

Beliefs, teachings and Practices within Judaism



Judaism: Beliefs and teachings

The nature of God

The basic Jewish beliefs about God can be summed up like this:

- Jews believe that there is one God (monotheism)
- God is all knowing (omniscient)
- God is all powerful (omnipotent)
- God exists always (omnipresent)
- Jews believe that the non-physical nature of God makes it difficult to describe him.
- The name of God is so holy that it should not be spoken aloud or written. Some Jews use “Hashem” (the name), “the Almighty” or write G-D instead to show their respect.
- The Torah, which is the Jewish scriptures, shows the characteristics of God.
- Jews believe God is Creator, Law-giver and Judge.

Torah the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Regarded as the holiest books of the Tenakh

Shema –the main Jewish declaration of faith. The most important prayer

God as One

The belief that there is only One God is at the core of Judaism. God is whole, complete and perfect. There is no division in God. Jews would reject the idea of Trinity that Christians have.

The Shema is the most important prayer for Jews and it affirms the belief that there is only one God.

‘Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.’ Deuteronomy 6:4

This idea is so important it is recited daily by Jews. Many Jews will say the Shema during their prayers in the morning and the evening. God is the only being to whom Jews should offer prayer.

God as creator

For Jews the world is too wonderful and complex to have happened by chance. Everything in the universe was created by God. God is the creator. Celebrating God as the creator is an important part of Judaism. The first chapter of the book of Genesis records how God made the world: Some Jews believe that every detail of the creation as told in the Torah is true, that God literally created the world in six days. Others believe the details are not meant to be taken literally. The most important thing to understand from the creation story is that God is responsible for the creation of everything that exists.

God as Lawgiver

Jews believe that God gave his Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. These laws and duties are recorded in the Torah and Jews are expected to keep them. God judges how each Jew follows the laws. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-15) that God gave to Moses are the basis of how a just society should work.

God as judge

Judaism teaches that God will judge each person’s actions. God is a just or fair judge. He will always be merciful. Each year Jewish people remember this at Rosh Hashanah it is believed God will judge every person. The Talmud describes how God brings out scales to weigh the deeds (mitzvot) of each person. God is a God of mercy humans can try to make up for any bad deeds and ask for forgiveness.

Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement is the holiest day of the year. On this day Jews confess their sins and try to make up for the things they have done wrong.

The nature and significance of Shekinah - 'the divine presence'

Shekinah the place where God's presence rests and can be felt.

Shekinah refers to God's presence in the world. Shekinah means "to settle or dwell" and refers to the divine presence of God. As Jews believe God created the world, they believe God continues to work and be present in the world. The actual word Shekinah does not appear in the Hebrew scriptures, but there are many examples of people being in God's presence:

- God reveals himself to Adam and Eve in the garden.
- God speaking to Moses from the burning bush.
- The Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem is a special place of God's presence too.
- God is everywhere, but Shekinah is when you feel or experience the presence.
- it is often used to refer to the feminine characteristics of God. This gives the idea that God cares just like a mother cares for her children. It emphasizes God's compassion and care, like a mother.
- Jewish people today focus on a spiritual connection with the divine presence; in worship, prayer, study or doing good in the world.

The Messiah (Mashiach)

The term 'Messiah' comes from the Hebrew 'Mashiach', which means 'anointed'. This refers to the way oil was put on the head of a king or queen at their coronation. It showed they were chosen by God for a special role. There is no reference in the Torah to a messiah. The first clues appear in the writings of some of the prophets. In Judaism there is a strong belief that humans should focus on the here and now. The world to come is beyond humans' understanding. The Messianic Age is a goal or an ideal to strive for.

Different views within Orthodox and Reform Judaism about the Mashiach

For some Jews a belief in the Messiah is central to their faith, but not for all. Some Orthodox Jews still believe that the Messiah will come. Reform Jews do not believe in a personal Messiah. Those Jews who believe in a personal Messiah hope that he will bring about the end of the world. The Messianic Age is a term used for a future time of peace on earth when there will be no violence or hunger or crime. Reform Jews believe that it will be the good actions of humans that will bring a Messianic Age of peace. They have rejected the idea of an individual person who will be the Messiah. They focus more on the ideal or goal of the Messianic Age. They will bring about this time by keeping the commandments and doing what God wants. Jews should work to bring about a better world (The Messianic Age) by behaving well, keeping God's commandments and improving the world.

What will the Messiah do?

There are many different beliefs about the nature of the Messiah and what he will actually do. The traditional belief is that the Messiah will be a great political leader and judge who will bring the world to an end.

- He will not be a supernatural being but a human being.
- He will be a descendant of King David.
- He will be a charismatic leader and an inspiration to all.
- Many Jews believe that in every generation a person is born with the potential to be the Messiah.

In the Jewish scriptures, three actions of the Messiah are referred to:

- He will bring about a time of peace when people will live together without fighting. This is the Messianic Age

- He will restore Jerusalem and bring Jews back to Israel.
- He will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. This was the most important place of Jewish worship which was destroyed in 70 CE

Covenant

What is a Covenant?

A covenant is an agreement between two people or groups of people. It benefits both and there are conditions and obligations. It is like a contract, promise, agreement or deal.

- In Judaism, the agreement is between God and the Jewish people.
- The Torah records God making relationships with individuals or groups through a covenant.
- The making of the covenant is marked by a special sign.

Covenant with Abraham (there are 3 parts to this)

The Promised Land [Genesis 12:1]

God called Abraham from Ur to a land that he would give him (Genesis 12:1).

Abraham and his descendants made their new home in the land of Canaan (Genesis 12).

This land is now known as Israel. It is named after Abraham's grandson.

The land is often called as the 'Promised Land' because of God's repeated promise (Genesis 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8) to give the land to the descendants of Abraham.

Jews have lived in this land continuously from the time of its original conquest by Joshua more than 3,200 years ago until the present day.

The promise of descendants [Genesis 12:2]

God promised Abraham that he would make a great nation out of him.

God changed his name from Abram to Abraham, meaning 'father of many nations'.

This promise is shown in Genesis 17:6-8 where God promises that nations and kings will descend from Abraham.

Even though Abraham and Sarah were very old they had a son called Isaac.

Isaac's son Jacob would go on to found the twelve tribes of Israel.

The promise of blessing and redemption [Genesis 12:1-3]

God promised to bless Abraham and the families of the earth through him.

Abraham sealed the covenant by circumcising himself and the males in his family.

Circumcision involves the removal of a boy's foreskin on the eighth day after birth.

All males were to be circumcised and so carry a mark in their flesh of their relationship with God.

God made covenants with the three patriarchs of Judaism: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As time passed their descendants became slaves in Egypt. They led hard lives and suffered at the hands of the pharaoh. Moses was chosen by God to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt.

Covenant with Moses

Moses was born an Israelite but was raised as part of the Egyptian royal family. He had been rescued as a baby from the river Nile. He found out about his Jewish heritage and had to flee Egypt after killing an Egyptian taskmaster. God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush and told him to return to Egypt

to lead the Jewish people to freedom. With the help of Aaron his brother Moses asked Pharaoh to let the Jewish people go. Pharaoh refused to let them leave so God sent ten plagues on the Egyptian people and Pharaoh finally gave in. Pharaoh changed his mind and sent his army after them and God then parted the Red Sea for the Jews to cross but brought it back down on the Egyptian army. The festival of Passover recalls this event every year. Moses led the people in the desert for forty years before arriving at the Promised Land. While in the desert, Moses took the people to Mount Sinai and here God made a covenant with the Jewish people. He received the Ten Commandments and the Torah.

The meaning and significance of this covenant

Moses is thought by Jews as the greatest of all the prophets and as the first rabbi. He had a special relationship with God and is believed to be the only person who has seen God face to face. Whilst at Sinai Moses received all of the commandments that make up the Torah.

This covenant identified the Jewish people as the chosen people of God. The Torah is the most important part of the Jewish scriptures. Jews believe they are bound to follow its teachings because of the covenant with Moses.

The importance of the Ten Commandments

God gave Moses the commandments at Mount Sinai where he met with God. Here Moses learned the commandments that God wanted him to teach the Israelites that make up the Torah. In the Torah there are 613 mitzvot, which explain how Jews should live their lives. The first ten of the mitzvot are the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments are duties concerning humans and God, their creator. The second six all deal with relationships between people.

Sanctity of Life

Judaism teaches that all life comes from God as it clearly states in the book of Genesis that humans are created in God's image. Life is given by God so it is sacred. This is reflected throughout the Jewish scriptures. The psalms often speak poetically of the way that God created humans and cherishes them. In Jeremiah the prophet speaks about how God has total knowledge of him as he was made in his mother's womb.

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| Pikuach Nefesh The principle that nearly any religious law can be broken in order to preserve human life. |
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Nature and importance of the 'Pikuach Nefesh' (sanctity of life)

Following the commandments and keeping religious laws is very important for Jews, but if human life is at risk, saving it is the most important thing to do. This principle is called **Pikuach Nefesh**. Saving of life should take priority over everything even if this means breaking some of the mitzvot in the Torah. To support life, all but 3 of the 613 mitzvot can be broken idolatry, incest and adultery.

Jews believe that they should live by the Torah, but not die because of it. An example would be at Yom Kippur, Jews are supposed to fast, but if a person's life is put at risk by this then they shouldn't do it. Jewish people are supposed to follow strict laws about what to eat, but if they are starving any food will do, the rules can be broken.

It is acceptable to work on the Sabbath if doing so will save life. Doctors can answer emergency calls, travelling to hospital in an emergency is acceptable. To preserve a life one may travel on Sabbath. In Judaism the emphasis is on life not on death. God is the creator who has given life.

This principle affects Jewish attitudes to abortion. Jewish people believe that if a pregnant woman is going to die, but having an abortion would save her life, then the foetus should be aborted. Her life is superior to the foetus.

Mitzvot the term has a mix of meanings. It is often used to refer to duties (such as the **613 in the Torah**) and good deeds

Free will the idea that individuals can choose how they behave, choosing to do good or evil

MITZVOT

It is difficult to find a word in English that really translates 'mitzvot' as it has more than one meaning:

- Keeping the duties given by God
- Doing good deeds
- Being given an honour or a privilege

The Talmud refers to the 613 mitzvot in the Torah. Today it is impossible to keep all 613 mitzvot as many related to religious practices in the Temple, which has been destroyed. For Orthodox Jews, keeping the mitzvot is an important principle of Judaism. Although many Reform Jews also try to keep the mitzvot many consider that some are no longer relevant for modern life. Decisions about which ones to observe are often based upon individual choices. The mitzvot either show how people should relate to God or how they should relate to other people. By following they build a relationship with God. Observing the mitzvot brings people close to God.

The relationship between free will and the 613 mitzvot

The concept of free will is central to the principles of the Torah. Free will is the idea that individuals can choose how they behave, choosing to do good or evil. People choose the way they behave and this is part of God's plan.

God made humanity in His own image. Other animals do not have this ability to choose their actions and decide on their moral behaviour. The Torah provides the mitzvot to give knowledge to make the choice between good and evil. Those who choose to do good and obey the commandments will be rewarded and those who choose to disobey them will be punished. God knows everything (omniscient) and therefore knows how people will act.

People have complete freedom to decide how to act, but God knows what people will choose to do. Judaism teaches that humans are born with two inclinations: the urge to do good (**Yetzer ha tov**) and the urge to do evil (**Yetzer ha ra**). People are born with these inclinations in balance but as the person does more good or bad the balance changes.

The Afterlife

Olam Ha-Ba –“The World to come”. A term used for life after death and the Messianic Age.

Resurrection – bodily rising from the dead

Immortality of the soul – the soul living on after death without a body

Reincarnation – being reborn into another body.

Judaism places great emphasis on how life should be lived. It teaches that what happens next is in the hands of God. There is little in the Torah about the afterlife. A place called “**Sheol**” or the underworld is mentioned. It is a physical place where the dead go, but its nature is not clear. Judaism is vague about life after death. One of the reasons for this is humans can never fully understand the ways of God. There are many different opinions among Jews, but there is general agreement that death is not the end.

- The afterlife in Judaism is called **Olam Ha-Ba** (the world to come).
- Traditional Jewish beliefs are Resurrection, Immortality of the soul and reincarnation
- All Jews share is a belief that doing good actions in this life is more important than spending time thinking about what might happen after death. The focus should be on this life now and how it is lived in preparation for the life to come.

Orthodox Beliefs

Many Orthodox Jews believe in some form of resurrection. Resurrection is the belief that the dead will come back to life with a physical body. This belief is stated in daily prayers and at funerals. This affects Jewish attitudes to cremation, organ transplants and autopsies as they believe they must be buried complete so they can be resurrected whole. Some rabbis argue that the resurrection of the dead will occur during the Messianic Age.

Reform Beliefs

Reform Judaism has rejected a belief in resurrection and references have been taken out of prayer books and worship. They do not object to cremation. Some Reform Jews believe that the memories of people live on through their actions and good deeds.

Other Reform Jews believe the soul lives on after death. The body remains on earth; only the soul goes to heaven. Heaven is not defined; it is sometimes called “The World to come”. This is known as immortality of the soul.

Although it is not a central belief in Judaism, some Jews believe in reincarnation. By this they mean that in some form the soul of the person will take on a different body to live again on earth. Some Jews believe that if the mitzvot of the Torah have not been completed then a soul may be allowed a Second chance through reincarnation.

Worship: practices in Britain and elsewhere

Orthodox and Reform synagogue services

Public Worship

The main public acts of worship take place in the synagogue. Each synagogue usually has daily prayers, but the time when the community comes together is for the Shabbat service and the festival services. In order for an act of public worship to take place there has to be at least ten people present. This is known as a minyan. In an Orthodox synagogue they must be men, but in a Reform one they can be men or women.

Shabbat service in the synagogue

It is important for Jews to come together as a community to worship. Important ceremonies happen at festival times but each week the Shabbat service brings the community together. It is the most important service of the week and many Jews make a real effort to get there. Services are held on Shabbat eve (Friday night), Shabbat morning (Saturday morning), and late Shabbat afternoon (Saturday afternoon).

The Orthodox Service

- The Shabbat morning service is quite long and can last between two to three hours.
- The atmosphere is relaxed and informal. People might arrive at different times and chat. Children will come in and out.
- The service will include important prayers such as the Shema, Amidah and Kaddish.
- At each service, selected portions of the Torah are read.
- Almost all the service is in Hebrew, apart from the sermon and the prayer for the welfare of the country and its rulers. Hebrew is the Jewish holy language and unites all Jews.
- The rabbi will give a sermon which explains the meaning of the readings from the Torah.
- Musical instruments are not used. Any singing is unaccompanied.
- The service is often followed by a buffet called a Kiddush. It is a chance for people to chat and socialise. Kiddush is the special blessing recited over a cup of wine or Shabbat wine before Friday night dinner.

The Reform Service

- The service in a Reform synagogue is based on traditional elements, but contains more use of English and far less Hebrew, because it is important that people understand it.
- Reform services are usually shorter but more formal, and more of the service is read aloud together.
- The rabbi might be female and men and women can sit together unlike in an Orthodox synagogue.
- Prayers and readings usually leave out beliefs about bodily resurrection, a personal Jewish Messiah, and references to angels.
- Reform services often play instrumental or recorded music.

The importance of prayer

Jews can pray anywhere. Jews are expected to pray three times a day. There are usually synagogue services to coincide with these times, but it isn't practical for most to attend, so they pray at home.

Jews want to praise and thank God or ask him for help. The main aim of prayer is to build a relationship with God.

The Amidah

- The Amidah is the core of every Jewish worship service, and is also referred to as 'the prayer'.
- Amidah means 'standing'. People stand throughout the prayer to show they are in God's presence.
- It consists of 18 blessings.

- It contains the three types of prayer: praise, requests and thanksgiving.
- The last line is, 'May God who brings peace to the universe, bring peace to us and all the people, Israel. Amen.'
- This is recited while taking three steps backward, bowing to both sides, and taking three steps forward again.

Worship in the home

Many Jews cannot attend the synagogue on a daily basis. Therefore praying at home is an important part of daily life.

The Siddur

The siddur is a book of daily prayers. It literally means "order" or "sequence". It guides Jews through daily prayers at home and at the synagogue. It contains many of the prayers used in daily life and festivals, which vary throughout the calendar.

Modeh Ani

The Modeh Ani is a prayer that Jews say first thing on a morning when they are still in bed. The first words of the prayer are "I give thanks". 'I offer thanks before you, living and eternal king, for you have mercifully restored my soul within me. Your faithfulness is great.' It thanks God for the gift of life. As it is short and simple, it is very popular with children.

Shema

The Shema is the most important prayer in Judaism. Shema means "hear". The first line is, "Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our God, Hashem is the One and Only." It is usually recited twice daily, in the morning and in the evening. It sums up the important Jewish belief in one God.

Mezuzah

The Shema is also kept in a container found on the right side of the doorpost outside Jewish homes. It is called a mezuzah. The parchment is prepared and written by a scribe. Usually on the back of the parchment the word 'Shaddai' is written. This means 'almighty' and is one of the names for God. They will be put in every door post in the house except for the toilets and cupboards. It should be placed at a slight angle, with the top pointing toward the inside of the room and the bottom pointing toward the outside. It is traditional to touch it as you enter and exit to remind yourself of god's presence. These remind Jews of God's presence and the covenant.

Shabbat

Shabbat is the weekly festival that is celebrated from sunset on a Friday to sunset on a Saturday. Shabbat is considered by many Jews as the most important festival. Jews believe God instructed them to keep it holy and it is repeated many times in the Torah. It is seen by many as a gift from God when weekday worries can be forgotten. Even in times of persecution Jews tried to celebrate Shabbat. It celebrates creation and is a time for family. No work is done on the sabbath.

Preparation and Celebration

- The home will be cleaned and tidied ready for Shabbat.
- Candles will be lit before Shabbat begins.
- The Friday evening meal is served with a Kiddush blessing and a blessing of challah bread.
- The end of Shabbat is marked with the Havdalah blessing over wine, when a special candle is lit.
- No work can be done, cooking is forbidden so everything to be eaten has to be prepared in advance. Igniting a cooker counts as lighting a fire which is considered as work.

Items worn for worship

Many Jews consider it a duty to wear special clothing for worship

Kippah

Orthodox Jewish men always cover their heads by wearing a hat or a skullcap known in Hebrew as a kippah or in Yiddish as a yarmulke. Wearing a Kippah is an obvious sign of Jewish identity. Most Jews will cover their heads when praying, attending the synagogue or at a festival. Liberal or Reform Jews see the covering of the head as optional. Women do not wear skullcaps, but do cover their heads by wearing a scarf or a hat.

- Wearing a skullcap is a sign of devoutness.
- The most common reason for covering the head is a sign of respect and fear of God. By wearing a hat you are recognising that God is above all mankind.
- The shape and size of the kippah also differs depending upon the community and personal taste and style.

Tallit

The tallit is a four-cornered garment which has fringes (tzitzit) attached. The tzitzit or fringes are to represent the 613 mitzvot. It is usually worn by men and boys who have been through bar mitzvah at every morning service. The tallit gadol (large) or prayer shawl which is only worn during prayer and worship. It goes across the shoulders and arms. After death the tallit is sometimes wrapped around the body like a shroud.

Many observant Jewish males choose to wear a small tallit under their everyday clothes throughout the day. It has a central hole that goes over the head and covers the front and back of the body with the fringes hanging down from the corners. It reminds them that life is a prayer.

Tefillin

Tefillin are worn by Orthodox Jewish males at morning prayer each day, apart from on Shabbat and festivals. The tefillin is made up of two leather boxes. In each there is a small handwritten scroll containing the first two paragraphs of the Shema. One is bound to the head with a strap. It is a reminder that the wearer must serve God with his mind by developing good thoughts. The second box is bound with a strap to the upper arm and leans slightly towards the heart. It is a reminder that the wearer must serve God with his heart through acts of compassion.

Women may wear tallit and tefillin in Reform and Liberal communities but Orthodox women do not wear them.

The Synagogue

The Jewish place of worship is called the synagogue, it means bringing together. In Hebrew it is called Beth Knesset meaning, "house of assembly". Synagogues have three main functions:

- **A house of prayer.** It is the focus of community prayers. Jews can pray anywhere but there are certain prayers can only be said in the presence of a **minyan** (ten adult males, although some traditions include women.)
- **A house of study.** It is sometimes called shul, meaning "school". Studying sacred text is important. It is also the place where children receive religious education.
- **As a social hall.** The synagogue is a focus for community celebration, clubs, cultural events and charity.

Features of different synagogues in Britain

Synagogues can be large or small, highly decorated or very simple, but they will all have a few common features.

- One common feature of all synagogues is a lack of statues or representations of living things. This is stated in the Torah (see source of wisdom)
- Synagogues should face towards Jerusalem, so those in the UK face east.
- Many of the features echo the now destroyed Temple in Jerusalem.
- Many features of synagogues are the same in Orthodox and Reform traditions. The main difference being Orthodox synagogues have separate seating for men and women, but Reform do not.

Aron Kodesh or Ark

- At the wall facing towards Jerusalem there will be a cupboard called the Ark. This is where the Torah scrolls are kept.
- It is the most important part of the prayer hall.
- The Ark is a reminder of the Holy of Holies in the Temple where the Ten Commandments were kept.
- The door or curtain is only opened when the Torah Scrolls are taken out during worship.

Ner Tamid

The Ner tamid or eternal light is kept burning always in front of the Ark. It is a reminder of the eternal nature of God and is a symbol of the light that burned continually in the Temple.

The bimah

- This is a platform, usually in the middle or front of the synagogue.
- This represents the altar in the Temple.
- This is the place from which the service is led.
- The Torah scrolls are removed from the Ark, placed on the bimah, and read from here.
- The words of the Torah are followed using a yad, a long finger shaped pointer. This is so the Torah is not touched directly by the reader, showing respect for the sacred Scripture.

Seating

- Synagogues often have seating on three sides facing the bimah, with the Ark on the fourth side.
- There may also be a separate balcony or gallery for women.
- Men and women sit together in Reform synagogues but separately in Orthodox.

Torah Scrolls

- The scrolls are dressed in silk or velvet covers in rich colours, and are embroidered with gold thread.
- They might also be decorated with gold and silver ornaments like a breastplate, crown or bells. These are like the priests used to wear in the Temple.

Rituals

Important moments in the life of a Jew are marked by special rituals and traditions. They help to show thanks to God, bring God into everyday life and increase a sense of Jewish identity and belonging.

Brit Milah

Brit milah means 'the covenant of circumcision'. Circumcision involves the removal of the foreskin.

It represents the covenant made with Abraham. It is one of the most universally observed mitzvot. Even secular Jews almost always observe it. It is an outward physical sign of God's covenant. . It usually takes place when the boy is eight days old.

Bar Mitzvah/Bat Mitzvah

At the age of 13 a boy becomes bar mitzvah or "son of the commandments". It is from now that a boy is considered an adult and responsible for his own actions and faith. It is expected that he is old enough now to keep the commandments. From this time on he will be able to form part of the minyan (the minimum group of ten needed for certain prayers), to wear tefillin, and read as part of the service.

It marks the deepening of the young person's faith.

Orthodox and Reform views regarding Bat Mitzvah and Bat Chayil

Reform Jewish girls become bat mitzvah (daughter of the commandment) at the age of 12 and can also form part of a minyan (the minimum group of ten needed for certain prayers). There are different customs among Reform synagogues but often there is a ceremony at her synagogue during the Shabbat morning service. She may lead prayers and read from the Torah scroll. The bat mitzvah demonstrates that she is taking on these additional privileges and responsibilities.

Orthodox Jewish girls have a ceremony called a **bat chayil** (daughter of worth) when they are 12. In Orthodox tradition girls do not have such large ceremonies as bar mitzvahs because they do not have the

same religious duties to fulfil. This ceremony includes a special service in the synagogue followed by the girl giving a presentation of some of the things she has learnt in her study of Judaism.

Marriage

Marriage is very important in Judaism. It is given by God. It allows a couple to bond and to have a family.

Features of the Marriage ceremony

The first part of the ceremony takes place under a chuppah. This is a shelter with four sides open and symbolises the couple's new home together. The marriage contract made between bride and groom or Ketubah is read out. It is a legal document in which traditionally the husband promises to support his wife. It will include provisions for what will happen in the case of divorce. The groom gives his bride a ring declaring 'Behold you are consecrated to me by means of this ring according to the rituals of Moses and Israel'. Seven blessings are sung for the couple and all present, and the couple share a glass of wine. At the end of the ceremony a glass is stamped on by the groom. Many reasons are given for this custom such as a reminder that marriage is fragile (like glass) or a reminder of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The second part of the service is called Nisuin. Seven further blessings are said to finalise the marriage. This is done in a separate room with the couple alone together. This is usually followed by a meal and a party celebration.

Orthodox and Reform differences

In Orthodox marriages two male witnesses are needed, in Reform and Liberal they can be male or female. In Reform ceremonies both exchange rings. In Orthodox a ring is placed on the bride's finger. In Reform and Liberal synagogues same-sex marriage is now possible.

Mourning Rituals

When someone has died there are a pattern of rituals that take place. This is to support the bereaved and help them to return to normal life after the loss of a loved one.

Role of the Chevra Kadisha

The Chevra Kadisha is the burial society and is attached to the synagogue. There are no commercial Jewish undertakers. Great care is taken by these volunteers as the body is the earthly container for the soul. They will wash the body and wrap it in a linen cloth. Men are wrapped in their tallit. Plain coffins are used to show equality in death.

Onan

The Onan is the chief mourner. They will take charge of the burial. They are exempt from all mitzvot apart from preparing for the burial. This shows how important it is. A dead person should not be left alone and someone will stay with the body until burial. This is an act of respect and care. The funeral service is very short and simple and someone will usually deliver a eulogy about the dead person.

Sheva

After the funeral there are seven days of intense mourning. This is known as Sheva.

Mourners will:

- Stay at home.
- They sit in low chairs or the floor.
- Do not wear makeup, shave, cut their hair or work.
- Usually wear the clothes they wore to the funeral.
- Pray three times a day.
- Male mourners will recite the Mourner's Kaddish, which is a prayer declaring God's greatness and a prayer for the coming age of peace.

Yarzheit

Every year on the anniversary of the death mourners light a candle at home and go to synagogue to say the mourner's prayer. Prayers are said and a candle burns for 24 hours to symbolise the departed soul.

Daily life

Tenakh

The Tenakh is the Jewish Bible. The name is formed from its three parts:

- Torah -The Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses
- Neviim -the Prophets
- Ketuvim- the Writings (made up of history, wisdom and history, it includes the psalms)

Torah

The Torah is the most sacred object in Judaism. It takes the form of a written scroll on parchment scroll it is kept in the Ark in the synagogue. It is written in Hebrew. It is a great honour to be asked to read it. The person reading from the Torah uses a pointing stick called a yad so that the scroll is given respect and not damaged by touch. Most Jews would not have a copy of the Torah at home. They will probably have a Chumash. This is a book which shows the passage that should be read each day.

Orthodox Jews regard the Torah as the literal word of God revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. The Torah cannot be changed. Many Reform Jews believe the Torah is a human creation. It was written by their ancestors and inspired by their understanding of God in their lives.

For both Orthodox and Reform reading the Torah is at the heart of their worship.

The Neviim

Their main purpose is to teach about the history of the religion. Jews believe the prophets had special knowledge from God. They pass on a message about how God wants us to live. Parts of the Neviim are read during synagogue service. Many parts of the Neviim are only read at home or for personal study.

The Ketuvim

This section includes the Psalms. These are songs of praise to God and in tradition some were written by King David and King Solomon. The psalms have been used in Jewish worship for thousands of years. They are used in communal and private worship.

The Talmud

This is a record of the Oral Tradition and means "instruction or learning". Tradition says it was given to Moses on Mount Sinai explaining how to interpret the Torah. Over 1000 years later it was written down so it did not become distorted or forgotten. It is made up of two parts the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah is written in Hebrew, The Gemara in Aramaic.

The Talmud contains the opinions, teachings and comments of thousands of rabbis on many topics such as law, customs and ethics. Extracts from the Talmud are used in public and private worship and also in the siddur. However, the Talmud is very difficult and takes years of training to understand. If a Jewish person wants to find an answer to an issue they would consult their rabbi who has trained in reading the Talmud and is an expert.

Orthodox Jews are encouraged to study the Talmud. There are many colleges throughout the world where Jews study the Torah and the Talmud. These are called Yeshiva.

Jewish Dietary Laws

Religious beliefs affect all aspects of Jewish people's lives including the food they eat and how it is prepared. Jewish dietary laws are known kashrut. The 'kashrut' laws tell what a Jew is allowed and not allowed to eat, and how it should be prepared. For many Jewish people keeping the food laws is a very important part of their observance.

Kosher, Treyfah and Parev

Food that is acceptable to Jews is called 'kosher' meaning "fit". The opposite of kosher is trefah, and this cannot be eaten. Foods like fruit and vegetables are neutral or 'Parev' and means they can go with any other food.

For meat to be kosher the animal must be killed by a swift cut across the throat with a razor sharp knife, and all blood must be drained from the meat. It must be performed by a specially trained person. Allowed animals, if they have not been killed properly are trefah.

The main details of kashrut can be found in Leviticus.

In summary:

- Only mammals which both chew the cud and have split hooves are kosher. This means Jews do not eat pork. Meat like Beef and lamb are acceptable.
- Only fish that have both scales and fins are kosher. This means things like prawns, crabs and lobster are not allowed.
- Various birds such as birds of prey, like owls are not allowed.
- Almost all insects are not kosher. Locusts are the only exception.

Kosher Kitchen: separating meat and milk

in the Torah it says, 'You shall not cook a kid (a baby goat) in the milk of its mother'. For this reason, meat and dairy must be kept separate. A kosher kitchen usually has separate utensils, washing up bowls, and tea towels so that milk and meat are kept separate.

Benefits of keeping kosher

For many Jewish people the laws of kashrut are a central part of their Jewish identity. It marks Jewish people as different and distinct. Every time a Jewish person eats it also helps to remind themselves of their relationship with God.

Challenges of keeping kosher

Keeping kosher can be difficult and there are many challenges such as:

- Eating out can be difficult. Some will only eat in Kosher restaurants, because they have been checked by rabbinic supervisors to make sure kashrut laws have been observed. Some Jews will eat in vegetarian restaurants, because these will have no meat or fish and are parev.
- Meat has to be bought from a kosher butcher to guarantee it has been prepared in the correct way.
- A three-hour gap is must be observed after eating meat before eating dairy. If you wanted tea or coffee at the end of a meal where meat had been served, it would have to served black, or use soya milk as it is vegetable in origin. A dessert would have to be dairy free.
- A simple tin of baked beans may appear parev but what if it comes into contact with trefeh food in the factory? Rabbinic authorities regularly publish lists of products that comply with the kashrut laws.

Festivals: practices in Britain and elsewhere

There are many festivals in the Jewish calendar. Most remember a great event in Jewish history. They provide an opportunity to build a relationship with God. They build Jewish identity as families and communities come together.

Rosh Hashanah

is the Jewish New Year it means "head" or beginning the year. It is connected to the feast of Yom Kippur which is ten days later. These are known as the Days of Awe. It is a time to think about what you have done right and wrong over the past year and to look forward to the year ahead. So Jewish people evaluate their behaviour, ask forgiveness and make plans. It is also a time to recall the story of creation and the start of the Torah.

Celebration

There are several traditional customs, such as:

- Jews will wish each other L'shanah tovah, "a good year".
- apples dipped in honey are eaten as people hope for a sweet new year.
- Pomegranates may be eaten to symbolize the wish that good deeds will be plentiful like the seeds in a pomegranate.
- people may put a fish's head on the table at home to hope for good deeds to multiply as much as fish in sea.

in the morning of the second day, 100 notes of the shofar horn are blown. This represents the crying of the soul asking to be reunited with God. There is a ceremony in the afternoon when people ask God to remove their sins. They go to a riverbank and scatter crumbs from their pockets so they can be carried away. It symbolises getting rid of their sins, hoping that God will sweep them away. This is called tashlikh or casting away. Orthodox Jews celebrate over two days and for some Reform Jews it is one day.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur comes 10 days after Rosh Hashanah. This is the holiest day of the year. This is the Day of Atonement and is when Jews ask for forgiveness. During the ten day period Jews try to make amends and plan ways to do better in the next year. Jews believe that if they are truly sorry for their bad actions God will be fair and compassionate and forgive them.

Celebration

This is the holiest day of the year and even secular Jews will attend synagogue. People will spend a large part of the day in the synagogue in prayer and reflection. Before the service begins the Kol Nidre or "All vows" is sung. This cancels any vows they have made to God and cannot keep. During prayers in the synagogue, people quietly ask God for forgiveness. The doors of the ark are open to symbolise that the gates of heaven are open.

Other festival traditions include:

- The rabbi may wear white clothes to show how people's sins are to be cleaned.
- People often give to charity.
- Adults normally fast for the day (don't eat food) and take the day as a chance to reflect on what they have done.
- A blast on the shofar signals the fast is over.

Sukkot

This festival follows four days after Yom Kippur, Sukkot is the festival of tabernacles or booths. It marks the end of summer and brings in the autumn harvest. It is celebrated for eight days and is seen as a holiday period and a time of hospitality. It reminds Jewish people of a time when their ancestors were wandering in the wilderness after leaving the slavery of Egypt.

People build tents and huts to represent the temporary shelters the wanderers used in the desert. The booths can be very large, enough for many people, and people are often invited into a family's sukkah (plural is sukkot). Families will eat in them and if the weather allows, even sleep in them. It is a time of hospitality and sharing. Leaves, fruit and vegetables will be hung from the roof to recall it is a harvest festival.

There is an ancient tradition that a lulav (palm, myrtle and willow placed in a woven palm holder) and an Etrog (a type of citrus fruit) are waved in six directions showing God's power is everywhere.

There is also a tradition of remembering Jewish biblical characters. Often young children do drawings of them and decorate the sukkah with them.

The last day of Sukkot is Simchat Torah. This is a celebration of the Torah. On this day all of the Torah scrolls are taken out of the Ark, with much singing and dancing, and are paraded around the synagogue.

Generally celebrations are very similar with small variations. The way Jews celebrate festivals depends on how observant they are, family tradition, personal circumstances and whether they are Ashkenazi or Sephardic, Orthodox or Reform.

Pesach – the festival of Passover

Pesach is known as Passover and takes place in the spring. It recalls the time the Jewish people were saved by Moses from Egypt. It is a festival of freedom.

Pesach recalls that the angel of death passed over Egypt killing every firstborn male, but not those of Jewish people. This was the tenth plague that God sent, and after this Pharaoh agreed to allow the Jewish slaves to leave. Pesach reminds Jewish people that they are God's chosen people, and that he saved them. God cares for the weak and the oppressed.

In preparation for this festival the home is thoroughly cleaned. All chametz or food containing yeast or rising agents is thrown out. Many Jewish families have a set of Passover crockery and utensils that have not come into contact with any chametz. Flat bread or matzot, is the only bread eaten during this time. This symbolises that the slaves who left Egypt were in such a rush that they did not have time for their bread to rise. As yeast swells when it is put in water some see it as a symbol of pride and therefore something they need to remove from their life.

The Seder meal is the most important event of the festival. Seder means order and it follows the order set out in a book called the Haggadah.

Everything on the seder plate is symbolic. For example, matzo crackers to remember how there was no time for the bread to rise, and bitter herbs like horseradish to remember the bitterness of slavery, salt water to remember the tears of the slaves, charoset (a mix of apple, cinnamon, nut and wine) to symbolise the cement used in buildings by slaves (the sweetness represents freedom).

Four cups of wine are drunk. Wine is a symbol of freedom.

A fifth cup of wine is poured and left undrunk. This is for the prophet Elijah. It is a traditional Jewish belief that he will return to announce the arrival of the Messiah and the Messianic Age.

Children play a key role in the celebration. The youngest child present start the meal by asking four questions about the origins of the ritual. A piece of matzah bread is hidden and the first child to find it receives a prize.

Diversity of practice

The festival lasts eight days in total for Orthodox Jews, and seven for Reform. Pesach is very well observed by most Jews. Most people try to get home to be with their family to celebrate. It is customary for families to invite guests who are unable to share the meal with their own family. Seder hosts can choose from a wide variety of published Haggadah or make their own. Traditional Haggadahs focus on the ancient story of the Exodus from Egypt, but modern ones reflect on modern day situations.