

Parshiot Vayakel-Pekudei-HaChodesh, 5781, 2021:

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The Power of the New Moon

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Kabbalat p'nei HaShechinah (encountering Hashem's Divine Presence) is one of the greatest spiritual heights a person can achieve. *Chazal* compared a variety of *mitzvot*-related actions to this transcendent experience, including giving heartfelt *tzedakah*, fulfilling the commandment of appearing in the *Beit HaMikdash* on the *yom tovim*, and *kiddush levanah* (Sanctification of the New Moon).

One of the better-known Rabbinic discussions of *kiddush levanah* that relates to this concept is found in *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin* 42a:

And Rabbi Acha bar Chanina said in the name of Rabbi Asi who said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "All those who bless the [new] month in its [proper] time *k'ilu mekable p'nei HaShechinah* (it is as if they have encountered Hashem's Divine Presence). It states here [in Parashat HaChodesh], 'this (*zeh*) month,' and it states there [*Kriyat Yam Suf*], 'this (*zeh*) is my G-d and I shall extol Him.'"

What is the *Gemara* communicating to us by emphasizing the Torah's use of the word "*zeh*" when referencing the new moon of Chodesh Nissan and the Almighty's palpable presence at *Kriyat Yam Suf*? Additionally, how is this a proof to the statement, "all those who bless the [new] month in its [proper] time *k'ilu mekable p'nei HaShechinah*?" Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein (1860-1941) addresses these questions in his commentary, *Torah*

Temimah, providing us with an incisive analysis of our passage:

One can say the matter of noting the textual similarity of these two verses [*zeh*] and their subsequent comparison, [is predicated upon the recognition] that the moon's renewal teaches us that the Holy One blessed be He runs the world and His endless changes [in Creation] are new each morning. As such, a person who blesses the new month [when viewing the new moon] bears witness, as it were, to this explicit manifestation of the way the Holy One blessed be He runs the world [and simultaneously proclaims] their recognition of His honor and glory. So, too, in the instance of "this (*zeh*) is my G-d and I shall extol Him," for they [the Jewish people] uttered this when they witnessed the incontrovertible glory of His Divine Presence at *Kriyat Yam Suf*. (*Sefer Shemot*, Parashat Bo, 12:2, translation and brackets my own)

In many ways, Rav Epstein's presentation is an exegetical tour de force. In the context of discussing *kiddush levanah*, he reveals to us the intrinsic meaning of ***chiddush levanah*** (renewal of the new moon in the heavens). In his estimation, it demonstrates to us that Hashem continuously runs the world, and His creations "are new each morning." Moreover, based on the word, "*zeh*," *chiddush levanah*, which operates within the laws of nature, joins the one-time miraculous event of *Kriyat Yam Suf* in proclaiming the ineffable presence of the Almighty in our lives. This, then, Rav Epstein asserts, is the reason *Chazal* declared: "All those who bless the [new] month in its [proper] time *k'ilu mekable p'nei HaShechinah*."

Approximately 300 years earlier, Rabbi Shmuel Halevi Eidels *zatzal* (1555-1631), known by his Hebrew acronym as the Maharsha, explained this phrase in a different manner. In his view, the statement gives voice to the seemingly unbridgeable distance between the Almighty and the Jewish people that powerfully pervades our lives in *galut* (exile), and expresses our concurrent hope for complete reconciliation with Him:

The Jewish people in their exile do not merit to gaze upon the countenance of the Divine Presence, since [as a result of the *galut*,] it is too distant to be encountered. Nonetheless, *chiddush levanah* is a sign to the Jewish people that in the future, they, too, will be renewed and once again bring glory to their Creator when they meet His Divine Presence anew... [Therefore,] when we bless the [new] month in its [proper] time, it symbolizes that we will

be renewed like it [the new moon]; as such, it is as if we have encountered the very countenance of the Divine Presence... (*Chidushei Aggadot, Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 42a*, translation and brackets my own)

In sum, for the Maharsha, *chiddush levanah* is a promise to us of our future spiritual union with the Almighty, and *kiddush levanah* presages the time when we will once again be *zocheh* (merit) to see and feel His presence, just as our ancestors did at *Kriyat Yam Suf*.

With Hashem's help, may we witness the ultimate fulfillment of the stirring words of *kiddush levanah* soon, and in our days: "To the moon He said that it should renew itself as a crown of splendor for those borne by Him from the womb [that is the Jewish people], those who are destined to renew themselves like it, and to glorify their Creator for the name of His glorious kingdom." (Translation with my emendations, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*) *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha's* name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.

