# Judaism

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| **General** | **Core Belief**Judaism began around 4,000 years ago when The **Prophet Abraham** received a revelation from God. Jews believe in one God with whom they have a special relationship called a **covenant**. The holy book, **the Tanakh**, is a collection of texts of which the first five, **The Torah**, are most important. Additionally, **the Talmud** gives extra detail on the original written law. A system of **commandments**, also known as the seven **Noahide Laws**, was given to all humanity. Compliance with these codes fulfils the Divine Will and affords humanity the opportunity to bond with God through the law. Jews worship in **synagogues** with a **Rabbi** (Hebrew for teacher) as the spiritual leader.**Living as a Jew**Jews believe that God’s will was made manifest through the revelation given to **Moses**, the **Torah**, which includes the commandments (or laws) that relate to every aspect of life, both spiritual and social. The interpretation of these laws is therefore a focus for personal and communal life. In practice, this would mean believing in one God, keeping the **Ten Commandments** and bringing the qualities of compassion and justice into everyday life.All practising Jews recite a daily prayer called **the Shema** (‘Hear’), which is a fundamental affirmation of faith. **Sabbath**, from sunset on Friday evening until sunset on Saturday evening, is generally observed by Jews as a day of rest. Attendance at **synagogue**, saying of prayers and a family meal also form part of the observance, although strictness of observance depends upon degree of orthodoxy. **Scripture**The Jewish scriptures are known as **the Tanakh** and include **the Torah** (the five books of Moses), **the Nevi’im** (including the books of the Prophets, Judges and Kings) and **the Ketuvim** (‘Writings’ which include the Books of Esther and Ruth).In addition to the scriptures, other popularly consulted Jewish writings are **the Talmud**, which relates in more detail to ritual, law and ethical guidance, and **the Midrash** which comprises parables, legends and stories from the early **rabbis** (teachers). Members of Jewish families in the UK would generally use English as their main language of communication, although **Hebrew** or **Yiddish** are conversationally spoken in some Jewish households. The Jewish scriptures are written in **Hebrew**, and this is also the main language of worship, learned by many children in **synagogue** class. **Hebrew** is written from right to left.**Major Annual Events**The observance of festivals is great importance in Jewish life:**Rosh Hashanah** - the New Year and time of penitence - September/October**Yom Kippur** - a day of fasting - September/October **Sukkot** - commemorates the wanderings of the children of Israel - September/October**Pesach** - commemorates the Exodus from Egypt – March/April**Chanukah** - a festival of light - December/January**Purim** - a reminder of the story of **Esther** – February/MarchThe most important festival is celebrated weekly and that is **Shabbat**.**Births**As each newly-born life is seen as being a unique gift from God, and Judaism is intrinsically a family-centred faith, the birth of a baby is a very happy occasion.About eight days after the birth of a male child, his **Brit Milah** (ritual circumcision and naming) takes place, usually at home, followed by a family party. The name of a girl child is given by her father before the whole congregation when he is called to the platform at the synagogue on the Sabbath following her birth.**Names**It is usual for Jewish children to have one or more given names, often taken from Biblical sources, followed by a family name.**Diet**General: Jews are religiously required to uphold the **Kashrut**, a series of special dietary laws, which refer to the provision of **kosher** food (food prepared in a specially prescribed way). In general, Jews do not eat pork in any form, and would not eat meat and milk products at the same meal. **Kosher** foods may be obtained from specialised food shops.Specific: **Yom Kippur** (**The Day of Atonement**) is the major annual, twenty-five hour fast observed by majority of Jews. In additional to this, no leavened bread is eaten during the period of **Passover** when unleavened bread called **matzah** may be obtained instead.**Dress**Everyday dress requirements differ with degree of orthodoxy. For Orthodox women and girls, it is necessary to keep the body and limbs covered, and in some cases also the hair.**Places of Worship**Inside the **synagogue** there is often a raised platform from which **the Torah** is read. The handwritten **Torah scroll** itself is in a covered alcove called an **Ark**, before which a lamp is kept alight to remind worshippers of the constant presence of God.A box called a **mezuzah**, on the internal doors of the synagogue contains a piece of parchment scroll on which is written the first parts of **the Shema** (the daily prayer).When entering a **synagogue** people cover their heads. In some **synagogues**, women and men sit separately and sometimes there is a special balcony area for women to sit in.**The Home**In most Jewish households, a **mezuzah** is positioned on the right-hand doorpost of each room except the bathroom and toilet, as a symbol of the sanctity of the home.The home is the place where Jewish children learn how to live a Jewish life.The kitchen is central to the Jewish home. In order to keep **Kashrut**, Jewish kitchens provide the means to store and prepare food according to dietary laws. |
| **Classroom Practice** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| Do describe the first 39 books of the Bible as being ‘the Jewish Bible’ or **the Tenakh**.Do explain that a **Torah** scroll is just the first five books of the Jewish Bible. If you can, show a replica of a **Torah** scroll and the way that it opens (it will not be possible to bring in an authentic **Torah** scroll into school). If you do not have access to a replica scroll, find good photos or film footage.Do be cautious about using the term ‘Jews’. The word developed a pejorative tone particularly under the Nazis. Many members of the faith prefer the term ‘the Jewish people’.Do attempt to describe the joyous nature of Judaism. Although Judaism might be based on fulfilling the 613 **mitzvah** this is not to be seen as a burden which one mechanically undertakes. They are undertaken with sincere intention (**kavanah**) and often with joy.Do avoid the use of the dating system BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini) as it assumes that Jesus was the Christ. BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) is widely used by Jewish writers. | Don’t refer to first 39 books of the Bible as being ‘the Old Testament’. It suggests that the books are old fashioned or out of date.Don’t make use of ‘Yahweh’ or ‘Jehovah’ with reference to God. The Hebrew letters standing for God YHWH were never spoken out loud instead phrases like ‘Lord’, ‘the Holy One’, ‘King of the Universe’ were always used.Don’t confuse the **Menorah**, the seven-branched candelabrum and symbol of Judaism with the **Hanukiah**, the nine-branched candelabrum used at the festival of **Hanukah**.Don’t use the term the ‘Wailing Wall’. The proper term is the ‘Western Wall’.Don’t suggest that Moses on Sinai received only the Ten Commandments. In Jewish belief **Moses** was given God’s Law, **the Torah**, containing the 613 commandments (**mitzvah**). |
| **Visits** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| Do ensure all pupils cover their heads when visiting a **synagogue**.It is preferable for visitors to be dressed modestly, with arms and legs covered, and women wearing a knee length skirt or dress, rather than trousers. |  |