

Shabbat Parashat Tazri'a – Shabbat Ha'Hodesh Living by the Rhythm of Holy Time

As we inch closer to the festival of Pesah, we experience each of the four special Shabbatot that occur during the six weeks prior to it. This week, as we do each month, we announce the coming of Rosh Hodesh/the celebration of the new Jewish month during the upcoming week. However, as the Shabbat immediately before Rosh Hodesh Nisan (the month during which Pesah falls), the Rabbis designated it as a special Shabbat: Shabbat Ha'Hodesh. The special Torah reading for this week's special Shabbat contains the first commandment given to the Israelites as a free people: to celebrate the beginning of the month of Nisan (the first official Israelite/Jewish month that could be marked by our people) as the New Year of all months, that is to say as a "Rosh HaShana." Marking holy time and creating a calendar is the first thing that God instructs God's people to do, not to pray, not to observe Shabbat or to keep dietary laws, not to follow a unique set of "Ten Commandments." The foundation of Israelite religion, which would later come to be known as Judaism, is sacred time. It entails living a life based on the rhythm that our sacred times provide, from Shabbat each week, to Rosh Hodesh each month, to the various festivals each year. The Jewish calendar is the bedrock of our religion.

To live one's life by the Jewish calendar dates, at least as much as by those of the secular ones, is to experience the true ebb and flow, ups and downs, rhythm and roll of Jewish life and the Jewish calendar. Taking vacations, **especially to Israel if possible**, for the pilgrimage festivals of Sukkot and Pesah, taking Shabbat for rest and family time away from the grind of the work week – according to your family's ability and custom, taking deliberate notice of the new moon (when no moon appears in the sky) marking Rosh Hodesh and the full moon (on which many Jewish festivals fall) are just some examples of how our calendar is supposed to affect our experiences each day, week, month, and year. To live one's life in this way is not "Orthodox." Rather, it is Jewish. If one was looking for a more specific way to describe this lifestyle, it would be "observant." And the benefits of living an observant lifestyle are many, but most significantly, we gain a deeper connection to our roots (going as far back as the first generation of our people coming out of Egypt), a sense of unity with other Jews around the world, and the spiritual elevation of our lives because they include the observance of holy time that reminds us of who we are as Jews, our God, and our precious tradition.

As we come to Shabbat Ha'Hodesh this week, use the first commandment given to our people as an inspiration and charge to take the next step forward in **observing** holy Jewish time and appreciating the rhythm of the Jewish calendar. To try to do it all at once would be too much too fast and overwhelming. However, in the same way as those Israelites in Egypt began one new *mitzvah*/commandment/observance at a time, so too can we.

Shabbat Shalom!