BAREKH ALENU, praying for rain

Today is the 5th day of Chanuka
29th day of Kislev, 5771

On Shemini Atzeret, we started reciting “Mashib HaRuach U’Morid HaGeshem” instead of “Morid HaTal” during the Amida prayers, praising HaShem for giving us rain, but we did not start asking Him to bring the rains yet.

In Israel, Jews start praying for rain in the Amida two weeks after Shemini Atzeret, on the evening of the seventh of Cheshvan (Sepharadic Jews do this by switching to ‘Barekh Alenu’ on the weekdays Amida, while Ashkenazi Jews add ‘veTen Tal uMatar’).

This was because they wanted to give time to the travelers who had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to get back home before praying for rain.

Diaspora Jews of the time, who mainly lived in Babylonia, did not need the rains to start so early, so the Rabbis ruled that in Babylonia the Jews would start praying for rain on the 60th day of Tekufat Tishrei (season of Tishrei) or approximately sixty days after the beginning of Autumn.

The Rabbis gave an easy to calculate round number for determining the beginning of each cycle (season). Each cycle is to be calculated at exactly 91 days 7 hours and 30 minutes. This makes each seasonal year exactly 365 days and 6 hours long, about 11 minutes longer than the actual astronomical calculation of a Solar year.

When it comes to calendar matters, Jews who live outside of Israel follow the practice of the Jews of Babylonia. Therefore, it has become tradition for all Jews who live in

the Diaspora to start asking for rain in their prayers as the Babylonian Jews did.

Based on this calculation, this year, 2010, we switched to ‘Barekh Alenu’ in our prayers on the evening of December 4th.

(Thanks to Mr. Mehran Etessami, expert in Hebrew calendar calculations, for his help with this HOTD)

CLICK HERE for a very cool Chanuka song, more than 2 millions hits in Youtube.

Rabbi Yosef Bitton. YMJC 130 Steamboat Rd. Great Neck NY 11024