

FOREWORD

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SABBATH, FESTIVAL AND FAST IN JUDAISM

[page xiii] Sabbath and holyday, festival and fast — round these is spun the web of ordinances constituting the Order Mo'ed. What significance did the Rabbis give them for the spiritual life of the Jewish people?

THE SABBATH

The Rabbis made the Sabbath the very centre of the Jewish religion, a perennial fountain of idealism and regeneration in Israel. They instituted the *Kiddush* prayer, praising God for the gift of the Sabbath, to celebrate its coming in; and the *Habdalah* blessing, praising God for the distinction between the Sabbath and the six weekdays, to mark its going out. In addition to being a day of rest, the Sabbath was to be 'a holy day, set apart for the building up of the spiritual element in man' (Philo). Religious worship and religious instruction — the renewal of man's spiritual life in God-form, according to them, an essential part of Sabbath observance. We, therefore, sanctify the Sabbath by a special Sabbath liturgy, by statutory Lessons from the Torah and the Prophets, and by attending to discourse and instruction given by religious teachers. The Sabbath has thus proved the great educator of Israel in the highest subject of all, namely, the laws governing human conduct. The effect of these Sabbath prayers and Synagogue homilies upon the Jewish people has been incalculable. Leopold Zunz, the founder of the New Jewish Learning, has shown that almost the whole of Israel's inner history since the close of the Bible times can be traced in the development of these Sabbath discourses on the Torah. Sabbath worship is still the chief bond which unites Jews into a religious Brotherhood. [page xiv] Neglect of such worship injures the spiritual life of both the individual and the community.

By keeping the Sabbath, the Rabbis tell us, we testify to our belief in God as the Creator of the Universe; in a God who is not identical with Nature, but is a *free Personality*, the Creator and

Ruler of Nature. The Talmudic mystics tell that when the heavens and earth were being called into existence, matter was getting out of hand, and the Divine Voice had to resound, 'Enough! So far and no further!' Man, made in the image of God, has been endowed by Him with the power of creating. But in his little universe, too, matter is constantly getting out of hand, threatening to overwhelm and crush out soul. By means of the Sabbath, called [H] 'a memorial of Creation', we are endowed with the Divine power of saying 'Enough!' to all rebellious claims of our environment, and are reminded of our potential victory over all material forces that would drag us down.

The Sabbath, as conceived by the Rabbis, is the supreme example of the hallowing of life under the sanctifying influence of the Law. That sacred day is the perennial fountain of idealism and regeneration in Israel. More than any other institution has it moulded Jewish family life with its virtues of chastity, charity, love, peace; virtues nowhere surpassed, rarely equalled. Amid all the misery and slavery that for so many centuries were the lot of Israel, once a week the home of the humblest Jew was flooded with light. The Sabbath banished care and toil, grief and sorrow. On that day, the despised and rejected of men was emancipated from the oppression and tribulation and degradation of this world; he felt himself a prince, a member of a great, eternal, holy people.

The Rabbis attached to the Sabbath a number of minute regulations which make its complete observance a matter of no small difficulty. In all ages — from early Christian times to the present day — ignorant and unsympathetic critics have stigmatized these minutiae as an intolerable burden and asserted that they make the Sabbath not a day of rest but one of sorrow and anxiety. Such a view shows a complete misunderstanding of the spirit in [page xv] which the Rabbis approached their task. It was their love for the Sabbath which led them to exert all their ingenuity in discovering ways of differentiating it from other days and making it more thoroughly a day of rest, a day in which man enjoys some foretaste of the pure bliss and happiness which are stored up for the righteous in the world to come. And the Jewish people received it from them in the same spirit. Let a hostile witness — a German Protestant theologian of anti-Semitic tendencies — testify what the Rabbinic Sabbath is to the loyal Jew.

'Anyone who has had the opportunity of knowing in our own day the inner life of Jewish families that observe the Law of the fathers with sincere piety and in all strictness, will have been astonished at the wealth of joyfulness, gratitude and sunshine, undreamt of by the outsider, with which the Law animates the Jewish home. The whole household rejoices on the Sabbath, which they celebrate with rare satisfaction not only as the day of rest, but rather as the day of rejoicing. Jewish prayers term the Sabbath a "joy of the soul" to him who hallows it: *he* "enjoys the abundance of Thy goodness". Such expressions are not mere words; they are the outcome of pure and genuine happiness and enthusiasm' (R.

Kittel).

By means of the Rabbinic expansion of the kinds of forbidden work on the Sacred Day, and as the outcome of the gigantic intellectual labour on the part of generations, nay centuries, of Sopherim, Tannaim, and Amoraim in the elucidation of these laws, there arose the choicest spiritual edifice in the realm of Judaism — the Sabbath Day of Jewish history. Without the observance of the Sabbath, of the olden Sabbath, of the Sabbath as perfected by the Rabbis, the whole of Jewish life would disappear. And only if the olden Sabbath is maintained by those who have lost or abandoned it, is the permanence of Israel assured.

PASSOVER

What epoch-making significance the Rabbis ascribed to the Exodus is clearly shown by the constant recurrence in the prayers of the expression, 'in memory of the going forth from Egypt'. 'The Exodus from Egypt is not only one of the greatest [page xvi] events and epochs in the history of the Jews, but one of the greatest events and epochs in the history of the world. To that successful escape, Europe, America and Australia are as much indebted as the Jews themselves. And the men of Europe, the men of America, and the men of Australia might join with us Jews in celebrating that feast of the Passover'. (C. G. Montefiore). The Rabbis deemed it a sacred task to keep alive the memory of that event, and the full understanding of its significance, in the mind of the Jewish people. And in the performance of this task, with sound psychological insight they began with the mind of the young. Out of a mere hint in the Biblical text, they evolved the wonderful Seder service, with its irresistible appeal to the interest and curiosity of the intelligent child. Of all the ceremonies of the Jewish religion, there is perhaps none so well calculated as the Seder to awaken the Jewish consciousness in the child, at the same time that it brings home to the adult with unique force the unbroken continuity of Jewish history.

One phrase in connection with Passover was the subject of heated controversy in early Rabbinic times between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The latter took the word '*sabbath*' (Lev. XXIII, 15)¹ in its usual sense, and maintained that the '*Omer* was to be brought on the morrow of the first Saturday in Passover. The Pharisees argued that '*sabbath*' here means, 'the day of cessation from work'; and the context shows that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is intended; therefore, the '*Omer* was to be brought on the sixteenth of Nisan. This is supported by the Septuagint which renders 'on the morrow of the first day', and by Josephus. The offerings of the sheaf took place on the sixteenth, the first busy work-day of the harvest, in relation to which the preceding day might well be called a *Sabbath* or rest-day, though not all labour was prohibited. This is alone compatible with the context, and is free from the objections to which all the other opinions are open

(Kalisch).

**FEAST OF
WEEKS —
SHABU'OTH**

One of the three agricultural festivals is the feast of the first harvest [H]. Jewish tradition, however, connects it with the [page xvii] Covenant on Mount Sinai, and speaks of the festival as [H] 'the Season of Giving of our Torah', the date of which is not expressly mentioned in the Torah but is calculated by the Rabbis from statements in the text to have been on the sixth day of the third month. Hence its association with the Feast of Weeks, which became the Festival of Revelation.

Its name in Talmudic literature is not Shabu'oth, but almost invariably '*Azereth*' 'the concluding festival' to Passover. 'We count the days that pass since the preceding Festival, just as one, who expects his most intimate friend on a certain day, counts the days and even the hours. This is the reason why we count the days that pass since the departure from Egypt and the anniversary of the Lawgiving. The latter was the aim and object of the exodus from Egypt' (Maimonides). In other words, the Deliverance from bondage was not an end in itself: it was the prelude to Sinai (Ex. III, 12). Liberty without law is a doubtful boon, whether to men or nations.

**FEAST OF
TABER-
NACLES**

In Rabbinic literature, it is known as '*the Feast*', because, as the time of the harvest, it would naturally be a period of rejoicing and holiday-making. It really consists of two groups; the first seven days, Tabernacles proper; and the eighth day, '*Azereth*'. The seventh day of Tabernacles became in later times an echo of the Day of Atonement and was known as Hoshanah Rabbah; and the 'second day' of '*Azereth*' assumed the nature of a separate Festival under the name of Simhath Torah, Rejoicing of the Law, the day on which the annual reading of the Torah was completed and restarted.

**ROSH
HASHANAH**

As the seventh day in the week was a holy day, so the seventh month was the holy month in the year. It is, therefore, not surprising that the New Moon of the seventh month should be a Festival of special solemnity. In later times, it was known as Rosh Hashanah, New Year's Day. But unlike the New Year celebrations of many ancient and modern nations, the Jewish New Year is not a time of revelry, but an occasion of the deepest religious import.

'A day of blowing the horn', i.e., *Shofar*, the ram's horn. The sound of *Shofar* consisting, as handed down by Tradition, of three [page xviii] distinctive *Shofar*-notes — *teki'ah*, *shebarim*, *teru'ah* — has been looked upon from times immemorial as a call to contrition and penitence, as a reminder of the *Shofar*-sound of Sinai; and the Day of Memorial, the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance [H] which culminate in the Day of Atonement, as a time of self-examination and humble petition of forgiveness. 'The Scriptural injunction of the *Shofar* for the New Year's Day has a profound meaning. It says: Awake, ye sleepers, and ponder over