

# א ביסל תורה!

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## The Importance of Time in Judaism

By Akiva Huff

This week we read פרשת החודש - one of the four special פרשיות that we read around פורים and פרשת החודש. Specifically, we read the ראש חודש ניסן before or of שבת. One of the most interesting things about פרשת החודש is that it begins with the very first מצווה that 'ה commanded all of בני ישראל. Most would expect the very first מצווה to be one that we consider to be a very major and fundamental מצווה. However this מצווה is ראש חודש, a מצווה that is too often overlooked. ראש חודש is the sanctification of the new moon and the establishment of a Jewish lunar calendar. This brings forth the question of what is so essential about ראש חודש that it deserves to be the very first מצווה given to בני ישראל.

An interesting connection to פרשת החודש is found in the very first פסוק of the תורה: **בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת:** "In the beginning, 'ה created the heavens and the earth. Usually, we figure from this פסוק that the first thing that 'ה created was the heavens and the earth. However, ספורנו, a medieval Italian scholar, disagrees. ספורנו says that 'ה's first creation was time. This idea can be logically deduced from the structure of the פסוק. The first word of the תורה is "בראשית", an ambiguous word with hundreds of commentaries on its meaning. Nevertheless, all agree that it is alluding in some way to time whether it means "in the beginning," "first," or so on. When dealing with the creation of the world, we have to remember that 'ה started from scratch; nothing existed before the creation. Therefore, in order for the תורה to refer to time in its very first word, time had to have been created. The fact that the very first word implies the concept of time, suggests that time was created before anything else. In other words, if the heavens and the earth were created "in the beginning," time has to have been created first in order for the concept of "the beginning" to exist. פרשת החודש and בראשית are connected through their shared emphasis on time. פרשת החודש is about the establishment of a calendar, a system to organize time, while בראשית is about the creation and primacy of time. Yet, the connection between פרשת החודש, בראשית and the concept of time goes even deeper.

The first משנה of ראש השנה names four ראשי שנים. Two of the four are 'א, תשרי, which we call ראש השנה, and 'א, ניסן. According to רבי אליעזר אומר בתשרי נברא העולם: "ראש השנה י'." It was taught that רבי אלעזר said: "In the world was created. This means that בראשית corresponds to 'א, תשרי, one of the ראשי שנים. Meanwhile, פרשת החודש corresponds to 'א, ניסן, another one of the ראשי שנים. This can be seen in the second פסוק of פרשת החודש: **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֵן רָאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֵן לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה** "This month (ניסן) shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. Both בראשית and פרשת החודש correspond to different ראשי שנים. The concept of ראשי שנים, or heads of the year, is also associated with time. They mark the beginnings of yearly cycles, a way in which time is organized.

בראשית and פרשת החודש are deeply intertwined with the concept of time, and through that shared concept, with each other. בראשית is the beginning of the world as well as the creation of time itself, and in order for there to have been a beginning, time has to have been the very first creation. בראשית also marks one of the several heads of the year-ראש השנה. פרשת החודש is the beginning of בני ישראל as a nation, and their very first commandment from 'ה is to sanctify the new moon and establish a calendar, systematizing time. פרשת החודש also marks a different head of the year- 'א, ניסן. Time plays a central role in two of the most significant milestones in Jewish history. This leaves us with the question: Why is time such an important aspect of Judaism?

In בראשית, time isn't just a recurring theme, it seems to serve a specific purpose; it's used as a tool. 'ה uses time as a tool in order to organize the creation by days: the six days of creation. Time is a universal force that is constant and predictable, allowing it to be used as a tool when organized properly. In order to convert time into a tool, 'ה essentially created the first calendar: **"וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ לַיְלָה וַיְהי עֶרְבַּ וַיְהי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:** " 'ה called the light Day and called the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day. Not only did 'ה literally create the

day, but He invented the concept of a certain amount of time being defined as what 'ה' named a "יום." In doing so, 'ה' established the very first "calendar." It's not as sophisticated as our calendars today with months and years, but 'ה' created the very first division of time into periods of defined lengths. This tool allowed the world to be created in an organized and orderly fashion, but its use was not limited to the creation of the world.

A parallel can be drawn between the use of time as a tool during the creation of the world and its role in פרשת החודש. In the beginning of פרשת החודש, בני ישראל faced a difficult task ahead of them: to establish themselves as a nation. 'ה' used time as a tool at the beginning of the world, and later instructed בני ישראל to do the same at their own beginning; when they were trying to establish themselves as a nation. 'ה' told בני ישראל to sanctify the new moon, thus creating a new measurement of time: the month. These months formed the Jewish calendar, and the Jewish calendar was crucial to the development of בני ישראל as a nation. It formed the backbone of the Jewish tradition. The Jewish calendar determines how to perform hundreds of time-related מצוות. When to daven, שמיטה, יובל, חגים, שבת, the list goes on, all depend on the Jewish calendar. All of these מצוות form the basis of the Jewish tradition which is vital to keeping בני ישראל together through a shared cultural identity. Therefore, 'ה's first commandment to בני ישראל was to sanctify the new moon, thereby establishing the Jewish calendar which makes up the foundation of the Jewish faith. After reading this, I hope that you will walk away with a more profound appreciation of the power of time and its deep fundamental connection to Judaism as well as an understanding of the major significance of פרשת החודש.

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## Why We Don't Judge on שבת

By Binyamin Orkaby

This week we read two פרשיות: פקודי and ויקהל. These two פרשיות are very interesting in that they have almost no new מצוות between them. The ספר החינוך, which is a list of all of the מצוות in the תורה, as well as the רמב"ם in his ספר החינוך, say that there is only one מצווה in פרשת ויקהל and none in פרשת פקודי. The ספר החינוך says that the only מצווה in ויקהל is פרשת ויקהל "שלא יעשו בית דין משפט מות בשבת" that we aren't allowed to do judgment on שבת. The ספר החינוך learns this from the פסוק in this week's פרשה "לא תבערו אש בכל משבתיכם ביום השבת" that one should not light a fire on שבת (שמות לה:ג). However, this leads us to the following question: How can we learn the מצווה of not doing judgment on שבת from not being allowed to light a fire on שבת? Furthermore, how is the מצווה of not doing judgment on שבת different from not doing work on שבת?

To explain the connection between the פסוק in this week's פרשה of פרשת ויקהל "לא תבערו אש בכל משבתיכם ביום השבת", the ספר החינוך brings down a גמרא from מסכת יבמות ב דף עמוד ב, which says that a בית דין, a courthouse, should not do שריפה on שבת, and so too by all the other מיתות בית דין. The ספר החינוך then explains that the reason this פסוק is brought is to teach us this הלכה otherwise it would not have been necessary. This is because we already have a פסוק which teaches us that we aren't allowed to do מלאכה on שבת, and lighting a fire on שבת is also a מלאכה. Because of this, isn't it obvious that you wouldn't be allowed to do שריפה? Therefore, it must be that the פסוק is coming to teach us something new, because every word in the תורה has importance and not one is extra.

However, this still hasn't shown us what the difference is between not doing judgment on שבת and not doing work. The ספר החינוך explains that 'ה' gave us this מצווה to teach us to honor and respect the שבת such that everyone will be able to rest even those who have committed crimes. The ספר החינוך brings a משל, a parable, of a king who invites all the people of his city to a party, and during the party there is no judgment being done. Only after the party on the following day does the king go and do judgment. So too, 'ה' wanted to teach us that we should honor שבת by taking time off from our daily lives and not worrying about the rest of the week.

With this מצווה, 'ה' is teaching us the importance of resting on שבת. שבת is a holy day on which we take a full day to not worry about what happened during the week and focus on our relationship with 'ה'. By teaching us not to make judgments on שבת, 'ה' has taught that even things as important as the court system are shut down on שבת, so too we should take a break from what we do during the week to recuperate from the busy week we've had and enjoy שבת, the day of rest.

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