

Rabbi Menachem Genack

Haftarat Machar Chodesh: Jewish Destiny and the Sanctification of the New Moon

Nowhere but in the *haftarah of Machar Chodesh* do we have a *keriyah* (reading) which focuses on what will happen the day after the *haftarah* is read. Indeed, R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, the Rav, taught that this *haftarah* is not limited to celebrating the morrow's *chodesh*. The Rav observed that the *keriyah of Machar Chodesh*, particularly the public nature of the *keriyah*, performs a halakhic function, in that it actually helps usher in the new month. This observation is based, in turn, on a specific understanding of how *Kelal Yisrael* is vested with the power to actually sanctify the *chodesh*, particularly when the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* is not standing. It is this idea that I would like to expound upon in this essay.

When the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* was presiding over *Rosh Chodesh*, the *Beit Din* determined when, in any given month, the new month would begin. It was a very exact and detailed procedure, and the month would begin only when declared by the *Beit Din*.

When the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* was disbanded, a formula was developed by Hillel II, and put into place around the time the Talmud was reaching its final redaction; each new *chodesh* would begin based on a formula that would conform to the astronomical reality of when the new moon appears. No longer would witnesses be interrogated, nor would the *Beit Din* make a declaration.

If the new month was originally sanctified through the *Beit Din*, where does the sanctity come from according to our current system? Is it simply the mathematical predictability of the new moon's appearance that confers its sanctity? The Ramban and Rambam respond to this question in two different ways.

The Ramban (in his *hasagah* on *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, Aseh* 153) understands that the last *Beit Din*, of Hillel II, sanctified every *Rosh Chodesh* until the time when the *Beit Din* will be restored. Although the calculation is now based on an established formula, their authority is recurrent and applicable to every new *chodesh*.

The Rambam, however, states (*Hilkhot Kiddush Ha-Chodesh* 5:4) that, based on a *halakhah le-Moshe mi-Sinai*, the sanctification of the moon comes either through *re'iyah* (seeing) – as it did during the time of the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* – or through *cheshbon*, the established calculation of the new moon, which is operative when there is no *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* to oversee the sanctification through *re'iyah*. The concept of *cheshbon* is not simply having the calculations operate like a wind-up clock that will reflect the reality of the timing of a new moon until the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* can once again become involved; rather, its authority is derived from *Kelal Yisrael*, who must, every month, sanctify the new month. Their observance of the new month is simply now in accordance with this *cheshbon*.

Although the Rambam relates that there are two forms of sanctifying the month – either through *re'iyah* and the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol*, or through *cheshbon* and *Kelal Yisrael* – the two are not to be understood as operating through fundamentally different mechanisms. The Rav, interpreting the Rambam, writes that the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* itself has the authority to declare and sanctify the *chodesh* only insofar as it is an instrument of the collective will of *Kelal Yisrael* (this idea is also found in the *halakhot* of the conquest of *Eretz Yisrael* and the appointment of a Jewish king. In both cases, *Beit Din* is acting as an expression of the will of *Kelal Yisrael*).

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 49a) notes that what appears to be a compound *berakhah* of “*mekadesh Yisrael ve-ha-zemanim*” is not a double acknowledgment at all, but rather a single, coherent idea: Through our being sanctified, we have the ability, in turn, to sanctify the *zemanim*. This is in contrast to *Shabbat*, where we only say “*mekadesh ha-Shabbat*” – because the *kedushah* of *Shabbat* is derived independently of any role that *Kelal Yisrael* plays in its sanctity.

When the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* presides over the sanctification of the new moon, it does so on behalf of *Kelal Yisrael*, and as its representative. When there is no *Beit Din Ha-Gadol*, *Kelal Yisrael* itself sanctifies the new moon.

This sanctification does not transpire by itself. Rather, it is done through *Kelal Yisrael's nihug*, public practice and observance. When the *Beit Din* presided, the public acceptance was demonstrated through *Beit Din* declaring “*mekudash!*” – “sanctified!”, and the nation responding “*mekudash! mekudash!*”. In contemporary times, this practice has been superseded by the *chazan's* pronouncement of what day of the week *Rosh Chodesh* will fall (see Ra'avyah, *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, #530). The Rav says that the *chazan's* holding of the *sefer Torah* is a further demonstration of the

nation's acceptance of the Torah, as the Torah represents the entirety of the Jewish nation; this idea is reinforced by the *chazan's* declaration of "*chaveirim kol Yisrael*" during his *tefillah*.

Thus, the *keriyah* of *Machar Chodesh*, the Rav taught, was also a demonstration of the Rambam's concept of *nihug*.

The Rambam's concept of *nihug* clarifies another puzzling *halakhah*. The Talmud (*Berakhot* 30b) states that if one forgets to recite *Ya'aleh Ve-Yavo* in *maariv* (the evening *tefillah*) of *Rosh Chodesh*, one need not repeat the *tefillah* since *Beit Din* only sanctified the new moon during the day. What is the relationship between our saying *Ya'aleh Ve-Yavo* and the *Beit Din* sanctifying the new *chodesh*?

Ya'aleh Ve-Yavo has a double motif: first, it is *mei-ein ha-me'ora* (it reflects the character of the day); second, the articulation of *Ya'aleh Ve-Yavo* itself sanctifies the month. According to the first reason, the recitation would not be *le-ikuva* (indispensable) even during the day (*Rosh Chodesh*, as opposed to *Yom Tov*, has no *kedushat ha-yom*); according to the second, *Ya'aleh Ve-Yavo* is *le-ikuva* since the recitation itself is what sanctifies the day. *Kelal Yisrael* itself sanctifies the *chodesh*, and therefore, since this process is not done at night, one does not have to repeat *Ya'aleh Ve-Yavo* if it is forgotten at night.

This is why the Ra'avad (*Hilkhos Berakhot* 11:16) rules that one makes a *berakhah* on *Hallel* on *Rosh Chodesh* in order to publicize (*pirsum*) the day. The *pirsum* is a demonstration of our publicly accepting the day, which itself is the mechanism that sanctifies it.

Thus, the Rav taught, we see the special role we play in terms of sanctifying the month. That is the reason we say *Machar Chodesh*, and we do it through the reading of the *haftarah* – it is a demonstration of our accepting the month, and an element of its sanctification.

Thematically, the rest of the *haftarah* itself speaks to the loyalty and love between Yehonatan and David, specifically during the time that Shaul was king, a time when it seemed so inauspicious that David would ever become king. Thus, the *haftarah*, whose first verse mentions the moon, which waxes and wanes, is representative of the course of Jewish destiny and Jewish history. In contrast to the more steady sun, the moon has phases – these phases reflect the vicissitudes of Jewish history, and are linked ultimately to the redemption.

Kiddush Ha-Chodesh thus represents our belief in Jewish destiny. This is why the first *mitzvah* in the Torah is *Rosh Chodesh* – for there could not have been a redemption from *Mitzrayim* without a new sense of time. Lastly, it is also clear why this theme of the moon as representative of the stages of redemption is mentioned in *Kiddush Levannah*, when we assert "*David melekh Yisrael chai ve-kayam*," even though we don't, as of yet, have David again as our king.