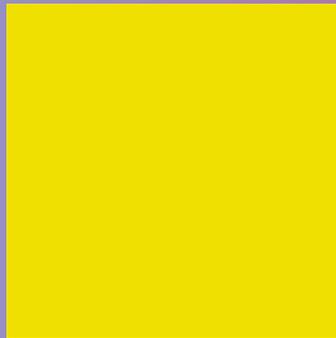


1



JUDAISM

JUDAISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 GENERAL

With 14 million members, Judaism is the smallest of the monotheistic religions. Judaism, like Christianity and Islam, is an Abrahamic religion. Similar to the other Abrahamic religions, God revealed himself to Abraham, an important figure in the Tanakh. Thus, Abraham is known as the patriarch of Judaism. The religion gets its name from one of his dissidents, Judah.

Jews represent 0.2% of the world population. Geographically speaking, Jews can be divided into two groups: Jews living in Israel, and the diaspora communities to be found outside of Israel. Most of the diaspora Jews live in America, with the remainder mostly living in Europe or the Latin American-Caribbean region.

Useful numbers and facts regarding Judaism are provided by Pew Research Center on their webpage: <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/jews/>

1.1.2 CONTENTS OF TEACHER'S HANDBOOK

The starting point of this module is the letter from Moshe: a letter from a young Jewish student talking about his religion. Most of the material unpacks the Jewish topics that Moshe mentions in his letter. The teacher's handbook offers background information on those elements, and extra exercises that can be used at the teacher's discretion. The topics are: the importance of the covenant with God, Jewish ethics, the role of tradition, and some of the most important Jewish feasts. Special attention is given to the initiation rite bar or bat mitzvah, and the feasts of Shabbat and Passover [Pesach]. All of these are paradigmatic examples of the religious underpinnings explained in this handbook. A last section is dedicated to extra material that contains information on the synagogue and further references to more important Jewish feasts. This material is, again, intended to be used at the teacher's discretion. All of the exercises are numbered in a chronological order.

Introduction to the topic

- The students are asked to write down five things that come to their mind when they think about Judaism. A mind map can be created on the blackboard to write down their ideas.
- The students note three questions that they would like to ask regarding Judaism.

1.2 UNPACKING THE LETTER

1.2.1 A LETTER FROM MOSHE

The class watches the brief video of Moshe's description of Judaism and is asked to answer the multiple-choice questions.

Exercise 1: quiz – ca. 7m.

What do we remember from Moshe's letter? (After watching the film, Multiple choice – Comprehension of the video)

1. Halacha
 - a. The father's
 - b. The grandfather's
 - c. None of them
 - d. I do not know / No answer

2. The synagogue is also known as the
 - a. House of assembly
 - b. House of learning
 - c. House of prayer
 - d. All of the above

3. On Shabbat Jews
 - a. Connect with God and with their family
 - b. Live a secluded life
 - c. Get their final work done
 - d. Eat food that reminds them of Ancient Israel

4. The word "monotheism" means
 - a. Believing in multiple Gods
 - b. Believing in only one God
 - c. The same as polytheistic
 - d. The Jewish walk of life

5. The Torah
 - a. Is the central Holy book for Jews
 - b. Contains the Five Books by Moses
 - c. Contains the written words given to Moses by God at mount Sinai
 - d. All of the above

6. A bar mitzvah celebrates
 - a. the twelfth birthday of a Jewish boy
 - b. the twelfth birthday of a Jewish girl
 - c. the thirteenth birthday of a Jewish boy
 - d. the thirteenth birthday of Jewish girl

7. A bar mitzvah celebrates
 - a. a festival of sorrow
 - b. a festival of celebration where we remember the story of Passover
 - c. another word for Seder
 - d. the weekly day of rest or Shabbat

Solutions: 1a. 2d. 3a. 4b. 5d. 6c. 7b.

1.3 THAT'S TRADITION

Tradition occupies an important part in Judaism, as the accumulated experience and knowledge, but also as the customs, habits, and commandments. Of course, not every Jew strictly adheres to the tradition. There are many different Jewish movements or 'branches'. There is Liberal or Reform Judaism, that has assimilated into the cultures Jews live in, and made traditional customs and practices more modern. Liberal Jews don't follow all the traditional halachic rules, for instance. Or they make halachic rules that correspond and fit with their daily, modern life. They are also more free in their preparation and approach to religious events. Traditional or orthodox Judaism is the opposite. Orthodox Jews stick close to practices, customs, and rules or norms that have given structure to Jews for a long time. These can offer some safety and reliance in an ever changing world. Of course, liberal Judaism and orthodox Judaism are presented here as opposite poles. In reality, there are many different variations and gradations.

Exercise 2: Following tradition – ca. 20m.

Within Judaism there are a lot of questions about to what extent we should follow the tradition. Having watched Moshe's presentation, please make the following exercise in groups of two or four:

- a. Jews have their own view on tradition, as explained by Moshe. What is your opinion on their idea and practice of tradition?
- b. Does your family or society have similar practices that are seen as traditional? Discuss them among each other.
- c. Tradition can be authoritative in how it regulates the everyday, religious lives of the members of a religious group. Discuss among each other positive and negative aspects of being part of a tradition.

1.4 JEWISH ETHICS

Moshe writes: “We believe that God loves us in a unique way. This love implicates a task. Answering the love of God means loving our fellow people by doing justice. Hearing the word of God means doing the word of God!”

Jews believe God wants them to be just and compassionate. To understand the importance of justice and doing good toward others, Jews often draw from their own experiences as a people. That’s why the understanding of your history can be so important.

Exercise 3: Jewish ethics – ca. 10m.

The students can be asked to look at the following passage from the Book of Exodus, and answer the following questions.

Exodus 23:9¹

[9] You are not to oppress a foreigner, for you know how a foreigner feels, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

- a. Who is the ‘you’ in this story? Why was this ‘you’ a foreigner in Egypt?
- b. What possible associations could someone reading this passage make, considering current situations and challenges?

¹Bible Gateway CJB (The Complete Jewish Bible). “Exodus 23:9.” Accessed 16 September 2020. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+23&version=CJB>.

1.5 SHABBAT

Shabbat is one of the most important feasts in Judaism. *Shabbat* is celebrated every week, from Friday evening until Saturday evening. During this day, Jews are not allowed to do any kind of work, and must rest. *Shabbat* is the fourth of the Ten Commandments.

***Exodus 20:8-11*²**

[8] Remember the day, Shabbat, to set it apart for God.

[9] You have six days to labor and do all your work,

[10] but the seventh day is a Shabbat for Adonai your God. On it, you are not to do any kind of work – not you, your son or your daughter, not your male or female slave, not your livestock, and not the foreigner staying with you inside the gates to your property.

[11] For in six days, Adonai made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. This is why Adonai blessed the day, Shabbat, and separated it for himself.

More information on Shabbat can be found on the following webpage:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/holydays/sabbath.shtml>

²Bible Gateway CJB (The Complete Jewish Bible). "Exodus 20:8-11." Accessed 15 September 2020. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+20&version=CJB>.

Exercise 4: Experiencing Shabbat – ca. 5m.

You have read or watched Moshe's description of Shabbat. Fill in the missing words:

Ten Commandment – kiddush – covenant – challah – wash our hands – Torah – covenant – parashah – Kiddush Cups

Today is a happy day. We are celebrating *Shabbat*: our weekly day of rest. On this day, we celebrate our **covenant** with God. We do this by laying down our work for one day, and reconnect with ourselves and our community. This way, we honor God who created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. It's also one of the **Ten Commandments**. A Jewish day is from evening till evening, not from twelve till twelve. Shabbat begins on Friday evening, and lasts until Saturday evening. *Shabbat* is officially over the moment we can count three stars in heaven. Because we can't work, we have to prepare everything beforehand. That means Friday is usually an extra busy day! Once the sun starts to set, my mother lights two candles for every family member that is present. And my dad speaks a prayer, to which everyone answers with 'amen'. This blessing is called **kiddush**. Everyone gets a little bit of wine, that we drink from **Kiddush Cups**. On this day, everyone wears beautiful, fancy clothes. We always eat fish, and sometimes chicken soup. It's usually a big dinner with salad, potatoes, meat, and dessert! My favorite part, however, is eating a special braided bread called **challah**. It's white, and eggy, and very soft inside! My mother makes it for Shabbat. We have to **wash our hands** before. It's forbidden to eat bread with dirty hands. We eat the challah at the start of the dinner, by ripping of the pieces with our hands. It's a lot of fun to eat bread that way!

Every Saturday morning, there is a Synagogue service, where we read a portion of the **Torah**, called **parashah**. We read these portions three days a week, on Saturday, Monday, and Thursdays, but on *Shabbat* we read the biggest portions. By the end of the year we have read the Torah in its entirety.

1.6 EXTRA MATERIAL

1.6.1 THE SYNAGOGUE

In ancient Israel the Temple of Jerusalem was the central religious place for Judaism. One of the main functions of the Temple was that of sacrifice. Ancient Jews would often travel great lengths to reach this Temple and make an offering to God. However, because not every Jew could reach the Temple, or make an offering, there was a need for a different place where their religion could be practiced. This place became the synagogue. After the Temple's destruction by the Romans, however, the synagogue became the central house of worship. Synagogue is Greek and stands for 'House of Assembly'. It is the place where Jews pray, learn, and hold feasts together. Nowadays, there are three services each week during which a weekly Torah portion is read.

There are two essential aspects for any synagogue: 1) a safe storage space to keep the Torah-scroll in, the Holy Book of Judaism, and 2) a clear visible space from where the Torah-scroll is read from. The Torah is placed in what we call the Torah Ark or Holy Ark. The Torah Ark is sealed with a door, and can be found in, or behind, the wall that faces the old Temple of Jerusalem. A beautifully ornamented curtain called parochet hangs in front of the Ark. The central, visible space from where the Torah-scroll needs to be read is called a bimah, a heightened platform. The location of the bimah varies according to the synagogue. In the synagogue, the minyan is very important. The minyan is a quorum of ten Jewish adults that are required in order to carry out communal Jewish worship. Orthodox synagogues only allow a minyan to be made up of Jewish men, that are considered adults after their bar mitzvah at the age of thirteen.

More information on the synagogue can be found on the following webpages:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zbm8jty/revision/1>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z3sf2nb/revision/1>

Exercise 5: Inside the synagogue – ca. 5m.

Fill in the gaps with one of the words given below. Each word can be used only once.

Baal kore – chazan – parochet – bimah – Torah Ark – Torah-scroll – minyan – ten adult men – three times a week – Holy Ark

Our synagogue plays a very important part in my Jewish community. Me and my family go each time, which is **three times a week**. In the middle of the synagogue is a **bimah**. It's difficult to describe... It's kind of like a heightened platform! On it are a couple of important people for our services. One of them is the **chazan**. He sings and recites a lot of the prayers. He leads the synagogue service! There is also the **baal koree**, who reads from the Torah-scroll. This is so difficult, there is even a special education designed to learn to this. The Torah has to be carried to the bimah from a safe storage room. We call this storage room the **Torah Ark**, or **Holy Ark**. There is a **parochet** hanging in front of it, which is a beautifully ornamented piece of fabric. This synagogue-service is a special occasion, because I get to be part of the **minyan**. This is a special chorus made up of **ten adult men**. I had my bar mitzvah last week, so I'm finally old enough to be a part of it! Some prayers can only be recited by us. My sister would like to be a part of it, too, but in our synagogue, that is not allowed. It is a halachic rule!



Figure 1.1
The interior of the synagogue Brahat ha-levana in Bnei Brak, Israel.
Source: © suprunvitaly / Adobe Stock

1.6.2 A COVENANT WITH GOD

Moshe writes the following: “Our relation to God is the most important aspect of our lives. This relation is a relation of love. We believe that God loves us in a unique way. This love implicates a task. Answering the love of God means loving our fellow people by doing justice. Hearing the word of God means doing the word of God! We see this as a covenant of love with God.”

This covenant with God is inscribed in the daily life of Jews to this day. One very corporeal sign is the circumcision. The circumcision is a controversial practice, but also a misunderstood one. Firstly, only boys are circumcised. This is done by someone that is specially trained to carry out the operation. Nowadays, it’s carried out by someone from a medical profession. The circumcision is not that painful, since they only cut in the skin. It takes place on the eight day of the boys life, which is an age at which the circumcision is less painful than at later age. After three days, the wound is fully healed.

In orthodox branches of Judaism, they only assign a name after or during the circumcision, which outlines its importance. Girls become part of the covenant differently. In orthodox Judaism they do this by saying words of gratitude on the girls’ first *Shabbat*.

Exercise 6: About the covenant – ca. 7m.

The students can be asked to reflect on this central aspect of Judaism. A class conversation can take place by making use of the following questions:

- a. Why do Jews experience this covenant as something hugely important?
- b. What could “hearing the word means doing the word” mean?

1.6.3 BAR AND BAT MITZVAH

One important moment in every Jewish kid's life is the bar or bat mitzvah. This event celebrates the moment when a Jew becomes an adult member of the religious community. It's when they become 'children of the commandments', because from now on they are expected to carry on following the commandments. Jewish children celebrate their bar/bat mitzvah on the Shabbat that is closest to their actual birthday.

More information on bar and bat mitzvah can be found on the following webpage:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zrrkxnb/revision/2>

Exercise 7: Moshe's bar mitzvah – ca. 5m.

You have read or watched Moshe's description of his bar mitzvah. Fill in the missing words:

bar mitzvah – bat mitzvah – twelve – ancient Hebrew – daughter of the commandment - parashah – thirteen – rabbi – son of the commandment

This Shabbat is a special occasion. I turned thirteen this year, so this Shabbat we will celebrate my bar mitzvah! This means that I'm now a 'son of the commandment'. We will celebrate my bar mitzvah in the synagogue. I'm kind of anxious, because I have to read the parashah, the weekly Torah portion. What makes matters even worse is that it's written in ancient Hebrew. As if standing in front of the synagogue wasn't stressful enough! You could say I'm looking forward to the feast afterwards. We are very close to our synagogue's rabbi, and he made sure that there will be a nice reception. At least, that's what my parents told me. My younger sister will be there too, but she won't have her bat mitzvah yet. According to our tradition, girls become adults at the age of twelve. Well, a lot of girls in my school class are bigger than me, so there must be some truth to that. Either way, my sister will have her turn next year. She can't wait to become a 'daughter of the commandment'.

Accompanying question

The students can be asked to reflect on their own (religious) customs and compare them to the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony.

1.6.4 PASSOVER OR PESACH, THE FESTIVAL OF FREEDOM

Passover, or Pesach in Hebrew, is one of the most important religious festivals in the Jewish calendar. According to the Jewish stories, Jews used to be slaves in Egypt. Luckily, God helped them escape, and allowed them to reach a land He promised them. This story is recounted in the Book of Exodus. During Passover, Jews celebrate Pesach to commemorate this redemption and liberation from slavery. That is why it's called the Festival of Freedom!

Passover is so popular that families often travel great lengths to celebrate it together. The length of the celebrations can vary, depending on where you live. In Israel, Passover lasts for seven days, with the first and the last being a full days of rest, kind of like *Shabbat*! In diaspora communities, Passover lasts for eight days, with the first two and last two being full days of rest.

In the Diaspora, they have two ritual meals on the first two nights. In Israel they have only one. This meal is called *Seder*. *Seder* means order, because there is a strict order in which the feast is arranged. For this event Jewish households even have specific cutlery and plates. The meal itself consists of a fixed amount of components. Each component is symbolic, and has to be eaten in order. During the meal they discuss these meanings. During Passover *Seder* Jews read from a book called *Haggadah*, which tells the story of Exodus and Passover.

More information on Passover can be found on the following webpage:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/holydays/passover_1.shtml

Exercise 8: Pesach – ca. 15m.

After reading or watching Moshe's description of Pesach, more background can be given on this important event by use of the information found above. Afterwards, the students can be separated into groups, and reflect on the following questions:

- a. Who was set free? And by who? And why is this event worth remembering for Jews? Why is it so important?
- b. Today, not everyone lives in freedom. Who do they think needs freedom today? And in what ways?
- c. What kinds of freedom do you look forward to as you grow up?



Figure 1.2
Passover wine and
matzoh jewish holiday
bread wooden board.
Source: © ungvar /
Adobe Stock

1.7 GLOSSARY

Aramaic

Aramaic is a language that originated in the ancient Near East. For example, Aramaic was spoken in regions that today are known as Iraq, Syria, Israel, Palestine, and Eastern Arabia. Aramaic and Hebrew are part of the same language family.

Circumcision

Circumcision is a medical practice through which a piece of the foreskin of the penis is removed. In Judaism, this is taken as a corporeal sign or token of their covenant with God. In Genesis 17:10-13, God commands Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish people, and all of his descendants to be circumcised. The circumcision is a very common practice, even among areligious Jews. Nowadays, this practice is carried out by someone from the medical field, and the potential pain of the operation is seriously minimized.

Covenant

The covenant is another word for 'bond': the relation between God and his People, the Jews. This covenant implies rules about how Jews should act, and thereby it has consequences to how Jews orient themselves in life.

Diaspora

Diaspora is the whole of Jewish people living outside of Israel. After the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, or during various periods of slavery, the Jewish people dispersed all over the world.

Exodus

The term 'Exodus' has two meanings. Firstly, it refers to the Book of Exodus, the second book of the Torah. Secondly, it refers to the first part of this book: the Jewish people's exodus out of Egypt. The name Exodus comes from Ancient Greek and means "going out-" The Hebrew name is "Names", which refers to the opening words of the text.

Mitzvah

Mitzvah is a synonym for a religious commandment or religious obligation. The plural of 'mitzvah' is 'mitzvot'.

Mount Sinai

Mount Sinai is the place where the prophet Moses is said to have received the Torah from God. It is also the place where the Jewish people made their covenant with God. It is known as a sacred location.

According to the story in the Bible, the ancient Jews were slaves in Egypt, until God helped them escape. Afterwards, they wandered through the desert for 40 years, during which they reached Mount Sinai.

Talmud

The Talmud is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism claims that Moses received two things on Mount Sinai: the Written Torah, and the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah consists of the explanations and interpretations of the Written Torah. Torah means 'Law' or 'Teaching', therefore, the Oral Torah is the collection of oral laws or teachings that Moses received from God!

These explanations were transmitted word-to-mouth from Moses all the way to the rabbis. After a while, even these explanations needed further commentaries. All of the commentaries were collected by rabbis in books called the Talmud.

Torah

The word Torah has a lot of meanings. It is the Hebrew word for 'Law' or 'Teaching'. It usually means the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Five Books of Moses or the Written Torah. These are the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. More generally, it can also mean all of the teachings of Judaism. See the section on the word 'Talmud' above!

Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments is a list of ten principles that have to be followed according to the Written Torah. Judaism believes that the Torah has many more commandments, but the Ten Commandments are often understood as being the basis of all the other commandments. The Ten Commandments also exist in Islam and Christianity!

Shoah

The Shoah, also known as the Holocaust, was a horrific event in the years 1941-1945 during which many European Jews were killed by Nazi Germany. It is thought that approximately 6 million Jews were killed in this genocide. At the time, this accounted for almost two-third of the Jewish population in Europe.

Wailing Wall

The Wailing Wall is another term for the Western Wall, the last remaining piece of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem. This Temple was the center of the religious, cultural and economic life of ancient Jews. The Temple was destroyed twice. The first time by the Babylonians, after which the Jews were enslaved in Babylonia. After a while they escaped, however, and they returned and rebuilt the Temple. Sadly, it got destroyed a second time, by the Romans.

1.8 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

A letter from Moshe

Hello! My name is Moshe, and I would like to tell you about my religion: Judaism! There are 14 million Jews all over the world. A lot of us live in Israel, but not every Jew is an Israeli! Jews living outside Israel are what we call the diaspora. I live in Europe, so I'm part of the diaspora! We are also the smallest monotheistic religion. Monotheism means believing in only one God. Although Judaism is the smallest monotheistic religion, it's actually the oldest one!

Some people find the terms 'Jew' or 'Judaism' a little bit complex. Someone is born as a Jew when their mother is Jewish. Few of us were not born by a Jewish mother, but converted to Judaism. Also, not all Jews look alike. We can even vary in how we live our Jewish life. Some Jews decided to assimilate into the cultures they lived in. As a result, they became less strict in following traditional customs and practices. These are liberal or Reform Jews. My family is orthodox or traditional. That means we keep close to our traditions. But there are even Jews who do not believe in God. Every Jewish community is unique!

Our main holy book is the Torah that God revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. That's why it's also called the Five Books of Moses. Most of our texts are in Hebrew, but we also have some texts written in Aramaic and Greek. Our relation to God is the most important aspect of our lives. It is a covenant of love that guides our daily life. We believe that God loves us in a unique way, and this love gives us the task to love other people and do justice. Hearing God's word means actually doing God's word! A sign of this covenant is circumcision: every Jewish boy has to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth.

Several rules guide our behavior towards God and other fellow humans. These are called *mitzvot* (commandments). The Ten Commandments are the most famous among them. But life constantly

changes, and is now very different from life in ancient Israel, an area now made up of Lebanon, Israel, a part of Syria, and Jordan. That's why we need help to interpret these commandments in order to apply them in our lives. Rabbis, our religious leaders, discuss and teach these rules in the form of halacha, Jewish law. *Halacha* in Hebrew means 'to go', 'to walk', so Halacha refers to the Jewish walk of life!

A lot of halachic rules were written in important texts called the Talmud. Learning our traditions is very important for us. It's part of our education. However, every rule is founded on the Torah, as the expression of God's love for us, and every rule needs to be accepted by a majority of the community. And because our life and experiences keep changing, we never stop discussing these laws. Our tradition is not just repeating what our ancestors did, but learning what they thought, in order to learn things for our own lives! That way our tradition never becomes closed, but stays open.

A big part of our life takes place in the synagogue. 'Synagogue' is a Greek word that means 'house of assembly'. It's the place where we learn, pray, and celebrate feasts! In earlier times, we had a temple in Jerusalem. It was the center of our religious, cultural and economic life. Unfortunately, the Temple was destroyed in ancient times. The Wailing Wall is the only thing that's left of this destroyed temple. Me and my family go and visit Jerusalem once a year. This place makes me feel connected to my Jewish history, which is very important to me and my family. Some moments in our history are sad to think about. During the second world war there was the Shoah, in which the Nazi's killed many Jews. For me and my family, this event is a reminder to always keep going!

Rituals and feasts are very important in the lives of Jews. They celebrate our covenant with God. Let me tell you about two of my favorites.

Firstly, there is *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* is a day of rest. It lasts from Friday evening to Saturday evening, because Jewish days begin at sundown. The Torah teaches us that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Imitating God, we also rest on the seventh day! This *Shabbat* is a special occasion: I turned thirteen this week, so we will celebrate my bar mitzvah! This means that I'm now a 'son of the commandment'. The ceremony will take place in the synagogue. I'm kind of anxious, because I have to read the *parashah*, the weekly Torah portion. What makes matters even worse is that it's written in ancient Hebrew. As if reading out loud in front of a full synagogue wasn't stressful enough! Luckily, there's a feast afterwards, and I'll get many gifts! My younger sister will be there too. According to our tradition, girls become adults at the age of twelve. That's when they become bat mitzvah, 'daughter of the commandment'.

Besides *Shabbat*, my favorite feast is *Pesach*, or Passover. Passover is known as the Festival of Celebration, when we remember our exodus from slavery in Egypt. God liberated us and under Moses' leadership brought us to the promised land. This event is the origin of our identity, during which God gave us the Torah! Passover is always in the spring, and it lasts eight days. The evening before we have *Seder*, a ritual meal during which we retell the story of Exodus. During Passover *Seder*, we only eat food that reminds us of ancient Israel. That means we can't eat anything with *chametz*, or leaven, because ancient Jews had to leave quickly and didn't have time to let their bread rise. My favorite part is the search for *chametz* the day before *Pesach*. This ritual search is always a lot of fun! It symbolizes getting rid of arrogance or pride in our house.

In short, Judaism is about the love of God, learning the Torah, doing good for others, and justice!

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