

# The Jewish Religion and Culture – Milestone for the Past, Present and Future

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## Abstract

The Jewish nation is the integral part of the European culture and philosophy. This nation started his journey through the history of mankind in the Biblical time down during the Ancient Age to the time of the destruction of the Temple of God. The year 70 A.D. meant in the Jewish history the turning point, when the state of them was destroyed and they had to leave the homeland and roamed to all parts of the contemporary world. The synagogue, Torah and Talmud are the milestones for the Jewish nation for the next centuries.

## Key words

Torah, Talmud, Jews, Synagogue, God

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The Jewish communities were the integral part of the many European cities from the Middle Ages to the time of the Shoa, for instance Vienna (Lohrman, 2000: 64-65), Trnava (Simoncic, 1995: 91) or Prešov (Konya, 2012: 35-36). The Jewish Kingdom with the Kings like Saul, David and Solomon and its cultural heritage influenced the European way of thinking to the present. The partition of the Jewish Kingdom into the separate states of Judea and Israel was the first step towards the expulsion and exodus from its historical homeland. The first step, which was connected with the historical difficulties of the Jewish nation, represented its detention by the Babylonian King Nabukadnesar in the year 587 B.C. This breakpoint meant the creation of the new center of Jewish culture and religion in the territory of Babylonia outside the former Jewish state. This area endured also after the return of the Jewish population to the Judea and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem as a residence of the Persian governor.

The most important place in the Jewish religion occupied the God Temple, which was built up by the King Salomon. This sanctuary suffered during its turbulent history several desecrations. The year 164 B.C. was an important moment for this shrine, when there were removed the pagan idols from the sanctuary by the rebels headed by Juda Maccabee during the uprising against the Seleucos dynasty. Any kind of imaging of the Jehovah as the Old Testament God, signed through Moses the treaty with the Jewish nation and gave them the Decalogue, was strictly forbidden. God's name could be spoken out during the prayers as a unique moment of spiritual connection between God and the human being. The destruction of the Temple followed after the seizure of the Jerusalem by the Roman legion in the year 70 A.D. after the defeat of the Jewish uprising against the Roman Empire. Approximately two millions of Jewish inhabitants had feed from the present Palestine and Israel and widespread onto the whole territory of the Roman Empire.

The synagogue had become the central place of worshipping after the destruction of God' Temple in Jerusalem. The synagogical divine service did not exist before the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The sacral text of the five books of Moses – Torah is the dominant point in the Jewish prayers. Its text had not been finished before the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., but the older parts in the Old Testament displayed, that the divine worship had been served outside Jerusalem. The Greek word *synagogé* had been used for the first time in Jerusalem in the 1<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

The synagogue meant the alternative to the destroyed Temple of God since the 2<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The inscription in the place called *Chammal Tveria* had contained the word for synagogue in Aramaic *atra kadisha* (Schubert, 1992: 126-127).

Shekhinah means the presence of God in the synagogue. It is present there, when the minjan or the group of ten adult men prays. The synagogue was not connected with the Temple in Jerusalem anymore, because the Jews had left the Holy City and Land and it had come to the exile together with them after 70 A.D. The synonym for synagogue is the phrase *Migdash Meat*. The western wall of the former Temple and the synagogue were connected with the original place of the God's presence. The throne of God is in heaven, but his presence is imminent in the Holy Shrine in synagogue (Eliav, 2005: 256).

The main symbol of the Judaism as combination of the religion, philosophy and history of the Jewish nation is the seven-branched candlestick *Menorah*, which was depicted as the most important motive in synagogues. The influence of the late antiquity had been shown in synagogal architecture by the figural motives and mosaics. The picture vanished from synagogues, after the Hebrew language and letters replaced the Greek ones. The Roman Emperor Justinianus issued the law against the Hebrew language in worship in the year 533 position of this language toward Greek was much stronger (Davis, 2007: 368).

The destruction of the Temple of God and the eclipse of the Jewish state brought the need for Jewish nation for searching of its new base and identity in exile. This factor of stability was the Jewish philosophy and religion. The Jewish religious and philosophical authorities denied the idea of state. The belief in the God was shown in written and spoken Torah. The Torah embraced the Jewish religion, philosophy and literature. The Talmud fulfilled the Torah and contained 64 tractates of the Jewish law *Halakkah* (Neusner, 2003: 85). The *Babylonian Talmud* contained thirty tractates in one volume and was finished in the year 498 A.D. The *Talmud of Jerusalem* was written in the year 350 A.D. and one of its books had 400 pages (Rubenstein, 2010: 125).

The Jewish year is organized in terms of the lunar calendar. The most important holiday in the Jewish year is the Sabbath. This day is also the most important of all week days. It starts after the sunset on Friday and ends after the sunset on Saturday. God had a rest on Saturday after creating the world in 6 days. People had to rest for the whole day. The beginning of the Jewish year is the *Rosh-Hasanah*, which comes in the first days of the month Tishri (September) The Day of Reconciliation, *Yom Kippur*, is celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> day after Rosh-Hasanah (Lancaster, 2007: 107-108).

The Holiday of *Hanukkah* is the celebration of the reconsecration of God' Temple in Jerusalem during the Uprising of Makkabea in the year 164 B.C. The symbol of the miracle is the eight-branched candlestick *Menorah of Hanukkah*, in which the oil light burned one day instead of eight days. This holiday starts on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month Kislev.

The *Purim*, or *the Holiday of the Lots*, Jews celebrate in March to commemorate their saving from genocide during their stay in the Persian Empire in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It is celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of month Adar. The story is written in the Book of Esther in the Old Testament (Goodman, 1970: 70).

The *Pesah* commemorates the liberation of the Jews from the Egyptian serfdom and their 40-year-long journey to the Promised Land. The feast lasts for seven days and is symbolized by the unfermented bread *matzoh*. The end of the Jewish year is represented by the feast of Shavuot. It commemorates the Giving of Torah from God to Moses. It is celebrated on the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Pesah and lasts for one week. The Jews fast for one day to remember the destruction of the Temple of God in the year 587

B.C. by the Babylonian King Nabukadnesar II and by the Roman Emperor Vespasianus and his son Titus in the year 70 A.D. (Müllner, 2002: 45).

The Jewish holiday continues with the Feast of Stands, *Sukkoth*, which starts on the 5th day after Yom Kippur and lasts to the 15th or 21th day of Tishri. It is the expression for thanking the God for the harvest. The symbols of this feast are the branches of a palm tree and the shofar (lamb-horn) (Spier, 2005: 25).

The Jewish household has very strict rules. Meat and milk must not be together in cooking, eating and storage. The blood of the Easter lamb was to be put on the doorframe with the small metallic case *mezuzah* with the parchment inside. That document contained the commandment of *Shma Yisrael* from the Holy Book Deuteronomium. The boy was circumcised on the 8th day after his birth. The wish for him, which was written on the parohet, expresses life in harmony with Tora. The age of 13 meant adulthood for the boy (*Bar Mitzvah*). When he read the Torah for the first time in the synagogue, he became a member of the group of full-aged men, the *minjan*. He was allowed to pray as a full member of the Jewish community, along with other adult men in the synagogue. The society *Hevra Kadishah* took care of the ill and dying members of the Jewish community. This institution of each Jewish community also managed its cemetery (Kimme, 1995: 94).

Jewish history is based on religious connections between Torah, Talmud and the synagogue as the points of the permanent presence of God, the Protector of the Jewish nation on its difficult journey through the ages. The Jewish famous past is displayed in Jewish museums around the Europe, like the ones in Prague or in Bratislava. The Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava is a part of the Slovak National Museum and has its expositions also, for example, in Prešov (Archlebova, 1994: 36). This article is just one of the possible points of view on the issue of Jewish religion, culture and philosophy.

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