

Shabbat shalom.

B'midbar 28 begins: *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Command the Israelite people and say to them: 'Be punctilious [I love that word, Be punctilious] in presenting to Me at stated times the offerings of food due Me...'"* Times such as:

- (28:9) *On the sabbath day: two yearling lambs without blemish*
- (28:11) *On your new moons, you shall present a burnt offering*
- (28:16) *In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, there shall be a Passover sacrifice to the LORD*
- (29:1) *In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion*

There are more examples I could read from our parsha, but the message here is that the Torah thinks our Jewish calendar is important. Things are supposed to happen at the times they're supposed to happen, so we need a calendar to keep track of it all. References to the Jewish calendar are sprinkled about the Torah. I'm rather a geek when it comes to our calendar, and I've had a drasha about the calendar floating around in my head for some years now. This is not that drasha because today I only have five minutes, but I could happily talk to you about our calendar for several hours.

As a teaser for that calendar drasha, whenever it ends up happening, I'd like to talk about Ibn Ezra. Avraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, the famous medieval commentator, poet, grammarian, mathematician, scientist, astronomer, astrologer... as songwriter Tom Lehrer once said, "it's people this who make you realize how little you've accomplished." Ibn Ezra was born in Spain about the year 1090, later lived in Italy, and then in France.

While researching this drasha I came across Ibn Ezra's commentary on Exodus 12:2. That verse reads "*This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you.*"

Ibn Ezra quotes Rabbi Judah HaParsi, who noted that the solar calendar is used by "the uncircumcised," which is to say, the Christians. "However," says Ibn Ezra, "Rabbi Judah did not speak correctly. I will now explain." Ibn Ezra's explanation continues for the next 148 lines. The solar calendar, our civil calendar, is based only on the Sun and ignores the Moon, despite our dividing it up into units called months (*month* and *moon* are the same word). "This year of the uncircumcised," says Ibn Ezra, "is not in keeping with the laws of nature."

Similarly, the Moslems use a strictly lunar calendar, which ignores the Sun. “These things are also not based on the laws of Nature. Now, God commanded in His Torah that the festivals be kept in their seasons,” and Ibn Ezra here quotes the Torah in various ways, for example Deut 16:1 “*Observe the month of spring and keep the Passover unto the Lord thy God.*” Thus it’s important that Passover, a lunar-based holiday, occurs in the spring, a solar-based season. Ibn Ezra thus comes to the logical but unsurprising conclusion that only the Jewish calendar will do, a calendar based on both the Sun and the Moon.

Ibn Ezra continues “Now Moses did not explain to us in the Torah how we should establish years or months. Neither did he tell us what we should do if we do not find it to be spring. One can pose a difficult question from all this, namely, why did Moses explain the laws of the plagues of the leper, which fall upon one person and do not last forever, and leave out of the Torah the laws of the Festivals that all of Israel is obligated to keep at all times?”

In answering his own question, Ibn Ezra says [and I love this bit] that if Moses was calculating the new moon by relying on the conjunction of the Sun and Moon in the sky, “Moses should have explained whether he meant the Moon’s mean motion or the true conjunction, because they can differ by almost fourteen hours ... Additionally, Moses should have explained from which part of the earth we reckon the conjunction. For behold, between Jerusalem and this city, whose name is Lucca, there is more than three hours.”

I would have enjoyed having dinner with Ibn Ezra—I would have especially enjoyed having dinner with him in Lucca—someone interested in and skilled at so many different things. And I love a guy who tells us what Moses should have said, given that Moses was just as skilled a mathematician and astronomer as Ibn Ezra was. He was Moses! Of course he was a mathematician!

Well, that’s my calendar teaser. Until next time, hold that thought. Shabbat shalom.