

ROSH CHODESH

רֵאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ



Rosh Chodesh ראש חודש Beginning of the Hebrew Month is the name for the first day of every month in the Hebrew calendar. Although *Rosh Chodesh* is not considered a religious holiday it is observed with additional Jewish prayers, including the Psalms of Hallel ("praise") in Orthodox and Conservative synagogues.

The occurrence of Rosh Chodesh was originally based on the testimony of witnesses observing the appearance of the "new moon", *i.e.*, a sliver of light reflected from the moon, typically appearing one or two days after the astronomical new moon, when no moon is visible and only the shadowed side of the moon faces the Earth, but after the 12th Century elaborate mathematical rules were adopted to determine the occurrence of Rosh Chodesh and the new month of the lunisolar cycle measured by the Hebrew Calendar

Significance

"This is the very first commandment given to the nation as a whole, an indication that the concept of *Rosh Chodesh*, or the New Moon, is very meaningful. Moreover, a thousand years later in Eretz Yisrael, during the period of Syrian-Greek persecution that culminated in the miracle of Chanukah, *Rosh Chodesh* was one of only three commandments whose observance the oppressors prohibited. The other two forbidden commandments were the Sabbath and circumcision; that *Rosh Chodesh* was on a plane with those central observances is sufficient indication of its great significance

"This can be understood on two levels. As noted below, only the court can proclaim *Rosh Chodesh* based on the testimony of witnesses who observed the re-appearance of the moon, and upon this proclamation, the Jewish calendar is based. Unless the new months can be proclaimed, there is no calendar, and without a calendar, there can be no festivals. Thus if the Syrian-Greeks had succeeded in eradicating the observance of *Rosh Chodesh*, they would have succeeded in eliminating large numbers of other *mitzvot*, as well."

"On a deeper level, *Rosh Chodesh* symbolizes renewal, the ability of the Jewish People to rise up from oblivion and restore itself to its past greatness.

In the Book of Exodus, it is written, "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.'" (12:1-2)



Rosh Chodesh has long been recognized as a women's holiday. According to the Talmud (tractate Megillah 22b) women are exempt from work on Rosh Chodesh. According to midrash Pirke DeRabbi Eliezer (chapter 45) it is specifically the women who merit this monthly holiday in commemoration of the Biblical women's refusal to relinquish their earrings to the men who were building the Golden Calf. As a reward, God gave them an extra holy day each month, free from work.

It is customary to wear new clothing on Rosh Chodesh, in celebration of the day's special character.

Just as the moon disappears at the end of each month and returns and grows to fullness, so Israel may suffer exile and decline, but it always renews itself - until the coming of the Messiah.



"This essential characteristic of Jewish history was first exhibited in Egypt, when, in the simile of the Sages, the nation had fallen to the forty-ninth level of impurity - one level above spiritual extermination - only to renew itself so breathtakingly that after seven weeks it was able to stand at Mount Sinai and experience prophecy."

"This concept of Jewish renewal was what the Syrian-Greeks attempted to eradicate by ending the observance of *Rosh Chodesh*. Instead, the Jewish People rose up in defense of the Torah and the Temple, and their triumph is commemorated through Chanukah, the festival of renewal."