**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

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**Rosh Chodesh**

What makes Rosh Chodesh a woman's holiday? How does this affect its observance?

# **Background**

A few weeks before the exodus from Egypt, *Benei Yisrael* received their first mitzva as a nation: to sanctify the new moon and to set our calendar accordingly:

*Shemot* 12 1-2

And God said to Moshe and to Aharon, in the land of Egypt, saying: This month is for you the head of the months. It is the first it is for you of the months of the year:

Rosh Ha-shana 20a

"This month is for you the head of the months. See [the moon] like this and sanctify [the month].

Nissan, the month of the redemption from Egypt, is the first of the Jewish months.

Until outside intrusions forced the introduction of a fixed Jewish calendar in the middle of the fourth century, the Sanhedrin would proclaim the beginning of each new month based on the reports of witnesses who had seen the first sliver of a new moon. This determination of when the new month begins is called *kiddush ha-chodesh*, sanctification of the month.

Since the new moon appears about every twenty-nine and a half days, the fixed calendar adopted a system that alternates thirty-day months with twenty-nine-day months. To allow for fine-tuning the calendar, the months of *Marcheshvan* and *Kislev* can be either thirty or twenty-nine days long. So the standard Jewish calendar year lasts anywhere from 353 to 355 days.

The lunar Jewish calendar does make adaptations to the solar year, so that our festivals align properly with Israel's agricultural seasons. For example, Pesach must take place in the spring, when the barley ripens, *Aviv*.[[1]](#footnote-1) Since the lunar year is shorter than the solar year by more than ten days, the fixed Jewish calendar adjusts for the discrepancy by adding a thirty-day leap month roughly once out of every three years.

The religious significance of the new month derives in part from our role in declaring it and, thus, fixing our festival calendar. It also derives from the Torah's reference to Rosh Chodesh as a day of rejoicing:

*Bemidbar* 10:10

And on the day of your joy and on your appointed days and on your heads of the month [*rashei chodsheichem*] you will blast on the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your peace offerings, and they will be for you for a remembrance before your God, I am the Lord your God:

Rosh Chodesh also resembles other days of rejoicing in having a special additional offering, a *korban musaf*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*Bemidbar* 28:11-14

And on your new months you will sacrifice a burnt offering…This is the burnt offering of each new month for the months of the year.

For a discussion of the connection between the *musaf* offering on Rosh Chodesh, the moon, and women, see [here](https://www.deracheha.org/positive-time-bound-mitzvot/?target=sources).

Verses in Tanach frequently mention Rosh Chodesh together with Shabbat, as if to compare them. For example, in *Melachim* II, the Shunamit's husband associates Rosh Chodesh with Shabbat as a day on which it would be more fitting to visit the prophet:

*Melachim* II:4:23

And he said, 'Why are you going to him today? It's not [Rosh] Chodesh and not Shabbat.'…

The Talmud goes even further and formally labels Rosh Chodesh as a *mo'ed* (appointed time):

*Pesachim* 77a

For Rosh Chodesh is called a *mo'ed*.

Calling Rosh Chodesh a *mo'ed* officially links it to Shabbat and other festive days.[[3]](#footnote-3)

# **Performing Work on Rosh Chodesh**

Rosh Chodesh also resembles Shabbat as a special day for worship. As part of his description of the third *Beit Ha-mikdash*, Yechezkel prophesies that the eastern gate of the inner courtyard will be closed on days of work, but open on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. Furthermore, on Rosh Chodesh, the people will come to bow down before God.

*Yechezkel* 46:1,3

Thus said the Lord God: the gate of the inner courtyard facing east will be shut the six days of work, but on the Shabbat day it will be opened and on the day of the [new] month it will be opened: And the people of the land will bow down at the opening of this gate on *Shabbatot* and on [new] months before God:

Yeshayahu makes a similar point, that it will come to pass that all creatures bow down before God every Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh.

*Yeshayahu* 66:23

And it will be from one [new] month to another and from one Shabbat to another, all flesh will come to bow down before Me...

Although these prophecies about the nature of worship refer to the future, the prophets' assessment of the enduring importance of Rosh Chodesh presumably draws from its importance in the time of the first Temple.

Labor

To set aside time for worship, one must disengage from some aspects of the everyday. In Shemuel I, Yehonatan tells David that the next day is Rosh Chodesh, which he contrasts with days of work:[[4]](#footnote-4)

*Shemuel* I 20:18-19

And Yehonatan said to him, 'Tomorrow is [Rosh] Chodesh and you[r absence] will be noticed, because your seat will be noted: And on the third day you will go descend greatly and you will come to the place where you hid on the day of work and you will sit by the stone of Ezel:

We can infer that Rosh Chodesh of his time was not a day of work. Radak makes this inference, observing that the ancient custom was apparently not to perform labor on Rosh Chodesh:

Radak *Shemuel* I 20:19

For it seems that it was their custom not to do labor on Rosh Chodesh, as is the custom of women today. And it may be that on account of the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice, many were free from their labor and came to bow before God, and so it seems in the prophecy of Yechezkel for the future:

Radak suggests that the custom to desist from labor on Rosh Chodesh originated with sacrifices. At the time of Shaul, private local altars (*bamot*) were permitted, and it seems that families gathered on Rosh Chodesh and sacrificed peace offerings. Later, as the prophets describe, masses came to worship in *Beit Ha-mikdash* where a *korban musaf*, additional sacrifice, was offered on Rosh Chodesh.

Centuries later, Turei Even argues that desisting from labor on Rosh Chodesh was not merely a custom, but actually a matter of law, because of the *musaf* sacrifice:

*Turei Even* *Megilla* 22b

And to me it seems that doing work was prohibited on Rosh Chodesh as a matter of law even for males in the time that the Temple was extant, because of the *musaf* sacrifices that were offered on it, which are for all of Israel.

Interestingly, the Talmudic evidence on the matter of performing labor on Rosh Chodesh is split. In a few places, the Talmud states or implies that there is no prohibition on labor on Rosh Chodesh.[[5]](#footnote-5)

*Chagiga* 18a

Rosh Chodesh will prove it, for it has a *musaf* offering, but performing labor is permissible [on it].

This passage teaches that even though there was a *korban musaf* on Rosh Chodesh, on account of which we would think labor would be prohibited, labor is permitted. Contra Turei Even, there was no prohibition of performing labor on Rosh Chodesh, though customs are another matter.

On the other hand, another Talmudic passage asserts that we have time for four *aliyot* on Rosh Chodesh – although we generally limit ourselves to three on workdays, even on fast days – because on Rosh Chodesh the extra time in synagogue will not cause people to miss work.

*Megilla* 22b

Come and learn: This is the rule, [on] every [day] where [an additional *aliya*] would entail taking people away from labor, such as a public fast day and the ninth of Av, we read three [*aliyot*]. And if it doesn't entail taking people away from labor, such as Rosh Chodesh and *chol ha-mo’ed*, we read four.

A simple reading of this passage indicates that people did **not** perform labor on Rosh Chodesh, even in post-Temple times.

# **Yom Tov for Women**

Rosh Chodesh is considered a *Yom Tov*, a festive day, for women. Why? The explanation rests on a midrashic tradition that picks up on a discrepancy in the story of the golden calf. In that narrative, Aharon tells the men to remove their wives' jewelry and bring it to him for melting down. The men, however, bring him their own jewelry.

*Shemot* 32:2-3

And Aharon said to them: Remove the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring [them] to me: And all the people removed the gold rings that were in their ears and brought [them] to Aharon:

The midrash explains that the men brought their own jewelry to Aharon, and not their wives' jewelry, because the women refused to participate in the sin of the golden calf.

*Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer Horev* 44

The women heard and did not take it upon themselves to give their rings to their husbands. Rather, they said to them, 'You want to make a deplorable [thing] and an abomination, that does not have power to save!' They did not listen to them and the Holy Blessed One gave reward to women in this world and in the world to come. What reward did he give them for this world? That they would keep Rosh Chodesh, as it is said (*Tehillim* 103:5) 'Who satisfies with good your adornment, your youth will be renewed like a griffon vulture.'

According to the midrash, the seeming discrepancy in the story attests to women's loyalty to God. The midrash expounds on the phrase in *Tehillim*, *"'edyech,*" your adornment, as referring to the women’s jewelry, which they refused to turn over for the calf. The term for renewal, "*tit’chadesh*," shares a Hebrew root with the word for month, *Chodesh*, so the women's reward entails special observance of Rosh Chodesh.

There are three main approaches as to why specifically Rosh Chodesh should be a reward for the women's meritorious behavior.

**I. Re-allotment** The first is Tur's, in the name of his brother.[[6]](#footnote-6) He asserts that, just as the three festivals correspond to the three patriarchs, Rosh Chodesh was originally intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. In the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf, God took away the prospective observance of Rosh Chodesh from the men of the tribes and gave it to the women.

*Tur* OC 417

And I heard from my brother the Ri a reason for the matter, since the festive days were established corresponding to the patriarchs… And the twelve Rosh Chodesh [days] of the year, which are also called festive days, corresponding to the twelve tribes. And when they sinned with the calf, they [Rosh Chodesh days] were taken away from them and were given to their wives as commemoration that they [the women] were not part of that sin:

For Tur, women's reward is not *losing* what was meant to be everyone's monthly observance.

**II. Women and Renewal** Or Zarua observes that a woman's monthly cycles are a form of renewal, much like those of the moon:

Or Zarua I Laws of *Nidda* 66

It says in *Pirkei De-rabbi Eliezer* regarding his conclusion that the Holy Blessed One gave women the reward of keeping Rosh Chodesh because they did not sin at the deed of the calf. And in the future, the Holy Blessed One will renew them like Rosh Chodesh as is written, "for like the new heavens and the new earth [that I make stand before me]"(*Yeshayahu* 66:22[[7]](#footnote-7)) …"your youth will be renewed like a griffon vulture" (*Tehillim* 103:5). Know that every single month a woman sanctifies herself and immerses and returns to her husband, and she is dear to him as on the day of the *chuppa*. Just as the moon renews herself every Rosh Chodesh and everyone desires to see her, so too the woman when she is renewed every month, her husband desires her and she is dear to him as a new woman.

On this reading, the reward corresponds to the nature of its recipient.

**III. Measure for Measure** Abudarham cites yet another midrash to explain why Rosh Chodesh becomes women's reward.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Sefer Abudraham Order of Rosh Chodesh

And in the midrash it says that because women were quick to donate to the *mishkan*, as it is written "and the men came in addition to the women". And it [the *mishkan*] was erected on the first of Nissan. But [the women] did not want to bring their rings to the calf, so God gave them their reward that they should keep Rosh Chodesh.

The same word that appears in the golden calf narrative, "*nezem*," appears in conjunction with the donations given for the *mishkan*. In the case of the *mishkan*, the verse relates that the men came "*'al ha-nashim*" "in addition to the women". That can be taken as meaning that the women brought their jewelry for the *mishkan* before the men did.

Whereas the women delayed giving up jewelry for the golden calf, those very same women hurried to contribute jewelry to the *mishkan*. The reward for not cooperating with the golden calf becomes linked to the building of the *mishkan*, which was dedicated on the first Rosh Chodesh of the year, Rosh Chodesh Nissan.[[9]](#footnote-9) For Abudarham, the reward corresponds to the act that merits it.

# **Women and Work on Rosh Chodesh**

The midrash tells us that women will be rewarded by “keeping” Rosh Chodesh, but doesn’t elaborate on exactly how it should be observed. In practice, women observe Rosh Chodesh primarily by refraining from performing labor.

As we have seen, the Talmudic sources are split regarding whether labor was performed on Rosh Chodesh. One way to resolve the apparent conflict is to maintain that only women refrained from labor. Passages that indicate labor was not performed refer to women. Passages that imply that labor was performed refer to men.

For example, Rashi claims that when the Talmud implies that people do not perform labor on Rosh Chodesh, the 'people' in question are women:

Rashi *Megilla* 22b

…For women do not perform labor on them [Rosh Chodesh]… and I heard from my teacher the elder that this mitzva was given to them because they did not remove their rings for the calf…

Labelling

How do we characterize women's refraining from labor on Rosh Chodesh? Early halachic authorities offer different labels. Rashi (above) refers to this abstention as a **mitzva**. Tosafot describe it in a few different ways. In some places, they refer to it as a **prohibition**....

*Tosafot Megilla* 22b s.v. *ve-she‘ein*

…For it is certainly permissible for men to perform labor on [Rosh Chodesh], but women are prohibited from labor because they did not remove their rings in the deed of the calf.

In other places, however, Tosafot formulate women's not performing labor on Rosh Chodesh as a **custom** for women.

*Tosafot Chagiga* 18a s.v. *Rosh Chodesh yochiach*

…Women who are accustomed [*nohagot*] not to perform labor on Rosh Chodesh…

*Tosafot Rosh Ha-shana* 23a

They were not used to performing labor on Rosh Chodesh…and they are used to saying that God added a Yom Tov for women on Rosh Chodesh as a reward for not agreeing to participate in the deed of the calf.

Custom can be halachically binding, so a custom to refrain from labor on Rosh Chodesh could in effect be like a prohibition. Both Rashi and Tosafot's descriptions establish women's abstention from labor on Rosh Chodesh as normative.

Perhaps as early as the time of the golden calf, women observed Rosh Chodesh, in part, by refraining from labor. Likely, it was once customary for men to refrain from labor on Rosh Chodesh as well, specifically in conjunction with the sacrifice that was brought then. Once the sacrifice was no longer brought, that custom dwindled among men,[[10]](#footnote-10) but women's observance of Rosh Chodesh by refraining from labor persists.

# **In Practice**

The Talmud Yerushalmi evaluates various women's customs to refrain from labor at specific times over the course of the year, and grants Rosh Chodesh approbation.

Talmud Yerushalmi *Pesachim* 4:1

Women who are accustomed not to perform labor…on Rosh Chodesh, it is a [valid] custom

Based on this text, Rav Yosef Karo writes positively in the *Shulchan Aruch* about women's refraining from labor on Rosh Chodesh.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Scope

Must women refrain from all labor on Rosh Chodesh? Halachic consensus is no, though authorities do debate the scope of women's refraining from labor on Rosh Chodesh.

In his *Beit Yosef* commentary, Rav Yosef Karo argues that, from the start, women have had the custom to refrain from some labors, and not others.

Beit Yosef OC 417

It could be that this is how they originally accepted it, to differentiate it from a true weekday, but not to prohibit labors that they do not do for pay

According to Bet Yosef, the essence of the custom serves to distinguish Rosh Chodesh from a workday, not to prohibit women from performing all labor. Rosh Chodesh should resemble how American Jews experience the day off on Sunday. As long as a woman's original custom is not to refrain from **all** labor on Rosh Chodesh, she may engage in some labors and not others, in accordance with her custom. By desisting from some labor on Rosh Chodesh, she distinguishes Rosh Chodesh from a regular workday.

Rema concurs with this view, that the determining factor is received custom:

Rema *Shulchan Aruch* OC 417:1

Gloss: And if the custom is to perform a few labors and not to perform a few of them, we follow the custom

Bach, however, disagrees. On his view, refraining from labor is a choice, not an obligation.

Bach OC 417

And according to this it seems that there is certainly no prohibition for women if they perform labor…rather, the Holy Blessed One gave them a reward of keeping Rosh Chodesh, [meaning] that her husband cannot force her to perform labor

Bach's central point is that women were given a reward, not a limitation. No one else may compel a woman to do labor on Rosh Chodesh.

Beiur Halacha rules in accordance with Bet Yosef and rejects Bach. He explains that it is incumbent upon all women to refrain from at least some labor on Rosh Chodesh, to recognize that it is a *Yom Tov* for women. …

*Beiur Halacha* 417:1 s.v. And the women who practice

That every woman needs to take upon herself this custom, i.e., she is not permitted in any event to make this day like a true weekday to be occupied with all labors, for in this matter women stand commanded from ancient days. But not to occupy herself with any labor, that matter depends on her custom. If from the time she grew up she was accustomed to perform some labors, one should not prohibit her, for she is not commanded on this at all. For in this [desisting from labor] there was never a unified custom for all of Israel and even in ancient days there were those who were accustomed to do a few labors and there were those who sanctified themselves and didn't do any labor…

In short, women must refrain from some labor on Rosh Chodesh, but have great leeway deciding how.

Aruch Ha-shulchan adds an important loophole. Even women who have a custom to desist from a given labor on Rosh Chodesh may perform labor when there is a financial need.

*Aruch Ha-shulchan* OC 417:10

Women who are occupied with a trade perform labor. And one must say that women did not take [refraining from labor] upon themselves to reduce their livelihood.

The custom never applied to labor necessary for a woman's livelihood.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Types of Labor

The classic examples of labors from which women over the ages have refrained on Rosh Chodesh include many of those from which we refrain on *Chol Ha-moed*, including sewing, spinning[[13]](#footnote-13), and laundry.[[14]](#footnote-14) Desisting from labor on Rosh Chodesh is a matter of custom and therefore even less stringent than on *Chol Ha-moed*, where the prohibition of performing some labor is on a Torah level.

Nowadays, with the proliferation of washing machines, doing the wash on Rosh Chodesh may not be considered labor. Rav Ovadya Yosef's son, Rav Yitzchak Yosef, reports that his father permitted even women who abstain from labor on Rosh Chodesh to load and run a laundry machine

*Yalkut Yosef* *Shabbat* 5 Notes 417

And I asked our master, my father and teacher, and he responded to me that one may be lenient with this in a place of need, since we have found that many women nowadays are accustomed not to be particular about all this…Therefore with an automatic laundry machine that doesn't entail so much excessive burden, one can be lenient even for those women who customarily do not perform labor on Rosh Chodesh.

Rabbanit Malka Puterkovsky reflects on the enduring spiritual significance of this custom:

Rabbanit Malka Puterkovsky, "Rosh Chodesh: A Women's Festival." In *Bat Mitzva*, Jerusalem: Matan, 2002

The words of halachic authorities reflect an enduring fulfillment of the nucleus of the custom for women to refrain from labor on Rosh Chodesh...We, women of this generation, must not give up altogether on the custom of our foremothers [to refrain from work on Rosh Chodesh], whose observance over the course of history suffices to remind ourselves and the entire Jewish people of the merits of the women of Israel...merits that emerged from the true, unconditional faith of women in the Creator of the world...

Two-Day Rosh Chodesh

Opinions vary as to how the custom to refrain from labor applies on a two-day Rosh Chodesh, which occurs at the end of a thirty-day month. Some authorities restrict the custom to the second day, which is officially the first day of the new month.[[15]](#footnote-15) Others say the custom applies both days.[[16]](#footnote-16)

How can we relate to Rosh Chodesh today?

When a woman lacks a clear family tradition for observing Rosh Chodesh, Mishna Berura's ruling becomes operative. A woman should choose at least one type of labor from which to refrain on Rosh Chodesh, as suits her lifestyle. This could be refraining from doing laundry. Or not mending or writing. Or it could be more flexible, acts that a woman personally experiences as a burden.

The idea is for a woman to give herself a little break on Rosh Chodesh. This is a way to remember that Rosh Chodesh is not a full workday for her, so that it retains a bit of a special character. And, per Bach, the idea is also for members of her household to support her in keeping her custom.

Going out for dinner or a special treat, at least for the females of the family, is one popular way to observe Rosh Chodesh today. Though it might relieve the pressure of making dinner, this is more an observance of the custom to have a special meal on Rosh Chodesh than of the custom to refrain from performing labor. Reciting Hallel and Mussaf is also an important way to set the day apart. We can even suggest giving tzedaka to a worthy cause as a way to remember women's readiness to contribute to the Mishkan, and not for the golden calf.

Beyond the specifics, we can connect to Rosh Chodesh as a time in which we look for the sacred within the mundane. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik develops this idea:

Rav Yosef B. Soloveitchik, "Revealed and Hidden"

Rosh Chodesh, notwithstanding its external secularity, teems with hidden sanctity…Judaism believes in the possibility of the new and renewal. The moon, whose light slowly dimmed until it disappeared from sight, returns and appears on the horizon…Rosh Chodesh symbolizes the faith in the comfort that is soon to come, in renewal even within degeneration, in the shining of light from within the flames of sunset, in revivification in the place of demise.

Rabbanit Ilana Fodiman Silverman connects Rav Soloveitchik's insight that Rosh Chodesh has no external displays of sanctity to her own experience:[[17]](#footnote-17)

Ilana Fodiman Silverman, "When the New Moon Falls on Black Friday"

Rosh Chodesh is the monthly opportunity to develop an experience of sanctity and celebration without material expressions. It is the day wherein the essence of the holiday is marked with the humble religious personality left to explore and develop, absent any physical trappings…[D]raped in simplicity, Rosh Chodesh presents a monthly retreat wherein we can experience a holiday in all of its glory without props.

# **Other Observances**

Women are typically exempt from positive, time-bound *mitzvot*. It follows that women should be exempt from other practices of Rosh Chodesh, which are time-bound. On the other hand, perhaps women's unique relationship to Rosh Chodesh dictates that observances of Rosh Chodesh should apply to women.

Hallel

The recitation of *Hallel* on Rosh Chodesh is a binding communal custom. Ashkenazim recite it with blessings and Sefardim without. Women's recitation of *Hallel* on Rosh Chodesh depends on individual custom, and is more common among Ashkenazi women.

All women are permitted to recite *Hallel* on Rosh Chodesh even when praying alone, and it is a fitting way to recognize women's special connection to the day. Rebbitzen Chana Bracha Siegelbaum makes a plea along these lines:[[18]](#footnote-18)

Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, "Praising Hashem through Song"

Especially on Rosh Chodesh, when women are accustomed to abstain from work (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 417) it seems to me, that we should prioritize praising Hashem by reciting Hallel.

Next week's shiur will discuss women and the recitation of *Hallel*.

Mussaf

Whether women are obligated in *tefillat mussaf* is a matter of debate. But reciting *mussaf* is at least fully permissible to women, and many take care to recite *musaf* on Rosh Chodesh, especially in light of women's special connection to Rosh Chodesh. (Our shiur on women and *tefillat mussaf* is coming soon.)

Ya'aleh Ve-yavo

On Rosh Chodesh, the *ya'aleh ve-yavo* paragraph is added to *shemoneh esrei* and to *birkat ha-mazon*. Women should add it for both.

We recite *ya'aleh ve-yavo* in *birkat ha-mazon* on any special day on which it is a mitzva to eat a meal with bread, such as *Yom Tov*. Since eating bread on Rosh Chodesh is a matter of custom, and not a requirement, reciting *ya'aleh ve-yavo* is ideal, not fully obligatory. The law is different for prayer, which is obligatory on Rosh Chodesh, as every day. The halacha when a person forgets to recite *ya'aleh ve-yavo* reflects this distinction:

*Berachot* 49b

Rav Idi bar Avin said in the name of Rav Amram in the name of Rav Nachman in the name of Shemuel: If someone made a mistake and did not mention Rosh Chodesh in prayer [*shemoneh esrei*], we make him go back. In *birkat ha-mazon*, we do not make him go back. Rav Avin said to Rav Amram: What's the difference between prayer and *birkat ha-mazon*? He said to him: For me too it was difficult, and I asked Rav Nachman, and he said to me…Prayer, which is obligatory, we make him go back. *Birkat ha-mazon*, where he eats if he wants and doesn’t eat if he wants, we don't make him go back…

If a person forgets to say *ya'aleh ve-yavo* at *birkat ha-mazon* following a Rosh Chodesh meal, there is no obligation to repeat it.

In contrast, there are some situations in which one must repeat *shemoneh esrei* after omitting *ya'aleh ve-yavo*.

A person praying alone who realizes omission of *ya'aleh ve-yavo* after completing *shemoneh esrei* of *shacharit* or *mincha* must repeat *shemoneh esrei* with *ya'aleh ve-yavo*. (Since the new month was not yet sanctified at night, someone who omits *ya'aleh veyavo* at *ma'ariv* does not repeat *shemoneh esrei*.) Someone who remembers *ya'aleh ve-yavo* before the end of *shemoneh esrei* goes back to “*Retzeh*” to recite it, and need not repeat the full prayer.

Rav Ovadya Yosef rules that this law applies to women saying *shemoneh esrei*.

Responsa *Yabi'a Omer* 6: OC 18

The rule that emerges is that a woman who made a mistake in her prayer and did not say *ya'aleh ve-yavo* in *shacharit* or *mincha*…and she remembered at the end of her *tefilla*, she needs to go back and pray like the enactment of our sages, for the law of a woman in prayer is like the law of a man in every respect. And in any case it is better that she make a conditional statement before she goes back: If I am obligated to go back, behold I am going back and praying [again] as an obligation, and if not [and my prayer already counted], it will be as a voluntary prayer.

A woman's *shemoneh esrei* fulfills her halachic obligation to pray, and the standard rules of repeating prayer apply, so if she forgot to recite *ya'aleh ve-yavo*, she prays again.

Festive Meal

At the time of *Beit Ha-mikdash*, in line with the festive status of Rosh Chodesh, a special meal would accompany its *musaf* offering, and other voluntary sacrifices might be brought and eaten. The witnesses to the new moon would also be feted with a festive meal.

Furthermore, fasting is prohibited on Rosh Chodesh,[[19]](#footnote-19) and a prohibition to fast on a given day often goes hand in hand with encouragement to eat.

Eating festively on Rosh Chodesh in the daytime, even in the absence of the sacrifice or witnesses to the new moon, is either a mitzva or a binding custom.

Roke’ach clarifies what needs be eaten on Rosh Chodesh, in light of a Talmudic suggestion that eating is voluntary.

*Roke’ach Rosh Chodesh* 228

That which he said, "Rosh Chodesh, if he wants he eats and if he wants he does not eat," means that if he wants he eats [bread] such that he will become obligated in *zimmun* [*birkat ha-mazon*], but fruits and meats he must eat.

According to Rokeach, eating bread on Rosh Chodesh is optional. Adding an additional delicacy, whether "fruits and meats" or something else, to regular meals is obligatory.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Kol Bo writes that the custom to eat a festive meal on Rosh Chodesh partially derives from Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer's teaching about women and Rosh Chodesh, i.e. the need to commemorate women's righteousness at the sin of the calf.

Kol Bo 43

…All of Israel is accustomed to make a larger meal than on other days because of the honor of the day, which is an atonement for Israel…And in *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer* we found a great custom in Israel that we make a festive meal on Rosh Chodesh and on *Yamim Tovim* so that we remember the *musaf* prayer, and that women are prohibited from performing labor on Rosh Chodesh, and on *Yom Tov* [the labor prohibition] is also for men.

Since Rosh Chodesh is a *Yom Tov* for women, women should take care to eat special delicacies on Rosh Chodesh, especially if the custom to eat festively on Rosh Chodesh commemorates women's connection to Rosh Chodesh.

Candle-Lighting

Among Kurdish Jews, women observed Rosh Chodesh as a full-fledged *Yom Tov*, performing only labor associated with cooking and lighting candles. Other communities in which women light candles for Rosh Chodesh include Jews of Iraq and North Africa.[[21]](#footnote-21)

# **Blessing Rosh Chodesh**

We recite a prayer in synagogue on the Shabbat preceding Rosh Chodesh, known as *birkat ha-chodesh*, in commemoration of the sanctification of the new month.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Rav Yose may refer to this prayer in a passage of the Talmud Yerushalmi.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Talmud Yerushalmi *Sanhedrin* 5:3

Rav Yose said: Like me that in all my days I did not pray *musaf* without knowing when is the [new] moon

The essential part of this prayer is the announcement of the timing of the upcoming Rosh Chodesh, and the unity of all Jews in accepting this declaration. We recite the prayer on Shabbat because that is when most of our communities assemble for prayer.

*Shibolei Ha-leket* 170

The custom that, on the eve of Rosh Chodesh during *ma'ariv* before the silent *amida*, the *chazzan* announces Rosh Chodesh and the congregation responds 'for joy and happiness,' is so that people will remember to say *ya'aleh ve-yavo* and further so that women will quickly cease performing their labor. And so too [is the custom of] announcing it on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh…

Shibolei Ha-leket adds that *birkat ha*-*chodesh* ensures that everyone in the community, women included, knows when Rosh Chodesh is. As such, women often make a special effort to attend synagogue on *Shabbat Mevarchin* and to participate in *birkat ha-chodesh* and seek a month of *beracha*.

We close with the eighteenth-century *techine* (personal penitential prayer) for *birkat ha-chodesh* of Leah Horowitz, who sees *Shabbat Mevarchin* as a special opportunity for prayer and who voices her prayer in first person feminine plural:[[24]](#footnote-24)

Leah Horowitz, Techine for the Blessing of the New Month

Since the day when we were exiled from our land, nothing remains for us from the mitzva of [sanctifying] the months except for announcing and reciting a *beracha* over the [new] month on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh. This is the time and season to plead before you, Lord our God. Therefore, we pour out our hearts in prayer and make our voices heard before you…

# **Further Reading**

Rav Baruch Gigi, Rosh Chodesh: The Difference Between Kedushat Ha-Yom and the Prohibition of Work

<http://etzion.org.il/en/rosh-chodesh-%D6%A0the-difference-between-kedushat-ha-yom-and-prohibition-work>

Rabbanit Malka Puterkowsky, "Rosh Chodesh – A Women's Festival." In *Bat Mitzva*, Jerusalem: Matan, 2002.

1. .*Rosh Ha-shana* 21a

As it is written "Keep the month of *Aviv*" Keep *Aviv* of the equinox [the vernal equinox] that it be in the month of *Nissan* [The word “*aviv*” refers to ripe grain, and is the Torah’s name for the month we call *Nissan*.] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Bemidbar* 28 11-15

And on your Rashei Chodesh, sacrifice a burnt offering to God, two young bulls and one ram, seven one-year-old sheep. And three tenths [of an *eifa*] of a fine meal offering mixed with oil for each bull and two tenths of fine meal mixed with oil for the single ram. And a tenth of a fine meal offering mixed with oil for each sheep as a burnt offering of a pleasing scent, a fire offering to God. And their libation of wine half a *hin* will be for each bull and a third of a *hin* per ram and a quarter of a *hin* per sheep, this is the burnt offering of each month of the months of the year. And one male goat for a sin offering for God in addition to the daily burnt offering and its libation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *Shavuot* 10a, *Arachin* 10b [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Targum Yonatan Shemuel I 20:19

 On the weekday [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Shabbat* 24a

Rosh Chodesh … on which it is not prohibited to do work

*Arachin* 10a

Rosh Chodesh, which is called a *mo’ed* – say that it was not sanctified with [a prohibition on] doing work [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Taz explains similarly:

Taz OC 417

For the reward that was assigned and ready for the men for this observance of Rosh Chodesh was taken from them and given to the women, more than what they deserved on their own account

For alternatives, see Beit Yosef:

*Bet Yosef* OC 417

For they were originally given to the men and not to the women, and when they sinned with the calf they were taken from the men and given to the women. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The next verse, *Yishayahu* 66:23, refers specifically to Rosh Chodesh: “And it will be every month in its month and every Shabbat in its Shabbat, all flesh will come to bow down before Me…” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. It is not clear what his source is, but there is a parallel midrash that speaks of the men collecting jewelry from their wives for the *mishkan* as an act toward atonement for the sin of the calf:

*Midrash Aggada Shemot Vayakhel* 35: 22

The men came in addition to the women. What does this come to teach us? That Israel said: how will the iniquity of removing our wives’ and sons' and daughters' rings, that we gave to make a god of gold, be atoned? And when Moshe assembled them, immediately the men came in addition to the women, and they brought bracelets and rings to atone for their sins. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See also Rabbeinu Bachya and Orchot Chayyim

Rabbeinu Bachya *Shemot* 35:20-21

This is a great quality in the women because in the deed of the calf they did not want to give their jewelry…but now in the matter of the mitzva of contributing to the *mishkan*, they wanted to give their gold jewelry very eagerly.

*Orchot Chayyim*

Thus Rosh Chodesh was established for them as a Yom Tov, and some say this is Rosh Chodesh Nissan, on which the *mishkan* was erected, and because of that Rosh Chodesh they keep every Rosh Chodesh. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. There is a difference of opinion regarding how to assess men who attempt to refrain from labor on Rosh Chodesh. Chida suggests that men's doing so is akin to a woman's observing a positive time-bound commandment which is not incumbent on her:

*Shut Yosef Ometz* 20

In any case, if the men want not to perform labor on Rosh Chodesh, it is fine, like the law of a positive time-bound commandment that women [voluntarily] perform and recite a *beracha* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Shulchan Aruch OC 417:1

It is permissible to perform labor on Rosh Chodesh, and the women who are accustomed not to perform labor then, it is a good custom. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Though, based on Bet Yosef above, it may have applied to paid work not necessary for livelihood. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Tashbetz connects the custom not to spin to the midrashim regarding women’s contributions to the *mishkan*, which included spinning.

Responsa Tashbetz 3:244

It seems to me that the fact that women practiced a prohibition to spin but allowed themselves to perform other labors such as sewing – this is because in the labors for the mishkan they gave with more alacrity than the men, as it is written “and the men came in addition to the women.” [There] it is written that “every woman wise of heart spun with her hands….” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. There was a custom to refrain from washing flax specifically at the time of the *molad*, new moon's rising. This was a different type of custom, based on a concern that certain acts performed during the new moon's emergence were bound to fail.

*Sefer Ha-chinuc*h Mitzva 403

Some other labors small and large require care not to perform them when the moon is renewed, until they said that flax that is found in a soaking vat or in a large pot to cook at the renewal of the moon when it is eclipsed will not succeed afterwards for anything. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Shibolei Ha-leket* 169

But when the month is extended [to thirty days], whether they need to observe it for two days is only a custom dependent on place and we are not stringent with them [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Roke’ach* Rosh Chodesh 228

When the [new] month is two days, they should not perform labor for two days [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Available here:

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/when-the-new-moon-falls-on-black-friday/> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Available here:

<https://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2011/03/haftorat-parashat-vayikra.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The mishna teaches that the sages may not decree a public fast on Rosh Chodesh.

Mishna *Ta'anit* 2:10

We do not decree a fast on the community on Rosh Chodesh. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Eliya Rabba* 419

Shayarei Kenesset Ha-gedola wrote: I saw that they are careful when Rosh Chodesh is on a weekday they make one additional dish, and when it is on Shabbat they make one more dish than they do [ordinarily] in honor of Shabbat [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See more here: http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/toshba/minhagim/Chodesh.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Birkat ha-chodesh* incorporates a version of the personal prayer that the Amora Rav would recite every day following *shemoneh esrei*.

*Berachot* 16b

My it be Thy will, Lord our God, that you give us long lives, lives of peace, lives of goodness, lives of blessing, lives of livelihood, lives of strength, lives that have fear of sin, lives without embarrassment or disgrace, lives of wealth and honor, lives in which we have love of Torah and fear of Heaven, lives in which You will fulfill for us all the wishes of our hearts for good. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Aruch Ha-shulchan* 417

…It seems to me that it refers to Shabbat *musaf*, in accordance with our custom [of *birkat ha-chodesh* on Shabbat] [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Quoted in Aliza Lavie, *Tefilat Nashim*, (Tel Aviv: Yedi’ot Books, 2005), 185-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)