

**JEWISH EDUCATION
and
JEWISH STATESMANSHIP**

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THE CALENDAR AND THEOLOGY

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A common calendar is one of the most important instruments of communal life. Not only does it help create and sustain the community, it also gives expression to the values that the community shares. I acquired my first formal knowledge of the Jewish calendar in the United Hebrew Schools of Detroit in the 1950s, when the school system was directed by Albert Elazar and one of my earliest teachers was Mrs. Nettie Elazar. I am honored to offer the following observations in Mr. Elazar's memory.

One of the best-known and essential differences between biblical and other ancient Near Eastern religions has to do with the role of nature in each. In pagan religions, the gods were personifications of natural phenomena, while the Bible perceives the divine as transcending nature. This difference is aptly expressed in the quaint rabbinic tale about how Abraham, at the age of three, realized that there is but one God. Wondering who created the world, Abraham first worshiped the sun until it set and was replaced by the moon, surrounded by the stars. He then reasoned that the moon was the creator and the stars its courtiers, and worshiped them all night. When these disappeared in the morning, only to be replaced by the sun, he concluded that "none of these have power, but there must be a Lord above them all; Him shall I worship." According to this tale, Abraham realized that everything within nature is finite and therefore could not be divine; the divine must be an infinite power that transcends nature. This is the belief that he then spread in the world.¹

The goal of the pagan religions of the ancient Near East, as a consequence of their belief that the divine is part of nature, was to strengthen the constructive forces of the cosmos and integrate human life with nature. Typical of this emphasis were religious festivals at which the primordial battles of the gods were re-enacted so that, by means of sympathetic magic, man could assist the constructive forces in defeating the forces of chaos over and over again. H. and H.A. Frankfort described this aspect of pagan religions thus:

[T]he life of man and the function of the state are for mythopoeic thought imbedded in nature, and the natural processes are affected by the acts of man no less than man's life depends on his harmonious integration with nature. The experiencing of this unity with the utmost intensity was the greatest good oriental [that is, Near Eastern — J.H.T.] religion could bestow.²

Biblical religion, in contrast, seeing God as above nature, saw His control of nature as absolute and in no need of human assistance. As a result, it concentrated on His actions in history, particularly in the exodus. This orientation is reflected in the increasing historicization of the Israelite festivals. In the Bible, the spring festivals of Pesah and Unleavened Bread are presented in exclusively historical terms as commemorations of the exodus. Sukkot, although essentially an agricultural festival, is also made to commemorate the fact that God "made the Israelite people dwell in booths when [He] brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 23:43). At least since Second Temple times Shavuot — in the Torah an entirely agricultural festival — was recognized as commemorating the giving of the Torah, which began with the proclamation of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai.

What is less often noted is that these differences between biblical religion and ancient paganism are reflected in differences between the calendar of the Torah and other calendars of the ancient world.³

Three different sets of month names are reflected in the Hebrew Bible (see Fig. 1). Of the oldest set, only four are known:

Aviv ("new ears of grain," falling in March-April);⁴ Ziv ("brightness," April-May);⁵ Ethanim (a term of debated meaning, but having to do with wadis,⁶ October-November); and Bul (probably "flooding," November-December).⁷

At least two of these names are also known in Phoenician, and they were probably adopted from the Canaanites. As the approximate translations of these names show (although the exact meaning of the last two is not certain), each month is named for a phenomenon of nature characteristic of that month. They reflect the concern of ancient Near Eastern religion with nature.

The fact that only four of these names are mentioned in the Bible implies that they were abandoned rather early (they are last mentioned in connection with King Solomon). In their place, the standard calendar of the Torah designates all the months by number rather than the phenomena of nature that characterize them. Thus, the festivals of Pesah and Unleavened Bread fall in the first month and the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths in the seventh (see Leviticus 23). According to Exodus 12:2, this numerical system was established at the time of the exodus. In the very first commandment addressed to the Israelites as a nation, God established a calendar reform, ordaining that the calendar begin with the month in which the exodus occurred. This means that the point of reference of all the numerical month-names is the exodus, and these names serve as constant reminders of that pivotal event. This point is noted by Joseph Bekhor Shor (twelfth century) in his paraphrase of God's command in that verse: "This month shall be the first of your freedom, and you shall make it first in counting months so that you may count from the hour of freedom and thus remember the hour of freedom and My kindness to you, and you will thereby take care to revere Me,

Fig. 1.
THE BIBLICAL MONTH NAMES¹³

Numerical (Torah)	Canaanite	Exilic-traditional	Gregorian equivalents	Akkadian sources
1	Abib (new grain)	Nisan	March-April	Nisannu (first produce)
2	Ziv (brightness)	Iyyar	April-May	Ayaru (rosette?)
3		Sivan	May-June	Simanu (sign, season)
4		Tammuz	June-July	Du'uzu (the god Dumuzi)
5		Ab	July-August	Abu
6		Elul	August-September	Elulu/Ululu (purification)
7		Tishri	September-October	Tashritu (beginning)
8	Ethanim (flowing streams)	Marheshvan	October-November	Arahsamna (eighth month)
9	Bul (flooding?)	Kislev	November-December	Kissilimu
10		Tebet	December-January	Tebetu (sinking?)
11		Shebat	January-February	Shabatu
12		Adar	February-March	Addaru (worry?, dim? threshing floor?)

love Me, and serve Me." The Torah's preference for this numerical system is in keeping with the Bible's emphasis on historical and social events, such as Israel's liberation from bondage, even more than nature as the sphere of life in which God's will is most manifest. This is in contrast to religions in which the harmonious integration of man and nature was the main focus of attention.

The latest books of the Bible, from the post-exilic period, use a third system of month names, one that was adopted from the Babylonian calendar during the Babylonian exile and became the traditional Jewish system.⁸ These names, of Akkadian and Sumerian origin, had been taken over into Aramaic, which soon became the spoken language of most Jews. The names in this system are not all understood, but most — like the Canaanite month names — are thought to be based on phenomena of nature, mythology, and Sumero-Babylonian religious practices (see Fig. 1, in which the names of this system are accompanied by their Sumero-Akkadian originals and translations of those whose meanings are fairly clear). In adopting these names, the Jews were not knowingly reverting to a pagan system, since their meaning was most likely forgotten long before the Jews borrowed them.

The Hebrew names of the days of the week also express a Jewish theological perspective. The concept of the Jewish week was implicitly established by the observance of the Sabbath. In Nehemiah 13:19 we find "Before the Sabbath" and "After the Sabbath" serving as designations for, respectively, the day before and the day after the Sabbath.⁹ By late Second Temple times we encounter the standard Jewish practice of referring to all the days but the Sabbath by number (thus Sunday is "the first day," Monday "the second day," etc.). The point of reference of these designations is the Sabbath itself. Just as the numerical month-names are a constant reminder of the exodus, the numerical day-names are a constant reminder of God and the historical

events commemorated by the Sabbath, the creation and the exodus (Exodus 20:11; 31:17; Deuteronomy 5:15).

This nomenclature was in direct contrast to the seven-day planetary week that began to spread through the Roman empire around the turn of the era. At Pompeii (destroyed 79 CE) a wall inscription, with the heading "days of the gods," lists the planets in the order Saturn, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus (i.e., Saturday through Friday). By the beginning of the third century CE the planetary day began to appear in dates. The earliest known instance is from 205 CE, in an inscription from Karlsburg, Transylvania, while the earliest case from the eastern empire is a school lesson from Egypt, dated 294 CE.¹⁰

It is around the beginning of the third century, just about the time the weekday is first attested as part of the date in inscriptions from the Roman Empire, that the Tosefta stipulates that contracts must include the day of the week in dates (Tosefta Baba Batra XI. 2). This stipulation may have been prompted by the growing prominence of the week in the empire. In any case, the rabbis were aware of the Roman practice, and another Tannaitic prescription shows resistance to it. In commenting on the command to "Remember the Sabbath day," R. Isaac explains: "Do not count (the days) as others do (i.e., with planetary names), but count with reference to the Sabbath," that is "the first day," etc.¹¹ Here, too, the Jewish practice constitutes a rejection of a pagan calendric practice.

That theological reasons underlay the insistence on numerical names is also shown by the fact that Christianity, too, resisted them, although with less success. When Christianity inherited the sabbatical week from Judaism, at first it modified only the name of the first day and preserved the Greek forms of the old Jewish names for the rest of the days. This is still reflected in the modern Greek names of the days; apart from Kuriake ("the Lord's day," Sunday) and Sabbaton (Saturday), the rest of the Greek names are numerical. Likewise Arabic adopted, perhaps

via Christianity, the standard Jewish numerical names for all days but the Islamic day of assembly (*yawm al-juma*). Like the rabbis, the leaders of the Church objected to the use of the planetary names,¹² but only the Eastern Church succeeded in excluding them, as reflected in the modern Greek names. In Western Europe the planetary names were for the most part accepted, either in a form based on the Roman names (e.g., Saturday, Lundi, Mardi, Mercredi, Jeudi, Vendredi) or local European counterparts (e.g., Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, etc.; see Fig. 2).

Figure 2

THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

1	Sunday	(Sun)
2	Monday	(Moon)
3	Tuesday	(Tiu = Mars, as in French Mardi)
4	Wednesday	(Woden/Odin = Mercury, as in French Mercredi)
5	Thursday	(Thor - Jove (Jupiter), as in French Jeudi)
6	Friday	(Freya = Venus, as in French Vendri)
7	Saturday	(Saturn)

Notes

1. A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (Leipzig: Nies, 1853-1877) 2:118 (reprinted in H.N. Bialik and Y.H. Rawnitzki, *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, 3rd ed. [Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1960], p. 24, and in J.D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Midrashim* [repr. Israel, 1969] 1:7). For earlier forms of this tale see Apocalypse of Abraham, chap. 7 (trans. R. Rubinkiewicz in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 1, ed. J.H. Charlesworth [Garden City: Doubleday, 1983], p. 692) and related texts cited by L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1925), 5:210 n. 16.
2. See H. and H.A. Frankfort, eds., *Before Philosophy* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1959), p. 36; cf. pp. 34-35.
3. I have seen this point noted, albeit briefly, only by N.M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1991), in his comment to Exod. 12:2.
4. Deut. 16:1. The name "Aviv" refers to the fact that this month begins when immature ears of grain (aviv) have begun to grow on the stalks; see Exod. 9:31; Lev. 2:14; M. Kil. 5:7. The name refers specifically to the phase of growth when the grain is still green and the seeds are full of milky liquid (H.L. Ginsberg, *The Israelian Heritage in Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 44; note that Ginsberg, p. 57, is not convinced that the term serves as a name).
5. 1 Kings 6:1,37.
6. 1 Kings 8:2. For *eitan* in connection with wadis, see Deut. 21:4; Amos 5:24; Ps. 74:15; Eccles. 40:13-14; cf. Exod. 14:27. *Eitan* is often taken to mean "everflowing," meaning a wadi with a perennial stream, as distinct from one that is full only in the rainy season. The translation is uncertain and it is unclear how a word with this meaning could characterize a particular month since perennial streams flow year-round. If the term means simply "strongly flowing wadis," its

applicability to October-November is puzzling, since the first showers (the *yoreh*) fall intermittently in these months and the wadis therefore do not flow as strongly as they do in later months. Some commentators take *eitan* as "strong," "hard," meaning rugged and resistant to cultivation (cf. Num. 24:21; Micah 6:2; Prov. 13:15, and see LXX; Josephus, Antiquities 4:221; Sifrei; Mishnah Sotah 9:5; Rashi; Shadal ("a stony valley"). This, too, would not provide a meaning that is obviously suitable for a particular month.

7. 1 Kings 6:38. On all these names see L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, et al., *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1967-1990).
8. On the Babylonian source of the names see Yerushalmi, R.H. 1:2,56d.
9. See J. Tigay, "Lifne' Hashabbat and Ahar Hashabbat: 'On the Day Before the Sabbath' and 'On the Day After the Sabbath'." *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978):362-65; "Notes on the Development of the Jewish Week." In H.L. Ginsberg Volume. *Eretz-Israel* 14 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1978), p. 116* (Non-Hebrew Section).
10. E. Schuürer, in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 6 (1905):23f.,33; F.H. Colson, *The Week* (Cambridge, 1926), p. 25.
11. Mekhiltas to Exod. 20:8, s. v. *zakhor veshamor*.
12. See Colson, *The Week*, pp. 26f.
13. S.J. de Vries, "Calendar," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G.A. Buttrick et al. (New York and Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 1:486. The names of the first six months in English have similar origins: January (Janus), February (Februa, Roman feast of purification), March (Mars), April (earth opens [aperio] for growth of plants), May (Maia, goddess of growth or increase). July and August are named, respectively, for Julius Caesar, and Augustus Caesar, while September through December have numerical meanings derived from

the seventh through tenth months of the ancient Roman year, which began in March (July and August, too, originally had numerical names, Quintilis and Sextilis, respectively).

THE OBLIGATION OF EDUCATING THE YOUNG IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

Joel Roth

There is no explicit verse in the Torah which commands one to educate one's children. Rabbinic literature, on the other hand, seems to assume that there is such an obligation. Nahmanides states clearly:¹

Since God has commanded regarding [certain] *mitzvot*:

"An eternal statute for all times throughout the ages,"²

"It shall be a sign forever between Me and the people

Israel,"³ "This shall be the covenant between Me and

you and your offspring after you,"⁴ it follows that we

are commanded to insure that our offspring know the

commandments, and how can they know them if we do

not teach them.

Both the comment of Nahmanides and virtually all rabbinic passages which we shall have occasion to quote make it clear that the purpose of education is training in the fulfillment of the *mitzvot*. Even the study of the Torah itself is a behaviorally oriented commandment. We study it and teach it to our children because the very act of studying it is commanded in order that we might know what God demands of us. The goal of education is behavioral in the rabbinic world view.

The Mishnah in Yoma⁵ could not be clearer: "Youngsters do not fast on the Day of Atonement. However, we begin training/teaching them a year or two earlier [than their actual attaining of legal majority], in order that they become accustomed