**The Special Shabbatot: The Four Parshiot**

The “Four Parshiot” are special Shabbat Torah readings added to the regular Torah reading cycle in preparation for the new Hebrew year and Feast of Passover (Pesach). The Parshiot reading is read after the regular Torah reading for that Shabbat and is referred to as the maftir (concluder) portion meaning that the last designated reader (the last reader of the seven ‘aliyahs’) is called to read the Parshiot. These four Parshiot are named “Shabbat Shekalim”, “Shabbat Zakhor”, “Shabbat Parah”, and “Shabbat Ha-Chodesh”

 **The Four Parshiot**

**Shabbat Shekalim:**

Shabbat Shekalim occurs on the new moon of the month before Aviv, that being the month of Adar or Adar Bet (depending on if there is a leap year) and sometimes can occur on the last Shabbat prior to the new moon. Exodus 30:11-16 is the maftir reading and is also aligned with the accompanied haftarah portion of II Kings 11:17-12:17 in which both portions make reference to the giving of the half shekel for the census and to maintain the Tabernacle/Holy Temple. According to tradition in Judaism, Shekalim is read at this particular time to remind us of the half shekel census that was taken on the first day of the month of Aviv and the importance of contributing to the maintenance of the synagogue. From a spiritual perspective, within the Torah both poor and rich give the same half shekel (a type of Terumah offering to YHWH). In the parshiyot reading it states that “…the rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel…” this reminds us that we are all equally valued in the eyes of YHWH!

**Shabbat Zakhor:**

Shabbat Zakhor occurs on the Shabbat before the celebration of Purim. The Hebrew word ‘Zachor’ means “to remember”. The maftir reading is Deuteronomy 25:17-19 which is the portion concerning Amalek. Torah instructs us to “remember what Amalek did to you on your way out of Egypt”. The corresponding haftarah reading is 1 Samuel 15:2-34 in which YHWH instructs King Saul to destroy Amalek. On another note, because this parsha is read prior to Purim, we are also to remember that Haman (an ‘Agagite’- descended from Agag, King of the Amalakites) was going to untterly destroy all the Jews/Hebrews living in the Kingdom of Artaxerxes.

**Shabbat Parah:**

Shabbat Parah occurs on the Shabbat after the celebration of Purim. Parah means “red heifer” as the instructions of ritual purification from the offering of the Red Heifer (Numbers 19:1-22). Interestingly, the accompanied haftarah for this Shabbat is Ezekiel 36:16-38 which also concerns purification… Eze 36:25 “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”

**Shabbat Ha-Chodesh:**

Shabbat Ha-Chodesh is the last of the four parshiyot. Exodus 12:1-20 is read which deals with reckoning the Hebrew calendar. Exodus 12:2 says that “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year”. This was the first commandment given Israel as a nation prior to leaving Egypt. This parsha is read either on the new moon (Rosh Chodesh) of Aviv or on the last Shabbat prior to the new moon. The haftarah for this particular parsha is Ezekiel 45:16-46:18 which also discusses the beginning of months: Eze 45:18 “Thus says Adonai YHWH; In the first *month*, in the first *day* of the month, thou shalt take a young bullock without blemish, and cleanse the sanctuary:” This future timing of scripture is also to take place in the month of Aviv.

Within these four Parshiot, we are reminded each year that 1.) We have value in the eyes of YHWH. 2.) To remember that Amalek is living among us and to always remember what Amalek did to our ancestors…YHWH also says “…YHWH has sworn, YHWH will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:16) and so we should always be prepared for any confrontation with Amalek. 3.) Purify oneself before Passover and prepare for the potential pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. 4.) YHWH has allowed us to reach this new month, this renewed season, this new year, what can we do better this year to please our King and Elohim?