

Judaism assignment

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Judaism Everything we do, believe or see cannot be defined and complied just in one sentence. If this was possible, than it would have been really easy for everyone to understand and master the universe. All we would have to do would be to just look it up in the dictionary and define it. There would be no conflicts or arguments over the same word. This would also make Experience and history less important to today's world, but things do not work like that. Even a simple word like Religion is defined in infinite different ways. Though Webster's dictionary tries to define it by saying it is only a noun.

Religion according to Webster's dictionary is defined as " A cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith". Science takes this one step further and tries to explain every phenomenon. But if you type the word religion in today's modern online Google mania world, you would find numerous definitions for the word religion. This just shows that there different ways to look and describe the same thing. People tend to believe what they like or what they think is right. Like the movie matrix it's all about choice. The topic of my paper is Judaism.

Just like religion, Judaism can be defined in many ways. We can argue weather Judaism is a religion, race, ethnic group and so on. With all this in mind let us be more flexible and look into more detail to what does Judaism really mean or how can you explain it. According to Webster's Dictionary Judaism is defined as the " monotheistic religion of the Jews, tracing its origins to Abraham and having its spiritual and ethical principles embodied chiefly in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Talmud". But can this one sentence definition satisfy or explain us everything what Judaism means and stands for.

Clearly Judaism is a religion. In the book *Understanding Judaism* author Benjamin Blech tries to define Judaism by saying that: Judaism is primarily a religion of actions rather than beliefs. When Jewish people accepted God's covenant, they committed themselves first to obedience and practice, and then to striving to understand the message implicit in Torah. He contends that Judaism is an active religion based on performance of mitzvot (commandment of the Jewish law) (1991 p. 1). While author Leon Roth defines Judaism in his book *Judaism*:

A Portrait: As unity of intellectual doctrine and moral discipline. The intellectual doctrine can be expressed in thirteen articles of faith; the moral discipline is contained in the precepts of the Law. Both are rational, not however in the sense that they proceed from reason but that they accord with reason. The moral discipline in particular being attuned with the human condition contains historical elements which are not deducible from a priori premises. It has however a general basis in the principles of morality and its practice leads to religious truth. (1961, p. 214).

Author Alfred J. Kolatch of the book *The Jewish book of why* defines Judaism as follows: Judaism is more than a religion. It is a way of life. Over the centuries it has created standards of practice, most of which have been codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law). These laws spell out what the conduct of the Jew should be from the moment he opens his eyes in the morning until the moment his head touches the pillow at night. (1982, P. 14) Author Tracy R. defines Judaism as "A set of ideas about the world and the way we should live our lives that is called "Judaism. It is studied in Religious Studies courses and taught to Jewish children in Hebrew schools.

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She further narrows it down by saying that “ There is a lot of flexibility about certain aspects of those beliefs, and a lot of disagreement about specifics, but that flexibility is built into the organized system of belief that is Judaism” (<http://www.jewfaq.org/judaism.htm>) Some of the Common Beliefs and practices Sometime back during the beginning of this semester I had made a new friend called Sasha who was born in Ukraine during the Soviet days and was raised as a Jew and than migrated to USA when he was only 11 years old.

His mother is a Jew married to a German. While he firmly believes in the Jewish religion and visits the Synagogue regularly, on the other hand his brother who grew up during the soviet rule does not believe much in religion. As a part of research for this paper I had many discussions with him about the Jewish religion and about Jews around the world. Some of the important things which he pointed out to me and are also backed up by the author Alfred J. Kolatch in his book are that: Why is the religion of the mother the primary factor in determining the religion of the child?

Jewish law considers the child Jewish if the mother is Jewish. A child is considered non-Jewish if the mother is non-Jewish, regardless of the father’s religion. The rule was established because one can be sure who gave birth to the child, whereas the paternity is sometimes questionable. (1981, P. 15) Why is the child of a Jewish woman who converts to another religion still considered Jewish? A child born to a Jewish mother is considered a Jewish regardless of the future actions of the parents. The child’s Jewish ness is considered his or her natural right. (1981, P. 15)

Author Lee also tries his best to explain some more beliefs of Judaism by stating that: What is Torah? The Torah is the primary document of Judaism. Torah, which means “teaching”, is God’s revealed instructions to the Jewish People. It teaches Jews how to act, think and even feel about life and death. The Torah contains 613 commandments. The ten commandments are considered the most important commandments of the Torah. The Torah also contains stories that teach us about God’s relationship with the Jewish People. There are two parts to the Torah, the Written and the Oral.

The Written Torah contains: 1. Five Books of Moses (Chumashe Torah), 2. Prophets (Nevi’im), 3. Writings (Ketuvim). Whereas, Oral are basically the explanations of the Written Torah, which was originally passed down verbally from generation to generation. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, it was decided the Oral Torah should be written down so it would not be forgotten. In the 2nd century C. E. , Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and a group of Sages compiled the Mishnah. The Mishnah is a written outline of the Oral Torah. Over the next few centuries, Jewish scholars studied the Mishnah.

Their discussions, questions and decisions became known as the Gemara.

The Gemara is commentaries elaborating on the Mishnah. (1982, P. 45)

Author Benjamin Blech adds to these explanations by stating the Jewish set of Ten Commandments as follows: 1. I am the Lord your God. 2. You shall not have other gods before Me. 3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God, in vain. 4. Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. 5. Honor your father and mother. 6. You shall not murder 7. You shall not commit adultery 8. You shall not steal 9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor 10.

You shall not covet. (1991, P. 48) But Author Lee also adds to this that Rambam's thirteen principles of faith is the most widely-accepted list of Jewish beliefs, which are: 1. God exists. 2. God is one and unique. 3. God is incorporeal. 4. God is eternal. 5. Prayer is to be directed to God alone. 6. The words of the prophets are true. 7. Moses was the greatest prophet, and his prophecies are true. 8. The Torah was given to Moses. 9. There will be no other Torah. 10. God knows the thoughts and deeds of men. 11. God will reward the good and punish the wicked. 12. The Messiah will come. 3. The dead will be resurrected. (1982, P. 132) There are many other beliefs and traditions that are practices in Judaism, but upon doing some research and a lot of reading, one thing that I did not know that is practiced in the Judaism was about Circumcision. Hence I'm going to write about that tradition.

Author Alfred J. Kolatch answers most of the questions in his book *The Jewish Book of why as: Why is Jewish male child circumcised?* Circumcision, a basic Jewish law prescribed in the Bible, requires that every son of a Jewish woman be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth.

The word for circumcision in Hebrew is brit, which means ' covenant'. This refers to the pledge God made to Abraham (Genesis 17: 2), in which He promised to bless Abraham and make him prosper if Abraham, in turn, would be loyal to God. This covenant was entered into and sealed by the act of circumcision. (1982, P. 17) Why are some circumcisions held after the eight day following birth? When a child is not in perfect health or was born prematurely, the circumcision is postponed until the child is in good health, where there is no absolutely no danger to his person.

After his recovery, seven days must elapse before the rite is performed, for the day of his recovery is considered to his day of birth. (1982, P. 18) Why do some Jews oppose circumcision? In the 19th century a group of Reform Jewish leaders advocated the abolition of circumcision on the grounds that it was antiquated and barbaric, but the prospect of abolition was vigorously opposed by the Reform movement as whole. (1982, P. 18) Synagogue – House of Prayer People find and pray in different venues under different roofs.

Churches, Mosques, Temples just to name a few. As I was growing up I had a unique experience, I went to a school which was started by Christian missionaries in India. We had a church in our school. My parents never stopped me from visiting a church or a mosque as a child. But they always told me that, no matter which holy institution I go to I should always respect their Gods and if I'm confused I should just say my own prayers in my mind. Every morning before our school began we started the day with the Christian prayer “ Our Father in Heaven...”.

If temples are for Hindus, Churches for Christians and Mosques for Muslims than where do Jews pray? Author Tracy R Rich, Responds to that question, by reporting that, “ The synagogue is the Jewish equivalent of a church, more or less. It is the center of the Jewish religious community: a place of prayer, study and education, social and charitable work, as well as a social center. ” She also adds to clarify that: There are still many different terms for a Jewish “ church,” and you can tell a lot about people by the terms they use. The Hebrew term is *beit k'nesset* (literally, House of

Assembly), although you will rarely hear this term used in conversation in English. The Orthodox and Chasidim typically use the word “ shul,” which is Yiddish. The word is derived from a German word meaning “ school,” and emphasizes the synagogue’s role as a place of study. Conservative Jews usually use the word “ synagogue,” which is actually a Greek translation of Beit K’nesset and means “ place of assembly” (it’s related to the word “ synod”). Reform Jews use the word “ temple,” because they consider every one of their meeting places to be equivalent to, or a replacement for, The Temple.

The use of the word “ temple” to describe modern houses of prayer offends some traditional Jews, because it trivializes the importance of The Temple. The word “ shul,” on the other hand, is unfamiliar to many modern Jews. When in doubt, the word “ synagogue” is the best bet, because everyone knows what it means, and I’ve never known anyone to be offended by it. To get a detailed explanation of Synagogue we can look into what author Albert M. Shulman of Gateway to Judaism has to say. He writes that: The story of Synagogue is the history of Israel and the Jew’s constant search for God.

Although it was known primarily as the building used for public assembly and prayer, within the synagogue the Jew also found an outlet for his social, economic, and communal interest. It served as a school for the education of children and adults; it was the original ‘ town-hall’ for assemblages on special occasions; it was the law court where grievances were heard and judged; it was the scene of weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, and funerals; and in the hours of Israel’s tragedies, it was often the last refuge.

Within its precincts were to be found quarters for the Shammus, a hostel for wayfarers, and the Mikveh, the ritual purification bath. (1971, p. 575) No record is available concerning the date, the structure, or the organization of the first synagogue. When Jacob dedicated the place where he dreamed of angels, as Beth-El (House of God), it was in the wilderness and it was but a bare rock. When the prophet Ezekiel brought messages of comfort to his exiled people in Babylonia after the destruction of the temple (586 BCE), it was to small scattered groups, probably meeting in open places or in the sections within larger buildings. In the absence of the Temple with its sacrificial cult, oral petitions or prayers became the pattern of worship. The Conclusion reached by most scholars is that the synagogue did develop in the Exile and when the people returned to Jerusalem they brought with them the practices that became the basis of the present synagogue. (1971, p. 577) Languages As I grew in India I realized that there were so many different languages spoken.

I believe we have more than 800 different dialogues though I do not remember the exact number. I myself speak four different languages, for instance I had to learn Gujrati because that is my mother tongue, Hindi because that is the national language, English because it is the administrative language and Marathi as it is the state language. While the Muslims consider Urdu as their holy language, but Arabic is spoken more in the Middle East. So what is the holy language for Jews?

Or what language do they communicate their prayers in? Author Albert M. Shulman of Gateway to Judaism does a good job of explaining the Jewish language, he writes: The Hebrew language, which is called Lashon Ha-
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Kodesh (the holy speech of tongue), was the first language of the Jewish people. It is also the language of worship and prayer in the synagogue and home. It is the national spoken language of the State of Israel. Hebrew belongs to Semitic language group of which Aramaic, Arabic, Assyrian, and others are a part.

Originally it was one of the dialects of the early Canaanite people. The Hebrew alphabet is written in square of block-shape characters and conforms to definite rules of syntax and grammar. (1971, p. 673) But the author also goes ahead and points out that however Hebrew language today has gone through few changes with time. He reports that: Wherever the Jews made their residence they adopted the language of the country. For instance, The Aramaic language was the popular language of the

Jewish people in Palestine during the second commonwealth, Judeo-Persian was the dialect used by Jews in Persia in the fourth century it was also called Grush or Parsi-Tat, when the crescent of the Mohammedan religion dominated the world, a Judeo-Arabic dialect arose among oriental Jews, Ladino is a Spanish-Hebrew dialect. (1971, p. 675) The widest and most popular language among the Jewish people is the Yiddish language. It is known as the Mameh Lashon(the Mother tongue) Another name for Yiddish is Ivre Teitsch, the Hebrew explanation. Yiddish stems from the German language and came into use in the 15th century.

Yiddish is 85% German with words and phrases borrowed from countries where Jews resided, particularly Slavic people. However, their own language, Hebrew, was always retained in the worship service of the synagogue and in

the instruction of adults and children in their schools of learning. (1971, p. 677) Jewish calendar Have you every wondered why do most of the Islamic and Hindu festivals do not occur on the same date as they occurred last year with respect to the Civil (Gregorian) calendar. Nature is a key to all this because those calendars depend on the lunar system.

The Jewish calendar is primarily lunar, with each month beginning on the new moon, when the first sliver of moon becomes visible after the dark of the moon. Author Alfred J. Kolatch explains this in an easier way to understand by observing that: The Jewish calendar was put in its present form over 1, 600 years ago. The process of intercalating was necessary in order to harmonize the Jewish calendar with the civil calendar. The Jewish calendar being a Lunar calendar with 345 days in its year, and the civil calendar being a solar calendar in which there were approximately 365 days, there is an 11 day discrepancy. 1982, P. 9) Important Facts Pertaining to the Calendar: ??? In the Civil Calendar, a new day begins at midnight and extends twenty-four hours. In the Jewish calendar, the day begins and ends at sunset. Hence a person born at nine P. M. on Thursday night, January 1, 1981 is considered to have been born on Friday January 2, 1981 according to the Jewish calendar. Hence, all Jewish holidays begin the evening before the date specified. ??? The following months in the Jewish calendar always have twenty-nine days: Iyyar, Tammuz, Elul, Tevet, Adar.

While the months Nissan, Sivan, Av, Tishri, Shevat always have thirty days. ??? Chesvan, on the other hand may have twenty-nine or thirty days depending on what adjustments are required. ??? In a leap year(which occurs seven times every nineteen years), a second Adar is added to the
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calendar, making a total of thirteen months in a year. In a Non-leap year, Adar has twenty nine days. (1982, P. 11) Author Tracy R. Rich makes it easy by posting the following comparison chart of the Jewish calendar with the Georgian Equivalent:

Hebrew	English	Number	Length	Gregorian Equivalent
Nissan	1	30 days	March-April	
Iyar	2	29 days	April-May	
Sivan	3	30 days	May-June	
Tammuz	4	29 days	June-July	
Av	5	30 days	July-August	
Elul	6	29 days	August-September	
Tishri	7	30 days	September-October	
Cheshvan	8	29 or 30 days	October-November	
Kislev	9	30 or 29 days	November-December	
Tevet	10	29 days	December-January	
Shevat	11	30 days	January-February	
Adar	12	29 or 30 days	February-March	
Adar II	13	29 days	March-April	

In leap years, Adar has 30 days. In non-leap years, Adar has 29 days.

Author Lee gives us a small introduction to some of the Jewish festivals and holidays in his book Introduction to Judaism by summarizing as: Rosh HaShana ‘ The Jewish new year. (1982 P. 78) Yom Kippur, literally “ Day of Atonement,” is the holiest day of the Jewish year. Yom Kippur is a day of “ self-denial” so that Jews may be cleansed of their sins. It is observed eight days after Rosh Hashanah. The days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur are called the Days of Awe. Yom Kippur is, essentially, one’s last chance to demonstrate repentance and change the judgment. (1982 P. 78) Sukkot is a harvest festival. It is sometimes referred to as Chag Ha’Asif, the Festival of the Ingathering (harvesting). On Sukkot, Jews thanks for a bountiful harvest. 1982 P. 79) Simchat Torah focuses on the Torah – the Five Books of Moses.

The annual cycle of weekly Torah readings is completed at this time. Jews read the last Torah portion, and then immediately proceed to the first chapter of Genesis. This reminds them that the Torah is a circle, and it never ends. (1982 P. 81) Hanukkah commemorates the Maccabees military victory over the Greek Syrians and the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Hanukkah is a celebration of Jewish national survival and religious freedom. (1982 P. 82) Tu B'Shvat, the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Shvat, is the New Year for trees. (1982 P. 3) Every year, on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Nissan, Jews worldwide commemorate the birth of the Jewish nation by celebrating Passover. (1982 P. 84) The Sabbath According to author Tracy R. Rich, the Sabbath to those who observe, is a precious gift from God, a day of great joy eagerly awaited throughout the week, a time when we can set aside all of our weekday concerns and devote ourselves to higher pursuits. Author Alfred answers to the question why do Jews observe Sabbath as a day of rest by stating that: The Sabbath as a day of rest has its origin in the bible. Genesis (2: 1-3) tells that after creating the world in six days, God rested on the seventh day.

In the Ten Commandments, Sabbath is referred to as a day of rest for servants as well as masters, and as a day commemorating Israel's redemption from Egyptian bondage. (1971 P. 162) Kosher Many religions have different food practices. For instance, I'm a vegetarian. I have never eaten or tasted meat, beef, fish, egg or chicken in my whole life. My parents are stricter than me; they avoid eating potatoes and onions. I used to always wonder in spite of my parents being Doctors in their professional life, how come they would not support the idea of eating egg, fish or beef for good

health. To top it off I also asked myself how some Hindu's can eat beef while others cannot. At the same time many Hindu's are also vegetarians.

Similarly, we all must have sometime or the other about kosher food when someone is talking about Jewish religion or Jewish people. But do you really know what does Kosher mean? I used to work at a local 7-11 store where we had installed a new automated machine for fries. My boss there was very proud of the fact that it was a kosher machine. There was a Synagogue near our store. As a result on weekends we would have many Jewish children visiting our stores for slurpees (iced soft drink) or Fries. My boss in order to gain their attention and also more customers had a big sign on all machines that they were Kosher. It is then that I decided to stop being ignorant and research what exactly is kosher. The word 'kosher' means OK.

Author Norman Solomon does a good job of explaining kosher food in his book Judaism: A very short introduction. He explains that by writing: Adam and Eve were vegetarians, and, according to fifteenth century rabbi, statesman and Bible commentator Isaac Abravanel, we will all be vegetarians when the messiah comes. But let us assume that we you are setting up an omnivorous kitchen 'at least, as omnivorous as is permitted by the 'laws of kashrut' 'that is the law of Torah regulating kosher diet. First of all, note which animals, birds and fishes are permitted. Lists are in the Bible. In Leviticus chap. 11, some of which is repeated in Deuteronomy chap. 14.

Only those animals having divided hooves and chewing the cud are permitted 'in practice cows, sheep, goat, and deer but not pig, camel, horse or rabbit. A list of forbidden birds is given which implies that all others are

permitted; since it is impossible to identify certainty of all those listed, the rabbis permit to eat only birds that are known by tradition to be kosher, such as ducks, geese, pigeons, peacocks, and domestic fowl. All fish with scales and fins may be eaten; this excludes mollusks and crustaceans and also some others not considered to have proper scales. Animals and birds even of permitted type are not kosher unless slaughtered by the method of shechita.

The shochet, who must be licensed by a rabbi to perform shechita, uses a sharp knife to cut through the windpipe and oesophagus of the animal, at the same time severing the main arteries and causing virtually instantaneous loss of consciousness; if practiced correctly the method is as ‘ humane’ as any. Additional blood is drained from the meat by a process of washing, salting, and rinsing, for centuries the prerogative of the housewife, but nowadays mostly undertaken by the kosher butcher or the supplier. A strictly kosher household will have two sets of utensils for the preparation and consumption of food, one a ‘ meaty’, set for use with meat and its derivatives, the other ‘ milky’ for use with dairy and non-animal foods, since it is forbidden to mix milk and meat. (2000, P. 87 ‘ 88) Jews in India

Today there are Jews all around the world. The reason I specifically choose to write about the Jews in India was because that’s where I come from. Staying in India for 18 years I never knew about Judaism or Jews living in India. It was only after I came to US for my further studies that I read and researched more about Judaism and Jewish people in general. Author Albert M. Shulman observes and gives different statistics of different Jewish groups residing in India as follows: Jews in India live in comparative freedom and security. Many

have risen to high ranks in the armed forces and others have prospered in business and in the professions, but majority are poor.

Some Jews of India claim that their ancestors settled there at the time of Solomon; some, after the destruction of the First Temple; and there is evidence, in the form of two large copper plates in the synagogue in Cochin, that a charter was granted to Jews giving certain privileges in 379 CE. (1971 P. 631) There are three areas of Jewish settlement. The first one is around Bombay, on the northwestern coast of India, where the largest number live. They are known as Bene Israel, and number about 21, 000. According to tradition they arrived from Palestine about 586 BCE. (1971 P. 632) The second largest group is that of the Arabic-speaking Jews of Iraqi origin, who number about 7000. They came in the early 19th century, chiefly from Baghdad. They live in Bombay and Calcutta and are engaged mainly in commerce.

They are more educated than the Bene Israel in religion and Hebrew, but there is otherwise little difference between them. (1971 P. 632) The third group consists of Cochin Jews, who live on the Malabar Coast near the southern tip of India. No one knows when they came, but they believe that their ancestors were members of the tribe Manassesh, who arrived in the years of the destruction of the second temple. (1971 P. 632) Bibliography 1. Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary (10th Ed.). (1993). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster. 2. Benjamin, Blech (1991). Understanding Judaism, Northvale, New Jersey, London: Jason Aronson Inc. 3. Albert M. Shulman, (1971).

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