

TAZRIA

PARSHAS HACHODESH

A

Achor and Kedem, of Beginnings and Ends

The Torah discusses the laws relating to childbirth: “*Isha ki sazria v’yalda zachar*” (Vayikra 12:2). The Midrash cites a *pasuk*: “*Achor vakedem tzartani*. You have created me back and front” (Tehillim 139:5). One of the fundamental beliefs of Judaism is the existence of two worlds, *olam hazeh* and *olam haba*. Rabbi Yochanan says a person can merit to live in two worlds, *kedem* and *achor*. If a person lives a life that enables him to get from this world to the next world, he fulfills his purpose in creation. If not, he will have to give an accounting to the Almighty and the heavenly tribunal explaining why he failed in his mission.

According to this Midrash, *olam hazeh* is *kedem*, the first experience. *Olam haba* is *achor*, the last experience. As we go through most situations in life that have beginnings and ends, we discern a pattern. Usually, the beginning of a situation is a struggle, requiring effort to make progress. We reach the end when we achieve the goal, the *achor*. When we understand this in a deeper way, we understand that *olam hazeh*—the beginning stage—and *olam haba*—the final stage—represent the struggle and movement towards the ultimate goal. This world is the stage of preparation and struggle, while *olam haba* is the world that we strive for. If

this is true, then we should really look at our current world this way. Unfortunately, many of us subscribe to the prevalent view in society today that this world is the only world. “Enjoy it while you have it,” they say. This is not the Jewish view.

The Torah view is that this world has minor significance compared to the future world. In terms of time, this world lasts us around seventy years. Even if we live until 120, in the final analysis our time is limited. The future world, on the other hand, is limitless. This world is a fleeting shadow compared to the world to come. Any pleasures that one has in this world pale in comparison to the good in the world to come. As we go through this world, our focus should be on the goal, on *olam haba*.

B

Psychological Meanings

The Shem Mishmuel notes that beginnings and endings have certain psychological meanings. At the beginning of a process, we are usually full of enthusiasm. If we think back to the early days of our marriage, we remember those exciting moments, the days and months and possibly years that were full of energy, excitement, and good feeling. The beginning of a school year brings new excitement and hope. These are feelings that Hashem built into the human psyche. We have fresh energy at the beginning of a process.

This is an important thing. It is not only important at the beginning phases, like when starting a job, marriage, or a new year on Rosh Hashana. It is important throughout the year to think of oneself as being at the beginning. This is related to the concept of *teshuva*, of being able to start fresh with incredible energy after the past is wiped out. We should always feel a sense of *kedem*, of a beginning.

We also need a sense of *achor*, of conclusion. The Gemara

(Kiddushin 40b) says that a person should always see himself as if he and the world are evenly balanced between good and evil. If he does one good deed, he will push the world to the side of good forever. A person should always feel that he is performing a most important and final step. You can feel that this *mitzva* is *the mitzva* that will catapult the world into the stage of everlasting bliss and happiness of *olam haba*.

The Rambam writes that all the goodness we receive in this world is only to help us to do *mitzvos* and thereby merit the world to come. We need a combination of mentalities. We must feel that we are beginning, with the energy associated with that, and at the same time that we are achieving our goal—we are getting to *olam haba*. If a person doesn't have these feelings, the Midrash says we have to give *din v'cheshbon*, judgment and accounting. The *din* will be about what we accomplished: did we get to the goal of *achor*? The *cheshbon* will ask us about what we didn't try to do. Why weren't we full with the excitement of a beginning?

C

Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh— Fresh Starts and Great Goals

The Shem Mishmuel explains the nature of two special days, Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh. Shabbos is the goal of the six days of the week. In all our struggles and challenges that we have to overcome, the goal is to get to the blissful day of Shabbos, a taste of the world to come. It has the aspect of *achor*, the ultimate goal. Shabbos is like *olam haba*, and the six days are like *olam hazeh*. The six days of the week are preparation for Shabbos, just as this entire world is a time of preparation for the world to come.

Another special day we have is Rosh Chodesh. At the beginning of the month of Nissan, we read the special *parsha* of Parshas Hachodesh, which tells us how Moshe revealed the *mitzva*

of establishing Rosh Chodesh Nissan to the people in Mitzrayim before they left.

What is the idea of a new month? It is a new beginning. Rosh Chodesh is a day full of excitement and enthusiasm. The past month is over. We are now setting out on a new road. We can start all over again with new enthusiasm and energy.

As we have discussed several times (see above Parshas Shemini), every energy that exists in time has a parallel in a human soul and in a certain place. The person who embodies the soul energy of Rosh Chodesh is Dovid HaMelech. What was the central point of Dovid's personality? In Tehillim, especially, we see that his central point was the power of *teshuva*. He had the power to become better. Dovid did sin, but with his power of *teshuva*, he was able to recover and achieve greatness.

Consider the lunar phenomenon that occurs on Rosh Chodesh. The new moon emerging from a black, empty sky, breaking the darkness with its silver light, teaches us that from the greatest darkness and disappointments, we can begin anew. The new moon reminds us that we possess the power of renewal, Rosh Chodesh, Dovid HaMelech, and *teshuva*.

D

Two Stages within Shabbos Itself

Shabbos is the goal of the week, like *olam haba*. As the seventh day, Shabbos closes the week, and it contains within it the whole week. Shabbos has the energy called *makif*, enclosing and enveloping what preceded it. It has the power of encompassing everything. The Torah places Shabbos at the beginning of the section of the holidays (Bamidbar 28:9) because it includes energies of every Jewish holiday. Some place within Shabbos there is a Rosh Chodesh energy too. It has the power of renewal, excitement, and inspiration to give people the energy to achieve.

In the Ten Commandments, there are two words used to command us to observe Shabbos: *zachor* (Shemos 20:8) and *shamor* (Devarim 5:12). *Zachor* means to maintain awareness of Shabbos, while *shamor* instructs us to keep Shabbos. Chazal teach us that Hashem pronounced these two words in one breath. They represent the two aspects of Shabbos. The *shamor* aspect, avoiding any forbidden work, is the preparation for the higher level of Shabbos. Refraining from work is one step, but there is a higher goal. We also want the inspiration of Shabbos, we want the Torah of Shabbos. This is the level of *zachor*. Shabbos itself has a *kedem*: the *shamor* command, like Rosh Chodesh. It also has a goal stage: *zachor*, which is like *olam haba*.

These two elements of holiness of Shabbos go together. Shabbos has energy and excitement to start fresh, but it is also the resting place of the Jewish soul, the endpoint that we strive to reach.

When we come home from *shul* we say, “*shalom aleichem malachei hashareis*.” We welcome the angels into our Jewish home and thank them for coming, “*bo’achem l’shalom*,” and then we ask them to bless us. Then, without even pausing, we say “*tzeischem l’shalom*,” you are leaving now, have a safe trip. Then we say *kiddush*. Why do we welcome them and quickly dismiss them? Why can’t they stay with us for all of Shabbos?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the Jewish soul on Shabbos soars much higher than the holiness of angels. The Jew goes to such a holy place that even angels can’t go there. Shabbos itself has a beginning and an end. The beginning of Shabbos is the angelic level, when we sing *shalom aleichem*. This is the level of *shamor*, of departing from the week. We stop doing *melachos*. We stop cooking, writing, driving, etc. We leave the mundane, six-day world and go to the elevated spiritual world of Shabbos. The angels are with us.

The next stage begins when we say *kiddush*. The Gemara (Pesachim 106a) says that *kiddush* is a fulfillment of the command of *zachor*. We transition beyond the beginning of Shabbos into its

goal. This level is beyond the angels. They can't join us in such elevated spirituality. So, we bid them farewell. We go higher than the beginning of Shabbos. We go to the *achor*, the goal, the experience of Shabbos in the deepest and highest way. This is *oneg Shabbos*, the spiritual pleasure of Shabbos. Angels cannot experience this. They are anchored at only one level of spirituality. They cannot begin anew and climb higher. Only people can ascend higher and higher as we do on Shabbos.

E

The Center of the Week

The Gemara (Pesachim 106a) states that the three days before Shabbos have a connection to the Shabbos that is coming, and the three days after Shabbos maintain their connection with the previous one. Shabbos is a unique time period. It is a piece of the world to come, way beyond the six days of the week, whether they are before or after Shabbos. We can compare Shabbos to the sun. Before the sun rises, there is already light in the world. And after the sun sets in the evening, there is still light coming into the world.

Shabbos is a bright light, and when it is here, the light is very intense. After Shabbos leaves, a twilight remains; there is some reflected holy light that breaks into the next three days. In the final three days of the week, the upcoming Shabbos shines some of the light of dawn into the weekday world. Shabbos itself is the day of sunshine. It is a different day that is not of this world, but of the world to come.

But while Shabbos is a day from a separate, spiritual world, Rosh Chodesh is very much from this world. It is the day on which the Jewish People were born as a nation, when Moshe taught them their first *mitzva*.

Rosh Chodesh teaches us that we can always begin. We are

never spiritually dead, *chas v'shalom*. As long as there is breath in our bodies, we can begin afresh. The Jewish nation in Mitzrayim was on the forty-ninth level of *tuma*, on the brink of irreversible contamination, but when they heard those words, “*Rishon hu lachem l'chodshei hashana*” (Shemos 12:2), they awoke. They became an energetic and passionate people, willing to risk everything to take the lamb for the Korban Pesach. They were willing even to march into the desert following God.

When we commemorate Rosh Chodesh Nissan, we learn, remember, and reexperience the lesson of *hischadshus*, being able to start anew even when we are otherwise completely lost. From there, a person can begin. The Rabam (Hilchos Teshuva 1:4) says that a *ba'al teshuva* is like a *katan shenolad dami*, like a newborn baby. The concept of Rosh Chodesh starts a new creation, the *ba'al teshuva* nation of Israel.

F

The Redemption of Speech

The Shem Mishmuel notes (based on Tosfos Rosh Hashana 27a) that in Tishrei, Hashem merely decided to create man, and on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, actually created Adam. When man was created, the Torah writes, “*Vayhi ha'adam l'nefesh chayah*. Man became a living soul” (Bereishis 2:6). The Targum translates these words—and thus defines the uniqueness of humanity—as, “He became a speaking soul.” The distinguishing feature of human life is speech, to be able to express oneself. Speech translates ideas and can bridge ideas and action. Man doesn't just react to stimuli like animals do. He plans, expresses his thoughts in speech, and acts.

The Arizal says that through the exodus from Egypt, the Jews gained the ability to speak. When they were in Mitzrayim, their

power of speech was in exile, it was *galus hadibur*. Leaving Egypt redeemed their power of speech.

I had a friend who used to visit the Soviet Union during the days of the USSR. He was amazed that there was no power of speech. People couldn't say what they thought. Eli Wiesel wrote a book about the Jews in Russia called *The Jews of Silence*. In the 1970s, the chief rabbi of Moscow, Rabbi Levin z"l, came to visit the United States I remember that he couldn't speak. He only talked with his eyes.

When Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, we regained the power of speech. We gained the ability to say what we believe, to try to convince other people of the righteousness and correctness of our ideas, to lead others towards what is right and good. This was the great gift of leaving Egypt.

Everyone understands that the Jewish slaves could not talk. They had to suffer their burden in misery and silence. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* restored our power of speech. The Jews expressed *hallel v'hoda'ah* when they sang *shiras hayam*. Words of prayer, thanks, praise, and Torah are the ultimate goal of all speech. This is the *achor*, the goal of becoming free on Pesach. This is the message and power of Rosh Chodesh Nissan: to think and to be free to do what's right, to thank Hashem and praise Him. This was the Rosh Chodesh that Moshe told the Jews they were getting. Nissan is the month of the creation of man and his essential freedom.

G

Personal Rebirth Today

The Shem Mishmuel teaches that every historical event we commemorate in our Jewish holidays represents a spiritual energy that came into the world at that time. Every year, as the calendar returns to familiar times, these original and powerful inspirational energies of the spiritual realm return to give us new strength.

Every year, we have a new month of Nissan. Every year, we have a new Seder and celebration of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Every year, we have the opportunity and privilege of receiving renewed energy from the exodus from Egypt. We are able to access the same energy that Bnei Yisrael accessed in Mitzrayim. We are able to experience a rebirth.

The *pasuk* quotes Hashem as saying, “*Bni atah ani hayom yeliditicha*. You are My son. I have given birth to you today” (Te-hillim 2:7). What better time is there to feel reborn than Nissan, the month of the creation of the Jewish People? This is the month when Adam was created, the month in which human speech was formed. This is the month when speech turned into praise and song in honor of Hashem. This is what the Pesach Seder is supposed to be. We should feel our freedom of speech to talk Torah and to sing about our higher aspirations. “I am a spiritual being and I am completely free to let my spirit soar higher and higher, to reach out to the Almighty, to sing and dance with Him.”

Every Shabbos comes to us from the world to come. On the Shabbos of Parshas Hachodesh, when we speak of the month of Nissan, we have the opportunity to combine *kedem* and *achor*, the beginning with the end, the excitement of beginning with achievement of the goal.

H

Hearing with Our Hearts

Unfortunately, not every Jew left Egypt (see Rashi to Shemos 13:18). Even after hearing Moshe say, “This is your month,” many Jews missed the message. They did not allow it to penetrate. They missed the inspiration that the others gained. They did not hear with their hearts or minds, only with their ears. They thus died in Egypt. This is a very sad part of the story that we usually don’t focus on.

We *can* hear. We must be careful to allow the words to penetrate our minds and our hearts. We will thus discover the power of speech. We will leave the exile and discover the powers of Rosh Chodesh and Shabbos. We will have both a beginning and an end. It all depends on whether we let the words go from our ears to our minds and hearts.

The *pasuk* says, “*Lev tahor bera li Elokim v’ruach nachon chadeish b’kirbi*. Create for me a pure heart, God, and renew within me a good and proper spirit” (Tehillim 51:12). Dovid’s first request is a pure heart. He asks Hashem to clear his heart from the accumulated baggage blocking purity from penetrating. We need an internal cleansing of our spiritual veins so that the holy words of Hashem can reach our hearts. Once we have been purified, we can then speak the second request, *ruach nachon chadeish b’kirbi*.

This explains the order of the two consecutive special *parshiyos* that we read, Para and Hachodesh. Parshas Para discusses how to purify a person from *tumas meis*. When we listen to that *parsha* with our hearts, we can understand that it also talks about the defilement of a spiritually dead heart. On Shabbos Para, we ask Hashem to purify our spiritual arteries. We beg Hashem to give us a pure, clean heart so that the holy words of Torah can penetrate deep into our hearts. We want to have the excitement of Torah and of being Jewish. We want to serve Hashem and sing His songs. Then we will be able to respond to Rosh Chodesh, to the exodus from the subjugation of Egypt.

This is why Parshas Hachodesh follows Parshas Para, the *parsha* of purification. We first purify ourselves from the mistakes of the past, and then we renew our spirits for the future on Parshas Hachodesh.

This purification and renewal essentially amounts to *teshuva*, a return to Hashem. We purify ourselves from our past and then begin with new commitment and new drive. We make ourselves like the Jews who responded to Moshe in Egypt when he said

hachodesh hazeh lachem. We pray that we will be inspired as we were in previous years.

We know the power of the Pesach Seder to inspire. It can bring us back to the beginning, to the wonderful feelings we had in our youth. It can remind us of our youth as a nation as we marched into and through the sea, into the desert and to Har Sinai, where we experienced our beloved Hashem at the *chuppa* of Har Sinai.

This is the experience of the period between Pesach and Shavuos.

We have three stages: Rosh Chodesh Nissan, Pesach, and Shavuos. On Rosh Chodesh, we get the new energy of the first day of school, the first day of marriage. Pesach is the marriage itself. On Shavuos, we finally receive the Torah and get to the ultimate level of marriage, when the bride and groom go off together.

We should merit the *bracha* of *hachodesh hazeh lachem*. May we merit the new beginning together with our beloved God. May we go into Shabbos with the goal of *olam haba*, to see the great Shabbos of the future.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of beginnings and endings?
2. How is Shabbos a beginning and an end?
3. What is Rosh Chodesh in terms of beginnings and ends?
4. What is the connection between Parshas Parah and Parshas Hachodesh?
5. How does *yetzias Mitzrayim* relate to the power of speech?

EXERCISE

1. Start a new spiritual project on Shabbos and carry it on for a week.

