by declaring the start of the new month, the extra soul has been earned and therefore remains. May we merit to appreciate the great spiritual power given to us by Hashem, and fully utilize it in sanctifying not just the new month, but every area of our lives, as well.

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| 1) Mars 10:10 s.v. n'nu | 2) Error of astronomic proportions 11:4 s.v. kachatzos | 3) Point out the moon 11:2 s.v. hazeh |
| 4) Withdrawal sacrifice 12:6 s.v. bain | 5) No questions asked 12:39 s.v. v'igam | 6) Best time to leave 13:4 s.v. b'chodesh |

Parsha Quizzers - Answers