

Judaism

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Introduction

Our series of subject knowledge essays are written for the teacher to expand and deepen understanding of religion and worldviews. You might like to share extracts with students but these are aimed at teachers and other professionals.

Each essay is authored by an expert in the field. They might take a particular position or stance with regards to the worldview in question. You can find out about each author in the biographies given at the start of the essay.

We hope you find these essays helpful as you learn more about this fascinating subject.

About the Author

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Beliefs, Teachings, Wisdom, Authority

Interpreting teachings, sources, authorities and ways of life in order to understand religions and beliefs;

Understanding and responding critically to beliefs and attitudes.

Basic Beliefs

Jews are monotheists. They believe there is only one G-d.

Jews believe that: G-d is eternal and beyond time and space. G-d is not limited by a physical body. G-d is omnipresent. G-d is the creator of the world and everything in it and has a purpose for the world. G-d is omnibenevolent. G-d is interested in people's moral behaviour. G-d is omnipotent and omniscient. G-d judges each individual.

Judaism teaches that G-d created the world. The accounts of this creation of the world and all life on it are found in Genesis 1-3.

Judaism teaches that G-d gives all life and only G-d can take it away. However, Judaism does not have any clear teaching about what happens after death.

Jews believe that they are the 'chosen people' of G-d. This means that G-d selected them to live their lives according to his will and to set an example to others of how he wanted everyone to live.

Both Christianity and Islam have the same belief in a monotheistic god but have different beliefs about how this god wants people to live.

The Future and the Messiah

In the Jewish Scriptures the 'Day of Jehovah' was a future battle that would decide the fate of the Jewish people. It was seen as a future day of victory but the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah, suggested that it would bring destruction.

Later, these prophecies also included ideas of future prosperity with eschatological hopes.

The Book of Daniel holds the hope that the kingdom of the world will be given to the saints of the Most High, the Jewish people. The archangel Michael will appear after the death of the beast which represents the Greek kingdoms of the Middle East.

There is no appearance of a messiah in the Book of Daniel. This idea of a deliverer king is in the Song of Solomon. The desire for a messiah who would break the Roman rule and establish the empire of the Jews led to the rebellion of 66-70CE that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem. It does not appear that this Messiah figure was connected with the final judgement and the raising of the dead:

But I know that my Vindicator lives;

In the end He will testify on earth (Job 19:25).

The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honourable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws" (2 Maccabees 7:20-23).

When the Messiah arrives, peace will be brought to the earth. As the prophet Isaiah said:

For a child has been born to us,

A son has been given us.

And authority has settled on his shoulders.

He has been named

"The Mighty God is planning grace;

The Eternal Father, a peaceable ruler"-

In token of abundant authority

And of peace without limit

Upon David's throne and kingdom,

That it may be firmly established

In justice and in equity

Now and evermore.

The zeal of the Lord of Hosts

Shall bring this to pass (Isaiah 9:5-6).

Isaiah also wrote that this Messiah or Servant of G-d who would suffer for the peoples' sins.

Jews are still waiting for this Messiah though some Jewish groups argue that they are waiting for a Messianic Age rather than for a person.

The Scriptures and Authority

For Jews all authority comes from the Torah and so from G-d.

– **Tenakh** The Jewish Bible is written in Hebrew and the first five books are the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This Jewish Bible is called in Hebrew the TeNaKh: Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), Ketuvim (Writings). (Sometimes the whole of the Jewish Bible is referred to as the Torah.)

Jewish belief is that the Torah was given to Moses by G-d. These five books are revealed scripture. This is the Written Torah. The Written Torah is unchanging and unchangeable, and all truth claims are based on the teachings it contains and the belief that it is the revealed word of G-d.

The teachings of the Torah influence all Jewish life as Jews are required to follow the 613 mitzvot (commandments or laws). These contain instructions for worship as well as for living, eating and clothing amongst many other things.

The rest of the Tenakh, Nevi'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings) are believed to be divinely inspired but not unchangeable or infallible as is the Torah.

The twenty-four books of the Tenakh are the history of the first 3500 years from the creation of the world until the building of the second Temple in Jerusalem. They contain details of the history of the Jews from the beginning, through the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and until the end of the first commonwealth.

The Tenakh provides details of G-d's plan for the world and of G-d's relationship with humanity.

– **Talmud** Moses received both the Written Torah, and the Oral Torah – the Talmud, direct from G-d. The Talmud (Oral Torah) has developed and grown through the work of the Rabbis who have added discussions to it over time offering further explanations of what it contains. All Jews recognise the authority of the Torah though there may be disagreement over the status accorded to the Talmud.

The Rabbis in Babylon produced a more detailed version of the Oral Law which is now called the Gemara ('Study'). A similar work by the Rabbis of Israel was never completed because of persecutions. The Mishnah ('Study by repetition') and Gemara form the Talmud (teachings).

Rabbi Judah the Prince lived about 1700 years ago. Until this time the Oral Torah had been passed on by word of mouth. However, the continuing persecution of the Jews meant that people began to fear that it might be lost. Rabbi Judah wrote down the outline of Oral Torah in the Mishnah.

The Mishnah has 62 divisions (Mesechtos) which provide the background for every subject of Halakha or Jewish law found in the Oral Torah. Each division is a collection of about 50 to 100 Mishnayos. The 62 are divided into six sedarim or orders:

- Zeraim (seeds)
- Moed (festivals)
- Nashim (women)
- Nezikin (damages)
- Kedoshim (holy matters)
- Taharos (purities)

The Mishnah provides a basis for discussion of these issues of Jewish life and belief. Also, in the Mishnah is Halakhah ('The Way') guidance on law and practical rulings, and Haggadah ('Tellings') which set out the order of the Passover Seder.

– **Midrash** The third religious book is the Midrash (rabbinic commentary and interpretation of the Scriptures). It dates from about 200CE.

The local Jewish community may be led by the Rabbi (teacher). A Rabbi is a learned person who leads the community, teaches the people and may lead them in worship. However, the authority of the Rabbi comes from learning in the Torah and Talmud and there is no sacramental or priestly role attached to the position.

Founders of Faith

The main figures associated with the foundation of Judaism are those who appear in the Jewish Scriptures. Perhaps the most significant of these are:

- Adam and Eve
- Noah 56tr442(although these three all predate the establishment of the Jewish people)

- Abraham
- Moses
- David

Adam and Eve: whether regarded as historical personages or mythical concepts Adam and Eve appear at the beginning of the Biblical accounts. The first Creation account in Genesis 1 says that Adam and Eve were made by G-d at the same time:

And G-d said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And G-d created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

The account in Genesis 2 suggests that at first G-d made a human being but, having being unable to find a partner for this human, created a female from the human's ribs and at this point the original human becomes male. [This subtlety is lost in the translation from the Hebrew.]

The Lord G-d planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed ... And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. So the Lord G-d cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This one at last

Is bone of my bones

And flesh of my flesh.

This one shall be called Woman,

For from man was she taken" (Genesis 2:8, 20-23).

The story of Eve being tempted by the serpent and taking the fruit from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil and eating with Adam is well-known. They are exiled from the Garden and lose their (presumed) immortality. Whilst Judaism sees this as the Fall it does not accept the later Christian interpretation of Original Sin arising from this event.

Noah: Noah is significant because he places his trust in G-d and accepts G-d's commands to build the ark and fill it without question.

Abraham: Abraham is often known as the Father of Judaism. It was Abraham's faith in G-d, having been brought up in the polytheistic society of Ur, that initially singles him out.

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there (Genesis 11:31).

Abram (later Abraham) made three Covenants with G-d. Genesis 12, 15 & 17). Perhaps the most significant is the Covenant of Circumcision in chapter 17:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous."

Abram threw himself on his face; and God spoke to him further, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you. I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God" (Genesis 17:1-8).

Moses: Known as the teacher of Judaism, Moses followed G-d's commands and led the Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness of Sinai. It was here that he received the Ten Commandments from G-d which form the Sinai Covenant. Although Moses frequently complains about the tasks G-d sets him, he nevertheless obeys all the commands he is given.

However, on an occasion when the Israelites had no water Moses and his brother Aaron spoke to G-d:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them (Numbers 20:7-12).

David: The story of David is found from 1 Samuel 16 to 1 Kings 2. David was the youngest son of Jesse, of the tribe of Judah, and the second king of Israel. In the Tenakh he is the forerunner and ancestor of the Messiah. He was the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz and the youngest of eight brothers. He was brought up to be a shepherd.

When God rejected Saul as King of Israel, Samuel knew that David was to be his successor. Saul died and G-d sent David back to Judah where he was anointed King. Later, after defeating the supporters of Saul, David was anointed king over the twelve tribes of Israel in Hebron, from where he moved his capital to Jerusalem.

David was King in Jerusalem for 33 years. He was 'a man after G-d's own heart' and brought the ark of the covenant back from Kiriath-jearim and placed it in a special tabernacle.

It was at this time of success that David fell in love with Bathsheba and had intercourse with her. He then had her husband Uriah murdered. Bathsheba gave birth to David's child but as a punishment for his actions the boy died.

David was known as a musician and seventy-three of the psalms in the Bible are recorded as David's.

Despite his sins of adultery and murder it is to David that Jews look back with pride and affection as the establisher of their kingdom, and as the image of the coming Messiah. Perhaps he is the dearer example because of his devotion to G-d's service and yet his flawed character.

An Exemplar of Faith

One Jew, significant for his life and the tradition which he founded is the Baal Shem Tov.

Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name) (b. c.1698 in a settlement near the village of Okopy Świętej Trójcy, Podolia, Poland [now the Ukraine] – d. 1760 Międzybóž, Podolia, Poland [now the Ukraine]), whose original name was Israel Ben Eliezer and was also known as Besht, was the founder of modern Chasidism. He caused surprise and opposition because he mixed with ordinary people, he rejected mortification of the flesh and insisted on the holiness of ordinary human life.

He defended his behaviour and said that his actions were a necessary 'descent for the sake of ascent'. This was later developed into a socio-theological theory placing great value on spiritual ministrations.

He was responsible for getting rid of the rigid asceticism which Isaac ben Solomon Luria had imposed on Kabbalah in the 16th century.

The Baal Shem Tov's life is surrounded by myth and legend. He came from a very simple background and was an orphan. He had several unimportant jobs in synagogues and Hebrew schools. Later he married the daughter of the very wealthy Ephraim of Kuty and moved to the Carpathian mountains. Here he studied mysticism and worked as a lime digger. He gained a reputation as healer using herbs, talismans and amulets which held the Divine name.

Later he became an innkeeper and schochet (ritual slaughterer).

In 1736, moved to the village of Międzybóž in Podolia. From then until his death he spent his time in spiritual study.

As a young man the Baal Shem Tov knew Rabbi Nahman of Gorodenka and Rabbi Nahman of Kosov. The discussions which these men had at meals were later written down and became part of Chasidic literature. The Baal Shem Tov's spirituality was tested by these rabbis and he recognised a mezuzah as non-kosher simply by his spiritual powers.

Eventually, he rejected the strict asceticism of his colleagues. According to his grandson, Rabbi Baruch of Międzybóž, he said:

I came into this world to point a new way, to prevail upon men to live by the light of these three things: love of God, love of Israel, and love of Torah. And there is no need to perform mortifications of the flesh.

The Baal Shem Tov's teaching was based on three issues:

- communion with God;
- service in ordinary bodily existence; he taught that every human deed done for the sake of heaven (even eating) was as valuable as any formal commandment;
- rescue of the sparks of divinity that are trapped in the material world.

These teachings appealed to ordinary people as it did not require any retreat from the world around them. They were all 'limbs of the divine presence'. Members of the movement were criticised by rabbinical leaders for 'dancing, drinking, and making merry all their lives'.

A story explains the Baal Shem Tov's view of the Messiah:

The Baal Shem Tov made an 'ascent of the soul' and met the Messiah in heaven. He asked when the Messiah would come and received the reply, 'when your well-springs shall overflow far and wide' – when the teachings of Chasidism had been spread.

He taught that piety was more important than learning and so even the poor and uneducated could commune with God if they had enthusiasm.

The Baal Shem Tov had great influence during his lifetime and brought about social and religious change. He challenged many traditional values; there was more happiness and new rituals with smaller prayer houses outside of the synagogues. These changes were emphasised by the wearing of distinctive clothes and by storytelling.

The Name of G-d:

In the Jewish Scriptures G-d's name is spelt with four consonants YHWH (this is called the Tetragrammaton or 'four letters'). Jewish teaching says that the name is so holy that only the High Priest knew how to pronounce it and that he only spoke it once a year, alone, in the Holy of Holies in the Temple at Jerusalem. When they see these four letters Jews usually say the name Adonai which means Lord. Many Jews will not write the word which is a translation of this name and instead put G-d. In some parts of the Tenakh the name Hashem is also used for G-d – it means 'the Name'.

Ways of Living

Exploring the impact of religions and beliefs on how people live their lives;

Understanding and responding critically to beliefs and attitudes.

Guidance for Life

Being Jewish impacts on every aspect of Jewish life.

In leading an halakhic life, Jews are always conscious of the obligations to G-d, to their families and to others.

Much of Jewish life is centred on worship and it is possible to argue that, in fact, all Jewish life is worship.

Religious Practice

Judaism requires separation from the non-Jewish world whilst still living very much within it. In order to follow the laws of kashrut, Jews will normally eat together, they wear clothes which are modest and which follow the laws of shaatnez (wool and cotton may not be mixed in a garment), and the laws of the Sabbath require all work to stop by sunset on Friday and for Saturday to be devoted to the worship of G-d until sunset is reached again.

This idea of separation from the non-Jewish world is not associated in any way with any notion of Jews being better than others or not wishing to have contact with others, simply with Jews having been born with more obligations to G-d which must be observed.

These beliefs can lead to very tight-knit families and communities and in some ways can be seen as Jews shutting themselves off from the world. This is not surprising in view of the results of anti-Semitism in the pogroms and Holocaust. However, this is not the intention it is merely that living entirely within the world poses a significant challenge to the preservation of Judaism and the living of an halakhic life.

In worship Jews show their respect for G-d and the Torah. Traditionally, the ark is placed on the east wall of the synagogue so that, when facing the scrolls, Jews are facing Jerusalem.

When praying in the synagogue, Jews stand to face the Ark. In respect to G-d, male Jews cover the heads with a yamulka or kippah – a skull cap.

During worship the Sefer Torah is taken out of the Ark and is carried through the synagogue before eventually reaching the Bimah (reading desk). After being undressed the scrolls is held high above the head and rotated so that everyone can see the writing on the parchment.

Reading and Interpreting the Scriptures

The Jewish sacred texts are the Torah – the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.

Both the Written and Oral Torah were given to Moses on Mount Sinai and were taught to the Jews during their forty years wandering in the desert. The Oral and Written Torah have existed for nearly three and a half thousand years and both are necessary to understand Jewish teaching and thought.

The handwritten Torah Scrolls are called the Sefer Torah. The Torah is treated with great respect by all Jews. It is handwritten on large pages of animal skin and placed on large rollers. The scrolls are carefully copied by hand by a specially trained scribe using a turkey or goose feather.

The scrolls are decorated with covers, bells, breastplates and other decorations. When not in use they are kept in a cupboard in the synagogue called the Aaron Hakodesh (the ark). The ner tamid (eternal light) burns constantly in front of the ark.

When they are being read they are not touched by hand but a yad (pointer) is used so that the reader can follow the text.

The respect given to the Torah and the mitzvot (laws) which it contains show its great importance to Jews as a document which contains the truth about G-d and about their relationship with him.

The Sefer Torah contains only consonants, there are no vowels, punctuation or musical notation. Hebrew is written from right to left across the page.

Portions of the Torah are read during worship on Sabbaths, festivals, new moons, fast days and every Monday and Thursday. Readings are at the end of morning worship and during the afternoon service. The lectionary (pattern of readings) means that the whole of the Torah is read during the course of the year, beginning and ending on Simchat Torah.

The texts of the Jewish Scriptures are enlarged upon by the Talmud but as the Torah is the revealed word of G-d it is not open to critical comment.

Torah reading is an essential part of synagogue worship. The teamim or signs which show how the Torah should be read and chanted were developed in the period 400-1000CE by Masorete scholars and are found in printed versions.

There are parts of the Torah where the text is unclear and difficult to understand but

tradition has provided an explanation of these in the Oral Torah. When a piece of text is unintelligible but can be understood if one word is corrected a rule called *keri* (read) and *k'tiv* (written) is used. The 'correct' word is read in place of the one which is actually written.

The Journey of Life

The key rites of an individual Jew mark their passage through life from birth to death.

Life itself lies at the centre of Jewish existence with the toast *L'Chaim* – to life.

The first two rites of passage are, at least within Orthodox Judaism, for the male.

At eight days old (or as soon as possible afterwards if the child is ill) a Jewish baby is circumcised – *Brit Milah*. This ceremony welcomes the child into the faith and gives them the physical mark of the Jewish male.

Pidyon Haben (redemption of the first-born son): G-d instructed the Israelites that every firstborn child was to be given to his service. So every firstborn male child (without the woman having had a miscarriage after three months of pregnancy or the birth being by Caesarean section) has to be redeemed by a Jew who is a member of the Cohen tribe (a Jew of priestly descent). The child is bought back for five silver shekels.

On the first Sabbath after the birth of a girl, her father will be called up to the bimah to offer a blessing:

He Who blessed our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon, may He bless the mother *N* and her new-born daughter, whose name in Israel shall be *N*; May they raise her for the marriage canopy and for a life of good deeds, and let us say Amen.

The Jewish initiation ceremony is called *Bar Mitzvah* but it is not a mitzvah as there is no requirement for the boy to go through such a ceremony. Traditionally, when a boy reaches the age of thirteen, he is responsible for his own actions and can be fully responsible for fulfilling the commandments. This only applies to his religious life. *Bar Mitzvah* means Son of the Commandment.

Before the ceremony the boy is taught how to put on or 'lay' *tefillin* and to read Hebrew and he prepares his 'portion'. This is a passage of the scriptures that he will read in the synagogue.

After the synagogue service his father says: 'Blessed be He Who has released me from the responsibilities of this child.'

There are similar services for girls in Progressive communities.

Kiddushin – marriage: The Jewish family and home are at the centre of religious life and marriage is therefore very important. The marriage service can take place anywhere provided that the couple are married under a chuppah or canopy. Weddings can take place on any day of the week except for the Sabbath but many Orthodox Jews still choose to be married on a Tuesday because in the Biblical account of the Creation of the world the sentence 'And G-d saw that it was good' is said twice for the day.

Before the ceremony, two male witnesses sign a contract or ketubah saying what duties each partner will undertake as husband or wife.

The groom is then taken to where the bride is waiting and lets the veil down over her face. The groom is now sure that he is marrying the right woman. (Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah instead of her younger sister Rachel, because the bride was veiled – *Genesis 29:21-30*) The Rabbi or chazzan says the blessing which was said to Rebecca before she married Isaac:

O sister!

May you grow

Into thousands of myriads;

May your offspring seize

The gates of their foes. (*Genesis 24:60*).

The groom stands under the chuppah facing Jerusalem while the bride walks around him seven times. There is a blessing over wine followed by the marriage blessing:

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us regarding forbidden unions; Who forbade betrothed women to us, the permitted women who are married to us through canopy and consecration. Blessed are You Hashem, Who sanctifies His people Israel through canopy and consecration.

The groom puts a plain gold ring on the first finger of the bride's right hand and says: 'Be sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel.'

There are then seven blessings – Sheva berachot. A glass is wrapped in a cloth and the groom smashes it under his foot. The bride and groom now go to a private room where they are alone together for the first time as husband and wife.

These three rites of passage all serve to strengthen the faith of a Jew by establishing their place in the community and history of Judaism.

Death is the final rite of passage. Judaism is concerned with life rather than death and lacks any clear teaching on the purpose of death or what follow it. In this respect it is very different from religions such as Christianity and Islam and also from those which teach reincarnation.

As they are dying, Jews try to say the Shema. After a death Jews say kaddish which is often described as a mourning prayer but is actually a prayer praising G-d. If possible, burial should take place on the day of death but if not then on the following one. The body is washed and dried and then dressed in a simple white shroud. Men are wrapped in a tallit – prayer shawl – from which the fringes have been cut to show that he is now freed from the religious laws that bound him on earth. The body is buried in a plain wooden coffin. There is a very simple service with no flowers as everyone is deemed equal in death.

After the funeral the family will go home to sit Shiva 'seven'. For seven days a candle is kept burning and the mirrors in the house are covered while the mourners do not leave their home. Kaddish is said three times a day.

Sheloshim is the period of thirty days after the burial when the bereaved do not go out for pleasure and continue to mourn.

For the next eleven months (but no longer), called Shanah, Kaddish is said every day.

Holy Days and Celebrations

Judaism is a religion of many festivals.

The weekly celebration of Shabbat (Sabbath) is sometimes seen as the most important. It takes place both in the home and the synagogue and the major requirement is that no work should be undertaken from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday.

This has its origins in the book of Genesis:

On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done (Genesis 2:2-3).

And its observation is repeated in the book of Exodus:

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work-you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements (Exodus 20:8-10).

Probably the next most important events are Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Rosh Hashanah – Head of the Year – the first and second days of the seventh month, Tishri is the Jewish New Year festival.

In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded (Numbers 29:1).

The preceding month of Elul is a time of repentance.

Rosh Hashanah has several meanings:

- Tradition says that it is the anniversary of the Creation.
- The Rabbis named it Yom Hadin – the day of judgement.
- Tradition also says that on Rosh Hashanah G-d forgave Adam his sins.

The ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur are known as the High Holy Days. In Hebrew they are Yamim Noraim the days of awe or the ten days of penitence Aseret Yemai Teshuvah.

Yom Kippur: Yom Kippur ends the ten days of repentance on 10 Tishri. On this day the decision which G-d makes about a person's behaviour during the past year is said to be sealed in the Book of Life. The final sealing is believed to take place ten days later on Hoshanah Rabbah. Yom Kippur is also called Shabbat Shabbaton – the ultimate Sabbath.

Yom Kippur was the one day of the year on which the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple and begged forgiveness for the people's sins.

The festivals instructed to be observed in the Torah are generally seen as the most important. In addition to those above, they include the three Pilgrim Festivals of Pesach, Sukkot and Shavuot:

- Pesach – barley harvest
- Sukkot – the ingathering of the crops
- Shavuot – wheat harvest

Then there are the rabbinic festivals of Hanukkah and Purim and later observances such as Yom HaShoah.

All these days serve to bring the Jewish community together in worship and to remind people of their history, heritage and tradition.

Ways of Expressing Meaning

Appreciating that individuals and cultures express their beliefs and values through many different forms.

Stories of Faith

Judaism is a religion of story and tradition.

The Jewish Scriptures are one of the greatest collections of stories in the world.

It is difficult to say which are the most important and central stories of the faith. The stories are sacred because they are part of the revealed word of G-d and, at least to Orthodox Jews, are therefore divine truth.

The stories of the Jewish Scriptures are the essential accounts of G-d's developing relationship with his people. They demonstrate G-d's love and care for his people and his righteousness and righteous judgement. They also show the fallibility of humanity which, despite its promises and undertakings, goes against G-d's wishes and disobeys the commandments again and again.

The key stories might be considered as:

- The Creation and the Fall (Genesis 1-3)
- Cain and Abel (Genesis 4)
- Noah and the flood (Genesis 6-9)
- The Covenants with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15 & 17)
- Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22)
- Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25-27)
- Joseph (Genesis 37-47)
- The Exodus from Egypt and the Sinai Covenant (Exodus)
- David and the building of the Temple (1 Samuel 16 – 1 Kings 2)
- Jonah- Job- Ruth

This is simply a selection, and anyone might produce a different list from a faith with so many stories to tell. They are all important because they show the developing relationship between G-d and the children of Israel and help Jews to understand how that relationship evolved.

Of course, many of these stories might be read as myths and interpreted accordingly but for many Jews they are true accounts of events in the life of the chosen people.

These stories are read in the synagogue, studied by Rabbis and told to young children. They are central to an understanding of the faith.

Symbols of Faith

The requirements of the second commandment and its strict interpretation by Jews: –

You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them (Exodus 20:4-5a).

– means that much Jewish symbolism tends to be abstract in nature.

The key symbols of Judaism:

– The Magen David (Shield or Star of David). The oldest example of this dates from the seventh century BCE. In the synagogue at Capernaum the hexagram is next to a pentagram and a swastika so it appears to be simply a form of decoration. By the 6th century CE it was called the 'Seal of Solomon'.

– In 1354 Charles IV allowed the Jewish community in Prague to have its own flag with the symbol on it and this became known as 'King David's flag'.

– The Magen David is on the flag of Israel but the symbol of the country is the Menorah: a menorah is a seven-branched candlestick representing the one which stood in the Temple.

You shall make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its base and its shaft, its cups, calyxes, and petals shall be of one piece. Six branches shall issue from its sides; three branches from one side of the lampstand and three branches from the other side of the lampstand (Exodus 25:31-32).

– The Lions of Judah are often on the curtain in front of the ark:

Judah is a lion's whelp;

On prey, my son, have you grown.

He crouches, lies down like a lion,

Like the king of beasts-who dare rouse him? (Genesis 49:9).

– There is also a crown (Keter Torah) – for the Torah is the crowning glory which G-d gave to the world.

These are the physical symbols of Judaism which express Jewish beliefs about G-d and the Torah as well as Jewish history.

Creative Expression

In the Jewish Scriptures symbol and analogy are often used to say something about G-d. For example, Psalm 8 says: When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers (Psalm 8:4a).

Elsewhere G-d is described as a 'Warrior', 'King', and 'Judge' as well as a craftsman making the world. The relationship between G-d and the Jews is made clear when G-d appears as a father-figure looking after the erring children of Israel. But the Jewish scriptures also use the feminine to describe G-d: providing water for the people, just as women fetch it for their families; providing for the children just as mothers feed their household; being a mother and nurse for her wandering children during the time of the Exodus; crying out like a woman in child birth and acting as a comforting mother in times of distress.

Because of the second commandment there is little figurative religious art in Judaism. However, work such as the Chagall stained-glass windows of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Hadassah Hospital of the Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Centre in Jerusalem demonstrates how it can have a part to play in Judaism.

The music of the Temple appears to have been chanted by the priests to the accompaniment of an orchestra. After the destruction of the Temple, music in the synagogues became the task of one person. The accompaniment of musical instruments was forbidden, particularly on the Sabbath as it constituted work. Responses to the prayers were sung by the entire male congregation. As new forms of music and chanting were developed the post of chazan, or cantor, was established during the early Middle Ages.

The Synagogue

The principal Jewish place of worship is the home but the central place for community worship is the synagogue. In Hebrew a synagogue is called: Beth ha-tefilla (house of prayer), Beth ha-knesset (house of assembly), Beth ha-midrash (house of study). Synagogue is a Greek word (a meeting or an assembly). The Yiddish word shul (German Schule, 'school') is also used for a synagogue.

A synagogue is an assembly house for communal prayer, study, and meeting; and is the centre of the community. Synagogues are generally plain buildings often with no more decoration outside than the Magen David (Shield or Star of David) to show their use.

The synagogue must have windows:

When Daniel learned that it had been put in writing, he went to his house, in whose upper chamber he had had windows made facing Jerusalem, and three times a day he knelt down, prayed, and made confession to his God, as he had always done (Daniel 6:11).

There are no pictures or statues in a synagogue in accordance with the second commandment.

In the eastern wall – mizrach (the wall facing Jerusalem) is the Aron Ha-Kodesh, the Holy Ark.

Above, or to the sides of the ark are two tablets bearing the first two words of each of the Ten Commandments. Above the ark is the Ner Tamid, the everlasting light which represents the lamp which burnt in the Jerusalem Temple. In Orthodox synagogues, men and women sit separately. There is a mejizah – a partition screen, separating the women's and men's areas. Sometimes the women sit in an upstairs gallery (Weibershul). In most Progressive synagogues, men and women sit together.

Mikveh: Every synagogue should have a ritual bath or mikveh which is a pool of natural water in which people can bathe to be ritually pure. The mikveh must contain at least 40 se'ah, (between 250-1,000 litres) of natural water. Women must visit the mikveh after the end of the monthly period to cleanse themselves before they can resume normal sexual relations with their husbands. Some Orthodox men also use it as Yom Kippur and converts are required to immerse themselves in it.

Expressing Faith through Worship

There are three daily periods of prayer:

– early morning – shacharit - afternoon – mincha - evening – ma-ariv.

All prayers are said facing east towards Jerusalem. Each period of prayer consists of readings from the Torah and prayers praising G-d. Jews may also pray spontaneously at any time when they feel that they want to speak to G-d.

The main synagogue services are on the Sabbath: Friday night and Saturday morning. For a service to take place there must be a minimum of ten adult males (minyan). In an Orthodox synagogue the service will be almost entirely in Hebrew. The service consists mainly of prayers and the central reading of the Torah.

Worship at home: The Jewish home is central to worship and prayer life.

Every door except for the bathroom has a mezuzah. The mezuzah is a small cylinder fixed to the top of the right-hand doorpost. It contains a piece of parchment on which is written the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:31-21; Numbers 15:37-41) – the central statement of Jewish belief. As they pass through the door Jews touch the mezuzah and take their fingers to their lips.

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Pilgrimage

When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, Jews visited three times a year to offer sacrifices for the harvest on Pesach, Sukkot and Shavuot. These are known as the Pilgrim or Foot festivals. However, there has been no Jewish pilgrimage since the destruction of the Temple in 70CE.

Identity, Diversity and Belonging

Understanding how individuals develop a sense of identity and belonging through faith or belief;

Exploring the variety, difference and relationships that exist within and between religions, values and beliefs.

Foundations of Identity and Belonging

Judaism teaches that anyone born to a Jewish mother is necessarily Jewish. This means that for most Jews no conscious decision is involved in being a Jew. In other faiths it may be necessary to take certain steps of initiation in order to be accepted as a member of the community, but this is not the case with Judaism.

The only physical requirement of Jews is for all males to be circumcised at a Brit Milah (Covenant of cutting), usually done when the baby is eight days old (dependant on health). However, not being circumcised does not mean that the male is not a Jew. Similarly, although a large majority of Jewish boys have a Bar Mitzvah ceremony, this is a tradition but not a requirement. Even if a Jew is completely non-practising and a non-believer it does not stop them being a Jew.

'Belonging' is an essential aspect of Judaism. To be a Jew is to be part of a community and a tradition as well as a religion. The Jews are G-d's 'chosen people' and the individual is therefore part of their own family, their local community, and of worldwide Jewry. The necessity of living by the mitzvot and, in particular, the requirements of kashrut and of the Sabbath, mean that there are elements of Jewish life which can be lived only within the Jewish community.

Faith and commitment are intertwined through practice and tradition and almost every aspect of Jewish life is influenced by religion: eating; clothes; prayer; the structure of the week and of the year.

Although Judaism stresses the very important roles of the family and the community, the relationship with G-d is both collective and personal.

The community and the preservation of it and its traditions are central. Traditionally, if a person married outside of the faith, the father would rip his clothes and say the Mourner's Kaddish because their child was now dead to them. This demonstrates the importance of the integrity of the community and the need to fulfil the first commandment in the scriptures: 'Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it ...' (Genesis 1:28a).

The Sabbath, the festivals and the sharing of rites of passage all serve to bring the community together.

The consequences of the 20th century Holocaust were the devastation of the traditional Jewish communities and the shtetls (small Jewish communities in eastern Europe).

The second half of the 20th century saw the re-establishment of Israel in the form of the modern state as well as new communities being established around the world. However, these communities have continued to shrink in recent years because of assimilation and intermarriage.

Religious / Spiritual Identity

In early Judaism the human personality was considered as a whole without a distinction between body and soul. However, by the Middle Ages, the soul was seen as the principle of life which could survive the death of the body.

Jews are expected to live an halakhic life, in accordance with G-d's will and the 613 mitzvot. This should ensure a life lived in the sight of G-d and one lived with yetser hara (good intentions) rather than yetser yatov (bad intentions).

Many Jews may demonstrate commitment in a physical manner by regular attendance at a synagogue and also by the wearing of particular clothing in daily life. This latter might be a beard and a simple yamulkah or the beaver hat and long black coat favoured by Hasidic Jews.

However important these are they are only outward symbols of a Jewish life which is expressed in every aspect of existence.

Non-orthodox Jews may offer no distinguishing features in this manner but would deny that their personal commitment was any less or their moral code diminished in any way.

Although kashrut means that many parts of a Jew's life might be lived separately from that of the gentile world, nevertheless, Judaism does not approve of a society which cuts itself off from the world. Therefore Jewish life can be viewed as being a demonstration of the faith in the secular world. The concept of a 'chosen people' is intended to present an example or role model to non-Jews of how G-d wishes people to live.

The moral code of Judaism based on the Torah is strict and required of all followers. However, in that it relates to others, Jews could not treat non-Jews differently from Jews. The same respect, honesty and integrity must be displayed.

Family and Community

Within a Jewish family, faith is demonstrated in the home through family life and worship as well as in the synagogue.

The home will have a mezuzah at every door except the bathroom as a constant reminder of the teachings of the Shema. There may be a small piece of wall unplastered or undecorated as a reminder of the destruction of the Temple. The kitchen is equipped with separate sets of utensils, crockery and equipment for the division of meat and milk foods.

There may be daily family prayer in the home but the key event is the Sabbath. Each week the family eat the Friday night meal together as an act of worship, the Sabbath candles are lit, the children are blessed and a man will praise his wife for her devotion to him, the family and their faith. The family then stay together throughout Saturday, probably worshipping at the synagogue together on Saturday morning, until the service of Havdalah (separation) which marks the end of the sabbath and the return to the secular world.

Many Jews who may not be very observant during the week will nevertheless ensure that they are together as a family on the Sabbath.

Family attendance at the synagogue for festivals, but particularly for the weekly Sabbath brings the Jewish community together in worship and socially. The family has always been at the centre of Jewish life and one of its major strengths as it is often in the home that the faith is most observed, stories are told and tradition maintained.

Judaism is a belief system but also a complete way of life. As such it affects both individuals and the wider community. In many countries of the Diaspora Jews are found in fairly close communities, they share a religion, a culture, a way of life and sometimes even a language.

The effect on the wider local community may be minimal as often Sabbath attendance on a Saturday goes unobserved in the bustle of weekend life. The requirements of being able to walk to the synagogue on the Sabbath and also the need to have shops which sell kosher food means that many Jewish communities tend to be small and tight knit. However, in many countries there may be particular areas of cities where there are large Jewish communities with all the facilities needed for an halakhic life.

One of the major fears of Judaism is of younger members 'marrying-out' and effectively leaving the faith and the community. Also it is often a struggle for teenagers and young people in the western world to adhere to the strict requirements of the faith when their colleagues and friends may be going out on a Friday night or encouraging them to eat with them away from their home. The family and the community offer support and strength but many may find it hard to resist the pull of some aspects of modern life.

Jewish Diversity

Within Judaism there are many different groups: Hasidic, Orthodox, Conservative (Masorti), Reform, Progressive, Liberal. (It is important to remember that some of these names have different meanings in the USA than in the UK.)

Differences between the groups derive from both belief and practice. There may be differences over the status of the Torah and also of the Talmud.

Some groups look towards a very traditional approach to the faith, believing essentially that nothing should ever change. Others are more progressive in their thinking and feel that Judaism should adapt to the world in which it finds itself and, importantly, that it is possible to do this without compromising the faith. Some Jews believe that the Torah can be questioned and may be interpreted for the 21st century.

There are differences over responses to the State of Israel.

There are also divisions over the extent to which kashrut (lawful in terms of food, clothes, money and objects) must be observed; over whether women can sit with men; whether women can read from the Torah in public; whether women can be rabbis; whether children with a Jewish father and gentile mother should be regarded as Jewish; whether a divorced woman can remarry if her husband does not grant her a 'get', a religious divorce document; over whether women can become rabbis; whether women must continue to visit a mikveh (ritual bath) after menstruation, and whether it is permissible to drive to the synagogue on the Sabbath. These and many other issues continue to divide the world Jewish community.

Other Religions & Beliefs

In some respects Jews may find it easier to relate to other faith groups than to other Jewish groups.

According to the Talmud, after the flood, G-d made an agreement with Noah and his sons. This is called the Noachide Code and is based on the text of Genesis.

Judaism teaches that any religion which keeps the laws of the Noachide Code is an acceptable way for non-Jews to serve G-d:

1. Do not worship images or idols
2. Do not commit blasphemy or curse G-d
3. Do not commit murder
4. Do not steal
5. Do not commit adultery
6. Do not eat a limb of a live animal
7. Set up a legal system and promote justice.

The Rabbis taught: 'seven precepts were the sons of Noah commanded: social laws; to refrain from blasphemy, idolatry; adultery; bloodshed; robbery; and eating flesh cut from a living animal' (Sanhedrin 56a).

Therefore, Judaism discourages converts because this teaching is that non-Jews who follow the code are already serving G-d as G-d wants.

Many Jews are, however, concerned about the number of young people who are 'marrying out' – that is marrying non-Jews who themselves are not converting to Judaism. They fear that this will mean more people leaving the practice of the faith and so weaken the community. There is a continuing increase of people who may describe themselves as 'Secular Jews'. They recognise their heritage but are not religious.

Meaning, Purpose and Truth

Exploring some of the ultimate questions that confront humanity, and responding imaginatively to them;

The ups, downs and meaning(s) of life's journey.

Religious Experience and the Kabbalah

It could be argued that, as all life is worship, so every aspect of life might be seen as a religious experience. Community events such as festivals and rites of passage reflect the emotions of the individual and the community. Feelings such as awe, worship, wonder, praise, thanks, concern, joy and sadness are all expressed in these events and are shared by the whole community.

The scriptures recount many examples of religious experiences. The patriarchs, for example, have many meetings and conversations direct with G-d. As the scriptures progress the Prophets continue to receive revelations from G-d.

In recent times there have been accounts of religious experiences from the period of the 20th century Holocaust. However, Judaism is not a religion which expects that sort of relationship with G-d.

One of the most significant portrayals of religious experience and its quest can be found in Kabbalistic Judaism.

Kabbalah is Jewish mysticism. It dates from the first centuries CE and developed further in Spain and Provence in the 13th century with the Sefer ha-Zohar – The Book of Splendour.

In its earliest forms, followers sought an ecstatic version of G-d's throne, the chariot seen by Ezekiel:

Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form. From what appeared as his loins up, I saw a gleam as of amber-what looked like a fire encased in a frame; and from what appeared as his loins down, I saw what looked like fire. There was a radiance all about him. Like the appearance of the bow which shines in the clouds on a day of rain, such was the appearance of the surrounding radiance (Ezekiel 1:26-28a).

Spanish Kabbalah was more concerned with esoteric knowledge about the nature of the divine world and its connections with the world of creation.

Medieval Kabbalah draws on Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism and is expressed in symbolic language.

The Sefer ha-Zohar gives a cosmic-symbolic interpretation of Judaism and of the history of Israel. Therefore, the observance of the mitzvot has cosmic significance.

This cosmic aspect is developed further in the 16th century Lurianic Kabbalah, developed by the Rabbi and mystic, Isaac Luria (1534 – 1572).

G-d

Judaism has an almost unique view of the relationship between humanity and G-d.

Jews know that their role is to live an halakhic life according to G-d's will which is expressed in the Ten Commandments and the 613 mitzvot.

The undertaking to obey G-d and to worship G-d is found in the Covenants (agreements) of the Jewish Scriptures, in particular the first covenant with Abraham:

The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

I will make of you a great nation,

And I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

And you shall be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you

And curse him that curses you;

And all the families of the earth

Shall bless themselves by you.” (Genesis 12:1-3).

Some time later, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said,

“Fear not, Abram,

I am a shield to you;

Your reward shall be very great.” ...

He took him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He added, “So shall your offspring be.” And because he put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to his merit (Genesis 15:1, 5-6).

Jews put their trust in G-d because of the promises of the Covenants and because of their role as a chosen people:

For I provide water in the wilderness,

Rivers in the desert,

To give drink to My chosen people,

The people I formed for Myself

That they might declare my praise (Isaiah 43:20b-21).

The G-d of the Jews is transcendent and some people suggest that this is more so since the time of the Torah as G-d has seemed more distant from humanity and less involved.

Suffering, Life, Death and Beyond

Judaism teaches that G-d gives all life and only G-d can take it away, but for many Jews the experience of the 20th century Holocaust posed a very real challenge to their view of G-d. Some theologians argued that as G-d did not prevent the Holocaust, G-d must be dead or non-existent. Conversely, some argue for a strengthened faith in the light of such as disaster. Whilst others look for a different way of believing:

We cannot sustain the old belief in man, nor the old belief in G-d ... but we can search for new beliefs (Albert Friedlander).

Judaism is a religion that rejoices in and celebrates life rather than concerning itself overmuch with questions of the afterlife; there is no clear teaching about what happens after death.

Religion and Science

Whether there is a real tension between religion and science in Judaism depends to a considerable extent on the tradition of Judaism being considered.

Judaism has very few problems in relation to modern scientific discoveries, particularly in relation to medical science. However, many Orthodox Jews may consider that some of the developments relating to issues embryo research are unacceptable interference with G-d's will.

Also, although science may suggest that there is no evidence for an afterlife, this poses no significant problem as Judaism has no specific teachings on the issue.

The real area of debate is in relation to the creation of the world.

Because Judaism teaches that the Torah is the revealed word of G-d and is literal truth, this sometimes makes it difficult to reconcile scientific theories of cosmology and evolution with the accounts found in Genesis 1-3.

The creation accounts in Genesis show that G-d created the world in seven 'ayin' or periods of time. The translation of 'days' is unhelpful but unsurprising in that the text says:

God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day (Genesis 1:5).

The Jewish calendar starts with the year 1 dated from the creation of the world in the book of Genesis. 1 Tishrei 1 AM (anno mundi), is equivalent to Monday, October 7, 3761 BCE. 1st September 2013 is 26 Elul 5773.

This reiterates a literal belief in a timescale calculated from the scriptures which means that the earth was created just over 5,700 years ago. It is clearly not possible to take a literal interpretation of the Genesis creation accounts and marry them with scientific theory and dating for the beginning of the world and of life.

Some areas can be reconciled to a degree. It is perhaps possible to accept the Big Bang Theory and then to suggest that the Big Bang needed a Prime Mover in the form of G-d. However, it is not possible to reconcile the whole of the accounts.

The story in Genesis 1:1-2:4a places humans as the last part of creation. The order is:

Day One: darkness and light

Day Two: separation of water and sky

Day Three: earth, sea and plants

Day Four: sun, moon and stars

Day Five: sea creatures and birds

Day Six: land animals, insects and humans

While some people have argued that this is very like the scientific belief about the order of creation, a bigger issue arises in relation to the second account in Genesis 2:4b-25. In this account G-d made the first human before there were any plants or animals created.

From a non-Orthodox Jewish perspective where the creation stories may be regarded as myth, scientific theories do not pose a problem.

Values and Commitments

Understanding how moral values and a sense of obligation can come from beliefs and experience;

Evaluating their own and others' values in order to make informed, rational and imaginative choices.

Rules and Ethical Guidelines

The core precepts of Jewish morality and behaviour are found in the Ten Commandments:

I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides Me.

You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God,

visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

Honour your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house: you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's (Exodus 20:2-14).

These are developed in the 613 mitzvot.

The Treatment of non-Jews is also prescribed in the Torah: You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:21).

Jews are required to follow the Ten Commandments and the other laws in the Torah and so, as a 'chosen people' to set an example to the rest of humanity for the way in which G-d wants them to live. In order to do this, Jews aim to live according to halakhah – 'walking' according to the Way which G-d has prescribed.

Individual and Social Responsibility

Judaism has very clear teaching about how people should be treated:

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God (Leviticus 19:33-34).

Many of the Jewish prophets wrote about social injustice:

Spare Me the sound of your hymns,

And let Me not hear the music of your lutes.

But let justice well up like water,

Righteousness like an unfailing stream (Amos 5:23-24).

Yet you ward off [the thought of] a day of woe

And convene a session of lawlessness.

They lie on ivory beds,

Lolling on their couches,

Feasting on lambs from the flock

And on calves from the stalls.

They hum snatches of song

To the tune of the lute-

They account themselves musicians like David.

They drink [straight] from the wine bowls

And anoint themselves with the choicest oils-

But they are not concerned about the ruin of Joseph (Amos 6:3-6).

Judaism believes it is a religious responsibility to try to help anyone or any country in terms of money and development. Jews should fight injustice in whatever way they can and make financial contributions to help people.

Jews should give a tenth of their wealth as tzedaka (righteousness). This money is owed to the poor and so if it is not given it is robbing them. Even the poorest people should try to give tzedaka.

The best way to give tzedaka is to lend money to them indefinitely and without interest. By doing this people are saved the embarrassment of taking a gift. The hope is that the money will help the poor to become self-supporting.

This view of life has been demonstrated by the many great Jewish benefactors.

The experience of the 20th century Holocaust has also had considerable significance for Jewish outlooks on the world and issues of injustice.

Euthanasia

Judaism teaches that all human life is sacred. People were G-d's special creation, and each individual is known by G-d, who plans their lives and decides how long they should live.

Your eyes saw my unformed limbs;

they were all recorded in Your book;

in due time they were formed,

to the very last one of them (Psalm 139:16).

The Torah was given to humans 'so that they might live'. Suicide is a sin. 'One who intentionally takes one's life has no share in the world to come.'

So Judaism cannot approve of euthanasia because only G-d can decide when a person should die.

The teaching of Rabbi Moses Isserles is sometimes used to argue that life-support machines should be turned off if there is not hope of the patient's recovery:

If there is anything which causes a hindrance to the departure of the soul ... then it is permissible to remove it.

Sex and Marriage

Judaism has a very natural and realistic view of sexuality. Sex plays a very important role in human relationships. Judaism recognises the strength of sexual desire but also sees that this must be carefully controlled. It may only be expressed within a marriage.

The Talmud says that:

A man without a woman is doomed to an existence without joy, without blessing, without experiencing life's true goodness, without Torah, without protection and without peace.

The importance of marriage in Judaism is seen as lying in the first book of the Torah, Genesis:

Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

This is explained in the Midrash:

G-d created the first human being half male, half female. He then separated the two parts to form a man and a woman.

The Jewish teacher, Maimonides said:

Through the sanctification of marriage, a husband and wife become the closest of relatives.

Judaism also has very strict rules concerning the relationships between husband and wife. A married couple is considered to be a complete organism whereas men and women on their own are incomplete, lacking the qualities of each other. Marriage sanctifies the relationship.

Abortion

Jews believe that, as G-d created human beings, therefore G-d is in charge of when they live and when they die. Judaism considers that abortion not only interferes with G-d's plan for the world but also destroys what has the potential to become a human being. However, according to the Jewish scriptures, the life of a human being is more important than the life of the unborn child. This is shown in this passage from Exodus:

When men fight, and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and a miscarriage results, but no other damage ensues, the one responsible shall be fined according as the woman's husband may exact from him, the payment to be based on reckoning. But if other damage ensues, the penalty shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise (Exodus 21:22-25).

The argument is when a foetus becomes a human being. The decision was that the foetus became a person at the moment of birth, not at conception. Therefore, abortion is not murder.

The life and well-being of the mother is the most important issue and abortion is acceptable if the mother or child is at risk either physically or mentally or if the pregnancy is the result of rape. The mother must be the person who decides in these circumstances.

Crime and punishment

Judaism teaches that criminals must be treated fairly. An accused person must have a fair trial by a court.

The 36 most serious crimes (including adultery, sodomy, idolatry, witchcraft, and murder) carry one of four different types of death penalty: stoning, burning, beheading, or strangling

However, the rabbis limited the possibility of capital punishment. A potential criminal had to be warned of the possible punishment before committing the crime. If all the judges agreed on a verdict it was felt likely that they were prejudiced, and that the verdict was wrong. Therefore, it was almost impossible to reach a death verdict.

If a death verdict was finally reached, every effort had to be made to have it reversed.

A final, less severe, penalty was makkat mardut, or disciplinary lashes.

Jewish law tried to limit the punishment and safeguard the criminal so that violence and suffering is kept to a minimum.

War

Judaism teaches that there are three kinds of wars which have to be fought:

1. milchemet mitzvah (war commanded by G-d). Two such wars are described in the Hebrew Bible: the campaign against Amalek, and Joshua and the Israelites fighting for the Promised Land. The conditions are that the enemy has attacked first or that there is a need to pre-empt an attack;
2. milchemet reshut (optional war). The war must be a last resort, non-violent solutions must have been tried first, civilians must not be targeted and damage must be limited. No war such as this has been called since the fall of the Temple in 70 CE;
3. a pre-emptive war: this may only be fought when an attack upon Israel is imminent. This occurred in 1967, when Israel attacked the airfields of Egypt and Syria in the Six Day War in an attempt to prevent a long and bloody siege.

Jews must protect themselves and other Jews, as well as going to the aid of other countries to prevent war. Self-defence is also permissible:

If a person intends to kill you, be first to kill him (Talmud).

The Environment

The central concept for Jews in relation to the world is Tikkun Olam – care for the world and the environment.

At the New Year festival of Rosh Hashanah, Jews thank G-d for the creation of the world because it is G-d's possession:

The earth is the Lord's and all that it holds,

the world and its inhabitants (Psalm 24:1).

The scriptures say how the earth is to be treated:

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the axe against them (Deuteronomy 20:19a).

Respect for trees is shown in the annual festival of Tu B'Shevat – New Year for Trees on the 15th of Shevat:

Agricultural land must be rested once every 50 years if it is to produce good crops. This is a Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-11).

The Jewish scriptures say little about animal rights. However, animals were seen as very valuable and were offered as sacrifices to G-d in the Temple in Jerusalem.

It is clear that the Judaism has always been concerned about animals. G-d gave Adam control over all the animals:

And G-d said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And G-d created man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them. G-d blessed them and G-d said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth" (Genesis 1:26-28).

and:

And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts (Genesis 2:19-20a).

Humanity's stewardship of the world is a gift and an obligation.

That animals are to be shown respect is shown in several passages:

You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing (Deuteronomy 25:4).

A righteous man knows the needs of his beast (Proverbs 12:10).

Animals are mentioned in the Ten Commandments:

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work-you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do (Deuteronomy 5:12-14).

Animals were to be shown concern as are humans and given a day's rest.

On the use of animals for scientific experiments Judaism says that these experiments must be necessary and, as far as possible, suffering should be avoided.

Websites

<http://www.jewfaq.org/index.htm>

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