



PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Plan A; Plan B

The title might be a bit confusing, because last week's PTDT was entitled: The Whole Plan. Let's just say, this week we are talking about a different pair of plans.

It will come as no surprise that this PTDT for Parshat Bo is going to be about the Jewish Calendar.

Let me start by asking if you can complete the following line:

Thirty days hath...

If you said September, April, June, and November - you'd be correct.

And you probably know the number of days in each of the months of the - let's call it the general calendar - solar calendar would be a better name. Probably even the February numbers and when it has 28 days and when it has 29 days.

How many days were there in February of 1900? If you said 28, you'd be right and you'd know that calendar well. 1900 was not leap year - even though 1900 divides evenly by four.

Whether you knew that or not, is not the point of this PTDT. The point is, that we have a Jewish Calendar.

And it was commanded to our nation while we were still in Egypt, two weeks before we were taken out.

And it is not just a mitzva - it is HaShem's taking us to be His junior partners in creating K'DUSHAT Z'MAN - the Sanctity of Time.

And it represents freedom from Egyptian oppression and slavery, because slaves do not have their own time - only free people have that capability.

Rambam clearly states that the mitzva, which is worded in the Torah as HACHODESH HAZE LACHEM... This month shall be to you the head of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year - means that our calendar is lunar as far as months are concerned and solar, with the periodic addition of a 13th month to keep Pesach in the springtime (and Sukkot in the fall).

Ramban says that HACHODESH HAZE does indeed command our months to confirm with the Moon's cycle of phases, but the adding of the extra month is commanded in a separate mitzva to preserve the Spring Month and bring the Korban Pesach.

Rambam is adamant about the Calendar being a single mitzva that consists of both components.

In Rambam's Hilchot Kiddush HaCho-

desh, he writes that there is a mitzva for Sanhedrin (a committee therefrom) to study the heavenly bodies and to be able to determine exactly if the Moon will be visible on the evening following the 29th of a month, or not. Further, they must know location in the sky of the first visibility of the lunar crescent (the L'VANA B'CHIDUSHA) in full detail. This is necessary for them to be able to question witnesses and determine if they actually saw the Moon or not.

Realize that with all other kinds of testimony, it is the witnesses that provide the judges with information they (the judges) lack. With the witnesses for Rosh Chodesh, the judges have all the facts and the witnesses might be unsure as to what they saw in the sky.

Long introduction; let's get to Plan A and Plan B.

Plan A is that we, the Jewish People via our leaders - Moshe and Aharon then and the Sanhedrin subsequently - and eye-witnesses to the L'VANA B'CHIDUSHA, be active participants with HKBH in sanctifying time. We become His junior partners in this special activity (as mentioned earlier).

From the beginning, the human factor was "problematic". When HaShem commanded Moshe and Aharon to create the Jewish Calendar, there was a technical problem. G-d had

taught that the month was to begin at New Moon. The problem is that we cannot see the Moon at New Moon - it is invisible to us on Earth.

(The terms New Moon, as well as the term MOLAD, birth of the Moon, are misleading. British Royal Astronomer, Patrick Moore explained that New Moon is really No Moon. Hundreds of years earlier, the Avudraham stated that Molad is a misnomer, because we cannot see the Moon at the moment of the molad.)

When Moshe expressed his problem with not being able to see the Moon at the moment of Molad, thus being unable to proclaim Rosh Chodesh, HaShem showed Moshe the form of the Moon when it first becomes visible and said to him - KAZEH R'EI V'KADEISH, see it like this and sanctify (the month).

What this means is that HaShem delayed the beginning of each month from His command, to accommodate us, since He wants us to be active in the process.

And then there are the problems at certain times of the year when the weather does not cooperate with witnesses being able to see the Moon.

And then there is the possibility of Sanhedrin declaring Rosh Chodesh in error. It could be because witnesses answered all the questions correctly and the Sanhedrin committee

accepted the testimony erroneously.

To this last point, Rambam writes that when Beit Din makes a mistake and sanctifies the wrong day as Rosh Chodesh, HaShem, so to speak, changes His calendar to match ours.

This is how much HaShem wants our participation in the process of Kiddush HaChodesh.

But, when there is no Sanhedrin, we are not authorized to undertake the process of sanctification of the month - which means the sanctification of the holidays in a particular month.

Our months could not be Kodesh; our holidays would not be holy. If - chas v'shalom, Rosh Chodesh Nissan would not be sanctified, then on the 15th day of the month it would not be Yom Tov, chametz would not be prohibited, matza would not be required.

Comes Plan B and saves the day (saves the months and the holidays).

The Sanhedrin of the later Hillel (not his great-great... grandfather, the Hillel of Hillel & Shammai fame) either devised or revealed (there are two ways of looking at it) a Jewish Calendar based on mathematical calculation, that can determine every Rosh Chodesh for as long as needed - until we again have a Sanhedrin

- AND -

that Sanhedrin of about 1700 years

ago, sanctified all Rosh Chodeshes of the fixed calendar in advance.

This Plan B gives us a flawless calendar which is not messed up by human error, nor by clouds that would prevent the Moon from being seen.

Under Plan A, if you invited family or friends to your Purim Seuda, the specific date might not be known until the month of Adar began, and even during that month, it would be possible for a declaration of the committee of Sanhedrin for IBUR HA-SHANA (different committee than the one for declaring Rosh Chodesh) that the month following this month of Adar will be Adar again, thus postponing your Seuda by a month.

That won't happen with Plan B.

Plan B is neat and works perfectly. Plan A is not as neat and has potential problems.

But Plan A is what HaShem wants for us. It involves our active participation - not just observer status we have with Plan B.

The key is the word twice stated in Sh'mot 12:2 - LACHEM, LACHEM. For you. It is yours. G-d can say that we should have Pesach from the 15th to the 21st of Nissan - but it won't happen unless we sanctify the calendar.

Our calendars (both Plan A and Plan B) are amazing gifts from HKBH. **PTDT**