

## REL 402 – World Religions - Three Days of Jewish Holidays

### Introduction

The assignment seemed simple - pick a typical activity from the life of a follower of Judaism and try it out for three days. In reality this is not as easy as it sounds. Not being Jewish, I first faced some difficulty in determining what a typical Jew does each day. Some Jews pray daily; however, it seems that it would be blasphemous to pretend to pray each day to a God that I do not believe in. Therefore, I was faced with a dilemma. What aspect of Judaism should I endeavor to emulate for three days?

My solution was to try out three Jewish holidays. My perception of Judaism as a religion is that it has a whole bunch of holidays and festivals. Indeed, I can recall living in Los Angeles, CA for a while. In Los Angeles the School District would shut down for every Jewish holiday. As a teacher I found this peculiar since I taught in (\*\*); where I doubt that Judaism was a popular religion. I always thought it was ironic that on Jewish holidays the number of criminal acts increased. When we teachers would return to school after a Jewish holiday, we would get a report on criminal activity in the area.

Since my perception was that Jews have lots of holidays, I decided to try some of them out.

### Failures and Successes

The first comment I need to make is that this effort did not go smoothly. The first Jewish holiday that I selected was Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is considered by the Jews to be the Day of Atonement. It begins at sunset and lasts until sunset on the following day. The beginning is marked by an evening prayer service. The holiday concludes with a second prayer service on the following evening.

My plan was to follow the fast; however, I was going to omit the evening prayers. At sunset on Saturday evening I marked the time that a Jew would have attended the evening prayer service. At this time I read through the liturgy notes on the Jewish Virtual Library website. I didn't stand for an hour like one would do during the actual ceremony.

The difficulties came the following day. Since it was Sunday, I didn't have a challenging schedule for the day. Thus, I thought that fasting would be a straightforward exercise in self control.

Sunday morning I awoke and faced the first real challenge. I could do without food; however, foregoing my daily morning tea was more difficult than I had imagined it would be.

At lunch I was feeling fine and was also quite surprised that I did not have any major food cravings. To be honest, I was more interested in a glass of water. The humidity in (\*\*\*) was extremely low that weekend. As a result I was beginning to feel very dehydrated. On Saturday, I had anticipated this and had purposefully endeavored to drink larger than normal amounts of water. Indeed, I had drunk 3 liters of water from my camelback on Saturday afternoon.

By mid afternoon I realized that there were going to be complications. As a diabetic I had a plan that I would break the fast if my blood glucose dropped below 90 mg/dL. For the sake of caution I was testing my blood glucose much more frequently than usual. Around 3:00 PM I was experiencing a painful headache; however, my blood glucose was slightly over 100 mg/dL. My concern was actually my hydration level. As I was drawing blood I noticed that it was more viscous than usual. I suspected that dehydration was also the cause of my headache. At this time I broke my fast and started drinking water and Gatorade.

My second Jewish holiday was to be the Passover. Passover in the Jewish tradition is seven or eight days long. During Passover Jewish people forgo the eating of any leavened bread products.

My strategy for Passover was to shorten it to two days. On Saturday I started by making an inventory of all of the Chametz (yeast) in my home. In a Jewish home all of the Chametz would have to be disposed of. I chose to not dispose of these products as I would have had very little food remaining in my house. I really didn't want to throw away the six pack of Fat Tire, my favorite wheat beer. Almost everything I looked at contained one of the Chametz grains as an ingredient.

Traditionally the beginning of Passover is marked by a meal called a Seder. However, since my cooking skills are lacking, I settled by looking up the details of the seder meal. My Seder dinner consisted of Matzo crackers and wine.

On the second day of Passover I attempted to eat according to the laws surrounding Passover. I had an egg for breakfast and ate Matzo crackers for lunch. By dinner I was really tired of Matzo crackers. Fortunately I have a friend, S-, whose grandmother was Jewish. S- very kindly cooked me matzah ball soup for dinner. This was basically chicken soup without noodles. Instead it had these squishy balls of matzah. It was a delicious meal that I enjoyed very much. It was certainly much more delightful than a dinner of Matzo crackers.

### Reflection

Yom Kippur was a trying experience. For future assignments I plan on omitting any events that involve fasting. Modern Jewish law seems to agree with this as it releases diabetic Jews from participating in the fast. From my experience this is a wise decision on the part of the Jewish authorities.

I actually enjoyed my two days of Passover. Trying to inventory the Chametz in my home was much more challenging than I expected. Eating foods without chametz was more challenging than I thought. On my first day of Passover I actually failed briefly as I ate a Clif bar while out for a bike ride. The Clif bar contained barley extract. One of the highlights of this was my evening meal of matzah ball soup. This was a surprising finish to my shortened Passover. I suspect that many Jewish families have many recipes that are much tastier than the Matzo crackers that sustained me for most of the holiday.

Ultimately I feel that I have gained an appreciation for the details that Jewish followers have to observe for every holiday. Prior to this experience I had never given this any thought.

**References**

My primary reference for information about Jewish Holidays came from the Jewish virtual library. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (2011). Jewish Virtual Library. Accessed online at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/>