

playing for money, writing down the score, and public ball games are not. There is also an afternoon service in the synagogue. The unusual feature of this, unlike the weekday afternoon services, is that the Torah is read. The Kaddish, the Alenu, and the Sabbath Amidah are said at this, as at the other two Sabbath services. The following prayer, recited in the afternoon service, states the ideal of Shabbat:

... thou hast given unto thy people ... a rest granted in generous love, a true and faithful rest, a rest in peace and tranquillity, in quietude and safety, a perfect rest wherein thou delightest. Let thy children perceive and know that this their rest is from thee, and by their rest may they hallow thy Name.

At any time after nightfall comes the evening service followed by the ceremony marking the end of Shabbat. This is conducted in both home and synagogue and, like the welcoming ceremony, it uses wine and light. Showing the distinction between the holy day of Shabbat and weekdays, the ceremony is known as *Havdalah* ('separation' or 'division'). There are berakhot (blessings) over wine and then over sweet-smelling spices. The spices, contained in a box, are passed round. Some take this as a way of sweetening the deeds of the coming week, others as a way of helping the memory of Shabbat to linger. A rabbinic saying suggests that on Shabbat people are given an additional soul, bringing them nearer to God. Perhaps the spices are to refresh the departing soul or to revive the body as it feels weak when the extra soul departs. Shabbat being over, a plaited candle is lit and hands are spread out towards the light as a third blessing is said. This is a reminder that the first thing God created was light to be used to good purpose. With the going out of Shabbat, the 'first day' of creation begins. All the physical senses are used in Havdalah to heighten the sense of the spiritual. In the essential prayer of Havdalah, God is praised for separating secular from sacred; dark from light; pagan nations from Israel; the six days from Shabbat. The candle is extinguished with the wine as one last blessing is said concluding the ceremony. There often follow songs, notably one about Elijah, prophet and herald of the Messiah.

13 the rhythm of the year – festivals and fasts

In this chapter you will learn:

- about the importance of annual commemoration in Judaism
- about the calculation of months and years in the Jewish calendar
- about the minor festivals and the fast of Tishah B'Av.

There is in Judaism a strong sense of the passage of time. We have seen this in the pattern of daily prayer and particularly in the weekly separation of Shabbat (the Sabbath) from the rest of the week. This sense, especially of historical time, is particularly strong in the annual remembrances of Judaism. At specific times each year, historical events are not just commemorated but recreated and so, the aim is, re-lived. Time is *experienced*, in both seasonal and historical terms, so that an awareness of time and of its significance is cultivated. With the exception of the Day of Atonement, all the special days in the Jewish year are designed to call to mind God's activity in nature or history or both.

History

The opening verses of Leviticus 23 tell us about Shabbat. This chapter goes on to institute other 'appointed festivals', presenting, in effect, a summary of the Jewish religious calendar. These festivals are 'holy convocations', that is, gatherings of the people specifically to hear the Torah read. They are *appointed* times or seasons, moments in time when the eternal, spiritual world can be glimpsed. The rituals and prayers associated with each festival, from biblical times until now, are a means to a spiritual experience, ways of appropriating the significance of God's activity in the history of a people and making it your own. Clearly, observing the rituals and saying the prayers do not automatically convey spirituality. It is possible for Jews, as for the adherents of any other religion, to go through the motions. The way in which the Jewish year is punctuated by a number of festivals, however, each contributing particular qualities to the Jewish way of life, has extraordinary potential. Festivals, and especially the meals associated with them, are what non-Jews tend to know about Judaism. They should not be viewed, however, as simply an indulgent string of parties. Rather they give the year a religious rhythm.

The details of behaviour and practice given in the halakhah are designed to amplify the intention of the biblical source. Festivals stemming from post-biblical times similarly celebrate events important in the history of the Jewish people. Though there is variation of local custom and liturgy, all groups jointly recognize the festivals as marking various experiences of the Jewish people and as responding to the emotional needs related to these experiences, thereby offering comfort, inspiration, and a general sense of meaning in Jewish history.

Season

The stress is primarily on the historical event, bringing it to life so that the sense of divine activity in the past is, ideally, experienced afresh in the present. Yet there remains in the Jewish year a sense of the seasonal and agricultural. Just as the year includes the full range of natural possibilities through the sequence of the seasons and the agricultural cycle, so the festivals harness a rich variety of psychological and spiritual qualities. Many scholars stress the agricultural origin of the festivals, believing their historical significance to have been developed later. They point to the similarity between the biblical festivals and those of other countries in the ancient Near East. What soon became vital for the Jewish people was the affirmation of God's work in human history, even if these celebrations of historical events may first have been more general agricultural feasts. Certainly, the ancient seasons, counted according to the phases of the moon yet inevitably determined also by the effects of the sun on the crops, explain the two basic series of celebrations.

The first series falls in the spring and early summer. Preparation for the spring holiday of *Pesah* (Passover) begins on the tenth day of what is sometimes counted as the first month (Nisan) and the festival itself commences on the fifteenth day of the month, the day of the full moon and lasts a week (or eight days). Beginning with the second day of Passover, according to Pharisaic tradition, a period of 49 days is counted out, culminating in the festival of *Shavuot*, ('Weeks' or 'Pentecost') celebrated for one day or two. Balancing these spring holidays is a series of autumnal festivals a half-year later. The first of these is *Rosh Hashanah* ('the New Year') observed for two days, at the beginning of the seventh month (Tishrei). It is followed 10 days later by *Yom Kippur* ('the Day of Atonement'), a one-day fast. On the fifteenth of the month, *Sukkot* ('Tabernacles') is celebrated for a week (or eight days), culminating in the additional one day festival of *Simchat Torah* ('Rejoicing of the Law').

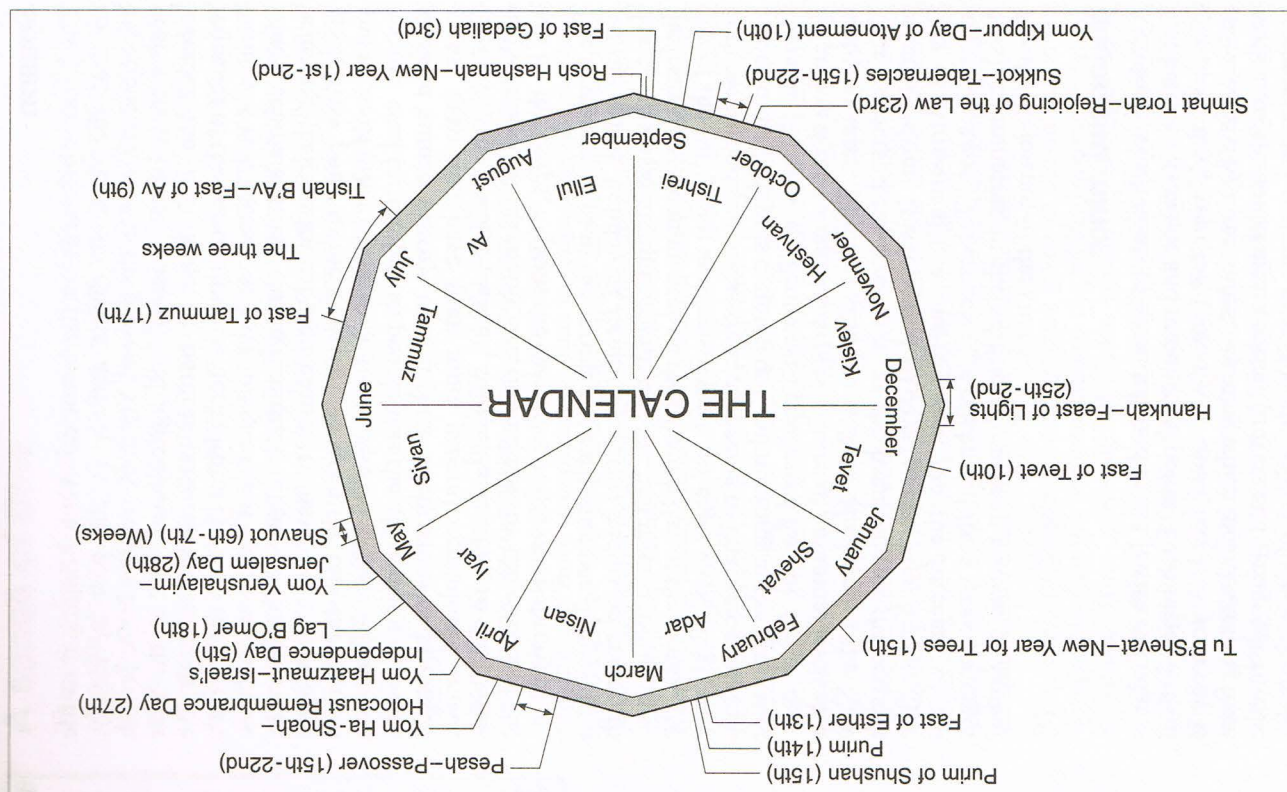
Major and minor

A division which needs to be understood in the Jewish calendar is that between its major and minor focal points. Each major festival is a 'holy day', *yom tov* (literally, a 'good day'). A *yom tov* is characterized by three things: rejoicing which includes resting from work and ceremonial meals; special prayers and synagogue rituals; ceremonies and customs related to the subject of the festivals. By

these criteria, there are three major festivals: Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot. (Strictly speaking, only the first and last days or Pesah and Sukkot are 'holy days'. The intermediate days are 'half-festivals' on which services are held and when only essential work is permitted.) They depict three stages of the exodus, with the liturgy of each festival speaking of it as 'a memorial of the Exodus from Egypt'. Passover marks the freedom of the exodus itself; Weeks gives freedom its spiritual connotation by marking the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, and Tabernacles stresses that true security is found in God's presence by marking the journey through the wilderness to the promised land.

These three are called Pilgrim (or Foot) festivals because, in Temple times, Jews would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. Since the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, such offerings are no longer made, but the festivals are still important and involve many celebrations in the home and the synagogue. In Israel, the Pilgrim festivals retain their agricultural connection, falling at the appropriate season of the year: Pesah at the time of the barley harvest; Shavuot at the time of the wheat harvest; and Sukkot at the ingathering of crops. In other countries too, the celebrations of the Pilgrim festivals ingeniously interweave the historical, agricultural, and personal. At Pesah, for example, there are thoughts of the freedom of people from political bondage, the liberation of the earth as it springs to new life, and the yearning of most people to escape the oppressive or even just the mundane in life. Taking a rather different character are the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They are major, in respect of originating in a biblical injunction and having work restrictions, but they are solemn rather than joyous festivals. Together the three days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are called the 'High Holy Days' or the 'Days of Awe'. The stress is on the awesome demands of God in each Jew's relationship with him and with other people. Yom Kippur, which is also a major fast, is the most important festival of the year.

All the other festivals and fasts of Judaism are minor, not in the sense of being unimportant, but in that they are not commanded in the Bible and consequently are not subject to the same restrictions as the biblical festivals and fasts. Some of these, viz. Israel's Independence Day, Jerusalem (Reunification) Day, and Holocaust Remembrance Day, are modern observances. Others are ancient, notably the festival of Purim which, though based on the biblical book of Esther, is held to be post-biblical and hence a minor festival.



Length of the month

The Gregorian calendar, with 12 months of slightly varying length, is based on the movement of the sun. The Jewish calendar is also solar, in the sense that the agricultural seasons of the year were, and are, determined by the position of the sun. When the ancient Israelites worked out their calendar, however, they based it mainly on the movements of the moon. The moon takes approximately 29.5 days to orbit the earth. As it gets to the end of its orbit, less and less of it is seen, until it disappears altogether and then it reappears. It is the *reappearance* of the moon, the new moon, that marks the new month for Jews. The Hebrew word for 'month' is *hodesh* which means 'that which is renewed'. The moon is what is renewed and with it the month. The Jewish calendar is then essentially lunar.

Length of the year

Clearly a month cannot last 29.5 days, but each pair of months will add up to 59 days, so the months are taken in pairs, the first having 30 days, and the second 29 days and so on. (There are sometimes slight variations in this.) This gives 354 days in an ordinary Jewish year, 11 days fewer than in the solar year. If this were left, the Jewish calendar would fall behind by 11 days each year until the lunar year was months behind and the festivals would eventually fall at the wrong time of the year. Deuteronomy 16:1 says that the Passover celebration of the exodus falls in the month of *Aviv* ('ripening'). This is understood to mean that it must always fall in the spring. To ensure this and the appropriate seasonal timing of Shavuot and Sukkot an intercalation is made, keeping the lunar year in step with the solar year. This is achieved by adding an extra month, a sort of leap month, seven times in a cycle of 19 years. It is the last month of the Jewish year, *Adar*, which is doubled. In the third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth year of every 19-year cycle, there is a 'second Adar', *Adar Sheni*. Jewish festivals and fasts occur at set dates in this calendar. For example, Pesah lasts from 15 to 22 of the month called *Nisan*. The months of the Jewish year are often numbered from Nisan because it occurs in the spring, at a time of new beginnings. Exodus 12:2 gives the occurrence of the exodus as determining this as the first month. (It should be noted, however, that the Jewish New Year festival

actually comes in the Autumn.) The dates to which 15–22 Nisan correspond in the non-Jewish calendar will vary slightly from year to year. For instance, in 2007, Pesah falls on 3 April–10 April, whilst in 2000, it fell on 20 April–27 April. The names of the months of the Jewish year are Babylonian and go back to the Jewish captivity in the sixth century BCE.

Numbering the years

So far as the numbering of the years themselves is concerned, there was no uniform method of dating until the Middle Ages. The current practice was then adopted of reckoning from the creation of the world *Anno Mundi* (AM), which medieval Jewish scholars calculated from the biblical account to have occurred in the year 3760 BCE. It is debated in the Talmud whether the creation took place in the first month (Nisan) or the seventh month (Tishrei). For dating purposes the latter view is followed, so the new year, and hence the Jewish New Year festival, falls on the first day of Tishrei. To convert dates from CE to AM, 3760/1 needs to be added to the CE date. Thus 2000 CE becomes the year 5760 from 1 January–29 September; from 30 September (the date of the Jewish New Year in 2000) the Jewish year is then 5761. This method of dating is used in Jewish legal documents, letters, and newspapers, but it has no doctrinal significance. Its use, therefore, does not normally disturb those who prefer to interpret the biblical record differently to allow for a belief in the vast age of the earth implied by science.

The new moon

Even though the new moon is marked in most diaries, few non-Jews pay much attention to it. In ancient Israel, however, the appearance of the new moon was of great importance. People watched out for it in order to know when the next month started and when, therefore, to celebrate their festivals. The new moon would be expected on the twenty-ninth or thirtieth day of the month. On the thirtieth day, the Sanhedrin, the great legislative court in Jerusalem, would assemble and wait for two reliable witnesses to come and testify that they had personally seen the crescent moon in the sky. Satisfied with the report of the witnesses, the Sanhedrin would announce the thirtieth day as the new moon, *Rosh Hodesh* (literally 'the head of the month'). Should weather conditions prevent this testimony to the moon's

reappearance, the court in Jerusalem would automatically declare the thirty-first day of the month Rosh Hodesh. The message was spread throughout Israel by lighting beacons and sending messengers.

A problem arose with the reliability of this procedure when Jews settled outside Israel. There would inevitably be a delay before these Diaspora communities, notably in Egypt and Babylon, had it confirmed whether the rabbinical court had announced the day after the twenty-ninth as Rosh Hodesh or had waited for the next day. Jews in these communities, therefore, celebrated the thirtieth as Rosh Hodesh and on those occasions when they were informed of its postponement to the thirty-first they observed this as a second day of Rosh Hodesh. In order to be quite sure that they were observing the festivals on the right date, these Jews automatically observed each festival for an extra day. Pesah became eight days, Shavuot two days, Rosh Hashanah two days and Sukkot eight days. The one exception was Yom Kippur which, because of the hardship of fasting for two days, lasted only one day. Those living in Israel still adhered to the time lengths stipulated in the Bible, except for Rosh Hashanah which was given an extra day as it fell on the first day of the month and so it was difficult to publicize its arrival in time even in Israel.

When the supreme court in Jerusalem no longer existed to announce the new moon, a permanent calendar was worked out. This system, still used today, was permanently established under Hillel II, Patriarch of Palestinian Jewry, about 360 CE. Even after the calendar was fixed, the talmudic sources state that the Jews of the Diaspora were advised to hold fast to the custom of their ancestors and keep the 'two days of the Diaspora' (Betzah 4b). Orthodox Jews outside Israel still follow this practice. They regard it as a means of expressing the special holiness of the land of Israel where they keep to the exact dates laid down in the Bible. Reform Jews, in whatever country, do not observe the extra days (though most observe Rosh Hashanah for two days in order to be in harmony with the practice in modern day Israel), since they believe that knowing the precise occurrence of each festival renders the talmudic advice unnecessary. Some Conservative Jews also argue for the abolition of the second day of the Diaspora because of the anomaly of treating as a holy day a day that is not observed as sacred in Israel.

The new moon today

Numerous biblical passages mention the new moon alongside Shabbat and other festivals (e.g. Numbers 28). In early times, it was clearly treated as a festive day when people did only essential work. Over the centuries, different ideas developed about just what work was allowed on the day. Today the new moon is little different from any other day. It is regarded as a minor festival by Orthodox Jews and its approach is solemnly announced in the synagogue on the previous Shabbat, rather like it was announced in the Sanhedrin. On the day itself, certain features in the service distinguish Rosh Hodesh from the ordinary weekday. Amongst the prayers is one that the new month will be 'unto us for good and for blessing, for joy and gladness, for salvation and consolation, for support and sustenance, for life and peace, for pardon of sin and forgiveness of iniquity.' The account of the ancient sacrifices offered on Rosh Hodesh (Numbers 28:1–15) is read from the Torah. (When the new moon falls on Shabbat, this reading follows the Torah portion for the week.) Also, part of the *Hallel* is recited. *Hallel* is the Hebrew for 'praise' and the word is used to mean Psalms 113–118. These are especially joyful psalms and are, therefore, sung during most festivals. (Only part of the *Hallel* is read on Rosh Hodesh when labour is permitted and on the last six days of Passover when it is considered unfitting to sing the full praises of God as the Egyptians drowned.)

The festivals of Hanukah and Purim

Though minor festivals (on which there are no work restrictions), Hanukah and Purim hold considerable importance for what they commemorate historically and for the attitudes they celebrate. Both highlight loyalty and courage in the face of persecution, the importance of religious freedom and survival, and the power of right to conquer might. Hanukah especially speaks to those nationalist and secular Jewish circles, in which other religious festivals are minimized, because it expresses a fight for Jewish identity and independence.

Maccabees and the Festival of Dedication

The spirit and purpose of Hanukah are summed up in its name. *Hanukah* is the Hebrew for 'dedication' and the festival commemorates the dedication of the Temple, or rather, the

rededication of the Temple after it had been desecrated by opponents of the Jewish faith in the second century BCE. In the fourth century, the powerful Alexander the Great tried to unite his subjects under Greek ways and beliefs. This process of Hellenization brought some benefits to the Jewish people of the time, but it also posed a threat. There was the temptation to abandon Jewish tradition and adopt Greek ways.

After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, his empire was divided among different rulers. The land of the Jews, by now called Judea, became part of the Seleucid (Syrian-Greek) Kingdom. In 175 BCE, Antiochus IV, the ruler of the Seleucid Kingdom, stepped up attempts to force the Greek religion on Jews who had remained faithful to belief in one God. He proclaimed himself a God, taking the title Antiochus Epiphanes ('god manifest'), and urged the Jewish High Priest, (Jason and then Menelaus) who in effect governed Judea, to spread Greek influence among the Jews.

In the following years, Antiochus became fierce in his opposition to the Jewish religion, issuing decrees, for instance, banning circumcision, the study of the Torah, and Sabbath observance. Pagan altars were erected throughout Judea and unclean animals sacrificed on them. Finally, in the month of Kislev (December) 167 BCE, he set an altar to the God Zeus in the Temple court and ordered that pigs be sacrificed. This sparked off a rebellion led by Mattathias, an elderly priest in Modin, a village outside Jerusalem. Mattathias and his five sons launched guerrilla attacks on the Greek units. After Mattathias' death in 166, the loyalist Jews were led by his third son, Judah, nicknamed 'Maccabeus'. The name 'Maccabee' suggests 'hammer' and possibly refers to Judah's heroism against the Greek forces. By December 164, Judah and his men had gained control of Jerusalem. There they restored and rededicated the Temple.

The story of the rededication of the Temple, and of the Maccabean Revolt which led up to it, is told in 1 and 2 Maccabees, the main story coming in 1 Maccabees 1–4. The climax came when, on 25 Kislev 164 BCE, Judah and his men entered the Temple and tore down the altar which had been desecrated exactly three years before. They built a new altar and relit the great menorah (the seven-branched candlestick). After the original purifying and rededication ceremonies, it was agreed that there should be an annual celebration of this event (1 Maccabees 4:59).

The Talmud and the Festival of Lights

Besides being the festival of Dedication, Hanukkah is also known as the 'festival of Lights'. This relates to a story in the Talmud (Shabbat 21a) which tells of a miracle in the Temple when Judah and his men rededicated it. When they entered the Temple, they found just one jar of oil that had not been defiled and with this they lit the menorah. This amount of oil would normally last only one day but, the story goes, it miraculously lasted eight days, giving time for fresh, pure oil to be prepared.

The Talmud says that to celebrate this miracle a lamp should be lit on each of the eight days of Hanukkah. These eight lights have become the main symbol of the festival. In fact, there are nine lamps or candles as one candle is used to light each of the eight special candles, which must not be used for any practical purpose. The lighting-candle is called the *shamash* ('servant'), and it is placed in the middle of the Hanukkah menorah, sometimes called a *hanukiah*. On the first night of Hanukkah the first candle (furthest right on the menorah) is lit. On the second night, another candle is added. The servant candle lights the new candle and then the one on its right and so on, until by the last night all the lights are burning. Placing the candles from right to left but lighting them from left to right gives equal importance to both sides of the hanukiah, indicating that God's presence is everywhere. The Talmud instructs that the lights burn outside where people can see them (Shabbat 22a) and so a hanukiah is often to be seen in the windows of Jewish homes at Hanukkah.

The candle-lighting takes place when all the family is together. There are special songs, notably *Maoz Tsur* ('O fortress, rock', addressed to God). The song recalls successive deliverances: from Egypt, from the Babylonian exile, from Haman's threat of extermination (see below), and, lastly, from the terror of Antiochus Epiphanes. Its point is the one central to the Haftarah (reading from the Prophets) on Hanukkah: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts.' (Zechariah 4:6). Presents are also given; foods fried in oil are often eaten, chiefly *latkes* ('potato pancakes'). A traditional children's game is played with a *dreidle* ('spinning-top'). Each of the top's four sides has on it a Hebrew letter. Together the letters stand for the Hebrew phrase: 'A great miracle took place there'. That Hanukkah is a festival of light, has special songs, presents, foods, and games, and falls in December (sometimes the 25th Kislev actually coinciding with the 25th December) sometimes leads

non-Jews to think of Hanukah as the Jewish Christmas. This is an unhelpful comparison both for Christians and for Jews. The central meaning of Christmas, that God became incarnate in the man Jesus, is vital to Christians and unacceptable to Jews. The central meaning of Hanukah resides in the resistance of Judaism to assimilating ideas and practices from other religions.

Esther and the Festival of 'Lots'

Purim is the other minor festival which remembers a difficult period in Jewish history and urges hope and trust in God. Like Hanukah, this festival is not commanded in the Torah but stems from the decision of the Rabbis to commemorate an historical event. Purim is based on the story vividly told in the book of Esther – a book accepted in the canon of the Bible only after much rabbinical dispute (Megillah 7a). The name of God nowhere appears in the book (a feature which has rendered artists free to illuminate the scroll). Modern scholarship is inclined to regard the book as a fictional short story, perhaps with an historical core, composed in Maccabean times to bolster Jewish patriotism. The first mention of Purim in Jewish literature occurs when 2 Maccabees 15:36 mentions the 'Day of Mordecai', celebrated on the 14 Adar. Some attach greater authenticity to its purported setting in Persian times. Its importance in the Jewish Year is not dependent on such speculations, however. Purim is the most light-hearted of the festivals and it teaches with a refreshing jollity the lesson, repeatedly needed in Jewish history, that oppressors will not have the last word against goodness and truth. In the early days of Liberal Judaism, the movement deleted Purim from the calendar. It was considered inappropriate to encourage Jewish nationalism and to applaud the characters of the book of Esther all of whose motives may be criticized.

The festival derives its name from the word used in the book of Esther for 'lots'. These lots were drawn by the villain of the story, Haman, to decide on what day to slaughter the Jews. This day, 14 Adar, became in the event the day of his own execution. The essence of the story of Esther is that she married the fifth century BCE king of Persia, Ahasuerus (thought to be Xerxes I), concealing her Jewish identity. Esther's only relative, Mordecai, uncovered a plot to kill the Jews and told Esther. This plot came from Ahasuerus' Prime Minister, Haman, who hated the Jews. Mordecai, who worked for the king, refused because of his Jewish faith to bow down to Haman and Haman, therefore,

persuaded the king that his Jewish subjects were not loyal. His plot seriously backfired when Ahasuerus was informed of it by his own wife, Esther. Impressed by his wife's risking her own safety by admitting her Jewishness, he executed not the Jews but Haman himself.

The carnival atmosphere of Purim is captured particularly by the children. They often dress up and enact humorous plays based on the story of Esther. They also boo, stamp, and wave *groggers* (rather like football rattles) every time Haman's name comes up in the reading in the synagogue. Reading the whole of Esther in public is one of the four mitzvot (obligations) of Purim. It is read not from a book but from a scroll. Because the Hebrew for 'scroll' is *megillah*, the book of Esther is often called simply 'the Megillah'. The Megillah is read both in the evening and the following morning. The most famous of the traditional foods associated with Purim are three-cornered pastries made of sweet dough, and filled with a mixture of poppyseeds and honey. Made by all Jewish communities, these cakes are known by a variety of names and are supposed to represent Haman's hat, Haman's ears, or Haman's pockets (in Yiddish *hamantaschen*).

Esther 9:22 speaks of the contrast between sorrow and gladness, mourning and holiday. To try to capture this contrast, Jews observe a fast on the day before Purim. They are remembering the fast of Esther before she went to plead with her husband to spare his Jewish subjects (Esther 4:16). The other three mitzvot of Purim itself are: festivity and rejoicing (a festive meal is usually part of the day); gifts to the poor; and gifts to each other. Esther 9:18–19 gives these mitzvot. The passage also explains why Jews in Jerusalem celebrate Purim on the 15 Adar, one day later than Jews everywhere else. The antiquity of ancient Jerusalem's wall from the days of Joshua renders it, according to the Rabbis, 'a walled city', equivalent to the ancient Persian capital of Shushan (or Susa) which won its victory a day later than the Jews of the provinces. The festive day is called *Shushan Purim*. In a leap year, Shushan Purim and Purim are celebrated on the fifteenth and fourteenth of the thirteenth month, Adar Sheni.

Other festivals

There are three other festivals related particularly to the land of Israel but also remembered by Jews elsewhere.

The New Year for Trees

The first of these is ancient and goes back to when the agricultural New Year was considered to begin. In modern life, we speak of the calendar year (beginning in January), the financial year (beginning in April), and the academic year (beginning in September). Ancient Israel also had more than one New Year according to what aspect of its life was being measured. Farmers had an obligation to set aside each year a proportion of their crops for the priests and the poor. There needed to be a date from which these contributions or tithes were counted and this was fixed as 15 Shevat, in Hebrew *Tu B'Shevat*.

The Talmud suggests that the reason for this choice of date was that it marked the end of the rainy season in Israel (Rosh Hashanah 14a). The sap of the trees became active again, bringing new life, and so a new crop of fruit, to the trees. The festival is often called the New Year for Trees and in Israel is marked by tree-planting. Jews living in other parts of the world often contribute money to such tree-planting projects. They also express their ties with Israel by eating fruit particularly associated with Israel, such as pomegranates and olives. It is a tradition to try to eat fifteen kinds of fruit. Nowadays, Tu B'Shevat is a celebration of thanksgiving for the fruit of the ground.

Israel's Independence Day and Jerusalem Day

The modern festivals of *Yom Haatzmaut* (Israel's Independence Day) and *Yom Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem Day) fall on 5 and 28 Iyar respectively. 5 Iyar 5708 (14 May 1948) was when David Ben Gurion declared the creation of a Jewish state to be named 'Israel'. In 1949, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel declared it a public holiday and established special orders of service for evening and morning worship. Some Orthodox Jews do not recognize Yom Haatzmaut as a new festival but many Jews throughout the world do observe it. In Israel, sirens herald a two-minute silence in which those who died in the conflict surrounding the Declaration of Independence are remembered. If the date coincides with Shabbat, Yom Haatzmaut is celebrated on the preceding Thursday. 28 Iyar (7 June) was the third day of the Six Day War in 1967 when the Israeli defence forces captured the portion of Jerusalem which had been in the Arab sector since partition in 1948. In this section of the city

was the Western Wall, the only part of the Temple left after 70 CE and the holiest place of Jews. The chief chaplain of the forces blew the ram's horn, whilst the Defence Minister placed within the Wall's crevices a slip of paper on which he had written the prayer: 'Peace be upon Israel'. Now an annual day of celebration, Yom Yerushalayim sees huge crowds gathering at the Western Wall. Many Jews around the world celebrate in the synagogue the reunification of the old and new sections of Jerusalem.

Fasts

An important part of celebrating for Jews is eating. When wanting to do the opposite of celebrating, Jews stop eating and fast. There are five public fast days in Judaism. (There are also fasts which are limited to specific groups or individuals. The day before Pesah is a fast for the first-born, remembering the sparing of the first-born Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 12). Another is that of a bride and groom before their wedding ceremony, expressing the beginning of a new stage in life.) Only one is commanded in the Torah and this is Yom Kippur (see Chapter 15) during which Jews express sorrow for wrongdoing. Jewish tradition has added four fast days, all commemorating sad events in Jewish history. Some judge these to have agricultural roots like the festivals.

Fasting for the loss of the Temple

The most important fast after Yom Kippur falls on *Tishah B'Av* ('9 Av'). On this date in 586 BCE, the Babylonians destroyed the first Temple and, in 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the second Temple. Other tragedies in Jewish history also occurred on Tishah B'Av, notably the fall of Bar Kokhba's fortress in 135 CE, the expulsion of the Jews from Britain in 1290 CE, and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 CE. Some synagogues commemorate the Holocaust destruction on Tishah B'Av. Others prefer to set aside a different date for this, 27 Nisan, known as *Yom Ha-Shoah* (see Chapter 16). Like Yom Kippur, Tishah B'Av is a 25-hour fast. (All other fasts are from dawn to dusk.) It is marked by an intense atmosphere of sadness in the synagogue. The curtain is removed from the ark and the covers from the reading desk. Lights are low and the biblical book of Lamentations, lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem, is chanted mournfully. At the morning service, prayers are said quietly without the adornments of tallit and tefillin. Amidst the

sadness, there is hope for the future and, in the seven weeks following Tishah B'Av, each Shabbat service includes messages of consolation and promise, beginning with Isaiah 40.

Non-Orthodox Jews do not think it right to emphasize the Temple and to pray for its restoration. They observe Tishah B'Av in recognition of the Jewish suffering involved in the two Temple destructions and other black events in Jewish history, but they do not observe the other fasts lamenting the loss of the Temple. Orthodox Jews, however, believe that the Temple was such a vital sign of God's presence with his people that it must remain a focus of Judaism. Psalm 137:5-6 expresses this:

*If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.*

They, therefore, observe the additional fasts of 10 Tevet, which marks the beginning of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, and 17 Tammuz which is the date when the Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem in 70 CE leading to the destruction of the Temple and the related fast of 3 Tishrei, known as the Fast of Gedaliah. After they had destroyed the Temple and deported many Jews in 586 BCE, the Babylonians appointed Gedaliah as governor over the people remaining in Judah. Rivals murdered him, shattering hopes of any continuing Jewish community. For Orthodox Jews, the three weeks following 17 Tammuz are the saddest time of the Jewish year, with mourning customs (for example, not listening to music) intensified as Tishah B'Av approaches. In many communities, there is no eating of meat and no drinking of wine from the 1-9 Av inclusive.

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the pilgrim festivals

In this chapter you will learn:

- about the origins of the three major festivals of Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles
- about the importance of reliving the experiences of gaining freedom, receiving the Torah, and depending on God
- about the rich symbolism and ceremonies of these festivals.