

RACHEL ELIOR

## THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE

### The Representation of the Imperceptible

#### I. A PLACE OF MEMORY

For almost a thousand years the Temple was in Jerusalem. Throughout the two thousand years since its earthly destruction, the Temple has been the fundamental symbol for remembrance and the essential 'place of memory' for Jewish consciousness, serving as the focus for enduring hope and yearning in Jewish prayer. In the obligatory daily liturgy (*shmone-esre*) Jews beseech God for the re-institution of the Temple, the House of the Lord, the holy dwelling place of the divine glory. This request is urged and uttered every day, three times a day. In the blessing following the sharing of food at every meal, the devotional request for the reconstruction of the Temple is recited. This request is restated dramatically at the conclusion of the daily prayer as well as during many other prayers on various occasions. The Temple is known in the words *Hekhal* - sanctuary, *Mikdash* - sacred dwelling place of the holy one, *Beit Elohim* - the house of the Lord, *Beit Olamim* - that could be translated either as the eternal house and or as the house of both worlds. It is also called *Beit Ya'ar HaLevanon* the house of the forest of Lebanon. Historians of Jewish Studies from ancient times until the present categorize antiquity in terms of the First Temple period (ca. 960-587 B.C.E) and the Second Temple period (ca. 515 B.C.E-70 C.E.) and the venerable phrase 'renew our days as in the days of old - rebuild our Temple as in ancient times' has been recited on countless occasions in the Jewish traditional world from antiquity until today.

The Temple is remembered in times of sorrow and joy in the recitation of the Psalms, and on significant occasions the Temple has been a living memory imbued with religious associations. The actual structural dimensions and figurative motifs of the temple as well as its sacred perceptions, ritual heritage and spiritual significance are discussed in the detailed legal discourse known as the *Mishnah*, which was composed in the first centuries after its destruction. All the legal and legendary dimensions are elaborated in detail in the traditional discursive literature known as the *Talmud*, which was compiled after the *Mishnah* (ca. 200-500 C.E). In addition to this liturgical commemoration and historical ritual, a rich mystical literature preserved its transcendental significance and numinous nature, which appear in the legal and legendary literatures known respectively as *Halakhah* and *Aggadah*. Mystical heavenly sanctuaries commemorated the 'Mysterium Tremendum' of the lost sanctuary and the secret meaning of the lost ritual, while magnificent heavenly hosts of angels replaced the abandoned priestly service on earth. Throughout the first

thousand years of the Common Era, the seven heavenly sanctuaries known as *Shiva'a Hekhalot* and the twenty four angelic-priestly vigils known as *Malakhei haSharet* (ministering angels) - together with the seven angelic princes of countenance - were the major motifs of Jewish mysticism.

There is no doubt that the millennium of actual Temple worship generated a multifaceted priestly tradition and an incredibly elaborate temple mythology which was consecrated in part and forgotten in part through the course of time and changing historical situations. Further, there can be no doubt that the yearning of the Jewish people for the lost Temple during the last two thousand years played a significant role in Jewish historical perception as well as in Jewish religious identity. However, we may legitimately ask what was the real object of commemoration and subject of yearning. Could it have been a heartfelt longing for a return to the lost glory of the past? A desire to regain lost sovereignty of the land and its nation's destiny? Or perhaps the reinstatement of the eminent focus and heart of national religious life or the restoration of the mythical era when divine order reigned and holy ritual made it manifest? Are we encountering the desire to relive the lost beauty of the sublime sanctuary and to reexperience the only instance and place where tangible divine presence was permitted in a religion which strictly prohibited any tangible expression of the divine outside of the sacred appointed place and time? What part does the commemoration of the lost priestly cult and the perpetuation of the ritual of the myth of the eternal return play? Is this a desire to sense divine Providence regarding a sacrificial cult or perhaps the experience of true holiness in the perceivable unity of holy time and holy place? Is it a delving into the 'depths of the well of the past', in the words of Thomas Mann, in order to preserve the past from oblivion? May it possibly be a projection of today's religious yearnings onto a past that never was?

There is no one answer to the array of questions concerning the significance of the Temple; nor are there precise demarcations between history and mythology, which are often entwined in ancient texts and mystical traditions. First and foremost, for the overwhelming part of the last two millennia, since 70 C.E., the Jewish people lived in exile from their land and their Temple. During their exile the memory of the Temple became the symbolic expression with which they confronted a host of painful realities: lost national existence, a lack of freedom from the continued loss of independence and sovereignty, and a compromising of personal and religious identity. The Temple was the symbol of the archetypal divine order of an ideal mythical past when divine presence and human experience were united. It was not primarily the tangible walls or the memory of any particular given moment in religious experience or political history; on the contrary, it became the paradoxical intangible-tangible symbol of the manner in which reality should have transpired as opposed to actual circumstance. The mythical-mystical Temple became the symbol of yearned-for redemption during two thousands years of exile. The Temple represented cosmic order and everlasting divine chronotopy uniting holy time and holy place in a myth of eternal ritual cycle - one which was perpetuated after its destruction by mystical inspiration and imaginative memory combined with various oral and written traditions of heavenly sanctuaries and mystical liturgical calendars kept by angels and

priests. The abstract ritual commemoration was anchored in biblical tradition, daily prayer, and mystical hymns; it was reinforced by the formal study of *halachic* discourse.

The Jerusalem Temple could have served as the symbol of redemption that transcended the borders of time and space because from its inception it constituted both the earthly dwelling of the infinite divine presence and the representation of the ideal eternal cosmic order within temporal confinements. This unity of opposites, one which united heaven and earth in ritual order, was in the core of the sacred precincts. The Temple was the place where the unrepresentable was represented; in it, the abstract, immeasurable creative power was ritualized, and the invisible divine cycles of time were expressed and symbolized. It was the place where the divine law was formed, kept, read, and taught; there, sacred ritual was performed in order to unite the hidden God with an eternal earthly representation in sacred time and sacred place; it accomplished this with holy books, divine commandments, religious rituals, and sacred liturgy. The Temple stood within both transcendental mythical space as well as on actual historical-geographical ground. The penetrating definition of Mircea Eliade points to the significance of this duality: 'In mythical geography, sacred space is the essential real space, for in the archaic world the myth alone is real. It tells of manifestations of the only indubitable reality - the sacred'<sup>1</sup>.

## II. SACRED SPACE AND HEAVENLY CALENDAR

The Bible relates to us that the first Temple had been erected by King Solomon according to a heavenly prototype previously shown to his father King David (I Kings 5:18-19; chap. 6-7; I Chronicles 28:11-19; II Chronicles 3-4). Every detail was specified because the earthly Temple was intended to reflect a complex cosmic order representing the everlasting creative duration of time and the eternal divine presence in the creation. This perception was consolidated around a divine solar calendar. The combined and synchronized order of natural divisions relating to the sun and *fourfold* divisions (natural cycle of days, seasons, years) and heavenly divisions relating to numerical, consecutive *sevenfold* cycles (Sabbaths, feast days, Sabbaths of years, Jubilees and 'all the appointed times of the year') was the essence of the priestly solar calendar kept in the Temple as the foundation for the ritual order. The Temple was a meeting place between heaven and earth and between *macro-cosmic order* - reflected in the daily cycles of sunrise and sunset, the periodical transformations in the course of the sun, moon and stars, the cycles of the four seasons, and the growing seasons of the earth's fruits - and *micro-cosmic worship* reflected in the eternal repetitive cycles of sacrificial rites and sacred liturgy. The eternal sequence of time and its pre-destined, calculated cosmic changes, as represented in the permanent astronomic courses and the constant cycles of nature, were kept by the priests who were called 'sentinels of the holy course of time' (*shomrei*

<sup>1</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, New York 1969, 40.

*mishmeret hakodesh*). The service of the priests was divided according to the divine chronological divisions; twenty-four priestly vigils (*mishmarot*) reflected the twenty-four hours of the day; the seven-day period of priestly service corresponded to the seven days of the week of creation. When this week is multiplied fifty-two times, it forms a solar year of 364 days (Book of Jubilees 6:30-32), during which a permanent ritual offering *korban tamid* was sacrificed. The year was divided into four seasons of ninety-one days each; dividing these days by seven resulted in thirteen Saturdays for each season. The Thirteen Songs of the *Sabbath Sacrifice* were recited in sequential order over the thirteen Saturdays in a sequence repeated four times a year. The holy calendar reflected the constant course of the sun in a solar year of 364 days, and its detailed calculations reflected the divine perception of time as described in the Book of Enoch (I Enoch chapters 72-82) and recounted in the Book of Jubilees in the narrative of the angel of the presence as told to Moses:

And on the first of the first month and on the first of the fourth month and on the first of the seventh month and on the first of the tenth month are the days of remembrance and they are days of appointed times in the four parts of the year... And they set them upon the heavenly tablets. Each one of them is thirteen weeks from one to another of the remembrances, from the first to the second and from the second to the third, and from the third to the fourth. And all of the days which will be commanded will be fifty-two weeks of days, and all of them are a complete year. Thus it is engraved and ordained on the heavenly tablets... And you, command the children of Israel so that they shall guard the years in this number, three hundred and sixty four days, and it will be a complete year (Jubilees 6:23-32).

## III. LITURGIC CALENDAR, COSMIC CYCLES, AND TEMPLE CULT

The four days of remembrance separating the four seasons correspond to the division of time as narrated in the story of the Flood as found in the book of Genesis 8:4-15. All the priestly calculations integrated the *fourfold natural* division of the seasons and all the tangible, eternal transformations of nature as rendered in fourfold multiplications and divisions with the *sevenfold divine* decree of the seven days of creation or the *intangibile* divisions of time, which can be attested to by no external phenomenon. The latter are those composed solely by divine decree, angelic testimony, or consecutive mathematical order in septuples or sevenfold multiplications, as kept by angels and priests. Time was divine and its divisions, marked by cycles of liturgy and calendar of sacrifice, were mysterious and kept in the Temple tradition:

mysteries of marvels in their revelations  
and holy weeks in their appointed time  
and divisions of months... beginnings of years in their seasons  
and glorious festivals in their ordained times

and the Sabbatical years of the earth in their divisions  
and appointed times of liberty... [jubilees]  
for eternal generations and light and reckonings  
(4QBerachot; DJD XI, 12-13 with my corrections R.E.).

The priestly account of the story of creation, as found in the *Book of Jubilees*, expresses the inherent connection between the sacred, ever-changing cosmic-astronomic time and the divine source for the permanent human unchanging division of time, thereby fusing the tangible-observable-natural components with the intangible-calculated-divine-angelic components:

And on the fourth day He made the sun and the moon and the stars. And He set them in the firmament of heaven so that they might give light upon the whole earth and rule over the day and the night and separate light and darkness. And the Lord set the sun as a great sign upon the earth for days, Sabbaths, months, feast days, years, Sabbaths of years, Jubilees and for all the appointed times of the year... And so that everything which sprouts and grows upon the earth might surely prosper (Jubilees 2:8-10).

The parallel tradition in Genesis indicates two luminaries as the basis for observing changing time and utilizes them only 'for signs and for seasons and for days and for years' (Gen I:14). In contrast, Jubilees bases its seven different calculations 'for days, Sabbaths, months, feast days, years, Sabbaths of years, Jubilees and for all the appointed times of the year...' on the fixed course of the sun and its permanent, sevenfold divine divisions.

A ritual calendar, found in Qumran and ascribed to King David, expresses this vital order that constitutes the sacrificial-liturgical calendar that unites cosmic cycles and divine decrees with Temple cult:

For the daily perpetual sacrifice for all days of the year, 364 songs; and for the Sabbath offering, 52 songs; and for the (12) new moon offering and for all consecrated feasts {seven Temple holiday in which additional offering is offered and their accumulative days are 17 (Leviticus 23)} and for the Day of Atonement, 30 songs (IIQPs xxvii: 5-8; DJD IV, 48).

The Temple was served by the priestly order from the family of Aaron, the high priest and brother of Moses; it stemmed from the ancient biblical tribe of Levi. The sons of Aaron were sanctified by divine decree as 'Holy of Holies' according to the priestly tradition (I Chr. 23:13). They were nominated as divine princes and holy ministers (I Chr. 24, 5-6) and entrusted with divine knowledge for keeping the sacred unity between holy time, holy place, and holy ritual. They were known as Bnei Zaddok according to the name of the seventh generation in the priestly line - Levi, Kehat, Amram, Aaron, Elazar, Pinhas, Zaddok. Alongside the cultic function that included service of the altar, the maintenance of the Temple and the performance of

the sacrifices and the accompanied rituals, the priests fulfilled the mantic and oracular functions of solving mysteries of the future or the past and of making decisions in uncertain cases through the revelation of divine will (*urim vethummim*), and of treating impurities and diseases with the sacred ceremonies involved. They also taught, blessed and judged people according to the Torah.

#### IV. HOLY TIME

All three dimensions of holiness that were kept in the Temple were identified by the number seven and were associated with the beginning of time, the initiation of place, and the generation of life.

*Holy time* was designated by the seven days of the creation and celebrated at seven appointed times of each year, from the first month until the seventh month of the solar calendar (Leviticus 23) alongside harvest holidays staged seven weeks apart (Temple Scroll col. XI, XIX). Some holidays were celebrated over seven days, and most of them have a sevenfold ritual expression. The sevenfold division of Sabbath and the appointed times for holidays in the first seven months of the year (the months between *nisan* to *tishrei*) were kept and declared in the Temple; they functioned as a living ritual, a liturgical calendar of the myth of eternal recurrence. The annual repetition of the weekly liturgical cycle of Sabbaths and seven appointed times combined with the seven-year sacred agricultural cycle repeated each seventh year to form a Jubilee of forty - nine years. All of these were kept in sevenfold ritual cycles by the priests in the Temple. The details of the sevenfold and fourfold divisions and calculations were learned from the angels in association with the calculation of the Flood that took one year (Gen. 7-8; Jub. 5-6) and are associated with Noah and his grandfather Enoch, the seventh patriarch (Gen. 5:21-24), who was taken to heaven in order to study the principles of its calculations and recounting and brought back the calendar from heaven (I Enoch Ch.72-82).

#### V. HOLY PLACE AND DIVISIONS OF TIME

*Holy place* was fashioned in association with the beginning of divine place: the Garden of Eden was reflected in the Holy of Holies, according to Jubilees:

And he [Noah] knew that the *Garden of Eden* was the *Holy of Holies* and the dwelling of the Lord... and Mount Zion (the Temple mount) was in the middle of the navel of the earth (Jubilees 8:19).

The heavenly reflection of paradise in the inner sanctum of the earthly sanctuary will be discussed after we present its external division. The earthly incarnation of holy place was symbolized within the Temple by the seven sequential areas of ascending

holiness into which access was restricted: to the seventh - *Kodesh Hakodashim* Holy of Holies or inner sanctum - only the High Priest himself was admitted; to the sixth - *Hekhal* sanctuary - only the priests from the house of Zaddok, the descendants of the sons of Aaron, were admitted; to the fifth - *Ulam* Hall of service - only priests of the twenty-four priestly orders were allowed; to the fourth - the inner yard - only priests and Levites; to the third, only men of Israel who had purified themselves. Women were allowed only into the second area, known as *ezrat nashim*, or the women's quarter; and the Jewish public could enter the first area, the external courtyard (cf. II Chr. 4, 9; *Mishnah, midot, Mishnah, yoma*).

*Holy ritual* was performed in a seven-day sequence attested to in the biblical tradition and in the priestly literature found in Qumran known as *Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice, The Temple Scroll, and The Priestly Courses Scroll*. Leviticus testifies amply that many of the sacrificial rites were arranged in septuple order. Holy ritual was sevenfold through the priestly order of seven-day service, maintaining a sevenfold rhythm of Sabbaths and holy days during a single solar year and seven-year units of years. All rituals corresponded to the divisions of time. The twenty-four vigils of priestly service (I Chr. 5) are presumably related to the hours of the day and to the daily sacrifice *olat tamid*; it occurs twice a day, dawn and evening, accompanied by the daily Psalms. The thirteen-Sabbath liturgical - sacrificial cycle (*olat hashabat*) is associated with the thirteen service cycles of the twenty-four priestly vigils. The seven days of service correspond to dividing the year into fifty-two Saturdays, with four consecutive overlapping liturgical cycles and the seven-year *shemitot* sequence.

The treasures of the Temple were the cultic representation of the priestly perception of macrocosmic - microcosmic temporal and spatial order. The seven-branched candelabra - the Menorah - was the representation of the eternal sequence of divine time that was counted, divided and multiplied by seven: as *Sabbath* (a week), as *Moa'dim* (seven consecrated appointed times testifying to the sevenfold sequence of divine decree), as *Shemitot* (seven-year units), and as *Jubilees* (forty-nine-year units). In Hebrew the word for the number seven (*Sheva'*), the word for a seven-day unit (*shavua'*), and the word for an eternal divine oath (*Shvua'a*) are all from the same root. They sound almost identical and are written with the same letters. The words *Shabbat* and *Shavuo't* (Pentecost; Holiday of Weeks) both retain the sevenfold counting of sacred time as well as the eternal oath or divine covenant. The word for the seven days of creation - *Beriah* - and the other word for divine covenant - *Brit* - are related to each other and entail the association between the divine sevenfold act of creation and the divine oath, a sign and covenant for the eternal duration of time. The word *edut* (testimony) and the word *brit* (testament or covenant) refer to the human obligation to testify to count and to recount and to live according to divine appointed time *moa'dim* (derived from testimony on divine time) and to keep these divisions regarding divine law. Further, these terms refer to the divine obligation to keep forever the laws of nature and the course of life as the eternal cosmic order and the creative duration of time.

The Temple was the place where the testimony and the testament were kept, counted, ritualized, and celebrated by following the pattern of sacred appointed time, by guarding the confines of sacred place, and by performing the eternal holy ritual. The details of these three dimensions of the sacred are elaborated in the holy scriptures, and all members of the Jewish community were required to abide by this sequence found in the sacred calendar. Their consecutive calculation (preserving holy time), the annual purification (maintaining the sanctity of the holy place), and the ritual order (keeping the holy sacraments) were exclusively the responsibility of priests while the Temple was active.

#### VI. TESTIMONY AND COVENANT IN THE HOLIDAY OF SHAVUO'T

According to the priestly tradition related in the *Book of Jubilees*, all events concerning the divine covenants (*britot/shvout/testaments*) occurred on the feast of Shavuo't (= seven weeks/Pentecost) in the middle of the third month (15th of Sivan). Their subject matter is manifold: the promise of the eternal continuation of the cosmic order, the perpetuation of the laws of nature, and the continued existence of human kind (the covenant with Noah); the eternal existence of the people of Israel in history (the covenant with Abraham); the everlasting existence of divine law (the covenants with the patriarchs and Moses); and the eternal existence of the priesthood (the covenant with Levi). In the covenant vision of the prophet priest Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1 and 10), the perpetuation of the holy Temple in heaven is promised despite its destruction on earth. Dating his vision by the solar calendar places it on the feast of Shavuo't. According to the priestly tradition, angels of the countenance witnessed all the covenants enacted in the midst of the third month, and priests were their earthly counterparts and representatives. The angels state in *Jubilees* that they are the eternal keepers of the Shabbat and that they preserved the Feast of Weeks (Shavuo't) from the day of creation until the covenant with Noah and that they continue to keep this holiday of covenants in heaven while the children of Israel celebrate it on earth. In the First Temple period the holiday of Shavuo't was the holiday for renewing the divine covenant in the Temple, as suggested in II Chr. 15:8-15. During the period of the Second Temple there were disputes between different priestly circles regarding the calendar and the date of the holiday. However, the writings of the priests from the house of Zaddok found in Qumran (Rule of the Community; Damascus Covenant) testify that it was celebrated as the annual renewal of the divine covenant. Likewise, we find various testimonies relating to its celebration as a Temple holiday and harvest feast until the destruction of the second Temple.

All intertwined were a host of elements: history and mythology, cult and ritual, divine cosmic order and divine law, covenants and calendars, eternal cycles of nature, and perpetual cycles of liturgical order guarded by priests and angels. They all reflected and represented the others, and each attested to the others; thus effecting the union of the invisible infinite divine order with the observable elements of cult as well as with the natural cycle of seasons and crops.

As long as the Temple was standing, it reflected the cycles of life, eternity, duration and fertility, crops and seeds, seasons and feasts; and all these were connected to divinely appointed times and to eternal covenants preserved in a sacred ritual centered around the pure, holy Temple and its priests.

#### VII. THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND THE HOLY OF HOLIES

Holy time was related to different representations of the primordial temporal sequence: the *seven* days of creation and its covenantal sign, the Sabbath. Similarly, holy space was fashioned in correspondence to the primordial spatial dimension, the Garden of Eden or *paradise*. Priestly lore defined the elusive relation between the divine dwelling in paradise and the divine dwelling in the sanctuary as Axis Mundi:

And he [Noah] knew that the *Garden of Eden* was the *Holy of Holies* and the dwelling of the Lord... and Mount Zion (the Temple mount) was in the middle of the navel of the earth (Jubilees 8:19).

What is described as the divine dwelling and an everlasting living force in the Garden of Eden is represented as a beautiful cultic garden, sculpted and gilded within the luminous mysterious sanctuary built on the founding stone (*even ha-shtiah*) on the Temple mount, which is in the navel of the earth or the place where creation started and life initiated.

The innermost part of the Temple was built from gold-covered Lebanese cedar and fir; there were engravings and moldings of flowers and buds, leaves and shrubs, fruits and palms; but there were also figures of winged angels. The different kinds of trees, woods, flowers, and fruits were often described as budding and blooming, thus enhancing the sumptuous materials with pictorial splendor. Combined with the varied and winged cherubim (Hebrew plural of 'cherub'), they are endowed with great significance and are meticulously described in many biblical passages:

And the house which King Solomon built for the lord... And he built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar... and the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers: And the oracle he prepared in the house within to set there the ark of the covenant of the Lord...; and he overlaid it with pure gold and so covered the altar which was of cedar; So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold... also the whole altar that was by the oracle he overlaid with gold; And within the oracle he made two cherubim of olive tree ... And he set the cherubim within the inner house and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubim... And he overlaid the cherubim with gold and he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, within and without; And the floor of the house he overlaid with gold, within and without; And for the entering of the oracle he made doors of olive tree... and he carved upon them carvings of cherubim and palm trees and

open flowers, and overlaid them with gold, and spread gold upon the cherubim and upon the palm trees. And he carved thereon cherubim and palm trees and open flowers: and covered them with gold fitted upon the carved work (I Kings 6:2-35).

And the greater house he ceiled with fir tree which he overlaid with fine gold and set thereon palm trees and chains: And he garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim (II Chron. 3:5-6).

Also he made before the house two pillars... and he made chains, as in the oracle, and put them on the heads of the pillars and made a hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains (ibid. 3:15-16).

The golden sanctuary and the Temple surrounding it were built in seven years, '...so he [Solomon] was seven years in building it' (Kings 6:38), implying an analogy to the universe that was created in seven days. It was built according to a divine pattern (I Chr. 28:18-19). Just as the perfection and completion of creation were represented in the Garden of Eden, so the perfection of the Temple was represented in the Holy of Holies that retained various elements from the heavenly garden of primordial time. The trees and the gold, the precious stones and the water, the cherubim and the symbols of an eternal life force associated with a blooming garden are all mentioned in the myth of Genesis 2:8-11; 3:24.

The two decorative luminous elements, gold and precious stones, are mentioned in the descriptions of both sanctuaries. The vital force of ongoing creation is depicted as living trees and running water in paradise; in the sanctuary it is represented by the scented wood as well as by the trees and buds carved therein. The invisible, eternal life force finds visible expression in the engravings and golden forms of palm trees, pomegranates, buds, flowers, vines, and branches. Jerusalem is situated on the edge of the desert without a river, but it is immersed in life-giving water, rain water. The precondition for all priestly worship was immersion in a ritual bath of collected rainwater. The sublime representations of the transcendent life force of God - the eternal, winged Cherubim - were a bridge between the divine and the human. These figures incorporated features of both the eternal and the temporal, and they formed the dominant iconographic pattern within the Holy of Holies. The ambiguity of a divine life force that is simultaneously hidden and revealed is well attested in the elements of the revealed/concealed garden and the hidden/revealed Cherubim. The Cherubim who were positioned to exclude man's entrance into paradise (Gen. 3:24) are alluded to both in myth and cult by means of a precisely detailed description although the prohibition to enter into the golden garden of the Holy of Holies caused them to be concealed. Within this cloister, the golden Cherubim were hidden all year long, with one exception; and their figure was obscured by the spreading of their wings which both revealed and concealed their figures. They were concealed by embroidered veils that were removed for the three Temple pilgrimage holy days. The Cherubim were viewed closely only once a year, on the holy Day of Atonement, and then only by the High Priest, who would enter the Holy of Holies, clad with seven consecrated garments and wearing a gold diadem; he also bore golden pome-

granates as well as the twelve precious stones of the oracular *urim vethummim* carried on golden chains. The High Priest, clad with holy names and golden engravings and armed with chains and pomegranates, entered into the liminal zone of the concealed/revealed divine presence and human hope to the place where life is generated and death is opposed. The mystical tradition of the Book of the Zohar (Book of Splendor, a medieval tradition retaining early priestly lore) relates in a portion called *Midrash haNeelam* - 'the exposition of the concealed':

The Holy of Holies is in the pattern and likeness of paradise and when the high priest is entering therein he does so with his soul not in his body. If he merited he entered in peace and went out in peace (*Zohar Hadash*, 19a).

The entrance of the high priest into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, the major priestly ceremony of purification for the priesthood as well as for the Jewish people, was celebrated in the seventh month (Lev. 16) in the temple. His ingress was an entrance or an approach to the divine source of life, to paradise, to the sacred place of eternal growth and fertility. At the same time, the priest confronted ever-present danger from the forces of death as symbolized by desert and famine. In the ritual of the Day of Atonement there are opposing powers of life and death: the entrance into the paradise of the sanctuary and the exile into the desert. Two sacrifices were offered on the Day of Atonement: one offered in the Temple for the blessing of life and as an entreaty for grace which was offered in the Temple and the other sent out into the desert against chastisement and death. The blood of the first sacrifice was ritually sprinkled seven times within the Temple while the blood of the second sacrifice, the scapegoat, was poured into the desert (Lev. 16:5-22; *Mishmah Yoma*). The solemn rite represents the struggle between life and death and between purity and defilement. It also shows the conflict between the perpetuation of natural cycles of fruitful fields and growth, on the one hand, and the disruption of cosmic order of life represented in desert and famine and danger of death, on the other.

#### VIII. COSMOS AND CHAOS-LIFE AND DEATH-PURITY AND DEFILEMENT

All Jewish rituals of purity and conditions of defilement are a demonstration of the struggle between life and death, between creation and chaos, and between fertility and barrenness. Holiness and purity were always related in priestly perception to a specific time, place, or ritual and were *calculated in sevenfold units*. They were dependent on living water and purity rites - in series of seven - and represented life, fertility, growth, blessing and continuity. Conversely, defilement and impurity, were considered *innumerable* and *boundless* and represented death and barrenness. Life and procreation were preconditioned by counting seven days of purity, observing the beginning of cycles and their ending. Death, however, possessed no number and had no end; thus, it was seen as the curse of barrenness. This was seen in the surrounding wilderness, which had no boundaries, no fertility, and no posterity. Counting the

different calendric units as well as observing cycles, boundaries and concealment - in the Temple and in personal life - secured life and fertility, while their opposites were associated with death and barrenness.

Thus, life forces concealed within the body remain pure, but the same life forces exposed outside the body are impure. Blood and semen, the generators of life, are pure while concealed in the body, where they represent potency of life and continuity. When the same elements are emitted from the body and revealed to the eye, they are impure since they represent a lost opportunity for growth, a loss of potency for pregnancy, or the sign of death. All life forces are measured by cyclical units of seven, whether in days, weeks, months, or years; but death and barrenness have neither number nor cycle.

Seven is the number of days of ritual purity that assures life; seven is the word for a divine oath and covenant. Seven was the number of days of creation, and seven was the number that defined the passage and transformation from chaos to cyclical order of laws of nature. It marks the change from numberless and lawless chaos into the eternal order of creation, defined by numbers and seasons, a perpetual cycle of time that secures the continuation of life. Seven is the number of rites of purification performed by the high priest on the Day of Atonement in the seventh month (10/7 Tishrei). Nine months later is the celebration in the Temple of the first harvest of wheat - Shavou't, the holiday of Weeks in the third month (15/3 Sivan). The agricultural time between seeding and harvest in the land of Israel is identical and parallel to the course of pregnancy, nine months. The harvest feast in the Temple was the time when the Cherubim were revealed and shown from a distance to the pilgrims (BT Yoma fol. 54a), nine months after they were seen by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.

#### IX. MYSTICAL UNION - HEIROS GAMOS

All testaments and covenants in priestly lore are associated with the number seven: the seventh day of the weekly covenant with the Lord; the seven days of purity before marital covenant; the seven days before circumcision, and seven pure days before marital conjugation. The holiday of Shavout - Pentecost, or holiday of Weeks - was celebrated in the Temple after the sacred counting of seven weeks; it is the day on which all the eternal national and cosmic covenants were pledged as recounted in the Book of Jubilees. Shavu'ot, the feast of harvest, reflects the fertility of the earth, nine months after the Day of Atonement - the day of struggle between life and death, between sanctuary of life and barren desert. It is celebrated in the Temple by the pilgrims after seven weeks, and it marks the wheat harvest. Fittingly, this holiday in the mystical tradition is the appointed time of the 'hieros gamos', the union between heaven and earth, or the marriage between God and the community of Israel. The Zohar relates an arcane tradition ascribing a marital union to the Day of Atonement:

When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he heard the sound of the wings of the Cherubim singing and fluttering their upward spread wings; when he offered the incense, the voice of their wings became silent and they mated whispering; when he concluded his service, they raised their wings as before and they were singing then he knew it was a time of satisfaction, a time of happiness for all (Zohar III. fol 67 a).

The Talmudic portion of *Yoma* refers to the sacred Day of Atonement. It contains cryptic accounts of obscure traditions relating to the High Priest and the Holy of Holies. One of them, apparently about the feast of Weeks with an allusion to the Day of Atonement, relates:

When the children of Israel came on pilgrimage to the Temple, the veil was removed; and the Cherubim, who were entwined one with another, were shown to the pilgrims. Then they were told: behold your affection before the divine presence is as the affection of male and female (BT *Yoma*, fol. 54 a).

Very early, it seems, in the ancient lore of tradition, the Day of Atonement occurred in the seventh month; and the Holiday of Weeks occurred in the third month of the following year. Both were celebrated in the Temple and were related to fertility rites, to mythical-mystical unions of the cherubim and to purity rituals for securing the continuity of life. All were associated with sevenfold counting, pregnancy spans, and cycles of harvest and fertility. It is interesting to note that one of the readings of S. B. A'. the root for seven, is *sova*' satiation which is written in Hebrew in the same letters as seven. Very few of those ancient aspects of an agricultural society led by priests, living by covenants and testimonies associated with blessing and fertility, were retained in later traditions, especially after the destruction of the Temple and the Exile. However, ancient linguistic elements, as well as some early and later mystical traditions, have preserved hints of these aspects; and the enumeration of seven days for purification, along with the Sabbath and the sevenfold rituals, are still observed today.

#### X. PARADISE REVISITED

Seven cultic representations of divine law and cosmic order were mentioned in the Holy of Holies and the sanctuary in First Temple (Ex. 37-38; I Kings 6:19-35; 8:3-9; I Chron. 28:18; II Chronicles 3-4): the golden ark, the golden chariot of the Cherubim, the golden seven branched candelabra (Menorah) the golden incense altar, the golden table upon which the new bread of harvest was presented, the veil embroidered with cherubim and used to cover and conceal the Holy of Holies, and the golden utensils of service of the altar.

The common denominator of the different objects and iconography in the Holy of Holies is that they too were associated with Garden of Eden, with paradisiac pat-

terns, or with the number of days of creation, thereby suggesting affiliation with the eternal source of life and fertility. The source of the gold from which they were made or from which they were gilded is paradise as mentioned above (Gen. 2:8-11). The Golden Menorah was formed of seven branches of flowers and buds representing the tree of life and the sacred number of seven days of creation, purity, and fertility. According to Jubilees, the fourfold golden altar of incense retained the smells of the seven trees and shrubs of paradise from which the incense was made. The fourfold ark contained the ten commandments, or the divine law; and the fourfold golden chariot of the Cherubim was a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic order, establishing contact between heaven and earth since it symbolized Gods' throne. The Hebrew word for the throne-chariot is *Merkavah*, and it is usually mistranslated as 'chariot', ignoring the connotations of composition or assembly, which indicate the universal compass of the four cardinal directions and the cosmic cycles of time. The cherubim were mentioned in the Garden of Eden as part of the divine glory, and they appeared as part of the divine throne in heaven. The heavenly instruction for preparing the Temple objects was given to David from heaven and committed to his son Solomon in detail, as described in the priestly tradition in Chronicles:

And for the altar of incense refined gold by weight and gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubim that spread out their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord (I Chro. 28:18).

The heavenly *Merkavah* relates to the unity of holy time, holy place, and holy ritual in heaven, all of which secure the eternal divine cosmic course. The pattern of the chariot-throne over which the cherubim spread their wings in the Temple, was perceived as a representation of holy heavenly pattern incorporating cosmic place with cosmic time (chronotopy) and angelic ritual. This generated the life-force and the divine blessing of fertility and continuity.

#### XI. RITUAL CHRONOTOPY

The description of Solomon's Temple in I Kings 6-7 and II Chronicles 3-4 demonstrates the replication of the iconographic motifs from within the Holy of Holies throughout the priestly courts of the sanctuary.

The cultic *expressions of holiness and eternal life* - the winged cherubim - as well as the floral motifs, the knops, the buds and the roses, the palm leaves, the vines and the pomegranates - were all made from gold and were replicated in various ritual objects throughout the courts of the Temple.

The cultic expressions for priestly purity and the calculation of time were all made from brass and likewise appear throughout the priestly courts. There was a molten sea made from brass set above twelve oxen divided into triads facing east, west, north, and south. Alongside this cultic object were found the ten lavers or basins of

brass that stood on four brazen wheels and were decorated with the floral motifs, cherubs, and living creatures (I Kings 7:23-32). The ritual molten sea that served for the purification of the priests represented the four cardinal directions as well as the four seasons, shown by dividing the twelve oxen into four groups. The division of twelve calendar months into four groups of three months is parallel to the time division of the liturgical calendar in priestly literature. The concealed golden sanctuary with its paradisiac motifs and the revealed courtyards containing purity lavers made from gleaming brass shared similar heavenly motifs and cosmic representations.

## XII. EZEKIEL'S CHARIOT

After the First Temple was destroyed and its priests exiled, the priest prophet Ezekiel received a heavenly vision (Ez. 1, 10) in which different motifs and structures from the Temple courts were combined to form a fourfold winged structure that was called in antiquity 'Ezekiel Merkavah' or the vision of the chariot of the Cherubim. Ezekiel's vision incorporated many cultic motifs from the Temple, but the chariot motif returns again and again. I Chr 28:18 describes the design for building the cultic structure representing holiness in the inner sanctum as: 'gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubim that spread out their wings'. After the first destruction, it was restated as: 'The vision which Ezekiel saw... a radiance of a chariot and four living creatures' (4Q385, 4 DJD XXI, 42-44). Further, the Septuagint's rendering of Ezekiel 43:3 reads: 'the vision of the Chariot which I saw was like the vision which I saw at the river Chebar'. At the time of the Second Temple (ca. 180 BCE), the priest Ben Sira said: 'Ezekiel saw a vision and he recounted the different details of the chariot' (Ben Sira 49:8). The vision of the chariot that incorporated the gleaming copper wheels and the fourfold decorated ritual structure and the winged cherubim described as living creatures testified that the ruined sanctuary on earth continued to exist in heaven. Ezekiel's vision served as the point of departure for chariot mysticism and Temple mysticism for a thousand years. Priestly mystical poetry found in Qumran demonstrates the transformation of Ezekiel's chariot from the ruined earthly Temple into a heavenly sanctuary where God is ever present and eternal time divisions are kept:

The throne of your splendor and the footstool of your glory  
in the heights of your standing-place and the tread of your holiness.  
And the chariots of your glory, their cherubim, their wheels  
with all their councils;  
Foundations of fire and flames of brightness  
and flashes of splendor and streams of fire  
and wonderful luminaries  
Majesty and splendor and height of glory, foundation of holiness and fountain of  
brightness, and height of beauty...  
And wondrous mysteries when they appear

and holy weeks in their appointed order  
and divisions of months [ ] beginning of years in their cycles  
and glorious festivals in times ordained for them;  
and the sabbatical years of the earth in their divisions  
and appointed times of liberty (jubilees)... eternal generations...  
and light and reckonings  
(4Q berachot 286 I ii,1-13; DJD XI, p.12-13).

The destroyed earthly Temple was replaced by seven heavenly sanctuaries in which angels were singing and counting and observing the heavenly priestly calendar. As stated above, Chariot in Hebrew is called Merkavah - a word which includes the meanings of structure and composition, grafting and unification, creating and assembling, as well as of throne - chariot (II Samuel 22:11). The chariot of the cherubim that stood in the Holy of Holies was a fourfold structure that was related to the cosmic order of the four directions and the four seasons. The four wings of the two cherubim may have alluded to the fourfold perception of natural time or cosmic order. It is obvious, however, from Ezekiel's vision that the word 'four', which is mentioned twenty times in the two visionary chapters (1,10), has the central dimensional direction in the description of the chariot. The composition of cosmic splendor and the heavenly time divisions are perceived in these poetical remnants. Other fragments integrate the seven heavenly sanctuaries with the fourfold structure called merkavah. Heavenly ritual in the celestial sanctuary, like earthly ritual in the Temple, was founded upon numbers and cycles, predetermined calculations, and eternal recurrences, all of which were observed and preserved by angels and priests who viewed the cosmic order through an eternal-temporal ritual.

## XIII. WRITTEN TESTAMENT AND HEAVENLY RITUAL

After the destruction and during the period of exile - when the unity of holy time, holy place, and holy ritual in the holy land and the holy city no longer existed - the *written* divine testament replaced the *ritual* commemoration. The holy biblical scroll kept in the synagogue replaced the ark, the cherubim, and the Temple. The unritualized study of the divine law by all the male members of the Jewish community replaced its ritual existential limitation to the anointed priests. *Beit hakneset*, the synagogue, is the place where ritual memory is conveyed by liturgy. It is also known as *Mikdash Mea't*, or small Temple; and there the priests from the house of Aaron and Levities from the tribe of Levi still retain a certain preeminence through the order of prayer and blessings. The daily liturgy retains echoes of the Temple worship, and the synagogue continues to function according to a sequence of weeks. However, the solar calendar, calculated at 364 days, was replaced by a lunar calendar, established at 354 days from observing the new moons. All that remains from the ancient Temple cult is the identification of the seventh day as sacred, the observation of the holy Sabbath, and the names of the prayers corresponding to the names and order of the



sacrifices. The Temple's appointed times, once safeguarded by angels and priests, were transformed into communal holidays.

Rites and calendars, priests and angels, testaments and covenants, Temple and sanctuary - all were replaced by the scriptural heritage of the law and the liturgical order of the synagogue. The calendar order of weeks was kept from antiquity until today, although without a predetermined calculation. The holidays requiring pilgrimage to the Temple are celebrated in every Jewish community, although some whose significance was specific to the agricultural cycle and without historical associations were marginalized and even forgotten. After the destruction, there was no Temple in which to celebrate the gratitude for the fertility of the land and the miracle of harvest in a desert land with no rivers, little rain, and frequent droughts. Moreover, the loss of the priestly orders, which supervised the arrangement of appointed times, led some festivals to oblivion while others became identified with the commemoration of historical events. The day of fast on which the Jewish people commemorate and mourn the day of the destruction of both Temples, the ninth day of Av, has been observed since antiquity and indicates the unique place of the Temple, where God was once present upon his throne and the cycles of nature and the laws of the universe were counted, calculated, and commemorated in the priestly ritual order.

The passage of time and change of place have concealed the historical and geographical sense inherent in the Temple, as well as the specifics of the rituals and their origin and significance. However, in literary tradition, as well as in religious memory and communal ritual, the Temple has preserved its own inalienable place. It continues to exist as both a symbol of Jewish redemption in the time to come, transforming the lost glories of the past into promised splendors of the future. It will always give witness to the heavenly throne in the world of the divine presence beyond all time and place.

## SUMMARY

For almost a thousand years there had been a Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was destroyed in 70 A. D. and served as a significant symbol of remembrance for the following two thousand years. This article is concerned with the mystical priestly tradition and the temple mythology of holy place, holy time, and holy ritual that was fostered by the priestly circles during their administration and after their exile from the holy place in antiquity. The Temple was the symbol of the archetypal divine order for an ideal mythical past in which the divine presence and human experience were united, a place where the sacred unity between holy time, holy place, and holy ritual was celebrated. The Temple was intended to reflect a complex cosmic order representing the everlasting creative duration of time, the seasons of nature, and the cycles of the eternal divine presence in the creation. This perception of sacred time was consolidated around a divine solar calendar that was kept and preserved in the Temple and that served as the foundation for the annual ritual order. The unique essence of this calendar was a divine testimony concerning the synchronized order of visible time units (days, seasons, new moon) and the invisible testimonial of calculated divisions of time (Sabbath, 'all the [seven] appointed times of the year', Sabbaths of years, Jubilees). The natural tangible changing cycles were synchronized with the numerical consecutive sevenfold cycles.

The eternal sequence of time and its predestined calculated cosmic variations were kept by the priests who were also known as the 'sentinels of the holy course of time'. The discussion focuses on the meaning of the fourfold natural division of the seasons and the tangible transformations of nature within the sevenfold order, i.e., the intangible divisions of time guarded by the priestly courses and their angelic counterparts in the seven heavenly temples. Time was considered divine, and its divisions marked by cycles of liturgy and calendar of sacrifice were mysterious and therefore were kept in the Temple. The priestly-angelic testimony of time is presented in the Book of Jubilees, in The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice Liturgy, the Book of Enoch and other priestly scrolls found in Qumran. The article concludes with a discussion concerning the Holy of Holies within the Temple which was perceived as a temporal reflection of the biblical Garden of Eden.

*Rachel Elior, born in 1949 in Jerusalem (Israel), is professor of Jewish philosophy and Jewish mysticism in the Department of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.*

*Address: 22 Dan Street, Jerusalem, Israel 93509 (e-mail: mselio@mscc.huji.ac.il).*

