

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch

Terumah 21 “Out of the Blue (Moon)”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat shalom. Friday of this week was a mini holiday on the Jewish calendar called *Zayin Adar*, the 7th of Adar, which is the yahrtzeit of Moshe Rabbeinu and the day on which it is the custom for members of the Chevra Kadisha, those who engage in burial societies, to fast. There is a famous commentary by the Vilna Gaon brought in *Sefer Kol Eliyahu* where he points out that in most years, Zayin Adar falls out in the week preceding Parshat Tetzaveh, which is next week’s parsha. The reason he gives is that following the Torah’s narrative of Moshe’s birth, Tetzaveh is the only parsha which omits his name, and that omission symbolizes his departure, so to speak. However, the Vilna Gaon remarks parenthetically that once in a blue moon, Zayin Adar falls out on Parshat Terumah. This year is one of those blue moons!

According to the gemara in Mesechet Megillah 13b, Haman picked the date to kill the Jews by using a *lottery, a pur*, which is the origin of the name Purim. The Gemara reports that he was incredibly happy when his lottery came up with the month of Adar, because it was the month when Moshe died, so he figured he would have better odds of killing the Jews.

However, the gemara goes on to point out the flaw in Haman's logic: As it happens, Moshe was also born in that month – actually on the same day - so the date turns out to be positive. Still, that seems to be a strange line of reasoning.

In any event, since Zayin Adar does not fall during the week preceding Tetzaveh this year, it can't symbolize Moshe's death. Based on the gemarah, I think this unusual timing could represent a shift in focus to Moshe's *birth*, so in a sense, we have more access this year to the miracle of Purim, so to speak.

One of the striking characteristics of the Purim story is that it starts out very bleak, apparently hopeless for the Jews. But then out of the blue, as the megillah says, *v'nahafoch hu, everything turns around*. It is a story which demonstrates that even in times of despair, God can extricate us completely from a dire situation.

This idea is alluded to in the Midrash Tanchuma on Parshat Beha'alotecha, that Moshe tried to build the menorah according to God's instructions, but he was flummoxed and couldn't put it together. (I guess he was like a lot of Jews – not very handy!)

Suddenly, from behind the scenes, God saved the day by instantly producing the fully constructed menorah.

We can find an additional message in that narrative, which also applies to the events of Purim: Before the positive outcome, Moshe had to endure some hardship, just as the Jewish people had to experience their struggle with Haman before they triumphed. But that's how the world works. One of the reasons for this, which we've brought often in the past, is that we don't fully appreciate the good outcomes if we've never experienced misfortune. We are most able to feel joy about a happy ending when we realize what was at stake.

That could be why in most years, Zayin Adar occurs during the week preceding Parsha Tetzaveh, when Moshe's name is omitted, and we are reminded of his death. After all, this is a difficult world, and we experience a lot of pain in our lives. But once in a while, we see that moment when *v'nahafoch hu*, when everything turns around. This could be the significance of Zayin Adar occurring during the week of Parshat Terumah this year, perhaps representing the hope generated by Moshe's birth.

Our prayer is that this rare timing will be a good omen – a sign that we will not simply get through the pandemic but overcome all its tribulations with a fresh appreciation of what we have. And more than that, perhaps we will even find some good that develops from this terrible experience, and witness firsthand our own *v'nahafoch hu*, God turning things completely around for us, for the better. Shabbat shalom.