



The Jewish Calendar -

Mindfulness of the Divine Rhythm

לְכָל־עֵשׂוֹת לְכָל־חַפְצֵי תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven (Eccl 3:1)



Introduction

The very first word of the Torah indicates the awareness of the significance of time - “*in the beginning...*” (Genesis 1:1), and according to Rabbinic tradition, the very first commandment given to the children of Israel after being delivered from Egypt was to sanctify the “New Moon” (Exodus 12:1-2), thereby causing the fledgling nation to depart from the solar tradition of the Egyptians (*Ra* worship) and to look to the moon for a new means of reckoning time and seasons.

The Hebrew lunar calendar is “set” differently than the solar calendar. The day begins at sundown; the climactic day of the week is *Shabbat* - the seventh day of the week; the moon and its phases in the night sky are the timepiece for the months, and the seasons of the year are marked with special festivals or *mo’edim* (appointed times). Even the years are numbered: every seventh year was *sh’mitah* - a Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:2-5), and after seven cycles of *sh’mitah* the *Yovel*, or Jubilee Year was to be observed (Lev. 25:8-17). Indeed, according to the Jewish sages, the history of the world may be understood as seven 1,000 year “days,” corresponding to the seven days of creation. In fact, the Talmud (Avodah Zarah, 9A) states that the *olam hazeh* (this world) will only exist for six thousand years, while the seventh millennium will be an era of worldwide shalom called the *olam haba* (world to come).

A Luni-Solar Seasonal Calendar



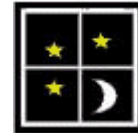
Actually, the Jewish calendar might best be described as “luni-solar.” Since every lunar cycle runs roughly 29.5 days, the Jewish year has 354 days compared to 365 days of the solar calendar. To ensure that the festivals would occur in their proper seasons (e.g. Passover in springtime, Sukkot in the fall, etc.), an extra month (Adar II) is added every two or three years to offset the 11 day lag per solar year. In this way the lunar calendar is synchronized with the solar cycle of the agricultural seasons.



The western sense of time is basically the measurement of linear, progressive motion, but in Hebrew thinking, time is seen as an ascending helix, with recurring patterns or cycles that present a thematic message or revelation of sacred history. Indeed, part of being a Jew today is to be mindful of this divinely ordered spiral of time and to order our affairs accordingly.

The Jewish Day

The Hebrew day (*yom*) begins at sundown, when **three stars** become visible in the sky (the rabbis reasoned that the day begins at sunset based on the description of God’s activity in creation, “and the evening and the morning were the first day,” Genesis 1:5). *Evening* is sometimes defined as the late afternoon, that is, between 3:00 pm to sundown.



Since the Jewish day (*yom*) begins at sundown, you must remember that a Jewish holiday actually begins on **the night before the day** listed in a Jewish calendar. For example, Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) occurs on Nisan 27, which actually begins after sundown, Nisan 26:

Thursday	Friday
5 Nisan 26	6 Nisan 27 Yom HaShoah
Nisan 27 Yom HaShoah	Nisan 28



Thus a given Jewish holiday spans **two days** on our Gregorian calendar. Most Jewish calendars do not indicate the previous night as part of the holiday. Observance of a holiday begins at sundown on the day *before* it is listed in the calendar!

In the example above, Yom HaShoah is observed both on Thursday the 5th (after sundown) and Friday the 6th (during daylight hours).

Note that if a Jewish holiday were to occur on a Sabbath, it would be moved to the previous Thursday on the calendar. For example, if Nisan 27 happened to begin on Friday at sundown, it would be moved to Nisan 26. Accessing a current Jewish Calendar is essential to observing the *mo'edim*!

A Note about the Jewish hour (*sha'ah*)

In rabbinical thinking, the hour is calculated by taking the total time of daylight (from sunrise until sunset) of a particular day and dividing it into 12 equal parts (this is called *sha'ah zemanit*, or a “proportional hour”). Since the duration of daylight varies according to seasons of the year, a proportionate hour will vary by season. The "sixth hour of the day" does not mean 6:00 a.m. or even six 60 minute hours after sunrise, but is the 6th proportionate hour of the 12 that are counted for the day in question.

For example, if the sun rises at 4:30 a.m. and sets at 7:30 p.m., the total time of daylight is 15 hours. 15 hours * 60 minutes is 900, which divided by 12 yields a proportional hour of 75 minutes. The "sixth hour of the day" therefore begins 450 minutes after sunrise, or about 11:30 in the morning.

The calculation of *zemanim* ("times") are important for the observance of Jewish holidays and Sabbath candle lighting hours. The results will vary depending on the length of the daylight hours in the particular location. Note, however, that the hour is not counted from sunset (as might be expected), but from sunrise.



The Jewish Week

The Jewish week (*shavu'a*) begins on Sunday and ends on Shabbat:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
יום ראשון	יום שני	יום שלישי	יום רביעי	יום חמישי	יום ששי	יום שבת
Yom Rishon	Yom Sheri	Yom Sh'lishi	Yom Rev'i	Yom Chamishi	Yom Shishi	Yom Shabbat

The Importance of Shabbat

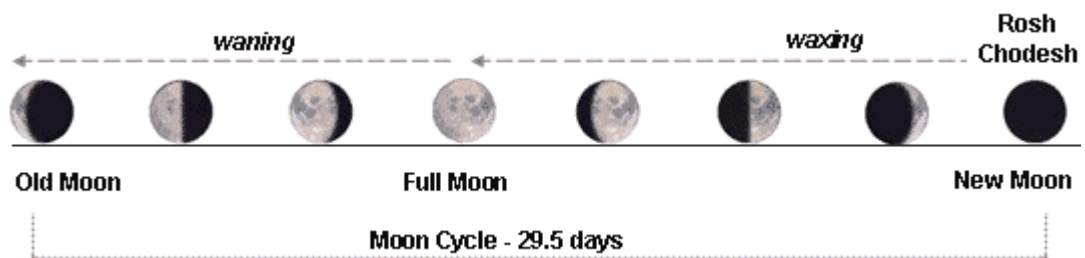
The fourth of the ten *mitzvot* (commandments) is, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8, KJV). Shabbat is therefore considered to be the most important day of the week, since its observance is explicitly set forth as one of the Ten Commandments. In fact, Shabbat is considered the most important of the Jewish Holidays, even more important than Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur! During Shabbat, no “work” (defined under 39 main categories associated with the building of the Tabernacle in the desert) is to be performed, since this would violate the idea of “rest” (*shabbaton*) that is to mark the day.

Weekly Torah Readings

Weekly Torah readings are divided into 54 sections. A given weekly section is called a *parashah* (pl. *parashiyot*) and is read during a synagogue service. Each portion has a Hebrew name (usually the first word of the section). A *haftarah* is a reading from the *Nevi'im* (prophets) that is recited directly following the Torah reading. For a table of the weekly readings, see the Hebrew for Christians website.

The Jewish Month

The duration of a Hebrew month (*chodesh*) is measured by the amount of time it takes for the moon to go through a lunar cycle, about 29.5 days:



In the Tanakh, the first month of the calendar is Nisan (when Passover occurs - see Ex. 12:12); however, Rosh Hashanah (“head of the year”) is in Tishri, the seventh month, and that is when the year number is increased.

- **Rosh Chodesh** - The appearance of the new moon is called Rosh Chodesh (“head of the month”). Twelve *chodeshim* make a *Shanah*, or year. The new moon is observed in synagogues with additional prayers.
- **Lunar Leap Years** - Since the solar year is 365 days long but a moon year is only 354 days (29.5 x 12), an extra month is added to the Hebrew calendar every two or three years. The formula is a bit esoteric, but every 19 years there are seven leap years (the third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth years). In a leap year a 13th month is added called *Adar Sheni* (Adar II).



The Jewish Year

The Jewish year is cyclical, with seasonal holidays and festivals. The names of the months of the Jewish calendar year were adopted during the time of Ezra the Scribe, after the return from the Babylonian exile.

Spring		Summer			
<i>Nisan</i>	<i>Iyyar</i>	<i>Sivan</i>	<i>Tammuz</i>	<i>Av</i>	<i>Elul</i>
ניסן	אייר	סיון	תמוז	אב	אלול
Mar/Apr	Apr/May	May/Jun	Jun/Jul	Jul/Aug	Aug/Sept
Pesach (15) Matzah (16-22) Bikurim (18) HaShoah (27)	Ha'atsmaut (5) HaZikaron (14) Lag B'Omer (18) Yerushalyim (28)	Shavu'ot (6)	Three weeks of Sorrow Fast of Tammuz (17)	Tish'a B'Av (9) Tu B'Av (15)	Selichot repentance

Fall		Winter			
<i>Tishri</i>	<i>Cheshvan</i>	<i>Kislev</i>	<i>Tevet</i>	<i>Shevat</i>	<i>Adar</i>
תשרי	חשוון	כסלו	טבת	שבט	אדר
Sept/Oct	Oct/Nov	Nov/Dec	Dec/Jan	Jan/Feb	Feb/Mar
Rosh Hashanah (1) Fast Gedaliah (3) Yom Kippur (10) Sukkot (15-22) Simchat Torah (22)		Chanukah (25) to Tevet (4)	Asarah B'Tevet (10)	Tu B'Shevat (15)	Fast Ester (13) Purim (14)

The three bold-faced festival names are known as *Shalosh Regalim*, the three “Pilgrim Festivals” (Ex. 23:14), that focus on key national events in Israel’s history. These festivals mark the three times in the yearly liturgical cycle when all Jews are commanded by the LORD to go up to Jerusalem to pray and sacrifice. Today, Jews mark these times with extended worship and prayer, study, distinctive prayer melodies, and festive meals.

The Jewish High Holidays run from the ten days from *Rosh HaShanah* to *Yom Kippur* and focus on individual repentance (*teshuvah*).

The date of Jewish holidays does not change from year to year. However, since the Jewish year is not the same length as the solar year on the Gregorian calendar, the date will appear to “shift” when viewed from the perspective of the Gregorian calendar.

How to calculate the Jewish Year

The year number on the Jewish calendar represents the number of years since creation, calculated by adding up the ages of people in the Tanakh back to the time of creation. To calculate the Jewish Year from our Gregorian calendar, you subtract 1,240 and then add 5,000. For example, if the year is 2005, subtract 1,240 to get 765. Then add 5,000 to obtain the Jewish year of 5765. Note that this works only up to Rosh Hashanah of the current Gregorian calendar: *after* Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) add one more year (e.g., 5766).

Note: Some have said that the Jewish Year counts from creation, but excludes the various years of the captivities. See www.hebrew4christians.com for more information.



The Jewish Festival Seasons – Mo'edim

Jewish time is cyclical and prophetic, a sort of an ascending spiral to God. The observant Jew will pray three times every day. On the seventh day of the week, Shabbat is celebrated, as is Rosh Chodesh at the start of the new month. In addition, the various larger periods of time, seasons, have their own prophetic role and function in the overall rhythm of Jewish life.



Note: The Jewish calendar can be a bit tricky to understand, especially if you are new to the study of the Jewish way of thinking about time!

In particular, you must remember that a Jewish holiday begins on **the evening previous to the day indicated** on a Jewish calendar (unless that happens to be a Sabbath, in which case the date is moved earlier). For example, Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) occurs on Nisan 27 - unless that day is a Sabbath - in which case it is moved earlier to Nisan 26 (whenever in doubt, consult an authoritative Jewish calendar).

Spring - Deliverance

- i. Rosh Chodashim - The Biblical New Year [Nisan 1]
- ii. Preparing for Passover - Spring Cleaning
- iii. Shabbat HaGadol - The Shabbat preceding Passover
- iv. Ta'anit Bechorim - Fast of the firstborn son [Nisan 14]
- v. Bedikat Chametz - The Search for Chametz [Nisan 14]
- ii. **Passover (*Pesach*)** - Celebration of freedom (*Major Holiday*)
 - a. The Passover Seder [Nisan 15 (evening of the 14th)]
 - b. Unleavened Bread (*Chag HaMatzah*) - Sanctification [Nisan 15-22]
 - c. Sefirat HaOmer - Counting the Omer [Nisan 16- Sivan 5]; the countdown to Shavu'ot.
 - d. Firstfruits (*Reishit Katzir*) - Messiah's Resurrection; [Nisan 17]
 - Yom HaShoah - Holocaust Memorial Day [Nisan 27]
 - Yom Hazikaron - Israel Memorial Day [Iyyar 4th]
 - Yom Ha'atzmaut - Israel Independence Day [Iyyar 5th]
 - e. Lag B'Omer - 31st day of the Omer count [Iyyar 18]
 - Yom Yerushalayim - Jerusalem Reunification Day [Iyyar 28th]
- iii. **Pentecost (*Shavu'ot*)** - The giving of the Torah at Sinai and the giving of the Ruach HaKodesh to the Church [Sivan 6-7] (*Major Holiday*)



Summer - Preparation

- Fast of the 17th of Tammuz - Start of the three weeks of sorrow [Tammuz 17]
- Tish'ah B'Av Last day of the three weeks of sorrow [Av 9]
- Tu B'Av - Harvest and Romance [Av 15]

Fall - Repentance

Elul and Selichot - Preparing for *teshuvah*

1. **Yamim Nora'im (Days of Awe):**
 - i. Rosh Hashanah and Trumpets (*Yom Teru'ah*) - The rapture of the *kellat Mashiach* (i.e., the church or Bride of Christ) [Tishri 1]
 - ii. Tzom Gedaliah - Fast of Gedaliah [Tishri 3]
 - iii. Day of Atonment (*Yom Kippur*) - Israel's national salvation [Tishri 10]
2. **Tabernacles (*Sukkot*)** - A picture of the millennial kingdom [Tishri 15-20]
 - a. Hosha'anah Rabah - The seventh day of Sukkot [Tishri 21]
 - b. Shmini Atzeret - The eighth day closure of Sukkot [Tishri 22]
 - c. Simchat Torah - Celebration of the giving of the Torah [Tishri 22/3]

Winter - Victory

- Chanukah (Dedication) [Kislev 25 - Tevet 3]
- Asarah B'Tevet [Tevet 10]
- Tu B'shevat [Shevat 15]
- The Fast of Esther [Adar 13]
- Purim (Lots) [Adar 14]