

Parashat HaChodesh 5783, 2023:

The Promise of Chodesh Nissan

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, 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, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The *mitzvah* of Rosh Chodesh, the focus of this week's additional Torah reading, has been an essential link between Hashem and our people since we were commanded in its observance prior to the Exodus from Egypt: "Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon in the land of Egypt, saying, 'This month (*hachodesh hazeh*) shall be to you the head of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year.'" (*Sefer Shemot* 12:1-2, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, with my emendations) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) explains the expression, "*hachodesh hazeh*," as referring to Chodesh Nissan: "Concerning the month of Nissan, He [Hashem] said to him [Moshe], 'This shall be [to you, Leipzig manuscript] the first [month] of the order of the number of the months, so Iyar shall be called the second [month], and Sivan the third [month].'" In short, the first month of the year is Chodesh Nissan, a reading that is strongly supported by the concluding words of the *pasuk*, "to you it shall be the first of the months of the year."

The Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270), in his *Drasha l'Rosh HaShanah*, raises a strong objection to Rashi's approach: "And if it [the first day of Tishrei, the seventh month from Chodesh Nissan,] is Rosh HaShanah, its month is incontrovertibly the first month of the year. For this is an unbreakable [logical] connection [that is, axiom,] that the first month of the year must also be Rosh

HaShanah, as the year is, by definition, the combination of the months.” (*Kitvei Ramban*, vol. I, Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel editor, pages 214-215, translations, and brackets, my own) How, then, does the Ramban understand our *pasuk*? His explanation is an exegetical tour de force:

That which is said in the Torah regarding Nissan, “this month shall be to you the head of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year,” [must not be explained in a literal fashion,] that Nissan is the [first] and the head, rather, it means that it should be called, “first,” for us [the Jewish people]. That is, it [Nissan,] is the first month of our Redemption (*rishon l’geulatainu*), and that we count the months [of the *chagim*] based upon our Redemption from Egypt, as is the custom of the Torah to count the months and days regarding the *mitzvot*.

In sum, for the Ramban, though Nissan is not calendrically the first month of the year, it is *rishon l’geulatainu*, and, therefore, it is fitting and proper “that we count the months [of the *chagim*] based upon our Redemption from Egypt, as is the custom of the Torah to count the months and days regarding the *mitzvot*.”

As Rabbi Yehoshua declared so long ago: “*b’Nissan nigalu; b’Nissan atidin liga’ale*—in Nissan, we, the Jewish people, were redeemed from Egypt, and in Nissan in the future, we will be redeemed in the Ultimate Redemption (*Geulah Shlaimah*).” (*Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah* 11a). With Hashem’s mercy and kindness, may this Nissan usher in the *Geulah Shlaimah* for all of *klal Yisrael. V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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*** 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: [The Rav](#)