

# CULTURE CONTACTS AND THE MAKING OF CULTURES

Papers in Homage to  
Itamar Even-Zohar



Edited by

Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury



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Gideon Toury

Tel Aviv

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# Table of Contents

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| To The Memory of Robert Paine | V   |
| Acknowledgements              | VII |

## **Introduction**

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Rakefet Sela-Sheffy | 1 |
|---------------------|---|

## **Part One**

### **Identities in Contacts:**

### **Conflicts and Negotiations of Collective Entities**

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Manfred Bietak                        |    |
| The Aftermath of the Hyksos in Avaris | 19 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Robert Paine†  |    |
| Identity Puzzlement: Saami in Norway, Past and Present | 67 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Rakefet Sela-Sheffy   |    |
| High-Status Immigration Group and Culture Retention:<br>German Jewish Immigrants in British-Ruled Palestine | 79 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Wadda Rios-Font  |     |
| Ramón Power y Giralt, First Delegate to the Cádiz<br>Courts, and the Origins of Puerto Rican National Dis-<br>course | 101 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Israel Gershoni  |     |
| Culture Planning and Counter-Planning: The Young Ha-<br>san al-Banna and the Formation of Egyptian-Islamic Cul-<br>ture in Egypt | 131 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Gisèle Sapiro  |     |
| Recadrer la mémoire collective: l'exemple de la France à la Libération                         | 147 |
| Nitsa Ben-Ari  |     |
| Popular Literature in Hebrew as Marker of Anti-Sabra Culture                                   | 219 |
| Jón Karl Helgason  |     |
| The Role of Cultural Saints in European Nation States  | 245 |
| <b>Part Two</b>  |     |
| <b>Repertoire Formation: Invention and Change</b>  |     |
| Orly Goldwasser  |     |
| The Advantage of Cultural Periphery: The Invention of the Alphabet In Sinai (Circa 1840 B.C.E) | 255 |
| Gabriel M. Rosenbaum   |     |
| The Rise and Expansion of Colloquial Egyptian Arabic as a Literary Language                    | 323 |
| Gideon Toury   |     |
| The Invention of a Four-Season Model for Modern Hebrew Culture                                 | 345 |
| Panchanan Mohanty  |     |
| Why so Many Maternal Uncles in South Asian Languages?  | 365 |
| Thomas Harrington  |     |
| Urbanity in Transit: Catalan Contributions to the Architectural Repertoire of Modern Uruguay   | 391 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Nam-Fung Chang   |     |
| The Development of Translation Studies into a Discipline in China                  | 411 |
| Yaacov Shavit  |     |
| The Reception of Greek Mythology in Modern Hebrew Culture                          | 437 |
| Saliha Paker   |     |
| Translation, the Pursuit of Inventiveness and Ottoman Poetics: A Systemic Approach | 459 |
| Notes on Authors   | 475 |

# THE INVENTION OF A FOUR-SEASON MODEL FOR MODERN HEBREW CULTURE

**Gideon Toury**

## **1. Time Models to Organize Life**

The way we perceive it, time has two complementary facets: it moves both **sequentially** and **cyclically**. Anything that may occur along the linear dimension is unique, but the model also allows for repetitions and duplications. Thus, in many societies, the point of one's birth lends itself to commemoration, even celebration, at fixed points along the cyclic contour of the model. This, however, is far from implying that unique points as such, let alone the acts they mark, will ever come again.

The main function of temporal models used by the members of a cultural group is to **give a form to reality and human life within it**, be it on the individual or the societal level. The principles themselves that underlie an organization of time do not enforce themselves on the group in question in any direct way, certainly not in a way which could be presented as "natural". Rather, they are mediated by factors of the culture itself for whose usage the model will have been established.

Life in a group may be governed by time models of various types. What they all share is the quality of **hierarchical order**, being regulated by two complementary principles:

(1) bottom-up **accumulation** (i.e., the combination of a number of units on a certain level to form one higher-level entity) and

(2) top-down **subdivision** (i.e., having an entity sliced into a number of lower-level ones).

To be sure, even if the people-in-a-culture appear to be using seemingly "natural" features to mark their accumulation / subdivision, which they often do, the way these features are put to work, and hence the resulting model as a whole, are **culture-bound** by their very nature, as the key operations involve selection and adoption. There is little wonder then that the organization of time tends to differ across cultures, the more so when the culture one focuses on has not been in touch with any other culture.



One possible move, which has indeed been realized in different ways, is to start with a "year", however this notion might be conceived, and subdivide it consecutively into a number of shorter, lower-level time units, e.g. "seasons", "months", "weeks"). Whatever the principles of the subdivision of a year to seasons, a basic condition is that the number of seasons per year will always be **higher than one** (otherwise wherefore the need for a category in between the "year" and the "month"?). On the other hand, the number of seasons will always be smaller than the number of months, although one or more than one of the seasons (but never all of them at once!) may indeed be one month long.

Whenever recourse to seasons is deemed necessary or useful for a culture, a number of attributes is selected from a potentially infinite reservoir and tied up with the seasons themselves, or with transition points from one season to another.<sup>1</sup> Though basically a **conceptual** kind of map, such a model is tangible enough to allow transfer from generation to generation as a piece of cultural heirloom, transfer which often leads to the sustenance of a particular organizational model of life even when reality itself may have changed, forgotten, or replaced by another one.

In what follows, the behavior of one culture vis-à-vis the concept of season will be sketched under changing historical conditions, involving, among other things, changing contacts with alternative ways of dividing time. Emphasized will be the implications of the juxtaposition of different mappings of "reality" and the role played therein by entrepreneurship and planning; issues which have become central to Itamar's outlook of the dynamics of culture. The main discussion will apply to modern Hebrew culture, and an attempt will be made to show that the historical process amounted to no less than the **invention of a**

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Harish Trivedi of Delhi tells me that the Indian/Sanskrit tradition has as many as six seasons. Included are two winters but only one summer. They are called *Greeshma* (summer; May-June), *Varshaa* (rains; July-August-September), *Sharada* (autumn, but with very positive connotations; October-November), *Hemanta* (winter; December-January), *Shishir* (late winter, January-February) and *Vasanta* (spring; March-April). (The English equivalents are Trivedi's and only approximate.)

**new kind of model** for a culture that had had little knowledge, and even less use for such a model in its past.

## 2. The Old Hebrews And Their Two-Term Model

As reflected by the very few documents that have come down to us from biblical times, first and foremost the Old Testament itself, to the extent that the old Hebrews did entertain an abstract notion of “season” (possibly with no one superordinate), the division which had the strongest organizing capacity for their life made use of a **climatological opposition**; namely, between having and not having rain (or, at least, a higher vs. lower probability of rainfall); which is quite understandable in view of the central role agriculture played in their lives and their absolute dependence on precipitations. Whether the opposition underlying the distinction between חורף [*Xoreph*] and קיץ [*Qayīṣ*], as the two seasons were called in the Bible, was understood as polar or graded, there is very little doubt that the model the old Hebrews employed was a **two-term** one. This division changes very little if other binary oppositions are added, most notably between “cold” and “hot”, as done in the quotation from Genesis 8:22 below. After all, in the local climate, these different principles and the times they can be expected to operate are strongly correlated.

On the whole, references to seasons and seasonal distinctions are not very common in the Bible. The clearest ones are those where *Qayīṣ* and *Xoreph* are presented as both contradictory and complementary entities, two parts of one unit. These are the three clearest quotations:

קִיץ וְחֹרֶף אֲתָהּ יִצְרָתָם (תהלים עד 17)

[you created [both] *Qayīṣ* and *Xoreph* (Proverbs 74:17)

וְקָר וְחֵם וְקִיץ וְחֹרֶף (בראשית ח 22)

[cold and heat and *Qayīṣ* and *Xoreph* (Genesis 8:22)

בְּקִיץ וּבְחֹרֶף יִהְיֶה (זכריה יד 8)

[it will happen in the *Qayīṣ* as in the *Xoreph* (Zechariah 14:8)

Important is also a third word which is used just once; namely, סתיו [*Staw*]:

כִּי-הִנֵּה הִסְתּוֹ עָבַר, הַגֶּשֶׁם הִלֵּף הִלֵּף לוֹ (שיר השירים ב 11)

[for lo, the *Staw* is past, the rain is over and gone.] (Song of Songs 2:11)

If – as tradition has it – *Staw* is taken as a synonym of *Xoreph*, then we have three **names** which correspond to a set of two **entities**. However –

as the parallelism may also suggest – *Staw* could well have been synonymous to *gešem* [rain], in which case it would apply to the main feature of *Xoreph* rather than to its status as a seasonal entity.

In addition to the two (or three) season names, the Bible also uses an array of words to denote a variety of natural or agricultural phenomena, recurring systematically along the annual cycle, which have been associated with stretches of time shorter than the season; for instance, אביב [*Aviv*], בציר [*Baḥir*], קציר [*Kaḥir*], אסיף [*Asiph*]. To be sure, one of the two basic season words themselves, *Qayīḥ*, is found to still be used in this capacity as well: It often denotes not the summer as a particular season but certain fruits which are ripe and ready for harvesting, especially figs (e.g. 2 Samuel 16:1, Jeremiah 40:12). This may suggest that thinking in abstract terms of “seasons” has not yet been fully consolidated in those early days. This claim is corroborated by the famous “Gezer Calendar” of ca. 925 BC, found in 1908 in archeological excavations at Tell Gezer (near Kibbutz Gezer today), where different agricultural chores are coupled and correlated with individual months or pairs thereof. The result is a twelve-month year with a parallel division into eight interim periods, maybe something like pre-seasons. (For a detailed discussion of the Gezer Calendar see Talmon 1963.)

The division of the Jewish year into two seasons was still in force in the *Mishna*, a religious compilation edited around 200 C.E. If anything, the underlying principle has been made even clearer as the two seasons were now called *Yemot ha-Xama* [literally: days of sun-shine] and *Yemot ha-Gešamim* [days of rain]. Another important thing we now learn with regard to the two-term model is the definition of a point in time when rain is supposed to have started if winter is to be regarded as normal. Thus, a special “prayer for rain” was added to the daily service as of the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Marxešwan, the second month of the Assyrian (and later Jewish) lunar calendar, though originally the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the year, as indicated by its name [*warxu šamanu*]. [The scribe must have confused the M and W, which look very much alike in the Assyrian writing system.]

In spite of the fact that the year was so neatly divided in two, there is no need for the two seasons to be of the same length. In fact, contrary to common beliefs, if the condition for *Xoreph* is a minimum of one rainy day, then the *Xoreph* would have been potentially the longer of

the two. Thus – taking our cue from today’s measurements (I will be using *Statistical abstract of Israel*, 2006) – then seven out of twelve or thirteen months (October to April, approximately) – abide by this criterion. On the other hand, the average number of rainy days (in today’s Tel Aviv) is as low as 46.8 per year, and even the rainiest month of the year, which is usually January, only has 10.6 rain days on the average. So maybe in the people-in-the-culture’s consciousness it was the *Qayīç* that was felt to be the more significant of the two seasons? It certainly seems to be the case today! Or maybe the relative length of the two seasons gave room for fluctuations?

Later Talmudic literature does have a number of indications of acquaintance with an alternative, four-seasonal model, probably of Hellenistic origin. However, this acquaintance seems to have had very little influence on life within the Jewish society. Above all, it was **months** that were still counted and they were associated with the word תקופה [*Tequpha*], one of several ways of denoting rather lengthy periods of time, which did not necessarily overlap today’s “season” (Hebrew: *‘Ona*), and which was never again suggested as a hypernym in this connection.

Here is an example where the division into four has been acknowledged. In this case, the name given to each time unit was the name of the first in a series of three consecutive months comprising that unit. Four of the names thus designate both a particular month and a three-month season-like entity: *Nisan*, *Tamuz*, *Tišre* and *Tevet*:

שנים עשר חודש בשנה, וארבע תקופות בשנה:  
 תקופת ניסן – שלושה חודשים: ניסן, אייר, סיוון;  
 תקופת תמוז – שלושה חודשים: תמוז, אב, אלול;  
 תקופת תשרי – שלושה חודשים: תשרי, מרחשוון, כסלו;  
 תקופת טבת – שלושה חודשים: טבת, שבט, אדר. (מדרש תהילים לפרק יט)

### 3. Getting in Touch with European Models

When in exile, especially in the European context, other ways of organizing the year and having it subdivided came to the attention of the Jews. Most significant for their future life proved to be their encounter with one particular **four-term temporal model**, which was based on intricate astronomical and mathematical calculations of the relative length of day and night along the annual cycle. The implication is by no means that the fact itself that days were getting shorter (or longer) with

the passage of time had not been realized by the old Hebrews, because there is evidence it had (e.g. in the following quotation from the *Jerusalem Talmud*):

באחד בתקופת ניסן ובאחד בתקופת תשרי היום והלילה שווים. (מסכת ברכות א:א)  
 [on the first day of the Nisan season and on the first day of the Tishre season day and night are of the same length]

It is only that, until that point, they failed to be adopted as a yardstick for anything.

To be sure, Jews living in Europe did not entirely give up the dual model which we found documented time and again in their writings. Rather, it was still kept and used as part of their cultural tool kit. As a result, they now had at their disposal **two competing ways of organizing the year** (which was not the same either), the original two-term model and an adapted four-term one.

For hundreds of years it was not much of a problem, because each model was resorted to under different circumstances. *Grosso modo*, immediate issues in time and place (that is, local and contemporary issues) tended to be handled within the European four-term system. Also, they were normally addressed in the vernacular or in a Jewish language such as Judeo-German (known as *Yiddish* since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century). By contrast, the inherited Hebrew pair of terms was used to refer mainly to quasi-biblical realities, especially in the religious domain. (Hebrew medieval poetry reveals a slightly more complex picture as it is not always clear what “realities” it wished to refer to, and in view of its close contacts with Arabic models and norms it warrants a separate treatment.)

A major change occurred in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, with the advent of the Enlightenment [*Haskalah*] movement, first in Germany, then in Eastern Europe. At that time, there was a new and growing pressure to use Hebrew for tackling issues occurring in the immediate vicinity as well. The incongruity between the two models thus made itself noticed.

A major problem was the **lack of agreed upon lexicon** to refer to the European seasonal division and its four members. The original season words *Qayīç* and *Xoreph* were used consistently to replace German (and Yiddish) *Sommer* and *Winter*, respectively, even though, when local realities were addressed, they could no longer carry the exact meaning they had in the past (for which reason they will henceforth be referred

to as *Qayīçı* and *Xorephı*, respectively). By contrast, the other two season names, German *Frühling* and *Herbst*, had no accepted Hebrew substitutes to fall on.

Following an ideological dictate accepted by the proponents of the *Haskalah*, the Bible was accepted as the only source of legitimacy for Hebrew forms, both lexemes (words and phrases) and rules for their combination. Hebrew writers encountering a lexical-semantic gap thus turned to the Book to look for candidates to fill it in with. Preferred were forms that were relatively free of previous semantic load and which could therefore be associated with new meanings with relative ease; first and foremost so-called *hapax legomena*, of which there are over 2,000 in the Old Testament. As already mentioned, *Staw* was such a word, which made it a central player in the creation of neologisms in the season field.

Appeal to the Bible in search of words thus became a leading strategy shared by all writers. However, in this general framework, each individual felt, and in a sense was, free to follow the dictate in his own ways. And, indeed, at the beginning of the Enlightenment period, each individual came up with their own Hebrew replacements. As might have been expected, most of the would-be season words were taken from one selection group: the limited list of words referring to agricultural activities which were associated with specific, relatively short stretches of time (see *supra*).

At first, it was mainly two types of texts that served as carriers of new forms and meanings: text-books for learners of Hebrew (both children and adults) and anthologies of basic readings. These two types shared one important thing which greatly enhanced their suitability as sources of novelties; namely, a claim for **authority**. This rendered the whole operation an act of **planning**. Somewhat later, literary texts were also added to the reservoir and started being used in that capacity. Of special importance here were **translations** into Hebrew, mostly from the German. After all, the very encounter with an existing text in another language – whichever way the need to translate was supposed to be realized – presented the writers with very concrete problems of lexical replacement and made lexical and semantic gaps stand out.

An important question is how a new word, which was offered by an individual writer as a season name, could be accepted as what it was

intended to be? And how was one to decide what its “correct” reading would be in spite of the fact that it may never have been in use before? – The most solid basis for answering these crucial questions was the German situation, since the books as well as the individual texts included in them, even if not translated directly from a German text, were largely modeled on German prototypes.

Thus, in many cases, the Hebrew word which was put forward was accompanied by a German season name and/or a sentence enumerating [some of] the features of the season it was intended to cover. **Always in the European context**, to be sure, which the proponents of the *Haskalah* people were more and more interested in writing about in Hebrew.

Let us have a look at a small selection of examples. The first quote is quoted from אַבְטָלְיוֹן [Avtalyon], Aharon Wolffsohn-Halle’s reader published in 1790. It reads as follows:

אַרְבַּעַה מוֹעֲדִים בְּשָׁנָה: הָאָבִיב הַקָּיִץ הַבָּצִיר וְהַחֶרֶף.

[the year has four units of time: the ‘Aviv, the Qayīṣ, the Baṣīr and the Xoreph<sub>1</sub>]

Like most Hebrew writers of the time, Wolffsohn-Halle starts his account of the year with ‘Aviv, i.e., around April, in keeping with the ancient Hebrew calendar in use before the adoption of the Assyrian calendar, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC or so. This will soon change, with the intensification of the contacts with the German culture and its growing interference into the older Hebrew culture. By contrast, you will have noticed that each one of the names given to a seasonal entity [here referred to by the superordinate *Moʿadim*] is preceded by a definite article, as would have been required from a German list of nouns but which was never that common in a Hebrew name list.

Most interesting of all are the words allotted to *Frühling* and *Herbst*, ‘Aviv and Baṣīr:

(1) These two words form a kind of a pair: they share a semantic nucleus, referring as both do to stages of ripening (of green ears of corn and grapes, respectively), as well as a morphologic pattern [N<sub>1</sub>aN<sub>2</sub>īN<sub>3</sub>].

(2) The selection of *Baṣīr* was probably enhanced by its strong phonetic similarity to the German prototype *Herbst* (/heRBST/–/BaTSiR/), which must have lent the Hebrew word a mnemonic quality for speakers of German and Yiddish and made it – for them – into something of a “justified” Hebrew replacement. (To be sure, recourse to a “phonetic

transposition" of this kind was quite common in that period in both the coining of new words and the establishment of individual translation replacements; see e.g. Toury 1990.)

Nine years later, in his book *Mishle Agor [The Fables of Agor]*, the writer Shalom ha-Cohen came up with an alternative version of the same basic sentence. In fact, the two Hebrew quotes share only the two non-problematic words *Qayīç* and *Xoreph*. Thus, in his 1799 book, ha-Cohen tells of a dispute which arose one day between אַרְבַּעַה עֲתוֹתַי הַשָּׁנָה [the four seasons of the year], which are presented in the poem's title as follows:

קִיץ וְחֹרֶף, עֵת הַזְּמִיר וְהַבָּצִיר

[*Qayīç* and *Xoreph* and the times of *Zamīr* and *Baçīr*]

Each season is then given a lengthy stanza to characterize itself and argue for its superiority.

It is important to note that it is not the words *Zamīr* and *Baçīr* as such which were introduced as season names. What made them into ones was the addition of the noun 'et [another generic word for a period of time], a technique which follows in the footsteps of several biblical examples:

(1) 'et *ha-Zamīr* appears as a phrase in the Bible itself (Song of Songs 2:12). The meaning which was traditionally associated with it is the pruning of grape wines.

(2) Then again, there are several other instances where the word 'et is coupled with another noun, justifying its adoption as a productive way of coining new Hebrew phrases. In this case it is 'et *ha-Baçīr*, referring to the harvesting of grapes.

It thus turns out that, from all possible time markers, ha-Cohen chose to adopt two points in the cycle of life of one particular species: vineyards, which was of great importance in the realities of both Palestine and central Europe.

The order in which the seasons have been presented in Ha-Cohen's text, itself a piece of literature where the seasons have been personified, adds some confusion. Were it not for the explicit mentioning of the number four, the times of the *Zamīr* and the *Baçīr* could easily have passed as synonyms for *Qayīç* and *Xoreph*. As it actually is, it may indicate that the relatively obscure realities behind *Zamīr* and *Baçīr* were intended to indicate subdivisions of the more commonly known and



used *Qayīç* and *Xoreph*, respectively, or that they are inferior to them in some other way. However, for anybody living in the German cultural domain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the picture was totally clear.

*Mishle Agor* is a bilingual book, Hebrew–German (in Hebrew characters) in facing pages. Even though ha-Cohen claims to have written the Hebrew version first, it is clear that German models dominated the composition of the text. Thus, in the German context, our quote is absolutely normal. Its title is “Die vier Jahreszeiten”, and the first line reads:

Der Sommer und der Winter, der Frühling und der Herbst, gerithen einstmahls  
untereinander in einem Streit

In the very same year, 1799, the same poet, Shalom Ha-Cohen, published (in the first Hebrew periodical *ha-Me'asef*) another poem entitled “*ha-Baçīr*”, which situates the time of grape harvesting as an agricultural chore rather than dealing with the Autumn, or any other particular segment of the annual cycle:

עבר קנין עתותי המד כלו –  
עבים יסעו יתקדדו פני שמים,  
עלים נובלות דשא וקציר מוללו ...  
הן ישב הרוח ומוליד הקרח

[summer is over, times of delight have reached their end, clouds are on the move and the sky darkens, withered leaves rub grass and hay ... the wind blows and creates frost]

The next example comes from the first volume of Yehuda Löb Ben-Zeev’s reader *בית הספר* [*Bet ha-Sefer*] of 1812. The quotation reads:

אַרְבַּעָה עֵתִים שׁוֹנִים בְּשָׁנָה: אָבִיב וְקִיץ וְחֵרֵף וְסֶתִי.  
[[there are] four different seasons in a year: ‘Aviv and Qayīç and Xoreph<sup>2</sup> and Staw]

The most striking decision here is the use the Hebrew word *Xoreph* to replace the German *Herbst* (hence the use of *Xoreph<sup>2</sup>* in the gloss) and let *Staw* stand for *Winter*. (You may recall that in the Bible *Staw* and *Xoreph* referred to one and the same season!) The list of “newly-learned words” which was appended to the book says the same things, which makes it clear that this is by no means slip of the pen. Moreover, a little later in the book, in a Section bearing the German title (in Hebrew characters) “פָּאָם רֵעָנָן אוֹנֵד וּוַעֲטָעֵרֵן” [vom Regen und Wetter, i.e. about the rain and kinds of weather], we get two characterizations of all four seasons, the

first one very brief, the other one rather detailed. This is what the short characterization says:

|         |         |        |             |
|---------|---------|--------|-------------|
|         | [Wärme] | ווערמע | באָכייבֿחם  |
| [Hitze] | הייטצע  | ה'רֿב  | ב'שׂוֹן     |
|         | [Kälte] | קעלטע  | ב'ח'רֿף ק'ר |
| [Frost] | פּראָסט | ק'רֿח  | ויב'ס'תּוֹי |

Interestingly enough, this succinct characterization looks like an attempt to stretch the original dual model and adapt it to a four-term mode of organization, relying on the secondary feature of relative heat. Thus, each term of the opposition between “heat” and “cold” is divided into two: two degrees of the one (‘warmth’ and ‘heat’) and two degrees of the other (‘cold’ and ‘frost’).

The presence or absence of precipitations comes to the fore again in the longer of the two characterizations, together with some other features of the different seasons in the European context:

ב'שׂוֹן ג'שֶׁם מ'עט וּל'ע'תִּים י'הי ע'ם ה'ג'שֶׁם ה'זוֹזִים וְיִרְדוּ ב'רִקִּים וְנִשְׁמַע קוֹל ר'עם ה'זֶק וְגוֹרָא  
גַם נִרְאֶה קִשְׁתּוֹ בְּעֵנָן: ב'ח'רֿף ג'שֶׁם רֿב, ויב'ס'תּוֹי יֵרֵד ה'שֶׁלֶג וְיִקְפְּאוּ הַנְּהָלִים ויכ'סֶה עֲלֵיהֶם  
ק'רֿח ק'פֿאוֹן.

[In the Qayīc there is little rain, and the rain would sometimes be accompanied by lightnings and a terribly strong thunder will be heard and an occasional rainbow will appear; in the Xoreph [there is] a lot of rain, and in the Staw snow falls and the rivers freeze and get covered with frost and ice]

Interestingly, *Aviv* was given no characterization. perhaps there was none which could be tied up with precipitations.

In the same year, 1812, Moses Ben Zwi Bock, in the Hebrew version of his reader *מודע לילדי בני ישׂראל* [*Moda le-yalde bne Yisrael*], made yet another choice:

ה'שָׁנָה לְאַרְבַּעַה עֲתִים תִּחְלַק, ה'אַבִּיב (דער פּרייהלינג), עֵת אֲשֶׁר הַנְּצַנִּים נִרְאוּ בְּאַרְצָן,  
ה'קִיץ (דער זאַממער), יְמֵי בִּכּוּרֵי תְבוּאוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה, גַם יִקְצְרוּ בְּעֵת הַהֵיא, ה'אַסִּיף (דער  
הערבסט), יְמֵי אֲסִיפַת הַפְּרוֹת וְיִבְצְרוּ הַכְּרִמִּים, ה'ח'וֹרֶף (דער ווינטער), יְמֵי ה'שֶׁלֶג וְהַקּוֹר.  
(עמ' קמו)

This reader also has a German version, *Israelitischer Kinderfreund* [A Jewish Child Companion], which was prepared by the same person and published by the same educational institute, Chevrat Chinuch Ne‘arim. This book, which preceded the Hebrew reader in a few months, has a very close formulation, with an explicit emphasis of the local context: “Bei uns [not under universal observation, that is, but

locally, in Central Europe] hat das Jahr 4 **Jahreszeiten**“ [the year comprises of four seasons:]

Sie heißen: der **Frühling**, oder die Zeit der Blüthe; der **Sommer**, oder die Zeit der ersten Früchte und der Korn-Ernte; der **Herbst**, oder die Zeit der Obst-Ernte und der Weinlese; der **Winter**, oder die Zeit des Frostes und Schnees. (p. 130)

These examples (and there are more to supplement them with) also shed some light on the road to the establishment of an institutionalized Hebrew superordinate, i.e., a generic term for “season”. Again, the German model was made use of, and it was different mirror images of the German word *Jahreszeiten* in its plural form which were first suggested: מועדים בשנה [Mo`adim be-Šana] (Wolffsohn-Halle), עתותי השנה [‘Tote ha-Šana] (Ha-Cohen) and עתים בשנה [‘Ttim be-Šana] (Ben-Zeev). A form in the singular was slower to appear, and – most striking of all – the word which was to become standard use in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, עונה [‘Ona], was the last to be suggested. One obstacle for its adoption was no doubt its sexual overtones in traditional Jewish parlance; namely, its use in the written marital contract to denote the sexual duties of the husband to his wife.

Little by little, a Hebrew terminology of seasons and seasonal divisions was consolidated, and the four-term model came to dominate the field. In its final form, this model consisted of the following words: סתיו [Staw], חורף [Xoreph], אביב [‘Aviv] and קיץ [Qayic].

#### 4. Back to the Land of Israel

As long as it was European reality that was mediated by the model, there was no real dissonance. However, the seemingly peaceful neighborhood of the two systems was not to last very long. There soon evolved a desire to extend the use of Hebrew to embrace non-local realities as well, most notably what was going on in the Land of Israel (then Ottoman-ruled Palestine). The situation became crucial when Hebrew started being adopted as first language and was elevated to the status of mother tongue for a growing number of Jewish communities and individuals.

In principle, it might have been possible to simply go back to the binary model which had been pushed to the margin but was never totally abandoned and give up all other distinctions and markers, which were

not easy to identify and apply in the old (and now new) cultural context. In other words, it would have been possible to “back-translate” accounts which the speakers of Hebrew had got used to making in the framework of the four-term system into statements that were based on either *Qayīç* or *Xoreph*, with the possible addition of certain modifiers such as *Rešit ha-Qayīç* [the beginning of summer] or *Sof ha-Xoreph* [the end of winter], to make references clearer. This however would have resulted in the obliteration of distinctions which had become relevant to the speakers of Hebrew irrespective of the surrounding realities. This would have counted in **cultural impoverishment** which the speakers would understandably have resented.<sup>2</sup>

Be that as it may, the fact is that the dual model was not called back and made operative again. Rather, its continued use went on being reduced to very specific circumstances, where the point was precisely to emphasize **differences** between the better-known Europe and the more obscure realities of Palestine of the day. Most notable among those were guidebooks for the Hebrew traveler in the Near East, of which there was a growing selection. The main way out of the dilemma, though, seems to have been to try and retain both principles of division, and have them collapsed into one combined system.

To be sure, there was more to this practice than a mechanical division of the old *Qayīç* and *Xoreph*, or *Yemot ha-Xama* and *Yemot ha-Gešamim*, into two seasons each. Thus, it was not as if the new *Staw* and *‘Aviv* simply took upon themselves half of the old *Xoreph* and half of the old *Qayīç* (or even a quarter of the *Xoreph* and a quarter of the *Qayīç* each). Rather, new, local meanings **were assigned to all four terms** in another intricate act of planning. The act was performed – as so usually is the case – by a relatively small number of culture entrepreneurs, mostly writers and teachers, often embodied in one and the same person. Many of those can still be identified by name.

Thus, it was realized that in order for the plan to come up well, it was necessary to **select a number of local features and to impose on them the role of “season markers”**. Most popular among the would-be markers (which were not, and could not have been a mere reflection of

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<sup>22</sup> In this connection, see what Lotman (1976) has to say about the implications of the translation of texts from a language “with a large alphabet” into a language “with a small alphabet”.

those that had their function in the European context) were local plants and animals which could be presented as “typical” of one or another season or mark the transition from one season to the next. As is normally the case, there was nothing really new about the phenomena themselves that were picked up now. They had always been part of the scenery, only they had so far not been assigned any marking function in the division of the year. Such a function was now imposed on them rather arbitrarily (in the sense that many other markers could have been selected just as well).

For example, for the transition from *Qayīç* to *Staw*, it was mainly **the blossoming of three kinds of flowers** which was taken up: *Urginea maritima* (English: Maritime Squill), *Colchicum stevenii* (Crocus) and *Scilla autumnalis* (Autumnal Squill). To enhance their marking capacity, these flowers were interconnected through the names that were given to them, thus creating the impression that they formed “one happy family”: קָצָב מְצוּי: [Xaçav Maçuy], סְתַנְנִית הַיָּרֵה [Sitvanit ha-Yore] and קָן-הַצָּב [Ben Xaçav Sitvani], respectively. (By the way, the name *Sitvanit*, derived directly from the season name *Staw* and literally meaning “the lady-flower of autumn”, had not been given to the flower in question until as late as 1929, when *Staw* was already functioning as an established season.)

Another natural phenomenon which has been given the role of a marker of the approach of *Staw* was **bird migration**, and the massive presence of flocks of one species in particular, so-called נַחְלִיאֵלִי [Naxali'eli] (Wagtail in English).

Interestingly enough, even this seemingly simple act of planning did not go all that smoothly, as the accepted association wouldn't always fully fit the “time-table of reality”. A small example: the blossoming of the almond tree – שְׂקֵדִיָּה [Šqediyya] in Hebrew – was selected as a marker of the approaching 'Aviv. At the same time, it was also associated with the so-called “New Year of the Trees”, which is celebrated two, sometimes three months before Passover, that is, nominally, in the middle of the *Xoreph*.

The difficulty does not seem to have become any smaller since. On the contrary, in the last few decades, the connection between many of the selected features and their seasonal marking function has been dissolving, the main reason being that the natural phenomena themselves

have become less and less known to people brought up in today's urbanized culture, who constitute a growing majority of the population. Thus, while the symbolic meaning of these phenomena is still being taught in Israeli kindergartens and elementary schools, they themselves are hardly present in the immediate context to be truly active in the organization of life.

### 5. *Staw* as a Case in Point

These incongruities are not only felt by the members of the culture. They are also verbalized by them, in sentences such as "there is no real *Staw* in Israel". Despite this, the four-term model has become deeply rooted in the Israeli culture. It seems that the main reason for its sustained life has been a predominant wish to be as close as possible to the "rest of the world". That part of it that seems to matter, that is: first Europe, later on America.

To illustrate what has been going on in this cultural area, let me tell you about an informal experiment I conducted in the nineteen-eighties. A short questionnaire was distributed to 166 students at Tel Aviv University, who were asked to react to it as quickly as possible. One of the questions required that the subjects write down the first five things that came into their minds when they thought of *Staw*. The findings are so striking that the informality of the experiment seems to matter very little. Interesting are both the responses that occupied the first places and those that hardly came up at all.

Thus, if each response, irrespective of its position on the list, is given one point, then the wagtail receives a meager number of 20 points (hardly an eighth of the possible 166). *Xaçav* fares even worse (17 points), *Sitvanit* gets as little as 2 points and *Ben Haçav* does not appear on the list at all (0 points). On the other hand, the non-controversial first place is taken by a series of words and phrases belonging to the field of "falling leaves" (158 points, that is, almost as many as we had respondents!). Next in line comes a selection of words which are connected with "grayness", be it physical or mental, including many explicit expressions of melancholy and gloomy mood (112 points, or 124, if indications of "the end of life" or of "death" are also included in this group, which seems highly justified. To be sure, quite often a list has in

it two or even three representatives of the same category, which adds extra weight to the findings.

The findings are even more striking if a variable scoring system is adopted; for instance, if 5 points are given to the first response, 4 to the second one, and so on. According to this system, the category "falling leaves" receives 634 out of 2490 possible points ( $166 \times 5 + 166 \times 4 + 166 \times 3 + 166 \times 2 + 166 \times 1$ ), an average of almost 4 (that is, second place throughout). "Melancholy", "grayness", "sadness", "depression" and "death" now receive 332 points. By contrast, the wagtail is given 60 points and the *xaçav* only 56.

As it turns out, there is an overriding tendency to make a **habitual, almost an automatic connection between *Staw* and falling leaves**; an association which has been originally imported from the European context. Its heavy cultural load helped it catch up in Israel too, despite the fact that local realities did not support it very well. In fact, of the native trees of the area only a small minority shed their leaves, to begin with, and most of those that do, do so in the *Xoreph* rather than the *Staw*. Then, again, Israeli falling leaves, when they are visible, do not look half as striking as European or North American ones, so that the connection is almost wholly a culturally acquired one. Rare are precisely the yellow, the orange, and especially the red colours which are normally associated with "falling leaves" in European cultures.

Interestingly enough from the dynamic cultural point of view, the picture has been on the change in the last decades, by virtue of yet another act of importation; namely, of quite a number of non-native trees which do shed their leaves, some of them indeed in the *Staw*. This change in the flora made Israeli *Staw* come closer to European (or North American, or East Asian) autumn, as did the annexation of the Golan Heights to the country – a territory which is much more European like than the rest of the country.

And what about gloom and melancholy and their centrality as markers of *Staw*? On the face of it, we are dealing here with individual moods, and many Israelis indeed argue that they are literally "sad" in the autumn, definitely sadder than in any other part of the year, and nothing would convince them otherwise. Some of them would even refuse to acknowledge the emotion they are feeling as a factor inculcated in the culture. However, historically speaking, it is clear that melan-

choly became habitually associated with autumn not in Israel, but in some parts of Europe, through a long tradition of myth, folklore, art and literature. Jews who had been leading their lives in those places for centuries felt reluctant to dissociate *Staw* from the “moody” attributes it had accumulated, which had in fact become part and parcel of the season as a cultural entity. They brought the result over with them to the land of Israel, where they made efforts to preserve it.

The association of *Staw* with melancholy was perpetuated, probably even enhanced in the coming generations, most notably in literature and popular music. (For an extensive account see Ben-Porat 1989 and 1991.) Indeed, the culmination of the “autumnal” attributes in Israeli Hebrew is probably the phrase “שלכה בלב” [*šalexet ba-lev*, literally: falling leaves in the heart], probably on the basis of the rhyming pair “*lev-ke’ev*” reflecting the German pair “*Herz-Schmerz*” [heart-pain], which was already common in Hebrew poetry of the Enlightenment period. It can be claimed that, *šalexet ba-lev* has become a fixed metaphor for melancholy in general, and not only in direct connection with *Staw*.

An interesting anecdote in this last connection: On September 30 2007, the results of a poll were made public on the internet, where subjects were asked to name the “ultimate autumn songs” in Hebrew. The results amounted to a 60 title list (URL: <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3451823,00.html>), many of which look more like series of stanzas comprising one long text... In quite a number of the 60 “winners” the connection between *šalexet* and *lev* is indeed made, one way or another.

At the same time, *Staw* has been losing part of its “negative” implications lately, for instance, as it started serving as a (more and more common) first name for both girls and boys, which is something that happened earlier to ‘*Aviv*, but not to either *Qayīç* or *Xoreph*).

## 6. Secondary Evolution: Derived Seasons

Whichever way we look at it, the four-term model has had the upper hand. At the same time, it is clear that – except for the official calendar and weather reports – we do not have four seasons of an identical length, as the four-term model originally had them. Those who entertain this model are mostly content with the combination of two “full-size” and two “shorter” seasons, or even two “genuine” and two “tran-



sitional" seasons, without however resorting to phrases such as the French *demi saison* [literally, half a season]. Thus, for instance, in marketing, there are normally only two "sales" per year (actually standing for "end season sales"), not four. What the relative length of the different seasons is, in the Israeli cultural consciousness, is not very clear, but it is no doubt a way of bringing the model closer to reality and making it easier to live with.

By the same token, the Israeli Electric Corporation has established an ameliorated season system of its own. It does use the four terms which have become habitual, including the seasons' names, but, for its specific purposes, the markers made use of are only so-called dates. Thus, *Xoreph* is defined as the time from December 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> (4 months), *'Aviv* as the three months between April 1<sup>st</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup>, *Qayīç* – as the three months between July 1<sup>st</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup>, and *Staw* – as the remaining two months (November 1<sup>st</sup> to February 28<sup>th</sup>). A third example of modifying the concept of season would be the period of time that car lights should be on at any time (which, in today's Israel, comprises the 5 months between November 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>). Here, a two-term model is used again, but it is not fully congruent with the *Xoreph* of the clothing business. There are no doubt more instances of this kind, designed to mitigate the incongruity that is still being felt.

One thing needs to be made very clear: it is far from me to make the simplistic point that "Israel does not sustain a four-way division of the year", as the claim is often made. Of course it does. However, it does so only because a **decision** was made at some point to actually **adopt** such a division. A mechanism was then **borrowed** for the realization of that division, with the ensuing four seasons. Terms were then coined for each season as well as the overall concept of 'season' itself, and those finally won agreement. A concept has thus been invented for this culture.

This is not to say that today's situation is devoid of hurdles. I, for one, would claim that it is not merely that the picture is still rather fluid, but that things have actually become more uncertain than they had been only a few decades ago. Thus, although everybody in the culture is aware of the four seasons in their Israeli-Hebrew version, for some their existence is much less of a fact than for others. This uncertainty has many manifestations, of very different nature, not least the fact that

– judging from a search I conducted – up to the very near past Israel hadn't had a single hotel bearing the name "The Four Seasons Hotel", which is one of the most current hotel names in the world. Israeli culture seems to be still on the move, then, which is an encouraging thought.

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