Night of No Moon

Thoughts on Shabbat HaChodesh
(adapted from previous versions)

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Look up in the sky tonight. You won’t see much of a moon. The beginning of a new month is coming up. Astronomically, Rosh Chodesh, the “new moon” in the Jewish calendar, occurs when we see no moon in the sky. The month of Nisan begins this coming Monday. This Shabbat is called “Shabbat HaChodesh,” the Sabbath announcing that the month of Nissan is about to begin.

When we see the moon at night, the sun is shining on the part we can see. When the moon is right between the earth and sun, the unlit side of the moon is facing us. The other side, facing the sun, gets all the sunlight. The new moon is actually “no visible moon;” it is the darkest night of the month. In ancient times, from what I have read, those moonless nights were terrifying, as if something had died in the heavens. Ancient peoples made noise and blew horns, to chase away evil spirits, or perhaps to awaken the deceased moon back to life.

This Shabbat, called Shabbat Ha-Chodesh, is the fourth of the four special Sabbaths that lead up to Pesach. This special Sabbath commemorates the “no moon” before Passover. The night of no visible moon this coming Monday, and the day following, is called Rosh Chodesh. “Rosh” is “beginning of” and “Chodesh” means month. The word “Chodesh” is clearly connected to the word “chadash” which means “new.”

The night of no light, Rosh Chodesh (new month), is interpreted in the Chasidic tradition as the “beginning of the new.” I find myself fascinated by the image of the dark side of the moon facing us (a moon we cannot see, because the other side is fully illuminated) to be the beginning of the new.

The spiritual-psychological meaning jumps out – transformation takes place when we experience an inner obscurity. The firmness of the ego self is undermined. We become a bit unknown to ourselves, the world is shifting. A new self is trying to birth out of dark inner regions. There is a new clarity on the other side of the darkness that awaits us.
I think of those ancient people, making sundry noises because of the darkness. I think of the noise in our own heads, a noise that distracts us from troubling inner shadow regions that might portend a new light. Maybe we are falling apart. Maybe we are coming together. Maybe both.

Spiritual liberation means being liberated from forces within that prevent our becoming whole persons. The image of giving a half shekel in the census, described in Ex. 30, is intriguing. The half shekel stands for us; we are only “half” – completed by others, by God, and by a self that is emerging from within. That self can only emerge when forces that impede that birth can be outfoxed. Those forces that want the emerging self to be stillborn are cunning and can rob us of our well-being. I know of so many people whom I have counseled who find themselves thinking and doing things so contrary to how they see themselves. A truer version of the self exists on the other side of the moon.

Well, those patterns that impede our full actualization are part of us. We can’t get rid of them. Those forces within have a voice. Some of that inner noise is a voice of distraction. Maybe even destruction. We can’t know unless we become conscious of that noise and engage with the voices that live on the dark side of the moon.

Sometimes, however, the voice that disturbs us is a voice of truth. We are disturbed because we are not living true lives, lives that integrate many truths within. Maybe we are avoiding and repressing. Maybe there is truth within that we just can’t live, right now at least.

In that inner dialogue, confusing and distressing at first, we can discern much. Some things we can discern, hopefully, are the forces and voices that clearly belong to less mature, less whole parts of us. When we listen to the voices on the dark side of the moon, we can sometimes hear voices of pettiness, catastrophizing, judgmentalism, entropy, fear, etc., voices that can prevent a new self from arising. Here is a mystery: by engaging with the voices from the darkness, a self emerges that is not from the darkness, but knows how to speak to the darkness.

At the times when I have been ensconced in utter darkness, a moonless, cloudy night in the desert, for example, at first the darkness seemed impenetrable. But when I would just sit in the darkness, and allow my eyes to adjust, I felt that some ancient part of myself emerged, some part of me that knew how to navigate the terrain of a thick, black night. I remember that during one of those nights, a poem I studied in high school rose out of my memory, “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley:

“I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul.”

This Shabbat is the Shabbat of “chadash,” the dark beginning of newness as we approach the liberation of Passover. The inner work so far has taken us to a level of great obscurity, the night of no moon. Which is the voice of truth? Which is the voice that must be heard but from which we ought not take counsel? We cannot grow without going through this moonless night, mastering our souls on our way to the full moon of liberation.
This special Haftarah for Parshat HaHodesh is a taken out of the last eight chapters of Ezekiel, where he speaks of the vision he has received from God of the restored theocracy. His vision includes building plans, ritual law and legal enactments which describe this Israeliite “Utopia,” called in Hebrew “Adonai Shammah,” “Adonai is There” (48:35). The section we read today from that great vision describes the sacrifice for Rosh Hodesh (New Month) Nisan, the Paschal sacrifice of the 14th of Nisan, the observance of Pesach, and other laws governing the sacrifices and the Holy Temple. By reading this Haftarah, we are brought into a vision of the Messianic future of restored Israel.

### Synopsis of the Special Haftarah

**Ezekiel 45:16 - 46:18**

1. The conclusion of the seven day inauguration period for the Kohanim (priests) -- preparatory korbanot (sacrifices) are made for the Kohanim, and for the first time, the regular korbanot for the people are made.

2. The “k’vod Adonai” (Glory of God) appears to the people, and a fire from before God consumes what was on the altar.

3. Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon, make an unauthorized incense offering on the altar. A fire comes from before God and kills them both. Aharon is silent.

4. Laws against priests imbibing any strong drink before entering the Ohel Mo’ed; they have the task of teaching the distinction between the holy and the mundane.

5. Further laws about sacrifices; a case of a misunderstanding about the law between Moshe and Aharon.

6. Laws of Kashrut -- forbidden animals for eating. Observing these laws as a way of being holy to God.

### Synopsis of the Torah Portion

**Leviticus 9:1 - 11:47**

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### Shabbat Zoom Sessions

**Friday Evening, 7 pm**

Candle Lighting and Brief Teaching

Meeting ID: 845 5543 7908

Passcode: 780011

**Shabbat Morning, 9 am**

Rabbi’s Teaching 9:30 am

Meeting ID: 880 7900 5392

Passcode: 011842
Happy Birthday...

Eric Taub on April 9
Samuel Maizel on April 9
Andy Cohen on April 11
Dev Letendre on April 11
Richard Foos on April 12

This Week We Remember...

Fred Joachim Weber,
father of Patrick Weber, on April 6.

Etta Blinderman,
mother of Barry Blinderman, on April 6.

Andree Marie Thompson,
sister of Mickey Shapiro, on April 7.

Susan Lukas,
sister of James Ries, on April 8.

Lawrence Stein,
stepfather of Robert Blashek, on April 8.

Eva Marcus,
grandmother of Diane Alvy-Haley, on April 9.

Edwin Fields,
husband of Cynthia Fields, on April 9.

Clarisse Gai Anderson Hamblin,
sister of Pam Mahoney, on April 12.

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