

Dear Community,

For most of us, the phrase 'New Year's Day' connotes either the solemnity of the High Holidays or the new gym membership of January 1<sup>st</sup>. However, the Talmud in Tractate Rosh Hashana cites Rabbi Yehoshua's opinion that the world was created in the month of Nissan rather than in the High Holiday month of Tishrei. In fact, the commentaries on Shulchan Aruch question why we refer to Rosh Hashana in its liturgy as the anniversary of the creation of the world if the world was created in Nissan. In the Torah nomenclature, Nissan is referred to as the first month and Tishrei as the seventh. On some level and in some way, the month of Nissan holds the key to the creation of the world.

The Haggadah includes a passage that is often passed over in pursuit of the Makkot play, Dayeinu recital, and the Matza, so appealing after a never-ending Maggid. The Hagadda discusses why we celebrate Pesach on the 14<sup>th</sup>. "I would have thought we should begin from the beginning of the month, but the verse tells us, 'On that day...' I would have thought to begin from the morning, [but I know that it is not because it is written] 'for the sake of this.' I didn't say 'for the sake of *this*' except [that it be observed] when [*this*] matzo and *maror* are resting in front of you [meaning, on the night of the fifteenth]". To many of us, this verse seems like an arcane bit of biblical exegesis that lies on our way to the green pastures of Shulchan Aruch. By probing slightly, we find that within this passage lie some of the most important keys to the message and mission of the Seder.

The Ma'aseh Nissim points out that the proof text used above is taken from the passage we read earlier regarding the fourth son, the one who "doesn't even know how to ask." Rabbi Loeberbaum understands this passage as a continuation of the four sons saga. "I would have thought from Rosh Chodesh:" this refers to the wise son who, as prescribed by the Talmud, begins to study the laws of Pesach on Rosh Chodesh. "I would have thought from that day" represents the evil and simple sons, who begin to see the ritual surrounding Pesach preparations and only then are motivated to ask, "Why to bother?" However, the passage ends off with stating that we wait until the Seder when we can engage even the simplest Jew, and that is when we recite the Hagadda.

If we are to think strategically, it can be argued that the best way to preserve our faith and ensure its transmission to the next generation is to focus on the motivated, righteous, and

dedicated Jews, in a kind of religious Darwinism. Let the few, the proud carry the torch and allow the weak to fall by the wayside, swept away by the tide of assimilation. The Hagadda tells us that this is decidedly not the way. On this night, the night where we celebrate the miracle of Jewish survival, we focus on the simple Jew, the one who cannot ask but is open to hearing. The commentaries explain that the world was created in Nissan as a foreshadowing for this moment when an entire nation stepped up to accept upon themselves the responsibility of taking on a leading role in bringing the world to completion. This night specifically is when we highlight and celebrate this responsibility and teach it to our children, grandchildren, and everyone who comes hungry, even and especially the "simple Jew" who "does not even know how to ask." The Seder is not about highbrow intellectual discourse: it's about going back to basics and making sure that all who are by the table are in one conversation, recognizing why we are here, and what we are meant to do.

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Shlomo Agishtein