

We recognize the word **מועד**-*mo'ed* from its common usage as **holiday** or **festival**. **מועדים**-*mo'adim* commonly refer to the festivals, Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot. **הול**-*hol ha-mo'ed* is the term for the less-sacred days of the festival, the intermediate days during which one can engage in normal work and non-work related activities. We also find the word **מועד**-*mo'ed* as a component of the term **אהל**-*ohel mo'ed* which refers to the inner oblong structure at the center of the mobile desert sanctuary and which we commonly translate as **Tent of Meeting**. The word **מועד**-*mo'ed* therefore, **conveys both time and space**. The **מועדים**-*mo'adim* are **appointed-times of meeting** and the **אהל**-*ohel mo'ed* is the **appointed-space of meeting**.

The word **מועד**-*mo'ed* first appears in the creation story:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֶת בְּרִקיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לִהְבֵּדִיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנָיִם. (בר' א:ד)

God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the heavens, to separate the day from the night, that they may be for signs—for mo'adim, for days and years.
(Gen. 1:14)

The purpose of the "lights" was to mark time. The "big light" was for daytime, and the "small light" was for nighttime. Each day could be divided by different "signs," which probably referred to the major moments of the day, namely sunrise, noon and sunset, and the other fractional points on the sun's trajectory across the sky. Likewise, nighttime could be divided into different segments by the position of the moon on its nighttime trajectory. The moon exhibits different "signs" throughout the course of a month as it waxes and wanes through its various phases. Likewise, the year can also be segmented into different **appointed times** or **seasons**, **mo'adim**, which would be observed by the lengthening and shortening of daylight as well as the positions of the sun on the horizon at sunrise and sunset during the course of a year. The creation story presents the universe as being composed of different realms of space - land, water, heavens - and different realms of time - **signs** and **seasons**, **days** and **years**. **Signs** are to **days** as **seasons** are to **years**. **The Torah thus presents Time as being comprised of smaller and larger units**. **Mo'adim-seasons** are built into creation and affect every living thing, plant and animal alike. Human beings, who are brought into existence at the climax of creation, inhabit a world which is governed by a system of time that belongs to the universe.

¹ While almost everywhere else in the book of Leviticus God tells Moses to instruct Aaron and the priests, here God tells Moses to instruct the people. The subtlety is not lost on us. A sacred calendar of Israel does not belong to an elite governing authority or class it belongs to the entire people.

² Exod. 12:2. By organizing certain activities connected to the Passover meal at specific dates and times, they gained control over their own lives. Freedom entails the ability to control your own time.

When we come to Leviticus 23 however, we begin to apprehend that while the universal system of time - signs, seasons, days and years - belongs to everything and everyone, there is a particular system of time that belongs to God. God has a calendar that he shares with his covenantal people. This calendar consists of the **מועדי ה'**-*mo'adei ado-nai*, literally, the **appointed-times of God**. Lev. 23:

(1) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם: מוֹעֲדֵי ה': (2) אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם - מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ. (3) אֵלֶּה הֵם - מוֹעֲדֵי.

(1) *God spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Appointed Times of God: (2) That they are to declare them as mikra'ei kodesh-proclamations of holiness. (3) They are my appointed-times.*

To paraphrase: **God says to Moses: Moses, Go before the entire people, (not only Aaron and the priests¹) and give them a discourse about the Appointed Times of God. Talk to them about the calendar.** Let's recall that this is a people that has been liberated from slavery² and has constructed an elaborate mobile sanctuary with an intricate sacred space, a **Tent of Meeting**, at its core, a place that represents God's presence among them. **Having just constructed and dedicated that sacred space, they are now going to hear about how to "construct" sacred times.** You construct sacred space through the donation of items and gathering of materials and then the labor that takes those items and makes them into the finished space. **You "construct" sacred times by declarations.** A declaration of a specific time elevates it and makes it holy. It becomes a **mikra-kodesh, that which has been proclaimed to be holy**. It is that act of declaration that renders the ordinary times which are part of the ordinary cycle of **signs and seasons, days and years** into God's **appointed-times**. (An aside: The Torah is acutely aware of **appointed-times** in human lives. A particularly interesting example is Pharaoh's birthday which figures prominently in the story of Joseph.³ But in general, we know that appointed-times for human beings is so crucial because already at the beginning of Genesis⁴ the Torah is practically obsessed with age. Ages, which are determined by the times that human beings appoint for themselves, function as one of the organizing devices of all the narratives and biblical history.)

³ Birthdays of the Pharaoh must have been days of feasting, amnesty and spectacles. On this particular birthday, Pharaoh made a feast for all his attendants, awarded amnesty to his chief wine-steward and executed his chief baker. Gen. 40:20-22.

⁴ Gen. 5:3 is the first example: **Adam lived thirty and a hundred years, and then he begot one in his likeness, according to his image, and called his name Shet.** In order to count years, you need to know birthdays!

The Torah's list of God's appointed times in Lev. 23 begins with Shabbat.

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבְתוֹן מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ
 כָּל מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ שַׁבַּת הוּא לֵה' בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֵיכֶם. (ויקרא כג:ג)

For six days may work be done, but on the seventh day [is] Sabbath, Sabbath-Ceasing, a proclamation of holiness: any-kind of work you are not to do. It is Sabbath to God, throughout all your settlements. (Lev. 23:3)

We are already familiar with Shabbat from manna story (Exod. 16:22-30), the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:7-10) and other places.⁵ Its location here conveys to us that it is first among the **proclamations of holiness** and in that way it is set apart from the others but also conjoined with them. Unlike the fifth commandment which refers back to Creation,⁶ the presence of Shabbat at the head of this list validates and reinforces that it is the single most important day within the biblical system of time and that it generates a seven-day rhythm for all life, six workdays followed by a seventh day of holiness, a day that God shares with his people. What follows in the rest of the chapter is the listing of seven **mikra'ei kodesh-proclamations of holiness**. Notice how they are distributed throughout the course of the year: two in the first month, one in the third month **and four in the seventh month. The seventh month is the most prominent of the months. God, who imprints time in series of sevens, has imprinted every seventh day with holiness; imprinted the completion of the seventh week from the first mo'ed with holiness, and imprinted the seventh month of the year as the month with the most proclamations of holiness.**

1	The First day of the Matzot holiday.	FIRST MONTH
2	The Seventh day of Matzot holiday.	
3	The Day of the Elevation of the Bread of the Firstfruits.	THIRD MONTH (AFTER SEVEN WEEKS)
4	The Day of the Remembrance of the Teruah.	SEVENTH MONTH
5	The Day of Purgation.	
6	The First Day of Sukkot.	
7	The Eighth Day of Sukkot.	

The remaining five months of the year (the cold, desolate, windy, awful, winter months) have no unique **mikra'ei kodesh** other than the regular Shabbat every seven days.⁷

Metaphors for Holidays. Leviticus 23 is an elaborate calendar whose main theme, or metaphor, (at least one of

⁵ Part of the Covenant Code, Exod. 23:12, in connection with the construction of the sanctuary, Exod. 31:12-17, and 35:1-3).
⁶ Exod. 20:10.
⁷ Professor Rachel Elijor, Hebrew University, discusses this observation in a discussion entitled, **Sodot ve-Gilgulav Shel Luah Shana ha-Ivri - Secrets and Cycles of the Hebrew Calendar (in Hebrew)**, which can be found on YouTube.
⁸ April 15, 2026, Episode 230, **Israel's 10 Days of Awe: From Holocaust Memorial Day to Independence Day.**

them, see below for the other) is **meeting. We meet God at the appointed times of holy proclamations.** On a recent *For Heaven's Sake* podcast,⁸ Donniel Hartman, in conversation with Yossi Klein Halevi, offered the following metaphor for holidays. Referring specifically to the week of national days in Israel - Yom Hashoa, Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut - he said: **The whole idea of a holiday cycle is to work as a speedbump to stop you from your regular flow of life. It's time for you to readjust and to reconnect to another dimension, the spiritual, intellectual, moral.** Ironically, the metaphor was a **speedbump** itself! Is life truly a **highway**,⁹ on which we are cruising at high speeds, and the holiday/speedbump nearly causes us to roll over? Are we, as Jews, on the road **less traveled by**¹⁰ going at slower speeds where the **speedbump** gives a jolt, but we recalibrate ourselves within the space of a second? Using **road, journey** and **orbital trajectory** as metaphors for the regular flow of life, we might suggest that the holidays enable us to **turn in at a rest stop**, or **visit a pilgrimage spot**, or **enter another planetary orbit** where we can **rest, explore, and imagine**. Having gone on many canoe trips, I am tempted to think of life **as a beautiful river** in Ontario. But are the holidays a set of **rapids** that force you to pull your canoe to the side or the overnight **camping stop** on your way towards your destination? Indeed, all of these metaphors **shape** our experiences (note the sculpting metaphor) and enable us, in Hartman's words, to **reconnect to another dimension** of our lives. Many other metaphors come to mind including, **Life as Story. Holidays as Chapters**. But let us not forget that we are presently located in the book of Leviticus, which is itself, according to the scholar Mary Douglas, **arranged as a literary replica of the desert Sanctuary. Chapters 1-17 are the Outer Court of the sanctuary complex, and Chapters 18-27 represent the inner oblong sacred zones, the Ohel Mo'ed, the Tent of Meeting.** In this scheme, we locate Chapter 23 adjacent to the Holy of Holies, where we would have found the candelabrum, the table of the showbread, and the incense altar.¹¹ **The meaning of the sacred calendar in Lev. 23 is that we are to meet God at sacred appointed-times if not in the actual sacred appointed-space, then in the one we have constructed in our minds. Shabbat Shalom!**

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Elissa Kaplan and Pam Plastock in gratitude for the emotional and gustatory support that the Temple Family provided during Pam's recent illness.

⁹Cue Canadian singer-songwriter Tom Cochrane's 1991 song, *Life is a Highway*.
¹⁰From Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*. Dozens of great poems and songs use the metaphor. Including Psalm 23, which conjures up a much slower road, calming, restorative and comforting.
¹¹See Gary Rendsburg's **Leviticus as a Literary Tabernacle** at thetorah.com/article/leviticus-as-a-literary-tabernacle.