

This booklet is one of a series of faith editions produced by St Philip's Centre.
Other beliefs covered include:-

Bahá'í, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism

St Philip's Centre is a charity set up in 2006 with the support of the Diocese of Leicester and is rooted in the multi-faith environment of Leicester, the UK's most plural city.

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JUDAISM



What is Judaism?

Judaism is one of the Abrahamic faiths, which also include **Christianity** and **Islam**. There are about 14 million Jews in the world, the majority in Israel and the USA followed by France, Canada & the UK.

Judaism originated in the Middle East over 3500 years ago and **Moses** is considered the founder, although Jews trace their story back to **Abraham**. He entered a **Covenant** with the One God, continued by Isaac and Jacob. Jewish people are required to keep God's laws and try to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives. The story of this covenant and its laws are contained in the **Torah**.

The birth of the Jewish people and the start of Judaism is told in the first 5 books of the Bible. God chose Abraham to be the father of a people who would be special to God and who would be an example of good behaviour and holiness to the rest of the world. God guided the Jewish people through many troubles. Moses led them out of Egypt in the Exodus. God gave them a set of rules by which they should live, including the **Ten Commandments** revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. The heart of the Jewish calling is the **Shema**: 'Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.' The laws of the Torah are summed up in 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Jesus set these words at the heart of Christian belief as well.

After entering the Promised Land, the Jews became a powerful people with kings such as **Saul**, **David** and **Solomon**, who built the first great temple. For nine centuries Jewish worship was focussed on the Temple, as it contained the Ark of the Covenant and was the only place where certain rites could be carried out.

Holy Texts

The **Torah** is extremely important to Jews. The term is used in a narrow sense to mean the first five books of the Bible, or 'Five Books of Moses' written on a parchment scroll kept in the synagogue. In a wider sense it includes the whole of the **Tanakh** (Hebrew Bible) and the **Talmud**. The Talmud is the **Mishnah** (the first writing down of the



memorial to the murdered Six Million.

Israel

Jews were first exiled from their land of origin with the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE. With the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish diaspora of nearly 2000 years began. The State of Israel was established in 1948 with a secular constitution and elected government. Most Jews see it as their ancestral homeland, the Promised Land and for many, a religious concept. It has lived with a controversial history ever since and conflicts continue about its very existence and boundaries to the present day.



Jerusalem has been the holiest city in Judaism and the spiritual centre of the Jewish people since the 10th century BCE. It is also sacred to Christians, and is considered the third-holiest city in Islam. Despite having an area of only 0.9 square kilometers (0.35 square miles), its Old City is home to holy places of all three faiths. Among them are the Temple Mount, the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque.

The Messiah

The Messiah is the anointed one who is to restore his people and rebuild the Temple. Prophets in Judaism demanded a more just and equal society and stressed fidelity to God and a purely ethical religion. They also predicted a future age of peace which they often associated with a heroic Messiah, who as king would liberate the people and whose success would vindicate Israel's faith in the eyes of other nations. The Messiah would be a human king from the line of David. Muslims and Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah but for Jews he has yet to come. Progressive Judaism speaks instead of a Messianic Age which all people build together by working for justice and peace.

During the first year after a death, children or siblings of the dead person attend synagogue regularly to recite a special prayer called **Kaddish**, the 'sanctification' of God's name. Each year on the anniversary of death, Jews recite Kaddish in synagogue and also light a candle at home as a reminder of their departed relative.

Converts to Judaism are welcomed, after lengthy study (somewhat shorter in Progressive Judaism) but Judaism is not a missionary religion and teaches that 'the righteous of all nations have a share in the World to Come'.

Denominations

In ancient and medieval times there were different movements in Judaism, and the same is true today. The major modern denominations are **Orthodox** (which has several varieties), **Conservative** or **Masorti**, and **Progressive Judaism** (includes both **Reform** and **Liberal** movements). These represent different responses to the challenges of the modern world, and different views about the divine authority of the Torah.



Orthodoxy upholds strict adherence to Jewish law and tradition, such as men praying 3 times every day in Hebrew. Progressive Judaism uses English in services, upholds equality of men and women, including women Rabbis and celebrates same-sex relationships.

The Holocaust

The Nazi murder of 6 million Jews is called in Hebrew the **Shoah**, meaning 'destruction'. **Yom Hashoah**, the day set aside for Jews to remember the Holocaust, was established in Israel in 1959. It falls on the 27th of the Jewish month of Nissan, chosen because it is the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Yom Hashoah is observed by lighting candles for Holocaust victims and listening to the stories of survivors. Religious ceremonies include prayers such as Kaddish for the dead and the **El Malei Rahamim**, a memorial prayer. In Israel Yom Hashoah is one of the most solemn days of the year, with national ceremonies being held in Jerusalem at Yad Vashem, the Jewish people's

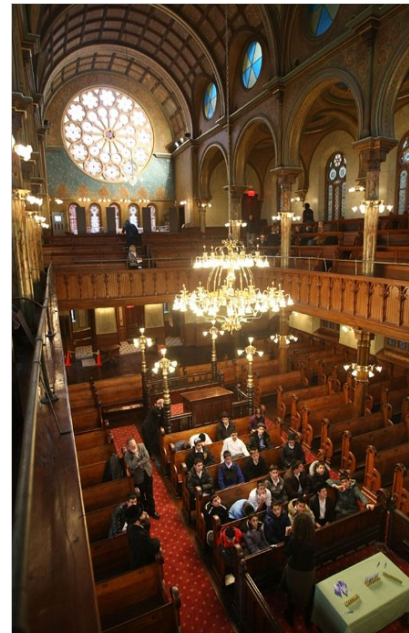
Oral Tradition) and the **Gemara** (commentary on the Mishnah) collected together. Jewish legal tradition is called **Halakhah**, while rabbinic interpretation of the Torah is called **Midrash**. Studying Torah is one of the most important sacred duties of a Jew.

Holy Days

Family and community are very important in Jewish life. The most important day of the week is **Shabbat** (the Sabbath), beginning on Friday evening and ending at nightfall on Saturday, which is made holy by refraining from weekday work. At the beginning of Shabbat families share a special meal, with the lighting of candles and blessings over wine and bread. Services are held at the **Synagogue** (place of worship), usually led by a **Rabbi** (teacher). The Rabbis of the Talmud deduced from the Torah the kinds of work Jews are forbidden to do during Shabbat, including kindling fire, writing and carrying. Orthodox Jews follow this way of life.


There are many Jewish festivals but these are some of the main ones:

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year and celebrates the creation of the world. It takes place over two days in September or October. In the synagogue, a 'shofar' or ram's horn is blown to start a ten-day period known as the 'High Holy Days', the most religious time of the calendar, when Jews



pray, repent, give charity, and reflect on their actions over the past year. It is traditional to eat sweet food, such as apples dipped in honey, to symbolize hopes for a sweet year ahead.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar. It comes ten days after Rosh Hashanah, and is the chance for a new beginning. Jews do not eat or drink for 25 hours, and spend most of the day in synagogue, to reflect on the past year and ask God's forgiveness for sins. The 'shofar' or ram's horn is blown at the end of Yom Kippur to signal the end of the Ten Days of Repentance. Families gather for a big meal at the end of the fast.

 **Hanukkah** is an eight-day festival celebrating a time in history when the Jews won a battle against the Greeks to practise their religion freely. The Greeks had banned Jewish rituals and set up idols in the Temple. When the Temple was rededicated and the golden oil lamp was lit, there was only enough oil to burn for one day, but miraculously it burned for eight days. The holiday is celebrated by lighting a nine-branched candlestick called a Hanukkiyah or Menorah. On the first night one candle is lit (using a helper candle called the Shamash), followed by the lighting of one extra candle on each night of Hanukkah. Children play with a spinning top called a 'dreidel' and also get small presents each night. Families eat 'latkes' or potato fritters and jam doughnuts – foods fried in oil, to remember the miracle of light.

Passover (Pesach in Hebrew) is one of the most important festivals in the Jewish year. Jews remember how the children of Israel were redeemed from slavery when they left Egypt. The Israelites had been enslaved by Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, until **Moses** led them out of Egypt over 3,000 years ago. The festival lasts eight days with services in the synagogue on the first and last two days. On the first two evenings, a special ceremony called the Seder ('Order') takes place over a meal around the family table, with many readings, songs, games, and special foods like Matzah (unleavened bread).

Diet

Jewish dietary laws, known as **kashrut** or **kosher** laws, are extremely important in Judaism, particularly for the Orthodox. They regulate virtually every aspect of eating for the Jewish community. The laws of kashrut derive from passages in the **Torah** and are numerous and complex. They include:

- Mammals and fowl must be slaughtered in a specific way (**shechitah**) by a trained individual (**shochet**) using a special method of slaughter which causes as little pain to the animal as possible
- Only consuming meat from certain species (e.g. pork is forbidden)
- Fish must have fins and scales to be kosher
- Meat and milk (or derivatives) cannot be mixed, meaning that meat and dairy products are not served at the same meal, cooked or served in the same utensils or stored together.



There are prayers to be said before and after eating.

Rites of passage

Brit Milah ('Covenant of Circumcision') is celebrated when a baby boy is eight days old, although this can be postponed for medical reasons. This is when the baby is named.

Bar Mitzvah (Son of the Commandment) is celebrated when a boy reaches the age of 13 and reads from the Torah. **Bat Mitzvah** (Daughter of the Commandment) is mainly marked in Progressive Judaism when a girl also reaches the age of 13. Both girls and boys are then obliged to keep the Commandments.

The Jewish wedding ceremony is called **Kiddushin**, which means 'holiness'. Rabbis or Cantors perform weddings, which are held under a **Huppah** (canopy). According to Jewish tradition, marriage is the most holy of all human institutions. It is counted among the 613 commandments found in the Torah and traditional Jews believe that a person must be married and have children to fulfill this mitzvah properly.

Judaism teaches that the soul lives on after a person dies. A person approaching death recites the **Shema** and there is a brief **Vidui** or confession, provided that the dying person is able to speak and wishes to recite it. If it is not recited, the soul of the deceased is not endangered in any way. While a Rabbi might be present, this is not essential.

Deceased Jews are buried as soon as possible. The body of the deceased is tended with great care and respect, often by a group called the **Hevra Kadisha** or 'holy fellowship'. Caring for the dead is considered an act of great merit. Orthodox Judaism does not allow cremation, but Progressive Judaism does.

The week following a burial is a period of intense mourning for family and friends. The family stays at home to be joined by relatives and friends. Daily worship services are held in the home. On Shabbat, when mourning is not permitted, the family leaves the house and joins the congregation at synagogue.

