**Holy Space and Holy Time**

September 28, 2015

### Dr. Deborah Weissman

Born in New York City, Debbie settled in Israel in 1972. Her Ph.D. is from the Hebrew University on the social history of Jewish women's education. She is one of the founding members of Kehillat Yedidya, an Orthodox synagogue in Jerusalem's Bak'a neighborhood which integrates Halacha (Jewish religious law) with feminism, tolerance and pluralism. Debbie is involved with Jewish religious feminism, interfaith dialogue and the religious peace movement. Immediate Past President of the ICCJ, International Council of Christians and Jews.

1. Reading from Barry Holtz, *Finding Our Way: Jewish Texts and the Lives We Lead Today*.
2. Reading: “Is there any way that Judaism can speak with authority in a time when we wish to find a connection to the stability of tradition? . . . . To live in the modern world means to face questions about the nature of tradition.”
3. Critique: Barry Holtz suggests that television is in tension with “modern Orthodoxy.” Nor is modern fashion in clothing in tension.
4. What *is* in tension is pluralism, human rights, openness to science, the status of women. These are the real tensions.
5. Reading: “During a dispute among the rabbis over the ritual purity of a certain oven . . . Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, a distinguished sage of the first century, had taken the position that us of the oven is permissible.”
6. Reading of the Story:
7. “On that day, Rabbi Eliezer brought all the proofs in the world, but the other masters would not accept them.” So he asked the carob tree to give proof, and the tree moved a hundred cubits. It is a miraculous proof. But the other rabbis rejected it.
8. “Then he said to them: If the law is according to me, let this stream of water prove it. And the stream of water turned and flowed backwards.” But the rabbis did not accept this either. After that, the walls of the House of Study began to topple. [At this point, Barry Holtz left out a section. When the walls toppled, Rabbi Joshua addressed the walls of the Study House, asking them why they are interfering with the conversation.]
9. Finally, “A voice came forth from heaven and said: Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer? The law is according to him in every case. Rabbi Joshua rose to his feet and said: ‘It is not in heaven’” [Deut. 30:12].
10. Reading: “What is the meaning of ‘It is not in heaven’? Rabbi Jeremiah said: The Torah has already been given once and for all from Mount Sinai; we do not listen to voices from heaven. For You have already written in the Torah at Mount Sinai: ‘After the majority must one incline’ (Exod. 23:20).” And God smiled and said, “My children have defeated me.” (Talmud, *Bava Metzia* 59b)

1. Further Discussion of the Text.
2. Is God ironic? He cannot be really defeated, so this “defeat” is what God wanted.
3. The people are finding ways of using the Torah to argue with God
4. The Torah is higher than the other parts of the Scripture, and higher than the Mishnah and Talmud.
5. A Text from the 18th Century. A Rabbi studied the question of what it means for God to be “defeated.” The conclusion:
6. Barry Holtz: “The Torah is not in heaven he [Rabbi Joshua] quotes, and we can’t be expected to rely on miracles for the system to work. Human agency, even at the expense of ‘truth,’ is what really matters.”
7. Weissman: Holy Time and Holy Space is like the weather: we can’t do much about it. They are decreed by God. So our task is to understand them.
8. Leviticus 11:10-12.
9. The Reading. “The land you are to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you would sow your seed and then water it by hand,[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/deuteronomy/11" \l "05011010-1) [the Hebrew has “by foot,” a reference to Egypt] as in a vegetable garden. [11[g](http://www.usccb.org/bible/deuteronomy/11" \l "05011011-g)]  No, the land into which you are crossing to take possession is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks in rain from the heavens, [12a] land which the LORD, your God, looks after; the eyes of the LORD, your God, are upon it continually through the year, from beginning to end.”
10. Discussion.
11. Watering “by foot” means that the farmer can kick open an irrigation canal. What does it mean to live in a desert?
12. The promised land means crossing the Jordan. We sang “River Jordan is chilly and wide, Milk and honey on the other side.” Jordan is not much of a river. It’s a trickle.
13. Minnesota as 10,000 lakes; Israel has one. It is dependent on “rain from heaven” for water. The cycle of rain and dryness in the land of Israel is the cycle of the seasons – the holy time and the holy land.
14. Climate Change in Israel.
    * + 1. Global climate change. Pope Francis has discussed it. People who live in coastal areas are precarious. Tsunami in Indonesia was devastating.
        2. Climate change. Debbie: “I’m upset because climate change is altering our relationship to the land.” Jews are impacted, because they depend on rain from heaven.
15. Further Reading. “If, then, you truly listen to my commandments which I give you today, loving and serving the LORD, your God, with your whole heart and your whole being, [14] I will give the seasonal rain to your land, the early rain[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/deuteronomy/11" \l "05011014-1) and the late rain, that you may have your grain, wine and oil to gather in; [15] and I will bring forth grass in your fields for your animals. Thus you may eat and be satisfied.”
    * + 1. When Debbie worked at a summer camp in New York, rain was a problem. What could the children do? But rain is not a problem. It manifests God.
        2. The “early rain” in Israel and the “late rain.” The early rain is in late November. The late rain is as late as April. In Deuteronomy, this is the way it should be, if we follow God’s commandments.
        3. Agricultural products: grain, wine, and oil. In Marseilles, see the Museum of Mediterranean Civilization. One exhibit focused on these three products.
           1. Grain: we make bread loaves (challah or challot).
           2. Wine.
           3. Oil. This was used for lamps.
        4. On November 20, we see grain, wine and oil as the symbols of Shabbat. On Pessach (Passover), we can only use Mazzah (mazzoth), or unleavened bread. Candles, wine and bread are also Eucharistic. Christian rituals come out of Deuteronomy 11. Chris Craig notes: Candles are from bees, and oil is from olives. Debbie promises to look this up. John Michaloski wonders whether this is from Europe, where there are bees but not olive trees. Also, evil “malum” is related to apple “māla mattiana.”
        5. Was Eve’s “apple” a grape, a citron, an olive?
16. The Festivals (Leviticus 15). This marks the beginning of the rainy season and the end of the dry season. A young Jew from Mexico City went to the synagogue on the eighth day of Succoth. “Why are we praying for rain when it is already raining?” The father replied, “That is not our rain.” In other words, Jews all over the world are praying for rain, not for themselves, but for the land of Israel.
17. Sabbath: Leviticus 15. “The LORD said to Moses: [2] Speak to the Israelites and tell them: The following are the festivals of the LORD, which you shall declare holy days. These are my festivals: [3] For six days work may be done; but the seventh day is a sabbath of complete rest,[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23" \l "03023003-1) a declared holy day; you shall do no work. It is the LORD’s sabbath wherever you dwell. [[b](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023003-b)]”
18. Passover. We stop praying for rain, and start praying for dew. “The Passover of the LORD[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23" \l "03023005-1) falls on the fourteenth day of the first month, at the evening twilight. [[d](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023005-d)6] The fifteenth day of this month is the LORD’s feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. [[e](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023006-e)7] On the first of these days you will have a declared holy day; you shall do no heavy work. [8] On each of the seven days you shall offer an oblation to the LORD. Then on the seventh day you will have a declared holy day; you shall do no heavy work.”
19. Pentecost (or Shavuot, 50 days). “Beginning with the day after the sabbath, the day on which you bring the sheaf for elevation, you shall count seven full weeks; [[h](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023015-h)16] you shall count to the day after the seventh week, fifty days.[ [\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023016-1) [i](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023016-i)] Then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD.”
20. Transition: “The LORD said to Moses: [24]Tell the Israelites: On the first day of the seventh month [[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023024-1) [k](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023024-k)] you will have a sabbath rest, with trumpet blasts as a reminder, a declared holy day; [25] you shall do no heavy work, and you shall offer an oblation to the LORD.”
21. Yom Kippur. “The LORD said to Moses: [27] Now the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. [[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023027-1) [l](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023027-l)] You will have a declared holy day. You shall humble yourselves and offer an oblation to the LORD. [28] On this day you shall not do any work, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD, your God. [29] Those who do not humble themselves on this day shall be cut off from the people. [30] If anyone does any work on this day, I will remove that person from the midst of the people. [31] You shall do no work; this is a perpetual statute throughout your generations wherever you dwell; [32] it is a sabbath of complete rest for you. You shall humble yourselves. Beginning on the evening of the ninth of the month, you shall keep your sabbath from evening to evening.”
22. Booths or Succoth. This is the feast (according to the Mishnah) of receiving the Torah on Sinai. “The LORD said to Moses: [34] Tell the Israelites: The fifteenth day of this seventh month is the LORD’s feast of Booths,[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23" \l "03023034-1) [m](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23#03023034-m) which shall continue for seven days. [35] On the first day, a declared holy day, you shall do no heavy work. [36] For seven days you shall offer an oblation to the LORD, and on the eighth day you will have a declared holy day. You shall offer an oblation to the LORD. It is the festival closing. You shall do no heavy work.”
23. The eighth day of Succoth. The Jews begin to pray for rain.
24. In the Diaspora, there are two days of fasting. The eighth day is Simchat Torah.
25. Discussion.
26. The “Species.” See Leviticus 23:40. “On the first day you shall gather fruit of majestic trees, branches of palms, and boughs[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/23" \l "03023040-1) of leafy trees and valley willows. Then for a week you shall make merry before the LORD, your God.” We wave the species in the six directions: east, west, north, south, up and down. Plus the seventh, the “spiritual direction.”
27. Debbie: the four (trees, palms, boughs of leafy trees, boughs of willows) are sold by her young friend.
28. Other Festivals in the Jewish Calendar.
29. What Are They?
    * + 1. Chanukah. This is in the Winter Solstice (not described in Torah).
        2. Purim. This is in the end of winter, a month before Passover. It is Debbie’s personal favorite, because it is a festival of eating, drinking, singing and dancing, and dressing up in costume. She sends packages of sweets to her friends. At a deeper level, Purim is the festival of “identity with the other.” You have to know who you are, so that you may come as you are not – or maybe as who you really are, deep inside. She once dressed up as a ghost, once as a punk rocker. Maybe it is who you really want to be. It is a “psychological” festival.
        3. Simchat Torah. This is the festival of dancing. This is a holiday on the eighth day of Succoth. It is a day of frivolity, like Purim.
        4. Holocaust Remembrance Day.
        5. Day of Remembering the Fallen Soldiers of Israel.
        6. Israel’s Independence Day.
        7. Jerusalem Day. After 1967, Debbie celebrated Jerusalem Day; but now she has stopped celebrating it. Now, in the wake of the ensuing occupation, and the failure to treat people of East Jerusalem with respect, she cannot celebrate.
30. Lunar and Muslim Calendars.
    * + 1. The lunar calendar. Every month there is a full moon. Many festivals are celebrated with the full moon. There are festivals on the full moon because there is more light. You cannot light an incandescent bulb in your “booth.” You can only use candles.
        2. Muslim Calendar. The Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. One adds the term “al Hajj” to one’s name: Anwar al Hajj Sadat. Jews use the word “Hag,” which is the same word. Three times a year, on Pessach, Shavuot, and Succoth, the Jew comes to Jerusalem. Some Muslims say, “Jewish festivals are tied to nature, but Muslim festivals are above nature.”
        3. Jewish festivals vary, according to the lunar calendar. Passover (spring), Succoth (autumn), Hannukah (winter).
31. Discussion.
    * + 1. Janelle: how important is it to celebrate the Jewish holy days during the season as it is done in Jerusalem?
        2. Debbie: It is very important. We pray for rain, not for ourselves, but for Israel.
32. The Number Seven.
    * + 1. Examples.
           1. Pessach: the first and seventh days are special.
           2. The seventh month of the year.
           3. Seven intermediary days of Succoth.
           4. On Simchat Torah, the scroll marches seven times.
        2. Significance.
           1. After Jewish funerals, there is the “shevah” the seven-day period of offering condolences.
           2. Seven species in the land of Israel.
           3. Two explanations of “seven.”

On the head of a human being, there are seven orifices: 2 eyes, 2 hears, 2 nostrils, one nostril.

The Prague Rabbi: the physical world in which we live has six directions: north, south, east, west, up and down. A cube. Plus the seventh, the “spiritual direction.”

When someone dies, the meaning of the person’s life is enhanced by mourning.

In marriage, there is a “spiritual” meaning to the physical world.

* + - 1. Trumpet blasts and the new year; and why does the new year start in the seventh month?

Coffee Break

1. Trumpet Blasts.
2. In Nehemiah, we read about Rosh HaShannah, and we read about trumpet blasts.
3. The festival of the new year “morphed” into Rosh HaShannah, along with the autumn harvest. We are moving from one year into the next. Repentance and renewal take place during the ten days.
4. What is the residual appearance of the *shofar* on Rosh HaShannah? The central command is about gathering and blowing the *shofar*. But if a Jewish community does not have a ram’s horn, could they blow a bull’s horn or an antelope.
   * + - 1. Neh. 4:18: **“**For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the **trumpet** was by me.**”**
         2. Neh. 4:20: **“**In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the**trumpet** resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.**”**
5. Meanings of the Shofar. It is a “wake up call.”
6. In Exodus, the trumpet is a metaphor for the voice of God (19:16, 19:19, 20: 18).
7. In Leviticus, it’s a way of announcing the Sabbath (23:24, 25:9).
8. In Joshua, it had to do with the fall of Jericho (6:4, 6:20)
9. In Second Chronicles, it refers to victory in battle (13:12-15) and the dedication of the temple (5:13).
10. In second Samuel, it referred to the return of the ark (6:15).
11. In Isaiah, it is the voice of God (18:3, 27:13, and 58:1).
12. Overview. Debbie distributes a festival, “Brief Summary of Jewish Festivals and Fasts.”
13. List.
    * + 1. Rosh HaShanah.
        2. Yom Kippur.
        3. Sukkot.
        4. Sh’mini Atzeret – Simchat Torah.
        5. Chanukah.
        6. Tu Bishevat.
        7. Purim.
        8. Pesach.
        9. Shavuot.
14. Discussion.
    * + 1. The calendar is a great achievement of Rabbinic Judaism, no matter what branch. Compare the disputes among Christians regarding Easter. For the Jews, there are very few decisions by a central authority. The calendar is one.
        2. Jews learned how to be Jews without the Talmud. See Psalm 137:
    1. Psalm 137. “By the rivers of Babylon there we sat weeping when we remembered Zion. [[a](http://www.usccb.org/bible/psalms/137#23137001-a)] [2] On the poplars in its midst we hung up our harps. [[b](http://www.usccb.org/bible/psalms/137#23137002-b)][3] For there our captors asked us for the words of a song; Our tormentors, for joy: “Sing for us a song of Zion!” [4] But how could we sing a song of the LORD in a foreign land? [5] If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget.” [[c](http://www.usccb.org/bible/psalms/137#23137005-c)]
    2. Fervent prayer, singing, dancing, discussion of the Torah, has replaced the Temple and sacrifice.
       * 1. Only the very conservative want a restoration of the Temple. The Temple Mount has become a flashpoint of conflict. Mainstream Orthodox (not extremists) would like Judaism to go back to the Temple Mount. They want to pray alongside the mosque.
         2. See Micah 4: “In days to come the mount of the LORD’s house Shall be established as the highest mountain; it shall be raised above the hills, And peoples shall stream to it: [[a](http://www.usccb.org/bible/micah/4#41004001-a)2] Many nations shall come, and say, “Come, let us climb the LORD’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, That he may instruct us in his ways, that we may walk in his paths.” For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”
15. The Western Wall. There is a group called “The Women of the Wall.” They try to hold services at the wall. But Debbie says, “My synagogue is as good as the wall as a place to pray.” But people pray for the restoration of the sacrifices. A news anchor on MSNBC asked, “What does it mean to be a Jesuit?” The anchor said, “Jesuits find God in everything.” So Debbie feels God’s presence everywhere.
16. The Involvement of Children. Judaism emphasizes the importance of the children. If there are children at home, there is a beautiful custom of blessing the children on Friday nights. Fathers put their hands on the heads of the children, just like in “Fiddler on the Roof.”
17. Examples.
    * + 1. Children love building a Succah/shelter, and camping out in it.
        2. At the Passover Seder, there are many features focused on the children. “Do this, so that the children may ask about the custom.”
        3. Channukah has children’s involvement.
        4. Many synagogues have special activities for children. Men read Torah in one group, women read in another group, and children in a third group.
        5. When children begin school, they are given the letters of the Hebrew alphabet dipped in honey.
18. Bar Mitzvah and Bath Mitzvah.
    * + 1. These are seen as a transition from childhood, when children are not expected to follow the commandments, to adulthood, when they are.
        2. Discrepancy: girls at age 12, boys at age 13. Sixth and seventh graders show a difference between girls and boys. A 12-year old boy is less mature.
        3. Critique. In order to ensure equality, the age of girls in some areas has been raised to 13. But Debbie says: “Equality does not mean sameness.”
19. Single Mothers. An unmarried woman with children is not “outside the law.” One unmarried mother with fraternal twins said that the daughter liked having the Bath Mitzvah before her twin brother, because it is “her own birthday.”