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"What is the Jewish relationship to time?"

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

From the creation until the end of days, Jews have been and will forever be fixated on time.

Historically and traditionally, we locate ourselves on a continuum from the six days of creation until the Messianic or Apocalyptic end of days. In principle, and often in practice, we parcel out time into smaller pieces: a continuum of weeks with their Sabbaths, and months with their new moons, and years with their new beginnings.

We qualify time too: some moments we call sacred or special, others profane or ordinary. Or, in the vernacular, we have work time and play time, rest time and family time, and a modern invention called weekends.

We marked time by the stars and the moon and became expert observers of the skies. But we had a problem when the lunar year lagged behind the solar year and the holidays threatened to rotate untethered away from their seasons. So we became inventive and adaptive and developed a sophisticated calendar that periodically adjusts lunar and solar timetables with our version of a leap year.

This novel system gave rise to another lesson: flexibility. Some years, we say, the Jewish holidays are early, some years they are late. But one thing they are not, which is on time. And so we have to adjust ourselves constantly to this slippery timetable. Whether time rushes on or standstill, we also have a choice to live in the past, in the future, in the moment, or maybe even in all three phases simultaneously!