

RABBI'S MESSAGE

The Gift of Time

I have a friend who was born on February 29. I'm not sure what year she was born, but she claims to only have a birthday every four years. Yes, on Leap Year in the Gregorian Calendar, we add an extra day to the solar calendar so that our years balance out. 365 days are not enough for a full revolution around the sun.

The Gregorian calendar, which almost all of the world uses, is a solar calendar. But the Hebrew calendar is a lunar one, based on the moon. The moon takes 28 or 29 days to cycle, so Hebrew months are slightly shorter than solar months. 12 lunar months make up a total of 354 days, about 11 fewer days than the 365.25 days of the solar cycle. So instead of one day every four years, the Hebrew calendar adds one month every 2-3 years in a complicated pattern that amounts to 7 times every 19 years. And this year, 5784, is leap year!

Just imagine...how often do we complain that there is not enough time to do what we need to do? It seems to last our whole lives. When we were children, homework assignments and papers always seemed to be due before we were ready. As adults, April 15 Income Tax Day creeps us on us, as do all the rest of the deadlines to pay bills, register to vote, get our cars inspected, etc.

This year, we get an extra month. The current month of **Shevat** (which includes Tu Beshvat, the blessing of the trees) follows **Adar** (which includes Purim), and then comes **Nisan** (which includes Passover). Those who clean their homes and change dishes for Passover may find themselves scrambling to get ready. But we insert an extra Adar, giving us all more time. During Leap Year, Adar I is followed by Adar II.

Technically, the reason why we insert an extra month is to correct the calendar is to make sure that Passover is always in the spring. This is important because Passover represents the rebirth of our people, as we emerge from the dark times of slavery into the world of freedom. If not for the Leap Year formula, Passover would move up into winter. And it corrects the rest of the calendar, too. It means that Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, remains in the darkest month to allow our candles to shine brightly. It means that Sukkot, the Festival of the Harvest, includes the brightest moon and comes at a time when our ancestors gathered their crops. The practical aspects of a Leap Year, like many things in Judaism, make sense.

On a more philosophical level, now that we know there is an extra full month this year, how can we use it in a way that enhances ourselves and enhances the world? Perhaps read an extra book or learn something we always wanted to learn. Embark on a new exercise or food regiment that can be springboard for better health. Connect with old friends who we miss or make a new friend to enrich our lives. Give a little time toward volunteering for a cause or visit someone who needs company. Pick up some groceries for someone who is homebound. Or maybe, just relax with some quiet time, breathing in the air of freedom and reminding ourselves that we are the ones who decide how to best use our time. It's easy to forget.

I hope during Adar II, I will feel less hurried, and be able to devote this precious time to caring for others AND for myself.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon