

Exodus 12:2 This month shall mark *for you* the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year *for you*.”

This indicates it is set in place for our benefit. It is a gift of renewal every month, a time to strengthen ourselves in our relationship with God, and our worship of Him and service to Him.

There is a Midrash that says: “God granted His people the authority to sanctify the New Moon, unlike Shabbat, which is sanctified by Heaven.”

Isaiah 66:23 in reference to the Final Redemption when Messiah is reigning from Jerusalem over God’s Kingdom on earth, “From New Moon to New Moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me,” says the LORD.

The biblical Hebrew calendar is lunar. It has 12 months which are calibrated with the solar calendar every 7 years by adding an extra month at the end - Adar Aleph and Adar Bet. In Ancient Israel there were special witnesses who had to sight the first sliver of the new moon and report to the High Priest. Then bonfires would be lit on strategic hilltops to spread the news that the new moon had appeared and the new month had begun. With the Roman exile and the spreading of the people of Israel to the four corners of the earth, the Rabbis instituted a fixed calendar of months so that all the people could be celebrating the festivals and seasons together and at the same time.

While in exile, the monthly observance of Rosh Chodesh, or the New Moon, waned - just like the moon itself, but, interestingly, since the restoration of the people of Israel back to the Land of Israel, the observance is growing again - just like the waxing of the moon.

God appointed this observance of months at the time of the Exodus. He set in place the first month, then called Aviv - Spring - now Nissan. “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.” (Gen. 12:2) In order to observe the commandment, the Rabbis instituted blessings to be said with the arrival and sanctification of every new moon. The moon is not blessed or sanctified, but God is praised for renewing the moon. The beautiful blessing, recorded in the Talmud is:

Praised are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who created the skies with His Word, and all heaven's hosts with the breath of His mouth. He gave them appointed times and roles, and they never miss their cues doing their Creator's bidding with gladness and joy. He is a true creator who acts faithfully, and He has told the moon to renew itself.

It is a beautiful crown for the people carried by God from birth [Israel], who will likewise be renewed in the future in order to proclaim the beauty of their Creator for His glorious majesty.

Praised are you, O LORD, who renews new moons.

After the Exodus, which is celebrated this month, the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became a nation. They were “carried by God from birth.” The people of Israel identify with the moon because Jewish destiny throughout history has been a series of waning and waxing. Times of being threatened with annihilation and then appearing and growing again. The renewal of the moon is a symbol of Hope. The national anthem of Israel is *HaTikvah* - the Hope.

Each new moon, in the synagogues, the congregation goes outside after the Havdalah service the first Shabbat after the new moon has appeared and all recite the blessing together and greet each other with: “*Shalom Aleichem*” - “Peace be upon you.” and “*David, melech Israel chai ve’kayam.*” “David, king of Israel, lives forever.”

The blessing also can be recited individually at home. In recent years, women are taking a growing interest in Rosh Chodesh - the New Month. Of course, women can more readily identify with the monthly cycle - and the waxing full with pregnancy and the waning after the baby is born.

All individuals go through ups and downs - low times alternating with the good times and Rosh Chodesh prompts us to remember our Father’s goodness in a special way - the hope of renewal we constantly find in Him.

The month of Nissan is the time of the “latter rains” in Israel. The almond trees have blossomed and are producing their first crop of green almonds. Passover is celebrated during Nissan - on the eve of the 14th when the moon is full. The story of the Exodus from Egypt is read at the Seder meal. also, during the Passover week, the Song of Songs is read. The arrival of Springtime and new life is reflected in chapter 2, verses 10-13:

My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away, for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.

At this beginning of the biblical year, we focus on new life and fresh hope.

TRIBE : YEHUDAH - JUDAH

Each Hebrew month is associated with one of the 12 tribes according to the order of their encampment and order of traveling through the wilderness. The tribe linked with Nissan is JUDAH - Yehudah. His is the leading tribe, as we see foretold in Jacob’s blessing of his sons on his deathbed in Egypt. Genesis 49:8 - “Yehudah, you your brothers shall acknowledge.” Eventually all Israelites would become known as *Yehudim* - Jews.

From the tribe of Yehudah would come Messiah, to serve and suffer as the Passover Lamb, and then to return and reign as King - the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Judah’s name in Hebrew is from the root *yadah* - grateful praise. Also *todah* - thank you!

WOMAN: MIRIAM

Miriam is one of the 7 prophetesses in the Bible. The others being Sarah, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther.

While in Egypt the Torah only refers to her as “Moses’ sister” in spite of her major role in preserving his life and enabling him to become the great man of God that he did. Only after the people have witnessed God’s great redeeming miracles and they have passed through the Reed Sea is she mentioned by name. After Moses’ great song at the Sea, the

first mention of God's Kingship in the Bible, Miriam rises up to sing and the women respond. They sing, play instruments and dance.

Rashi, the great medieval commentator on the Torah, says: "The righteous women of that generation were confident that God would do miracles for them, so they brought drums (and tambourines) with them from Egypt."

The root of Miriam's name is *mar* - bitter. It is connected with the bitterness of slavery the Israelites suffered in Egypt. Now, with her song, she redeems the bitterness with praise and a prophetic hope for the future - for the Kingdom of God, her people, their land, for Messiah, and the final Redemption of Israel and all the world.

From the life of Miriam we can learn to see things in the perspective of eternity. We can learn from the past and redeem it, to create a new future with faith and hope in our God!

When we allow the Word of God and the promised "not yet" to become more real than the present "what is" we can act with boldness and confidence - with Faith and Hope!

As we see in the Exodus story, the issue was a great clash of wills - the will of Pharaoh against the will of God. The Pharaohs set themselves up as gods. They were rulers of mighty empires and lived in grand luxury above the common people. Who were these faceless, nameless slaves to come to him and demand to worship their God? So it goes throughout history - the power struggle! - the battle between man's will and God's will and our own individual will against His! We are weak and we fail - but, if our hearts are yielded to Him and we desire to know Him more and to please Him in our service to Him, then we are reminded by each new moon - the start of each new biblical month, just as we are with the dawning of each new day, that we are offered a fresh start, a new beginning filled with faith and hope.