

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHULCHAN ARUCH PROJECT

The Noahide Laws – Lesson Thirty Three



**Written by Rabbi Avraham Chaim
Bloomenstiel**

© Yeshiva Pirchei Shoshanim 2014

This shiur may not be reproduced in any
form without permission of the copyright holder.

Table of Contents:

1. Introduction
2. 7th of Adar
3. Month of Nissan
4. Nissan as the Rosh HaShanah for Kings and Festivals
5. New Year for Kings
6. Judgment for Grain
7. *Birkas Hallanos* – Blessing on the Trees
8. *Birkas HaChama* – The Blessing on the Cycle of the Sun
9. Summary

Adar & Nissan

Lesson

33

Introduction

The next month in the calendar is Adar. The only major holiday in Adar is Purim, a Rabbinic celebration commemorating the victory of the Jews over their Persian oppressors. Like Chanukah, this day is of little significance to Noahides. However, there are other days, though not as well-known as Purim, that are nevertheless significant. In this lesson, we will also look at the month of Nissan and the holiday of Passover.

The 7th of Adar

The 7th of Adar is the anniversary of both Moses's birth and death. Though there are no special commemorations for this day, there are a number of customs that have grown up around it. However, most of these customs are not universally observed. In the past, there were some who had the custom to fast on the 7th of Adar and to recite a special prayer. However, this is uncommon in our days. There are some who light a *yahrzeit* (memorial) candle in memory of Moses. In many communities, Jewish burial societies hold their annual meetings on the 7th of Adar.

For Noahides, Moses is a significant figure in the transmission of the Noahide laws and it is certainly important to acknowledge his role. The 7th of Adar is the appropriate day to do so.

- As a general rule, fasting is discouraged unless one has a particularly compelling reason to do so. Nevertheless, one may still recite the prayer for the 7th of Adar (this will be provided to the group in the near future).

- Lighting a 24-hour memorial candle in memory of Moses is an appropriate custom.

This year the 7th of Adar is Thursday, February 26, 2015.

In a Hebrew leap year, when there is an extra month of Adar, the 7th of Adar is commemorated in Adar II.

The Month of Nissan

The Month of Nissan is second only to Tishrei in religious significance. As with all of the major festivals of the Torah, it has levels of specific meaning relevant only to Israel and broader meaning relevant to the world. Let's take a look again at our source Mishnah's:

*There are four Rosh Hashanah's [New Years]: **the 1st of Nissan is the New Year for kings and festivals**, the 15th of Elul is the New Year for the tithing of animals (according to Rabbis Elazar and Shimon, this is on the 1st of Tishrei), the 1st of Tishrei for counting years, the Jubilee and Shemitta cycles, and the tithing of trees and produce. The 1st of Shvat is the New Year for trees according to the yeshiva [school] of Shammai. According to the yeshiva [school] of Hillel, it is on the 15th of Shvat.¹*

*At four junctures, the world is judged: **on Passover for grain**, on Shavnot for fruits, on Rosh Hashanah all pass before him like sheep of the flock, as it is written, "He form their hearts as one, he understands all of their deeds." (Psalms 33). On Sukkot, the world is judged for water.²*

For Jews, the Month of Nissan is all about Passover, the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt. However, the universal meaning is two-fold:

- 1) The 1st of Nissan is a Rosh HaShanah for Kings and festivals.
- 2) On the 15th of Nissan, Passover, the world is judged upon the abundance of grain.

¹ Mishnah Rosh HaShanah 1:1.

² Mishnah Rosh HaShanah 1:2.

Nissan as the Rosh HaShanah for Kings and Festivals

Before Israel exited Egypt, the months of the Hebrew calendar were all counted from varying starting points. Either the months were counted from creation, from the cessation of the flood, or the birth of Abraham. After the exodus, however, God commanded Israel to count all of the months beginning from Nissan:

*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."
(Exodus 12:1-2)*

Having established Nissan as the first month, Pesach (Passover) is thus reckoned as the first of the festivals. This is important for calculating the window one has to fulfill a vows pertaining to offering (this detail will be discussed in the live class). This aspect of Nissan may be relevant to Noahides and will be discussed in greater detail in a future lesson.

This year, the first of Nissan falls on Saturday, March 21, 2015.

The New Year for Kings

The Talmud clarifies that Nissan is only considered the New Year for the reign of Jewish kings. This is because of the unique status of Nissan for Jews as the month of Redemption. For gentile kings, their reign is counted from the time of creation, the month of Tishrei.

We see that the status of Tishrei as a Rosh HaShanah for kings is only relevant to Jews. Yet, as a Rosh HaShanah for festivals, it may be relevant to Noahides.

Judgment for Grain

The 15th of Nissan is Passover for the Jews, but for the rest of the world it is a day of judgment for grain.

It is on this day that God determines which nations will prosper and which will have famine. As such, it is important to pray for the sustenance of the world at this time.

On Passover, we also recite the prayer for dew. The reason for this prayer is that the rains that fall after the 15th of Nissan are damaging for the grain harvest. An excess of moisture at this time can cause the drying grain to rot. Therefore, on the 15th of Nissan we pray for dew, asking God for a sufficient amount of moisture to sustain the crops and the world without harming the drying grain. This prayer is recited on the first day of Passover during morning prayers.

Communal meals should be eaten at this time. It is appropriate to eat bread and food from grains at this meal.

For Noahides, the 15th of Nissan is a one-day holiday. This year it falls on Saturday, April 4, 2015.

Birkas Hallanos – Blessing on the Trees

Nissan is strongly associated with spring, renewal, and the emergence of the world from its winter slumber. During this month, upon seeing fruit trees in bloom, we make a special blessing upon them. This blessing may be made only once each year. Some have the custom to gather in groups, making the occasion one for celebration. This blessing is subject to the following rules:

- The blessing is said only upon fruit bearing trees. It is a dispute as to whether or not this blessing may be said in any month other than Nissan.
- The blessing is only recited when one sees at least two fruit bearing trees together. These trees should be over 3 years old.
- According to some, this blessing should not be made on the seventh day or on a holiday.
- If one has already seen blossoming trees, then the blessing is not recited.
- The blessing is not recited upon a tree that is actually laden with fruit, only upon a tree that is blossoming.

This is the blessing on blossoming fruit trees:

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, in Whose universe nothing is lacking, and in which He created good creatures and good trees, in which mankind takes joy.

***Birkas HaChama* – The Blessing on the Cycle of the Sun**

The Blessing on the Sun is a blessing recited once every 28 years. Due to its infrequency, this blessing has become a special occasion for rejoicing. The Talmud writes:

*One who sees the sun at the beginning of its cycle ... recites: Blessed in the One who makes the creation. And when is this? Abaye said: Every 28 years.*³

Conventional wisdom, that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, is only mostly true. The exact positions of its rising and setting vary from season-to-season. Near the summer solstice, the sun rises and sets at its northernmost point. However, near the winter solstice, the sun's rising and setting is at its southernmost place. The midpoint of the sun's southern journey is the autumnal equinox, while the midpoint of its northern journey is the spring equinox. The interval between the reoccurrence of these phases is the solar year, which is approximately 365 ¼ days, or 52 weeks and 1 ¼ day.

Due to the additional 1 ¼ day, these solar benchmarks shift forward slightly each year. For example, if the spring equinox is at 12:00 PM on a Sunday, then it will fall on Monday at 6:00 PM in the following year. The next year, it will fall at midnight on Tuesday, and so on.

After 28 years will the sun have returned back to its original position at the same time we began our count.

The sun was placed in the heavens during the first hour on the evening of the fourth day of the week (a Tuesday night).⁴ According to the sages, this was the Spring Equinox. Therefore, the first sunrise occurred twelve hours later on the morning of the fourth day. It is at that time, every 28 years that we make the blessing on the sun.

2009 was the last time that the blessing was made. The next occasion for this blessing is April 8, 2037.

³ Brachos 59b.

⁴ The details here are all summarized from Brachos 2a & 59b, Eruvin 56a, Rosh HaShanah 10b.

This blessing is recited according to the following laws:

- The blessing is cited as soon as the entire disk of the sun has risen above the horizon.
- The blessing may only be said until the third hour of daylight. According to some, if one misses that time, then he may recite it until noon.
- It is preferable that this blessing be recited by as many people together as possible.
- Women do not recite this blessing. This is because, in the times of the Prophet Jeremiah, worship of the sun became widespread among women of the time.
- It is customary for the congregation to assemble before sunrise for their prayers, timing them so that they have ample time afterwards to make the blessing.
- Following the blessing, the custom is to celebrate with song, music, and food.

The blessing is:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, who makes the work of Creation.

Summary of the Lesson

1. Nissan, as a Rosh HaShanah may be relevant to Noahides because it established the window of time during which one must fulfill a vow to bring a voluntary offering.
2. Nissan, as a Rosh HaShanah for kings, is not relevant to Noahides
3. The 15th of Nissan is important as a day of judgment for grain and produce.
4. On the 15th of Nissan we recite the prayer for dew.
5. During Nissan, we recite the blessing on blooming fruit trees.
6. Every 28 years, we make a blessing upon God's renewal of the cycle of the sun.