

REEH (DEUTERONOMY 11:26-16:17)

Spring Ahead ...

2002 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Most Muslim holidays don't attract a great deal of attention. One notable exception is the month of Ramadan. This month of fasting and feasting often attracts the world's attention, mostly due to political/military considerations. During the war in Afghanistan, many wondered if the U.S. would continue its relentless attacks on the Taliban during the "holy" month of Ramadan. That was, if you recall, during the secular month of November. A few years back, there were cruise missile attacks on Iraq during Ramadan. That was during Chanukah. The first time I heard of Ramadan was when I was a Yeshiva student in Israel in 1974. That year, Ramadan came out in the fall.

Jews and Muslims both use a lunar calendar. *Rosh Chodesh*, the first of the month, always comes out on the new moon. Why then, is there such a discrepancy between the Jewish and Muslim calendars? While Ramadan can come out any time during the year, Rosh Hashanah is always in September, and Passover is always in March or April. How do calendars that are so similar end up so different?

Passover in the spring is no mere coincidence. The Torah tells us, "*Guard the Month of the Spring, and bring a Passover Offering to G-d, because it was during the Month of the Spring that G-d took you out of Egypt at night.*" (Deuteronomy, 16:1)

"Modern" (i.e., the last 2400 years or so) calendars refer to the month during which Passover comes out as "Nissan." (Actually, the names of the Jewish months are names that we picked up during the Babylonian exile.) The Torah, which usually refers to the months by number, (the first month, the second month, etc.,) calls Nissan "*the Month of the Spring,*" and tells us to "*guard*" it.

The Talmud, (Sifri, 167) tells us that the way we "*guard the Month of the Spring*" is by making sure that it comes out in the spring. This is accomplished by fine-tuning the lunar calendar to correspond with the solar calendar.

As we know, the secular year is based on the amount of time it takes for the earth to travel around the sun. This journey takes approximately 365 days and 6 hours. We make up for the 6 hours by adding a day to February every four years. (Since it's not EXACTLY six hours, we usually make additional adjustments every 400 years, but we skipped that adjustment in the year 2000. However, the year 2400 will NOT be a leap year. Stay tuned. :-))

On the Jewish calendar, it's a bit more complicated. A lunar month is 29½ days. Therefore, we usually have six 29-day months and six 30-day months. This gives us a 354-day year, an eleven-day deficit vis-à-vis the solar calendar. That's why last year Rosh Hashanah was on September 18, and this year it's on the 7th.

If the calendar were left alone, Rosh Hashanah would slip back an additional 11 days every year. Before you knew it, we'd have Chanukah in July! (At least it might eliminate the "December dilemma!") The Torah says that this would be unacceptable. Passover must come out in the spring. Therefore, every few years we have a leap year, adding a MONTH to the calendar. The month of Adar becomes Adar 1 and Adar 2 (actually giving us a "Little Purim" a month before the regular Purim).

It seems that the only concern is about Passover. We really wouldn't care if Rosh Hashanah fell in May or Purim in September. The problem is that Passover has to come out in the spring. Why?

Rashi (Exodus, 13:4) explains that there was a specific reason that the Exodus took place in the spring. Rather than taking the Israelites out of Egypt during the heat of the summer, or the cold and rain of the winter, He took them out when it was most comfortable to travel. (Of course, they ended up spending forty years in the desert, but had they done what they were supposed to do, they would have been in Israel before the summer.)

Another reason for the springtime departure from Egypt was to show the world Who is in charge. The Zodiac sign for the "*Springtime Month*" is Aries, the sign of the ram, the god of Egypt. Right smack in the middle of the month when the Egyptian god was considered to be in power, G-d told us to roast little lambs for a Passover feast. Once we finished eating those little Egyptian icons, G-d further showed the Egyptians how powerless their "god" was by taking us out under the "its watch."

G-d has the power to save us at any time He desires. He chooses to do it at the time that He understands is best for us.

Please, dear Father, let it be now.

Have a great Shabbos. Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz