

Judaism

Judaism is the religion of the world's approximately 15 million Jews. It is one of the oldest religions and the first monotheistic religion to teach the belief in one God. Both Christianity and Islam have similarities with Judaism. These religions accept the belief in one God and the moral teachings of the Hebrew Bible, which includes the Torah.

The most important teaching of Judaism is that there is one God, who wants people to do what is just and compassionate. Judaism teaches that a person serves God by studying the holy writings and doing what they teach. These teachings include both ritual practices and ethical laws. Judaism teaches that all people are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

The Torah and Commandments

The basic laws and teachings of Judaism come from the Torah. The Torah is the most important holy book of Judaism. Torah also means "Tree of Life." The Torah is a scroll and it takes 365 days to read. Once it is finished, it is unwound and rewound to start all over again. This festive holiday is Simchat Torah and is happening right now - on September 26!

Jews believe that Moses brought the Ten Commandments and the Torah down from Mount Sinai. It is considered good in Judaism to talk about the commandments and to try to understand how to follow them.

There is no single leader of Judaism who can decide how to follow the commandments or what to believe. Even though Jews believe different things and they disagree about the rules, they are still one religion and one people.

The Ten Commandments are special because they were heard by all of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. However, in traditional Judaism, all of the 613 mitzvot in the Torah are equally important. (Note: a pomegranate is said to have 613 seeds for the 613 mitzvot.)

The Ten Commandments are:

- Believe in God.
- Do not worship anyone or anything except God; do not make, bow to, or worship an image or statue that is supposed to be God.
- Do not take God's name in vain.
- Observe Shabbat, that means, rest on the seventh day.
- Honour your parents.
- Do not murder.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not steal.
- Do not testify as a false witness.
- Do not be jealous of anything someone else has.

Sabbath or Shabbat

One of the commandments is to keep the Jewish Sabbath, or *Shabbat*. Shabbat starts every Friday at sunset and ends on Saturday at nightfall. Shabbat is a day of rest to thank God for making the universe.

The tradition of resting on Shabbat comes from the Torah. According to the Torah, God created the world in six days and on the seventh day, Shabbat, He rested. Many Jews go to their temple or synagogue to pray on Shabbat.

Religious Jews follow special rules on Shabbat. These rules require Jews not to do creative work on Shabbat. One reason for this is to give people a break from all the things that make them busy during the week. This helps them focus more on appreciating God, their family, and the rest of creation. Also it reminds people that God is the creator and ruler of the world; and no matter how great a person's creative power is, it cannot compare with God's creation of the universe and everything in it.

Food

Jews who follow the religious rules called "*kashrut*" only eat some types of food that are prepared by special rules. Food that a Jew can eat is called *kosher* food.

Traditional Jews are very careful about kashrut. Liberal Jews are not so careful about kosher, although some of them may keep some rules.

- Jews can eat any fresh fruit or vegetables that do not have any insects on or in them.
- Jews can eat any fish that has scales and fins. This includes fish like salmon and tuna. They cannot eat seafood like shrimp, lobster, or mussels.
- Jews can eat meat of any animal that chews its cud (food which has already been partly digested), and has split hooves. For example, cows, sheep, deer, and goats. However to be kosher it must be slaughtered and prepared in a specific way.

Jews can eat many common birds such as chickens and turkeys and duck. The birds must also be slaughtered and prepared in a specific way. Jews can't eat some uncommon birds that are listed by name in the Torah, like vultures.

- Jews cannot eat animals that do not have split hooves and do not chew their cud. For example, a pig has split hooves, but does not chew its cud. For this reason, it is not kosher. A cow has split hooves and chews its cud, so it is kosher.

Jews cannot eat rodents, reptiles or amphibians.

Important points in a Jewish Life:

- Birth
- Brit Mila (for boys) a circumcision ceremony when a boy is 8 days old. It includes naming the baby.
- Bat Mitzvah (for girls) a 'coming of age' ceremony when a girl turns 12 (13 for some Jews). Bat Mitzvah means "daughter of the mitvah" or "daughter of the commandments" in Hebrew.

Once a girl turns 12 (or 13), she is considered a woman and is expected to follow Jewish law. A ceremony is not required. Bat Mitzvah not only refers to the ceremony, but also to the girl herself.

- Bar Mitzvah (for boys) a 'coming of age' ceremony when a boy turns 13. It includes reading the Torah and special prayers. Bar Mitzvah means "son of the mitzvah" or "son of the commandments" in Hebrew. Once a boy turns 13, he is considered a man and is expected to follow Jewish law. A ceremony is not required. Bar Mitzvah not only refers to the ceremony, but also to the boy himself.

- Marriage
- Having Children

Death

Main Jewish holidays:

Rosh Hashanah – Jewish New Year

Yom Kippur – Day of Attonement

Sukkot – Harvest Festival

Simchat Torah – Holiday of the Torah

Chanukah – Festival of the Lights

Tu Bish'vat – New Year of the Trees

Purim – Feast of Lots (masquerades, carnivals and merriment)

Passover – Begins with a Seder and celebrates Freedom and Spring

Yom HaAtzmaut – Israel Independence Day