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**A Parsha Weekly by the Friedman Kollel  
of Metropolitan Washington**

**Parshas Bo  
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## **The Mystery of Newness**

**By Rabbi Eliezer Lachman, Rosh HaKollel**

In this week's portion we read a long section (Shemos 12:1-20) in which Hashem commands the Jews in the laws of Pesach. Interestingly, the first commandment in this section, as interpreted by the Sages, does not appear to be directly related to Pesach at all. It is, rather, the mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh - that the High Court declare a new month when witnesses testify that they have seen a new moon (see Rashi 12:2). Why does the Torah start the laws of Pesach with this law? What is its connection to Pesach?

It would appear that the very concept of newness is one that a slave does not have. To a slave, every day feels like every other day, as he is just working and carrying out orders. He has no sense of initiative, nor does he have a sense of independent being that would allow him to make a new start. Just as yesterday he had to listen to his master or overseer, so too today and tomorrow. Appreciating newness and instituting newness in one's life is something that only people who are free in mind and consciousness can do.

This is essentially the concept of the mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh. The court hears testimony that there is a new moon, and appreciates this newness by declaring a new month, thereby instituting newness into the collective life of the Jewish people. The Jewish people, in turn, respond by rejoicing on this day of newness, Rosh Chodesh, the first of the month, and they recite Hallel and offer special sacrifices and prayers to Hashem. The entire calendar is based upon this concept of appreciating newness and renewal, as the specific days of Rosh Chodesh are given from on High but are determined by man and his response to the newness of creation. This whole process is predicated upon the Jewish people being free, and not slaves like they were in Egypt. Because this concept is central to the exodus from slavery that we commemorate on Pesach, the Torah starts the section of Pesach with this law.

There is a deeper aspect to this insight. On Pesach we not only commemorate the freedom that the Jews attained in the past when they left Egypt, but it is also "the time of our

freedom," when we try to understand and internalize the Jewish concept of freedom and its relevance in our lives. This concept of freedom is inextricably linked with the ideas of moral choice and responsibility. A simple examination of the Hebrew terms for these ideas shows their interconnectedness. Freedom in Hebrew is "cheirus"; choice in Hebrew is "bechirah"; and responsibility is "acharayus." These terms are phonetically related because to be free, in the Torah world-view, means to exercise moral choice and be responsible for one's actions. Pesach is the first holiday and the start of the Jewish year, because relationship with God must be based upon this idea of human freedom, the ability to freely act out of one's own self, making moral choices with responsibility.

This concept implies further that a free man's actions are uncaused: if his actions would be caused, he would not be freely acting, but would be determined by something else. He is thus different from all other things in the world, whose actions have causes, and are therefore subject to scientific understanding and prediction. The actions of a free man cannot be predicted because he is constantly choosing them anew. They are in a most meaningful sense new all the time.

When the Jews left Egypt, they not only became free from actual slavery; they also became free in this deeper, existential sense. They were no longer limited, in their actions, by laws of causation, and this was symbolized and concretized by the power vested in the Jewish High Court to create newness in time itself.

## About the Friedman Kollel

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel, located in Olney, Maryland, offers learning opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds. These include one-on-one chavrusas, public lectures and classes for men and women, as well as after-school structured learning for public school teens. The Kollel operates under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Lachman and Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky. For more information or to sponsor an upcoming Capital Torah, please contact Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky at [FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org](mailto:FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org).

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