



Fresh Beginnings

By Rabbi Jake Berman

The Klausenberger Rebbe, Zechuto Yagein Aleinu, reached out to a Rosh Yeshivah that had just thrown a Bachur out of the Yeshivah. The Rosh Yeshivah told him that the boy is a terrible influence and that it is impossible to keep him in the Yeshivah. The Klausenberger Rebbe understood and agreed but told the Rosh Yeshivah that he spoke with the Bachur, and the Bachur told him that he is ready to change. The Rosh Yeshivah laughed and said that the Bachur promised him a thousand times he would improve and he never kept his word! The Rebbe then grabbed his long white beard and said, "I am already old. Throughout my years, I promised Hashem more than a thousand times that I will improve, and I have not done so yet. According to what you're saying, it's impossible for me to change. There is no hope. But we believe that as long as a Yiddische soul is alive, the person still has potential to improve his ways!"

The Shem MeShmuel (Rav Shmuel Borenstein, the Sogochover Rebbe) in Parashat Mishpatim writes that on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, Hashem breathes a new breath of life into every single person; this gives, in the heart of every single Yid, a freshness to his life and his Avodat Hashem. However, this only works for those who genuinely desire to make a change and emerge from their own Tumah.

Rosh Chodesh is generally a time for renewal. Nissan is also a time for renewal, and so is Shabbat. Therefore, this coming Shabbat is a very auspicious time for turning a new page in life, thinking about our past

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actions, and taking upon ourselves to be better. This Shabbat is also a great time to examine what we can do to implement those changes. As a nation, this is the time we left Mitzrayim but entered into the wilderness. On an individual level, this is the time where Hashem gives us the opportunity to leave our own personal "Mitzrayims" (limits, addictions, struggles, bad habits, etc.) and advance into a journey with Hashem towards the ultimate goal of receiving the Torah and Eretz Yisrael.

The story with the Klausenberger Rebbe and the ideas stated above are reminders that no matter what level one is on, he has potential to change and the ability to improve. This is the essence of Rosh Chodesh and particularly the month of Nissan, especially when they fall out on Shabbat. This is the time for new beginnings; this is the time to do Teshuvah. And remember, regardless of what was, the truth is that we can always start anew.

The Power of Rosh Chodesh

By Nachi Scheiner ('22)

"Hachodesh HaZeh Lachem Rosh Chadashim" (Shemot 12:2), This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months. Bnei Yisrael, at the apex of their preparations for Yetzi'at Mitzrayim, are commanded to do the Mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh. The Mitzvah every month to establish the incoming month and determine the future calendar. One is left bewildered. What is the nature of this Mitzvah? What does it have to do with Sefer Shemot and Yetzi'at Mitzrayim?

In addressing the second question, the Seforno writes that the ability to control the calendar is the ultimate manifestation of freedom. Bnei Yisrael is no longer controlled by Mitzraim's schedule, they are free.

The Ramban takes a different approach. Although this Pasuk is referring to the Mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh, it is also referring to the order of those months. The Ramban explains that since the Jewish

nation was formed in the month of Nisan when they left Mitzraim, it is fit to command them now to start the order of the months from Nisan.

Whether one takes the approach of the Ramban or the Seforno, one is still left with the question of what is the nature of the Mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh?

When pondering the reason behind a Mitzvah, one first looks at the Sefer Hachinuch. The Sefer Hachinuch explains that Bnei Yisrael is obligated to establish the months for the Holidays fall out at the right time. Kiddush Hachodesh is the prelude to the other Mitzvot that we are commanded. This may also explain question two. Since we were about to be commanded about Pesach and its laws, we first needed the Mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh.

In addition to the approaches laid out above, many have offered various suggestions. However, Rav Gedaliah Schorr (Ohr Gedaliyah on the Moadim) based on a Mahara"l explains that although the new moon is a naturally occurring event, it indicates a change in the heavenly spheres. The power of renewal is expressed by the lunar cycle. Therefore, on Rosh Chodesh we have the ability to change, to become new people. This message is important for us to realize every month, as we can all use some improvement, but the apex of this message was at the exodus. Bnei Yisrael completely transformed themselves with the bringing of the Korban Pesach. In fact, the Mechilta suggests that every new convert should bring a Korban Pesach due to its transformative properties. Bnei Yisrael was finally about to be formed. The ultimate prelude to this was the Mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh, the Mitzvah to recognize and actualize the power of renewal.

The Ultimate Song: "When a Woman Conceives and Births a Male"

By Rabbi Zev Kahane (09)

The Haggadah is filled with so many songs that we have cherished singing since we were in preschool, however, the Haggadah text itself refers to the songs that we will sing as a celebration of freedom and redemption.

Towards the end of the maggid section in the paragraph of "Lifichach" we thank and praise Hashem for all the miracles He has done "for our forefathers and for us," taking us "from darkness to great light". We conclude, "Let us recite before Him a new song: Halleluyah!" We recognize the

miracles of God as an imperative to sing a "Shira Chadashah", "new song". Later on, in the final paragraph of maggid ("Asher Ge'alanu"), we again refer to our desire to sing a 'new song' as a thanksgiving to Hashem. After describing the sacrifices that we will one day merit to bring in the Beit HaMikdash, we say: "We will then thank You with a new song for our redemption and for the deliverance of our souls". We look forward to the time when we will sing a "Shir Chadash", "new song".

A closer read of both of these references to singing 'a new song', presents us with a grammatical question. In the first paragraph "a new song" is written in the feminine form – "Shira Chadashah". In the final paragraph "a new song" is written in a masculine form – "Shir Chadash". Why does the Haggadah use varying grammar in these two instances?

The key to unlocking this question can be found in a Tosafot (Arvei Pesachim, 116b). There, Tosafot quotes the Mechilta which distinguishes between two different typologies of redemptions. Feminine redemption, so to speak, signifies an incomplete redemption, filled with pain, struggles, and setbacks; much like a woman in pregnancy and childbirth. Masculine redemption, on the other hand, refers to a complete redemption, without pain, struggles, and setbacks. The male does not experience the pains of pregnancy and childbirth.¹

Tosafot, therefore, explains that we only sing the "shir chadash" in the masculine form for the ultimate redemption - in the times of Mashiach. At that point, the redemption will be complete, and painless. For smaller, non-Messianic redemptions— both on an individual level and on a national level— we sing a "shira chadasha". We sing in celebration of the redemption, but we also acknowledge that we still experience some pain, struggles, and setbacks.

We sing a "Shira Chadashah" – in feminine form – for the imperfect redemption.

We sing a "Shir Chadash" – in masculine form– for the ultimate redemption.

This helps explain the grammatical change we see in the haggadah. In the first paragraph of "Lifichach", we thank Hashem for redeeming us from our personal struggles by singing a "shira chadasha". In the later paragraph of "Asher Gealanu", we hope towards the ultimate redemption, when we can sing a "shir chadash".

One of the early Hassidic masters, Rabbi Yakov Yitzchak Horowitz (also known as the Seer of Lublin), uses this very distinction between masculine and feminine redemption in a beautiful, homiletic interpretation of the opening pasuk

¹ The Mechilta is not making a statement about the values or roles of either gender. Rather, the Mechilta is simply invoking the respective experiences of childbirth to express two different typologies of redemptions.

from this week's Parashah, "אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרֶיעַ וַיֵּלֶד זָכָר," "When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male" (Devarim 12:2).

The Parashah begins with a description of the procedure for a woman who births a male child. While much of this procedure is only relevant in the times of the Temple, the great Seer of Lublin invokes this redemption symbolism in his homiletic read of this pasuk. This verse can serve as a prayer for the Jewish people. We have experienced many moments of "אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרֶיעַ" – a 'feminine' incomplete redemption filled with pains. Throughout the generations, Hashem has redeemed us, yet we still have struggles and hardships. This experience is symbolized by the opening of the pasuk, "When a woman conceives". But then the pasuk continues: "...and gives birth to a male". We long for moments of "וַיֵּלֶד זָכָר" – complete redemption, symbolized by the birth of a boy.

As we head into Pesach, Hashem should answer all the individual prayers of the Jewish people and grant each person with a personal redemption. But, ultimately, may Hashem answer the prayers of the Jewish Nation, so that we can all join together to sing one harmonious 'shir chadash' – an exuberant new song, like no song that has ever been sung before.

Humbling the Brazen Tzeduki

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Perushim and Tzedukim Debate

Among the great debates that raged between Orthodox Jews (Perushim/Pharisees) and Jews who deviate from tradition (Tzedukim/Sadducees) in Talmudic times was an intense argument how to perform the Ketoret, the special incense offering, of Yom Kippur the only day the Kohen Gadol would enter the Kodesh HaKodashim.

The Perushim believe that the Kohen Gadol places the ketoret on the coals after he has entered the Kodesh HaKodashim and the Tzedukaim insist it is done before entering the Kodesh Kodashim.

During the waning years of the second Beit HaMikdash, the quality of Kohanim Gedolim had greatly diminished since the Roman government sold the position to the highest bidder. The Mishna (Yoma 1:5) records the Sanhedrin administering a solemn oath to the Kohen Gadol, who enters the Kodesh HaKodashim alone, ensuring he would perform the Ketoret ceremony in proper Orthodox fashion.

The Brazen Tzeduki

The Gemara (Yoma 19b) presents a poignant episode about an ambitious and ardent Tzeduki who gravely overstepped his bounds:

The Sages taught in the Tosefta: There was an incident involving a certain Sadducee who was appointed as High Priest, who prepared the incense outside and then brought it into the Holy of Holies. Upon his emergence he was overjoyed that he

had succeeded. The father of that Sadducee met him and said to him: My son, although we are Sadducees and you performed the service in accordance with our opinion, we fear the Pharisees and do not actually implement that procedure in practice. The son said to his father: All my days I have been troubled over this verse: "For I will appear in the cloud above the Ark cover" (Leviticus 16:2). The Sadducees interpreted this verse to mean that God will appear above the Ark cover, i.e., will enter the Holy of Holies, only after the incense cloud is already there. I said: When will the opportunity become available to me, and I will fulfill it according to the Sadducee interpretation? Now that the opportunity has become available to me, will I not fulfill it?

The Sages said: Not even a few days passed until he died and was laid out in the garbage dump, and worms were coming out of his nose in punishment for his actions. And some say that he was struck as soon as he emerged from the Holy of Holies, as Rabbi Hiyya taught: A type of sound was heard in the Temple courtyard, as an angel came and struck him in the face. And his fellow priests came in to remove him from there and they found the likeness of a footprint of a calf between his shoulders. That is the mark left by an angel striking, as it is stated with regard to angels: "And their feet were straight feet, and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot" (Ezekiel 1:7).

While there are rich discussions and manifold lessons we may derive from this episode, for now we will focus on three major lessons.

Misplaced Passion

The passionate Tzeduki words match the passionate words Rabi Akiva uttered during his horrifying execution by the evil Romans for his teaching Torah publicly in defiance of a Roman government decree. The Gemara (Brachot 61b) recounts: "When they took Rabbi Akiva out to be executed, it was time for the recitation of Shema. And they were raking his flesh with iron combs, and he was reciting Shema, thereby accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven. His students said to him: Our teacher, even now, as you suffer, you recite Shema? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by the verse: With all your soul, meaning: Even if God takes your soul. I said to myself: When will the opportunity be afforded me to fulfill this verse? Now that it has been afforded me, shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged his uttering of the word: One, until his soul left his body as he uttered his final word: One. A voice descended from heaven and said: Happy are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul left your body as you uttered: One.

While Rabi Akiva lives on a great honor and esteem in Jewish memory, the fervent Sadducee is remembered as a fool. The legacy of Rabi Akiva continues to survive, burn bright, and thrive.

By contrast, there is no continuity for the Sadducee worldview. Rabi Akiva's dedication saved our people and our spiritual way of life. The Sadducee's death was a tragic and entirely unnecessary waste of a life.

Human beings thrive on passion in all areas of life, especially in regards to our relationship to the Creator and Lord. It is the oxygen upon which life depends. Religious passion, though, can be channeled in a very wrong direction. Molech, the Avoda Zara involved the burning of children, is a classic example. Death resulting from praying in a Beit Keneset in defiance of public health regulations during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, is a contemporary case.

The brazen Tzeduki shared the identical religious passion as Rabi Akiva. What a tragedy that he expressed in a completely misguided manner!

A sobering lesson emerges that our religious passion must be reined in and disciplined by our tradition and leading Rabbanim. Otherwise, we follow the misguided Sadducee's (paraphrasing Yirmiyahu 2:13) abandoning Mekor Mayim Chaim (the source of living water) for "Borot Nishbarim Asher Lo Yachilu Mayim" (broken cisterns that cannot retain its water).

We are Tzedukim

Responsibility for the tragic end of the brazen Tzeduki lies to a great extent with his father. Notice the words of father to son "We are Tzedukim". The father's critical error is defining himself as a Tzeduki. It is one thing for a Jew to imperfectly adhere to every word of the Torah. It is quite worse to label oneself as a member of a deviant group. When one defines himself as a member of a deviant group, he can justify all sorts of deviant practices based on his affiliation.

Defining oneself as a secular Jew, a Reform Jew, or a Conservative paves a most unfortunate road to Jewish spiritual oblivion. It is painful to hear Jewish people say "I am a Conservative Jew and I drive to synagogue on Shabbat" or "I am Reform and do not observe Kashrut".

By contrast very few Sephardic Jews define themselves as secular, Reform, or Conservative even if they are less than stellar in their religious observance. When a less than fully observant Sephardic Jew attends a synagogue or celebrates a lifecycle event such as marriage, it will typically be at an Orthodox congregation. The result is a dramatically lower rate of assimilation among non-observant Sephardic Jews than non-observant Ashkenazic Jews. Paraphrasing Bava Batra 73b, the boat of Torah remains nearby such Jews that saves them from drowning in the sea of assimilation.

In our story the father set his son up for failure by creating a family culture of belonging to a Jewish deviationist group. The son therefore is raised with intensity and fervor for the Tzeduki worldview.

We Fear the Perushim

The father made the fatal error of neglecting to teach his son that Tzedukim recognize that the inauthenticity of their practices and beliefs. Alternatively, the father communicated the point, but the son raised in an environment defining itself as Tzeduki was unable to internalize the message.

While the skeptic may regard this Talmudic story as self-serving to the Perushi worldview, I and many others testify that have experienced such attitude first hand.

A relative who was raised in an Orthodox environment and received an Orthodox education but left tradition and is a member of a Reform congregation, confided to me that he knows that non-Orthodox Judaism, in his words, "play Judaism". However, his children who did not benefit from an Orthodox upbringing do not grasp what their father is able to intuit.

Conclusion

Jews affiliating with deviationist groups that brandish alternative beliefs and practices are paving a path to spiritual extinction. While a small percentage may feel passionately attached to their wayward ideology, theirs is a broken cistern that is incapable of containing water, as evidenced by the Jewish experience of the past hundred years.

What a happy phenomenon to hear of droves of less than fully observant Jews leaving non-Orthodox congregations in favor of Chabad synagogues. The many Jews making this switch are tuning into the Mekor Mayim Chayim, from which they at least have a chance at a much brighter Jewish and legacy.

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