

# Unity of Faiths - Judaism

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## INTRODUCTION

Judaism is one of the world's oldest religions. It began in the Bronze Age (approximately 2000 - 1500 B.C.). Despite Judaism's diversity, all of its forms revere the Jewish Scriptures and believe in one God. Because of its emphasis on Scripture, Judaism is referred to as a "religion of the book". Judaism, moreover, is unique among the world's religions because both Christianity and Islam trace their heritage to Judaism. Both of these faiths accept the Jewish Scriptures, as well as many Jewish teachings and customs.

The words *Hebrew*, *Israelite*, *Jew* and even *Israeli* describe groups of people from different times in the history of Judaism. The *Hebrews* were members of the various tribes who accepted Yahweh (misread as Jehovah in English) as their one god. The term Hebrew is usually used to describe the Jews who lived from the earliest times to the end of the second millennium B.C.E. In Genesis 10, a book of the Hebrew Bible, Eber is said to be an ancestor of the Hebrews.

The term *Israelite* describes two groups of people. In general, the Israelites were the descendants of the Hebrews, probably joined by other people, who created the united nation of ancient Israel around 1025 B.C.E. The word is also used to describe the people who inhabited the Northern Kingdom of Israel from about 922 to 722 B.C.E.

The word *Jew* comes from the term *yehudah*, or Judah. Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel that existed under the rule of kings from about 922 to 586 B.C.E., was named after one of the many tribes that formed the people of Israel. Eventually Judah became more formally a religious state, dedicating its people to live as God's loyal followers. In Latin, the name of this Southern Kingdom was *Judea*, and the term *Jew* comes from the Latin *Judaeus*, meaning "a resident of Judea."

Judaism is now practiced all over the world, and Jews are found in many countries throughout the world. The largest population of Jews is located in the United States, Israel, and a number of European nations. Although many Jews in modern times have moved to either Israel or the United States, there are still Jewish communities scattered in more than one hundred countries around the world. Approximately half a million Jews live in Asia.

Many Jews consider Judaism a culture. As Judaism expanded around the world, it gradually adopted many new cultural practices. Many Jews, regardless of the way they practice Judaism, incorporate elements from one of the two dominant Jewish cultures: Sephardic, and Ashkenazic.

**Sephardic Judaism:** During the centuries of Muslim rule, the Jewish community in Spain became quite large. Jews in Spain developed many common customs, as well as a language called Ladino, which combined Hebrew and Spanish. Jews in other nations under Muslim rule, such as Morocco, Greece, Egypt and other countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, developed a similar culture. Jews who can trace their heritage to these regions are known as Sephardic Jews, or Sephardim.

The Sephardic Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, and settled in North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Italy, and in the provinces of the Turkish Empire, especially Salonika and Istanbul. Later,

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they established communities in a number of European cities including: London, Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Bordeaux.

**Ashkenazic Judaism:** Jews from Central Europe, who developed very different cultural practices and traditions from those of the Jews in the Middle East, became known as Ashkenazi Jews. The Ashkenazim generally lived in Poland, Lithuania, Germany, Hungary, and other Eastern European countries. Their common language is Yiddish, which is a medieval form of German that includes many Hebrew words. The distinctive culture of Ashkenazi Jews in Europe largely ended with the Holocaust.

Ashkenazic Jews became one community by their strengthening conviction that they were the chosen people of Yahweh's covenant. The Ashkenazic Jews were people of traditional practices. They followed the demands of Torah (Law) and Mitzvoth (Commandments). Ashkenazic rituals were closely linked the ancient Palestinian tradition - those of the Jewish people in their homeland.

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## JEWISH HISTORY

*Now the Lord said to Abraham, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation..." - Genesis 12:1-2*

The history of Judaism is a long tale that begins in ancient Mesopotamia, which was located in present-day Iraq. Judaism has not a single founder, but many foundational figures, each of whom added something new to the faith. All Jews, despite their theological differences, believe that they are connected spiritually with the people whose stories are told in the Jewish scriptures.

**Abraham:** Judaism actually begins with a man named Abraham, who is also a foundational figure for Christianity and Islam. All three of these religions believe that Abraham was called by God and was the first person to practice monotheism, which is the belief in a single God. Abraham and his male descendants are called the "patriarchs." Most scholars believe that Abraham lived sometime between 1900 and 1700 B.C.

Abraham lived in a city called Ur of the Chaldeans, located in southern Iraq. He was born into a culture that was dominated by polytheism. He belonged to a group of people referred to as "Semitic," or "Semites." According to the Bible, God told Abraham and his family to leave their home in Ur and go to a new land. In exchange for their agreeing to leave their home, God promised to make Abraham and his family a great nation, and to bless the people of the earth through Abraham's descendants. The promise is known as the covenant. A covenant is a legally binding agreement or contract between two parties. The Jewish covenant is unique because it was entirely based on a belief in one God. God eventually led him to the land called Canaan, named after its original inhabitants, the Canaanites. (Later, the land of Canaan became known as Israel.) The Canaanites, like other people of the day, practiced polytheism.

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Because Abraham was an outsider, he was not always welcomed by the Canaanites. As Abraham and his family grew more prosperous, the Canaanites became afraid of their power. When a famine struck the Middle East, Abraham and his family had to leave Canaan for Egypt in order to find food. Even though Abraham had to leave Canaan, he knew that he would someday return, because God had promised the land to his descendants.

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, grew very old and had no children. So Sarah asked Abraham, who was then eighty six years old, to have children for her, through their female Egyptian slave, Hagar. Abraham had a child with Hagar, a boy named Ishmael. Over time, Sarah became jealous of Hagar and her son. She convinced Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away into the desert. God, however, sent an angel to protect Hagar and Ishmael. Today, the religion of Islam traces its heritage through Abraham's son Ishmael.



Abraham and Sarah eventually had a son named Isaac. Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born. Abraham was still forced to move around from place to place, since he did not have any land of his own. One day, God decided to test Abraham. God told him to kill his son Isaac as a religious sacrifice. When the father and son arrived at the chosen site, Abraham bound Isaac and placed him upon an altar. As Abraham raised his knife, God sent an angel to stop him. God praised Abraham because he had not withheld his son, and sent a ram to take Isaac's place as the burnt offering. Judaism views this incident, commonly referred to as the "binding of Isaac," as one of the most important events in Jewish history. Abraham was willing to give up his son to obey God. Both Christians and Muslims also view this incident as a foundational event in history, and regard Abraham's faith in God's promise as a model of perfect obedience that should be imitated today.

**Isaac and Jacob:** Isaac too, is considered one of the great patriarchs of Judaism. Isaac married a woman by name Rebecca and had Jacob and Esau, they fought incessantly even while in Rebecca's womb. Isaac favored Esau over the gentler and quiet Jacob. However, when Isaac grew old and blind, and the time came for him to bless Esau with his birthright, Rebecca tricked him into giving the blessing to Jacob instead. Esau returned from the hunt, was upset, and vowed that he would kill Jacob as soon as his father died. Jacob fled to go live with his uncle Laban, who put him to work for his own profit.

While Jacob lived and worked in Haran, he wished to marry his uncle's daughter Rachel, but was tricked into marrying her sister Leah instead. He had many children. Eventually he also married Rachel and had a son, Joseph. After twenty years he fled Laban's authority to return to the land of Canaan.

On the way to South Canaan, Jacob decided to spend the last night alone before he met Esau. "A man" wrestled with Jacob all that night. When daylight was about to break, the "man" asked Jacob to let go of him. Even though Jacob was wounded in his thigh, he did not release him, and said, "I will not release you until you bless me." Jewish tradition holds that the "man" was, in fact, an angel of God. The angel's blessings came in the form of significant change of name: The angel said, "Your name is no longer Jacob, but rather Israel (Yisrael), for you have contended with God and with men and you have prevailed." The name Yisrael means

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“one who wrestles with God” (some translate it “one who persists for God,” or “prince of God.”) Jacob’s descendants, then became the “children of Israel,” and every one of Jacob’s sons (except Joseph and Levi) later grew up to become the leader of a major tribe. After this, Jacob was sometimes called “Israel” and sometimes “Jacob.”

*Joseph:* Joseph was Jacob’s first born with Rachel and was clearly his favorite child. Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him. Joseph told everyone about his dreams in which his brothers and even his parents, bowed down to him. His brothers finally plotted against him, and, when they had the chance, captured him and sold him as a slave to a group of travelling traders and returned home with his famous many-colored coat soaked in the blood of a goat. Jacob believed that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal and grieved for his lost son.

Meanwhile, Joseph was brought to Egypt, where he ended up in the home of Potiphar, an influential member of the Pharaoh’s court, and was soon given authority over the entire household. Later he was accused of taking liberties with Potiphar’s wife and thrown into a dungeon. In the prison, with God’s help, he could interpret accurately, the dreams of two other inmates, a cupbearer and a baker. He was then put in charge of all the prisoners. Two years later, the Pharaoh himself had a series of dreams which no one else in the kingdom could interpret. The cupbearer remembered Joseph and recommended him to the Pharaoh.

The Pharaoh had dreamt that seven lean cows consumed seven fat cows, and then seven withered ears of grain swallowed seven full and ripe ears of grain. With God’s help, Joseph explained that following seven years of abundance, there would be seven years of famine in the land of Egypt. He then encouraged the Pharaoh to plan for the bad years by storing food during the years of plenty. He further indicated that this planning will enable Egypt to gain power during bad years, since people from near and far would come to Egypt for food. The Pharaoh chose Joseph as his second-in-command over all of Egypt.

Joseph’s interpretation of the Pharaoh’ dream came to pass, and after seven years of bounty, during which Joseph organized the store housing of produce, the land was struck with a terrible drought. The people of Egypt and the outlying areas traded their riches and their lands to the pharaoh for food. Before long, Joseph brothers arrived from Canaan, sent by Jacob to buy grain. They did not recognize Joseph, but Joseph certainly recognized them, and as they bowed before him, his childhood dream came true. However, time had changed Joseph, instead of ill-treating his brothers, he acted compassionately. The Pharaoh permitted Joseph to bring his newly re-discovered family to Egypt and gave them fertile land called Goshen.

*The Enslavement and the Exodus* (1200 B.C.): Early records tell of a people who appeared in Egypt in the fifteenth century B.C.E. called *Apiru* or *Hapiru* - which may be the origin of the word “Hebrew”. The word “Hapiru” seems to have indicated a social class rather than a particular clan or family and some scholars note that the word “Hapiru” may have meant “refugee” or “someone on the fringe of society” in ancient Canaanite language.

Over time, the relationship with the Egyptians and the *pharaoh* became strained. The new pharaohs who ruled after Joseph’s death did not favor the Hebrews. The Egyptians began to fear the Hebrews because they were so numerous. The story of the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt is known as the Exodus. The Exodus is the most important event in Judaism. Exodus is a Greek word that means “to leave” or “going out”. According to the Scriptures, the

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Hebrews were forced to build cities for the pharaohs. Two of these cities, Pithom and Rameses (Exodus 1:11), have possibly been built by the Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses II (1290-1224 B.C.). Because Rameses II named the city of Rameses after himself, many Jews and biblical scholars believe that the Exodus took place during his reign.

**Moses:** The pharaoh was afraid that, because the Hebrews were so numerous, they would take over the country. To limit their numbers, he ordered that all male Hebrew children be put to death. A Hebrew woman defied this order, and attempted to save her son by placing him in a basket and setting it adrift in the Nile River. The pharaoh's daughter found the child and decided to adopt him. She named him Moses. When Moses became an adult, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Feeling a connection with his own people, although he had been raised among Egyptians (Exodus 2:10), Moses grew angry and killed the Egyptian, hiding the dead man's body in the sand. When his crime was discovered, the pharaoh ordered that Moses be executed for the murder. Moses fled Egypt. Moses eventually reached the desert of Midian, which is located in a region known as the Sinai Peninsula or Egypt. There he married a woman named Zipporah, and became a shepherd, working with his father-in-law, Jethro. One day, Moses was watching his flock on the mountain that is usually referred to as Sinai. Moses saw that a bush was on fire, burning, but was not consumed by flames. Moses became curious, and climbed farther up the mountain to see the bush more closely. God himself, in the form of an angel, appeared to Moses in the burning bush. God told Moses to come no closer, and to remove his sandals because he was standing upon holy ground. As the Bible explains, God said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. God then said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings" (Exodus 3:6-3:7) God told Moses to return to Egypt and ask the pharaoh to let the Hebrews go into the desert to worship God.

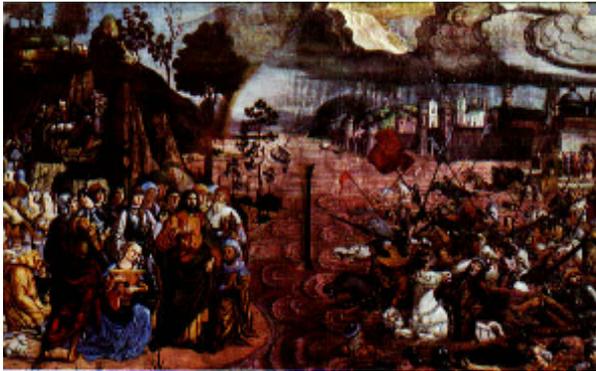
God offered Moses a sign to prove that He would be with him: When Moses brought the people out of Egypt, they would worship God on the very mountain on which he was now standing. Moses then asked God to reveal His name, in case the Hebrews asked for the identity of the deity who had sent Moses to them. God said to Moses: "I am Who I Am". He told Moses to tell the Hebrews: "I Am has sent me to you."

In Hebrew, the name "I Am Who I Am" consists of the four letters "YHWY" and is pronounced "Yahweh." To show respect for God, Jews normally do not say this divine name when they pray or read the Bible. Instead, they replace the vowels of the name "Yahweh" with the vowels for the Hebrew word Lord, and say "Adonai".

Moses returned to Egypt and asked the pharaoh to let the Hebrews go into the desert to worship their God. The pharaoh refused. God then sent ten miraculous plagues upon the Egyptians to convince them to release the Hebrews. The tenth plague caused the death of the firstborn of every house in Egypt. God told the Hebrews to smear lamb's blood on their doorposts, so the angel of death would pass over their homes and spare their children. God also commanded the Hebrews to celebrate this event each year by holding a commemorative meal to remember God's deliverance of the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt. This meal of roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread is still celebrated by Jews around the world each year; it is called Passover.

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After the last plague, the pharaoh finally agreed to release the Hebrews. He changed his mind after the Hebrews left Egypt, however.



He sent an army to follow and destroy Moses and his people. The Egyptians trapped the Hebrews beside a body of water known as the "Sea of Reeds." According to the biblical account, God intervened to save the Hebrews by parting the waters, allowing them passage through the "Sea of Reeds." When the Egyptian army tried to follow, the waters closed and the soldiers drowned. Moses and the Hebrews continued their journey to the

mountain where Moses had seen the burning bush and heard the voice of God.

When the Hebrews reached Mount Sinai, God gave Moses a code of laws for the Hebrews to follow. God commanded him to build a portable structure known as the Ark of the Covenant that represented God's presence in the Hebrews' camp. At God's command, Moses selected and ordained priests to supervise worship rituals and to protect the Ark of the Covenant. The Hebrews were also instructed to build a portable tent shrine, known as the Tabernacle, to house the Ark of the Covenant. This shrine was dismantled whenever God told the Hebrews to move, and reassembled when they were ordered to stop.

When the Hebrews reached the land of Canaan, many refused to enter because they were afraid of the people who already lived there. Because of this disobedience, God punished the Hebrews by forcing them to live in the Sinai Desert for forty years. Because Moses had made God angry by showing unwillingness to follow God's will and continue leading the Hebrews, he was told that he would not be permitted to enter Canaan. Moses was commanded to appoint a successor to lead the people.

Joshua, a military and political leader from the tribe of Ephraim, became the next leader of the Hebrews, and led them into the land of Canaan after the forty years had passed. This period is known as the Conquest. The Hebrews fought the Canaanites because they believed that God had given them the land. Although the Hebrews managed to occupy much territory, and created what eventually became the nation of Israel, they were never able to remove the Canaanites from the land entirely. When the Hebrews failed to follow the Torah, God allowed the Canaanites to conquer them. When they repented, God sent leaders known as judges to save the Hebrews from their enemies. The period of the judges lasted for several generations, until the Hebrews asked God for a king to lead them.

Over time, a new group of people, the Philistines, began to push the Hebrews out of their land. The Hebrews realized that they needed a king and a professional army if they hoped to defeat their enemies. God chose a man named Saul to govern the Hebrews and lead them in battle. Although Saul defeated his enemies, he did not kill the king and his subjects. Because of Saul's disobedience, he was replaced by a new king named David.

David, who was originally a shepherd, became famous for accepting the challenge to fight a Philistine giant named Goliath. Refusing to wear armor, David fought Goliath with just a slingshot and some stones, and killed Goliath with a single stone. Because of his bravery,

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David rose rapidly in Saul's army. Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in a battle with the Philistines, and David became king of the Hebrews.

At that time, the Hebrews were divided into twelve different tribes. Each tribe traced its heritage to one of the twelve sons of the patriarch Joseph. The two southern tribes were called



Judah, and the ten northern tribes were known as Israel. David united the twelve tribes and created the Nation of Israel. He built a new capital in the city called Jerusalem and brought the Ark of the Covenant there. David sought God's forgiveness whenever he sinned. For this reason, God frequently punished David, but promised him that his sons would continue to rule in Jerusalem. David wanted to build a temple in Jerusalem to honor God. Although God denied David's request, God promised that David's son would build a temple one day. When David's son Solomon became king, he

constructed an elaborate temple in Jerusalem. In order for King Solomon to carry out his ambitious building projects throughout Judea, he raised taxes and drafted a number of people into enforced labor. When King Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king. The people went to Rehoboam to ask him to ease the workload Solomon had imposed. The king responded quite rudely, he was surprised when almost all the tribes rebelled against him. The rebelling tribes invited a man named Jeroboam to be their new king, and they declared a separate Israelite kingdom, also called the Northern Kingdom. A hundred years of unity was shattered, and from then on, the Israelite Kingdom and Judean Kingdom were almost constantly at war with each other. Jeroboam built two temples in the Israelite Kingdom in order to keep his subjects from visiting Jerusalem, which was in Judea.

The Northern Kingdom was ruled by many different families over the next 200 years with no one family maintaining kingship for very long. The Southern Kingdom continued to be ruled by descendants from the house of David. Most of the kings led people into idolatry and questionable ethics. A notable exception to this line of poor rulers was King Josiah, a very innovative king who began to rule around 640 B.C.E. During his rule, a missing book of the Bible (probably the book of Deuteronomy), was "miraculously" recovered leading to great religious change - the emphasis on the centrality of Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Temple became the only place where the ancient Israelites were permitted to make sacrifices to God.

During this time, the surrounding kingdoms of Assyria, Egypt and Babylonia were constantly at war with each other. Josiah tried to stop the Egyptians from helping the Assyrians to fight the Babylonians. It worked out for a time, but then Josiah got killed, Egypt took over the Judea, and finally Babylonia invaded, pushing out Egyptians. The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah, a son of Josiah, on the throne as puppet king. Around 587 B.C.E. Zedekiah, rebelled against the Babylonians. After a long siege, Nebuchadnezzar's troops broke through the walls of Jerusalem. They killed Zedekiah's children in front of him, blinded him, and burned down the first temple. Because Jerusalem was the site chosen for the Temple, it remains an important city for Jews today, even though the temple was destroyed a long time ago.

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Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple signaled a radical change for the Children of Israel: there were now more Jews in exile than in Judea, mostly in Babylon, though some lived in Egypt and other lands. The Jews who were taken to live in Babylon lived fairly well. They were allowed to own land, farm and practice Judaism, although for the first time in Jewish history, the practice no longer included animal sacrifice.

The exile from Judea lasted almost 50 years, until 539 B.C.E., when Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylonia. Under a remarkable policy of ethnic tolerance, Cyrus gave permission for the exiled Jews to return to Judea and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The returning Jews built a second temple in Jerusalem. In 332 B.C.E. the Persian Empire was conquered by the Greeks. At around 250 B.C.E. the biblical texts were translated for the first time. There is a wonderful story that 72 scholars, each separated from the other, miraculously translated the texts exactly the same way, proving that this one translation was correct.

This period of relative calm and peace came to an end when Judea fell under control of the Seleucid emperor Antiochus IV, around 176 B.C.E. Life for Jews got worse after Antiochus looted the temple, removed the current High priest, and then replaced him with a highest bidder, who probably wasn't even an official priest. After 15 years of increasingly harsh rule under Antiochus, rebellion broke out. A small town Jewish Priest named Mattathias used guerilla warfare tactics to attack the Seleucid armies and the false high priests, as well as destroy the Greek pagan temples. Mattathias died but his sons fought on, especially Judah the Maccabee. A year later, Jerusalem was recaptured by the religious Jews and the temple was rededicated, ending about 175 years of Greek rule over the city, a feat that is to this day celebrated on Chanukah. After a short while, all but one of the Maccabee brothers had died or been assassinated, and the last Maccabee, Simon, decided to appoint himself as king. For the first time in nearly 400 years, Judea was ruled by Jewish king, lasting a century, two major parties grew within Judaism: the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Sadducees fought with the Pharisees over philosophy, religious practice, and control of the Temple compound. There were also class differences; the Sadducee priests were probably aristocratic, while the Pharisees were mostly scribes and scholars who later transformed into the "rabbis". None of the Jewish groups liked the Romans. Gangs of Jews, called the Zealots, began to appear, violently attacking Jews who were known to be collaborating with Romans. In 66 C.E. this popular uprising evolved into a full-scale war against Rome. It was incredibly disorganized. While various sections of Judean society agreed in the "freedom of Zion" (a slogan seen on coins dating from this era), they disagreed over who should lead the rebellion. In fact, near the end of the war, when the walls of Jerusalem were about to fall to the Romans, there were three factions in Jerusalem fighting for control of the Temple. In the end, Judea and Jerusalem were conquered on the day of Tisha B'Av in 70 C.E. by Titus, the son of the new Roman Emperor, Vespasian. The great Temple was destroyed and legions of Jews were marched over 1,500 miles back to Rome as prisoners and slaves.

After the second temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., most Judeans aristocrats and priests were led as slaves to Rome, along with the surviving treasures of the Temple. The Romans, in an attempt to blot out all traces of Judaism from the area, changed the name of Judea to Palestine. While Jews were allowed to remain Jewish and were allowed to live in Palestine, they were charged a special tax for the privilege. Sacrifices could no longer be offered at the temple, high priests were no longer available to decide how Jewish law should be interpreted.

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The Pharisees, who believed in the study of the written and oral Torah, were in a position to revitalize Judaism because their practices were not dependent on the physical location of the temple. A few synagogues were established around Palestine, where smaller, more prayer-study-based groups met. The sages of the Pharisees, who tended to be middle-class merchants or scribes, took the title "rabbi" (meaning the teacher), in order to help other Jews learn to study and practice a new kind of Judaism not dependent on the Temple.

There was a second revolutionary movement, actually much larger than the first one, led by Simon bar Kochba ("son of a star") from 132 C.E. to 135 C.E. , who was also considered to be a messiah by his followers, including the famous Talmudic scholar Rabbi Akiba, known as the Bar Kochba rebellion. It was quickly squashed by the immense power of the Roman army. Not only were the leaders killed, but Hadrian also deported almost every remaining Jew from the country, selling most of them as slaves. Fortunately, many rabbis and their students ended up in the Galilee, north of what was Judea. Without their homeland or the Temple, they focused on studying the Torah which they believed was passed down through the generations from Moses to them. The first section of oral Torah was finally written down around 200 C.E. by Yehuda haNasi (Judah the Prince), this work, which came to be known as the Mishnah ("that which is taught by repetition"), became the cornerstone of rabbinical thought and came to define non-Temple-based Judaism.

In the first few centuries of Common Era, the Romans prosecuted both the Christians and the Jews. Later in the fourth century, the vast empire split into two parts: the Western World (centered in Rome) and the Eastern World renamed the Byzantine Empire and centered in Constantinople (now Istanbul). The two empires fought each other and other invaders, many Jews chose to leave Palestine for better economic waters in Babylonia, Italy, Spain and even as far as Germany.

When Western Europe fell apart in the middle of the first millennium, it was replaced by many smaller countries ruled by kings, emperors, Tsars, and Kaisers. The Jews were second-class citizens in the Muslim world, but they were not even that in the Christian world. Judaism was extremely decentralized in Western Europe; with few or no great centers of learning or renowned rabbis. Life for the Jews of Western Europe went from bad to worse in 1095, when Pope Urban II promised salvation to any Christian who went to Palestine to fight (or convert) the Muslims and recapture the Holy land of Palestine for Christendom. Of course, anti-Jewish sentiment waxed and waned from country to country. Unfortunately, as soon as the Jews became too affluent and the non-Jewish community became in too much debt, the Jews' property was seized by the ruling powers. The Jews were either run out of town or killed. After the Jews were expelled from England in 1290, they were not allowed to legally re-enter the country until 1730.

In 1391, mobs of Spanish Christians perhaps fueled by resentment over the affluence of some Jews, rioted, seizing property and attacking Jewish communities. Some Jews took refuge in safer communities of North Africa while others converted to Christianity. By 1480, suspicion of 'conversos' (converts) was so great that Queen Isabella - a devout Catholic - decided that the allegations of hidden Jewish practices needed to be examined. The Catholic Church had long-before instituted a special corps trained to root out heretics, called the Inquisition. The Inquisition acted like a secret police and investigated every aspect of a suspected converso's life to ensure that they accepted Christianity completely. Many families tried to escape to the

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Netherlands or the New World, lands which came to be controlled by Spain but were out of the immediate purview of the Inquisition. The Inquisition – which targeted only Jews who had converted – spread slowly across Europe, and in later centuries even tracked down non-practicing Christians who had escaped to the Americas.

Finally after a century of anti-Jewish attitudes and policies, Queen Isabella and her husband King Ferdinand, urged by Father Tomas' de Torquemada, made a fateful decree in 1492. They ordered that within four months every Jew had to either convert to Christianity or leave the country. And so, the same month Christopher Columbus began his fateful expedition that ended in the Americas, over 200,000 Jews embarked upon a trail of tears looking for countries that would allow them entry. Many went to Portugal. Some of the Jews ended up in Turkey, many brilliant Jewish scholars fled to Safed, in Northern Palestine, creating a community that generated scholarship, poetry, and prayers that are still used today. Many other Sephardic communities flourished in peace and security for over 500 years, until the middle of the twentieth century, when they were destroyed in the Holocaust.

Polish and Lithuanian kings, like many other Christian rulers, invited the Jews to settle in their lands during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Over the centuries of relative freedom, the thousands of *shtetls* (Jewish communities of Poland and Russia) around Western Russia, Lithuania, and Poland came to form a federation called the Council of the Four Lands. The council, which acted like a behind-the-scenes independent Jewish Parliament, transcending national boundaries, ruled on legal issues concerning the Jewish people. Over time, Poland had slowly annexed increasing portions of the Ukraine. In 1648, the Ukrainian Cossacks rebelled, led by a man named Bogdan Chmielnicki. Poland allied with Sweden to fight off the rebellion; the Cossacks allied with Russia. The warfare was intense and both sides slaughtered the Jews. By some accounts, as many as 100,000 Jews died, and the fighting led countless thousands of Jews to flee to Germany and Lithuania. These areas became major centers for Jewish education and culture over the next 300 years.

Philosophers such as Rousseau suddenly started asking questions like, “Why not treat non-Christians the same as Christians?” Ideas such as these were outrageous for the day and reflected a revolution of thinking that came to be called the Enlightenment. The French revolution of 1789 changed the face of Europe, and the French declaration of the Rights of Man, which specifically notes that no one should be persecuted for their religion, brought enlightenment to the political arena.

In the 1770s, after years of fighting, Poland was partitioned and absorbed by Lithuania, Austria, and Russia. Russia had little interest in the Enlightenment or emancipation of the Jews, or just about anyone else, either. Trying to figure out what to do with the hundreds of thousands of Jews it had recently acquired, Russia set aside an area, called the Pale of settlement, inside which the Jews were allowed to live.

It was very difficult for Jews entering the mainstream, Christian, Western European culture of the nineteenth century. One response to these difficulties from the Jewish side was Reform Judaism, which tried to demonstrate that Judaism could conform to modern secular life. Many Western European Jews rejected the Reform movement's policies. The Neo-Orthodox movement agreed that Jews should learn the language of the land and have both religious and

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secular education. In the nineteenth century, in some countries like Austria, politicians began running on specifically anti-Jewish platforms. In the 1880s, the Russian government began tolerating and even sponsoring pogroms (massacres, or literally riots) directed at the Jews. Over the next few decades, hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed or maimed in these riots. Between 1880 and 1920, about two million Jews migrated to Palestine, Western European nations and to USA.

Herzl, known as the father of modern Zionism (the movement for a Jewish state), tried to talk the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire into giving up Palestine, to no avail. He discussed the problem with Pope Pius X, with no success. As pogroms became increasingly bad in Eastern Europe, Herzl approached England for assistance. Their offer: Jews could use Uganda as a temporary refuge until Palestine worked out. Many Jews sneaked into Palestine, where they were able to buy land and build settlements. By 1909, Jews bought enough empty land on the Mediterranean coast that they founded a new city, the first all-Jewish city in Palestine, called Tel Aviv.

***The Holocaust:*** By the early 1930s, much of the world had fallen into an economic depression. In Germany, Adolf Hitler rose to power. In the mid 1930s, Hitler's National Socialist party (Nazi) instituted laws that would make Jews miserable enough to emigrate. Concentration camps were created to hold anyone, Jewish or non-Jewish, considered dangerous. Some concentration camps became death camps, but some were simply sources of slave labor for the Germans. Finally in 1935, the Nazis instituted the Nuremberg laws, which did not allow for Jewish citizenship and prohibited mixed marriages. The Jews had no choice of converting or escaping. Many Jews left Germany during this time. On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1938, a nationwide pogrom was unleashed against the Jewish community, smashing windows, burning buildings, killing 91 Jews and arresting 30,000 others who were taken to concentration camps. By the end of 1939, emigration out of Germany was nearly impossible for the Jews, and the German government decided it was time to change their policy from terror to murder. Many Jews were routinely tortured and shot both in Germany and Poland, and Nazis killed more than 250,000 Jews in their communities within a few months. As World War II broke out, the Nazis instituted the same policies wherever they conquered. Once Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the Nazis accomplished even larger-scale murders. In 1942, Hitler met with a group of high ranking officials to prepare what they considered "the final solution of the Jewish problem". The goal: "extermination".

In the end, some six million Jews over a million and a half of whom were children – brought three new words into modern common language. The first word is "genocide", the extermination of an entire people, which had never been attempted on this scale before. The second word is "Holocaust," which, two millennia earlier, had been used to describe the ancient sacrificial offering that was completely burned when offered at the Temple. Even later, the tragedy became known by the Hebrew word, Shoah, which means "devastation". Today, Yom Ha-Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, is marked each year in the spring.

After the war, the British turned their attention once again to figuring out what to do with Palestine. A second Jewish military group, called the Irgun was fanatically anti-British; the Irgun carried out various violent acts against them. One such act was when they blew up a wing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, when 91 British soldiers were killed. On November 29, 1947, the USA voted for a plan to partition Palestine into two states, the small

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independent Jewish state of Israel and a larger Arab state. The following day, six countries – Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq – attacked Israel. Within weeks the Jews had actually captured a significant amount of land, and within months, the Arabs – while not defeated – agreed to cease fire.

### IMPORTANT JEWS IN THE MODERN ERA

*Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer* (1700 to 1760) was a highly charismatic leader whose legendary miraculous works led people to call him Ba'al Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name of God"), or simply by the acronym "the Besht." Ba'al' Shem Tov lived humbly as a teacher of children until his thirty-sixth birthday, when he revealed that he was a healer and began to gather a group of disciples. Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer mixed his magic with beautiful lessons on life, emphasizing a joyful – even ecstatic – connection with God through dance, song, and celebration. These lessons and ideals survived to help form the basis of Hasidism.

He argued that all things in the world are imbued with divine vitality and that this is the foundation of existence. The assumption of the Omnipresence of God in all things and in all dimensions of existence becomes a criterion for reevaluating the whole of human experience.

At a time when deep mystical spirituality was practiced only by an elite group of people, he taught that an intimate connection with God was available to everyone, that prayer shouldn't be restricted to certain times of the day, but that people could be in constant prayer, and that all life – even business transactions – could be performed with devotional joy.

*Moses Mendelssohn* (1729 – 1796) was a German philosopher, communal leader, proponent of Jewish emancipation, biblical scholar and translator. His first work was *Philosophical Dialogues*, which established him as one of the leading spokesmen on German enlightenment philosophy. In his subsequent works, he wrote on the immortality of the soul, the goodness of God, and he contended that God must necessarily guarantee that the soul after death will advance along the path to self-perfection and happiness. Mendelssohn wrote on a wide variety of subjects, including aesthetics and psychology.

In the 1770s Mendelssohn made use of his growing reputation as a philosopher to deflect anti-Jewish measures in Germany and Switzerland. His other important works are *on the civic improvement of the Jews*, *The searching for Light and Right* and *Jerusalem, or On Religious power and Judaism*. In the first section of the work Mendelssohn reaffirmed and elaborated upon his opposition to coercion in matters of conscience, grounding this opposition in the principle of the natural law, while in the second section he sought to show that such opposition is in harmony with "authentic" Judaism.

Mendelssohn has been called the first modern Jew. His pioneering attempts to combine enlightenment philosophy with traditional Judaism, continued observance of the law with participation in intellectual streams of European culture and loyalty to the Jewish community with political emancipation and liberalism are epochal.

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*Abraham Joshua Heschel* (1907 – 1972) was a religious philosopher. Born in Poland into a distinguished Hasidic family, he studied at the University of Berlin and taught the Talmud. In 1939, he escaped to England and then moved to the United States. Heschel's books cover a wide range of thought, philosophic and mystic. He is best known for his theological writings, often written in a poetic style with strong mystical influences, which include *Man is not alone*, *Man's quest for God*, *God in search of man* etc.

In his major work, *God in search of man*, Heschel asserts that the religious life of contemporary Jews is without fervor and inner conviction, a form of religious behaviorism. There is a need to rediscover the paths that lead to an awareness of God's presence in the world and in one's own life. The paths to such awareness are not those of rational argument but of existential decision making. Reason, however can function to clarify the alternatives among which we must choose.

According to Heschel, the first of the three such paths is that of reawakened religious emotions, the experiences of awe and reverence. These lead to an awareness of the grandeur of natural and human existence, of their mystery, and of their allusiveness to an ineffable reality. The second path to God is through the Torah: God's voice can be heard addressing us in the words of the Torah. The third path to the awareness of the presence of God is through the life of *mitzvoth* (biblical commandments and statutes), which begins as an experiment in living. The mitzvoth can evoke experiences of the sublimity and mystery of existence. Moreover the discipline of the mitzvoth enables people to control their darker impulses. We can become God's proxy in bringing redemption to the world by ridding the world of violence and oppression.

**Adin Steinsaltz:** Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (born in 1937) is one of the most influential and brilliant Talmudic scholars in history. He is also a writer on the Jewish mystical traditions. The author of over 50 books, he is best known for his translation and interpretation of the Talmud into Modern Hebrew and English, a task which he began over 25 years ago.

**David Ben-Gurion:** Rightfully known as Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) led Israel's War of Independence in 1948, and then he guided the country as Prime minister for the next 15 years. Ben-Gurion was a fiercely stubborn man, and his charisma and force of will often seemed to hold Israel together in difficult times. A staunch socialist, passionately Jewish but not religious, Ben-Gurion became the face of Israel in the 1950s and early 1960s.

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### MAIN SUB DIVISIONS OF JUDAISM

## Unity of Faiths - Judaism

During the modern period, which began around the eighteenth century in Germany, Judaism has increasingly adapted to the changing world by adjusting its beliefs. Today, there are four major sub-divisions of Judaism: (Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist).

**Orthodox Judaism:** As a response to the growth of Reform Judaism in Europe, Moses Sofer (1762-1839), a rabbi from Bratislava, in the area now known as Slovakia, called on all traditional Jews to make no compromise with modernity. He summoned them to keep themselves separate from reform-dominated communities if they did not want to lose their Jewish identity.

Orthodox Judaism is the traditional form of Judaism. Although Orthodox Judaism has changed over time to adapt to historical events and new circumstances, it has always remained firmly rooted in tradition. It attempts to follow many of the ancient laws that were preserved in written form in the Jewish Scriptures, as well as other laws that were passed down orally through successive generations of Jewish religious leaders called *rabbis*. Orthodox Jews rest on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, as commanded in the Jewish Scriptures. Hebrew, the language of the Jews, is still used in worship. Women in Orthodox Judaism must cover their heads and sit apart from men during worship. Men are required to keep their heads covered at all times to remind them that God is above everything. Orthodox Jewish men traditionally leave their beards and the hair in front of their ears uncut, in accordance with the Jewish Scriptures (Leviticus 19:27).

Many Orthodox Jewish communities use Yiddish in daily life, and speak Hebrew during worship services. Because Orthodox Jews follow strict dietary laws (*Kashrut*), they have traditionally lived apart from other people.

**Reform Judaism:** The early founders of Reform Judaism wanted to merge the Jewish faith with modern German culture. Many Jews wanted to remain Jewish, but wished to be identified first as citizens of Germany, and then as Jews. They were open to new scientific advances, such as the historical-critical study of religious texts and a more secular and historical outlook regarding the development of civilization and reject many of their ancestral traditions.

The Reform movement shortened the traditional Sabbath service and allowed Jews to use their own everyday language, rather than Hebrew, in worship. Men and women sit together in the synagogue as they worship with uncovered heads. Some reform congregations use organs and choirs, and services are usually held on Friday night. Reform Jews are not required to adhere to kosher food restrictions or follow the laws in the ancient traditions recorded in Talmud. Reform Judaism also ordains women as rabbis. This form of Judaism is especially popular in United States and Europe.

The name "Orthodox Judaism" was not used until the liberal movement known as Reform Judaism emerged in the early to mid-1800s. Once there was a new liberal movement, the more traditional form of Judaism needed a name to distinguish it from its less observant counterpart. Similarly, Conservative Judaism also emerged as a distinct subdivision of Judaism after the creation of Reform Judaism. It adopted the name "Conservative" to distinguish itself from both Orthodox and Reform Judaism.

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**Conservative Judaism:** Conservative Judaism is the largest branch of Judaism in the United States. The subdivision traces its origin to Jews in the nineteenth century who thought that the liberal Reform movement became too extreme. Conservative Judaism seeks to strike a balance between the strict beliefs of Orthodox Jews and the liberal practices of Reform Jews. Conservative Judaism believes that Judaism has always changed, and that Jews have adapted their laws and beliefs in order to make them relevant to the times. Like their ancestors, Conservative Jews believe that they must adapt Judaism to the modern world while maintaining continuity with past customs and traditions.

Many conservative Jews follow the regulations about kosher food and Sabbath observance that are found in the Jewish Scriptures and in a Jewish book known as the Talmud. Conservative Judaism has retained the traditional Saturday morning worship, and men cover their heads during religious services. Although Conservative Judaism is open to change, it emphasizes that study and discussion must precede any innovation. Many of the practices of Conservative Judaism are common to those of Orthodox Jews. Conservative Jews would claim, however, that their practices are less mechanical, or routine. Conservative Judaism also places a strong emphasis on Jewish community -building in the form of religious education for children, youth programs, women's groups and adult education.

**Reconstructionist Judaism:** Reconstructionist Judaism grew out of Conservative Judaism. It is the newest and smallest branch of Judaism. An American Conservative Jewish Rabbi named Mordecai M Kaplan (1881 - 1983), who taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, founded Reconstructionist Judaism. He considered Judaism both a culture and a religion. Kaplan thought that Judaism was an evolving religious civilization. In his view, Jews need to study the entire history of Jewish culture in order to know how to be Jewish, and he believed that Judaism periodically had to be updated.

Reconstructionist Judaism does not interpret the Bible and traditional Jewish texts literally. Kaplan also departed from traditional Judaism in a dramatic way when he denied that God had chosen the Jewish people as the line of descent that would come to occupy Israel and through which the Messiah would come. Kaplan taught that the Jewish people had always tried of their own accord to become the people of God. He also interpreted many elements of traditional Jewish belief, such as angels and the Messiah, as symbols, rather than as actual physical beings.

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1. Religions of the World - Judaism by Kenneth Atkinson.
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## THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

*Now the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." - Exodus 24:12*

Jews have traditionally learned about God by studying the written word. Jews also believe that God has revealed these teachings to messengers, in the words of prophets, and that

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these were collected in the Jewish scriptures. They describe the foundational beliefs and practices of the faith. Jews believe they are divine.

*The Tanakh:* According to some ancient Jewish traditions, a man named Ezra was largely responsible for collecting the Jewish Scriptures during the Exile. The Jewish Bible is actually a library of many books that consists of three parts: Torah, Writings and Prophets. Jews in the past referred to these books as the *Bible*, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word for "book". They also took the first letter of the Hebrew name for each of these three divisions of the Bible and inserted vowels to come up with the acronym *Tanakh*. Jews commonly use the word *Tanakh* to refer to their Scriptures. A few books of the Jewish Scriptures were written in Aramaic, which is a language related to Hebrew.

Christianity accepts the Jewish Scriptures as the word of God. . After Jesus' death, the Christians wrote books about Jesus and formed their own book of Scriptures. Christians began to refer to the Jewish Scriptures as the "Old Testament," and to their own writings as the "New Testament." The word *testament* is Latin for "covenant." Christians called the Jewish Scriptures the Old Testament, because they viewed these writings as God's first covenant with humans.

When the religion of Islam was founded in the early seventh century A.D., it, too accepted the teachings of the Old Testament. The Qur'an (or Koran), the sacred book of Islam, like the New Testament, frequently quotes from the Tanakh. The Tanakh, therefore, is unique, because it represents the basis for the world's three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The Jewish Tanakh is sometimes difficult to understand, many are actually collections of ancient material that was passed down through the generations orally before being put into writing. Each book of Tanakh was copied into ancient paper that was either made of reeds called papyrus or animal skin called parchment. The books were copied by hand. Sometimes, scribes added new material to these texts. The Book of Isaiah, for example, had to have been written by at least three writers, because it describes three different historical periods. The Scriptures are divided into three sections, known as the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings.

*Torah:* The first five books of the Jewish Scriptures are called the *Torah*, which is a Hebrew word that means "law." The Torah begins with a book called Genesis (*Bereisheet*). The book tells about the creation of the universe and the history of the first humans. Genesis also contains the early history of the Jewish people, and stories about Abraham and his descendants Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Because Genesis contains writings about the covenant with Abraham, it is one of Judaism's most important books. It ends with a description of Abraham's descendants living in Egypt.

The second book of the Torah is simply called the Book of Exodus (*Sh'mot*), because it tells the story about the departure or exodus, of Moses and the Hebrews from Egypt. It contains many laws, also called Torah, which were received on Mount Sinai. The most famous of these are the Ten Commandments.

Leviticus (*Vayikra*), the third book of Torah, is a detailed set of instructions about how to worship God. It includes many rules that tell Jews which foods they are permitted to eat. These

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regulations about which foods are ritually clean or acceptable are known as the laws of *Kashrut*, or Jewish dietary laws.

The Book of Numbers (*BaMidbar*) continues the story of the Exodus, and recounts the wandering of the Jews in the wilderness of Sinai. Deuteronomy (*D'varim*), the final book of Torah, is an extended sermon by Moses. It warns about the consequences of forsaking the one God.

**The Mishnah:** Over time, though, as more Jews began to live in the Diaspora (Gr; dispersion, i.e. Jewish residence outside the Holy Land), they began to have new questions about the practice of Judaism that were not covered in the Bible. Jewish religious leaders and preachers, called rabbis, were frequently called upon to determine how to apply the Torah in the Bible to new situations. At first, the opinions of the rabbis circulated orally. Over time, however, many Jews came to regard the teachings and interpretations of the rabbis as another form of scripture. The Oral Torah and its interpretations by the rabbis were written down around A.D. 200 in a book known as *Mishnah*. The Mishnah was another book that helped the Jews to live as a part of the covenant community.

**The Talmud:** The Talmud was written over an extended period of time by rabbis who lived in Palestine and Babylon. Each of these two communities produced its own version of the Talmud. The first was written in Palestine around A.D. 425, and is called the Palestinian Talmud. This version was replaced by the Babylonian Talmud, which was completed around A.D. 500. Unless otherwise specified, the word *Talmud* always refers to the Babylonian Talmud.

The Talmud includes history, folklore, and sermons. Jews do not consider the Talmud divinely inspired scripture. Rather, it is a repository of Jewish tradition, designed to serve as a guide for future generations. It teaches members of the faith how to live and think like Jews.

Jews traditionally study the Talmud by debating an opponent. The object of such debates, however, is not to win. Rather, the aim is to learn how to be righteous. Sometimes the students will switch sides during the debate, in order to learn how to think.

**Prophets:** The Prophets make up the second division of the Tanakh. The prophetic books are traditionally divided into Former and Latter Prophets. The earlier, or Former, Prophets include the books of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings. These books tell the history of the Jewish community from the time of Moses' successor, Joshua, until the return of the Jewish people to Jerusalem after the Exile. They are included in the Prophets because they contain many stories about the Prophets who guided Jewish people.

The "Latter Prophets" consists of many books about the lives and work of the Jewish prophets. The first three books include the teachings of the three greatest prophets of Judaism: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Each prophet has a book devoted to his teachings that also bears his name. The remaining twelve books are known as the Minor Prophets, because they are short in length. They include: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Sometimes the Latter Prophets is called "The Book of the Twelve."

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**Writings:** The Writings are a collection of several different types of literature. The first is a book of poems known as Psalms. Most of the Psalms are attributed to King David. Proverbs and the Book of Job deal with the theme of wisdom. According to the tradition, King David's son Solomon wrote Proverbs. The "Song of Songs" is a love poem about a man and woman. Jews have understood this book as a symbolic story about God's relationship with Israel. Ecclesiastes is another wisdom book that examines whether there is any meaning in life. "Lamentations" is a poem about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonian Army. Prophet Jeremiah wrote the poem. The Book of Esther is a story about a Jewish woman who saved her people from annihilation by a Persian king. Daniel is about a Jew named Daniel who was taken into exile.

The remaining books in the Writings are works of history. The last two books of the Writings, I and II Chronicles, are similar to Kings I and II. They are about the history of the Jewish people from after Moses' time to the end of the exile.

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## CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS

Judaism teaches monotheism, the belief that there is only one God. He is unknowable and imageless. Judaism tends to focus more on how one practices and lives in the world than on analyzing the nature of God. Biblical monotheism is usually called "ethical monotheism" because of the very strong linkage of right acts to the belief in one God. While some religious traditions consider belief alone to be adequate, to Jews belief is most significant in the light of the actions motivated by that belief.

In the ancient world, naming something meant that you had power over it. Naming implies both understanding and control. What name can be given to God who is beyond full understanding, certainly beyond control and far more powerful than human beings? However the importance and subtle nuances of the experience of God can be described by many "names". The simplest name of God in the Jewish tradition is *Ha-Shem* (literally "the Name"). In the Jewish mystical tradition, God is often referred to as *Ain Sof* ("Without end")

Most traditional Jews will not write out the word "God". It is written as "G-d". Some Jews extend this restriction to writing the names of God. It ensures that a name of God is not defaced or erased if the paper is ripped up, soiled or thrown away.

The *Shem Ha-M'forash* ("The Ineffable Name) is the name of four letters. This name of God is comprised of the Hebrew letters *yod-hay-vav-hay* (YHVH), and it is never pronounced as written. The Jewish tradition teaches that anytime YHVH appears, it should be read *Adonai* ("Lord" or "my Lord"). However, YHVH does not mean "Lord". The four letter name is a form of the Hebrew verb "to be" which signifies Unlimited Being.

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*Ha-kadosh Baruch Hu* ("The Holy One Blessed is He"). This is often seen as the 'masculine' aspect of God corresponding to the feminine *Shechinah*

*Shechinah* This is the "indwelling presence," the feminine aspect of Oneness. The *Shechinah* permeates the world in the same way that the soul permeates the body; just as the soul sustains the body, *Shechinah* sustains the world. In some traditions, *Shechinah* is another name for *Elohim* (the One, manifesting as the many).

The two most frequently used names for God are the unspeakable YHVH and the word *Elohim* (God). It is the plural form of the noun *Eloha*, also translated as God.

One Jewish mystical tradition teaches that *Elohim* is the One, manifesting as the many. In this sense, YHVH refers to the Totality (the transcendent, which contains everything), and *Elohim* refers to the Immanent, that Spark of Divinity which awakens within each and every expression of the One Being. It's another way of reminding people that what they see as lots of individual forms (people, animals, plants, rocks and so on) is, behind the scenes, all part of the One.

The basic beliefs of Judaism include the following principles:

1. There is only One God. He controls the events of nature and history according to his divine design, which is beyond our comprehension.
2. God chose Abraham and his descendants as his special people and promised that they would be a great nation dwelling in the Promised Land (Canaan).
3. God made a covenant with the Hebrews at Mount Sinai where he gave the Law to the people through Moses. The Law provides the rules by which the faithful are to live.
4. Abraham's people were chosen to be the model of behavior for all nations in the future age of the Messiah, who will rule the world in peace and justice.

The Hebrew word for "law" is *Torah*. The name "Torah" refers to the laws that Moses received on Mount Sinai, along with the first five books of the Jewish scriptures. The most important and famous part of the Torah is known as the Ten Commandments, also called the Decalogue. Jews and Christians sometimes number the commandments differently, but they always include the same basic regulations and prohibitions:

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make any graven images.
3. You shall not make any false oaths in God's name.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. You shall not commit murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not testify falsely against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's property.

In addition to the Ten Commandments, God gave Moses many other rules and regulations. For example the Hebrews were forbidden to eat certain kinds of foods, such as pork, which God declared unclean. The biblical books of Exodus and Leviticus contain extensive commentaries

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on each of the Ten Commandments and how to fulfill them in daily life. The extensive code of laws was designated to remind Jews of God and to help them behave properly. Because all religions have beliefs, rules and regulations that set them apart from other religions, many scholars say that the religion of Judaism begins with Moses and the Torah. This is because Moses is the traditional source of Judaism's unique lifestyle.

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## SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE CORE VALUES AND SATHYA SAI BABA'S TEACHINGS

The following outlines some similarities between Judaism and Sathya Sai Baba's teachings:

Judaism's basic beliefs include principles similar to Swami's teachings of devotion to God (Daiva Bhakti), fear of sin (Papa Bheethi), living in harmony with the community (Sangha Neeti).

Judaism believes that there is only One God, who is the source of everything. It teaches that God is eternal. Swami teaches God is the source of everything. He says that all are God and encourages us to realize the divinity within. Judaism insists on the study of Scriptures and practicing them. By following the rules and teachings of the Torah, Jews are brought closer to God. It insists in righteous living which is in line with Sathya Sai Baba's teachings. Swami insists on study of spiritual literature on a regular basis and the practice of the studied material.

- a. *"Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one.  
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart,  
And with all thy soul, and with all thy might,  
And these words which I command thee this day  
Shall be in thy heart. And thou shalt teach  
diligently unto thy children..." –( Deuteronomy 6:4-7)*
- b. *"The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;  
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;  
The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever;  
The ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb." – Tehilim (Psalm) 19:7-10*
- c. *"God is omnipresent. He is the indweller of every heart and all names are His. So you can call Him by any name that gives you joy." (The Holy Man and the Psychiatrist, by*

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Sam Sandweiss, 134)

- d. *"Believe that all are God, through wisdom (Jnaana); even then, compassion compels you to love and serve. Believe that God is Master or Father and that you are His children or servants, through devotion (Bhakti). Even then, His command is to wipe the tears, nourish the sick and help the lame to climb over the stile, through pity and sympathy. Believe, through faith in action (Karma), that God has to be adored through dedication; even then, Love says the highest form of adoration is by means of service (Seva), done in Love."* (Deepaavali, Prashanthi Nilayam, 29-10-1970)
- e. *"A little practice will teach you to hold fast to the feet of God while roaming about in the world, doing all duties and carrying out all responsibilities dedicated to Him. Do all work as actors in a play, keeping your identity separate and not getting too attached to your role. Remember that the whole thing is just a play and the Lord has assigned you a part; there your duty ends. He has designed the play and enjoys it."* (Thought for the day 6/5/07 [www.sathyasai.org](http://www.sathyasai.org))
- f. *"There is a technique by which the immortal Spirit can be discovered. Though it may appear difficult, each step forward makes the next one easier, and a mind that is made ready by discipline is able to discover the Divine basis of man and creation in a flash. There is no short-cut to this consummation. One has to give up all the tendencies that one has accumulated so far and become light for the journey. Lust, greed, anger, malice, conceit, envy, hate – all these tendencies have to be shed. It is not enough to listen to my discourses and count the number you have listened to. The only thing that counts is practicing at least one of my teachings."* (Thought for the day 2/10/08 [www.sathyasai.org](http://www.sathyasai.org))

Judaism teaches to practice right conduct by not stealing, not committing murder or adultery which is in line with Swami's teaching of fear of sin.

- a. *"Keep Company with the wise and you will become wise. If you make friends with stupid people, you will be ruined"* - Meshlei (Proverbs) 13:20
- b. *"Strengthen and sensitize yourself with pure thoughts in order to understand that the pleasures of this world are empty and ephemeral"* Pele Yoetz, P.76
- c. *"Truth and right conduct should be adhered to with pure intentions. A righteous life leads to peace. Love is to be experienced in the depths of peace. Love should find expression in non-violence. Where love prevails, there is no room for doing harm or indulging in violence towards others. All these basic values have to be demonstrated in action and not limited to preaching."* - (Thought for the day 6/6/07 [www.sathyasai.org](http://www.sathyasai.org))
- d. *"Leave all thoughts of conquest aside; strive to know the Truth and when that is known, false notions fondly held by you will fall off of their own accord...The illumination of discrimination (viveka) will remove the darkness which hides the Divine essence of Man."* - Divine Discourse, March 6, 1962

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- e. *“The company of the good and godly is the wealth that is most worthy. Wisdom is the most precious wealth. The educated person must live with this conviction. Search for mere riches can never confer contentment and peace of mind. Each one yearns for lasting joy but does not stop to discover from where it can be got. It is not available anywhere outside him “ - Divine Discourse, December 1st, 1982*

Judaism teaches not to testify falsely against the neighbor. Swami teaches not to talk ill of others especially in their absence. Judaism teaching to honor one’s mother and father is very much in line with Swami’s teachings of respecting the parents.

- a. *Whenever you possibly can, do good to those who need it. Never tell your neighbor to wait until tomorrow if you can help him now. Don’t plan anything that will hurt your neighbor, he lives besides you, trusting you. Don’t argue with someone for no reason when he has never done you any harm. Don’t be jealous of violent people or decide to act as they do, because the Lord hates people who do evil, but He takes righteous men into HIS confidence.” Meshlei (Proverbs) 3:27-32*
- b. *“You must respect your parents, whoever they may be and in whatever condition they may be. You must respect their words and obey their commands, without any reservation. Then only you will be able to command respect from society.” ( Sankranti Eve, 12-1-2004, Prashanthi Nilayam)*
- c. *“Discharge your duties sincerely. Do not forget your mother. In the world today, there may be a wicked son, but never a wicked mother. You owe your blood, food, and head to your mother. What is the gratitude you are offering to the mother for the sacrifice made by her? She is the one who has fostered and nourished you. So, never forget the love of the mother. First and foremost, love your mother, father, teacher, and God. The mother shows the father; the father shows the teacher; the teacher shows God.” (11/19/1998, Prashanthi Nilayam)*
- d. *“Respect, adore, and worship your parents. They constitute the real wealth of your life. The blessings of your parents will confer health and wealth on you. God comes to you on His own when you love and serve your parents. “(11/19/1998, Prashanthi Nilayam)*
- e. *“God is in you and in everybody. So hurting others amounts to hurting God. Do not criticize and find fault with others. Love all, Serve all.” 11/19/1998, Prashanthi Nilayam*
- f. *“Bliss has to be sought not through accumulation of material wealth, but through sacrifice and promotion of the welfare of one's fellow beings. Thyaga (sacrifice) is recommended by the Vedas as the only path to immortality. Give in plenty; give gladly, and with gratitude to God. Selfishness is the cancer that destroys charity. Though one is aware that a certain act is wrong, selfishness does not allow him to desist. But, this weakness can be overcome by steady determination. Share with others the knowledge and skills you have earned, the ideas and ideals you have benefited from and the joy you have won by discipline and dedication. Sharing will not diminish them or devalue them. On the other hand, they will shine with added splendor.” TFTD 4/11/08*

# Unity of Faiths - Judaism

- g. “The spirit of sacrifice is the basic equipment of a volunteer. Inscribe this on your heart; inscribe it deep and clear. There are four modes of writing, dependent on the material on which the text is inscribed. The first is, writing on water; it is washed out even while the finger moves. The next is, writing on sand; it is legible, until the wind blows it into mere flatness. The third is the inscription on rocks; it lasts for centuries, but, it too is corroded by the claws of time. The inscription on steel can withstand the wasting touch of time. Have this so inscribed on your heart - the axiom that "serving others is meritorious, that harming others or remaining unaffected and idle while others suffer, is sin." - Divine Discourse, June 26, 1969

## Sources:

1. Religions of the World – Judaism by *Kenneth Atkinson*.
2. [www.sathyasai.org](http://www.sathyasai.org)
3. Heart 2 Heart web site (link in <http://www.radiosai.org/Home.asp>)

## SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

### *House of Worship -The Jewish Synagogue*

Judaism has changed its worship practices many times during its long history. In the past, as recorded in the Jewish Scriptures, Jews worshipped by praying to God and by sacrificing animals. Jews in exile in Babylon could not sacrifice, because they did not have access to the Jerusalem Temple, where all sacrifices had to take place. So, the Jewish people replaced sacrifice with prayer and the study of their scriptures. Prayer became the central feature of Jewish worship. Contemporary Jewish worship is held in a building known as a synagogue. In keeping with Judaism’s emphasis on history, synagogue worship includes symbols and rituals that are designed to recall many ancient worship practices from the time of the Jerusalem Temple and the Exile.

The English name for the Jewish building of worship comes from the Greek word *synagogue*, which means “assembly.” The Greek word *synagogue* is equivalent to the Hebrew *Bet Ha-Knesset*, which means “house of assembly.” These Greek and Hebrew terms both refer to a place constructed especially for Jewish worship.

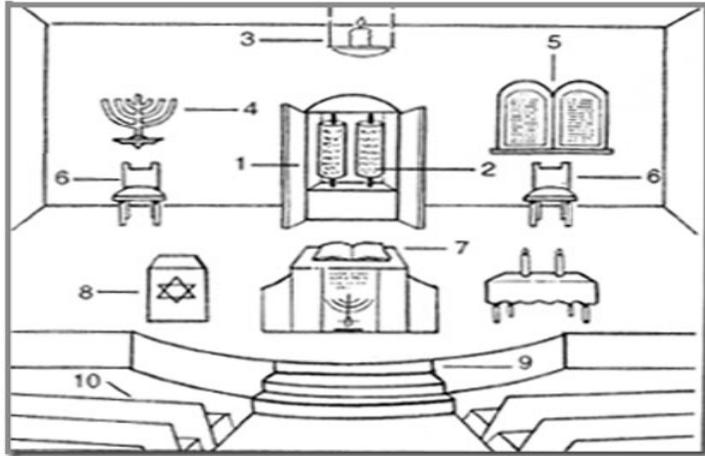
The early buildings were made of fine masonry, and contained an interior hall surrounded by benches. The benches were placed on all four sides of the building, so that the worshipers would face the center. Many ancient synagogues pointed towards Jerusalem, and contained decorations such as rosettes with six petals flanked by date palms.

Synagogues also included a *mikveh*, a ritual purification bath, near their entrances. The waters of mikveh symbolize purity. A mikveh is normally located in a synagogue. The more liberal Jewish synagogues do not often have a mikveh.

The ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem had been divided into three sections; an outer court open for the people, where all Jews could pray; an inner sanctuary, open only to the priests, with an altar for sacrifice, a table for offerings, and a seven-branched candlestick that was always lit; and the Holy of Holies – the Temple’s innermost room, which only the high

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priest could enter and only once each year, on the holy day of Yom Kippur. The room was empty and represented the presence of God.



1. The Aron Kodesh – holy cabinet
2. Torah Scrolls
3. The Ner Tamid – eternal light
4. The menorah
5. The Ten Commandments
6. Rabbi's and Cantor's Chair
7. Rabbi's Torah Reading table
8. Rabbi's Podium
9. Bimah – reading platform
10. Auditorium – Congregation Seating.

The modern synagogue generally follows the three part pattern of the original Jerusalem temple. The first section is the auditorium, second Bimah, or pulpit, represents ancient temple sanctuary. It is customary to have a light always on above the Bimah, to represent the eternal light that burned in the Jerusalem Temple. The Holy Ark corresponds to the ancient Temple's Holy of Holies. Some traditional synagogues place a pitcher or washbasin by the entrance for people to wash their hands. This is done to fulfill the biblical commandment that one should approach the Temple with clean hands and a pure heart. A crown is also placed on the top of the Torah. Small bells are also placed on the Torah crown to represent the bells the high priest wore on his robe.

Other than the adornment on the Torah scrolls, synagogues usually have no decorations. Only decorations and art that are not three dimensional are permitted. Depictions of Ten Commandments are popular. Many synagogues also contain a menorah.

Originally a seven branched menorah was the center piece of the Temple. An eight-branched menorah is used during the festival of Hanukkah. The six-pointed Star of David is another popular design in many synagogues. It is called the Maagen David in Hebrew, which means "Shield of David." The design dates back to over 1,800 years, and has become a common symbol of Judaism.



### *Synagogue Worship*

In keeping with a custom recorded in the Tanakh, a portion of the Torah is read during worship. Worship usually follows a prayer book called a *Siddur*, which means "order." Holiday services follow a special prayer book called a *Machzor* ("cycle"). The book contains both prayers and poems. Most of the prayers are in Hebrew, although some are in Aramaic, because this was one of the languages of ancient Judaism. Services are held three times a day because this was the number of times daily the sacrifices were offered in Jerusalem temple. Weekly communal worship occurs on the Sabbath, the most holy day of the week. Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday night, and ends at sunset on Saturday night. This is because the ancient Jewish

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calendar marked the beginning of the day at nightfall. A special Friday night dinner typically precedes the Friday night synagogue service.

At the Sabbath morning worship, seven people are called to read Torah. On Yom Kippur, six are called, and fewer on other Jewish holidays. The Torah follows a cycle of readings. Torah is read during Sabbath services over the course of months or years. In order to accomplish this, the Torah is divided into sections. In some traditions, the entire Torah is divided into 54 sections and read over year or 155 portions and read over 3 years.

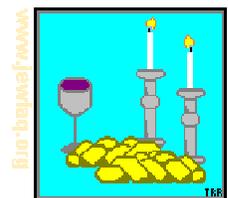
The honor of reading Torah is known as *aliya*, a Hebrew word that means "ascent." This term refers to the ascent that the reader makes when he or she steps onto the platform, or Bimah, to read. The person who is "called up" is known as an *oleh*. The *oleh* is called by the synagogue official by his or her Hebrew name. The male *oleh* traditionally touches the Torah with the corner of his prayer shawl (*talit*) and kisses the Torah at both the beginning and the end of the reading. Readers ascend the Bimah from the right and depart from the left.

The *oleh* invites the congregation to praise God, and says, "Bless the Lord who is to be blessed." The congregation responds, "Blessed be the Lord, who is to be blessed for all eternity." Next, there is a blessing: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, He who has chosen us from among all the nations and given us HIS Torah. Blessed are You Lord, who gives the Torah". A portion of the Torah is then read. After the reading the *oleh* says: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, He who has given us a Torah of truth, thus implanting within us eternal life. Blessed are You, Lord, Giver of the Torah." The next *oleh* is then called to read. There are always at least three people on the Bimah whenever Torah is read, to show that a person should not stand alone, because God gave the Torah to the Jews through intermediaries, the prophets.

Orthodox Judaism does not use instrumental music, while other branches may have lively songs performed by multiple instruments.

### *Candles, Challah (braided bread) and wine*

For each Holy Day – starting the evening before – the Day is ushered in with the blessings – lighting candles and saying the words for whichever Holy Day is being celebrated. The Mother lights the candles, the father and all those over 13 recite the *Kiddush* (literally holy) over the wine and the prayer is said over the *Challah*. On Passover there is a special meal called the *Seder* in which leavened bread is not eaten for eight days, just unleavened bread called *matzo*.



*Kippah or Yarmulke (Yiddish)* is a slightly-rounded brimless skullcap worn by most Jewish men while praying, eating, reciting blessings, or studying Jewish religious texts, and at all times by some Jewish men. It probably came from the old Middle Eastern custom of covering one's head in the presence of royalty. Because God is seen as the King of Kings, the Always Present Holy One, Jews began to wear head covering all the time. Some Jewish women have also begun to wear *kippot*. *Kippot* range in sizes, from small round beanies that cover only the back of the head, to large snug caps, that cover the whole crown.



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*Tzitzit* are "fringes" or "tassels" found on a *tallit*, or prayer shawl. The Biblical Book of Numbers states that Jews must wear *Tzitzit* (fringes) at the corners of their garments to help them remember God and the commandments. This is the basis of the Jewish prayer shawl or *tallit*. Some are only six or seven inches wide like a scarf, and some are wider like small blankets, but they always have specially knotted fringes hanging from their corners. Observant Jewish men wear a *tallit* throughout the day, sometimes beneath their shirts. A *tallit* is worn over their clothes by most Jewish men and by some Jewish women during appropriate prayer services.



*Tefillin*, also called phylacteries, are two boxes containing Biblical verses and the leather straps attached to them. They are worn during weekday morning services by observant Jewish men and by some Jewish women.

Wearing the *Tefillin* is a very powerful physical symbol of faith and devotion.

*Mezuzah* is a very small cylinder that contains the Schema Israel and is affixed to the door jamb of the house and can also be affixed to the door jamb in each room. The Schema is the rallying call for the Jewish people – Hear Oh Israel, The Lord Our God Is One (*pgs 330-333 Art Scroll Prayer Book*). And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...



### Sources:

1. Religions of the World – Judaism by *Kenneth Atkinson*.
2. Judaism, Third Edition, World Religions by *Martha A. Morrison, Stephen F. Brown*.
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## MAJOR HOLY DAYS AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Jewish holidays (*haggim*), celebrate landmark events in Jewish history, such as the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah, and sometimes mark the change of seasons and transitions in the agricultural cycle. The three major festivals, *Sukkoth*, *Passover* and *Shavuot*, are called *regalim* (derived from the Hebrew word *regel*, or foot). On the three *regalim*, it was customary for the Israelites to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the Temple.

*Shabbat* (*Hebrew*) - *Sabbath* (*English*) The word "Shabbat" comes from the root Shin-Beit-Tav, meaning to cease, to end, or to rest.

Shabbat is the most important ritual observance in Judaism. It is the only ritual observance instituted in the Ten Commandments. It is also the most important special day, this is clear from the fact that more *aliyot* (opportunities for congregants to be called up to the Torah) are given on Shabbat than on any other day. Shabbat is the weekly day of rest and spiritual enrichment, starting from shortly before sundown on Friday evening to shortly after sundown

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Saturday night. It commemorates G-d's day of rest after six days of creation. In Exodus 20:11, after the Fourth Commandment is first instituted, G-d explains, "because for six days, the L-rd made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and on the seventh day, he rested; therefore, the L-rd blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it." By resting on the seventh day and sanctifying it, we remember and acknowledge that G-d is the creator of heaven and earth and all living things. We also emulate the divine example, by refraining from work on the seventh day, as G-d did. If G-d's work can be set aside for a day of rest, how can we believe that our own work is too important to set aside temporarily?

***Shabbat: Last in Creation, First in Intention:*** It is not easy to maintain the proper balance between human dominion and nature's integrity. From the start, God seems to recognize that people will frequently choose to misinterpret their stewardship as license to plunder the natural world. Therefore, immediately after forming humanity, God established an essential constraint on our destructive tendencies, the Sabbath. This is the crown of creation, a day on which all forms of work are forbidden. The Rabbis of the Talmud maintained that although the Sabbath was the last thing God created, it was meant to be from the start, "first in intention." These same sages defined the "work" prohibited on the Sabbath as any of thirty-nine types of activity that change the natural order. Once a week then, we are called upon to refrain from all labor that employs the things of nature for the achievement of human ends. The Sabbath is a tangible reminder that the creation is worth more than any monetary considerations. Later in the Torah, the principle of the Sabbath day is applied to agricultural policy in the ordinance of the sabbatical year. Every seven years, the farmer is required to let his or her land lie fallow, relying instead upon God's bounty. However, it is also one more expression of the proposition which underlies all Jewish environmental ethics: we are only tenants on this earth. The land belongs to God. We are given permission to enjoy the Creator's abundant gifts, but we must not waste or wantonly destroy anything. The Jewish injunction known as BAL tashchit teaches us to live lightly, conserving earth's abundance. Indeed, the rabbis declare that anyone who eats a fruit without saying the proper blessing of thanksgiving to God is like a thief, stealing from the Creator.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, while Moses reiterates the Ten Commandments, he notes the second thing that we must remember on Shabbat: "remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the L-rd, your G-d brought you forth from there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore the L-rd your G-d commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." In ancient times, leisure was confined to certain classes; slaves did not get days off. Thus, by resting on Shabbat, we are reminded that we are free. During the week, we are slaves to our jobs, to our creditors, to our need to provide for ourselves; on Shabbat, we are freed from these concerns, much as our ancestors were freed from slavery in Egypt.

Shabbat is not specifically a day of prayer. It plays a pivotal role in Jewish practice and is governed by a large corpus of religious law. At sundown on Friday, the woman of the house welcomes the Shabbat by lighting two or more candles and reciting a blessing. The evening meal begins with a blessing recited aloud over a cup of wine (Kiddush), and a blessing recited

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over the bread (Motzi). It is customary to have two braided loaves of bread (Challah), on the table. During Shabbat, Jews are forbidden to engage in any activity that falls under thirty-nine categories of work (Melachah). In fact the activities banned on the Sabbath are not "work" in the usual sense: They include such actions as lighting a fire, writing, using money and carrying on work in the public domain. The prohibition of lighting a fire has been extended in the modern era to driving a car, which involves burning fuel, and using electricity.

“Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it (Hebrew: Zakhor et Yom ha-Shabbat l'kad'sho)” -Exodus 20:8

We are commanded to remember Shabbat; it means to remember the significance of Shabbat, both as a commemoration of creation and as a commemoration of our freedom from slavery in Egypt.

*Rosh Hashanah* and Yom Kippur which follows ten days later are together called the “High Holidays.” Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are among the most important and holiest days of the Jewish year. For over 2000 years, the high holidays have been observed as a time for judgment, remembrance and return or repentance (*teshuvah*). These holidays focus on people and their relationship with God.

The Jewish year starts in September or October with Rosh Hashanah. It is a solemn time. The most important aspect of Rosh Hashanah is *teshuvah* or repentance. It is the beginning of the process of forgiveness and of forgiving others. The process continues through Yom Kippur. The cycle begins in the last month of the Jewish year Elul, which has 30 days and then ends 10 days after Rosh Hashanah, on Yom Kippur. The 30 day month of Elul is dedicated to study and self examination.

It is customary to blow the ram’s horn (shofar) at the Synagogue briefly each morning during Elul except on Shabbat and the last day of the month. It is like a “wake up call” for the soul. There’s another custom also, reading the 27th. Psalm each day. It begins “the Lord is my light and salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid”? Rabbis have taught that the enemies spoken of in the Psalm can be interpreted as the enemy within, the parts of one’s self that work from a place of forgetfulness, ignorance, fear or anger. The reading assures one that we can rely on the strength of the great presence awakening within. During the entire month of Elul, traditional congregations add a series of prayers to their services called forgivenesses (*s’lichot*). These prayers call out to God asking for forgiveness.

On the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah, however, there is a special service, often held at midnight, when it is said that the heavens are especially open to prayers. In many communities, *S’lichot* is a time for people to search out their neighbors to ask for or to offer forgiveness, like clearing the air and releasing themselves and others of the heavy betrayals and failures accrued over the years.

The service on Rosh Hashanah day is called *Musaf*. The ram’s horn is blown 100 times in varying ways and times throughout the service. According to the Bible, the sound the Hebrews heard at Mount Sinai was a blast of the *shofar*. Abraham sacrificed a ram after God spared his

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son Isaac. Tradition holds that God blew one of the ram's horns at Sinai and will blow the other to announce the coming of the "messiah". Some people think of the *shofar* as an alarm, warning people to wake up and turn their lives around. Others see it as piercing the shell that has hardened around their hearts in the previous year. One custom called *Tashlich* (you will cast), calls on Jews to visit a body of free flowing water and empty their pockets and cuffs of crumbs and lint in a symbolic gesture of casting away guilt and letting go of the previous year.

**Yom Kippur** Yom Kippur is a day of atonement designed to bring Jews closer to G-d and encourages return to him through the process of Teshuvah. It is the holiest day of the year. Yom Kippur serves as an important time to seek forgiveness from God. It is traditionally seen as the day on which God finalizes the judgment of all Jews each year, sealing people's names in the Books of Life or Death. Yom Kippur is the last chance to change, to repent and to atone before this judgment.

By the time the day rolls around, Jews are expected to have taken care of sins against other people. The actual day of Yom Kippur is then reserved for atoning for sins against God. Jewish tradition states that Yom Kippur offers the blanket of forgiveness from God only if one has both repented and atoned for any wrongs. Known as a day of prayer, Yom Kippur has numerous prayers associated with it. Most revolve around the central theme of repentance and return. Apparently, Jews everywhere find a connection to Judaism through Yom Kippur. Indeed, Yom Kippur brings more Jews to the Synagogue than any other holiday.

The laws for Yom Kippur include all of the work restrictions found on Shabbat. In addition, there are five *ennuim*, or afflictions, which a person is also not allowed to do on Yom Kippur. These are eating or drinking, bathing luxuriously, anointing one's body, wearing leather shoes and marital relations. The most famous restriction of Yom Kippur is, of course, fasting. The intention of fasting is not to torture ourselves or to punish ourselves for the sins we have done. Rather, fasting helps us to transcend our physical nature. Praying without concern for food allows us to completely focus on the prayers.

All have the purpose of focusing a person on the task at hand for Yom Kippur. The Kuzari, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, points out that, the fast of the pious man is such that eye, ear and tongue share in it, that he regards nothing except that which brings him near to God.

**Sukkoth** ("Tabernacles" or "The Festival of Booths") commemorates the Israelites' forty years of wandering through the desert on their way to the Promised Land. It is celebrated through the construction of temporary booths called *Sukkoth* that represent the temporary shelters of the Israelites during their wandering. It coincides with the fruit harvest, and marks the end of the agricultural cycle. Jews all around the world eat in their *Sukkoth* for seven days and nights. Sukkoth concludes with *Shemini Atzeret*, where Jews begin to pray for rain and *Simchat Torah*, the holiday on which Jews finish the yearlong reading of the Torah and start over at the beginning. Jews read the end of the Torah, celebrate with singing and dancing, and then read the beginning of the Torah.

**Hanukkah**, also known as the Festival of Lights, is an eight day Jewish holiday, in the month of December, which starts on the 25th day of *Kislev* (Hebrew calendar). The festival is observed in

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Jewish homes by the kindling of lights on each of the festival's eight nights, one on the first night, two on the second night and so on.



The holiday was called Hanukkah meaning "dedication" because it marks the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem after its desecration by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Spiritually, Hanukkah commemorates the "Miracle of the Oil". According to the Talmud, at the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem following the victory of the Maccabee over the Seleucid Empire, there was only enough consecrated oil to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days - which was the length of time it took to press, prepare and consecrate new oil.

Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Bible and was never considered a major holiday in Judaism, but it has become much more visible and widely celebrated in modern times, mainly because it falls around the same time as Christmas.

**Passover (Pesach)** is a week-long holiday beginning on the evening of the 14th day of *Nisan* (the first month in the Hebrew calendar), that commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. It occurs in March or April. In ancient times, it coincided with the barley harvest. It is the only holiday that centers on home-service and a ritual dinner called the *Seder*. Leavened bread products (*chametz*) are removed from the house prior to the holiday, and are not consumed throughout the week. Homes are thoroughly cleaned to insure no bread or bread by-products remain, and a symbolic burning of the last vestiges of *chametz* is conducted on the morning of the *Seder*. Unleavened bread (*Matzoah*) is eaten instead of bread for seven days. Leavened bread is a symbol of the ego. Tradition states that, the ego if allowed to grow and swell too long makes one arrogant and sinful. Avoiding leavened food for a week is done to rid the body and soul of "ego puffery".



**Shavuot** ("Pentecost" or "Feast of Weeks") celebrates the revelation of the Torah to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. It occurs in late May or early June. It honors the receiving of the path of Judaism in the form of the Torah. Also known as the Festival of Bikurim, or first fruits, it coincided in biblical times with the wheat harvest. Shavuot customs include all-night study marathons known as *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* (Repair on the night of Shavuot), eating dairy foods (cheesecake and blintzes are special favorites), reading the Book of Ruth, decorating homes and synagogues with greenery, and wearing white clothing, symbolizing purity

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1. Daniel B. Fink - Rabbi of Congregation Ahavath Beth Israel, in Boise, Idaho
2. Judaism for dummies A reference for the rest of us by Rabbi Ted Falcon, Ph. D., David Blatner
3. Religions of the World – Judaism by Kenneth Atkinson.
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# Unity of Faiths - Judaism

## SONGS FROM JEWISH FAITH

### 1. Schma Israel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad

Listen, Israel: The Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One (Deuteronomy 6:4)

### 2. Hevenu Shalom Aleichem(4x)

Hevenu Shalom Shalom Shalom Aleichem

### 3. Shalu Shalom Jerusalem (4)

We Pray for the Peace of Israel

We Pray for the Peace of Ishmael

We Pray for the Peace of All the Worlds

All the Worlds shall live in Peace

Shalom Shalom (3)

Shalu Shalom Jerusalem

### 4. Shalom Aleichem Shalom Aleichem Shalom Shalom

Shalom Aleichem Shalom Aleichem Shalom Shalom

This Hebrew song means we bring you peace.

### 5. Blessings for food

like saying “grace” before meals, these blessings encourage us to be aware throughout the day.

**Before eating bread:** *Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech Ha-olam, ha-motzee lechem min ha-aretz.*

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Universal Presence, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

**Before eating fruit that grows on trees:** *Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech Ha-olam, boray p'ree ha-etz.*

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Universal Presence, Who creates the fruit of the tree.

**Before eating produce that grows directly from the earth:** *Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech Ha-olam, boray p'ree ha-adamah.*

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Universal Presence, Who creates the fruit of the earth.

# Unity of Faiths - Judaism

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