This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.

R' Hirsh on Mo'ed 9:160

Keeps alive the memory of the original and the free determination by our community. These second days originated in those better times when our community still had a national center and national representatives, for whose decision regarding the fixing of the mo'edim all outlying communities had to wait. This very waiting enabled them to regard themselves as part of a larger national body and to regard their festivals as freely determined times in which God and His people were to meet. Those communities that could not be reached in time by the messengers who were sent out from the national center celebrated two days because of their doubt as to the exact date.

The members of our last representative assembly indeed knew well what they were doing when on the one hand they fixed the calendar for the duration of the mo'edim as a temporary remedy, while on the other hand, they sent a message to the people, which celebrates two days, saying: Be careful to keep well this custom (of celebrating two days), which has been handed down to you by your fathers. May you do the melamdeni and the melamdein (Beizah 4b): Due to the pressures of the times, knowledge of the Torah and of the way we have fixed the calendar may come to be forgotten. You would then determine your New Moons and festivals in accordance with your own calculation or sighting, not knowing that it is not the astronomical calculation nor the actual sighting, but, rather, the sanctifying determination by the representatives of the entire Jewish community that transforms New Moons and festivals into Jewish mo'edim. It is therefore an absolute truth that, for Israel in the Diaspora, only the second day of the holiday ensures the sacred Jewish character of the first day.
If we may speak in human terms, this meeting should be voluntar from both sides; it should not be like a master summoning his servant into his presence. It is God Who wishes that His people should come to Him. That is why He specifies only in general terms the time of the coming to Him; He allows them a certain latitude within which they themselves may set the exact date for the meeting, so that the time of the meeting will be by mutual choice.

Note this well: It is to be by mutual choice! If the beginnings of our months and, consequently, the dates of the festivals were to be tied exactly to planetary-astronomical phases, so that the lunar cycle would automatically determine the mezuzah and the new moon, then we and our God, as it were, would be bound by the blind, unchanging cycle of nature. In that case, our knowledge of the New Moon would lend serious support to the idolatry of a cult of nature worship.

But this shall not be. Indeed, this dangerous illusion that so readily suggests itself must be countered with all deliberate firmness. It is not the meeting of heavenly bodies, the renewed illumination of the moon by the sun, that produces the beginning of the month; it is not this natural phenomenon that the New Moon celebrates. Rather, each time the moon unites with the sun and receives from it new light, God wants His people to find their way back to Him, so that His light may again shine forth on them, no matter where they may be or through what periods of darkness they may have to pass in their path through history. The encounter between the moon and the sun is only a symbol and occasion for our reunion with God; the renewal of the moon is a symbol and an occasion for our own renewal, literally means “meeting.”

Thus, it is neither the astronomical phenomenon nor astronomical calculations, but we ourselves, through the representatives of our community, that create our world and set the date for our meeting with God.

Hence the halachah: melach lechah ha-R'Hashanah (Rosh Hashanah 20a). Objective astronomical certainty is not sufficient; subjective perception, too, is required.