BALANCING CONSISTENCY AND CHANGE
A lesson from the Jewish leap year.
Farbrengen – 6 Tishrei, 5744-1983

There is a special lesson from this year, being a leap year.

Why do we need a leap year?

Because the solar year is longer than the lunar year, and the seasons are determined by the movement of the sun. The Jewish People count our days by the moon and therefore our festivals are determined by the lunar cycle.

Eventually, every few years, the solar year will be about one month later than the lunar year. That is when we add a thirteenth month to the year, and this synchronizes the two cycles. As a result, Pesach falls out in the spring, where it belongs and Sukkot in autumn— not earlier.

What is the difference between the sun and the moon?

They each "shine upon the earth," in their own way: The sun's light is unchanging. It is the same on the first day of the week and the first day of the month as it is on the seventh day of the week and on the fifteenth day of the month.

The moon is just the opposite: There are no two consecutive days when the moon is the same. It is always different from yesterday and tomorrow.

"He placed the world in their hearts." A person is a reflection of the world. Life must mirror these two ideas of constancy and change: In certain areas, a person must be consistent and unchanging. And this enables him to succeed at changing whatever requires change – as the immutable sun gives light to the ever-changing moon.

Conversely, there are life issues where change is necessary, for he must innovate.

For example: When a novel concept —even of Torah—is introduced, how do you arrive at the new insight? By finding fault in the earlier understanding rendering it unacceptable, you can go on to a greater, deeper, wisdom.

Conventional wisdom develops in stages, and one can build on previous presumptions. But a leap to new and higher understanding must come through refuting the previous presumptions.

When the Talmud offers a conclusive explanation, the term used is "rather." "Rather, says the Sage…" "Rather" means a retraction of all previous explanations. Now, when one is

innovating, and to be worthy of the title 'Chacham' one must innovate, he must build on solid principles.

When the principles are firmly set, as Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers define it, "the first premise," these—as the sun—are the unchangeable base rules, upon which all innovative argument, difficulties and contradictions can be argued. Upon these rules, one can "uproot mountains" of theory and "grind them in each other," dissolving the theory, and then use the dust to "build new mountains."

All this is true only when the novel theory is illuminated by, and is based on, the foundations of the "first premise." We find this throughout Torah. There are the rules which are unchangeable, and these rules themselves offer rules on how to innovate in Torah.

This is the lesson from a leap year. The sun and moon have two different, even opposing patterns: Constancy and change. Likewise a person may be talented in one way or the other—and is therefore inclined toward a certain practice.

The leap year teaches us: No! Since "I was created to serve my Master" in a manner that reflects the Heavenly pattern, you must toil in both ways: The unchangeable rules, as well as the innovative aspects of Judaism.

You may argue, "My nature is to be innovative." Or conversely, "I have a remarkable memory, I don't need to innovate and grow, I will suffice what I have already learned." Torah says: "This may be *your* nature. But you were created 'to serve your *Master*.'" You must actively pursue both modes, even if it requires sacrifice!

He may retort: These two modes are incompatible! Torah says: Yes. But then again, you are a Jew, and it is expected of you to do the impossible!

And you must do both tasks "to serve your Master." And this with total devotion since we are talking about your Master who gave you the privilege and the ability – and Who requests – that you serve Him!

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