



The Jewish Calendar

By Steve Cohen

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Basic Jewish Teaching: The Calendar

The Jewish calendar is really two calendars in one. The civil year and New Year begin in September, the month of Tishre. The religious year begins with the month of Nissan, March or April. The first month of the civil calendar falls on the seventh month of the religious calendar.

The present Jewish calendar is lunisolar, the months being reckoned according to the moon and the years according to the sun. A month is the period of time between one conjunction of the moon with the sun and the next. The number of days in a year in this Jewish lunar calendar is shorter than the number of days in the solar calendar. The lunar year consists of twelve months, or 354 days, approximately 10 days, 21 hours shorter than the solar calendar.

To equalize the difference between the two systems, every two to three years the Jewish calendar adds another month, making a “leap year” consisting of 13 months. This thirteenth month is called adar shnee, meaning the second Adar, which is one of the names of another month. The adding of this leap year occurs seven times in each 19-year cycle. This keeps the Biblical festivals aligned with the appropriate seasons.

Major Days of Commemoration on the Calendar

Holiday	Description
Tu B'Shevat	Tu B'Shevat, the 15th of Shevat on the Jewish calendar, is the day that marks the beginning of a “new year” for trees.
Purim	Purim celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the wicked Haman in the days of Queen Esther of Persia.
Passover	Passover (Pesach) celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt.
Yom Hashoah	Yom Hashoah is also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day, as a memorial to the Jewish people who were slaughtered by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945.
Yom Ha'atzmaut	Yom Ha'atzmaut is also known as Israeli Independence Day, the anniversary of the day on which Israeli independence was proclaimed by David Ben-Gurion publicly reading the Israeli Declaration of Independence.
Second Passover	A “Second Passover” (Pesach Sheni) for anyone who was unable to bring the offering on its appointed time (at Passover) in the previous month
Lag B'Omer	The anniversary of the passing of the great sage and mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, author of the Zohar, a landmark text of Jewish mysticism.
Shavuot	Shavuot marks the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai. The Ten Commandments are read in synagogues, just as they were in the desert on Mt. Sinai over 3,300 years ago.



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Holiday	Description
The Three Weeks Tisha B'Av	The "Three Weeks" and Tisha B'Av are designated as a time of mourning over the destruction of the Holy Temple and the galut (exile).
The 15th of Av	A festival of the future redemption, and thus a day whose essence, by definition, is unknowable to our unredeemed selves.
Rosh Hashanah	Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year. It is the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, and a day of judgment and coronation of God as king.
Yom Kippur	The holiest day on the Jewish calendar, known as the Day of Atonement.
Sukkot	A joyful time to remember God's kindness and reaffirm our trust in His providence.
Shemini Atzeret	Shemini Atzeret means "the eighth [day] of retention". The purpose of the day, celebrated as a festival, is to remember and apply the spiritual revelations provided during the festivals of the month of Tishrei.
Simchat Torah	Simchat Torah means "Rejoicing of the Torah". The purpose of this day is to joyously conclude and begin anew the annual Torah reading cycle.
Chanukah	Chanukah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after a group of Jewish warriors defeated the occupying mighty Greek armies.



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For More Information

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