

October 2019 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

As I'm sure you've picked up on already by now, the month of *Tishrei* is a busy one in our Jewish Calendar. First comes Rosh HaShanah on the first of *Tishrei*, then *Yom Kippur* on the tenth of *Tishrei*, followed by i from the fifteenth through the twenty-first of *Tishrei*, and then, finally, *Shemini Atzeret* (the "Eighth Day of Assembly," on which we switch from including the summer prayer for dew in our prayers to the winter prayer for rain) which coincides with Simchat Torah (the "Happiness of Torah") on which we complete and then begin again our yearly cycle of Torah reading. Five holidays is just over three weeks!

The calendar just described is the way it is presented in the Bible (except for *Simchat Torah*, which is **post**-biblical in origin, dating back "only" about 1,000 years). It is the calendar to which our brothers and sisters in Israel adhere, as well as most Reform Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Diaspora Jews of other denominations, however, follow a different schedule, and this is why:

Until the Reform Movement was formed in the 19th Century, it was universally accepted that except for *Yom Kippur*, all holidays of biblical origin – *Sukkot* included – would be extended by one day when celebrated outside the land of Israel. The reason for this traces back well over 2000 years, when it was the responsibility of the Sanhedrin, the chief rabbinical court of the day, to announce each new month. While even back then they were scientifically advanced well enough to predict with good accuracy when one lunar month should end and the next one begin, in keeping with tradition, and in order to be 100% positive, they would wait until two reliable witness had testified to having seen the new moon with their own eyes before making an official pronouncement.

Accuracy, of course mattered, because if they were off by even one day, that would set the entire nation of Israel on a course of failing to fulfill God's time-bound commandments to observe certain specific holidays on certain specific days. Therefore, making the best use of ancient technology they could, immediately upon receiving expert eyewitness testimony regarding the arrival of the New Moon, the Sanhedrin would order a signal fire to be lit on top of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Upon seeing the signal, watchers on the next mountaintop would light their own fire, which would then signal watchers on the third mountain after that to light theirs. Eventually, the chain reaction would continue all the way to the diasporic Jewish community in Babylonia (which was located, roughly speaking, where modern day Iraq sits today). Even as the alert system was indeed remarkably efficient, still, it did take time, which is the reason that holidays are celebrated longer outside Israel than in. The extra day serves as an insurance policy to make sure that we in the Diaspora don't miss the opportunity to fulfill our celebratory obligations.

Of course, with today's science, there's hardly a chance that we will actually mistake the wrong day for the correct one, but rabbinic tradition holds tremendous authority in Jewish thought, which is why non-Reform religious Jews choose to continue adding the extra day of observance when not in Israel. Reform, on the other hand, with our origins firmly established in a more rational approach to Jewish practice, chose at its inception to observe biblical holidays for the biblically prescribed number of days rather than the rabbinically prescribed extended period.

And this is why not all Jews in New Jersey will be celebrating it on the same day. Reform congregations in America (and all congregations of all denominations in Israel) will celebrate *Sukkot* for the biblically prescribed **seven** days, and then move on to *Simchat Torah* at sundown of Sunday, October 20. Non-Reform congregations outside Israel, on the other hand, will celebrate *Sukkot* for the rabbinically prescribed **eight** days, and therefore not move on to *Simchat Torah* until sundown of Monday, October 21.

Now, all that having been said . . . The Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey, never afraid to do things our own way, will continue our practice of celebrating all major Jewish holidays (other than *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*) on the Shabbat evening immediately preceding or following the pre-scribed date. This year we will celebrate *Simchat Torah* during Shabbat services on Friday, October 25, at 7:00 pm (note the early start time) In addition to our dancing and singing and merry-making, of special interest will be our annual unrolling of the Torah around the entire sanctuary, for which we will need as many hands as we can get! Also, while the Torah is out for all to see, I will lead us through a whirlwind tour of the entire scroll. As well, the children of our [Mike Weiner School of Jewish Learning](#) will help lead us in prayer through music during the celebration. This is always one of the highlight services of the year, and I look forward to seeing as many of us as possible come together for it.

Happy New Year to All, and May you be Inscribed for Goodness in the Book of Life,

Rabbi Dubin

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