

Rising to Greatness

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As we observe the world around us and witness the depths to which many have sunk, it becomes increasingly difficult to remember that we were created to achieve great heights, both as a nation and as individuals. Our mission is to continually strive for self-improvement, always working toward the goal of becoming better people.

We see so many Yidden who have become ensnared by ideologies and behaviors that are foreign to Torah. Many have been misled and strayed from our well-trodden path, and we feel pity for them, seeking to bring them back. We wonder how, and if we possess the capability, to engage in outreach that will bring about positive change.

The parshiyos that describe the construction of the Mishkon provide us with encouragement and direction. The posuk (Shemos 35:10-19) states that Moshe Rabbeinu called out to the entire Klal Yisroel and told them, “Kol chacham lev bochem yavo’u v’yaasu, every wise-hearted person among you should come forward to do everything that Hashem commanded us to do regarding the construction of the Mishkon.” The pesukim then list every component of the Mishkon that they were to complete.

The posuk (35:21) reports that every man “asher nesa’o libo,” whose heart inspired him, responded to Moshe’s call.

The Ramban explains that the reason the posuk describes the people who volunteered to help in this way is because none of the Yidden at that time had any formal training in the necessary skills. They came because Moshe said that everyone should have a share in the construction of the Mishkon and they were inspired to fulfill his directive.

Later, the pesukim refer to Betzalel (together with Oholiav) as the leader of the project, blessed by Hashem with the knowledge and ability in every aspect of the technical skills needed for the Mishkon.

Every person who responded to Moshe Rabbeinu’s call was endowed with the ability to play a part in the formation of the structure and the keilim that would house the Shechinah in this world.

Similarly, when a person is inspired to do good, to build, and to help in a positive way, Hashem enables him to rise to the occasion, making him effective and constructive. Every Jew has the ability to bring more kedusha into this world and to build proper homes for that kedusha if he is properly motivated and works leSheim Shomayim.

We see this same concept in Parshas Hachodesh, which we read this Shabbos.

Rashi, in his very first comment on the Torah (Bereishis 1:1), quotes Rav Yitzchok, who said that the Torah should have begun with the parsha of hachodesh hazeh lochem, which we read this Shabbos.

We need to understand the significance of the mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh and why it is that we are introduced to this mitzvah as we begin our lives as avdei Hashem. Of all the mitzvos of the Torah, why was this the first one given to the Jewish people as a group and the one with which Rashi believed the Torah should have started?

Proclaiming the new month through Kiddush Hachodesh requires a verbal statement from a bais din. The dayanim on the bais din who certify that the new moon has been seen and proclaim, “Mekudash,” must either be members of the Sanhedrin or “semuchin” (approved by the Sanhedrin for kidush hachodesh), who were certified and invested with the power of psak, forming a link in a chain that stretches back to Har Sinai (Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh 5:1).

Why does the Torah require those who proclaim the new moon to be semuchin? Why is it not sufficient for them to simply be proficient in recognizing the shapes of the moon, so that they can determine when to accept testimony regarding the sighting of the new moon?

This is because Hakadosh Boruch Hu invested these botei din with the ability to affect the lives of every Jew by deciding which day is Rosh Chodesh and thereby determining the calendar—not only determining the day of Rosh Chodesh, but also the days of Pesach, Sukkos, Shavuos, etc., and investing those days with kedusha and mitzvos.

They are enabled to do this in the same way that the people “asher nesaom libom” were able to take simple materials and invest them with kedusha. Because they had dedicated themselves to reach the level of semuchim, Hashem entrusted them with the ability to effect kedusha.

The Nefesh Hachaim and other seforim discuss our ability to affect events in this world and in Shomayim through the observance—and transgression—of mitzvos. That capability is first seen in the mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh.

Through the ability to proclaim Rosh Chodesh or a leap year, the Torah first reveals to us the potential of man to rise to the highest spheres, becoming a partner with the Creator.

The bais din, through its proclamation of which day will be Rosh Chodesh and subsequently on which day Yom Tov will begin, determines when Hashem will cause that specific measure of Divine hashpa’ah to occur. The Ribbono Shel Olam abides by the bais din’s decision and determination to celebrate the Yom Tov on that day.

Thus, since the mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh is unique in that it shows Klal Yisroel the incredible heights they can reach, it is the first mitzvah given to us as a group and serves as an introduction to all the other mitzvos. It goes to the root of the greatness of Am Yisroel and

demonstrates how much we can accomplish if we devote ourselves to observing the mitzvos and living lives dedicated to Hashem and His Torah.

This is the idea of the mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh, which would have been a fitting opening to the entire Torah.

Imagine the message that Klal Yisroel received when, still in the throes of servitude, they were taught the details of a mitzvah with the capacity to transcend time and space. What a resounding announcement of their own freedom from the constrictions of Mitzrayim! It was as if they were gathered together by Moshe Rabbeinu and told, “You are redeemed from slavery and ready to soar!”

That awareness, with its accompanying demand for growth, was given to Klal Yisroel on the verge of freedom, as if to say, “This is what you can reach and accomplish through these mitzvos and by learning Torah.”

In Parshas Bo, the pesukim discuss the halachos of Pesach. The posuk (12:28) states, “Vayeilchu vaya’asu Bnei Yisroel ka’asher tzivah Hashem es Moshe v’Aharon – The Bnei Yisroel did as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon.”

The Mechilta, quoted by Rashi, notes that this discussion took place on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, while the Korban Pesach wasn’t brought until the middle of the month. Still, the posuk refers to the Yidden as having done as Hashem commanded Moshe, using the past tense.

We can suggest that the posuk refers to them as having completed what was asked of them because this parsha of hachodesh hazeh lochem carries something integral to the observance of every mitzvah that would follow it, namely, an instructive lesson regarding what a mitzvah can do for us and the heights we can reach by following the Torah. “Vaya’asu” indicates that they understood the message being imparted to them, appreciating its relevance at every juncture of life. In this case, hearing, comprehending, and internalizing the messages of hachodesh hazeh lochem and the Chag Hageulah were themselves fulfillments of Hashem’s will.

The halachos of Kiddush Hachodesh and Pesach aren’t merely introductory and practical. They are a call from Shomayim. “My children,” the Ribbono Shel Olam is saying, “you are ge’ulim. There is no end to your freedom and to how great you can become!”

According to the Nefesh Hachaim (1:13), the word asiyah, which lies at the root of the word vaya’asu, means that what was being discussed achieved its tachlis, or purpose. Thus, when the Torah employs the verb asiyah to complete the discussion, stating, “Vaya’asu Bnei Yisroel ka’asher tzivah Hashem,” that indicates that they realized the potential inherent in Hashem’s commandment. They understood the message behind the tzivuy, and thus, even though they had not yet performed the mitzvah, they had actualized the potential of how high they could reach.

We, the she'airis Yisroel, the remainder that clings to Kiddush Hachodesh and all the mitzvos that follow, know that we have a special purpose to carry out in this world. We need to know that our mission is the same as those in the midbar who built the Mishkon, the semuchin in Eretz Yisroel who decided the timing of Rosh Chodesh and all the Yidden throughout the ages who dedicated their efforts lehagdil Torah ulehaadirah.

Each generation has its own unique challenges that make it difficult to rise. Every generation gives birth to styles, language, technology, and cultural immoralities with the potential to demoralize us and disconnect us from Torah.

That is why the Torah stresses the concept of discussing the events and mitzvos surrounding Yetzias Mitzrayim with the younger generations. This is because the Torah speaks to all generations for all times. No matter what questions confound an era, the answers are in the Torah. Its Divine wisdom shines like rays of welcome light into all epochs of history and corners of the globe, its lessons a living reality for each one.

We thank Hashem that the Torah can be transmitted from one generation to the next, that its messages can reach all children, and that it is relevant and meaningful to each Jewish child as well as adult. It's a celebration of the timeless and enduring relevance of the Torah.

This represents an obligation upon parents to work to find the point where their child can be reached. No one is ever too far gone, too disinterested, or too worn out to be written off and separated from Torah. The Torah speaks to and is relevant to every Yid. Although it sometimes takes much effort, no parent should ever give up on connecting with any of their children, and no person should give up on reaching those around him and those with whom he comes into contact.

With love and Torah, everyone can be reached.

The tale is told of a chossid who felt that he needed Eliyohu Hanovi to help him out of his troubles. He was confident that his rebbe merited regular visits from the holy sage, so he went to his rebbe and asked him if he could facilitate such a meeting for him.

It was just a few days before Rosh Hashanah. The rebbe gave his chossid an address in a small shtetel and told him to go there for Yom Tov. His heart was pounding as he hitched his horse to a wagon and bumped along the unpaved roads to the tiny town. He finally reached the address his rebbe had given him. It was a run-down, ramshackle hut.

He knocked on the door and a poor widow answered. There were nine children in the hovel.

The rebbe had said that he would find Eliyohu Hanovi there, so he asked the widow if he could stay there for Yom Tov. It was already late and he had nowhere else to go, he told her.

She let him in and he stayed for Yom Tov, hoping that Eliyohu would come to that small home. When Yom Tov was over, he left without having met Eliyohu.

The forlorn chossid returned to his rebbe and said, “Rebbe, where did you send me? Eliyohu was not there. The address you gave me was of a poor almanah who didn’t even have enough food for herself and her children. I had to help them out. I gave them a generous amount of money, and boruch Hashem there was enough time for them to run off and buy what was left in the local market.”

The rebbe listened and told his chossid to go back there for Yom Kippur. With no choice but to follow his rebbe’s command, the man once again hitched his wagon to his horse and headed out. This time, he made sure to bring food for himself and for the poor family.

Finally, he reached his destination. As he was standing by the door, he heard one of the children crying to his poor mother, “Oy, mammeh, morgen iz Yom Kippur un mir hoben gornit heint tzu essen. Tomorrow is Yom Kippur, when we will fast, but we have nothing to eat today.”

The chossid stood there, lost in thought, wondering why the rebbe had sent him to this house again. Then he heard the mother’s response, which changed his life forever. With motherly love, she responded to her child, “Mein tayereh kind, on Erev Rosh Hashanah we also didn’t have anything to eat, but then Eliyohu Hanovi came to our house and bought us food for the whole Yom Tov. Who knows? Maybe he will return for Yom Kippur!”

This story is a portrayal of the concept that greatness lies within our hearts. We each have the ability to be great—great for ourselves and for others. We each have what it takes to make ourselves holy and special. We can all make the world a better place and help bring Eliyohu Hanovi and Moshiach bekarov.

Despite the distractions, temptations, and turbulence around us, we must follow the guidance of the Torah and remain focused on our missions to bring about positive change in ourselves, our families, and the world.

With the emunah and bitachon that emanate from studying the parshiyos and lessons of Yetzias Mitzrayim that we can maintain the simcha, inspiration, and conviction that we need to be good and productive.

In Parshas Pekudei, which we learn this week, the Torah gives a full reckoning of the precious metals that were donated for the Mishkon, all the keilim and begodim that were fashioned by the dedicated volunteers under the direction and leadership of Betzalel and Oholiav.

When everything was completed, it was brought to Moshe, who determined that it was all done precisely as Hashem had commanded, and Moshe blessed them all.

We do not merit at this time to have a Mishkon or a Bais Hamikdosh as a home for the Shechinah. We do not have a place to bring a Korban Pesach or any other korban. But we can still build yeshivos, botei medrash, and botei knesses, where people can become connected to Hashem through limud haTorah, and where their neshamos can be lifted. We can help tzubrocheneh people and assist them in restoring their lives. We can bring Torah to people who are distant and help others who are expanding the tent, bringing more people to shemiras hamitzvos. We can bring love and brotherhood to people who have become lost in the golus and have fallen to the temptations it offers.

Rabbeim and moros everyday show what can be done as they teach and influence their talmidim and talmidos to know and appreciate Torah, mesorah and midos tovos, working with them with love and dedication and helping them grow day by day.

If we are properly motivated and inspired, our actions can help bring about the changes necessary for Moshiach to come. Each one of us can help end the golus and bring us the geulah we so desperately await. May it happen very soon. Amein.