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Bo – Creating Your Light

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In this week's Parsha we are given the first national Mitzvah, "*HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem Rosh Chodashim, This month will be for you the first of all months ... (Shemos 12:2).*" God gave Moshe the instructions for establishing the lunar calendar. After "disappearing" towards the end of the month, the moon reappears and signals the beginning of a new month. The Talmud explains that after receiving the testimony of those who saw the new moon, the Jewish court proceeded to declare the new month and dispatched messengers to inform the greater Jewish community.

One would imagine that a great deal of Divine thought went into choosing the first *mitzvah* to be given to the fledgling Jewish nation. This first *mitzvah* would set the tone and serve as the foundation for our national consciousness. If we are honest - we find ourselves a bit surprised by God's decision. There are so many dramatic, meaningful, covenantal *mitzvos* that help to shape our relationship with God and with one another. *Mitzvos* like *Bris Mila* (circumcision), *Shabbos*, *Tzedaka* (charity) and *Emunah* (belief in God). Yet, despite the numerous choices, the first *mitzvah* God gives to us is something that most people are not even directly involved in. *Kiddush HaChodesh* (sanctification of the new moon) is a technical, calendrical necessity that does not appear to carry incredible meaning for the common man. Why did God choose this *mitzvah* as our first?

In order to answer this question we must examine the juxtaposition of the plague of darkness (*choshech*) to the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush HaChodesh* (sanctification of the new moon). In describing the plague of darkness the Torah states, "*They did not see each other, and no one rose from his place for three days, but for all the children of Israel there was light in their dwellings (Shemos 10:23).*" The *Chizkuni* (Rabbi Chizkiyah ben Manoach, 13th century) points out that the word "*dwellings*" teaches us that wherever the Jews went they had light. Wherever they established their "*dwelling*" the light followed. During the earlier plagues if the Jew wanted to escape the Divine wrath he had to remain in *Goshen*. If he ventured out into Egypt proper, he ran the risk of being harmed by the plagues. However, when it came to darkness, the Jew had light wherever he traveled. But why was the plague of darkness different than the previous ones? The *Ohr HaChaim* (Rabbi Hayyim b"r Moshe ibn Attar, 1696-1743) explains that the plague of darkness was an external manifestation of an internal state of disrepair. The Egyptians were so overcome by anger, animosity, rage and hatred that darkness filled their souls. And this inner darkness became so intense that it flowed out and darkened the world around them. When a person is filled with bitter darkness, it prevents them from seeing any light in the world. Yet, in the very moment when the Egyptians were blanketed by their internal darkness, *u'lchol Bnai Yisroel haya ohr b'moshvosom, the Jewish people had light in all of their dwellings.*

Life was far from idyllic, the Jewish nation still bore the emotional and physical scars of barbaric slavery - but they made a decision to focus on the light. Our ancestors made a decision to focus on the good. They made a decision to gird themselves with optimism, dreams and hope. There were many obstacles both present and future. They knew not what awaited them but they knew that God loved them and would take care of them. They knew that their leaders Moshe and Aharon would lay down their lives for them. They knew that they were the children of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs and as such were heirs to a great spiritual destiny. The nation of Israel suffered loss, humiliation and defeat. They would have been within their right to become bitter and filled with resentment. But they didn't. They made a decision to focus on the positive. By maintaining an optimistic disposition they made a decision to create luminescent light. The truly amazing reality is that when you decide to create your personal light, it follows you wherever you go and illuminates even the darkest of paths.

Rashi (12:2) explains that Moshe had difficulty seeing the new moon even as God, Himself pointed it out. The *Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabba 3:2)* explains that no matter how much Moshe strained himself, he saw nothing but darkness. God turned to Moshe and He said, "*HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem, this month is for you; if you want light - lachem, you must create it yourself.*" Moshe was waiting for God to illuminate the dark night; God reminded Moshe, you must create your own light.

This is the deeper meaning of *Kiddush HaChodesh*. God gives us time, God gives us opportunities, but God doesn't give us the light, we must produce it ourselves. At the beginning of each new month we walk outside, we look heavenward and it is dark. We look up and it is difficult to see the light. We walk into the darkness and we pledge to ourselves to do our best to create new and beautiful light. We vow to be like our ancestors in Egypt who illuminated the dark night with their internal, luminescent optimism and hope. Life is difficult, life is challenging, life is often an uphill struggle but we have the ability to create light within the darkness. If we focus on the positive, if we maintain an unconquerable sense of optimism and if we choose to see the good in our world, in ourselves and in one another; we can illuminate even the darkest of circumstances. Too often we wait for others to provide us with happiness, fulfillment and light. If you want to dispel the darkness – the power is in your hands.

"*HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem Rosh Chodashim, This month will be for you the first of all months ...*" is not a technical *mitzvah* for the measurement of time, it is a mandate for successful living. The world is often dark – find the courage to create your own light.