

So it's all about the moon these days. Maybe it's always been about the moon. I mean, everybody wants to walk on it or take pictures of it. Israel wants to take pictures and say, we've been to the moon, we've seen the moon, the moon. We, as a people, have always been moon people. And we've also been sun people.

Sun and the moon have been doing a dance in our tradition for many, many years. And there's something on my heart that I want to share with you tonight about freedom and about the moon and its relationship with the sun and that dance that became clarified for me earlier this week. So what does the moon have to do with freedom? Well, you know, we're all familiar to some degree with the annual ritual, the annual evening where we commemorate the full moon of the month of Nisan. We know that as the first night Seder. The full moon of Nisan of the month, the first month of the calendar in our tradition. That full moon was when we left Egypt.

That evening, that evening known as L'El Shemarim, the night of being watched, the watched night, the watched overnight, the safe night, was the evening where we took that Paschal Lamb and sacrificed it as a litmus test on our readiness to be free and to walk out the door. But the chapter of the book of Exodus that will introduce us to those very, very detailed instructions will begin with two anomalous verses, two verses, instructions from God, words from our source through Moses to the people of Israel that we commemorate every year by naming an entire Shabbat for those two verses. The Shabbat that immediately precedes the month in which freedom happens, the month in our calendar in which liberation occurred, the month in our calendar known as the month of miracles, Nisan.

The Shabbat that immediately precedes that always is called Shabbat HaChodesh, the Shabbat of the month, the month with a capital The. The definite article of Hey is saying the month, as if there's only one, the month. HaChodesh, that title and that name is given to this Shabbat, which is of course tonight and tomorrow, because of the words found in those two strange verses that seem to come out of nowhere and seem to be absolutely not connected to the detailed instructions on how to sacrifice the Paschal Lamb.

The Torah in chapter 12, verse 1 and 2. And God spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt. HaChodesh HaZeh. Rosh Chodeshim. Rishonu Lachem Lechadshei HaShana. Taber Yerbenei Yisrael. God begins the detailed directions for the Paschal offering with two strange verses. God spoke to Moses and Aaron, telling us where they were, where are they, in the land of Egypt. Were they in the land of Egypt? Do we need to know where they are? Does it ever say where Aaron and Moses are receiving a divine communication? Hi, it's me, and where are you? Usually in the desert or usually somewhere else, but we're in the land of Egypt. Okay, let me tell you about the Paschal offering, but before I tell you that, let me also tell you about this little thing.

HaChodesh, this new month. This new month will be for you a new month. And the words in Hebrew are very, very interesting. HaChodesh HaZeh, this month. This meaning pointing to it, this month. Of course the simple meaning was, this very month, this very moon, is the moon called the new moon. HaChodesh HaZeh. This institution becomes known as how we decide when the new month is. The monthly cycle of our tradition comes from this source.

God says, before you leave the land of Egypt, before I give you the directions on how to get out, you need to know that there's something called the new month. As if that's part and parcel of the divine instructions on how to get out of here. You can imagine Moses saying, well, wait a second, I'm not really clear how telling me about a new month institution, and this is the first month, it's going to be Nisan, what does that have to do with sacrificing a Paschal offering and getting my people out? We have time later to talk about calendars and all that business.

What is so fundamental to leaving slavery? What is so important, so essential to understanding what liberation is all about that God had to fork these two verses? And I want to make it even more intense. Because the rabbis say that Moses had a hard time hearing this, and that God saying this month, HazeH, which really means just this month, is telling us a story, a rabbinic tale about Moses' incapacity, his absolute radical inability to hear these words. Moses says, HazeH? I'm a little bit confused. Which month is it? And in the rabbi's imagination, the word HazeH, which means this, is God saying to Moses, HazeH re'eh v'kadesh, as if God says, like this one, here let me show you Moses, like this moon, HazeH, like this one, re'eh, see? And make it holy. I think that this rabbinic story, this Midrash about Moses needing someone to say, this one, see it and make it holy, is all part of what liberation means for me, for you, for all of us. In many ways, the big moment of sacrificing a lamb, taking its blood and putting it on the doorpost is very gory, it's very messy, it's very beautiful, it's very shamanistic, it's very powerful.

Not many of us know this, when we walk through doors, where those little amulets are, really we are re-enacting the birth of our people from slavery. It's all very fine and good, those are big moments, that's a big deal. We're kind of on the edge, and we have to make a decision, shall I stay or should I go now? If I stay, more slavery, if I go, who knows? What's behind curtain number one? But something more profound happens two weeks before that big moment, something more profound and more instructive and more ubiquitous for our lives each and every day, because not every day is a leaving of Egypt for me, for you, and for all of us. And the preparation to be able to arrive at that moment where we would take a lamb, and we would walk through a door, those two weeks, those preparations, those

preparedness moments are vital. Like this, like this, God says to Moses in the rabbinic imagination, like this, you must see it and sanctify. See, sanctify, see, sanctify.

The entire lunar calendar in ancient Israel, according to the rabbis, was dependent upon human witnesses. They didn't have the complex calculations. They didn't rely upon a calendar or an iPhone app. Two witnesses had to come, and if two witnesses didn't come, the moon was not renewed. Human beings had to see, kazer, see, like that, see it and sanctify it. One simple meaning of all of this for liberation means that time is the first thing that we own on the way out of slavery. We are given the gift of time, and we spoke about that last night with Peter and Pamela.

But for me tonight, I'm thinking about what this teaching of the rabbis, kazer e'o kadesh, means. It means to me that the seeds of liberation, the incipient moments where something good, something benevolent, something lovely appears, like the flicker of the moon against a dark night whose absence has been long, long, long. The despair at the end of a long, dark period, kazer e'o kadesh. If you want to know what it is to be free, Moses is told by God. Tell the people who have despaired after a long winter of grief. Tell the people who were languishing and longing for a leader. Tell the people who had given up hope that you must develop the vision to see in the dark and then notice when the light comes. If you want to know what it is to become free, you need to notice the moment the moon returns. The moment the moon plants a seed of hope that will become a full moon in the sun's time. A seed of hope against a backdrop of night. A glimmer in an exile that went on and on and on.

To develop that kind of ocularity, to develop that kind of vision, to develop those holy eyes, those expectant eyes, that are mitzvahim, that are waiting and longing for the moon to flash. Kazer e'o kadesh. Like that. Notice that. And you will be readying yourselves for freedom. How many of us are waiting for the big moment, the big high, the big phone call, the big foundation gift, the big donor, the big bar mitzvah. Oh, it's so great to celebrate big moments, but it's the small ones. It's those little glimmers, those seeds that are planted. See the seed. If you can't see the seed, it won't become what it needs to become by the middle of the month.

So here's your programmatic agenda, Moses. Liberator of the Jewish people, you go to them, and before you give them all the details about what's going to happen in two weeks' time, before they stand in the fullness of the liberation moment, you tell them that forever and ever they will be the lunar people who will notice when the moon returns. They'll be those who notice those seeds, and they see them. They notice them. Like a good farmer. Like a good husband, a good wife, a good partner, a good manager, a good human being. If we only wait for the moments where things are clear and obvious, they won't be clear and

obvious. See the seeds. And if you do, if you see those seeds, if you notice that moon's light, then you wait two weeks. You keep looking, you keep looking, and the sun will make his way. And the sun and moons will have a dance. In the middle of the month, the light of the moon will be full. Liberation will be calling us. So this is the work. The work is always, and always, always, every day, every week, every month, to see the seeds and sanctify them.

I'm thinking tonight about this for my own life. I'm thinking about this tonight for yours, for this community. There were seeds that were planted 13 years ago, and every year around this time when we have a benefit, I get emails or I get phone calls from people who say, I remember when you guys were just three people and a drum. I remember it when you guys couldn't open your doors and you had to struggle. I remember this moment, that moment, that seed, that seed, and with each and every phone call, with each and every email, with each and every one of those reminders, I feel that we saw the seeds and sanctified them. We saw those seeds. We noticed those moments. We waited for that light, and then it came.

Not just in this community, but in our own private lives, wherever you are, if there's a moment now in your life that is dark and the moon is not yet in its fullness, we are enjoined, we are called to remind one another that even in the winter, there's hope. Some say love. It is. I say love. Far beneath the bitter snows lies the seed that with the sun's love in the spring becomes the rose.

Please rise.