

INTRODUCTION TO SEDER MO'ED

BY

THE EDITOR 1

GENERAL CHARACTER AND CONTENTS

[page xxi] Mo'ed, which is the name given to the second 'Order' of the Babylonian Talmud, deals with the 'appointed seasons', the feasts and fasts and holy days of the calendar, which have always constituted a highly distinctive feature of Jewish life. The Pentateuch enumerates six such seasons — the Sabbath, the three pilgrimage festivals, and the Days of 'blowing of the trumpet' and atonement. These were added subsequently, by the religious authorities of the people, certain holidays and fast days of lesser sanctity, instituted to commemorate outstanding occasions of joy or sorrow in later Jewish history. Each of these had its own distinguishing mark or ceremony, the rules and regulations for which are exhaustively discussed in the appropriate tractates of Seder Mo'ed.

The term 'Mo'ed' ('appointed season') by which this Order has always been known is probably derived from Lev. XXIII, 2 where it is used in introducing the laws of the festivals including the Sabbath. It might be observed that the designation 'Mo'ed' is in the singular, as distinct from the plural forms used to designate the other Orders, e.g., Nashim, Nezikin, etc. It has been suggested that the singular is here specially used to avoid the confusion that might arise through the employment of the plural Seder Mo'adim (or Mo'adoth) denoting as it does in Rabbinic literature the Order of the Calendar.¹ The opinion may, however, be hazarded that it is because the Sabbath and the festivals constitute one complete cycle of Jewish observance that preference has been given to the singular form.

The 'Order' is divided into twelve tractates arranged according [page xxii] to the separate editions of the Mishnah in the following sequence:²

1. SHABBATH (Sabbath) 24 Chapters. Rules and regulations for observing the Sabbath rest. Includes also the laws of Hanukkah.
2. 'ERUBIN (Blendings) 10 Chapters. Regulations enabling freedom of movement beyond certain prescribed limits on Sabbaths and festivals.
3. PESAHIM (Paschal Lambs) 10 Chapters. Laws of destroying leaven on Passover, of bringing the Paschal lamb and of the *Seder* service.
4. SHEKALIM (Shekels) 8 Chapters. On the contributions for the upkeep of the Temple and the regular sacrifices.
5. YOMA (The Day) 8 Chapters. Regulations for the Day of Atonement, with an historic description of the ceremonies carried out by the High Priest on that day.
6. SUKKAH (Booth) 5 Chapters. Regulations of the 'booth' on the Feast of Tabernacles and the taking of the four plants.
7. BEZAH (Egg) 5 Chapters. Lays down the limitations within which food may be prepared on Festivals.

8. ROSH HASHANAH (New Year) 4 Chapters. Rules for proclaiming New Moon, for the New Year liturgy and the blowing of the *shofar* (trumpet).
9. TA'ANITH (Fast) 4 Chapters. Rules for the fast days, whether fixed or occasional, whether private or communal.
10. MEGILLAH (The Scroll) 4 Chapters. Rules for reading the Book of Esther on Purim; also the regulations for the reading of the Torah in public worship.
11. MO'ED KATAN (Minor Feast) 3 Chapters. Regulations governing work on the intermediate days Passover and Tabernacles; also contains the laws of mourning.
12. HAGIGAH (Festival-Offering) 3 Chapters. Regulations regarding voluntary offerings on Festivals. Contains the famous digression on the esoteric teaching of the Torah.

In the printed editions of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud [page xxiii] there are deviations from this order of succession.³ In view of these divergencies it is idle to search for any logical sequence in the arrangement of the several tractates within the 'Order'. Significant in this connection is the fact that already in the days of Sherira Gaon there was no uniformity in this respect in the Academies; and the Gaon, in his famous *Epistle*, written in 987 C.E., is at pains to explain why a particular sequence was followed in his Academy.⁴ Generally speaking the tractates are arranged in accordance with the respective number of chapters in each, the largest taking precedence; and such variations as do occur are in most cases where the number of the chapters in the tractates is equal.

For the eight volume first edition of this publication the order adopted is for practical reasons as follows:

- Vols. I and II. Shabbath.
- Vol. III. 'Erubin.
- Vol. IV. Pesahim.
- Vol. V. Yoma.
- Vol. VI. Sukkah and Bezah.
- Vol. VII. Rosh Hashanah, Ta'anith and Shekalim.
- Vol. VIII. Megillah, Wed Katan and Hagigah. [page xxiv]

For the edition de luxe it was found expedient to follow another sequence:

- Vols. I, II and III. Shabbath.
- Vols. IV and V. 'Erubin.
- Vols. VI and VII. Pesahim.
- Vol. VIII. Yoma.
- Vol. IX. Sukkah.
- Vol. X. Bezah and Rosh Hashanah.
- Vol. XI. Ta'amth, Shekahm and Megillah.
- Vol. XII. Mo'ed Katan and Hagigah.

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 'APPOINTED SEASONS'

The Sabbath, declare the Talmudic Sages, is equal in importance to all the precepts in the Torah.⁵ . evaluation of the Sabbath will accordingly involve as preliminary some explanation of the significance of the Torah. Briefly stated, the foremost meaning of the word Torah is teaching. The primary purpose of the Torah which God gave to Israel is educative. Its aim is the idealization of all earthly action and

the bringing of all detail of life into touch with the divine.

The laws of the Torah are divided into two classes — socio-moral and religious. They consist in other words of precepts concerning the relations between man and God and precepts governing the relations between man and man. Precepts that affect directly our fellowman are regarded as socio-moral. Those regulating the cult and ritual are religious. These differences in the laws, however, involve no contradiction in the unity of the Torah. For what is not moral law, is law helping thereto, or means of educating thereto, although the connection may not be evident in all cases.

SABBATH The Sabbath stands at the boundary between the moral and the religious signification of the Torah. In the law of the Sabbath is thus to be found the quintessence of Judaism. It is both 'a memorial of the work of the beginning', and 'of the going out of Egypt'. Its socio-ethical character is well illustrated in Deuteronomy (V, 12-15): *Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy as the Lord thy God commanded thee. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto thee, in it thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates, that thy man-servant and thy maid-servant may rest as well as thou. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God brought thee out thence by a mighty hand and by an outstretched [page xxv] arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.* Here we have the emphasis on the social significance of the Sabbath as the symbol of the emancipation of the slave. The man must rest on the day when the Israelites rest. It is further worthy of note that the Hebrew word 'as well as' [H] is the same as that used in the injunction to love thy neighbour as thyself⁶ (Lev. XIX, 18). The wording of the Sabbath law in Deuteronomy clearly shows that the Sabbath is designed to make secure the equality of men in spite of the differences in their social position. This is indeed a clear testimony to the fundamental connection of Sabbath with morality.

The religious significance of the Sabbath is emphasized in Exodus (XX, 8-11) where it is presented as the symbol of the creation as well as the end of creation. This aspect of the Sabbath makes it not merely a day of rest, of cessation of labour, but a Holy Day. *Therefore the Lord blessed the day of Sabbath and sanctified it*, a phrase which is conspicuously absent from the Deuteronomic version.

The proper observance of the Sabbath in testimony to the Creator and His creation demands the sanctification of objects as well as of life.⁷ This does not imply a flight from the holy pleasures of life: *Thou shalt call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable* (Isa. LVIII, 13). But it does mean a surrender to the Creator of all such activities as shut in man's outlook during the working day of the week and blind him in consequence to his actual relations to God and to his fellowman.⁸ Hence the many restrictions of the Sabbath day regarding the handling of objects (*Mukzeh*, v. [Glos.](#)) as well as of action and movement, which form the major part of the laws discussed in this 'Order'. By such a surrender to God man testifies that the world and all that is therein is God's. 'He who observes Sabbath testifies to Him at Whose word the world came into existence'.⁹ The sanctification of the Day of Rest [page xxvi] makes the Sabbath into a day in which man is free to attend to the claims of his relations to God and to his fellowman. *Blessed be the man that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it and keepeth his hand from doing evil* (Isa. LVI, 2). The Sabbath thus becomes a day of religious inwardness and moral regeneration.

FESTIVALS The same twofold significance is found in the Festivals. The three pilgrimage Festivals, Passover, Tabernacles and Pentecost, commemorating the mighty acts at the Exodus that culminated in the Revelation at Sinai and the national experiences of Israel during their wandering in the desert, combine the religious and the social aspects of the Torah. The former finds expression in the special ceremonies and rituals

attached to each of the Festivals, proclaiming the sovereignty and overruling providence of God, and the in the Festival rejoicings in which the stranger, the orphan and the widow were to be invited to participate

DAY OF ATONEMENT AND NEW YEAR But the most striking expression of the close connection between the religious and social aspects of the Law is found in the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement is the chief Festivals not excepting the Passover Festival. The Bible describes the day as one given to fasting and solemn sacrifice. The high priest atoned for himself, then for the priests, lastly all Israel. Yet an old Mishnah¹¹ tells us that the Atonement-day was at the same time a day of national rejoicing. Young men and young women held bride-show. The richer young women had to dress in plain white linen in order not to outshine the poorer — a piece of consideration, which is as yet conspicuously absent from the polished societies of modern times. In the evening all went to the house of the high priest who made a feast for all his friends. The culminating act was the sending of the scapegoat into the wilderness as a pronouncement of the pardon of the people. In later days when the sacrificial system ceased, the Day of Atonement still retained its twofold significance. While the fasting and abstention from other bodily requirements spelled contrition, confession and [page xxvii]repentance for all trespasses both ritual and national, the liturgy of the day, significantly enough, practically excluded from the confession ritual ritual trespasses. Moreover the reconciliation of man with God was made dependent on the reconciliation of man with man. Closely connected with the Atonement-day is the New Year day, both being periods of Divine Judgment and days of self-scrutiny and moral regeneration,¹² in which too the socio-moral and religious aspects of the Torah are merged into

MINOR FEASTS AND FASTS And not only the appointed seasons prescribed by the Torah possess this twofold significance of Jewish feast and fast; it is found equally in all the holidays and fasts of lesser sanctity instituted by the religious leaders of later generations: Purim with the Megillah reading and a distribution of 'gifts to the poor'¹³ as special features of the feast; and the four minor fasts with their insistent message of the love of 'truth and peace'¹⁴ alike show the inseparableness in the Jewish conception of morals and religion. And similarly the rain-fasts were like the minor fasts on which they were patterned. The various regulations of the rain-fasts described in Ta'amth were primarily designed to rouse people to contrition and to make amends for any social wrongs of which they might have been guilty.¹⁵ The only feast in which the blending of the moral and religious is absent is Hanukkah (the Feast of Dedication). Hanukkah is strictly speaking not a Feast. The eight days of Hanukkah, except for the kindling of lights and a recital of *Hallel* and other liturgical additions, are but ordinary working days and do not bear the stamp of *Tob*.¹⁶ Nevertheless, [page xxviii] later Jewish piety introduced the moral note characteristic of Jewish feasts in the celebration, and made the distribution of charity a feature also of this festival.¹⁷

METHOD AND SCOPE

TEXT. The Text used for this edition is in the main that of the Wilna Romm Edition. Note has, however, been taken of the most important variants of manuscript and printed editions some of which have been adopted in the main body of the translation, the reason for such preference being generally explained or indicated in the Notes. All the censored passages appear either in the text or in the Note

TRANSLATION. The translation aims at reproducing in clear and lucid English the central meaning of the original text. It is true some translators will be found to have been less literal than others, but in checking and controlling *every line* of the work, the Editor has endeavoured not to lose sight of the main aim of the translation. Words and passages not occurring in the original are placed in square brackets.

NOTES. The main purpose of these is to elucidate the translation by making clear the course of the arguments, explaining allusions and technical expressions, thus providing a running commentary on

the text. With this in view resort has been made to the standard Hebrew commentators, Rashi, the Tosafists, Asheri, Alfasi, Maimonides, Maharsha, the glosses of BaH, Rashal, Straghun, the Wilna Gaon, etc.¹⁸ Advantage has also been taken of the results of modern scholarship, such as represented by the names of Graetz, Bacher, Weiss, Halevy, Levy, Kohut, Jastrow, Obermeyer, and — happily still with us — Krauss, Buchler, Ginzberg, [page xxix] Klein and Herford among others, in dealing with matters of general cultural interest with which the Talmud teems — historical, geographical, archaeological, philological and social.

GLOSSARY AND INDICES. Each Tractate is equipped with a [Glossary](#) wherein recurring technical terms are fully explained, thus obviating the necessity of explaining them afresh each time they appear in the text. To this have been added a Scriptural Index and a [General Index](#) of contents.

In the presentation of the tractates the following principles have also been adopted:

- i. The Mishnah and the words of the Mishnah recurring and commented upon in the Gemara are printed in capitals.
- ii. [H] introducing a Mishnah cited in the Gemara, is rendered 'we have learnt'.
- iii. [H] introducing a Baraita, is rendered 'it has been (or was) taught'.
- iv. [H] introducing a Tannaitic teaching, is rendered 'Our Rabbis taught'.
- v. Where an Amora cites a Tannaitic teaching the word 'learnt' is used, e.g., [H] 'R. Joseph learnt'.
- vi. The word *tanna* designating a teacher of the Amoraic period (v. [Glos.](#)) is written with a small 't'.
- vii. A distinction is made between ... [H] referring to a Tannaitic ruling and ... [H] which refers to the ruling of an Amora, the former being rendered 'the *haluchuh* is ...' and the latter, 'the law is ...'.
- viii. R. stands either for Rabbi designating a Palestinian teacher or Rab designating a Babylonian teacher, except in the case of the frequently recurring Rab Judah where the title 'Rab' has been written in full to distinguish him from the Tanna of the same name.
- ix. [H] lit., 'The Merciful One', has been rendered 'the Divine Law' in cases where the literal rendering may appear somewhat incongruous to the English ear.
- x. Biblical verses appear in italics except for the emphasized word or words in the quotation which appear in Roman characters.
[page xxx]
- xi. No particular English version of the Bible is followed, as the Talmud has its own method of exegesis and its own way of understanding Biblical verses which it cites. Where, however, there is a radical departure from the English versions, the rendering of a recognized English version is indicated in the Notes. References to chapter and verse are those of the Massoretic Hebrew text.
- xii. Any answer to a question is preceded by a dash (—), except where the question and the answer form part of one and the same argument.
- xiii. Inverted commas are used sparingly, that is, where they are deemed essential or in dialogues.
- xiv. The archaic second person 'thou', 'thee' etc. is employed only in *Aggadic* passages or where it is necessary to distinguish it from the plural 'you', 'yours', etc.
- xv. The usual English spelling is retained in proper names in vogue like Simeon, Isaac, Akiba, as well as in words like *halachah*, *Shechinah*, *shechitah*, etc. which have almost passed into the English language. The transliteration employed for other Hebrew words is given at the end of each tractate.
- xvi. It might also be pointed out for the benefit of the student that the recurring phrases 'Come and hear:' and 'An objection was raised:' or 'He objected:' introduce Tannaitic teachings, the two

latter in contradiction, the former either in support or contradiction of a particular view expressed by an Amora.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Once again I have the pleasure of expressing my warmest appreciation of the industry and scholarship which the several collaborators have brought to bear upon their work.

To Mr. Maurice Simon, M.A., who has assisted in many directions, and to my dear wife for her invaluable help in many ways, I would express my especial thanks.

I should also like to pay personal tribute to Mr. J. Davidson, [page xxxi] the Governing Director of the Soncino Press, for the care and self-sacrificing devotion with which he has seen Seder Mo'ed through the press.

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With the publication of this 'Order' we are approaching the completion of the Soncino Edition of the first complete and unabridged English translation of the Babylonian Talmud. Only those who have been closely connected with it can appreciate the exacting and strenuous nature of the task. I tender my humble thanks to the Almighty God for having given me strength to carry through, amidst other labours, my heavy share of the work, and on behalf of all those who have been concerned with this publication I offer the traditional prayer:

I. EPSTEIN

Jews' College, London.
Sivan 24, 5698
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Footnotes

1. V. Baneth, E., *Die sechs Ordnungen der Mischna, Seder Mo'ed*, p. 168.
2. This arrangement rests on the order given by Maimonides in his introduction to his commentary on Zera'im.
3. In the current editions of the Babylonian Talmud the tractates appear in the following order: Shab., 'Er., Pes., Bez., M. Hag., R.H., Yoma, Suk., Ta'an., Shek., Meg. In J.T., Yoma precedes Shek.; and Hag., M.K. For other variations v. Stra H., *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Philadelphia 1931) p. 365.
4. The sequence given by him follows that of Maimonides. Though, strange to say, neither in the Spanish nor French Recension of the *Epistle* is there any reference to Megillah, Mo'ed Katan and Hagigah. V. Ed. Lewin, M.B. p. 33.
5. V. Hal. 5a; J. Ber. I, 5; J. Ned. III, 14; Ex. Rab. XXV, 12.
6. V. Cohen H., *Religion der Vernunft aus d. Quellen d. Judentums* (1929) p. 182.
7. V. Bialik, *Sefer ha-Shabbath*, p. 518.
8. Cf. Huxley, A., *Ends and Means*, p. 298: 'We fail to attend to our true relations with ultimate reality and, through ultimate reality, with our fellow beings, because we prefer to attend to our animal nature and to the business of getting in the world'.
9. Mekilta, *Yithro*, 8.
10. V. Deut. XVI, 11 and 14. Cf. Maimonides, (*Guide for the Perplexed*, III, 53: 'They (the festivals) promote the good feelings that men should have to each other in their social and political relations'.
11. V. Ta'an. 26b.
12. Cf. Sherira Gaon, *Epistle*, *loc. cit.* (French Recension): 'New Year is like the harbinger ([H]) of the Day of Atonement
13. V. Esth. IX, 22.
14. Zech. VIII, 19.
15. V. Ta'an. i6a and Buchler, A. *Maimonides VIII Centenary Memorial Volume* (Soncino Press) p. 13ff.
16. The technical term by which a Jewish festival is designated. This term occurs in connection with Purim (Esth. IX, 22)

and on this basis Purim was to be treated according to an old Baraita as a day on which all work was prohibited (v. Meg. 5b). Although this restriction was not made absolute, the established custom to the present day is to abstain from non-urgent manual labour on Purim (v. *Shulhan Aruk O.H.* 696, 1). True it is that this term occurs also in connection with Hanukkah, v. Shab. 22b, but the phrasing there makes it quite clear that it is designated as *Yom Tob* only in respect of *Hallel* recital and thanksgiving [H] Cf. with this the phrase [H] in Esth. loc. cit. It is a noteworthy fact that but for a brief reference to the Hanukkah light, the Hanukkah feast is ignored by the Mishnah; for the reason v. Naltmanides on Gen. XLIX, 10.

17. V. [H], 670.

18. These names are referred to more fully in the list of Abbreviations at the end of each Tractate.

[Directory of Sedarim and Tractates](#)

