

The Abrahamic Religions:

An Introduction to World Religions

Judaism: Practices

Session Week 6

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Aim and Learning Outcomes – Week 6 Session

Aims

- This session aims to discuss the Religious Practices in Judaism Tradition .

Learning Outcomes

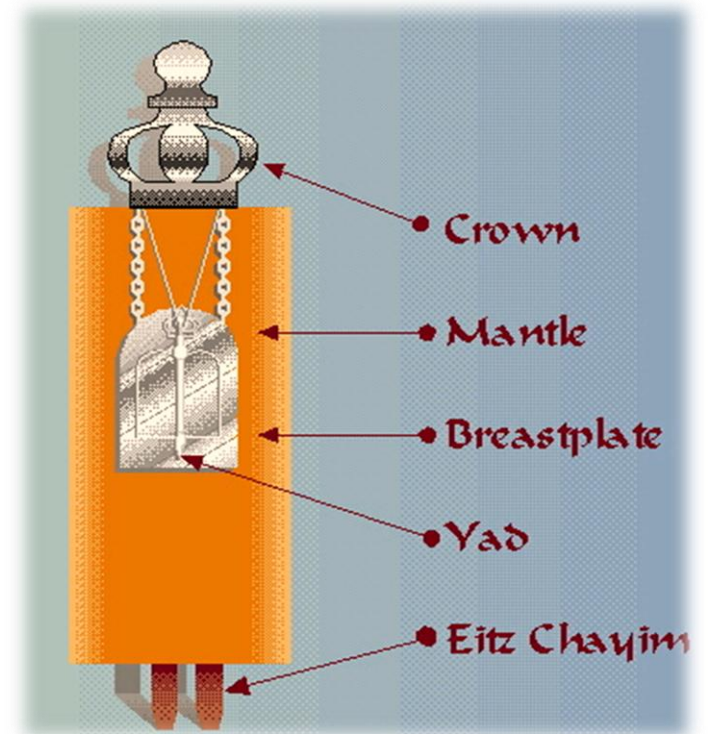
- Students have some understanding of:
 - Judaism Practices.

Judaism: Practices

Lying at the heart of Jewish worship is the 'Torah', or the Five Books Moses:

English	Hebrew
Genesis	Beraishit
Exodus	Shemot
Leviticus	Vayikra
Numbers	B'midbar
Deuteronomy	Devarim

Torah Scroll



Jewish Myth

- Jewish myth associates the Torah with Moses, the wilderness period following the end of the era of slavery in Egypt, and Mount Sinai.
- Some scholars believe that Moses was a historical figure who lived about 3,200 or 3,500 years ago. For this reason, many Jews believe that humankind acquired the guidance contained in the Torah well over 3,000 years ago.
- However, modern scholarship suggests that the Torah was assembled about 500BCE.
- At present-day versions of the Torah are written in Hebrew, the sacred language of Judaism, and on a parchment scroll.
- Most Jews believe that the present-day copies of the Torah are copies of the first Torah.
- The word 'Torah' means 'teaching', and the Torah teaches about God, His people and the world.
- The Book of Exodus Chapter 28 contains a description of the garb of the High Priest. His special clothing included a tunic (the Torah mantle, or covering), a belt (the sash around the Torah scroll), a mitre (the crown of the Torah), and a breastplate. Each of these has been reproduced in some fashion for dressing and decorating the Safer Torah.

Torah – Law

- Most of the Torah is taken up with detailed laws about how to worship God and how to organise society. For this reason the Torah is sometimes called the Law.
- Jewish scholarship identifies no fewer than 613 laws, or commandments, which devout Jews should subscribe to.
- Orthodox Judaism maintains that the word Torah were revealed directly to Moses on Mount Sinai and that Moses wrote them all down perfectly, apart from the few verses which record his own death.
- Liberal and Reform Jews can live with the findings of recent scholarship which suggest that the Torah was compiled over a long period of about 400 years ending approximately 2,500 years ago.
- Nonetheless, most Liberal and Reform Jews believe the Torah was written by people who were divinely inspired.
- For all Jews, the Torah is the source of their religion and is regarded as the most important guide anyone can have in life.

- The scrolls have crowns covering the top of the rollers and a metal plate, called a breastplate hanging around the crowns.
- Covering the Torah scroll is a decorated cover called a mantle. This is usually embroidered with a crown, representing King David.



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- In seeking a more sophisticated understanding of the concept of God, it's important to bear in mind the following.
- Judaism has cherished and encouraged freedom of thought. Why?
- Because neither knowledge nor understanding are possible without enquiry, debate and the right of people to make up their own minds. An outcome of this tradition is that conceptions of God are elastic and amenable to diverse interpretations. In the end, everyone makes of the common God of Judaism his or her own God, an envisagement unique and peculiar to each individual.
- This aside, what can be said with some certainty God?
- First, Judaism tends to assume God, or take God as read. Very little time is spent trying to prove His existence. Having assumed Him to exist, it's up to individuals to decide whether He is transcendent – having existence outside the created world – or immanent – present throughout the world.
- Second, no matter how God is defined, humankind's knowledge of God is limited. Humankind's ignorance is greater than its knowledge.
- However, and this is the third point, God is One. This implies that there is no other God.

Place of Worship – Synagogue

- In the Synagogue the Torah exists as a discreet entity, but in Jewish homes it forms part of the Tenach, or the Hebrew Bible (The Hebrew Bible, very similar to the Old Testament of the Christians, is composed of the Torah, Prophets and Writings.)
- Although divinity inspired, Orthodox Judaism does not insist the Prophets and Writings come directly from God. Nor are they as the Torah. The collection of 150 Psalms is regarded as the most important book in Writings.
- Needless to say, the precise form that worship assumes will vary depending on whether Jews define themselves as Orthodox, Liberal, Reform or Conservative.
- However, before addressing this issue, some reflection about worship in the distant past

- The layout of the building is rectangular, with seats arranged on three sides. The fourth side is the most important, it holds the Ark. Almost in the centre of the Synagogue is a raised platform called the Bimah. At the foot of the Bimah is a group of seats reserved for elders of the synagogue.



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- Back in the days when the Temple existed, a priestly hierarchy officiated with the knowledge and skills to worship God and to lead others in the worship of God.
- By the year 400 BCE, familiar aspects of Judaic worship were in place:
 - The centrality of the Torah
 - The importance of the Ten Commandments, and
 - The celebration of many of the holy days Jews celebrate today.
- At Pesach, or Passover, sheep were sacrificed, and some scholars are of the opinion that sacrifice may have been a legacy from the pre-Judaic polytheistic and pantheistic religions of the region.
- Male alone formed the priestly hierarchy and women observed rather than actively participated. Indeed, even for males of the lay community there was little to do.
- Beside Pesach, the main festival of the year were probably *Rosh Hashanah* (New Year), *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) and *Sukkot* (Autumn Harvest).
- Regular worship occurred every **Shabat**, or **Sabbath** (Friday evening to Saturday evening), when Jews recalled God's day of rest following the Creation.
- **Shabat** was an occasion when work was forbidden.

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- Following the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the synagogue and the home became the main centres of worship.
- With the priestly hierarchy in Jerusalem now no longer in existence, it was the Rabbis – the masters or teachers – who assumed many of the duties associated with worship. Many of the duties but not all, because, over time, male lay members of the congregation assumed some of the tasks in the synagogue, and in the home the father and mother shared ritual responsibilities.
- Rabbi means teacher and, through preaching from the pulpit, teaching classes, and individual counselling, teaching is the primary duty of a rabbi.
- Some prayers are said by everyone, and some are recited aloud by the shaliach tzibbur, to which the congregation responds "Amen." The *chazzan* (cantor) is specially trained in the art of Jewish music and liturgy for this role.

Judaism Worship in More Detail

Let's look at worship in more detail by outlining what might happen in an Orthodox synagogue on a Saturday morning.

- First, Jewish families walk to the synagogue – driving a car is regarded as an aspect of work – and everyone covers their head before entering.
- Males sit in pews around the bimah, or raised reading desk, on which the Torah is opened and read from.
- Females sit in pews detached from and above ground level.
- Males wear *Yamulkas* and *Tallins*, or Skull caps and prayer shawls respectively. Also, they may wear Tefellins, or Phylacteries.

Yarmulke



Tefillin

Tallit

- Phylacteries are small leather boxes that have long straps attached that are worn on the left forearm and on the forehead. Inside the boxes are passages from the scriptures, including the Shema.

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- The service begins with readings from the Psalms, after which the cantor may sing about one of God's acts in history before singing a blessing.
- Next, the doors of the Ark are opened and one of the Torah scrolls is removed. The silver ornaments and protective cloth are put to one side and the Torah is opened and held aloft. It is carried to the bimah.
- Passages are read from the Torah by any male who can read and speak Hebrew and has successfully completed his **Bar Mitzvah**.
- A **yad** is used keep his place in the text: the script is never touched by hand.
- After additional prayers, the Torah is returned to the Ark and the service concludes with a sermon delivered by the Rabbi.



- The ceremony of the Bar Mitzvah is a very important occasion for the young Jewish male. The ceremony, is normally held on the first Shabbat after his 13th birthday.

Form of Worship – Orthodox Home - Shabt

- Now let's examine the form that worship takes in an Orthodox home on Friday evening, the start of Shabat.
- Shabat begins 20 minutes before sunset on Friday and lasts until three stars appear in the sky on Saturday evening. No work should be done because it's God's day or rest.
- On Friday evening the family meal is the focus of worship.
- The table is spread with a special white cloth which often has important symbols embroidered into the material – the **Kiddush cup**, the spice container, the Star of David, etc.



- The Magen David is the star of David, this is the representation of the state of Israel.

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- At dusk, the females in the family light two light Shabat candles.
- The oldest female, usually the mother, covers her eyes with her hands and recites a prayer welcoming the Shabat into her home.
- The meal proper begins when the males return from their visit to the synagogue.
- Family members dip their hands into a bowl of water symbolically cleaning themselves, then sit down.
- The father blesses the children around the table with the words, “May the Lord bless you and keep you.”
- Then the Kiddush Cup, or Challah, have already been put on the table. The father blesses the bread, cuts slices from the loaves and gives everyone a piece.
- After the bread has been eaten the main dishes of the meal are brought in and consumed course by course.
- A typical meal consists of fish, soup, chicken, various vegetables and fruit. During and after the meal the family may sing traditional Hebrew songs called **Zmirot**.



- The **Menorah** is the seven branched candlestick which was placed in the temple in Jerusalem, each home has a Menorah to remind them of the temple and of their hope that one day it will be built again

Form of Worship – Orthodox Home - Pesach

- Every year at Pesach, the family members sit down to a meal known as the Seder. Special foods are on the table, as is unleavened bread called Matzos, a glass of red wine, and a glass of water in which salt has been dissolved.
- All these items remind Jews of aspects of the Exodus story, the story which is so important to Jewish identity.
- The Shankbone reminds Jews of the animal sacrifices at the Temple during Pesach, and of the lambs which were killed so that their blood could be painted on the doorposts and lintels of the slaves' huts, thereby ensuring that the Angel of Death “passed over”.
- The roast egg, a symbol of new life, recalls that Pesach is a Spring festival. The parsley and lettuce, symbols of the harvest to come, reveal that Spring is the start of the growing season, but also remind Jews that God provided for the one-time slaves when they were in the wilderness. The bitter herbs, today often a dish of horseradish sauce, symbolise the bitter lives the Jews experienced during enslavement in Egypt.
- The Charoset, usually made from apple, nuts, cinnamon, wine, and lemon juice, represents the mortar the Jews used as slaves to construct buildings for the pharaohs. However, the charoset tastes sweet and is also a symbol of the sweet taste of freedom.

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- The leaves of matzos remind Jews that, after the Angel of Death had distracted the Egyptians by killing the first-born in every Egyptian family, the slaves had to make their escape as quickly as possible.
- Unleavened bread can be made and cooked much more quickly than bread containing yeast.
- The salt water reminds the Jews of the tears of joy the slaves shed when they realised they were returning to Palestine as free people.
- And the wine, which is drunk four times, is a reminder of the fourfold promise which God gave to Moses.
- God promised to deliver the Jews from slavery, to redeem them, to take care of His Chosen People, and to give them a land of their own.
- At the end of the meal, some Jews pour a few drops of wine onto the edge of the Seder plate and the family express sadness that Jewish freedom was secured at the expense of so much Egyptian blood.

Festivals

- **Rosh Hashanah** begins the Jewish liturgical year and usually occurs in September. It is the time when Jewish people remember God, the story of the Creation and what God has done for them. They reflect on His Judgement on evil, and by repenting their sins they begin the new year by submitting to Him. It is a quiet day of solemn reflection.
- **Yom Kippur** is the holiest of Jewish festivals with 24 hours of fasting to show sincerity, self-discipline, dedication and compassion. It is a public act of reconciliation with God which commemorates their faithlessness in the wilderness. The Ark is covered in white, and a solemn prayer, the Kol Nidrei, is sung in memorial to Jews who have suffered persecution. Sins are confessed directly to God and prayers are said for forgiveness for personal and private wrongs.
- **Purim** is a early Spring festival commemorating the victory of Esther over persecutors who sought to slaughter the Jews in ancient Persia. There is a carnival atmosphere with special meals, plays portraying the story of Esther, and processions with children in fancy dress.
- **Shavout** is the early Summer harvest festival which also celebrates the revelation of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.

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- **Sukkot** is the Autumn harvest festival which also celebrates the care received from God while the Jewish people wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. Jews build temporary shelters, or tabernacles, with a roof of branches in their gardens or homes, and all meals are eaten within them.
- **Hanukkah** is the festival of lights. Jews recall a miracle when the oil lasted in the Temple lights for eight days when there was only enough oil for a day. Candles are lit on a special nine-branched menorah, or candlestick. The festival also recalls the rededication of the Temple after it had been desecrated. Hanukkah is the time of year when Jewish children are given gifts and one of the occasions when relations and friends send other greetings cards.
- A synagogue is much more than a house of worship; it is also a place of study or a home of learning where Jews, in particular children, receive religious instruction.
- The ceremonies of Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah make boys and girls sons and daughters of the Law. Young Jews study the Torah in great detail before they are ready to claim this title.

Conclusion (Schools of Judaism)

We conclude with a short look at the schools in Judaism.

- If we thought of the schools of Judaism as homogeneous, we would make a great mistake this especially so in the case of Orthodoxy. There are many ways of defining Orthodoxy from the Pietist Hassidic Groups.
- **Hassidic** teachings are popularised forms of the Kabbalah, one of Jewish mysticism's most enduring legacies.
 - Hassidic Jews emphasise the importance of inner service to God rather than strict adherence to ritual.
 - People can serve God by fulfilling everyday and mundane acts as well as by complying with the commandments.
 - Scholarship alone won't reveal what God expects of humankind: intuition and common sense are just as helpful.
 - The Hassidic Sects dress in a distinctive manner. Males may wear heavy, dark-coloured coats and trilbies and grow side locks and beards.

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Reform Judaism has its origins in Germany at the beginning of the 19th c. Reformers wanted to adapt worship to contemporary aesthetic standards. To them the informality of the traditional service seemed alien and undignified. They sought greater decorum, more unison in prayer, a choir, hymns and musical responses, as well as amendments to the prayers and the length of the service. In Reform synagogues males and females sit together in family groups, and part of the service is conducted in the language of the country in which the Jews reside.

Liberal Judaism has its origins in Britain in about 1900. It emerged there because the British version of Reform Judaism was less reformist than Reform Judaism on the continent. Liberal Judaism recognises female Rabbis. In their synagogues males and females sit together in family groups, and part of the service is conducted in the language of the country in which the Jews reside.

Conservative Judaism is especially strong in the US. Dating from the last quarter of the 19th century, Conservatives felt that Reform Judaism had been too sweeping in its changes. In other words, it occupies a position somewhere between **Orthodox** and **Reform Judaism** and employs Hebrew for all or most forms of worship.

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- All Groups:
 - accept Torah and fulfill its Mitzvot
 - embrace the ethical mandate of Judaism
 - regulate existence to Judaism's rituals & observances
 - support Jewish causes
 - be a devoted member of the Jewish community
 - maintain a bond and a sense of mutual interdependence with the Jewish Land
 - feel a connection to Jewish history
 - be committed to the creative survival of the Jewish future
- Judaism, in common with all religions, has its artefacts such as Yamulkas, Talliths, Tefellins, Seder Plates, Kiddush Cups, Spice Boxes, Mezuzahs and Yads, as well as its pilgrimage sites.
- Jerusalem is, of course, the holiest of all pilgrimage sites. One of the characteristic images we have of devout Jews in Jerusalem is of men saying their prayers as they rock gently back in front of all that remains of the First Temple built by King Solomon. Jews call it the **Western Wall**.

Reflection

Below are some exercises to help your understanding about Judaism tradition. Think through your answers and **briefly** write them down. This will help develop your knowledge. You should be able to complete all these tasks after reading the course hand out and other relative materials.

- **Briefly** write your learning reflection from Week 4, 5, and 6 Lessons
 - What will be the main points of your argument?
 - What are the origins of Judaism and the denominations in Judaism?
 - Explore their similarities and differences in terms of religious practices.
 - Identify how Judaism is related to Christianity.

Reference

- Robinson, George (2001) *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals* (Pocket Books)
- Chhn-Sherbok, Dan (2003) *The Jewish Faith* (Routledge)

Next Session

- We continue to discuss about Christianity