

TORAH THOUGHTS – GETTING READY FOR LEAP YEAR

Next Saturday is February 29, or a leap year. Where does this phenomenon come from? This explanation is from infoplease.com. “The Gregorian calendar, ... has both common years and leap years. A common year has 365 days and a leap year 366 days, with the extra, or intercalary, day designated as February 29. A leap year occurs every four years to help synchronize the calendar year with the solar year, or the length of time it takes the earth to complete its orbit about the sun, which is about 365¼ days.”

The Hebrew calendar has a leap *month*, seven times every nineteen years! This is because the Hebrew calendar is based on the lunar cycle, not the solar one. A lunar month is 29.5 days, multiplied by twelve is 354. About once every three years, we add a full month in order to compensate for the difference between the lunar and solar cycles.

Other faiths, such as Islam, also follow the lunar cycle but do not compensate. This means that their holidays can occur during different seasons depending on the year. In Judaism, it is important that certain holidays be in a particular season. Examples are Passover, which is a spring festival, a time of rebirth. And Hanukkah is a winter holiday – the candlelight dissipates the season’s dark and cold days. Therefore, we add an entire month occasionally (not this year).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Join us for “Leap Shabbat” on Saturday, February 29! We’ll celebrate with ice cream sundaes at kiddush!! Tot Shabbat is also that morning – see the weekly email for details.
2. How would it feel if Passover was in the winter or Hanukkah in the summer?
3. What if you have a *yahrtzeit* (anniversary of a loved one’s death) in Adar? During a leap year, do you mark it in Adar I or II? Rabbi Maurice Lamm, in his authoritative volume The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, wrote, “If death occurred in Adar of a regular year, the *yahrtzeit* in leap years is customarily observed in Adar I. Some insist on both Adar I and II being observed. Certainly, this latter custom should be observed if possible.” What a Jewish answer!!

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Pont