

עדת אש קודש Adass Aish Kodesh

THE MOON SPEAKS OF JOY

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

"Is there a moon?"

This question, asked in Yiddish, would circulate around the shalosh seudos tisch every month. "Se'iz du a levuna? The moon is visible?" Someone would go outside to gaze into the sky while the congregation would await an answer. There would be a moment of hesitancy; then he would run in, "Yes! There is a clear view of the moon!"

The very atmosphere would change. There was a moon! The Rav would ask for his winter fur-lined coat, and all would push to get through the shul door. Soon we would all be outside. Then the Rav would look up into the heavens, see the moon and break out in joyful prayer.

So it was by the Bobover Rebbe, zt"l, each month, and in his recital of those prayers one could sense the uniqueness that is the Jewish faith. An outsider might very well ask, what are Jews doing howling at the moon? Obviously, it has nothing to do with the moon as such, and everything to do with who and what we are as a people.

We are a durable nation, more persevering than the ancient nomadic tribes that couldn't survive the natural onslaughts of harsh desert life, and yes, even tougher than the great nations who once ruled and are now no more. We've been victimized on all the continents of this world, and there is nothing we haven't seen nor survived. What is the secret of our survival?

It can be understood through the moon.

I speak not of some belief that this illuminated orb somehow has a uniqueness deserving of worship in its own right. Rather, it is about how we as Jews relate to the world around us.



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The Jewish people have always known that darkness in this world is only temporary, for Hashem is light, and that light will always persevere. Even when we are driven into darkness by those who seek to destroy us, the light continues within our mitzvos, our blessings, and yes, most importantly, within our hearts.

The Sefas Emes tells us that “by seeking to annul the observance of Rosh Chodesh, the Greeks sought to deprive the Jewish people of one of their greatest strengths - the ability to master time by determining the order of the Jewish calendar. The Jewish people, through the Sanhedrin, enjoyed the unique prerogative of proclaiming the new moon and consequently the timing of all the festivals. It was this unique sense of mastering time that the Greeks sought to deny us. In recompense, after suppressing the Greek threat, Klal Yisrael not only resumed its ability to determine the festival’s timing, but was also given the capacity to proclaim yet another Yom Tov, Chanukah.”

When we bless the new moon, we are transforming a natural occurrence into something much more powerful. We are demonstrating our ability to create kedusha in this material world, to create light from darkness. This was something the Greeks could never accept. Their whole worldview was that of superficiality, form over content. If it came in a nice wrapper, it was okay. The Jewish experience is one that seeks to go beyond the surface, to delve deeper and find the kernel that is Hashem’s spark.

The Sefas Emes goes on in his notes about this Yom Tov and explains that Klal Yisrael was royally compensated for the temporary challenge to observing Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh by the addition of the festival of Chanukah.

“In a certain respect, the proclamation of Chanukah as a festival is indicative of even greater spiritual strength than the monthly proclamation of Rosh Chodesh. Unlike the new moon, which occurs at the beginning of every month, at a time of renewal, Chanukah occurs during the final days of the month. Chanukah’s placement at the time of the waning of the moon, when darkness grips the earth, would ordinarily not be a propitious time to proclaim a new festival. However, Hashem granted us the ability to brighten even this degree of darkness.”

When Yidden go out and bless the new moon, it is this very dynamic that brings forth such blessing. We can create light. What a marvel! What a gift! It matters not where we are standing: be it in the streets of New York, the fields of England, or the lofty mountains of our Holy Land, we can create light from darkness.

We bring holy illumination into our homes during Chanuka, and despite the madness of the streets outside we sit by these lights and stare into their glow of hope.

Kapitel (Chapter) 148 of Tehillim is said when Jews sanctify the new moon. Its message is of a time when the entire world will extol the greatness of Hashem. We say it in the darkness of the street, knowing full well that it will bear witness to our certainty that one day the real light

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will flow for all. It may well start as a flickering flame in a menorah, but the truth is undeniable - it will yet shine forth for all.

"Halleluka hallelu es Hashem min hashamayim...", "Praise Hashem. Praise Hashem from the sky, praise Him in the heights. Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His Hosts. Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all the stars of light." These words melt the heart. In the midst of darkness our voice sings out, "Praise Him!" Listen to the Jewish neshoma! It praises even when it seems dark and bitter. It seeks the stars, the moon and the sun. Yes, we may be broken-hearted and things are troubling, yet our desire is that the whole of creation should praise Hashem. The soul of every Yid yearns to hear such praise, even amidst our sense of desolation.

This is one of the greatest Chanuka lessons. Those Yidden of old were unable to do so very much, but their hearts sought to hear Hashem's praise even when they themselves were placed in the worst of circumstances.

"Malchei eretz vechol le'umim...", "Earthly kings and all peoples, ministers and all earthly judges. Young men and also maidens, elders together with lads. They will praise the name of Hashem, for His name alone is exalted; His majesty is over the earth and the skies."

There is but one truth. The kings, their ministers, the highborn and those of no status - all will know this. Hashem is one, and our role is to live this reality. We will do so in our homes, surrounding our menoras, and we will sing these words under the stars. It makes no difference where or under what circumstances - the light will always come forth and we will see it.

And so, the Rav would daven, and then we would all say Aleinu, fingering our tzitzis, after kaddish the Rav would call for a lebedike niggun (lively tune) to be sung. The dancing would begin, this strange mixture of holocaust survivors and young American born students. Interweaving together, feet rising to a cadence of promise and hope. The Rav's holy eyes would stare above at visions of hope, and the whole community would be one.

My dear friends, to know the truth, to realise how grateful we should be just for being Yidden - it's enough to make you sing, and sing we do. This to me is the secret that the menorah lights hold for us all. So, sing, sweet Yidden, and be joyous that you have within you the power to know this truth.