

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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**BH**

### STARTING THE NEW YEAR: THE SUN CONSTITUENCY V. THE MOON CONSTITUENCY IN THE YERUSHALMI

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As we've seen before, Israel was home to a Jewish community that based its calendar on the orderly progression of the holidays based on a solar calendar, i.e., the Dead Sea Scroll folks. Their arch-enemies were those who based their calendar on the observance of the new moon by human beings. The Yerushalmi preserves this disagreement with a decidedly favorable view toward the Sun constituency:

The Holy One blessed be He created 365 windows that the world might use them: 182 in the east, and 182 in the west and one in the center of the firmament from which it came forth at the beginning of the Creation. (Y. Rosh Hashanah 2:5).

Rabbi Hanina went to En Tav to the blessing of the New Moon and the weather was cloudy. He said: Now they will say, "How heavy is the weather of this old man! So the Holy One blessed be He punctured the cloud for him like a sieve and the moon appeared through it." (Y. Rosh Hashanah 2:11)

Rabbi Hiyya the Great walked in the light of the old moon for four miles. Then he started to throw stones at it and he said: You are embarrassing the sons of your master. This evening, according to our calculations, we must see you new at such and such a place, so why aren't you, moon, seen now in this place!?! Immediately, miraculously, the moon disappeared. (Y. Rosh Hashanah 2:12-13)

The Sun version of the calendar is portrayed as divine and orderly. The moon-observance version is told in vignettes as farcical as the Keystone Kops. Only by means of divine intervention are these sages able to tell when the new moon appears.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Which mode of measuring time appeals to you on a personal level, the predictable sun option or the less predictable moon sighting option? Why?
2. It seems as if the sun constituency has strong proponents among those sages who put the Yerushalmi together. Why do you think that might be? Why did the lunar version of Judaism basically win, in terms of liturgy? We note the new moon coming each month, but not the solar equinoxes and solstices?
3. As you prepare for Rosh Hashanah, can you think of a new way of telling time, informed by modern science and

math, that can help you value each day that you have in the coming year more?