

On On One Foot

Yahrzeit and Kaddish in a Leap Year

A Jewish Leap Year happens 7 times in a 19 year cycle in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th & 19th years. An additional month is added so that there is Shevat, Adar Rishon, Adar Sheini then Nissan. The leap month resolves the disparity between the lunar and solar years so that Pesach will fall in spring time (in the Northern Hemisphere). In a leap year, Purim is in Adar Sheini, so it is always a month before Pesach.

We are currently in the 19th year of the cycle and the new cycle begins on Rosh Hashana 5777.

People saying Kaddish for a parent normally say it for 11 months less a day rather than the full year. According to tradition a full year would be the judgment period for wicked people. We like to assume that our parents have not been so wicked that they would require a full year of prayers, so unless a parent has specifically asked for a full 12 months of Kaddish, we stop saying Kaddish a full 30 days before the Yahrzeit. In a leap year we still only say Kaddish for 11 months, not 12.

The Yahrzeit always falls on the calendar anniversary, so in a leap year there will be a 13 month interval. If someone dies in Adar on a regular year, the Yahrzeit is always observed in Adar Rishon of a leap year. If they die in Adar Sheini, the yahrzeit is observed on the corresponding day of Adar in a regular year and Adar Sheini in a leap year.

There are some anomalies around Yahrzeits and the two days Rosh Chodesh at the beginning of Adar I and Adar II. If a person dies on 30th Shevat in a leap year or 30th Adar I in a leap year, the Yahrzeits will both be observed on Rosh Chodesh Adar (1st Adar) in a regular year.

Both Cheshvan and Kislev can have 29 or 30 days. If someone dies on 30th Cheshvan or 30th Kislev in "full months", their yahrzeit will be observed 29th Cheshvan and 29th Kislev in years with only a 29 day month.

If David is born on 25th Adar I and his best friend Jonathan is born on 4th Adar II in the same (leap) year, then when they are Bar Mitzvah in a non-leap year, Jonathan's Bar Mitzvah will be three weeks earlier than his older friend. Twins born on either side of sunset as Adar I goes into Adar II will see the younger one celebrate his Bar Mitzvah almost a full month before his older twin