

# Jewish Calendar, Festivals and Holy days

(Edited by Alon Gildoni, The Jewish Agency for Israel 5768)

## THE JEWISH CALENDAR

TISHREI (Sept-Oct)

CHESHVAN (Oct – Nov)

KISLEV (Nov-Dec)

TEVET (Dec-Jan)

SHVAT (Jan-Feb)

ADAR (Feb-March)

**Note: In a Leap Year, the month ADAR II is added.**

NISSAN (March-April)

IYAR (April-May)

SIVAN (May-June)

TAMMUZ (June-July)

AV (July-August)

ELUL (Aug-Sept)

YEAR:	2008/5768-69
Tu B' Shevat	Tue Jan 22
Ta'anit Esther	Thu Mar 20
Purim	Fri Mar 21
Pesach	Sun-Sun Apr 20-27
Yom haShoah	Thu May 1
Yom haZikaron	Wed May 7
Yom haAtzma'ut	Thu May 8
Lag baOmer	Fri May 23
Yom Yerushalayim	Mon Jun 2
Shavuot	Mon-Tue Jun 9-10
Shiva Asar B' Tammuz	Sun Jul 20
Tisha B' Av	Sun Aug 10
Rosh Hashanah	Tue-Wed Sept 30-Oct 1
Tzom Gedaliah	Thu Oct 2
Yom Kippur	Thu Oct 9
Sukkot / Shmini Atzeret	Tue-Wed Oct 14-22
Chanukah	Mon-Mon Dec 22-29
Asarah B' Tevet	Tue Jan 6 ('09)

The Jewish calendar is a lunisolar calendar, or "fixed lunar year," based on twelve lunar months of twenty-nine or thirty days, with an intercalary lunar month added seven times every nineteen years (once every two to three years) to synchronize the twelve lunar cycles with the slightly longer solar year. Each Jewish lunar month starts with the new moon; although originally the new lunar crescent had to be observed and certified by witnesses, the timing of the new moon is now mathematically determined.

Concurrently there is a weekly cycle of seven days, mirroring the seven day period of the Book of Genesis in which the world is created. The names for the days of the week, like those in the Creation story, are simply the day number within the week, with Shabbat being the seventh day. The Jewish day runs from sunset to the next sunset, and accordingly, standard times and time zones have no place in the Jewish calendar.

To compute the civil (Gregorian) year, simply add the number 1240 to the shortened Hebrew year. For example, the year 5767 "shortened", becomes 767 adding 1240 makes 2007.

## Rosh Ha-Shanah - The Jewish New Year

Rosh Ha-Shanah is the Jewish new year and day of judgement, in which God judges each person individually according to their deeds, and makes a decree for the following year. The holiday is characterized by the special mitzvah of blowing the *shofar*.

- For a the month of Elul which precedes Rosh Hashana, special additional prayers are added to the prayer service, known as Selichot (forgiveness).

Rosh Ha-Shanah (ראש השנה) - 1-2 Tishrei

According to the Jewish oral tradition, the creation of the world was completed on Rosh Hashanah.

The recitation of *Tashlikh* ( occurs during the afternoon of the first day. Rosh Ha-Shanah is always observed as a two-day holiday, both inside and outside the boundaries of Israel.

## Aseret Yemei Teshuva - Ten Days of Repentance

Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are ten days, known as the Aseret Yemei Teshuva. During this time it is "exceedingly appropriate" for Jews to practice "Teshuvah," which is examining one's deeds and repenting for sins committed against both God and one's fellow man in anticipation of Yom Kippur. This repentance can take the form of additional supplications, confessing one's deeds before God, fasting, and self-reflection. On the third day, the Fast of Gedalia is celebrated.

## Yom Kippur - Day of Atonement

- Yom Kippur (יום כיפור) - 10 Tishrei

Yom Kippur is considered by Jews to be the holiest and most solemn day of the year. Its central theme is atonement and reconciliation. Eating, drinking, bathing, anointing with oil, and marital relations are prohibited. Fasting begins at sundown, and ends after nightfall the following day. Yom Kippur services begin with the prayer known as "*Kol Nidrei*", which must be recited before sunset. (*Kol Nidrei*, Aramaic for "all vows," is a public annulment of religious vows made by Jews during the preceding year. It only concerns unfilled vows made between a person and God, and does not cancel or nullify any vows made between people.)

A *Tallit* (four-cornered prayer shawl) is donned for evening prayers; the only evening service of the year in which this is done. The *Ne'ilah* service is a special service held only on the day of Yom Kippur, and deals with the closing of the holiday. Yom Kippur comes to an end with the blowing of the *shofar*, which marks the conclusion of the fast. It is always observed as a one-day holiday, both inside and outside the boundaries of the land of Israel.

## Sukkot

Sukkot (סוכות or סוכות *sukkōt*) or *Succoth* is a 7-day festival, also known as the Feast of Booths, the Feast of Tabernacles, or just Tabernacles. It is one of the three pilgrimage festivals mentioned in the Bible. The word *sukkot* is the plural of the Hebrew word *sukkah*, meaning booth. Jews are commanded to "dwell" in booths during the holiday. This generally means taking meals, but some sleep in the *sukkah* as well. There are specific rules for constructing a *sukkah*. The seventh day of the holiday is called Hoshanah Rabbah.

- Sukkot (חג הסוכות) - 15–22 Tishrei

## Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah (תורה שמחת) means "rejoicing with the Torah". It actually refers to a special ceremony which takes place on the holiday of Shemini Atzeret. This holiday immediately follows the conclusion of the holiday of Sukkot. In Israel, Shemini Atzeret (or Eighth Day Assembly) is one day long and includes the celebration of Simchat Torah. Outside Israel, Shemini Atzeret is two days long and Simchat Torah is observed on the second day, which is often referred to by the name of the ceremony.

The last portion of the Torah is read, completing the annual cycle, followed by the first chapter of Genesis. Services are especially joyous, and all attendees, young and old, are involved.

## Hanukkah - Festival of Lights

- Hanukkah (חנוכה) - 25 Kislev – 2 or 3 Tevet

The story of Hanukkah is preserved in the books of the First and Second Maccabees. These books are not part of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), they are apocryphal books instead. The miracle of the one-day supply of oil miraculously lasting eight days is first described in the Talmud.

Hanukkah marks the defeat of Seleucid Empire forces that had tried to prevent the people of Israel from practicing Judaism. Judah Maccabee and his brothers destroyed overwhelming forces, and rededicated the Temple in Jerusalem. The eight-day festival is marked by the kindling of lights — one on the first night, two on the second, and so on - using a special candle holder called a *Chanukkiyah*, or a *Hanukkah menorah*.

There is a custom to give children money on Hanukkah to commemorate the learning of Torah in guise of Jews gathering in what was perceived as gambling at that time since Torah was forbidden. Because of this, there is also the custom to play with the dreidel (called a *sevivon* in Hebrew).

## Tenth of Tevet

This minor fast day marks the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem as outlined in 2 Kings 25:1 "And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about."

As a minor fast day, fasting from dawn to dusk is required, but other laws of mourning are not observed. A Torah reading and Haftorah reading, and a special prayer in the Amidah, are added at both Shacharit and Mincha services.

## Tu Bishvat-New Year of the Trees

- Tu Bishvat (חג האילנות - ט"ו בשבט) — 15 Shevat

Tu Bishvat is the new year for trees. According to the Mishnah, it marks the day from which fruit tithes are counted each year. In modern times, it is celebrated by eating various fruits and nuts associated with the Land of Israel. During the 1600s, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria of Safed and his disciples created a short seder, called *Hemdat ha-Yamim*, reminiscent of the seder that Jews observe on Passover, that explores the holiday's Kabbalistic themes.

## Purim - Festival of Lots

- Erev Purim and Fast of Esther known as "Ta'anit Ester" — 13 Adar
- Purim (פורים) — 14 Adar
- Shushan Purim 15 Adar
- In leap years on the Hebrew calendar, Purim is observed in the Second Adar (Adar Sheni).

Purim commemorates the events that took place in the Book of Esther. It is celebrated by reading or acting out the story of Esther, and by making disparaging noises at every mention of Haman's name. In Purim it is a tradition to masquerade around in costumes and to give *Mishloakh Manot* (care packages, i.e. gifts of food and drink) to the poor and the needy. In Israel it is also a tradition to arrange festive parades, known as *Ad-D'lo-Yada*, in the town's main street.

Although Rosh Hashanah marks the change of the Jewish calendar year, Nisan is considered the first month of the Hebrew calendar. The Mishnah indicates that the year of the reign of Jewish kings was counted from Nisan in Biblical times. Nisan is also considered the beginning of the calendar year in terms of the order of the holidays.

In addition to this New Year, the Mishnah sets up three other legal New Years:

- 1st of Elul, New Year for animal tithes,
- 1st of Tishrei (Rosh Hashanah), the New Year for the calendar year and for vegetable tithes
- 15th of Shevat (Tu B'Shevat), the New Year for Trees/fruit

## Pesach Passover

- Erev Pesach and Fast of the Firstborn known as "Ta'anit Bechorim" — 14 Nisan
- Passover/Pesach (פסח) (first two days) — 15 (and 16) Nisan
- The semi-holiday days between the "first days" and the "last days" of Passover are known as *Chol Hamo'ed*, referred to as the "Intermediate days".

Pesach (Passover) commemorates the liberation of the Israelite slaves from Egypt. No leavened food is eaten during the week of Pesach, in commemoration of the fact that the Jews left Egypt so quickly that their bread did not have enough time to rise.

The first seder begins at sundown on the 15th of Nisan, and the second seder is held on the night of the 16th of Nisan. On the second night, Jews start counting the *omer*. The counting of the *omer* is a count of the days from the time they left Egypt until the time they arrived at Mount Sinai.

## Sefirat Ha'Omer - Counting of the Omer

Sefirah (ספירת העומר, *Sefirat Ha'Omer*) - Counting the Omer

Sefirat Ha'Omer is the 49 day ("seven weeks") period between Pesach and Shavuot; it is defined by the Torah as the period during which special offerings are to be brought to the

Temple in Jerusalem. Judaism teaches that this makes physical the spiritual connection between Pesach and Shavuot.

This period is a time of partial mourning, during which weddings, parties, and dinners with dancing are not prohibited, in memory of a tens of thousands of our people who died in a plague during the lifetime of Rabbi Akiba. Haircuts during this time are also forbidden.

## Lag Ba'omer

**Lag Ba'omer** (ל"ג בעומר) is the 33rd day in the Omer count (ל"ג is the number 33 in Hebrew). The mourning restrictions on joyous activities during the Omer period are lifted on Lag Ba'Omer and there are often celebrations with picnics, bonfires and bow and arrow play by children. In Israel, youth can be seen gathering materials for bonfires.

The origins of the holiday begin with the time of Rabbi Akiva. The Talmud (Yevamot 62b) states that 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students died from a mysterious divine-sent plague. The Talmud then goes on to say that this was because they did not show proper respect to one another, befitting their level. Jews celebrate Lag Ba'omer as the traditional day that this plague ended. This is the view recorded in the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 120:1-10.

Others say that these students were killed in the Bar Kokhba revolt (in which Rabbi Akiva was a major figure), the plague being the Roman occupation. As an act of censorship, the Talmud attributed their deaths to lack of respect to one another, afraid attributing their deaths to resisting the Roman empire would be viewed as treachery. Viewed in this context, the lighting of bonfires on this evening seems logical, since in ancient times bonfires were used as signals in wartime.

There is some conjecture that the holiday marks the temporary victory of Bar Kochba's men over the Romans.[3] The holiday became a symbol emphasizing the struggle for national liberation and freedom. The bonfires and the bow&arrow games coincide with Bar Kocvha's revolt.

The day is also the Yortsayt, the anniversary of the death, of the Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai [4] who is believed by some to have authored the Zohar, a landmark text of Jewish mysticism.

## New Israeli/Jewish national holidays

Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has established four new Jewish holidays.

- Jerusalem Day
- Yom HaShoah — Holocaust Remembrance day
- Yom Hazikaron — Memorial Day
- Yom Ha'atzma'ut — Israel Independence Day

These four days are national holidays in the State of Israel, and have since been accepted as religious holidays in general by the following groups: The Union of Orthodox Congregations and Rabbinical Council of America; The United Hebrew Congregations of

the Commonwealth (United Kingdom); The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel; All of Reform Judaism and Conservative Judaism; The Union for Traditional Judaism and the Reconstructionist movement.

## **Yom HaShoah - Holocaust Remembrance day**

- Yom HaShoah (לשואה ולגבורה יום הזכרון) — 27 Nisan

Yom HaShoah is also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day, and takes place on the 27th day of Nisan.

## **Yom Hazikaron - Memorial Day**

- Yom Hazikaron (הזכרון לחללי מערכות ישראל יום) — 4 Iyar

Yom Hazikaron is the day of remembrance in honor of Israeli veterans and fallen soldiers of the Wars of Israel. The Memorial Day also commemorates fallen civilians, slain by acts of hostile terrorism.

## **Yom Ha'atzma'ut — Israel Independence Day**

- Yom Ha'atzma'ut (יום העצמאות) — 5 Iyar

Yom Ha'atzma'ut is Israel's Independence Day. An official ceremony is held annually on the eve of Yom Ha'atzma'ut at Mount Herzl. The ceremony includes speeches by senior Israeli officials, an artistic presentation, a ritual march of flag-carrying soldiers forming elaborate structures (such as a Menorah, a Magen David and the number which represents the age of the State of Israel) and the lighting of twelve beacons (one for each of the Tribes of Israel). Dozens of Israeli citizens, who contributed significantly to the state, are selected to light these beacons.

## **Jerusalem Day**

- Jerusalem Day (ירושלים יום) — 28 Iyar

*Jerusalem Day* marks the 1967 reunification of Jerusalem and The Temple Mount under Jewish rule during the Six-Day War almost 1900 years after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

## **Shavuot - Feast of Weeks - Yom HaBikurim**

- Shavuot (שבועות) — 6, 7 Sivan

Shavuot, The Feast of Weeks is one of the three pilgrim festivals (*Shalosh regalim*) ordained in the Torah, Shavuot marks the end of the counting of the *Omer*, the period between Passover and Shavuot. According to Rabbinic tradition, the Ten Commandments were given on this day. During this holiday the Torah portion containing the Ten Commandments is read in the synagogue, and the biblical Book of Ruth is read as well. It is traditional to eat dairy meals during Shavuot.

## Seventeenth of Tammuz

The 17th of Tammuz traditionally marks the first breach in the walls of the Second Temple during the Roman occupation.

As a minor fast day, fasting from dawn to dusk is required, but other laws of mourning are not observed. A Torah reading and Haftarah reading, and a special prayer in the Amidah, are added at both Shacharit and Mincha services.

## The Three Weeks and the Nine Days

- The Three Weeks: Seventeenth of Tammuz, 17 Tammuz – 9 Av
- The Nine Days: 1–9 Av

The days between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av are days of mourning, on account of the collapse of Jerusalem during the Roman occupation which occurred during this time framework. Weddings and other joyful occasions are traditionally not held during this period. A further element is added within the three weeks, during the nine days between the 1st and 9th day of Av — the pious refrain from eating meat and drinking wine, except on Shabbat or at a *Seudat Mitzvah* (a Mitzvah meal, such as a *Pidyon Haben* — the recognition of a firstborn male child — or the study completion of a religious text.) In addition, one's hair is not cut during this period.

## Tisha B'av - Ninth of Av

- Tisha B'Av (באב צום תשעה) - 9 Av

Tisha B'Av is a fast day that commemorates two of the saddest events in Jewish history that both occurred on the ninth of Av - the destruction in 586 BCE of the First Temple, originally built by King Solomon, and destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Other calamities throughout Jewish history are said to have taken place on Tisha B'Av, including King Edward I's edict compelling the Jews to leave England (1290), the Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492, Germany's declaration of war against Russia during World War I, and the first killings at the Treblinka death camp (1942).

## Rosh Chodesh - the New Month

The first day of each month and the thirtieth day of the preceding month, if it has thirty days, is (in modern times) a minor holiday known as Rosh Chodesh (head of the month). The one exception is the month of Tishrei, whose beginning is a major holiday, Rosh Hashanah. There are also special prayers said upon observing the new Moon for the first time each month.

## Shabbat - The Sabbath - שבת

Jewish law accords the Sabbath the status of a holiday. Jews celebrate a *Shabbat*, a day of rest, on the seventh day of each week. Jewish law defines a day as ending at nightfall, which is when the next day then begins. Thus, *Shabbat* begins at sundown Friday night, and ends at nightfall Saturday night.

In many ways *halakha* (Jewish law) gives *Shabbat* the status of being the most important holy day in the Jewish calendar.

- It is the first holiday mentioned in the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible), and God was the first one to observe it.
- The liturgy treats the Sabbath as a bride and queen.
- The Torah reading on the Sabbath has more sections of *parshiot* (Torah readings) than on Yom Kippur, the most of any Jewish holiday.
- There is a tradition that the Messiah will come if every Jew observes the Sabbath twice in a row.
- The Biblical penalty for violating *Shabbat* is greater than that for violating any other holiday.

For more information log on to our website:

[www.uciya.org](http://www.uciya.org)

