

Constructing Sacred Time: A Pragmatic–Semiotic Study of Temporality in Islamic and Jewish Ritual Discourse

AHMAD ABDEL TAWWAB SHARAF ELDIN

Department of English Language, Faculty of Arts, Menoufia University, 6131567 Shibin El Kom, Menoufia Governorate, Egypt
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7117-8207>

MAIADA SHEHAB

Department of Hebrew Language, Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University, 11566 Caliph Al-ma'mun, Abbassia, Cairo Governorate, Egypt
<http://orcid.org/0009-0003-2431-4258>

DINA HELMY SHALABY

Department of English Language, Faculty of Arts, Menoufia University, 6131567 Shibin El Kom, Menoufia Governorate, Egypt
<http://orcid.org/0009-0006-8131-2488>

NERMIN MAHMOUD IBRAHIM

Department of English Language, Faculty of Arts, Menoufia University, 6131567 Shibin El Kom, Menoufia Governorate, Egypt
<http://orcid.org/0009-0001-9270-2725>

WALID REDA ALI*

Department of Hebrew Language, Faculty of Arts, Menoufia University, 6131567 Shibin El Kom, Menoufia Governorate, Egypt
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8805-2205>

*Corresponding Author; email: walid.abdallah@art.menoufia.edu.eg

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how sacred time is discursively constructed and regulated in Islamic and Jewish canonical traditions. Rather than treating ritual calendars as fixed religious structures, the paper investigates how sacred texts actively produce temporal authority through linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms. Drawing on Speech Act Theory, cultural semiotics, and contemporary discourse analysis, the study analyzes how temporal directives in the Qur'an, Hadith, Tanakh, and Talmud function as performative acts that organize communal religious life. Through a comparative analysis of key ritual practices, including lunar month determination, daily prayer schedules, and major observances such as Ramadan and the Sabbath, the paper demonstrates how language operates as a mechanism for the institutionalization of sacred temporality. Particular attention is given to pragmatic features such as deixis, vagueness, prescriptive authority, and ritual directives, which structure how communities interpret and enact sacred time. The analysis reveals an important divergence in the discursive strategies of the two traditions. Jewish textual discourse tends to centralize temporal authority through juridical institutions and legal declarations, whereas Islamic discourse frequently frames sacred time through direct engagement with natural signs and phenomenological observation.

Keywords: Illocutionary acts; pragmatics; sacred time; semiotics; speech act theory

INTRODUCTION

In the academic study of religion, the concept of “sacred time” has been profoundly shaped by the work of Mircea Eliade. For Eliade, sacred time is

fundamentally distinct from the linear, sequential, and irreversible “profane” time of ordinary human experience. It is the “first time, the archetypal time,” a primordial moment of divine creation that is made present and re-experienced through the cyclical

nature of ritual (Eliade 1959:46). This framework posits a dichotomy between the ordinary and the extraordinary, where festivals and rituals serve as portals that allow communities to periodically return to a transcendent, meaningful temporality, thereby rejuvenating profane existence (Talmon-Heller 2020).

While this model has been influential, its binary structure can obscure the nuanced and dynamic ways in which time and sanctity intersect within religious texts and practices. As scholars like Lynn Kaye have argued, applying a monolithic category of “sacred time” can mask the complex processes by which certain times are made sacred (Kaye 2021). This paper proceeds from the premise that sacred time is not an *a priori* category but a discursively constructed reality. Religious language does more than simply convey information about holy days; it actively persuades, motivates, and cultivates a sense of community among its adherents (Wolterstorff 1995). Therefore, a deeper understanding requires a pragmatic approach; an analysis of how language is used in context to perform specific functions (Grice 1975). This study shifts the analytical focus from what sacred time is to how it is done through the power of words.

LIMITATION

The limitation of this investigation is focused on a selection of core rituals that are fundamental to the temporal organization of each faith: the establishment of the new month (Hilal and Rosh Chodesh), the weekly Sabbath, daily prayers (Salat and Tefillot), and the annual fast of Ramadan. This purposive sampling restricts the scope to the most universally obligatory temporal anchors, spanning daily, weekly, monthly, and annual cycles. Selecting these specific texts ensures a rich, representative comparative analysis of foundational timekeeping, while avoiding the methodological overextension that would result from attempting to analyze all temporal directives within these vast scriptural canons

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative discourse-analytic approach that draws from three interrelated theoretical traditions: Speech Act Theory, Pragmatics, and Cultural Semiotics. This

triangulated methodology is designed to uncover how sacred time is not simply referenced but actively constructed through linguistic, performative, and symbolic means in both Islamic and Jewish foundational texts. The research is situated within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba 1985), which views reality, including religious temporality, as socially and discursively mediated rather than fixed or given.

The first theoretical pillar is Speech Act Theory, originally developed by J. L. Austin (1962) and expanded by John Searle (1969). According to this framework, every utterance can be analyzed at three levels: the locutionary act (the literal expression), the illocutionary act (the intention behind the utterance, such as commanding, declaring, or questioning), and the perlocutionary act (the effect the utterance has on the listener). This approach is particularly useful in analyzing religious texts, where divine or prophetic speech is not merely descriptive but constitutive; it brings about obligations, social realities, and ritual events. For instance, the Qur’anic directive “فمن شهد منكم الشهر فليصمه” (“Whoever among you sees the month [of Ramadan], let him fast” [Qur’an 2:185]) functions as a divine imperative. Similarly, in Jewish tradition, the declaration of the new month by a rabbinical court, which is marked by the term “מקדש” (“It is sanctified!”), operates as a performative utterance that creates sacred time through legal pronouncement (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:7).

The second methodological layer is Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis, drawing particularly on the work of H. P. Grice (1975), as well as more recent developments in linguistic anthropology and religious pragmatics. Pragmatics allows us to consider the communicative context in which utterances occur. It emphasizes how meaning is shaped not only by the words themselves but also by the intentions of the speaker, the interpretive frame of the listener, and the social circumstances of the exchange. Tools such as deixis, presupposition, implicature, and modality help analyze religious language as situated discourse. For example, phrases like “هذا يوم الحج الأكبر” (“This is the Day of the Greater Pilgrimage” [Qur’an 9:3]) or “וביום השביעי שבת וינפש” (“And on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed” [Exodus 31:17]) are not just time locators but carry significant theological and ritual weight. They are deictic anchors that link cosmic time to sacred events.

The third component is Cultural Semiotics, particularly as developed by scholars such as Umberto Eco (1976), Yuri Lotman (1990), and Massimo Leone (2010). In this tradition, religious systems are seen as semiotic universes in which natural phenomena such as celestial bodies, seasonal shifts, and natural signs are culturally encoded and made meaningful. These signs become triggers for ritual behavior and belief. In Islam, for example, the *hilāl* (crescent moon) is not just an astronomical event but a semiotic marker that activates rituals such as fasting and feasting. In Judaism, the *shofar* (ram’s horn) serves not only as a liturgical instrument but also as a semantic signal of temporal transition, awakening, and divine judgment (Malek et al. 2024).

For the data, purposive sampling was employed to select scriptural and legal texts that contain explicit references to ritual time and its regulation. From the Islamic tradition, selections were drawn from the Qur’an and canonical Hadith collections, especially Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, and Sunan Abu Dawud, Jami’ al-Tirmidhi, Sunan al-Nasa’i, and Sunan Ibn Majah. From the Jewish tradition, selections were taken from the Torah, Psalms, and the Babylonian Talmud, particularly Tractates Berakhot and Rosh Hashanah. To ensure a focused and rigorous dataset, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Texts were included if they met three criteria: (1) explicit establishment of temporal boundaries for daily or annual rituals, (2) the presence of performative speech acts regulating these times, and (3) demonstrable significance in structuring communal religious life. Conversely, texts were excluded if they contained merely historical or narrative references to time without a ritual-regulatory function, or if they belonged to later exegetical traditions outside the defined primary canonical frame. The chosen texts were selected based on three criteria: their reference to ritual timing, their use of authoritative speech acts, and their significance in structuring communal religious life.

Each selected passage underwent multi-level analysis. First, the original Arabic or Hebrew text was cited alongside a faithful English translation. Second, the locutionary content of the utterance was analyzed for semantic and syntactic features. Third, the illocutionary force was classified according to Searle’s (1969) taxonomy of speech acts (e.g. directives, declarations, assertives). Fourth, a semiotic reading was applied to identify embedded

natural or symbolic signs such as the moon, sunset, or the seventh day. Finally, a pragmatic analysis was conducted to interpret the utterance’s role within its socio-religious and ritual context, considering factors such as speaker authority (e.g., prophet, divine voice, rabbinic court), audience (individual vs. collective), and expected perlocutionary effect (obedience, sanctification, communal cohesion).

By integrating Speech Act Theory, Pragmatics, and Cultural Semiotics, this methodology makes it possible to answer the guiding question of the study: How do religious texts construct, rather than merely describe, sacred time?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Pragmatics offers the foundation for understanding how sacred texts do things with words. Building on Austin’s (1962) theory of speech acts and Searle’s (1969) expansion, pragmatics explores how utterances perform functions such as commanding, declaring, and obligating. In the context of religious texts, these utterances are often attributed to divine or prophetic sources and thus carry an illocutionary force that is both performative and normative. For example, when the Qur’an instructs believers to begin fasting “when the white thread becomes distinct from the black thread” (Qur’an 2:187), or when the Torah commands “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8), these are not merely descriptive statements. They are performative speech acts that constitute sacred time by delineating its beginning and end, and by imposing ritual obligations upon the faithful (Wolterstorff 1995 & Ali W. Abo-Elmagd L. & Sharafeldin A. 2024).

Religious utterances therefore function not only as conveyors of divine knowledge but as instruments of communal formation (Levinson 1983). Complementing this is semiotics, the study of signs and their meanings, which provides insight into how religious communities interpret natural phenomena (such as the moon, sun, or times of day) as indicators of divine will. As Peirce (1955: 32) conceptualized it, “a sign functions within a triadic relationship: it stands for something (the object) to someone (the interpreter) in some capacity”. In religious settings, these signs often take on sacralized meanings. The new moon becomes more than an astronomical event; it becomes a symbol that triggers the start of Ramadan or Rosh Chodesh. Through ritual calendars, these natural signs are elevated into spiritual codes, indicating when to fast,

pray, or refrain from labor (Leone 2010). Sacred time, therefore, emerges not from nature alone, but from the semiotic encoding of nature through religious discourse.

Lotman's (1990:10) theory of cultural semiotics deepens this understanding by showing how rituals, calendars, and religious language are interrelated semiotic systems within a culture. Religious timekeeping is not a neutral act; it is a culturally loaded performance of identity. In Judaism, the legalistic determination of Rosh Chodesh through rabbinic courts demonstrates the semiotic role of communal authority in marking time. In Islam, the empirical sighting of the moon by any trustworthy observer foregrounds a more decentralized, phenomenological model of sacred temporality. These models are not merely procedural; they reflect the differing epistemologies and theological priorities of the two traditions.

Religious discourse analysis bridges these two domains, pragmatics and semiotics, by studying how sacred texts use language to communicate authority, frame ritual, and organize communal memory. Fairclough (1992:35) emphasized that "discourse is never neutral; it always reflects and reproduces social power structures". In the case of Jewish and Islamic texts, we see discourse employed both to invoke divine authority and to instantiate sacred order (Ashaari 2010). Rabbinic texts, shaped by diasporic and post-Temple realities, often engage in legal reasoning and debate to generate consensus around sacred time. Islamic texts, particularly the Hadith, frequently use direct speech acts that address the believer personally and situate sacred time in sensory experience and divine signs. As Graham (1987) argued, sacred discourse must be understood not only as written instruction but as a performative act, often enacted ritually through repetition and communal practice.

By applying this triadic conceptual framework, pragmatics, semiotics, and religious discourse analysis, this research examines how sacred time is created in the act of being named, regulated, and ritually enacted. According to Rehman (2020), the comparison between Islamic and Jewish texts shows that while both traditions rely on similar semiotic anchors (such as lunar or solar cycles), the pragmatic and discursive mechanisms for engaging with these signs differ substantially (Ibrahim et al. 2025). Jewish texts tend to frame time through centralized legal authority, while Islamic texts invite a direct phenomenological relationship between believer and sign.

Ultimately, this framework allows us to move from the question of what sacred time is to how sacred time is done; that is, how it is constructed linguistically and performatively within scriptural traditions that are deeply embedded in both natural and supernatural cosmologies.

DATA ANALYSIS

PART I: THE SEMIOTICS OF THE CALENDAR: ESTABLISHING THE SACRED FRAME

The foundation of sacred time in both Judaism and Islam is the ritual calendar. At the heart of this calendar lies the moon, serving not only as a natural sign but as a culturally coded symbol that marks the beginning of a new month. However, the way this celestial sign is interpreted, operationalized, and authorized within each tradition differs significantly in terms of both pragmatics and semiotics, reflecting distinct theological and communal structures.

A. Sighting the Sign: The Moon as Semiotic Anchor

In both Islam and Judaism, the new moon signals the beginning of the month. However, in Judaism, this moment is subject to juridical validation. The Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah 1:4 specifies that witnesses are allowed to desecrate the Sabbath to testify about the new moon before the rabbinical court (Beit Din), especially for the months of Nisan and Tishrei, which include major festivals: *Hebrew*: יִרְשֶׁת לַעֲנֹן וְסִיג לַעֲ, תִבְרַשֶׁה חָצֵי וְיִלְקַחְמָ מִשְׁדָּחָה יְגִשָּׁ לַע... *English*: "For two months they desecrate the Sabbath, on Nisan and on Tishrei. For in these months, they were sent out to Syria to establish the festivals."

The illocutionary force of the court's declaration is verdictive; it does not simply report that the new month has begun; it creates that fact through institutional authority. This performative utterance illustrates a top-down, legal-procedural model of sacred time construction where central institutions play a mediating role between divine signs and community action.

In contrast, the Islamic tradition adopts a phenomenological and decentralized model rooted in the Hadith. In Sahih Muslim 1081b, the Prophet Muhammad states: *Arabic*: "صوموا لرؤيته وأفطروا لرؤيته فإن غمّي عليكم فأكملوا العدد" *English*: "Fast on sighting it (the new moon) and break [your fast] on sighting it. If the sky is cloudy, then complete the number [of days]."

Here, the directive comes directly from the Prophet without any need for formal validation. The speech act is clearly directive: it instructs the community on how to act based on observable signs. The simplicity of the rule and its direct appeal to empirical observation democratizes the process, creating a sacred time that is accessible and universally enactable. It shifts religious authority from a central legal body to the collective perception of the faithful.

Yet, this phenomenological democratization is structurally bounded by the Qur’anic text itself. As Surah Al-Baqarah 2:184 specifies, the sacred time of fasting is defined as “أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ” (“a limited number of days”). From a pragmatic perspective, while the Hadith provides the empirical directive for initiating the sacred time, 2:184 functions as a foundational macro-directive that establishes the definitive temporal container and its conditional exemptions (such as for illness or travel). Consequently, the Islamic model synthesizes a decentralized, visual semiotic anchor for the onset of sacred time with a centralized, divinely legislated boundary for its duration.

B. The Sabbath as Archetype: Sanctification by Divine Utterance

In Exodus 20:8-10, the command to observe the Sabbath is both commemorative and creative: *Hebrew: זָכוֹר יוֹם שַׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ... English: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...”*

Here, “Remember” (Zakhor) functions on multiple illocutionary levels: as a directive (calling for ritual acts such as rest and recitation), as a commissive (binding God and Israel in covenant), and as a declarative (consecrating the seventh day through divine speech). The Sabbath is not merely remembered; it is ritually constituted by God’s utterance, making time itself sacred.

Islamic Friday prayer (Jumu’ah) also carries profound ritual significance, as explicitly commanded in Surat Al-Jumu’ah (62:9). However, its pragmatic construction of sacred time differs markedly from the Jewish model. It lacks the full sanctification of a continuous twenty-four-hour period; whereas the Sabbath is a declarative establishment of an entire day defined by absolute statutory rest from sunset to sunset, the temporal sanctification of Friday is dynamically anchored to the specific duration of the congregational gathering. When analyzing the Qur’anic injunction, the speech act is centrally one of summoning. It is true that the text explicitly issues a directive to cease worldly activities: “O you who

have believed, when [the adhan] is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu’ah [Friday], then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade” (وَذُرُوا الْبَيْعَ). Yet, from a pragmatic standpoint, this cessation is a temporary, preparatory condition rather than an absolute ontological state. The directive to suspend commerce facilitates the primary illocutionary act of gathering. This temporary bound is confirmed by the subsequent verse (62:10), which issues a definitive counter-directive to resume mundane activities once the ritual concludes: “And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah.”

Thus, while both traditions ritualize specific times, their speech acts differ in scope and intensity: one constructs an all-encompassing temporal sanctuary through absolute cessation, while the other orchestrates a punctual, temporary interruption of mundane time to fulfill a specific communal directive.

PART II: THE PRAGMATICS OF DAILY AND ANNUAL RITUALS

A. Ramadan Fast: Temporal Boundaries as Sensory Experience

The Quran specifies the limits of fasting during Ramadan using vivid, phenomenological language: *Qur’an 2:187 Arabic: وكلوا واشربوا حتى يتبين لكم الخيط الأبيض من الخيط الأسود من الفجر English: “And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night], then complete the fast until nightfall.”*

This directive is highly deictic. It orients the believer not toward abstract timekeeping but toward direct observation. The speech act combines permissive and directive functions, permitting consumption until a sensory threshold is reached and then obligating cessation. The pragmatic force is thus experiential and self-validating, emphasizing taqwa (God-consciousness) through embodied observance.

B. Shema Recitation: Time, Memory, and Rabbinic Authority

The Mishnah in Berakhot 1:1 anchors the evening recitation of the Shema in a post-Temple context: *Hebrew: מִיְהִיבָהּ הָעֶשְׂמָה? וְיַבְרַעַב עֲמֵשׁ תָּא וְיִרְוֶק יִתְּךָ יֵאֵךְ... English: “From what time may one recite the Shema in the evening? From the time that the priests enter [to eat] their terumah.”*

This timing is neither strictly astronomical nor purely legal. It references a now-defunct Temple practice, thus anchoring contemporary prayer in sacred memory. The speech act maintains a covenantal link across historical rupture, demonstrating how language constructs continuity through symbolic anchoring.

C. Comparative Structures of Daily Prayer

In Islam, prayer times (Salat) are demarcated by solar phenomena. The Qur'an and Hadith provide specific temporal directives anchored to the physical environment. For instance, the Qur'an commands in Surah Al-Isra (17:78): "Establish prayer at the decline of the sun [from its meridian] until the darkness of the night and [also] the Qur'an of dawn." Furthermore, foundational Hadith traditions, such as the detailed narration in Sahih Muslim (612), explicitly define these prayer windows through observational metrics, delineating boundaries based on the sun's zenith, sunrise, sunset, and precise shadow lengths (e.g., noting when an object's shadow equals its height to mark the beginning of Asr). This is a highly observational model of ritual time.

In Judaism, the daily prayers (Tefillot) are temporally anchored either in the sacrificial system or the Patriarchs. The Talmud, Berakhot 26b, explores these competing models. Time is measured in "seasonal hours" (sha'ot zmaniyot), which require calculation. This creates a layered discourse combining historical memory, legal reasoning, and calendrical precision.

In sum, Islamic and Jewish texts construct sacred time through distinct semiotic and pragmatic strategies. Jewish texts centralize ritual time through legal authority and historical memory, while Islamic texts encourage a direct, sensory engagement with divine signs. Both traditions, however, rely on the power of performative language to sanctify, regulate, and structure religious life across temporal boundaries.

DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of Islamic and Jewish temporal directives reveals distinct but equally sophisticated linguistic strategies for constructing sacred time. Drawing on a theoretical framework that integrates cultural semiotics, pragmatics, and Speech Act Theory, we observe how the two

traditions encode time not only as a metaphysical or cosmological category but as a lived, performative, and socially mediated experience.

One of the most compelling findings of this study is the contrast between centralized legal authority in Judaism and decentralized sensory engagement in Islam. In Jewish texts, particularly the Mishnah and Talmud, the sanctification of time relies heavily on legal discourse and institutional authority. For example, the declaration of Rosh Chodesh (the new month) is not merely observational but juridical. The rabbinic court (Beit Din) serves as an authoritative interpreter of celestial phenomena, transforming empirical signs into religious obligations through verdictive speech acts (Cohen 1984 & Fraade 2011). This aligns with what Bakhtin (1981:71) would describe as a "monologic" discourse structure, where the center controls meaning and dissent or ambiguity is absorbed through legal dialectics.

Conversely, Islamic texts, particularly the Hadith, emphasize a phenomenological approach that privileges direct observation. The command to "fast upon sighting the moon" functions as a directive speech act that assigns agency to individual believers or communities (Brown 2009 & Nasr 2002). The lack of juridical mediation in most Sunni traditions suggests a more "dialogic" relationship between text and practitioner, consistent with Bakhtin's notion of openness and multiplicity in meaning-making. This structure is further reinforced by the Quranic use of metaphor and deixis such as the "white thread of dawn," which evokes immediate sensory experience rather than abstract measurement (Grice 1975 Sells 1996).

The performative nature of these utterances demonstrates the applicability of Austin's (1975) and Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory to sacred texts. In both traditions, divine speech is not limited to constative or descriptive functions but acts upon the world to create new realities; what Wolterstorff (1995) terms "illocutionary theology." For instance, God's declaration that the Sabbath is holy is not a report but a sanctification, echoing Austin's insight that "to say something is to do something." Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad's injunctions regarding prayer and fasting times instantiate community norms through directive acts that bind believers to a shared temporal rhythm.

From a semiotic perspective, the use of natural signs such as the moon, dawn, or shadow lengths as temporal anchors reveals the sacralization of

the cosmos itself (Sharafeldin et al. 2024). In both traditions, the natural world becomes a semiotic system through which divine will be communicated. As Leone (2010) notes, religion operates as a “semiotic phenomenon par excellence,” wherein objects and phenomena become signs through ritual encoding. However, the mode of encoding differs. Jewish ritual time is often historically anchored in the memory of the Temple, the role of the priests, and the authority of the sages (Boyarin 1993). In contrast, Islamic ritual time is cosmologically universal, tied to observable phenomena accessible across geographic and cultural boundaries (Nasr 2002; Ahmed 2016). Within this framework, however, a profound contemporary tension exists between the traditional method of physical moonsighting (*rukyah*) and modern astronomical calculations (*hisab*). Semiotically, this debate represents a shift in how the sign is authenticated: *rukyah* preserves the physical cosmos as a direct, participatory signifier requiring human sensory engagement, while *hisab* transitions the epistemic authority to mathematical abstraction, subtly altering the ritual encoding of sacred time without changing the referent itself.

The pragmatics of daily prayers also underscore these theological orientations. Jewish texts tie the three daily prayers to either the patriarchs or the sacrificial system. The calculation of prayer times using “seasonal hours” (*sha’ot zmaniyot*) reflects a legal-rational approach that embeds religious life within a framework of precision and structure (Hoffman 1996). Islamic texts, meanwhile, emphasize solar phenomena and shadow lengths, reinforcing a direct relationship between natural signs and divine law. This contrast illustrates differing epistemologies of sacred time: one based on halakhic reasoning and historical continuity, the other on phenomenological immediacy and global accessibility (Rahman 1980).

This strict adherence to phenomenological observation is deeply rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence; for instance, Ibn Taymiyyah rigorously argued that altering divinely appointed temporal boundaries through unauthorized mathematical calculations constitutes temporal *bid’ah* (reprehensible innovation). He insisted that the pragmatic authority of sacred time must remain strictly tethered to the Prophet’s explicit observational directives, rejecting any systemic shift away from the visible, natural signs (Ibn Taymiyyah 1999).

Additionally, the discussion of the Shema in Mishnah Berakhot reflects how rabbinic language constructs continuity through symbolic memory. By referencing the priests eating Teruma, a practice no longer possible after the Temple’s destruction, the rabbis perform an intertextual act of temporal bridging. This is a pragmatic move that maintains communal cohesion by anchoring present rituals in a sacred past (Neusner 2003). Islamic discourse, particularly in the case of Ramadan and Salat, performs a different kind of pragmatic function: fostering mindfulness (*taqwa*) through embodied experience and sensory cues (Ishak et al. 2025). This is consistent with the Sufi emphasis on inner perception and the Quranic use of metaphor to invoke states of consciousness (Ernst 2011).

As Al-Ghazali elaborates in his magnum opus, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, the outward observance of ritual time (such as the physical fast or the punctual prayer) is pragmatically incomplete without the inward realization of its spiritual objective, transforming mundane time into a vehicle for divine proximity and conscious awakening (Al-Ghazali 2005).

Furthermore, a crucial dimension revealed by this comparative analysis is the discursive management of human contingency. Neither tradition constructs sacred time as entirely inflexible; rather, both utilize permissive speech acts to accommodate human limitations and temporal crises. Whether it is the rabbinic authorization to violate the Sabbath to secure the calendar, or the Qur’anic deferment of fasting for the sick and traveling, these texts deploy conditional pragmatics to ensure that the strictures of sacred time ultimately serve the preservation of the community and human welfare, rather than functioning as rigid, destructive absolutes.

In the Islamic context, this discursive flexibility is the operative manifestation of *Maqasid al-Shariah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law). Specifically, it fulfills the core objective of *hifz al-nafs* (the preservation of life and well-being), which textually mandates that temporal and ritual strictures be pragmatically adapted through conditional exemptions whenever they threaten human welfare (Al-Shatibi 1997).

RESULTS

The analysis of sacred time constructions in Islamic and Jewish texts reveals two distinct yet sophisticated semiotic-pragmatic frameworks that reflect differing theological orientations.

1. The Semiotics of the Calendar: Moon Sighting as Sacred

Anchor in Judaism, the new moon functions as a sacred sign subject to juridical validation by the rabbinical court (Beit Din). The Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah 1:4 explicitly permits witnesses to desecrate the Sabbath to testify about the moon's appearance, illustrating the authority of the Beit Din in verdictive speech acts (Cohen 1984 & Fraade 2011). In contrast, Islamic texts adopt a decentralized approach where the Prophet Muhammad's directive in Sahih Muslim 1081b places the responsibility for moon sighting directly on individual believers (Brown 2009 & Nasr 2002). This directive speech act democratizes sacred time construction by relying on observable phenomena (Ibrahim et al. 2025).

2. Sanctification of Time through Divine Utterance: The Sabbath and Jumu'ah

The Sabbath command in Exodus 20:8–10 revealed a multilayered illocutionary force where the imperative "Remember" (Zakhor) simultaneously functions as a directive and a declarative that consecrates time itself (Wolterstorff 1995). The Islamic Friday prayer (Jumu'ah) is characterized by a speech act of summoning and gathering rather than a complete cessation of labor (Ernst 2011), highlighting divergent scopes of temporal sanctity.

3. Pragmatics of Daily and Annual Rituals

The Quranic injunction in 2:187 uses sensory language to direct believers toward embodied experience, fostering *taqwa* through personal observation (Sells 1996 & Grice 1975). In Judaism, the evening Shema prayer (Mishnah Berakhot 1:1) sustains communal memory through a historical temporal anchor linked to Temple practices (Boyarin 1993 & Neusner 2003). Islamic prayer times (Salat) are tied to solar phenomena, reinforcing the universality of divine authority (Rahman 1980 & Ahmed 2016).

4. Performative Language and Religious Identity

Both traditions rely on performative language to construct identity. Jewish texts emphasize institutional mediation and historical continuity (Fraade 2011 & Boyarin 1993), while Islamic texts emphasize sensory experience and immediacy (Nasr 2002 & Ernst 2011). Ritual repetition ensures that sacred time is continuously enacted and reaffirmed (Fairclough 1992 & Graham 1987 & Austin 1962 & Searle 1969).

5. Illocutionary Accommodation

The analysis reveals that sacred time is constructed to accommodate human vulnerability. In Jewish tradition, the Sabbath boundary is suspended for the calendar; in Islam, temporal boundaries for Ramadan are modified for illness and travel. These conditional utterances prioritize the preservation of human life over inflexible adherence.

CONCLUSION

This semiotic-discursive study demonstrates that temporal directives in scripture are powerful performative utterances that constitute religious reality. Sacred time is not a pre-existing category but a complex reality discursively constructed through the illocutionary force of sacred speech. This approach reveals that the ways a religious tradition "keeps time" are deeply embedded in its core theological orientations. Future research could explore how these frameworks are adapted in the face of modern clock-time.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization Walid Ali & Ahmad Abdel Tawwab & Maiada Shehab; methodology Walid Ali Ahmad Abdel Tawwab; writing original draft & preparation Walid Ali & Ahmad Abdel Tawwab; writing review and editing Walid Ali & Ahmad Abdel Tawwab; linguistic revision Dina Helmy Shalaby; Visualization Walid Ali; Supervision Walid Ali Ahmad Abdel Tawwab Nermin Mahmoud Ibrahim. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) GENERATED TEXT DECLARATION

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript. Any assistance from digital tools was limited to language refinement.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors confirm strict adherence to all institutional and international ethical standards ensuring research integrity and the complete avoidance of plagiarism or any form of misconduct.

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