

# Hadracha Choveret



תנועת בני עקיבא  
BNEI AKIVA  
UNITED KINGDOM

BNEI AKIVA'S WEEKLY EDUCATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR MADRICHIM

## Rosh Chodesh



### Aims:

- To learn about the significance of Rosh Chodesh (RC).
- To find out how the new month was declared before the Temple was destroyed.
- To see how Eretz Yisrael is crucial to this mitzvah.

Dearest wonderful leaders,

It feels like it has been absolutely ages since I wrote to you last, and to be honest it has been a few weeks! Machane was great, and I hope for those of you that took part, you also had a fantastic experience!

It's good to be back, writing Chovrot! I hope you enjoyed the break and are raring to go with another term of amazing Bnei Akiva sviva, created by you!!!

It's also important to note that this term is Shabbat Ha'irgun season. Whilst this will bring a wave of excitement to your Svivot, it's also a really great opportunity to exercise some different ways of getting across our Chinuch. For example, if you normally have 10 Chanichim in your group, you may now have 50. Somethign worth thinking about!

B'hatzlacha

Eve

Chinuch Worker 5773

[chinuch@bauk.org](mailto:chinuch@bauk.org)

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֹאשׁ  
חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לַחֹדֶשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה

*“And Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon in the land of Egypt saying: This month is to you the head of months; it’s the first to you of the months of the year.” – Shemot 12:1-2*

And there we have it, the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people! We do learn mitzvot from Sefer Bereshit like Brit Mila – but here for the first time we have a mitzvah given to the Jews as a nation.

## **Why is this the first mitzvah given to Am Yisrael?**

Time governs our lives. We wake up, eat and sleep based around the time of day. Our appointments, meetings and holidays are all scheduled for a particular time. Time is the sphere in which we play out our actions.

Therefore if we are to be a people that bring Hashem into every part of our lives, we have to look at what we spend our time doing.

Rosh Chodesh is not just about having a festival once a month – it is the basis for the entire Jewish calendar.



# The Jewish Calendar

We have so many mitzvot based around the concept of time – from Shabbat to Tefillin, Succah to Megilla and Chanukah candles to Seder Night. But the whole system only works if you have a calendar with dates and times - and for that you need Rosh Chodesh.

So let's find out more about the origins of how we work out when the new month is...

## **Back in the day**

In ancient times, Rosh Chodesh was a significant festival day. At that time, the new months were determined by observation. Each month began when the first sliver of moon became visible after the dark of the moon. Observers would watch the sky at night for any sign of the moon. If they saw the moon, they would report their sightings to the Sanhedrin, who would interrogate them to make sure that they were not mistaken. Where in the sky did the moon appear? Which direction was it pointing? If two independent and reliable eyewitnesses confirmed that the new moon had appeared and described it consistently, the Sanhedrin would say 'Mekadesh'-sanctified. This process was called *Kiddush Hachodesh*, sanctification of the month.



This decision would then be communicated by messengers to all Jewish communities telling people when the month began. Essentially the decision of Sanhedrin could alter the date of the festivals, the day on which people testified and the New Moon was declared would decide whether any day of Yom Tov was one day or another.

The day after the moon appeared was a festival, announced with the sounding of the shofar, commemorated with solemn gathering, family festivities and special sacrifices. The importance of this holiday in ancient times should not be underestimated. The entire calendar was dependent upon these declarations; without the declarations, there would be no way of knowing when holidays were supposed to occur.

## Points TO PONDER

- ✚ Why is there a commandment to *declare* Rosh Chodesh – why can't we just 'know' when it is, like Shabbat?



- ✚ Why did we make such a song and dance about the whole ‘moon-spotting’ phenomenon?
- ✚ What would happen if the witnesses got it wrong – weren’t we a bit reliant on two people?

One of the most fascinating elements to Rosh Chodesh is that it is up to the Jewish people to keep the calendar going. Yes, there could be a mistake and the months could be wrong – but this mitzvah shows that *Hashem has faith in the Jewish people to be part of making halacha*. Judaism is not a one-way process, it is a two-way one. As the Chief Rabbi may well say at some point,

*“Judaism is not a monologue but a dialogue. It is the most divine of religions but also the most human. Judaism is the covenant of conversation.”* Michael Rainsbury, January 2010



Hashem speaks to us through the Torah – and we speak to Him through our tefillot. Hashem took us out of Egypt – but we had to conquer Eretz Yisrael. Hashem decided when Shabbat would be – but we decide the dates of Rosh Chodesh and Chagim.

In other words, Rosh Chodesh shows the beautiful partnership between Hashem and the Jewish people, which has been made strong throughout a series of covenants, notably of course the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, which we'll read about in a few weeks' time.

## **Rosh Chodesh and Eretz Yisrael**

One lesser-known feature of Rosh Chodesh is that it is not just based on the Jewish people making it happen – it is very much linked to the land of Israel too. The idea is as follows:

Since we don't have a Sanhedrin unfortunately, we can't do the Mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh in full. Rather, we have a calendar, which we nowadays rely on. BUT this has one major condition, as will be explained by the Rambam (Maimonides)...

*“If we assume, for example, that all Jews in Eretz Yisrael were to leave Eretz Yisrael (G-d forbid He should do this since He already promised not to erase or uproot the people completely); and we assume there is no Bet Din close to Eretz Yisrael – all our calculations would be not be useful in any way, because in Chutz*

*La'aretz we cannot calculate the months, make leap years and establish months..."*

The Rambam is saying something unbelievable – that our entire existence of Judaism is completely reliant on Jews being in the land of Israel! Without this, there can be no calendar, no Kiddush Hachodesh, no Chagim – basically not much!



Basically, we need to have at least three males, representing a theoretical Bet Din, living in Israel to be able to give authority to our calendar. But why isn't a calendar good enough? Because unlike the counting process for Shabbat, the way this Mitzvah was designed was to be contingent on having a Bet Din in Eretz Yisrael. (Note: these limitations only took place once the Jews entered the land i.e. not when first commanded in Parashat Bo).

This is definitely food for thought in terms of how we view Eretz Yisrael – is it just another mitzvah or a nice dream...or is it none other than the life-force of the Jewish people?



## A few final ideas

### **Laws and Customs of Rosh Chodesh today:**

- We say Hallel, but only the ‘skipped’ version (this means leaving out the second half of two chapters in the Tehillim we say).
- It is forbidden to fast (why would you anyway?!) and there is even a mitzvah to increase one’s meals/food on RC.
- We add an extra prayer, Ya’aleh V’yavo, in both the Amidah and Bircat Hamazon, which asks Hashem to favour us at this special time and gives us many brachot.
- We leyen, reading about the korbanot for Rosh Chodesh.
- We say Musaf.
- There is an idea to wear nicer clothes.
- The Shulchan Aruch talks about a custom of women not to work on Rosh Chodesh – possibly the source for women’s Rosh Chodesh groups in many shuls today!



- **The Minute Game**
- A new game – **the Moonpig game!** Get into groups and each have to make a personalised Rosh Chodesh greeting card for a selected person, which has to include the moonpig.com jingo! (We are not being paid by www.moonpig.com for this free publicity!)
- **Acting out** the process of Kiddush Hachodesh with witnesses, Sanhedrin et al.
- Play the **Chocolate Game**, Rosh Chodesh style! Normally each player rolls the dice and if it lands on a 6, they get to the chocolate – but before they eat it, they have to put lots of coats and scarves on and then use a knife and fork to eat it (hands not allowed). By this time, it is likely someone else gets a 6 and they have to put on the clothes etc. The Rosh Chodesh twist is that instead of rolling a dice, you make slips of paper, each numbered 1-30 & if you pick number 1 (Rosh Chodesh) out of the hat, that's like getting a 6 and you get to eat the 'special Rosh Chodesh chocolate'. **Remember to use parev chocolate!**
- If you don't normally have Seudah Shlishit at BA, have one this week! It's a great opportunity to give the chanichim something different – with nice food and ruach – as well as doing something special to show it's both Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. Perhaps you could do a joint seudah with the Shul and get a chanich to say a Dvar Torah.

## ***Hadracha Tip of the Week***

*One often-forgotten feature of sviva was teaching chanichim a new song every so often – using food at seudah shlishit as a bribe of course! Why not bring this tradition back...and you can start with the song below!*



Do you know these two umpa Lumpas?!

Prize for best caption. Send to [chinuch@bauk.org](mailto:chinuch@bauk.org)

## -KVUTSAH PLANNING SHEET-

