

**CALENDAR REFORM
Before the
UNITED NATIONS**

**JEWISH SUPPORT
For The World Calendar**

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JEWISH SUPPORT FOR THE WORLD CALENDAR

By Daniel Sher

THE TIME has come for a frank presentation of The World Calendar in the Hebrew language and generally to Jews, discussing candidly the attitude of such groups as the World Jewish Congress in this, an issue of great public interest.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to show not merely why it is right to have The World Calendar, but equally why it is wrong to oppose it. At the same time, we shall seek to deal concretely with the main stumbling block—the week (and the Sabbath).

In relation to the general subject of calendar reform, there is at present a good deal of ignorance and confusion among our people. The unfortunate result is that an action is being carried out on behalf of organized Jewry that is hasty, erroneous and harmful.

This opposition to The World Calendar runs counter to logic, morals and history alike. A blunder is being committed which is due to misconceptions and a confusion of basic principles.

Organized Jewry committed the same blunder in the days of the League of Nations. It is being repeated right now in the halls of the United Nations.

The urgency of this matter is that it should be set right without delay. The sooner, the better—and most emphatically before the State of Israel becomes involved.

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SINCE HISTORY began, man has been struggling with the problem of time measurement—how to coordinate the various astronomical occurrences by which time is divided into convenient units. The adjustment is not an easy one and it has no perfect solution. The week is an artificial unit in the sense that it has no astronomical counterpart. But the day, the month and the year are natural units, which cannot be correlated with complete precision; a year lasts 365.242199 days, a lunar month lasts 29.530598 days

In various civilizations and epochs, a great variety of solutions have been tried, in each case according to the practical needs and the existing knowledge of the facts. The Jewish calendar is one of those solutions. The Christian, or Gregorian calendar is another.

The striving toward perfection—that is, making practice and reality fit—has been a typical aspiration of the human race from earliest times, and it still is with us. In the realm of time reckoning it has assumed the form—during the past century or so—of a movement for the reform of the international civil calendar.

Scientists, businessmen and governments—both East and West—have long since shown that this calendar has several serious shortcomings that disturb the normal course of life in modern civilization. The disturbance is greater than in former centuries because the present age requires coordination and precision. So there are great pressures to have the shortcomings corrected and set right.

So far, this reform movement has encountered only two main obstacles—inertia and religious opposition, the latter mainly from organized Jewry. In the days of the League of Nations, Rabbis and Jewish civil leaders launched a campaign against calendar reform, and many signatures were obtained to petitions asking the League to desist.

This year (1954), at the United Nations, the World Jewish Congress has embarked upon a similar campaign. This group and its member organizations are respectable and important. But they are not

immune from error. However respectable and important are the bodies in question, even weightier and important are the issues in which they have erred.

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FIRST OF ALL comes the fact that it is not the *Jewish* calendar that is being discussed. The subject of discussion is the Christian and universal civil calendar. Surely, the moral right to participate in the decision belongs exclusively to the nations that accept this calendar and are “partners” in it.

Whoever makes a Sabbath for himself should not interfere with the Sabbath of others. The Jewish people have sole jurisdiction over the Jewish calendar, not the Christian one.

Any intervention by organized Jewry in the affairs of the Christian calendar, whether to reform it or to prevent its reform, is as out of place as for the Pope to meddle in the affairs of the Jewish calendar.

Politically and morally, then, this is not the time for us Jews to speak or advise. This is rather a time for us to keep “silence.” Any statement of opinion from us, any attempted intervention by the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish congregations or the rabbinate, would seem to be utterly unjustified and improper.

Nor, from a political-moral standpoint, is the State of Israel justified in intervening. The Jewish calendar determines the current events and routines of our State, and it would little matter if, alongside the Hebrew date, we placed The World Calendar date instead of the Gregorian. In so far as the general civil calendar affects current affairs in Israel—for example, in the economic field—the reform will have definite advantages, since it will promote stability, efficiency and economy.

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IF UNDER the religious and moral aspect any intervention by organized Jewry is out of place and improper, then under the historic aspect is it completely irrational.

At the League of Nations and now again at the UN, the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish congregations and the rabbinate come forward to preserve the Christian calendar from any change. This is a more “Christian” stand than that of the Pope himself, who has remained aloof—on the basis that the civil calendar is no concern of the religious authorities. At a UN meeting in New York last month the Belgian delegate is reported as saying: “The arguments of an economic sort supporting calendar reform are so strong that, according to our latest information, the Vatican is disposed to be moved by them and to withdraw any religious opposition.”

So let us go back a little in calendar history. It was the Vatican that accomplished the most recent reform of the Christian calendar, when Gregory XIII in 1582 installed the present system. Of course he did this without any Jewish participation. Earlier, Julius Caesar introduced his calendar—again without any Jewish intervention. The weeks came into the calendar at the time of Emperor Constantine, out of Christian religious considerations—and the Jews were not consulted.

The solar calendar of ancient Egypt provided the basis for Caesar’s calendar, just as the Jewish calendar is founded upon the lunar calendar of Babylonia. In the perspective of historic evolution, our Jewish calendar is the heir of old Babylon, while the Christian system goes back to ancient Egypt. Names of the Christian months and weekdays perpetuate some of the ancient Roman and Germanic gods; names of some Jewish months perpetuate Babylonian deities.

Any effort on our part to intervene in the reform of the international civil calendar would indicate a straddle in which we are at the same time trying to be faithful to the cultural heritage of Nebuchadnezzar and also defending the world against any change in the cultural heritage of Titus. History makes strange bedfellows.

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THE POINTS that I have taken up—religious, moral and historical—do not embrace the whole scope of realities as concerns calendar reform. It is necessary to face also the fact that the Christian

calendar has become the civil calendar of the world, particularly in the matter of international relations. It is a common denominator of all the nations, both Christian and non-Christian.

To the extent that the State of Israel—and Jewish populations everywhere—acknowledge their partnership in this universal civil calendar, they are entitled, and even expected, to state their opinions and take a stand. But they should be meticulous to keep to the civil side of the matter and not trespass into the province of religion.

In this light, we see that, in the broadest sense, the current plan for calendar reform favors the interests of the Jews—both those outside Israel and those within the borders of the new State, being intended to serve the whole community of civilized humanity. The arguments that point in this direction are:

(1) The increased efficiency and economy that an improved calendar will bring.

(2) The finding of a common denominator and the achievement of an agreement between civilizations and governments in the East and West will prove a stabilizing factor of considerable psychological relevance in international relations. The very fact of an East-West agreement and the introduction of a yearly world holiday devoted to international understanding would emphasize the desire for world peace, which is a vital need of all nations—and particularly of the Jewish people.

(3) The movement for calendar reform, being aimed at rationalization and normalization, helps to overcome the inertia of preconceived notions and superstitions, of ignorance and bigotry. This then is a progressive movement, and the experience of all history is a continuous proof that the best interests of the Jewish people are indissolubly bound up with progressive movements of this kind, while resistance to them undermines the very basis of our existence. It is sheer inconsistency for us to preach against bigotry in one sphere—for example, that of racial prejudice—while at the same time we support the same sort of preconceptions, ignorance and bigotry in another sphere, that of time reckoning. Progress, like peace, is indivisible.

Support of calendar reform on exclusively lay grounds is, then, a course of action which the State of Israel should take, both for the sake of its interests as a State and in accordance with its special aspiration to serve the best interests of the Jewish communities throughout the world. Thus, indeed, it can quickly put right the damage caused by the hasty action of the Jewish private organizations that are opposing the reform.

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WHY AND WHEREFORE came that hasty opposition? The reason, of course, lies not in any devotion to the plan devised by Caesar and slightly amended by Gregory. It lies rather in the adjustment that necessarily results from the proposed reform—the exclusion of one day a year (two days in leap years) from the sequence of the weeks, and the transformation of this day into a universal holiday under the name of “Worldsday,” rather than “Sunday,” “Monday” or any other weekday name.

Under the reform plan, Worldsday will come after Saturday, December 30th, and will be followed by Sunday, January 1st. Since 364 is exactly divisible by 7—while 365 and 366 are not—there is no better way to stabilize the calendar so that month-dates will always coordinate with weekdays.

Incidentally, the supporters of this plan point out that this idea of intercalating an extra day into the normal weekly sequence was borrowed from them by Moses, who did not keep to the immutable sequence of the weeks and whose example was still observed by the Saducees in the days of the Second Temple. In Leviticus XXIII: 15-16, we read: “Ye shall count from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be complete. Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days.” This was the so-called “pentecontad” calendar, with an intercalary day after each seven-week unit.

But the issue consists, of course, not in the interpretation of a Bible verse nor in any controversy as to whether the idea of an “embolismic” week comes from Moses. Some people claim that the sequence of the weekdays should not be interfered with because the world was created in seven days, according to the Bible. This argument is not to the point, because (1) even the belief that the world was created in seven days does not necessarily require the perpetuation of the seven-day sequence in any civil system of time reckoning; and (2) since this is a matter of faith, it should not be *imposed* on

anybody, least of all on followers of another religion—Jews certainly should not seek to impose it upon Christians, nor upon Mohammedans, Buddhists, Hindus and others.

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HOWEVER, the main argument is more tangible than matters of Scriptural interpretation. The argument is that, should the sequence of the weeks be altered in the international civil calendar, then the Jewish Sabbath (also of course the Christian Sunday and the Moslem Friday) would start wandering across the *civil* calendar, and such an occurrence would cause economic and social hardships to those of the Jews outside Israel who observe the Sabbath, and would make such observance difficult. “This would be an attempt,” said the late Chief Rabbi Hertz, “on the spiritual and human rights to the minority.”

His argument seems serious at first sight. Indeed, it was the cause of the hasty and erroneous action taken by the Jewish organizations. Their action was hasty and erroneous because the argument is serious only at first sight. Actually it is: (1) fallacious as to the facts; (2) untenable morally and politically; (3) deficient logically.

We shall take these three points in order. How is it fallacious? The Jewish holidays are not fixed in the Christian calendar; they wander through its various dates. Does this compel the Jews of the Diaspora to observe the holidays to a lesser extent than they observe the Sabbath? And did any Jewish organization ever as much as hint that Christendom ought to adapt its time-reckoning system to the Jewish holidays so as to render it easier for Jews to comply with the commandments and rights of their religion?

The argument is fallacious because its theoretical foundations are dubious. The objection derives wholly from a faulty conception of the terms “day” and “week,” that is to say from the erroneous premise that these terms are *absolute*, and that any interference with them is therefore arbitrary and indefensible. Two or three examples will suffice to show how changes and adaptations are continually being made to fit these concepts to the facts of life:

(1) A person crossing the International Date Line may experience two successive Sabbaths, or may entirely skip one Sabbath and pass directly from Friday to Sunday. Or, one may observe either a six-day week or an eight-day week, according to the direction of travel. Did any Jewish organizations protest when, in 1884, the International Date Line was established under an international convention?

(2) The Sabbath, according to the Law, lasts from one sunset until the next one. What happens, then, in the polar regions, where the sun does not set, or rise, for months?

(3) The Sabbath should last 24 hours. But, in fact, it lasts 24 hours only at a given point while, on the globe *as a whole*, it must therefore last for 48 hours.

The Sabbath, then, is not *absolute*. It is relative. It is a function of physical and political geography.

There is no need to go further and explain what happens with navigation in outer space, which is just around the corner. In this case, the whole issue of the terrestrial calendar and the Sabbath would become meaningless and there would arise a compelling need to devise new rules and adjustments for adapting old doctrines to new realities. In short, realities have the peculiar feature of stubbornly refusing to adapt themselves to ancient dogmas and formulas.

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IT IS LIKEWISE maintained that the arguments put forward by Jewish opponents of calendar reform are “morally and politically untenable.” The point is simple. If the imposition of customs and beliefs on a minority is untenable, then an attempt by a minority to impose its customs and beliefs on a majority is most certainly wrong.

Indeed, this attitude is not only morally untenable; it is politically senseless. If, for example, the Christian world is required to keep its calendar unchanged for the sake of the comfort of the Jewish minority living among its people, then it certainly would be permissible, with an equal degree of morality, to require the Jews to change *their* calendar for the comfort and convenience of the Christian majority.

If one invokes “the spiritual and human rights of the minority” in the matter of calendar reform, it follows that either these rights do not conflict with or dictate to the majority in its time-reckoning system, or they constitute an attempt against “the spiritual and human rights” of the majority, and therefore must be disallowed. This is especially pertinent to the present situation at the United Nations, because Judaism appears to be the only opponent on religious grounds—except for a small group of Christian Sabbatarians. All other religions have stated either approval or non-opposition. In other words, the Jewish opposition is in the nature of a 0.5 percent minority against a 99.5% majority.

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IT HAS ALSO been asserted that the argument against calendar reform is “logically deficient,” because of its *inconsistency*.

It is commonly submitted, mainly by religious quarters, that the perception of time, and the terminology of it, have undergone a change in the course of many centuries. Thus are explained some of the contradictions between scientific and traditional chronologies. For example, science shows the cosmos as billions of years old, whereas tradition sets the Creation at 5714 years ago. And, again, the Scriptural statement that Methuselah lived for 969 years may be explained by the theory that in ancient times the word year (shana) was used in the connotation of months (hodesh), which brings him out somewhere near three score years and ten.

If the concept of “year” underwent such a change, why should not the concept of “week” have undergone a similar change? If, on the one hand, the reckoning of time is something relative and changeable, there is no logical reason for opposing a reform of the calendar. But if, on the other hand, time reckoning is something absolute—remaining unchangeable for eternities—how has it happened that so many precedents to the contrary have already been established in Judaism, without so much as a single protest or objection? Consider a few of these precedents:

(1) No Jew has ever protested against the abandonment of the division of hours in 1080 “parts” (each of 3 ½ seconds) and these parts in 78 “moments” (each of 0.04 seconds), an ancient system now completely replaced by the conventional scheme of minutes and seconds.

(2) No Jew has ever protested that the month of Tishri, and not the month of Nisan, is the first month of our calendar year. The Scriptures explicitly say about the month of Nisan (Exodus XII: 2): “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.”

(3) No Jew has ever protested against the modern tendency to introduce a five-day working week, although this is in flagrant contradiction to the explicit Scriptural command: “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day shall be a holy day.” (Exodus XXXV: 2)

(4) No Jew has ever protested against Albert Einstein’s proclamation of the principle of relativity of time.

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TO SUM UP, reform of the *civil* calendar is not the affair of religionists. Time is merely a physical datum. The measurement of times is like the measurement of space or electricity. Nobody charges that adoption of the metric system has anything to do with divine laws. Nobody objects on religious grounds to the meter, the gram or the volt.

Time is merely an order of events. Time and space are dimensions and nothing else. They are measured, not by theology, but by convenient standards that fit a practical purpose. The unit may be a yard or a mile, a week or a light-year.

The practical civil objectives of The World Calendar are: efficiency and economy for both individual and community, and improvement of international relations. The attainment of this objective is in the best interest of humanity as a whole, including—perhaps first and foremost—the State of Israel and the Jewish people of the Diaspora.

Further information on all aspects of
Calendar reform may be obtained from

THE WORLD CALENDAR ASSOCIATION
~~630 Fifth Avenue, New York City~~
~~Telephone Circle 6-2460~~
P.O. Box 456
Ellinwood, KS (Kansas) 67526
U.S.A.

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E-mail to: TWCA@TheWorldCalendar.org

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