

Torah Table Talk

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Rosh Hodesh: A Universal Holiday

Parshat Tazriah/Metzorah Rosh Hodesh

Leviticus 12:1 - 15:33/ Isaiah 66:1 – 24



*Dedicated by Frances and Buddy Brandt
in memory of their grandson, Oren Jacob Brandt-Rauf.
“He was the perfect child.”*

The special Haftorah which is read on Shabbat Rosh Hodesh contains a series of separate prophecies which were delivered around the middle of the sixth century BCE. The prophet speaks of the great power of God which cannot be contained on the earth, let alone in a sanctuary. He condemns the people for their continued practice of pagan worship but he also promises them that Zion will be reborn and the people will return to their land. In a striking image he compares the way Israel will be comforted by God to the way a mother comforts her children. In the pen-ultimate verse of the Haftorah, the prophet predicts that all the people of the earth shall come to worship God in the end of time. This verse is repeated a second time at the end of the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 66:22 - 24

For as a new heaven and the new earth which I will make shall endure by My will, declares the Lord, so shall your seed and your name endure. And new moon after new moon, and Sabbath after Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship Me, said the Lord. They shall go out and gaze on the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me; their worms shall not die nor their fire be quenched; they shall be a horror to all flesh. *And new moon after new moon, and Sabbath after Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship Me, said the Lord.*

W. Gunther Plaut The Haftorah Commentary

All flesh shall come to worship me: A messianic hope. Because the following verse (the last verse in the book of Isaiah) the prophet delivers a terrible imprecation against those who oppose God, the sages arranged to repeat Verse 23 and thus end the reading on an upbeat note. The rabbinic practice applies also to the books of Malachi, Lamentation, and Kohelet (Ecclesiastes). In many editions the repeated passage is printed in smaller size font.

Radak Rabbi David Kimchi Isaiah 66:23

From one month to the next new month: The prefix *Mee* in the word *Meeday* implies “From month to the next month.: And the word *day* in the word *Mee-day* implies continuously without any pause. Mentioning two periods of time closer and farther apart (months and Sabbaths or weeks) also implies continuously, as in one year to the next, those that are closer together for those who are closer to Jerusalem and those that are farther apart for those who are farther from Jerusalem. (This implies that those who are both close and those that are far from Jerusalem will continuously be coming to the city.

Metzudat David Isaiah 66:23

And new moon after new moon: The word *Mee-day* implies “whenever,” as in “Whenever it is Rosh Hodesh or Shabbat.” (in other words, the people would come to worship God on Rosh Hodesh and Shabbat, as opposed to Radak who said that the people would continuously worship God from one special occasion to the next).

Michael Fishbane The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftorot

The cycle of the moon has thus offered the opportunity in Jewish ritual and spirituality for a periodic renewal of one's inner light and wholeness. As the moon is not the source of its own light, the symbolism of the new moon invites worshipers to deepen their receptivity to a higher radiance, so that they may be connected to a divine dimension and reflect it outward into the world. This is the movement from the private to the social realm. In this respect the Haftarah for Rosh Hodesh reminds the single self of its commonality with all creatures. Its proclamation of the cyclical celebration of God by all flesh in Zion, "new moon after new moon," is thus a prophecy of a united humanity that repeatedly renews itself through ecumenical reciprocity and common concerns

Exodus Rabbah 15:24

When the Sanhedrin sanctified a new month, what blessing did they make? Some Rabbis say that the blessing recited was "Blessed are You...who renews the months." Other Rabbis say that the blessing recited was "Blessed are You... who makes the months holy." Other Rabbis say that the blessing recited was "Blessed are You... Who makes the Children of Israel holy." Because if the Children of Israel do not sanctify the moon, it does not become holy at all! Don't be surprised by this, because Hashem made Israel holy, as it says "And you shall be holy to Me, for I, Hashem, am holy..." (Leviticus 20:26). And since the Children of Israel are holy and special to heaven, whatever they make holy is truly holy.....The Holy One, blessed is He, said, "I am holy. I Myself make things holy. I will make Israel holy, and they will fill the world with holiness by declaring Me holy. Therefore, the Torah says, "And you will be holy to Me, for I, Hashem, am holy... (ibid)," and "I am Hashem Who makes you holy" (Leviticus 20:8). That is what King David means when he says "You are holy; You are enthroned by the praises of Israel" (Psalms 22:4) And when did Israel begin to sanctify the months? In Egypt, as it says "This month shall be the first month for you..." (Exodus 12:2).

Around the Table:

1. Why do we repeat the second to last verse of the Haftarah? What is the connection between these two verses at the end of the book? Do they contradict or compliment one another?
 2. The Radak and the Metzudat David understand this verse in different ways. How are they different from one another? Which one makes the most sense to you? Do the two understandings make a significant difference in what we think the passage is talking about?
 3. Does the Jewish tradition think of Rosh Hodesh as a Jewish celebration or a universal celebration? What is the nationalistic element in this holiday and what is the more humanistic element in the celebration of Rosh Hodesh? Which one should we emphasize today.
 4. What is the connection between the Exodus from Egypt and the celebration of Rosh Hodesh?
 5. Why does the prophet speak of the people coming to the Temple to worship God specifically on Rosh Hodesh and Shabbat? What special significant might these two occasions have for other people?
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Torah Table Talk is a weekly e-publication of Rabbi Mark B Greenspan sponsored by the Oceanside Jewish Center on Long Island, New York. If you would like to subscribe to Torah Table Talk please send an e-mail to Tabletalk@oceansidejc.org. To remove your address from this list, send a blank email to tabletalk-unsubscribe@oceansidejc.org. To see an archive of Rabbi Greenspan's sermons and TTT go to <http://www.oceansidejc.org/rebmark/RabbiGreenspan.html>

*“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”*

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