

Basics of Judaism

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Judaism is the totality of beliefs and practices of the Jewish people, as given by G-d and recorded in the Torah (Hebrew Bible) and subsequent sacred writings.

Basic Jewish Beliefs The Jewish people believe that G-d is the single creator and animator of the world. He has no helpers, no children and no rivals.

G-d is everywhere and has no properties (for that matter, neither is He really a “he.”) G-d is the invisible force behind everything that happens and knows everything, past present and future.

G-d granted humanity the gift of free choice. When people follow His ways (as outlined in the Torah), G-d rewards them. These rewards can be in this world, as well as in the World to Come, which comes after death.

Just as every individual works hard toward achieving personal perfection through following G-d’s ways, so is the entire world heading toward a time of eternal peace and plenty. This time is known as the era of Moshiach (or Messiah). During this time, Jews will return to the Land of Israel and rebuild the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (see below). A most amazing feature of this time is that death will cease, and the dead will be brought back to life.

The Story of Judaism The story of the Jewish people begins with G-d creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh. Then, He chose Abraham and his children to become His special nation who would dwell in a special homeland (Israel).

After a 210-year stint of slavery in Egypt, G-d took His people to Mount Sinai, where he made a covenant with them and gave them instructions for life.

After 40 years of wandering, the Israelites entered the Promised Land. In time, they built a Holy Temple (Beit Hamikdash) in Jerusalem, where they could offer sacrifices and connect to G-d.

The Holy Temple was eventually destroyed by Roman invaders, and the Jewish people went into exile and were scattered all over the world (galut).

But the story is not over yet. We believe that the time will come when we will once again be gathered in our homeland with a rebuilt Temple in a world that will be peaceful, G-dly and perfect.

Where Does the Term Judaism Come From? There are three names for the descendants of Abraham:

The Torah refers to Abraham as a Hebrew, and that name is most commonly associated with the language of his descendants.

His grandson, Jacob, was given a second name of Israel, and that name has become closely associated with Israelite homeland.

Of Jacob’s 12 sons, Judah had the role of leadership. At one point, he was the dominant tribe among those living in Israel, and the entire nation became known as Jews, and their creed, Judaism.

The Torah - Sacred Texts of Judaism Moses—the leader who led the Jews out of Egypt and to whom G-d communicated in the presence of the people at Mount Sinai—recorded the story of creation and the history of Abraham’s family up until his time in what became known as the Torah, or the Five Books of Moses. In addition, the Torah also contains G-d’s instructions for personal and communal life.

Prophets and Writings: In addition to the Torah, there are 19 other books that are sacred to the Jewish people. They are grouped into Neviim and Ketuvim, (Prophets and Writings). They contain the history of the Jewish people for several hundred years from after Moses’ death, as well as prophetic communications from great leaders of the Jewish people.

Oral Torah: Alongside the Divine traditions that Moses recorded in the Torah, there were many details and commandments from G-d that were communicated and preserved orally. As time went on, the sages of each generation discussed the Torah and elaborated on its principles. These discussions were eventually written down, becoming the Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash.

These texts are still being studied, explored and expanded on as we speak. In addition to individual scholars and study groups, there are academies (yeshivahs) where people study these traditions. In many places, Jewish children attend private schools where they can learn Torah in addition to their secular education. Some children may attend Hebrew school, where they learn about Judaism outside of their regular school hours. Since 1994, Torah study has been accessible online through Chabad.org and other sites.

What Jews Do The Torah contains 613 instructions, called mitzvahs. While some of these mitzvahs pertain to the Holy Temple, others are applicable to day-to-day Jewish life. Here are some of the basics.

Shabbat: Remember that G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh? He commanded His people to do the same. Every seventh day (Friday night to Saturday night) Jewish people feast, pray and enjoy a break from everyday life. The Shabbat is ushered in with candlelighting late on Friday afternoon.

Jewish Story

BY Rabbi Tuvya Bolton

This week's Torah reading is perhaps the strangest story ever told.

G-d, the creator of the universe, drowned the entire human, animal and bird population of the world because they got Him angry!

Only one man, his immediate family and representatives of all the creations got into an 'ark' and were saved.

At first glance we can ask; what is this story doing in the Torah? The Torah is the book of the Jews and the flood story contains no commandments or Jewish messages or even one Jewish character. Indeed, the first Jew, Abraham, was born three hundred years after the flood!

It would have sufficed to give the flood a line or two at the end of the previous section that told the history of the world. Why is such a negative subject that contains not one Jew, given such coverage in such great detail in the Jewish Bible?

Even more remarkable is the fact that a basic work of Jewish Mysticism called 'The Zohar' (as well as in other 'midrashim') finds here references to Moshiach and the future redemption (The goal of Judaism) in many details of the flood;

The flood itself is reminiscent of how the Moshiach will flood the world with the awareness of G-d. The peace that reigned between the animals in Noah's Ark is a foretaste of the redemption when the wolf will lie with the lamb. The Dove that Noah sent out, the rainbow that appeared, the new world that Noah saw after the flood, the promise G-d made not to destroy the world, even Noah's name all hint at the same thing; Moshiach.

But at first glance this is also not understood.

It is a basic principle of the Torah that the redemption depends solely on the Jewish people and the Moshiach himself must be Jewish.

So why do all these 'hints' appear specifically in such a 'non-Jewish' portion?

Here is a story that I just heard this evening that will help us to understand.

Rabbi Benyamin Klein was one of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's personal secretaries and he saw a lot of miracles. Here is one of them that was told at a wedding I attended recently.

A well known Jewish lecturer-professor (the person who told me the story did not remember his name or personal details) had had several private audiences with the Lubavitcher Rebbe since the nineteen seventies and now was accustomed to visit the Rebbe's grave (called the 'Ohel') in the Montifiori Cemetery every time he was in New York (It seems that he lived in Europe).

He once arrived in New York to give a lecture to a group. They sent a driver to pick him up from and return him to the airport but after the lecture he told the driver that on the way back to the airport he wanted to stop in at the 'Ohel' for just five or ten minutes to pray.

The driver became interested and began asking questions. It turns out that the driver was Jewish. He admitted that he had never in his life done anything Jewish but nevertheless he was sure that both he and his wife were Jews and their parents were Jews.

The idea of prayer in such a holy place interested him so he asked the Professor how much it cost and if it was late to order a ticket. When he heard that it was open 24 hours a day to everyone, for free, he announced that he was going.

He parked the taxi, the professor gave him a Yarmulke and together they entered the cemetery and then to the grave.

As soon as they were standing there the taxi-driver closed his eyes for a moment and then burst into uncontrollable weeping. His body was shaking as he held his face in his hands and cried aloud like a baby.

The professor was astounded but he managed to ignore the sobbing for a few moments and pray. When he finished he tapped the driver on the shoulder and they both returned to the taxi.

The driver blew his nose, wiped his eyes and started the car. "What was that?" asked the professor. "What happened? What is wrong? Why were you weeping?"

"My dog!" He was barely able to say it. "Our dog, Freddy is having an operation!" his eyes were all red and puffy and almost began crying again.

"Your what?" asked the professor incredulously. "Your DOG?! Are you kidding?!" he said, covering his mouth so the driver wouldn't see his smirk, staring at him to see if it was really true. "Are you kidding? I don't believe it!!"

"Yes" the driver said sadly as he started driving. "The doctors all said that me and my wife can't have children so we adopted a dog. Such a special, wonderful dog! He is everything to us. But last week he had a stroke!" He was in tears again. "And the vet said that there's no chance he will ever be well. Best he can do is try to save his life by an operation, and he has doubts if even that will work. The operation is tomorrow and me and my wife are going crazy! That's what I prayed for; that the operation would succeed."

The professor was trying to empathize but he wasn't doing a good job, especially when he said, "Listen my friend, if worse comes to worse you can always buy another dog" and the driver began whimpering so heavily he almost had to pull over to the side of the road and stop.

His body was shaking as he held his face in his hands and cried aloud like a baby.

When they got to the airport the professor gave the driver a nice tip together with his calling card and said. "Please excuse me if I said anything wrong. I'm really interested to know what happens to your dog. Here is my number. Call me collect after the operation" and wished him the best. The driver thanked him for everything and they parted.

But months passed and the entire incident was forgotten - almost.

One year later the professor received a collect call from New York and, not recognizing the caller and not expecting any collect calls, didn't accept. But after the same person called five times he decided to accept the charges.

It was the taxi driver.

"Hello professor. How are you?"

"Thank G-d, fine my friend. It's been a long time. Sorry I didn't accept charges, I forgot you completely. Tell me how was the operation?"

"Thank G-d, Thank G-d. It was a miracle!! A real miracle. In fact our Freddy came back to life and is healthier than ever!! You should see him!! You have no idea how grateful we are to you and the Rebbe. He is so healthy and happy. Even the doctor said it was a miracle!!"

"Well, that is really good news. I'm so happy for you." Said the professor. "But why did you wait for a year? You said a year ago that the operation was in a few days. Why didn't you call immediately? Why did you wait so long?"

"Well," the driver answered. "I saw back then that you really didn't understand about my dog so I figured that I wouldn't waste your money calling you collect or your time by calling direct. I figured that I had bothered you enough."

"Too bad" replied the professor. "I certainly would have liked to have heard the good news back then and I'm happy to hear it now" He hesitated a second and continued. "But, tell me, if you didn't call back then, then why are you calling now? A year later?"

The driver answered. "Ahh, that's the point.

"So after Freddy got better, my wife and I were so happy that we went back to the 'Ohel' to say thanks. When we got there we asked one of the Chassidim what to do to show our gratitude. He said that what the Rebbe wants is for every Jew to do the commandments and he suggested that we take on at least one commandment.

"So we spoke for a while and finally decided that I would put on Tefillin every day and my wife would keep family purity, you know, going to the Mikva and all that. The Chassid even set up a time to come to our house and teach us.

"So that's why I'm calling you. After we started doing all this,

keeping the Tefilin and Mikva and everything, well... my wife got pregnant!

"That was months ago, professor, and, well, you won't believe it but today is the Bris of our son!! We had a baby boy!! Thanks to you and the Rebbe!!!"

And that is why I'm calling. Maybe you don't appreciate dogs but I knew you would appreciate this!"

Rabbi Klein finished the story by saying that today the taxi-driver and his wife are completely observant Jews.

With this we can answer our questions. As we see from our dog story, G-d loves all His Creations; G-d answered the taxi driver's prayers about his dog. So too was Noah commanded to save the animals with his ark.

That is what the Torah is teaching us here; that we too should share this love for all G-d's creations... especially all human beings.

And that is why the story of Noah is written in the Torah; in order to give power to all mankind to achieve his righteousness and to create a new world as he did. In fact that is why the gentiles are called "Bnei Noah" literally the offspring of Noah and the Torah's directives to them are called the Seven Commandments of Bnei Noah.

Because, although the Torah was given to the Jews its message is for all humanity (Rambam, Hil Melachim 8:10) and through it we will see a new world devoid of evil, pain and destruction and filled with meaning and blessing.

But although this is the goal of Judaism and why the first Jew, Abraham, was called "The father of all nations" (Gen. 17:5) nevertheless only the Moshiach (True Jewish Messiah) will succeed in doing it (ibid 11:4)

And that is why the Zohar finds so many connections here to Moshiach.

And that is one of the main messages of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Up to now it was dangerous to teach these Noahide Commandments but now it is different. Today, not only do the gentiles want to learn and they will be grateful when we teach them - they will be disappointed if we withhold this from them. (Rebbe's speech of Purim 5747).

That is the message of this week's portion: we can change the world and bring billions of people to serve only the Creator (Zephaniah 3:9). We just have to learn Chassidut (go to your local Chabad House for details) and do all we can to improve the world.

But so much has already been done that now even one more good deed, word or even thought can tilt the scales and bring...

Moshiach NOW!!

Jewish Joke

A shnorrer knocked on the door of a house in the Jewish neighborhood.

"What do you want?" said the owner.

"Can you spare some money to help a poor person?" said the beggar.

But as soon he was given a few coins and told to go on his way, the beggar complained, "Your son gave me twice as much when I called here last week."

"Well, my son can afford to," said the owner, "he has a very rich father."

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*In loving memory of
Mrs. Hinda Scheiman OBM*

NOTICES:

Please make a request to your Chaplain that you would like a visit from a Rabbi in NOVEMBER.

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*Inmate Advocate
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Housing Resource: For any families trying to find a rental for their loved one to parole to upon release. Contact Mr. Marcus. This applies even to register with the state upon release. There is a fee for his services . Don Yosef Marcus—(847) 361-7770

Upcoming Holidays:

CHANUKAH: December 12-20, 2017 is the Holiday of Chanukah. Please put in a request to your Chaplain at least 45 days in advance (October 28, 2017) to observe this holiday.

Kosher: In the Torah G-d sets forth a special diet for His people. Only certain species of animal may be eaten (no pork or shellfish), meat must be slaughtered in a special way, and meat and dairy are kept completely separate.

Prayer: Jews pray regularly to G-d, often communally in a synagogue. The backbone of the prayer service is a line from the Torah called the Shema, which reads: Shema Yisrael A-donai E-lohainu A-donai Ekhad. In addition to being said every morning and night, this prayer is also said as a Jew prepares to pass on to the next world.

Jewish Holidays In the fall there are the high holidays: Rosh Hashanah (the New Year), which is celebrated with prayers, hearing the blasts of the shofar (ram’s horn) and feasts, which include the traditional dish of apples dipped in honey; Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), when Jews gather to pray and don’t eat or drink for 25 hours; and Sukkot, celebrated by dwelling in special huts called sukkahs, and taking the four kinds.

These are followed by Chanukah, in the winter, which is celebrated with lighting a candelabra called a menorah (or chanukiah) for eight consecutive nights, and Purim, which is a joyful holiday toward the end of winter.

In the spring, Jews celebrate Pesach (or Passover), during which we get rid of all leaven (dough that has risen). Instead, matzah (a flat cracker-like food) is eaten. This is followed by Shavuot, which marks the day of the Divine revelation at Sinai, when we received the Torah.

The Language of Judaism The Torah and most of the Writings and Prophets are in Hebrew, the language that G-d used to create the world. In time, Jews began to speak Aramaic, and that became the language of the Talmud.

As Jews migrated to Europe, they began to speak special dialects of Spanish and German. Those became known as Ladino and Yiddish, respectively. There are also Jewish dialects of Arabic.

Sacred Places of Judaism The Land of Israel is the sacred birthright of the Jewish people. The holiest city is Jerusalem, which is the place G-d chose for His presence to dwell in. The holiest place in Jerusalem is the Temple Mount, where the two Holy Temples stood. Since Jews can no longer go there, the Western Wall, which hugs the western embankment of the mountain, has become the central

place for Jewish prayer. It is also known as the Kotel (“wall”).

All over the world, Jews gather regularly to pray in synagogues (also called shuls). In the front of the synagogue (in the direction that faces Jerusalem), is the Holy Ark, a cabinet in which the Torah scrolls (each one handwritten on parchment) are housed.

But Jewish worship can happen anywhere, and every place can become a holy place. Do something nice and make G-d proud somewhere, and you’ve made that place a sacred spot.

Who Is Judaism For? Judaism is the automatic religion of every Jew. And a Jew is someone who was either born to a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism with a bonafide rabbinical court. There are some Jews who (for whatever reason) have lapsed in their practice of Judaism. Some may profess to believe in another religion or have no beliefs at all. They are still Jewish, and the Torah and its teachings remain their eternal birthright.

Non-Jews are not bound by most of the Torah. They are, however, enjoined to live in accordance with the Seven Noahide Laws, which set the groundwork for a moral and just society.

Are There Different Kinds of Jews? Every Jew has equal access to G-d. The more mitzvahs you do, the more Torah you study, and the more you work on refining your character, the closer you come to G-d. No individuals or organizations hold the keys to heaven.

In ancient times, there were twelve tribes of Israel, each one of whom had a different territory in the land. The tribe of Levi was selected to be G-d’s servants. They taught Torah to the people and cared for the Holy Temple. Within Levi, there were the kohanim (priests), who offered sacrifices in the Temple.

Today, most Jews do not know which tribe they are from. However, the exception is the Levites and Kohanim, many of whom have preserved their tribal identity.

Rabbis are learned Jews, who are proficient in key areas of the Torah. Like a doctor is qualified to give medical advice and prescribe medicine, someone who has been conferred the title “rabbi” can be relied upon to be a trustworthy and accurate conduit of Jewish tradition, belief and practice.

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3710122/jewish/What-Is-Judaism.htm