NISAN: The First Month and the Month of Miracles

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The month of Nisan (pronounced Nisán, not to be confused with Níssan, the Japanese automaker!) begins today. In the Hebrew calendar there are 12 months (or 13 when it is a leap year). The month of Nisan is the first of the 12 months of the year, but the new year does not begin in Nisan. In the Hebrew calendar the year begins in the seventh month, the month of Tishri. . January, on the hand, is both, the first month of the months and the first month of the year. A the first month of the months which is not the first month of the year, is a concept that does NOT exist in the Gregorian calendar.

Why is Nisan the first month of the months?

SPRING TIME

Nisan, in Israel and in the northern hemisphere, marks the beginning of spring. And that is how the Bible refers to this month, *Chodesh haAbib*, the month of spring. The name Nisan also comes from "nitsan", that in Hebrew means to flourish, since in this month the trees begin to produce their green leaves and their flowers. And it is for this reason that during the month of Nisan we say a special blessing, Bircat haIlanot, the blessing when we see a blossoming fruit tree (See here).

REDEMPTION FROM EGYPT

According to our Sages the main reason why Nisan was assigned as the first month is so that every time we would mention one of the Hebrew months we would remember "Nisan" and the great miracle of our redemption. Thus, when we mention for example "the third month" of the year, we remind ourselves that this is "the third month, counting from Nisan, the month of our redemption".

Something similar, although in the opposite direction, occurs with the days of the week. The days of the week in Hebrew, as in Portuguese, are counted with ordinals: first day (□□□ □□□□□) for Sunday; second day (□□□ □□□) for Monday, etc. And

when we count the Hebrew days we do it in reference to the Shabbat: when we say in Hebrew Yom Sheni (Monday) we are declaring that "today is the second day, counting *towards* the Shabbat". So every time we mention a day of the week, we remember Shabbat (in Rabbinical Hebrew we say explicitly □□□ □□□□).

But why is that in Hebrew we still continue to count the days of the week with ordinal numbers, but we do NOT count the Hebrew months with their ordinal names anymore? Why nowadays we call the months with names? Nisan, Iyar, Tishri, etc. And these names, are not even Hebrew names! They are actually the Babylonian names of the months! .

Why did we Jews abandon the Hebrew Biblical names of the months and adopted the non-Jewish Babylonian names of the months?

THE RETURN OF THE CAPTIVITY FROM BABYLON

Ramban (Exodus 12: 2) explains that we do this to fulfill one of Yirmiyahu's (Jeremiah) prophecies. Yirmiyahu had the difficult task of announcing to the people of Israel that if they persisted in their abandonment of the Tora, the Bet haMiqdash and Yerushalayim would be destroyed, and that the survivors would be taken as captives to Babylon. And the Bet haMiqdash was destroyed… But he also comforted the people. He announced that HaShem will miraculously bring them back from Babylon to the land of Israel. This great miracle happened 70 years after the destruction of the Bet haMiqdash, when the Persian emperor "Cyrus" (Koresh), announced that HaShem revealed Himself to him and ordered him to rebuild the Bet haMiqdash in Yerushalayim. Cyrus invited all Yehudim who wanted to return to Israel under his protection. And this was considered one of the greatest miracles ever in Jewish history! Moreover, it was compared with the miracle of the exodus from Egypt. Yirmiyahu prophesied the return of the Jewish people to their land saying (16: 14-15) that when HaShem will bring the Jewish people from Babel back to Israel: *"… it will no longer be said that HaShem … brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. [The miracle of the exodus from Babel will be so great that from that time] it will be mentioned and remembered that HaShem [miraculously] brought back the children of Israel [to their land] from the land of the north (= Babel) and from all the countries where*

they had been exiled. “
Our sages understood that this does not mean that the memory of the miraculous redemption from Babel will *replace* the memory of the redemption from Egypt. Nonetheless, in order to remember the great miracle of the redemption from Babel, ever since we came back to Israel in the times of Cyrus, we began calling the Hebrew months with the Babylonian non-Jewish names. Each time we mention the name of one of the months of our calendar, we remember our exile in Babel and our miraculous redemption from that second captivity.
Today, in 2020, I have one special prayer to Bore Olam. There is a pasuq that says: □□□□ □□□□□ □□□ , that refers to the time of sunset and how the Kohen could then be purified. But this pasuq could be also understood like: “when the sun comes, it will purify”… the environment. I hope and pray that this coming spring, the UV rays of the sun, and the higher temperatures that we will have BH with the proximity of the summer, will bring an end to the present pandemia, and we will be soon go back to our routine, Minyanim, Bate Kenesiyot, jobs, communities.
After all, the month of Nisan, the month of Spring, is also the month of the greatest miracles.
Dedicated to the Refua Shelema of all the Cholim and bikhlalam “SHEMUEL BEN RIBKA”.
https://halakhaoftheday.org/2020/03/22/invisible-hamets/