***Overview of Judaism***

**General**

*What is a Jew?*

The word *Jew*- derived from tribe of Judah

A person who worships a single, universal God

Judaism is a faith, a people, a nation

Israel is the spiritual and cultural centre for Jewish people.

Of the 15 million approx Jews in the world…

* 2/3 would consider themselves to be Orthodox
* 1/3 would consider themselves to be Progressive/Reform

However in the US it is the reverse: 1/3 Orthodox, 2/3 Progressive/Reform

Jews are said to have a “duality of existence”. This is because many of them live in the *dispersa* (dispersion of Jews around the world) and have a country where they reside, however, their spiritual home is always Israel (the Promised Land).

Christianity and Islam both have links to Judaism through Abraham.

*Shalom* – peace, health, happiness, welcome, greeting, well-being, wholesomeness.

*Magen David-* Star of David – 6 points – based on King David’s shield. The Magen David (literally "Shield of David") has six-points, which symbolize that God rules over the universe and protects us from all six directions: North, South, East, West, Up and Down.

*Mezuzah* – sign on the gate post of your house. Has a scroll inside with a prayer (*Shema plus other scripts from Torah).* Link to Passover.

A person is considered a Jew if their mother is Jewish. In Progressive/Reform children whose father is Jewish (mother not) and have been raised Jewish will also be considered to be Jewish.

**Origins**

2009 CE in Jewish years is 5769 (counted from traditional understanding of creation of the world)

*Timeline- significant dates*

3768 BCE - Creation

2704 BCE - Birth of Noah (Noah given 7 laws all civilized people should follow, see Gn 9)

1812 BCE – Birth of Abraham (1948 Jewish Calendar) (significant- 1948 CE was founding state of Israel)

587 BCE – Destruction of the first temple (by Babylonains)

70 CE – Desctruction of the second temple (by Romans)

All Jewish souls present at handing over of the commandments therefore we have all answered “we have heard and we will do”.

**Principal Beliefs**

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* Monotheistic
* God is YHVH (tetragrammaton). But this name is not said. Instead *Ha Shem* (The Name) or *Adonai*  (Lord) is used (link to Christian scriptures use of Lord out of respect). See further discussion of various forms of the name of God at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/2/Judaism/name/>

*The Hebrew letters (R-L): Yod, He, Waw, He*

* God is pure Spirit, ie. has no physical form, therefore stained glass windows in synagogues have no images. No other image can be worshipped, eg. Animal, person. Therefore no images found in synagogues.
* No real concept of heaven and hell. After death, Jews are “gathered to their people” (Gn 25: 8)
* However, there is a concept of earning a place in the world to come.
* Jews believe that anyone who is monotheist will be “gathered to their people”

**Sacred Texts and Writings**

* Ark
  + Has 10 commandments above it
  + Always faces Jerusalem
  + contains torah scrolls
  + written by hand on parchment in Hebrew
  + Above – eternal flame
* Torah
  + Means ‘law’
  + Contains 613 commandments- *mitzvot*
  + Centrepiece of study for Jews
  + Read on Monday, Thursday, Saturday (Sabbath) in synagogue. In ancient Jerusalem these were market days. Bells on scrolls would call people from the market to hear the Torah being read. Same portion is read over the week (sometimes is read in 3 portions, sometimes is read 3 times over).
  + *Yad-* pointer to read from Torah, finger damages parchment
  + Torah encompasses laws, customs, values and history for Jewish people
  + All Jewish people would have a copy of the torah in their house (book form with Hebrew and English usually)
  + Every Sabbath and festival the same part is read from the Torah the world over
  + Sages – wise people over time who have interpreted and annotated the *Torah* (*Talmud*)
* Torah Scrolls
  + Made of animal parchment
  + Dressed in same way as high priest described- breastplate, crown etc
  + Have velvet covers to protect and show importance
  + Have bells to signify their importance, people hear bells and fall to silence
  + Cost approx $150 000 per scroll
  + Written by hand, takes 12-18 months to write per scroll, with a quill
  + If a scroll is dropped, everyone who sees it needs to fast for 40 days, sunrise to sunset
  + If a mistake is made, the section needs to be discarded and begun again
  + Have a funeral ceremony same as a person, is then buried. Any paper with the name of God written on it (in Hebrew) is buried after it is not considered *kosher* (appropriate) any more
  + Certain times of the year when Chevrah Kadisha collect them and conduct the funeral service.
* *Talmud*
  + Moses was given the *Torah* in written and oral form
  + Written and oral *torah* passed on parent to child for over 1000 years
  + After the first temple was destroyed and during the Babylonian exile, the oral Torah started to be written down in case it was lost. Today, the *Talmud* is a collection of the written down oral *Torah* as well as the commentary on both the oral and written tradition
  + Traces its origin to the Babylonian exile (Babylonian Talmud, there was also a Palestinian one) but was not completed until few hundred years into the Common Era

Talmud today = Torah (written law) + Mishnah (oral law written down finished 200CE) + commentary from rabbinical scholars from post-second temple period. Rabbinical scholarship completed since 500CE (completion of the Babylonian Talmud) are now represented in Responsa Literature.

* *Midrash*
  + A style of writing which explores elements of the sacred texts in new ways
  + Means ‘learning’
  + Stories used to teach important truths/concepts
  + Although Jews do not really have a concept of heaven/hell there is Midrash which likens the two to: Hell – table laden with food, hands tied, Heaven – books filled with learning

**Core Ethical Teachings**

See Liz Alderton’s resource.

**Observance**

*Commandments*

* Observe 613 commandments- *mitzvot*
  + Women are not bound by time-bound commandments (Orthodox)

*Rites of Passage*

* *Brit Milah*
  + Circumcision (links to Abraham and covenant)
  + Takes place 8 days after birth
* *Bat/Bar Mitzvah*
  + Orthodox- only boys (Bar)
  + Progressive/Reform- boys (13) and girls (12)
  + Study Torah, give *Drash*
  + Child after reading from Torah is counted as an adult (included in *minyan)*

*Synagogue Worship*

* Synagogues in general
  + 3 Names for synagogue (*Beit-* House)
    - *Beit Tefillah* (Prayer)
    - *Beit Midrash* (Learning)
    - *Beit Kresset* (Assembly)
  + Face Jerusalem, pray in the direction of spiritual home
  + Came into being after the destruction of the Temple
  + Emmanuel Synagogue- Woollahra- is a Progressive/Reform synagogue – egalitarian – men and women do same roles
  + Beth Israel (The Great Synagogue), City- is an Orthodox synagogue – men and women sit separately – men take on the specific roles
  + The design of a synagogue reflects torah teachings, ie. no pictures of people or animals, no images of things you can pray to idols
* Rabbi Ninio- *Emmanuel Synagogue*
  + 3rd Australian born woman rabbi
  + 12 or 13 Aust born people have become rabbis
  + she is now 10 years ordained (in 2009)
  + 6 Australian born women rabbis exist (3 working in Aust, 3 in US)
  + Was previously a lawyer
  + Rabbinical School 5 years- 1 in Israel and 4 in US
* Rabbis in General
  + *Rabbi* means ‘teacher’, title is an acknowledgement of learning rather than a special connection with God.
  + Function is more of a prayer leader
  + Employed by congregation
  + Role of rabbi
    - Teaching
    - Preaching
    - Conducting services
    - Counseling – refer people to other services if required
  + Women have been ordained since 1970’s in Progressive/Reform (started in the US)
  + Traditionally rabbis lead synagogue worship but technically any congregant capable of leading a service can.
* Ordaining Rabbis
  + 3 rabbis to ordain a rabbi
  + Private ordination exists, ie. 3 rabbis ordain someone and it is not officially recognized, they know they are a rabbi but may not minister.
* Ark
  + Has 10 commandments above
  + Always faces Jerusalem
  + contains torah scrolls
  + written by hand on parchment in Hebrew
  + Above – eternal flame and “Know before whom you stand”.
* *Shabbat*
  + ‘Sabbath’
  + Begins: when the first 3 stars appear in the night sky (Friday)
  + Ends: an hour after the first 3 stars appear in the night sky (Saturday)
  + Why an hour after? To make sure they do it right and don’t miss an hour
* Synagogue Service
  + Often referred to as *Shul-* school (emphasis on place of learning)
  + Men wear a head covering as a sign of respect- *kippah* or *yarmulke*
  + 3 services a day
    - Morning Service- *Sha charit*- means dawn
    - Afternoon Service- *Mincha*- means midday
    - Evening Service- Ma’ariv- means evening

In practice the *Mincha* and *Ma’ariv* are usually prayed together, the *Mincha* is prayed before the first 3 stars appear and the *Ma’ariv* follows it

* + Torah is read on Monday, Thursday and Saturday (Shabbat). In ancient Jerusalem these were market days. Bells on scrolls would call people from the market to hear the Torah being read. Same portion is read Monday, Thursday, Saturday
  + On other days, prayer is held without reading of the Torah
  + On Fridays…
    - The evening service first has *Kabbalat Shabbat-* the prayer of welcoming the bride (welcoming the Sabbath)
    - There is also an additional service in the morning (makes a total of 4) where the torah is read
  + Follows prescribed patterns of prayer
    - Preparatory Psalms
    - Shema- (from Deut- “Hear O Israel…” etc) (see: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/shema.html>)
    - Torah reading (if Mon, Thur, Sat)
    - Drash (as above)
    - Amidah- Silent meditation – 18 blessings
    - Aleinu- prayer of praise
    - Kaddish- used for sanctification of all believers (required to be prayed by mourners- the Mourner’s Prayer) – how great and glorified is God
    - See p. 423 of *Living Religion 3rd edition*
* Communal Prayer (includes Synagogue service prayer)
  + Belief in God means a belief in community- hence *minyan* (can’t pray publically alone)
  + *Minyan-* Orthodox- 10 men (ie. over 13, age of Bar Mitzvah), Progressive/Reform- 10 Jews of age (ie. men or women completed Bar/Bat Mitzvah)
  + When a *minyan* is present it is believed God rests with them (link to Christian Scriptures- “where two or three are gathered in my name” (Mt 18:20)
  + According to tradition you can’t ask people to come to synagogue (even if you are trying to achieve a *minyan*) so you need to wait for them to come of their own accord. The idea is that people shouldn’t feel obligated to pray to God.
* Individual Prayer
  + Jews pray 3 times a day (usually in synagogue)
  + Jews will wear a *Tallit* (Orthodox- men only, Progressive/Reform- anyone)
    - On edge of prayer shawls are *tzitzit-* knots and tassels
    - Combination of tassels + number of knots = 613 (ie. *mitzvot*)
  + 3 core prayers of Judaism:
    - Shema- (from Deut- “Hear O Israel…” etc) (see: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/shema.html>)
    - Amidah- Silent meditation – 18 blessings
    - Kaddish- used for sanctification of all believers (required to be prayed by mourners- the Mourner’s Prayer) – how great and glorified is God
  + Jews should pray with *kavainah* = with intention. Therefore must pray from the book of prayer.
  + Wear *teffillin* – boxes with *torah* script inside
    - worn between eyes close to brain
    - leather strap wound 7 times around arm, one round for each day of creation
    - near heart
    - only for morning prayer and not on the Sabbath
* Conversion
  + Must study Hebrew and Judaism for 12 months (at least)
  + Meet weekly for 3 hours to learn
  + Meet with 3 rabbis for discussion and debate
  + Women- take ritual bath ‘*mikvah*’, Men- circumcised if not already
  + 3 rabbis to do ceremony
* Festivals
  + Commencement and conclusion follows same rules as *Shabbat* (ie. first 3 stars night before, first 3 stars plus hour next day)
  + *Yom Kippur*
    - Day of Atonement
    - Holiest day of Jewish calendar
    - 5 services
    - 25hr fast, nothing for 25 hrs
    - Orthodox (observant) – no showering, no luxuries
    - Erev Yom Kipper – day before- atonement with people. Must atone with each other before coming to God (link to Christian understanding of Reconciliation)
  + *Hannukah*- commemorates the rededication of the Temple and the miracle of the oil (1 day’s oil lasted 8 days)
* Judaism in the Home
  + *Shabbat*
    - Led by mother (mother is leader at home, father in public)
  + Keeping *Kashrut* (laws of fit or appropriate)/*kosher* (fit or appropriate)
    - meat – has to come from an animal with a cloven loaf and chews its cud
    - fish – must have scales and fins
    - animal killed as humanly as possible to reduce pain and suffering
    - blood drained from meat
    - not mixing meat and dairy (in Orthodox houses this means 2 sets of cooking equipment and utensils and 2 sets of dinnerware)

*Funerals*

* Funerals
  + Chevrah Kadisha – Jewish funeral home
  + As the Chevrah Kadisha are Orthodox there are issues of women rabbis conducting funeral services
  + Synagogue is a place for the living so Orthodox funerals would not be done there. Progressive/Reform overcome the Hevrah Kadisha problem by holding the service in the synagogue with the body in the foyer and it is then transferred to the gravesite.
  + Funeral Service
    - Funerals immediate – within 24hours of death
    - Exactly the same prayers said for every person. All are equal in death.
    - Plain coffin, no adornments
    - Body is buried whole. Returns to dust from where it came. Soul returns to God.
    - Body is watched over by the *‘shomerim’*
    - Autopsy is watched over
    - Organ donation – if the giving of an organ means that life will be saved it is permissible only for reasons of saving a life, not for profit (even orthodox but this is a recent change)
  + Mourning Periods
    - Shiva – 1 month
    - Mourning period- parents 11mths, other people- 1 mth
    - Belief that it takes 1yr to be gathered to your people, ie. with God

*Marriage*

* + *Chuppah* – canopy with 4 poles – symbolises the home they will make together
  + Drink from service glass, break glass- symbolizes that at the height of happiness and joy, a reminder of people less fortunate than themselves. Also, the broken glass is a reminder of the destruction of the temple