Judaism: 101

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## Guide to app usage

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| n, space | next slide |
| p | previous slide |
| f | fullscreen |
| esc, o | overview slide |
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## Abrahamic Religions

### Names of God

'el

Perhaps the oldest name for "god" in the Hebrew Bible, 'E:lohiym אלהים

(God) "Elohim"

is another name used for God. It is a plural form of the older name for God "el".

yhwh יהןה

(Yahweh or LORD) This is the holy name of God; cf. Exodus 3, where Moses learns about this name, although it had been used from the beginning of the text of Genesis. By the time of Jesus, it was no longer pronounced.

adonai אדני

(Lord) This is the ordinary hebrew word which would have referred to a person. The name "Jehovah" was mistakenly derived from combining the vowels of the word "adonai" with the consonants of the tetragrammaton "yhwh". **HaShem** is used when even saying "adonai" is too holy to speak.

Allāh الله

from ancient times the name for "God" by Arabic peoples. Allah recited to Muhammad the Quran. And a 3rd religion emerged, Islam.

Note:

* Hebrew is primarily written in consonants. Try reading a text with all the vowels removed. You can do pretty well. If you removed the consonants it is gibberish.
* It is clear that both El (Elohim) and Allah are linguistically related.
* the account of God revealing his name, YHWH, is found in Exodus ch. 3. The basis of the name is in some sense related to the verb "to be."

### Judaism 101

History of Jews in 10 min: <https://youtu.be/KR9sWRzbdJw>

#### What is Judaism?

* a religion, or
* a race, or
* a culture, or
* a nation

**All of these descriptions have some validity.**

The Jewish people are perhaps best described as an **extended family**

What is Judaism? What does it mean to be a Jew? Most people, both Jewish and gentile, would instinctively say that Judaism is a religion. And yet, there are militant atheists who insist that they are Jews! Is Judaism a race? If you were to say so, most Jews would think you were an antisemite! So what is Judaism?

#### 1. Is Judaism a Religion?

* In some senses anyway it is clearly a religion
* However many Jews do **not** believe in religion at all
* many don't believe in **G-d**

Note: Clearly, there is a religion called Judaism, a set of ideas about the world and the way we should live our lives that is called "Judaism." It is studied in Religious Studies courses and taught to Jewish children in Hebrew schools. See What do Jews Believe? for details. There is a lot of flexibility about certain aspects of those beliefs, and a lot of disagreement about specifics, but that flexibility is built into the organized system of belief that is Judaism.

However, many people who call themselves Jews do not believe in that religion at all! More than half of all Jews in Israel today call themselves "secular," and don't believe in G-d or any of the religious beliefs of Judaism. Half of all Jews in the United States don't belong to any synagogue. They may practice some of the rituals of Judaism and celebrate some of the holidays, but they don't think of these actions as religious activities.

The most traditional Jews and the most liberal Jews and everyone in between would agree that these secular people are still Jews, regardless of their disbelief. See Who is a Jew? Clearly, then, there is more to being Jewish than just a religion.

#### 2. Are Jews a Race?

* US Supreme Court in 1980's – "Yes"
* reasoning: "Jewish Race" – "Negro Race"

Note:

* In the 1980s, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Jews are a

race, at least for purposes of certain anti-discrimination laws.

* Their reasoning: at the time these laws were passed, people routinely

spoke of the "Jewish race" or the "Italian race" as well as the "Negro race," so that is what the legislators intended to protect.

But many Jews were deeply offended by that decision, offended by any hint that Jews could be considered a race. The idea of Jews as a race brings to mind nightmarish visions of Nazi Germany, where Jews were declared to be not just a race, but an inferior race that had to be rounded up into ghettos and exterminated like vermin.

But setting aside the emotional issues, Jews are clearly not a race.

Race is a genetic distinction, and refers to people with shared ancestry and shared genetic traits. You can't change your race; it's in your DNA. I could never become black or Asian no matter how much I might want to.

Common ancestry is not required to be a Jew. Many Jews worldwide share common ancestry, as shown by genetic research; however, you can be a Jew without sharing this common ancestry, for example, by converting. Thus, although I could never become black or Asian, blacks and Asians have become Jews (Sammy Davis Jr. and Connie Chung).

#### 3. Is It a Culture or Ethnic Group?

* secular American Jews think of their **Jewishness** as a matter of culture or ethnicity
* e.g. food, Yiddish, holidays, values like emphasis on education

Note:

* Most secular American Jews think of their Jewishness as a matter

of culture or ethnicity. - When they think of Jewish culture, they think of - the food, - of the Yiddish language, - of some limited holiday observances, and - of cultural values like the emphasis on education.

Those secular American Jews would probably be surprised to learn that much of what they think of as Jewish culture is really just Ashkenazic Jewish culture, the culture of Jews whose ancestors come from one part of the world. Jews have lived in many parts of the world and have developed many different traditions. As a Sephardic friend likes to remind me, Yiddish is not part of his culture, nor are bagels and lox, chopped liver, latkes, gefilte fish or matzah ball soup. His idea of Jewish cooking includes bourekas, phyllo dough pastries filled with cheese or spinach. His ancestors probably wouldn't know what to do with a dreidel. There are certainly cultural traits and behaviors that are shared by many Jews, that make us feel more comfortable with other Jews. Jews in many parts of the world share many of those cultural aspects. However, that culture is not shared by all Jews all over the world, and people who do not share that culture are no less Jews because of it. Thus, Judaism must be something more than a culture or an ethnic group.

#### 4. Are the Jews a Nation?

* The traditional explanation, and the one given in the Torah, is that the Jews are a nation.
* The Hebrew word for "nation" is "goy."
* ancient sense meaning a **group of people with a common history, a common destiny, and a sense that we are all connected to each other**.

Note: Unfortunately, in modern times, the term "nation" has become too contaminated by ugly, jingoistic notions of a country obsessed with its own superiority and bent on world domination. Because of this notion of "nationhood," Jews are often falsely accused of being disloyal to their own country in favor of their loyalty to the Jewish "nation," of being more loyal to Israel than to their home country. Some have gone so far as to use this distorted interpretation of "nationhood" to prove that Jews do, or seek to, control the world. In fact, a surprising number of antisemitic websites and newsgroup postings linked to this page (in an earlier form) as proof of their antisemitic delusions that Jews are nationalistic, that Israel is a colonial power and so forth. Because of the inaccurate connotations that have attached themselves to the term "nation," the term can no longer be used to accurately describe the Jewish people.

* The Torah and the rabbis used this term not in the modern sense meaning a territorial and political entity, but in the ancient sense meaning a **group of people with a common history, a common destiny, and a sense that we are all connected to each other**.

### Who Is a Jew?

* A Jew is any person whose mother was a Jew or any person who has gone through the formal process of conversion to Judaism.
* there are perhaps about 13 million Jews in the world. (ca. 6 mill. in US and 5 mill in Israel)
* 2 major traditions **Sephardic** (Spanish/Middle Eastern) and **Ashkenazic** (German/Eastern European) Jews, and other cultural subgroups of Judaism.
* Judaism does not maintain that Jews are better than other people.

Note:

* A Jew is any person whose mother was a Jew or any person who has gone

through the formal process of conversion to Judaism.

* Most estimates suggest that there are about 13 million Jews in the

world. The vast majority of these Jews live in either the United States (about 6 million) and Israel (about 5 million).

* the differences between **Sephardic** (Spanish/Middle Eastern) and

**Ashkenazic** (German/Eastern European) Jews, and other cultural subgroups of Judaism.

* Judaism does not maintain that Jews are better than other people.

#### Traditional beliefs

a short list of the traditional beliefs of Judaism would include the following:

* God is creator **all**.
* He is **one**
* He alone is to be worshipped
* first 5 books of Hebrew Bible were revealed to Moses by God
* God rewards and punishes for good and evil deeds

Note:

* God is the creator of all that exists; He is one, incorporeal

(without a body), and He alone is to be worshipped as absolute ruler of the universe. - The first five books of the Hebrew Bible were revealed to Moses by God. They will not be changed or augmented in the future. - God has communicated to the Jewish people through prophets. - God monitors the activities of humans; He rewards individuals for good deeds and punishes evil.

### Major differences from Christianity:

* consider **actions and behavior to be of primary importance**;
* no concept of **original sin**
* **affirms the inherent goodness of the world and its people as creations of God**

Note: Although Christians base much of their faith on the same Hebrew Scriptures as Jews do, there are major differences in belief:

* Jews generally consider **actions and behavior to be of primary importance**; beliefs come out of actions. This conflicts with conservative Christians for whom belief is of primary importance and actions are a result of that belief.
* Jewish belief does not accept the Christian concept of **original sin** (the belief that all people have inherited Adam and Eve's sin when they disobeyed God's instructions in the Garden of Eden).
* Judaism **affirms the inherent goodness of the world and its people as creations of God**.

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