

Year 8 Religion & Society - How Should We Live?

Unit 2: Religious Education: Exploring the Abrahamic Religions

Part 1: How might holy days remind Jews of their shared values?



1. What are rituals and why are they so important?

- A ritual is a ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed to a set order.
- We come across rituals in every-day life, they help to give us a strong sense of belonging in our many communities.
- A strong sense of belonging is important because strong, positive communities help us to develop the tools we need for life's journey and support us when we hit obstacles.
- Rituals bring communities together by helping them to:
 - **Connect** - eg Sunday Roast as a family
 - **Commit** - eg. Wedding ceremony
 - **Celebrate** - eg. Birthday party
 - **Commemorate** - eg. Remembrance Day
- Ritual is a very important feature of religion and over the next few lessons we will explore how the many rituals of the Jewish faith brings a strong sense of community and belonging.

2. What is Judaism?

- Judaism is an ancient religion that can be traced back to 1500 CE and has survived despite the many struggles faced by Jewish people in history.
- Jews believe in one eternal God who created the universe and declared a set of rules they should live by.
- These were delivered to Moses and were written down in the Torah, the first part of the Jewish scriptures.
- Jews believe they have a special agreement with God called a Covenant where they will follow these rules and in return, they will be God's specially chosen people.
- There are many different types of Jewish people, such as more traditional Orthodox Jews and more Liberal or Reform Jews.
- Orthodox Jews read the Jewish scriptures more literally and are more cautious of change.
- Reform Jews read the scriptures more liberally and are more willing to allow their faith to adapt.
- When Jews go to the synagogue they are more likely to feel closer to God and each other.

3. What is God's Covenant with Abraham and why is it significant?

- Abraham is considered, the founder of Judaism because he made a covenant with God.
- A covenant is an agreement between two parties typically marked with a sign.
- The story of Abraham and the everlasting promise made with God can be read in the book of Genesis which is the first book of both the Jewish and Christian scriptures.
- Moses was promised by God:
 - That he would be given a huge family and millions of descendants
 - That he and his descendants would be God's special people and he would be their God
 - That he would be given the land of Canaan as their homeland
- This agreement was marked by Abraham, all the men in his household and all male Jews today with the sign of circumcision which is the removal of the foreskin from the penis.
- This takes place in a special service called a 'Brit Milah' (Covenant of circumcision) shortly after birth and it is an important reminder to the whole Jewish community that they are the children of the covenant, they are God's chosen people, and he is their God.

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4. What is the story of Moses and the Exodus?

Summary: Moses was a Hebrew prophet who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt in the Book of Exodus. He received the Ten Commandments from God at Mount Sinai, establishing the basis for Jewish law. After fleeing Egypt, Moses led his people through the Red Sea and into the desert, where they wandered for 40 years before entering the Promised Land of Canaan.

- **Early Life:** Moses was born into a Hebrew family during a time of oppression by the Pharaoh of Egypt. He was saved from an order to kill all male Hebrew children by being placed in a basket on the Nile River and found by the Pharaoh's daughter, who raised him as a Prince of Egypt.
- **Fleeing Egypt:** Moses witnessed the mistreatment of Hebrews and, after killing an Egyptian guard who was abusing a Hebrew slave, he fled to Midian after his identity was exposed. There he settled, married Zipporah, had children and tended the herds of his father in law, Jethro.
- **The Burning Bush:** In Midian, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire, commanding him to return to Egypt and free the Israelites.
- **The Ten Plagues:** Moses and his brother Aaron demanded the Pharaoh release the Israelites, and when he refused, God inflicted ten plagues upon Egypt, each increasing in severity and impact on the Egyptians their crops and their animals: (1) Water turning to blood (2) Frogs (3) Flies (4) Livestock pestilence (5) Boils (6) Hail (7) Locusts (8) Darkness (9) Death of the firstborn
- **The Exodus:** After the final plague, the Pharaoh finally released the Israelites, and Moses led them through the Red Sea, which God miraculously parted, allowing the Israelites to escape. The Israelites would spend the next 40 years wandering the wilderness to the Promised land.
- **Mount Sinai:** After crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites settled at Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. This established the basis for the Jewish law. Moses asked Aaron to build an Ark for the tablets of stone upon which the 10 commandments were written to be stored in and this was always kept in a special tent called the Tabernacle.
- **The Promised Land:** Moses was able to see the Promised Land before he eventually died but it was only after Moses and all the original slaves who had left Egypt had died that Joshua would lead their descendants across the River Jordan into Canaan, the Promised Land.

5. Why is the story of Moses so important to Jews?

- **Liberation from Slavery:** Moses's leadership in the Exodus, the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt, is a major historical and religious event for Jews.
- **The Covenant at Mount Sinai:** Moses's ascent to Mount Sinai and his receipt of the Torah (including the Ten Commandments) from God are believed to have established a further covenant between God and the Jewish people that builds upon the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant, involving a set of laws and commandments, forms the basis of Jewish law.
- **Prophetic Role and leadership:** Moses is revered as the greatest prophet in Judaism, and his role as God's messenger and teacher is central to Jewish belief. Moses's leadership, courage, and unwavering faith serve as an example for Jews to emulate, especially in face of adversity.
- **Chosen People:** The covenant with Moses, and the subsequent Jewish people's adherence to the Torah, reinforces the belief in Judaism as a chosen people with a special relationship with God. Many Jews believe that God was teaching his people how to live as his chosen people through the 40 year exodus (journey) out of Egypt to the promised land.

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6. How is the story of Moses celebrated at Passover?

- The story of Moses and the Exodus is still very important to Jews today and is remembered annually during Passover or in Hebrew, Pesach, a holiday commemorating this pivotal event.
- The name Passover relates directly to the final plague, the death of the firstborn in each home. God told Moses that if he the Israelites mark their homes with Lamb's blood they would be spared, and death would pass-over their homes which is why this festival is called the Passover.
- Everything needs to be ready for Passover Seder, a special meal on the first night.
- Each specific piece of food on the Seder plate reminds Jews what it was like for the Hebrew Slaves in Egypt so that Jews today can experience the exodus all over again each year. For example, the charoset is a paste made from sugar, cinnamon, apple, wine and nuts which represents the mortar used by the slaves when building the pyramids. The egg and meat, reminds Jews of the offerings made to God in the holy temple in Jerusalem. Bitter herbs like horseradish help Jews to remember the bitter suffering of the slaves. Finally, the vegetable karpas (Parsley) is dipped in salt water to remember the tears of the Hebrew slaves.

Significance of observing this holy day:

Observing this holy day and participating in this ritual helps Jews to connect with God and each other as part of a faith community. It enables them to commemorate the suffering of their ancestors in Egypt but also celebrate God delivering his people from slavery and providing for them as his children of the covenant, his chosen people.

7. What is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and why is it important?

- The Bar Mitzvah for a boy and Bat Mitzvah for a girl takes place at either the age of 12 or 13 depending on what Jewish tradition you follow. Mitzvah is a Hebrew word meaning commandment from God, so becoming a Bat Mitzvah means becoming a daughter of the commandment and promising to follow God's rules.
- Therefore, this ritual is a coming-of-age ceremony where the Jewish community recognises and celebrates a boy or girl as now being a Jewish adult.
- Young Jews know that they won't become an adult by the laws of the land until they are 18, but they would be able to take on more adult roles and responsibilities in the Jewish community such as at the Synagogue.
- After the ceremony Jews will have a big party with their friends and family to celebrate their coming of age.
- Many Jews feel closer to the Jewish community after this celebration because it is where they make their own personal commitment to their faith community.
- This ceremony has similarities with the Christian Church through the idea of Confirmation (Church of England) or First Holy Communion (Roman Catholic church).

Significance of observing this holy day:

Observing this holy day and participating in this ritual helps young Jews to connect with and show their own commitment to God and their Jewish faith by celebrating coming of age as a member of the Jewish community and taking on greater responsibilities within it.

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8. What is Shabbat and why is it important?

- The first story in the Jewish and Christian scriptures is the creation story which says God created the world and everything in it in 6 days and on the 7th day God rested.
- Consequently, Jews have a day of rest where they stop their very busy everyday life.
- This is called the Sabbath or in Hebrew, Shabbat.
- Shabbat starts at sunset on Friday and lasts 25 hours into Saturday evening.
- Every week Jewish families make sure all the work is done to prepare for Shabbat so that they can enjoy it together, as a day of rest, connecting with God, their family and faith community
- During Shabbat, several prayers are given over the bread and wine and then a meal is enjoyed together as a family and traditional Hebrew songs are sung. Coming together and sharing meals as a family is a big part of being Jewish.
- A Jew, might feel that they can make a fresh start each week after celebrating Shabbat.
- Orthodox and Reform Jews celebrate Shabbat with varying degrees of strictness:
 - More traditional Orthodox Jews generally adhere to stricter interpretations of the Sabbath including restrictions on work and the use of technology. For example, most Orthodox Jews would have their ovens and lights on timers, and they wouldn't turn on the TV, phone or a console as all these examples would be considered 'work'
 - More liberal Reform Jews are more flexible in their interpretations of the Torah and Sabbath law, often allowing activities like driving and using technology but still value and uphold the underlying principle that Sabbath is a day of rest to connect with their God, their family and their faith community

Significance of observing this holy day:

Observing Shabbat is a weekly opportunity for a Jew to rest and recover at the end of a busy week but also re-set and realign their commitment to God ahead of a new week. By doing this together with their family and faith community they also strengthen their connection to each other and to God which will help them to feel closer as a community. It is also a weekly reminder to Jews to celebrate what God has given through his creation and by observing it they keep God's commandments, given to Moses. A weekly day of rest is not just important to a Jewish person's faith but their health, wellbeing, and relationships.