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ROSH CHODESH AVIV – TO BE FOUND NEAREST OR AFTER THE VERNAL EQUINOX?
ENDING THE MYTHS

One clear and overriding criterion for determining the beginning of the biblical new year is the command of *Hanafat Haomer* – the wave sheaf offering that is to be performed during the week of Passover in the *Beiyth Hamiqdash* (the Holy Temple). The *Beiyth Hamiqdash*, and the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) before it, were the center of Hebrew religious life in ancient times, and someday will be again. Any and all other calendrical criteria must be considered secondary to their requirements. Modern thinking tends to disregard this fact and the centrality of the *Beiyth Hamiqdash* to Judaism in ancient times. This is a great mistake which needs to be corrected.

As regards the use of the equinox, or the *tekufah*, in determining the beginning of the biblical year, there are at least two schools of thought on when the month of *Aviv* should occur, and whether or not a 13th month (*Adar II*) should be intercalated into the Hebrew calendar. These two schools are often fiercely supported by their respective adherents, sometimes causing disputes and divisions between families and congregations. This need not be. This article is intended to end the myths and disputes on this subject, bringing healing and unity to all.

One school of thought believes that the month of *Aviv* (the first biblical month) should begin with the *rosh chodesh* (new moon) nearest the vernal (spring) equinox, whether that occurs before or after the equinox. Essentially, that means it should be 14 days or less from the equinox, there being 29 or 30 days in a lunar month. The other school of thought holds that *Rosh Chodesh Aviv* will only and always be that new moon after the vernal equinox, even if it is a full 29 days afterward. Both of these methods are based upon reason and common sense. Both have their advantages and both have their problems. Both are, in fact, wrong. As so often happens when men try to reason the things of the Most High, they fall short of the truth. One thing neither method is based upon is unassailable empirical evidence.

Please bear in mind that no matter how emotionally or intellectually attached one is to a particular belief, the truth remains what it is. And no matter how many times a thing might occur a certain way, if it happens another way only once, it can no longer be said to always occur that certain way. If gravity should fail but one time, there would no longer be a “law of gravity”. When dealing with a mathematical rule, a single anomaly invalidates that rule. It follows then that a single *Rosh Chodesh Aviv* not nearest the vernal equinox must invalidate that method of determination. Likewise, a single occurrence of *Rosh Chodesh Aviv* not after the vernal equinox must invalidate that method as well. If we find factual evidence of either, those methods must be discarded, no matter how tightly we wish to cling to them.

Below you will find a chart which includes both the dates of the vernal equinoxes and the dates of the *rosh chodesh* *Aviv* for the previous 14 years. These dates are corroborated by several sources including both “Truth on the Web” and by the Karaite Jews. These groups and others in Israel do extensive searches and verifications of *Aviv* barley each spring with attestation by numerous experienced and novice examiners. In using these several sources, we have satisfied the biblical command which requires that “on the testimony of two or three witnesses shall you establish a matter.” What you see in this chart then are not our beliefs, but established facts.

Dates of the Vernal Equinox	Date of Sighting Aviv	Aviv Sighted Before Vernal Equinox	Aviv Sighted After Equinox 15 Days or Less	Aviv Sighted After Equinox 16 Days or More
3/20/2000	4/6			17 days
3/20/2001	3/27		7 days	
3/20/2002	3/16	4 days		
3/21/2003	4/4		14 days	
3/20/2004	3/23		3 days	
3/20/2005	3/12	8 days		
3/20/2006	3/31		11 days	
3/21/2007	3/21		0 days	
3/20/2008	4/8			19 days
3/20/2009	3/28		8 days	

Dates of the Vernal Equinox	Date of Sighting Aviv	Aviv Sighted Before Vernal Equinox	Aviv Sighted After Equinox 15 Days or Less	Aviv Sighted After Equinox 16 Days or More
3/20/2010	3/17	3 days		
3/20/2011	4/4		15 days	
3/20/2012	3/23		3 days	
3/20/2013	3/14	6 days		
3/20/2014	3/4	16 days		
3/20/2015	3/22		2 days	
3/19/2016	3/11	8 days		
3/20/2017	3/30		10 days	
3/20/2018	3/19	1 day		
3/20/2019	3/9	11 days		
3/19/2020	3/26		6 days	
3/20/2021	3/15	5 days		
3/20/2022	4/3		14 days	
3/20/2023				

The first column in the chart is simply the date of a particular year's vernal equinox. The second column is the date that *Aviv* stage barley was found and verified by at least three competent witnesses in Israel, in sufficient quantities to provide the wave sheaf offering of Leviticus 23:10. In the third column are instances of confirmed *Aviv* sightings prior to the vernal equinox that invalidate the "after equinox" method. In the fourth column are sighting dates of *Aviv* that are 15 days or less after equinox, which neither prove or disprove either method. In the fifth column are sighting dates of *Aviv* that are 16 or more days after equinox, and that invalidate the "nearest equinox" method. As can be plainly seen, in the 23 years charted there are 9 instances of *Aviv* sighted before equinox in the 3rd column, and two instances of *Aviv* sighted more than 16 days after equinox in the 5th column. These constitute undisputed anomalies that invalidate both methods – case closed. Neither method can any longer be used to accurately and honestly predict a *Rosh Chodesh Aviv*.

So what is the truth regarding the equinox and *Aviv*? Based upon such a small sample of yearly records it is difficult to tell for sure. Unfortunately, we have only been able to obtain verifiable sighting records of *Aviv* from the year 2000 through the present. If anyone knows where we can find dependable and witnessed earlier records, please let us know. That said, it appears from our sample that *Rosh Chodesh Aviv* is most likely to occur from eight days prior to the vernal equinox until nineteen days after it. Since the equinox always falls on March 20th or 21st, it appears that, according to our limited evidence, *Rosh Chodesh Aviv* is most likely to occur during the 28 days between March 12 and April 8th. While this is not by any means a certainty, it seems to be what the evidence suggests at present.

The truth of the matter is, *Rosh Chodesh Aviv* occurs when the barley crop in Israel is found to be at the stage of maturation called "green in the ear", about 2 weeks before it is fully ripe. *Shamor et chodesh ha'Aviv v'asiyat Pesach l'YHWH Eloheyka*, which means "Guard the month of the green ears and perform the Passover to YHWH thy Elohyim". In the days when the *Beiyth Hamiqdash* stood in Jerusalem, the barley crop had to be ripe 2 weeks after the new moon of *Aviv* in order that the required *Omer* (wave sheaf) offering could be performed during the week of *Chag HaMatzot* (the Feast of Unleavened Bread). It was a necessity and there was no more important criteria for establishing the new year than that. It is true that the rabbis who wrote the *Talmud* utilized also the ripeness of the fruit on trees (to be brought later on *Shavuoth* [Pentecost] as "firstfruits") and the *tekufot* (equated with the equinox at the "turn of the season" in the fall). But even at that late writing they always gave primacy to the *Aviv* barley as a determinant, as it says, "any two of these reasons can justify intercalation, ...all, however, are glad when the state of the spring crop is one of them (Sanhedrin 11b)." Ripeness of the fruit of trees, adjudged by their blossoms at this stage, was a marginal gauge at best. The proper use of the *tekufah* was highly disputed by Talmudic sages and never completely agreed upon at all (see tractates Sanhedrin 11b-13b). The *Aviv* barley was and always will be the clearest and most necessary component of those used in properly keeping the Torah command to begin the new biblical year in the month of *Aviv*.

Therefore, the proper method for forecasting each new year and intercalating a leap – month of *Adar II* when necessary can only be to *Qaveh el YHWH* – Wait on YHWH. Let go of your myths and disputes, brethren. May we all have faith in Him to bring our *moedym* (appointed times) in their due season according to His will.

B'Shalom,

Ovadyah