

The Month of Nissan: Rectifying the Sense of Speech

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Introduction

One of the reasons I usually don't leave my home and garden during spring is that this is the loveliest time here in Bat Ayin and especially in my garden (I am biased). It was so special having my students bless together with me on the flowering fruit trees surrounded by spring flowers, butterflies and flower buds.

Awaken with the Spring that's in the Air

Nissan, it sounds like the Hebrew word *Nitzan*-Bud. The two words are connected, for this month is referred to as "*month of the spring*,"¹ always occurring near April when we enjoy the magnificent beauty of nature budding around us. Hibernating animals awaken, flowers bloom, fruit trees blossom and vegetation emerges everywhere. New growth of green grass is pop up as the world experiences a bursting forth of life. We, too, tap into the energy of renewal predominant in the air. Take a moment to stop, enjoy, and appreciate the world. Make a blessing on a flowering fruit tree. Listen to the birds chirp. Watch a stream of water flow. Breathe the air. Smell the Flowers. Give thanks for all the beauty that surrounds you.

Be Highly Connected

Nissan is a time when we are capable of achieving dramatic change by way of miracles. In this month there exists a special ability to engage the assistance of the One Above. It's as if G-d bends down and sweeps you off your feet to take you wherever you need to go. And by connecting with G-d, you too become sanctified. Thus, we have a certain strength during this month to exude an additional degree of holiness. This parallels the renewal taking place in the month of Nissan.

The Royal Gift

Nissan is the first of the twelve months of the Jewish calendar. The first *mitzvah* (commandment) of the total 613 assigned to Israel as a nation was to recognize and sanctify the months beginning with Nissan, as it states, "*This month [the month of Nissan] is for you the first of the months of the year.*"² Nissan is the king of all the months. Nissan is the head – the beginning of the relationship between G-d and Israel His first born. The word 'month' in Hebrew is *חֹדֶשׁ/chodesh* containing the same root as *חִידוּשׁ/chidush* which means a 'new insight.' If one walks in the ways of Hashem and follows His commandments, the mitzvot become a gift, not a burden. The rules that emanate from the Torah, actually act as a set of instructions for us to refine ourselves. Rather than burdensome rules that tie us down, they end up freeing us to

¹ Devarim 16:1.

² Shemot 12:2.



reach our fullest potential without stumbling. "This month is for you."³ The Hebrew letters in the word לַחֶמֶךְ/*lachem* –for you, when rearranged spell מֶלֶךְ/*melech* –King, a hint to the royalty associated with this month. Nissan was given as a gift to the Jewish people. Through this gift, we can achieve royalty. It's possible to receive a gift and never open it. Think about how you approach spirituality in your life. Do you access the secrets of your religion? Are you imprisoned by the rules of society, the constraints of your social circle? Or freed by the rules of your spirit? It all depends on you, what you will do with this month.

Month of Kings, King of Months

Nissan is the New Year for the Kings, the reign of each Jewish king is counted from this month. *Malchut* – Kingship is the attribute associated with Nissan also because this is the month the nation of Israel was born. Not only did we emerge as a people, but a people connected to a Hashem, for G-d Himself came to take us out of bondage. So go ahead! Be regal! Walk with your head up! Express the royalty from which you descend, and exhibit the class and dignity befitting the daughter of a King, for you are G-d's child. And this month you know it!

The tribe of the month of Nissan is יהודה/Yehuda. Powerful and victorious, his name means "praise" appropriate for the month in which the Jews praise the One who liberated us. He is the emblem of all rulers and the forefather of the ultimate king, Mashiach, son of King David, who descends from this tribal line. Moreover, the entire nation takes its name from Yehuda – Jew. So it is particularly appropriate that he should be associated with the month the Jews became a nation. Nissan, the first of the months, serves as the New Year for kings. On Pesach, it is customary to sit with pillows and cushions like royalty commemorating the Hebrews' transformation from slaves to a nation of free people, Hashem's people. A king cannot rule without a people to rule over. By establishing Israel as a nation, G-d began His reign. View this as a second New Year celebration, resolutions and all. To whom do you bow? Which kings do you serve rather than serving the One and only King?

Month of Miracles

Nissan is a month of miracles נִסִּים/*nissim*. The fact that the name *Nissan* possesses two *nuns* implies, according to our sages, *nissei nissim* – miracles of miracles,⁴ alluding to the redemption of the future. In Nissan the *miskan* (tabernacle) was erected.⁵ This is the month when Israel was redeemed from Egypt, and in this same month we will be redeemed in the future. In this month G-d changed the nature with His miracles, and made a new beginning in the month of Nissan. The miracles in the month of Nissan testify to the fact that G-d is the Creator of the world. The Hebrew word חֹדֶשׁ/*chodesh* means both month and renewal, whereas the Hebrew word שָׁנָה/*shana* means both year and repetition. Nissan marks a break with the old way of the world (*shana*) through the

³ *Shemot* 12:2.

⁴ *Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 57a, with Rashi.

⁵ *Shemot* 40:17.



renewal (*chodesh*) of nature. In Nissan our fathers who were the beginning of the Jewish people were born and died. *Nissan* is also referred to as “the month of the redemption.”⁶

Count to Fifty

Collectively, the Israelites were told to count the months beginning with Nissan...in essence, to track the passage of the year. Compartmentalizing time... counting months, counting weeks, counting days... an element of order ‘*sefer*’ emanates from this aspect of Nissan. Appropriately, the meal on the first night of Pesach is called the Seder. Mid-month we begin to *Count the Omer*, seven weeks from the Exodus (Pesach) to the receiving of the Torah Commandments (Shavuot), the following holiday. Each week is devoted to a different energy. Each week, we work on a distinct characteristic trait associated with that energy, systematically addressing all aspects of our being, until we have refined ourselves enough to be worthy of receiving the holy Torah. On the 15th of Nissan, the Jews become a nation by way of miracles, from-above-to-below, Hashem reached down and took us out of slavery; in the 49 days to follow we work on ourselves to become a nation also by natural means from-below-to-above, taking the slavery out of ourselves until we reach the fiftieth level of refinement. Thus, this month *is for you* - “*lachem*”...someone can help you from the outside, but ultimately, it depends on you to help yourself, from the inside. And then, you can reach the level of king, “*melech*.”

Go With The Flow

There is a debate among the sages as to whether the world was created in the Hebrew month of Tishrei or Nissan. Which is the real New Year? The answer is both. The two are exactly six months apart, and each acts as a counterpart to the other. So if the six days of Creation occurred in Tishrei, there must be a counterpart in Nissan. Half the year there is an energy flowing from the Heavens down to us and the other half the year, the energy flows in reverse, from us up to the Heavens. Half the year, G-d pours down his blessing regardless of our action, whether we deserve it or not, while the other half the year the amount of blessing received is dependent on our effort, how much we work for it. And the whole world operates by this flow. What can you do this month to make yourself a vessel for blessing? Remember, nothing can be added to a vessel that is full. (If you know it all, there’s nothing to learn.) So, be humble, remove some ego and get ready to receive! Look for miracles taking place every day of your life!

The Spiritual Attributes of Nissan

המליך אות ה' בשיחה וקשר לו כתר וצר בו טלה בעולם, ניסן בשנה, ורגל ימין בנפש זכר ונקבה:

⁶ *Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashana 11a.*



(ספר יצירה פרק ה משנה ז)

"He made the letter *heh* king over conversation, and He tied a crown to it and He combined one with another and with them He formed lamb in the Universe, *Nissan* in the Year, and the right leg in the soul, male and female" (*Sefer Yetzirah* 5:7).

Speak Up!

The sense of speech is associated with Nissan. According to Rabbi Yehoshua the world was created in Nissan⁷ through words – G-d spoke and it came into being.⁸ Whereas the physical birthday of the world is in Tishrei, the Head of the Year, the spiritual birthday of the world is in Nissan, Head of the Months. Nissan is in the *gematria* (numerical value of two times mouth.⁹ This corresponds to the process of sanctifying and declaring the new month. The *beit din* declared, "Sanctified," and the entire people answered afterwards, "Sanctified sanctified. There is a strong connection between the king and speech. A king rules by his word... "for the word of the king is his rule."¹⁰ The very root for "speech" means as well "to lead." Thus the sense of speech is in essence the sense of leadership. Personifying the *sefirah* of *malchut* (kingdom), it is often referred to as "the world of speech."¹¹

Conversation cannot occur without both speaker and listener in the same way a ruler requires a kingdom. Each demands a recipient, and similarly, the Lord yearns for His people and they for him. Conversation forms the basis to any relationship including that between G-d and us. In Nissan speech came out of its exile and the shell of being of uncircumcised lips is removed, speech itself is redeemed. Egypt represents the existential state of confinement, the inability to truly express oneself. The Israelites had no voice as slaves, but once outside of Egypt, they received a voice - the voice of a unified nation, the voice of freedom, the voice of joyous song. Like a bride singing to her lover, upon crossing the Reed Sea they burst into song, a reaction to all the miracles they had experienced and a vocalization of their relationship to the Holy One. By the Exodus, their mouths were opened in amazement and awe, and also in the future in this month there will be an opening of the mouth and "I will pour my spirit on all flesh and all your sons and daughters will prophesize,"¹² representing the pinnacle of the relationship with G-d. The crowning point, this represents the true essence of the month of Nissan – the redemption of our "freedom of speech."

The Haggadah means To Tell

⁷ *Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashana* 11a.

⁸ *Tehillim* 33:9.

⁹ פה = 170 (80+5+80+5), ניסן = 170 (50+10+60+50=170).

¹⁰ *Kohelet* 8:4.

¹¹ Sefat Emet, *Likutim, Parashat Nasa*.

¹² *Yoel* 3:1.



Telling of the story of the Exodus on the Seder night is the central mitzvah of the month of Nissan. "The more one tells of the Exodus from Egypt, the more praiseworthy."¹³ Of the fifteen stages of the *seder, magid* – the telling of the story of the Exodus – is the fifth stage which corresponds to the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the ה/*heh*. It is with the breath of ה/*heh* preceding speech that Hashem created the world.¹⁴ The stage of *magid* also begins with the letter "heh," אַחַד לַחֲמַתּוֹ אֶחָד/ha *lachma anya* – This is the bread of poverty... It's no wonder that the letter of the month of Nissan is the letter *heh*.¹⁵

So this month, strengthen your relationships with everyone you touch by increasing in all forms of expression. Sing songs of love and praise; voice thanks for what you have; convey your deepest feelings and insights to the One Above and to one another. Change your speech patterns. Go 24 hours without uttering anything but good. If you can't make it through the day, do it for just an hour a day: no gossip, no negativity, and no judgments. We create with our talk the same way G-d created through His words. So lead your speech, don't let it lead you. Verbalize only good, it will bring you to see only good...resulting in a positive aura around you that draws others to do the same.

The Constellation of Aries Associated with Nissan

In the month of Nissan the life force of nature is awakening. The trees are budding, the floral plant life blooming, calves are born and the ducks lay eggs. People put on their shorts, go out in the park and flirt. The summer is ahead. We feel excited and full of life. Our animal soul is also awakened. It is this part of our soul, the worldly desires, which drive people forth in life. If it weren't for the animal instincts, very few people would ever do anything. But just as you tame a wild horse, we must control our animal self. This is how we attain holiness.

The astrological sign of this month is Aries the world over, but the Kabbalistic equivalent is a תַּלְהִי/taleh – lamb instead of a ram. The constellation of the lamb symbolizes the unity of the people, for sheep group together and identify one with the other. Of all of G-d's creations, the lamb alone possesses the innate ability to arouse mercy by its voice. Lambs are calm, gentle creatures. Just like the sheep following the shepherd, thus the Jewish people accepted the authority of Moshe our leader. The Jewish people themselves are symbolized as a lamb among seventy wolves.¹⁶

Tame the Ram to Turn it into a Lamb

¹³ Pesach Haggadah.

¹⁴ See Bereishit 2:4, "These are the generation of heaven and earth when they were created/ בהבראם, the *heh* is smaller, and therefore stands out to give the possibility of reading the word as: *b'heh baram* – with "*heh* He created them." Rashi explains that the physical world is created with the letter *heh*.

¹⁵ Sefer Yetzira 5:7.

¹⁶ Pesikta Rabatai, Parasha 9.



The Egyptian people worshipped the ram. Its strength was idolized. The Egyptian lifestyle was wild and uninhibited; they let the ram wild in themselves. They gave in to their very instincts. It was the evil inclination within themselves which they worshipped. It is this same ram, people worship today, at the discotheques, beaches, streets, music halls, T.V. etc. The Jewish people represent the exact opposite of this kind of "civilization." We never idolized the ram; on the contrary we sacrificed it to G-d. When we realize that our life-force is only a means to worship the Higher Power, we are able to control the ram within us and make it into a lamb. The lamb symbolizes the fact that we strive towards subduing the animal instinct within us. This is why we were commanded to sacrifice the Pascal lamb to G-d before being able to leave Egypt.

In the month of Nissan we celebrate פסח/Pesach, which even sounds like the cry of a lamb..."peeeehhhh sach." The holiday incorporates all the mystical attributes and energies associated with Nissan. Celebrated on the 15th of Nissan, it falls smack in the middle of the month when the moon is full and Nissan is at its peak thus exuding these qualities to the fullest and most brightly. "Pesach" means to skip and jump, pass over, for the angel of death passed over the homes of the Jewish families. Hinted at is a further meaning that the Almighty skipped over the mountains to redeem his children. The same word can be broken into פה פה/peh sach – the mouth speaks. The sense of speech is in essence the sense of leadership...use the month of Nissan to bring this element out into your personal life without hesitation, turn your speech and your intentions into actions.

Summary

"This month is for you" – This month depends on you, what you do with this month makes all the difference. Let us sanctify our speech to become the holy speech of songs and praise, a song that reaches way beyond the boundaries of the nature of the world. A song that arouses and brings the good tidings of the coming of Mashiach!

