

A New Year...Again!

Our Gregorian calendar calls March 21 the first day of spring. March 21, 2015 was also the first day of the Hebrew month of Nissan. Even though we celebrate Rosh Hashana as the “head of the year,” according to Torah, Tishrei (which includes Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot) is actually the seventh month of the year. Nissan is the first month because it includes Passover, the beginning of our covenant with G-d. We receive the Ten Commandments, the first of which states “I am your G-d who led you out of Egypt, out of bondage.”

Most Jewish holidays, like Passover, start during a full moon. This year, Passover comes at the beginning of April and the middle of Nissan. These next three weeks bring about a roller coaster of observances for Jewish people to connect with our identity and heritage.

Of all the Jewish holidays on the calendar, Passover is celebrated by more Jewish people than any other. In fact, studies have shown that if a Jew is only going to observe one holiday, it is most likely to be Passover. This makes sense. Passover is fun, has lots of food and usually good memories of family. It also makes sense from a historical perspective, as without the Passover story, there would be no Jewish nation.

But the next 30 days are fuller than any month-long period since Tishrei. Later in Nissan and into the next month of Iyar, we have four other observances:

1. Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance)
2. Yom HaZikaron (Israeli Memorial Day)
3. Yom HaAtzmaut (Israeli Independence Day)
4. Lag B'Omer (33rd day of counting the Omer between Passover and Shavuot)

After the joyous freedom celebration of Passover, we have two solemn days and two celebratory ones. We remember the Holocaust, the most horrific time in Jewish history; then Memorial Day for our fallen soldiers in Israel. Israeli Independence Day follows immediately with the excitement of statehood for our homeland, despite the struggles we have in maintaining a peaceful coexistence with our neighbors.

The fourth day on the list is just a date, but one with a unique tradition. It commemorates a revolt led by Bar Kochba against the Roman Empire around the year 132 CE. It recognizes that our Jewish spirit is willing to battle enormous odds to maintain our independence and identity. It is celebrated today with picnics, parades and bonfires and, in the observant communities, a special day for weddings.

Just like at our *seder* table, we mix the bitter herbs with the sweet *haroset*, the Jewish calendar reminds us of the historical happenings to celebrate and those in which we acknowledge our sadness. The key is to remember. We celebrate. We mourn. We support each other in both.

L'shalom and Happy Pesach!

Rabbi Dan Gordon

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