

Dear Chavraya,

Days, weeks, months, years, demarcations in time, neither bad nor good in themselves. When we speak of a “bad day” or a “good year,” we are speaking in relation to events that transpired in our lives during that period of time. It is a distinction as oft forgotten as it is obvious and important. When with a sigh of resignation we lament at its end the bad day or week or year we’ve known, a fatalism creeps into our souls that makes it difficult to look ahead with hope, to see ourselves as shapers of time. We celebrate the joys in our lives and we mourn the sorrows, knowing in truth that to everything there is a season. As a measure of time, length of days not ours to choose, but therefore choosing life in the way of our coming through the days, by the quality of life with which we fill them. Though seasons come in our lives that are ever so painful, time itself does not conspire against us. We are not as passive flotsam buffeted on a churning sea of amorphous time.

Time has its own natural markers and its rhythm, day and night, seasons, a wrinkle in the skin of one’s face that tells of years passing, a wrinkle in time. Human demarcations of time are superimposed on natural cycles. We look to the heavens and see the starry night of a new day. Ever since the sun and moon were set above, sunrise and moonrise of another day’s turning in our own lives corresponds to another day in the life of the universe; “and it was evening and it was morning, and it was good.”

Counting back all the way to creation, the Jewish calendar follows the moon in the marking of days and months and years. The seasons follow the sun, insuring that harvest festivals will come at times of harvest, when fields are full and fruited. Lunar and solar cycles are balanced. That is why festivals “float,” and we are wont to say, “the holidays are early this year,” or late, as the case may be. Ours is a lunar-solar calendar, not as the pure lunar calendar that Muslims follow. Seven times in a nineteen-year cycle a month is intercalated, inserted into the calendar so that Pesach occurs in the springtime, remaining in truth *chag ha’aviv/the spring festival*. Counting off from Nisan, the month of the exodus, of freedom and renewal, each of the other festivals in turn now takes their own place in time and at the proper season.

The edifice of our calendar is built on Rosh Chodesh. Still in Egypt, looking ahead to the great journey that will continue through the generations, the commandment to mark the new moon is given in this week’s Torah portion, *Parashat Bo: Ha’chodesh ha’zeh lachem rosh chodashim/this renewal of the moon shall be for you a beginning of new moons; it shall be for you the first among the months of the year*. Two commandments are taught through this verse, that the beginning of each month, Rosh Chodesh, is to be established by a physical viewing of the new moon, and that *Nisan*, the month of our liberation, is to be the first month of the year. That our own sighting of the new moon is to mark the arrival of Rosh

Chodesh is an affirmation of the human role in shaping time. Until the end of the Sanhedrin, the Great Court in Jerusalem, the new moon was announced with great pageantry following the first sighting of crescent light emerging.

The cycle of the moon becomes a metaphor for the journey of the Jewish people through time, fortunes and wellbeing waxing and waning. So too for every individual life, times of light expanding and times of light diminished. Rosh Chodesh is about us, and our renewal, *Ha'chodesh ha'zeh lachem rosh chodashim/this renewal of the moon shall be for you a beginning of new moons.*

Before its first sliver is revealed to the human eye and Rosh Chodesh can be announced, the moon remains hidden. We learn to anticipate hidden light waiting to be revealed, knowing it will come. In that moment is the astronomical Rosh Chodesh. It is a perfect moment when end and beginning are one, the sun, the moon, and the earth in conjunction. Completely aligned, we cannot see from earth the light of the sun glinting off the moon's edge until it moves out of conjunction just enough for its edge to be touched by the sun's radiance. The moment of conjunction is called the *molad/the birth*, a time truly pregnant with possibility, of hope renewed.

Days, weeks, months, years, demarcations in time, neither bad nor good in themselves. End and beginning as one in the cycle of the moon, Rosh Chodesh is also about our own journey and our own efforts to fill the time we have with meaning. Of light hidden and revealed, we look to the heavens, *this renewal of the moon shall be for you.* Life is a journey of faith.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Victor