

PTDT

PhiloTorah D'var Torah

LACHEM!

Picture this: A hilltop yishuv somewhere in Eretz Yisrael - at a time when we will have a Sanhedrin. Friday was the 29th of Adar and it is now Leil Shabbat. The scene takes place in the small, beautiful Beit Knesset of the Yishuv. Mincha has ended, and so has Kabbalat Shabbat. The Rav is about to give a five-minute D'var Torah, to be followed by Maariv.

Moshe Aharon (name chosen to honor the two great brothers of our sedra) decides to step outside for a breath of air - he'll be right back for Maariv.

Outside, the air is cool, the sky is clear. Moshe Aharon takes a few deep breaths, and turns around to enjoy the 360 degree view from his yishuv.

He looks towards the western horizon, which is turning from pink to purple following the recent setting of the Sun, and he notices a small streak of light low in the sky. Remembering that today had been the 29th of the month, he wonders if he is looking at the first visibility of the Lunar crescent, the L'VANA B'CHIDUSHA.

Excited by this, he quickly goes back

inside just to catch BOR'CHU. After Maariv, he tells the Rav what he thinks he might have seen (and apologizes to him for having stepped out during the Rav's DT).

The rav tells him that he must go to Yerushalayim, to the headquarters of the Sanhedrin and offer testimony to what he saw.

Moshe Aharon asks the rav how he is supposed to go to Yerushalayim on a Friday night.

The rav tells him, simple, you drive there - it's only an hour's drive.

But it is Shabbat, Moshe Aharon objects. Not a problem, the Shabbat steps aside - so to speak - to facilitate the process of Kiddush HaChodesh.

Wait - my car broke down yesterday and I haven't had a chance to take it into the repair shop.

No problem, says the rav, I'll drive you (but let me check that out with my wife).

But you didn't see the Moon. I'm not even sure that I did.

Halacha permits me to assist you, a potential witness, to get to the Sanhedrin - even on Shabbat.

Meanwhile in the Lishkat HaGazit, the headquarters of the Sanhedrin, the committee of members in charge of

questioning and accepting (or rejecting) witnesses is in session, eagerly awaiting potential EIDIM. They have previously calculated that the Moon can possibly be visible to the naked eye on this particular evening.

Moshe Aharon and the Rav arrive and Moshe Aharon is taken in to be interviewed by the committee.

Please note that this kind of testimony is different from all other kinds of testimony. Usually, judges of a Beit Din accept the testimony of at least two witnesses in order to clarify the truth of a case. For example, A and B come to a Beit Din. A claims that B owes him a thousand shekel. B denies it. The judges don't yet know who to believe. So they ask A if he has witnesses. He does and they testify to the satisfaction of the judges that A did indeed lend a thousand shekel to B. The judges did not know the true facts; they do now. That is the function of witnesses.

With Kiddush HaChodesh, things are different. The judges know in advance exactly if and when the Moon will be visible, how high above the horizon, on which side of the recent set Sun it will be visible, the shape and thickness of its crescent.

The witnesses are not sure that they actually saw the L'VANA B'CHIDU-SHA. They think they did, but the

judges of Sanhedrin will determine if they actually saw it.

And Moshe Aharon (and other potential witnesses) are allowed to "violate" Shabbat? He might not have actually seen the new Moon. Nonetheless, he has halachic permission to make the trip. This is how much HKBH wants our participation in the process of setting up our calendar.

And there is more. Let's say that on the evening following the 29th of a month, the Moon was not visible at all do to cloudy conditions all over the country. And no witnesses show up. This will usually result in Rosh Chodesh being declared on the following day, not the day after the 29th. But sometimes, the committee of Sanhedrin will realize that if R"Ch is not declared after the 29th, it will mess up the calendar for the following month. They have the discretionary power to declare Rosh Chodesh even without witnesses.

So why not tell people who see the first sliver of Moon on a Friday night to stay home and they (members of Sanhedrin) will exercise their authority to proclaim R"Ch anyway? Is that not better than the Chilul Shabbat of (possibly) many people from around the country.

The answer is NO. G-d wants our active participation in the process.

That is the ideal. He so much wants our participation, that He puts His Shabbat aside to allow us to testify.

Even if we are not sure. Even if the judges are sure. Even if the judges can do it on their own.

HACHODESH HAZEH - LACHEM! G-d exercised Sanctification of Time in His creation of Shabbat. He wants our involvement in the further sanctification of time by our acts to sanctify Rosh Chodesh and the Chagim.

We usually think of Shabbat being overridden by Piku'ach Nefesh, a life-threatening situation. Kiddush Ha-Chodesh is like national piku'ach nefesh.

We should not take Rosh Chodesh or Chagim in stride. We should contemplate their significance as proofs of our status as AM NIVCHAR, as close partners with Avinu Shebashamayim. It is an awesome realization and an awesome responsibility.

Between Sanhedrins we have a fixed calendar that is based on certain calculation. The current calendar's Rosh Chodeshes have been sanctified by a Sanhedrin of old. So we are 'covered' until the re-establishment of a Sanhedrin - may we see it soon.

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