

Invitation to Judaism Course – The Jewish Calendar

Rabbi Steven Morgen, Congregation Beth Yeshurun

Reading: Robinson, pp. 76-81, 101-111, Kushner, pp. 87-92, 119-142, Telushkin, pp. 631-633, 641-646, 98-100 (Ecclesiastes)

1. A Lunar Calendar

- A. 12 months of 29/30 days = 354 days per year; solar year = 365 ¼
- B. Leap year in Jewish calendar adds a whole month (Adar II) of 30 days, and occurs 7 times in 19 year period
- C. Thus, Jewish calendar is *solar-adjusted* lunar calendar
- D. Names of months (see charts on page “Months of the Jewish Calendar”)
- E. Note: first month is Nisan – in spring. Two reasons: first, spring is rebirth, new beginning for nature; second, it is month of our liberation from Egypt. Our national calendar, so it begins with our liberation. Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, falls in 7th month! This is opposite of American calendar: Independence Day (July 4) falls in 7th month, New Year in 1st month. Rosh Hashanah actually commemorates birth of Adam and Eve in Garden of Eden.

2. The Year – 5781

- A. We count from the birth of Adam and Eve. Taking into account the ages of people mentioned in the Bible and how old they were when they gave birth, etc., Sages calculated that destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. occurred 3830 years after world was created.
- B. Most of the world uses Christian calendar which naturally enough counts from year Jesus was supposed to have been born. That year is 1. So subtract 70 from 3830 and you get 3760. Add that number to the Christian year and you get the Jewish year (although the Jewish year begins earlier in September or October instead of January. E.g. 2021 + 3760 = 5781 which is the current year in the Jewish calendar.

3. The Day/Week

- A. The Day begins at *nightfall* because in Genesis, Chapter 1, we say “There was evening, there was morning, day one.”
- B. When is *nightfall*? Either *sunset* or “*when it gets dark*”. (How dark? Three stars.) About 45 minutes difference between the two times.
- C. Days of the week continue to be named by their number: First day, second day... Seventh day has special name: Shabbat, meaning rest. (Distinguished from “The Lord’s Day” in Christianity, which is Sunday.)
- D. Not allowed to work on Shabbat, so we start it at the earlier time (*sunset*) and end it at the later time (*when it gets dark*) just to be safe. Then add 18 minutes before Shabbat just to be *extra* safe.

4. Holidays

- A. **Rosh Hodesh** – the New Moon (sometimes celebrated for *two* days because lunar cycle = 29 ½ days)

- B. **Rosh Hashanah** and **Yom Kippur** – Days of Awe or High Holy Days
- C. *Shalosh Regalim* – Three pilgrimage festivals: **Sukkot**, **Passover**, **Shavuot**
- D. **Purim** (Book of Esther) and **Hanukkah** (post-Biblical holiday)
- E. **Tisha B'av** – **9th day of Av** day of mourning, commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem and other calamities in Jewish history, which all occurred on that day in the Jewish calendar (or are remembered on that day). Traditionally we read the *Book of Lamentations* from the Bible.
- F. Modern holidays: Israel Independence Day (*Yom Ha'atzma'ut*), Israel Memorial Day (*Yom Hazikaron*), Holocaust Remembrance Day (*Yom Hasho'ah*)
- G. Hol *Hamo'ed* (intermediate days of Sukkot and Passover)
- H. *Yom Tov Sheni Shel Galiyot* – second day of Festival for communities outside Israel

5. Sukkot/Simḥat Torah

- A. Historical significance – wandering in desert for 40 years
- B. Agricultural significance – harvest holiday, like Thanksgiving
- C. Rituals/terms:
 - 1) *Sukkah* (booth) – construction; eat, sleep and study there, invite guests
 - 2) *Ushpizin* – “Spiritual Guests”: Abraham (Sarah), Isaac (Rebecca), Jacob (Leah), Joseph (Rachel), Moses (Miriam), Aaron (Devorah), David (Ruth)
 - 3) *lulav* and *etrog* (Palm + 3 myrtle + 2 willow wrapped together, and citron); symbolism of parts of body: backbone, eyes, lips, heart
 - 4) *hakafot* (circling the sanctuary with Lulav and Etrog on Sukkot, and with Torah scrolls on Simḥat Torah)
 - 5) *Hoshanot* (prayers asking for God’s care and guidance)
 - 6) *Hoshanah Rabbah* (last day of Sukkot, beating willows)
 - 7) Ecclesiastes (*Kohelet*) – Biblical book we read on Sukkot
 - 8) *Shemini Atzeret/Simḥat Torah* (an “extra” holiday at the end)
- D. *Simḥat Torah* – end the Book of Deuteronomy and begin Genesis. Never-ending cycle. The Journey not the Destination.

Journal Questions:

How is the Jewish Calendar different from the American Calendar?

How do I want to participate in Sukkot and Simhat Torah at Beth Yeshurun this year?

(After Sukkot) What was Sukkot and Simhat Torah like for me this year? What do I want to know before next year? What do I want to do differently next year?

<http://www.kaluach.org/>

<https://www.hebc.com/>

Months of the Jewish Calendar

Name of month	Month Number	When it usually falls	Zodiac sign
Tishrei	Seventh	September-October	Libra
Heshvan	Eighth	October-November	Scorpio
Kislev	Ninth	November-December	Sagittarius
Tevet	Tenth	December-January	Capricorn
Shevat	Eleventh	January-February	Aquarius
Adar (plus sometimes Adar 2)	Twelfth (and Thirteenth)	February-March (and sometimes April too)	Pisces
Nissan	First	March-April	Aries
Iyar	Second	April-May	Taurus
Sivan	Third	May-June	Gemini
Tamuz	Fourth	June-July	Cancer
Av	Fifth	July-August	Leo
Elul	Sixth	August-September	Virgo

This year is 5781, that means (symbolically) 5781 years from the “birth of Adam” on the 6th day of Creation. Jewish tradition has it that Abraham was born in the year 1948 of the Jewish calendar; the Exodus was 2448, the modern state of Israel established in 5708 (1948 CE).

Note: Heshvan is originally called Marheshvan

