

February 2019 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

Because Exodus 12:1-2 (**And the LORD spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you."**) marks the very first commandment placed upon the Children of Israel as a full nation, the obligation to establish a proper calendar – which delineates exactly when the first month of the year begins – seems to take clear pride of place. In order to make sure this happens, we need to have a reliable system of calculation.

The first day of every lunar month, which we call **rosh hodesh** (the “new moon”), is the day on which the moon moves from being entirely invisible to being just barely visible. The yearly cycle of one **rosh hodesh** to the next takes just over 29½ days to complete, which results in the lunar year being roughly eleven days shorter than a solar year.

This discrepancy matters because the Jewish calendar is based on a biblically mandated lunar cycle. Were the solar calendar to be ignored entirely, holidays that are seasonally dependent would more often than not fall at illogical times of the year. The solution came in the form of a 19-year “Metonic” cycle (named after the 5th Century BCE Greek mathematician Meton of Athens), which introduced one additional month to seven out of every nineteen years. This combined luni-solar cycle managed to keep seasonal holidays at their prescribed seasons while also adhering to the strict requirements of biblical calendaring.

The name of this additional month that is added seven times over 19 years is **Adar Bet** (not surprisingly, it follows **Adar Aleph**). While the holiday of Purim usually falls on the 14th day of the month of **Adar**, the **Mishnah** instructs that when we add **Adar Bet**, we have to wait until the 14th day of that additional month to celebrate. This year, 5779, is one of those years in the Metonic cycle when we add **Adar Bet**. In other words, beginning with **rosh hodesh Adar Aleph** (Monday evening, February 4 – Tuesday evening, February 5), we will then have an entire month with no major holiday. So we ask, “Given the lack of holidays, how will we find holiness during this month of mundanity?”

On this question, I am reminded of what the early 20th Century French composer, Claude Debussy (who, while not Jewish himself, was married for the last ten years of his life to Emma Bardac, a French singer of Jewish descent) is quoted to have said: “**Music is the space between the notes.**”

Sometimes the best way to experience holiness is to make the very most of those moments that come between the major mileposts of life. As important as the holy days of our calendar truly are, the reality of it is that the overwhelming majority of life is lived on the **other** days, the days that are not accorded special status. Yet these days

are of crucial importance, because in order to absorb fully the lessons of our holidays, sometimes we need a little extra time to let them soak in and influence our behavior. Sometimes we need time to reflect, consider, and figure out how best to navigate our lives in a way that truly honors the call for holiness.

So as we enter this month of no-holidays, I encourage us all to take advantage of the silence. Let us make use of **Adar Aleph** to seek out daily opportunities for reflection and connection. Let us strengthen our relationships with each other and with God. Let us make special effort to join together for Shabbat services at JCNWJ – and for the Sunday Sabbath service for which we will be joining our friends at [Mt. Pisgah AME Church](#) on Sunday morning, February 17. Most of all, let us take advantage of the space between the notes this month in order to hear the music, experience the music, and create the music of holiness.

Wishing you all a happy and meaningful *Adar Aleph*,

Rabbi Dubin

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