

Parshiot Tazria - HaChodesh 5782, 2022:

The Inner Meaning of Chodesh Nissan

Rabbi David Etengoff

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 Yecheiel, 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, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and 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.

Parashat HaChodesh contains the celebrated verse, “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 translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, with my emendations and underlining) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi *zatzal* (1040-1105) suggests this *peshat*-level interpretation of *hachodesh hazeh*: “[Hashem] said this phrase to Moshe regarding Chodesh Nissan, [and stated:] ‘This will be to you the first in the order of counting the months; Iyar shall be called the second; and Sivan third.’” (*Sefer Shemot* 12:2, Rashi Leipzig Manuscript, translation and brackets my own)

In his posthumous work of Torah analysis, *Darash Moshe*, Rav Moshe Feinstein *zatzal* (1895-1986) notes that Rashi underscores Nissan’s precedence of place as the first of the months of the year, and examines its significance:

The reason for this is simple: It is insufficient for us, the Jewish people, to believe that Hashem, may He be blessed, is the Creator of the Universe, for we have Shabbat that symbolizes this, and serves as a permanent covenant [between ourselves and the Almighty.] In addition, [and crucially so,] the Jewish people must believe that not only did He create [the Universe in the past], but rather, He is its Creator at this very moment, and its active Guide (*manhig*). And everything that occurs to a person, and to everything that lives, is from the Holy One blessed be He, just as we have seen regarding the Exodus from Egypt and the [10] Plagues, as we find stated explicitly in the Torah’s text. (Pages 44-45, translation and brackets my own)

For Rav Moshe, Nissan's designation as the first of the months of the year is underscored by Rashi to emphasize that Hashem is the *Manhig HaOlam* (the Guide of the Universe), as we find in the Torah's narratives of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* (the Exodus) and the *Eser Makkot*. This concept of Hashem's ongoing *hanhagat haolam* (guidance of the Universe) is succinctly explained by the Rambam *zatzal* (Maimonides, 1135-1204) in a celebrated *halacha* in the *Mishneh Torah*:

This entity is the G-d of the world and the L-rd of the entire earth. He controls the sphere (*v'Hu HaManhig hagalgal*) with infinite and unbounded power. This power [continues] without interruption because the sphere is constantly revolving, and it is impossible for it to revolve without someone causing it to revolve. [That one is] He, blessed be He, who causes it to revolve without a hand or any [other] corporeal dimension. (*Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:5, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger)

As Rav Moshe notes, the belief in Hashem's direct management of the Universe constitutes the foundation of the crucial theological principle: "Everything that occurs to a person, and to everything that lives, is from the Holy One blessed be He." This is reminiscent of the following beautiful interchange between Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook *zatzal* (first Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi under the Palestine Mandate, 1865-1935) and Rabbi Aryeh Levin *zatzal* (the "Tzaddik of Yerushalayim," 1885-1969) during their first meeting in Jaffa, as cited in Rav Levin's memoirs:

After an early *minhah* he [Rav Kook] went out, as his hallowed custom was, to stroll a bit in the fields and gather his thoughts; and I went along. On the way I plucked some branch or flower. Our great master was taken aback; and then he told me gently, "Believe me: In all my days I have taken care never to pluck a blade of grass or a flower needlessly when it had the ability to grow or blossom. You know the teaching of the Sages that there is not a single blade of grass below, here on earth, which does not have a heavenly force (or angel) above telling it, *Grow!* Every sprout and leaf of grass says something, conveys some meaning. Every stone whispers some inner hidden message in the silence. Every creation utters its song (in praise of the Creator)." Those words, spoken from a pure and holy heart, engraved themselves deeply on my heart. From that time on I began to feel a strong sense of compassion for everything. (*A Tzaddik in Our Time*, pages 108-109)

With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may we ever recognize Hashem's guiding hand in our lives, and may this enhance our compassion for all His creations. *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](#)