

7. Rabbinically- Mandated Jewish Festivals

There are two major Jewish festivals that were instituted by Rabbinic decree: Chanukah and Purim. Unlike festivals mandated by the Bible, there is no absolute work proscription similar to the Sabbath on these two holidays.



Chanukah - Eight Days (beginning Kislev 25)

Special Ritual Items:

“Chanukiah” Also referred to as the “menorah,” a candelabrum to hold oil or candles.

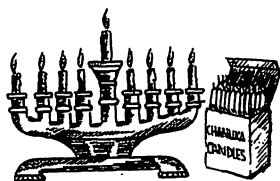
Supply of oil and wicks or 44 candles (1 for first night, 2 for second, 3 for third, etc. plus one extra for each night to light the others.)

This holiday marks the defeat of Assyrian forces who had tried to prevent Israel from practicing Judaism during the existence of the second Temple (approximately 160 B.C.E.). Judah Maccabee and his brothers destroyed the overwhelming forces, and rededicated the Temple. C.J.L. ch. 139 §1.

After the Jews prevailed over their enemies, they entered the Temple on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, and found only a small cruse of pure oil bearing the seal of the High Priest. The oil was sufficient for only one day, but when they lit the Menorah (candelabrum) with it, the Menorah burned for eight days. For this



reason, the Sages of that generation decreed that eight days, which begin on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, be set aside as days of rejoicing and thanksgiving.



Every night during these eight days, lights (oil or candles) are lit towards evening in a conspicuous place, to proclaim the miracle. C.J.L. ch. 139 §1.

The kindling of lights each evening start with the eve of the first day, just after dark. C.J.L. ch. 139 §10. One candle is lit the first night, two the second, three the third, and so on for eight nights. C.J.L. ch. 139 §11.

Although electric Menorahs have become commonplace as decorative fixtures, the religious obligation to kindle a flame is *not* satisfied with electric candles. While all kinds of oil are valid for the Chanukah lights, olive oil is the most preferred, for the miracle of the Temple was wrought with olive oil. If olive oil cannot be obtained, one may chose any other oil which gives a clear and bright flame, or wax candles may be used, for their light is also clear. All kinds of wicks are valid for the use of Chanukah lights, but the most preferred are the ones made of cotton. C.J.L. ch. 139 §4.

Candles are typically lit indoors. They should be lit near the door or a window facing the public place. C.J.L. ch. 139 §7.



The time to kindle the Chanukah lights is immediately after the stars come out, and one should not put it off. It is forbidden to do anything, even to study the Torah, before lighting the Chanukah lamp. Candles for the Chanukah lamp must be large enough to burn at least half an hour. C.J.L. ch. 139 §10.

One person may light the menorah on behalf of the assembled group. All say “Amen” after the blessing. Women are obligated to light the Chanukah candles too. C.J.L. ch. 139 §16.

On Friday night, the Chanukah lamp must be lit before the Sabbath candles. The Chanukah candles should be large enough to last approximately one and one-half hours on Friday night. C.J.L. ch. 139 §17.

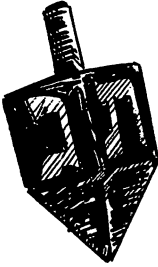
There is no requirement of work proscription during this eight-day holiday, although it is customary for women to refrain from work such as sewing, weaving, and laundry while the Chanukah lights are burning. C.J.L. ch. 139 §3.

Other Chanukah Traditions

Because the holiday of Chanukah is based on a miracle that involved oil, certain foods fried in oil are traditionally consumed, such as fried potato “latkes” (pancakes) and jelly donuts (commonly fried in oil).



During the period that Assyrian forces prevented Israel from practicing Judaism, Jewish children were not permitted to study the Torah. When Assyrian troops would watch, children would play with little tops, to appear as if they were only playing. To commemorate this situation, games are played on the holiday with little four-sided tops (called a "dreidel").



In order to excite children to observe the holiday, a tradition developed to give children small prizes of coins (called Chanukah "gelt") or small presents throughout the holiday.



Purim - (Adar 14)

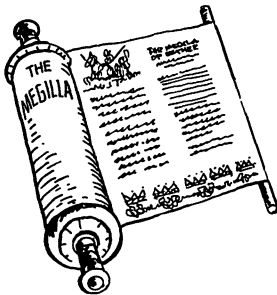
Special Ritual Items:

Megillah (parchment scroll containing Book of Esther)

At Least Two Pennies (for charity)

Two Foods (Readily edible for gift-giving)

Purim is the most joyous of all Jewish holidays, as joyous as Yom Kippur is somber. *See generally* C.J.L. ch. 141. The festival commemorates the events found



in the Book of Esther, celebrating the nullification of a decree seeking the death of the Jews in Persia approximately 2,500 years ago. *See generally* C.J.L. ch. 141 §2. Purim is a holiday mandated by Rabbinic decree and the stringent rules of the

Sabbath do not apply. C.J.L. ch. 141 §8.

Before the holiday commences, it is customary to donate half of the unit coin current in the country to charity (one-half dollar in the United States). *Id.* §5. The holiday itself is celebrated through four rituals:



1. *Megillah Readings*: The Book of Esther (written on a scroll called the “Megillah”) is read at services on the eve and morning of Purim, C.J.L. ch. 141 §§7-22. One person generally recites the Megillah on behalf of the assembled group, and both men and women are obligated to hear the Megillah on the eve of Purim and in the morning of the holiday. C.J.L. ch. 141 §7;
2. *Gifts of Food to Friends (“Mish’Loach Manot”)*: A gift of two ready-to-eat foods is given to at least one friend, C.J.L. ch. 142 §§1-2;
3. *Charity to the Poor (“Matanot L’Evyonim”)*: At least one penny (and usually more) is given to each of at least two poor people (can be satisfied by proxy), C.J.L. ch. 141 §3. Everybody, even the poorest who are themselves dependant on charity, is obligated to give at least one gift each to two poor persons. *Id.*; and
4. *A Festive Meal (“Se’Udat Purim”)*: A festive meal is eaten the afternoon of the holiday, C.J.L. ch. 141 §5. Purim must be celebrated by eating, drinking, and making merry. The obligation of feasting on Purim is not fulfilled by a feast that is made on the night before the day of Purim; the principal Purim feast is to be held in the day of Purim itself. C.J.L. ch. 142 §5.



8. Fast Days

While most Jewish holidays celebrate happy occasions, there are several tragedies that are commemorated by fasting and mourning. The object of fasting is to stir the heart to repentance. *See generally* C.J.L. ch. 121.

Eating and drinking are prohibited on a fast day (health permitting) from 1 hour prior to daybreak until approximately one hour after sunset. *But see* Yom Kippur, *supra* (fasting begins the evening before); Fast of the Ninth Day of Av, *infra* (same).

Institutional staff should be aware that Jews may not be able to eat dinner at its regularly-scheduled time on the eve of certain fast days, and should be permitted to eat well before sundown. With respect to all fast days, staff should be made aware that Jews may need to wait to consume any food or drink until one hour after sundown on the fast day itself, and, if dinner is scheduled before then, those individuals should be given the opportunity to eat at a later, more religiously appropriate, time.



Yom Kippur - (Tishrei 10)

Yom Kippur is the most important fast day in the Jewish tradition. A description of the day's significance and religious laws pertaining to it are enumerated in Section 6, *Biblically-Mandated Jewish Festivals: Yom Kippur*.



Fast Days

Commemorating the Destruction of the Temples In Jerusalem

Four fast days commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Temples that once stood there. If any of these fast days falls on a Saturday (the Sabbath), the fast is observed the following day, Sunday. C.J.L. ch. 121 §6.

Prayer Services

Prayer services are similar to those of regular weekdays, with minor modifications and additions. A special portion of the Torah is read both at morning and afternoon services.



Fast of 10th of Tevet

This fast day commemorates the start of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the time of the First Temple. C.J.L. ch. 121 §3. If the Tenth of Tevet falls on a Friday, the fast is observed that day. C.J.L. ch. 121 §6.



Fast of 17th of Tammuz

This date was selected by Rabbinic authorities to commemorate the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem at the time of both the First and Second Temples. (The walls of Jerusalem were actually breached on the 9th of Tammuz during the time of the First Temple, but one day was selected to commemorate both events.) C.J.L. ch. 121 §4. A number of other tragedies befell the Jewish people on this date, too.



Fast of 9th of Av ***("Tisha B'Av")***

The saddest day of the Jewish calendar. On this day both the First and Second Temples were destroyed (587 B.C.E. and 70 C.E.). C.J.L. ch. 121 §5. Throughout history, other tragedies befell the Jewish people on this date, too. *Id.* On this day in 1290, King Edward I signed the edict compelling the Jews to leave England. The Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492 also occurred on this day. Tisha B'av also marked the outbreak of World War I.

Unlike other fast days, the fast of Tisha B'av begins the night before, at sunset on the evening of Av 8. C.J.L. ch. 121 §8; ch. 124. On the day preceding the ninth of Av, the custom is to eat a regular meal before the afternoon Mincha service. C.J.L. ch. 123 §3. Just before sunset, one eats a special "meal" of a small piece of bread and/or a cold, hard-boiled egg -- either or both of which are dipped in ashes. *Id.* This special "mourners" meal commemorates the destruction of the

Temples and puts us in the proper mindset for the fast day itself.



During the evening service, the Book of Lamentations is read. All congregates sit on the floor or on low benches in the fashion of mourners.



On the fast day itself, work is forbidden until noon, and the general custom is to abstain from work or business the entire day. C.J.L. ch. 124 §15.

Eating, drinking, bathing, shaving, the wearing of leather shoes and conjugal relations are prohibited from sunset on the evening of Av 8 until after dark on Av 9 (a period of approximately 25 hours), *id.* §11, and it is customary not to sit on a bench or chair until noon, but rather, to sit on the floor or on a low stool in the fashion of mourners. *Id.* §16.



Fast of Gedaliah - (Tishrei 3)

After the First Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C.E., a remnant of the Jewish people remained in Israel under the leadership of Gedaliah. All hope of imminent redemption was lost when Gedaliah was murdered and a fast day was decreed to commemorate his death. C.J.L. ch. 121 §2.



Fast of Esther - (Adar 13)

This fast day, the day before the holiday of Purim, commemorates Esther's three-day fast before appealing to King Achashveros to abolish Haman's evil decree against the Jews of Persia. *See* Book of Esther. If the Fast of Esther falls on the Sabbath, the fast is observed the preceding Thursday, inasmuch as one cannot fast the next day (Sunday) because of the Purim holiday, and one does not generally fast on Friday before the Sabbath. C.J.L. ch. 141 §3. However, if one forgot to fast on Thursday, one must fast on Friday. *Id.*

Prayer Services

Prayer services are similar to those of regular weekdays, with minor modifications and additions. A special portion of the Torah is read both at morning and afternoon services.



Fast of the Firstborn - (Nissan 14)

Jewish firstborn males are required to fast from 1 hour prior to sunrise to sunset on the day before Passover in commemoration of the Tenth Plague visited upon the firstborn of the Egyptians before the Exodus from Egypt. Firstborns fast as an act of contrition that the firstborn living during the time of the Exodus were worthy for Almighty G-d to “pass over” their homes and spare them. One may obviate the need to fast by having a “*seudat mitzva*” (a meal connected with the celebration of the fulfillment of a positive command) as the first meal, usually upon completing the study of an entire tractate of the Talmud. Many firstborns opt for this alternative, and may satisfy this rule by reading an entire tractate of Talmud before eating the first meal that day.

If the Fast of the Firstborn falls on a Saturday, one cannot fast on the next day (which is the first day of Passover). In such circumstances, the fast is observed on the preceding Thursday.

