

CHIZUK *and* IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

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This week's Parsha contains the very first mitzva directed towards the Jewish People - the mitzva of Kiddush HaChodesh, sanctifying the new month. This factum of Jewish trivia is well-known as a result of its appearing in Rashi's opening question to his commentary to the Torah. Rashi famously wonders why the Torah would have started with B'REISHIT BARA, and not with the first of the mitzvot - HACHODESH HAZEH LACHEM. While we have discussed Rashi's answer in the past, much less explored is the immediate follow-up question: Why indeed was mitzvat Kiddush HaChodesh chosen to be given first, before all of the other mitzvot? What unique quality is to be found in this mitzva?

A partial answer may be attained by looking carefully at the blessing of the new month which we recite in Shul. As part of this blessing we say the following: MI SHE'ASA NISIM LA'AVOTEINU - He who performed miracles for our Forefathers and

redeemed them from slavery to freedom, may He redeem us soon and gather in our dispersed from the four corners of the earth; all Israel becoming comrades, Amein."

We might ask: What does redemption from slavery have to do with the blessing of the new month? Rav J.B. Soloveitchik zt"l (Gesher June/66) suggested that a slave's existence is one devoid of time-awareness and time-consciousness. A slave lacks both of the above since he is not master of his own time. The master owns not only the body of his slave, he possesses and regulates the slave's every waking moment. AVADIM HAYINU - as slaves in Egypt, our time was not our own. In essence, R Soloveitchik's comments expand upon the words of the S'forno: Hachodesh Hazeh Lachem - "from this point onwards the months shall be yours to do as you see fit. During the days of bondage, however, they did not belong to you. They existed instead for the purpose of serving others and doing their will. Consequently, this month will become the head of the year, for on this month (Nissan) you (the Jewish People) have begun your free existence."

It is, therefore, very appropriate that this should be the first mitzva - at the moment we are granted the ability to

freely choose how to utilize our time, we are directed to raise our sights to the heavens (both figuratively, as well as literally, scanning the horizon in search of the crescent of the new moon), and sanctify time itself.

The Zohar talks of three concepts: OLAM, SHANA and NEFESH. OLAM (or MAKOM) is the universe - corresponding to our sense of space; SHANA represents the element of time; while NEFESH is the soul, the spiritual essence innate in every human being.

Of this triad we are now discussing SHANA as represented by the concept of Kiddush HaChodesh. By determining the day of Rosh Chodesh, the people of Israel introduce kedusha into our lives. All the holidays throughout the year are determined by the exact date, the time of year, which in turn determined by the Beit Din acting as representatives of the Jewish People. Thus in the Amida prayer recited on the holidays we conclude the blessing of Kedushat HaYom ("the sanctity of the day"), with the words MIKADESH YISRAEL V'HAZMANIM, "Blessed be the Almighty who sanctifies Israel and the festival seasons".

Holiness in time, classified by Rav Soloveitchik as time-consciousness,

could have been introduced in Egypt, seeing as it transcends geographical boundaries and constraints. Holiness in space, Kedushat HaMakom, cannot be imparted in Egypt. In order to achieve this holiness, our forefathers had to wander for forty years crossing the Sinai Desert, before they could enter Eretz Yisrael. Rav Soloveitchik discusses the psychological aspects of space-consciousness needed to appreciate Kedushat HaMakom, distinguishing between Kayin and Hevel: One was a nomad living in a tent, while the other was a builder, a city dweller. A nomad is not bound, lacking deep roots connecting him to any given locale, or specific spot. The settler, on the other hand, has "place-consciousness", he is attached to his land, becoming one with it. For generations the "wandering Jew" has become accustomed to a nomadic existence. However, throughout this whole time, deep down within, our attachment to Eretz Yisrael has always been part of the warp and woof of the Jewish psyche. This explains why young families making Aliyah today feel at home from day one. When they hear the news on the radio first thing in the morning opening with "Sh'ma Yisrael", how can they not be uplifted and know that they are HOME? Paradoxically,

while Aliyah is the quintessential act of homecoming, at the same time it involves HITCHADSHUT - freshness and novelty.

**So this is my pitgam of the week:
"TITCHADSHU - be novel and come home!"**