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PARSHAT BO

# Reflections

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YU TORAH MITZION KOLLEL OF CHICAGO

## Look Up

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Look up at the moon—it's beautiful, majestic, and so far away. During the space race of the 1960's, the moon was the embodiment of achievement and supremacy for nations across the globe. Yet neither grandeur nor beauty create holiness, so how does observing a fanciful orb become our first mitzvah? Why would Hashem ever want us to keep track of the movement of the moon, no less make it the introductory, formative, and first mitzvah?

To complicate matters, the Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (2:8) teaches that anyone who sees the moon has to go to Jerusalem and inform the Sanhedrin. Without a witness, the Jewish Supreme Court has no ability to begin the new month; so much so that a person can break Shabbos in order to get there! This is very odd. We know *precisely* when the new moon will appear. We have calendars printed years in advance, and despite the surprise announcements each month in shul, "the molad" has been the worst kept secret for over a millennium! If we can calculate the new moon, why do we need witnesses to testify for the court?

Let's look back at the moon. Even after landing men on the moon, it still remains out of reach. To date, only 12 people in history have walked its evanescent surface. It's larger than life. It's out of reach. The moon dictates the tides and slows the rotation of the earth. In times past, we relied solely on the moon for light in the dark of night. It is easy to ask: what relationship could I possibly have with the grandeur of the moon?

Enter the first mitzvah: We look up at the vast sky and see the moon sitting hundreds of thousands of miles away. In that moment, scholar or student, old or young, healthy or healing, anyone seeing this overwhelming sight, has a mitzvah to perform. This first mitzvah communicates that although the world is so much bigger than we can fathom, Hashem cares about our little mitzvah. When confronted with something so intimidating, Hashem commands us to perform a mitzvah and assert our place in the world. And that initial mitzvah sets the tone for every mitzvah the Jewish people will fulfill.

Over three thousand years ago, this message resonated with the newly released slaves, and today that relevance only grows. The modern world is so much bigger, and we appreciate even more how small we are. We are equally in need of this reminder and this encouragement—that what we do matters. And this first mitzvah, found in our parsha, is just the beginning.

## Reflection Questions:

- Why are the plagues split into 2 parshiot?
- Why does Hashem speak to Moshe in the middle of Moshe's conversation with Pharaoh?
- Why end the parsha with the mitzvah of Tefillin?
- Why are there 2 separate paragraphs commanding us to wear Tefillin? What are they teaching differently?

