



Jewish Calendar Curriculum

By Rabbi Johnny Solomon

Contents

The Jewish Day.....	6
A. What is a day?.....	6
B. Jewish Days As 'Natural' Days.....	7
C. When does a Jewish day start and end?.....	8
D. The values we can learn from the Jewish day.....	9
Appendix: Additional Information About the Jewish Day.....	10
The Jewish Week.....	13
A. An Accompaniment to Shabbat.....	13
B. The Days of the Week are all Connected to Shabbat.....	14
C. The Days of the Week are all Connected to the First Week of Creation.....	17
D. The Structure of the Jewish Week.....	18
E. Deeper Lessons About the Jewish Week.....	18
F. Did You Know?.....	19
The Jewish Month.....	20
A. The Lunar Cycle.....	20
B. What is the Lunar Cycle and How Long Does it Last?.....	20
C. What is a Jewish Month?.....	22
Rosh Chodesh.....	25
A. What is Rosh Chodesh?.....	25
B. When is Rosh Chodesh?.....	25
C. Testimony for Rosh Chodesh.....	26
D. Communicating About Rosh Chodesh.....	27
E. Is Rosh Chodesh a Festive Day?.....	28
F. Special Laws and Customs for Rosh Chodesh.....	29

G. Deeper Insights	29
Months in the Jewish Year	31
A. How Do We Count the Months in the Jewish Year?	31
B. The Names of the Months in the Jewish Year	32
C. How Many Months are There in the Jewish Year?	33
The Jewish Year	35
A. What is a Jewish Year?	35
B. What Jewish Year Are We In?	36
C. The Jewish Year as Shared Time	36
D. The Energy of the Jewish Year	37
E. Memory in a Jewish Year	38
F. Symbolism in the Jewish Year	39
Seasons in the Jewish Year	40
A. The Four Seasons	41
B. The Symbolism of the Seasons	42
C. The Seasonal Prayers	42
Special Events in the Jewish Year	45
A. Biblical Festivals & Fasts	45
B. Rabbinic Festivals & Fasts	46
C. Modern Festivals	46
Jewish Birthdays	47
The Jewish Month of Nissan	48
The Jewish Month of Iyar	51
The Jewish Month of Sivan	53
The Jewish Month of Tammuz	55
The Jewish Month of Av	57

The Jewish Month of Ellul	60
The Jewish Month of Tishrei	62
The Jewish Month of Cheshvan	64
The Jewish Month of Kislev	66
The Jewish Month of Tevet	68
The Jewish Month of Shevat.....	69
The Jewish Month of Adar	71

The Jewish Day



A. What is a day?

Since the invention of watches and clocks we have measured time according to hours, minutes and seconds. However, prior to this period time was measured naturally according to the movement of the sun and as shown on sun-dials.

Per the rules of nature, the day consists of a cycle during which the sun sets, rises and sets again. This means that during the ancient times, if two people met one afternoon by a tree when the sun was shining and they wanted to meet again the next day at around the same time and at the same place, they would wait for the sun to set, and to rise again, and when the sun would be shining and would be in the same place in the sky, they would know that it would be the next day, and the same time, and they would meet up again at the tree. This leads us to the definition of a day

as 'one complete cycle of setting, rising, and setting of the sun. It is not defined by time on a clock or any other device. It is defined only by the sun.'¹

B. Jewish Days As 'Natural' Days

Because of this, when the Torah - which was given to the Jewish people over 2,500 years prior to the invention of watches or clocks - speaks of 'days', it is referring to the natural day as defined by the sun, rather than as defined by 24 hours.² Proof for this is found in **Bereishit Chapter 1 Verse 5**³ where we read:

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:

And God called the light "day" and the darkness He called "night".

And there was evening, and there was morning, one day.

This means that while we use the word יום (day) to refer to the part of the natural day when the sun is out and shines its light, a true יום according to the Torah and the laws of nature is made up of times when the sun has set and it is dark, as well as times when the sun has risen and it is light.

¹Understanding the Jewish Calendar by Rabbi Nathan Bushwick p. 4

² As Rabbi Bushwick points out, 'hours, minutes and seconds do not correspond to any natural cycle as days, months and years do. They are simply divisions of the day. [While] we are used to saying that a day is a period of twenty-four hours, an hour sixty minutes, and a minute sixty seconds, actually it is the other way around.'

³ As explained in Pesikta Rabbati Chapter 17 Piska 4 where we read: "וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר" דכתיב "וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר" - We find that the 'day' and the 'night' are, together, referred to as 'day' as it is written: "And there was evening, and there was morning, one day." (Bereishit Chapter 1 Verse 5)



C. When does a Jewish day start and end?

In addition to being told in this verse that a 'day' is defined by a cycle of one complete cycle of setting, rising, and setting of the sun, the Rabbis of the Talmud (**Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hullin Page 83a**) also use **Bereishit Chapter 1 Verse 5** to teach how the 'Jewish Day' *begins* when the sun sets, and *ends* at the end of this cycle.

יום אחד האמור במעשה בראשית - היום הולך אחר הלילה

*The 'one day' which is mentioned in the story of creation
begins with the evening and ends with the morning
(literally, 'the day follows the night').*

In **Bereishit Chapter 1 Verse 5**, the word evening (עֶרֶב) comes *before* the word morning (בֹּקֶר). From here, the Talmudic Rabbis learn that the natural day begins in the evening (with sunset), and ends once the sun has set again. This means that the 'Jewish day' is actually the 'natural day' which is defined by one complete cycle of setting, rising, and setting of the sun, and based on

the word order of **Bereishit Chapter 1 Verse 5** we learn that the natural day *begins* in the evening (with sunset), and *ends* the next 'day' when the sun sets again. Since Jews live according to 'Jewish/natural days', Shabbat and Festival days begin in the evening and last until the next evening.

D. The values we can learn from the Jewish day

There are three main values that we can learn from the fact that the 'Jewish day' follows the order of the 'natural day'.

i) LIVING LIKE GOD

We have previously said that we are taught how the Jewish/natural day begins in the evening from **Bereishit Chapter 1 Verse 5** which describes the way God created the world. This means that when we live creative lives in this manner, we are – in some way - living like God.⁴

ii) LIVING WITH NATURE

Given that Jews live according to the natural order of creation, they don't simply live in nature; they actually live with nature. Each time a Jew is reminded that Jewish days are derived from the creation narrative, they are also reminded that God is the creator of the universe and that their life must show sensitivity to creation. Therefore, every day – and especially Shabbat - is a day of not just 'God consciousness' but also 'ecological consciousness.'⁵

iii) LIVING WITH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

In explaining the order of the Jewish day, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes: 'Night is ... not a time for resting from the occupations of the previous day, but rather for rallying our strength and preparing for the following day'⁶. This shows that the Jewish day begins with a process of

⁴ It should be noted that one of the commandments of the Torah is that we should try and live like God and follow His ways (see Devarim 28:7-9; Rambam: *Sefer Hamitzvot, Mitzvat Asseh* No. 8)

⁵ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Faith in the Future* p. 136

⁶ Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb* para. 253

energizing ourselves for the future, which means that while Jews think of the past, they live for the future. However, by starting the Jewish day at night, there is also a deeper message of hope. We often speak of 'dark' moments of confusion or despair. By living according to the order of the Jewish day we are taught to 'renew your light, arise, and shine forth out of any darkening of morality and spirit, or out any dark period in your history'⁷.

Appendix: Additional Information About the Jewish Day

1a. Rabbinic Terms Concerning When a Jewish Day Starts and Ends

While the definitions that we have used concerning when the Jewish day starts and ends are basically correct, we have not used precise language so that the concepts related to the Jewish day can be clearly presented. We will now outline the periods of the Jewish day with greater precision.

Based on **Bereishit Chapter 1 Verse 5**, we have said that the Jewish day begins in the evening which starts at sunset. Sunset is referred to by the Hebrew word **שְׁקִיעַת הַחֶמֶה** - **Shkiat HaChamah** which is when the last edge of the sun disappears below the horizon. However, while sunset indicates that a transition is happening between day and night, it is not clear whether sunset marks the end of the previous day or the start of the next. It is only when three stars can be seen in the sky, which is referred to by the Hebrew term **צֵאת הַכּוֹכָבִים** - **Tzeit HaKochavim**, that we can state with certainty that the next day has begun. The time in between Shkiah (when the sun begins to set) and Tzeit HaKochavim (when the stars can be seen in the sky) which is known in English as 'twilight' is referred to by the Hebrew term **בֵּין הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת** - **Bein Hashmashot**. Since we are not exactly sure when the Jewish day starts, Shabbat and Festivals start just before **Shkiah**, and end at **Tzeit HaKochavim**.

⁷ Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary to Bereishit 1:14-19

1b. Other Rabbinic Terms Concerning Times Within the Jewish Day

While we have noted that the Jewish day is made up of times when the sun has set and it is dark, as well as times when the sun has risen and it is light.

While there is disagreement about the precise moment when the Jewish day begins, there is almost total agreement about when the daytime part of the Jewish day begins. This is dawn, and it is referred to by the Hebrew term **עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר** - **Alot HaShachar**. Following this is sunrise which is when the top edge of the sun appears above the horizon. This moment is referred to by the Hebrew term **הַנֶּיֶץ הַחַמָּה** - **HaNeitz HaChamah**⁸. Finally, the middle of the daytime part of the Jewish day is referred to by the Hebrew term **חֲצוֹת** - **Chatzot** and is calculated through working out the midpoint between sunrise (**HaNeitz HaChama**) and sunset (**Shkiah**).

2. The 'Jewish Hours' that Make Up a 'Jewish Day'

We have previously noted that 'Hours, minutes and seconds do not correspond to any natural cycle as days, months and years do. They are simply divisions of the day. [While] we are used to saying that a day is a period of twenty-four hours, an hour sixty minutes, and a minute sixty seconds, actually it is the other way around.'⁹ In fact, 'the definition of an hour is one twenty-fourth of a day. We know how long a day is from the rising and setting of the sun. It is that cycle that defines a day. We divide that period into twenty-four equal parts and call each one an hour'.¹⁰

⁸ It should be noted that there is disagreement about whether the correct term is 'Hanetz HaChamah' or 'Netz HaChamah'. On the one side, there is no Hebrew root of ה-נ-ץ which would imply that the 'ה' is a prefix of sorts, while every classic source refers to 'הנֶיֶץ' and not 'נֶיֶץ'. According to Rabbi Dovid Braunfeld's *Dvar Yom*, הנֶיֶץ החמה is the correct usage with the ה being part of the word 'for if it were [not], then Shkiah would likewise be referred to as HaShkiah which is never done.' He then continues to offer a grammatical basis for the term basing himself on several sources. As he explains, 'the meaning of 'Hanetz HaChamah' is similar to the wording in Shir Hashirim (6:11, 7:13) 'HeNetzu HaRimonim – the pomegranates have budded'. Thus, 'just as the bud is the beginning of the fruit, the sun's beginning appearance on the horizon is its 'budding''.

⁹ *Understanding the Jewish Calendar* by Rabbi Nathan Bushwick p. 4

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Based on this definition, a 'Jewish hour' is established by calculating 1/12th of the time between **HaNeitz HaChamah** and **Shkiah**. Given that this period is longer in the summer when the sun rises earlier and sets later, and shorter in the winter when the sun rises later and sets earlier, 'Jewish hours' become either longer or shorter depending on the season.



The screenshot shows the Ji Calendar app interface for the date 18 October 2016. The interface is in Hebrew and displays the following information:

- Calendar Navigation:** Home icon, date selection (18 October 2016, 19 November 2015), and view options (Day, Month, Year).
- Prayer Times (Today):**
 - Sunset (שקיעת החמה): 6:15 PM
 - Twilight (בין השמשות): 6:40 PM
 - Nightfall (צאת הכוכבים): 6:50 PM
 - Midnight (חצות הלילה): 11:52 PM
 - Dawn (עלות השחר): 4:18 AM
 - Sunrise (הנץ החמה): 5:23 AM
 - Latest shema (סוף זמן קריאת שמע): 8:41 AM
 - Latest shacharit (סוף זמן תפלה): 9:45 AM
 - Midday (חצות היום): 11:52 AM
 - Mincha gedolah (מנחה גדולה): 12:24 PM
 - Mincha ketana (מנחה קטנה): 3:36 PM
 - Plag hamincha (פלג המנחה): 4:56 PM
 - Sunset (שקיעת החמה): 6:16 PM
 - Twilight (בין השמשות): 6:40 PM
 - Nightfall (צאת הכוכבים): 6:51 PM
- Holiday Information:**
 - יום שלישי (Tishrei ט"ז תשרי): Sukkot (קצות)
 - Image of a succah (Sukkot symbol)
- Weather:**
 - Today's Weather: Sunny with clouds
 - Icons for Sun (שמש), Cloud (מען), and Wind (ערפלי)
- Navigation and Features:**
 - Experience (Earth icon)
 - Tap Lessons (Ji logo)
 - Advanced and In Israel toggle buttons
 - Location: 5777 תשע"ז, 5776 תשע"ו

The Jewish Week

A. An Accompaniment to Shabbat

The Torah begins by describing the first week in Creation through outlining the first six days of Creation, each of which started in the evening.

On the first day of creation, God created light and darkness¹¹; on day two, God created the sky¹²; on day three, He created the seas and vegetation¹³; on day four, God created the sun and the moon¹⁴; on day five He created flying creatures and sea creatures¹⁵, and on day six, God created land animals and human beings¹⁶. We are then told that ‘He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had been doing. God blessed the seventh day, and He declared it to be holy, for it was on this day that God ceased from all the work that He had been creating.’¹⁷ It is from here that we are taught that a period of seven days – “the week” - is of significance, and that the main feature of the week is Shabbat.

However, there is something unique about the week. Unlike other units of time such as the day and the year which are determined by the sun, or the month which is determined according to the cycle of the moon,¹⁸ the week is different because ‘it is not directly dependent upon the motion of any heavenly body’¹⁹. Instead, ‘the significance of the week as a unit of time depends upon the

¹¹Bereishit 1:1-5

¹² Ibid. 1:6-8

¹³ Ibid. 1:9-13

¹⁴ Ibid. 1:14-19

¹⁵ Ibid. 1:20-23

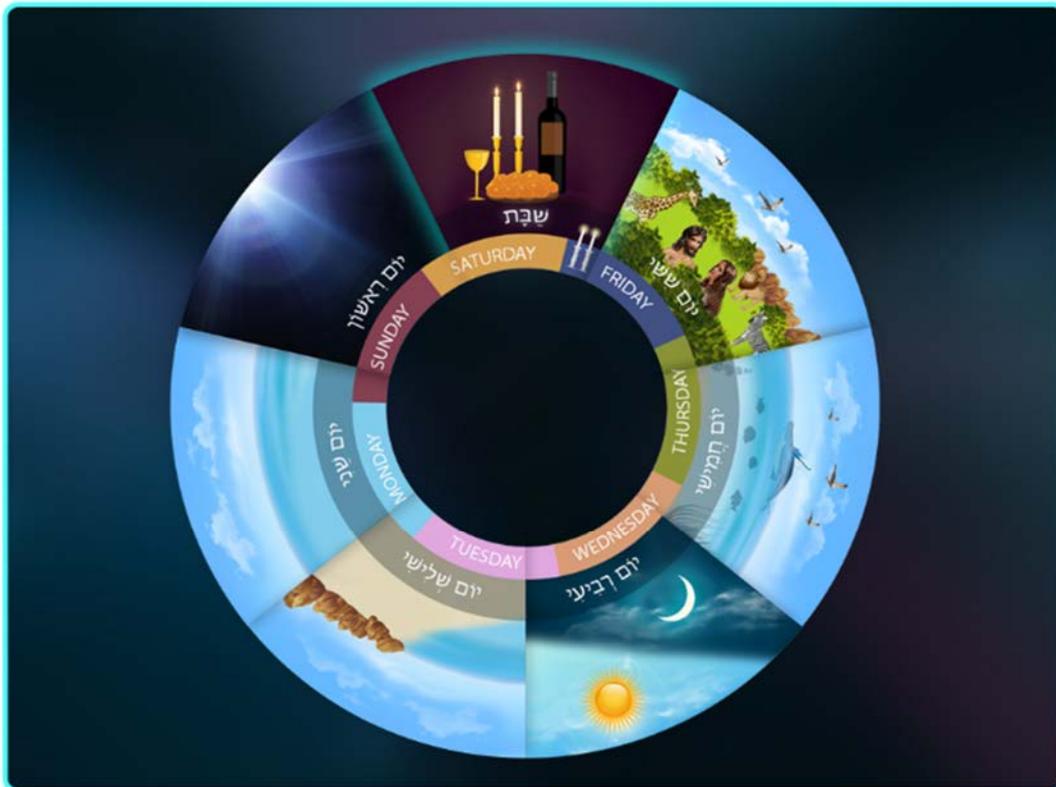
¹⁶ Ibid. 1:24-31

¹⁷ Ibid. 2:2-3

¹⁸ *Understanding the Jewish Calendar* by Rabbi Nathan Bushwick p. 3

¹⁹ Ibid. , ‘although it is indirectly dependent upon the sun, since it consists of seven days’

observance of Shabbat.²⁰ This means that **the concept of the Jewish week only makes sense given the existence and centrality of Shabbat.**



B. The Days of the Week are all Connected to Shabbat

i) The Jewish Week as a Full Working Week

Given that the Jewish week only makes sense given the existence and centrality of Shabbat, the concept of Shabbat only makes sense if it is preceded by six days of creative activity. Therefore, a key element of the Jewish week is that we work during the six days prior to Shabbat (NB: not only is this something that the Torah expects of us, it would seem that it is considered a mitzvah

²⁰ibid.

to work during the week²¹) in order to enjoy the rest of Shabbat. This is itself reflected in the Torah when we are told (Shemot Chapter 20 Verses 8-10):

זְכוֹר אֶת-יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ:
שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלֶאכֶתְךָ:
יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ...

Always remember the Shabbat day to keep it holy.

For six days may you work and complete all your work.

But the seventh day [is the] Shabbat for Hashem your God...

In fact, the Hebrew word **שָׁבוּעַ**²² which means 'week' (and which originates from the word **שֶׁבַע** which means 'seven') also incorporates the concept of the Jewish week as a full working week. Rabbi Hirsch notes the similarity between the word **שָׁבוּעַ** meaning 'week' and the Hebrew verb **לְשַׁבֵּעַ** which means 'to be full' or 'to be satisfied'²³. Therefore, the Hebrew word for 'week' itself testifies to living a full and busy life and suggests that a Jewish week is a busy one²⁴.

²¹ See *Mechilta* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai on Shemot 20:9 where we are told that 'לָשֵׁם שְׁנַצְטוּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה שֶׁל' - just as the Jewish people were commanded about the positive mitzvah of observing Shabbat, they were also commanded about [the positive mitzvah] of working [during the other six days]'

²²This word is first used in the Torah to refer to a week in Bereishit 29:27, although see Rashi there who states that this is solely referring to seven days, and that its usage as referring to a unit of a week is only found later in the Torah in Devarim 16:9

²³ See for example Devarim 8:10

²⁴As Rabbi Hirsch explains, 'the number seven is used to express a full number of a full measure, something "whole" or "complete"'. Therefore 'a seven-day period constitute[s] a span of time for man during which [man can] implement an idea fully and adequately' (*Collected Writings* Vol. III pgs. 99-100)

ii) Remembering Shabbat During the Jewish Week

It should now be clear that the Jewish week is Shabbat-centric. In fact, from the words ‘always remember the Shabbat day’²⁵ we are taught that we should remember the Shabbat even when it is not Shabbat. This means that much of our efforts during the week should include making plans for Shabbat. One example of this would be that if you see some nice food during the week, you should buy it and plan to use it on Shabbat.²⁶

iii) The Names of the Jewish Week

A further way to remember Shabbat even when it is not Shabbat is through the names we use for the days of the week themselves. The Rabbis explain²⁷ that we shouldn’t count the days of the week like other nations. Instead, we should count them for the sake of Shabbat. This concept is explained further by the Ramban who explains that while ‘non-Jewish nations count the days of the week by giving names to the days themselves, calling each day a separate name’²⁸, the Jewish nation counts all the days of the week for the sake of Shabbat²⁹.

- Sunday, which is the first day of the week after Shabbat, is called **יום ראשון** (literally, ‘Day One’).
- Monday, which is the second day of the week after Shabbat, is called **יום שני** (literally, ‘Day Two’).

²⁵Shemot 20:8

²⁶Rashi on Shemot 20:8, based on *Beitzah* 16a

²⁷ See *Mechilta* on Shemot 20:8 where we read that ‘אלא תהא מונה לשם שבת’ – Do not count the days in the way that the other [nations] count [their days]. Rather, you should count for the sake of Shabbat’.

²⁸ For example, we refer to Sunday to recall the sun, Monday to recall the moon, Tuesday to recall the planet Mars (Tiu was the Anglo-Saxon for Mars), Wednesday to recall the planet Mercury (Woden was the Anglo-Saxon for Mercury), Thursday to recall the planet Jupiter (Thor was the Norse for Jupiter), Friday to recall the planet Venus (Freya was the Norse for Venus), and Saturday to recall the planet Saturn. See Rashi on *Brachot* 59b as explained in *Artscroll Ramban* on Shemot 20:8 footnote 124

²⁹Ramban on Shemot 20:8

- Tuesday, which is the third day of the week after Shabbat, is called **יום שלישי** (literally, 'the third day').
- Wednesday, which is the fourth day of the week after Shabbat, is called **יום רביעי** (literally, 'the fourth day').
- Thursday, which is the fifth day of the week after Shabbat, is called **יום חמישי** (literally, 'the fifth day').
- Friday, which is the sixth day of the week after Shabbat, is called **יום שישי** (literally, 'the sixth day').

iv) Adding to Shabbat from the Weekday

In light of the central role Shabbat plays in the Jewish week, it is customary to welcome Shabbat a little earlier than sunset in order to 'add' some of our weekday time to Shabbat. This time, which can be added either on Friday afternoon or on Saturday evening, is known as **תוספת שבת**, 'addition to Shabbat'.

C. The Days of the Week are all Connected to the First Week of Creation

In addition to the Jewish week being 'Shabbat-centric', we do try and recall each creation from each day of creation on its respective day in the Jewish week. This is done by reading the Psalm of the Day³⁰ which is found in all siddurim.

³⁰ For the correlation of each Psalm with each day of creation, see *Rosh Hashanah* 31a

D. The Structure of the Jewish Week

While the Torah text presents the Jewish week in a very linear manner, within Rabbinic literature we find two different approaches to the structure of the Jewish week:

i) The Pairs of the Week

The Midrash³¹ relates that 'Shabbat' complained to God saying that each day of the week had a partner – the first with the second, the third with the fourth & the fifth with the sixth – yet it remained alone. In response to this, the Midrash teaches that the Jewish nation became the partner to 'Shabbat'. Whatever the meaning of this Midrash, it is suggestive that Shabbat is not only different to all the other days of the week, but is in many ways, distinct from all the other days of the week.

ii) Shabbat as the Center of the Week

A different teaching³² informs us that from Tuesday night (i.e. **יום רביעי**) we are already considered to be in the period of Erev Shabbat, which itself ends at the end of Tuesday afternoon (i.e. **יום שלישי**)³³. This is suggestive that rather than Shabbat being at the end of the week, given its centrality within the Jewish week it is in fact viewed by some as if it is in the middle of the Jewish week.³⁴

E. Deeper Lessons About the Jewish Week

A deeper concept about the symbolism of the Jewish week is that it represents all the days of the world. Based on the verse 'a thousand years in Your eyes are like yesterday'³⁵, some³⁶ explain

³¹ *Bereishit Rabbah* 11:8

³² See *Pesachim* 106a & *Gittin* 77a

³³ In light of this teaching, if one is unable to recite Havdalah on Motzei Shabbat, they can recite it until Tuesday afternoon. See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 299:6

³⁴ See Rabbeinu Bachya's *Kad HaKemach*, in the entry on 'Shabbat'

³⁵ Tehillim 90:4

³⁶ See *Rosh Hashanah* 31a, *Avodah Zara* 9a, *Sanhedrin* 97a, Ramban on Bereishit 2:3

that the world will last 6,000 years corresponding to the six days each of which last 1000 years, after which Mashiach will come, representing the ultimate day of Shabbat.

F. Did You Know?

Did you know? Since the word 'good' appears twice when talking about god's creations on the third day of creation, many people view the third day (Tuesday) as a special day which is why many people choose to get married on a Tuesday.

The Jewish Month



A. The Lunar Cycle

We have previously mentioned that while the Jewish day and the Jewish year are determined by the sun, the Jewish month is established according to the cycle of the moon,³⁷ known as the 'lunar cycle'.

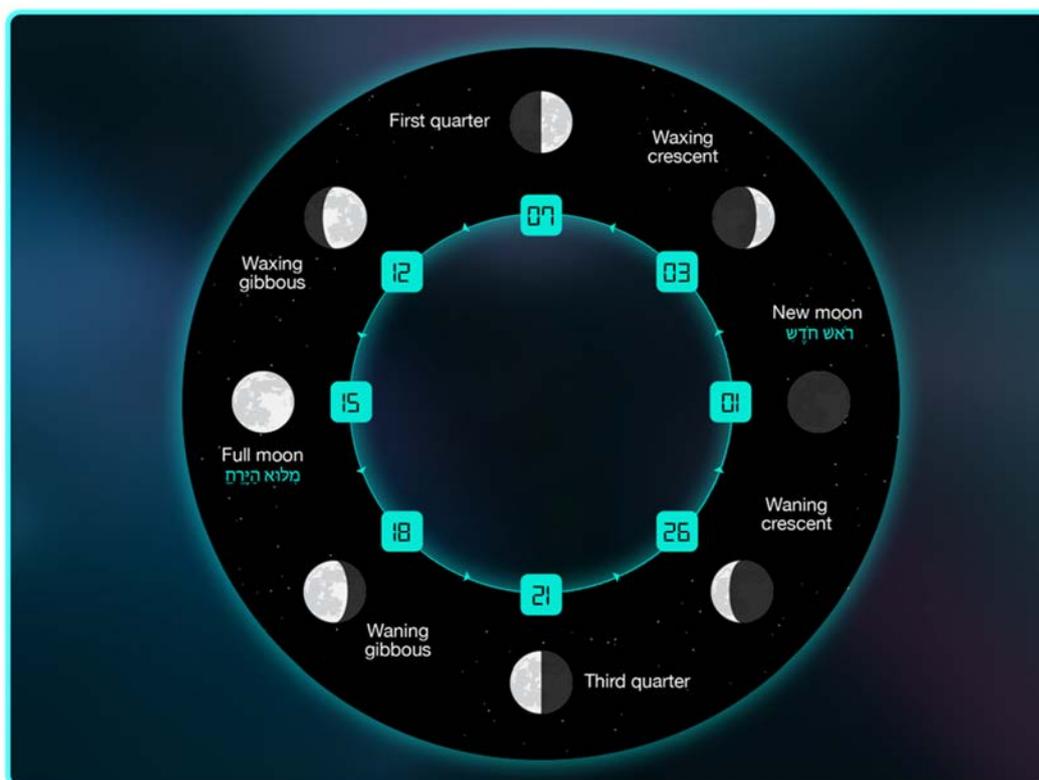
B. What is the Lunar Cycle and How Long Does it Last?

The term 'lunar cycle' describes the cycle of the moon which revolves around the earth, and it takes precisely 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes and $3\frac{1}{3}$ seconds³⁸ for a full lunar cycle.

³⁷ *Understanding the Jewish Calendar* by Rabbi Nathan Bushwick p. 3

³⁸ See Introduction to *Schottenstein Talmud Bavli, Tractate Rosh Hashanah*.

At the beginning of the lunar cycle, we can see the moon but it looks like a very thin crescent (a bit like a very thin banana), in the middle of the cycle, the moon 'looks' whole (like a ball) and near the end of the month, the moon looks like a very thin crescent but pointing in the opposite direction as it did at the start of the month (see picture³⁹ below):



The exact moment when the moon completes its cycle when the illuminated left side of the moon cannot be seen and when the new moon begins to 'grow' on the right side of the moon is referred to as the 'מולד הַלְּבָנָה' - the birth of the moon (NB: this is often simply known as the 'מולד'). In fact, it is precisely because we observe the concept of newness and rebirth in the lunar cycle that we call the lunar month a חודש whose Hebrew root ח-ד-ש signifies newness.⁴⁰

³⁹ Picture taken from <http://blog.thefoundationstone.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/6a00d83451bc4a69e200e54f1ed37b8834-640wi.jpg>

⁴⁰ See the commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on Shemot 12:2

This means that a Jewish month starts when the moon begins its new cycle, and ends at the end of this cycle, and lasts the period between the start and finish of one lunar cycle.

C. What is a Jewish Month?

Did you know? The word 'month' comes from the word 'moon' which shows that months followed the cycle of the moon.

However, this would suggest that Jewish months are simply defined by the movements of the moon, and before the Roman period, non-Jews also defined months according to the movements of the moon⁴¹. So, what is the difference between 'Jewish months' and 'secular months'?

To answer this question, we need to learn about when Jews were commanded to count 'Jewish months'.

As the Bnei Yisrael prepared to leave Egypt having been enslaved for 210 years, and just as the moon was starting its new cycle, God commanded Moshe and Aharon

כִּזְמַח רְאֵה וְקִדַּשׁ - when you see the moon like this, sanctify the beginnings of your months⁴².

This appears to be a strange law to be given to a nation who had been slaves for so long and who don't yet understand what it means to live freely. Furthermore, what is the significance of 'sanctifying' the cycle of the moon that occurs naturally?

In addressing this question, Rabbi Abraham Pam⁴³ notes that the difference between a slave and a free human being is that the latter has control over his time. Therefore, by being commanded to sanctify the new moon, the Bnei Yisrael were being taught that a key element of freedom is about having control over your time.

⁴¹ In early Roman calendars, lunar months were counted. However, the Roman, Julian and Gregorian calendars prioritised having 12 months that fit into the solar calendar rather than having each month following the lunar cycle. Therefore, within these calendars, each month consisted of around 30 or 31 days.

⁴² *Rosh Hashanah* 20a, explaining the commandment found in Shemot 12:2

⁴³ Rabbi Pam explains this idea in his Hebrew book עטרה למלך but this idea has been translated and explained by Jonathan Sacks in *Faith in the Future* p. 129

What is the significance of the ‘sanctification’ process? How does an act of sanctification help **create** a Jewish month?

While it is clear that the Jews were not the first people to define months according to the cycle of the moon - in fact, until the introduction of the Roman calendar, almost all nations used the lunar cycle to track the months in the year – what is unique about ‘Jewish months’ is that they are months whose lunar cycle is sanctified and made holy.

While the **מוֹלָד** is the moment when the new month naturally begins, the new month was only sanctified once witnesses had testified to the Sanhedrin that they had seen the new moon. Some suggest⁴⁴ that the reason for this sanctification process was to avoid the possibility of Jews worshipping the moon – something that many other nations did. Therefore, in order to ensure that the Jewish months reflected the moon’s cycle but avoided worship of the moon, Jews were commanded by God to sanctify the new moon.

Therefore, we can now define a Jewish month as being **a month that begins when the moon begins its new cycle, and ends at the end of the moon’s cycle, which is sanctified through the identification of the new moon by witnesses and the declaration of the Sanhedrin. Simply put, before the Roman period, Jewish months were only different from secular months because they were sanctified through the declaration of the Sanhedrin.**

‘as long as the months were sanctified in this Divinely ordained manner, there could not be an annual calendar...since each new month required new testimony of witnesses, no one could guarantee whether the current month would be twenty-nine or thirty⁴⁵.

However, in the year 358 CE (4118), the Sanhedrin ceased operating⁴⁶. Because there was no longer an institution to declare the new moon, the great scholar Hillel decided to establish a fixed calendar which would be able to predict when each month would start.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See his commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch to Shemot 12:2

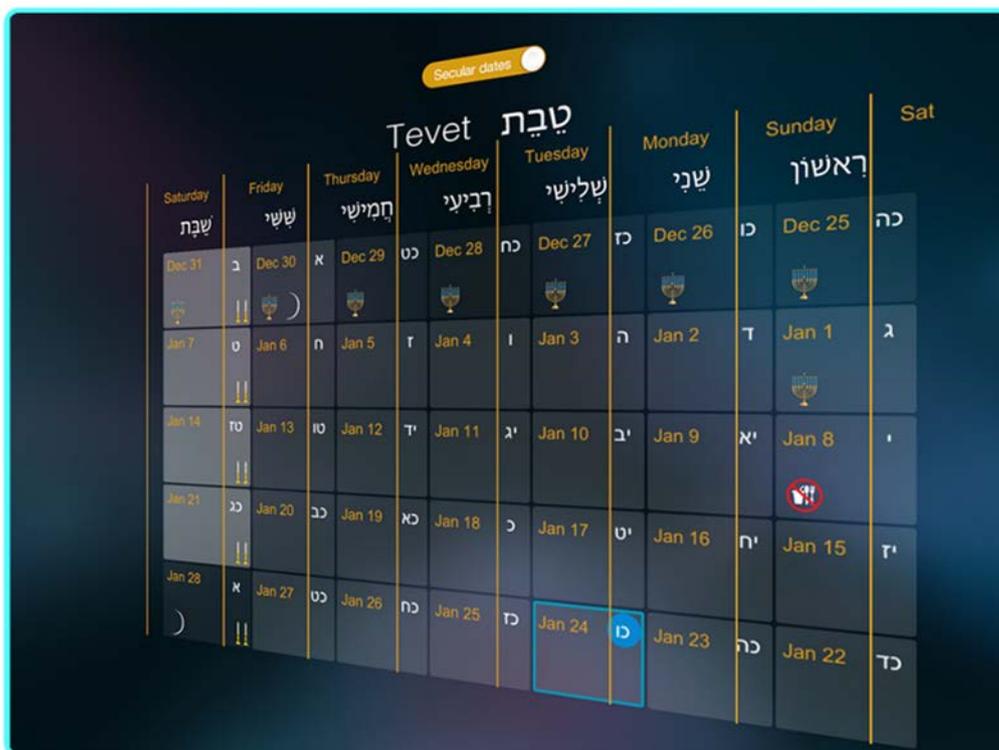
⁴⁵ *The Jewish Calendar* by Rabbi David Feinstein p. 19

⁴⁶ See Introduction to *Schottenstein Talmud Bavli, Tractate Rosh Hashanah*.

⁴⁷ As Rambam writes in his *Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh* 5: 2, ‘When there is a Sanhedrin, the monthly calendar is established according to the sighting of the moon. When there is no Sanhedrin, the monthly calendar is established according to the fixed calendar that we follow now, and the sighting of the moon is of no consequence.’

Prior to this period, non-Jews also used the lunar cycle to define the length of a month. However, from the Roman period onwards where priority was placed on having 12 months that fit into the solar calendar rather than having each month following the lunar cycle⁴⁸, we find that secular months differ from Jewish months in their length too. Within the Roman, Julian and Gregorian calendars, each month consisted of either 30 or 31 days, with 1 month consisting of 28 days (other than in a leap year) as opposed to all months lasting 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes and 3½ seconds.

Since the establishment of the Roman – and subsequently Julian and Gregorian calendar - Jewish months are often shorter than 'secular months by around 2-3 days.



⁴⁸ See *Sukkah* 29a, where we read that ‘Jews reckon [the calendar] according to the moon, and non-Jews according to the sun’.

Rosh Chodesh

A. What is Rosh Chodesh?

ראש חודש, literally ‘the head of the month’ is the name of the day⁴⁹ (or days)⁵⁰ that celebrate⁵¹ the arrival of each new Jewish month.

B. When is Rosh Chodesh?

In our discussion on ‘The Jewish Month’, we have noted that the exact moment when the moon completes its cycle is referred to as the **מולד הלבנה** - the birth of the moon. This implies that **ראש חודש** occurs at the exact moment of the **מולד הלבנה**.

However, we have also noted that when the Bnei Yisrael prepared to leave Egypt God commanded Moshe and Aharon:

החודש הזה לכם ראש חודשים

This month [shall be] for you the beginning [of the order] of the months’
(*Shemot Chapter 12 Verse 2*)

The Rabbis of the Talmud⁵² (**Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashanah Page 20a**) explain :

כזה ראה וקדש -

⁴⁹ The following months always have one day of Rosh Chodesh: Tishrei, Shevat, Nissan, Sivan, and Av.

⁵⁰ The following months always have two days of Rosh Chodesh (the first day of the month plus the last day of the previous month): Cheshvan, Adar (and Adar II), Iyar, Tammuz, and Elul. The months of Kisleiv and Tevet fluctuate; some years they both have one day of Rosh Chodesh, some years both have two days, and some years Kisleiv has one day and Tevet has two days Rosh Chodesh.

⁵¹ See *Pesachim 77a/Shavuot 10a*

⁵² *Rosh Hashanah 20a*

*[when you] see [the moon] like this⁵³, sanctify
[the beginnings of your months].*

Therefore, while the **מוֹלַד** is the moment when the new month naturally begins, the new month was only sanctified⁵⁴ once witnesses had testified to the Sanhedrin in Israel that they had seen the new moon, and this process of sanctifying the new moon was referred to as **קְדוּשַׁת הַחֹדֶשׁ**, literally, ‘sanctifying the month’. Therefore, **רֵאשִׁית חֹדֶשׁ** is the day (or days) which were sanctified by the Sanhedrin to celebrate the new Jewish month. Every first day of a Jewish month is **רֵאשִׁית חֹדֶשׁ** and, if the previous month had 30 days, then the 30th day of the previous month as well is considered **רֵאשִׁית חֹדֶשׁ**.⁵⁵

C. Testimony for Rosh Chodesh

In his laws which present the sanctifying of the new moon, Rambam explains: ‘the court would make calculations in a manner resembling the calculations of the astronomers, and would know whether the position of the moon - when it would be sighted - would be to the north of the sun, or to its south, if its [crescent] would be wide or narrow, and the direction in which its corners would

⁵³ Which is understood to mean that Hashem showed Moshe & Aharon the shapes of the moon

⁵⁴ As Rambam writes in his *Hilchot Kiddush Hachodesh* 1:5 – “The [establishment of Rosh Chodesh] based on the sighting of the moon is not the province of every individual, as is the Sabbath [of the weekly cycle]. [In the latter instance,] everyone counts six days and rests on the seventh day. [The sanctification of the new month,] by contrast, has been entrusted to the court. [The new month does not begin] until it has been sanctified by the court, and it is the day that they establish as Rosh Chodesh that is Rosh Chodesh. [This is implied by the verse,] "This month will be for you..." - i.e., the testimony [concerning the new month] will be entrusted to you.”

⁵⁵ In our discussion on ‘The Jewish Month’ we noted that it takes precisely 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes and 3½ seconds for a full lunar cycle. This means that during the time when the Sanhedrin would sanctify the new moon, this would occur either on the 30th from the start of the previous month (if the preceding month was 29 days long) or the 31st day (if the previous month was 30 days long). As Rabbi David Feinstein explains, ‘the appearance of witnesses at any time on the 30th day would designate that day as Rosh Chodesh, but because it was uncertain if witnesses would come that day, it was treated as a potential Rosh Chodesh. If no witnesses had come on the 30th, then the 31st would automatically become Rosh Chodesh. Consequently, whenever a preceding month contained 30 days, both the 30th and the 31st day were treated as Rosh Chodesh. If, however, a month had twenty-nine days, only the thirtieth of a month is the first day of a two-day Rosh Chodesh. Though nowadays our calendar leaves no doubt as to which day the new moon will appear, the principle of celebrating two days of Rosh Chodesh whenever the preceding month has thirty days is continued.’ (*The Jewish Calendar* p. 42, based on Rambam *Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh* 8:1-4).

be pointed. When the witnesses came to testify, they would ask them: "Where did you see [the moon]: to the north or to the south [of the sun]?", "In which direction were its corners pointed?", "How high and how wide did it appear to you?" If their replies were suitable, their testimony was accepted. If their replies were not suitable, their testimony was not accepted⁵⁶.

This witness examination would ensure that they actually saw the new moon (which would show the waxing of the moon when the illuminated right side of the moon gradually increases⁵⁷) and were not either making it up or confused.

D. Communicating About Rosh Chodesh

Once the Sanhedrin had declared the start of a new Jewish month, they then shared this news as quickly as possible through the use of bonfires.

*'Huge bonfires were lit on a series of mountaintops, fire after fire, with the signal rippling from Jerusalem to all across the country. Agents of the courts were stationed on the mountains. When the agents near Jerusalem saw the fire at the Holy City, they would light their fire and so on, mountain to mountain across the length and breadth of the land.'*⁵⁸

However, during the time of the Second Temple, this method had to be abandoned, when anti-Torah saboteurs lit fires on the wrong days, in malicious attempts to mislead the people. Thereafter, the Sanhedrin dispatched messengers who rode to announce which day had become Rosh Chodesh⁵⁹.

Did you know? *During Temple times, witnesses that saw the new moon were allowed to break Shabbat in order to travel to Jerusalem to inform the Sanhedrin about what they had seen⁶⁰ (which teaches us that individuals are allowed to break a Jewish law in order to help the whole Jewish nation keep a Jewish law)*

⁵⁶ *Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh 2:4*

⁵⁷ See Introduction to *Schottenstein Talmud Bavli, Tractate Rosh Hashanah*.

⁵⁸ *The Jewish Calendar* p. 19

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Mishna Rosh Hashanah 1:4*

In the year 358 CE (4118), the Sanhedrin ceased operating⁶¹. Because there was no longer an institution to declare the new moon, the great scholar Hillel decided to establish a fixed calendar which would be able to predict when each month would start. As Rambam explains:

‘When there is a Sanhedrin, the monthly calendar is established according to the sighting of the moon. When there is no Sanhedrin, the monthly calendar is established according to the fixed calendar that we follow now, and the sighting of the moon is of no consequence’.⁶²

However, since it was only fairly recently that everyone had their own printed calendars, from the time of the cessation of the Sanhedrin it was necessary to announce in advance the day(s) on which Rosh Chodesh would fall. This was done on Shabbat, when the greatest number of people were in the synagogue and it was inserted into **בְּרַכַּת הַחֹדֶשׁ** - the Blessing concerning the New Month⁶³ (NB: This is not done in the week preceding Rosh Hashanah).

E. Is Rosh Chodesh a Festive Day?

There are numerous biblical sources⁶⁴ that place Rosh Chodesh with other festive days, suggesting that Rosh Chodesh is itself a festival, and the Talmud⁶⁵ clearly states that ‘*the New Moon is also called a festival*’. However, the significance of what is meant by saying that the New Moon is also called a festival is not entirely clear. Rashi observes:

‘Although it is called a Moed, there is no verse which commands feasting and joy on [Rosh Chodesh]’⁶⁶

During the period of the Temple, the additional sacrifice (Musaf) was offered, but we were still permitted to work on Rosh Chodesh⁶⁷ – unlike Shabbat and other Jewish Festivals. As Rabbi Zevin

⁶¹ See Introduction to *Schottenstein Talmud Bavli, Tractate Rosh Hashanah*.

⁶² *Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh* 5: 2

⁶³ ‘The Blessing concerning the New Month is prefaced with a prayer that the new month should be filled with all good things including a long and blessed life, prosperity, good health, piety, and a love of Torah’ (*The Jewish Calendar* p. 44)

⁶⁴ See for example Bamidbar 10:10, Shmuel I 20:18, Malachim II 4:23

⁶⁵ *Pesachim* Page 77a

⁶⁶ Rashi on *Ta’anit* 15b

⁶⁷ See *Chagigah* 18a

explains, Rosh Chodesh has a 'festive quality different from the ordinary days of the year'⁶⁸ and therefore we are told that 'it is a mitzvah to make one's meals finer for Rosh Chodesh.'⁶⁹

F. Special Laws and Customs for Rosh Chodesh

Therefore, half-hallel is recited⁷⁰ on Rosh Chodesh (although while Ashkenazim say a bracha, Sefardim do not), and we also add the prayer of Ya'aleh VeYavo⁷¹ to all of our daily prayers on Rosh Chodesh. There is a special Torah reading⁷² for Rosh Chodesh and an additional amidah (Musaf) corresponding to the additional sacrifice that was offered in the Temple, and some recite Tehillim 104 known as it contains the phrase 'he made the moon for ⁷⁴because ⁷³בְּרַכְּי נִפְשֵׁי' festivals' found in v. 19.

***DID YOU KNOW?** According to many authorities, Rosh Chodesh is considered to be a semi-holiday for women as a reward for not participating in the building of the golden calf?⁷⁵*

G. Deeper Insights

In explaining **Shemot Chapter 12 Verse 2** where we are told that 'this month [shall be] for you the beginning [of the order] of the months.'

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch notes⁷⁶ that the word 'לְכֶם'='for you' is used to teach us that we should spiritually renew ourselves each month just as the month is renewed each month. 'Thus

⁶⁸ Rabbi Yosef Zevin in *The Festivals in Halachah* Vol. 1 p. 370

⁶⁹ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 419

⁷⁰ *Ta'anit* 28b, *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 422:2

⁷¹ *Shabbat* 24a

⁷² *Megillah* 21-22

⁷³ *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 423:3

⁷⁴ *Ibid* as noted by the *Mishna Berura* note 9

⁷⁵ See *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 417:1 with note 3 of the *Mishna Berura*. The original source for this custom is the *Pirkei D' Rabbi Eliezer* Ch. 45

⁷⁶ See his commentary to *Shemot* 12:2

the Jewish sanctification of the new moon is an institution for the moral and spiritual rejuvenation of Israel⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Months in the Jewish Year



A. How Do We Count the Months in the Jewish Year?

We have learnt (see 'The Jewish Months') that as the Jewish nation prepared to leave Egypt, they were given the commandment to sanctify the New Moon. However, this does not mean that lunar months were unknown prior to this.

In fact, there are numerous verses in the Torah where reference is made to months. Bereishit 7:11 informs us that the flood began '*in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month...*';

We learn from these and similar verses that the Israelites and other ancient nations measured time by the (lunar) months of the year, and that each month was simply numbered rather than named.

As the Bnei Yisrael then prepared to leave Egypt - having been enslaved for 210 years – we then learn⁷⁸ about a major change relating to how the months were to be identified. God commands the Bnei Yisrael to sanctify the New Moon and to start counting the months again.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch observed,

'We count from Nissan because it is the epoch of the Exodus from Egypt, and we call the months simply the first, second, third etc., in the same way as we reckon the days of the week as such-and-such a day from the Sabbath⁷⁹. As a result of this, 'the counting of the months [became] a remembrance of the great miracle of the Exodus⁸⁰, ensuring that 'on every occasion that we mention the months, the miracle [of the Exodus from Egypt] will be recalled⁸¹.

B. The Names of the Months in the Jewish Year

However, nowadays, rather than referring to months according to their proximity to the first month of the year (i.e. First, second) when the Bnei Yisrael were released from slavery, we use specific names for specific months -

נִיסָן, אֵיר, סִינּוֹן, תַּמּוּז, אָב, אֶלּוּל, תִּשְׂרִי, חֶשְׁוֹן⁸², כֶּסֶלּוֹ,

טַבֵּת, שְׁבֵט, אֶדְר.

Where did these names come from? Were they made up by Rabbis or perhaps do they have a biblical source?⁸³

The **Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah Chapter 1 Law 2** notes that *'the names of the months came up with us from Babylonia'*. This means that the names we use for the Jewish months are

⁷⁸ As explained by the Ramban in his commentary to Shemot 12:2

⁷⁹ Hirsch, *Horeb* Ch. 35

⁸⁰ Ramban, Shemot 12:2

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² It should be noted that the more correct name for חֶשְׁוֹן is מְרֵחֶשְׁוֹן (as evident from Mishna *Ta'anit* 1:3,4, *Pesachim* 94b, *Rosh Hashanah* 7a)

⁸³ We actually find reference to the month of נִיסָן in the books of Esther (Esther 3:7) and Nechemiah (Nechemiah 2:1), of שְׁבֵט and כֶּסֶלּוֹ in the books of Zechariah (Shevat is mentioned in Zechariah 1:7, and Kislev in Zechariah 7:1) and Nechemiah (Kislev is mentioned in Nechemiah 1:1), the month of אֶדְר is referred to in the books of Ezra (Ezra 6:15) and Esther (Esther 9:17), the month of אֶלּוּל in the book of Nechemiah (Nechemiah 6:5) and we also find reference to the months of טַבֵּת and סִינּוֹן in the Book of Esther (Tevet is mentioned in Esther 2:16, Sivan in Esther 8:9).

not Jewish names⁸⁴ but were used by the Jews while they were exiled to Babylon. When they returned to Israel to build the second temple in Jerusalem, they continued to refer to the Jewish months by these names and we have continued to use them ever since (NB: this also explains why these names are only found in the biblical books of the prophets of Babylonia and in the Book of Esther⁸⁵).

***Did you know?** The name 'Tammuz' which is the fourth of the Jewish months was actually the name of a Babylonian idol⁸⁶?*

But why did the Jews maintain these names for the Jewish months given that these were not Jewish names?

The Ramban explains that just as the commandment to count the months from the month of Nissan ensured that the Jewish people would remember the miracle of their Exodus from Egypt, the reason why the Jews retained the Persian names for the Jewish months was in order to remind them of the salvation they experienced during this period and their miraculous return to the land of Israel. Therefore, the manner in which the Jewish months were referred to after the Exodus, and the manner they are referred to now, both remind us of moments of freedom and salvation from slavery and exile, and inspire us to thank God and live a full Jewish life.

C. How Many Months are There in the Jewish Year?

While the names we use for the Jewish months may remind us of the return from the Babylonian exile, a key detail relating to the Jewish calendar is the importance and centrality of the Exodus in the Jewish calendar.

We read in **Devarim Chapter 16 Verse 1** :

'You shall observe the month of springtime and perform the pesach-offering for the Lord your God, for it was in the month of springtime, at night, that the Lord your God freed you from Egypt.'

⁸⁴ Ramban (on Shemot 12:2) suggests that these are Persian names, while the Ibn Ezra (on Shemot 12:2) and the Chizkuni (on Shemot 12:2) claim that they are Chaldean names.

⁸⁵ See Ramban on Shemot 12:2

⁸⁶ See Yechezkel 8:14

This means that it is a biblical requirement to ensure that Pesach falls during the Spring⁸⁷.

If the Jewish year was simply made up on 12 Jewish months and lasted 354 days, we would find that after a few years, Pesach would no longer fall in the Spring. At the same time, if a Jewish year had 365.25 days, it would include 12 full months and around 11 days which would lead to great confusion.⁸⁸

Therefore, in order to maintain our desire to follow lunar months, and yet ensure that our festivals occur in the right season, the Rabbis established that an extra month should be added to the Jewish year in seven out of every nineteen years⁸⁹. This month is added prior to **נִיסָן** as its aim is to ensure that Pesach (which falls in **נִיסָן**) occurs in the Spring. Therefore, because the preceding month to **נִיסָן** is **אָדָר**, in a leap year we actually have two months of **אָדָר**; the first is **אָדָר ראשון** (which is the 'added' **אָדָר**), and the second is **אָדָר שני** (which is the 'original' **אָדָר**). Therefore, while an ordinary Jewish year contains 12 months, a leap year contains 13 months.

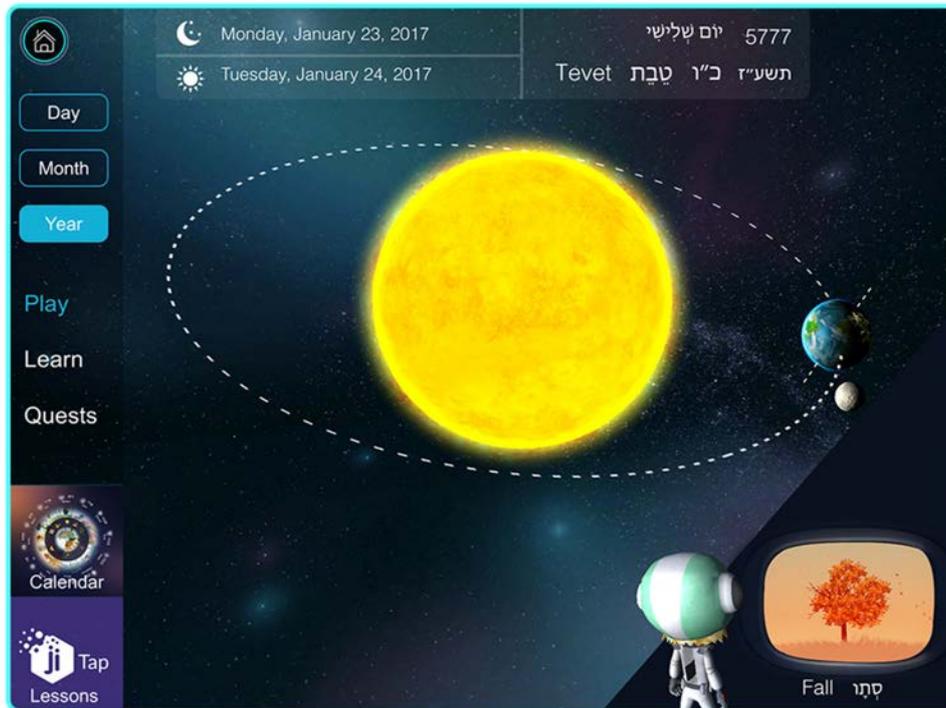
⁸⁷ See *Rosh Hashanah* 21a

⁸⁸ We have previously said that Jewish months are lunar months and that each Jewish month begins with the renewal of the moon and ends after the moon has made one revolution around the earth (which takes approximately 29.5 days). This means that a year made up of 12 Jewish (i.e. lunar) months lasts 354 days.

However, we have also noted that the Jewish year is determined by the relationship between the earth and the sun (NB: this is because the seasons are linked to the sun, and as we have noted above, the Jewish festivals - and most notably, Pesach - are linked to specific seasons). Given that it takes the earth 365.25 days to revolve around the sun, the (solar) year lasts 365.25 days.

⁸⁹ NB: these are the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th & 19th years in each 19-year cycle

The Jewish Year



A. What is a Jewish Year?

A Jewish year is a period of 12-13 lunar months, which begins on the 1st Tishrei (i.e. Rosh Hashanah).

There are two forms of a Jewish year. A regular Jewish year is referred to as a **שָׁנָה פְּשוּטָה** and contains 12 lunar months.⁹⁰ This means that a **שָׁנָה פְּשוּטָה** lasts just over 354 days. However, in 7 out of every 19 years⁹¹, we add an extra lunar month to the year (in order to ensure that

⁹⁰ Tur, *Orach Chaim* 427

⁹¹ These occur on the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years in the cycle. See *Rosh Hashanah* 19b

Pesach falls in the spring). Such a year, which lasts just under 384 days, is a Jewish leap year and is called a **שְׁנָה מְעֻבֶּרֶת** (literally, ‘a pregnant year’).

B. What Jewish Year Are We In?

According to tradition, we are in the Jewish Year of 5777. This means that we are in the five thousand seven hundredth and seventy fourth year since Adam was created, as described in Sefer Bereishit. However, this does not mean that the world is 5777 years old. While we are able to use the Bible and other sources to calculate the time between the creation of Adam and today, the Bible is clear that Adam was created on the 6th ‘day’ of creation, with many scholars claiming that these days may have lasted many billions of years.⁹² Given this, by referring to the ‘Jewish Years’, this does not mean that the world is no older than 5777 years.

However, the Jewish year count of 5777 is very different to the secular year of 2017, which is said to commemorate the number of years since the birth of Jesus. Since this calculation is centered on a significant moment in Christian rather than Jewish history, some Jews are reluctant to refer to secular years. In fact, by using the Jewish counting which begins when all of humanity was created, as opposed to using the secular counting which begins when just one human was created, it shows how Judaism includes values and messages that are relevant to Jews and non-Jews alike.

However, even those that do refer to 2017, follow it with the term CE, meaning ‘the Common Era’ and prior to the start of this calculation as being BCE, ‘Before the Common Era’, as opposed to AD⁹³ and BC⁹⁴ respectively.

C. The Jewish Year as Shared Time

We have previously noted that ‘Jewish years’ began when all of humanity was created, as compared to the secular counting which began when just one human was created. This highlights

⁹² See for example <http://www.aish.com/ci/sam/48951136.html>

⁹³ AD=Anno Domini, meaning ‘in the year of our Lord’

⁹⁴ BC=Before Christ

a key distinction between how Jews look at the Jewish year, and how others do so. Whereas many people look at the concept of time as a way of tracking personal events, Jews look at time as a means of guiding community celebrations and national commemorations. As Jonathan Sacks explains, ‘the *luach* (i.e. the Jewish calendar) is time as collective experience. Its message is that there is public time just as there is public space: time in which we merge our private concerns with the larger community of which we are a part’⁹⁵.

D. The Energy of the Jewish Year

However, the concept of shared time is not merely that we share time with those with us. Instead, shared time is connecting with energies in the Jewish year that have been planted by previous generations, and whose energy is then enjoyed together with them. As Rabbi Dessler explains, ‘the observance of Holy Days is much more than a pious remembrance of past events. It would be truer to say that on each festival we return to the original spiritual content of the day – to the sanctity of time which is made available to us now as it was then.’⁹⁶ He then quotes his teacher, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Broide of Kelm, who used to say that ‘instead of seeing ourselves as stationary with time passing by us, we should see ourselves as engaged on a cyclic journey through time.’⁹⁷ Therefore, ‘for Jews, the creation of the universe is not a metaphysical truth to be accepted. It is an experience to be lived one day in seven [and] the exodus from Egypt is not a historical truth to be recorded. It is a dramatic episode to be re-enacted every year’⁹⁸.

More so, the energies in the Jewish year are not exclusively felt on the Shabbat and festivals. We find that ‘certain days are propitious for certain events’⁹⁹, and ‘certain seasons portend certain auspicious occurrences while other seasons are indicators of more calamitous incidents’¹⁰⁰. For example, ‘the ten-day period at the beginning of Tishrei is more favorable for repentance than any

⁹⁵ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Faith in the Future* p. 129

⁹⁶ *Strive for Truth* Part IV p. 21

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Faith in the Future* p. 130

⁹⁹ Rabbi Nachum Amsel, *The Jewish Encyclopaedia of Moral and Ethical Issues* p. 284

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

days during the rest of the year¹⁰¹, while during the Hebrew month of Adar, it is propitious for Jews to agree business deals¹⁰².

However, it is because of this cyclic journey that ‘gives the Jew the ability to drastically change spiritual moods very quickly’¹⁰³. For example, ‘the mood on the day before Purim, the Fast of Esther, is one of seriousness and repentance’¹⁰⁴. However, ‘as soon as nightfall arrives, the mood on Purim immediately changes to one of joy, rejoicing and “partying”’¹⁰⁵ and we see similar contrasts between Erev Yom Kippur when it is a mitzvah to eat, and Yom Kippur where eating is forbidden, as well as on Yom Hazikaron when Israel remembers its fallen soldiers, and then proceeds to celebrate its Independence Day. It is therefore due to the fact that each day is sown with its own unique energies which are planted by previous generations that enables us to drastically change our spiritual moods very quickly and tap into the different energies of adjacent days.

E. Memory in a Jewish Year

However, in addition to considering what is found in a Jewish year, we also find that a Jewish year is the longest period of time for someone to maintain a meaningful remembrance of a person, event or item. Because of this, Judaism requires that we remember those who are dear to us who have passed on at least once a year on their Yahrzeit¹⁰⁶, and we are also required to recall events such as the attack of Amalek at least once a year so that they remain a part of our consciousness. Furthermore, if you lose an item and do not find it within a year, Jewish law considers it as if you have lost hope of finding it and you start to forget about it¹⁰⁷. Consequently, if someone finds such

¹⁰¹ Ibid. quoting *Rambam, Hilkhoh Teshuvah 2:6*

¹⁰² *Ta’anit 29a*

¹⁰³ *The Jewish Encyclopaedia of Moral and Ethical Issues* p. 285

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See *Brachot 58b*

¹⁰⁷ See Rashi’s commentary to *Brachot 58b* leading words ‘*kekli abud*’

an item, they may keep it. We see from here that the Jewish Year is not merely a measure of time; but is in fact a measure of the mind.

F. Symbolism in the Jewish Year

Finally, aside from how the Jewish year is shared time and includes different spiritual energies, the Tur¹⁰⁸ states that the Shalosh Regalim correspond to our three forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and that each of the twelve Roshei Chodashim (in a regular year) corresponds to the twelve Shevatim (tribes). This means that the Jewish year itself contains reminders of key personalities in Jewish history, and by doing so, is a wonderful tool to not only experience Jewish days of celebration, but also remember great Jewish personalities in Jewish history.

¹⁰⁸ Tur, *Orach Chaim* 417

A. The Four Seasons

If you live outside of Israel¹¹¹, you are probably used to experiencing four seasons¹¹²: Spring (אָבִיב), Summer (קִיץ), Autumn/Fall (סָתוּ) & Winter (חֶרֶף), and according to Rabbinic sources¹¹³, these seasons fall in the Jewish calendar at the following times:

FOUR SEASONS		
SEASON	SEASON IN HEBREW	STARTS ON
Spring	אָבִיב	1 st Nissan
Summer	קִיץ	1 st Tammuz
Autumn/Fall	סָתוּ	1 st Tishrei
Winter	חֶרֶף	1 st Tevet

However, it is clear from **Devarim Chapter 16 Verse 1** that Pesach must fall in the Spring. But why is this so?

¹¹¹ NB: Based on where Israel is found on the earth, many claim that it doesn't really have four separate seasons but simply has 2 main seasons, the sunny season (i.e. Spring/Summer) and the winter/rainy season (i.e. Autumn/Winter). This is supported by Tehillim 74:17 where we read, "You have established the bounds of the Earth, you have created summer and winter" (see also Amos 3:15, Zechariah 14:8 & Yeshaya 18:6 who also imply that there are only two seasons in Israel). However, it should be noted that the Gemara (*Bava Metzi'ah* 106b) identifies six seasons which reflect different stages in the agricultural process.

¹¹² NB: In modern Hebrew, seasons are referred to by the word עונות. However, in Rabbinical literature, seasons are referred to as תקופות

¹¹³ See *Pirkei D' Rabbi Eliezer* Ch. 6

B. The Symbolism of the Seasons

One obvious reason why the Torah insists that Pesach fall in the Spring is because Bnei Yisrael left Egypt in the Spring. While this is correct, it does not explain why this required us to add an extra month in 7 out of every 19 years.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a deeper explanation:

‘The festival of our historical revival must also be the festival of the revival of nature. The God whose breath of spring awakens nature from the death-like numbness of winter is the same God Who delivered us from death and bondage and granted us life and freedom¹¹⁴.

This means that the seasonal changes that take place in Spring describe the changes that took place to the Jewish people when they left Egypt, and because of this, the Torah commands us to make sure that Pesach falls in Springtime. Therefore, the season is not just a *reminder of Pesach*; it is actually a *metaphor for Pesach*.

However, Rabbi Hirsch¹¹⁵ adds another reason why our festivals should occur at the time of the changes in seasons. He explains that if we did not celebrate a festival when a new season began, we may start celebrating and worshipping nature. Given that this is totally against Jewish belief, God wanted us to focus on Him when the new seasons began.

C. The Seasonal Prayers

In addition to the association between Jewish festivals and the seasons, we also find that our prayers reflect the seasons as well.

In the Amidah, we recite two prayers that relate to the seasons. The first, which is a four word prayer, appears in the second blessing of the Amidah and is referred to as

מְשִׁיב הַרוּחַ וּמוֹרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם.

¹¹⁴ Hirsch commentary to Devarim 16:1

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

This prayer, which literally means ‘who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall’, is regarded as a remembrance for rain (see **Mishna Ta’anit 1:1**)¹¹⁶ and is recited from the Musaf prayer on Shmini Atzeret until the beginning of Pesach.¹¹⁷ It is important to note that this prayer is recited during this period by all Jews throughout the world. This means that when Jews in South Africa and Australia are enjoying their summer season, they are also praying for rain.

The reason for this is that this prayer refers to the rain IN ISRAEL rather than rain in the country where the person who is praying is living.

At the same time, the ninth blessing of the Amidah includes a line when we ask God to

וְתַן טַל וּמָטָר לְבִרְכָה עַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה

grant us dew and rain for blessing. However, this prayer is recited at different times. Those in Israel start saying this prayer on the 7th of Cheshvan – 15 days after Sukkot - when they really need it to rain, whereas those outside of Israel start reciting this prayer on the 4th or 5th of December which is the date when the rainy season begins in Babylon (where the prayer was written)¹¹⁸, and even though the rainy season begins at different times in different countries, the custom has developed for all communities outside of Israel to begin reciting

וְתַן טַל וּמָטָר לְבִרְכָה עַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה on December 4th/5th.

We therefore see that even in our siddur, we are aware of the different seasons occurring in different times in different places. The fact that all Jews recite the prayer of מְשִׁיב הַרוּחַ וּמוֹרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם from the Musaf prayer on Shmini Atzeret until the beginning of Pesach shows that **whatever season we experience where we live, part of our spiritual life remains permanently connected to the land of Israel and the seasons that take place in Israel.**

¹¹⁶ See also *Ta’anit* 4a-4b

¹¹⁷ See Mishna *Ta’anit* 1:2, codified in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 114:1 (NB: clearly this also shows that the rainy ‘season’ in Israel lasted around 6 months, rather than the 3 months you would expect in a four-season year).

¹¹⁸ See Rashi on *Ta’anit* 10b



Special Events in the Jewish Year

While we will be focusing on each individual festival in future modules, it is important to take a macroscopic view of the Jewish year and identify the special events in the Jewish year and consider their similarities and differences.

We find that there are four categories of three events in the Jewish Year:

A. Biblical Festivals & Fasts

This category includes three groups of festivals.

a) Yamim Noraim

Rosh Hashanah (1st-2nd Tishrei) and **Yom Kippur** (10th Tishrei) are together known as the Yamim Noraim, the Days of Awe/the High Holy Days.

b) Shalosh Regalim

Pesach (15th-21st/22nd Nissan), **Shavuot** (6th/6-7th Sivan) & **Sukkot** (15th-21st/22nd Tishrei) are known as the Shalosh Regalim. This term, which is often translated as 'the Three Foot Festivals', informs us that Pesach, Shavuot & Sukkot are the Three Pilgrim festivals when Jews would visit the Temple and offer sacrifices. As previously explained, each of these festivals last one extra day when observed in the diaspora.

c) Tisha B'Av

Other than Yom Kippur, **Tisha B'Av** (literally 'The 9th of Av') is the only other fast day which has Biblical origins. Consequently, both Yom Kippur & Tisha B'Av are treated more strictly than all other fast days.

B. Rabbinic Festivals & Fasts

a) Purim & Chanukah

Unlike the Yamim Noraim and the Shalosh Regalim, there are some festivals found in the Jewish calendar that are either mentioned in the Bible as a story but not as an everlasting festival (such as **Purim** which falls on the 14th of Adar) or not mentioned whatsoever in the Bible (such as **Chanukah** which falls on the 25th Kislev and lasts 8 days). These festivals were therefore established by the Rabbis in the post-biblical period.

b) Other Rabbinic days of celebration

Two other days which are considered days of celebration are mentioned by the Rabbis. These are **Tu Bishvat** (15th Shevat) which is the New Year for trees, and **Lag BaOmer** (18th Iyar) which is the yahrzeit of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, and also when there was a halt of the plague which killed many thousands of Rabbi Akiva's students.

c) Other fast days

As previously mentioned, the only two fast days which are explicitly mentioned in the Bible are Yom Kippur & Tisha B'Av. Therefore, the other 'minor fast days' of the **Fast of Gedaliah** (3rd Tishrei), the **Tenth of Tevet**, the **Fast of Esther** (13th Adar) and the **Seventeenth of Tammuz** last for shorter periods of time and are treated with greater leniency.

C. Modern Festivals

In addition to the Biblical and Rabbinic festivals and fasts, there are four days which have been recently been added to the Jewish calendar. They are **Yom Hashoah VeHagevurah** (27th Nissan), **Yom Hazikaron** (4th Iyar), **Yom Ha'atzmaut** (5th Iyar) and **Yom Yerushalayim** (28th Iyar).

Jewish Birthdays

Though most Jews are only aware of the date of the Jewish calendar as fasts and festivals approach, an easy way to connect with the Jewish calendar is by identifying and celebrating your Hebrew birthday. This is done by looking at a Hebrew calendar and seeing the Hebrew date on the day and in the year that you were born. Of course, care should be taken to correctly identify whether you were born in the evening or morning because someone born in the evening of one day will have a different Hebrew birthday to one who is born on the morning of that same day.

According to the Sages 'the day a person was born offers that individual the mystical benefits and powers of what is known in Kabbalah as "ascending fortune" each year on that day'¹¹⁹, and it is actually the practice of some people to seek blessings from those celebrating birthdays.¹²⁰

However, perhaps the most beautiful teaching about birthdays was expressed by Rabbi Nachman of Breslev who observed that:

היום בו נולדת הוא היום בו החליט הקב"ה שהעולם אינו יכול להתקיים בלעדיך

The day you were born was the day God decided the universe could no longer exist without you.

¹¹⁹ *Ramat HaShulchan* by Rabbi Ari Enkin p. 240

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

The Jewish Month of Nissan



Name of month and its meaning

The 1st month in the Jewish year¹²¹ is referred to as **הַחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן** – the first of the months, and **חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב** – the month of Spring. However, it is best known by the name **נִיסָן**. While ‘נִיסָן’ was originally a Babylonian name¹²², some authorities claim that the name **נִיסָן** is connected with the Hebrew word ‘נִס’ meaning a miracle ‘because it is a month of open miracles that transcend nature and the scope of human comprehension.’¹²³



Length of month

While the length of Nissan would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar it was agreed that Nissan would last 30 days and that there would only be 1 day for Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

Major theme of Nissan

The major theme of the month of Nissan is Redemption. Nissan was the month of the Exodus¹²⁴ and it is said that the Messianic redemption will also come in Nissan.¹²⁵

¹²¹ See Shemot 12:1

¹²² See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:2*

¹²³ Bnei Yissaschar, quoted in ‘*The Wisdom of the Hebrew Months*’ p. 134

¹²⁴ See Shemot Ch. 12

¹²⁵ *Rosh Hashanah 11a*



Special days

- The Shabbat that precedes Pesach is called Shabbat HaGadol¹²⁶
- The 14th of Nissan is the fast of the firstborn
- The 15th of Nissan is the first day of Pesach which lasts 7 days in Israel and 8 days outside of Israel.
- We start counting the Omer on the 16th of Nissan
- Isru Chag is the day after Pesach which is the 22nd of Nissan in Israel, and 23rd outside of Israel
- The 27th of Nissan is Yom Hashoah



Historical events that took place in this month

- 1-12 Nissan 2449: When the Mishkan (Tabernacle) was built in the Wilderness, there were special celebratory offerings by each of the tribal leaders during the first twelve days of the month,¹²⁷ making this a period of celebration for the entire nation.¹²⁸
- 10 Nissan 2448: The Children of Israel took the lambs in Egypt which were later used as the Pesach Sacrifice
- 15th Nissan 2448: The Children of Israel were freed from Egyptian bondage
- 21st Nissan 2448: The Sea of Reeds split
- 27th Nissan 5703: The Warsaw Ghetto uprising



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Nissan is Tleh/Aries/ram

¹²⁶ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 430:1*

¹²⁷ See Bemidbar Ch. 7; Shemot 40:17

¹²⁸ See Mishna Berura on *Orach Chaim* 429 note 7



Did you know?

If you see fruit trees blossoming in the month of Nissan, you should recite a special bracha called 'birkat ha-ilanot'¹²⁹?

¹²⁹ Rambam, *Hilchot Berachot* 10:13

The Jewish Month of Iyar



Name of month and its meaning

The 2nd month in the Jewish year is referred to as the second חֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה¹³⁰ - of the months, and חֹדֶשׁ נֹרָא¹³¹ – the month of radiance¹³² because ‘the sun is in full radiance even though the intense heat of the summer months is not yet felt’¹³³. However, it is best known by the name אֵיָר.



Length of month

While the length of Iyar would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Iyar would last 29 days and that there would be 2 days for Rosh Chodesh Iyar.



Special days

- The 4th of Iyar is Yom Hazikaron¹³⁴
- The 5th of Iyar is Yom Ha'atzmaut
- The 14th of Iyar is Pesach Sheini¹³⁵
- The 18th of Iyar is Lag BaOmer
- The 28th of Iyar is Yom Yerushalayim

¹³⁰ Bemidbar 9:11

¹³¹ Melachim I 6:1

¹³² Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov (*The Book of Our Heritage* Vol. 3 p. 729) offers two meanings of this term. Either ‘the sun is in full radiance even though the intense heat of the summer months is not yet felt’. Alternatively, because the Targum translates the word נֹרָא as ‘bud’. Therefore’ the name נֹרָא may thus have been given to Iyar because the buds of the flowers and leaves appear then’.

¹³³ *The Book of Our Heritage* Vol. 3 p. 729

¹³⁴ http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/MemorialDayLaw_eng.htm

¹³⁵ See Bemidbar 9:10-11



Historical events that took place in this month

- 17th Iyar 1656: The flood started¹³⁶
- 1 Iyar 2448: The Children of Israel were encamped at Marah and saw how 'the bitter water [that] they found was miraculously transformed into sweet, fresh water, suitable for drinking'¹³⁷.
- 1 Iyar 2449: The Children of Israel were counted for the first time.¹³⁸
- 1 Iyar 2928: Shlomo began building the first Temple¹³⁹
- 1 Iyar 3391: Construction on the second Temple began¹⁴⁰
- 5 Iyar 5708: The state of Israel was declared
- 18 Iyar 3930: Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai died
- 28 Iyar 5727: Jerusalem was reunified after the Six-Day War



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Iyar is Shor/Taurus/bull.



Did you know?

The 14th of Iyar is 'Pesach Sheini' – the second Pesach. If someone was unable to bringing the korban Pesach (Pesach sacrifice), they would bring it on this day. Nowadays, some people have the custom of eating matzah on Pesach Sheini.

¹³⁶ This follows the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua as identified by Rashi on Bereishit 7:11

¹³⁷ *The Book of Our Heritage* Vol. 3 p. 729

¹³⁸ See Bemidbar 1:1

¹³⁹ Melachim I 6:1

¹⁴⁰ Ezra 3:8

The Jewish Month of Sivan



Name of month and its meaning

The 3rd month in the Jewish year¹⁴¹ is referred to as ¹⁴²חֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי – the third month. However, it is best known by its originally Babylonian name¹⁴³ of סִינן.



Length of month

While the length of Nissan would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Sivan would last 30 days and that there would only be 1 day for Rosh Chodesh Sivan.



Special days

- The 6th (6-7th in the diaspora) of Sivan is Shavuot

¹⁴¹ See Shemot 12:1

¹⁴² Shemot 19:1

¹⁴³ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 1:2



Historical events that took place in this month

- 1 Sivan 2448: The Children of Israel arrive at the wilderness of Sinai¹⁴⁴
- 6 Sivan 2448: The Torah was given at Sinai¹⁴⁵
- 1 Sivan 2815: King Asa gathered all the tribes in Jerusalem to accept the covenant¹⁴⁶
- 20 Sivan 4931: This is a day on which the Jewish communities of Europe repeatedly suffered calamities and it was designated in 4931, and subsequently in 5410 following the Chmielnicki massacres as a public fast day in Poland¹⁴⁷



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Sivan is Teumim/Gemini/twins.



Did you know?

Since the Torah was given in the month of Sivan, Tachanun – which is a more mournful prayer – is not recited for the first 8¹⁴⁸, and some say 12¹⁴⁹ days of the month.

¹⁴⁴ Shemot 19:1

¹⁴⁵ See Vayikra 23:15-16; Devarim 16:9-10

¹⁴⁶ Divrei Hayamim II 15:9-12

¹⁴⁷ See the Taz on *Orach Chaim* 580 where he writes that ‘it is customary to fast on the twentieth of Sivan throughout the kingdom of Poland – each community according to its custom’

¹⁴⁸ Rema, *Orach Chaim* 131:7

¹⁴⁹ *Mishna Berura* on *Orach Chaim* 131 note 36

The Jewish Month of Tammuz



Name of month and its meaning

The 4th month in the Jewish year is referred to as ¹⁵⁰ חֹדֶשׁ הָרְבִיעִי – the fourth of the months. However, it is best known by its Babylonian name¹⁵¹ ‘תַּמּוּז’, which itself had been associated with a Babylonian pagan cult¹⁵².



Length of month

While the length of Nissan would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Tammuz would last 29 days and that there would be 2 days for Rosh Chodesh Tammuz.



Special days

- The 17th of Tammuz is the fast known in Hebrew as ‘Shiv’a Assar B’Tammuz’¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Yirmeyahu 39:2

¹⁵¹ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:2*

¹⁵² As we read in Yechezkel 8:14 ‘and behold the women sat there and cried over Tammuz’

¹⁵³ See Zechariah 8:19



Historical events that took place in this month

- 17 Tammuz 2448: The tablets were broken¹⁵⁴
- 3 Tammuz 2488: Yehoshua caused the sun and moon to stop¹⁵⁵
- 9 Tammuz 3338: The walls of the city were breached in the time of the first Temple¹⁵⁶
- 17 Tammuz 3830: The wall of the city was breached in the time of the second Temple¹⁵⁷



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Tammuz is 'cancer' (crab).



Did you know?

The 17th of Tammuz is the start of the three-week period during which time numerous mourning rituals are practiced as we mourn the destruction of both temples¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁴ See Shemot 32:15-19; Mishna Ta'anit 4:3

¹⁵⁵ See Yehoshua 10:12-13

¹⁵⁶ See Yirmiyahu 52:67. NB. 'so as not to overburden the people, two fasts were not declared in such close proximity and the fast was ordained for the 17th of Tammuz' (*The Book of our Heritage* Vol. 3 p. 899)

¹⁵⁷ *Ta'anit* 28b

¹⁵⁸ See *Perisha to Orach Chaim* 551 No. 5

The Jewish Month of Av



Name of month and its meaning

The 5th month in the Jewish year is referred to as ¹⁵⁹ חֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִישִׁי - the fifth of the months. However, it is best known by its Babylonian name¹⁶⁰ 'אָב' or occasionally by its expanded name 'מְנַחֵם אָב'¹⁶¹, literally 'the comfort of Av'.



Length of month

While the length of Nissan would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Av would last 30 days and that there would be 1 day for Rosh Chodesh Av.



Special days

- The first 9 days of the month of Av are referred to as 'the Nine days' from which point we limit rejoicing or actions associated with happiness such as cutting our hair, wearing new clothes, eating meat or drinking wine¹⁶² (other than on Shabbat) & bathing for pleasure¹⁶³
- The Shabbat immediately preceding Tisha B'Av is called Shabbat Chazon¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Bemidbar 33:38

¹⁶⁰ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:2*

¹⁶¹ This name is used in anticipation of the consolation which we hope for and await ever since the calamities that took place during this month.

¹⁶² It should be noted that Sefardim limit the restrictions of eating meat and drinking wine to the week of Tisha B'Av

¹⁶³ *The Book of Our Heritage* Vol. 3 pp. 916-918

¹⁶⁴ It is called 'Shabbat Chazon' because the Haftarah which is read on this Shabbat comes from Isaiah Chapter 1 and begins with the word 'Chazon' (literally, 'vision') in which it describes the calamities that befell Israel

- The ninth of Av is a fast day¹⁶⁵ and is known as Tisha B'Av (תשעה באב). The fast begins at sunset of the 9th of Av and ends at nightfall on the 10th of Av. During this time, it is forbidden to eat, drink, wear leather shoes, or anoint yourself with creams or oil.¹⁶⁶
- The 15th of Av is known as ט"ו באב and is a happy day¹⁶⁷



Historical events that took place in this month

- 9 Av 2449: The spies returned with a negative report¹⁶⁸
- 15 Av 2478: The generation of the wilderness ceased dying¹⁶⁹
- 15 Av 2831: Permission was given for intertribal marriages¹⁷⁰
- 7 Av 3338: The first Beit Hamikdash was vandalized¹⁷¹
- 9 Av 3338: The first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed¹⁷²
- 9 Av 3829: The second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed¹⁷³
- 9 Av 3893: The city of Beitar was captured¹⁷⁴
- 9 Av 3893: Turnus Rufus plowed the site of the Beit Hamikdash and the surrounding area
- 9 Av 5050: Jews were expelled from England
- 9 Av 5252: Jews were expelled from Spain

¹⁶⁵ See Zechariah 8:19

¹⁶⁶ *The Book of Our Heritage* Vol. 3 pp. 919-924

¹⁶⁷ Mishna *Ta'anit* 4:8

¹⁶⁸ Mishna *Ta'anit* 4:6

¹⁶⁹ *Eichah Rabbah*, Prologue 33

¹⁷⁰ *The Book of Our Heritage* Vol. 3 p. 1021, based on Shoftim 21:19

¹⁷¹ See Malachim II 25:8, *Ta'anit* 29a

¹⁷² Mishna *Ta'anit* 4:6

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Av is Ari/Leo/lion.



Did you know?

Some people follow the custom of referring to the month of 'Av' before the fast of the 9th of Av, and then referring to it as 'Menachem Av' from the 10th of Av onwards?

The Jewish Month of Ellul



Name of month and its meaning

The 6th month in the Jewish year when counting from Nissan is known by its Babylonian name¹⁷⁵ 'אֶלּוּל'. However, in the general calendar year of the Jewish tradition which begins counting the months from Tishrei,¹⁷⁶ the month of אֶלּוּל is the last month of the year.



Length of month

While the length of Nissan would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Ellul would last 29 days and that there would be 2 days for Rosh Chodesh Ellul.



Special days

- Since Ellul immediately precedes Rosh Hashanah which falls on the 1st-2nd of Tishrei, the month of Ellul was established as a time for repentance. We therefore recite Selichot during all of (for Sefardim) or part of (for Ashkenazim) the month of Ellul.¹⁷⁷
- In addition to the above, the shofar is blown each morning in the synagogue from the 1st of Ellul until the eve of Rosh Hashanah to warn the people of the approach of Rosh Hashanah

¹⁷⁵ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:2*

¹⁷⁶ See *Rosh Hashanah 10b*

¹⁷⁷ It is also the custom to recite Tehillim 27 each morning throughout the month of Ellul



Historical events that took place in this month

- 25 Ellul 0: The world was created¹⁷⁸
- 1 Ellul 2448: Moshe pleaded for divine mercy after the episode of the Golden Calf
- 17 Ellul 2449: The spies who provided an evil report about the land of Israel, died
- 25 Ellul 3426: Nechemya completed construction of the wall surrounding the city of Jerusalem¹⁷⁹



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Ellul is Betula/Virgo.



Did you know?

Some people have the practice of checking their mezuzot and tefillin during the month of Ellul¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁸ See *Rosh Hashanah* 10b

¹⁷⁹ See *Nechemya* 6:15

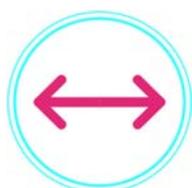
¹⁸⁰ *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 128:3

The Jewish Month of Tishrei



Name of month and its meaning

The 7th month is referred to as ¹⁸¹ חֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי - the seventh of the months, although in the general calendar year of the Jewish tradition, this is the first of the months. While often referred to as ¹⁸² יָרַח הָאֶתְנַיִם, it is best known by its Babylonian name¹⁸³ 'תִּשְׁרִי'.



Length of month

While the length of Tishrei would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Tishrei would last 30 days.



Special days

- The 1st and 2nd of Tishrei are Rosh Hashanah¹⁸⁴
- The 3rd of Tishrei is the fast of Gedaliah¹⁸⁵
- The period from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur is referred to as the 'Ten Days of Repentance', and the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur is called 'Shabbat Shuva – The Shabbat of returning'
- The 10th of Tishrei is Yom Kippur¹⁸⁶
- Sukkot is celebrated from the 15th-21st of Tishrei. In Israel, Sukkot begins with just one day of Yom Tov which is then followed by Chol

¹⁸¹ Melachim I 8:2

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 1:2

¹⁸⁴ Although Vayikra 23:24 states that Rosh Hashanah lasts just 1 day, tradition teaches that Rosh Hashanah lasts 2 days even when celebrated in Israel (see Beitzah 5b)

¹⁸⁵ See Zechariah 4:19

¹⁸⁶ Bemidbar 29:7

Hamoed, while in the diaspora, Sukkot begins with two days of Yom Tov

- The 21st of Tishrei is Hoshanah Rabbah¹⁸⁷
- The 22nd of Tishrei is Shmini Atzeret in Israel, while Shmini Atzeret falls on both the 22nd & 23rd of Tishrei in the diaspora
- In Israel, Simchat Torah is celebrated on the 22nd of Tishrei, while it is celebrated in the diaspora on the 23rd of Tishrei



Historical events that took place in this month

- 1 Tishrei: Adam & Eve were created¹⁸⁸
- 3 Tishrei 3180: Gedaliah ben Achikam was assassinated
- 8 Tishrei: The first day of the dedication ceremony of the 1st Temple
- 10 Tishrei 2448: Moshe returns with the second set of tablets and a message of forgiveness following the sin of the Golden Calf



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Tishrei is moznaim/Libra/scales.



Did you know?

The month of Tishrei contains so many festivals that we do not recite the mournful prayer of tachanun throughout the month.

¹⁸⁷ According to tradition (see *Zohar, Tzav* 31b), Hoshanah Rabbah is the final day to overturn an inscription for life of death as decided by God on Yom Kippur

¹⁸⁸ See *Tosafot, Rosh Hashanah* 8a

The Jewish Month of Cheshvan



Name of month and its meaning

The 8th month in the Jewish year is referred to as **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁמִינִי**¹⁸⁹ – the eighth of the months, and it is also referred to as **יָרֵחַ בּוּל**.¹⁹⁰ However, it is best known by its Babylonian name¹⁹¹ **חֶשְׁוֹן** or more correctly, **מַרְחֶשְׁוֹן**.¹⁹²



Length of month

In a regular year, Cheshvan lasts 29 days. However, in a special year lasting 355 days, we add an extra day onto Cheshvan which then lasts 30 days. Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan always consists of two days, since it follows Tishrei which is a 'full' month.



Special days

- There are no special days in Cheshvan, and according to some people, this is why it is also known as **מַרְחֶשְׁוֹן** which literally means 'bitter Cheshvan'.



Historical events that took place in this month

- 15 Cheshvan 2811: Two national idols were constructed¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Melachim I 6:38

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:2*

¹⁹² That Marcheshvan is the more correct term is supported by as evident from Mishna *Ta'anit* 1:3,4, *Pesachim* 94b, *Rosh Hashanah* 7a. According to numerous sources, the term **מר** refers to water (see Yeshayahu 40:15) because Cheshvan is the start of the rainy season (see *Pri Chadash, Even Haezer* 126:7).

¹⁹³ See Melachim I Ch. 12



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Cheshvan is akrav/Scorpio.



Did you know?

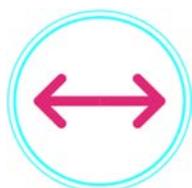
Cheshvan is the beginning of the rainy season in Israel.

The Jewish Month of Kislev



Name of month and its meaning

The 9th month in the Jewish year is referred to as ¹⁹⁴חֹדֶשׁ הַתְּשַׁעִי – the ninth of the months. However, it is best known by its Babylonian name¹⁹⁵ 'כְּסֵלֻ'.



Length of month

In a regular year, Kislev lasts 30 days. However, in a special year lasting 353 days, we reduce Kislev by one day and it then lasts 29 days. Rosh Chodesh Kislev lasts 1 day when the month has 29 days, and 2 days when the month has 30 days.



Special days

- Chanukah begins on the 25th of Kislev



Historical events that took place in this month

- 25th of Kislev 3622: The miracle of the oil which we celebrate during Chanukah



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Kislev is kashet/Sagittarius/archer.

¹⁹⁴ Zechariah 7:1

¹⁹⁵ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 1:2. See also Zechariah 7:1 and Nechemiah 1:1.



Did you know?

It is customary to eat oily foods on Chanukah, especially doughnuts.

The Jewish Month of Tevet



Name of month and its meaning

The 10th month in the Jewish year is referred to as ¹⁹⁶חֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי – the tenth of the months. However, it is best known by its Babylonian name¹⁹⁷ טֵבֵת.



Length of month

While the length of Tevet would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Tevet would last 29 days, although Rosh Chodesh Tevet varies from being 1 or 2 days.



Special days

- The 10th of Tevet is a fast day¹⁹⁸



Historical events that took place in this month

- 10th Tevet 3335: The Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, began their siege of Jerusalem¹⁹⁹



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Tevet is gedi/Capricorn/kid.

¹⁹⁶ Esther 2:16

¹⁹⁷ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:2*

¹⁹⁸ Zechariah 8:19

¹⁹⁹ Melachim II 25:4

The Jewish Month of Shevat



Name of month and its meaning

The 11th month in the Jewish year is referred to as ²⁰⁰ חֹדֶשׁ עֲשָׂתֵי-עָשָׂר – the eleventh of the months. However, it is best known by its Babylonian name²⁰¹ ‘שֶׁבֶט’.



Length of month

While the length of Shevat would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Shevat would always last 30 days and that there would be 1 day for Rosh Chodesh Shevat.



Special days

- The 15th of Shevat, otherwise known as Tu Bishvat, is the New Year for Trees and is one of the four New Years in the Jewish Calendar²⁰²



Historical events that took place in this month

- 1 Shevat 2488: Moshe began delivering his final address to Bnei Yisrael²⁰³.



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Shevat is dli/Aquarius/water-drawer.

²⁰⁰ Devarim 1:3, Zechariah 1:7

²⁰¹ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 1:2

²⁰² *Mishna Rosh Hashanah* 1:1

²⁰³ Devarim 1:3. According to Rabbi Eliyahu KiTov, ‘the later Sages have therefore said that the first of Shevat is comparable to the day of the giving of the Torah’ (*The Book of our Heritage* Vol. 1 p. 342)



Did you know?

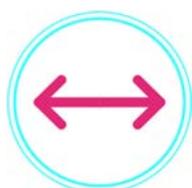
It is customary to eat fruits on Tu Bishvat.

The Jewish Month of Adar



Name of month and its meaning

The 12th month in the Jewish year is referred to as ²⁰⁴חֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם-עָשָׂר – the fourth of the months. However, it is best known by its Babylonian name²⁰⁵ ‘אַדָּר’.



Length of month

While the length of Adar would vary during the time of the Sanhedrin, (from the year 359 CE when Hillel II fixed the Jewish calendar) it was agreed that Adar would last 29 days in a regular year and that there would be 2 days for Rosh Chodesh Adar. However, during a leap year (when we add a second month of Adar), the first month contains 30 days.



Special days in Adar

- The 13th of Adar is the fast of Esther
- The 14th of Adar is Purim
- The 15th of Adar is Shushan Purim



Historical events that took place in Adar

- 14 Adar 3405: The Jewish people are saved from the threat of Haman



Zodiac sign

The zodiac sign of Adar is dagim/Pisces/fish.

²⁰⁴ Esther 8:12

²⁰⁵ See *Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 1:2



Did you know?

According to our rabbis, we should be extra happy during the month of Adar.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Mishna *Ta'anit* 29a



Powered by

JEWISH INTERACTIVE

Available for Mac and PC as well as iOS and Android devices

Ji Calendar is a state-of-the-art, educationally rich, imaginative and enriching series of modules to teach everything that a child needs to know about the Jewish calendar. The app is both a classroom tool and an addictive game for students.

Ji Calendar is produced by Jewish Interactive (Ji) and jointly funded by The Center For Initiatives In Jewish Education (CIJE) and the Glatt Charitable Trust.



Contact us

Tel: +1 (646) 701 0017

E-mail: info@jewishinteractive.net