

## The Moon that Jumped Over the Cow Rabbi Maury Grebenau

The Midrash (Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer Ch. 45) tells us that when the Jews gave gold in order to create the golden calf, the women did not want to participate. This is the reason that when Aharon gives the order to collect the gold, he says, 'remove the golden rings that are in the ears of your wives and sons and daughters' (Shemos 32:2). He speaks to the men and tells them to take the gold from their wives, against their will. The Midrash continues that the women were rewarded for not participating in the sin of the golden calf by being given Rosh Chodesh (the beginning of each new month) as a holiday.

The Midrash is puzzling; in what way is Rosh Chodesh connected to women and to refraining from contributing to the golden calf? The Tur<sup>1</sup> (O.C. 417) quotes his brother, R' Yehudah, who begins to explain this puzzle. He explains that the *shalosh regalim* of Pesach, Sukkos and Shavous are related to the Avos. Each of our forefathers had a specific holiday which was related to his specific impact on the Jewish people. There are twelve months each with a Rosh Chodesh. These days were connected to the twelve tribes until the sin of the golden calf. The Midrash, he explains, means that the Jewish people lost these special days but the women retained their connection in the merit of not being involved in the golden calf fiasco.

R' Moshe Isserles (Darchei Moshe O.C. 417) mentions a second connection between women and the days of Rosh Chodesh. He explains that Rosh Chodesh celebrates the rebirth of the moon which constantly renews itself at the beginning of its cycle. So too, he explains, women have a cycle of their own which culminates in a woman returning to her husband. Both have a sense of renewal and refreshing an established relationship. R' Isserles explains the connection between women and Rosh Chodesh, but leaves us to make the final connection to their meritorious refusal to participate in the golden calf.

We have a number of examples in our History of women being able to ignore the confusion or depression of the moment, in favor of a larger understanding of what is happening. When Moshe seemed not to be coming down from the mountain, the men immediately assumed the worst and panicked. They were caught up in the moment and made a critical error. The women, however, had the presence of mind to see the big picture and remember their Exodus from Egypt and Hashem's guiding hand. This ability of women is related to the cycles mentioned by R' Isserles. Life is a series of ups and downs; a constant cycle. When we are on a nadir in our cycle of life we tend to focus on the negatives of the moment and are unable to see that we will soon rise again to a high point. This was the ability of the women who saw past the current obstacle to the bright future.

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<sup>1</sup> See Rashi and Tosfos (Megilla 22b) who quote this Midrash and discuss it

Even before we left Egypt the Jewish women exhibited the same quality. The Gemara (Sotah 11b) tells us that the Exodus from Egypt was in the merit of the women. The men were exhausted from the work but the women would dress themselves up in order to entice their husbands and keep the Jewish people thriving. I heard a novel explanation from Rav Zweig that in reality it wasn't mere physical exhaustion which caused the men not to want to have children. They did not want to bring more children into the horrible conditions of slavery which were present in Egypt. It was the women who were able to see past the current plight of the Jews and strive to secure a strong future for the Jewish nation.

This quality of the Jewish women is why Rosh Chodesh is the perfect day for them to celebrate. They celebrate the renewal and the global vision of the cyclical which has been so fundamental to their role in the Jewish people. This vision is an imperative in our every day lives. We all have ruts and nadirs in our cycles of life. We each have to deal with our own personal 'Egyptian exile.' Times in our life where we experience difficulty and a feeling of hopelessness. Times when our guide seems to have died atop the mountain, and we feel like we are wandering out of control. In these times we need to rise above the immediate and have a vision of the larger picture. Like the righteous women, we must hold on to the hope of a future where we are once again at a high point in our cycle.