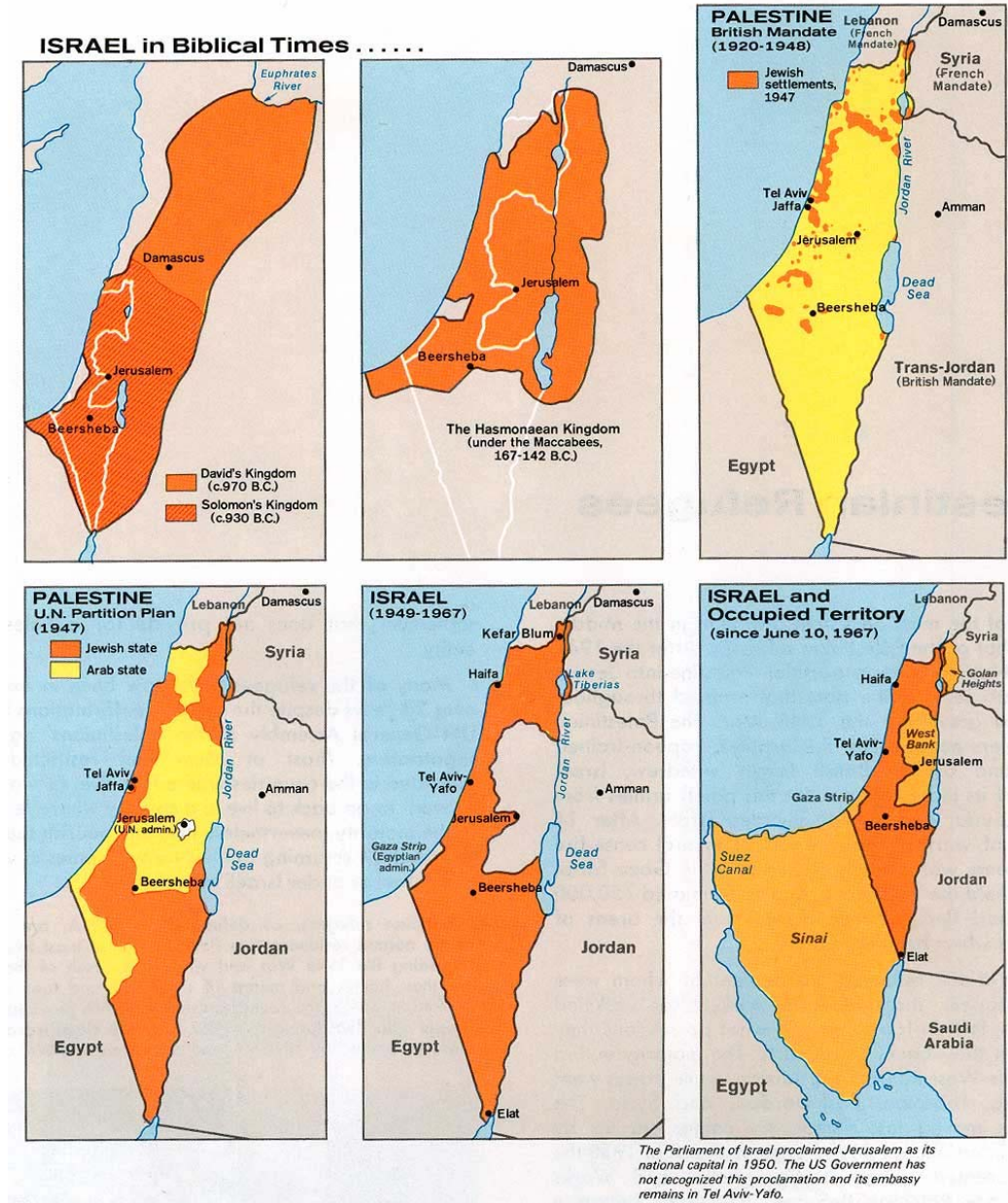


# JUDAISM

## An extraordinarily brief history of the Jews and Israel



Most Jews are Jews by birth - they are Jews because their mother was a Jew, although some people do convert to the faith.

The Jews are a **covenant people**. Their identity as a nation goes back to two significant covenants (agreements) firstly with God through their ancestor Abraham, and then the covenant at Sinai (Moses) approximately 3,500 years ago. This gave them the certainty of being a Chosen People, but by being chosen they would also say they are chosen for suffering and harder

examination than other peoples, because of their special relationship with God.

The belief in Israel as the **Promised Land** of the Jewish people goes back to God's covenant with Abraham 4,000 years ago (Genesis chapter 17 verse 8). In the period of migrations which followed, Canaan remained the land of promise, and the Israelites re-entered the land under Joshua (Joshua chapter 1 verses 2-5). The Israelites established themselves and grew to become an Empire under Kings David and Solomon then shrank back to the two small monarchies of Judah and Israel. Israel was destroyed in 721 BC and its inhabitants so widely scattered that they were no longer identifiable as a people. The Jews of Judah were dispersed to Babylon when their nation was destroyed in 587 BC. The people of Judah did not all return to their country at the end of the Exile, and the Babylonian communities of Jews became famous for their learning and wealth. They were the first of the communities of the **Diaspora** or **Dispersion** and from here originated the synagogue and the Talmud (see below). Jewish communities were set up by trading families throughout the territories of the Persian, Greek and Roman Empires, but the second great Dispersion came with the destruction of the nation by the Romans following the Jewish Revolt of the second century CE. The temple, the symbol of God's abiding with His people, was destroyed in the First Revolt (70 CE). Although a small number of Jews remained in Israel, the focus of Jewish life was elsewhere, in the communities of Europe and North Africa.



The land of Israel remained the idealised homeland of many Jews, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe in particular, began the move to Palestine, as it was then called. The area was then under the control of the Ottoman Empire and inhabited by Palestinian Arabs, but the Jews began with the reclamation of unused land and established their colonies. The new state of Israel was not born until the

end of World War II (1948) and has had to maintain its position in the face of the hostility of its neighbours and the resident Palestinians. Any Jew may emigrate to Israel, whatever their nationality, and it has become a magnet for Jews once again. The concept of this area of territory as being the Promised Land still, will readily be seen by watching news documentaries. It is also well known that Hasidic Jews living in Israel and elsewhere do not actually recognise the state, because of their strong belief that the true Israel will only be brought into being with the coming of the Messiah. In fact Jews live in many different countries and belong to many different races – as well as Israel itself, the largest concentrations are in the USA and the area of the former USSR.

You will find mention of two main groups in world Jewry – about 80% of Jews are Ashkenazim, which means they are of Central and Eastern European origin, whilst the Sephardim originate from the Mediterranean countries, especially Spain, North Africa and the Middle East. These two groups share the same beliefs but have different practices and customs. The other chief difference is between Orthodox and Progressive Jews. In broad terms, the Orthodox believe that the Torah was given by God and cannot be changed, whilst the Progressive Jews (which includes the Reform and Liberal synagogues) try to relate traditional Jewish practices to the contemporary world. Most Jews take very seriously the commandment in the Torah to pass on Jewish customs, beliefs and traditions to their children.

**Jews believe in One God, the Creator of the Universe, beyond space and time. God is also a personal God – He is concerned with the affairs of human beings and listens to our prayers. Belief in God means ACTION. Jews serve God and witness to Him by carrying out His commandments – this not only makes us better people, but makes the world a better place. Fulfilling God’s laws brings God into every aspect of a person’s life –eating, use of money, lifestyle etc. It is notable that many of the everyday actions carried out by Jews are accompanied by a blessing – in fact a Jew may say as many as a hundred blessings a day! This means that everyday actions are transformed into acts of holiness.**

### Star of David

Known as the Magen David, this six-pointed star or shield is one the



traditional symbols of Judaism. It will be found decorating many Jewish artefacts and is also the device on the flag of the state of Israel. It was introduced in the last century as a Zionist symbol, and cannot be traced back to David. There are occasional references to the shield in the Medieval period. It was infamously used by the Nazis as a badge to mark out Jews for persecution.

# The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem



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The Wailing Wall – more correctly known as the Western Wall – is all that remains of the Temple of Jerusalem. It is the platform on which Herod built his temple. The site of the main Temple building is now occupied by the Muslim shrine known as the Dome of the Rock. The Western Wall is the closest devout Jews are able to go to the temple site and is therefore the holiest site in Judaism and a place of Jewish pilgrimage.

## The heart of Jewish belief and practices – the Torah

In Genesis chapter 17 God makes a **covenant** with **Abraham**, who is seen as the founder of the Jewish nation: Abraham is to worship God alone, while God promises him that he will be the father of many people and he and his descendants will hold the land of Canaan in perpetuity (see above). The covenant was renewed with **Isaac** and **Jacob** and then with the whole nation, led by **Moses** at **Mount Sinai**.

### Torah Scrolls and Yad



The tradition of Judaism is that Moses received the whole of the **Torah** (the first five books of the Jewish Bible) from God on Mount Sinai and later wrote it down. The Torah is the record of the teachings by which the covenanted people should live, it is central to Jewish life and seen as God's precious gift to the Jewish people. According to tradition there are 613 commandments in the Torah of which 365 are negative ("thou shall not ..."), which matches the number of days in the year, and 248 positive, corresponding to the number of bones in the human body. It is not possible to obey **all** these commandments nowadays as many are concerned with the organisation of the Jerusalem Temple. Children under thirteen and woman also do not have to

observe a significant number of the commandments. The entire five books are read over a cycle of a year in the synagogue

Following the Torah is not limited to the Jewish faith; **the 10 commandments** are as important to Christians as they are to Jews. Non-Jews it is believed, should at least keep the seven laws of the covenant made between God and Noah; this will lead to a peaceful, civilised world. (Do not worship idols; do not blaspheme; do not murder; do not steal; do not commit immoral acts; do not be cruel to animals; set up and maintain courts of justice.)

An example of the wisdom of the Torah is the saying on the evil tongue: "An evil tongue hurts three people: the one who speaks, the one who listens and the one who is talked about."

Jews are sometimes known as "the People of the Book" because of the importance of the torah, and the written word in general, in Jewish life. The **Tenakh** is the name given to the Jewish Scriptures. It is a composite word uniting the three main divisions of the Scriptures; the **Torah**, the **Nevi'im**

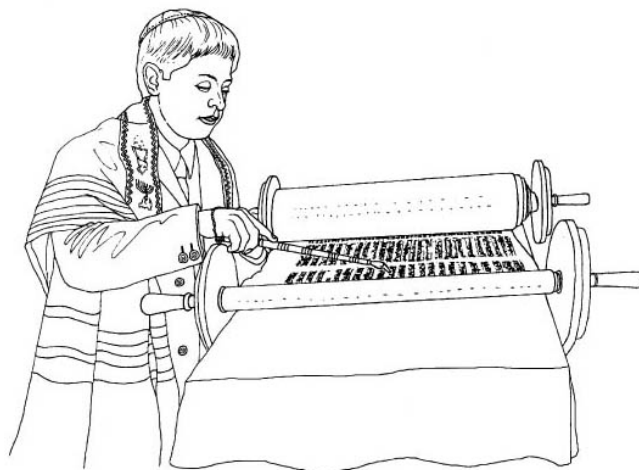
(the books of the Prophets) and the **Ketuvim** (the “writings”, e.g. Psalms, Esther, Job). The Tenakh contains the same books as the Christian Old Testament, but in a different order.

In every generation there have been teachers and commentators of the Torah, whose devotion to the Scriptures have effectively helped Judaism to flourish and develop. All religious Jews will affirm that the Torah is their central guide to life. Orthodox Jews asserts that every word of the Torah comes directly from God and is both perfect and unchanging. Progressive Jews will state that the Torah is the word of God mediated by human beings; they will distinguish between laws which remain true for all time, and those which were relevant only for their own time. You will, therefore, find, e.g. differences in the degree to which households observe the food laws.

**The Torah Scroll** The Torah Scrolls (**Sefer Torah**) contain the most important of the Jewish Scriptures, namely the five books of Moses; Genesis – Deuteronomy. “Sefer” means scribe, and the Torah will be hand written by the scribe on parchment in Hebrew, without punctuation or verse numbers. Writing the scroll is about one year’s work. The term Sefer Torah is used only for the handwritten scrolls.

The Sefer Torah is wound round two wooden rollers called the Trees of Life. When not in use, bells (rimmonim) and crowns (keter) are placed on the Trees of Life to remind one of the bells on the High Priest’s mantle and majesty of

## Reading the Torah Scroll



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the Torah. The Torah is covered by a mantle over which hangs a breastplate (tas), a reminder of the High Priest’s breastplate. (In Sephardic synagogues the scroll will be encased in a decorative wooden or metal case with a breastplate engraved on the outside. These scrolls are not removed from their casings when they are read.) Torah Scrolls are kept in a Holy Ark (Aron Hakodesh) at the eastern end of the synagogue and will only be removed to be read or to be processed around the synagogue in celebrations

such as Simchat Torah.

The Scroll is read using a **Yad**, which is a pointer with a hand on the end. This helps the reader to keep his place in the text without damaging the Scroll. Torah Scrolls are very valuable and will not normally be seen outside the synagogue, but small replicas are readily available for display purposes.

The Torah is regarded as the holiest of objects, and this can be seen by the way in which the Torah is written and cared for. Important outward signs of Judaism (the mezuzah and tefillin) include sections of the Torah. To sell a Torah is a sign of disrespect. When a scroll cannot be used because of its age it will be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

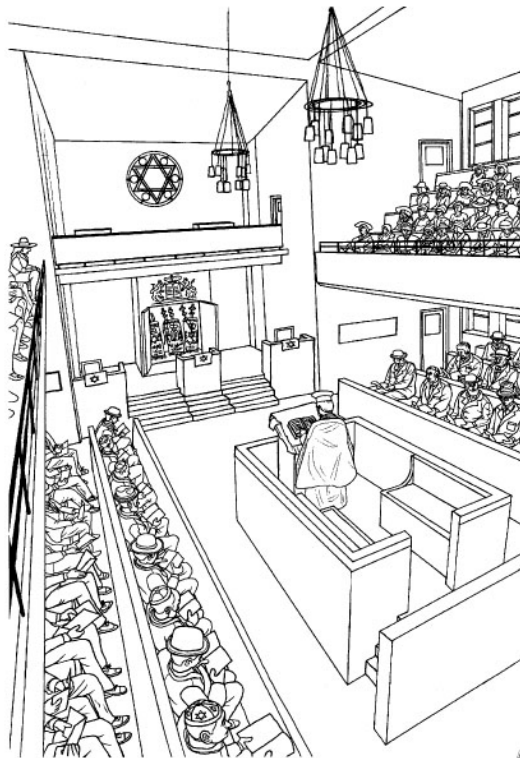
All Jews are encouraged to take times each day to study the Torah, and this may take place at home or in the synagogue, Very young children begin to learn through celebrating festivals in their own homes. Once they are old enough to learn Hebrew they will be enrolled in a **cheder** (Religion School) at the local synagogue (assuming they do not attend a Jewish day school). Here they will be prepared for their Bar (Bat) Mitzvah. Serious Torah Study begins in their late teens or early twenties when they (mainly men) will attend a **Yeshiva** full or part-time. Here most of the study will be of the Talmud. Some of the students will go on to become rabbis, but many are actually destined for other jobs. When they are older, they will still make time to study Torah. There are also many centres of higher study and students may choose to study in Israel for several years. Often, when you see orthodox Jews studying the Torah they will be swaying backwards and forwards (whether they are sitting or standing) it is said this is because the whole body should be involved in study

**Hebrew** is the ancient language in which the Jewish scriptures were written. By the time of Jesus a variant of a Semitic language, Aramaic, was the common language of the Jews. Hebrew remained the language of worship and study, but Jews used the language of their own country of residence for everyday living. In Eastern Europe a Germanic/Hebrew language came into being (Yiddish). A conscious decision was made by the politicians and settlers in Palestine, that Hebrew would be resurrected to become the official language of the modern state of Israel. New words are being constantly added to the language, to take into account developments since Biblical times. Hebrew is written from right to left. It has 22 letters in the alphabet – all consonants – and no capital letters. The vowels are added to words by a system of “dots and dashes”, but these were a later invention, and the Hebrew scriptures were written without vowels or punctuation. In Israel today you will find that newspapers, signposts, advertisements, notices etc are also written without vowels (this is known as “unpointed text”).

Aleph (A)	Beth (B)	Gimel (G)	Daleth (D)	Heh (H)	Vav (V)
א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו
Zayin (Z)	Cheth (Ch)	Teth (T)	Yod (Y)	Kaph (K)	Lamed (L)
ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל
Mem (M)	Nun (N)	Samekh (S)	Ayin (O)	Peh (P)	Tsaddi (Ts)
מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ
Qoph (Q)	Resh (R)	Shin (Sh)	Tau (T)		
ק	ר	ש	ת		
Final ך	Final ם	Final ן	Final ף	Final ץ	
ך	ם	ן	ף	ץ	

As the majority of Jews live outside of Israel they will continue to learn Hebrew specifically to read the scriptures and participate in worship. The **Bar Mitzvah** ceremony, at which a boy becomes an adult for religious purposes, includes a public reading of a (carefully prepared) Torah portion in Hebrew by the candidate.

## Synagogue interior (Orthodox)



## Jewish Worship

The **synagogue** or **Shul** is the Jewish “House of Assembly” for prayer, study and community meetings. However, it is generally accepted that in the Jewish tradition the home, rather than the synagogue, is the main focus of faith.

Synagogues originated in sixth century BCE Babylonia where the Exiles, deprived of their Temple in Jerusalem, met together as small local communities to worship God and preserve their faith. Many of the features of the synagogue recollect the Temple.

- The central feature of the synagogue is the **Ark** containing the Torah Scrolls which

will be at the eastern end (the Mizrah wall, facing Jerusalem). It will be curtained off with a parochet, a reminder of the curtain dividing the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. A copy of the 10 commandments will be nearby.

- In front of the Ark is the **ner tamid**, the everlasting light which is a reminder of the presence of God and of the ever-burning menorah of the Temple. The original menorah was made during the Exodus period and kept in the Temple at Jerusalem (Exodus chapter 25 versus 31-40, chapter 27 verses 20f). It was a huge seven branched candlestick and has become a well-known symbol for Judaism. Many synagogues and Jewish homes will have their own menorah today.
- The Torah Scrolls are read and the service led from a raised platform called a **bimah** which will be in the centre of the building. There may be a separate pulpit.
- In Orthodox synagogues men and women sit separately; the women may be in a **gallery** or behind a screen.

The whole layout of the synagogue points to the importance of the Torah in Judaism.

The synagogue has always had a strong **educational** role and it is here that Hebrew classes will take place as well as clubs connected with the

transmission of Jewish culture. Major synagogues may also have a **beth din**, or law court, where matters such as divorces or the licensing of kosher premises will be carried out. Some of the older synagogues may still have a ritual bath (a mikvah) attached, or hostels or a bakery for unleavened bread at Passover.

The keeping of **Sabbath** is linked both to the creation of the World and the Exodus from Egypt: God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The commandment for the Jews is also to rest on that day and keep it as a holy day is found in Exodus chapter 20 verses 8-11. The holy day is also a reminder of the nation's deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

Jewish days are counted from **sunset** to sunset (when three stars can be seen in the sky), Sabbath begins on Friday evening and goes through to Saturday evening; the day may thus begin at any time from 3pm to 10pm in this country, depending on the time of year.

The day is devoted to worship of God and this is marked in several ways:

- On **Friday** there will be a service at the synagogue. This is most often attended by men on their way home.
- In the **home** the family celebrate with the sanctification ceremony known as **Kiddush**. The home will have been cleaned, food prepared in advance and best clothes will be worn. The Sabbath is welcomed by the mother lighting and blessing two white candles. (The two candles represent the two occasions on which the commandment to celebrate the Sabbath is recorded in the Torah (Exodus chapter 20 verses 8ff, Deuteronomy chapter 5 verses 12ff).) The light of the

Sabbath is a symbol of the joy and goodness of the day. The father blesses his children, thanks God for his wife, and then blesses the wine before ritually washing his hands. This is followed by the blessing, breaking and eating of bread and salt; the two plaited **challah** loaves being a reminder of the manna in the wilderness. The meal continues with songs and celebrations.

Kiddush Cup



Challah Loaves



- The main **synagogue** service will be on the Saturday morning and lasts about two hours. It includes psalms, the shema, the Amidah (“standing” prayer), readings from the Torah, a sermon and the Kaddish. The service is led by the **rabbi** who will also preach the sermon. He will be assisted by a **cantor** who intones the prayers and several of the readings. The general flow of the service will be controlled by a committee of elders who select worshippers to undertake different duties. The rabbi will usually have undergone a lengthy training before ordination to the rabbinate and will be the accepted leader and teacher of the community. During the service the congregation will use a **Siddur (Prayer Book)** The Siddur contains the orders of service and prayers for use in both the synagogue and home. Most orthodox prayer books will be in Hebrew, which is still the language of worship, but may contain a translation in the language of the country. In England it is traditional to pray for the Queen and country in English although the rest of the service is in Hebrew; this was apparently originally to allay the fears of visitors who heard the monarch spoken of and might have assumed the worshippers were saying something treasonable.
- There are **laws** about not working on the Sabbath which means that food must be prepared in advance, lights will be on time switches, etc. These are seen not as negative, but as positive ways of setting aside time for God and for quality family time. The emphasis will be on joy.

Havdalah Candle and Holder



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- Sabbath ends with a short **Havdalah** service. A special candle is used, composed of several tapers plaited together. It is lit by a male who will bless the lights, some wine and spices in a special box. The box is passed round to be sniffed and the candle put out in the wine, which is then sipped. The candle represents the unity of the Sabbath and the spices the sweetness of the day, both of which (it is hoped) will be carried on into the new week. Havdalah means “separation” and it separates the Sabbath from the ordinary week.

For prayer Jews wear a tallit and tefillin:

**Tallit (Prayer Shawl)** The tallit is worn by Jewish males over the age of thirteen for prayer on weekdays, Shabbat and festivals. (In the Reform Tradition woman may also wear one.) Tallits may be full size shawls or like a small scarf. They are white with blue or black stripes and may be made of wool, cotton or silk (but never a mix). The two short ends of the tallit have fringes, and at each of the four corners is a **tzitzit** composed of eight threads and five knots. The numerical value of the word “**tzitzit**” is 600 (each letter has a number value) and, this added to the

## Tallit



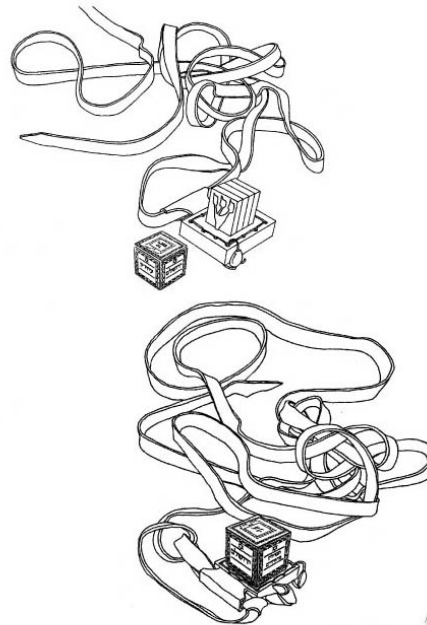
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**Tefillin (Phylacteries)** The commandment to wear tefillin is found in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 8. Like the tallit, they are worn by Jewish males after their Bar Mitzvah. They are two small leather boxes with long straps, one of which is worn on the forehead and one on the left arm during weekday prayers (**not** Shabbat or festivals). Inside the tefillin are four passages from the Torah in Hebrew; Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4-9, chapter 11 verses 13-20, Exodus chapter 13 verses 1-10, chapter 13 verses 11-16. The Shel Yad (on the arm) points towards the heart, showing that a person's emotions and actions are dedicated to God. The Shel Rosh (on the forehead) shows God is always in the worshipper's thoughts.

**Kippah (Skull Cap)** The skull cap is also known as a yarmulke or a cappall. It is worn by Jewish men and boys as a reminder of God's presence with them. Orthodox Jews cover their head at all times, but Progressive Jews will only wear the kippah when worshipping at home or in the synagogue. The kippah has many different designs, it is most commonly made of velvet, satin or crochet and may have Jewish symbols or patterns on it. Any hat may be worn to cover the head, but the kippah is the most common. All men (Jewish or not) will be required to cover their head in a synagogue and synagogues often have cardboard kippahs available for visitors.

sum of the knots and threads, makes 613, the total number of commandments in the Torah. The tallit is pulled up over the back of the head during prayer, when it becomes a reminder of the shelter and comfort of God's protection over the believer. The commandments to wear the tallit may be found in Numbers chapter 15 verse 38, Deuteronomy chapter 22 verse 12. The tallit may often be buried with its owner as their shroud.

## Tefillin



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## The Jewish Home

**A Jewish home can be recognised by the presence of a Mezuzah .**

The mezuzah is a small box fixed onto the doorposts of Jewish homes (with the exception of the bathroom and cupboards). It is fixed just above head height on the right hand post with the top tilted to the left. It thus “points” to God’s presence in the building. The mezuzah case may be simple or highly decorative and will have the Hebrew word for “Almighty” (Shaddai), or its initial letter, as part of the design.

Inside the box is a tiny scroll on which is written the **Shema**. (The Shema is the prayer which is recited by Jews every morning and evening and as they die. It consists of Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4-9, chapter 11 verses 13-29 and Numbers chapter 15 verses 37-41. It is the key Jewish statement of faith.) Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 9 instructs the Jews to fix the word of the Lord to their doorposts; the mezuzah is the practical outworking of this. Some Jews may kiss or touch the mezuzah every time they pass it.

A blessing is said when the mezuzah is hung, and some Jews hold a dedication ceremony.

Mezuzah



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## The Shema

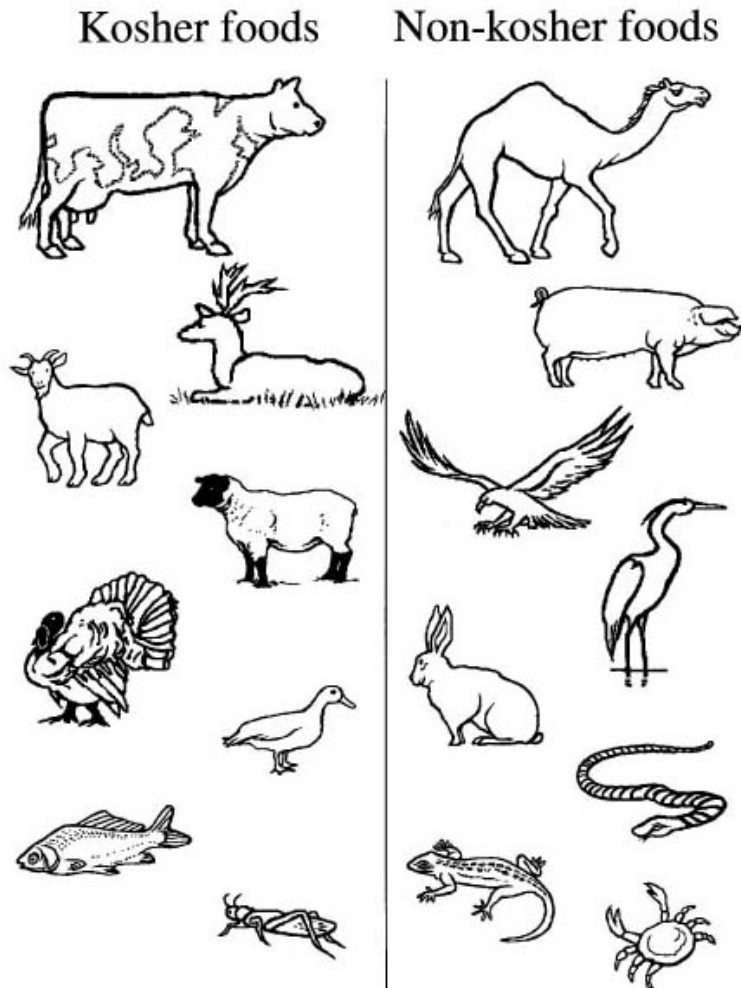


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SOUTH ALABAMA

The home is central to Jewish worshipping life, so children really experience and live out their faith as they grow. This also gives a key role to the mother of the family in nurturing her children in the Jewish ways. One important area is the keeping of the law of **kashrut** (kosher), that all food should be “fit” and

“proper”. These dietary laws are quite detailed and may be observed differently in different households. There are several key laws to observe:

## Kashrut



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- Leviticus chapter 17 verse 11. Blood is the source of life, and rightly belongs to God. Any meat eaten is first soaked and salted to remove the blood. Animals will be killed by the shechitah method (slitting of the throat).
- Exodus chapter 23 verse 19, chapter 34 verse 26. Milk and meat dishes must be kept separate. Most kosher households will possess two (colour-coded) sets of crockery, cutlery and cooking and washing utensils as well as separate cupboards, sinks etc if there is enough space. There are also rules (which may vary) about not taking milk or milk dishes for at least three hours after a meat meal, or meat for at least half an hour after a milk meal.
- Leviticus chapter 11 states the categories of animals allowed and those not (treifa). Fish must have both fins and scales (e.g. no shellfish), it may

be cooked with milk, but not eaten at the same meal as meat. Animals to be eaten must both chew the cud and have cloven hooves, e.g. sheep, goats, cows, deer. Most domestic birds are kosher, but not birds of prey. Eggs of kosher birds may be eaten, as long as they do not have a blood spot on the yolk.

- Genesis chapter 1 verse 29 allows the eating of all vegetables and fruit. They are considered neutral (pareve), and may be eaten with meat or milk.

The food laws ensure that God is consciously remembered in the Jews' everyday actions, respect is given to the Creator, and His creation is not taken for granted. Keeping the laws of kashrut also encourages self-discipline.

The home is also the focus of a Jew's prayer life. **The three daily prayers** take place in the early morning (shacharit), afternoon (mincha) and evening (ma'ariv), and are prayed towards Jerusalem. Whilst praying the Jew will wear his kippah, tallit and tefillin (see above). There are set prayers used to accompany the ritual actions in putting on the tefillin and tallit and suggestions for prayer are found in the Prayer Book (Siddur), but spontaneous prayer and praise is also important.

There are no rules governing the way women must pray or when they must do it; they are expected to fit their prayer life around their domestic duties.

## Jewish Festivals

**Jewish Festivals** occur on set days in the lunar calendar but appear to fluctuate by up to a month against the Gregorian calendar. Jews date their years from creation, thus 2007 is 5767. Sabbath is seen as a weekly festival, but there are other key annual festivals, which tell the story of God's relationship with His covenant people:

- **Passover** (Pesach) in March-April is the first festival of the year. Originally a harvest festival, it celebrates the deliverance of the Hebrew nation from Egypt in the Exodus and is the key festival of the Jewish faith, celebrating the independence of the nation, under God. The name comes from the story of the angel of death "passing over" the Hebrews' houses in Exodus chapter 12 when he killed all first-born in the land of Egypt. It is also known as the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Exodus chapter 12 verses 14-20), and the home will be prepared for the seder by removing all traces of yeast. Special crockery will be used just for this festival. Jews throughout the world will follow the same order (seder) of celebration. The Seder meal is held on the first night of Passover (Pesach). In it Jews follow the story of Exodus in a book called the **Haggadah**. The story is told by questions and answers. Symbolic foods are used and placed on a **Seder Plate**:



- the Passover celebration (Seder) three matzoth will be used and placed in a special matzah cover which has three compartments.
- g) Four glasses of wine will be drunk.
  - h) The seder is followed by a meal. Passover has many key themes: freedom, deliverance, witness and community.
- **Shavuot** comes fifty days after Passover. It's title means "feast of Weeks" and it falls after a week of weeks (i.e. 7x7 days) after Passover. It may also be known as Pentecost (meaning 50<sup>th</sup> day). See Leviticus chapter 23 verses 15-21, which shows the origin of this festival is the offering of the first-fruits of the grain harvest. It also celebrates the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. The book of Ruth is read in the synagogues at this time. Dairy foods will be on the menus (to show the Torah is like "milk and honey"). Homes and synagogues are decorated with flowers and greenery.

- **Sukkot** (September/October) had its origins in the Festival of the Grape Harvest but is now the festival of the Exodus; Leviticus chapter 23 verses 33-43. Jews forsake their homes to live in simple huts or lean-to shelters (sukkahs) made of tree branches and greenery which will be erected in their garden or perhaps on the roof of their house. These are reminders of the desert wanderings in tents, and the stars should be visible through the roof of the sukkah. Daily the **lulav** is waved in the synagogue (myrtle, willow and palm branches) with an etrog (a citrus fruit). (The palm is the spine – Jews should work straight and true in life. The myrtle leaves are shaped like eyes – Jews should see clearly and with understanding. The willow leaves are the shape of lips – Jews should speak with truth and with fairness. The etrog is the heart – Jews should have an open, kind and loving heart.) They are waved to the four points of the compass to represent God's rule over the whole earth.

## Sukkah



Blowing a Shofar during Rosh Hashanah



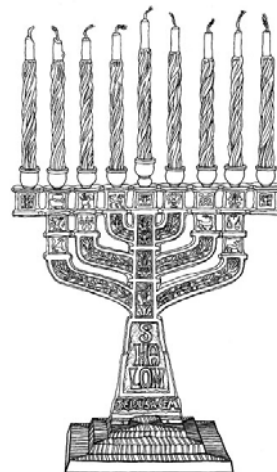
- **Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (September).** Leviticus chapter 23 verses 26-32. Rosh Hashanah is Jewish New Year, it proclaims God's creation of the world and His continuing rule over it. The festival is marked by the frequent blowing of the Shofar. It is the beginning of the High Holy Days or Days of Awe, during which Jews should be involved in much soul-searching, putting their affairs in order and seeking the reconciliation of disputes and quarrels. It is also a time for wishing others a "good and sweet new year" and this will be accompanied by eating apples dipped in honey.

The last of the ten days is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is a day of total fasting and abstinence, spent in the synagogue. Jews, having put themselves right with their fellow men, now make peace with God. The book of Jonah is read and the shofar is sounded to mark the passing of the old year.

**Shofar (Ram's Horn Trumpet)** Shofar means "hollow". The Shofar is an hollowed out horn from a kosher animal, usually a ram. It can be any length but must not be damaged and must not have an artificial mouthpiece attached. It is very difficult to blow! The Shofar is sounded for a month before Rosh Hashanah (New Year) in the morning services (except Shabbat and the eve of the festival). It will be blown repeatedly on Rosh Hashanah, marking the beginning of the ten day period of penitence. It is blown again at the end of this time, on Yom Kippur.

- **Hanukkah (November/December).** This festival is of minor importance as it is not featured in the Torah. It has, however, become a popular one in Primary School RE! Its name means "Feast of Dedication" and refers to the rededication of the Temple in 165 BC after it had been profaned by the country's Greek overlords. The story chiefly remembered at this time is not the battles of the Jewish Resistance fighters under Judah Maccabee, but the miraculous oil which lasted eight times longer than it should. The miracle is celebrated by lighting hanukkiah which symbolise the victory of light over darkness and of good over evil.

Hannukiyah



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**Hanukiah (Hanukkah Lamps)** This nine-branched candlestick is often designed in the shape of a menorah. It is used during the festival of Hanukkah when one candle is lit for each of the eight nights of the festival (i.e. one the first night, two the second, etc) using the ninth candle known as the "shamash" or servant. The candles should be placed in the hanukkiah from the right then lit from the left. The hanukkiah will be displayed in the window of the home. Often every member of the

household will have their own hanukkiah. The eight candles stand for the miracle of the oil which is celebrated at this festival, when a small container of consecrated oil lasted eight days instead of one

Dreidles



**Dreidel (Spinning Top)** This four-sided top is used to play games at Hanukkah. The four letters on the side are the initial letters of the Hebrew sentence “Ness Gadol Hayah Sham” (“a great miracle happened here”). This refers to the miracle of the oil celebrated at the Hanukkah. To play the game you need counters (often sweets are used). Each player puts one in the kitty then the first person spins N( ) means do nothing, G ( ) take all the kitty, H( ) take half the kitty, S( ) put a counter into the kitty. Everyone then puts in another counter, the second player spins etc. The object of the game is for one person to collect all the counters.

- **Purim** (February/March). Another minor festival, this celebrates the story of Esther and the deliverance of the Jews from persecution. The name means “Feast of Lots” because lots were cast to determine on which days the Jews would be eliminated. The megillah (scroll of Esther) is read in the synagogue and the congregation shows their support for Esther and Mordecai and their contempt for Haman by cheering or booing or waving their greggors (noisemakers shaped like old-fashioned football rattles) as their names occur. This is a time of parties and present giving.

## Rites of Passage

### Bar Mitzvah boy reading Scroll



The significant stages of a Jew’s life are marked by religious ceremonies:

- Baby boys are circumcised (the Brit Milah ceremony) at eight days old as a visible sign of the covenant between God and His people (Genesis chp 17 vss 10-12). Every Jew has a **Hebrew**

**name** as well as the name by which he is generally known (sometimes these are the same thing). The boy's Hebrew name will be announced at the Brit Milah (which usually takes place in the home or hospital), a girl's name will be announced in the synagogue. This name will be used in all religious documents, such as marriage certificates, and is usually the child's name and the name of the father e.g. Jacob ben Joseph, Sarah bat Joseph.

- At age 12 for a girl and 13 for a boy, children become adults in the eyes of the Jewish religion and are responsible for their own actions. This is marked by the ceremony of **Bar (Bat) Mitzvah** ("Son (daughter) of the Commandment"). This takes place in a normal synagogue service where the candidate is called up to sing the blessing over the Torah scrolls and read the Hebrew Torah portion for the day in front of the community. In many countries this involves learning to read Hebrew, as this will not be his first language. The Bar Mitzvah will also be asked to give a short sermon or lead a prayer – in some communities they may even be asked to lead most of the service! This is a time for great family and community celebrations. The female equivalent, the Bat Mitzvah, is practised in Reformed synagogues, but not by Orthodox communities where women do not take a public role in religious services. The Bar Mitzvah will be the first time that a boy wears his tefillin in the synagogue. From this time onwards he will count as a member of the minyan (the quorum of ten adult males necessary for congregational worship to take place).
- **Marriage** is seen as an ideal, and a positive duty by Jews. Most parents will hope and expect their children to find Jewish partners. A religious marriage ceremony can only take place if both partners are Jewish. The marriage ceremony can only take place on certain days e.g. not Shabbat.

The couple will usually not see each other for a period beforehand and will fast in preparation for this new stage of their lives. The marriage may take place anywhere. The couple stand beneath a canopy (huppah) which symbolises the household they will form together. The ceremony includes: the exchange of rings, the reading of the Ketubah (marriage contract setting out the duties and obligations of the two parties), and the seven blessings recited over wine. Everyone remembers that this ends with the groom stamping on the glass to shatter it - this is a reminder of the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem and the message that even in joy there is sorrow

### Huppah



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- but it has come to take on other connotations - who will be “master” in the new relationship.
- In Judaism there is great concern for a **dying** person who will be given all comfort and care, but once they die they are in God’s hands, and attention is focussed on the bereaved. As death approaches the dying person recites the Shema - the statement of faith. The body is buried the same day if possible, because it is disrespectful to leave a person unburied. The body is carefully washed and enclosed in simple shrouds and the tallit. A coffin will only be used if the local law requires it. At the service psalms are recited and a eulogy given. A period of intense mourning (Shiva) follows when family members sit for seven days at the home of the deceased, they eat foods symbolic of death and regeneration ( e.g. eggs) and recite the Kaddish. The Kaddish is the prayer of the dead but makes no mention of death or dying, instead it is exultant praise of God. Less intense mourning will continue for thirty days, or for a whole year in the case of a parent. These stages of ritual mourning mark the gradual return of the bereaved to normal life and help them to work through their grief with the support of the community. (Find the Kaddish at <http://www.jewfaq.org/prayer/kaddish.htm> )

## A Way of Life

The foundation of Jewish life is belief in the one God who is the creator and sustainer of the world, and the covenant relationship between God and the Jewish people. The relationship with God is set out in the Torah. For Jews the Torah is relevant and speaks to every generation as a framework for righteous living. Present day social, moral and ethical issues are addressed within the context of the people’s relationship with God, so that the whole of life is seen as giving people opportunities to serve God in every aspect of their lives.

Key Jewish values are **justice and righteousness**. Justice recognises that all human beings have six fundamental rights: to life; possessions; work; clothing; shelter; leisure and liberty. This means that a Jew should not e.g. involve himself in unfair business competition, lying and deception etc, but will respect other people in his dealings with them. The principle of righteousness takes justice further. It rests on the belief that ownership of everything lies with God, and thus property and possessions should be treated as held in trust from Him. In practical terms this means such things as giving alms without taking account of the creed or nationality of the needy, or avoiding waste or needless destruction of the material world.

“**Love your neighbour**” is an important Jewish teaching, which underpins all human relationships. This includes love of self in a positive sense i.e. enjoying life and caring for one’s body as a gift from God.

*Here is a selection of other sayings from the Talmud you may like to discuss:*

“An evil tongue hurts three people: the one who speaks, the one who listens, and the one who is talked about.”

“When a person appears before the Throne of Judgement, the first question asked is not “Have you believed in God?” or “Have you prayed or performed ritual acts?” but “Have you dealt honourably in all your dealings with your fellow?”.

“Charity knows neither race nor creed.”

“The world exists for the sake of three things: the study of Torah, the worship of God, and acts of loving kindness.”

“Who is the bravest hero? He who turns an enemy into a friend.”

“Whether Jew or non-Jew, man or woman, rich or poor, it is according to deeds that God’s presence descends.”

“One is not permitted to eat until one has fed one’s animals.”

“Do not limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time.”

**and**

“Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.”