



PART 7

JUDAISM

SUMMARY

More than any other world religion, Judaism can be thought of as the religion of a particular people – or indeed as *being* that people, rather than their religion. In part, this goes back to the shared, though disputed, story of national origin transmitted to us by scripture. According to this tradition, the people of Israel are bound by a covenant as God's elect to fulfil his obligations, in return for their special status. This tradition is central to the religion today: Judaism's most popular festivals, such as Passover and *Hanukkah*, commemorate key events from this version of the community's past. The religion of the ancient Judeans, based around the maintenance of the covenant through sacrificial rites, in time gave way to the rabbinic tradition, centred upon the synagogue, serving as a place of prayer, praise, and study.

The diaspora that followed the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 70 CE carried Judaism across much of the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. During the medieval period, many Jews – especially those in Muslim lands – made significant contributions to the arts and sciences, while those living in Christendom were frequently subjected to persecution and changing royal whim. By the twentieth century, though, Jewish communities formed part of the fabric of many European states. Reform of Judaism's tradition formed one distinct strand of the European Enlightenment, and the increasing separation of church and state at this time provided a framework into which Judaism could comfortably fit. More recently of a variety of schools of thought has emerged within Judaism, maintaining different approaches to doctrine and worship, and sometimes differing over how to respond to the changes and challenges of the secular world.

Much of recent Jewish history is overshadowed by the Nazi Holocaust, and for many the memory of this event highlights the importance Jewish traditions and of the community itself. Since 1948, the state of Israel has been a centre for this community and home – along with many other countries – to the diverse schools of thought that together make it up.

A Historical Overview



Rabbinic Judaism today sees itself as a direct development from the time of Moses, the giver of the Torah, more than 3000 years ago. To understand the developing beliefs and practices of Judaism, we need to know something of the social and political events that affected Jewish communities. We also need to observe the ideas of their neighbours in order to understand the influence of the cultures with which they came into contact. Greek thought, Christianity, Islam, medieval philosophy, and charismatic movements have all affected the intellectual activity and popular customs of Judaism.

EXILE AND AFTER

The story of the early development of Judaism is much debated. The commonly accepted narrative, largely based on the polemical biblical texts of Ezra and Nehemiah – which actually refer to ‘people of Israel’ rather than ‘Jews’ – has been important for the later development of Jewish self-understanding, but is not necessarily founded in historical reality.

This popular story of Judaism begins in the late sixth century BCE, when the Persian Empire was dominant in the Middle East. In 586 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar II, King of the

*I was glad when they said to me,
‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’
Our feet have been standing within your gates,
O Jerusalem!
Jerusalem, built as a city which is bound
firmly together,
to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
‘May they prosper who love you!
Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers!’
For my brethren and companions’ sake
I will say, ‘Peace be within you!’
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.*

Psalm 122, Old Testament, Revised Standard Version



The Judean Exiles, c. 560 BCE

neo-Babylonian Empire, destroyed Jerusalem, and many of its people were taken captive to Babylon, along with much of the population of Judea. In both Babylon and Egypt there were now communities of people who still considered themselves Judeans – consisting largely of mercenary soldiers and of prisoners of war and their families – some of whom were agents of the ruling power, and for that reason privileged. In Egypt, where this caused much resentment, the Judeans remained separate, following the religion and customs they brought with them.

The Judeans believed there should be just a single Temple, the only place where religious sacrifice could be carried out. While they lived in Judah, it was possible for all to make the pilgrimage to this Temple in Jerusalem; but in exile this became difficult, if not impossible – though the Jews of the Dispersion apparently made great efforts

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat
 and wept
 when we remembered Zion.
 There on the poplars
 we hung our harps,
 for there our captors asked us
 for songs,
 our tormentors demanded songs
 of joy;
 they said, 'Sing us one of the songs
 of Zion!'
 How can we sing the songs of the Lord
 while in a foreign land?
 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
 may my right hand forget its skill.
 May my tongue cling to the roof of
 my mouth
 if I do not remember you,
 if I do not consider Jerusalem
 my highest joy.*

Psalm 137:1–6, Old Testament,
 New International Version

to visit Jerusalem and worship in obedience to the Torah, the written teaching. To meet this obstacle, and in an attempt to maintain some continuity with the past, houses of assembly – *beitai kneset* in Hebrew, 'synagogues' in Greek – were set up in Babylon, and prayer, singing or chanting, teaching, and reading and discussion of the Torah – but not sacrifice – took place in them. Some time during this period, scribes also first appeared. Based in the synagogue, their role was to understand the Torah and interpret its rules for the contemporary situation. This 'guild of scholars' seems eventually to have evolved into the rabbis of rabbinic Judaism.

In 539 the army of Cyrus II, 'the Great', of Persia captured Babylon, and Cyrus gained nominal control of the Babylonian Empire. According to Ezra 1:3, he permitted the Hebrews to return from exile and rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem. When Hebrew religious leaders returned to Jerusalem, the city was apparently established as a Temple community, led by the priests, as Cyrus would not allow the restoration of the monarchy. According to Ezra/Nehemiah, a strict separation between Judean – 'Jews' – and non-Judean in Judah was enforced by the Hebrews' leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah, a separation apparently marked by circumcision, observance of *Shabbat* – the Jewish Sabbath – and of the Sabbatical year, recognition of the Torah (the first five books of Jewish scripture), and obligations to the Temple in Jerusalem. Rigorists also required that marriage arrangements should be made only between Judeans.

THE HELLENISTIC KINGDOMS

After Alexander the Great won the Battle of Issus in 333 BCE, an era of prosperity commenced in the region. Cities founded on the Greek pattern grew rapidly, with Alexandria becoming the leading city in Egypt within a few years of its foundation. The Judean community there was substantial, and Greek – rather than Aramaic – became their language. People even tried to look Greek! The Greek language was the medium by which Greek ideas, attitudes, and ways of reasoning were passed on. People who could read Greek – especially those living in Alexandria – might have had an opportunity to read the great Greek philosophers in the original. But it seems Greek-speaking Jews were

not drawn away from their customs as much as some feared, and still visited Jerusalem to celebrate the festivals in the Temple.

After the death of Alexander, his empire broke up into smaller units, principally the kingdoms of Macedonia, Egypt, and the Seleucids. When the Parthian Empire rose to power in the third century BCE, the Seleucid Kingdom, which had included Babylon, was gradually reduced to only the Syrian region, and Babylon came under Parthian control. The Jews remaining in Babylon were now cut off from other Jewish communities, and Aramaic remained their language, adding a linguistic barrier to that of politics. The Jewish communities of Babylon and of the Greek-influenced, or 'Hellenized', kingdoms inevitably developed differently, though they were united by a common scripture and emphasis on Jerusalem and its Temple, where priests were leaders, and the high priest politically and economically powerful.

TENSION AND REVOLT

In 191–190 BCE the Romans, turning their eyes towards the East, defeated King Antiochus III of Syria; it was probably prisoners of war from this conflict who founded the Jewish community in Rome. Jews also settled in Antioch, Syria, and in Asia Minor, modern Turkey. The Romans exacted tribute from Antiochus, which meant increased taxes. Consequently tension grew between rich and poor in Jerusalem and Judah, which – along with the political and cultural divisions between those for and against Hellenism – made for a volatile situation.

The explosion came during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164). When the Jews resisted his nominee for the high priesthood, he sent troops to sack Jerusalem, established pagan practices in the Temple, and attacked the Jewish religion. Some Jews submitted, but those who adhered to the Torah, especially the *Hasidim* – 'The Pious' – suffered greatly. Eventually there was full-scale revolt, led by the Maccabee family, and – against the odds – Judas Maccabeus came to terms with the Syrians in 165 BCE, marched on Jerusalem, and ritually cleansed the desecrated Temple. This victory, and the reconsecration of the Temple, is celebrated today in the Festival of Lights, or *Hanukkah*.

The Maccabee family now began a line of rulers – the Hasmonean dynasty – many of whom, ironically, became typical Hellenistic despots. However they won a measure of freedom for the Jewish realm before the Romans, under Pompey, annexed Judea in 63 BCE.

UNDER THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Judea now became a vassal of Rome. The current Hasmonean king was confirmed as the nation's leader and high priest, but the Romans refused to recognize him as king.

In 40 BCE, following a Parthian invasion of Syria and Judea, the Romans gave Herod (c. 73–4 BCE), son of Antipater the Idumean, the title 'king of the Jews'. Although his personal life was disastrous, the country prospered under his rule, and Herod 'the Great' is remembered as a builder of cities such as Sebaste and Caesarea, of fortresses such as

Masada and Herodium, of palaces, theatres, and amphitheatres, and of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Those who opposed Rome and Hellenism hated and opposed him.

During the Roman period Jewish hopes rose for a messiah – a king of David's line, for some, a priest-king – who would rescue his people from the Romans and restore the Judean state. There were several revolts in Judea during the time of Herod and his successors, and 'prophets' attracted large followings. The most serious threat to the Jews came during the reign of the Emperor Caligula (37–41 CE), who demanded that all his subjects worship him, and ordered a statue of himself as Zeus to be placed in the Jerusalem Temple.

THE TEMPLE DESTROYED

Judea became increasingly unsettled. In the coastal cities, conflict between Greeks and Jews was constant, and tension mounted between the Roman governors and the people. Finally in 66 CE the Jews rose in revolt against Rome, but initial success was followed by crushing defeat, Jerusalem was taken, and its Temple destroyed in 70 CE.

The destruction of the Temple was decisive for the future of Judaism. The Temple, the priesthood, and the council – the Sanhedrin – were finished. No longer could Jerusalem act as a unifying force within Judaism, the focus of pilgrimage. Jewish communities now became just one group within larger communities; although distinct, they were inevitably affected by the culture of the city or nation in which they found themselves.



HELLENISTIC JUDAISM

The life of the ordinary Jew in Greek-speaking areas centred on the synagogue, where worship and practical matters of community life were conducted. Strangers were lodged, the poor helped, discipline enforced, public gatherings held, and children taught in the synagogue. Visiting preachers might give a sermon, but the resident scholars probably did not. Authority was in the hands of the 'ruler of the synagogue'. Associated with the synagogue was the 'house of study' (*bet midrash*), where the Bible was studied and scholars could consult a library.

Some Hellenistic rabbis drew up rules of biblical interpretation. Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE–50 CE) attempted to explain the Bible from the point of view of Greek philosophy, presenting the great events of Israel's history as allegories of eternal truths and adopting



The Jewish Diaspora c. 240 BCE

the Stoic idea of Reason (*Logos*), which he called a 'second God', an intermediary between God and the world.

RABBINIC JUDAISM

A seemingly insignificant event provided a new direction for Judaism when Johanan ben Zakai (30–90 CE) founded a school at Jamnia, or Yavneh, Galilee, where *rabbi* (master) became the formal title for teachers. Though Johanan may not have been a Pharisee, his successor, Gamaliel the Elder, was, and the school's ethos was essentially Pharisaic, the stance of emerging rabbinic Judaism. The school at Jamnia came to exercise the function

of a council, and even adopted the name 'Sanhedrin'. Johanan fixed the calendar for Jews abroad – once the prerogative of the high priest – and Jews began to look to this council for advice and judgments. The rabbis of this early period are known as *Tanna* – plural *Tannaim*, 'teachers'. Their earliest surviving works are 'sayings' in the *Pirkei Avot*, sometimes known as the 'Ethics of the Fathers', and second-century written Hebrew versions of Jewish oral traditions known as the Mishnah.

Most other varieties of Judaism gradually died out. Jewish Christianity survived into the second century CE, although the rabbis tried hard to exclude Jewish Christians from the synagogues after about 90 CE. In the Greek world, Christians broke entirely with Judaism, often becoming anti-Jewish.

PERSECUTION

Jewish revolts against Roman rule continued widely and were brutally put down. The Judean revolt of 132 CE may have been ignited by the establishment of the new Roman city of Aelia Capitolina upon the ruins of Jerusalem; the Old City of present-day Jerusalem is the linear descendant of this Roman town. This revolt was led by Simon ben Kosiba, also known as Simon bar Kokhba – 'Son of a Star', who claimed to be the messiah, and who was supported by the greatest rabbinic scholar of the day, Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph (c. 40–c. 137 CE). But the uprising was hopeless, and the casualties inflicted on the Romans only made the final defeat more harsh.

The governors of Palestine – the name the Romans now gave the country – were now higher-ranking Romans than previously. Construction of Aelia Capitolina was completed, and Jews forbidden to enter the city. Galilee now became a centre of Jewish life, and several different towns in succession became the seat of the Jewish council. Judaism was not banned, but the circumcision of converts was forbidden, making conversion difficult, if not impossible.

PALESTINIAN PATRIARCHATE

Simeon ben Gamaliel II became president of the 'Great Sanhedrin' and first Palestinian Patriarch with – at least in theory – authority over all Jews of the Roman world. His son, Judah I, the Prince (b. 135) – also known as Rabbi HaQadosh – appears to have exercised considerable power. A noted scholar, during his time the Mishnah was codified and published. The Palestinian Patriarchate came to an end with the execution by the Romans of Gamaliel VI in 425, and the Sanhedrin was also dissolved as a result of Roman oppression.

The conversion of Constantine to Christianity in 313 was not auspicious for Jews. Although Judaism was never made illegal, life became difficult for Jews, as Jewish-Christian tensions grew. In Egypt, the Jewish community began to recover, though numbers were never as high as in earlier centuries. Greek culture was on the wane, and with it Hellenistic Judaism.

BABYLONIAN EXILARCHS

In Babylon, the ruler of the Jews of the Diaspora were known as an 'exilarch', or head of the exiles. This hereditary position was recognized by the state and, later, under Arab rule by the Muslims. But from the fifth century onward, relations between the Jews and the Persian authorities became difficult, and the Jews there welcomed the Arab conquerors. Similarly, in Palestine, the harshness of the Byzantine rule caused the Jews to look for help abroad, aiding the invading Persian forces in 614. However uprisings among the Jerusalem Jews in 617 were subdued by military force when the Byzantine army re-entered the city, and the Jews were once more expelled.

JUDAISM AND ISLAM

Islam arose and spread with extraordinary rapidity in the seventh and eight centuries CE. Muslim Arabs defeated the Byzantine army in 634, conquered Syria and Palestine, defeated Persia in 637, and Egypt soon after. Muslims invaded Spain in 711, and set up a Muslim state. Within a century, many Jews had come under Muslim rule. For most, living conditions improved considerably, and the Jews shared in the intellectual ferment of the Arab world. Arabs translated and studied the learning of Greece, Persia, China, and India, and drawing on these resources, Muslim and Jewish scholars made great advances in mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, chemistry, medicine, and philology. One of the greatest Jewish philosophers, Saadiah Gaon (882–942), grappled with the problem of 'faith and knowledge', discussing proofs of God's existence.

BABYLON: THE AGE OF THE GAONS

In Babylon, the authority and importance of the Gaons – the heads of the Babylonian academies – grew immensely after 600. The Gaons ensured that the Babylonian Talmud – documents compiled in the Babylonian academies between the third and fifth centuries – became accepted more widely. In the ninth century a gaonate was established in Palestine, and was recognized as authoritative by Jews in Spain, Egypt, and Italy. Under the Gaons collections of Talmudic laws were made, synagogue poetry written, prayer-books drawn up, and the text of the Bible was fixed and annotated. Most influential were the *Responsa* (Hebrew, *She'elot ve-Tshuvot* – questions and answers) – questions on matters of practice sent to the Gaons, debated in the academies, and answered in their name.

Variants from rabbinic Judaism arose. In eighth century Babylon, Anan ben David (c. 715–c. 795), and Karaite movement he possibly founded, rejected the Talmud and all forms of oral law, such as the Mishnah, taking a stand on the Bible only. It seemed the Karaites might divide the Jewish world, but the movement soon became merely a sect, which still survives today in small numbers.

SCHOLARSHIP IN SPAIN

Jews rose to influential positions at court in Spain, where 'Sephardic' Judaism developed, with its own synagogue rituals and a Spanish-Jewish dialect, Ladino. Solomon ibn Gabirol (c. 1021–c. 1058) attempted to reconcile Jewish thought with Neo-Platonism – which posits that God is separated from the world by a descending series of 'emanations' – which contributed to the development of the Jewish mystical tradition known as the Kabbalah (see below). Judah Halevi of Toledo (1085–1140) wrote a fictional dialogue between a Jewish scholar and the king of the Khazars – a Turkish tribe converted to Judaism – showing that philosophy could prove God's existence, but that revelation was then necessary to know more of him.

JEWS IN WESTERN EUROPE

From the mid-eleventh century Jewish scholars in the West became more important than the Gaons. The French scholar Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040–1105), known, from his initials, as Rashi, produced standard commentaries on the Bible and Talmud. With additions by his successors, his commentaries are still printed in the Talmud.

In the eleventh century there was a shift in philosophical thought, as Aristotle supplanted Plato. Aristotle's science seemed to leave no room for religion, and Jewish scholars debated whether his philosophy could be reconciled with biblical religion. In Córdoba, Spain, the Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Moses Maimonides, 1135–1204) presented a code containing all the *halakbab* in his *Mishneh Torah*. Exiled from Spain to Egypt, he wrote in Arabic the great philosophical work *The Guide for the Perplexed*, discussing the difficulties Aristotle's philosophy presented for the believer. Although Judaism had been – and is – far more based on right behaviour – orthopraxis – than orthodoxy, Maimonides saw 'right belief' as of great importance, for which he was much criticized. Maimonides also drew up thirteen 'roots' of Judaism, the 'Thirteen Principles of the Faith'.

This God is one. He is not two nor more than two, but one. None of the things existing in the universe to which the term one is applied is like unto his unity.

Moses Maimonides,
Mishneh Torah

THE RISE OF ANTI-SEMITISM

From the tenth century onwards, anti-Jewish sentiment and riots became common in France, and life in Christian Europe generally became difficult for Jews. The Crusading armies marching to the 'Holy Land' looted and slaughtered Jews as they went, and the capture of Jerusalem – hailed by Christendom as a great triumph – meant death for the Jews there. Many Jews regarded such death as martyrdom, the ultimate form of witness, or 'sanctification of the Name' (*kiddush haShem*), and some committed suicide rather than renouncing their faith. Jewish rules of conduct (*halakbab*) stated that in some situations death was preferable to the

JUDAISM TIMELINE

2000 BCE 1500 BCE 1000 BCE 500 BCE 0 500 CE 1000 CE 1500 CE 2000 CE

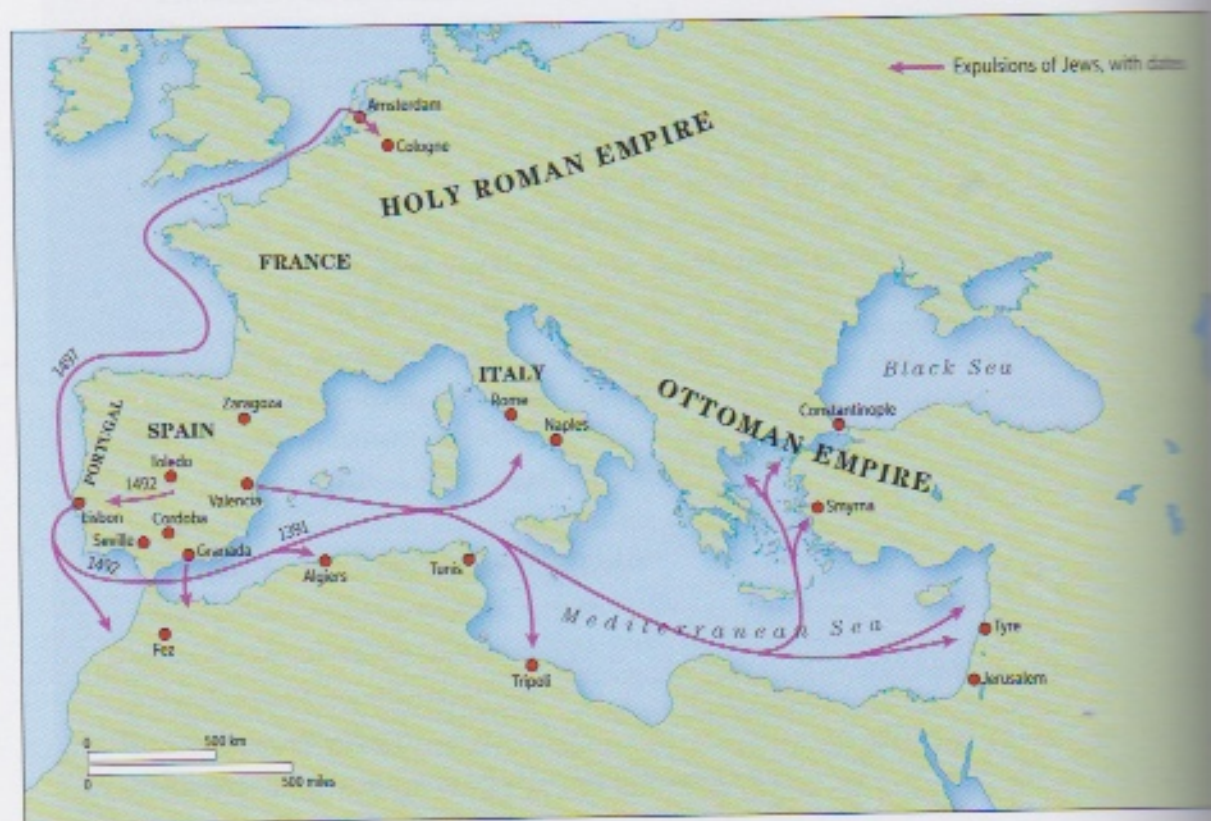
- c. 1800 BCE Traditional date for Abraham, first Patriarch
- c. 1280 BCE Traditional date when Moses leads Exodus from Egypt
- c. 1000 BCE King David takes Jerusalem, makes it his capital
- c. 950 BCE King Solomon completes first Temple in Jerusalem
- 922 BCE Northern kingdom separates on Solomon's death
- 722 BCE Assyrians conquer Northern kingdom, disperse its people
- 621 BCE Josiah centralizes worship at Jerusalem Temple
- 586 BCE Babylonians conquer Jerusalem, exile leaders and people
- 538 BCE Persians conquer Babylon, permit Hebrew exiles to return
- 515 BCE Second Temple dedicated
- 164 BCE Rededication of Jerusalem Temple after Maccabean revolt
- 70 Romans besiege Jerusalem, destroy Herod's Temple
- c. 90 By tradition, canon of Hebrew scripture completed
- c. 200 The Mishnah of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi completed
- c. 400 Palestinian Talmud completed
- c. 600 Babylonian Talmud completed
- 882–942 Saadia Gaon, Jewish philosopher, Babylonia
- 1040–1105 Rashi, commentator on Bible and Talmud
- 1135–1204 Maimonides, author of *The Guide of the Perplexed*
- 1250–1305 Moses de Léon, author of *Zohar*
- 1492 Jews expelled from Spain
- 1520–23 Printed edition of Talmud published in Venice
- c. 1698–1759 Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov, in Poland
- 1729–86 Moses Mendelssohn, pioneer of Reform in Germany
- 1881 Pogroms in Russia spur Jewish westward emigration
- 1889 Conservative Judaism separates from Reform in USA
- 1897 Theodor Herzl and the first Zionist Congress
- 1938 German synagogues vandalized
- 1938–45 Holocaust (Shoah) – destruction of much of European Jewry by the Nazis
- 1948 State of Israel established

alternative – for instance to avoid idolatry, incest, or murder, or to ‘sanctify the Name’.

In Europe, two vicious lies circulated: the 'blood libel' and the 'libel of desecration of the host'. The blood libel claimed Jews were guilty of ritual murder, using the blood of Christian children during Passover. The 'libel of desecration of the host' spuriously claimed that Jews stole the host – the consecrated bread of the eucharist, believed to be the body of Christ – and stabbed or burned it, thus re-enacting the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jews entered England during the eleventh century, but were expelled in 1290, not to return until after 1650. Between 1290 and 1293, Jewish communities in southern Italy were almost wiped out and many forced conversions were made. The Jews were expelled from France in 1306, and massacres occurred in 1348. Jews were falsely accused of poisoning wells and causing the Black Death, a plague that killed off one third of the population of Europe in 1348. From Spain to Poland, Jews were persecuted and massacred.

In the twelfth century Christians attempted to recapture Spain from the Muslims. In response, the Muslim Almohades from North Africa pushed into Spain and, not showing their usual tolerance towards Jews, drove them northwards. Christian leaders at first welcomed these Jews. With other means of livelihood closed to them, many became moneylenders, since usury was forbidden for Christians. But tolerance did not last, and in



The Jews are expelled from Spain

Christian Spain attacks on Jews reached a peak in 1391. Many Jews professed conversion to Christianity, and were known by the insulting name of *Marranos* (swine). In 1492 Jews were offered the choice of converting or leaving; thousands fled to other parts of Europe and beyond, such as Safed in Galilee.

JEWISH MYSTICISM

Another important strand of Judaism is mysticism: belief in some kind of direct 'vision' of divine things, a way of experiencing things other than through our ordinary senses. The Kabbalah, a Jewish mystical tradition, developed in Spain, bringing together earlier traditions, such as ideas from the Talmud and the Book of Creation (*Sefer Yetzirah*), which emphasized the mystical meaning of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet and from Neo-Platonism a concept of how God related to the world.

UNDER THE OTTOMANS

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Muslim Ottoman Empire was in the ascendant, capturing Palestine in 1515, Egypt in 1517, and expanding into Europe, until halted in Vienna in 1683. Most Jews now lived either in Christian Poland-Lithuania, or under the Muslim Ottoman Empire, where conditions were generally less difficult, but where they were still subject to arbitrary or capricious acts of the rulers. In Christian Italy, severe penalties were inflicted on the Jews in this period.

The Protestant Reformers on the whole favoured Jews, but Martin Luther changed from tolerance and defence to rabid anti-Jewish abuse. The rite of non-Sephardic Jews in Europe – especially in Germany – known as 'Ashkenazi' dates to the sixteenth century, and has its own German-Jewish dialect, Yiddish.

Anti-Jewish riots continued, but the authorities now more often protected the Jews, who were seen as useful for their money-lending and trading. In Ukraine and Poland many Jews were killed in massacres in 1648 and 1649, when Jewish leaders were seen by the peasantry to be economically and politically at one with the Polish overlords.

HOPE OF A MESSIAH

In the late seventeenth century a number of Jewish messianic movements arose, partly a product of the insecurity of Jewish life. The most important was centred on Shabbetai Zvi (1626–1700) and his prophet, Nathan of Gaza (1643–80), who called for repentance, strict ascetic practices, and mortification of the body – including fasting, bathing in freezing water, and constant prayer. Shabbetai was imprisoned in Gallipoli in 1665, and in 1666, under coercion, converted to Islam. His remaining followers were viewed with deep suspicion by the Jewish community, and the episode resulted in general disillusion with Messianism.

HASIDISM

Eighteenth century Poland saw the rise of Hasidism, a popular movement that gave hope and excitement to people who were frightened and deprived, with its emphasis on emotion and devotion. The movement focused on the individual and direct experience of the divine, and was thus accessible to ordinary labourers, who could not afford the long hours of study required by rabbinical Judaism. The key figure in the growth of Hasidism was Israel ben Eliezer (1700–60), known as the Baal Shem Tov, 'Master of the Good Name'; a dynamic, charismatic figure, widely known as a miracle worker, whose teaching contained much from the Kabbalah, especially the *Zohar*.

Many legends are told about Baal Shem Tov, and much popular belief – indeed superstition – was caught up into the movement. But at the core was a passionate devotion to God, expressed in ecstatic prayer, singing, and dancing. From outside, Hasidic life may seem a narrow existence, but it is sustained by Hasidic 'joy' – a genuine religious 'high'.

The leaders of Hasidic groups were more gurus than rabbi-like scholars. The leader, *rebbe*, or *zaddiq*, is a man who lives the life of devotion, and acts as intermediary between his followers and God. His word is absolute: his followers leave their families to be with him, and even contest for a share of the food he has touched. There are a number of different branches of Hasidism today. Women played a much more prominent role in the beginnings of the movement than they do today. Generally, Hasidism is a man's world; Hasidic women lead separate lives.

The Hasidic movement met strong opposition from the Jewish establishment, with something of a class struggle, as *rebbs* replaced the rich and learned. One of the most hostile opponents was the Gaon of Vilna, Elijah ben Solomon (1720–97), an ascetic intellectual who excoriated Hasidism. The Hasidic Jews were sometimes excluded from the community – and even betrayed to hostile authorities. Influenced by Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1812), his Chabad branch of Hasidic Judaism was reconciled to Talmudic study and thus accepted by the wider Jewish community.

GO WEST

From the early seventeenth century, Jews gradually began to move from Poland and the Ottoman Empire into the cities of the West. There was a growing recognition of the value of Jewish commercial activity, and Jews began to be associated with the more developed social and economic systems. During the nineteenth century, large numbers of Jews migrated to America. Judaism remained the target for abuse and oppression, but there was a growing tolerance. During the nineteenth century equal rights were eventually obtained in many countries, though often with great difficulty.

JEWISH ENLIGHTENMENT

The 'Jewish enlightenment', *Haskalah*, pointed to another new direction within Judaism. Its founder, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), advocated the separation of church and state, so that religious bodies should not be able to compel, only persuade. He emphasized the universal principles of religion within Judaism, and translated the Torah into German. After his death, this movement, now led by Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), became more radical, rejecting the Talmud and traditional ideas – even the idea of revelation.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, emancipation in France, Italy, and Germany allowed Jews to leave the ghetto and – as a result of *Haskalah* – develop reformed Judaism. Emancipation also aided the assimilation of Jews – sometimes even their cultural disappearance, when Jews merged through marriage into the surrounding society. After emancipation, the lifestyle of many Jews began more closely to resemble that of their non-Jewish fellow citizens.

The dark counterpoint to increased tolerance was anti-Semitism, based on a belief in the 'soul' of a people; a contrast was drawn between the 'Semitic' nature of Jews and that of the 'Aryan' or 'Slavonic'. Strongly anti-Semitic movements were promoted in Germany and France from the 1880s, the direct consequence of which was the destruction between 1939 and 1945 of six million people in the Holocaust, simply because they were Jewish. European Jewry almost ceased to exist, and one-third of world Jewry was killed.

GEOFFREY COWLING

REVISED BY TIM DOWLEY

All things that are, are in God, and must be conceived through God, and therefore God is the cause of the things which are in himself. This is the first point. Further, no substance can be granted outside God, that is, nothing which is outside God exists in itself; which was the second point. Therefore God is the immanent, but not the transcendent, cause of all things.

Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics* (1677).

Sacred Writings



The texts of Judaism have long been central to its life and culture, as can be seen in many expressions. In the Torah, Deuteronomy 30:14, we read: '... the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe' (literally: for you to do). Psalms and wisdom also hint at the centrality of texts. For example, the psalmist proclaims: 'I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you ... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Psalm 119:11, 105).

In the reign of King Josiah (c. 639–609 BCE; see 2 Kings 22–23), it is the discovery of the 'book of the Law' (an early form of Torah) that inspires Josiah's reforms. From the late biblical period until classical rabbinic Judaism, the scribe, from the copyist to the 'maker' of scrolls or books, has been regarded as something of a hero, often on a par with a sage and, eventually, a *reb* or rabbi.

A Jewish legend reflects the sacredness of texts. It tells of a Roman soldier who defaced a Torah scroll in the first century CE, and whom the authorities put to death to avoid insurrection. Since the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, and the final revolt against Roman authorities (132–35 CE), sacrifice and pilgrimage to the Temple was replaced with the study of Scripture and other sacred texts, prayer, and works of piety.

The study of texts made Judaism a portable tradition. Jews of the diaspora, or exile, were able to worship God anywhere, and the study of sacred texts could also be done anywhere. Today, the sacredness of texts is expressed in other ways too. Since the advent of printing, Jewish writers and publishers have been at the forefront of the book industry. Modern *halakhot* (observances) include stipulations about the proper treatment of books. Judaism has always exhibited a remarkable love of the word, of manuscripts, and of books.

There are three major textual traditions:

- Tanakh (Hebrew scriptures)
- Mishnah (tractates and regulations on the Law)
- Talmud (exposition of the Mishnah and Torah)

TANAKH

In Jewish practice and theology the term 'torah' is used in three senses:

- the first five books of the Scriptures, traditionally ascribed to Moses
- the whole of the Jewish Scriptures (written torah)
- ethical teaching of the rabbis (oral torah)

This article only uses the term in the first sense, referring to the first five books. In referring to the whole of Hebrew scripture, we use the term 'Tanakh', which derives from the tradition since late antiquity of dividing the Hebrew scriptures into three distinct sections.

Much debate surrounds how and why particular books came to be included in the Jewish canon, and in what order. The order is significant. For example, in the Jewish canon the Book of Ruth is in the Writings and belongs to a group of five books (the *megillot*) that are read cyclically at festival times, Ruth being read at harvest.

In Judaism the notion of canon itself has evolved over the centuries. From the earliest records, what mattered was the pragmatic nature of texts: which texts manage to speak with immediacy – beyond the context of their composition – to the ongoing life and identity of the faith community? Once identified, those texts are 'biblical'. These are texts that, for whatever reason, accrued existential value for the community who used them.

There is one way to salvation; to go back to the sources of Judaism, to Bible, Talmud, and Midrash; to read, study, and comprehend them in order to live them ... the seekers after knowledge will go back to the ancient fountains of Judaism, Bible, and Talmud and the one effort will be to obtain the concept of life out of Judaism.

Samson Raphael Hirsch,
The Nineteen Letters on Judaism
(1836), transl. B. Drachman
(New York: Feldheim, 1960).

MISHNAH

The Mishnah is a collection of tractates consisting of *halakhot*, observances which cover every conceivable area of Jewish daily life and ritual purity. Its first tractate, the sayings of the fathers, *Pirke Avot*, begins by laying down some principles for interpretation and for practice. The first verse sets the tone:

Moses received Torah from Sinai and passed it on to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets passed it on to the men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: 'Be careful in giving judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah.'

In other words, like Jewish writers after them, the authors of the Mishnah saw themselves as part of an unbroken chain of tradition. Jews who fulfilled the ordinances of the Mishnah would in turn be fulfilling the Torah, building a hedge around it in a mutually beneficial exchange: guard the Torah and it will guard you. From its inception (c. 200 CE), the Mishnah became the key reference for decision making among the diaspora Jews. However, within fifty to a hundred years large portions of it were thought to be terse and obscure, and an explanatory companion soon evolved.

TALMUD

The Talmud ('teaching'), a vast collection of writings containing the teaching of the rabbis, appeared in the rabbinic academies of diaspora Judaism out of the continuing debate about the significance and implementation of the Tanakh – especially the Torah – and the Mishnah, with tractates and groups of tractates gradually becoming authoritative through use.

There are two Talmuds: the Palestinian – also known as the Jerusalem Talmud – a record of discussion in the rabbinic schools of Galilee, especially Tiberias, during the fourth century CE; and the longer Babylonian Talmud, completed in the seventh or eighth century CE, recording the opinions of more than a thousand rabbis between 200 and 650 CE. The Babylonian Talmud was used by Jews living in the Muslim Empire, whilst the Palestinian Talmud was influential in Italy and Egypt.

These lengthy collections – the Babylonian Talmud amounts around 4 million words – contain many kinds of literature. The scholar Solomon Schechter (1847–1915) described the Talmud as 'a work too varied, too disconnected, too divergent in its elements, to be concisely defined at all, or even approximately to be described within the limits of an English sentence'. For this reason, we have to be careful about taking any particular opinion in the Talmud as 'the teaching of Judaism'. The Talmud records many views, so it is necessary to discover who said what, how authoritative it was, whether it was accepted by the later authorities, and what later commentaries said about it.

The range of topics the Talmud covers is astounding. Hyam Maccoby's anthology of the Talmud, *The Day God Laughed*, organizes its material into such categories as: Enjoying Nature, Against Asceticism, Physical Beauty, Eating and Drinking, Rejoicing, Studying; Tall Stories, The Value of Argument, Arguing for Pleasure, Arguing with God, and Privy Etiquette. The Talmud is at pains to blur any distinction between holy and profane, and is not concerned with answers. It is far more concerned with questions – and the process of answering them. One of its most celebrated passages captures this:

On that day, Rabbi Eliezer put forward all the arguments in the world, but the sages did not accept them.

Finally, he said to them, 'If the halakhah is according to me, let that carob-tree prove it.'

He pointed to a nearby carob-tree, which then moved from its place a hundred cubits, some say, four hundred cubits. They said to him, 'One cannot bring a proof from the moving of a carob-tree.' ...

[Two more miracles were performed by Rabbi Eliezer in a bid to have his argument accepted.]

Then said Rabbi Eliezer to the Sages, 'If the halakhah is according to me, may a proof come from heaven.'

Then a heavenly voice went forth, and said, 'What have you to do with Rabbi Eliezer? The halakhah is according to him in every place.'

Then Rabbi Joshua rose up on his feet, and said, 'It is not in the heavens.'
[Deuteronomy 30:12 – he goes on to explain that since the Torah has already been given on Sinai, we do not need to pay attention to a heavenly voice.]

Rabbi Nathan met the prophet Elijah. He asked him, 'What was the Holy One, blessed be He, doing in that hour?'

Said Elijah, 'He was laughing, and saying, "My children have defeated me, my children have defeated me."'

Bava Metzia 59b

In other words, God's children are grown up enough to argue with him; for the rabbi, it is even a responsibility. In this sense, the Talmud captures something essential, not just of the historical period and contexts it emerges from, but also of the ongoing life of Judaism: God is in the argument, and he may well be found in the delight of vigorous human discourse.

In some ways, for modern Judaism the Tanakh is not the most important text. In matters of practice, the texts of classical rabbinic Judaism, of its subsequent commentators—such as the biblical *Targums* (paraphrases) and medieval texts such as the *Mishneh Torah* ("Copy of the Torah") of Maimonides, and commentaries by Rashi and Abraham ibn Ezra – and of a whole range of popular prayer books and guides to Jewish life, including the *Zohar* and *Shulhan Arukh* (c. 1565) – are often the first port of call. Yet for the composers of the Mishnah, Tanakh was the foundation not just of the laws being composed, but of life itself; and for the Talmud, Mishnah and Tanakh were foundational.

Judaism's sacred texts, then, can be envisaged as concentric circles: The innermost three circles are the Tanakh, at the very centre, Torah, followed by *Nevi'im* (the prophets), and *Ketuvim* (the writings). After that come Mishnah, Talmud, and *Midrash* ("commentary") – the ongoing tradition of commentary and critique, a potentially never-ending circle that includes all texts that manage to become, in some way, of existential value to the Jewish community.

ERIC S. CHRISTIANSON

DIVISIONS OF THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Torah

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Nevi'im (Prophets)

Former: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
Latter: major: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
Minor: the book of the twelve: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Ketuvim (Writings)

Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles

Beliefs



In the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites experienced God as the Lord of history. The most uncompromising expression of his unity is the *Shema* prayer: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord' (Deuteronomy 6:4–9). According to Scripture, the universe owes its existence to the one God, the creator of heaven and earth, and since all human beings are created in his image, all men and women are brothers and sisters. Thus, the belief in one God implies, for the Jewish faith, that there is one humanity and one world.

GOD AND CREATION

For the Jewish people, God is conceived as the transcendent creator of the universe; that is to say, God is distinct from that which he has created, above and beyond the world. He is 'wholly other' than anything that is not God. Unlike creation, God is uncreated and does not depend upon anything for his existence. Thus he is described as forming heaven and earth:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

Genesis 1:1–2

Throughout the Bible this theme of divine transcendence is repeatedly affirmed. The prophet Isaiah proclaims:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in.

Isaiah 40: 21–2

Despite this view of God as remote from his creation, he is also viewed as actively involved in the cosmos. In the Bible, the belief that he is always omnipresent is repeatedly stressed. In the rabbinic period, Jewish scholars formulated the doctrine of the *Shekhinah* to denote the divine presence. As the indwelling presence of God, the *Shekhinah* is compared to light. Thus the Midrash paraphrases Numbers 6:25, 'The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you': 'May he give thee of the light of the *Shekhinah*'. In the Middle Ages the doctrine of the *Shekhinah* was further elaborated: according to Saadiah Gaon, the *Shekhinah* is identical with the glory of God, and serves as an intermediary between God and human beings during the prophetic encounter. Judah Halevi of Toledo argued in his *Kuzari* that it is the *Shekhinah* rather than God himself who appears to prophets.

Some feminists today see the *Shekhinah* as a way for women to connect spiritually to the divine, distinct from the normalized male attribute of God that occurs in many Jewish contexts.

TIME AND ETERNITY

The Hebrew Bible also depicts God as having neither beginning nor end, a teaching that was elaborated by the rabbis. According to the Talmud, there is an unbridgeable gap between God and humans:

Come and see! The measure of the Holy One, blessed be he, is unlike the measure of flesh and blood. The things fashioned by a creature of flesh and blood outlast him; the Holy One, blessed be he, outlasts the things he has fashioned.

God's eternal reign is similarly affirmed in midrashic literature. Yet the rabbis discouraged speculation about the nature of eternity. The Mishnah states:

Whoever reflects on four things, it were better for him that he had not come into the world: What is above? What is beneath? What is before? and What is after?

Despite such teaching, in the Middle Ages Jewish theologians debated this issue. In his *Guide for the Perplexed* Maimonides argued that time itself was part of creation; when God is described as existing before the creation of the universe, the 'time' should not be understood in its normal sense. This concept was developed by Joseph Albo in his *Ikkarim* (fifteenth century), where he argues that the concepts of priority and perpetuity can only be applied to God in a negative sense. That is, when God is described as being 'before' or 'after' some period, this only means that he was not

*Whither shall I go from
thy Spirit?*

*Or whither shall I flee
from thy presence?*

*If I ascend to heaven,
thou art there!*

*If I make my bed in
Sheol, thou art there!*

*If I take the wings of the
morning*

*and dwell in the
utmost parts of the
sea,*

*even there thy hand
shall lead me,*

*and thy right hand shall
hold me.*

Psalms 139:7-12,

Old Testament,

Revised Standard Version

non-existent before or after that time. However, terms indicating a time-span cannot be applied to God himself.

According to other Jewish thinkers, God is outside time altogether: he does not live in the present, have a past, or look forward to the future, but lives in the 'Eternal Now'. Hence, God is experiencing every moment in the past and future history of the created world simultaneously and eternally. What for us are fleeting moments rushing by are, for God, a huge tapestry, of which he sees every part continually.

OMNIPOTENCE AND OMNISCIENCE

Allied to this is the Jewish conviction that God is all-powerful and all-knowing. From biblical times the belief in God's omnipotence has been a central feature of the faith. Thus in Genesis, when Abraham's wife Sarah expressed astonishment at the suggestion that she should have a child at the age of ninety, she was criticized. Similarly, when Jerusalem was threatened by the Chaldeans, God declared: 'Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?' (Jeremiah 32:27).

In the Middle Ages, however, Jewish thinkers wrestled with the concept of divine omnipotence. Maimonides, for example, argues in his *Guide for the Perplexed* that, although God is all-powerful, there are certain actions that he cannot perform because they are logically impossible:

That which is impossible has a permanent and constant property, which is not the result of some agent, and cannot in any way change, and consequently we do not ascribe to God the power of doing what is impossible.

Regarding God's omniscience, the Bible proclaims:

The Lord looks down from heaven, he sees all the sons of men ... he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds.

Psalms 33:13, 15

Modern statue of Moses Maimonides, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1135–1204), in Córdoba, Spain.



Following the biblical view, rabbinic Judaism asserted that God's knowledge is not limited by space and time. Rather, nothing is hidden from him. Further, the rabbis declared that God's foreknowledge of events does not deprive human beings of free will. Thus, in the Mishnah, the second-century sage Akiva declares: 'All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given.' In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides claims that God knows all things before they occur. Nonetheless, human beings are unable to comprehend the nature of God's knowledge because it is of a different order from theirs. Similarly, it is impossible to understand how divine foreknowledge is compatible with free will.

THE ELECTION AND MISSION OF ISRAEL

The Bible asserts that God controls and guides the universe. The Hebrew term for such divine action is *hashgahah*, derived from Psalm 33:14: 'From where he sits enthroned he looks forth on all the inhabitants of the earth.' Such a view implies that the dispensation of a wise and benevolent providence is found everywhere: all events are ultimately foreordained by God. Such a notion was developed in rabbinic literature, where God is depicted as the judge of the world, who provides for the destiny of individuals as well as nations on the basis of their actions.

Jews further affirm that God chose the Jews as his special people:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.

Deuteronomy 7:6

Through its election, Israel has been given a historic mission to bear divine truth to humanity. God's choice of Israel thus carries with it numerous responsibilities:

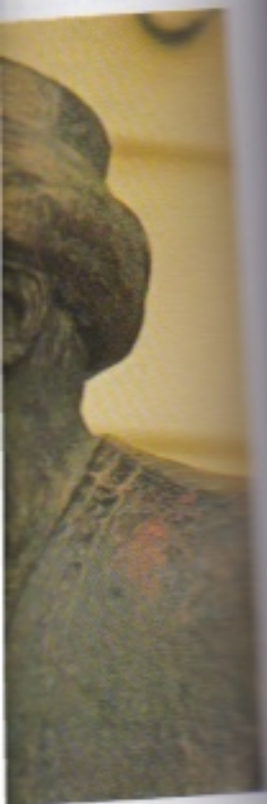
For I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.

Genesis 18:19

THE TORAH

To accomplish this task, God revealed both the oral Torah and the written Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. As Maimonides explains:

The Torah was revealed from Heaven. This implies our belief that the whole of the Torah found in our hands this day is the Torah that was handed down by Moses, and that it is all of divine origin. By this I mean that the whole of the Torah came unto him from before God in a manner which is metaphorically



called 'speaking'; but the real nature of that communication is unknown to everybody except to Moses.

In rabbinic literature, a distinction is drawn between the revelation of the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible, and Torah in the narrow sense – and the prophetic writings. Such a distinction is frequently expressed within Judaism: the Torah was given directly by God, whereas the prophetic books were given by means of prophecy. The remaining books of the Bible were conveyed by means of the Holy Spirit rather than through prophecy. According to the rabbis, the expositions and elaborations of the written Law were also revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, subsequently passed from generation to generation, and through this process additional legislation was incorporated, a process referred to as 'the oral Torah'. Thus traditional Judaism affirms that God's revelation is twofold and binding for all time.

According to tradition, God revealed 613 commandments to Moses. These *mitzvot* are recorded in the Five Books of Moses and classified in two major categories:

- statutes concerned with ritual performances, characterized as obligations between human beings and God;
- judgments consisting of ritual laws that would have been adopted by society even if they had not been decreed by God.

All these laws, together with their expansion in rabbinic sources such as the Mishnah and Talmud, are binding on Jewry for all time.

Rabbinic Judaism teaches that there are two tendencies in every person: the good inclination (*yetzer ha-tov*) and the evil inclination (*yetzer ha-ra*). The former urges individuals to do what is right, whereas the latter encourages sinful acts. At all times a person is to be on guard against the assaults of the *yetzer ha-ra*.

ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatology is teaching about the 'last things', such as the end of time, the afterlife, heaven, and hell. Traditional Judaism asserts that, at the end of time, God will send the Messiah to redeem his people and usher in the messianic age. In Scripture, such a figure is depicted in various ways, and as time passed the rabbis elaborated the themes found in the Bible and Jewish literature of the Second Temple period. In the midrashim and the Talmud they formulated an elaborate eschatological scheme, divided into various stages.

First there will be the time of the messianic redemption. According to the Babylonian Talmud, the messianic age will take place on earth after a period of decline and calamity, and will result in the complete fulfilment of every human wish. Peace will reign on earth; Jerusalem will be rebuilt; and at the close of this era the dead will be resurrected and joined with their souls, and a final judgment will come upon all humankind. Those who

*Before the mountains
were brought forth,*

*or ever thou hadst
formed the earth and the
world,*

*from everlasting to
everlasting thou art God.*

Psalms 90:2, Old Testament.

Revised Standard Version

are judged righteous will enter heaven (*Gan Eden*), whereas those deemed wicked will be condemned to everlasting punishment in hell (*Gehinnom*).

However, 'when the Messiah comes' is also a colloquial way of saying 'never', and modern Judaism has become increasingly eschatology-neutral, particularly as a result of disillusion following such messianic disappointments of Bar-Kochba and Sabbati Zevi.

CHANGING BELIEFS IN MODERN TIMES

From biblical times Jews have subscribed to a wide range of beliefs about the nature of God and his activity in the world. In modern times, these have been increasingly called into question. In the nineteenth century, reformers sought to reinterpret this belief system for modern Jews. In their view, it no longer made sense to believe in the coming of the messiah and the eschatological scheme as outlined in rabbinic sources. Subsequent movements, such as Reconstructionist and Humanistic Judaism, rejected the supernaturalism of the past, and called for a radical revision of Jewish theology for the contemporary age. In more recent times, the Holocaust has raised fundamental questions about belief in a supernatural God who watches over his chosen people. Today there is widespread uncertainty in the Jewish world about the central tenets of the faith.

DAN COHN-SHERBOK

Worship and Festivals



An annual cycle of worship and festivals gives Judaism its distinctive form. There is a major or minor festival almost every month of the year. Beginning with *Rosh Hashanah*, New Year's Day, on the first day of *Tisri*, and proceeding to the period of penitence that begins in the twelfth month, *Elul*, Jews are able to express and celebrate their identity through the regular re-enactment of stories that explore life's meaning and purpose. High and low points of the Jewish story are remembered year by year.

THE HEART OF JUDAISM

Maimonides' 'Thirteen Principles of the Faith' help define Judaism. They were not intended to become a creed – indeed, Judaism is based much more upon practice than belief – and can be summarized in the three great themes that underpin the Jewish religion: creation, revelation, and redemption.

At the heart of Judaism is the profound idea that human beings can bring God into the world through their everyday actions and interactions. Although Judaism acknowledges a huge distance between the infinity of God and the limitations of human beings, it believes we are called to be partners with God in the task of creation. This understanding of the divine-human relationship can be traced back to the Babylonian Talmud (*Shabbat* 10a, 119b, *Sanhedrin* 38a). The supreme moment of revelation was when the people received the commandments at Mount Sinai; hence, Jewish religious expression or worship occurs when *mitzvot*, the commandments, are followed, as one practises *halakha*, or 'walking in God's way'.

Judaism is a very practical and also a very joyful religion. 'Happy are we! How good is our lot! How pleasant is our destiny! How beautiful our heritage! Happy are we who, early and late, evening and morning, twice each day declare: Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!'

The Jewish Prayer Book, extract from the Morning Service

HOME AND SYNAGOGUE

The object of greatest religious importance in Judaism is a scroll of the Law, a *Sefer Torah*. It is a moving moment when the Torah scroll is taken out of its protective ark in the synagogue during the course of a service of worship and held up before the people. The synagogue is important as a meeting place, a focus for prayer, and house of study. But it is not the only significant place of worship, in the sense in which a mosque or a church may be; Jews often refer to the synagogue simply as *shul*, school.

The home is the focus of many of the most central aspects of Jewish religious life, such as *Shabbat*, the festivals, and the dietary laws, as well as education across the generations. Every effort is made to involve children in the celebration of the major festivals. It is a child who asks the questions concerning the special night at the *Seder* celebration during *Pesach*, Passover. It is children who enjoy drowning out the sound of Haman's name whenever it is mentioned during the reading of the book of Esther at Purim. It is children who are given the best places in front of the lights of the *menorah*, candelabrum, at the festival of *Hanukkah*.

THREE PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS

Three of the most popular biblical festivals are known as 'pilgrimage' festivals, since they recall the three annual occasions when Jews made the journey to worship in Jerusalem when the Temple played a central role in Jewish life. These are the eight-day festival of *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavuot* (Pentecost), and *Sukkot* (Tabernacles), also an eight-day festival. Together, they form an annual re-enactment of the special events that forged the relationship between the Jews and their God.

- *Pesach* (15–21/22 *Nisan*) remembers the Exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, and celebrates the passage from slavery to freedom. The highlight is the first evening, with the observance of the *Seder*. Around the table in the home, Jews relive the story, often reading from the *Haggadah*, 'telling', the order of the *Seder*, and reflect how it must have felt to be a slave in Egypt (Exodus 13:8).
- *Shavuot* (6 *Sivan*) marked the bringing of the first fruits in the days of the Temple, and celebrates the giving of the Torah by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.
- *Sukkot* (15–20 *Tishri*) commemorates the time when God protected the people in the desert.

In many ways, the story of the Exodus from Egypt did not end with Moses gaining freedom for a small group of people centuries ago. The theme of Passover gives a context

The three Pilgrim festivals have in common the theme of joy in God's presence: 'And you shall rejoice on your festivals' (Deuteronomy 16:14–16) ... The festive joy is traditionally expressed in feasting with meat and drink, and with the purchase of new garments for the women. It is a joy which is only complete when allied with concern for the needy; as the verse continues, 'with ... the strangers, orphans and widows among you.'

Rabbi Norman Solomon

SEDER MEAL

Through the ritual and symbolism of the Seder meal, Jews tell the story of how their ancestors left Egypt. The foods placed upon the often beautifully decorated Seder plate are symbolic and comprise: three wafers of unleavened bread, matzo, to symbolize the bread eaten by the Israelites when they left Egypt in a hurry (Exodus 12:39); bitter herbs, maror, to recall the experiences of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1:14); a sweet paste, haroset, made from almonds, apples, and wine, to represent the mortar used for building in Egypt as slaves, and symbolize both the toils of slavery and the sweetness

of redemption and freedom; a bowl of salt water to represent the bitter tears of slavery, with parsley used for dipping; a roasted bone; as a reminder of the Paschal lamb; and a roasted egg, as a reminder of the offering brought to the Temple for the festival with the Paschal lamb – these last two items being left on the Seder plate during the meal, and not eaten. It has also been the custom, since Rabbinic times, to drink four cups of wine during the Seder to represent the four stages of redemption, from the Exodus to the future coming of the messiah.

for exploration of the issues of freedom and slavery, and the accompanying themes of risk, choice, hope, disappointment, leadership, hardship, and sacrifice. Moses has inspired many people who have struggled to gain freedom from prejudice and oppression; issues of marginalization and possibilities for liberation in the contemporary world are often discussed during the Seder meal.

ROSH HASHANAH

The new year festival of *Rosh Hashanah* (1–2 Tishrei), as in many traditions, is a time for making resolutions about the future. However, for the Jews it is a serious occasion. A month earlier a forty-day period of penitence begins – the Ten Days of Awe, 'yamim noraim' – and *Rosh Hashanah* marks the beginning of the last ten of these days. The foods eaten at the meal on New Year's Eve symbolize sweetness, blessings, and plenty. Bread is dipped into honey – rather than the usual salt – and the following prayer is said: 'May it be your will to renew for us a good and sweet year.' Prayers at the morning service the following day, which lasts up to six hours, focus on the characteristics of God as creator, king, and judge: the God who will show mercy and compassion to those who sincerely turn towards him, 'teshuvah'. The sounding of the ram's horn, 'shofar', regularly through the service is literally a wake-up call to the people (see Amos 3:6).

From the Seder liturgy

This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.

Let all who are hungry come and eat.

Let all who are in want come and celebrate the Passover with us.

May it be God's will to redeem us from all trouble and from all servitude.

Next year at this season, may the whole house of Israel be free!

From the Seder Haggadah, The Union Haggadah, ed. The Central Council of American Rabbis, 1972.

YOM KIPPUR

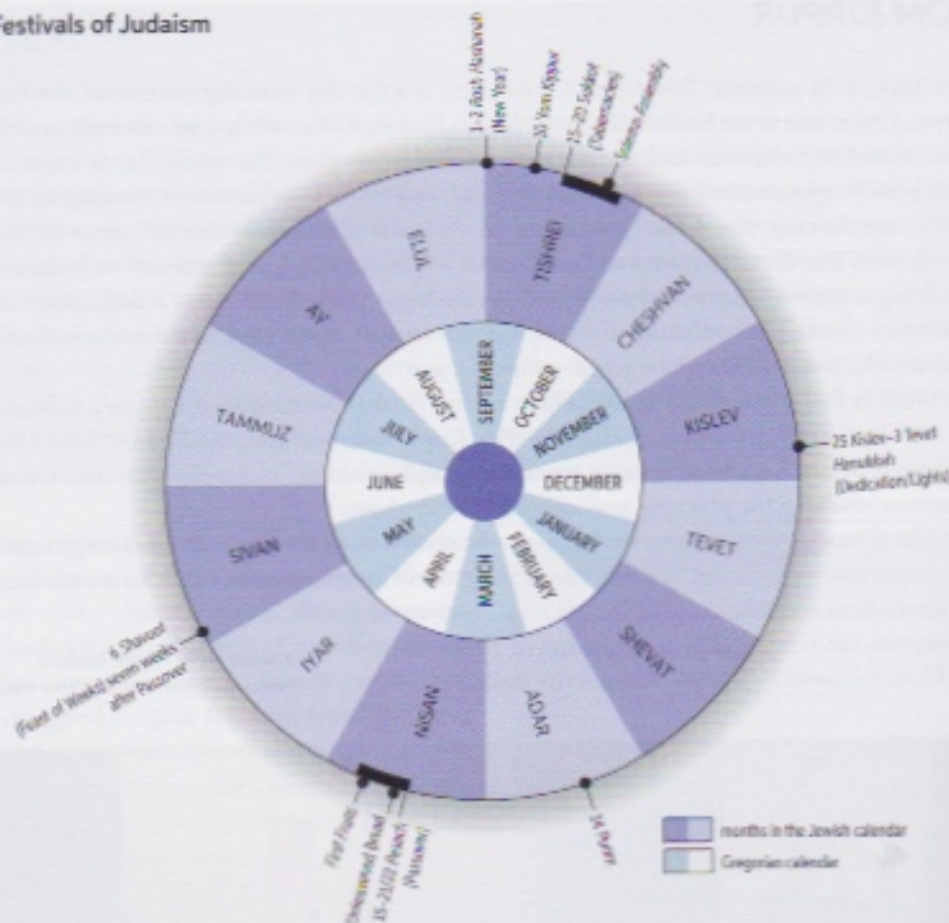
The Day of Atonement, 'Yom Kippur' (10 Tishrei), is a fast day marking the end of the Ten Days of Awe, and is the holiest day in the Jewish liturgical year, when Jews solemnly review their record of behaviour and literally turn to face a new year. The whole day is spent in prayer for forgiveness and for a good year ahead, and for at least part of it synagogues are full to overflowing. *Yom Kippur* marks one of the most emotionally charged times of the Jewish year. The theme is return to God, '*teshuvah*' – a major religious theme within Judaism, involving a renewed commitment to walk in the right path. *Kol Nidrei* – a declaration in Aramaic – forms the beginning of the synagogue service, often sung to a moving melody, and sets the tone as the congregation gathers in awe.

Work is forbidden, as on *Shabbat*. There are five further prohibitions, '*innuyin*', or forms of self-discipline, that apply during the *Yom Kippur* fast, and also the fast of *Tisba b'Av*, discussed below. Jews must abstain from eating and drinking, anointing with oils, sexual relations, washing for pleasure, and wearing leather shoes.

The Closing of the Gates, '*Ne'ilah*', is the final service, as the fast ends, and emphasizes the importance of the last hour in which the gates of heaven remain open for a returning to God. *Avina Malkenu*, 'our father, our king', is chanted to express the congregation's commitment to the unity of God, followed by a final blow on the *shofar*.

A Jewish family in Israel celebrate Passover together with the Seder meal.





MINOR FESTIVALS

The most popular of the minor festivals are *Hanukkah* (25 Kislev – 2 Tevet), *Purim* (14 Adar), and the New Year for Trees, *Tu biShevat* (15 Shevat).

Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Temple in about 165 BCE, after its defilement by the Greeks. On each of the eight nights of the festival, a light is lit to commemorate the 'miracle of the oil'. The Hasmoneans, seeking to rededicate the Temple, could only find one cruse of oil, enough to keep the Temple *menorah* burning for a day – yet it lasted for eight. This is interpreted as symbolic of God's creative action in the world.

Between the destruction of the first Temple and the building of the second, many Jews were threatened with massacre by Haman's scheming with Ahasuerus, King of Persia, but Queen Esther and her uncle Mordechai were used by God to avert catastrophe. *Purim* celebrates this deliverance with parties and sending gifts of food to people in need, and the scroll of the book of Esther, *Megillah*, is read in the synagogue.

Judaism celebrates a new year for trees, *Tu b'Shevat*, a popular festival with the return to the land of Israel in modern times. In Israel it is marked by a school holiday and tree-planting ceremonies.

OTHER FAST DAYS

Of the other fast days the most important is 9 *Av* (*Tishab b'Av*), when the destruction of the two Temples, in 586 BCE and in 70 CE, is commemorated, as well as other tragedies of Jewish history. Reform Jews often use the day to commemorate the Holocaust.

On *Yom Kippur* and on *Tishab b'Av* people fast for twenty-five hours, instead of the twenty-four hours required for other fast days. Nothing is eaten or drunk during this time, unless there is a practical reason for not undertaking this discipline.

SECULAR JUDAISM

Many Jews who describe themselves as 'secular' nevertheless experience a sense of belonging to the wider Jewish community at times such as *Pesach* or *Yom Kippur*. Official Israeli holidays can also strengthen the links between communal identity and liturgy:

- Holocaust Day, *Yom HaShoah* (27 *Nisan*) remembers the Holocaust and the six million Jews who were murdered.
- Memorial Day, *Yom HaZikaron* (4 *Iyar*) remembers the soldiers killed defending the state of Israel.
- Independence Day, *Yom Ha-Atzma'ut* (5 *Iyar*) marks the anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel in 5708 (1948 CE).
- Jerusalem Day, *Yom Yerushalayim* (28 *Iyar*) commemorates the reunification of the city of Jerusalem in 5727, 1967 CE.
- The Israeli Declaration of Independence, proclaimed on 14 May 1948, is celebrated with social activities, in Israel and throughout the world, and special psalms and prayers are said in the synagogue, but is somewhat controversial, for both religious and political reasons.

LIZ RAMSEY



I AM A JEW

My paternal grandparents immigrated to Western Europe from Lithuania at the turn of the twentieth century to escape the effects of anti-Semitism and grinding poverty. My mother was born and brought up in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany. She fled Germany at the end of June 1939, a refugee from Nazi persecution. She and her father were the only members of my maternal line to survive, the rest of the family are numbered among the millions of Jews murdered in the Holocaust. We live in a predominantly secular world, where religion and spiritual values are often assigned a very low priority. But, for me, my Jewish faith and family history have shaped and defined my identity. I attach great value to the traditions of democracy, freedom of speech, and equality before the law. I also feel a personal responsibility to contribute to building a better understanding and harmonious relations between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish majority among whom we live.

I also think I am incredibly lucky to be Jewish. I draw inspiration from the courage and fortitude with which my mother confronted both the difficulties of her childhood and the humiliation and poverty of being a refugee. No less inspiring is the example of friends who are Holocaust survivors. They are often the sole surviving members of their families, whose homes and communities were completely destroyed. Their suffering and loss is unimaginable. They were brutalized and terrorized solely because they were born Jewish. Yet despite all this, so many of the survivors have chosen to renew and rebuild their lives firmly rooted in the Jewish faith and tradition into which they were born. This, for me, is proof of the eternal and enduring nature of their Jewish faith. The triumph of their humanity is truly inspiring.

Many of those murdered in the Holocaust were condemned in part because of the failure of so many countries, including the Western democracies, to take in Jewish refugees. So for me, and most Jews living in the diaspora (that is, Jews who live outside the borders of Israel), Israel represents a life insurance policy, a place of

safety to which we can go if we feel we are once again endangered by anti-Semitism. Israel is, therefore, very important for the worldwide Jewish community. I have visited Jerusalem twice. It is at the heart and geographical centre of the Jewish world. Synagogues around the world are all built facing Jerusalem. The festival of Hanukkah and the fast days of Tevet, Tammuz, and Av have their origin in the sieges of Jerusalem and the desecration of the Temple. Each time I prayed at the Kotel – formerly known as the 'Western Wall' or 'Wailing Wall' – I sobbed uncontrollably.

For me Judaism is not just a religion, but a complete and distinctive way of life. It defines my relationship with God, my relationship with other people, Jewish and non-Jewish, and my obligations as a human being. The central and defining principal of Judaism is belief in a single God who is responsible for the creation of the universe and everything in it. The foundation of Judaism is the Torah, also known as the Five Books of Moses. I remember as a five-year-old schoolboy going after school to cheder, where I was taught to read Hebrew. At school I had to attend assembly each morning for Christian prayers, while at home, at the synagogue, and at cheder I was expected to follow Jewish religious practice and traditions. For a few years I found this mixture of Jewish and Christian teaching all very confusing, especially when one day at school I was beaten up because, according to my accuser, I had 'murdered little Lord Jesus'!

Every Jew is obliged to obey the law of the land, to do all they can to preserve human life, *pikuach nefesh*, and give to charity. This includes not only donations of money or goods, but acts of kindness, the promotion of education and caring for the sick, needy, and elderly. On Shabbat, Jews are obliged to refrain from all forms of work: using machines, operating mechanical or electrical equipment, cooking, handling money, and travelling in a vehicle. For me, Shabbat is the one day of the week to which I always look forward: it is truly a day of physical and spiritual renewal.

David Rosen

Branches of Judaism

The majority of Jews throughout the world today are descendants either of the Sephardim or the Ashkenazim. Before being driven from Spain by the Inquisition in 1492, the Sephardim had been closely involved with the Muslim world, enabling them to develop a unique intellectual culture. Sephardic Jews — ‘Sepharad’ means Spain — created the Ladino language, a mix of Spanish and Hebrew.



The Ashkenazim came from central Europe, mainly Germany and France, and later moved to Poland and Russia. ‘Ashkenaz’ means the area inhabited by the Ashkenazim, who adhere to *minhag Ashkenaz* — a region that coincides with modern-day Germany, but also extends from France to the Pale of Settlement, the region within which Jews were allowed to reside by Imperial Russia. Ashkenazi Jews developed Yiddish — a mixture of Hebrew and medieval German — as their language and around it produced a culture rich in art, music, and literature. The difference in cultural background between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim is evident in Israel today, where each supports its own chief rabbi.

But the Jews are not a race, and Judaism is not an unchanging institution. Due to intermarriage, conversion, and dispersion among the nations, there has been a branching out over the centuries, and wide cultural differences between Jews have resulted. The difference between the black Falasha Jews of Ethiopia and the Indian Jews of Mexico, for instance, is immense.

In addition to these cultural groupings, several religious branches can be distinguished within Judaism today. Modern Judaism is rooted in rabbinic, or Talmudic, Judaism, and both evolved from biblical Judaism.

ORTHODOX JUDAISM

Orthodox Judaism regards itself as the only true Judaism. During the first half of the nineteenth century it developed into a well-defined movement, seeking to preserve traditional (classical) Judaism against the emerging Reform movement in East Europe.

Orthodox Jews are characterized by a ‘Torah-true’ approach to life, teaching that God personally and decisively revealed himself, in giving the Torah at Sinai, and that the words

of the Torah are therefore divine and hence fully authoritative – the changeless revelation of God's eternal will. Every aspect of the Orthodox Jew's life is to be governed by the commandments (*mitzvot*). Jews are to study the Torah daily, and conform their lives to its propositions and rituals, including the strict rules of *Shabbat* observance, dietary laws, and prayer three times a day. In short, Orthodox Judaism is 'mitzvahcentric'.

At the start of the nineteenth century many East European Jews in rural areas lived in a close-knit community known as a *shtetl*, a stockaded, traditional culture shut off from the secular world. However, as large numbers started to emigrate to the United States, Orthodox leaders such as Rabbi Samson Hirsch (1808–88) encouraged Jews to involve themselves in the contemporary culture of the Western world, pursue secular university education, and develop philosophical thinking. Today, most Orthodox Jews believe adjustment to the modern world is legitimate, so long as it does not conflict with the teachings of the Torah.

Orthodox Jews maintain a high regard for the rabbi as teacher and interpreter of the Torah, and place a strong emphasis upon education, particularly day-schools where traditional learning can be acquired. Most Orthodox Jews are Zionist, supporting the state of Israel, and many hope for a personal messiah: an ideal man who will one day fully redeem Israel, although exactly what is meant by 'ideal' and 'redeem' is the subject of some debate. However few today would accept the divine authority of the Torah, the old test of 'Orthodoxy', and it is not uncommon for Jews to belong to both an Orthodox and a Progressive or Liberal synagogue. The term 'Orthodox' was originally used as a label for traditionalists opposed to radical change; now there are many shades of Orthodoxy, as the energy inspired by the Reform movement influences most Jewish groupings.

REFORM JUDAISM

Reform Judaism had its origins in Germany, where the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century stressed reason and progress. Emancipation in the following century opened the Jewish people to new freedoms, to equal rights as citizens, and to new opportunities to explore secular society. Jews quickly began to adapt to this new age, geared to change, growth, scientific inquiry, and critical evaluation. To meet this move away from Jewishness, Abraham Geiger (1810–74) and others declared that modern people could no longer accept the revelation of the Torah as factual and binding, and encouraged changes in ritual law and worship. Dietary laws were abandoned, prayers were translated from Hebrew into the vernacular, and synagogue worship was changed – the organ was introduced, services shortened, and the 'family pew' replaced segregation of the sexes. Some Jews even began to worship on Sunday rather than *Shabbat*.

In the USA, the Reform movement was led by Isaac Wise (1819–1900), who founded an organization of Reform congregations, and in 1875 set up the Hebrew Union College, the main seminary for training Reform rabbis. While Reform Judaism is one of the most progressive major branches of modern Judaism, active in the area of dialogue between faiths, the smaller Reconstructionist and Renewal movements are more radical in such

areas as gender and political activism. Since the 1970s, Hebrew Union College has ordained women rabbis.

Liberal (Reform) Judaism¹ is still evolving – as revelation is seen to be a continuing process – and seeks to keep current with each new generation, using reason and experience to establish the relevance or truth of a proposition. Thus the ethical teachings of the prophets are emphasized rather than the ritual Law. Reform Judaism provides an individualized, non-authoritarian approach to religion; a law is observed, not because God said so, but because it is meaningful to modern religious experience.

Many Jews claim the Reform movement is now the most creative component within Judaism. With younger Jews no longer feeling that Judaism is defined by suffering and persecution, they are exploring the boundaries of cultural experience and convey a sense of expectancy for a new age of Judaism.

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Many European Jews were uncomfortable with the radical changes introduced by Reform Judaism, and as a result Conservative Judaism arose at the end of the nineteenth century, emphasizing the historical elements of the Jewish tradition. As president of the newly-founded Jewish Theological Seminary, Solomon Schechter (1850–1915) led the movement in the USA, stressing commitment to tradition – with adjustments if necessary. Conservative Judaism thus has roots in Orthodoxy and Reform, and combines the ideals of both, preserving traditional Jewish practices, but holding that Jewish law can be reinterpreted in the light of modern views and trends – such as the findings of modern historical criticism.

Conservatism has maintained a strong emphasis on the people of Israel and modern Zionism. Laypeople have considerable influence: some congregations, for instance, permit the use of the organ, while others do not; some emphasize dietary laws, others do not. Conservative Judaism is possibly the largest single Jewish grouping in North America. In Israel and Britain, where it has been a more recent development, it is known by its Hebrew name, *Masorti*.

RECONSTRUCTIONIST JUDAISM

Reconstructionist Judaism is an outgrowth of Conservative Judaism, based on the work of the scholar Mordecai Kaplan (1881–1983), who stressed Judaism as an evolving culture, giving equal importance to religion, ethics, and culture. Reconstructionist Judaism doesn't fit neatly into the traditional/liberal, observant/non observant continuum. Although

¹ In the UK, there is a difference between Liberal/Progressive Judaism, which is closer to American Reform Judaism, and Reform Judaism, which is somewhat closer to the American Conservative movement.

there are few Reconstructionist groups outside the United States and Israel, the movement has influenced Judaism, contributing to a reappraisal of basic concepts such as God, Israel, and Torah. Since its inception in the late 1960s, Reconstructionism has developed the use of inclusive language, encouraged women to be fully involved in liturgical practice, and accepted people with one Jewish parent as Jewish. Reconstructionists are actively involved in developing liberal Judaism in Israel.

THE HASIDIM

The Hasidim, founded by Baal Shem Tov, have many sects around the world, each led by its own *rebbe*. However, there is – and has been historically – much controversy over whether the Hasidim inappropriately substitute the judgment of the *rebbe* for the laws of Torah.

In some Hasidic groups the men have a distinctive style of dress, including black coats and hats, and wear ear-locks. They have a joyful form of worship, involving song and dance. In the United States, the Lubavitch and Satmar sects are especially influential. Some Hasidim are ultra-Orthodox, living in isolation from the Gentile world. The Renewal Movement, with roots in the 1960s counter-culture, attempts to reinvigorate Judaism, drawing on elements from Jewish mystic, Hasidic, musical, and meditative traditions, and has been criticised by some as 'New Age'.

HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

Humanistic Judaism began in 1965 with the rejection or reinterpretation of the beliefs of traditional Judaism. For example, supernatural beliefs are denied, and the Exodus from Egypt is seen as a myth. Humanistic Jewish worship is very different from traditional worship, and rarely uses the word 'God'. Unlike traditional Judaism, Humanistic Jews 'welcome into the Jewish people all men and women who sincerely desire to share Jewish experience regardless of their ancestry.' The principal institution of Humanistic Judaism is the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews.

ULTRA-ORTHODOX JUDAISM

The Haredim, or Ultra-Orthodox Jews, view the total separation of Judaism from the modern world as a religious obligation. Whereas Sephardic Haredim generally support Zionism and the State of Israel, many Ashkenazi Haredim oppose both.

The Reconstructionist philosophy emphasizes our obligation as Jews to work for social justice and tikkun olam, the 'repair of the world'. Reconstructionists reject any distinction between 'religious life' and 'real life'.

*A member of the
Jewish Reconstructionist
Congregation, Evanston, Illinois.*

We believe in the value of human reason and in the reality of the world which reason discloses. The natural universe stands on its own, requiring no supernatural intervention. We believe in the value of human existence and in the power of human beings to solve their problems both individually and collectively. Life should be directed to the satisfaction of human needs. Every person is entitled to life, dignity and freedom. We believe in the value of Jewish identity and in the survival of the Jewish people. Jewish history is a human story.

Proclamation stating the ideology and aims of Humanistic Judaism

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a rapid acceleration of Jewish immigration to Israel. Due to the earlier Soviet restriction of religious freedom, however, many of these immigrants came to Israel severely limited in their understanding and practice of Judaism. Unemployment, housing needs, and political unrest among Israelis and Palestinians created additional hardships associated with return to the Land.

The increased secularization of society has continued to threaten Jewish religious and community life through assimilation and intermarriage. To help counter these and other challenges, Chabad Lubavitch launched a successful programme of outreach towards unaffiliated Jews.

MARVIN WILSON

REVISED BY TIM DOWLEY

Judaism in the Modern World



THE HASIDIM

Jewish communities can be found in most parts of the modern world, which means there are great cultural and social variations as well as religious diversity within Judaism. Out of a worldwide total of around 13 million Jews the largest groupings live in Israel – 5,000,000 or 78.7 per cent of local population – and the USA – 5,700,000 or 2.1 per cent of local population. Although Jews account for no more than 0.25 per cent of the world's population, it would be hard to find another group of people who have had so much influence on the world in so many ways over such a long time. There is little sign of this influence lessening, in spite of the challenges facing Jewish survival. In the technological and scientific developments of the modern age, Jewish knowledge and expertise have a high profile, from medicine and genetic engineering to art and architecture. Jews are also prominent in the worlds of entertainment, law and politics. It is amazing how influence on this scale has been maintained despite the appalling loss of people and centres of learning that took place between 1933 and 1945.

WHO IS A JEW?

This question is hotly debated within contemporary Judaism. The Orthodox insistence that a Jew must be born of a Jewish mother – or convert according to Orthodox criteria – is largely disregarded by Reform Jews, but can lead to painful situations concerning identity and status for partners and children. The Reform view is that a person is a Jew if one parent is Jewish and that person is raised in a Jewish community. Moreover, conversion to Reform Judaism is a much simpler process. However, the term 'Judaism' does not only refer to a religion; more than fifty per cent of all Jews in Israel today call themselves 'secular', and half of the Jews in the USA do not belong to a synagogue or temple. Jews can be described as a 'nation' or 'people' – but the question of whether Judaism is a religion or ethnicity or peoplehood is complex and hotly debated.

'Lo alecha ha-mamlacha ligmor,' says the Mishnah.

'It is not incumbent on you to complete the world (of repairing the world), but neither are you free to evade it.'

Prophet Isaiah

ISRAEL

Since its establishment in 1948, the state of Israel has been the focus of the Jewish world. In this tiny strip of land, only twelve miles wide in places, Jews from more than one hundred cultures mingle. All Jews, inside or outside Israel, feel an obligation to assess their relationship with Israel. Within Israel there are serious tensions between secular, Orthodox, and Ultra-Orthodox Jews concerning their attitudes to it. Some groups of Orthodox Jews do not support the existence of a Jewish state at all, and consider the militarism involved in preserving the state to be a contradiction of fundamental Jewish values.

The Zionist movement, dating back to Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), includes many supporters who prioritize the preservation of the Jewish people over the preservation of the Jewish religion. Herzl's dream was simply to establish a Jewish homeland after centuries of exile.

A common Israeli view, shared by many Jews in the diaspora, is that Israel needs to be strong in order to provide a safe haven for Jews all over the world, to provide a feeling of security and, perhaps even more importantly, hope for the future.

A minority fundamentalist group, *Cash Emunim*, 'Bloc of the Faithful', founded in 1974 in the wake of the

Interior of Eldridge Street Synagogue, Lower East Side, Manhattan, the oldest Eastern European synagogue in the USA.



Yom Kippur War, claims a divine right to the settlement of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights – and sometimes as far as the Euphrates – as part of Israel.

JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious Jews pray and study Torah. They observe the dietary laws, keep the Sabbath and the festivals, and try to apply Jewish ethics in a global context of commerce and business. Jews are keen to observe religious regulations that emphasize the importance of the family and marriage. They are also aware of the responsibilities involved in being members of a community that is international as well as local, including praying together, providing welfare support, sharing in times of sadness and joy, and becoming involved in the cycle of rituals and festivals. In so doing, the religious Jew receives a glimpse of what heaven on earth might be like.

From the first century CE onwards, the rabbinic tradition bonded the Jewish people. Today there are more Jews studying in rabbinical seminaries than at any time since the great Babylonian academies. But following the rabbinic tradition is only one way of being Jewish.

Committed Jews remain faithful because the continuing story of Judaism depends on such commitment. Traditionally, Jews have shared a strong sense that there is a divine purpose for humanity, and that they have a special role in achieving it. The covenantal relationship between the Creator and creation, described in the Torah, means that together God and human beings may embark on the task of repairing or mending the world, *tikkun olam*.

Jews and Judaism have shown an amazing capacity to adapt to changing times and circumstances, while preserving the vital traditions central to the faith – a capacity closely linked to a strong emphasis on interpretation as well as revelation. For many Jews do not view revelation as something that happened solely once and for all in the distant past, but that there are different layers of meaning of Torah that can be rediscovered and interpreted in the light of contemporary contexts and needs.

At the core of Jewish life is an immense store of moral energy. 'Social justice' is much the highest scoring factor that Jews in the United States give as relevant to what being Jewish involves. The restless drive to 'perfect the world under the sovereignty of God' remains after other practices have been abandoned. Judaism puts a high value on the dignity and responsibility of human beings, an emphasis that can provide the stimulus for creative dialogue and shared action between Jews, Muslims, and Christians with regard to the responsible stewardship and management of the world's resources, though there may never be more than an agreement to differ as far as theological issues are concerned.

*To be a Jew means
first belonging to the
group ... Judaism is
an evolving religious
civilization.*

Mordecai Kaplan

DIVERSITY

The Jewish world reflects the pluralistic nature of the wider society in which Jews live. All Jews today contend with conflicting influences. One option is to cut off modern influences as far as possible, and seek refuge in tradition. Another is to abandon Judaism. The path that young Jews are increasingly choosing goes beyond the fractiousness between and within different groups with regard to authority, Torah, the role of women, modernity and cultural change and the state of Israel, and seeks to transform Judaism. But it is a mistake to define movements within modern Judaism as if they were sects or denominations. It is more accurate to use the term 'schools of thought'. There is a saying among Jews, 'Where you have two Jews you will have three opinions.'

THE FUTURE

The continuity of Judaism cannot be taken for granted. People are freer to be Jews than at any other time in history. They are also freer not to be. There is real concern about the continuation of the Jewish faith when in the United States one in two Jews either does not marry or marries a non-Jew. The long and painful history of anti-Semitism has understandably made some people uncertain about wanting their children to be overtly Jewish. There are many examples of people changing their name in order to hide their Jewishness.

A new generation of Jews sometimes express a desire to be free of the burden of memory that has traditionally been the hallmark of being Jewish. In complex, pluralist, and multicultural societies, some argue that Jewish identity has become superfluous. However, Jews and Judaism have an incredible capacity to survive.

There is also today a greater confidence in the continuation of the story that is Judaism than there has been since the Holocaust. Jewish people have managed to outlive a succession of oppressors. At the same time, they have increased the depth and richness of Jewish spirituality. More non-Jews than ever before find inspiration from the study of Judaism, as it has entered the curriculum of institutions of higher learning.

With rising levels of anti-Semitism across the world, the need for education and dialogue is acute. Contrary to many people's perceptions, Judaism combines universalism with the exclusivity of an ethnic religion. Jewish ideas of salvation extend to the non-Jewish world. Neither Christianity nor Islam would be conceivable without Judaism. Since the Holocaust, many Christians have commenced a more positive exploration of their Jewish roots. The monotheistic religions share a distinctive ethical focus that can inspire greater efforts on the part of human beings to work together to perfect the world.

LIZ RAMSEY