

# Back to the Basics

# Holy Times

Session 1 of 3: An Introduction to the Hebrew Calendar

4 March 2021

Rabbi Rafi Spitzer, Congregation Agudat Achim

How do we mark time?

# How do we mark time?

- Weeks, Months, Years
- 525600 minutes (a la Rent)
- Birthdays
- Milestones (first steps, anniversaries, bnai mitzvah...)
- New Year's
- School Year
- Shabbat
- Holidays
- What makes time holy?

What is the beginning of the Jewish Year?

# What is the beginning of the Jewish Year?

- Fall
  - Rosh Hashanah
  - 1 Tishrei
  - Tishrei, Heshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shvat, Adar, Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tamuz, Av, Elul

# What is the beginning of the Jewish Year?

- Fall

- Rosh Hashanah
- 1 Tishrei
- Tishrei, Heshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shvat, Adar, Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tamuz, Av, Elul

- Spring

- Passover
- 1 Nisan
- Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tamuz, Av, Elul, Tishrei, Heshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shvat, Adar

# Biblical Sources

- Exodus 12:2

• הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רִאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:

- This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you.

- Esther 3:7

• בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ נִסָּן בְּשָׁנַת שְׁתַּיִם עָשָׂרָה לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ הַפִּיל פּוּרָּהּ הוּא הַגּוֹרָל לִפְנֵי הַמֶּן מִיּוֹם אֶל יוֹם וּמִחֹדֶשׁ לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם־עָשָׂר הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר: (o)

- In the first month, that is, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, pur—which means “the lot”—was cast before Haman concerning every day and every month, [until it fell on] the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar.

# Rabbinic Sources

- Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1

- אַרְבַּעַה רָאשֵׁי שָׁנִים הֵם. בְּאַחַד בְּנִיסָן רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְמַלְכִּים וְלְרִגְלִים.

- **They are four** days in the year that serve as the **New Year**, each for a different purpose: **On the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings**; it is from this date that the years of a king's rule are counted. **And** the first of Nisan is also the New Year **for** the order of **the Festivals**, as it determines which is considered the first Festival of the year and which the last.

- בְּאַחַד בְּאֵלוּל רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְמַעֲשֵׂר בְּהֵמָה. רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר וְרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמְרִים, בְּאַחַד בְּתִשְׁרִי.

- **On the first of Elul is the New Year for animal tithes**; all the animals born prior to that date belong to the previous tithe year and are tithed as a single unit, whereas those born after that date belong to the next tithe year. **Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say:** The New Year for animal tithes is **on the first of Tishrei**.



# Rabbinic Sources cont.

- Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1 cont.

• בְּאַחַד בְּתִשְׁרֵי רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לִשְׁנִים וְלִשְׁמֹטִין וְלִיּוֹבְלוֹת, לְנִטְיָעָה וְלִירְקוֹת.

- **On the first of Tishrei is the New Year for counting years**, as will be explained in the Gemara; **for** calculating **Sabbatical Years and Jubilee Years**, i.e., from the first of Tishrei there is a biblical prohibition to work the land during these years; **for planting**, for determining the years of *orla*, the three-year period from when a tree has been planted during which time its fruit is forbidden; **and for tithing vegetables**, as vegetables picked prior to that date cannot be tithed together with vegetables picked after that date.

• בְּאַחַד בְּשֵׁבַט, רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְאֵילָן, כְּדִבְרֵי בֵּית שְׁמַאי. בֵּית הֵלֵל אוֹמְרִים, בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ:

- **On the first of Shevat is the New Year for the tree**; the fruit of a tree that was formed prior to that date belong to the previous tithe year and cannot be tithed together with fruit that was formed after that date; this ruling is **in accordance with the statement of Beit Shammai**. But **Beit Hillel say**: The New Year for trees is **on the fifteenth of Shevat**.

# How is the Calendar Set?

- The months of the Jewish year are lunar in nature.
- Whereas the months of the Gregorian calendar vary in length between 28 and 31 days in order to make a solar year of 365 (or, in leap years, 366) days, the months of the Jewish year are either 29 or 30 days long. This reflects the fact that a lunar month is 29.5 days in length, and the months always must begin with the new moon.
- Now, our calendar is “intercalated” or set, years in advance. But it used to be that the calendar was set by witness testimony.
- Or, at least, it was supposed to be set by witness testimony.

# Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:8-9

**Rabban Gamliel had a diagram of the different forms of the moon drawn on a chart that hung on the wall of his attic, which he would show to the laymen who came to testify about the new moon. And he would say to them: Did you see like this or like this?**

**There was an incident in which two witnesses came to testify about the new moon, and they said: We saw the waning moon in the morning in the east, and that same day we saw the new moon in the evening in the west. Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri said: They are false witnesses, as it is impossible to see the new moon so soon after the last sighting of the waning moon. However, when they arrived in Yavne, Rabban Gamliel accepted them as witnesses without concern.**

**And there was another incident in which two witnesses came and said: We saw the new moon at its anticipated time, i.e., on the night of the thirtieth day of the previous month; however, on the following night, i.e., the start of the thirty-first, which is often the determinant of a full, thirty-day month, it was not seen. And nevertheless Rabban Gamliel accepted their testimony and established the New Moon on the thirtieth day.**

**Rabbi Dosa ben Horkinas disagreed and said: They are false witnesses; how can witnesses testify that a woman gave birth and the next day her belly is between her teeth, Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: I see the logic of your statement; the New Moon must be established a day later.**

# Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:8-9

Upon hearing that Rabbi Yehoshua had challenged his ruling, **Rabban Gamliel sent a message to him: I decree against you that you must appear before me with your staff and with your money on the day on which Yom Kippur occurs according to your calculation;** according to my calculation, that day is the eleventh of Tishrei, the day after Yom Kippur.

**Rabbi Akiva went and found Rabbi Yehoshua distressed** that the head of the Great Sanhedrin was forcing him to desecrate the day that he maintained was Yom Kippur. In an attempt to console him, Rabbi Akiva **said to Rabbi Yehoshua: I can learn from a verse that everything that Rabban Gamliel did in sanctifying the month is done, i.e., it is valid. As it is stated: “These are the appointed seasons of the Lord, sacred convocations, which you shall proclaim in their season”** ([Leviticus 23:4](#)). This verse indicates that **whether** you have proclaimed them **at their proper time** or **whether** you have declared them **not at their proper time, I have only these Festivals** as established by the representatives of the Jewish people.

# Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:8-9

Rabbi Yehoshua then **came to Rabbi Dosa ben Horkinas, and said to him: If we come to debate** and question the rulings of **the court of Rabban Gamliel, we must debate** and question the rulings of **every court that has stood from the days of Moses until now. As it is stated: “Then Moses went up, and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy of the Elders of Israel”** ([Exodus 24:9](#)). But why were the names of these seventy Elders not specified? Rather, this comes **to teach that every set of three judges that stands as a court over the Jewish people** has the same status as **the court of Moses**.

Rabbi Yehoshua **took his staff and his money in his hand, and went to Yavne to Rabban Gamliel on the day on which Yom Kippur occurred according to his own calculation.** Upon seeing him, **Rabban Gamliel stood up and kissed him on his head. He said to him: Come in peace, my teacher and my student.** You are **my teacher in wisdom**, as Rabbi Yehoshua was wiser than anyone else in his generation, **and you are my student, as you accepted my statement,** despite your disagreement.

So, the months are lunar– I guess we have a lunar calendar?! Well, not exactly...

- Solar year (365 days 5 hours 48 minutes 46 seconds / 365.24 days)
  - So, every year, we lose about a quarter of a day as we revolve around the sun
  - And every four years, we add a leap day, which makes up those hours
- Lunar year (12 lunar months of 29 or 30 days =  $12 * 29.5 = 354$  days)
  - Lunar calendars lose 11 days (or 12 days in Gregorian leap years) relative to the solar calendar
- Hebrew year is a lunisolar calendar, that tracks the seasons: Passover has to occur in the Spring (at least in the northern hemisphere)
  - To make up for losing those 11 days every year, the Hebrew year adds in leap months

# The 19-year Cycle

- But how many extra months do we need?
  - 7 every 19 years
  - $19 * 365.25 = 6939.75$  days
  - $19 * 12 * 29.5 = 6726$
  - $6940 - 6726 = 214$
  - $214 / 7 \sim 30$
- So, every 19 years, we have 7 leap months

# The 19-year Cycle Cont.

- This year (5781) is year 5 of the 19 year cycle, and does not have a leap month. It is also haseira, lacking, meaning that it is 353 days (instead of 354 or 355)
- Years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19 are leap years.
- In order to further fine-tune their calculations, the rabbis determined that the months of Nisan, Sivan, Av, Tishrei, and Shevat are always 30 days long. Iyyar, Tammuz, Elul, Tevet and Adar are always 29 days long. Heshvan and Kislev are either 29 or 30 days in length. In a leap year, there are two months of Adar. When that occurs, Adar I is 30 days long, and Adar II 29. A short Jewish year, therefore, consists of 353 to 355 days, while a leap year varies between 383 and 385 days.
- In other words, Hebrew years can have 353, 354, 355, 383, 384, or 385 days.



What makes time holy?

What makes it meaningful?

- Psalms 90:12– Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom

# What makes time holy?

# What makes it meaningful?

- Sarah Hurwitz, *Here All Along*:
  - This is what Jewish holidays are supposed to do: move us, inspire us, challenge us, and shake us up.
  - Jewish holidays also operate at a number of different levels, marking historical and biblical events, teaching moral and spiritual lessons, and calling our attention to the cycles of nature. Passover, for example, is simultaneously a commemoration of the Exodus, a celebration of freedom, and an ancient harvest festival welcoming the arrival of spring. As Blu Greenberg has noted, “One could, in fact, teach all of Jewish history and dogma through the Jewish calendar, and it would be quite an exhaustive lesson at that.”

What makes time holy?  
What makes it meaningful?

- Sarah Hurwitz, *Here All Along*:
  - I'm certainly not saying we should abandon our holiday traditions. Just the opposite: I think we should assume that each of them as something profound to teach us— something that will touch our souls and transform our lives— but we need to put some effort into finding it. We need to keep digging, learning, and interpreting until we unearth the beating-heart meanings of these holidays. And we need to celebrate them in ways that bring those meanings to life so that their lessons stay with us long after they have ended.

# Next week

The fall holiday cycle– the days of awe season

Please read in advance:

Sarah Hurwitz, *Here All Along* pages 184 (at the bottom where it says The Days of Awe Season: From Tisha B'Av, to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, to Sukkot) – 202 (at the top of the page, where there is a big break between paragraphs)

# Back to the Basics

# Holy Times

Session 2 of 3: The Fall Holidays

11 March 2021

Rabbi Rafi Spitzer, Congregation Agudat Achim

When do the “Days of Awe” begin?

# When do the “Days of Awe” begin?

- Rosh Hashanah
- Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah (when we begin the special Selihot/Penitential prayers)
- First day of Elul (one month before RH, when we begin to blow shofar)
- What Sarah Hurwitz teaches us, based on the seminal work of Rabbi Alan Lew, in his book *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared* is that the days of awe begin weeks before that, with 9 Av

# Fast Days

## *Tisha B'Av*

- 3 weeks before 9 Av– public mourning practices
- Destruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Temples
  - Other associations: 12 spies, Bar Kochba rebellion, golden calf
- Read Lamentations (*Eichah*)
- Kinnot
- Fasting, no showering, no perfume, no leather shoes, no Torah study
- Sitting on low stools
- *Seudat Mafseket*
- No tefillin in the morning
- 7 Haftarot of Consolation



# Insight from Sarah Hurwitz

- What jumped out at you from her description?

# Insight from Sarah Hurwitz

- “Rabbi Alan Lew described Tisha B’Av as ‘the beginning of Teshuvah, the point of turning toward this process by turning toward a recognition of our estrangement from God, from ourselves, and from others.’
- “meaningful soul accounting requires some amount of demolition, or at least the courage to stop frantically trying to hold up so many walls...”
- “we too must let our old walls crumble”

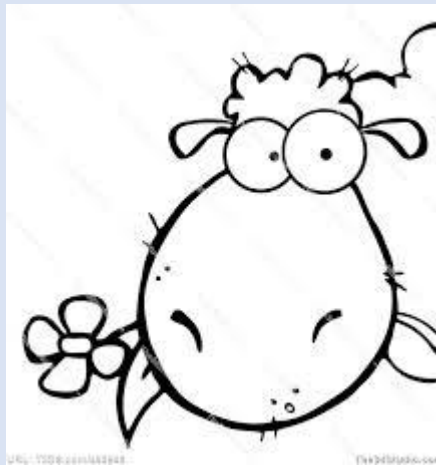
# Rosh Hashana

- “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation.” (Lev. 23:24)
- Shofar: *Tekiah, Shevarim, Teru’ah*



# Rosh Hashanah

- “Head of the Year”
- 1<sup>st</sup> Day of the Month of *Tishrei*
- Day of Judgment
- 2 Days (even in Israel)



# Rosh Hashanah

- Sovereignty
  - We are not in control
- Remembrance
  - What parts of our lives do we want to edit out
  - What does it mean to be conscious of being watched
- Forgiveness
  - Return to your true self
  - Don't let your mistakes hold you back
- Life is brief, and fleeting, and therefore very valuable

# Tashlich

- "You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-20)



# *Tzom Gedaliah*

(The Fast of Gedaliah)

- The Day after Rosh Hashana
- Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) conquered Jerusalem and installed Gedaliah as governor of Judah.
- See Jer. 41 & 2 Kings 25:25-6
- He was assassinated by a Jew who didn't like his politics

# 10 Days of Repentance

- Prayer is understood to be more “effective”
- Try to set good patterns for the year



# Yom Kippur

- The Day of Atonement
- Purification Ritual of two goats, one for sins and one for Azazel



# Yom Kippur

- "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work--whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you (Lev. 16:29)
- "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the LORD. (Lev 23:27)

# Yom Kippur

- Refraining from things that make us comfortable:
  - Fasting, not bathing, no sexual relations, no perfumes
- Repentance
- Liturgy: Reenactment of temple ritual & martyrology
- Jewish ethics
- Isaiah– Is this not the fast I desire
- “we” vs “I” – deeply humane
- Jonah

# Sukkot in the Bible

- [34](#)“Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD. [35](#)‘On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. [36](#)‘For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work. (Lev. 23:34-36)

# Sukkot in the Bible

- [39](#)‘On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. [40](#)‘Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. [41](#)‘You shall thus celebrate it *as* a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It *shall be* a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. [42](#)‘You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, [43](#)so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.’” (Lev. 23:39-43)

# Sukkot Lulav & Etrog



4 Species = 4 Body Parts

Neither dried nor stolen

Shaking them each day



with a Pitom





# Sukkot

## *Sukkah*

- Dwelling 7 days
- 3 Walls
- Natural roof
- Reading Kohelet



# Insight from Sarah Hurwitz

- What did you learn about Sukkot from *Here All Along*?



# Insight from Sarah Hurwitz

- Temporary dwelling
- Acknowledgement of gratitude, impermanence
- New kind of walls, to replace the ones we tore down on 9 Av
- Joy!

# Simchat Torah



- Finishing and restarting the Torah
- Celebrating with the Torah



# Next week

Spring Holidays (Purim, Passover, Shavuot, and the Yoms)

Please read in advance:

Sarah Hurwitz, *Here All Along* pages 172-184

# Back to the Basics

# Holy Times

Session 3 of 3: The Spring Holidays

18 March 2021

Rabbi Rafi Spitzer, Congregation Agudat Achim

# Purim

- Story of Esther (*Megillat Esther*)
- Mitzvot of the Holiday
  - Hear the reading of the Megillah
  - *Mishloach Manot* (Sending of Gifts)
  - *Matanot la'Eviyonim* (Gifts for the Poor)
  - Purim Seudah (meal)
- *Taanit Esther* (fast day before Purim)
- “*Purim Meshulash*”
- Relationship to non-Jews



- ...And they wrote in the name of king Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback... that the king had granted the Jews that were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, and to slay, and to cause to perish, all the forces of the people and province that would assault them, (Esther 8:9-11)
- And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto them that hated them. And in Shushan the castle the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men (Esther 9:5-6)
- And the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of them that hated them seventy and five thousand—but on the spoil they laid not their hand (Esther 9:16)

# Passover

- The Exodus Story
- 10 Plagues
- Sacrifice (contemporary Samaritans)





# Samaritan Sacrifice

Samaria, or the Shomron, is the part of the West Bank north of Ramallah and Jerusalem. The city of Shchem is the center of the Shomron, an ancient city from Biblical times. The Kingdom of Israel (the northern kingdom, after the split in the time of Solomon's son) was based in Samaria, and was eventually destroyed by the Assyrians. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, Titus of Rome built a new city (called in the Latin *Niapolis* = new city) near Shchem to be the capital of the region. Over time, *Niapolis* Arabized to Nablus, and the two cities, both in the valley of Mount Grizim, grew to encompass one another, so that now the two names are interchangeable. In the part of the city that was the old city of Shchem, there is a shrine to Joseph, which you can see from a lookout point on Mount Grizim. Grizim is also the place of a ritualized formula of blessings and curses was performed, as described in Deuteronomy, and the Jewish settlement at the top of the mountain is called Har Bracha (mount of blessings) after that ceremony.



# Samaritan Sacrifice

The Samaritans are a non-Rabbinite (they do not follow Rabbinic laws) sect who believe they are descended from the tribes of Ephraim, Menashe, and Levi. According to the Samaritan version of history, when Joshua and the people of Israel came into the land, the first center of the Israelite cult was on Mount Grizim. Later, the priest Eli took his family to Shiloh, which the Jewish tradition venerates as the place of the tabernacle before the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, but some priests stayed at Grizim, and continued worshiping at the original place—these worshipers became the Samaritan sect. The legend goes on to explain that the two versions of Israelite worship (Jerusalem focused and Grizim focused) lived side by side for many years (after all, the kingdom of Israel also had their own worship sites, for example, in the northern region of Dan), but that when the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel it created a power vacuum in Samaria that led to an increase of power of the Samaritans and a resulting increase of tensions with the Jerusalem focused Israelites. We know from other accounts of history, and from the Christian Bible, and from the Talmud, that there were periods of more and less getting along with the Samaritans. Some versions of the story say that the Israelites were preferred by Greece, but the Samaritans by Rome. It is clear that just as the Israelite Kingdom of Judea was persecuted and destroyed by Rome, the Samaritan community was persecuted and destroyed a few hundred years later by the Byzantine Empire. Today, there are about 800 (!) Samaritans in the world, and they live half in Holon (near Tel Aviv, speak Hebrew, go to Israeli schools, serve in the army) and half on Mount Grizim (near Shchem, speak Arabic, go to Palestinian schools, though since 1967 they also are Israeli citizens). To this day, the entire Samaritan community observes the 3 pilgrimage festivals described in the Torah by going up to Mount Grizim to celebrate.

# Samaritan Sacrifice

We arrived at the mountain an hour before the festivities were to begin, and we went to look out over Shchem to see the shine to Joseph and Mount Eval, the mountain of the curses. Then we arrived at the site of the sacrifice. As we waited, many Samaritans dressed all in white (there were also Samaritan priests in different brightly colored robes, but most of the community was in white) passed us by, carrying and dragging large sheep with them. The site was shaped like an L—the long part of the L (described from the top to the place it joins with the bottom leg) contained 6 deep fire pits, a bier that we later learned was the altar, and a trough in the ground flanked by a blue metal arbor lined with hooks. In the bottom leg were many chairs, set up for the prayers included in the ritual. At 6:30, all the men who were to slaughter the sheep lined up on either side of the trough, with the sheep between their legs, so the animal could not move. Many other folks sat on chairs in the bottom leg of the L, and at 6:45, they began to pray, chanting in an ancient Hebrew/Aramaic of which only some words were familiar to me.

# Samaritan Sacrifice

After half an hour of chanting, everything got really loud and grew to a crescendo, and all at once, the folks at the trough raised their knives and slaughtered the sheep. From where we were standing, we could not see very well, so we followed some other people into a nearby house, and went onto the roof, where we could see everything perfectly. We watched for a long time as they hung the sheep on the hooks on the blue scaffolding, and skinned them, removed their fatty parts (as described also in our Torah) to burn on the altar, and prepared them for roasting. As they finished with a sheep, other people came and put the animals on wooden spits, and brought them over to the fire pits for final cleaning and roasting. Women and men were all together at the site, and though the men were doing the actual slaughter, it seemed more egalitarian than I imagined it would be. We left before they began to eat the sacrifice, but I saw some people with Matza and Marror, so they too eat the Passover sacrifice with bitter herbs on matza as described in the Torah. In some ways it was very informal—not everyone was chanting during the prayers, and people were milling around and greeting each other—and in some ways it was very archaic and foreign. The truth is, I felt like I had been transported back in time and was able to see a glimpse at what the Temple in Jerusalem might have been like on Passover 2000 years ago. Wow!



# Samaritan Sacrifice



# Samaritan Sacrifice



# Exodus 3:15-18

**15** And God said moreover unto Moses: 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you; this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations. **16** Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath appeared unto me, saying: I have surely remembered you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt. **17** And I have said: I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. **18** And they shall hearken to thy voice. And thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him: The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, hath met with us. And now let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.



# Exodus 11:1-7

**1** And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Yet one plague more will I bring upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence; when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. **2** Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask every man of his neighbor, and every woman of her neighbor, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold.' **3** And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people. **4** And Moses said: 'Thus saith the LORD: About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; **5** and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sits upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of cattle. **6** And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there hath been none like it, nor shall be like it any more. **7** But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog whet his tongue, against man or beast; that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.

# Exodus 12:3-8

**3** Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying: In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household; **4** and if the household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbor next unto his house take one according to the number of the souls; according to every man's eating ye shall make your count for the lamb. **5** Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year; ye shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats; **6** and ye shall keep it unto the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at dusk. **7** And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it. **8** And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it.



# Exodus 12:12-15

**12** For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. **13** And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, **I will pass over you**, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. **14** And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. **15** Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; howbeit the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses; for whosoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

**וַפֶּסַח תִּהְיֶה עֲלֵכֶם = Pesach!**

# Passover Hametz



- *Bedikat Hametz* (Search for Hametz)
  - *Beiur Hametz* (Destorying Hametz)
  - Selling Hametz
- 
- “Seven days shall you eat unleavened bread; the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses; for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.” (Exod. 12:15)



# Passover

- Fast of the first born
  - Day before passover
  - Siyum
- 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan
- Reading Song of Songs

# Passover Seder

Kadesh -Kiddush.

Urchatz -washing the hands.

Karpas -vegetable dipped in salt-water.

Yachatz -breaking middle matzo.

Maggid -the Hagadah.

Rachtzah -washing of the hands

Motze -blessing hamotzi.

Matzah -blessing over matzah

Morror -eating the bitter herbs.

Korech -sandwich of matzah and  
bitter herbs.

Shulchan Oruch -eating the meal.

Tzafun -eating the afikomen.

Bayrech -the recitation of grace.

Hallel -the recitation of Hallel

Nirtzah -Conclusion of the seder.



# Seder

- *Korech* = Shwarama
- *Maggid* – minimal mention of Moses
- *Afikomen* = Greek επικωμον = Moving from one meal to another
  - Originally there was a *prohibition against* doing this afikomen
- Questions & Answers
- 4 questions & 4 cups of wine



# Counting of the Omer

- 50 Days between Passover and Shavuot
- Counting – days & weeks
- Leading up to the grain festival
- Old and new grain
- Lag B'Omer (33<sup>rd</sup> day)



# Shavuot ("Weeks")

- Harvest Festival
- Connected to the giving of the Torah
- Dairy & Cheesecake
- *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* – studying Torah
- Last of the pilgrimage festivals
- Book of Ruth



# Akdamut

The entire poem is 90 verses long. The first 44 verses of *Akdamut* are arranged as a double alphabetic acrostic, two lines for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, followed by 46 verses with the initial letters spelling out the words, "Meir, son of Rabbi Isaac, may he grow in Torah and in good deeds. Amen. Be strong and have courage."

In summary, the poem begins with the **greatness of God**, which exceeds all ability to describe it (verses 1-14), and then the myriads of **various kinds of angels** created by Him and attending Him (15-26). The various **angels praise God according to their categories**, some praise Him unceasingly, some at recurring times, some only once (27-42). The nations of the earth seek to acquire Israel to add to their own greatness but **Israel replies that its loyalty is only to God**, and this is the source of Israel's attributes and strength (43-74). **In the future, Leviathan and Behemoth**, two enormous creatures mentioned in Scripture, will be brought together, and killed and prepared by God **as a banquet** for the righteous in opulent furnishings (75-84). May you, who have heard this song, be privileged to be seated at that banquet, if only you will harken to the Torah that He gave us (85-90).

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akdamut>



# Purim Jews and Passover Jews

(Yossi Klein Halevi)

## **Purim Jews**

- Jewish history speaks to our generation in the voice of the biblical command to remember how the tribe of Amalek attacked us without provocation while we were wandering in the desert, and the message of that command is: Don't be naïve.
- This command is the voice commemorating our victory over genocidal threats
- Motivated by alertness to threat

## **Passover Jews**

- Jewish history speaks to our generation in the voice of the biblical command to remember that we were strangers in the land of Egypt, and the message of that command is: Don't be brutal.
- This command is the voice of liberation
- Motivated by empathy with the oppressed

# Passover and Shavuot (Sarah Hurwitz)

- “I now realize that Passover and Shavuot don’t just represent major plot points in the Torah’s account of the Israelites’ journey from oppression to freedom thousands of years ago. These holidays are yearly reminders of who we are and our mission in the world as Jews *today*.”

# Passover Jews and Shavuot Jews

(Rabbi Gail Labovitz)

## Passover Jews

- redeemed from slavery, but still must go into the wilderness
- threats still abound, and she knows she is still in need of, and must seek, God's protection
- bound up in the paradox of triumphantly listing the plagues that finally defeated the Egyptians while also pouring out drops of wine to mourn lives lost even among our enemies
- knows trauma, and is certainly allowed to celebrate its overthrow, but is challenged to seek compassion and justice nonetheless

## Shavuot Jews

- has arrived, in every sense of that word
- has a Land of her own in which she lives comfortably, and her needs are well met
- What threatens her is complacency, smugness, and unwarranted self-congratulation
- challenge of the Shavuot Jew is not to forget that he too still needs God's protection – in fact, that all that he has must be credited to God's gifts and love
- In relationship with God through the Torah, through right-action in the world, through mitzvah

# Judaism of Redemption vs. Judaism of Revelation

(David Hartman)

**“Sinai or Auschwitz?”** – In the 1970’s, the Holocaust came to dominate the strategies for enhancing Jewish identity in Israel and America. Hartman was sharply critical of what he saw as a “Holocaustization” of Judaism. Without detracting from the calamities of the Shoah, the center of Jewish experience must be Sinai, not Auschwitz, he claimed. Sinai is the blueprint for a living community which seeks to embody in practice a world of justice, solidarity and service. Dwelling on the indignities of the past will not renew our passion for a just life – rather the creation of a vibrant future-oriented discourse must be the basis of our identity.

Hartman loved teaching a passage in Maimonides which addresses a seemingly ritualistic question: The Candle of Hanukkah and the Candle of Shabbat, which candle takes preference? In Hartman’s keen reading, this was a question of philosophy, not blind ritual: What takes precedence – commemorating heroic wars and the defense of God and the Jewish people, or conserving *shalom bayit* and the intimacy of a candle-lit Shabbat dinner? Maimonides resoundingly subordinates Hanukkah to Shabbat, which to Hartman was a call to subordinate historical memory and messianic dreams for the joy of a Shabbat meal and the vibrancy of family life. As his teacher Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik said: “The Jewish people were not put in this world simply to fight Anti-Semitism.”

# Contemporary Holidays

- *Yom HaShoah* – Holocaust, 27<sup>th</sup> Nissan
- *Yom HaZikaron* – Sirens, 4<sup>th</sup> of Iyar
- *Yom HaAtzmaut* – Independence, 5<sup>th</sup> of Iyar
- *Yom Yerushaliyim* – (1967) reunification of Jerusalem