



NEW MONTH, NEW MOON

Written by Allison Ofanansky

Photographs by Eliyahu Alpern

Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of a new month, is marked with a new moon. In this story, a family hikes out to the Negev Desert to observe the phases of the moon in the beautiful Israeli night sky.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Rosh Chodesh, which means “head of the month” in Hebrew, is a celebration of the new moon’s sighting at the beginning of each month in the Hebrew calendar. Prior to their release from slavery in ancient Egypt, the people of Israel were commanded by God to observe *Rosh Chodesh*, as recorded in the book of Exodus (the second book in the *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible). Every people has some form of calendar by which to keep track of their holidays and special times, and this commandment helped mark the true beginning of the Israelites’ identity as a nation.

Unlike the Gregorian (Western) calendar, which marks time by the sun, the Hebrew calendar is linked to the moon. Most years on the Hebrew calendar contain twelve months, but periodically a thirteenth month is inserted so that the cycle matches the solar calendar more closely. (In this way, for example, the holiday of Passover, the celebration of the exodus from Egypt, will always occur in the springtime, as it did historically.)

Despite Israel’s small size (about the same as New Jersey), it is quite varied in nature. In the north, Mount Hermon is covered with snow in the rainy season, while the Galil region below has rolling hills and green mountains. Further south, the Dead Sea is in a hot, rocky area at the lowest elevation on Earth, yet the nearby desert oasis of Ein Gedi is covered with palm trees, lush vegetation, and beautiful waterfalls. Israel is truly a diverse treasure to be explored!

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Sighting the moon: Find a Jewish calendar, either online or at your local Jewish book shop, and look to see when the next *Rosh Chodesh* will be. On that night, go outside as a family to see if you can spot the new moon. If you have a telescope, take it with you and enjoy the search!

Tasty moons: As the family in this story does, take pitas or tortilla wraps and cover them with your favorite spread (peanut butter, chocolate spread, cream cheese, etc.) to illustrate the different phases of the moon. Cutting up round fruit, such as apples or oranges, also works. When you are finished making moons, enjoy eating your creations. *Bete’avon* (“Bon Appetit” in Hebrew)!

Virtual tour of Israel: There are many beautiful pictures of Israel to be found online. Search for images with your children and keep a map of Israel handy so that you can locate the places in the pictures. See who can find each place first!