

3D Parsha: A Multidimensional Approach to the Topics You Thought You Knew

The Deeper Messages of Rosh Chodesh

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שמות י"ב:

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:

This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you.

ספורנו שם

החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים. מכאן ואילך יהיו החדשים שלכם, לעשות בהם כרצונכם, אבל בימי השעבוד לא היו ימיכם שלכם, אבל היו לעבודת אחרים ורצונם, לפיכך ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה. כי בו התחיל מציאותכם הבחירי:

from now on these months will be yours, to do with as you like. [you have My authority to organize your own calendar. Ed.] This is by way of contrast to the years when you were enslaved when you had no control over your time or timetable at all. [Freedom, i.e. retirement from the “rat race,” means being able to formulate one’s own timetable. Ed.] While you were enslaved, your days, hours, minutes even, were always at the beck and call of your taskmasters.

רמב"ן שם

החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים זו מצוה ראשונה שצוה הקב"ה את ישראל על ידי משה, ולכן אמר בארץ מצרים, כי שאר מצות שבתורה היו בהר סיני, או שבא לומר בארץ מצרים, לא בעיר מצרים, כמו שאמרו רבותינו (מכילתא כאן) חוץ לכרך. **והיה** ראוי שיאמר תחלה דברו אל כל עדת ישראל לאמר החדש הזה לכם וגומר הפרשה, אבל משה ואהרן הם במקום ישראל, ואמר **לכם** כנגד ישראל לדורותם, וחזר ואמר דברו אל כל עדת ישראל, שיצום במצות שעה לקחת פסח מצרים מבעשור:

ולפי מדרשו **לכם** לומר שקדוש החדש צריך בית דין מומחין (ר"ה כה:): ולכך לא נאמר בתחלה "דברו אל כל עדת ישראל", שאין בקדוש החדש אלא משה ואהרן וכיוצא בהם. וטעם ה**חדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים**, שימנו אותו ישראל חדש הראשון, וממנו ימנו כל החדשים שני ושלישי עד תשלום השנה בשנים עשר חדש, כדי שיהיה זה זכרון בנס הגדול, כי בכל עת שנזכיר החדשים יהיה הנס נזכר, ועל כן אין לחדשים שם בתורה, אלא יאמר בחדש השלישי (שמות

י"ט:א'), ואומר ויהי בשנה השנית בחדש השני נעלה הענן (במדבר י'יא), ובחדש השביעי באחד לחודש וגו' (שם כט א),
וכן כלם:

וכמו שתהיה הזכירה ביום השבת במנותינו ממנו אחד בשבת ושני בשבת, כאשר אפרש (רמב"ן על שמות כ"ח:'), כך
הזכירה ביציאת מצרים במנותינו החדש הראשון והחדש השני והשלישי לגאולתינו, שאין המנין הזה לשנה, שהרי
תחלת שנותינו מתשרי, דכתיב (שמות ל"ד:כ"ב) וחג האסיף תקופת השנה, וכתיב (שם כג טז) בצאת השנה, אם כן
כשנקרא לחדש ניסן ראשון ולתשרי שביעי, פתרונו ראשון לגאולה ושביעי אליה וזה טעם **ראשון הוא לכם**, שאיננו
ראשון בשנה, אבל הוא ראשון לכם, שנקרא לו לזכרון גאולתינו:

וכבר הזכירו רבותינו זה הענין, ואמרו שמות חדשים עלו עמנו מבבל (ירושלמי ר"ה א ב, ב"ר מח ט), כי מתחלה לא היו
להם שמות אצלנו, והסבה בזה, כי מתחלה היה מנינם זכר ליציאת מצרים, אבל כאשר עלינו מבבל ונתקיים מה שאמר
הכתוב (ירמיה טז יד-טו) ולא יאמר עוד חי ה' אשר העלה את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים כי אם חי ה' אשר העלה ואשר
הביא את בני ישראל מארץ צפון, חזרנו לקרא החדשים בשם שנקראים בארץ בבל, להזכיר כי שם עמדנו ומשם העלנו
הש"י כי אלה השמות ניסן אייר וזולתם שמות פרסיים, ולא ימצא רק בספרי נביאי בבל (זכריה א ז, עזרא ו טו, נחמיה א
א) ובמגילת אסתר (ג ז). ולכן אמר הכתוב בחדש הראשון הוא חדש ניסן, כמו הפיל פור הוא הגורל (שם). ועוד היום
הגוים בארצות פרס ומדי כך הם קוראים אותם ניסן ותשרי וכלם כמונו. והנה נזכיר בחדשים הגאולה השנית כאשר
עשינו עד הנה בראשונה:

This is the first commandment which the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Israel through Moses.
Therefore it says here [that the Eternal spoke unto Moses and Aaron] *in the land of Egypt*,⁹⁷Verse 1. for
the rest of the commandments of the Torah were given to him on Mount Sinai. It may be that the intent
of the expression, *in the land of Egypt*, is to exclude the city of Egypt, just as our Rabbis have
said:⁹⁸*Mechilta, Introduction. "In the land of Egypt. This means outside the city."*

Now Scripture should have first said, *Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying*:⁹⁹Verse 3. *This
month shall be unto you the beginning of months*, and so on to the end of the chapter. [Why then is the
verse, *Speak ye, etc.*, mentioned after the verse, *This month, etc.*?] It is because Moses and Aaron — [as
mentioned in Verse 1: *And the Eternal spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: This
month, etc.*] — are in the place of Israel. Saying it to them is equivalent to saying it to Israel in all their
generations. In the following verse, however, He repeats by saying, *Speak ye unto all the congregation
of Israel*, in order to command them something which is not binding for all time, namely, the buying of
the paschal offering in Egypt on the tenth day of Nisan.¹⁰⁰*In subsequent generations, the paschal
offering may be purchased at any time (Pesachim 96a). Ramban's thought is thus clear. With the
commandment, This month shall be unto you, etc., applying as it does for all time, it is sufficient for*

Scripture to mention only Moses and Aaron in connection with it, since they are in place of Israel for all times. But since the command mentioned in Verse 3, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, applied only to the paschal offering in Egypt, He therefore preceded it again by saying, Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, the Israel of that time.

According to the Midrashic interpretation,¹⁰¹*Rosh Hashanah 25b. The process involved witnesses who saw the appearance of the new moon. After their testimony was heard and examined, the chief of the Court then said, "It is hallowed!" and all the people answered him, "It is hallowed! It is hallowed!" This established that day as being the first of the month, and the occurrence of all festivals of that month were accordingly determined. With the Great Court or Sanhedrin no longer functioning in the Land of Israel, the first of the month is established only by calculating when the new moon appears. For a more detailed discussion of this important topic, see my translation of "The Commandments," Vol. I, pp. 159-163. lachem (unto you) [in the verse, This month shall be unto you], means that "the Sanctification of the New Moon"*¹⁰¹*Rosh Hashanah 25b. The process involved witnesses who saw the appearance of the new moon. After their testimony was heard and examined, the chief of the Court then said, "It is hallowed!" and all the people answered him, "It is hallowed! It is hallowed!" This established that day as being the first of the month, and the occurrence of all festivals of that month were accordingly determined. With the Great Court or Sanhedrin no longer functioning in the Land of Israel, the first of the month is established only by calculating when the new moon appears. For a more detailed discussion of this important topic, see my translation of "The Commandments," Vol. I, pp. 159-163. is to be performed only by a Court of experts [as Moses and Aaron were]. And this is the reason it does not say at the beginning [of Verse 2], Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, since "the Sanctification of the New Moon" can be performed only by Moses and Aaron and their like.*

Now the purport of the expression, *This month shall be unto you the beginning of months*, is that Israel is to count this as the first of the months, and from it they are to count all months — second, third, etc., until a year of twelve months is completed — in order that there be through this enumeration a remembrance of the great miracle, [i.e., the exodus from Egypt, which occurred in the first month]. Whenever we will mention the months, the miracle will be remembered.¹⁰²*Thus everytime a person says, for example, "the third month," he implies that it is the third in the order of the months which begins with Nisan, when the exodus occurred. It is for this reason that the months have no individual names in the Torah. Instead, Scripture says: In the third month;*¹⁰³*Further, 19:1. And it came to pass in the second year, in the second month ... that the cloud was taken up from over the Tabernacle of the Testimony;*¹⁰⁴*Numbers 10:11. And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, etc.,*¹⁰⁵*Ibid., 29:1. and so in all cases. Just as in counting the weekdays we always remember the Sabbath-day since the*

weekdays have no specific name of their own, but instead are called “one day in the Sabbath,” “the second day in the Sabbath,” as I will explain,¹⁰⁶*Further, 20:8*. so we remember the exodus from Egypt in our counting “the first month,” “the second month,” “the third month,” etc., to our redemption.

This order of the counting of the months is not in regard to the years, for the beginning of our years is from Tishri, [the seventh month], as it is written, *And the feast of ingathering at the turn of the year*,¹⁰⁷*Ibid., 34:22*. *Now the feast of ingathering is in the seventh month (Leviticus 23:39) and yet Scripture calls it here at the turn of the year, which means the beginning of the new year. Thus we learn that Tishri is the beginning of the year, although in the order of the counting of the months it is the seventh month.* and it is further written, *And the feast of ingathering, at the end of the year*.¹⁰⁸*Ibid., 23:16*. If so, when we call the month of Nisan the first of the months and Tishri the seventh, the meaning thereof is “the first [month] to the redemption” and “the seventh month” thereto. This then is the intent of the expression, *it shall be the first month to you*, meaning that it is not the first in regard to the year but it is the first “to you,” i.e., that it be called “the first” for the purpose of remembering our redemption.

Our Rabbis have already mentioned this matter when saying,¹⁰⁹*Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah I, 2*. “The names of the months came up with us from Babylon,” since at first we had no names for the months. The reason for this [adoption of the names of the months when our ancestors returned from Babylon to build the Second Temple], was that at first their reckoning was a memorial to the exodus from Egypt, but when we came up from Babylon, and the words of Scripture were fulfilled — *And it shall no more be said: As the Eternal liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but: As the Eternal liveth that brought up and that led the children of Israel from the land of the north*¹¹⁰*Jeremiah 16:14-15*. *The expression and that led is found* *ibid., 23:8*. — from then on we began to call the months by the names they were called in the land of Babylon. We are thus reminded that there we stayed [during our exile] and from there, blessed G-d brought us up [to our Land].¹¹¹*From Ramban’s “Sermon on Rosh Hashanah,” where he discussed the same topic (Kithvei Haramban, Vol. I, p. 215), it is crystal clear that the author’s intent here was not that the memorial of the redemption from Babylon will thrust aside the memorial of the redemption from Egypt. Rather, the one of Babylon will be added to that of Egypt, so that the names of the months will be reminiscent of the two redemptions together. See Note 114 further, for example. Joseph Albo’s position in his book Ikkarim (Roots), III, 16, that Ramban’s intent here was that after the return from the Babylonian exile, the first memorial was to give way altogether to the second, is thus not correct. For further discussion of this problem see the note in my Hebrew commentary Vol. II, p. 520.* These names — Nisan, Iyar, and the others — are Persian names and are to be found only in the books of the prophets of the Babylonian era¹¹²*See Zechariah 1:7, etc.; Ezra 6:15;*

Nehemiah 1:1. and in the Scroll of Esther.¹¹³*Esther 3:7, etc.* It is for this reason that Scripture says, *In the first month, which is the month of Nisan,*¹¹⁴*Ibid.* Thus both memorials are mentioned simultaneously: the first month to our redemption from Egypt, which is the month of Nisan, a name which is reminiscent of our Babylonian exile from which we have also been redeemed. just as it says, they cast ‘pur,’ that is, the lot.¹¹⁵*Ibid.* In this case too Scripture explains the Persian word *pur* as meaning lot, just as it explained the name Nisan as being “the first month.” To this day, people of Persia and Media use these names of the months — Nisan, Tishri, and the others — as we do. Thus through the names of the months we remember our second redemption even as we had done until then with regard to the first one.