

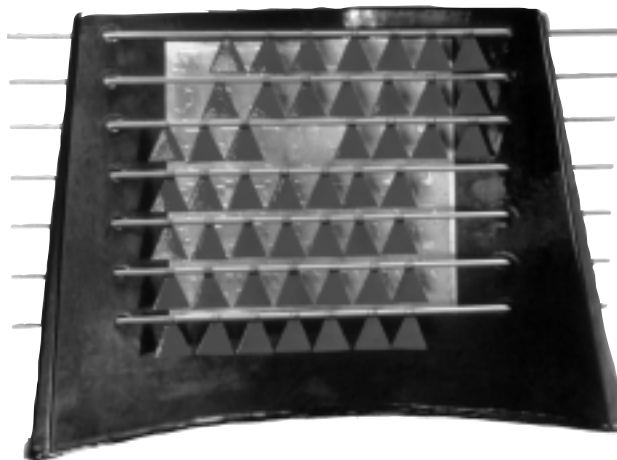
TIME AND THE SACRED

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▲ *Sukkah, Be Seated, Be Seated, Ross Lewis*

is prescribed are precisely those times of transition that mark the passage from one experienced cosmic status to another: dawn, high noon, and dusk articulating the day; the quadrants of the sun articulating the seasons; and the phases of the moon



▲ *Omer Counter, Arnold Schwarzbart*

In the matter of time, both our ancient Israelite ancestors and their near eastern contemporaries were empiricists. The idea of a cosmic order is rooted in the observed cyclical regularities of sunrise and sunset, the climatic-agricultural seasons of the year, the phases of the moon, and the motions of the celestial bodies. Periodicity is the order of nature. The recurring celestial phenomena and their terrestrial effects spell out the various cycles of the calendar: the solar year with its four seasons, the lunar month and week (each period of the moon lasting approximately seven days), the solar day. Surely these experienced regularities and the symmetries they embody are part of a larger order, our ancestors reasoned: they must be the work of a divine Intelligence, a beneficent Creator who regulates with forethought the environmental conditions under which humankind can thrive: “God made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows when to set” (Psalm 104:19).

And yet there is sufficient experience of disorder and unpredictability in nature as well—floods, droughts, earthquakes, lightning strikes, solar and lunar eclipses—so that order could not be taken for granted. Particularly is this so in the semi-arable land of Israel, where uncertainties about weather and rainfall constantly affected the viability of Israelite agriculture and the very lives of those who depended upon it. The experience and threat of disorder, of eruptions of the chaotic within the larger context of order, called forth a human ritual and cultic response—perhaps God needs human assistance to maintain the cosmic order? Perhaps by our own rule-governed and periodic activity (coupled with obedience to divine commandments), we can influence the outcomes? The idea of human “partnership with God in maintaining the work of creation” primally had a straightforward, instrumental meaning.

The Israelite cultic calendar thus enacts—and maintains—the cosmic calendar and its order. The sacred times at which human ritual activity

articulating the week and month. Just as the social rites of passage (*brit milah*, puberty rituals, weddings, funerals) enact the different moments of transition in a human life cycle, the cultic calendar continually enacts the transitions in the cosmic cycle, in the ever-renewing life of the world.

“Sacred time” is about boundaries and passages—from one weekly cycle to the next, from one agricultural cycle to the next. For it is at these moments of passage that we are most aware of our dependence on the Power outside us. These transitional times are fraught with anticipation and danger: What will the next week bring? Will there be adequate rain to sustain crops, herds, and human life in the next rainy season? Will there be enough dew to sustain planting during the next dry season? Will the spring grain harvests and the birthings of the flocks and herds be plentiful? When we have done our work and the rest is out of our hands, can we nonetheless add our energies and intentions to the natural and divine processes? To this day, traditional Jewish liturgy prescribes prayers and scriptural recitations for protection and salvation at these times of turning (*Havdalah* verses at the end of the Sabbath, *Hoshanot* litanies on Sukkot, prayers for rain on Shemini Atseret and for dew on Pesach).

It is no accident that the calendar has been the source of much conflict historically among Jewish groups: at stake literally is the accurate correspondence between human and divine action, between human/conventional and divine/ontological time. The biblical calendars are basically lunar-solar: the months follow the phases of the moon while every year must begin in the spring. But there have been other calendrical systems in the history of Judaism. Most notable is the elegantly symmetrical solar calendar advocated in the late Second Commonwealth period by the groups behind the Book of Jubilees, the Enoch literature, and the Qumran scrolls. This 364-day calendar is divided into four periods of thirteen weeks (ninety-one days) each; in this calendar the Sabbaths always

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Kalsman Institute staff also includes Dr. Jay Abarbanel, lay leader and former Professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern California.

Augmenting the College-Institute's 20-plus years of offering classes on *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick), the Institute will offer lectures for students and alumni and provide chaplaincy training. The expansion of rabbinical studies at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles into a four year stateside ordaining program is leading to the transformation of its supervised field work program and related courses.

To address the health and spiritual crises in America, the Kalsman Institute stimulates the intellect and advocates for the psychological, emotional, spiritual, and religious sides to healing. In the words of Kodmur, the goal of integrating Judaism and healing is to make people "whole."

The Kalsman Institute complements other HUC-JIR programs that train students and encourage faculty to become engaged with the health agenda: HUC-JIR/New York's Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Center for Pastoral

The Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health

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Counseling in New York [see page 14] and Doctor of Ministry Program, run in conjunction with the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health, which develops pastoral counseling skills of clergy of all faiths; and HUC-JIR/Cincinnati's Clinical Pastoral Education program [see page 15; and *Chronicle*, Spring 1991, number 51, page 10].

In Cincinnati, rabbinical students enroll in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), a national system of experiential education that teaches pastoral care in healthcare settings. With the support of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, this program trains rabbinical students in CPE at the Jewish Hospital and other healthcare institutions. Cincinnati rabbinical students are currently required to

serve a minimum of 400 hours in CPE as part of their ordination requirements. The Cincinnati School is working toward earning accreditation in CPE which will give the College-Institute the opportunity to place and supervise students in various clinical settings, including their congregational pulpit internships.

Rabbi Ruth Alpers, Stein Director of Human Relations and Pastoral Counseling at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati, who is working toward becoming a CPE supervisor, noted that the "primary goal of CPE is the professional development of our students training to become clergy. Each individual is working on him- or herself, clarifying personal theology and religious boundaries." She hopes to expand the program to offer CPE to HUC-JIR alumni.

To ensure that the College-Institute's field programs on all campuses are consistent in their training goals and requirements, a national Clinical Education Advisory Committee has been meeting regularly to review and develop institution-wide learning objectives and supervision standards.

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fall on the same monthly dates, and the festivals on the same day of the week. The rabbinic calendar, on the other hand, follows the biblical lunar-solar pattern and has 354 days. The intercalation of the months was initially an arcane and closely guarded process, sometimes subject to political controversy. Similarly, the sighting of the new moon which marked the beginning of the new year in the autumn was carefully monitored by rabbinical authorities; the New Year began according to rabbinical decree, no matter what others might interpret what they saw in the heavens (cf. M. Rosh HaShanah 2:9; Y. Rosh HaShanah 1:3, 57b).

While we are better informed today about the material bases of the celestial and terrestrial orders than were our ancestors, as humans we remain aware of our smallness and finitude in the face of the cosmos. At sunrise and sunset and the changing of the seasons, we feel a sense of awe and wonder-

ment at the grandeur, mystery, and overwhelming power of the world around us. We may still recite with the Psalmist, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims God's handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

Earlier generations of Reform and liberal Jews, reading in the signs of their times the dawning of a messianic-like age of social amelioration and universal brotherhood, gave greater attention to the sweep of history, to time's forward, linear march. We today, looking back on both the advances and barbarities of the past century, while no less committed to the ideal of social betterment, may be less sanguine about human nature and the inevitability of progress. But we still live our daily lives within the cycles and rhythms dictated by the natural order and its calendar. By marking those times with Jewish ritual, by pausing to encounter the sacred and reflect on our creatureliness, we reenact our people's paths and fill our lives with

meaning that transcends both the passing scene and our fleeting place in it. For us no less than for our ancestors, time is the vessel of holiness. For time, well and mindfully spent, is the most precious gift we have.

For further reading:

Theodor H. Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year: A Modern Interpretation and Guide* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1953)

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962)

Jacob Neusner, *Between Time and Eternity: The Essentials of Judaism* (Encino, CA: Dickenson, 1975)

———, *The Enchantments of Judaism: Rites of Transformation From Birth Through Death* (New York: Basic, 1987)

Shemaryahu Talmon, "Calendars and Mishmarot," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 1:108-17