

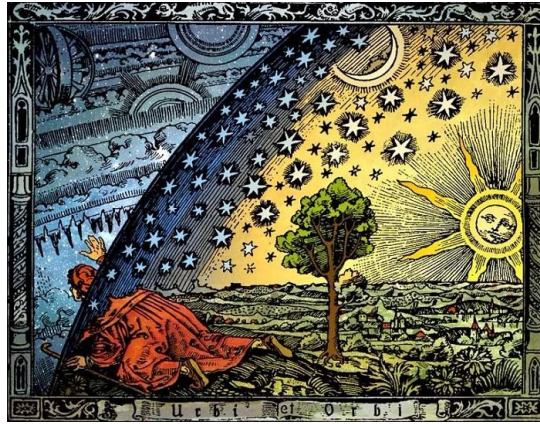
From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist

[242]

There Are Twelve Hours in The Day Insights into Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara 3b

With Appreciation to Rabbi Robyn Fryer Bodzin for bringing this story and some good insights to my attention



Background to Our Story

Day and Night in Talmudic Times

From: [JewishEncyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com) and <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>

The halakhah attaches great importance to the day-and-night cycle. Many mitzvot may only be performed during the day, e.g., circumcision, the sounding of the shofar, putting on the tefillin (phylacteries), lulav ("the taking of the palm-branch"), the laying of the hands on, and the slaughtering of, sacrifices, prayer, testimony and judgment, the construction of the Temple, and others.

The Bible does not clearly define day and night or their divisions, such as "evening, morning, and noonday" (Ps. 55:18), the watches of the night (Ex. 14:24; Judg. 7:19), midnight or half the night (Ex. 11:4; 12:29), and the notion of "hour" is not mentioned at all. The duration of a "halakhic" day is from dawn until the appearance of the stars, i.e., a full solar day. Every day (and every night) is divided into 12 "variable" ("זמניות") hours, no matter what season it occurs in; the duration of the hour is therefore dependent on the yearly season (Sanh. 38b). Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel follow this system to the present day.

The division into day and night was originally very indefinite, and there was no accurate measurement of time. The distinctions were made according to the successive natural stages or the occupations in daily life. The early morning is "alat hashahar," literally "rising of the morning [star]."

The morning is "boqer," or "the sun rose" (Gen. xix. 23, xxxii. 31).

Midday is "zaharayim," literally "the double light," that is, the time when the sunlight is brightest; or "the heat of the day" (Gen. xviii. 1; I Sam. xi. 11); or "the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18).

Afternoon and evening are "'ereb," the time of the day's decline (Judges xix. 8); or "the wind of the day" (Gen. iii. 8), that is, the evening breeze; or "neshef," darkness (Hi. xxiv. 15, 5; v. 11, etc.). A late designation is "the appearance of the stars" (Neh. iv. 15 [21]).

The twilight before nightfall is in the Mishnah and Talmud called "ben ha-shemashot" (between the suns), of which Yer. Ber. i. gives this explanation: "When the eastern sky becomes pale, that is 'ben ha-shemashot'; but when it becomes so black [or dark] that the upper and lower parts of the sky are of the same color, it is night."

The subdivision of night and day into twelve equal divisions of variable duration is of late introduction, probably adopted in the Exile from the Babylonians. Older is the division of the night into three night-watches, "ashmurah" or "ashmoret" (mishnaic, "mishmarah").

Leviathan



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan>



Leviathan (Hebrew: לִוְיָתָן) is a sea monster referenced in the Hebrew Bible in the Book of Job, Psalms, and Isaiah. The Leviathan of the Book of Job is a reflection of the older Canaanite *Lotan*, a primeval monster defeated by the god Hadad. Parallels to the role of Mesopotamian Tiamat defeated by Marduk have long been drawn in comparative mythology, as have been wider comparisons to dragon and world serpent narratives such as Indra slaying Vrtra or Thor slaying Jörmungandr, but Leviathan already figures in the Hebrew Bible as a metaphor for a powerful enemy, notably Babylon (Isaiah 27:1), and some scholars have pragmatically interpreted it as referring to large aquatic creatures, such as the crocodile. The word later came to be used as a term for "great whale" as well as of sea monsters in general.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara 3b

וְהָא אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: שְׁתֵּימָּה עֲשָׂרָה שָׁעוֹת הָיָה הַיּוֹם, שְׁלֹשׁ הָרְאשׁוֹנוֹת – הַקְּדוּשָׁה בְּרוּךְ הוּא יוֹשֵׁב וְעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה, שְׁנֵי יוֹשֵׁב וְדָן אֶת כָּל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ, כִּיּוֹן שְׂרוּאָה שְׁנֵי עָתִיד עוֹלָם כְּלִיָּהּ, עוֹמֵד מִכְּסֵּא הַדִּין וְיוֹשֵׁב עַל כְּסֵּא רַחֲמִים. שְׁלִישִׁיּוֹת – יוֹשֵׁב וְדָן

את כל העולם כולו מקרני ראמים עד ביצי כנים, רביעיות – יושב ומשחק עם לוינתו, שנאמר: "לוינתו זה יצרת לשחק בו!"

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אמר ליה רב אחא לרב נתמן בר יצחק: מיום שתרב בית המקדש אין שחוק להקדוש ברוך הוא. ומגלן דליכא שחוק? אילימא מדכתיב: "ויקרא ה' אלהים צבאות ביום ההוא לבכי ולמספד ולקרחה" וגו', דלמא ההוא יומא ותו לא! אלא דכתיב: "אם אשפחה ירושלם תשפח ימיני, תדבק לשוני לחפי אם לא אזכרכי" – דלמא שכחה הוא דליכא, אבל שחוק מיהא איכא! אלא מהא: "החשינתי מעולם אתריש אתאפק" וגו'. ברביעיות מאי עביד? יושב ומלמד תיבוקות של בית רבן תורה, שנאמר: "את מי יורה דעה ואת מי יבין שמועה גמולי מחלב עתיקי משדים", למי יורה דעה ולמי יבין שמועה? לגמולי מחלב ולעתיקי משדים. ומעיקרא מאן הנה מיגמר להו? איבעית אימא: מיטטרון. ואיבעית אימא: הא והא עביד.

ובליילא מאי עביד? איבעית אימא: מעין וממא. ואיבעית אימא: רוכב על כרוב קל שלו ושט בשמונה עשר אלה עולמות, שנאמר: "רכב אלהים רבתיים אלפי שנאן", אל תקרי "שנאן" אלא "שאינן". ואיבעית אימא: יושב ושומע שירה מפני חיות, שנאמר: "יומם יצוה ה' חסדו ובלילה שירה עמי"

Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: There are twelve hours in the day. During the first three, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and engages in Torah study. During the second three hours, He sits and judges the entire world. Once He sees that the world has rendered itself liable to destruction, He arises from the throne of judgment and sits on the throne of mercy, and the world is not destroyed.

During the third set of three hours, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and sustains the entire world, from the horns of wild oxen to the eggs of lice. During the fourth three hours, He sits and plays with the leviathan, as it is stated: "There is leviathan, whom You have formed to play with" (Psalms 104:26).

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Rav Aha said to Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak: From the day the Temple was destroyed, there is no longer any playing (rejoicing) for the Holy One, Blessed be He.

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The Gemara asks: If God no longer plays, what does He now do during the fourth three-hour period of the day? The Gemara answers: He sits and teaches Torah to schoolchildren, as it is stated: "Whom shall one teach knowledge? And whom shall one make to understand the message? Them that are weaned from the milk, them that are drawn from the breasts" (Isaiah 28:9). The verse is interpreted in the following manner: To whom does God teach knowledge, and to whom does He make to understand the message? To those who are just weaned from the milk and to those who are drawn from the breasts, i.e., children only recently weaned from nursing.

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The Gemara asks: And during the twelve hours of the night, what does God do? The Gemara answers: If you wish, say that the night is similar to the day, i.e., God performs the same activities as in the day. And if you wish, say instead that He rides on his light cherub and flies in eighteen thousand worlds, as it is stated: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even [*shinan*] thousands" (Psalms 68:18). Do not read it as even [*shinan*], rather read it as: That which are not [*she'einan*]. Since the minimum of thousands is two thousand, the phrase: That which are not thousands, indicates that two thousand are not present, i.e., the chariots of God are twenty thousand minus two thousand, which means that God rides in eighteen thousand worlds. And if you wish, say instead that God sits and listens to the songs from the mouths of the angelic creatures, as it is stated: "By day the Lord will command His loving-kindness, and in the night His song shall be with me" (Psalms 42:9)



Explaining the Story (What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? How is God's daily schedule?

1st Quarter of the day _____

2nd Quarter of the day _____

3rd Quarter of the day _____

4th Quarter of the day _____

Night Schedule _____

Bonus **?** What is God's daily schedule?

Bonus **?** What can we learn from the fact that God has a schedule?

Bonus **?** What can we learn from the schedule itself?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Have a daily schedule and keep it diverse, leaving time for study, work, play, family time, and volunteer work; and everything you do, do it kindly and mercifully.

EPILOGUE

By anthropomorphically describing God's schedule, the Talmudic Sages gave us a priceless insight into their own view on time managing. A person who wishes to imitate God, should have time for productive work (judging), study (Torah study), play (playing with the leviathan and listening to the angelic choir), family time (teaching little children Torah), and volunteer work (feeding the world). While God's sovereignty extends over 18,000 thousand worlds, He rules over them with kindness and compassion, something human beings ought to imitate in our own lives.