

Jews in a time of Crisis – A field guide for the Caregiver

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Not a spectator sport! – an overview

The Jewish faith is intrinsically complex, and even the most enthusiastic participant must immerse him/her self in study, but more importantly actual observance and practice.

As the Dean of the Bais Chana Women's institute of Jewish Studies, based in Minnesota, I've been fortunate enough to travel across the globe the continental United States to hear a variety of perceptions, misconceptions and insights that to put it mildly have at times been very unique.

In this field guide, I seek to convey to you the vitality of a faith that is the ultimate survivor of a variety of significant and dastardly attempts to destroy it physically and spiritually. Being referred to as a light amongst the nations, brings with it not privileges, but great responsibility and spiritual obligations, that Jews throughout history have observed, with great joy, despite their circumstances or world current events.

On September 11th 2001, the world was shown how human beings can twist and distort the representation of G-dliness, and convert that into man made evil. Many questions for emergency management, the caregiver and even civilians, be they parents, husband & wife, children or siblings, have arisen and the need to understand and empathize with a variety of cultures in a time of crisis is needed more than ever.

In this field guide you will find an easy to refer to index for immediate information, but feel free to take the time to leisurely read this field guide.

Please note one golden rule. Life is number one and all the rules, rites and customs explained put to the side for a life saving circumstance. The complexities of identifying and defining a life saving circumstance are very complex, but it is imperative that if any Jewish laws are obstructing a life being saved, it must be conveyed when possible to patients, their families or an Orthodox rabbi when practical and possible, in order for them to make an informed decision.

A Jewish book wouldn't be Jewish without some anecdotal humor. Humor, the antidote to all negativity. How better to deal with a crisis than humor. Jews who have been persecuted and pursued since the beginning of time, feel the pain....but humor and all that it brings makes it easier.....just like chicken soup!

So just as a Jewish grandmother would make sure that you clean up your plate at the dinner table, *ess gezunterheit*....enjoy, and immerse yourself in this guide to Jewish life and living.

And may the A-mighty bless you in your holy work of saving lives. The Talmud relates, one who saves one life, is as if he saves the world entire. Thank you.

Please refer to a local Orthodox Rabbi or for specific questions or concerns on Jewish legal or ritual matters.

Rabbi Manis Friedman
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Languages and Phraseology

The Jewish faith is based around community. The synagogue (SEE-NAH-GOG), the house of worship is where Jews pray to the A-mighty three times a day. Jews are spread across the world and one can find Jewish tourists from a variety of nations visiting, studying or residing in your community.

As being Jewish is a faith, rather than a national identity, your native tongue may very well be spoken. Many Jews speak Yiddish or Hebrew, the national language of Israel and the language of the Torah (the Bible).

Judaism

Judaism is the world's oldest religion and views creation beginning 5765 years ago. The faith and its rituals are intact from that time. In the beginning of Creation, Adam, of Adam and Eve fame received the first set of rules or commandments about living on this earth. After much chaos, turmoil and paganism ensued throughout 20 generations, along came Abraham who successfully campaigned for G-d being "put back" in his rightful place in society and life in general. Through his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob (also referred to as Israel) and Jacob's 12 sons who headed each of the 12 Jewish tribes giving us the originators of Judaism, as we know it today.

The Torah (the Bible) is a blueprint for creation. Jews accepted it without reservation, and instead of being "chosen" were the last of the nations to be asked if they wished to take on the yoke of the commandments, lifestyle and servitude to G-d that came with receiving the Torah.

Being called the “Chosen People” has over history been used by derogators as evidence of the special treatment expected by and necessary for dealing with the Jewish people. All mankind has 7 governing laws, the laws of Noah:

- Do not murder.
- Do not steal.
- Do not worship false gods.
- Do not be sexually immoral (forbidden sexual acts are traditionally interpreted to include incest, sodomy, male homosexual sex acts and adultery)
- Do not eat anything of the body of an unslaughtered animal (This is a humanitarian command; in many regions the practice was to cut meat from animals still alive, despite the suffering caused. See [Kosher](#)).
- Do not blaspheme.
- Set up righteous and honest courts and apply fair justice in judging offenders.
The Talmud says: "Righteous people of all nations have a share in the world to come" (Sanhedrin 105a). Any person who lives according to these laws is known as "the righteous among the gentiles". Maimonides states that this refers to those who have acquired knowledge of God and act in accordance with the Noahide laws.

Observance of these laws is all that a non-Jew must do to be accepted in the next world, the place where those who are no longer living reside.

So being “chosen” is not a cause for first class treatment by non-Jewish people, it’s a heavy duty responsibility requiring an unceasing adherence to daily Jewish ritual and laws covering every aspect of life. Eating, prayer, sleeping, doing business, marital relations and even how one gets dressed are subject to unfaltering laws observed since Creation.

The Jewish people find their origins in the Middle East. The Roman Empire fostered a dispersion of Jews from what is known today as Israel. This dispersion or Diaspora has created Jewish refugees fleeing to Europe, Asia and Africa. This has created a very diverse representation of Judaism, not in adherence to Jewish law, but in local customs and observances. Jews are mainly divided up, by national origin, as being Askenazic Jews (those from Northern or Eastern European Origin) or Sephardic Jews (those from Middle Eastern and Spanish origin).

The Jewish people are known as passionate and highly opinionated on contentious issues from the security issues in the Middle East to actually how many matzah balls you really need in your chicken soup.

Jewish leadership is divided by lay leadership and religious leadership. Lay leaders generally set up infrastructures for community services and general activities. Religious leaders, also known as Rabbi's or Rebbe's are teachers and spiritual guides who can interpret Jewish law as it applies to specific cases.

In present times, since 1948, the State of Israel has existed. The 20th Century has seen mass persecution and the near destruction of the Jewish people particularly in Eastern Europe.

Jews reside all across the globe, and in the United States with population figures in the region of 5.5 million residing in communities across the nation, most notably in New York, California and Florida.

The State of Israel, although a physical haven is not regarded by all as being a complete panacea towards ending the Jewish diaspora. The ultimate and complete manner in which Jews from all corner of the globe will be able to return to Israel is with the redemption of the Jewish people that can only be delivered by the long awaited Messiah.

Prayer & Ritual

The Jewish people are painfully aware and challenged as a minority. Despite this, there is an openness to explain religious practices to those who ask. Discussion about the validity of certain rituals will usually not be pursued. Talking about conversion to another faith is not going to be well received and may likely antagonize the person you are seeking to assist.

Jewish Law considers people to be Jewish only if they are born to a Jewish mother (not a father as we can question parental lineage, but not maternal) or if they converted according to Orthodox Jewish law.

So if Jews don't convert others, or actively seek to – is there a role for a non-Jew within the Jewish world. There absolutely is.

The Jewish faith is based around community. The synagogue (SEE-NAH-GOG), the house of worship is where Jews pray to the A-mighty three times a day.

Men are more stringently obliged in the daily prayers. They appreciate knowing where East is when external cues are not readily available.

Places for prayer should be empty of all religious tokens. Bare walls, good lighting, a place to sit, along with a table on which to place prayer books and religious items would be very much appreciated.

Prayers, when possible, are done with a minimum quorum of ten males, age 13 or older. Some of the accessories used during prayer may be a white prayer shawl, known as a Talis, black boxes and leather straps called tefillin and a black sash known as a gartel. Different holidays bring their own unique items.

Ritual hand washing is done for different situations. At the bedside a wash basin and a cup is necessary. This is in addition to regular washing for cleanliness. The sink is used by those in and out of the hospital.

Confidentiality is expected by Jewish patients being questioned. In general, questions out of the context of obviously pertinent information required for treatment will be treated with suspicion and may close up the patient or their kin.

If an error is made in cultural interaction, consider it only as a mistake. Providers do not need to think it will be looked upon as a denigration of their character or ability, if sincerity and concern have already been observed and demonstrated.

Initial Health and care issues

A man walks into a bar profusely sweating and breathing heavily. He gasps "Oy, am thirsty....oy am I thirsty.....oy am I thirsty". The barman scrambles over to this man, and says "er....don't...worry sir, here's some water". The man chugs down the water.....takes a deep breath and lets out a satisfied sigh. He turns to the barman and says " oy.....was I thirsty!, oy was I thirsty.....oy..."

Jewish comedians joke about the great concern, particularly from the maternal personalities in Jewish families, over everyone's general health which at times may appear to verge on hypochondria, but just like Chicken soup, a little bit won't hurt. This undoubtedly stems from the innate desire of Jews to survive, no matter what the odds are.

Kosher

Kosher in Hebrew is something that is proper or fit according to Jewish law. Jewish law is found in and extracted from the writings of the Old Testament, which the Jews refer to as the Torah.

The laws of keeping kosher are direct from G-d. A Jew is expected to keep kosher in every aspect of his/her life, but particularly in what one puts into ones body.

Kosher dietary laws are very complex and may vary in observance of certain additional restrictions and even amongst members of the same family. Many views of what is absolutely kosher can vary between different Jewish regulating and inspecting agencies. Chassidic Jews pay exceptional attention to the issue of Kosher dietary laws.

The use of animal flesh as food for Jewish people has many stipulations. Production of Kosher meat deals with what animals are permitted, their physical health, ritual slaughtering, removal of blood and what parts of the animal are permissible. This complex process results in the need of a significant team of dedicated, highly trained, full time rabbinical staff at the sites of slaughtering, processing and packing of meat and general food stuffs.

Do not be offended if a patient will not eat food labeled as Kosher or from a Kosher kitchen. This is due to the variance and complexity of kosher regulations and observances.

As there are many basic laws regarding what is kosher to eat, it's tricky to use these laws to identify what a specific individual may or may not eat or how it should be served. If at all possible, consult the patient, a family member or an Orthodox Rabbi regarding what to buy or how to prepare it. Please check before doing any of the following:

Obtaining prepared foods that are believed to be kosher

Buying from a foodservice enterprise that is believed to be kosher

Opening any packaging or bags

Placing food on utensils or surfaces

Warming food

Washing their own utensils

Storing Leftovers

Kosher dairy and meat products are not served together, need different utensils and servicing containers and have waiting intervals between eating. There are many ramifications of these laws.

Because of complexities as well as personal stringencies, not every Jew will eat in the kosher house of another Jew.

Most things are kosher in their original state. By the time they get to a person processing, preparation and some precautionary regulations can take them out of consideration for consumption.

Families are usually ready and happy to rearrange for food. Hospital staff can assist this process by providing accessible refrigeration and disposable single use utensils, plates, bowls and cups.

When handling clients food bring their own food, check with each patient regarding their request for the following preparation procedures:

Cutting food

Warming food

Storing and refrigerating food

Opening kosher packaging or containers

Making hot drinks

Using non-disposable utensils and appliances which are designated for kosher use.

The initial use of, the storage and washing of utensils and containers should be primarily checked with the patient, family or Orthodox rabbi.

Most families of Jewish patients will gladly work with doctors, nurses and dieticians to explain Kosher dietary laws. Health providers should work closely with these people to ensure client satisfaction and proper nutrition in a culturally appropriate manner.

The exchange of food is a highly regarded sign of friendship in many cultures. However, because of strict Jewish dietary laws, it is usually best that the hospital make no effort to provide unsolicited kosher food. This applies to business and medical gatherings. This could cause a very embarrassing situation for all parties as religious Jews would typically decline eating this food gifts.

Medicine in capsules or caplets could present a problem due to the gelatin content found in many capsules. Gelatin is normally derived from non-kosher animals. There are differing views on the use of gelatin use in medical situations. The best approach would be to ask ahead of time.

Hands off! The roles and responsibilities of Men and Women

To use a cliché, Jewish men and women are just that – hands off. Roles and responsibilities of Jewish men and women are very clearly defined. Men are usually the bread winners, while the women are the CEO's of the home. They also participate in volunteer communal activities and work as teachers or similar civic positions.

There are some clearly defined rules about interaction between men and women. In order to ensure that any inappropriate behavior doesn't occur, or doesn't even have the opportunity to, Jewish law separates men and women, without inferring or hinting to any superiority or inferiority of one or the other.

Unless married to each other or immediate family members, orthodox Jewish men and women do not mingle or chat at social gatherings, at religious ceremonies or community events. At parties and weddings, men and women separate and are kept apart by a large physical barrier with a curtain across. This keeps the genders apart, retains modesty and all are allowed to enjoy privacy amongst their peers in gender, with out any sexual friction occurring.

Casual conversation between men and women, even in a public environment is frowned upon. Health workers of the opposite gender are encouraged to elicit information from an Orthodox Jewish patient, but any small talk beyond that which is necessary to gather pertinent information should be kept to a minimum.

Physical contact between the genders is not usually practiced and is indeed avoided. Shaking hands with others of the same gender is acceptable.

Unless required for medical or healthcare treatment, male and female seclusion is generally avoided. In the instance that a procedure must be carried out by a male medical staff member, a female patient would strongly prefer another female present, if possible.

In the instance that a female staff member or relative is not available during an absolutely necessary procedure, the door should be unlocked or ideally kept ajar while not interfering with the privacy and modesty of the patient.

But don't get worried here. There is a stark difference between casually touching a person of the opposite gender and treating that persons medical needs and this is widely understood and accepted. Nevertheless, out of sensitivity it would be prudent to ask before touching.

When riding in a vehicle, Jewish men and women separate with one gender in the back and the other gender in the front where this is applicable.

Men are not allowed to listen to women singing or to be around women who are provocatively dressed.

Jewish women have a general dress code that includes:

Dresses or skirts that cover the knees in all positions – pants aren't allowed

Socks, stockings and tight that cover all exposed skin of the leg

Upper garments that cover the elbows and collarbones, and the waist.

No garment that is revealing as a result of being tight, semi-transparent or loosely open around buttons.

All the hair of the head covered on married women with wigs, large kerchiefs, some type of hat or an operating room head covering if needed.

Women who come as labor coaches would appreciate modest hospital attire, and this also applies to women being transported in or out of the hospital.

Outside, females are permitted to wear appropriate clothes that are attractive in style and color. Jewelry and make up are also used.

Orthodox Jewish men, in general, limit body exposure, but without some of the absolute restriction designated for women. Men dressed for daily routines will almost automatically have adequate coverage.

Religious Jewish men cover their heads at all times to be reminded that G-d is above them at all times and in all ways.

It's amusing that in some cases of balding men, the size of the yarmulke increases as time goes on and more hair disappears!

Men also wear a four cornered garment with strings attached that usually protrude from the waistband. Each corner has fringes and is detailed in the Torah and named as Tzitzis.

Many Orthodox Jewish men do not shave, cut or remove their beards or mustaches nor the hair at the temples and in front of the ear. In the event of a procedure necessitating cutting of the beard, hair of mustache, every effort should be made to discuss this with the patient or his designee.

Modesty is a closely held onto as an Orthodox Jewish trait and this extends to clothing. It affects speech and action. What may be commonplace to find in waiting room material or even educational materials for patients, may be embarrassing to an orthodox Jew. They will generally isolate their children from these items. Hospitals and their staff should be aware that some Jewish religious patients may be very uncomfortable in an environment where they are exposed to these materials.

Most religious orthodox homes do not have television or cable. Videos and CD players can be found and typically have materials or programs produced by Orthodox Jewish educational media organizations.

Do not assume that Jewish patients are aware of a natural or man made disaster having occurred. If it occurs on the Sabbath or a Jewish holiday, there will be no contact with the media at all.

And during regular days in the Jewish calendar, some Orthodox patients may be generally oblivious to news events, just by not having access to media outlets.

TGIF! The Sabbath and other holidays

Rabbi Friedman recounts an experience as a youth in New York.

*"On the Sabbath and Holidays we do not turn electricity on or off. Thus we do not hear the radio or tv news during a state of emergency.
It's the holiest day of the Jewish calendar – Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. I'm fourteen years old, on my way to synagogue walking up Kingston Avenue in Brooklyn, New York. My mind should be occupied with lofty thoughts of piety, but I'm a loyal baseball fan and the Dodgers are playing at the fourth game of the World Series. There is no radio playing on Yom Kippur – what to do?"*

So on my way to synagogue I walk on the other street where the man at the newspaper stand is listening to the game. As I pass by the stand, I slow down imperceptibly to catch the score. I wasn't fooling anyone at the time and I thought I was mighty clever. So if we don't turn o the radio for the World Series why would we turn it to hear about a hurricane or a tornado?!!"

Most observant Jews celebrate many religious holidays. The standard worldwide solar calendar dates vary for these holidays each year, as Jews follow the lunar calendar.,

The Jewish Sabbath begins just before sundown on Friday night, and ends in complete darkness on Saturday evening. All Jewish holidays follow a similar time pattern of beginning and ending at nightfall as do all Jewish calendar days.

Sunday is a working day in Israel and most Jewish communities around the world.

Outside of the land of Israel, most Jewish biblical holidays are two days in a row, except for Yom Kippur, which lasts one day. "Intermediate days" are attached to Succot and Passover. They are of the spirit of the holidays, but somewhat less restrictive.

During the Sabbath and Holidays, observant Jews are not involved in their occupations. "Rest" is a part of the Sabbath observance, but refraining from certain endeavors might be a more descriptive term for changes in conduct on these days. For example, religious Jews do not

Turn on appliances

Drive

Do not cook on the Sabbath

Do not start or put out fires on the Sabbath

Do not do creative activities

Do not write

Do not paint

Do not build things

Do not farm

Do not do plumbing

Do not handle money or financial affairs

Do not participate in business activities

Do not carry things on the Sabbath except in certain designated areas.

Patients who are discharged on the Sabbath or Holiday may not be able to leave the health facility until that day is over.

Unless it is absolutely vital for the safety and well being of the patient, hospitals should not try to schedule elective surgery on Jewish patients on the holidays or Sabbath. One accepted Jewish legal opinion adds to not having surgery during three days prior to Sabbath.

On the Sabbath and holidays, please provide box tissue with single separate sheets in the place of "roll" bathroom tissue.

When in need of a signature, most hospital administrations will accept a witnessed verbal statement. A written signature maybe obtained on the following day. Just have in mind that some holidays may be as long as three days.

During an emergency a Jewish patient may drive him or herself to the hospital, or may be driven by a Jew or a non-Jew. Observant Jews will leave the vehicle running at the completion of the trip, as the act of turning off the car is not a part of the work required for an emergency. Care givers should feel free to ask if they can move and turn off the power in a vehicle for Jewish patients

Jewish emergency workers or "Hatzolah" are permitted to return to their communities with their vehicle since their presence is considered essential to the welfare of the communities.

Care of the dead

***A Rabbi, priest and Imam are sitting around speaking about how they wish to be eulogized when their respective times come to depart the physical world. The Priest says, " I hope that at my funeral, my flock say that I left a deep impression with my sermons and activities and that I brought positive matters into their lives".

The Imam says "At my funeral I hope that my congregants will say that I brought them closer to repenting and participating in holy activities"

The Rabbi says " At my funeral, I hope that my congregants turn and say " oy, he's moving!"

No one wants to die, let alone discuss death and dying. But as a serious matter, the care of the dead is one of the biggest mitzvoth (commandments in the Code of Jewish law). As the only activity in which the recipient cannot thank or reimburse you, it's regarded as a selfless and very special merit to be involved in the care of the dead.

In the case of the death of a Jewish person anywhere, the body should be covered and if at all possible not moved, except by family or members of their community. It is very prudent to make an effort to consult an Orthodox Rabbi.

Do not remove "IV" lines or any other therapeutic tubes. Do not remove blood or any body tissue from in or around the body to the extent that the clothes or sheets that are stained with blood or tissue go with the body.

In a place where the death occurred outside of the hospital the rescue personnel should follow these rules:

If the death is a result of an injury, save the surrounding cushions or the soil that may contain blood or other tissue. Any body part that is removed as part of an autopsy, accident or even surgery should be slated for burial.

Jews do not embalm or cremate and will make every effort to avoid a limited or full autopsy.

A special community team of volunteers will wash and prepare the body for burial.

The body should not be left alone without direct supervision until burial. Family and friends will take over this ritual from health providers as soon as possible.

Jews typically bury the body as soon as possible. Viewing is strictly limited to identification of the body by a relative or appropriate party.

And utmost respect is due to the body, as if it were a living person.

Jews will usually recite the Kaddish, a special prayer in honor of the dead. This prayer will be said several times daily for the first 11 months of the mourning period. They will "sit shiva" for seven days, which means that they will curtail most daily activities and mourn the dead. During shiva, they will rip a garment, cover mirrors and sit on low chairs or stools. A special candle will usually be lit to honor the dead. The full mourning period lasts one year, at which time a special memorial ceremony is offered.

Many Jews, particularly those from Sephardic backgrounds, may be highly expressive and visibly distraught when a loved one dies or is seriously ill. To remain stoic and silent, as is more common in dominant American culture would imply lack of true feelings for the deceased, and would not likely provide for the needed release of grief.

After burial, it is common for many people to comfort the mourners and visit to console them.