

The Jewish Community

“Death is merely moving from one home to another. The wise man will spend his main efforts in trying to make his future home the more beautiful one.”

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern

Origins

‘What is the Jew? What kind of unique creature is this whom all the rulers of all the nations of the world have disgraced and crushed and expelled and destroyed; persecuted, burned and drowned, and who, despite their anger and their fury, continue to live and to flourish.

What is this Jew whom they have never succeeded in enticing with all the enticements in the world, whose oppressors and persecutors only suggested that he deny (and disown) his religion and cast aside the faithfulness of his ancestors?!

The Jew - is the symbol of eternity. He is the one who for so long had guarded the prophetic message and transmitted it to all mankind. A people such as this can never disappear.

The Jew is eternal. He is the embodiment of eternity.’

Leo Tolstoy (What is the Jew? 1908)

The Jews or Israelites traced their common lineage to the biblical patriarch Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Jewish tradition holds that the Israelites were the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons (one of which was named Judah), who settled in Egypt. Their direct descendants respectively divided into twelve tribes, who were enslaved under the rule of an Egyptian pharaoh, often identified as Ramses II. In the Jewish faith, the emigration of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan (the Exodus), led by the Prophet Moses, marks the formation of the Israelites as a people.

Jewish tradition has it that after forty years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites arrived in Canaan and conquered it under the command of Joshua, dividing the land among the twelve tribes. For a period of time, the united twelve tribes were led by a series of rulers known as Judges. After this period, an Israelite monarchy was established under Saul, and continued under King David and Solomon. King David conquered Jerusalem (first a Canaanite, then a Jebusite town) and made it his capital. After Solomon's reign the nation split into two kingdoms, Israel, consisting of ten of the tribes (in the north), and Judah, consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (in the South). Israel was conquered by the Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser V in the 8th century BCE. There is no commonly accepted historical record of those ten tribes, which are sometimes referred to as the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

Judea under Roman rule was at first an independent Jewish Kingdom, but gradually the rule over Judea became less and less Jewish, until it came under the direct rule of Roman administration (and renamed the province of Judaea), which was often callous and brutal in its treatment of its Judean subjects. The Romans destroyed much of the Temple in Jerusalem and, according to some accounts, stole artefacts from the temple, such as the Menorah. Judeans continued to live in their land in significant numbers, and were allowed to practise their religion, until the 2nd century when Julius Severus ravaged Judea while putting down the Bar Kokhba revolt. After 135 CE, Jews were not allowed to enter the city of

Jerusalem, although this ban must have been at least partially lifted, since at the destruction of the rebuilt city by the Persians in the 7th century, Jews were said to have lived there.

Many of the Judean Jews were sold into slavery while others became citizens of other parts of the Roman Empire. This is the traditional explanation of the diaspora. However, a majority of the Jews in Antiquity were most likely descendants of converts in the cities of the Hellenistic-Roman world, especially in Alexandria and Asia Minor, and were only affected by the diaspora in its spiritual sense.

Jews settled throughout Europe, especially in the area of the former Roman Empire. There are records of Jewish communities in France and Germany from the 4th century, and substantial Jewish communities in Spain even earlier. Since they were the only people allowed to loan money for interest (forbidden to Catholics by the church), some Jews became prominent moneylenders.

Jews were frequently massacred and exiled from various European countries. The persecution hit its first peak during the Crusades. In the First Crusade (1096) flourishing communities on the Rhine and the Danube were utterly destroyed. In the Second Crusade (1147) the Jews in France were subject to frequent massacres. The Jews were also subjected to attacks by the Shepherds' Crusades of 1251 and 1320. The Crusades were followed by expulsions, including in 1290, the banishing of all English Jews; in 1396, 100,000 Jews were expelled from France and in 1421 thousands were expelled from Austria. Many of the expelled Jews fled to Poland.

Although Jews flourished and underwent a revival within Muslim Spain, this was brought to a tragic end following the Christian re-conquest of Muslim Spain, which was followed by Spanish Inquisition in 1492, when the entire Spanish population of around 200,000 Sephardic Jews were expelled. This was followed by expulsions from Sicily in 1493 (37,000 Jews) and Portugal in 1496. The expelled Spanish Jews fled mainly to the Ottoman Empire, Holland, and North Africa, others migrating to Southern Europe and the Middle East.

During the Middle Ages, Jews were generally better treated by Islamic rulers than by Christian ones. Despite second-class citizenship, Jews played prominent roles in Muslim courts, and experienced a "Golden Age" in the Moorish Spain about 900-1100, though the situation deteriorated after that time.

In the 17th century, almost no Jews lived in Western Europe. The relatively tolerant Poland had the largest Jewish population in Europe, but the calm situation for the Jews there ended when Polish and Lithuanian Jews were slaughtered in the hundreds of thousands by the Cossack Chmielnicki (1648) and in the Swedish wars (1655). Driven by these and other persecutions, Jews moved back to Western Europe in the 17th Century.

During the period of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, significant changes were happening within the Jewish community. The Haskalah movement paralleled the wider Enlightenment, as Jews began in the 1700s to campaign for emancipation from restrictive laws and integration into the wider European society. Secular and scientific education was added to the traditional religious instruction received by students, and interest in a national Jewish identity, including a revival in the study of Jewish history and Hebrew, started to grow. Haskalah gave birth to the Reform and Conservative movements and planted the seeds of Zionism while at the same time encouraging cultural assimilation into the countries in which Jews resided. At around the same time another movement was born, one preaching almost the opposite of Haskalah, Hasidic Judaism. Hasidic Judaism began in the 1700s by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, and quickly gained a following with its more exuberant, mystical approach to religion. These two movements, and the traditional orthodox approach to

Judaism from which they spring, formed the basis for the modern divisions within Jewish observance.

Though persecution still existed, emancipation spread throughout Europe in the 1800s. Napoleon invited Jews to leave the Jewish ghettos in Europe and seek refuge in the newly created tolerant political regimes that offered equality under Napoleonic Law. By 1871, with Germany's emancipation of Jews, every European country except Russia had emancipated its Jews.

Despite increasing integration of the Jews with secular society, a new form of anti-semitism emerged, based on the ideas of race and nationhood rather than the religious hatred of the Middle Ages. This form of anti-Semitism held that Jews were a separate and inferior race from the Aryan people of Western Europe, and led to the emergence of political parties in France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary that campaigned on a platform of rolling back emancipation. This form of anti-Semitism emerged frequently in European culture, most famously in the Dreyfus Trial in France. These persecutions, along with state-sponsored pogroms in Russia in the late 1800s, led a number of Jews to believe that they would only be safe in their own nation.

At the same time, Jewish migration to the United States created a new community in large part freed of the restrictions of Europe. Over 2 million Jews arrived in the United States between 1890 and 1924, mostly from Russia and Eastern Europe.

Though Jews became increasingly integrated in Europe, fighting for their home countries in World War I and playing important roles in culture and art during the 20s and 30s, racial anti-Semitism remained. It reached its most virulent form in the killing of approximately six million Jews during the Holocaust, almost completely obliterating the two-thousand year history of the Jews in Europe. In 1948, the Jewish state of Israel was founded, creating the first Jewish nation since the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

Today, the largest Jewish communities are in the United States and Israel, with major communities in France, Russia, England, and Canada.

Teachings

Judaism, the religion of the Jewish people has, at its heart an underlying promise, the belief that there exists only one indivisible God who is the Creator and ruler of the universe and all that is in it; transcendent and eternal, knowing and seeing everything.

God has revealed the Law (Torah) to his specially appointed people, the Jews, which on the one hand forms the central part of the particularistic covenant, or bond, between them. On the other hand the Torah contains a message from God to humanity, mediated through the Jewish prophets but of universal validity. Through Abraham, the biblical patriarch, the Jewish faith was given its first expression and the blessing and inheritance from God to the Jewish people, especially the promise of the land, Israel, that maintains a central place in Jewish thought and practice.

The essence of the Jewish faith is contained in a prayer called the Shema, which is found in the Torah and recited daily by the devout Jew: it begins:

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart".

Deuteronomy, Chapter 6. verses 4-6

Worship

The Sabbath (Shabbat), the most important of Jewish holy days is observed weekly from sunset on Friday until one hour after sunset on Saturday. It is set apart from the rest of the week for worship, rest and peace. The devout Jew does not work or transact business on the Sabbath.

Regular and frequent prayer is an essential part of Jewish daily life. Jews may pray whenever they wish, but for the devout there are three set occasions for prayer: morning, afternoon and evening.

Places of Worship

In a synagogue, a minimum of 10 adult male worshippers must be present for a service to take place. There are many variations in form and customs in synagogues reflecting the particular religious views of the congregations, In Orthodox synagogues, men and women sit separately but in Reform synagogues mixed seating is normal. The ritual and participants also vary accordingly.

In Orthodox services, the men wear their skull-caps, talliths and tefillin with the women seated in the galleries. In Reform services women share the conduct of the service.

A synagogue can be a simple room and contain the two main items of the ark and bimah. The ark is a decorated cupboard or cabinet to contain the scrolls on which the Jewish Law, the Torah, is written. The bimah is simply a raised platform with a reading desk on which the scrolls are placed when read aloud during worship. A menorah, the seven-branched candlestick, and a lighted lamp hanging near the ark are normally installed. All these items can be portable. Normally a Rabbi (teacher) and Cantor or Reader lead the worship, but any layperson can officiate in their absence.

The synagogue is, however, a totally lay institution and therefore any adult male Jew may lead the prayers, read from the Torah and perform other synagogue rituals.

Jews will attend the synagogue for corporate worship services, which are held at the onset of the Sabbath on Friday, and on Saturday morning afternoon and evening at the termination of the Sabbath. The observant Jew does not work or travel on the Sabbath.

Practices

Birth

Boys are normally circumcised on the 8th day after birth and are then given a Hebrew name.

Marriage

Marriage signifies the setting up of a new family -the family being the basic unit of Jewish ritual. It is a holy thing instituted by God and it reminds the Jew that the home is a sanctuary in which God dwells. Judaism does not accept marriage with a non-Jewish spouse, and marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew cannot be performed in a synagogue. The ceremony is called Kiddushin, meaning 'to be holy', and takes place usually in a synagogue. A convenient room is also acceptable as the legal essentials are that the Secretary for Marriages of the Synagogue is present as a witness and registrar.

Jewish marriage ceremonies are usually held in a synagogue but can also take place in a hall or hotel before the Secretary for Marriages of the synagogue. An essential part of the service is the act of marriage contracts and vows, which take place under the marriage canopy. Men must have their heads covered at all times. During the ceremony under the

canopy there are two occasions in which the bride and bridegroom drink wine as prayers are said. The marriage service lasts about 50 minutes.

Funerals

There are no special rites for a dying person. However, people of the Jewish faith should not die alone, as the dying person may need support to recite the appropriate prayers.

Orthodox Jews are always buried; burial should be in a Jewish cemetery. Non-orthodox Jews are normally buried. Reform Judaism does not object to the practice of cremation. In accordance with religious practice, delay in burial is prohibited, and subject to the Coroner's permission, arrangements for burial should be made immediately after death occurs.

The ceremony will last about one hour and include prayers in Hebrew and a sermon in English. All male mourners will be expected to put three shovels of earth into the grave. All must keep their heads covered: both men and women can attend. There is no special part for the eldest son to play, although he should be present. Next-of-kin undergo an intense period of official mourning for the first week after the burial. The mourning then decreases in intensity during the next 12 months.

Diet

Food eaten by Orthodox Jews is determined by strict adherence dietary laws. Some Jews will observe the dietary requirements only partially or reject them completely, as in the case of some Reform Jews, although many will tend to eat kosher-style food developed from traditional cuisine.

Jewish dietary laws prohibit the eating of all animals which do not have cloven hoof and chew the cud, all birds which are birds of prey and all sea creatures which do not have fins and scales. Meat which can be eaten is known as kosher. To be kosher, animals must be religiously slaughtered, certain parts removed and the meat salted to remove the blood before it can be eaten. Kosher fowl (not birds of prey) must also be slaughtered and dressed in the prescribed manner.

Meat and dairy products cannot be cooked, served or eaten together. Milk products may not be eaten with or immediately after meat products; an interval of time depending on the custom of the community must elapse between meat and milk. Meat products, on the other hand, may be eaten after milk products, after a short interval.

Fish (kosher if with scales and fins) does not require special preparation. Fish can be eaten with dairy products if prepared with non-meat shortening or if broiled. Fish, meat, milk and their products, eggs, fats, oil and shortenings are all considered kosher only if derived from the above-mentioned animals or from plants and vegetables.

Utensils used for the preparation and serving of non-kosher food may not be used for kosher food or vegetables. Separate utensils are used for meat and milk foods.

During the eight days of Passover, Jews do not eat leavened products (i.e. without yeast), nor would they wish to touch any leavened products. Instead they eat special foods including matzos (unleavened bread).

Dress

The head is covered during prayer with an ordinary hat or skullcap (yarmulke or kippah). In the morning a prayer shawl (talith) is worn and on weekdays phylacteries (tefillin) may be worn by Orthodox Jews. The tefillin are black leather boxes containing four passages of scripture, which are strapped to the forehead and left upper arm. The Shema (Deuteronomy 6. v.4.6) is recited morning and evening. The Orthodox Jew may continue to cover his head

throughout the day as a sign of reverence to God. Married women cover their heads at prayer.

Jewish dress varies greatly. Some men often have their heads covered and some married women cover their hair.

Religious Books and Artefacts

The Jewish Bible consists of three parts:

- The Torah (which means teaching)
- The Prophets
- The Writings

The Torah consists of the five lawbooks of Moses (the Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The Prophets are divided into two sections: early Prophets -Joshua, Judges, Kings, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel; later Prophets include the twelve minor Prophets - Amos, Hosea, Micah, and others.

The Writings are a variety of books including the Psalms, Proverbs, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, etc.

The Talmud explains the laws written in the Torah. The detailed interpretation and explanation of the law written in the Torah is found in the Talmud and covers the many aspects of Jewish life and thought including laws about agriculture, festivals, marriage and divorce, civil and criminal laws and the laws concerning food and drink.

A copy of the Torah and copies of the Prayer Books (Siddur)

Prayer cap

Prayer Shawl

Tefillin (Phylacteries)

Copies of the Holy Scriptures (according to the Masoretic Text) and the Authorised Daily Prayer Book. The Pentateuch and Haftorahs are also available.

Festivals and Celebrations

There are a number of religious festivals found within the Torah that are observed within Judaism following similar practices as for the Sabbath. All begin at sunset of the previous day and end one hour after sunset the following day(s).

The Jewish calendar is lunar, but to keep in step with the Gregorian calendar, leap months are intercalated (i.e. inserted) at regular intervals since the festivals are tied to the agricultural seasons. Observant Jews do not work on the major Jewish festivals, but rather, worship together on these days.

Rosh Hashannah

New Year Festival, which lasts 2 days. Occurs during the months of September and October. For Jews, this is a time of divine judgement in which the fate of the world in the coming year is determined. Jews repent of their sins, the ram's horn (shofar) is sounded to remind them of their shortcomings and a call to spiritual awareness. It is also a time to eat sweet foods as a symbol of the good year to come and to greet relatives and friends.

The period between New Year and Atonement is a time of soul searching and penitence, culminating in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Jewish date is 1st Tishri.

Yom Kippur

Day of Atonement - Occurs during the months of September or October. This is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar: a day of fasting, devoted to prayer and worship, seeking atonement (i.e. 'at one' with God) from God for past sins. The Jewish date is 10th Tishri.

Tabernacles

Also called Sukkot. Occurs during the months of September or October, five days after Yom Kippur. It is primarily a Harvest Festival, but linked with the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt. For the period of the festival, Jews live in a little shack or booth (sukkah) covered with branches and remember the time that their Israelite ancestors wandered through the wilderness after the exodus protected only by the mercy of God. The Jewish date is 15th to 23rd Tishri.

Simchat Torah

Rejoicing of the Torah - Tabernacles concludes with the festival of Shemini Atzeret on 22nd Tishri and Simchat Torah on 23rd Tishri. Simchat Tishri is a particularly joyous occasion with special appeal to children. It commemorates the conclusion of the reading of the Torah in the Synagogue.

Pesach

Festival of Passover - Occurs during March and April. Pesach is the Festival of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, remembering the period when in their haste to leave Egypt they only had time to make bread without yeast. The staple food eaten during Passover is unleavened bread (matzah). On the first two nights a ritual meal is held, a tradition maintained even among Jews who do not keep up with other Jewish traditions. Orthodox Jews will possess a completely separate set of kitchen and tableware for Passover. The Jewish date is 15th to 22nd Nisan.

Shavuot

Pentecost - Occurs during the months of May or June. This is celebrated seven weeks after Passover and lasts 2 days. It is known as the Festival of Weeks because it is held seven weeks after Passover and commemorates the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. It used to be associated with the harvests of Israel when people brought to the Temple the first crops of barley, wheat and fruit. Most synagogues today are still decorated with flowers and plants in thanksgiving to God. The Jewish date is 6th and 7th Sivan.

Chanukah

Festival of dedication (or Lights) - This is a minor festival commemorating the victory of the Maccabees over Antiochus of Syria in the 2nd Century BC in preservation of their faith and lasts for eight days. On each night an extra candle is lit in the eight-branched candelabrum (menorah) until all eight candles are burning. The Jewish date is 25th Kislev.

Purim

Feast of Esther This carnival-like festival commemorates how the Jews of the Persian Empire were saved from the villainous Haman as recounted in the Book of Esther. It is a joyful festival with parties, presents to the poor and fancy-dress parades. The Jewish date is 14th Adar.

Tishah B'Av

This is a fast and solemn day of mourning commemorating the destruction of the Temple in 587 BC and again in 70 AD. The Jewish date is 9th Av.

Community

The main members in the order of ministry within Judaism are the Rabbi and Cantor. The title Rabbi means teacher; a rabbi is an expert in the Jewish law and leader of the Jews in the local community. He will often preach during synagogue worship. The Cantor or Reader leads the service in the synagogue; he needs a good voice as most of the service is chanted.

A child is considered a Jew if born of a Jewish mother. Until the age of twelve for a girl and thirteen for a boy, a child is regarded as a minor. After instruction in Jewish religious law and the Hebrew language, the child at the age of twelve or thirteen is regarded as an adult.

This is marked by the ceremonies of a Bar Mitzvah for a boy and a Bat Mitzvah for a girl

Old age is given great respect in Judaism. Children have a duty to honour and look after their parents. In established Jewish communities old people's homes are often well endowed to provide a comfortable and Jewish atmosphere.

The Jewish home is the centre of Jewish life and ritual. Traditionally the Jewish family will fix a mezuzah (a small parchment scroll on which is written the first two paragraphs of the Shema and contained in a metal case) to each doorway of their home. A traditional Jewish home may have a plaque on a wall facing Jerusalem, known in the west as mizrach (i.e. 'east').

On Sabbaths and festivals the family endeavour to eat their meals together, which are accompanied by benedictions and hymn singing. Before food is eaten, their hands should be ritually washed as they are on rising in the morning. A number of other ritual observances are customary in the Orthodox Jewish home. Life is structured around religious observances, which affect both family and individuals.

Different Schools

Within Judaism there is a number of different groupings based on common ancestry, religious identification and mutual concern. In each of these groups there are variations in respect to religious belief and practice, ritual observances, lifestyles and degree of acculturation.

Orthodox Judaism is the traditionalist approach which believes that a complete revelation of God's eternal will has been conveyed through the Bible and Rabbinic law and therefore is fully authoritative.

Conservative Judaism emphasises and is committed to the historical elements of the Jewish tradition, but with adjustment and change in response to theological and ritual concepts as objects of continuing and evolving change.

Reform Judaism holds to a historical religious experience inspired by the progressive revelation of God's will for each generation, emphasising ethical concepts rather than ritual Law. In Reform congregations, women play an active part in synagogue management and in some cases act as full-time Rabbis or Cantors.

Nearest Synagogues

Bradford Reform Synagogue
7 Bowland Street
Bradford BD1 3BW

Sinai Synagogue
2A Roman Avenue
Leeds LS8 2AN

0113 2665256