

CHABAD  
**DED**  
RESEARCH UNIT

גה

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 30 January 2009 - 5 Shevat 5769  
Sedra Bo

### SANCTIFYING TIME

**T**IME AND PLACE ARE TWO FUNDAMENTAL CO-ORDINATES OF LIFE, AND, IN PARTICULAR, OF Jewish life and teaching. As regards 'Place', the Torah focuses on the Holy Land, the site of the Temple and the sacred City of Jerusalem, as the spiritual centre for the Jewish people and the world. One can also think of the Jewish home and of the Synagogue as examples of places where there is something special, a quality of holiness.

In the account of the Exodus in this week's Sedra<sup>1</sup>, there is another fundamental idea: the sanctification of Time. This is expressed in the Divine instruction to Moses and the Jewish people that "This month shall be for you the first of the months, it will be the first month of the year"<sup>2</sup>. The Sages understand this as the law to sanctify the New Moon every month, and to calculate the details of the Jewish Calendar<sup>3</sup>.

The Sedra follows with the detailed description of how on the tenth of the month the Jewish people should take a lamb, and on the fourteenth of the month they should slaughter and roast it as the Paschal Lamb. That night they would go free. This would be the



In Memory of Meshulam Scharfstein ה"ג - 10 Shevat.  
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moment of the Exodus celebrated every year at the Seder Night in the Festival of Passover.

A key element in celebrating Passover and indeed *any* Jewish Festival is the concept of the Jewish Calendar. This runs as a lunar calendar, in which the months follow the phases of the moon. But the Jewish calendar also has to take into account the Solar Year, in order that Pesach, in the first month, will always fall in the Spring. Hence in a leap year, an extra month is added to the Jewish year.

In ancient times witnesses who had seen the New Moon would come to the Law Court in Jerusalem, and there the Sages would proclaim the start of the new month. In later generations this became difficult on account of Roman persecution. The Patriarch Hillel II (4<sup>th</sup> century CE) therefore calculated the details of the Jewish calendar and today the entire Jewish people round the world follow his system. The unity of the Jewish calendar is a remarkable expression of the unity of the Jewish people.

The command to sanctify the New Moon and calculate the Jewish Calendar was the first Command given to the Jewish people as a whole. Rashi even suggests that this Command might have been the beginning of the entire Torah<sup>4</sup>. Through the Calendar the Jewish people sanctify and transform Time. Shabbat comes automatically every seven days; but the Jewish Calendar, put in the hands of the leaders of the Jewish people, determines which day is the New Moon, and therefore which days are Festivals, whether Pesach or Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year.

The task of the Jewish people is to sanctify and transform existence, making it into a realm for the indwelling of the Divine. The first step in this process was the Command which gave them the power to sanctify Time. This was the prelude to the Exodus, which would culminate in the conquest of the Holy Land, expressing the Sanctification of Place. This expresses the full role of the Jewish people: to bring holiness and light to the world in all its aspects, including both space and time<sup>5</sup>.

1. Exodus 10:1-13:16. 2. Exodus 12:2. 3. See Rambam, *The Commandments*, Positive Command no.153. 4. See Rashi to Genesis 1:1. 5. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 26 p.59 ff.

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SEDRA BO

**TIME MANAGEMENT**

"David," Mrs. Becker was calling her son for the third time. "Have you started on your math homework yet?"

"5 more minutes, Mom. I am just passing the level."

Mrs. Becker sighed. She knew her son was playing computer games, but was really supposed to be doing his homework. This was her third time reminding him, but he always seemed to just need to 'pass another level.'

Five minutes passed....another five....now it was already 7 pm, and David's bedtime was at 7:30. How would he have enough time?

Mrs. Becker knew exactly what would happen. He would finally finish his game (either he would be out, or he would complete all the levels), Then he would look at his watch and realize that it was too late to do any work. Typically, David would crawl into bed with a worried look on his face, wake up with a worried look on his face, and then go to school.

Sure enough, he would come home sad, and upset, because he had to miss recess, as he caught up on his schoolwork. Over dinner, David would then resolutely decide to do his homework first thing after supper. But

then...he would get caught up in his toys...the computer games...his model airplanes....and the list would never end. Mrs. Becker, herself, was starting to feel sad and upset as well. Why was David having such a difficult time? What could she do? As she walked past the bookshelves in the living room, filled with books of the Torah, her eyes lit up as she saw the book of Shemot. She eagerly flipped through the pages until she came to the current week's Torah portion – Sedra Bo. She knew exactly where to go. Past the three final plagues which Hashem gave the Egyptian people, and just before the command to slaughter the Passover sacrifice, which would lead into the triumphant redemption of the Jewish people.

Found it! The Mitzvah of establishing Jewish months throughout the year! It was based upon sighting the New Moon. Then the Beth Din, the Jewish Law Court, would declare the Jewish month to have begun.

Mrs. Becker took the Bible in one hand, and marched upstairs to the homework room.

"David," she began, "look at this important Mitzvah in this week's Torah portion - it was the first one given to the Jewish people. It is about establishing the Jewish calendar. The beginning of every month was declared, based on when the New Moon was sighted. Why do you think it is so important?"

David thought for a while. "Probably because all the Jewish festivals are based on the Jewish calendar?"

Mrs. Becker smiled. "True. Also, the Torah is teaching us the value of time. Time is a gift from G-d, that we can use for good or bad. Using it for good means filling up our time with Torah and Mitzvot. Now, how else can we use our time for good?"

David smiled sheepishly. "Doing our homework as soon as we can... which is exactly what I was just about to do!"

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