

**JEWISH EDUCATION
and
JEWISH STATESMANSHIP**

**ALBERT ELAZAR
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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

