

Geulas Yisrael #94- Vayikra

Time After Time

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The moment had finally arrived. After we were subjected to two centuries of nightmarish torture and bondage, Hashem was about to liberate us, thereby fulfilling His ancient promise to our ancestors. The recalcitrant Egyptians had been pummeled by a year-long cycle of brutal plagues, as Pharo, their once proud leader, was brought to his knees. Independence was in the air.

Before announcing the instructions for the great night of Exodus, Hashem delivered a new calendar, fixing the month of Nissan as its new year. In addition to a different start point, our new calendar would be structured around twelve months, and not around a 365-day solar cycle.

החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים ראשון הוא לחדשי השנה

For some reason, our geulah from Egypt was inaugurated by the launch of a new calendar and a new method of marking time.

Slavery and Timelessness

Slaves live with little control over their freedom, their decisions, and their schedules. Constantly subjected to the whim of their masters, day and night become indistinguishable. Without any consistent schedule, human identity slowly erodes. Granting us freedom, Hashem endowed us with time authorship and with the ability to set our own schedules. By introducing a new calendar, Hashem empowered us with time agency.

The night before we left Egypt, we marked our passage into freedom by conducting a Pesach meal which had to be concluded by midnight. Freed from bondage, we could now control our schedule and were to complete the festivities by an appointed hour. That night of freedom we managed time in a precise and meticulous manner, characteristic of free men. We were expected to demonstrate time agency and our new calendar highlighted this newfound status as freemen in control of time.

Actually, our introduction to time management commenced a few days before we received news about our new calendar. A few days earlier our

former Egyptian masters were plunged into a vacuum of timelessness. For a week, they were shrouded in darkness, reaching a point that they could no longer see one another, or even rise from their seated position. They spent an entire week in darkened solitary confinement, ultimately, losing any sense of the passage of time. They were now suffering the exact same torment they had subjected us to.

Meanwhile, in Goshen, our grandparents, who by this point were no longer physically enslaved, enjoyed a normal lit world and a normal time routine. Transitioning into freedom, we watched the Egyptians lose their schedule, just as we gained our own time management. Shortly thereafter, as Nissan arrived we received a new calendar, and finally, on the night of the exodus, we were expected to behave with scrupulous time discipline.

Hope or Futility

Time transitions are milestones of human experience. As we transition into a new year or a new month, we take stock of our lives, and ponder our future. Every Shabbat mevarchim, as we "bless" the new month, we stand atop a precipice looking out at the unknown, while our hearts flutter with both anticipation and trepidation, praying that Hashem will steward us through the uncertain future. Time transitions are momentous occasions...but not for slaves who live without hope and without horizons. People without freedom are trapped in an endless and monotonous world, enduring unending cycles of suffering and anguish. For free men, time transitions are milestones, but for slaves they are merely painful taunts. By delivering a calendar pivoted on monthly transitions, Hashem awarded us with lives of hope, opportunity, and renewal.

Our new calendar conditioned us to our new lives as free people, who could manage time and would live with hope and future.

A New Time Experience

More important than merely conditioning us to a new life of freedom, the new calendar launched an entirely new chapter in human history, and radically altered time experience. We typically view time as the *background* for human experience. Time inexorably cycles forward, determining seasons and framing day and night. Time provides a

framework which steadies our experience and provides predictability and rhythm. Human experience requires this stable and predictable platform. In the modern era we have discovered how vital time rhythm is to our welfare. Flying into a different time zone, we upset the bio-rhythm which time provides, become discombobulated, and suffer jet lag. Time provides a solid and durable scaffolding within which we orient our lives.

Promising that human history would never be upended by a global apocalypse, Hashem guaranteed Noach that time and seasons would remain undisturbed:

עוד כל ימי הארץ זרע וקציר וקר וחום וקיץ וחרף ויום ולילה לא ישבתו

A world with dependable and predictable agricultural periods, recurring seasons, and cycles of day and night enables human prosperity. We desperately require that time be static and predictable.

Furthermore, *natural time as a background*, affects humans in the exact same manner that it influences Nature at large. Humans experience time no differently than plants and animals, except that we are conscious of its relentless passage.

With the birth of our nation, a new form of time arose, introducing an entirely different time experience. Time became a *process* with a specific beginning and a specific endpoint. Time was no longer merely a static and immovable *background* for human experience, but a fluid course influenced by human behavior. We call this new time-process *redemption*. Redemption is a historical *process* through which the world gradually advances back to its original pristine state, just the way Hashem created it. Time has a distinct trajectory, arching toward a better state, and this trajectory is driven by "time agents". A new calendar represented an entirely new system of time experience, and tasked us with the responsibility to redeem history and to redeem time.

We are agents of time and agents of geulah. We don't just occupy a world framed by static time, but shape the arch of redemptive time. Our singular time experience is anchored to an entirely different calendar.

Within this new calendar of time, not every moment is identical. Within natural time every minute is interchangeable with the next. Natural time

must be unchangeable and identical, to provide consistency and continuity. Human experience differs from moment to moment, but the background of time remains constant and monotonous.

Within our calendar of *redemptive* time, specific days are imbued with distinct redemptive meaning. In particular, the night of Pesach is a unique moment of redemptive resonance, during which we reenact the exact same circumstances and rituals of that seminal night of liberty. The 15th night of Nissan launched redemptive history and every successive Pesach night further advances redemption. On Pesach we look back over time, span the centuries, and sculpt the arch of redemptive time.

Freedom and Time Manipulation

We even manipulate the calendar to synchronize Pesach with the spring season, locking in the precise weather conditions of our original exodus. Namely, we completely ignore natural time to preserve the authenticity of redemptive time. We choreograph *natural time* to assure the integrity of *redemptive time*.

As agents of time, we aren't locked into a static reality, but shape our world and our experience. Ultimate freedom is only achieved when we escape our own historical period and live as part of a larger multigenerational process of redemption. We may physically occupy the 21st century, but we participate in a centuries-long process of redemption which far outlasts the limited time we spend on this earth.

Months, are the building blocks of our Jewish calendar and are referred to in Hebrew as chodesh or חֹדֶשׁ, the very same etymological root for the term chadash or חָדַשׁ, which signals renewal. We aren't locked in or trapped in time but are free to manage it. We are free to live beyond our own small historical space. We are free if we live redemption.