



Judaism



What is a Jew?

A Jew is a person born to a Jewish mother (or father in Liberal movements), or who has converted to Judaism. Jews believe in one God. Jewish prayers are directed to God alone. Jews believe that the Ten Commandments were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Torah contains the laws and commandments by which the Jewish people live.

Most Jews identify strongly with the State of Israel. Jewishness presents a unique expression of a history, culture and faith united by a desire to lead a constructive and spiritual life.

It is a way of life maintained by the Jewish people throughout thousands of years. Being a people that has followed particular laws and customs throughout the ages has helped the Jews to survive as a community through periods of anti-Semitism, persecutions, and expulsions. Jews were re-admitted to England in the 17th century and there has been a formal Jewish Community in Southampton since 1833. 6 million Jews died in the 2nd World War Holocaust.

Many religious Jews believe that one day in the future the Messiah will come.

How does a Jew worship?

Jews may worship in a Synagogue or at home. Jews keep the Sabbath (Shabbat) by resting on the seventh day; Saturday. Shabbat begins on the evening of the Friday. The principle religious text is called the Torah (The Five Books of Moses) which is kept in the form of a scroll, is hand written and treated with great respect.



The Synagogue

In the Synagogue it is traditional for men to have their heads covered by wearing a skullcap known as Kippah. In daily services men wear a prayer shawl known as a "Tallit". Women in Progressive Congregations may also choose to wear these items.



How does a Jew live?

Judaism is very much a family/ community faith and the ceremonies start when a Jewish boy baby is circumcised at eight days old, following the instructions that God gave to Abraham around 4,000 years ago.

Bar Mitzvah is the celebration when a Jewish boy at the age of 13 becomes a man by being initiated into the Jewish Religion and is able to take a full part in the Synagogue Service. In Progressive communities this will also apply to a Jewish girl.

Many Jewish religious customs revolve around the home. For example the Sabbath Friday night meal, when families join together to welcome in Shabbat. Many Jews express their identity through non-religious traditions, including literature, culture, music and food.

The laws of Kashrut (Kosher) describe food that is permissible to eat under Jewish dietary laws. Well known foods, which are not permitted, are pork and shellfish. In addition, meat and dairy dishes are not permitted at the same meal.

Who are the leaders of Jews?

There are two main religious movements in Judaism in England, Orthodox and

Progressive (Reform and Liberal). Within each movement the Rabbi is the religious leader of the community and in Progressive congregations, women may be Rabbis too.

Jewish Festivals

Rosh Hashanah is the Hebrew name for the Jewish New Year. There follows 10 days of reflection and repentance culminating on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) with a 24 hour fast that ends at sunset with a final note on the Shofar.

Sukkot is a Harvest festival It commemorates the journey of the Jews through the desert to the Promised Land.

Simchat Torah or the rejoicing of the Torah is a one-day festival that falls at the end of Sukkot.

Chanukah is the Festival of Lights - over eight days candles are lit to recall the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Purim is held to remember how Jews living in Persia were saved from destruction by Queen Esther.

Pesach or Passover is celebrated in memory of exodus from Egypt when Jews were led from slavery by Moses to the Promised Land.

Shavuot is known as the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. It marks the end of the first harvest and also celebrates the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

