



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

שבת החודש Shabbat HaChodesh

March 25, 2025

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

שבת החודש - *Shabbat HaChodesh*

On the last day of the month of Adar some 3,500 years ago, as the first sliver of the new moon signaling the beginning of the new month Nissan appeared, Hashem taught Moshe and Aharon the mitzvah of sanctifying the new month - קידוש החודש - *Kiddush HaChodesh* (Exodus 12:1 ,2):

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר יְדָוֶד אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר.
(ב) הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשִׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה.

1) Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt saying, 2) This month is for you the beginning of the months; it is for you the first month of the months of the year.

Accordingly, the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Nissan is called “*Shabbat HaChodesh*,” which translates as “*Shabbat of the month*,” viz, the Shabbat on which we commemorate that event.

What does this entail today? To commemorate the first Rosh Chodesh ever celebrated, we take out a second Sefer Torah on the Shabbat before the first day of Nissan and read from it about the sanctification of the new moon. Because that portion begins with the word “החודש” (*Hachodesh –this month*), we designate this Shabbat as *Shabbat Hachodesh*, meaning, “The Shabbat on which we read the portion of the Torah about *Rosh Chodesh*.”

Only the High Court (the Sanhedrin) in Jerusalem can sanctify the month. (In this case, Hashem with Moshe and

Aharon, comprised the high court.) Hashem instructed Moshe, “When the new moon looks like this (when you see its first sliver) you can proclaim *Rosh Chodesh – the new month.*”

Although the new moon appears automatically in the sky, Rosh Chodesh does not become “official” until the Sanhedrin proclaims it so. The process requires witnesses who see the new moon to come to the high Court to testify that they saw it. The court, knowing how the new moon *should* look, would interrogate them to determine if they actually saw it; and if their testimony was accepted, the court would proclaim the new moon by saying the words, “מְקוֹדֵשׁ הַחֹדֶשׁ מִקּוֹדֵשׁ!”- “*the new month is sanctified.*”

Hashem then also informed Moshe exactly when each future month, until the end of time, would become visible so that Moshe would sanctify them in advance should the court, for some reason, be unable to do it. This is how our *Roshei Chodoshim* were sanctified, even though we no longer have the High Court to do so.

According to Maimonides, the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon also includes the mandate to synchronize the lunar year with the solar year. The solar year contains 365 days and 6 hours, while the lunar year comprises 354 days, 8 hours, and about 49 minutes. The difference is almost 11 days (10 days, 21 hours, and about 11 minutes). The Torah moreover mandates that Pesach be celebrated in the spring and Sukkot be celebrated in the fall. With no adjustment, over time the almost 11-day difference between the solar and lunar years would accumulate, pushing these holidays out of their proper seasons resulting in Pesach, for example, being celebrated in the fall

instead of the spring. To remedy this problem, an extra month, Adar 2, is added 7 times in 19 years (years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19). This is why a person's secular and Hebrew birthdays coincide only once in 19 years. Every 19 years, the solar and lunar calendars are at the same place they were the year that you were born.

The Midrash tells us that Hashem told Moshe, "Until now, the calculation of the new moon was known only by Me; but from now on, it is in your hands."

ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן בארץ מצרים לאמר, מהו לאמר? אמר. מכאן
ואילך הרי הם מסורים לכם

Hashem gave Moshe the exact length of a solar month, which exact number has been used since then to calculate the months and years in the Jewish calendar. A Jewish month begins and ends with the first and last light of the moon; hence, this is the length of a Jewish calendar month.

Rabban Gamliel tells us in Tractate Rosh Hashana (25a).

אמר להם רבן גמליאל, כך מקובלני מבית אבי אבא : אין חדושה של לבנה
פחותה מעשרים ותשעה יום ומחצה ושני שלישי שעה ושבעים ושלושה
חלקים

*"This is the information I received from my grandfather's house:
A new moon will not appear earlier than 29 ½ days, ⅔ of an hour,
and 73 parts (73/1080) of an hour."*

Rather than in minutes or seconds, the Sages divide an hour into 1,080 *parts*. (Maimonides explains that this number was chosen because it is divisible by 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10.) The 44 minutes represents 793 parts of an hour; thus, the exact

length of a lunar month is **29.530594** days, or, 29.5 days, 44 minutes and 2.8 seconds. Since a lunar month is roughly 29 ½ days, and a month must have whole days, the two half days add up to a whole day, and every other month has 30 days. To keep the calendar in sync, moreover, a specific Hebrew month may, depending on the year, alternate between 29 and 30 days.

When we receive the numerous Jewish calendars before Rosh Hashana from the different institutions soliciting donations, we give little thought to the miracle of what we are holding in our hand. The permanent Hebrew calendar was established primarily by Hillel II the Prince, a great-grandson of Rabbi Judah the Prince, in circa 358, over 1667 years ago, and it has worked flawlessly since then! If the original number was off by even the slightest amount, over so many years the discrepancy would have skewed the holidays and placed them in different parts of the year. But the number is perfect, so the calendar is perfect. How could the Sages of that time have had such an accurate number for the length of a lunar month? Did they have telescopes, spaceships, or other sophisticated instruments with which to measure? Did they spend their time out of doors gazing into the heavens to figure it out? Of course not! They spent their time doing one thing, studying Torah day and night. There is only one answer. They received this number from Moshe who received it from Hashem and passed it down from generation to generation. A Google query of “*how long is a lunar month?*” yielded this answer: *The Moon's synodic period (the length of a lunar month) is **29.53059** days – or 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes, and 2.8 seconds.* Does this number look familiar? After many years of research and calculations, they have finally arrived at the exact number the Sages have been

using for centuries. This is a clear, irrefutable proof that the Torah is from Sinai.

Indeed, when Claudius Ptolemaeus (85-165) of Alexandria, considered the most prominent astronomer of the ancient world, heard that the Jewish Sages had such a precise number for a lunar month, he said that this proves that the Jews had prophecy.

The verse cited above says that Nissan is the first month of the year. Indeed, when the Torah talks about Rosh Hashana, it places it on the first day of the **seventh** month of the year, Tishrei! But, how could that be? Rosh Hashana means the “*Head of the year,*” and it is the beginning of the new year! On Rosh Hashana, we changed the calendar year from 5784 to 5785. Are there **two** *Rosh Hashanas*?

Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of the *world’s* creation, and it has been 5785 years since Adam was created, which is considered the world’s beginning. Nissan, on the other hand, marks the anniversary of the creation of the Jewish Nation, which was “born” on Pesach. Therefore, Pesach is our birthday, and for all matters relevant exclusively to the Jewish people, Nissan is the first month.

Sanctifying *Rosh Chodosh* was the first mitzvah given to the Jewish Nation. The calculation of Rosh Chodesh, beginning with the month of Nissan, was necessary to set the festival of Pesach, which would happen on the 15th of the month when they would leave Egypt. This would also set the stage for all the future months.

As the very first mitzvah given to the Jewish people, Rosh Chodesh has great significance in that, unlike most other nations, we use a lunar calendar instead of a solar one. It is indicative of the Jewish view of time versus the conventional view of time.

Our first personal encounter with time was probably the first birthday party that we can remember. That was the day they told us, “Happy Birthday!! You are so and so many years old!” We loved the party, but at the same time we may have wondered, “What does that mean?” Eventually, we learned about the concept of time, and how to tell time so that we could do things in a timely manner. We then realized that there is a continuum of time that seems to have no beginning and no end and that we were born into that continuum the year of our birthday. Here I am, dangling in time, on this continuum, from the date of my birth until the current year. We hope that this will continue for many more years until we pass from the world as have so many others before us. Time marches on relentlessly without us; new people are born, others pass on, following a continuing pattern from time immemorial.

The “purpose” of time is the greatest mystery in the world. Everyone is trying to figure out what to do with it. Some say that time has no purpose; it just “is.” Others use it to play solitaire on their computers, and others say that it is for doing good. The options cover the entire spectrum of human thought and action.

The Torah, though, has a different perspective on time, teaching us clearly its purpose. It starts at the very beginning of time.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:1) teaches us:

א) בְּעֶשְׂרֵה מְאֻמְרוֹת נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם

1) *The world was created with 10 pronouncements.*

A “pronouncement” occurred when, in the creation narrative, it says, וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים - “*And Hashem said,*” upon creating a specific part of the creation. The problem is that וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים is only said *nine* times in the narrative! The Talmud answers the question by noting that the first word of the Torah, בְּרֵאשִׁית - “*In the beginning*” also constitutes one of the ten statements. The commentaries rightfully ask, “What was created with this word?” The answer is – a beginning, *the beginning of time*.

Rabbeinu Ovadia Seforno (1480-1550) in his commentary to the Torah says it like this (Genesis 1:1).

א) בְּרֵאשִׁית. בְּתַחֲלַת הַזְּמַן וְהוּא רִגַע רֵאשׁוֹן בְּלִתֵּי מִתְחַלֵּק שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה זְמַן קוֹדֵם לוֹ

At the beginning of time, which is the very first moment, which cannot be divided, and before which there was nothing.

We tend to think that before Hashem created the world there were just eons of time and a vast expanse with nothing in it, into which Hashem placed the entire universe, including our Milky Way galaxy, our solar system with the planets, and planet Earth. The reality is that before Hashem created the world, there was *nothing*, absolutely nothing, but Hashem. No time. No space. Just Hashem Who created time and space.

When we contemplate the creation of “*a beginning*,” our thoughts must also include a continuation of that beginning and its end. Created time is a finite thing, with a specific duration.

The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 97a):

אמר רב קטינא, שית אלפי שני הוו עלמא וחד חרוב

Rav Ketina said, “*The world will exist for six thousand years, and it will be destroyed for one thousand.*”

These words contain a profound message. Hashem created the world for 6,000 years because it would take 6,000 years for the world to achieve the purpose for which it was created. At the moment of creation, the world embarked on a process that would take 6,000 years to complete, and all of the people who would be born into the world are charged with the task of furthering the world along its path to completion. What constitutes completion? The world will reach its purpose when all living creatures recognize Hashem as the Creator and Master of the world. Mashiach will accomplish this, but in the meantime, our job is to prepare the world for Mashiach by modeling Hashem’s G-dliness to the world and demonstrating through our lifestyle and actions Hashem’s involvement in the world. This way, when Hashem finally sends the Mashiach, the idea of Hashem, who He is and what He is all about, will be something that people are familiar with, and they will accept Hashem immediately.

This has been the struggle throughout history: to see Hashem in a world that so cleverly hides Him.

Through the ten plagues during the miraculous exodus from Egypt, Hashem showed the Jewish people and the people of the world that He created it, maintains it, and is involved with every individual in it. At the revelation on Sinai, and during the forty years that Hashem miraculously sustained the Jewish nation as they wandered through the wilderness, Hashem created an unbreakable bond with the Jewish nation. This was a temporary mode of operation that Hashem employed to establish His presence once and for all.

Once the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel, and from then on, life returned to “normal,” and people had to work to make a living. Plowing, planting, watering, and harvesting would be the only way to have sustenance. Hashem would be hidden in our everyday actions, managing our affairs behind the scenes. Our job is to expose Hashem and reveal His involvement in all of our affairs.

Some bright flashes of lightning occasionally occurred along the way that lit up the darkness and allowed us to see Hashem in all his Glory, such as Purim and Chanukah, and, of course, countless times in the lives of individual Jews who experienced Hashem’s special kindness to them; but for the most part, Hashem lies hidden behind the scenes.

This idea, that time is a creation with a purpose and a goal, should change our perspective in life about time. Instead of thinking of ourselves existing in a vast continuum of time, *viz*, that we “*just happened*” to be born into at the time of our birth, we realize that Hashem has put us specifically at this point in time in the world’s 6,000 years of existence. From the moment

of creation, we were part of Hashem's plan for this world, and our place in time – the present - is extremely significant!

Our Sages tell us that we currently live in a time called עקבתא דמשיחא - *The times of the Mashiach*. Another translation for this is, “*the footsteps of the Mashiach*,” meaning that he is so close that we can hear his footsteps as he approaches. We were chosen to be the ones who, through our actions, will complete the world's mission and ultimately bring the Mashiach, who will restore Hashem's kingdom to the world. My sense tells me that Partners in Torah, and all of the wonderful people who come to study Torah and come closer to Hashem through it, is at the forefront of this operation.

When we choose to fulfill one of Hashem's commandments rather than doing what we would want to do, we demonstrate to the world that there is a Creator Who has commanded us to follow His mitzvot, and we are His loyal servants, fulfilling His wish. Slowly but surely, as this concept sinks in, people will begin to realize that there are people in the world who fear Hashem and listen to Him. People still believe in G-d. These concepts are the building blocks for Mashiach.

Revealing Hashem in this world through our actions entitles us to a future reward from Hashem. There is no greater service that we can perform for Hashem, and, for it, Hashem wants to repay us with the most sublime reward in the World to Come.

This is what time is for. Its purpose is actually hinted in its name. The Hebrew word for *time* is זמן – *z'man*. The source of this word is להזמין, which means *to prepare*. Time in this world

is the medium through which we prepare ourselves for the World to Come. When used properly, time is the ultimate instrument through which we earn reward in the World to Come. How is that? We earn reward in the World to Come by revealing Hashem in this world through doing His commandments.

Rabbi Yaakov in Pirkei Avot teaches us (4:16).

טז) רבי יעקב אומר, העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא. התקן עצמך בפרוזדור, כדי שתכניס לטרקלין

This world is like a hallway that leads to the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the hallway so you can enter the ballroom.

The sole purpose of a hallway is to bring one to the ballroom. Similarly, the only purpose for this world and our time in it, is to reach the ballroom, the World to Come.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi shows where this concept is written in the Torah (Eruvin 22a):

דאמר רבי יהושע בן לוי מאי דכתיב אשר אנכי מצוך היום לעשותם היום לעשותם ולא למחר לעשותם היום לעשותם למחר לקבל שכרם

*“That which it says (Deuteronomy 6:6) ‘That I command you **today**,’ the word **today** teaches us that we have only today – this world- to do them [the mitzvot], not tomorrow. We do them today, and tomorrow -in the World to Come- we receive the reward for their performance.”*

The moon is the perfect example of what life is like; it is ever changing. There are no two moments when the moon is the same. Either it is waxing, or it is waning. That is why a month is called a חֲדָשׁ, from the word חָדַשׁ which means *new*, since every moment of the lunar month is new. Contrary to conventional

thought that life is supposed to be perfect, and I just need to get over this hump, we need to know that, like the moon, each moment of our lives presents a new challenge and a new opportunity to reveal Hashem, and with that, prepare ourselves for the World to Come.

The moon teaches us another important facet of this concept. The moon waxes and wanes until it disappears for 24 hours. After being absent for 24 hours, the moon always returns and steadily grows to reach its full size.

This resembles life in many ways. We have our ups and our downs. There are times in life when we feel that we are in total darkness with no understanding of what is happening to us, and there are times in life when things go swimmingly well and the future is bright and clear. And, of course, there is everything in between, covering the entire spectrum of possibilities. We need to understand that each of these situations is a special opportunity to fulfill our purpose in the world. And we should take a lesson from the moon. When we are down, we need to look at the moon and see how it comes back full every month, and when we are up, we should not make the mistake of thinking this is the way it will always be. This is life; things wax and wane, and we must look for the opportunity for growth in every situation.

The sun, on the other hand, despite its awesome size and energy, is the same every day of the year; it never changes. It is always out there in full force with its life sustaining rays beating relentlessly on the earth. That's not realistic model for the human being.

This is why the sanctification of the new moon is the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a nation, a mitzvah that sets the foundation for what the Jewish nation is here to accomplish. With time, we have the past from which to learn, the present to execute in, and the future to look forward to, for new opportunities to prepare ourselves for the ultimate destination, the World to Come.

The Vilna Gaon cried on his deathbed, and those around him asked, “What could a person like you, who didn’t waste a minute of his life, have to cry about?” He answered. “In this world, I can take a few dollars, buy a pair of tzitzit, and gain eternal reward in the world to come for wearing them. In the next world, there are no more such opportunities. I am crying because those opportunities will no longer be available to me.”

Having said all of this, there is no time to waste. Every moment is a precious opportunity to do a mitzvah which will bring one untold reward in the World to Come.