



Message from the **Haftara**

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The Waxing and Waning of God's Presence

MACHAR CHODESH

This week, as Rosh Chodesh falls on a Sunday, we will read the haftara of MACHAR CHODESH, which opens with the words: "Tomorrow is the new month" (Sh'muel Alef 20:18). At first glance, the reference to the new moon seems incidental, a plot device that frames Yonatan's confrontation with Shaul over his friend David. Yet the haftara invites us to see beyond this detail. The significance lies not simply in mentioning tomorrow's new moon, but in what the Moon – and its rhythms – reveals about the relationship between God and the people of Israel.

The connection between the Moon and Israel is woven throughout our tradition. The Moon is always present in the heavens, though we do not always perceive its fullness or even glimpse it at all. It waxes and wanes in a steady, ancient rhythm. This rhythm offers a profound image for the Jewish experience across history and

into the present. Like the Moon, God's presence endures, providing spiritual light to our souls just as the Sun illuminates the Moon. We draw our strength and direction from that inexhaustible Source. And yet, there are seasons in our history and our personal lives when that light seems hidden from us, when darkness appears to prevail, when God's providence is no longer visible to our eyes.

The haftara itself reflects this pattern through the life of David. We encounter him at a moment of acute vulnerability and danger. He is pursued by Shaul, whose instability and paranoia drive him to turn on his former protege and hunt him relentlessly across the desert. David's safety – indeed, his very survival – depends on forces entirely beyond his control. He must hide, flee, and depend on the mercy of others. His life at this point is at a nadir from which recovery seems unlikely.

And yet, we know this moment does not define David's entire life. In time, his circumstances transform completely, and he emerges from hiding to accomplish extraordinary things: composing the Psalms, waging victorious battles against Israel's enemies, unifying the fractured kingdom, and establishing Jerusalem as its center. Though his life remains

plagued with conflict and adversity, he rises and perseveres. David's journey is one of waxing and waning, of descent followed by ascent, of darkness giving way to light.

Through David, the haftara teaches that this rhythm is not incidental. It is not a failure of faith or a sign of abandonment. Rather, it is the very pattern through which the relationship between God and the Jewish people unfolds and develops through history.

This profound insight finds its fullest expression in Kiddush L'vana, the blessing we recite each month to sanctify the new moon. We declare: SHEHEIM ATIDIM L'HITCHADEISH KAMOTAH – "they are destined to be reborn like the Moon" (Sanhedrin 42a). In the same breath, we proclaim: DAVID MELECH YISRAEL CHAI V'KAYAM – "David, king of Israel, lives and endures." The pairing of these two affirmations is not coincidental; it is theologically essential. David embodies the lived experience of the Jewish people in their covenant relationship with the Almighty.

As David's life rises and falls, so too does ours. There are times when we must flee, when we must hide, when we must endure darkness without clarity or comfort. There are moments of Jewish history when our brothers and sisters, sons and

daughters, stand on the frontlines of battle, are held hostage in enemy hands, or are destroyed in the depths of human evil – from Auschwitz to Treblinka. And yet, the promise of Kiddush L'vana remains: God has not forsaken us.

This is not a promise that darkness will disappear. It is a far deeper assurance: that even when light is hidden, when our vision falters, when we cannot perceive God's presence, we are not abandoned. The Moon wanes, but it returns. David flees, but he rises. The Jewish people pass through cycles of struggle, concealment and renewal, but we are promised redemption.

For our time, this teaching carries particular urgency. We are living through a period that demands we recognize these rhythms in our own reality – in the story of our people, in the story of the land of Israel, and in our individual spiritual journeys. The haftara's account of David's flight and hiding is not a story of abandonment, but a profound teaching about our enduring covenant.

When we bless the new moon and proclaim DAVID MELECH YISRAEL CHAI V'KAYAM, we are affirming that we understand these cycles, that we accept seasons of light and shadow, and that we trust – with the certainty of the Moon's return – that dawn follows even the darkest night. 



The TOCHACHA - A Perspective

Here's the short of it. G-d has repeatedly told us in the Torah what He wants of us. What He requires of us. And that should be - should be enough for us to comply.

But obviously, it isn't enough. So He tells us of the many good things that will happen to us if we follow His Torah and Mitzvot. And that should be enough.

But we have proven over and over again that it isn't enough. So He tells us in a number of places in the Torah, what bad things will happen if we don't follow Him. One of those places is in the second passage of the Sh'ma - something we say at least twice every single day. The first passage of the Sh'ma commands us to believe in G-d's Unity, to love Him, to say the Sh'ma twice a day, to study and teach Torah, to wear T'filin, to put Mezuzot on our doorposts. Then, in the second passage, He tells us what will happen WHEN we listen to Him. Then, the Torah warns us not to turn away from G-d... And the bad things that will happen if we betray G-d.

And you might think that would certainly be enough to have of stay in line.

But... in Parshat B'chukotai and again in this week's Ki Tavo we are hit over the head with a sledgehammer. That is the Tochacha. It is so painful to hear that the custom developed to read it in a low voice and quickly. It is so painful that we contain it within a single aliya (Shishi - the longest aliya of the whole Torah) with some good stuff before it and after.

Our challenge is to follow HaShem and do His bidding out of Ahavat HaShem, love of G-d, with a healthy measure of Yir'at HaShem. Then the promises and warnings will be unnecessary and the Tochacha, while remaining in the Torah, will not feel as painful as it does and we will wonder why G-d had to use a sledgehammer in the first place.

Take this challenge seriously, especially in Elul, especially with the Yamim Nora'im looming so close. **PTDT**

עגורן



The national bird of
Israel is the
DUCHIFAS
the hoopoe.

People jokingly say that
the Crane should be.

According to the Academia,
MANOF is not the correct
word for crane. AGURAN
is.

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



B'REISHIT

What is Man that You Are Mindful of Him?

As we begin anew our annual Torah reading cycle this week, we return to the story of Creation. The birth of the universe is, of course, a remarkable story, but it's pretty much overshadowed by God's conception of humanity.

The genesis of mankind dominates the Creation story in two ways, first of all it caps off the narrative in the first chapter of our Torah and, then, its reprise in the second chapter emphasizes the special relationship between God and humanity.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik pointed out the profound ideas contained in the repetition of the creation of humankind. He observed: We all know that the Bible offers two accounts of the creation of man. We are also aware of the theory suggested by Bible critics attributing these two accounts to two different sources. Since we unreservedly accept the integrity of the text, we categorically reject this hypothesis. It is, of course, true that the two accounts of the creation of man differ considerably. This incongruity was not discovered by the Bible critics. Our Sages of old

were aware of it. However, the answer lies not in an alleged dual tradition but in dual man, not in an imaginary contradiction between two versions but in a real contradiction in the nature of man. The two accounts deal with two Adams, two men, two fathers of mankind, two types, two representatives of humanity, and it is no wonder that they are not identical.

But what are the differences between the two accounts and, indeed, the two images of humanity?

In the first chapter we have this remarkable verse: And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth."

First of all, what does God mean by 'us'? Who was God partnering with? Rav Hirsch declares that this is Pluralis Majestatis ('royal we', as in 'We are not amused.'), because of the lofty position of humans in the scheme of things.

The Radak, on the other hand, claims that God was including the earth in this creation. The earth contributed the raw material for all the other animals, but here God contributed the soul. Rav Steinzaltz added: Although in a physiological sense man is very similar to other living creatures, he is nevertheless a cate-

gory of being to himself. Unlike other creations, man was fashioned in the image of God, not in terms of his appearance, but in terms of his essence. Aside from man's superior intelligence, this likeness is expressed principally in man's freedom to choose. This quality is unique to man and God.

Now we're getting somewhere. Man's unique position is clearly delineated. Humanity is cool, because we have Free Will. That's special, but now we must focus on what did God add to this exceptional position of humanity in the reprise of humanity's creation in chapter 2?

In chapter two we have this verse: The ETERNAL God (Hashem Elokim) formed a Human from the soil's humus, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life: the Human became a living being.

Immediately we must notice that the Divine appellation ELOKIM (used exclusively in chapter one) is now joined to the Tetragramaton. Clearly, a new aspect of humanity's remarkable position and role is being announced. But what is it?

Rav Hirsch is clearly moved by this new declaration, and states: In this sentence the whole secret of the nature of Man is laid down, and the whole higher dignity of Man rests on the facts revealed here.

But what's the secret? He explains

that the unique manner of his creation raised him so high that he is different from all the other creatures. It's the singular nature of humanity's formation that makes us so superior. We alone from all creatures possess a Divine element directly implanted by God.

Chizkuni adds that God personally, if you will, blew the breath of life into the first human, which was not done for any other being. This enabled humanity to have the wisdom (and 'Holy spirit') to discern the differences in all the other creations. But much more importantly, this granted humans an 'immortal soul'. The true boon granted humanity was an immortal soul, which survives the physical body it inhabits.

Now that's cool! But the Kli Yakar observes that we still have a dual creation process going on here. There is a first step in Chapter 1 which is an enhanced version of every creation. Then there is a truly unique added version of humanity's creation in Chapter 2. Why do we need both?

Well, the two steps in the test reflect two stages in human development. Humans begin very much like other animals (Kli Yakar alludes to the verse: man is born a wild donkey, Iyov 11:12). Our eventual perfection depends on diligent effort and good choices as one opens their eyes in intellectual endeavor as one matures.

Our sublime superiority is not inevitable, only possible through the tools God provided.

Now, I believe, we can begin to address the question which is my title: What is mankind that you are mindful of him, human beings that you care for them? (T'hilim 8:5). To a certain extent the very next verse in Psalms begins the answer: That You made him a little less than Divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty.

In other words, God loves us because in the Divine effort to Create we were granted unique gifts. We've mentioned a number of these gifts: free will, adaptability, and the potential for immortality.

But what is the purpose, the goal of these bequests? I think that's the \$64,000 Question (that's before inflation). Although it would be easy to declare: Divine Largesse. God was just being generous. Okay. But I think there's more.

I strongly believe that these gifts also make a demand upon the recipients. God created a world which is physical, and, therefore, not conducive to Divine Presence (SH'CHINA). AHA! We can be holy and make space for God in this realm.

God created an amazing habitat for humanity. We display appreciation by hosting the SH'CHINA. We make the physical realm hospitable for the

spiritual, for the Holy, for God. Enjoy your company! 

Rav Kook Torah



by Rabbi Chanan Morrison -
www.ravkooktorah.com

The Hidden Light of Creation

Summary: When God wrapped Himself in light like a garment, this light took on His qualities of oneness, establishing an underlying unity throughout all creation.

Ohr HaGanuz

The very first act of Creation, as recorded in the Book of B'reishit, was the creation of light. And God said: "There shall be light" (B'reishit 1:3). What kind of light was this?

It cannot be the light that we are familiar with, the light emanating from the Sun and the stars. These heavenly bodies were created much later, on the fourth day of Creation. The Sages called this primordial light Ohr HaGanuz, "the Hidden Light". Too pure for the current state of the universe, God concealed it for a future, more deserving world.

What is the nature of this special illumination introduced at the beginning of Creation?

The Sages taught (Sh'mot Rabba 15:22) that certain topics mentioned cryptically in the Torah were later elucidated by David in the Book of

T'hilim. For example, Psalm 104 speaks poetically of the creation of the heavens:

[God] wrapped Himself in light like a garment and spread out the heavens like a curtain (104:3).

In this instance, however, it is difficult to claim that the verse in T'hilim explains the Torah's account; in fact, it contradicts it. The Torah states that God created light after creating heaven and earth (1:1-3). In Psalms, however, the order is reversed: God first created the light, and only afterward the heavens.

CHOMER and TZURA

The philosophers distinguished between CHOMER, matter, and TZURA, the form or function of an object. For example, wood is a raw material (CHOMER) that may be used to produce many different functional objects. Once it is designated for use as a table, the wood also has TZURA, form, having acquired a particular purpose.

At the very beginning of Creation, there was only CHOMER. God created numerous elements, but they were without TZURA. They lacked function and purpose. This state of disorder and dissonance is referred to as darkness – "darkness on the surface of the depths" (1:2). The Torah calls this unstable primeval stage TOHU and BOHU, indicating that it was

chaotic and empty of form.

Then God created the Ohr HaGanuz. This special light played a critical role in Creation. Just as regular light allows us to see and relate to our surroundings, the Hidden Light enabled the different elements of creation to interact with one another. It dispelled the initial state of darkness, when all objects were isolated and disconnected from one another.

To use the terminology of the philosophers, the illumination created on the first day of Creation stamped a functional TZURA on the material CHOMER. Through this special light, the universe's myriad objects acquired purpose and function and were able to work together towards a common goal.

To Wear Light

The Midrash (B'reishit Rabba 3:4) elucidates the verse in T'hilim, explaining that "God wrapped Himself in light like a garment and illuminated the splendor of His glory from one end of the world to the other."

What does it mean that "God wore light"?

This phrase indicates that the light took on God's qualities of oneness and unity, just as a garment takes on the shape of the one wearing it. When

"God wrapped Himself in light", this means that He introduced an underlying unity into all aspects of creation, "from one end of the world to the other".

In summary: the description in T'hilim does not contradict the account in B'reishit. At first, God created heaven and earth in an isolated state, as CHOMER without form and purpose. This was the unstable state of TOHU VAVOHU described in the Torah's second pasuk, when the diverse elements of creation existed in chaotic darkness, lacking an underlying unity.

Then God said, "There shall be light", creating the special Ohr HaGanuz, the Hidden Light with which He bound the matter together with a common purpose. God "wrapped Himself in the light", thereby giving the light His trait of oneness and making it a unifying force. After creating this unifying light, God "spread out the heavens" and stabilized the universe. The continuation of the psalm describes the stability of the world after the creation of light: "He founded the earth on its foundations, so that it will never falter" (104:5).

*Sapphire from the Land of Israel.
Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 95-96*

Rav Kook on T'hilim

*from an unpublished work
by Rabbi Chanan Morrison*

T'hilim 26 -

Two Levels of Love

Summary: The love we experience when entering God's house is based on the awareness that we find ourselves in a holy place. But the highest love transcends the self entirely.

HASHEM, AHAVTI... O God, I love the abode of Your house, and the dwelling-place of Your glory (26:8).

What is the difference between “the abode of Your house” and “the dwelling-place of Your glory”?

True Love and Self-Love

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, well known for his sharp-witted sayings, was a fearless champion of truth. Once he saw a young man enjoying a fillet of fish.

“Why are you eating the fish?” the rabbi asked.

Surprised by the question, the young man replied, “Because I love fish!”

“And is it because you love the fish so much that you killed and cooked it? If you really loved the fish, you would have let it live in the water!”

“The truth is,” the rabbi observed, “that you do not love the fish. You love yourself. Because the fish gratifies your appetite, you killed and ate it.”*[Story told by Rabbi Abraham Twerski in Visions of the Fathers (ArtScroll, 1999)]*

Two Stages

This verse portrays the psalmist's mental preparations for prayer. He first notes his delight upon entering a sacred place. “O God, I love the abode of Your house!”

As we develop feelings of love, they are connected to our sense of self. The love and pleasure we experience when entering God's house are rooted in the awareness that we find ourselves in a place of sanctity. The soul is intoxicated with the uplifting experience of holiness and inspiration.

This love is bound to our self. We are aware we are standing in “the abode of God's house”. The focus is on us, on our love and delight.

Then comes the higher level of “the dwelling-place of Your glory”. The holiness intensifies; the love is refined and purified. This is no longer a love where the self has a place. There is no longer a self-awareness that allows one to say, “I love.” There is no MA'ON, no abode where I exist.

There is only an exceptional love

without parallel in the physical realm, a love only found in the highest love of God. This love transcends any sense of an external observer.

There is only “the dwelling-place of Your glory.”

This is the extraordinary experience of boundless, eternal love; it belongs to the state of heightened consciousness when “My flesh and my heart cease; God is the rock of my heart, my portion forever” (73:26).[Cf. Tanya ch. 43]

With this great love, the psalmist is ready to engage in the majesty of lofty prayer.

Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 44

The Daily Portion **- Sivan Rahav Meir**

Five things about the Ari Hakadosh

Translated by Janine Muller Sherr

1) This week was the *yahrzeit* of the Arizal – Rabbi Yitzchak Luria– who passed away 454 years ago on the fifth of Av at age 38. He was a great Kabbalist who delved into the esoteric dimension of the Torah which later influenced the development of Chasidic thought. On that day, many people have the custom to light a candle in his memory, study his teachings, and visit his grave in Tzfat.

2) He explained that everything he was able to achieve was due to his joyful observance of the mitzvot. In other words, he didn't perform the mitzvot out of a sense of obligation but from his strong desire to connect to the Infinite Light.

3) His students related that he could have relied on heavenly guidance to explain the holy Zohar – the foundational text of Jewish mysticism that has traditionally been attributed to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Instead, he told them that he chose to toil and study with devotion in order to achieve the deepest mastery of this holy text on his own.

4) He lived in Tzfat for only two years but it was there that he initiated a revolutionary approach to Judaism. On Friday evening – toward sunset – he and his peers would dress in their Shabbat finery and walk into the fields to welcome the Shabbat Queen with joy. The prayers he composed for this occasion laid the foundation for the Kabbalat Shabbat service that we continue to recite on Friday night to this day.

5) He modified the traditional prayer book by integrating deep Kabbalistic meditations and kavanot (intentions), but one line that appears in his siddur and is also engraved on his tombstone – can be adopted by everyone. He requested that we should recite the following verse before our morning prayers: “Behold, I take upon myself the commandment of ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

May his memory be a blessing.

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