Rambam's Positive Commandment #153

The Sanhedrin is commanded to calculate a calendar of months and years. Rambam derives this commandment from Exodus 12:2: "This month shall be the head of the months for you. It shall be the first of the months of the year for you."

Rashi, in his classic commentary on the Torah[1] writes that this mitzvah, known as *Kiddush haChodesh*, is actually the *first* commandment, not the 153rd, while Rambam enumerates belief in G-d as the first commandment. How can we reconcile these two opinions?

It's All About Perspective

From a G-dly perspective, *Kiddush haChodesh* is indeed the first commandment. From a human perspective, however, belief in G-d needs to come first; we need to have a foundation of belief in G-d in order to fulfill His commandments. The Talmud says that first we must accept the yoke of G-d, and then the yoke of the commandments.

From G-d's perspective, though, what is so important about the mitzvah of *Kiddush haChodesh* that it is considered the first?

The Purpose of Creation

The objective of creation, and of the entire Torah, is to bring holiness into the world. This is the mission of the Jewish people for which we were chosen by G-d – to sanctify creation. This is the meaning of *Kiddush haChodesh*, the Sanctification of the New Moon, that everything we do should bring holiness to the world. Up until the new moon appears, it is a normal weekday. Then, when the Bais Din confirms the sighting of the new moon, the beginning of the new month, it becomes a holy day. In Temple times, we would bring an extra sacrifice in honor of the day's sanctity. We must bring this holiness into our normal weekday existence.

Another approach is that the mitzvah of *Kiddush haChodesh* is not only first in importance, but also first in creation. Generally, we say that when G-d created time and space, He created them together. In reality, the creation of time preceded the creation of space. Since the first thing G-d created was time, and our mission is to sanctify G-d's creations, the first mitzvah is to sanctify time. A practical example is that man first looks on his calendar to see what day it is (time) then he plans at what location (space) he needs to be.

Calculating the Calendar: The Details

In the times of Holy Temple , the Beth Din and Sanhedrin pronounced the day of the new moon "*Mekudash*" (holy) only after two witnesses came to testify that the new moon had been sighted.[2]

When witnesses came, the Beth Din sanctified the 30th day of the month and made that day the first of the month. If no witnesses came, the 31st day became by default the first of the new month, and there was no sanctification. If so, was the mitzvah not fulfilled?

Another part of the Beth Din's responsibility was intercalating the 354-day lunar calendar and 365-day solar calendar. The lunar calendar, which the Jewish people follow, is eleven days short of the solar calendar. We intercalate the calendars and create leap years to ensure that Passover will always fall in the spring, which is the season the Torah designates for it. We end up with seven leap years – years with an extra month – in a cycle of 19 years. We also end up with a question – what does calculating the calendar in such detail have to do with the mitzvah of sanctifying the day of the new moon's appearance?

To strengthen our question: the Rebbe points out[3] that in Rambam's elaboration on the mitzvah of *Kiddush haChodesh*, Rambam actually omits the term *Kiddush* (sanctification) but includes the requirements of calculating the calendar and of designating which day will be the first of the new month.[4] Why?

Time Management

The answer is: The whole of creation is for the sake of Torah and the Jewish people; in other words, G-d created the world so that the Jews would follow the Torah, thereby imbuing creation with holiness. It is not just creation *ex nihilo* that is supposed to be holy – every moment of creation should be holy. Rambam's point is that it is not just the first day of the month that should be holy, but every minute of every occasion. The mitzvah of sanctifying the new month is to calculate and intercalate the calendar. To do this, the Sages had every hour and minute of the whole year in their mind; they had to closely observe the stars and planets, and had to calculate all these details with mind-bogglingly intricate diagrams and complex mathematical equations. Through this, they sanctified and gave *us* potential to sanctify every hour and every minute of the day of the year. By making these calculations, they sanctified time, and this teaches us that we, too, must value our time by spending it on holy pursuits.

Story

The Rebbe told a story[5] that he heard from his father-in-law, the Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok, about the Rashba, a sage who had a very hectic daily schedule. He gave three advanced Torah classes each day, answered letters from around the world asking very involved halachic questions, prayed three times, did his own learning, and still had time to take an hour-long stroll. How? The Frierdicker Rebbe said that the Rashba had *hatzlacha b'zman*, success with time – every single moment he was fully present in whatever he did, putting himself completely into it. When a person puts themselves completely into what they're doing, they are fulfilling the mitzvah of *Kiddush haChodesh*, sanctifying time. When we realize that every moment is precious and organize our time properly, G-d will give us time for everything.

May we all have *hatzlacha b'zman*, to sanctify each moment, and bring about the ***time*** of Moshiach when the Sanhedrin will be reestablished, and we will truly see how every moment is overflowing with holiness!

Footnotes

1) Genesis 1:1
2) Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh 2:8
3) *Lekkutei Sichos* Vol. 26, Parshas Bo 1
4) Rambam's introduction to Chapter 1 of Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh
5) *Sichos Kodesh*, 20 Shevat 5730