



Rabbi Weiner's March 2008 Bulletin Article

As the March bulletin reaches you, we will soon celebrate Rosh Chodesh Adar II, the beginning of the new month of Second Adar. This season provides a good opportunity to review some important aspects of the Jewish calendar that are often misunderstood by even the most knowledgeable of our congregants. I strongly believe that in a Jewish world so often divided religiously, politically, even culturally, it is the calendar which is our greatest source of unity and common purpose.

The Hebrew year is composed of 12 lunar months, each lasting approximately 29 and $\frac{1}{2}$ days. For all practical purposes, 6 months are observed for 29 days, and 6 are observed for 30 days. Although we are used to understanding the Jewish calendar as a lunar calendar, we also make adjustments to align it with the solar calendar as well. What does this mean exactly? If we observed a purely lunar calendar, the months would “cycle” through the seasons. For example, the Torah teaches that that Passover is a spring holiday. We know that sometimes Passover is “early” meaning it arrives late March or early April, or it arrives “late”, meaning later in the month of April. But if we did not make periodic adjustments in the calendar to align it with the solar year, Passover would shift over the course of years to the summer, then fall, then winter, and eventually back to spring. For those familiar with the Islamic calendar this is exactly what happens with Islamic holidays and festivals which are not bound to the seasons like ours. This adjustment is called a leap year, much like the leap year is observed by the addition of an extra day, February 29th every 4 years in the solar calendar. To align the lunar calendar to the solar calendar, 7 times every 19 years (for the astronomers among us, years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19) the Jewish calendar adds a leap month to align the lunar and solar calendars and to keep them from cycling through the seasons. This year is a leap year, marked by the addition of Adar II. (Now you understand why Passover and Rosh Hashanah this year will be late)

Mi SheNichnas Adar Marbim B'simcha—when Adar arrives, there is great joy. The month of Adar heralds the coming of spring. Judaism shares with other cultures a joyful acknowledgement of this season of the year. Over the course of Jewish history particular days in Adar commemorate great victories and miracles experienced by previous generations. The 13th of Adar, now observed as the Fast of Esther preceding Purim is also remembered as Nicanor Day, commemorating the victory of the Macabees over the Syrian Greek General

Nicanor. The 16th of Adar recalls the day the building of the walls of Jerusalem began. The 20th day of Adar was a day of great feasting and rejoicing because on that day, according to the Talmud, the holy Honi ha-Me'agel, Honi the circle maker affected deliverance from a severe drought. And of course best known is the observance of Purim, celebrating the great victory of the Jewish people against the wicked Haman, and all that he represented. So great was the appreciation of Purim that our Rabbis taught that when the Messiah arrives, all holidays will cease to be observed—except Purim. In a leap year, all the observances of Adar are observed in Second Adar.

I hope that this month's column adds to your understanding of the calendar, and the special observances that are a part of it at this wonderful time of the year. Come and celebrate the spring season in the synagogue. The calendar beckons the Jewish people to join together in celebration. As individuals, as families and as a community, let's answer the call.



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