

Bais HaVaad on the Parsha

Parshas Hachodesh

Man and the Moon

Adapted from a shiur

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This month is for you the head of the months.... (Shemos 12:1)

The *mishnayos* in *Rosh Hashanah* describe the performance of this mitzvah during the period of *Bayis Sheini* and beyond: Witnesses came to the Sanhedrin and testified that they saw the new moon. The Sanhedrin would interrogate them and then declare “*mekudash mekudash*,” making that day Rosh Chodesh. Bonfires would be lit on a series of mountaintops to communicate the date of Rosh Chodesh to all the communities in Eretz Yisrael and Bavel. When this method was undermined by sabotage, they sent messengers to the communities. In the time of the *Amora'im*, astronomical calculations were used. When this practice, too, was subverted, Hillel Hanasi (a contemporary of Abaye and Rava) implemented the fixed calendar that we have used ever since.

Who is qualified to perform *kiddush hachodesh*?

According to the Rambam (*Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh* 5:1; *Sefer Hamitzvos*, Asei 153), it is the province of the Sanhedrin, but they can authorize

another bais din in Eretz Yisrael to perform it. It seems that the Rambam holds *kiddush hachodesh* is not a *p'sak din*; rather, *Klal Yisrael*, represented by the Sanhedrin, chooses when the month will begin. This can be done by any bais din in Eretz Yisrael when needed, and when there is none, *Klal Yisrael* themselves can do it.

The Ramban (*Hasagos on Sefer Hamitzvos*) argues that declaring “*mekudash mekudash*” is a *p'sak din* that may be issued by any bais din of *semuchin*. Hillel Hanasi was *mekadesh*, in advance, every future Rosh Chodesh.