

# THE BASIC BELIEFS

## God

The Jewish belief about God is simple. There is only one God who is eternal, and he alone is prayed to. He is the creator of the universe, but He is also near to every creature, and listens to their prayers.

Although there is only one God, the Jewish religion has many names for God. God's real name is so holy that it is never mentioned - and its pronunciation is unknown. Other names are used instead out of respect for His name, such as God, Lord, Adonai, Jehovah, Yahweh, Father, or a phrase which means 'the Holy One, blessed be he'.

## Good and Evil

Judaism teaches that because God is good, so should people be good and love one another. In fact, the central prayer of the Jews is called the Shema which states, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength."

However, since God has given humans the ability to choose, there will be times when people choose to do bad, even evil, things. Judaism is aware that everyone has the choice to do evil or good. Luckily, God will always forgive sins as long as His people pray, are truly sorry (repent), and show that they will try to put things right through good deeds to make up for evil ways.

## A Chosen People

Jews feel they have a very special relationship with God, or Covenant, since God chose to give the Jews His laws (613 Commandments). In this way, the Jews regard themselves as his 'Chosen People'.

But this does not mean that other nations and peoples are in any way inferior. It means that Jews have special duties or obligations to perform, and only by remaining faithful to their religion can they continue in this relationship.

The Jews are taught in their scriptures that they are Radak (Light Unto Nations), which means they are to teach the world about God and His laws and be an example to others. Jews, however, do not normally seek converts, but instead hope that by their example others will come to also know God as they do. Muslims and Christians already share the same view of God, and Judaism simply asks that all people should live their lives with love, respect and care for other people. It recognizes that there are important values in all faiths.

## The Messiah

Another important teaching is concerned with a future event foretold by great prophets like Isaiah and Daniel. Our world today is scarred, as it has always been, by wars and conflicts. The Jewish hope is one of future peace and harmony, and Judaism's Torah speaks of a leader sent by God to bring peace to mankind. He is called the Messiah or 'The Anointed One'. Many have claimed to be the Messiah over the centuries, but Jews believe that because wars are still with us then the Messiah cannot have come yet. They still await his coming.

## The Language of Prayer

A specific detail to the Jewish tradition is the use of the Hebrew language. This is regarded as a very important, even sacred, language that the Torah Scrolls themselves are written in. Orthodox Jews use Hebrew exclusively in all of their services. Many even rever the language and the Torah so much that they will use a small silver pointer called a 'stylus' when reading from the scrolls so that the oils from their fingers never touch the sacred writings fearing to damage them over time. Jews believe that Hebrew is not only a link for Jews with their history as it has been their language for thousands of years, but also something they share in common with Jews all over the world. If synagogue services are held in Hebrew, then a Jew from Britain or Canada can visit, say, a French or Italian synagogue and feel at home there.

Orthodox Jews believe, too, that it is a requirement of all members to know Hebrew in order to be considered an adult within the faith. They study the language and scriptures for many years in Yeshiva (Hebrew school). This is why it is the most important component of the Bar Mitzvah that a young Jew read

directly from the Torah and interpret what they have read.

Conservative and Reform Jews often use a combination of Hebrew and their local language (eg. English) for prayer at synagogue services. In this way they can still maintain a link with their past heritage using Hebrew yet still follow prayers and understand them in their home language.



## Observance of the Sabbath

Setting aside a special day to recognize the greatness of God is a commonality amongst all Jews regardless of their path. Shabbat (Hebrew for Sabbath) is a solemn occasion for Jews to attend synagogue services to pray and share community while led by a rabbi.

Orthodox Jews separate the men of the congregation during the services from the women and children to reduce distraction from prayer. Men are exclusively given the responsibility to run the service. The rabbi reads and preaches from the Torah and wardens (servers) are charged with caring for and moving the sacred Torah Scrolls to the reading table.

More modernized Jewish traditions have always encouraged the full participation of women in religious life. Men and women pray together and women may even lead the service, preach sermons, and become rabbis.

