

Jewish service

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The history of Jewish people has remained one of its own in the world. Their religion has undergone massive changes following influence from other religions like Christianity and Islam which have continued to dominate in the world. Jewish people observed a number of rituals, celebrations and holidays which accompanied by varying activities as a way of praising God whom they believe that caused them to come into existence through creation.

Transitions from one stage to another right from childhood are also common and this continues throughout the entire life of Jewish people. Unlike Christians who refer to their place of worship as churches, Jewish place of worship is called a synagogue. It a highly respected place where believers make most of their prayers and needs known to God. The place is highly honored as God's dwelling house. What fascinates most is the manner in which Jewish people conduct their worship and prayer meetings and services.

This paper categorically analyses Jewish services with regard to what happens in the synagogue. A part from the services which accompany various transitions in the life of Jewish people, they highly value prayers. As noted above, Jewish strongly believe in the existence of God who is considered as the creator who also formed their ancestors. They therefore use prayers as a communication to God. These prayers are aimed at strengthening their relationship with God and as a way of receiving blessings. Jewish people usually engage in prayers their programmed worship which takes place three times in a day.

The first service of prayer is in the evening and it is referred to as Ma'ariv. The second service of prayer is Shacharit which takes place in the morning followed by afternoon prayers called Minchah. These prayers are usually recited during services and are contained in a special book called the siddur. The word siddur means order. Therefore, this book gives a proper outline and order in which prayers need to be conducted. Although Jewish services are currently made up of three prayer sessions, these services were initially two based on the book of Deuteronomy and Numbers in the Holy Bible (Jewish Liturgy).

According to these books, believers were to pray in the morning and in the evening. This service is one of the oldest and is referred to as Shema. Ancient Jews therefore observed this commandment by reciting prayers twice a day. Like in many other religions, Jewish experienced development in their prayer system especially during the Babylonian Exile. During this time, nobody was allowed to offer sacrifices in the Temple as it was done before.

They therefore considered prayer as a substitute for sacrifices which were to be made as a way of honoring God. This was viewed as lip offering and was to be observed by every member of the faith. Prayers were made during festive seasons and holidays. The number of prayer services changed from two to three in order to correspond to the three sacrifices which were usually observed. It is important to note that the Jewish continued to observe these prayer services long after Exile and are still observed today (Jewish Liturgy). There were other developments like the formulation of the Shemoneh Esrei which is referred to as "18" prayer blessings.

It is believed that Shemoneh Esrei is the basic foundation of Jewish services. According to the eighteen blessings, the Jewish were free to pray as many needs as they had. The reading of the Torah is also a major prayer service among the Jewish. The Torah is mainly composed of the first five books of the Bible and the Prophets and is divided into 54 sections corresponding to the total number of weeks in a year. Each section is therefore read in a week to cover the entire year. In addition, Haftarah is read during special holidays and Shabbat (Jewish Liturgy).

The reading of both the Torah is always accompanied by ceremonies and celebrations. These celebrations are usually seen honor in reciting blessings by reading the Torah. The Jewish service also contains P'sukei d'Zimra which is a collection of hymns and psalms which are sung before main prayers are conducted. This is not compulsory and therefore some people attend prayer services after P'sukei d'Zimra. It is however important to note that some of these prayers are also recited at home and services vary from one to another.

As a core characteristic of Jewish service, prayer sessions significantly determine the nature of activities which take place in the synagogue. How do Jews carry out their services? Do they pray while kneeling or standing? Are they allowed to engage themselves in body movement during prayers? These and many other questions revolve around Jewish services which are unique compared to other religions. Prayers and worship services are usually mandatory for Observant Jews and are to be recited three times in a day. Just to emphasize, more prayers are recited during holidays and on the Sabbath day. These days are considered special and praise and honor is

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attributed to God. Although believers are allowed to pray at home, quorum prayers with ten male adults in the temple is considered to be very important.

This group of elders is called a minyan and is mainly involved in leading of prayers (Jewish Worship and Prayer). Like other religious services, the general length and content of Jews services vary from one sect to the other as defined by their customs. Orthodox and Reform services are generally shorter compared to those held in Conservative synagogues and Orthodox shuls. Singing is a common activity during services. Songs are mainly led by a hazzan hired by the synagogue for the purpose of leading the congregation during singing. Swaying of the body among Jews is common during their services.

However, this practice is not compulsory and therefore a number of worshippers prefer doing it while standing still. In fact, some people argue that body movement should not be allowed during services. This argument is based on the fact that some people sway their bodies vigorously up to the other end of the prayer room. Prayer attention is generally important during prayer with some prayers being considered null and void in the absence of serious attention (Jewish Worship and Prayer). This concentration also referred to as kavvanah is mandatory when reciting first lines Shema Yisrael and the blessings of Amidah. Dress code is also important when attending Jewish services.

In most synagogues male attendants are required to have a dress which covers their entire body up to the head. They also wear head huts which are

usually provided at the entrance of the temple. This means that the synagogue leaders make early preparations to have the hats ready prior to the commence of the service. It is important to note that Orthodox and Conservative synagogues require every male attendees of any worship to cover their heads regardless of whether they are gentiles or Jews. This is not the case among many Reform temples which do not consider it mandatory for worshipers to cover their heads.

Nonetheless, a kipa has become quite common with many Reform Jews also choosing to use it during services. A kipa is the hat commonly used by male attendees to cover their heads (Jewish Worship and Prayer). Based on temple regulations and laws, there are a number of things expected from visitors or those attending a Jewish service for the first time. These requirements are also accompanied by regulations which prohibit certain activities and behavior in the synagogue at any given moment. Standing is very important during Jewish services. It is considered to be a sign of honor to God.

Although not performed throughout the service, there are certain prayers which are recited while standing. Visitors are also supposed to arise during these prayers together with the rest of the congregation. It is of immense importance for a visitor to be quite attentive and keen to note stages when the congregation is sitting or standing. Bowing is also common during Jewish services. This is not an easy task for visitors since they might not really understand stages where bowing is important.

They are therefore exempted from this act of honor and respect to God. The use of a prayer shawl is also common among Jewish congregation. This shawl

is called a tallit and visitors together with non Jews are not supposed to use it during prayer services. On the other hand, women are not exempted from temple rules and regulation. Adhering to dressing rules is mandatory for all women.

They are supposed to use the tzenuit which is designed to be used as a worship attire for women. It consists of long skirts, long sleeves and covering of hair especially for married women (Jewish Worship and Prayer). In a Jewish reform temple, prayer discipline and reverence to God is quite important. The use mobile phones during services are not allowed. Although it is not officially announced by service leaders, there is usually a notice on the table informing all worshippers to turn off their mobile phones and pagers.

This is placed strategically to allow everyone who comes for the service whether a member or a visitor to see it. A Jewish temple, although not extravagant, it has a number of pieces of art which are usually displayed on the wall. Old prayer books are commonly seen in the temple and symbols representing olden beliefs like the Noah's ark are also seen in the temple (A Christian Perspective of a Jewish Worship Service). The first impression one notes when he attends a Jewish service is the maintenance of the temple. Although most temples are old, they are properly maintained as a sign of reverence to God. Jewish services also demonstrate high levels of equality among worshippers in accordance to Biblical scriptures which define prayer as a house for every person to meet with their God (A Christian Perspective of a Jewish Worship Service).

From their prayer service book, one is able to note that Jewish people acknowledge the fact that there are other service and prayers made in different style but with a common goal of leading people to heaven. Equality of sexes is also demonstrated during Jewish services. This is common among Reform Jews who view men and women as equal in the presence of God. From their prayer book, one is able to hear statements implying their concern over the continuous changing of status women in the society. This is quite encouraging especially in a generation that views women as inferior beings. Lighting of candles is also common in Jewish services.

There are usually seven candles lit to represent the spirits of God which are placed at the both sides of the pulpit. These candles together with small ones placed on nearby tables are always lit with a ceremony accompanied with singing and speaking in English and Hebrew (A Christian Perspective of a Jewish Worship Service). Additionally, temples have other symbols representing say the stars of David and Noah's Ark which were quiet symbolic in ancient worship services. Jewish services are usually led by a Rabbi who uses the prayer book as a service guide. The Rabbi and the Congregation normally read prayer lines in the prayer book in an alternating manner.

Songs are rhythmically sung in between the prayers. These songs are mainly in Hebrew. The reading of the Torah takes place after the prayers with the doors of the Ark open. Many of the scrolls are in their original state as written by the scribes in early years. The scrolls are not allowed to be touched by hands.

However, the Rabbi walks through the congregation as they holding the scroll to allow members touch it with their prayer books before kissing them (Michael 140). The reading of the Torah usually guides in the sacrificial system of the Jewish service. Jewish services generally demonstrate purity of mankind and love of others including strangers. This is in accordance with their history since they were once strangers in Egypt. Attending a Jewish service brings vivid memories, pictures and events of ancient services to reality.