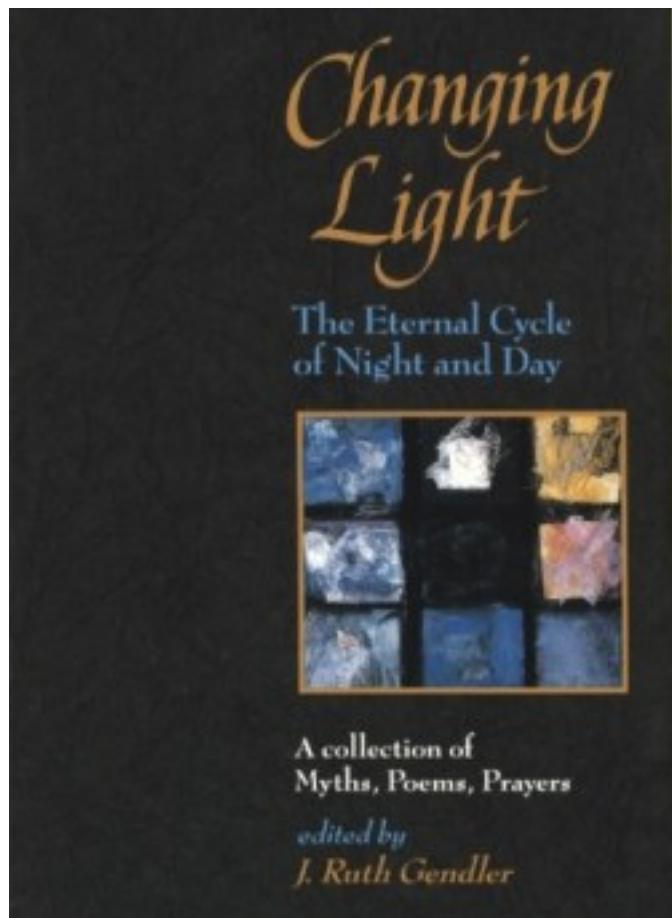


Changing Light: The Eternal Cycle of Night and Day



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INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years our ancestors marked the daily cycle of dark

and light with poems, prayers, stories, songs. Recognizing the repetition and variation of changing light was a matter of survival as well as sacred knowledge. Throughout the world people have prayed at the border between sleep and waking, turned their faces east to greet the sun, chanted and taken purifying baths at dawn, offered sun salutations in the morning and sun dances on special days, petitioned the moon with love poems, counted their month from new moon to new moon. Children's lullabies were often a kind of prayer for singing the child to a safe sleep.

The traditional Catholic prayer cycle includes prayers for the eight canonical hours. Traditional Moslems pray five times a day; Jews gather in groups of ten for morning, late afternoon, and evening prayers. In medieval Europe The Book of Hours presented a series of prayers, psalms, stories from the lives of Jesus and Mary in words and pictures. It was the main book in people's homes, a beautifully illustrated manuscript arranged according to the church hours: matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, nones, vespers, complines.

Time Sanctified is the title of a contemporary book about the Book of Hours. This title is startling to our modern ears; sacred time is not a part of our lives. At the doorway of the 21st century in our rush to be on time and take time off most of us don't give much attention to how we live in time. Feeling controlled by time, we in turn try to control and conquer time. At night we watch the stars on television instead of the stars in the sky.

Both the Trappist monk Thomas Merton and the Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel wrote movingly about sacred time. Merton was convinced that if you let the hours of the day saturate you,

and you gave them time, something would happen. He said that one of the best things that ~@pened to him when he became a hermit was "being

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