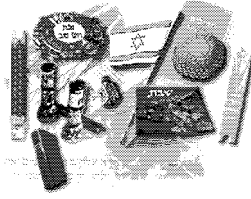


Introduction to the Jewish Festivals



The Jewish Calendar

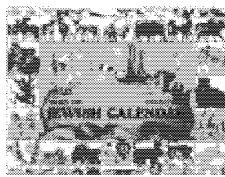
Most calendars are made up of one way of measuring time during the year. It is called the “solar” calendar and is based on the time it takes for the earth to make one cycle around the sun. This takes 365 days (and a few hours). The year is then divided into 12 months, four months of 30 days, 7 months of 31 days and one month of 28 days. This adds up to 365 days.



Question:

Is the Australian calendar a “solar” one? Explain:

The Jewish calendar is made up of *two different ways* of measuring time. On the one hand, it uses the solar calendar, because the four seasons -- and all of agriculture -- is connected to the earth’s rotation around the sun. But it also uses a “lunar” calendar, based on this verse in the Torah (12:2 שמות), which appears right before the Exodus:



הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֹס רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לְכֹס
לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:

“This renewal-of-the-moon-cycle should be the first of months; the first of the months of the year for you”

HaShem told Moshe and Aharon that the new cycle of the moon in the spring month of the Exodus from Egypt should be counted as the first month of the Jewish

calendar (later named *Nisan*). Therefore, we were told to use a lunar calendar -- the cycle of the moon -- to measure time for “Jewish” months. As we will see shortly, we determine all our Jewish holidays by the lunar months.

Question: 

Why do you think the “new” moon was to be associated with the Exodus?

But counting time by a lunar calendar creates a problem!



A **lunar** month measures time by one cycle of the moon around the earth. It takes 29.5 days for the cycle, so a lunar year is made up of six months of 29 days and six months of thirty days. That makes 354 days for a year.

As we can see there is an 11 day difference between the two ways of measuring a year ($365-354=11$). This presents a problem, because in two or three years, there will be an extra month difference between the two calendars. The lunar calendar will be short a whole month as compared with the solar calendar.

Question: 

Why is this a problem for the observance of Jewish Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot?

So in the Jewish calendar, we have to make an adjustment every two or three years (7 times in 19 years). We *add* an extra month before the spring festival of Pesach (the

extra month is Adar II) and that adjusts the lunar to solar year so that they stay similar to each other and the holidays are celebrated in the right seasons.



Question:

Why do we choose to add a second month of Adar (Adar II)? Why not another month?

Fill in the boxes to distinguish between a solar and lunar calendar:

	Solar Calendar	Lunar Calendar
Based on cycle of the... (Moon or Earth?)		
Days in a month		
Days in a Year:		
Determines Seasons? (Yes or No)		
Proclaimed by the Sanhedrin? (Yes or No)		

Rosh Chodesh

Proclaiming the sighting of this first sliver of moonlight on the night of the Exodus was the first formal commandment given to the nation in the Torah. How was this symbol preserved and translated into *halacha* (Jewish law)?



In the times of the Temple, when the High Court (*Sanhedrin*) sat within the Temple complex, the law required two reliable witnesses to testify before judges that they had seen the first crescent of the new moon. On the 30th of the month, Judges of the Sanhedrin assembled in the Temple courtyard to await the appearance of witnesses. After formal questioning, if the testimony was accepted as reliable, the Court proclaimed the next day the beginning of the month. If no reliable witnesses appeared or the moon could not be seen on the 30th, the next day was automatically proclaimed the first day of the new month.

Special additional offerings were made on the first day of the new month with the sounding of trumpets, and festive meals were enjoyed.

Why was it important to proclaim the first day of the month?

Of most significance to our discussion, is how and why the Court established the first day of a month. The first day of a month determined on what specific day a festival would fall during that month. Since all festivals (like Pesach and Succot) required stopping work, bringing offerings and enjoying festive meals, the exact date was crucial to celebrating each festival at the proper time.

Witnesses determine the new month, not the calendar

It is curious to find that the law defines the mitzvah of establishing the first day of the month -- not based on fixed astronomic calculation (the moon's orbit), but

-- by human witness of the moon's first visible crescent of light. Why was it that a set calendar – which existed in all Ancient Near East cultures --was not established by the Sanhedrin as the means to set the calendar months?



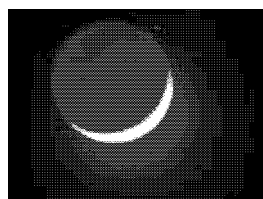
Question:

Why do you think they didn't use a calendar?

The suggestion that the Jews were unable to predict the phases of the moon and had to rely on the primitive method of watching for it each month, is baseless. It's unacceptable because an accurate calendar was certainly used by the High Court.



During the cloudy season, weeks could pass by when the moon could not be visible and besides, watching for the moon in the first place, implies a calculation of when to start looking! In fact, the halacha required an accurate calendar so that if valid witnesses did not appear or the moon could not be seen, the 31st of the month became the first of the new month without the new moon being seen at all, as we mentioned above.



The whole procedure of proclaiming the new moon -- and hence the new month -- clearly indicates an intentional emphasis on *human participation*, not on the astronomic phenomena. An even more striking halachik example of the way people influence the actual calendar is the fact that the Court could decide to simply shift one day to start the new month, for the *convenience of the people* (so that, e.g., Yom Kippur and Shabbat should not fall on consecutive days). Or, if it was found that the Court erred in establishing the 1st of Tishrei, Yom Kippur was kept according to the mistaken declaration! Probably most unusual was the Court's ability to add an entire month (Adar II) -- even not in a leap-year -- if the winter rains threatened to interfere with road travel or other preparations for Pesach!

All these examples point to the unmistakable observation that the law of declaring a new month was concerned primarily with the human factor.

To understand this intentional emphasis on the human factor in proclaiming the new month, let us return to the key word, מועד, meaning “appointment” or “place of meeting.”

The Torah uses this word for the meeting between a person and God.



Sometimes the “inquirer” comes to initiate the meeting, at other times God calls Moses to Him from the Tent of Meeting (“אֵלֶיךָ מוֹעֵד”) and sometimes Moses goes to the Tent to inquire of God.

Note that both parties can initiate the “meeting.” However, the nuance of “making an appointment” is significant. In such a case, both parties wish to meet each other and mutually agree on a time.

After discussion in class, give your own example of making a meeting time with your friend to illustrate the point

“Making an Appointment”

With this analogy in mind, we can better understand the stress on proclaiming the new month by representatives of the nation rather than by imposing the unchangeable laws of astronomy. For our meeting with God at the Temple in Jerusalem, the *moed* is set by both parties. We fix the start of the month and God fixes the date within the month. God calls us to Him on the 15th of Tishrei (Succot) and the 15th of Nisan (Pesach), but *we* determine when the first day of each month will be, and together we come to meet. It is, therefore, the act of the nation proclaiming each month that gives the “מועד” character to our festivals. *It is the human being, not the lunar cycle, who personally makes an appointment with God -- with our convenience taken into consideration. As noted above, we can postpone a festival for reasons of national convenience. As a nation we come to the festivals in joy and gratitude -- not because the date forced us, but -- because we yearn to experience God’s Presence in His Holy Temple.*



Question:

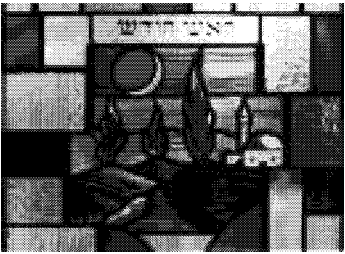
In your own words (not copying from the text) explain how the combination of HaShem giving us the date of a holiday in the Torah and we determining the first of the month, gives character to our festivals.

Pretend that you lived in the time of the Temple and were visiting Jerusalem on the eve of the New Moon. Write what you would see in the court of the Sanhedrin. Include everything you learned.

Extra Credit Research Question:

If we have a calendar now, why do we have to observe two days of Yom Tov? We know the exact day and according to the Torah, we observe just one day of a festival, like we do now in Israel (except Rosh HaShanah which is always two days).

(Hint: In your research, look up the topic of "The Second Day of a Festival in the Diaspora"). You can also research this question by asking your Rabbi (not your teachers!). Make sure you get sources.



Rosh Chodesh Prayers And Vocabulary

Announcing the New Moon

The Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh, just after reading the Torah, we announce the date of Rosh Chodesh the coming week. Even though we have a calendar, we do this in commemoration of the Sanhedrin announcing Rosh Chodesh based on witnesses, in the time of the Temple.

This Shabbat is called: שבת מברכים and the prayer for a good, healthy, successful month is called ברכת החודש.



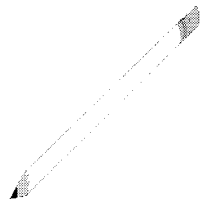
Additional Prayers

We add a special paragraph during the עמידה and during ברכת המזון called יעלה ויבוא which describes our wish to be able to go up to the Temple again in Jerusalem on the New Moon and our wish for a blessed and successful month.

We also sing an abbreviated Hallel to express the joy of celebrating a new month.

The Saturday night after Rosh Chodesh, when we can see the moon, we recite קידוש לבנה, which is a blessing over seeing the new moon. This reminds us of the Sanhedrin declaring the new moon by witnesses seeing the first sliver of moonlight.

Fill in the blanks:



The Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh is called

_____. On that Shabbat, we say a special prayer called _____ which announces the name and day of new month. We bless the new moon after it appears to remind us _____.

The prayer that we add in the amidah and benching on Rosh Chodesh is (Hebrew)_____.

The special prayer we sing on Rosh Chodesh is _____.

It describes_____

Write the Hebrew word for these definitions:

Vocabulary for this Unit

Month or “renewal-of-the-moon-cycle”	
Either the first day of the new month or, when <u>two days</u> , the last day of the previous month also	
Jewish Festival. From the root word meaning: “Appointment” or “set a meeting” or “meeting place”	
The Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh	
Announcing and Blessing the New Month on Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh	
Prayer we add in Tefillot for Rosh Chodesh	
Blessing the New Moon the Shabbat night after Rosh Chodesh	