

Ksharim



Lesson 24:

The Jewish Calendar



1. Outline:

- a. Biblical sources/mention of calendar. The implications and explanations given to the fact that the calendar is influenced by both the lunar and solar cycles: the calendar as bound to the agricultural cycle of Eretz Yisrael.
- b. The “proclaiming of the moon” during the Second Temple and after its destruction: the centrality of Israel as the authority for administering the calendar.
- c. Establishing the 19 year cycle and how it works (or not).
- d. The Hebrew calendar today in Israel – dilemmas.

2. Introduction:

How we measure time reflects how we see the world and our place in it. Each individual has markers in time that are important to him – birthdays, anniversaries, yahrzeits, etc. So too different nations and cultures mark time uniquely. Their respective systems reflect their perception of time and space. The Christians count from the death of Christ, the Moslems from the flight of Mohammed. The Gregorian calendar follows the solar year. The Islamic calendar follows the lunar year. In this lesson we will study how Jews mark time and try to understand the significance and results of the system, and its role in linking the land and people of Israel. It turns out that in addition to sanctifying time, the Jewish calendar is deeply connected to the sanctification of place: in living according to it, Jews all over the world affirm, consciously or not, their rootedness in the landscape of Eretz Yisrael.

3. Goals:

- a. To familiarize the students with the sources and development of the Jewish calendar
- b. To understand the connection between the marking of time and the land of Israel
- c. To study dilemmas and problems involved in constructing the calendar.
- d. To discuss the place of the Jewish calendar in Zionist thought and the state of Israel today through specific events in Israeli life e.g. Rabin Memorial day.

4. Expanded Outline:

a. The Biblical Sources

1. The first “commandment” given to the fledgling nation of Israel on the eve of the Exodus is to mark the month of their deliverance as the first of months. The Rabbis elaborate that at this time G-D showed Moses the new moon and instructed him to use the lunar cycle as a basis for measuring time (see source **Questions for discussion**: Why would the establishing of a calendar be the one of the first commandments given to the nation of Israel? Why while they are still in Egypt?)
2. It seems that the Torah is commanding us to establish a calendar based on the lunar cycle. One complete cycle (crescent - full - crescent) corresponds to a month. The lunar cycle is 29.5 days. This method of marking time has no relation to the

tropical or solar calendar. Twelve lunar months form a year = 254.5 days. Since the solar cycle is 365 days the months slip 11 days every year. The Islamic calendar is based on lunar months. Ramadan, the holy month, “moves” through the seasons, sometimes coming out in the winter and other times coming out in the summer. It takes it about 33 years to move around the whole cycle (e.g., Ramadan began on Rosh Hashana in 1974 – and will do so again in 2006; it always, of course, begins on a rosh chodesh).

3. The Torah later commands us that the holiday of Passover must be celebrated in the “spring month” (see source 2).
These two sources seem contradictory. According to the first commandment we are to mark the months by the moon. Yet according to the second, Passover must be celebrated in the **spring** month. Abiding by both commandments necessitated a system that allows for adjusting the season-less lunar months with the seasonal solar calendar to assure that Passover was always celebrated in the spring. This synchronization was accomplished by periodically adding a 13th month – if it appeared that Passover was going to occur too early in the year (before the spring equinox - March 21st today). This was called “impregnating the year” or in modern terms, a leap year. (see source 3)

Questions for discussion:

If Pesach must be in the spring - how do we define spring?

4. Spring in the southern hemisphere is autumn in the northern hemisphere and vice versa? Does spring mean spring in the land of Israel? If so what does that signify? What are the repercussions?

Many of the Biblical commandments for celebrating the holidays reflect agricultural phenomena e.g. the offering of the Omer (offering the first barley) and the offering of the two loaves on Shavuot, the offering of the first fruits beginning on Shavuot. This ties Jewish ritual and holidays to the agricultural reality of a specific land. Is this unique in comparison to other religions?

In early Biblical times, the months had no names, only numbers. The month of Passover, which celebrates the exodus - the birth of the Jewish nation is the first month. This means that the Jewish new year – “Rosh Hashanah” is actually in the seventh month. (In the Bible the holiday is only referred to as a “day of blowing” on the first day of the seventh month). There are discussions and debates in the Talmud about exactly when the world was created, be it Tishrei or Nissan, and the significance of each date (see source 4). In the time of Ezra after the Jews had been exiled to Babylon they began to use the Babylonian names of the months, and these names remain in use until today. (see source 5)

Questions for discussion:

Do the two different types “new years” reflect the nature of different beginnings? What examples can we think of in our lives? The Mishna discussed 4 new years each relevant for the beginning of different cycles (Mishna Rosh Hashana Chapter 1 Mishna 1) How is the first of Nissan unique? Why?

5. Today the Hebrew year is 5766. According to traditional sources this is the count from the time of creation or more specifically from the creation of man – when counting time became relevant. It is interesting to note though that throughout the Bible and Prophets years are counted not from creation but from major events. Like the exodus, or according the reign of the certain kings or even cataclysmic events e.g. Amos 1:1.

According to Jewish tradition time is defined and consecrated by man, or more specifically the nation of Israel. It is they who proclaim the months and regulate the calendar deciding when the holidays will occur. This theme is evident in the different format of blessing on Shabbat and the Holidays. While on Shabbat in Kiddush and prayers we bless G-D who “consecrates the seventh day and Shabbat,” on the holidays we bless G-D who “consecrates Israel and the special days.” G-d consecrated Israel and empowered them to consecrate the special days. (For some discussions of the sanctification of time by human calendrical institutions see source 6)

b. Proclaiming the New Month

- i. During the time of the Second Temple the new month was proclaimed by the Beit Din after the crescent moon was sighted and reported by two reliable witnesses. The rabbis were sufficiently knowledgeable about astronomy; for example, their calculation of an average lunation as 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes and 3 1/3 seconds is very close to modern computations. Still, Jewish law required that the rabbis not rely on their knowledge alone, but rather base their proclamation of the new month on an actual sighting of the new moon. If the testimony was given and, upon cross-examination, accepted on the 30th day then the Beit Din would announce that the new month was "sanctified," meaning that the month just ended was 29 days and the new month would begin. If the testimony was not processed on that day - or even if the witnesses came too late, or were disqualified on a technicality (such as lacking credibility due to their being unrepentant criminals) - then the new month would begin the next day.
- ii. Once the sages accepted the testimony of the witnesses they notified all the people of Israel - even those living in the Diaspora - by a series of bonfires on strategic mountain tops (think of the scene in *Lord of the Rings - The Return of the King*). and messengers. This meant that the people received notification only after the fact. They knew when the new month was proclaimed retroactively. The further away you lived the longer it took for the news to travel. This is the reason that holidays were celebrated for two days in the Diaspora while Israel they were only celebrated for one. Passover and Sukkot are mid-month and Shavuot is the 6th day. There was a good chance that the news of the proclamation would not arrive in time in the outlying communities. So they had to count from the previous announcement, but that left room for a one day error since the lunar month is 29 **and a half** days and the new month might have been proclaimed on the 29th day after the previous month or on the 30th. To compensate for this uncertainty they celebrated both days. Inside the land of Israel the news traveled faster so by the time the holiday arrived, everyone knew

when the month had been proclaimed and they celebrated accordingly. The exception was Rosh Hashanah which occurs on the first of the month. In such a case the witnesses could give testimony only after the holiday was over. Therefore two days were celebrated even inside the land of Israel. Yom Kippur was set afterwards counting ten days from the actual testimony. This system gave great power to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem which had sole authority for proclaiming the month. The system also left room for possible conflict between the sages themselves since the rules for accepting or rejecting testimony were complex.

- iii. The above description of the process of setting the new month is based on the Mishnah, Tractate Rosh Hashana, chapters 1 and 2. (see source 7)
- iv. The story of Rabbi Joshua and Rabban Gamaliel. (see source 8) This story illustrates the importance the Rabbis attributed to their authority to proclaim or “sanctify” the month. Why was it so critical that their decision be universally accepted?

Even after the destruction of the Temple the Sanhedrin in Yavne declared itself the sole authority to proclaim the new month still rested only with them. This continued for as long as the Sanhedrin was active, until the fourth century, even though the majority of Jews and the important Jewish centers were outside the country.

Questions for discussion: Why do you think the Sanhedrin relied on actual sightings and not mathematical calculations? Why was it so important for the decision to be made in the land of Israel and not by any major community? The Reform movement cancelled the second day celebrated in the Diaspora since today we follow a set calendar. What arguments can you think of for or against this decision? Could there be a connection between this ruling and the Reform tendency, in the early years of the movement, to de-emphasize the connection to Israel as a homeland?

- v. Today Moslems still rely on the sighting of the new moon to declare their month. This announcement is especially important at the onset of Ramadan. The exact date is not known until the actual proclamation and if you ask Moslems when Ramadan starts they will tell you day “x” or the next day. There are two councils that proclaim the month, one in Mecca and one in Cairo and they do not always agree or coordinate their proclamations so it is possible for different Moslems to celebrate holidays on different days.

c. The Set Calendar

1. The Sanhedrin stopped being active in the early part of the 4th Century CE, when religious persecution forced it to disband. The rules for the present Jewish calendar system are believed to have been published by the patriarch Hillel II in the year 358, the Jewish year 4118. Hillel II established a fixed calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. This calendar, still in use, standardized the length of months and the

addition of 7 months over the course of a 19 year cycle, so that the lunar calendar realigns with the solar years. Here's the math: 19 lunar years are about 210 days less than 19 solar years, so during that cycle it is necessary to add seven 30-day Adar II's to make it even. The leap years are the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th. The current cycle began in Jewish year 5758 (the year that began October 2, 1997).

2. Why a 19 year cycle? In 432 BC the Athenian astronomer Meton reformed the Athenian calendar based on an approximate relationship between the solar and lunar cycles. He had observed that every nineteen years the occurrences of the new and full moons returned to the same time with respect to the solar cycle. This pattern is known as the Metonic cycle. Actually, in nineteen years the annual difference (10 days, 21 hours and 6 seconds) accumulates to 206 days, 15 hours, 1 minute and 54 seconds. This accumulation is equal (within two hours) to seven lunar months (which come to 206 days, 17 hours, 8 minutes and 23 1/3 seconds). So if seven lunar months were added over a nineteen year period the lunar and solar cycles could be more or less maintained in synchronization.
3. However there is still a 7 hour discrepancy which over the last 1700 years has added up. In 2005 the Jewish calendar was off – a thirteenth month was added according to the 19 year schedule even though the Passover would have occurred after the spring equinox without adding an extra month. As a result Passover was very “late” this year, as are all the other holidays in relation to the general calendar; indeed, Easter came out at Purim time. (For more on this problem see source 9)
4. Another consideration taken into account when determining the calendar was ensuring that Yom Kippur would not occur on a Friday or Sunday as this would interfere with the fast. The rabbis also wanted to avoid Hoshanah Rabba (the seventh day of Sukkot) from occurring on Shabbat. This is accomplished by adjusting Rosh Hashannah so that it never occurs on a Sunday Wednesday or Friday. This is turn is done by varying the lengths of the preceding Heshvan or Kislev so that sometimes they are a “complete” month (30 days) and others they are “incomplete” (29 days). The length of Cheshvan and Kislev are determined by complex calculations involving the time of day of the full moon of the following year's Tishri and the day of the week that Rosh Hodesh Tishri would occur in the following year. The length of Adar also varies for this reason. In leap years Adar has 30 days. In non-leap years, Adar has 29 days.

All said the Jewish calendar today looks like this:

English	Length	Gregorian Period
Nissan	30 days	March-April
Iyar	29 days	April-May
Sivan	30 days	May-June
Tammuz	29 days	June-July
Av	30 days	July-August
Elul	29 days	August-September
Tishri	30 days	September-October
Cheshvan	29 or 30 days	October-November
Kislev	30 or 29 days	November-December
Tevet	29 days	December-January
Shevat	30 days	January-February
Adar	29 or 30 days	February-March
Adar II	29 days	

For more sites on the Hebrew calendars see source 10

5. An interesting episode occurred in the tenth century when a famous dispute arose between a Rabbi Ben Meir who lived in Israel and the chief rabbi, or Gaon of the Babylonian community, Saadia ben Yosef. Ben Meir, relying on the traditional ruling that the sages of Israel had authority to set the calendar, proposed certain adjustments to the calendar. Saadia Gaon opposed the changes and argued that the established calendar had the authority of Mosaic Law and could no longer be changed. It is interesting to note the power struggles that formed the background to this disagreement. And that the Diaspora leader, in the end, won. See source 11

d. The Jewish calendar in Israel today

1. When it comes to defining time Israel is slightly schizophrenic. As a modern Western country dealing with the rest of the world it runs mainly on the Gregorian or civil calendar. However since Jewish holidays are official holidays, the Hebrew dates are also relevant. The Orthodox and especially the "ultra-Orthodox, or *Haredim* operate almost solely on the Jewish Calendar while secular Jews are

mostly oblivious to it. The question of dates becomes especially charged and poignant when dealing with commemorating modern events in the State.

2. Early Zionists saw re-instating the Jewish Calendar as an expression of Jewish National identity unconnected to religious observance. Officially that sentiment exists until today. Yom Haatzmaut – the day of independence was established as a national holiday on the 5th of Iyar and not May 14th. All pieces of Israeli legislature carry the Hebrew year as well as the civil one. In the early 1990's there was a directive given that all documents from government or municipal offices must carry the Hebrew date. Daily papers carry both dates. For some inexplicable reason the cut off date for the school year is a Hebrew date – the 30th of Kislev even though the school year runs on the civil calendar (Sept 1 –June 30) However on a personal level it is mostly the Orthodox that truly "live" Hebrew calendar. (A personal story [T.S.]: Growing up in Toronto as an Orthodox Jew I was mainly aware of the civil dates. Even our day school used them primarily. My children, who have been raised in Israel in an Orthodox community and educational system are almost ignorant of the civil calendar. They don't even know their Gregorian dates of birth or the names of the months.)
3. This duality or indecision is painfully illustrated in the annual debate on when to commemorate Rabin's assassination. In the years immediately after his death there were two separate commemorations - one on the civil date and another on the Hebrew date. Until today the press tends to run its memorials on the civil date even though a law has been passed designating the Hebrew date as the official memorial day. (See sources in source 13 for examples and discussion)
4. The Hebrew calendar and its associations with the seasons is of course a mainstay of Israeli elementary education and culture. See for example Naomi Shemer's song of the calendar...

Sources

1. **Exodus 12:2:** "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you."

Rashi (based on the Midrash in the Mechilta):

He (G-d) showed him the moon at its renewal and said to him, "When the moon renews itself, let that be for you the beginning of a new month." However, Scripture does not depart from its plain meaning: He (G-d) was telling him about the month of *Nissan*; [viz.] this (Nissan) shall be the start of the order of the counting of the months, so that *Iyar* will be called the second [month] and *Sivan*, the third.

2. **Exodus 13:3-6**

3. **Babylonian Talmud tractate Sanhedrin 11b**

Our rabbis taught: A year may be intercalated on three grounds: on account of the premature state of the grain crop, or that of the fruit trees, or on account of the lateness of the equinox. Any two of these reasons can justify intercalation but not one alone. [but, once

Rabban Gamaliel the Nasi wrote to the Diaspora communities:] We beg to inform you that the doves are still tender and the lambs still young, and the grain has not yet ripened. I have considered the matter and thought it advisable to add thirty days to the year.

4. **Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashanah 10b-11a:**

Eliezer says: "In Tishrei the world was created" ... Rabbi Joshua says: "In Nissan the world was created."

Tosfot Rosh Hashana 27a: "These and these are the words of the living God, and one may say that the thought to create was formed in Tishrei, while the actual creation did not take place until Nissan."

5. **On the historical development of the calendar**

<http://www-spof.gsfc.nasa.gov/stargaze/Sjewcale.htm>

6. **On the sanctification of time by fixing the calendar:**

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb: <http://www.limmud.org/tasteoflimmud/Bo>

Rabbi Michael Rosenzweig: www.torahweb.org/torah/2004/parsha/rros_bo.html

From Heschel's book on the Shabbat:

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/daily_life/Shabbat/Shabbat_Themes_and_Theology/Shabbat_Sanctuary_in_Time.htm

Psalm 81:4-5

Blow the horn on the new moon, on the full moon for our feast day.

For it is a law for Israel, a ruling of the God of Jacob.

Midrash Tehilim on the above:

This verse says that God's ruling is dependent on Israel's law, as R. Hoshaya taught, once the earthly court set the date of Rosh Hashana, and God said to the angels, "Set up the courtroom, bring in the defenders, etc., as the earthly court has decreed that it is Rosh Hashana." But then the witnesses were delayed, or the court changed its mind and delayed Rosh Hashana by a day; God said to the angels, "Wait, change everything to tomorrow, as the earthly court has delayed Rosh Hashana..." R. Pinhas and R. Hilkiya in the name of R. Simon taught: all the angels assemble and ask, "Master of the universe, when is Rosh Hashana?" And He answers them: "You're asking Me? Together, we must ask the earthly court, as it is written: *For it is a law for Israel, a ruling of the God of Jacob.*"

7. **Mishna Rosh Hashanah Chapter 1 Mishna 3 -Ch 2 Mishna 7**

1:3 On six months the messengers go forth: on Nisan, because of Passover; on Av, because of the fast; on Elul, because of the New Year; on Tishri, because of the determination of the Holy Days; on Kislev, because of Chanuka; on Adar, because of Purim. And while the Temple still existed, they went forth also on Iyar, because of Pesach Katan.

1:4 Because of two months could they profane the Sabbath: because of Nisan and Tishri, for on them messengers went forth to Syria and by them the Holydays were determined. And when the Temple still stood, they could profane it indeed for all of the [months] for the correct regulation of the offering.

1:5 Whether the crescent were clearly visible or whether it were not manifestly visible, they may profane the Sabbath because of it. R. Yose says, If the crescent were undoubtedly seen they must not profane the Sabbath because of it.

1:8 These are they who are ineligible [to bear witness to sighting the new moon]: a dice player, a userer, those who fly pigeons, dealers in the produce of a Sabbatical Year, and slaves. This is the general principle: all evidence that a woman is not eligible to give, these also are not eligible to bring.

1:9 If one see the new moon and is not able to walk, they bring him on an ass or even on a litter; and if any lie in wait for them, they may take sticks in their hands. If the journey be a long one, they may carry food in their hands, because for a journey lasting a night and a day they may profane the Sabbath and go forth to give evidence about the new moon...

2:2 Beforetime they used to light beacons, but after the Samaritans caused great harm, they enacted that messengers should go forth.

2:3 In what manner did they kindle the beacons? They used to bring long poles of cedar wood and rushes and pine wood and tow flax, and a man tied these together with twine. He went up to the top of the hill and set them on fire and waved them to and fro and moved them up and down until he saw his fell doing likewise on the top of the next hills; and also similarly on the top of the third hill.

2:4 And from where did they kindle the beacons? From the Mount of Olives to Sartaba, and from Sartaba to Agrippina, and from Agrippina to Hauran, and from Hauran to Beth Baltin; and from Beth Baltin they did not go, but waved to and fro and moved up and down until he could see the whole of the diaspora before him like a mass of fire.

2:5 There was a large courtyard in Jerusalem called Beth Yaazek, and there all the witnesses used to assemble, and there the court examined them. And they prepared big meals for them, so that they should acquire the habit of coming...

2:6 How did they examine the witnesses? The pair that arrived first they examined first. And they brought in the elder of the two and said to him: Relate how you saw the moon: in front of the sun or behind the sun? To the north of it or to the south of it? How high was it? And how wide was it? If he said, In front of the sun, his statement was worth naught. And then they brought in the second one and examined him. If their statements were found to agree, their evidence stood...

2:7 The head of the court said, It is sanctified! And all the people answered after him, It is sanctified. Whether it was seen at its proper time, or whether it was not observed at its due time, they proclaimed it sanctified. R. Eliezer ben R. Zadok says, If it be not seen at its appointed time, they do not acclaim it as sanctified, since heaven has already sanctified it.

8. **Mishna Rosh Hashanah Chapter 2 Mishna 8-9:**

...Two other witnesses came and said: We saw the moon on its proper day, but could not see it on the next evening of the intercalary day. R. Gamaliel accepted their testimony, but R. Dosa b. Hyrcanus said: They are false witnesses; for how can they testify of a woman being delivered (on a certain day) when on the next day she appears to be pregnant? Then R. Joshua said unto him: I approve your opinion. Upon this R. Gamaliel sent him (R. Joshua) word, saying: "I order thee to appear before me on the Day of Atonement, according to *your* computation, with your staff and with money." R. Akiba went to him (R. Joshua) and found him grieving. He then said to him: I can prove that all which R. Gamaliel has done is proper, for it is said: "These are the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which ye shall proclaim," either at their proper time, or not at their proper time, only *their* convocations are to be considered as holy festivals. When he (R. Joshua) came to R. Dosa b. Hyrcanus, the latter told him: "If we are to reinvestigate the decisions of the Beth Din of R. Gamaliel, we must also reinvestigate the decisions of all the tribunals of justice which have existed from the time of Moses till the present day; for it is said [Ex. xxiv. 9] Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders went up (to the Mount)." Why were not the names of the elders also specified? To teach us that every three men in Israel that form a Beth Din are to be respected in an equal degree with the Beth Din of Moses. Then did R. Joshua take his staff and money in his hand, and went to Yavneh, to R. Gamaliel, on the very day on which the Day of Atonement would have been according to his computation, when R. Gamaliel arose and kissed him on the forehead, saying: "Enter in peace, my master and disciple! My master--in knowledge; my disciple--since thou didst obey my injunction."

9. **A deeper look at the astronomy behind the calendar:**

<http://individual.utoronto.ca/kalendis/hebrew.htm>

...and at the accumulating discrepancies between the lunar and solar calendars

<http://avoiceinthewilderness.org/saccal/passlate.html>

10. **For converting dates between the calendars (which can be a fun activity):**

[www.aish.com/literacy/reference/AishLuach_\(Luach_means_-Calendar-_in_Hebrew\).asp](http://www.aish.com/literacy/reference/AishLuach_(Luach_means_-Calendar-_in_Hebrew).asp)

<http://www.hebcal.com>

<http://www.hebrewcalendar.net>

Various interesting facts and background on the calendar and on each month

<http://members.ngfp.org/QNA/Calendar>

11. www.abcog.org/saadia.htm

This episode can help explain the difficulty facing Jewish leadership today when faced with the problems of timing that have arisen in the set calendar

חוק יום הזכרון ליצחק רבין תשנ"ז - 1997

יום הזיכרון ליצחק רבין

הביטחון ושר הממשלה ראש של הירצחו יום, בחשון ב" י
יום זיכרון ממלכתי; יום זה יצוין יצחק רבין, יהיה
הספר במוסדות המדינה, במחנות צה"ל ובבתי
הל"ב בחשון ביום שישי או בשבת, יקוים יום הזיכרון
ביום חמישי שלפניו.

(Memorial day for Yitzchak Rabin Law – 5757-1997)

The twelfth day of Cheshvan, the day the prime minister and minister of Defense Yitzchak Rabin, was murdered, shall be a national memorial day; this day will be commemorated in national institutions, army bases, and schools. If the twelfth day of Cheshvan falls on a Friday or Saturday it shall be observed on the previous Thursday.)

Official Knesset Website

On November 4th, 1965, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was murdered. In this website, The Knesset commemorates Rabin. The site has a wealth of information on Rabin, reviewing his life with images, as well as listing relevant laws and speeches in his memory.

An Online article from San Francisco community

The sixth yahrzeit of Israel's late prime minister formally fell on Oct. 28, which corresponded with Heshvan 11, the Hebrew date of the assassination. The San Francisco memorial was organized to coincide with the mass demonstration held in Israel on the secular date.

,4 Uri Avnery on the 4.11.95: The Real Rabin

Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated on Saturday night, the 4th of November. The changing of this date with some day of the month of Heshvan, according to the "Jewish" calendar, is a falsification.

Rabin was an atheist. He had nothing to do with the religious calendar. Not to mention the fact that the "Jewish" calendar is really a Babylonian one and that its months carry the names of Babylonian gods. Why is the name of a Babylonian god like Tammuz more admissible than the name of a Roman colleague of his, Mars?

This is not an apropos remark. The transfer of the tragic date to the religious calendar is a part of the process that led Ehud Barak and the whole crowd of dignitaries at the graveside to put a Kippah on their heads. Why? Ben Gurion refused to use a Kippah even at funerals, and that seemed quite natural at the time. I categorically refuse to wear a Kippah at a state ceremony in memory of an atheist Prime Minister who was murdered by a Kippah-wearing fanatic after a long campaign of sedition by a Kippah-wearing gang of rabbis. Most of the leaders of the Kippah-wearing public did not participate in the day of mourning and rejected it outright. Why, then, did the Rabin family agree to this, if indeed it did agree?

Additional sources...

Three entries from Marc Rosenstein's "Galilee Diary" reflecting on the calendar and its place in Israeli culture:

http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=4632&pge_prj_id=19465&pge_id=1697

http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=4989&pge_prj_id=19465&pge_id=1697

http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=4991&pge_prj_id=19465&pge_id=1697