

The Jewish Community in Scouting



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There are about 270,000 Jews living in Great Britain today i Many of them belong to the synagogues scattered through out the country, but a great majority of them live in the Greater London area and other large cities. There are about 16 Jewish Scout Groups with approximately 750 Scouts, both male and female. Many Jewish Scout Groups are sponsored by their synagogue. The Jewish community in Scouting encourages religious growth and learning in young people. Jewish Scouts also join existing non Jewish Groups and participate in all activities providing they do not conflict with their religious beliefs.

Being Jewish is primarily about belonging to a people who share a historical background that dates from 4000 years ago. Archaeology has confirmed this startling tradition ii. Most Jews will grow up knowing something of their recent and distant history. Since Jews have lived in the Diaspora (outside their Spiritual homeland), they

have become skilful in absorbing the cultures and traditions of the societies in which they live, while at the same time retaining their own distinctive identity.

It is possible to become a Jew by conversion, but normally one inherits Jewishness by being born of a Jewish mother. Being a Jew starts from the moment of birth and is not dependent upon any ceremony.

Being Jewish affects all aspects of life.

Religiously: Believing in one God; keeping the commandments, as laid down in both the written and oral law; and observing feasts and fasts commemorating historical events affecting the lives of the Jewish people.

Culturally: Studying the written texts.

Historically: Belonging to a people that are 4000 years old and understanding events in the past which have an affect on our lives today.

Politically: Being part of a people all over the world with a spiritual bond to our homeland.

Socially: Being with other Jews and accepting our responsibility towards our neighbour.

JUDAISM

Jewish religious traditions come from the **Torah** (the first five books of the Bible). It is within these books and the Oral Law that a large number of rules and commandments are found. In addition to the rules the Torah contains the early history of the Jewish people. Judaism is the root of two major world religions - Christianity and Islam. For ease of description Judaism can be divided into several categories, examples include

Orthodox, Masorti or Progressive, and Sephardi or Ashkenazi. All Jews share much in common whether they consider themselves Orthodox or Progressive – the difference between these groups being the question of the when and how of the revelation and, consequently, who is the author of the Torah – or whether they are born Sephardi or Ashkenazi.

Orthodox Jews believe that the entire Torah is the word of God given by him to Moses and through Moses to the Jewish people. It is this revelation plus the explanation and interpretations by later sages, which form the basis of the Jewish way of life. Judaism can not change with every passing fashion. As a result the Torah can never be changed.

Masorti Jews seek to balance tradition and change - the teachings of the past with the needs of the present and future. They believe in the same things as Orthodox Judaism, but how they understand them is influenced by the findings of modern science and modern thought.

Progressive Jews on the other hand believe Judaism is an evolving religion and must continue to change in order to meet contemporary needs. They affirm that it is possible for God to reveal the divine will in each generation and that the Torah was the product of generations of people who however divinely inspired, were fallible like other human beings. Ritual laws were developed by human beings to satisfy the needs of their days. They can therefore be changed with each passing generation.

THE JEWISH HOLY BOOKS - TENAKH

The complete Jewish scriptures are called the **Tenakh**. It is divided into three sections:

The Torah - The five Books of Moses (The first five books of the Bible also known as the Old Testament)

Nevi'im - The books of the Prophets

Ketuvim - The Writings (which include for instance, Psalms, Proverbs)

The Torah is the most important part of the Scriptures. It contains the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. For reading in the synagogue, these books are written on scrolls. The word Torah means teaching. The Torah teaches Jews what God is like and how the Jews should live. The five books include stories of the creation of the world and of the first Jews such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Torah also includes the rules about worship and festivals. All together there are 613 rules in the Torah including the Ten Commandments which address all aspects of life.

Nevi'im is a collection of books about the history of the Jewish people. It includes the teachings of the prophets and the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Some parts of Nevi'im are read in synagogues after the readings of the Torah, but from a book not a scroll.

Ketuvim means writings. They are stories from Jewish history such as Daniel and Chronicles and also the Song of Songs, Lamentations and Esther. The Ketuvim are often used in synagogue services, especially the Book of Psalms. Other books are read on certain festivals and fast days.

Another collection of teachings about how Jews should live is the **Talmud**. It contains the teachings of the **Rabbis** (Religious scholar/spiritual leader) collected together over many years and recorded sometime after 200 CE (Common Era). The Talmud gives much more detail about the Torah and helps explain the laws.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

Prayers are recited three times a day, *Shacharit* (morning), *Mincha* (afternoon) and *Ma'ariv* (evening). Jews worship in a synagogue, but can also pray at home, the focal point of their faith. As Jews enter the synagogue they wash their hands. This is a symbolic act to show that

they are ready for prayer. The synagogue service includes readings from the Torah scrolls, prayers and the singing of psalms.

The synagogue is not only a place of worship. It is also a place where children are taught the history and traditions of Jewish people and how to speak, read and write *Hebrew*; the language of the scriptures and other holy books.

The most important feature of the synagogue is the *Ark*. This is a special cupboard which, in the UK, is built into the eastern wall of Synagogue, facing Jerusalem. The Torah scrolls are kept in the Ark. The scroll is a long roll made up of strips of parchment (animal skins which have been dried and smoothed so they can be written on). The scroll is wound round wooden rollers. Scrolls are written by hand in Hebrew by a trained scribe using special ink. A *Yud* (special pointer) is used to follow the words. Each scroll is dressed in a special cover called a *mantel*, usually made of silk or velvet and beautifully decorated with embroidery.

Another important aspect of the synagogue is the *Ner Tamid* (ever burning light) which hangs in front of the Ark. This symbolises a flame that never goes out and helps to remind people that God is always present. It also reminds us of the seven-branch candlestick in the temple.

In the middle of the synagogue is a raised platform called a *Bimah*. The person leading the service stands here and reads The Torah, which is placed on a table.

In Orthodox synagogues, men and women do not sit together. The women have a separate section either in a gallery or at the back of the synagogue. In a Progressive synagogue, men and women sit together with their families.

HOLY DAYS AND FESTIVALS

The Jewish calendar is lunar (i.e. according to the cycle of the moon). It is based on twelve months and each month is marked from new moon to new moon, either 29 or 30 days, the time it takes the moon to travel around the earth.

Twelve such months total 354 days - eleven days shorter than the solar year. Adding a full month in spring, roughly every three years, makes up the difference. Many Jewish festivals rely for their mood and expression on an observance at a particular time of the year. For example, Pesach (Passover) is a spring festival, Succoth (Tabernacles) celebrates the autumn harvest and Chanukah (Festival of Lights) is only meaningful in winter.

All festivals to some extent originate with specific events in the past which have significance for the Jewish people. Associations are mainly agricultural and historical. Jewish tradition has developed many customs over the years to celebrate and commemorate them.

Rosh Hashanah - Jewish New Year

(September/ October). During the first days of the year people have an opportunity to reflect on their deeds in the past year and look forward to doing better in the coming year. Rosh Hashanah is both a happy and a solemn holiday. Jews eat honey cake and apples dipped in honey to symbolise the hope for a sweet year to come. A distinctive feature of Rosh Hashanah is the blowing of the **Shofar** (ram's horn) in the synagogue which is a clarion call to conscience.

Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement occurs ten days after Rosh Hashanah and is the most solemn day of the year. It is a day of prayer and fasting for those over 13 years old (adults). It lasts from sunset and continues for approximately 25 hours. The Shofar is blown at the end of the fast and thus the end of Yom Kippur.

Succoth - Feast of Tabernacles

(September/October) symbolises the transience of material belongings and reminds the Jewish people of the temporary dwellings they built as they wandered in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt.

Simchat Torah: Rejoicing over the Torah (October). This is the day on which the yearly cycle of reading the Torah scrolls comes to an end and is begun again. The scrolls are paraded around the synagogue seven times amidst the

singing and dancing of the congregation. Children follow the procession waving flags. It is a joyous celebration.

Chanukah: Festival of Lights (December). This is a festival commemorating the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks in 167 BCE (Before the Common Era), the story of a small nation fighting for freedom. On Chanukah the eight branched Chanukiah (Candlestick) is lit in Jewish homes. During the eight day festival, one candle is lit on the first night and two on the second and so forth until all eight are lit on the last night. Doughnuts and latkahs (fried potato pancakes) are eaten and gifts are given to children.

Tu B' shvat - New Year for Trees (January/February) marks the start of the planting season and every tree has its 'birthday' on this day.

Purim - Feast of Lots (February/March). This festival celebrates the physical deliverance of the Jewish people from annihilation. In Tel Aviv there is the famous street carnival (Adloyada) at this time. Children wear fancy dress and re-enact the story of Queen Esther.

Pesach: Passover (March/April). There are two aspects to this celebration - a festival of spring, linked to the agricultural cycle of the land of Israel, and the celebration of the exodus of the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Yom Ha'shoah: Holocaust Remembrance Day (April). Yom Ha'shoah commemorates the six million Jews who were slaughtered in the Holocaust during the Second World War. The Jews who took part in the revolts in concentration camps, and those who joined the various resistance movements are also remembered Yom Ha'shoah. Since this day varies according to the lunar calendar, the British government have introduced a permanent memorial day which will fall every year on the 27th of January.

Yom Ha'atzmaut: Independence Day (April/May). This commemorates Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel and the Declaration of Independence on 14th May 1948. A

torch lighting ceremony marks the beginning of the celebration, which includes parades, street parties and dancing all over Israel. In *Diaspora* communities (Jewish communities outside Israel), Independence Day is celebrated in the same way.

Yom Yershalayim: Jerusalem Day (May/June). This day commemorates the re-unification of Jerusalem on 7th June 1967.

Shavuot: Pentecost (May/June). Shavuot marks the receiving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. It is also the festival of the 'First Fruits' of the wheat harvest.

Tisha B'av: 10th day of the month of Av (July/August). Commemorates the anniversary of the destruction of the first Temple in 586 BCE (Before the Common Era) and the second Temple in 70 CE. (Common Era) On this day verses from the Book of Lamentations are read and in Israel it is the custom to visit the Western Wall, the only remaining fragment of the Temple in Jerusalem. Orthodox Jews continue to mourn the loss of the Temple.

Shabbat: Sabbath (Every Week). Shabbat starts every Friday evening at sunset with the lighting and blessing of two candles for the sabbath day and the reciting of a blessing over wine. Children are also blessed. On the table are placed two *Challot* (plaited loaves of bread). A blessing is said over the bread at the start of the meal. Synagogue services take place on the Friday evening and the Saturday morning. The Saturday evening service is followed by the ceremony of *Havdallah* (separation). This usually takes place at home after dark to mark the end of the Shabbat. Shabbat is a day of peace and rest from work, a day of study and prayer and also a day for families and friends.

BEHAVIOUR AND VALUES

Judaism is based on the Ten Commandments found in the book of Exodus in the Bible.

Jews believe that the concept of religion is totally tied in with a person's identity. Therefore the food

that one eats, the clothes one wears and the words one speaks are all part of one's identity.

The Jewish faith respects people's right to lead lives of their own and to own property but realises that there must be a balance between what is good for the society and what is good for the individual.

Jews also believe that the Sabbath day is a day for releasing themselves from everyday pressures so that they can allow time to develop the richer and deeper qualities of being human in relationships with their God, families, and themselves.

THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The family is very important in the Jewish way of life. Parents have obligations to care for their children and children should treat their parents with care and respect. Even members of the extended family are expected to look after one another. The Jewish community has a very well developed system of caring for the less fortunate and is known for their generosity to deserving causes.

FOOD

Kashrut (Keeping Kosher) is a system of dietary laws given in the Torah. It is also about self restraint in all things. It is about not having what you want just when you want.ⁱⁱⁱ

Attaching Jewish concepts to food laws ensures that one can hardly go more than a few hours without being reminded of one's Jewish identity and relationship with God. In a Jewish home every meal is a religious rite because the food must be **Kosher** ('fit', conforming to the rules).

According to Jewish law only certain kinds of meat and fish may be eaten. Only animals that chew the cud (herbivores - animals which feed on plants) and have cloven hooves are permitted, like sheep, cows and even deer if killed in the kosher

way. But pigs are not allowed because they do not chew the cud (omnivores - animals that feed on food of vegetable and animal origin) even though they have cloven hooves. Chickens, ducks, geese and turkey may be eaten if they are killed the kosher way, but not birds of prey.

Fish with both scales and fins are permitted like cod, haddock, herring, mackerel, plaice, sole, salmon and trout. But shellfish like prawns, shrimps, crab and lobster, oysters and fish without scales like eels and catfish, are strictly forbidden so are snails or other reptiles. Orthodox Jews will only eat meat from animals that have been killed by a qualified **shochet**, a professional slaughterer working under religious supervision. A shochet prides himself on his skill and humaneness. **Shechita** is a method of killing the animal or fowl to make it kosher to eat and is so swift as to be painless. It is important that the meat should have been drained of blood.

Dairy produce also has rules. Eggs must first be broken in a glass to see if there is a blood spot in the yolk. If there is, the egg cannot be eaten since consuming blood is forbidden. The very observant will also ensure that the cheese they buy is free from rennet (an animal product).

All fruit and vegetables can be eaten but must be washed very carefully in order to remove all insects which are **trayfah** (forbidden).

Another important food rule is that meat and dairy products should be kept completely separate. After consuming meat one must wait a minimum of three hours before consuming milk or any of its derivatives. This goes back to the injunction in the Torah:

"... not to eat a kid that has been stewed in its mother's milk".

In an orthodox kitchen there are separate sets of utensils for meat and milk dishes. Saucepans, cutlery, washing up bowls and towels are kept carefully apart and colour co-ordinated.

There is another category of food called **parev** (neutral). This refers to foods which are neither meat or dairy. It includes eggs, nuts, pasta, fruits, cereal, vegetables, and rice, as well

as bread, cakes, biscuits, margarine and oil, providing they do not contain milk or animal products.

Eating is a consecrated act in Judaism. Blessings are recited before eating – **Kiddish**, and after the meal – **Birakat H'mazon**.

DRESS CODE

At the service in the Synagogue men wear a **kippah** (a small head covering). It is worn as a sign of respect to God and many Jewish men wear it all the time. In addition at the morning services, on Sabbaths and festivals a **Tallit** is worn. This is a prayer shul usually made of silk or wool with fringes and a tassel at each end of the four corners.

In Orthodox synagogues, as well as the Tallit and Kippah men wear two small black leather boxes with straps called **Tefillin**. They contain small pieces of parchment on which are written short passages from the scriptures. One box is worn in the middle of the forehead. This is to remind Jews that they must love God with all their minds. The other is worn on the arm facing the heart to remind them to love God with all their hearts.

SCOUT MEETINGS

The Sabbath starts at sunset on Fridays and finishes an hour after sunset on Saturdays. During this time activity is restricted and work prohibited. As a result, Jewish Scout Groups do not meet during this time.

Co-educational groups are acceptable the majority of communities, although individual Groups may decide not to admit females-

THE PROMISE

Jewish Scouts take the same Promise and Law as all other Scouts in the UK.

CAMP

As many camps take place over the weekend, certain activities need to be altered on a Friday night and Saturday to ensure none of the Sabbath rules are broken. Examples of these may include arriving at the site and putting all tents up before sunset on Friday, not cooking during the Sabbath, not doing activities which involve writing. The exact extent to which these rules are followed will depend on the Groups and Individuals within those Groups.

All Scouts have a Scouts own service and Jewish Scouts are no different. This will usually take place on a Friday night and/or Saturday morning and will consist of traditional Jewish prayers recited on the Sabbath. In addition, some Groups will pause for prayers at meal times and up to three times during the day.

When eating at camp, it is important to keep the laws of Kashrut. This includes having two full sets of equipment, one for milk and one for meat. Vegetarian food is a suitable alternative and this means that only one set of equipment needs to be used (milk).

FURTHER INFORMATION

The SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education publishes an annual calendar of festivals which will list the appropriate dates for a particular year.

The calendar is available from the
SHAP Working Party,
c/o National Societies R.E.Centre,
36 Causton Street, London, SW1P 4AU.

If you would like to more about the Jewish
community you could contact any of the following:

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- i Peter Russel, Jewish Scout Advisory Council
- ii *This is my God* Herman Wouk - 1961
- iii *Kushrut* Esme Daniels - The Board of Deputies
of British Jews 1996