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# Exploring the Theology and Rituals: An Academic Analysis of Jewish Prayers and Festivals

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## Abstract

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This academic analysis delves into the rich tapestry of Jewish theology and rituals, focusing on prayers and festivals. Beginning with an exploration of Tefillah, the prayers central to Jewish life, it examines the significance of the three daily prayers: Shacharit, Mincha, and Ma'ariv, each tethered to distinct moments in the day. The symbolism of the Tallit prayer shawl and the commandments surrounding prayer in Jewish religious literature elucidate the depth of these practices. Furthermore, it investigates the role of the synagogue as a communal hub for worship, underscoring its importance in Jewish spiritual life. Moving beyond prayers, it unravels the intricate fabric of Jewish festivals, highlighting their theological underpinnings and ritualistic significance. From the Passover/Pesach festival, commemorating the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, to the Pentecost/Shavuot Festival, celebrating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, each festival encapsulates profound theological truths. Additionally, it explores the sacred observance of Shabbat/Sabbath, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Hanukkah, uncovering the layers of meaning embedded within these annual celebrations. In synthesizing these themes, its analysis underscores the integral role of theology and rituals in Jewish life, weaving together threads of tradition, community, and

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spirituality. This exploration not only deepens our understanding of Jewish faith but also invites reflection on the Jewish culture.

Judaism's socio-religious practices are rooted in Halakhah, which translates to "the way to go." Essentially, this law functions as a compendium of divine directives and God's commandments. Halakha not only offers guidance on matters of faith but also lays out practical instructions for daily living, covering everything from attire and grooming to dietary habits and charitable acts. This component of Judaism fosters a deep sense of gratitude towards God, fosters a distinct Jewish identity, and promotes purity and cleanliness in everyday life. Similar to other faiths, Judaism designates specific days for worship, observes rituals, and celebrates festivals with special reverence, all of which are elaborated upon in this article. Judaism places significant emphasis on various social and personal aspects of an individual's life. These include occasions where an individual becomes the central focus of family, festivities, or even broader social gatherings. These special events hold profound religious significance within the Jewish faith. Jewish worship comprises three prayers conducted at distinct times: one at dawn, another at noon, and the third at sunset. This worship, known as Ibadah, can be conducted individually or as part of a congregation, with no strict limitations imposed. However, a congregation typically requires a minimum of ten individuals. Both men and women are welcome to participate in these gatherings.

The early era of Judaism, often referred to as the Age of Elders, holds significance in both male and female roles. While men typically dominate the portrayal of elders, historical traditions highlight the influential role of women during this period. Notably, Sarah's role stands out in this context. She urged Abraham to leave his son Ishmael and his slave Hagar in the desert, a decision he was initially hesitant about. Judaism acknowledges women as prophets, emphasizing their importance in religious narratives. The exclusion of women from certain rituals isn't a reflection of diminished religious status but rather stems from entrusting them with significant responsibilities like family care, household duties, and child-rearing. This recognition grants them exemptions in certain aspects of religious practices.<sup>1</sup>

The synagogue holds immense significance, both culturally and historically, for the Jewish community. When the temple was unavailable for worship, synagogues provided a vital space for continued religious practice. This institution, accompanied by the role

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of the rabbi as a spiritual leader, became central to Jewish life. Beyond Israel, synagogues became hubs for Jewish communities, sustaining their faith and traditions. Various holy days are observed with deep reverence, each serving as a testament to Jewish heritage. These festivals not only mark significant occasions but also reinforce communal bonds and spiritual devotion. Moreover, rituals surrounding marriage, childbirth, puberty, and burial are conducted with utmost religious dedication. These rites hold profound importance within Judaism, shaping and enriching the lives of its followers.

### **Prayers: Tefillah in Judaism**

In Hebrew tradition, the daily act of Jewish worship is known as Tefillah. Interestingly, it's also referred to as Jewish prayer in Urdu. Within Judaism, there are three designated times for these rituals. The morning and afternoon sessions are obligatory, while the evening one is more of a personal commitment, though still highly encouraged. In Jewish practice, other religious obligations are seen as optional, as long as the individual has the sincere intention to incorporate them into their daily routine. Once that intention is set, those actions become wajib, or necessary, and are treated no differently from the obligatory duties. This principle is evident in Jewish congregational worship as well, where a minimum of ten individuals is required to form a congregation. Without this quorum, even if people reside together, their worship is considered individual rather than communal. In Judaism, a group of ten men traditionally constitutes a congregation, though it's worth noting that in many modern interpretations, this group can include both men and women.

For Jews, prayer holds significant importance, dating back to the time of Prophet Moses (PBUH). However, during that era, there weren't fixed times or specific numbers associated with these rituals. The directive to pray is rooted in the Torah, where Allah commands their observance on a daily basis. Interestingly, while the Torah mandates prayer, it doesn't prescribe a particular form or structure for it. Instead, Jewish prayer is characterized by three fundamental components.

1. Praising Allah
2. Engaging in prayer and supplication, an expression of servitude
3. Expressing gratitude to God for His blessings

During the time of Prophet Musa (peace be upon him), prayer was a personal duty for every Jew. However, later, during the first migration of Jews to Babylon, influenced by the Babylonian civilization, they began to neglect their prayers. In response, to rekindle the spirit of daily prayer and to unify the dispersed Jewish community,

Prophet Musa reinstated the importance of daily prayers. The Jewish exile in Babylon lasted for 70 years, during which King Nasr enslaved the Jews. Upon their return to Jerusalem, they rebuilt the second temple. Unfortunately, this temple was also destroyed, this time by the Roman army under Titus Flāvius Caesar in 70 AD.<sup>2</sup>

After a period of neglecting their prayers and fasts, the Jewish community received a reminder to reestablish their religious practices. It was emphasized that prayers should coincide with the frequency of sacrifices at the temple. During this time, sacrifices were conducted twice daily, occasionally supplemented with an extra sacrifice. Each sacrifice was followed by a corresponding prayer: morning sacrifice with morning prayer, afternoon sacrifice with afternoon prayer, and any additional sacrifice with an extra prayer. Additionally, since the sacrificial fire burned throughout the night, an evening prayer was also prescribed. This effectively set a schedule of three prayer times for the Jews: morning, noon, and evening.<sup>3</sup>

### **Three daily prayers of Jews**

In Jewish tradition, it's believed that morning prayer traces back to Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH), while afternoon prayer was initiated by Prophet Ishaq (PBUH), and evening prayer by Prophet Yaqub (PBUH).

In the Book of Daniel, Chapter 6, Verse 10, it's mentioned that Prophet Daniel (peace be upon him) also worshipped three times a day. Although the prayer is directed solely to Allah, Jewish scriptures advise against taking the name of Allah lightly, as stated in the book of Exodus. It warns against invoking Allah's name in vain, as there are consequences for doing so.

The Jewish tradition observes three daily prayers, known as Tefillah. Here's a breakdown:

1. Morning Prayer (Shacharit): This prayer takes place after sunrise but before noon.
2. Afternoon Prayer (Mincha): Held after noon but before sunset.
3. Night Prayer (Ma'ariv): Conducted after sunset and before dawn.

Each prayer time holds significance in Jewish spiritual practice and observance.

### **Morning Prayer (Shacharit):**

In the Shacharit, or morning prayer, the Fajr prayer holds significant importance among Jews. It's revered as the lengthiest and most pivotal prayer of the day, comprising six distinct segments. Firstly, scholars' interpretations are recited, setting the tone for the

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spiritual journey ahead. Following this, excerpts from the Torah and Psalms are read, enriching the prayer with divine wisdom and inspiration. The third part encompasses the recitation of the Shammah, a pivotal moment where the entire community of Bani Israel is summoned to affirm their belief in monotheism. Subsequently, the Amidah, a central prayer, is recited, followed by a poignant plea for the arrival of the Messiah, expressed through a psalm. As the prayer concludes, the obligations of Bani Israel are reiterated, underscoring their commitment to monotheism. It's a profound act of worship that binds the community together in faith and devotion.

### **Afternoon Prayer (Mincha):**

Afternoon Prayer: During Mincha, we recite the Amidah prayer, and read a portion of the Torah on festivals.

### **Night Prayer (Ma'ariv):**

During the Maghrib worship, Jews recite the Shamaa and Amedah prayers. Jewish religious practice includes three daily prayers, a fundamental part of their spiritual routine. Additionally, orthodox and conservative Jews observe an extra prayer, called 'Mosaf', on Sabbaths and other significant holy days like festivals. There's also a fifth prayer, Na'ila, which is specifically offered on the tenth day of the autumn month of Tishri, known as Yom al-Ghafran (Yom Kippur). Jewish prayers can be recited individually or in a group. Similar to Islam, congregational prayer holds significance in Judaism, with the belief that it's superior to individual prayer. In fact, it's emphasized that congregational prayer is a necessity in Judaism.

### **Conditions of Jewish Prayers**

In Jewish tradition, prayer holds special significance, carrying certain practices and customs. While individuals are permitted to pray at home, there's a preference for communal prayer, known as a "minyan," which consists of ten men aged 13 or older. This numerical requirement stems from the Book of Numbers, Chapter 14, Verse 27 of the Old Testament.

Men are obligated to pray, and this obligation extends to women as well, though some religious scholars emphasize specific times for prayer, particularly morning, afternoon, and evening prayers. During prayer, certain items hold symbolic importance. These include a prayer shawl, known as a Talit, adorned with fringes. Additionally, a small white hat, called a Kippah, is worn, along with a leather amulet containing Torah texts. The prayer shawl, in particular, must have four fringes on its four corners, with specific numerical values (13, 11, 8, 7). These numbers, when combined according to the rule of Abjad Huzar,

spell out the phrase "God is one," underscoring the unity and singularity of the divine.

During engagement in prayer Jews do fowling actions:

- Recite the Shema aloud.
- Listen for the gentle ring of the bell.
- Find solace within the sacred space, like the Sukkah.
- Adorn yourself with leather straps amulets for the prayers.<sup>4</sup>

There are two types of these amulets: one worn on the forehead and the other on the hand. The forehead amulet, often a leather band, sits atop the forehead, while the hand amulet, also a leather band, is wrapped seven times around the left hand. Both types feature Hebrew letters, *dal* and *shen*, woven into them. This practice extends to how Jews write the name of God or Lord in English, often as G-d or L-rd, out of reverence. In referring to God, Jews use His attribute names, such as the One, the Lord of the Universe, the Savior of the Children of Israel, the Guardian of the Children of Israel, the Great and the Mighty, and others.<sup>5</sup>

### **Tallit prayer shawl**

From childhood, Jewish men and boys don the Tallit prayer shawl, either over or under their garments, adorned with fringes on all four corners. According to the Torah, they are instructed to wear this fringed cloak during prayer.<sup>6</sup>

In the Torah, it is written: "And the Lord spoke to Moses, instructing him to convey to the children of Israel the command to attach fringes to the corners of their garments for all generations. They are to hand-stitch a thread of sky-blue onto the edge of these fringes. Remember these commandments, follow them diligently, and refrain from straying into sin by yielding to the desires of your heart and eyes. Instead, keep all my commandments close to your heart, put them into practice, and sanctify yourself to your God. For I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God."<sup>7</sup>

During prayer, Jews talk directly to God, without any need for someone in the middle. They typically pray in Hebrew, but it's perfectly acceptable to pray in any language you're comfortable with. It's important to dress respectfully because you're essentially standing before the highest of high kings.

Another crucial aspect of *tefillah* is "prayer," which reflects a person's hopes and desires. This can take many forms, from reciting verses from Jewish texts to composing prayers in one's own words. The essence of *tefillah* lies in its role as a cornerstone of Jewish worship, enriching spirituality and devotion in various everyday situations.

## Prayer Commandments in Jewish Religious Literature

"According to the book of Ecclesiastes, 'Worship God with your heart and soul.' Moses ben Maimon writes, 'The worship that emanates from the heart constitutes prayer.' Thus, prayer is also referred to as Bodashbalu, signifying worship with a sincere heart."<sup>8</sup>

The reference from the Old Testament could be Ecclesiastes 5:1: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong."<sup>9</sup>

Moses bin Maimon says

The worship that is done from the heart is the prayer, which means worship with a sincere heart.<sup>10</sup>

Musa bin Maimon once described prayer as a homage to the Torah's worship, but specifics on when and how often remained vague. Among the obligatory prayers for women, the morning prayer takes precedence as the foremost requirement, while the others remain optional. Interestingly, women are excused from participating in the subsequent prayers.

In the Talmud, two arguments arise regarding the necessity of three prayers. Firstly, each prayer mirrors a sacrificial offering in Sulaimani's ancient temple. Secondly, akin to Ghushl Baptisma, there's a cleansing aspect, with morning and evening prayers serving as purification rituals. The night prayer, akin to Ghushl Baptisma, absolves sins accumulated throughout the day.

These prayers stand as memorials to revered figures like kings and forefathers. According to Torah, Abraham observed the morning prayer, Isaac the afternoon prayer, and Jacob the night prayer. Further elucidation on prayer performance, timings, and Salah Musaf can be found in earlier inscriptions.

Both David and Daniel are noted for their thrice-daily prayers. David's Psalms attest:

"Morning, evening, and night, I offer worship and supplication; assuredly, He hears supplications."<sup>11</sup>

Daniel's story recounts how he faced Jerusalem, bowing before God three times daily, earning divine favor.

"The window of his room was open towards Jerusalem and he bowed down to God three times a day in worship and he was grateful, so God always exalted him."<sup>12</sup>

These narratives, scattered throughout scriptures, illustrate the significance and regularity of prayer in Jewish tradition.

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In traditional Jewish practice, it's expected that every Jew prays three times daily, with an additional prayer on Sabbath and holidays, and five times on Yom Kippur. While Orthodox Jews typically see one prayer as obligatory for women, there's some flexibility regarding timing. However, even more conservative Jews uphold the fixed prayer count as mandatory. A significant shift occurred in 2000 when it was ruled that, aside from traditionally exempt groups, women should participate in the same prayers as men, both in number and timing. In Reform Judaism, adherence to halakhah isn't mandatory, and prayer schedules are more optional. During prayers, many Jewish communities recite aloud in a special setting called the *Negon*, typically from a slightly raised platform in the synagogue. Among Eastern Jews, who often speak Yiddish, the term "Daven" is commonly used to mean "to pray," especially among orthodox Ashkenazi Jews.

### **Synagogue: A Gathering Place for Jewish Worship**

A synagogue serves as the cornerstone of Jewish worship, providing a space for communal gathering and spiritual reflection. The term "synagogue" finds its roots in the Greek word *Synagoge*, meaning assembly, encapsulating the essence of collective worship among the Jewish community. Historically, it also denoted the central religious council. Before the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent shift away from sacrificial worship, synagogues already held significant religious importance, fulfilling essential spiritual needs.<sup>13</sup>

Jerusalem housed the largest and oldest Jewish temple, traditionally attributed to Prophet David and later rebuilt by his son, Prophet Solomon (PBUH). This grand structure, adorned with precious stones and housing sacred artifacts, stood as a testament to Jewish faith for centuries.<sup>14</sup>

Outside of Palestine, Jewish communities established separate places of worship, often referred to as "monasteries." These spaces served not only for prayer but also as centers for religious education, where the laws of Moses were imparted by elected leaders.

The dispersion of Jews from Palestine led to a profound shift in perspective, with many realizing that Judaism could thrive beyond the borders of Palestine. This realization birthed a seminary in Janbia, offering a beacon of hope for Jewish continuity. The compilation of Jewish traditions and teachings culminated in the Talmud, emanating from the teachings of the Janbiah seminary. The Palestinian Talmud was completed some time in the fourth century, about a century before the Babylonian Talmud, but by whom it was compiled is unknown. It



apparently was not subjected to a final revision, and has reached us in an incomplete form. Possibly, however, some portions have been lost.<sup>15</sup>

Inspired by the Janbiah model, similar seminaries emerged in Galilee and Babylon, becoming hubs for scholarly discourse and interpretation of holy texts to meet the evolving needs of the Jewish community. Leaders of Israel in history. Seminaries can teach ordinances and laws or better, as the original Hebrew has it, "Toroth," a term comprehensive of all Jewish thought, whether deposited in the Scriptures or in the Talmud, whether it finds its expressions in the lessons of Jewish history and Jewish philosophy, or Jewish poetry and Jewish mysticism.<sup>16</sup>

### Importance of Jewish Rituals and Festivals

The significance of Jewish rituals and festivals permeates every aspect of a devout Jew's life, guiding them from birth to death. Rabbi Tuvia Levin beautifully encapsulates this notion when he interprets the Mishnah, expressing the essence of Jewish existence through the lens of tradition and practice.

הוא הִיא אומר: בן חמש שנים למקרא, בן עשר שנים למשנה, בן שלש עשרה למצוות, בן חמש עשרה כב לגמרא, בן שמונה עשרה לחפה, בן עשרים לרדוף, בן שלשים לכה, בן ארבעים לבינה, בן חמשים לעצה, בן ששים לזקנה, בן שבעים לשיבה, בן שמונים לגבורה, בן תשעים לשיח, בן מאה כאלו מת ועבר ובטל מן העולם.<sup>17</sup>

He would often remark, "At five, a child is ready to begin studying Scripture. By ten, they delve into the Mishnah. Thirteen marks the age of obligation to observe the mitzvot. Fifteen is the time to immerse oneself in the study of Talmud. At eighteen, marriage becomes a consideration. By twenty, one should be pursuing a livelihood. It's at thirty that strength truly blossoms. Wisdom starts to take root at forty. Fifty brings the gift of counsel. By sixty, sagacity begins to flourish. Seventy is the age of elderliness, where experience reigns supreme. Eighty brings a sense of power and accomplishment. Ninety is when one starts to feel the weight of time, beginning to stoop. And when someone reaches a hundred, it's as if they've completed their journey, having left their mark on the world, yet now exist as a mere memory.

Understanding and appreciating Jewish culture poses its own set of challenges. One of the primary reasons behind this lies in the fact that Jews have had relatively limited periods of independent existence throughout their four-thousand-year history. Instead, their cultural identity has been heavily influenced by the societies and religions in which they lived. Consequently, attempting to trace the evolution of

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Jewish civilization through the annals of time is a task fraught with difficulty and subjectivity.

Roberta Rosenthal Kwall writes

“Jewish religious law, known as halakhah, is similar to all law in that it is best understood in cultural terms and therefore through a paradigm known as cultural analysis. Cultural analysis of law sees law and culture as intertwined rather than as distinct entities developed in isolation from one another. A cultural analysis of law rejects the view that law is objectively neutral and coherent and thus lacking a relationship to its surrounding cultural environment. Instead, cultural analysis of law understands both law and culture as products of social context and historically specific circumstances. It also sees law as the product of discourse and debate, shaped in response to the push and pull of social forces. Halakhah, like all law, both reflects and constitutes social and cultural practices. Jewish law, which is binding upon Jews according to the tradition, produces Jewish culture, and Jewish culture produces Jewish law.”<sup>18</sup>

The literature penned by Jewish scholars regarding their civilization and culture primarily recounts their historical journey, often shrouded in the rich tapestry of civilization. While these works offer insights into the complexities and expansiveness of Jewish civilization, they tend to prioritize narrative over philosophical intricacies and practical descriptions of culture. Thus, while these texts provide valuable glimpses into the breadth of the subject, they may not always delve deeply into the nuanced aspects of Jewish culture and its practical manifestations.

### **Passover /Pesach festival**

Passover, also known as Pesach, holds deep significance in Jewish tradition, marking the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. This festival spans seven days during the Hebrew month of Nisan, typically falling in March or April each year. The centrepiece of Passover is the Seder meal, observed on the first two nights, with the first and last two days being full holidays. Lighting candles at night is a special tradition during this time, followed by a ceremonial reenactment of the parting of the Red Sea.

“The day after the seder meal is a holiday for Jews. Many Jews like to meet at the synagogue to pray and to celebrate Passover. Whenever Jews meet together for services, they read the Torah scrolls, which are their holy writings. The scrolls are kept in a cupboard called

an ark. Each week they are taken out and the rabbi reads part of them. The next week he reads out the next part. It takes a year to read right through to the end like this. The synagogue is the place of worship for Jews.”<sup>19</sup>

During Pesach, unlike the Sabbath, there are no restrictions on travel, writing, or using electronic devices. Cooking and going out are also permitted, adding to the festive atmosphere. The festival, which extends for eight days, is a time for reflecting on the journey of the Israelites and their newfound freedom.

Traditional Passover foods, such as unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and roasted meats, play a central role, evoking the hardships and triumphs of the exodus. The Torah mandates the consumption of unleavened bread for seven days, symbolizing the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt.<sup>20</sup> The Seder meal brings families together to recount the story of the exodus, with each food item holding symbolic significance. It's a time for collective remembrance and gratitude, as all generations participate in honouring the legacy of liberation passed down through the ages.

David W. Rose also writes about Passover pilgrims, as he writes

“Israel is quite a new country, but Jews have lived in that part of the world for at least 3000 years. Today there are Jews in every continent of the world. They may speak different languages and wear different clothes, but wherever they live, they have one thing in common. They all think of Jerusalem, in Israel, as the central place of their religion. Passover is an old 'pilgrim' festival. In the past pilgrim Jews travelled from far and wide to celebrate the festival together in Jerusalem.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Pentecost/Shavuot Festival “The Festival of Weeks”**

Pentecost/Shavuot, also known as the Festival of Weeks, holds significance across cultures. Shavuot, derived from the Hebrew word meaning "weeks," falls in the month of Sivan (May, June), fifty days post-Pesach. Transitioning into the New Testament, it gains recognition as Pentecost. Originally an agricultural celebration marking the conclusion of the wheat harvest, it later intertwines with the narrative of Prophet Moses (PBUH) receiving the holy tablets atop Mount Sinai.

Sejin Park explained in the following words

“The Festival of Weeks was the second of the three great festivals on the Israelite calendar Harvest festivals such as the Festival of Weeks were ubiquitous in the ancient world. The completion of harvest was a natural opportunity for celebration since it signified divine blessing and material abundance, and was a natural point in the

agricultural cycle to take a break from work. In the Hebrew Bible, the Festival of Weeks is referred to in lists of cultic festivals (Exod 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23: 15—21; Num 28:26—31; Deut 16:9—12; 2 Chr 8:13). Moreover, it is peculiar among holidays in the Hebrew Bible in that it is never assigned a precise date.”<sup>22</sup>

Traditionally, Shavuot involves baking two leavened wheat loaves and sacrificing either seven sheep or an ox (or two oxen), with the poor welcomed to partake. Synagogues host special worship services, while homes and sacred spaces are adorned with vibrant flowers and greenery.

Lilian Helen Montagu writes about it in the following words

“The second of the great festivals of rejoicing, the festival of Pentecost (the name of Pentecost means the fiftieth day, from the Greek Pentikonta, meaning fifty), is celebrated seven weeks after Passover. Its meaning has changed since Biblical times, when in Palestine it was celebrated as a purely agricultural festival. The Passover ritual observances included the offering of a sheaf of barley. On the feast of Pentecost the Jews were commanded to bring two wave loaves out of their habitations and in holy convocation to give thanks for the harvest blessings. Since early post - Biblical times Pentecost has, however, been mainly regarded as a festival to commemorate the giving of the ten words. But we decorate our synagogues with flowers in order that we may be reminded of the old agricultural meaning.”<sup>23</sup>

The festival, celebrated on the sixth and seventh days of Sivan, embodies a blend of agricultural and spiritual elements. Known by various names like Chug Hasaviot (Festival of the Week) and Chug Habikkarkar (Feast of First Fruits), it resonates with the Exodus narrative, further enriching its significance.<sup>24</sup>

### **Shabbat/ Sabbath Festival**

In Judaism and certain Christian denominations, the Sabbath, also known as Shabbat, holds significant importance as a day of worship. It begins at sunset on Friday and concludes at sunset the following day. Traditionally, the Sabbath revolves around three pivotal meals. Among non-Orthodox Jews, the Friday and Saturday night meal takes precedence, often involving special arrangements. Commencing with the blessing of challah bread, these meals symbolize a sense of sanctity and community.

The Sabbath is revered as a time of tranquillity and spiritual purity. Dressing elegantly is customary, with some individuals opting for white attire as a symbol of purity. At sunset on Friday, candles are ceremoniously lit at home, while the morning sees worshippers

gathering at synagogues for special prayers commemorating the day. Observant Jews refrain from activities such as smoking, fireworks, strenuous Labor, and automobile travel during this sacred time.

At the core of Jewish observance, the Sabbath stands as the paramount holy day. Rooted in the teachings of Judaism, it underscores the principle of dedicating six days to Labor and reserving the seventh for worship and repose. Central to the Mosaic Law encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath commandment signifies the divine decree to abstain from work on this consecrated day, mirroring the rest God took after creating the universe.

According to the Hebrew Bible, God created the world in six days and took a rest on the seventh, hallowing it as holy.<sup>25</sup> In the Talmud, it's recounted that on Friday evening, as Jewish folks return home from the synagogue to prepare for the Sabbath, two angels, one of good and one of evil, accompany them. These celestial beings inspect the preparations for the Sabbath. If everything is in order, the angel of goodness offers a prayer for a beautiful upcoming Sabbath, which the angel of evil begrudgingly echoes with an "Amen." However, if any shortcomings are found, the angel of evil prays for misfortune, echoed by the angel of goodness. After this, families gather around the Sabbath table, singing hymns and invoking blessings through the angels.<sup>26</sup>

The Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and lasts until sunset on Saturday, a sacred time for Jews. Participation in this festival is obligatory for all Jews, with Friday evening hosting the best meal of the week. Businesses are closed on Saturday, adhering to tradition. Orthodox Jews refrain from worldly activities, dedicating the day to worship and meditation.

Moses Maimonides writes.

The God commanded us to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and to rest, for two; namely. That we might confirm the true theory, that of the Creation, which at once and clearly leads to the theory of the existence of God. (a) That we might remember how kind God has been in freeing us from the burden of the Egyptians. Sabbath is therefore a double blessing it give us correct notions and also promotes the well-being of our bodies<sup>27</sup>.

## **Rosh Hashanah Festival**

Rosh Hashanah, meaning "beginning of the year" in literal terms, is known as the Jewish New Year. The festivities kick off with Maddt-i Istighfar, a period of worship spanning 10 days. This occasion primarily revolves around repentance and seeking forgiveness. Jews

worldwide gather at their places of worship to mark this significant event. Culminating on the subsequent day, the Day of Atonement, considered the holiest day, Rosh Hashanah spans the first and second days of Tushre (typically falling in September or October). Tradition holds that these days were the initial moments of "creation." To usher in the new year, Jews exchange blessings and hopes for the upcoming year, often accompanied by the symbolic act of dipping apples in honey as a sign of sweetness and prosperity.

Adam Augustine writes in the Encyclopedia of Britannica.

Rosh Hashana, a major Jewish observance now accepted as inaugurating the religious New Year on Tishri 1 (September or October). Because the New Year ushers in a 10-day period of self-examination and penitence, Rosh Hashana is also called the annual Day of Judgment; during this period each Jew reviews his relationship with God, the Supreme Judge. A distinctive feature of the liturgy is the blowing of the ram's horn (shofar) as prescribed in Numbers 29:1; the notes of the shofar call the Jewish people to a spiritual awakening associated with the revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai. During the Additional Service in the synagogue, the shofar is sounded after the recital of each of three groups of prayers.<sup>28</sup>

Rosh Hashana is also known as the Day of Remembrance, for on this day Jews commemorate the creation of the world, and the Jewish nation recalls its responsibilities as God's chosen people<sup>29</sup>.

In Sinai, the Torah scrolls, and associated items are adorned in white cloth for a blessing. Jewish tradition holds that on the first day of the year, all individuals stand before God, with some deemed good and others not. Many fall in between, and it's crucial for them to seek forgiveness from God before Yom Kippur arrives, aiming for divine Favor. On this day, Jews exchange wishes for a happy new year, praying for a good one ahead. The Sabbath between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is observed as a time of reflection and repentance, with special prayers added to the usual ones.

A customary practice on the first night of Rosh Hashanah involves preparing special dishes symbolizing good fortune. The following night, bread and fruit dipped in honey are consumed, accompanied by a unique prayer. Rosh Hashanah stands out as the only festival in Israel celebrated over two days.<sup>30</sup>

### **Yom Kippur: Known as the Day of Atonement**

Yom Kippur: Known as the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur holds a special place in the Jewish calendar, particularly in the month of Tishri, considered the holiest month. It's not just any ordinary day; it's a

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sacred holiday. The observance includes a solemn 25-hour fast and the offering of sacrifices, accompanied by the distribution of charity and heartfelt prayers seeking forgiveness for transgressions. Unlike holidays tied to the Christian calendar, Yom Kippur follows the Hebrew calendar, leading to varying dates each year.

During Yom Kippur, synagogues undergo a transformation, adorned with white curtains and drapes, symbolizing purity, and renewal. Rabbis, too, don white attire, embracing the color's significance of cleansing and absolution. It's a day that opens the doors to hope and reconciliation, inviting believers to reflect and seek forgiveness with pure hearts.

The story goes that Prophet Moses (PBUH) received ten commandments on Mount Sinai after spending 40 days there. However, upon his return, he was dismayed to find that instead of adhering to God's commands, the Bani Israel were worshipping a cow. He admonished them sternly and warned of the consequences in the Hereafter. His warnings prompted the people to seek forgiveness from Allah, who then pardoned them. When Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) returned to the mountain, he found that his people had strengthened their faith significantly. Consequently, the tenth day of the seventh month was designated as the Day of Atonement for the Jewish nation according to Sharia law.

In the book of Leviticus, it is written: "Remember that the tenth day of the seventh month is the day of atonement, a sacred assembly for you. On this day, you must cleanse yourselves and present an offering to the Lord."<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the book Numbers specifies: "On the first day of the seventh month, there shall be a sacred assembly. You shall do no regular work. It is a day for you to sound the trumpets."<sup>32</sup>

### **Sukkot Festival**

Sukkot, derived from Hebrew, translates to "temporary hut or shelter." It marks the autumn harvest festival and, like other holy occasions, recalls the Exodus story, where Israelites journeyed through the Sinai desert, dwelling in Sukkot. Celebrated on the fifteenth of Tishri, five days following the Day of Atonement, Sukkot is known as the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths. "Sukkot" is the plural of "Sukkah," meaning tent or canopy. According to the Bible, this feast occurs annually on the fifteenth of Tishri, signifying the Jewish Eid. Sukkah observance commemorates the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, symbolizing liberation from slavery and arrival at the tent of freedom. Despite the Exodus happening on Nisan's 15th (Passover), Sukkot is

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ordained for Tishri. The festival begins five days after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, spanning seven days. Jews are enjoined to abandon their homes, dwelling temporarily in a makeshift mud house on this occasion.

In the book of Leviticus, it's written that for seven days, like the Israelites of old, one should dwell in the wilderness. This tradition ensures that future generations understand that when the Israelites were led out of Egypt, it was by the hand of the Lord.<sup>33</sup> Today, in observance of this commandment, Jews construct makeshift shelters, capable of withstanding the wind's gusts, immediately after Yom Kippur.

If setting up temporary dwellings indoors isn't feasible, they're permitted to reside in a Sukkah, a temporary structure. These Sukkahs, even those erected within synagogues, serve this purpose.

During Sukkot, Jews recite blessings over four specific plants and fruits:

1. A small palm branch
2. Branches of the henna plant
3. Branches of the myrtle tree
4. Lemon tree branches

These branches are then bound together with a palm branch. Sukkot has two primary rituals: the waving of the Four Species (the above-mentioned plants) and the construction of a ceremonial bundle called a lulav, made by binding the henna and myrtle leaves onto the palm branch. During prayer, this lulav is waved in all directions, symbolizing gratitude for God's blessings.

In the Book of Leviticus, it is specifically mentioned that:

"On the first day you shall bring for yourself fresh fruit from the trees. And you shall also bring branches of palm trees, sycamore trees, and fir trees. You shall celebrate before the Lord your God for seven days."<sup>34</sup>

## **Hanukkah Festival**

Hanukkah is a festival that holds deep historical significance for the Jewish community. It serves as a poignant reminder of the oppression faced by the Jews at the hands of Greek and Syrian authorities in the past, as well as their remarkable resilience and spiritual triumph. During this dark period, the Jews were subjected to severe restrictions on their religious practices and were even forbidden from observing their festivals and worship. The desecration reached a terrible climax when their sacred temple was defiled, transformed into a den of immorality and vice. In the face of such adversity, the Jewish people were divided in their response. Some chose to resist, refusing to



compromise their faith even at the cost of their lives, while others rose in rebellion. Among these rebels were the Maccabees, a courageous tribe who played a pivotal role in the struggle for liberation.

Against all odds, in the year 165 BC, the Jews achieved a miraculous victory, reclaiming their holy Temple from the hands of their oppressors. As they cleansed and rededicated the Temple, they discovered a single sacred candle burning despite the scarcity of oil. This divine light, which should have lasted only one day, continued to shine for eight days, a symbol of God's enduring presence and grace. In gratitude for this extraordinary blessing, the Maccabees instituted an eight-day celebration, known as Hanukkah, to honor and thank the Almighty.<sup>35</sup>

This tradition has endured through the centuries, endorsed by esteemed religious leaders, and continues to be observed fervently to this day. Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, serves as a beacon of hope and resilience, reminding us of the enduring power of faith and the triumph of light over darkness.

In modern Hebrew, it's also known as Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, an eighth-day Jewish celebration honoring the Holy Temple. It kicks off at sunset with the lighting of a special nine-branched candlestick called the Hanukkah Menorah or Hanukkiah. The centerpiece, called the Shamash, stands higher in the middle and is used to light the other eight candles. These eight candles flank the Shamash on either side. Kids receive toys and money during this festivity. Traditional Hanukkah dishes like jam-filled and potato pancakes or latkes, along with doughnuts, are cooked and enjoyed.

This Festival of Lights, starting on the 25th of the month, carries extra significance nowadays, partly due to its proximity to Christmas. It commemorates the triumph of the Maccabees in Jerusalem. Legend has it that when the Maccabees reclaimed Jerusalem, they found only a single container of oil for the candles. Though it was expected to last only one night, miraculously, it burned for eight days. Jews light candles in remembrance of this event. Gift-giving, music, and games are cherished traditions of this holiday.<sup>36</sup>

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## Conclusion

In this exploration of Jewish theology and rituals, we have delved into the rich tapestry of prayers and festivals that form the cornerstone of Jewish spiritual life. From the structured cadence of daily prayers to the jubilant celebrations of festivals, each aspect reveals layers of meaning and significance. The prayers, Tefillah, are not mere recitations but profound expressions of devotion and connection to the divine. Through the Morning Prayer (Shacharit), Afternoon Prayer (Mincha), and Night Prayer (Ma'ariv), Jews engage in a continuous dialogue with God, punctuating their day with moments of reflection and gratitude. The donning of the Tallit prayer shawl signifies a physical manifestation of spiritual commitment, a tangible reminder of the commandments woven into the fabric of Jewish religious literature. Within the sacred confines of the synagogue, believers gather to commune with one another and with God, finding strength and solace in collective worship.

But it is not only in prayer that the Jewish faith finds expression. The observance of festivals like Passover (Pesach), Pentecost (Shavuot), and Shabbat (Sabbath) weaves the threads of tradition and history into the fabric of everyday life. Each festival carries its own narrative of liberation, revelation, or renewal, offering Jewish believers a roadmap for navigating life's complexities. From the solemn introspection of Yom Kippur to the joyous festivities of Hanukkah, these rituals serve as anchors in the tumult of existence, grounding believers in their identity and purpose. Through prayer and festival alike, Jews affirm their covenant with God and with one another, forging bonds that transcend time and space.

In conclusion, through the observation of Jewish theology and rituals of Judaism has revealed not only the depth of spiritual practice but also the enduring resilience of Jewish faith that has withstood the test of time. In the rhythm of prayer and the rhythm of festivals, Jews find not only solace but also strength according to their belief, and drawing sustenance from the wellspring of tradition as they navigate the journey of life.

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