

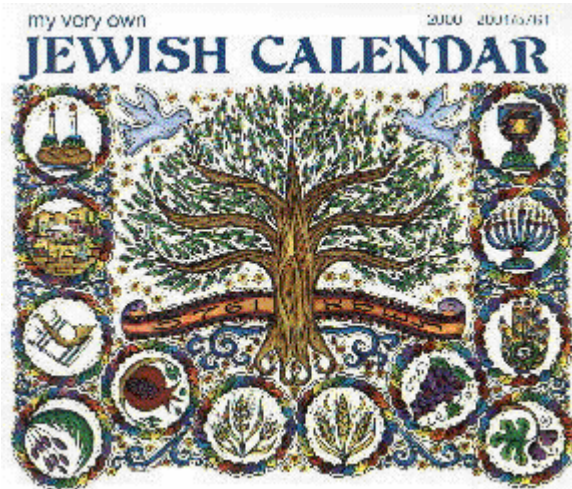
FAMILY EDUCATION PRESENTS



The Jewish Calendar

A few years ago, a woman was in a synagogue, and she overheard one man ask another, "When is Chanukkah this year?" The other man smiled slyly and replied, "Same as always: the 25th of Kislev." This humorous comment makes an important point: the date of Jewish holidays does not change from year to year. Holidays are celebrated on the same day of the Jewish calendar every year, but the Jewish year is not the same length as a solar year on the Gregorian calendar used by most of the western world, so the date shifts on the Gregorian calendar.

The Jewish calendar is primarily lunar, with each month beginning on the new moon, when the first sliver of moon becomes visible after the dark of the moon. The problem with strictly lunar calendars is that the lunar calendar is approximately 11 days shorter than the solar year. Left uncorrected over a number of years, the festivals would wander or drift through the seasons. For example, on a 12 month calendar, the month of Nissan, which is supposed to occur in the Spring, occurs 11 days earlier each year, eventually occurring in the Winter, the Fall, the Summer, and then the Spring again. To compensate for this drift, an extra month was occasionally added: a second month of Adar.



occasionally added: a second month of Adar. This is similar to the leap year that is in Gregorian calendar every fourth year.

In the fourth century, Hillel II established a fixed calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. He was concerned that while the solar and lunar calendars were being synchronized, the Jewish holidays were possibly not being observed at the times as specified in the Bible. Passover, for example, had to be celebrated in the spring. The calendar he devised, still in use, standardized

the length of months and the addition of months over the course of a 19 year cycle, so that the lunar calendar realigns with the solar years. Adar II is added in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years of the cycle. In years when Adar II occurs, Purim is celebrated in the second Adar.

In addition to the leap month of Adar II being added, each year a day was added or subtracted from the months of Cheshvan and Kislev as required. These were the “swing months”: in some years they would have 29 days, in some years 30 days.

Because we use a Gregorian calendar regularly, we are familiar with the terms B.C. and A.D. These stand for Before Christ and Anno Domini (the Year of Our Lord). Jews and non Christians use the terms B.C.E (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era).

In ancient times, the new months used to be determined by observation. When people observed the new moon, they would notify the Sanhedrin. *(until 359 C.E., the Sanhedrin functioned in Jerusalem as the supreme judicial body in Jewish life)*. When the Sanhedrin heard testimony from two independent, reliable eyewitnesses that the new moon occurred on a certain date, they would declare the Rosh Chodesh (head of the month) and send out messengers (the shofar was also blown) to tell people when the month began. Rosh Chodesh means ‘head of the month’, just as Rosh HaShanah means ‘head of the year’. Once Hillel II decided to publish the calendar for distribution to all communities, the official day(s) of Rosh Chodesh were fixed so the testimony of witnesses were no longer required.



Moon worship was prevalent throughout the world in ancient times. As far back as Biblical times, it is clear that some sort of festival of the new moon was celebrated. Early in Jewish history, Rosh Chodesh became associated with women, who were exempt from working on that day each month. Women were also supposed to eat festive meals and to light candles (perhaps a way to commemorate the torches originally lit when the new moon was first sighted in the sky). It is believed that the reason that women were rewarded with this day of leisure is because of their noble behavior (they refused to participate) when the Golden Calf was erected and worshipped. In addition, there is the obvious biological connection women have to the monthly cycle. Today, Rosh Chodesh continues to be marked with special prayers and blessings. It has evolved into a day that is special, not only to women, but to both sexes, as are the Sabbath and other holy days. With the feminist emergence in the 1960s, the festival has been moving back again to its original position, that of a sacred time for women.

Since the moon makes one revolution around the earth every 29.5 days, the new moon actually appears every 30th day. This is why some months have 29 days and some have 30 days. Rosh Chodesh is celebrated for two days, on the thirtieth day of the old month and on the first day of the new one.

Due to the lack of clarity regarding the start of the lunar month, the custom developed to add an extra day to each of the 3 pilgrimage festivals of the Torah: Pesach, Sukkot and Shavuot for Jews living outside the land of Israel. Thus, for example, Pesach would be observed for 8 days and Shavuot for 2; rather than the Biblical 7 or 1. This is called *Yom Tov Sheni Shel Galuyot* for the extra holiday for the diaspora. Within the Land of Israel, ALL Jews follow the biblical model. In our time, our congregation, together with all Reform, Reconstructionist and some Conservative congregations, follow the calendar as observed in Israel. It should be noted that the second day of Rosh HaShanah was not added for this reason and is therefore much more widely observed.

The names of the months of the Jewish calendar were adopted during the time of Ezra, after the return from the Babylonian exile. The names are actually Babylonian month names, brought back to Judea by the returning exiles. It is interesting to note that the Bible frequently refers to months by number, not by name (e.g. 1st month, 7th month). And today, we still refer to the days of the week this way.

The Jewish calendar has the following months:

Hebrew Month	Number	Length	Gregorian Equivalent
Nissan	1	30 days	March-April
Iyar	2	29 days	April-May
Sivan	3	30 days	May-June
Tammuz	4	29 days	June-July
Av	5	30 days	July-August
Elul	6	29 days	August-September
Tishri	7	30 days	September-October
Cheshvan	8	29 or 30 days	October-November
Kislev	9	30 or 29 days	November-December
Tevet	10	29 days	December-January
Shevat	11	30 days	January-February
Adar	12	29 or 30 days	February-March
Adar II	13	29 days	March-April

The days of the week are:

Sunday	Yom Rishon (1 st day)	Thursday (5 th day)	Yom Chamishi
Monday	Yom Sheini (2 nd day)	Friday (6 th day)	Yom Shishi
Tuesday	Yom Shlishi (3 rd day)	Saturday	Shabbat
Wednesday	Yom R'vi'i (4 th day)		

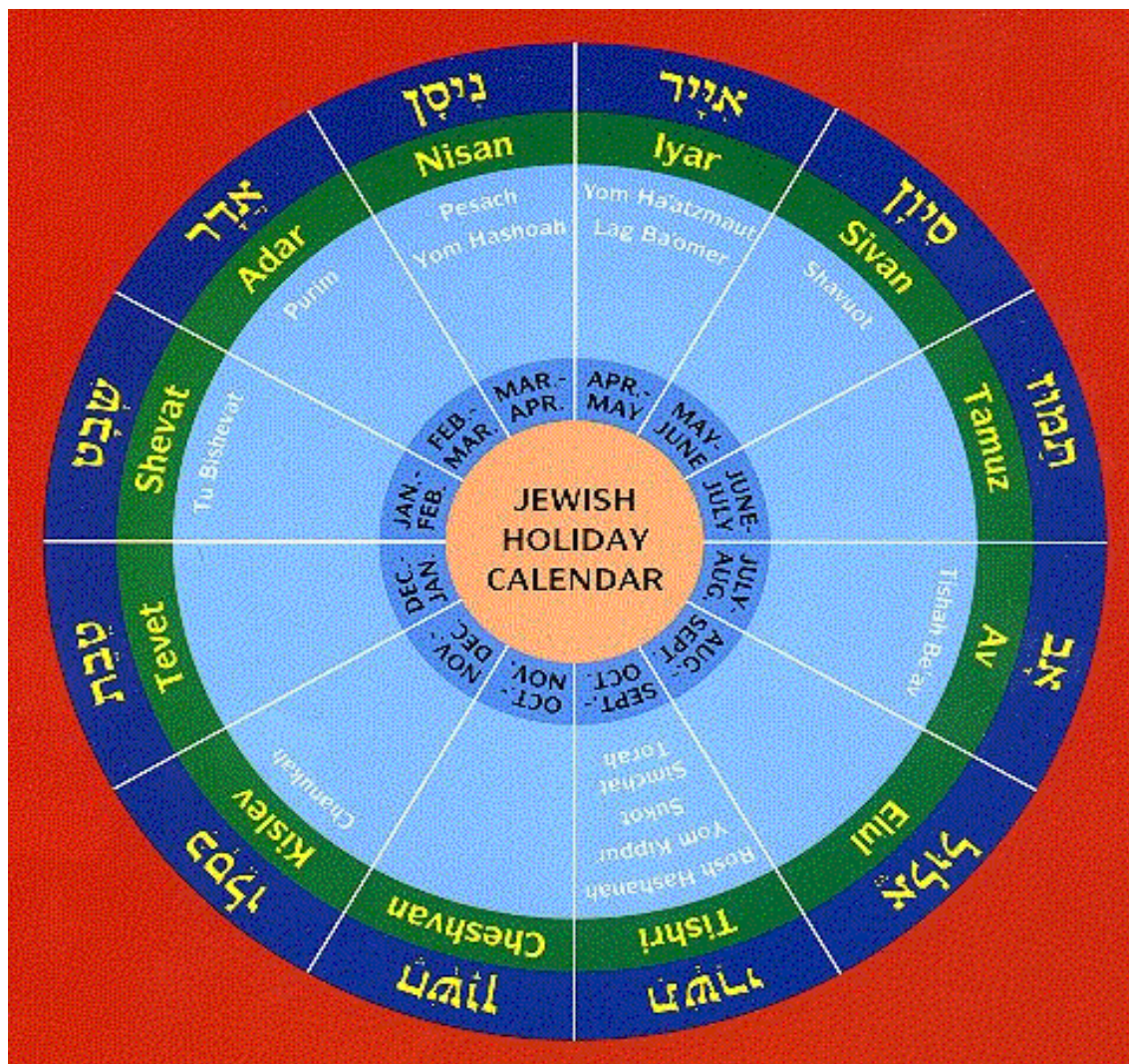
The Jewish day begins and ends at sundown. Thus, all holidays begin at sundown of the day preceding the date shown and end at sundown of the (last) day shown. Why do the holidays begin at sundown? Because at the time of creation, God said "there was evening and there was morning", mentioning the night first.

Since the Jewish calendar begins with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish year always straddles two years of the civil calendar. In other words, spring holidays (such as Pesach and Shavuot) occur in the civil year following the year of Rosh Hashanah.

The Jewish year is also different. When we say that the year is 5771, it means that, in earlier times, the calendar was seen as being dated from *the Creation*. Even though we know that the origins of the universe go back much farther, we still use this numbering system. (Some refer to the date as the beginning of recorded history.) To give you a bit of perspective of where in time we are, it is believed that the Exodus occurred in the year 2448 of the Jewish calendar and the modern state of Israel was established in 5708 (the spring of 1948).

In determining the Jewish calendar, some additional factors must be taken into consideration. The date of Rosh Hashanah must be set so that Yom Kippur will not fall on either a Friday or Sunday (which would cause complications and conflicts with the observance of Shabbat). The first day of Rosh Hashanah, therefore, never falls on Sunday, Wednesday or Friday.

Below is a graphic that shows the Hebrew month name, the transliteration and what holiday(s) fall within that month for your reference.



When is an hour not an hour?

To calculate an “hour” in Talmudic time, one must take the total time from sunrise to sunset and divide by 12. The equal units of daylight are called hours. It is interesting to realize that these hours vary greatly in length from long summer days to short winter months. For example, if the sun were to rise at 5:30 a.m. and set at 8:30 p.m., the days would consist of 900 minutes, which divided by 12 would yield 75 minutes per “hour”. This determination primarily affects the proper time for prayers.

Why do we celebrate the New Year (Rosh Hashanah) in the *seventh* month? Why is it not the first month of Nissan?

The Bible calls the Sukkot observance in autumn as the “*feast of ingathering, at the turning of the year.*” From that we learn that the Jews started the year in the fall, when all the work of the year was completed and all the produce of field and orchard were gathered in barn and bin; when the earth was seared with heat and the rains were awaited to bring forth new growth and life.

But another passage of the Bible tells us that the first month of the year is Nissan, and the months were numbered beginning with the spring, making Pesach the first festival. It is commonly believed that in more ancient times, Jews began the year in the spring, but that they were later influenced by the practices of the Babylonians, who observed the New Year in the autumn. The Jews, therefore, arranged their calendar to begin at that time. It was in this way that the observance of the New Year occurs in the seventh month of the calendar, not the first.

So...when someone next asks you if the holidays come early or late next year you can answer: they come the same time every year!!



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