

Mark Time

Marking time is a military step in which soldiers march in place, moving their legs as in marching, but without stepping forward[#]. The military drill command is "Mark Time!" to change from standing at attention to 'Marking Time' or to change from marching at 'Quick Time' to 'Marking Time'. The resulting action is to march in the same place, not to move in any direction. Also used during Color Guard maneuvers to make minor adjustments in a single file presentation of the colors. ([#]US Army Field Manual: FM 22-5)

The beginning of the Hebrew calendar is established in today's *Torah* Reading: *Parashat Bo*. In Exodus 12, just before the departure from Egypt God commands the our people to mark the months of the year: "Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,² "This month (moon) shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you" (Ex 12:1-2). Later on in the *Torah*, the beginning of each month (Hebrew *Rosh Chodesh*) is mentioned in the same context as the more important festivals. The people are commanded to be joyous, offer sacrifices, and be reminded of God's holiness (Nu. 10:10).

Originally, there was not a set calendar for Jewish months. Instead, the Sanhedrin (an ancient court) would declare a new month after receiving the testimony of two reliable witnesses reporting that they had seen the first sliver of the new moon. Then the message was spread throughout Israel and Babylonia via small fires on hilltops. When a new moon (and by implication, new month) was announced, someone would go to the top of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem with a long pole of wood. He would set the end of his pole on fire and wave it around until he could see someone on another hilltop waving his own pole. The second person waved his pole until he could see a third person waving, and so on until the message reached Babylonia. Eventually the Samaritans began lighting fires on hilltops in order to mislead the Jews, and so instead of fires, messengers were sent out from Jerusalem. By the later Amoraic period, a fixed calendar was set, and there was no longer any need for witnesses or messengers.

The first day of Nisan (or the month of the *Aviv*, meaning *spring*) is a historic day for our Jewish people. It marks the day when we received our first commandment as a nation: *to sanctify the new moon*. This new moon declaration methodology had a profound spiritual and historic significance for Jews living all over the world because it sets or establishes when the Biblical Holy Days (Hebrew, *chagim*) fall, how many days they encompass and when they are celebrated in and out of Israel. By virtue of this commandment, the Jewish people were/are given mastery and privilege over the reckoning of sacred time. From that moment on, the calendar with its cycle of *Shabbat*, High Holidays and Festivals could exist only when human witnesses declared the new moon/month. This signifies more than control over the determination of time and the everyday events of daily life because it also represents the potential for change and renewal, for rebirth and growth, and for the waning and waxing of the moon each month.

The concept of *Rosh Chodesh* is one that connects holiness with time. Sanctifying (setting apart) time and marking time is central to our lives as Messianic Jews. As Abraham Joshua Herschel states: "*Judaism is more concerned with time than space and Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time.*" The *Torah* tells us in Exodus 12:2 how to mark our time so we can keep our appointed times (our times of intimacy with Him). They are not based on the Catholic calendar (Gregorian – Pope Gregory the Great's calendar), or on whenever we feel. He gave His Bride Israel instructions on these special dates and we should be persuaded to keep them sacred. The first new moon in the springtime is to be unto us the beginning of months (moons). This is the start of *The Lord's sacred year* – the first day of the month of *Aviv*. Modern Jewish calendars refer to this month as Nisan the first month of the year. Note that it is not the first of the seventh month called *Tishrei* (*Yom Teruah*), but rather it is Nisan (*Aviv*). If the sages say the world was created in *Tishrei*, then why is Nisan considered the first month of the year? *Moses Maimonides* (or *Rambam*) understood this in the following way: "*The children of Israel should mark this month as the first, and should count months in relation to this one; the second, the third, to the 12th month. This is to ensure that we remember the great miracle of the Exodus for whenever we mention the month; we will (effectively) be mentioning the miracle. That is why there are no names of months in the Torah, but the Torah will say (for example): 'and it came to pass in the third month' (19:1) or 'In the second month of the second year' (Nu. 10:11).*

This is the same notion as our counting the days of the week in relation to Shabbat. And this is why it says in the verse 'it shall be the first of the months of the year FOR YOU'. It is the first month for you as it is a remembrance of our redemption."

It is interesting to note that following the Greek conquest of the land of Israel, three observances of the Jewish people were forbidden: (1) Circumcision, (2) Shabbat observance, and (3) the sanctification of the New Moon. Evidently our enemies always understood that these three observances, all time related (circumcision on the 8th day, Sabbath observance on the 7th day), were/are fundamental to the existence of Israel as a nation. Forbidding these three *Mitzvot* contributed to the revolt of the *Hasmoneans* and the victory of *Chanukah*.

Maimonides/Rambam sees this commandment in Exodus 12:2 as marking the centrality of the Exodus experience in the overall Jewish frame of mind. In the same way, the days of the week have no names in Modern Hebrew. Sunday is called *Yom Rishon*, Monday *Yom Sheni*, etc., leading up to Shabbat and emphasizing the prominence of *Shabbat* in our week. Similarly in the *Torah*, the months are pointing straight to the month of the *Aviv* (Nisan) and to the month of *Tishrei*. *Aviv* is a month of miracles and redemption. This is the month when we celebrate Pesach, freedom, ridding ourselves of *chametz* and eating a lot of *matzah*!

In fact, the establishment of the calendar can be seen as a vital step in the pursuit of freedom – all sorts of freedoms, both collective and personal. A slave is not a master of his or her own time. When I create my own weekly calendar, I am stating without reservation that I control my time. I can control my work times, my quiet times, my holidays, my family and friend times, and my work/life balance. It enables me to honor time and mark it. I am in control of my life. The establishment of a Jewish month system is most significant especially if our calendar begins at, and points to, a month of release and redemption.

The verse states: “*this month is for you.*” It is our very own personal gift of time. Maybe it is implying that something new can happen during this month/year: a new discovery, a new release, a new learning, a new opportunity for relationships, a renewed sense of ourselves and our understanding of time. *Aviv/Nisan* is a month and year designation ‘for you, and for me’ and for us in KS and for Jews all over the world.