



Parshas Bo

January 22, 2021

A Taste of Torah

United Partial Service

by Rabbi Aharon Wilen

In the introduction to the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh (declaring the new month) that is given in this week's parsha, the verse (Bo 12:1) says that Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon together. Rashi points out that usually, the mitzvos were given through Moshe alone. Here, though, Hashem chose to honor Aharon by including him in the revelation. Why was this mitzvah the place to include Aharon?

There is a perplexing passage of Talmud (Chullin 60b) that relates that when initially created during the Six Days of Creation, the moon was the same size as the sun. The moon complained to Hashem, saying that two kings could not share the same crown. Hashem responded, "Go shrink yourself." The moon responded, "Why do I deserve to become smaller just because I have a valid complaint?" After trying to placate the moon, Hashem saw that it was still upset. This, says the Talmud, is why there is a *korban chatas*, a sin offering, included the sacrifices of Rosh Chodesh; Hashem commands, "Bring an offering to atone for the fact that I made the moon smaller."

The tale shared by the Talmud is meant to convey a message of the moon's purpose in Creation, but before discussing what that lesson is, the story itself demands an explanation. The moon's complaint was that there are two entities that are performing exactly the same role. Having two luminaries that are exactly identical, said the moon, seems redundant. What was wrong with this complaint that warranted shrinking the moon? Furthermore, for Hashem's part, He surely had a good reason for creating the sun and the moon as identical bodies, so why did He then shrink the moon, defeating that purpose?

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon explains that there is a flaw in the moon's reasoning. The moon referred to itself and the sun as "kings," inasmuch as they provide light for the world. Neither the sun nor moon is king, however. Hashem is King, and the luminaries in the sky are there to do His bidding. And if this is how He wants His

service to be done, it is irrelevant that the sun and moon seem to be competing for the same space. Serving Hashem is done on His terms, not ours. This idea was, in fact, part of Hashem's intended message to humanity through the sun and moon.

In a perfect world, the sun and moon would exhibit a unity of purpose despite their identical roles. However, the reality that we live in is intentionally imperfect and left for us to complete. In our reality, such perfect unity while sharing the same space is an aspiration for us to work toward and does not naturally exist. Because the world is not created with this perfect reality, the sun and moon cannot actually demonstrate it; the moon, having pointed out this imperfection, now had to shrink so as not to be the same as the sun. This was not a punishment for complaining, but, rather, giving the moon its own unique existence and its own role, as its cycles serve to create the Jewish calendar and to determine the start of the new months. This reality exists, however, with something missing, an imperfection, the lack of perfect unity, and so Hashem asks us to atone for the imperfection he placed in Creation on Rosh Chodesh. On a deeper level, this means that He left it to us to revisit and stress this important lesson. Rosh Chodesh, which marks the start of a new moon, is the time when we reflect on the cycle of the moon. We take note of its current size and how its shrinking leads to its growth. As we say in the blessing of *kiddush levana* (sanctifying the new moon), this cycle symbolizes that the moon will, one day, be returned to its original state. If we work to achieve this type of reality around ourselves and succeed in perfecting the intended unity of Creation, then the sun and moon will be altered to the original intended state of coexistence devoted to the service of Hashem.

With this in mind, we can understand why this mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh was revealed to Moshe and Aharon together. Moshe and Aharon are an example of

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Stories for the Soul

Practice Makes Perfect

Two ninth-grade students at the Yeshiva of Staten Island came to the dean, Rabbi Reuven Feinstein, for a "court case." One had borrowed a cassette recorder from the other and had swung it by its strap, causing it to hit a wall and break. The teenagers wanted to know whether the borrower was liable for damages.

At that time, the yeshivah was studying Tractate Bava Metzia, parts of which discusses the laws of shomrim (watchmen), including a sho'el (borrower). Rav Reuven asked the borrower, "What are the responsibilities of a sho'el?" The boy replied correctly that a borrower is liable even for unavoidable accidents.

"And he is certainly liable for negligence," responded Rav Reuven, indicating that there was no question that the borrower was liable in this case.

The boys walked away satisfied that their question had been resolved, but Rav Reuven was troubled that they had come to him with a question whose answer was so plainly obvious. That night he asked his father, the great Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), "How can it be that they are learning these laws in yeshiva and they cannot apply it to their own lives?" Rav Moshe responded, "Ask them what they learned when they began studying Talmud."

Rav Reuven followed this directive and discovered that both boys had begun with Tractate Brachos, which focuses on prayers and blessings. Rav Moshe, hearing this, was not surprised, and said, "In Brachos, they learned some things that, to their minds, are not put into practice. They learned that the ideal time for praying the Shemone Esrei of shacharis (the morning prayer)

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Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: When can the blessing on a food go from *hamotzi* to none at all based upon one's personal food preferences?

Answer: When one eats a bread-type food for the sole purpose of accompanying the consumption of another food with it, it is relegated to a secondary status, known as *tafel*, and does not get its own blessing. For example, if one eats very salty fish and eats a bread-type item with it, or even after eating the fish, to mitigate the sharp flavor of the fish, only a *shehakol* would be recited upon the fish and no blessing at all upon the bread, whose only purpose is to enable consumption of the salty fish (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 212:1 with Mishna Berura 5).

Also, if one is eating a food, such as cheese for example, and a bread-type item together with the cheese to enhance the cheese, no blessing would be made upon the cracker (Mishna Berura 212:6 with Sha'ar Hatziyun 21). (In the case of enhancement, the bread-type enhancer must be eaten together with the main food.) It is often difficult to ascertain when the bread-type food is regarded as secondary and when it maintains its own status. In addition, there is debate whether one must wash before eating bread in these cases. One should seek competent halachic guidance.

This week's question: Two people are eating the exact same food with the same intentions yet they make different blessings how can this be?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part XIII

Dovid ben Zakkai asked Rav Nissim his opinion about appointing Rav Saadia to the position. Rav Nissim replied that Rav Sadia's credentials were outstanding and he was certainly fit for the job. However, he

expressed concern that because both Rav Saadia and Dovid ben Zakkai were strong-willed individuals, conflict would inevitably arise between the political and Torah heads of the Babylonian community.

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perfect coexistence. When Aharon was informed of his brother taking the leading role, he reacted by "rejoicing in his heart" (see Shemos 4:14). Not only that, when they transmitted this mitzvah to the Jewish People, Rashi (Bo 12:3) says that Moshe and Aharon honored each other, each telling the other, "You teach me." Rashi continues that Hashem caused the words to be heard from between the two of them together -

unified in the service of Hashem.

Moshe and Aharon exemplified the pure service of Hashem. They demonstrated that a person can reach a point in his faith in Hashem's complete control and in submission to His rule that he is no longer disturbed at having to share his role with another. Through this achievement, the honor of Heaven is expressed in true perfection.

Stories for the Soul

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is at sunrise, but how many people actually do this? They learned that there is a deadline each morning for the recitation of Shema and Shemone Esrei, but they may have seen their fathers or older brothers pray late and miss these required deadlines. So what have they learned? That there are things in Judaism that are nice to do, but it's all right if you don't do them. So they

apply this logic to the monetary law of Bava Metzia, as well."

In this week's parsha, the Jewish People are told of the importance of conveying the story of the Exodus and its lessons to their children. Success in passing our heritage of Torah Judaism to future generations is contingent upon our own commitment to the Torah way of life.

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