

Dateline: Calendars, Months and Judaism

Solar or Lunar?

The months of the year are lunar months, as [implied by Numbers 28:14]: "... the burnt offering of the month when it is renewed," and [Exodus 12:2]: "This month shall be for you the first of months." [Concerning this verse,] our Sages commented: The Holy One, blessed be He, showed Moses in the vision of prophecy an image of the moon and told him, "When you see the moon like this, sanctify it." The years we follow are solar years, as [implied by Deuteronomy 16:1]: "Keep the month of spring."

A leap year is a year that includes an additional month. The extra month that is added is always Adar, and thus the year contains two Adarim: the first Adar and the second Adar. Why is this month added? Because of the season of spring, so that Pesach will fall then, as [implied by Deuteronomy 16:1]: "Take heed the month of spring" [This command can be interpreted to mean, "Take heed] that this month falls in the spring season. Were the month [of Adar] not to be added [from time to time], there are times when Pesach would fall in the summer, and times [when it would fall] in the rainy season. (Maimonides Mishneh Torah Hilchot Kiddush haChodesh 1, 4)

Sectarian Strife

Initially, they would light torches. After the Samaritans [*Kutim*] corrupted the Sages instituted that messengers should go out . .

And from which mountains would they light the torches? From the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem to Sartava, and from Sartava to Gerofina, and from Gerofina to Havran, and from Havran to Beit Baltin. And from Beit Baltin they would not move. Rather, the one who was appointed for this task would wave the torch back and forth and up and down, until he would see the entire Diaspora before him alight like one large bonfire (Mishnah Rosh haShanah 2:2,4)

Who Decides?

When Rabbi Yehoshua heard that even Rabbi Dosa ben Horkinas maintained that they must submit to Rabban Gamliel's decision, he took his staff and his money in his hand, and went to Yavne to Rabban Gamliel on the day on which Yom Kippur occurred according to his own calculation. Upon seeing him, Rabban Gamliel stood up and kissed him on his head. He said to him: Come in peace, my teacher and my student. You are my teacher in wisdom, as Rabbi Yehoshua was wiser than anyone else in his generation, and you are my student, as you accepted my statement, (Mishnah Rosh haShanah 2:9)

Hanania the nephew of Rabbi Joshua intercalated outside the Land. Rabbi sent him three letters through Rabbi Isaac and Rabbi Nathan. In one he wrote, to His holiness Hanania. And in one he wrote, the kid goats you left behind became rams. And in one he wrote, if you do not accept, go to the thistle desert, do slaughter and let Onias sprinkle. After the first [letter], he honored them. After the second, he honored them. After the third, he wanted to disgrace them. They said to him, you cannot do that since you already did honor us. Rabbi Isaac rose and quoted, it is written in the Torah: These are the holidays of Hanania the nephew of Rabbi Joshua. They said to him, “the holidays of the Eternal”. He said to them, that is with us. Rabbi Nathan rose and finished: “For from Babylonia will go Torah forth and the Eternal’s word from Nahar-Peqod.” They said to him, “for from Zion will Torah go forth and the Eternal’s word from Jerusalem”. He said to them, that is with us. (Yerushalmi Nedarim 6:8)

Tax Years

אַרְבַּעָה רֵאשֵׁי שָׁנִים הֵם. בְּאַחַד בְּנִסָּן רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לַמְּלָכִים וְלַרְגָּלִים. בְּאַחַד בְּאֵלוּל רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לַמַּעֲשֵׂר בַּהֶמָּה. רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר וְרַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן אוֹמְרִים, בְּאַחַד בְּתִשְׁרִי. בְּאַחַד בְּתִשְׁרִי רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְשָׁנִים וְלִשְׁמֹטִין וְלִיּוֹבְלוֹת, לְנִטְיָעָה וְלִירִקוֹת. בְּאַחַד בְּשֶׁבֶט, רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְאֵילָן, כְּדַבְּרֵי בֵּית שְׁמַאי. בֵּית הִלֵּל אוֹמְרִים, בְּחֻמְשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ:

There are four New Years: On the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings and for the Festivals. On the first of Elul is the New Year for animal tithes;. Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say: on the first of Tishrei. On the first of Tishrei is the New Year for years,; for Sabbatical Years and Jubilee Years, for planting, and for vegetables. On the first of Shevat is the New Year for the tree; in accordance with the statement of Beit Shammai. But Beit Hillel say: on the fifteenth of Shevat. (Mishnah Rosh HaShanah 1:1)

Judgment Years

בְּאַרְבַּעָה פְּרָקִים הָעוֹלָם נִדּוֹן, בְּפֶסַח עַל הַתְּבוּאָה, בְּעֶצֶרֶת עַל פְּרוֹת הָאֵילָן, בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לִפְנֵי כְּבִי מְרוֹן, שְׁנָאֲמַר (תהלים לג) הַיּוֹצֵר יַחַד לָבָם, הַיִּמְבִּין אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם. וּבְחֹג נִדּוֹנִין עַל הַמַּיִם:

At four times of the year the world is judged: On Passover concerning grain; on *Shavuot* concerning fruits on Rosh HaShana, all creatures pass before Him like sheep [*benei maron*], as it is stated: “He Who fashions their hearts alike, Who considers all their deeds” (Psalms 33:15); and on the festival of *Sukkot* they are judged concerning water, (Mishnah Rosh HaShanah 1:2)

Like Soldiers or Like Sheep?

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לִפְנֵי כְּבִי מְרוֹן. מֵאֵי “כְּבִי מְרוֹן”? הֲכֵא תַּרְגִּימוֹ: כְּבִי אֲמַרְנָא. רִישׁ לְקִישׁ אָמַר: כְּמַעֲלוֹת בֵּית מְרוֹן. אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: כְּחַיִּילוֹת שֶׁל בֵּית דָּוִד. On Rosh HaShana all creatures pass before Him like *benei maron*.: What is the meaning of the phrase *benei maron*? Here [in Babylonia] they interpreted it to

mean: Like a flock of sheep [*kivnei imarna*]. Reish Lakish] said: Like the ascent of Beit Maron,]. Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said another opinion: Like the soldiers of the house of King David (Rosh HaShanah 18a)

Tishrei or Nisan?

Rabbi Eliezer says: In Tishrei the world was created; in Tishrei the Patriarchs were born; in Tishrei the Patriarchs died; on Passover Isaac was born; on Rosh HaShana Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah were remembered by God and conceived; on Rosh HaShana Joseph came out from prison; on Rosh HaShana our forefathers' slavery in Egypt ceased; in Nisan the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt; and in Tishrei in the future the Jewish people will be redeemed in the final redemption with the coming of the Messiah. Rabbi Yehoshua disagrees and says: In Nisan the world was created; in Nisan the Patriarchs were born; in Nisan the Patriarchs died; on Passover Isaac was born; on Rosh HaShana Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah were remembered by God and conceived sons; on Rosh HaShana Joseph came out from prison; on Rosh HaShana our forefathers' slavery in Egypt ceased; in Nisan the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt; and in Nisan in the future the Jewish people will be redeemed in the final redemption. (Rosh haShanah 10b-11a)

What is the Name of That Month?

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֵם רִאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֵם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:

This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. (Shmot 12:2)

Now the purport of the expression, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months, is that Israel is to count this as the first of the months, and from it they are to count all months — second, third, etc., until a year of twelve months is completed — in order that there be through this enumeration a remembrance of the great miracle, [i.e., the exodus from Egypt, which occurred in the first month]. Whenever we will mention the months, the miracle will be remembered. It is for this reason that the months have no individual names in the Torah. . . Just as in counting the weekdays we always remember the Sabbath-day since the weekdays have no specific name of their own, but instead are called “one day in the Sabbath,” “the second day in the Sabbath,” as I will explain, so we remember the exodus from Egypt in our counting “the first month,” “the second month,” “the third month,” etc., to our redemption.

The names of the months came up with us from Babylon,” since at first we had no names for the months. The reason for this [adoption of the names of the months when our ancestors returned from Babylon to build the Second Temple], was that at first their reckoning was a memorial to the exodus from Egypt, but when we came up from Babylon, and the words of Scripture were fulfilled — And it shall no more be said: As the Eternal liveth, that brought up the children of

Israel out of the land of Egypt, but: As the Eternal liveth that brought up and that led the children of Israel from the land of the north *Jeremiah 16:14-15. — from then on we began to call the months by the names they were called in the land of Babylon. . . . Thus through the names of the months we remember our second redemption even as we had done until then with regard to the first one. (Nachmanides on Shmot 12:2)

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, wine was set before him; I took the wine and gave it to the king—I had never been out of sorts in his presence (Nehemiah 2:1)

Jewish Dates

הדין פסיפוסה אתקבע בשתה
למלכותה דיוסטינוס מלכה
סאין ... אתנדבון כל בני
קרתה ... בירבי
דכירין לטב כל ...
בני קרתה ... דכיר לטב

This mosaic was laid down in the year ... of the reign of Emperor Justinus ... who gave a hundred dinars ... gave all members (sons) of the community(?) ... Rabbi ... honoured be the memory of all sons ... Amen (Bet Alfa synagogue mosaic)

זכורין לטובה
ולברכה
שהחזיקו ועשו
השניה שלטבוע
שנת ארבעת אלפים
שנברה העולם
לי בו ...
יהי שלום

Remembered be for good and for blessing, who endeavored and made... the second of the week [the second year of the sabbatical cycle], the year four thousand when the world was created... in it. Let there be peace.(Sussya synagogue mosaic)

Celebrating the New Month

It is necessary to say [after the ceremonial meal] in the benediction over the wine, 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who createst the fruit of the vine. Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who hast revealed the secret of the renewal of the moon, Who didst instruct and teach us the [courses of] the seasons, New Moons and Festivals and Who didst appoint men of understanding who determine the times [of the New Moons and Festivals]. Thou, our Rock, hast weighed and calculated the minutest divisions of

time whereby those New Moons and Festivals are determined, as it is written, *Who appointedst the moon for seasons; the sun knoweth his going down*, and it also states, *For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make*'; and one concludes with 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who sanctifiest Israel and the New Moons'. [Then one says,] 'O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good; on this day we all in Jerusalem rejoice and are happy in the All-present. May Elijah the prophet soon come to us; may the king Messiah cause to spring forth in our days the [happy] time like the years when the Temple will be rebuilt, and may joyous occasions multiply in Israel'; and the people answer and say 'Amen'. [The prayer is then continued,] 'May good tidings multiply in Israel, may happy days multiply in Israel, may disciples of the Torah multiply in Israel. Consecrated is the New Moon, consecrated at the beginning of the month, consecrated in its proper time, consecrated in its intercalation, consecrated according to the Torah, consecrated according to the *halakah*, consecrated in the celestial regions, consecrated in the terrestrial regions, consecrated in the land of Israel, consecrated in Zion, consecrated in Jerusalem, consecrated in all the habitations of Israel, consecrated by the order of our Rabbis, consecrated in the House of Assembly. O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good'. (Masechet Sofrim 19)