

From The Rabbi



The story in the Torah that serves to define who we are as descendants of the Biblical Israelite nation, is the story of Egyptian enslavement and the Exodus from Egypt. The narrative of that story is interrupted by a section in which the Israelites were commanded to set up a calendar in which the month in which the Exodus took place would be the first month of the calendar year. Then there were commands that were linked to specific days of this month that led up to the Exodus. Then a very specific day of this month was set aside as a day of remembrance on which an annual festival would be held “throughout the ages...as an institution for all time.” Later on in the Book of Deuteronomy we are told that this festival was not only to be known as the Festival of Unleavened Bread, but it was also to be known as The Festival of Spring.

In order for the first month of a year, whose new months are determined by the cycle of the moon, to be in the Spring, an intricate system of intercalation was required. At first, the system was a little bit like Ground Hog Day. The rabbis would go out in the 12th month of the year and decide if Spring Time was near or if it felt like there would be another month of Winter before the Spring season would begin. In some years they would add a month to make the year 13 months and in some years they would not add a month and a new year would begin. Sometime between the years of 360 and 500 CE, based on Astronomy and Mathematics, it was determined that years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19 of every 19 year cycle would become leap years with thirteen months and the other years would be regular years with 12 months.

On page 380 of the Etz Hayim Chumash is the following commentary:

Why does Israel count by the moon, with each month stating when the new moon emerges? Because the moon, unlike the sun, waxes and wanes, nearly disappears and then grows bright again. So the Jewish people go through cycles of prosperity and suffering, knowing that even in darkness there are brighter days ahead. Just as God showed Noah the rainbow as a sign of the covenant, God shows Moses the sliver of the new moon as a symbol of Israel's capacity for constant renewal.

For nearly 2000 years, the ebb and flow of the Jewish calendar, with each of its significant dates and observances, has helped to shape and maintain Jewish identity. Every time of the year has its own unique quality dependent upon the special days within each of the months as well as the specific passages from the Torah that are read on an annual cycle. So much of our Jewish tradition is based upon the sanctification of time. We mark the passage of each week with the celebration of Shabbat, the passage of each month with the celebration of Rosh Chodesh and the passage of each year with the celebration of Rosh Hashanah. In addition to each of these celebrations, the Jewish year is punctuated with holidays, festivals and fast days that help us to remember significant events in the history of our people, strengthen our relationship with God, Torah and the Jewish people and live the values that we hold so dear.

We do lots of things with **time**. We **make** time, **find** time, **save** time, **spend** time, **have** time, **lose** time, and **waste** time. It is our tradition that teaches us to **sanctify** time and to appreciate that time is precious.

This year of the Jewish calendar is a leap year. This means there is an entire extra month between the time that Chanukah concludes and the celebration of Purim. When one lives his or her life according to the rhythm of the Jewish calendar, this extra month is like a gift from God. It is the extra time for which we often yearn. In each year that is a Jewish leap year, I feel like I really do have time to do some things for which I never seem to have time. Receiving this gift on the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th year of every 19 year cycle is just one more great aspect of being Jewish.

As the extra month of 5776 approaches, may we all be grateful for the gift of the time we have and do our best to make the most of it, to accomplish our personal goals, to strengthen our relationships and do what we can to make this world a little better than the way we found it.

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