



UNDERSTANDING JUDAISM



Understanding Judaism is a project of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies - the representative roof-body of the Jewish community of New South Wales.

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As Premier Iemma wrote in approving the grant application: "The Grants Programme aims to promote community harmony and encourages the participation of people from multicultural communities and in all aspects of life in New South Wales."

The booklet was crafted by NSW Jewish Board of Deputies Executive member Ian Lacey AM, with input from members of the Board of Deputies Executive and staff.

April 2008

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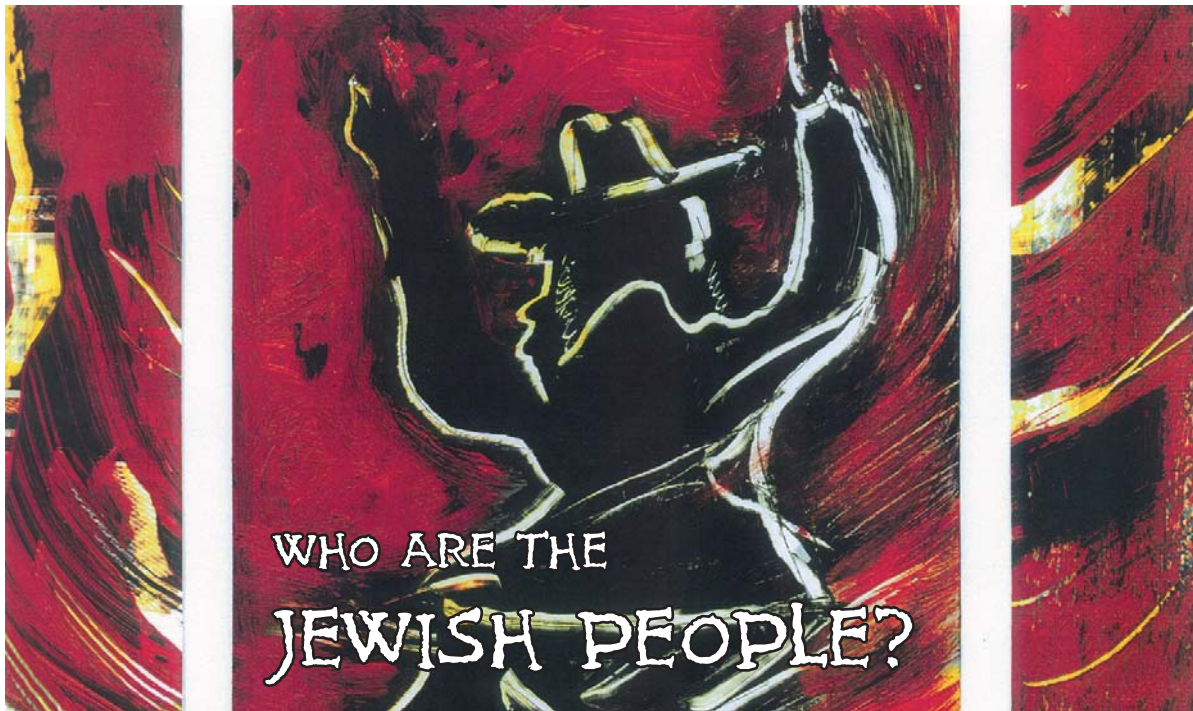


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Jews are not a race; they come in all colours from the lightest to the darkest. The Jews are not just a nation, but they are one. They are not just a religion, but they are one. Jews resolve the question of definition by calling themselves a people.

Indeed, the Jewish people see themselves as a family, tracing their origins to the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, generally dated at about 1900 BCE (Before the Common Era).

Two thousand years later, the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the present Jewish Dispersion began. There are now some 14 million Jews in the world, with about 110,000 living in Australia.

As they spread throughout the world, the Jewish people brought with them particular spiritual and ethical values, a body of inspired literature and a sense of continuing history - the religion known as Judaism.

This booklet is intended to convey a small impression of the content of that religion.



Monotheism

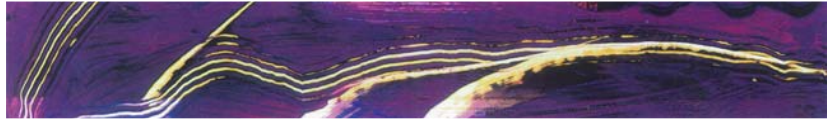
Jews believe in a single God, without shape or form, who is both the creator and ruler of the universe and who prescribes a moral law for humanity. The concept has been described as ethical monotheism, since it joins a Divine concern for the perfection of humanity with the idea of a single omniscient God. It is a concept which has been adopted by Christianity and Islam with various modifications.

However, Judaism is more than a faith or a belief system. It might be described as a religious culture, originating in the historical narrative of the Jewish people. Thus, the monotheistic idea has its foundation in the biblical account of Abraham dedicating himself and his descendants to God. (Both Christianity and Islam describe themselves as Abrahamic faiths.)

Later, Abraham's grandson Jacob figuratively wrestles with an angel, symbolising the struggle of finite beings to comprehend the idea of an incorporeal, eternal and infinite God. Jacob is given the name Israel - "He who wrestles with God" - and Jacob's descendants become the "Children of Israel" and are promised a "Land of Israel".

The Torah - the Moral Law

The next critical stage in the development of Judaism, the idea of a Divine moral code, follows the Exodus. After centuries as slaves in Egypt, the Jewish people receive the Law in the Sinai Desert. The principles are incorporated in the Five Books of Moses, known as the Torah, which become the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The 613 moral commandments which are set out in the Torah include the Ten Commandments.



The Temple

Some 400 years after the Exodus, in about 1000 BCE, Jewish life in the Land reached a peak of achievement with the kingdoms of David and Solomon, and the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Judaism now celebrated festivals of national pilgrimage, and a liturgy comprising the inspired poetry of the Psalms was sung in a Temple administered by hereditary priests, scribes and musicians. (The name Cohen means 'priest', and the tribe of Levi are the descendants of the scribes and musicians.)

The Prophets

Judaism found another dimension as its spiritual leaders coped with the rise of the ruthless imperial powers of Assyria and Babylon, both centred in what is now Iraq. The inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deported by the Assyrian conqueror in 722 BCE, and in 586 BCE the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. One response was the majestic literature of the Prophets, thundering against immorality, visualising peace on earth and foreseeing the end of the conquering empires and the restoration of Zion.



The Hebrew Bible

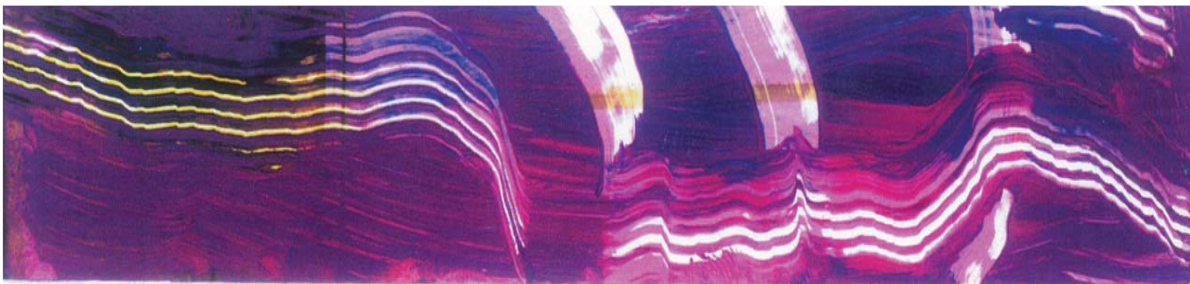
When Cyrus of Persia permitted the rebuilding of the Temple and a return of Jewish leadership from exile in Babylon, Ezra established the public reading of the Torah, which still continues as a central part of the synagogue service. The 120 "Men of the Great Assembly" brought together the sacred literature which had been written during the preceding thousand years and began the task of establishing the canon of the Hebrew Bible (described by Christians as the Old Testament).

The Sages and the Sanhedrin

"If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?
And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not
now, when?" (Ethics of the Fathers 1.14)

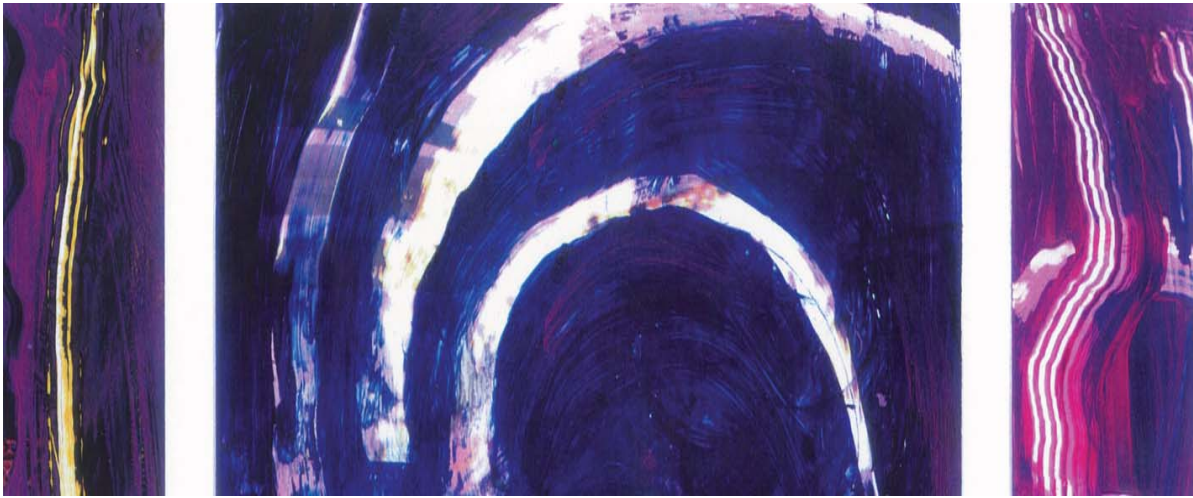
This is one of the sayings of Hillel the Elder (c.60 BCE - c.10CE) included in the collection of aphorisms known as The Ethics of the Fathers. This is a tractate, or section, of the Talmud, and it comprises a few hundred wisdom sayings by 72 sages between the first century BCE and the second century CE. In about 20 BCE during the reign of Herod the Great, Hillel became President of the Sanhedrin, an assembly of 71 sages which operated both as a political assembly and as the superior court.

The Sanhedrin followed rules of evidence which ensured that leniency prevailed and that the death penalty was rarely, if ever, imposed. Sophisticated rules protected women's rights and prevented exploitation in property and financial transactions. The court was also opposed to the Herodian puppet kings and the Roman procurators who sold the right to collect the Roman taxes to 'tax-farmers' who used ruthless force to oppress the population with confiscatory taxation.



Rabbinic Judaism

In 70 CE the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Rome celebrated its victory by building the Arch of Titus, which still stands in the Forum. The centrepiece of the Arch depicts the legion in its triumphal procession in Rome, bearing the sacred objects of the Temple, including the golden candelabrum - the Menorah - which is described in the Book of Exodus.



As the ritual of Temple worship came to an end, it was replaced by the synagogue service, and an order of prayer was established by the sages, who came to be known as rabbis (literally, 'my teachers'). The rabbis also taught that in addition to the written law there is a supplementary Oral Law, equally divine in its origins, which is ascertained by a process of interpretation and which was eventually codified in the Talmud. The Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, writing in the first century CE, described those who supported the concept of the Oral Law as the Pharisees.

The Jewish Dispersion

Meanwhile, a second Jewish revolt was defeated by the Romans in 135 CE. The Roman historian Cassius Dio records that 580,000 Jewish soldiers were killed and over 900 villages and towns destroyed. The Emperor Hadrian decreed that the name Judea be replaced by the name Palestine, or more precisely 'Syria Palestina' or Philistine Syria. (In fact, the Philistines had ceased to exist 700 years earlier.) A temple to Jupiter was built in Jerusalem, which was renamed Aelia Capitolina, and the dispersion of the Jewish people as captives, slaves and refugees was accelerated.

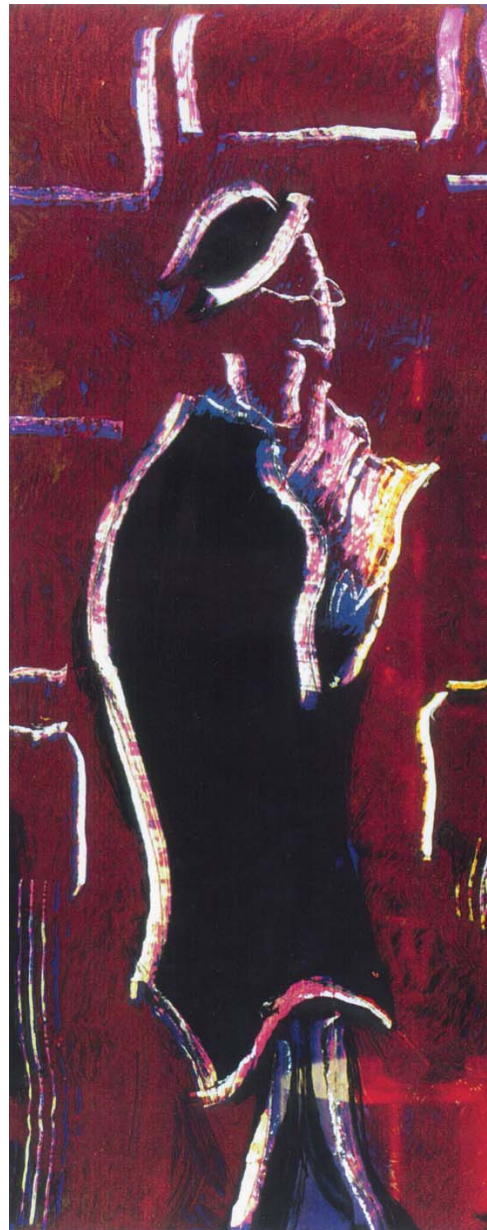
Jewish communities appeared in the countries of dispersion, where the literature, philosophy and liturgy of Judaism have continued to develop.

JEWISH LITERATURE

The central point of Judaism is the Hebrew Bible, described by Christians as the Old Testament. In Hebrew it is described by the acronym Tanach, as it is divided into three sections: Torah (Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im (Books of the Prophets) and Ketuvim (Holy Writings).

It is not so much a religious text as a library of inspired literature, comprising a great storehouse of history, law and legend, poetry, philosophy and prophetic insight. Its books were written and collated over a period of nearly 1000 years, ending in about 200 BCE. The Hebrew Bible represents a significant Jewish contribution to human civilisation.

Torah is often translated as the 'Law' and also as 'teaching', and it provides Judaism's basic moral and ethical principles and its system of beliefs. Over time, the term Torah has come to stand for the teachings and traditions of Judaism as a whole.



The Torah gave rise to many commentaries and interpretations, and eventually, the codification of the Oral Law culminated at the beginning of the third century CE in the written compilation of the Mishnah (lit. 'repetition') in Galilee. The Mishnah is a collection in logical order of the legal and ritual rulings of the leading commentators, often differing and recorded side by side, and interspersed with history, legend and moral and religious philosophy. Further commentary on that Code continued during succeeding centuries in Galilee and in Babylon (with the Babylonian commentary considered more authoritative), culminating in an edited combination of code and commentary known as the Talmud (Learning), a work of 63 volumes completed in the 6th century CE.

A Jewish literature of liturgical poetry and religious commentary has continued throughout the Dispersion, reaching great heights of achievement in medieval Spain, the Rhineland and later Eastern Europe. It continues as part of a living Jewish tradition.





THE ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF JUDAISM

“God has shown you, O Man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Included in the moral principles set out in the commandments in the Torah are rules about justice, equality before the law, lovingkindness, social welfare and the ideals of peace and political freedom. Some examples:

Leviticus 19.17

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

Psalms 37:11

“The meek shall inherit the earth and delight in the abundance of peace”.

Leviticus 19.34

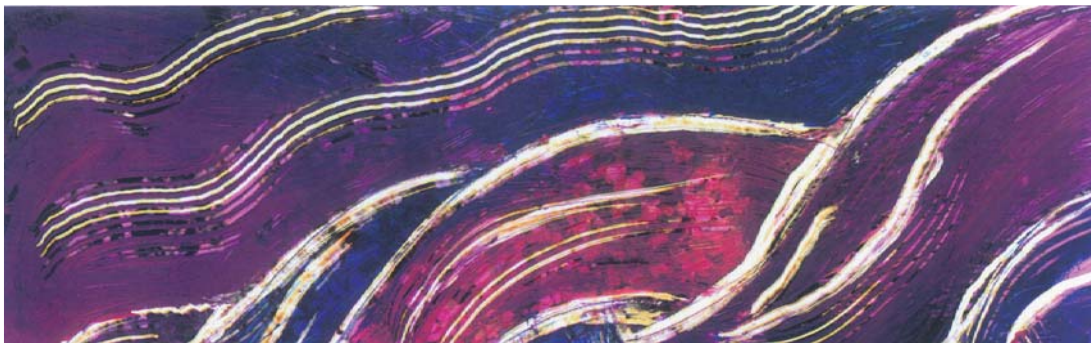
“The stranger that dwells with you shall be as one born among you, and you shall love him as thyself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

Exodus 23: 4-10

"Do not join your hand with the wicked to be a malicious witness. Do not follow a crowd to do evil; neither shall you testify in court to side with a multitude to pervert justice; neither shall you favour a poor man in his cause if it is not just.

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of him who hates you, fallen down under his burden, don't leave him. Help him with it.

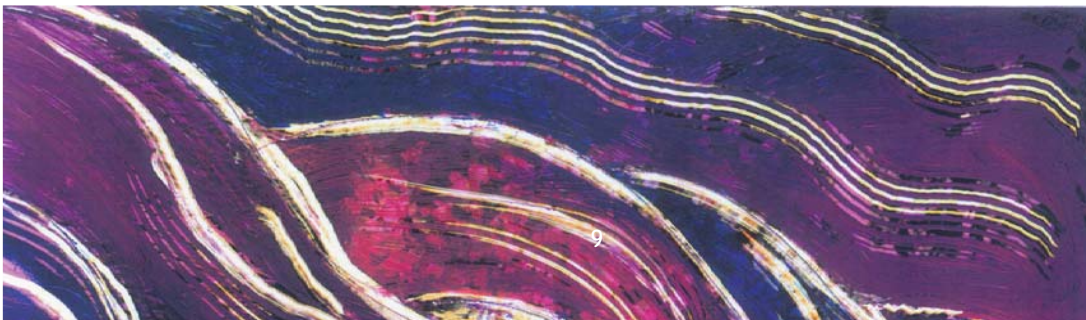
Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits."



Deuteronomy 15.11

"For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you: You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land."

(Later traditions stipulate that the highest forms of charity are to give so that the recipient does not know the donor, and in such a manner as to assist the recipient to become self-reliant.)





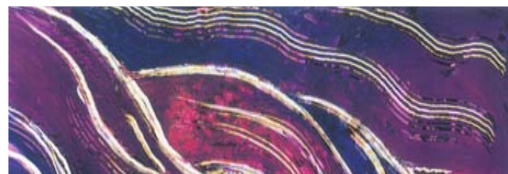
The Torah also prescribes various specific duties to assist the poor. These include commandments not to harvest the corners of the field, or to pick the last fruit from the tree so that the poor should have a right to “glean” the remaining produce (eg Leviticus 23:22). A tithe, a tenth part of the produce, is also to be contributed for the benefit of “the widow and the orphan”.

The spirit of the biblical rules of the tithe and the gleaning continues in Sydney with the Jewish Communal Appeal (JCA), a central communal appeal for funds which are distributed to welfare agencies, old-age homes, day schools and a hospital and other communal institutions.

Throughout the biblical narrative there is a distrust of autocratic government and an insistence that rulers must be subject to the law. Deuteronomy 17 prohibits kings from “multiplying” horses, wives, gold and silver. Verses 18-20 preserve the rule of law, which protects the liberty of the subject:

“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law ... That he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping ... these statutes and doing them, so that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren.”

The books of Kings and the Prophets are also full of examples of prophets standing up to kings and reminding them of their duties to God and to the people. See particularly the passage in 1 Samuel 8-10, where Samuel warns the people of the dangers of an autocratic monarchy.



LIFECYCLE EVENTS

Birth: Circumcision of all male babies is the first Jewish rite of passage. It marks the entry of Jewish males into the Divine Covenant between God and the Jewish people. It is performed on the eighth day after birth, or later if the boy is not ready. A boy receives his name at the time of circumcision and the ceremony ends with a prayer that the child will progress to the Torah, the wedding canopy and good deeds. Jewish girls are given their name in the synagogue on the Sabbath following the birth and are welcomed into the community at home ceremonies, often held within the first month after birth.

Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah (Son or daughter of the Commandment): These events mark the passage from childhood to adulthood, when a person assumes responsibility for his or her actions. The barmitzvah (for boys) occurs at age 13, while the batmitzvah (for girls) occurs from age 12 to 13. At the Sabbath service the boy (or girl in Progressive and Conservative congregations) is called up as an adult to chant the weekly reading from the Torah and the Prophets in the traditional melody. The event is marked by ceremony and celebration.



Marriage: Jews regard marriage as essential for both the spiritual development of individuals and the bringing of children into the world. Weddings are held under a chuppah - an open canopy held up by four poles, symbolic of the home which the couple will make. At the conclusion of the ceremony the groom crushes a glass underfoot to symbolise the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the fragility of life. A Jewish marriage is sanctified by the placing of a ring on the bride's finger, the sharing of two cups of wine and the signing of a marriage contract protecting the rights of the wife under Jewish law.



Death and Mourning: The body is prepared for burial by voluntary members of the Chevra Kadisha (the Burial Society - literally, 'Holy Brotherhood'). They wash the body, wrap it in a plain linen shroud and place it in a simple wooden coffin. In death, rich and poor are treated alike. No profit may be made from funerals and any surplus is given to charity.

The first week of mourning is known as Shiva (Seven), when mourners do not leave their homes and prayers are recited. Other rituals of mourning include avoiding entertainment and the purchase of new items, as well as the daily recitation of Kaddish (a prayer in praise of God) in the case of the loss of a parent for a period of 11 months.

WHO IS A JEW?

Orthodox Jewish law defines a Jew by the religion of the mother, not the father; ie if the mother is Jewish, the child is regarded as Jewish. Some Progressive communities also accept a child as Jewish if the father is Jewish and the child is raised as a Jew.

Judaism is not a proselytising religion, and Jews do not seek to convert others to Judaism as the Jewish religion accepts that there are many paths to God. However, it is possible to become Jewish through a lengthy process of conversion, which involves joining the Jewish people through a commitment to Jewish observance.



JEWISH WORSHIP

Observant Jews pray three times a day, although spontaneous prayer may be offered at any time. Although God accepts prayer in any language, Hebrew is the usual language of Jewish prayer. The Jewish communal place of worship is the synagogue, where prayer takes place facing Jerusalem. The Torah scrolls are the holiest objects in a synagogue and are kept in an alcove called the Ark. The spiritual leader of a synagogue or community is usually a rabbi (teacher).





Orthodox Judaism is distinguished by its maintenance of the traditional forms of worship in the Hebrew language and of the traditional observances as prescribed by the Law. The Orthodox view is that the biblical law may be developed and interpreted only by processes of reasoning which maintain respect for the Law's divine origin. Men and women sit separately in the synagogue, and men and married women keep their heads covered.

Chassidic Chassidic Judaism ("ch" as in loch) is an Orthodox Jewish revivalist movement. It emphasises spiritual intensity and joy in Jewish worship, as well as Messianic expectation. Chassidim are sometimes differentiated from other Orthodox Jews by their wearing of distinctive clothing.

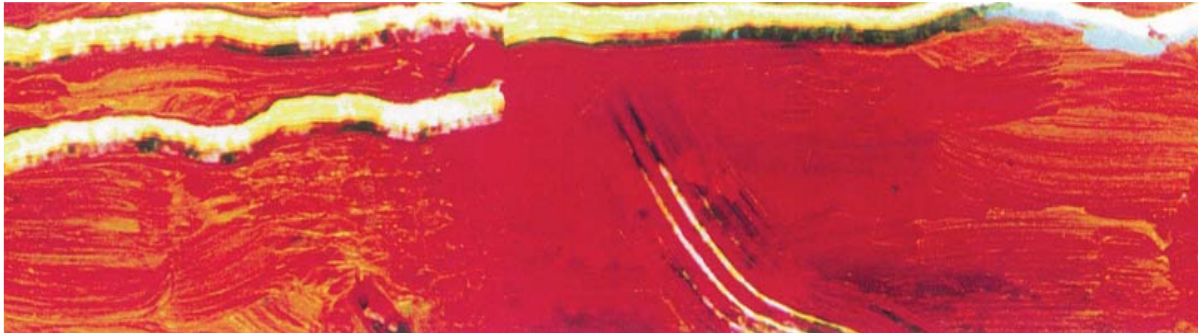
Progressive Judaism (also known as Reform or Liberal) believes in the religious autonomy of the individual. Reform Jews believe the Torah was written by human authors with Divine inspiration and that Judaism continues to evolve to adapt to changes in society. They therefore follow those rules and observances which they regard as having continuing relevance, but with a strong emphasis on the maintenance of Jewish tradition. In Progressive synagogues prayers are sometimes abridged, and some of the service is in English. Men and some women cover their heads during prayer. Men and women take part equally in synagogue services and in all rituals and sit together. Women as well as men are ordained as rabbis.

Conservative comes midway between Orthodoxy and Reform, intellectually liberal in matters of belief, but conservative in matters of religious practice. It combines a positive attitude to modern culture with acceptance of critical secular scholarship regarding Judaism's sacred texts and a commitment to Jewish observance. Conservative study of the holy texts is embedded in the belief that Judaism is constantly evolving to meet the contemporary needs of the Jewish people.

The Conservative service follows the traditional liturgy, and is mainly in Hebrew and similar to Orthodox services. However, as in Progressive Judaism, men and women sit together and share equally in synagogue services, prayers and rituals, and both men and women are ordained as rabbis.



Secular Jews are not committed to religious belief, yet identify as part of the Jewish people. Secular Jews accept Jewish values, ethics and concerns, as well as some rituals, as part of their cultural Jewish heritage, and many are affiliated to synagogues.



Mizrachim, Sephardim, Ashkenazim and others

The difference between the various Jewish traditions lies in the cultures developed in the countries in which they have lived. The Mizrahim are the descendants of those who lived in Babylon, Persia and Arabia. The Ashkenazi tradition originated in the Franco-German region in Western Europe and developed further in Eastern Europe and Russia. In contrast, the formative experience of the Sephardim originates in Spain, North Africa, Greece and Turkey.

Due to their different historical experiences, there are small variations in the liturgy, and in the customs and linguistic traditions of the various groups. Each has a distinctive pronunciation of Hebrew, with the Sephardi pronunciation being adopted in the modern spoken language of Israel. Yiddish, Ladino and Judeo-Arabic have also developed as unique additional languages.

There are also a number of other distinctive Jewish communities throughout the world, such as the Ethiopian and Indian Jews, many of whom have settled in Israel.

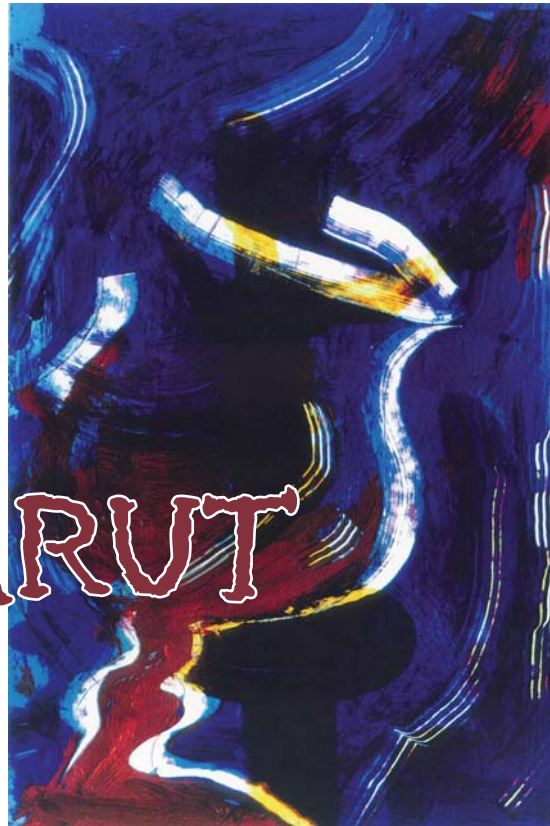
Observant Jews eat only kosher ('proper') foods, as defined in the biblical commandments. All plants are kosher, while kosher meat must come from a permitted animal, bird or fish.

Permitted animals must have split hooves and chew their cud, such as cows, sheep, goats and deer. Permitted birds include chicken, duck and turkey. Permitted fish must have fins and scales. Forbidden foods include pork and its products, birds of prey and shellfish. Also, milk and meat products may not be eaten together.

Animals are slaughtered by a specially trained person in a specific manner that is as pain-free and humane as possible. Kashrut also requires the preparation of food using kosher equipment and utensils, which must not be used for non-kosher food. Observant Jews will therefore not eat food prepared in restaurants or homes that are not kosher.

JEWISH DIETARY LAWS

KASHRUT





THE JEWISH CALENDAR

The Jewish calendar is based on a lunar year, consisting of 12 months of 29-30 days, with each month beginning with the new moon. An extra month is added every few years to adapt to the solar year and to keep the festivals, which often have seasonal aspects, in the appropriate season. Sabbaths and festivals begin at sunset, as each new day begins at sunset.

Shabbat (Sabbath) is a day of rest, lasting from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday. 'Rest' is the subject of complex definitions, with absence of work as the central feature. Sabbath candles are lit before sunset at a family gathering in the home, and prayers of sanctification are recited over wine and bread. Sabbath services and celebrations are held in the synagogue. With prayer, song and study, the main features of Shabbat are *menuchah* (rest) and *oneg* (joy).

Rosh Hashana (New Year) is the anniversary of Creation when God reviews the world and examines the deeds of mankind. The shofar (a ram's horn) is blown as a call to spiritual wakefulness. Rosh Hashana is a two-day festival spent in prayer at the beginning of the month of Tishrei (which falls in September or October). The days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are known as The Days of Awe or the Ten Days of Penitence and are a time for personal resolutions and healing relationships.

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is a 25-hour fast and period of abstinence, largely spent in prayers for forgiveness of sins against God and if there is an injured party who has been appeased - fellow humans. Prayer, repentance and charity lead to forgiveness from God, while restitution is also required to achieve forgiveness from other people. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.

Succot (Tabernacles) falls at the conclusion of the fruit harvest in Israel and five days after Yom Kippur. It lasts seven days. The succah, a temporary structure often built of wood and branches, recalls the temporary shelters and the vulnerability of the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. The succah symbolises the fragility of life and the need for God's protection. Jews are meant to sleep or at least eat meals in the succah during the week of Succot.

Pesach (Passover) lasts eight days and marks the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. On the first two nights of the festival a home ceremony called a Seder takes place with prayers and food which symbolise the bitterness of slavery and the sweetness of freedom, and the story of the exodus from Egypt is related. Matzah, unleavened bread (flour without yeast), is eaten on Pesach to recall the "bread of affliction" which was eaten in Egypt. Leavened bread or other leavened food may not be eaten during the eight days of the festival. Pesach falls in the month of Nissan, which corresponds to March or April.

Shavuot (Weeks) is the festival when Jews mark God's giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. It is an occasion for renewed dedication to the Torah. It falls seven weeks after Pesach. The period of 49 days between the festivals marks the transition from slavery to the freedom to serve God. Shavuot falls in the month of Sivan, which coincides with May or June.

Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, is observed as a festival, with the traditional Song of Praise reserved for festivals.

Days of Mourning include the **Fast of Av**, on which the destruction of both Temples is remembered, and Yom Ha'Shoah, a day of remembrance for the victims of the Nazi Holocaust.

Simchat Torah (Celebration of the Torah) is a time of rejoicing over the completion of the annual cycle of reading the Torah and the beginning of a new annual cycle.

Chanukah (Festival of Lights)

is an eight-day festival marking the victory of Judah the Maccabee in the 2nd century BCE over the Hellenic oppressors who had conquered Judea and defiled the Temple in Jerusalem. Judah, in re-dedicating the Temple, found only one day's supply of sacred oil from which to light the Menorah. The miracle of Chanukah is that the oil burned for eight days, symbolising the survival of the monotheistic Jewish tradition against the onslaught of paganism. Hence Jews today light a chanukiah (candelabrum) every night for eight nights. Chanukah falls in Kislev (November or December).





Twice in ancient times Jews had a Temple in Jerusalem. The First Temple was built by King Solomon and dedicated in about 950BCE. It was destroyed in 586BCE by the Babylonians. The leaders of the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon, which became a renowned seat of Jewish learning. Indeed a significant Jewish community remained in Iraq until most of its Jews fled from persecution in 1948.

The building of the Second Temple began after the return from Babylonian exile in 516 BCE. That Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE after a four-year war in which the Jews revolted against Roman oppression. The Romans celebrated their victory by constructing the Arch of Titus in Rome, showing the treasures of the Temple, including the Menorah described in the Book of Exodus, being carried by the Legion in triumph.

Only a remnant of the western wall of the Temple remains. It is called the Kotel ('Wall') and is the most sacred site in Judaism. For the last 19 centuries Jews have prayed for the restoration of the Temple. However, when the modern State of Israel was founded in 1948, the Kotel came under Jordanian control and no Jew was allowed to pray there or to enter East Jerusalem.

Since the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel reunified Jerusalem, the places that are sacred to each of the three monotheistic faiths have been freely accessible to their followers. However, the religious use of the Temple Mount (now the site of the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque) is, under Israeli law, controlled by the Islamic Authority.



AND THE NAZI HOLOCAUST (THE SHOAH)

As the only outsiders and strangers in monocultural societies, and determined to maintain their separate identity with its ancient culture and tradition, Jews have been subject to persecution in almost every generation. The manifestations of this hatred of the stranger have varied from mild discrimination to mass murder.

The advent of Christianity and Islam as successor religions claiming to supersede Judaism intensified the experience of persecution. Medieval Europe in particular was the scene of a fiercely anti-Jewish mythology, resulting in blood libels, forced conversions, expulsions, discriminatory laws, confinement to the ghetto and repeated massacres.

In Tsarist Russia after 1881, anti-Jewish laws were revived. 12-year-old Jewish boys were conscripted into the Imperial Army for 25 years; outbreaks of violence and terror against Jewish communities, known as pogroms, swept through the countryside with government connivance, and millions of Jews fled Russia.

In 1933 the National Socialist German Workers Party, led by Adolf Hitler, was elected to power in Germany with the aim of restoring the nation's glory through the armed conquest of Europe. It adopted a government policy in which Jews were defined as a separate sub-human race.





As the Germans came to occupy most of Europe, they sought to round up and murder every Jew. Their methods included working and starving Jews to death in ghettos, labour camps and concentration camps, and mass murder by various means, including shooting squads and gas chambers. Extermination camps (eg Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka) were established specifically to annihilate Jews in a more efficient manner.

In less than six years, six million Jews - one third of the world's Jewish population - including almost 1.5 million children, were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators in Europe.

For all people, the Nazi Holocaust not only marks the tragic loss of six million people, but reminds humanity to be forever vigilant against the circumstances which can lead to genocide. Unfortunately, recent history has shown that humanity has not learned from this tragic event, and other genocides have been perpetrated in Rwanda, Cambodia, Darfur and elsewhere.

Many Jewish writers prefer to use the term 'Shoah', meaning 'whirlwind', 'calamity' or 'desolation' to describe the events, as they feel that the term 'holocaust' is sometimes appropriated for other linguistic uses.





ISRAEL:

CENTRE OF THE JEWISH WORLD

“To live as a free people
In our own land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem”

These are the concluding words of the national anthem of Israel. It is called Hatikvah - “The Hope” - and it sings of the hope of 2000 years for the restoration of the Land of Israel and a life of freedom and peace for the Jewish people.

Modern Zionism reflects the biblical longing for the restoration of Zion, and it emerged as a practical organised movement in Russia in the 1880s. Young people set out for the swamps and deserts of Turkish Palestine, determined to restore the land to its ancient fertility and to lead the way for a Jewish return.

In 1897 Theodore Herzl called the first Congress of the World Zionist Organisation, which provided a political structure for the program of restoring the Jewish homeland. Roads were built, land was purchased, communal settlements appeared, funds were raised and in 1909 the city of Tel Aviv started to rise from the sand dunes.

As the defeat of Turkey approached in 1917, the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration - “His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish national home”. On the basis of that declaration, the League of Nations granted a Mandate for the administration of Palestine to Britain as part of the post-war arrangements for the disposition of the Turkish Empire.

As the Second World War approached and the threat to the Jews of Europe became increasingly apparent, the gates of Palestine were progressively closed to Jewish immigration. At a Red Cross conference on refugees in 1938, the Australian reaction was typical: "Australia does not have a racial problem and is not desirous of importing one" - although Australia did in fact agree to accept 9000 Jewish refugees, which was one of the largest quotas. Severe restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine were maintained by Britain until the end of the Mandate in 1948.



On 29 November, 1947 the United Nations General Assembly resolved to partition the territory of British-mandated Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. The neighbouring Arab countries rejected the United Nations resolution and openly declared that they would commence using military force at the first opportunity to prevent the resolution being implemented. The first organised attacks against the Jewish population by armed Arab militias occurred within 24 hours of the passage of the resolution.

In May 1948 the British Mandate was terminated and the State of Israel was proclaimed. The armies of five Arab states immediately invaded Israel, seeking to destroy the Jewish State. In a protracted war known by Jews as the War of Independence, Israel defeated the attacking Arab armies and in 1949 signed agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria which established armistice lines. However, these lines were not recognised as legal borders.

During the establishment of the State of Israel, approximately 700,000 Jews who had lived in Arab lands were expelled from their homes, while approximately the same number of Arabs left Israel as a result of the war.

A state of continuous hostility followed. Israel was again subjected to major Arab aggression in the 1967 (Six-Day) and 1973 (Yom Kippur) wars. Neither the Palestinians nor any Arab state recognised the legitimacy of Israel's existence until the momentous visit to Jerusalem by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1977.

Eventually, peace treaties were signed with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994), and the Oslo Accords of 1993 now provide for self-government by the Palestinian Authority and the future negotiation of a final-status agreement, but tensions remain. Many Arab and Islamic countries remain openly hostile to Israel and promote terrorism in the hope of destroying it. Twenty-two Arab/Islamic countries, with a combined population of over 250 million, surround Israel's 7 million people.

Israel is a small country. It is 424 km in length, and its east-west width varies from 114 km at its widest to 14 km at its narrowest point. In an Australian context, Israel's land area would occupy an area from Sydney to Port Macquarie in length and Sydney to Parramatta in width. Israel's borders are critical for its defence as there is no land mass to act as a buffer zone in which to repel an aggressor before Israeli population centres are reached.

Israel has a population of about 7 million, comprising 5.7 million Jews (about 80%), and 1.3 million Arabs (about 20%). Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens enjoy equal voting rights and complete equality before the law. There are Arab political parties, several Arab members of parliament and an Arab judge on the Supreme Court bench.

To both Israelis and world Jewry, Israel's survival and security are of paramount emotional and spiritual significance. It is the universal hope of the Jewish people that Israel will be able to eventually live in peace.





Australia is home to about 120,000 Jews, with 50,000 living in Sydney, 55,000 in Melbourne, 9000 in Perth and smaller communities in Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra and Hobart.

The history of Australian Jewry dates back to 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleet at Botany Bay. There were 16 Jews among the 750 convicts transported on the ships of the First Fleet.

Organised communal life began after the arrival of free settlers in 1820, with prayer services held in one or more homes. Australia's oldest continuing synagogue was built in Hobart in 1845. In 1878 the York Street synagogue in Sydney was replaced by the Great Synagogue at its present Elizabeth Street location.

The Jewish population increased with further migration from England, and then from Europe during the gold rushes, and from Russia and Poland with the pogroms at the end of the 19th century. However, the Anglo-Jewish character of Australian Jewry predominated until the refugee migrations of 1940-1950, when large numbers of survivors of the Holocaust arrived from Europe. Since then the community has been augmented by various waves of immigration, including influxes from Hungary, Russia and South Africa.

Jews have been represented in all sections of Australian life from the “Jew-boy bushranger” Edward Davis (executed in 1841) to two Governors-General - Sir Isaac Isaacs, the first Australian-born Governor-General (1931-36), and Sir Zelman Cowan (1977-82), Major-General Sir John Monash, Commander of the Australian Army in Europe at the end of World War I, NSW Governor Gordon Samuels (1996-2001), and NSW Chief Justice James Spigelman (since 2001).

Jews have fought in all major wars in defence of Australia. During the First World War, 1914-18, 13 per cent of the Jewish community enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces, compared to 9.2 per cent of the general population. 57 Jewish ANZACS were killed in action at Gallipoli.

Jews participate in all major political parties, the professions, arts, medicine, sciences, academia, sport and commerce. Although some high-profile individuals have achieved great success in Australia, most Jews experience the same problems, enjoy the same rewards and live the same lifestyle as the general Australian public and are represented within all socio-economic groups.

Australia's political and social acceptance of multiculturalism allows Jews to live in a country generally free of religious discrimination and without persecution. Australian Jewry contributes to many aspects of Australian life and adds to the richness of our Australian multicultural society.





The New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies is the representative organisation of the NSW Jewish community. Its mandate is the political and physical security of the Jewish community. It represents the community to the State Government and media, and is actively involved in interfaith and outreach, building bridges and breaking down barriers. It operates a speaker service which provides presentations to organisations throughout the state which wish to know more about Jews, Judaism or Israel.

63 organisations are affiliated to the Board of Deputies, which provides a forum where matters that impact on the Jewish community can be discussed and resolved. The Board of Deputies is an affiliate of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the federal representative organisation of the Australian Jewish community.

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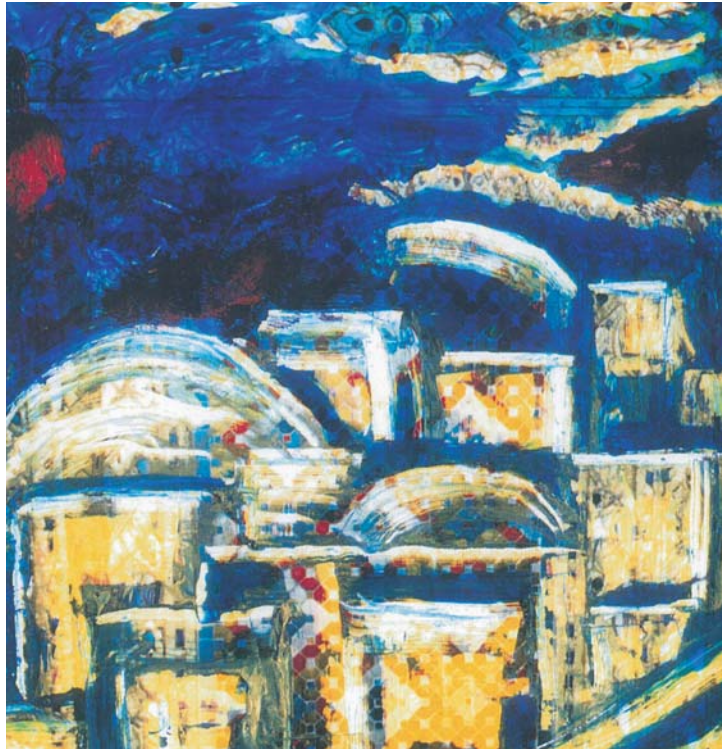
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All artwork in this booklet is by Sydney artist Derryn Tal. The cover is an original artwork, "Jerusalem".

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