

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

THE MOON

- an addendum

This Parsha contains the details of the various sacrifices offered on all the holidays, including Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. Although all the holidays required, ultimately, a KORBAN CHATAT of a SE'IR IZIM, it's only regarding the one offered on Rosh Chodesh that it is called a SE'IR IZIM ECHAD L'CHATAT LASHEM - And one male he-goat for a sin-offering to HaShem (28:15) which Rashi explains by citing a Midrash: Bring an atonement for Me for My having reduced (the size of) the Moon. It is certainly difficult to understand how HaShem feels He "did something wrong", as it were, when He had the Moon reduce its size.

The well-known story as Rashi explains (B'reishit 1:16), is that the Moon questioned Gd as to the wisdom in the equal sharing of the rulership by the Sun and the Moon, as a result of which, Gd asked the Moon to reduce itself. According to R. Moshe Shapiro (Mima'amakim p.273), Gd responded favorably to the Moon's statement and said 'since you understand this and comprehend that this is the way it must be, therefore contract yourself'. And in order to

appease her, Gd added the host of all the stars to her. Gd's initial intention was that one luminary should be greater than the other, for there can be no two beings in the world that are the same.

The Sun is an entity of light while the Moon is an entity prepared to receive light. What the Sun does is in its nature, is its self-expression, while the Moon "illuminates because it negates itself and transforms its entire self into a vehicle of light capturing the light and transmitting it onward" (Reflections & Introspections: Building from the Ruins; R. Moshe Shapiro, p. 429). The relationship of the Sun to the Moon is one of a provider to a receiver which is the foundation of all relationships. As a matter of fact, the Gemara (Ketuvot 2a) relates how marriages were encouraged to take place on the 4th day of the week because this was the day the Sun and Moon were created, which is seen as the ideal marriage - the great provider and great recipient.

Given all this, it seems that the reduction of the Moon was not only something which Gd wanted but, also was an expression of a fundamental philosophy. So, why does the midrash suggest that the reason for the Rosh Chodesh chatat was that HaShem wanted a KAPARA for its reduction?

This obviously forces Chazal to offer a number of explanations. Among

them, the following: Tos'fot HaRosh (Shavuot 9a) suggests that Gd's trying to appease the Moon was really meant as a lesson for us, to teach that "a master, forced to discipline his servant for misbehavior, should nonetheless seek to mollify the servant afterwards" (Artscroll, Shavu'ot 9a, footnote #13). This is similar to other incidents where Gd's behavior is meant to be a lesson to us (e.g. "Let us make man" [B'reishit 1:26] which was to teach us that the superior should consult with his inferiors; "I will go down" [Vayeira 18:21] - which was to teach that capital crime cases have to be judged by actually 'seeing').

The Rif explains this differently: "To mollify the Moon, Gd granted the honor of its renewal being the occasion on which the Jewish people would bring a he-goat to atone for their sins. By bringing the he-goat on Rosh Chodesh, the Jewish people bestow, on behalf of Gd, the honor He promised to the Moon. Thus, the meaning of Gd's statement is: 'Bring your atonement for Me, i.e. to compensate the Moon on My behalf for having diminished it" (footnote #13). This is something we find to be 'typical' of Gd. Even though we know that everything He does is for our good, sometimes, it involves treatment that is harsh for us, and we know how much He bemoans the fact that He has to do this, and therefore

"suffers" with us.

Personally, I was hoping to come up with some original explanation based upon the many various meanings of the root KUF-PEI-REISH, but failed to find anything legitimate. What puzzles me most is how the Moon is praised for its understanding of the nature of relationships and its ability to reduce itself to be a receiver rather than a giver and yet, somehow, this is not emphasized. Maybe that is why Gd feels the need for a kapara - because He didn't fully publicize this and in this way, He "minimized" what the importance of the Moon really was.

Perhaps the whole idea of KIDDUSH L'VANA, where we have a special ceremony just to "greet" HaShem in the presence of the new Moon, as it were, is something that Gd orchestrated, as well, to appease the Moon. What could be greater than to be compared to the Shechina, for the Gemara (Sanhedrin 42a) informs us that - all who bless over the new Moon in its proper time, it is as if he is greeting the Shechina. And, indeed, we get the impression that the Moon was mollified. As the words in the kiddush l'vana state: "...SASIM USMECHIM LA'ASOT R'TZON KONAM - they are joyous and glad to perform the will of their Creator.

The comparison of the Moon to the Sun, which was referred to in this

Rashi, brought to mind something else, similar, in this Parsha. Moshe is instructed by Gd to give of his "splendor" to Yehoshua and to confirm him as the future leader of B'nei Yisrael. Despite this being done in the presence of all of the people, the Gemara tells us (Bava Batra 75a) that "the elders of that generation said: the face of Moshe was like the face of the Sun; the face of Yehoshua, only like the face of the Moon. Woe for the shame, for the embarrassment". It was their misfortune to see things in this way. Yehoshua was merely a reflection of the greatness that was Moshe. Just as the Moon, Yehoshua negated himself all his life to be the receptacle of whatever he could receive from Moshe. (Maybe this was why Moshe was worried about him in the company of the spies.) And, indeed, just like the Moon, his true greatness wasn't appreciated. We are taught in the book of Yehoshua (24:31) that the people of Israel were faithful to HaShem all the days of Yehoshua - which serves as a priceless praise of Yehoshua and his greatness. And yet, Rashi tells us that Yehoshua was buried in Timnat Serach near HAR GA'ASH, a volcanic mountain to tell us that it threatened to kill the people because - they neglected to properly eulogize Yehoshua. He, too, wasn't appreciated as he should have been. Indeed, he was like the Moon.

All of the above supports an understanding I have of some of the words in the KEIL ADON that we recite on Shabbat: TOVIM ME'OROT SHE'BARA ELOKEINU... - the luminaries that Gd created are good... He endowed them with KO'ACH and G'VURA. If I were to be asked what the difference is between the word KO'ACH and the word G'VURA - both of which denote strength and might - I would think that KO'ACH refers to physical strength while G'VURA refers to spiritual, emotional strength (as in EIZEHU GIBOR? HAKOVEISH ET YITZRO). If I am correct in my conclusion, then this would apply to these words in the KEIL ADON. I would submit that KO'ACH refers to the strength of the Sun, and G'VURA, to that of the Moon - who had to constrict itself to be a mere reflection of the Sun, until the time of the GEULA when it will have the light of the Shechina returned to it.

And in spite of the idea presented by the midrash about the Moon needing to be appeased, the blessing of the kiddush l'vana clearly implies that it was. ❀