Handing on belief

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Hear, O Israel!
Adonai is our God.
Adonai is One.
(Deut 6:4)

Introduction

THE CENTRAL CREDAL STATEMENT OF JUDAISM, *Shema Yisrael*, requires that the Jew hear and respond.[1] When presented with the Torah, the ancient Israelites responded, 'We shall do and we shall hear' (Deut 5:24). To be a Jew today is to embrace a living faith tradition and a culture. For the secular Jew, culture is enough. For some other Jews, the understanding of their faith tradition and culture leads to a closed society, separated from both Jews and other religious traditions by the fences of Torah. For others again, a vibrant faith tradition and cultural inheritance is strengthened and enhanced as a new generation seeks to hear and respond in ways that are more open and innovative.

After the fall of the Temple in 70 CE and the dispersal of the Jews, the Torah became a portable homeland and the Sabbath table the altar of sacrifice. The Torah, its study and observance, is the medium through which the Jewish people have listened to the voice of God and transmitted their beliefs throughout the ages. Active hearing of God's voice within rabbinic Judaism is informed by the Talmud (oral law)[2] and the Midrash.[3] From generation to generation, interaction with the Midrash has been a source of sustenance and strength as the Jewish people seek to hear, interpret and transmit the voice of the living God. Today all branches of Judaism – Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist – emphasize practice over dogma.[4]

Leviticus 23:2[5] begins: 'Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals'. Through the lived observance of the sacred cycle of the Jewish year, the Jewish people hear the requirements of relationship between God and God's chosen people and celebrate the unfolding of the mystery of creation, revelation and redemption. Within the cycle of the year, the faith tradition is reappropriated both personally and communally. Through ritual and observance the heritage of Torah is passed from generation to

generation. The events of salvation history and an appreciation of God's enduring fidelity through the ages is a tangible memory which sustains the Jewish people in the hope of a Messiah who is yet to come.

Why, then, is it important for us as Christians to know, understand and appreciate the importance of the Jewish tradition as we seek to appropriate and hand on our Christian identity and beliefs in a post-modern world? Pope John Paul II tells us that: 'The life and teachings of Jesus are so firmly rooted in Jewish traditions that He is a living Torah. He cannot be understood without an awareness of the living faith of the Jewish people.'[6] Our own liturgical year, rooted as it is in the Paschal Mystery – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – creates the framework through which we as Christians understand the action of God in salvation history. In studying the Jewish tradition, the New Testament cannot help but take on a richer and more nuanced meaning as we hear the words of Jesus: *Shema Yisrael*:

> One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'[7]

Further study and exploration of the Jewish tradition will reveal that the structure of the liturgy of the hours, the liturgy of the word as well as the structure of the eucharistic prayers are modelled on the Jewish tradition.[8]

The New Testament shows us Jesus in a Jewish context. Through the centuries, we Christians have divided ourselves into many traditions; traditions that hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ but traditions that are fractured along the lines of doctrine, dogma and interpretation. Perhaps one of the ways which will facilitate handing on Christianity to a postmodern world is to revisit and reappropriate the heritage of Jesus, the Jew.

This paper will focus on the sacred cycle of the Jewish year as a way of handing on a tradition through faithful observance. The prayer and ritual of festival days also lay a foundation for the silence[9] and study which allows the Jewish soul to forge an intimate and personal relationship with God.

Boundaries

The cycle of the Jewish year has weekly and monthly boundaries each of which is integral to religious observance. The Sabbath creates a weekly boundary between the sacred and the profane. In a world where time signifies profit, productivity and power, Judaism aims at the 'sanctification of time' through its teaching of being 'attached to sacred events' in order to 'learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year'.[10] Sabbath is rooted in the very act of creation itself (Gen 2:2, Exod 31:15); thus the essence of Sabbath observance is to 'care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul'.[11] The Midrash tells us that tranquillity, serenity, peace and repose were created on the seventh day.[12] The intent of Sabbath restrictions is to provide the observant Jew with a day of complete rest and freedom from any sort of toil. Sabbath is a day characterized by harmony and peace within oneself, with one's neighbour and with all of creation. For the observant the spiritual nature of the Sabbath unfolds in a rhythm of rest, festive meals, discussing the *parasha*[13] of the week, Sabbath songs, visits to family and friends and finally, with great reluctance, praying the *Havdalah*[14] prayer after the first three stars have been sighted in the evening sky.

Rosh Chodesh,[15] unlike other biblical holy days, is not described as a day upon which labour is prohibited totally, although Amos 8:5 seems to indicate some restrictions on commerce – 'if only the new moon were over so that we could sell grain . . .' However, the joyous spirit of the day is communicated by Numbers 10:10 which states 'And on your joyous occasions – your fixed festivals and new moon day – you shall sound the trumpets'. Later sources propose that this partial abstention from labour was a reward for the righteous women who did not donate their jewellery to the creation of the golden calf.[16] Perhaps this tradition may be the origin of the particular affinity that women have for this festival.

After the fall of the Temple, this celebration, unlike those with historical ties, fell into minor observance with a particular set of prayers and the announcement of the new month on the Sabbath prior to *Rosh Chodesh*.

Jewish feminists[17] have since reclaimed *Rosh Chodesh* and celebrate not only creation but also those characteristics that relate woman to the moon – the life cycle, rebirth and renewal. Symbols such as water, spheres and circles are used to represent the monthly purification in the *mikveh* as well as to symbolize the moon and the cyclical nature of life. Women's groups often meet at *Rosh Chodesh* to sanctify time on a

monthly basis, to pray together, to focus on personal spiritual renewal and to give charity. Robin Zeigler writes, '*Rosh Chodesh*, the waxing and waning of the moon, speaks to my feminine tasks. I must remind myself that life is filled with constant change . . . My reality is to learn to live with these changes – to ebb and flow with them.'[18]

Weekly and monthly boundaries create the space and climate for exploring, rediscovering and teaching Jewish tradition within a faith community in the synagogue, in the home as a gathering of family and friends, and in groups who have chosen to come together as women to reappropriate their heritage.

Pilgrimage

In Temple times the three pilgrimage feasts,[19] Passover, Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Shavuot (Pentecost), literally required a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem in order to participate in ritual and sacrifice. With the destruction of the Temple, today's pilgrimage is a pilgrimage of heart and memory to the origin of the celebration and into the fidelity of a God who has sustained and nurtured a people year by year since the original event the feast commemorates. God's constancy and fidelity through the ages is energy and inspiration as the Jewish community engages a new context in which to anticipate the promised Messiah. These three festivals are also agricultural landmarks within the land of Israel. In the spring of the year, at Passover, the land yields the first harvest; in early summer, at Shavuot, the second harvest is gathered; while the fall feast of Sukkot marks the harvesting of the fruit of the trees.[20]

Passover

Passover is named as a permanent reminder that God passed over the houses of the Israelites and saved them (Exod 12:27) while they were enslaved in Egypt. Their hasty flight from Egypt gives rise to a second name for this feast – the feast of unleavened bread (Exod 23:15). Moses called the Israelite slaves to return to the God of their ancestors and through a remarkable series of events their prayer was heard and freedom was theirs. The underlying truth of the Exodus story is that God heard the pleas of the enslaved Israelites, saw their plight and redeemed them. Exodus marks the beginning of Jewish existence as a unique people[21] who are called through an appropriation of Exodus morality to stand against all forms of injustice, suffering and oppression.

Each year the drama of the Passover is re-enacted as the youngest present begins: 'Why is this night different from all other nights?'[22] In the presentation of the ritual foods and the recitation of the story of the Exodus the past becomes present. As the meal unfolds, God's intervention and redeeming presence in the many events of Jewish history are linked to the Exodus story with the result that the Seder meal becomes a celebration of liberation from bondage and oppression. Through the seven days of the Passover festival, *chametz*[23] is excluded from the house and diet. This dramatic break with the usual diet has a deeper significance, that of an internal or spiritual break with whatever enslaves or causes an unhealthy dependency. In modern observance this internal disposition is a pivotal step in the process of liberation and freedom which encourages the appropriation of an Exodus morality – a morality that implies 'that a partnership between God and humanity will carry out the transformation of the world'.[24]

Shavuot

Shavuot, according to rabbinic tradition, occurs on the fiftieth day after the Exodus and marks the theophany of Sinai. Shavuot not only commemorates the giving of the Torah but the acceptance of Torah by the Israelites, thereby establishing the Covenant between God and Israel. Greenberg notes that the 'binding of God in the Covenant is the guarantor that redemption is the true fate of humankind'.[25] The Covenant is the promise and the process whereby the morality of the Exodus is carried forward day by day until the day of Messianic redemption. The basis for the communal aspect of Judaism is to achieve the goals of the Covenant and to perpetuate the 'Jewish way'.[26]

Shavuot, unlike Passover and Sukkot, has no rituals that are unique to the celebration of the day. Since Shavuot occurs in late spring or early summer, it has become the custom to put up decorations of roses and fragrant spices. These customs originate in one of the midrashim which recounts that the Israelites fainted from fear when God began to speak the Ten Commandments, and the Holy One had to revive the Israelites with fragrant spices.[27] The Book of Ruth figures in the liturgy of the morning service of Shavuot for several reasons. The story of Ruth is set at harvest time, but on another level Ruth's conversion to Judaism is paralleled to each person's voluntary acceptance of Torah and Covenant. The Book of Ruth ends with a genealogy from Ruth to David and tradition places the death of King David on Shavuot.

One of the most interesting and dramatic customs of Shavuot, which originates with the kabbalists (mystics) of Safed in the sixteenth

century is *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*. This is a practice of staying up from the evening before the feast of Shavuot and through the night to prepare through prayer and the study of Talmud and Torah for the momentous events of Sinai which occur on Shavuot. The kabbalists also regard the feast of Shavuot as the wedding of God and Israel.

The definitive date of Shavuot is not set down in the Torah itself but rather comes from the oral tradition (Talmud). Rabbi Soloveitchik[28] makes the point that since Scripture obscures the date of the giving of the Torah, the ascendancy of the oral law is established. Shavuot, therefore, also celebrates the ongoing revelation of God as the Torah of tradition is unfolded age by age through God's people. This unfolding or rediscovering of the subtleties and nuances of God's word keeps the Covenant ever vibrant.

Sukkot

Sukkot is an autumn holiday which occurs exactly six months after Passover with the central focus on redemption and faith as the community commemorates and reflects on the forty years the Israelites wandered in the desert. The central feature of this festival is the *sukkah*,[29] which symbolizes the portable housing available to the Israelites on their desert journey and underscores for us the impermanence of our own lives. This conscious movement from permanence to impermanence is yet another reminder that God has been and continues to be with God's people. The message of the *sukkah* is that God and faith are portable.

The agricultural aspect of Sukkot recognizes the mystery of nature and the relentless human toil required to produce the harvest, which in turn is received and celebrated as a gift of God. There is also a simultaneous remote preparation for the planting of the next crop.

The central liturgical expression of this seven-day period is the waving of the *lulav*[30] during the morning service. Unlike the other pilgrimage festivals, which begin and end with full festival days, Sukkot finishes with the movement into Shemini Atzeret which is called the eighth day of assembly. This is the last day, the great day of assembly, and in Temple times it was the day of the water rejoicing[31] – the day of drawing down the Spirit. It is a full festival day and now that Sukkot is over, the formal prayer for rain, *tefillat geshem*, is begun in anticipation of the needs for the next agricultural season. The memorial prayer for the dead, usually said on the last day of the festival, has been transferred to this feast. In Israel, Shemini Atzeret and Simhat Torah are celebrated as one day. In the Diaspora Simhat Torah becomes the ninth

day of the festival. Simhat Torah celebrates the completion and the beginning again of the annual cycle of Torah readings. As soon as the final portion of Deuteronomy is read, the reader moves on to begin the first chapter of Genesis. For the Jewish community, the world is never finished reading Torah or without its light. The joy of Torah is expressed in the evening service when the scrolls are removed from the Ark and literally danced through the congregation and out into the streets surrounding the synagogue. Throughout this eight- or nine-day period, the interplay of the liturgy, the Torah readings, the agricultural connection and the setting and message of the *sukkah*, combine the focus on redemption with a celebration of humankind as creature and co-creator.

Connections

The cycle of the year makes a connection to the cumulative sorrow of the Jewish people in the observance of Tisha B'Av, while Purim contains within it the delight of a world turned upside down through masquerade and mime and a serious warning against assimilation. Tu Bishvat is the new year for planting trees.

Tu Bishvat

Tu Bishvat, the New Year of planting trees, dates back to Talmudic times. The rabbis of the times decreed that on the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat, the new fruit began to form on the trees. After the exile of the Jews from the land of Israel, it became a day upon which to commemorate and celebrate the Jewish connection to the land of Israel.

Tu Bishvat has taken on a greater significance with the Zionist movement and the founding of the state of Israel. In Israel, there are tree-planting ceremonies for the school children while in the Diaspora adults and children alike donate to the Jewish National Fund so that trees can be planted in the land of Israel.

The tradition endows Tu Bishvat with the same meaning that Rosh Ha Shanah does for humankind – judgement and the new year are one. According to the tradition God decides on the bounty of the trees for the coming year. Sukkot, the harvest festival, witnesses as to how well the trees were judged on Tu Bishvat.[32] In one month Tu Bishvat leads the community into the merrymaking of an early spring festival – Purim.

Purim

Purim is the only Jewish holiday based on a book of the Bible – the *Megillat* Esther. It also enjoys the distinction of being the only Jewish

festival which has no direct or indirect connection with the land of Israel; it concerns itself rather with the Jews in the Diaspora. As the story unfolds, the Jews of Sushan, the capital of Persia, have become a highly assimilated and highly successful minority in the city. Mordecai refuses to bow down to the new prime minister and in the resulting rage Haman resolves to kill not only Mordecai but the entire Jewish population. Esther intervenes but even after Haman is hanged, she must go and plead that the order of genocide be revoked.

In this post-Holocaust era, the darker message of Purim is a clear warning against becoming too comfortable and too assimilated in the Diaspora milieu.

All men, women and children are commanded to celebrate Purim not as sacred time marked by restrictions but with a great spirit of secularity. Women are obliged to hear the reading of *Megillat* Esther and may even read it for others. The Sabbath prior to Purim is called Sabbath Zachor, the Sabbath of Remembrance. It is only human to want to focus on what is pleasant and joyful, but for the Jewish people it is a particular *mitzvah* to be present on the Sabbath of Remembrance. To remember the dangers of becoming too comfortable and too assimilated perhaps is to prevent future sorrow.

Masquerades, satires and 'Purim-shpielers',[33] the sending of gifts, the giving of charity and festive meals mark the day. Purim is the feast wherein Jews express their faith through humour. Jews admit on Purim that they follow God 'not because their hopes have been realized but because they have trust in the Divine'.[34]

Tisha B'Av and the mourning period

This period begins with the fast of the seventeenth of Tammuz. This is a minor fast and requires abstaining from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. Tradition ascribes to this day the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Roman invaders in 70 CE, and the worship of the golden calf at Sinai. Other tragedies include the cessation of the daily sacrifice during one of the sieges of Jerusalem, the burning of a Torah scroll and the erection of an idol in the temple of Jerusalem.[35]

On the first of the month of Av, the mourning period deepens. This period is known as the nine days during which no meat or wine is consumed, with the exception of the Sabbath meals. There are many prohibitions. In general, the Jewish people are asked to refrain from doing anything that brings joy or gladness.[36] The ninth of the month of Av stands alone in that it marks the day when the Babylonians destroyed the first temple in 586 BCE and the Romans destroyed the

second temple in 70 CE. The Mishnah adds three more solemn events to this date: namely, the decree that Israel should wander through the desert for forty years, the fall of the fortress of Bethar which resulted in the fall of Bar Kochba and the massacre of his men, and the ploughing up of Jerusalem by Hadrian in 135 CE.[37] The expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 CE and the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 CE have been added to the list of 9th of Av commemorations.

On Tisha b'Av strict mourning practices are observed.[38] A practice unique to Tisha b'Av is the prohibition against studying Torah, since this is a joyous activity. Torah reading and study is restricted to the book of Job, the parts of Jeremiah that describe the destruction of Jerusalem and the Book of Lamentations. Talmud study is restricted to sections that deal with destruction.

With the rebirth of the state of Israel in 1948, the dispersed Jews of all the nations have a land to call home, so would it not be counterproductive to dwell on past destruction and desolation? Greenberg[39] says that a premature abandonment of Tisha B'Av might be perceived as an insensitivity to Jews who are still suffering in many countries of the world. On the other hand, not to allow healing to take place is to be blind to the gratitude that is required of those who have experienced that God is always faithful to God's promises. In this century Jews have seen the fulfilment of the prophet Isaiah's words: 'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins' (Isai 40:1–2).

Seven weeks of prophetic consolation follow Tisha B'Av and move the community into the month of Ellul and the preparation for the Days of Awe.

Renewal

The High Holy Days are the second major cycle[40] of the Jewish year. In Hebrew, this cycle is called *yamim noraim* – the Days of Awe, a title which reflects more clearly the mood of this period. Internal renewal is the hallmark of this cycle which moves from Rosh ha Shanah through the Ten Days of Repentance to Yom Kippur. The central task of this time is an introspective one during which an observant Jew attempts to bring into consciousness the ways in which he or she has failed God, self and others. When this knowledge has surfaced, the penitent must act upon it by seeking forgiveness of those who have been wronged, or by making restitution for misdeeds. The month of Ellul which precedes

Tishri prepares the Jewish people for this somewhat onerous task by sounding the Shofar each day in order to alert the observant that the time for introspection is at hand. The end of Ellul is marked by *selihot*[41] recited during the week before Rosh ha Shanah. One of the central features of *selihot* is the thirteen attributes of mercy as taken from Exodus 34:6–7.

Some biblical scholars posit that the origin of Rosh ha Shanah lies in the divine coronation festivals of the ancient Near East.[42] Be that as it may, the focal point of the Rosh ha Shanah liturgy is that God is Sovereign of the world, the One who created the world and continues to renew this creation. A second theme, that of Rosh ha Shanah being the anniversary of the creation of the world, is intertwined with the sovereignty of God.

The blessing of candles for Rosh ha Shanah underscores the theme of creation and the creation of the world:

> Creator of beginnings, as you created the world on this day, uniting fragments into a universe, so help unite our hearts, the hearts of all Jews who serve You. Illumine our lives with the light of Your Torah, for by Your light do we see light. Grant us this year a glimpse of the light of redemption, the light of healing and of peace.[43]

As the liturgy progresses we come to the prayer entitled *Avinu Malkeinu* – 'Our Father, Our King'.[44] This prayer is central to the focus of the Days of Awe. Within the prayer, God is enthroned Sovereign of the universe, human frailty and error acknowledged and finally the praying Jew asks God to 'inscribe us for blessing in the book of life'.[45] According to tradition there is a Book of Life and a Book of Death. The Books are opened at Rosh ha Shanah and closed on Yom Kippur. The righteous are inscribed in the Book of Life and the wicked in the Book of Death.[46] Those who are in between have the ten days of repentance during which to decide their fate. The liturgy is filled with prayers to be signed and sealed in the Book of Life. This same wish is expressed by those who send greeting cards to friends and family at the New Year.

During Rosh ha Shanah the ceremony of *Tashlich*[47] is performed in some communities while in others *Kapparot* is performed. Some communities prefer to omit both ceremonies.

Although the focus of Rosh ha Shanah is in the synagogue, there are some food customs that characterize the celebration, most notably dipping apple slices into honey and offering them to friends and family with the wish for a good and sweet year. Rosh ha Shanah is a two-day

festival which is designed to strengthen the observance through being designated 'one long day'.[48]

The days between Rosh ha Shanah and Yom Kippur are characterized by personal prayer and introspection as well as seeking reconciliation where reconciliation is required. The liturgy of the synagogue continues with the *Avinu Malkeinu* and *Selihot.*

Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement concludes the cycle of introspection. This day is almost exclusively located within the synagogue. There are five services beginning with the *Kol Nidrei* which 'proclaims null and void those vows and promises that we may make and fail to fulfil in the coming year'.[49] Since the *Kol Nidrei* is a legal formula, it is chanted before a court of three people. A person holding a Torah scroll stands on each side of the service leader. In order to formalize the declaration, it is chanted three times and since it is viewed as a legal procedure it takes place before the sun sets. Yom Kippur is regarded as a Sabbath of complete rest (Lev 23:32) wherein all of the regular Sabbath restrictions apply, with additional restrictions which include a solemn fast from food and water for twenty-four hours. The final service on Yom Kippur is the *Neilah* or closing of the gates of heaven. The *Neilah* liturgy asks that the petitioner be sealed in the Book of Life and concludes with a responsive recitation of the *Shema* and the phrase 'The Lord is God' repeated seven times before the Kaddish and the final sounding of the Shofar.

The message of Yom Kippur is to lead the observant from introspection to action. Judaism seeks always to choose life[50] and does this most consciously in the observance and introspection of the Days of Awe. However, the task does not end with the *Neilah* service. The challenge of the cycle of internal renewal is to live more consciously out of the values of Torah and the tradition, to be intentional about putting words into deeds.

Light in the darkness

Hanukkah has an ambiguous history. First and Second Maccabees recount with minor differences a military victory, but fail to mention the cruse of oil or the miracle,[51] even though the cleansing of the Temple and the lighting of the lamp are noted. Some hold that Hanukkah is instituted for eight days because the Maccabees could not observe Sukkot as fugitives in the Judaean hills. Josephus does not mention the miracle but names the holiday – 'lights'.[52] Only in the Gemara[53] does the long-lost miracle emerge. Through the years, Hanukkah and its observance has continued to evolve. In North

America Hanukkah has been given great prominence as a counter-balance to Christmas. The tradition of giving Hanukkah *gelt* is an old one, but the proximity with Christmas has added a new emphasis to the dimension of gift-giving at this season of the year.

Like the holiday itself, the candle-lighting ritual is rabbinically ordained. One candle of an eight-branched menorah is lit every evening after sundown and the menorah is placed in a window or another place where it is visible from outside. The servant candle, which is used to light the others, is placed apart or at a different level so that the eight candles denoting the miracle are clearly visible. It is customary to start placing the candles at the right and move toward the left. Candle lighting is accompanied by prayer and blessing and after singing some of the traditional Hanukkah melodies, gifts are exchanged. The dreidel game is often a part of Hanukkah celebration. Like any festival Hanukkah includes traditional foods which memorialize the miracle of the oil.

On a deeper level Hanukkah is a time of dedication and renewal. In the lighting of the Hanukkah menorah, the Jewish people seek to ignite a flame in the soul, 'the spark that cannot be extinguished, that will burn not for eight days but for eternity'.[54] The menorah in the window is symbolic of the inner light of truth and belief that flickers in the darkness, indifference and intolerance of daily existence. Greenberg says that 'as long as Hanukkah is studied and remembered, Jews will not surrender to the night'.[55]

Towards the future

Hope for a renewed future took concrete form in the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. This renewal of nationhood is in turn made concrete in the celebrations of the modern state. A Remembrance Day for the fallen in the wars of the past fifty-one years lays bare the fact that some are asked to die in order to bring hopes and dreams to life. Yom Ha' Shoah marks the resolve never to forget the six million and the need for human solidarity, the need for this generation to find a way to give voice to the unspeakable and to create a lasting memorial through acts of loving-kindness. Greenberg reminds us that 'against pure hatred and death, one must offer urgent life and love'.[56]

Yom Ha'atzmaut is Independence Day in Israel and is celebrated with secular and unrestrained joy. To have power as a state is also to have morality and life transformed by the facts of power. According to Jewish tradition self-judgement should feature in the prayer of the powerful so that God is asked to strengthen and enhance good

tendencies and to accompany persons in power as 'Friend, Partner and Judge',[57] in order to ensure that prayer is translated into action.

In many ways the polarities within Judaism itself militate against handing on belief in any uniform manner. For some members of the Ultra Orthodox, the new state of Israel does not exist and is therefore inconsequential in their belief system. For other Jews, biblical boundaries for the state of Israel are of paramount importance, and set this group in an adversarial position with any person or group who seeks to change these boundaries. The debate over who is a Jew marginalizes members of some Conservative congregations and relegates Reform Jews to a position without status within the state of Israel. So how does one hand on belief in such a complex tradition? There is no simple answer, but I believe that the key is in the listening and the observance – 'We shall do and we shall hear' (Deut 5:24).

The cycle of the years becomes a spiral staircase of covenantal relationship which leads the observant Jew deeper and deeper into the meaning and significance of fidelity to the foundational credal statement of Judaism – *Shema Yisrael* – as he or she meets the challenges and opportunities of handing on belief and tradition in a new and ever-changing context.

As Christians, we also face a daunting task in handing on our beliefs in a world that is becoming increasingly more complex and fragmented. Dogma, doctrine and interpretation have given us not one but many Christian traditions. Some of these traditions have more similarities than differences, and vice versa. Within these many traditions, we need to be creative and intentional about fostering dialogue and understanding not only between the polarities which exist within the individual Christian traditions but between the traditions themselves. Perhaps for us as Christian communities the *Shema Yisrael* uttered by Jesus in Mark 12:23–31 should be heard as a call to conversion, a conversion that will impel us to make the vision of Vatican II a reality: 'The sacred Council exhorts, therefore, all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism.'[58] For Christians an ecumenical vision that is understanding and respectful is foundational to handing on belief.

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NOTES

1 Carol Ochs and Kerry M. Olitzky, *Jewish spiritual guidance: finding our way to God* (San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997), p 53.
2 Philip Birnbaum, *Encyclopedia of Jewish concepts* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1988), pp 45, 128, 464, 636–637.
3 *Ibid.*, pp 335–337. *Midrash Haggadah* explains the biblical text from an ethical and devotional point of view. Its purpose is to admonish and edify. Biblical themes are interpreted midrashically to portray the entire story of Israel as an ongoing revelation of God's love and justice. *Midrash Halakhah*, on the other hand, concerns itself with the derivation of laws from the scriptural text. *Midrash Halakhah* pays careful attention to the economy of the biblical text where no letter, phrase, word, addition or omission is insignificant. One of the most sizeable collections of Midrash is the *Midrash Rabba*.
4 Menachem Kellner, 'Dogma' in Arthur A. Cohen and Paul M. Flohr (eds), *Contemporary Jewish religious thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), pp 141–146.
5 *NRSV*, Leviticus 23:2. All scriptural references used in the body of the text are from the *NRSV*.
6 Pope John Paul II, Rome, 28 April 1999.
7 *NRSV*, Mark 12:28–31.
8 John Paul II, Rome, 28 April 1999. See also *Insegnamenti*, 1980 III/2, pp 1272–1276.
9 Ochs and Olitzky, *Jewish spiritual guidance*, p 42.
10 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: its meaning for modern man* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), p 8.
11 *Ibid.*, p 13.
12 *Genesis Rabba* 10, 9.
13 The *parasha* or Torah reading for the week very often begins the conversation at the Sabbath evening meal. Elsewhere in this volume, Professor Maureena Fritz NDS has explored Sabbath in greater detail.
14 The *Havdalah* service is conducted in the home at the end of Sabbath and marks with sorrow the departure of the Sabbath Queen.
15 *Rosh Chodesh* was celebrated only eleven times a year. In the month of Tishri, *Rosh ha Shanah* coincides with *Rosh Chodesh*. *Rosh ha Shanah* celebrations take precedence over *Rosh Chodesh*.
16 Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish way: living the holidays* (New York: Touchstone Press, 1988), p 414.
17 Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, *ReVisions: seeing Torah through a feminist lens* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books, 1998), p 159.
18 Robin Zeigler, 'My body, myself and *Rosh Chodesh*' in Susan Berrin (ed), *Celebrating the new moon: a Rosh Chodesh anthology* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), p 38.
19 It is interesting to note that several references in the New Testament situate Jesus at the observance of one or more of these festivals. (Passover – John 2:23 and Mt 26:2 are two of many references. Sukkot – John 7:37–39.)
20 Yaacov Vainstein, *The cycle of the Jewish year* (Jerusalem, IL: The Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1971), p 141.
21 Greenberg, *The Jewish way*, pp 36–37.
22 *Passover Haggada*, Collection of the Jewish National and University Library Jerusalem (Jerusalem, IL: W. Turnowsky Ltd, 5758), p 2.

23 Greenberg, *The Jewish way*, pp 41–48. *Chametz* is a technical Hebrew term for any one of the five basic types of food grain (wheat, rye, spelt, barley and oats) that ferments when mixed with water and allowed to stand.
24 *Ibid.*, p 36.
25 *Ibid.*, p 74.
26 *Ibid.*, p 70. See also Norbert Lohfink, *The covenant never revoked*, trans the Missionary Society of St Paul the Apostle in New York (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991); Michael Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays: a guide and commentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp 69–83.
27 Recounted in Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays*, p 73.
28 Greenberg, *The Jewish way*, p 91.
29 Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays*, p 127. The *sukkah* is a temporary structure, governed by halachic requirements. It is usually constructed with four walls and covered with a roof of tree branches. The roof ideally should protect from the sun but allow the stars to be seen. The inside of the *sukkah* is decorated with the fruit and vines available at harvest time. The ideal is to live in the *sukkah* in so far as is possible. However, in intemperate climates such as North America, the rabbis have enacted the principle that you should enjoy the *sukkah* and not suffer in it.
30 Greenberg, *The Jewish way*, p 106. The *lulav* is composed of a *citron* or *etrog* with branches of palm, myrtle and willows woven together. These four species are representative of the beauty and bounty of the land of Israel. During the days of the festival the *lulav* is waved in every synagogue or home. See also Leviticus 23:40.
31 Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 51B.
32 Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays*, p 181. See also Arthur Waskow, *Seasons of our joy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1982), pp 105–114. The five fruits and two grains associated with the land of Israel are found in Deuteronomy 8:8.
33 Greenberg, *The Jewish way*, p 247. Purim-shpielers are players who circulate through the community, visiting homes and putting on skits that satirize current events or family events or Jewish life in general. It has also become a tradition to satirize the rabbis or heads of Yeshivot.
34 *Ibid.*, p 257.
35 *Ibid.*, p 87. The exact siege of Jerusalem is puzzling. These events may have occurred between the Maccabean period (second century BCE) and 70 CE.
36 Some of the prohibitions are haircutting, shaving, bathing, swimming, wearing freshly laundered clothing, going to movies, focusing on home renovations, or shopping for new clothes.
37 *Mishnah*, Ta-anit, 4.6. See also Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays*, pp 87–89.
38 The mourning practices governing Tish B'Av and Yom Kippur include abstaining from eating, drinking, bathing, anointing with perfume or oil, sexual intercourse and wearing leather shoes.
39 Greenberg, *The Jewish way*, p 303.
40 The pilgrimage festivals, Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot are the other major cycle of the year.
41 *Selihot* are special penitential prayers recited in the week preceding Rosh ha Shanah.
42 Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays*, p 97.
43 *Gates of repentance: the New Union prayerbook for the Days of Awe* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1978), p 17. The Central Conference of American Rabbis is one of the major rabbinical groups in the United States.
44 *Ibid.*, p 40.
45 *Ibid.*, p 40.
46 Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays*, pp 100–101.
47 *Tashlich* is a ceremony at which prayers are recited and symbolic crumbs of bread representative of one's sins are cast into a flowing stream. *Kapparot* has the same symbolic meaning whereby sin is transferred to a white fowl that is then circled about the head, then subsequently slaughtered and given to charity. In later years money in a handkerchief has been substituted for the fowl. Both rituals have some reference to the biblical 'scapegoat'.
48 Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays*, p 103.
49 *Ibid.*, p 113.

50 Deut 30:19: 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.'
51 The contemporary celebration of Hanukkah focuses on the finding of a cruse (small container) of oil, which contained only enough oil to fuel the temple lamp for one day. The miracle of Hanukkah is that this tiny amount of oil kept the temple lamp burning for eight days.
52 Strassfeld, *The Jewish holidays*, p 161.
53 *Ibid.*, p 162. The Gemara is a compilation of later rabbinic material that together with the Mishnah makes up the Talmud.
54 *Ibid.*, p 177.
55 Greenberg, *The Jewish way*, p 282.
56 *Ibid.*, p 366.
57 *Ibid.*, p 396.
58 *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4, in *Vatican Council II: the conciliar and post conciliar documents* vol 1, ed Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1988), p 456.