

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye

Toldot Yaakov Yosef

Parshas Hachodesh

<p>A mitzvah from the 613 mitzvos: “This month shall be for you” (Shemos 12:2). Shlomo said (Mishlei 8:15): “Through me kings reign.” Rabbi Levi said: A parable—to a duke to whom the legions threw a purple cloak, etc., until “This month shall be for you,” to fulfill what is stated: “Through me kings reign” (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 15:13). And it is astonishing, for it has no basis at all.</p>	<p>מִצְוָה מִהַתְּרַגְלֵי מִצְוֹת הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם (י"ב, ב), אָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה (מִשְׁלֵי ח, ט"ו) בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלֹכוּ, אָמַר רַבִּי לְוִי מִשְׁלֵי לְדוּכָס שֶׁנִּזְרְקוּ לוֹ הַלְגִּיּוֹנוֹת פּוֹרְפִירָא וְכוּ', עַד הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם, לְקַיִּים מֵה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלֹכוּ (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים רַבָּה ט"ו, י"ג). וְהוּא תְמוּנָה שֶׁאֵין לוֹ שִׁחָר כָּלֵל</p>
<p>And it seems to me: It is stated in the Talmud (Yoma 72b): Rabbi Yochanan said—there are three crowns: that of the Mizbeach, that of the Aron, and that of the Shulchan. The crown of the Mizbeach—Aharon merited it. The crown of the Shulchan—David merited it. The crown of the Aron—is still set aside, etc.</p>	<p>וְנִרְאָה לִי: דְּאֵיתָא בְּש"ס דְּיוֹמָא דָּף ע"ב (ע"ב): אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן שְׁלֹשָׁה זָרִים הֵם: שֶׁל מִזְבֵּחַ, וְשֶׁל אֲרוֹן, וְשֶׁל שֻׁלְחָן. שֶׁל מִזְבֵּחַ—זָכָה אַהֲרֹן, וְשֶׁל שֻׁלְחָן—זָכָה דָּוִד, וְשֶׁל אֲרוֹן—עַדְיוֹן מִנְּחָ וְכוּ'</p>
<p>And lest you say it is of lesser status—Scripture says: “Through me kings reign.” Rashi explains: The one who causes kings to reign—that is the Torah—is greater than the king. And one must understand: Why specifically are there three crowns?</p>	<p>וְשִׁמָּא תֵּאמַר תַּחֲמוֹת הוּא—תִּלְמוּד לומר: בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלֹכוּ. וּפִירֵשׁ רַשִׁי: גְּדוֹל הַמַּמְלִיכָה, שֶׁהִיא הַתּוֹרָה, מִן הַמֶּלֶךְ. וְיֵשׁ לְהַבִּינִי: לָמָּה דְּנִקְאָ שְׁלֹשָׁה זָרִים</p>
<p>And it appears [to me] that I have written elsewhere an explanation of the words of Tosafos, and this is the language: “And that which we say: ‘Three things are equivalent to each other—wisdom, humility, and fear (of Heaven),’ Rabbi Yitzchak said: That they are equivalent means that one cannot exist without the other, etc.” See there.</p>	<p>וְנִרְאָה דְּכַתְּבֵיתִי בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר בִּיאור דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹסְפוֹת וְזֶה לְשׁוֹן: וְהָא דְּאֶמְרִינוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים שְׁקוּלִים זֶה בְּזֶה: חֲכָמָה, עֲנוּהָ, יִרְאָה — אָמַר ר' יִצְחָק דְּשְׁקוּלִים הֵיִינוּ. דְּהָא בְּלָא הָא לֹא סָגִי וְכוּ', עַי"ש</p>
<p>And the conclusion from there is that the level of wisdom—which is Torah—cannot exist without fear [of Heaven], for otherwise, Heaven forbid, one becomes a talebearer who separates a close friend (Mishlei 16:28). And also, the level of wisdom cannot exist without humility, as explained there.</p>	<p>וְהַעוֹלָה מִשָּׁם, כִּי מַעֲלַת הַחֲכָמָה שֶׁהִיא הַתּוֹרָה אֵי אֶפְשָׁר בְּלֹא יִרְאָה, וְדִהּוּי חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם נִרְגָּן מִפְּרִיד אֱלוּף (מִשְׁלֵי ט"ז, כ"ח), וְגַם מַעֲלַת הַחֲכָמָה בְּלֹא עֲנוּהָ אֵי אֶפְשָׁר, כְּמִבּוֹאֵר שָׁם</p>
<p>And with this, the aforementioned Gemara can be understood: Rabbi Yochanan said, “There are three crowns.” That is, when the three are together, then they are the three levels mentioned by Tosafos—for one without the other cannot suffice.</p>	<p>וּבְזֶה יוֹבֵן שׁ"ס הַנ"ל, אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן שְׁלֹשָׁה זָרִים הֵם — רִצּוֹן לומר: כְּשֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה יַחַד, אָז הֵם שְׁלוּשׁ מַעֲלֹת שֶׁנִּזְכְּרוּ הַתּוֹסֵ', דְּהָא בְּלֹא הָא לֹא סָגִי</p>
<p>Likewise, when they are three crowns, then it is considered a lofty thing. But when one of them is missing, then none of them is truly called a “crown.” For the crown of the Aron—which is the crown of Torah—is the essential one, only when joined with the crown of the Shulchan, which is the aspect of kingship, which David</p>	<p>ה"נ כְּשֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשָׁה זָרִים — אָז לְמַעֲלָה יִחְשַׁב, מֵה שֶׁאֵין כּוֹן כְּשֶׁחָסַר אֶחָד מֵהֶם — אָז אֵין שׁוֹם אֶחָד נִקְרָא "זֶר". כִּי זֶר שֶׁל הָאֲרוֹן, שֶׁהוּא כְּתֵר תּוֹרָה, הוּא הַעֶקֶר — רַק כְּשֶׁיִּצְטָרֵף עִמּוֹ זֶר שֶׁל הַשֻּׁלְחָן, שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת מְלָכוּת שֶׁנִּזְכָּה בּוֹ דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשְׁלוֹם — דְּהֵיִינוּ בְּחִינַת יִרְאָה עִם הַתּוֹרָה, אָז לְמַעֲלָה יִחְשַׁב</p>

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HaMelech, peace be upon him, merited—meaning the aspect of fear [of Heaven] together with Torah—then it is considered lofty.	
And also, when joined with the aspect of humility, which is the crown of the Mizbeach that Aharon merited—who was equal to Moshe even in the trait of humility, as Rashi explains on the verse (see Shemos 6:26): “He is Moshe and Aharon,” to say that they are equal, etc.	וגם שיצטרף אליו בחינת ענוה, שהיא זר של המזבח שזכה בו אהרן, שנשתנה לבחינת משה גם כן במדת הענוה, כמו שפירש רש"י על הפסוק (עין שמות ו', כ"ו): הוא משה ואהרן, לומר ששקולים וכו'.
If so, it is explained that the three crowns are the three qualities mentioned by the above Tosafos, that one without the other cannot suffice. Understand this well.	אם כן מבואר, כי שלושה זרים היינו שלוש בחינות שכתבו התוס' הנ"ל — דהא בלא הא לא סגי, והבן.
And behold, it is known what our Sages said (Midrash Tanchuma, Bereishis 11): Rabbi Yitzchak said—the Torah need not have begun with anything other than “This month shall be for you,” which is the first mitzvah, etc.	והנה נודע מה שאמרו חז"ל (תנחומא בראשית י"א): אמר רבי יצחק לא היתה צריכה התורה להתחיל אלא 'מהחדש הזה לכם', שהיא מצוה ראשונה וכו'.
Behold, the essence of the Torah is from “This month shall be for you.”	הרי עקר התורה היא מהחדש הזה לכם.
And one may ask: Why does it say “for you” (לכם)? It seems extra. And the Midrashic interpretations of Chazal on this are known.	וזה להקשות: למה לכם — שהוא מיותר. ודרשות חז"ל ידועות.
And it seems to me [to explain]: I wrote elsewhere that it is stated in the Gemara (Berachos 7a, Avodah Zarah 4b): “And [he] knows the knowledge of the Most High” (Bamidbar 24:16)—that he knew how to pinpoint the exact moment of Hashem’s anger, and how long is His anger? A moment, etc.	ונראה לי: דכתבתי במקום אחר, דאיתא בש"ס (ברכות ז. עבודה זרה ד:): “וידע דעת עליון” (במדבר כ"ד, ט"ז) — שהיה יודע לכוון אותה שעה שהיא נעמו של 'הקדוש ברוך הוא, וכמה נעמו — רגע וכו'.
And Tosafos asked: What can be cursed in a single moment? And they answered that he could say “destroy them (כלם),” and then it would be transformed—from “כלם” to “מלך (king),” as it is said (Devarim 33:5): “And there was a king in Yeshurun.”	והקשו התוספות: מה יכול לקלל ברגע? ומשיני: שיכול לומר “כלם”, ואחר כך נהפך מן “כלם” נעשה “מלך”, “שנאמר (דברים ל"ג, ה) “ויהי בישרון מלך”.
As Tosafos wrote in tractate Avodah Zarah, etc. (4b s.v. וידע), see there.	וכמו שכתבו התוספות במסכת עבודה זרה וכו' (ד' ע"ב ד"ה וידע), עי"ש.
And this is [the meaning of] what is written (Devarim 23:6): “And Hashem turned the curse into a blessing for you, because Hashem your G-d loves you,” etc. See there.	וזהו שנאמר (דברים כ"ג, ו) “ויהפך ה' אלהיך לך את הקללה לברכה כי אהבך ה' אלהיך” וכו', עי"ש.
And the concept of the transformation from curse to blessing is through Torah, combined with fear [of Heaven].	וענין ההיפוך מקללה לברכה — הוא על-ידי התורה, בצרוף היראה.

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For what had previously been “a talebearer who separates a close friend,” which causes, Heaven forbid, curses—now, through the unification of Torah and fear (which is the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He), it causes blessing and abundance in the world.	פי מה שְׁהִיָּה "נִרְגָּן מִפְּרִיד אֱלוֹהִים", הַגּוֹרֵם חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם קָלָלוֹת — וְעַתָּה עַל־יְדֵי הַחֲבוּר, הַתּוֹרָה וְהִירָאָה, שֶׁהִיא יְחִיד קוֹדֶשׁ-אֲבִרִיד-הוּא — גּוֹרֵם בְּרָכָה וְשִׁפְעַ בְּעוֹלָם.
As I explained elsewhere in elucidating the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): “And you shall place [these words]” (Devarim 11:18)— SM TM —the Torah is compared to a potion of life. A parable: to a person, etc.	כְּמוֹ שֶׁפָּתַחְתִּי בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר בִּיאור ש"ס (קְדוּשִׁין ל:): "וְשִׁמְתָּם" (דְּבָרִים י"א, י"ח) — ס"ס תָּם — נִמְשָׁלָה 'הַתּוֹרָה לְסֵם חַיִּים, מְשָׁל לְאָדָם וְכו'.
And the conclusion from there is: through the potion of Torah, it transforms the מ"ת (death) —which is the evil inclination—to ח"ם (wholesomeness) , etc. See there.	וְהַעוֹלָה מִשָּׁם: עַל־יְדֵי סֵם הַתּוֹרָה — מִהֲפֹךְ מִן "מ"ת", [שֶׁהוּא הַיֵּצֵר הָרָע, שִׁיְהִיָּה "ת"ם" וְכו', עַי"ש].
So too here: it transforms from the evil inclination, which is “כָּלֵם (destroy them),” into “מֶלֶךְ (king).”	וְהִכִּי נָמִי — מִהֲפֹךְ מִן הַיֵּצֵר הָרָע, שֶׁהוּא "כָּלֵם", "וְנִבְעָשָׂה "מֶלֶךְ".
And this is the meaning of what is written: “And Hashem your G-d turned the curse for you”—meaning the evil inclination—“into a blessing.” And this is clear.	וְזֶהוּ שֶׁהוּא דִּכְתִּיב: "וַיִּהְיֶה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ אֵת הַקְּלָלָה" — שֶׁהוּא הַיֵּצֵר הָרָע — "לְבָרָכָה", וְק"ל.
And behold, the word “לָכֶם (for you)” has three possible arrangements: 1) מֶלֶךְ (3 כָּלֵם, 2) מֶלֶךְ (1) לָכֶם.	וְהִנֵּה תִבֵּת "לָכֶם" — יֵשׁ בָּהּ שְׁלֹשָׁה צְרוּפִים: א' — "לָכֶם", ב' — "כָּלֵם", ג' — "מֶלֶךְ".
And with this, we can understand: “This month shall be for you”—it is difficult: Why does it say “for you”? And the answer is that this is what is written: “Through me kings reign.”	וּבִנְיָה יוֹבֵן: "הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם" — קִשָּׁה: לָמָּה "לָכֶם"? "וּמִשְׁנֵי: הֵדָא הוּא דִּכְתִּיב "בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלֹכוּ".
The intent is: through Torah, which begins with “This month shall be for you,” it is given over to you to transform “כָּלֵם” into “מֶלֶךְ.”	הַכּוֹנֵן: כִּי עַל־יְדֵי הַתּוֹרָה, הַמִּתְחִיל מִהַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם — הִיא מְסוּרָה לָכֶם הַבְּחִירָה לַעֲשׂוֹת זֹאת: לְהַפְּךְ מִן "כָּלֵם" לְ"מֶלֶךְ".
And this is what is meant by “Through me kings reign”—because Torah, when joined with kingship (which is fear [of Heaven])—then “through me, kings.”	וְזֶהוּ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלֹכוּ" — כִּי הַתּוֹרָה בְּחֲבוּר, "מְלָכוּת, שֶׁהִיא יִרְאָה — וְזֶהוּ "בִּי מְלָכִים".
That is: when “בִּי”—in Torah—there is the aspect of kingship, which is fear, then they [too] reign.	כְּשֵׁי"ש "בִּי", בַּתּוֹרָה, בְּחִינַת מְלָכוּת, שֶׁהִיא יִרְאָה — אֵז "מְלָכוּת" הֵם גַּם פֶּן.
As it says: “And there was a king in Yeshurun” (Devarim 33:5), because they transformed from “כָּלֵם” to “מֶלֶךְ.”	כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיְהִי בִישֻׁרוּן מֶלֶךְ" (דְּבָרִים ל"ג, ה'), "עַל־יְדֵי שֶׁהִפְכוּ מִן "כָּלֵם" — "מֶלֶךְ".
Understand this well. And in the parsha of Bereishis, I also wrote at length about this. See there.	וְהִבֵּן. וּבִפְרָשַׁת בְּרֵאשִׁית גַּם פֶּן פָּתַחְתִּי בְּאֲרִיכוֹת מְנָה, עַי"ש.

Summary and Explanation



1. "This Month Shall Be for You" – the First Mitzvah and Its Deeper Meaning

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The Torah begins with the creation of the world, but according to Rabbi Yitzchak (Midrash Tanchuma, Bereishis 11), it should have begun with the **first mitzvah** given to the Jewish people:

"החודש הזה לכם" – "This month shall be for you" (Shemos 12:2).

This mitzvah, which establishes **Jewish time and renewal** through the calendar, is central—not just chronologically, but **spiritually**—to the essence of Torah.

2. The Phrase “לכם” – For You”: Why Does the Torah Emphasize It?

The word “לכם” seems extra—why does the Torah stress that the month is “for you”?

The answer lies in a **play on the letters** of the word **לכם (for you)**, which can be rearranged into:

1. **לכם** – simply “for you”
2. **כלם** – *Kalem*, meaning “destroy them” (a curse)
3. **מלך** – *Melech*, “king” (a blessing)

The implication: **The power is given to “you” to choose** which version of “לכם” manifests—**curse or kingship**, destruction or elevation.

3. How Does One Transform “Curse” into “Blessing”?

This concept is rooted in the **story of Bilam** (Bamidbar 24:16; Devarim 23:6). He knew the **moment of Divine anger** and attempted to curse the Jews by saying “**כלם**” (**destroy them**). However, Hashem transformed it into “**מלך**” (**king**)—as it says:

“וַיְהִי בִישֻׁרוּן מֶלֶךְ” – "And there was a king in Yeshurun" (Devarim 33:5)

“וַיִּהְיֶה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ אֶת הַקְּלָלָה לְבִרְכָּה” – "Hashem your G-d turned the curse into a blessing" (Devarim 23:6)

This transformation happens through **Torah** combined with **Yirah (fear/reverence of G-d)**.

4. Three Crowns and Their Deeper Meaning

Rabbi Yochanan (Yoma 72b) teaches that there are **three “crowns” (זָרִים)**:

- **Mizbeach** (Altar) → Aharon → **Humility**
- **Shulchan** (Table) → David → **Kingship / Fear**
- **Aron** (Ark) → Torah → **Wisdom**

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Each on its own is incomplete. Only when **all three are united**—Torah, Yirah, and Anavah (humility)—does the true greatness of Torah shine. This matches Tosafos' teaching that **wisdom, humility, and fear of G-d are equal**, and **none can exist without the others**.

Thus, the **"crown" of Torah** (the Ark) becomes meaningful **only when joined** with:

- **Fear/Yirah** (kingship → David → Shulchan)
- **Humility** (Aharon → Mizbeach)



5. The Role of Torah in Reversal and Elevation

Torah is described (Kiddushin 30b) as a **"סם חיים"** – a **potion of life**.

It has the power to transform:

- **מָוֶת** (death) into **חַיִּים** (wholesomeness)
- **פְּלַג** (curse) into **מַלְכוּת** (kingship)

This transformation is only possible when Torah is **combined with Yirah** (awe of G-d), symbolizing a full **spiritual unification** with Hashem.



Takeaway

You, the learner of Torah, are given the **power of לָכֶם** – "for you":

- The Torah empowers **your choice**.
- You can turn destruction (**פְּלַג**) into majesty (**מַלְכוּת**) through living with **Torah, Yirah, and Anavah**.

This is the deeper meaning of the verse:

"בִּי מַלְכִּים יִמְלֹכוּ" – "Through Me, kings reign" (Mishlei 8:15)

When **"בִּי"** (Torah) contains **"מַלְכוּת"** (Yirah), then true kingship emerges—for both the individual and the nation.