

The Invention of the Seven-Day Week

EZRA ZUCKERMAN SIVAN

MIT SLOAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

LECTURE 1:

IF THE SEVEN-DAY WEEK IS ARTIFICIAL, WHY DOES THE TORAH IN THE FIRST CREATION STORY SEEM TO PRESENT IT AS A FEATURE OF THE NATURAL WORLD?



Introduction



THANK YOU for what you will share and I will learn

Hoping to make this as meaningful and valuable for you

- Please introduce yourself via google form

- Please show yourself on video

- Please raise hand

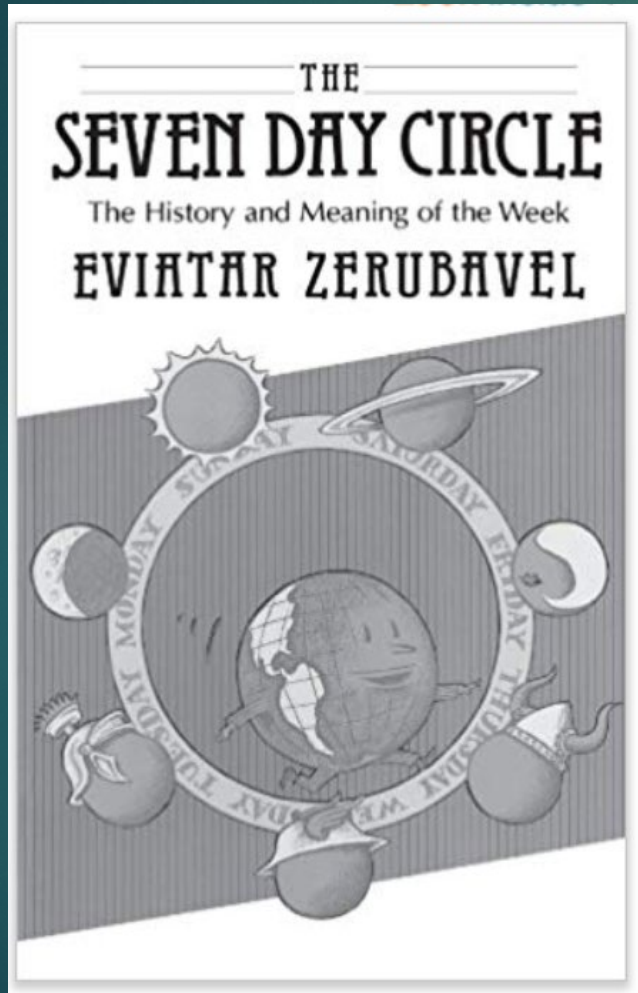
- Please limit chat comments (best when before 15 min pauses)

Organization of lectures is somewhat tentative. Will adapt based on what seems to be resonating and working

Will stay on extra 10 min tonight

Now.... .let's jump right in!

It Began with Astonishment... and a Crisis



“A continuous seven-day cycle that runs throughout history paying no attention whatsoever to the moon and its phases is a distinctively Jewish **invention**... The **invention** of the continuous week was ... one of the most significant breakthroughs in human beings’ attempts to break away from being prisoners of nature and create a social world of their own.”

A belated (15 Years Later...) aha moment

The Torah in fact does present the week as a radical invention

To see this, we must

Read the text closely, using what we have learned (& חז"ל knew!) about its literary conventions

Try to lose our retrospective blinders as “creatures of the week”

Helps even to suppose the Torah as a recovered relic

When we do this, we gain a deeper appreciation for

The social science of the week:

The Torah’s message about the shabbat/week:

Towering question: How & why was the week invented & successfully launched?

A bit of illuminating social scientific context

What is the week? What is it unlike?

1. Social convention that structures our lives
2. Social practice that structure our experience of “time”
3. Market cycles

1. Social conventions/institutions that structure our lives

- ▶ Writing Systems
- ▶ Currency
- ▶ Practices for Managing Death (burial, cremation, etc)
- ▶ Marriage practices
- ▶ Personal and family naming practices
- ▶ Keyboard layout (QWERTY)

Common features of such conventions

1. Diffuse ownership
2. Originate as (parallel) solution to problem
3. Universal with cross-societal variation
4. Essential
5. Taken-for-granted/Feel natural
6. Strong path-dependence
7. Blessing and curse

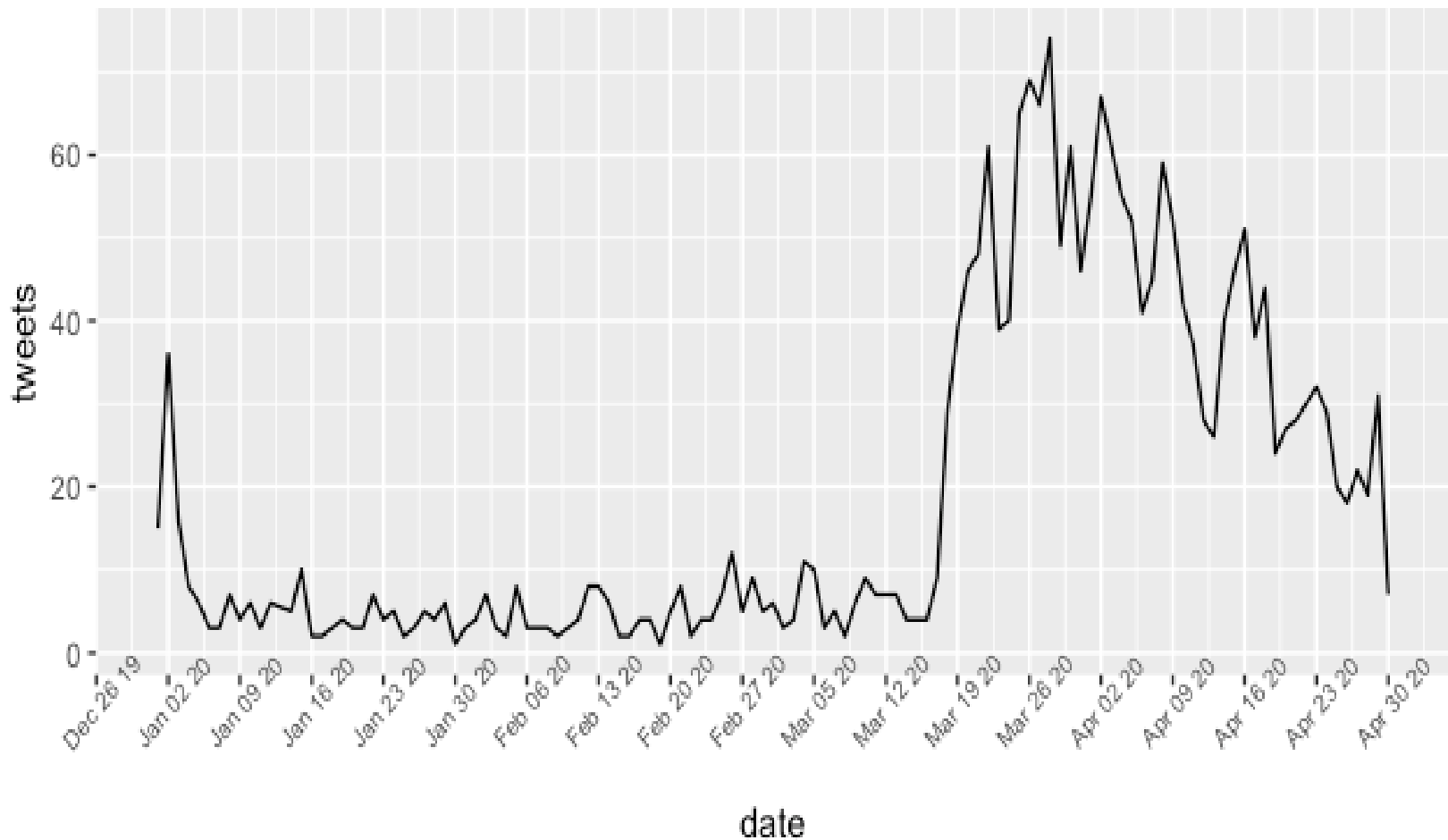
What About the Week?

1. Diffuse ownership
2. Originate as (parallel) solution to problem
3. Universal with cross-societal variation
4. Essential
5. Taken-for-granted/Feel Natural
6. Strong path-dependence
7. Blessing and curse

*Q: If the week(end) is such an essential blessing, why launched only once?
It's just a social agreement– should have been launched everywhere!*

The Week as Essential Foundation

'What day is it' tweet Timeline



Evidence of Weekend Happiness

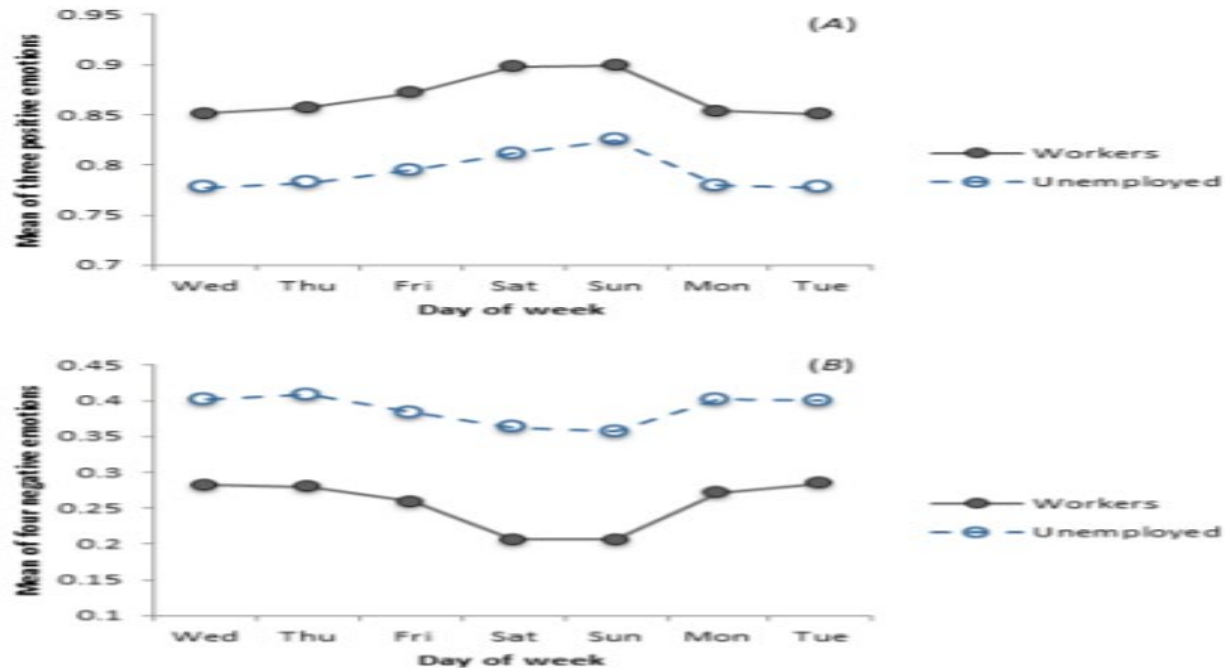


Figure 2: (A) Positive and (B) negative emotions by day of week. From Gallup Daily Poll, 2009–11.

Source:

Young, Cristobal, and Chaeyoon Lim. 2014.

“Time as a Network Good: Evidence from Unemployment and the Standard Workweek.” *Sociological Science* 1: 10-27

2. Social practices that structure our experience of “time”

(Fixed) calendars (אָדר שְׁנִי!), based on sun &/or moon
Era-counting (e.g., Gregorian, Hebcad) (vs. regnal etc.)

Conventions for structuring the day

- Time zone system

- Daylight savings

- (24/12) hour and minute divisions

The week *is different*:

- Used to mark *regular return*, not change

- Entrepreneurial founding efforts are unknown & paradoxical:

 - A disruption to introduce routine!

3. Another such disruptive scheduling platform!

Market cycles are attested in many ancient cultures

Like our שני והמישי, and contemporary farmers markets

But *not* on the seven-day week

They are more obviously human inventions, in part because they were never universal

In fact, they *lost* in competition to the week

Key question to ponder (lecture 5!):

How would the invention/launch process be similar/different?

Um. This is Drisha: Where are the texts???

And what about that crisis?!

Genesis 2:1-3

(1) The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. (2) On the seventh day God finished the work that had been undertaken: [God] ceased* on the seventh day from doing any of the work. (3) And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy—having ceased on it from all the work of creation that God had done.

בראשית ב' א'-ג'

(א) וַיִּכְלֹוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צְבָאָם: (ב)
וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר
עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכָל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: (ג) וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יּוֹם
הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת
מְכָל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים
לַעֲשׂוֹת: {פ}

Key Questions

1. What distinctive aspects of your Shabbat or the week experience **are missing** from the Torah's account of the seventh day?
2. Was anything created on the seventh day?
 - ▶ *Hint: what is the rhetorical format of creation?*
3. What genre is Genesis 2:1-3?
 - ▶ *Prose or poetry?*
 - ▶ *Why poetic?*

Answers to 1st Question

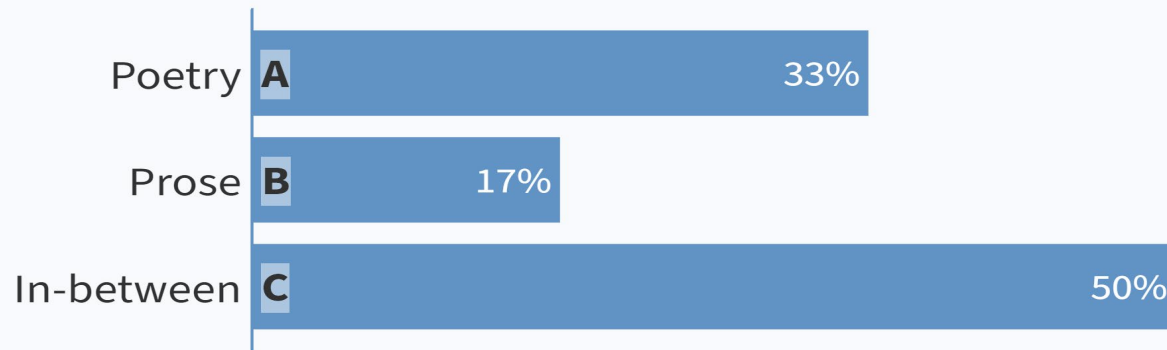


What aspects of your personal experience of Shabbat &/or the week are missing from the Torah's account of the seventh day?



Answers to 3rd Question

What genre is the Torah's account of the seventh day?



What poetic or lyrical elements do you see?

phrasing
rhythm
assonance
repetition

My Answers

1. Pretty much *everything about our experience is missing*– i.e., the **human** part
 - ▶ Also, the *cycle!*
2. Distinctive language of creation is missing, set off
 - ▶ ויאמר (10 times in days 1-6)
 - ▶ ויהי (12 + 6 times)
 - ▶ וירא (7 times)
 - ▶ ברא (there, making 7, but intransitive)
 - ▶ No processes set in motion
 - ▶ New verbs: לשבות, לקדש, לכלות, (לעשות), לברך
3. Poetry!
 - ▶ Suggests what matters is how it *feels*, not what was
 - ▶ Structure conveys something from nothing

Lyrical Elements

What poetic or lyrical elements do you see?

phrasing
rhythm
assonance
repetition

Heavenly Staircase of Nothing

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרְב
וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי

וַיִּכְלוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צִבְאָם

וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלֹאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכֹל-מְלֹאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ

כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכֹל-מְלֹאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת

אֶתְהָ תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהַבְרָאָם בַּיּוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְהוָה

אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וּשְׁמַיִם

Heavenly Staircase of Nothing

Creation is final,
a stable world

.1 וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרְבַּת

Completion was a
deliberate action,
which took a “yom” &
didn't involve speech

.2 וַיִּכְלֹו הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צָבָאָם

.3 וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

This action is called
“sabbathing” & is a
form of non-work that
effects completion

.4 וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

.5 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ

כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְקַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת

This action entails has
a mysterious positive
valence (blessing and
holy) and seems to
fulfill creation

.6 אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בַּיּוֹם עָשׂוֹת יְהִנֶּה אֱלֹהִים

The entire creation process
was completed in one yom,
including the seventh yom

Key takeaways from this week

Genesis does not present Shabbat or the week as a *human* social convention!
There's no **noun** shabbat here, no cycle. And no indication humans are informed

Nor does it appear in the rest of Bereshit!

It is a metaphysical description of God's actions

The artful poetic construction seems designed to teach us that Shabbat is somehow something important... that is also nothing at all. Nothing was created!

Note: There's a key extra-textual reason why it's wrong to read Breshit as saying the week is built into nature

This would have made no sense to the first audience for the Torah. *They were not creatures of the week like we are!*

OK, so where does first Shabbat invented & launched as continuous, human cycle?

Rashi on Genesis 2:3

(1) ויקדש ... ויברך AND GOD BLESSED ... AND HE SANCTIFIED — He blessed it through the Manna, that on all other days of the week there should fall for them (the Israelites) an Omer for each person, whereas on the sixth day there should fall twice as much of that bread. So, too, He sanctified it through the Manna, that it should not fall at all on the Sabbath (Genesis Rabbah 11:2). This verse is written here with reference to what would happen in the future.

רש"י על בראשית ב'ג'

(א) ויברך, ויקדש. בִּרְכוּ בַּמָּן, שְׁפֵל יָמוֹת הַשְּׁבוּעָה יוֹרֵד לָהֶם עֹמֶר לְאִגְלָגֶלֶת, וּבַשְּׁשִׁי לָהֶם מִשְׁנֵה, וְקִדְּשׁוּ בַּמָּן, שְׁלֹא יֵרֵד כָּלֵל בַּשַּׁבָּת, וְהַמְקָרָא כְּתוּב עַל הָעֵתִיד: (ב)

P.S. What would it look like if Shabbat were primordial?

ספר היובלים ב'

10 וביום הרביעי ברא את השמש ואת הירח ואת הכוכבים ויתן אותם ברקיע השמים להאיר על כל הארץ:

11 וישם אותם למושלי היום והלילה ולהבדיל בין אור ובין חושך:

12 ויעש אלהים את השמש לאות גדולה על הארץ לימים ולשבתות לשנים וליובלים ולכל לתקופות השנה:

Where We're Headed

1. Today: If the week is artificial, why does the Torah (in the first creation story) seem to present it as a feature of the natural world?
2. Next week: Why does each version of the **Ten Commandments** present such different, and seemingly contradictory, accounts of the **historical basis for the Shabbat** (creation vs. exodus)?
3. Week 3: How does the Torah's description of the first Shabbat observed by Israel fit in **the larger narrative of the Exodus** and the theological doubts that Israel expresses?
4. Week 4: If the Shabbat, and the week generally, is sustained today on the basis of **love**, why does the Torah seem to think it requires a very harsh enforcement regime, **including capital punishment**?
5. Week 5: Why does the Torah claim that Shabbat observance furnishes us with knowledge of God? Can the invention and launch of the week actually prove we're not alone?

For next session

1. Please fill out the short poll:

Intended for us to get to better know one another & get a sense of what we're trying to get out of the course:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1y2wUXxyYBWSPiX-5BPfCSd78x-h28GedyvCV0XjEVKg/edit>

2. Homework!

Not necessary but a great idea to read Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 4, and Exodus 16

3. May God protect those in Ukraine and elsewhere under great threat

4. Chodesh tov and Shabbat shalom