

# Introduction to Judaism

## Lesson 3

### Calendar and Holidays

### Worship and Liturgy

#### 1) The Jewish Calendar

- A. The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar of 354 days.
- B. Originally it was governed by the Jewish high court in Jerusalem. The new month was established by witnesses who saw the new moon and then the news was spread to the countryside
- C. A large amount of Jewish law is devoted to regulating the calendar since this establishes the celebration of the holidays, which must be celebrated in certain seasons.
- D. This system lasted until 359 A.D. when the Rabbis realized that Jews were dispersed all over the world and they needed a standardized calendar. At that time Hillel established the permanent calendar.
- E. The year has 12 months of 29 or 30 days. 7 leap years on a 19 year cycle. A leap year adds 1 month in order to keep the holidays in their proper season.
- F. The calendar has never been adjusted or amended. This shows how advanced the Rabbis were in their knowledge of the cosmos.
- G. According to tradition, when the Messiah comes and all Jews return to the land of Israel, then the traditional methods regulating the calendar will be reinstated.

#### 2) Holidays

- A. There are 6 biblically ordained holidays.
- B. Rosh Hashanah – The Jewish new year. A day of judgment when all things are decreed for the following year.
- C. Yom Kippur – The day of atonement. This is a fast day and is considered the holiest day of the year. We spend this day in prayer and fasting.
- D. Sukkot – The time of joy. We live in temporary shelters to commemorate our sojourn in the desert. We also shake the 4 species to celebrate the harvest. Date palm, citron, myrtle, and willow.
- E. Shemini Atzeret – Celebrates the completion of the yearly cycle of reading the Torah. Also celebrate the beginning of the rainy season in Israel.
- F. Passover – A time of freedom. Commemorates our exodus from slavery in Egypt. Springtime celebration of the beginning of the harvest. We conduct a seder to relive the days of the exodus.
- G. Shavuot – The giving of the Torah on Sinai. This was the day when Moses came down with the 10 commandments. Celebrated at beginning of the summer.

#### 3) Rabbinically Ordained Holidays

- A. Chanukah – 165 B.C. Commemorates the victory of the Hasmoneans over the Assyrian Greeks and the rededication of the Temple. Usually in December. We light candles for 8 nights to celebrate the miracle of the oil lasting for 8 days.

B. Purim – 525 B.C. Commemorates the miracle of the Jewish victory detailed in the Book of Esther. One-day holiday which is preceded by the fast of Esther the day before.

#### 4) 7 Fast days

A. Fast of Gedaliah – 586 B.C. Commemorates the governor of Israel Gedaliah ben Achikam who was killed by Jewish rebels as detailed in Jeremiah chapter 41. This ends the hope of independent Jewish life in the land of Israel.

B. Yom Kippur – The day of atonement. Holiest day of the year. Only biblically ordained fast day.

C. 10th of Teves – Commemorates the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. This led to the eventual destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people.

D. Fast of Esther – Commemorates the fast established by Esther in the story of Purim.

E. Fast of the firstborn – Commemorates God’s sparing of the Jewish firstborn during the exodus from Egypt.

F. 17th of Tammuz – Commemorates the first breach of the walls of Jerusalem during the destruction of the city by the Babylonians 586 B.C.

G. 9th of Av – Commemorates the destruction of the first and second temples which according to tradition happened on the same day.

#### 5) Liturgy and Prayer

A. Originally people achieved closeness to God through the bringing of sacrifices. The animal represented man’s animal instincts which were symbolically slaughtered and provided a spiritual elevation.

B. The rabbis say in the Talmud that prayer was established for 2 reasons. (1) It is instead of the sacrifices in the Temple. (2) It was established to commemorate our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

C. Prayer has 2 components. (1) We ask God for the things we need. (2) It is a statement of our faith in God. By praying we show that we believe in God. So prayer is to commemorate the temple services. This is a statement of faith. And prayer for our needs is in line with how the forefathers prayed. They asked God for what they needed.

D. Prayers begin to become standardized after the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C. They evolved from a service read by a leader who prayed for all to a standardized prayer book for each individual.

E. The first standardized prayer book was established by Rabbi Amram Gaon in 880 A.D. This included psalms and prayers written by the rabbis of previous generations.

F. There are prayers which cover all situations in Jewish life, from the blessings we make before and after eating to holidays and life events.

G. Jews pray communally 3 times per day, morning, afternoon, and evening. This commemorates the temple services as well as our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.