

The Month of Adar: The Secret of the Pregnant Year

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Introduction

Mazal tov it's our 33rd wedding anniversary this Shabbat! I bless all of you with many happy years together with your true soul mate. This year, is one of the rare occasions when I get to celebrate our real anniversary. Because we were married in Adar *alef*, our anniversary only occurs seven times every nineteen year, during Jewish 'leap year' – In Hebrew *שנת העיבור* / *shenat haibur*.

Literally *shenat haibur* means 'pregnant year,' and there is actually, an underlying connection between the concept of pregnancy and the Jewish leap year. Kabbalah teaches us that the 'pregnant year' includes a deep secret about the world and the Jewish path. Let us take this opportunity to delve deeper into understanding the significance of the Hebrew calendar in general, and the secret of *shenat haibur* in particular. (This article is based on a recording I heard about 25 years with Rav Moshe Shapiro).

The order of the nature of the world is established by the sun. It determines the seasons, the climate and everything which pertains to the nature of the world. The moon, however, shows us the possibility of renewal. It doesn't give enough light to generate direct changes of nature like the sun, but just enough to show us the importance of growth and rebirth. While the Gregorian calendar is linked to the sun and the Muslim calendar to the moon, the Jewish calendar integrates the lunar and solar calendar. It primarily follows the moon cycles, but is adjusted to the solar calendar by means of the pregnant year. If our calendar was determined only according to the moon, our holidays would occur eleven days earlier in the season every year, since twelve lunar cycles are eleven days shorter than the solar cycle.¹ Thus Pesach would end up in the fall and Sukkoth in the spring. Our holidays, however, must be celebrated at certain seasons, as every season in nature reflects the spiritual transformation Israel undergoes throughout our various holidays. Pesach – the holiday of our freedom – needs to be celebrated during spring, while nature awakens and expresses its freedom and unfolding. Therefore, the Torah specifically commands us to ensure that Pesach always falls in the spring:

שְׁמוֹר אֶת חֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב וְעֲשִׂיתָ פֶסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב הוֹצִיאָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה:
(ספר דברים פרק ט:א)

Watch the month of spring (*aviv*), and observe Pesach to Hashem your G-d: for in the month of spring Hashem your G-d brought you out of Egypt by night."²

¹ A lunar month is 29.5 days, (29.5 x 12=354), a solar year is 365 days, (365-354=11).

² *Devarim* 16:1.

Rashi explains that the word *aviv* indicates the season in which ripe ears for the Omer offering is produced. The Torah instructs us to watch before the month of Pesach (Nissan) whether this would be the case, if not then we must intercalate the year.”³ This is the most well-known Torah source for establishing a pregnant year. Therefore, we need to adjust our lunar calendar to the solar calendar by adding an extra month before the month of Pesach, whenever the discrepancy between the lunar and the solar cycle adds up enough days to fill a month.

The spiritual Significance of our Lunar Calendar

The reason why the Jewish calendar primarily follows the moon is that the Jewish people are intrinsically connected to the moon, which renews itself. Likewise, our life rhythm is connected to constant renewal. Calculating our months according to the moon rather than the sun indicates that the timeframe which only refers to the establishment of nature is not the primary order of time for us. However, it doesn't mean that we separate ourselves from the fixed order of the world; but rather that we emphasize the renewal of the moon, for we are heading towards the future when: “They will in future renew themselves like her.”⁴

Adapting our Lunar Months to the Solar Year

We would have totally separated ourselves from the established nature of the world, had we calculated exclusively according to the moon. Actually, even in the mitzvah to sanctify the new moon, there is an allusion to the importance of integrating the renewal of the moon with the repeated cycles of nature represented by the sun.

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רֵאשׁוֹן חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לְכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה: (ספר שמות פרק יב:ב)

“This month (*chodesh*) is the head of the months; it is first in the months of the year (*shana*).”⁵

The mitzvah to sanctify the new moon includes the two opposite aspects of both renewal of the month as well as repetition of the cycle of the year. Whereas the word for ‘month’ in Hebrew is *חֹדֶשׁ/chodesh* related to the word *חָדַשׁ/chadash* – new, the Hebrew word for ‘year’ is *שָׁנָה/shana* which means repetition, as in *וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ/V’shinantam l’vanecha* – “you shall repeat them to your children.”⁶ While the sun repeats itself, the moon renews itself. For this reason the pregnant year comes to link the time-cycle of renewal (moon) with that of the nature of the world (sun). Although our calendar is primarily fixed by the moon, we are still obligated to operate within the framework of the solar-year. Whereas, the months are the months of the moon, the year must be the year of the sun. Since the verse about the mitzvah to sanctify the new moon includes a reference to the ‘year,’ it alludes to the mitzvah to intercalate the year. The fusion of the mitzvot to sanctify the new moon and to intercalate the year, as an introduction to the redemption from Egypt, indicates that the renewal of the moon will be born within the pregnancy of the order of the year.

³ Rashi, *Devarim* 16:1.

⁴ *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 42a.

⁵ *Shemot* 12:2.

⁶ *Devarim* 6:7.

Integrating Repetition and Change in our Lives and Relationships

The concept of the pregnant year teaches us that we need to maintain the balance in our lives between the repetition of good habits and the excitement of renewal and unexpected change. In our relationship with Hashem we pray daily the repeated prayers from the same prayer-book, yet we must continually infuse our words with new meaning and intent. Although there is a mitzvah to have a special designated place for prayer,⁷ in my experience praying in a new place or praying a new prayer helps strengthen our *kavana* (intention) and bring renewal into our prayers. This is why going out to nature to talk with Hashem in your own words has become so popular in our times. Also in relationships with people we need to balance reliability and dependability with creativity and original initiative. For example I'm grateful that my husband comes home for dinner at a set hour, yet I also need him to once in a while surprise me with an unexpected gift or excursion. I bake the same chocolate chip cookies for more than twenty years because they are yummy and easy to prepare, yet, my family really appreciate when I make the extra effort to try out a new recipe.

The Secret of the Pregnant Year (*Sod Haibur*)

The reason Jewish leap year is called a 'pregnant year' rather than a 'leap year' is explained through the concept in Kabbalah called *sod haibur* – The secret pregnancy.⁸ This inner secret symbolizes that our bleak mundane reality carries within it a secret higher level of reality – the pregnancy of a new reality growing within the womb of the established realm. Just as pregnancy entails the existence of a fetus growing within the womb of the mother, the hidden reality of *sod haibur* keeps growing within our revealed level of existence. It demonstrates the existence of the renewal within the established. Within the framework of year, grows the pattern of months. Just as pregnancy is hidden and not recognizable until at least a third of its term, likewise the external established world is pregnant with an inner hidden spiritual reality.

The Renewal of Israel Born within the Frozen Predictable Egyptian Society

The first mitzvah that the Jewish people received as a nation was the mitzvah to sanctify the new moon in the land of Egypt: "Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt saying: This month is the head of the months, it is the first month of the year to you."⁹ This prophecy, which took place on the first day of the month of Nissan, marked the beginning of the redemption from Egypt. It is followed by the remaining mitzvot pertaining to the Exodus from Egypt, which denote the birth of the Jewish people as a nation. The Torah emphasizes that this first mitzvah in the Exodus process – to sanctify the new moon – took place specifically in Egypt, which symbolizes the unchanging established reality. The Nile, as opposed to rain, would water Egypt at predictable intervals. The worship of the old and fear of the new is reflected in the ancient Egyptian society's drowning of newborn babies in the Nile, while attempting to preserve the dead in their mummies. It was specifically within the frozen, dead, necrophilic society of Egypt that the holiness of the renewal of Israel was born.

⁷ Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 90:19.

⁸ See for example Zohar, part 3, 216a.

⁹ Shemot 12:1.

Renewal within the Yearly Routine is Foundation for the Final Redemption

The timeframe of sowing, harvesting, cold, heat, summer, and winter is the order of time that gives birth to a renewal totally independent from the realm of the mundane world. Even within the framework of the year which denotes repetition and routine there exist the level of renewal. Once a year, there is a renewal in the month of spring. The redemption from Egypt must always be a renewal. Therefore, Pesach needs to be in the spring. The redemption from Egypt, which itself is called a birth, laid down the foundation for the final birth. This renewal, revealed only in the month of spring is hidden within the remainder of time in our current reality. However, this secret renewal will one day become revealed within the entire world.

Mikdash & Mishkan (Sanctuary & Tabernacle)

This week's *Parashat Teruma* includes the command to build the '*mishkan*,' described as '*mikdash*' as it states: (שמות כה:ה) "וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם" / *Asu li Mikdash v'shachanti b'tocham* – "Make for me a sanctuary (*mikdash*) and I will dwell among them."¹⁰ We would have expected our verse describing the tabernacle to use the word '*mishkan*,' referring to the mobile tabernacle related to the word *Shechina*, which is with Israel in every place, even in the darkest exile. However, our verse used the word '*mikdash*' deriving from the root of holiness which always denotes separation. Since the *mikdash* must be in a certain place, it is separated from those who are far away. The place of the *mikdash* has holiness in itself, and according to halacha one is to sacrifice in that place even if there is no building.¹¹

The Dialectic between the Sun & Moon Reflected in the *Mishkan & Mikdash*

"The tabernacle (*mishkan*) is called a sanctuary (*mikdash*) and the sanctuary is called a tabernacle."¹² The same dialectic between the establishment of the sun and the renewal of the moon is reflected in the relationship between the mobile all-indwelling tabernacle (*mishkan*) and the holy separate sanctuary (*mikdash*). This dialectic is alluded to in our verse "make for me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them." The word "I will dwell within" (*v'shachanti*) derives from the root of *mishkan*. The reason why it doesn't say "I will dwell within it" (*betoch*), but rather "I will dwell among them" (*betocham*) teaches us that the *Shechina* is not limited to a certain place; it dwells among us wherever we are. This is contrasted to the *mikdash* denoting a specific place which we need to approach. It doesn't come to us, we must come to it. The first part of our verse using the word '*mikdash*' relates to the aspect of raising ourselves up towards Hashem, whereas the second part describes how Hashem's presence comes to us in every place. It is not limited to the tabernacle itself. Yet the *mikdash* and the *mishkan* are interrelated. Just as the womb of the established year carries within it the realm of renewal, the *mishkan* carries within it the hidden seed of the *mikdash*. Within the *mishkan* the *Shechina* itself is crying in her yearning for the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple). The end of the redemption from Egypt culminates with the building of the *mikdash* rather than the *mishkan* as it states: "You shall bring them in and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance, in the

¹⁰ *Shemot* 25:8.

¹¹ *Mishna Mesechet Eduyot* 8:6.

¹² *Babylonian Talmud, Shavuot* 16b).

*establishment, O Hashem which you have made for your residence, in the sanctuary...*¹³ Although the *mikdash* denotes separation, it will be built through the realm of *mishkan* which dwells among us even within our impurity. When the *mikdash* will be built, it likewise will carry within it the level of *mishkan*. The *Shechina* will not be limited to the *Beit HaMikdash* itself.

The 15-Step Ladder towards the Full-Moon of Final Redemption

King Shlomo who built the *Beit Hamikdash* is compared to the full moon. Just as the 15th day of the month is full moon, so was Shlomo the 15th generation after Avraham *Avinu*. From King Shlomo's golden epoch in Jewish history it went downhill another 15 kings until the complete diminishment of the moon at the destruction of the Temple. The moon became smaller and smaller until we again await its rebirth. King David, known for his ability to renew himself, is compared to the moon. At the time of *Kidush Levana* (sanctifying the new moon) we recite: "*David Melech Yisrael Chai v'kayam.*" We thus pray that the dynasty of David will become renewed like the moon and reach its peak, as in Shlomo's time. The fifteen days between the birth of the moon and full moon reflects the fifteen stages of redemption from the Exodus to the building of the Temple.¹⁴ When we will complete climbing this fifteen-step ladder, we will reach the final redemption – the culmination of all the pregnancies, after which there will never again be any birth-pangs. At that time there will no longer be a gap between the sun and the moon – between repetition and renewal, *miskhan* and *mikdash*. May we all experience the unfolding of renewal when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun... on the day that Hashem binds up the breach of His people, and heals the injuries of their wound!"¹⁵

¹³ *Shemot* 15:17.

¹⁴ In the *Dayeinu* song of Haggadah of Pesach we praise Hashem for fifteen great things He has done for us, beginning with the Exodus from Egypt and culminating in the building of the Temple.

¹⁵ *Yeshu' yahu* 30:26.