

# Judaism 101

By Rabbi Aryeh Blaut and Chaplain Matthew Perry

**A**s Religious Coordinators or Chaplains, one sees that the best way for rehabilitation is through religious observance. A goal of this article is to share with the reader some of the basics of Judaism in order to assist him/her in providing for the needs of the Jews in their care.

Judaism is very regulated. A Jew wakes up in the morning and there are laws as to what to do, beginning with thanking HaShem (G-d) for allowing him to wake up. The hands are then ritually washed three times.

## Daily Practices

### Prayer

On all days except *Shabbas* (the day of “rest” beginning Fridays before sundown through dark on Saturday nights) and most holidays, a male is to place *Tefilin* (usually translated as phylacteries) on his arm and head. These are leather boxes containing certain verses from the Torah. Attached to these boxes are leather straps. Using a *Siddur* (a Jewish book containing the prayers of each service) the morning prayer

service during the week usually takes the experienced Jew 30–60 minutes to recite. On *Shabbas* and holidays 90–120 minutes.

While on the topic of prayer — a Jew is constantly praying and making blessings throughout the day. Besides the morning blessings, there are blessings said before and after eating, after going to the bathroom, afternoon prayers and evening prayers.

### Torah Study

Torah study is of high value in Judaism. Pause for some terminology. A Torah is a handwritten scroll written by a scribe over the better part of a year. This is a very Holy scroll and very expensive. When the Torah is printed and bound into a book, it is referred to as a *Chumash*. When the book contains not only the Torah, but the Prophets and Writings, it is called a *Tanach*. When a Jew refers to a “Bible” — this is to what he is referring. There is no “New Testament” in Judaism. There are numerous other books that a Jew may choose to study in the way of Oral Law & Tradition, *Halacha* (Jewish Code or Law), Jewish Ethics and more. These are all classified as Torah in the context of learning.



## Kosher Food

Let us address one more daily requirement of a Jew, eating kosher. Kosher is not a Rabbi blessing the food. Rather, for food to be kosher, it must meet the basic requirements of Jewish Code which includes the raw ingredients, inspection for insects and worms, the equipment used to prepare the food, the supervision, etc.

## The Jewish Sabbath

Every week, a few minutes before sundown begins the Jewish Sabbath (also known as Shabbas or Shabbat). It lasts for about 25 hours. Shabbas is ushered in by the lighting of candles prior to the start of Shabbas (time restrictions apply). If this is not possible, a competent Orthodox Rabbi should be consulted. Shabbas is a time for spiritual growth as well as physical pleasure. There are 39 categories (and multiple sub-categories) of activities that do not occur on Shabbas.

Friday night, Shabbas late morning and Shabbas afternoon special foods are enjoyed. The first two meals begin with a blessing over wine (or grape juice) and then challa rolls or matza. The third meal only needs the challa or matza. After Shabbas is over and the evening prayers are said, there is a special ceremony that is said called Havdala that separates the holy day of Shabbas from the rest of the week. This is usually said over wine/grape juice, nice smelling spices and a candle with two or more wicks.

## Jewish Holidays

Once a month (sometimes twice) celebrates the new month. This is

called Rosh Chodesh. There are a couple of extra prayers said. The source for this holiday is Shmos (Exodus) 12. While still in Egypt, the Jews were commanded to sanctify the new month. The Jewish calendar follows a Lunar Month (each month containing either 29 or 30 days) and a Solar Year (therefore there is an extra month added seven times in a 19-year cycle). This is the reason that the Jewish holidays do not fall out the same day on the secular calendar every year.

Pesach (Passover), Shavu'os and Sukkos are the three pilgrimage holidays. When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, Jews from all over would go there to celebrate these holidays. Full holidays are similar to Shabbat in restriction but with some types of activity permitted on them (for example, under certain conditions, cooking may take place). If a holiday falls on Shabbat Shabbat rules apply.

**The two holiest days of the Jewish year are Rosh HaShana (15 days before Sukkos) and Yom Kippur (ten days after Rosh HaShana).**

## Passover

Passover is always in the spring and among other things, celebrates HaShem taking the Jews out of Egypt in order to serve Him. Outside of Israel, it is eight days — the first and last two are full holidays and the days in between are semi-holidays. From the day before Passover until Passover ends, there is a restriction on eating foods that have leavened, legumes are prohibited for many, special dish and kitchen ware are used only for this week. There are many more details to the observance of Passover but that is beyond the scope of this article.

## Shavu'os

Shavu'os is seven weeks after Passover and outside of Israel is two days. This holiday celebrates the revelation at Mt. Sinai and HaShem giving the Jewish people the Torah. This holiday is so special, that there is a custom to stay up the entire night learning the Torah.

## Sukkos

Sukkos is similar to Passover in length and is in the fall. The first two days are holiday days, the next five are semi-holiday and the next two days are a special holiday called Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. While there aren't the special food needs as Passover, Sukkos has two major commandments — 1. Eat and dwell in a special booth called a sukkah and 2. To hold and wave together four types of plant life: A special citron called an esrog, a palm branch, two willow branches and three myrtle branches; together they are referred to as the Lulav.

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## Rosh HaShana & Yom Kippur

The two holiest days of the Jewish year are Rosh HaShana (15 days before Sukkos) and Yom Kippur (ten days after Rosh HaShana). Rosh HaShana is the head of the year or “new year”. It is two days in length. Prayers are extended as this is the day that HaShem judges the world. A major mitzva to this holiday is that a ram’s horn is blown a minimum of 30 times — ideally 100 times each day (except on Shabbas). Yom Kippur is a 25 hour fast of food and water. It is the day that HaShem seals the verdict for the coming year, and as such has even more prayer time than usual.

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## Other Fast Days

While speaking of fast days — there are several other fasts. In the summer, there is a 25 hour fast called Tish’a B’Av (9<sup>th</sup> of Av). A number of major tragedies occurred over history on this day. Three weeks prior to 9<sup>th</sup>



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of Av is 17 Tamuz — a sunup to dark fast takes place. There are a couple of other minor fast days throughout the year.

## Chanuka & Purim

Finally, Chanuka in the winter and Purim a month before Passover. Both holidays are considered weekdays, unlike the major holidays above. Chanuka is an eight day holiday in which a major part of the holiday is to light candles at a certain time each of the eight nights. It is a holiday that celebrates the Jews defeating the Syrian-Greeks who wanted us to convert. Purim is the

Book of Esther and celebrates being saved from physical elimination. Purim there are several mitzvos to do — reading from a special scroll called Megilas Ester — two times; giving food packages to friends; giving money to the poor and a festive meal.

This is just a small introduction to Judaism. We hope this serves as an introduction to future discussions. We hope you will reach out to Jewish Prisoner Services International and contact Rabbi Blaut or Matthew Perry to discuss any questions or just learn more to help you better serve your Jewish Community.



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