UWS Multifaith Chaplaincy September 2008

What do you know about Judaism?

The Jewish people, (the Jews), consider themselves the descendants of Abraham and the heirs of the Torah, the Law given to Moses on Mt Sinai. Jewish staff and students form a part of the UWS community. Acknowledging and respecting Jewish identities therefore requires, in part, a basic understanding of what Judaism is about.

About Judaism

According to Jewish tradition, around 1900 BCE (Before the Common Era), God revealed himself to Abraham, the ancestor of Jewish people, who was called to leave his home in Ur and travel to Canaan (later known as Israel, Judea and then Palestine), a land which God promised to give his descendants. Approximately 450 years later, God rescued the Jews from slavery in Egypt (the Exodus) and led them back to the land of Israel with Moses as their leader. God then made a further covenant with the nation at Mount Sinai. He revealed the Torah, including the Ten Commandments and other rules to live by, thus marking the beginning of Judaism as a structured religion.

Orthodox Judaism

The most conservative Jewish denomination is Orthodox Judaism whereby the Torah remains authoritative for modern life. The practices and beliefs of Orthodox Judaism include daily worship, dietary laws, traditional prayers, regular study of the Torah, the separation of men and women in the synagogue and strict observance of the Sabbath and religious festivals.

Progressive Judaism

Reform Judaism is the most liberal Jewish denomination. The central tenets of Judaism, namely God, the Torah and Israel are affirmed while acknowledging a great diversity in Jewish beliefs and practises. For example, women may become rabbis, illustrating that tradition is tempered by modern understandings.

Jewish Religious Observance

Place and Style of Worship

The Jewish place of worship is the synagogue where daily prayers can take place. Spiritual leaders are known as Rabbis. The synagogue is also used as a place to study as well as a community centre. Religious observance also takes place in the home.

The Jewish holy day is called the Sabbath which begins at sunset every Friday and lasts until sunset the following Saturday. Sabbath is observed by rest, worship and spending the day at home and in the synagogue with the family.



Religious Text

Torah comprised of two components: The Written Torah and the Oral Torah. According to Jewish learning and tradition, they were both delivered to Moses at Mount Sinai. The Written Torah is comprised of the Five Books of Moses. The Oral Torah, which appears today in Judaism as the Mishna and Talmud, explains the Written Torah.

Jewish Dress Code

Some observant Jewish men have beards and wear a skull cap known as a kippah, and some married Orthodox Jewish women cover their hair with a sheital (wig), a hat or scarf.

Dietary Requirements and Restrictions

The Jewish dietary laws are referred to as Kashrut, a Hebrew word meaning 'fit' or 'proper for use'. Food that meets these standards is more commonly referred to as 'Kosher'. Forbidden foods are termed 'trayf.'

Jews maintain detailed dietary laws which include prohibitions about mixing milk and meat. There are different levels to which different denominations and different individuals adhere to these restrictions. For further details visit http://www.jewfaq.org/kashrut.htm

There are a number of fasts during the year associated with various festivals and historical events. For example, eating and drinking is forbidden for a 25 hour period from sundown to darkness on Yom Kippur (see next page) and Tisha b'Av, which falls in July or August. http://www.jewfaq.org/kashrut.htm

Significant Religious Dates and Events

The two major holidays are:

Rosh Hashanah / New Year

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year and usually falls in late September or early October. The Festival celebrates God's sovereignty over the world. Work is generally not permitted on Rosh Hashanah and much of the day is spent in synagogue. The ram's horn is sounded in the synagogue.

Yom Kippur / Day of Atonement

Yom Kippur is the most important of Jewish holidays. It is believed that on this day God judges all people and decides their fate for the next year. It is also a time for reflecting and repairing one's relationship with God. On Yom Kippur, Jews must abstain from all work, food, drink and other pleasures from sundown to darkness (25 hour period) and most of the day is spent in the synagogue where special services are conducted from morning to evening.

For further religious dates and events: http://www.aish.com/holidays/

Jews in Australia

- Jewish presence in Australia began with the arrival of Jewish convicts on the First Fleet in 1788.
- The first Jewish free settlers arrived in Australia in 1809 and by the 1840s there were small but growing Jewish communities in New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia, totalling approximately 0.5% of the Australian population.
- The first synagogue in Australia was formally established in 1837 in Sydney, and in 1850 the Adelaide Hebrew congregation was established.
- The first Australian born Governor General, Sir Isaac Isaacs (1885-1945), was Jewish.
- Up until the 1930s, the majority of Jews in Australia were Anglo-Jews.
- After World War Two, the Jewish population grew and diversified with the influx of Jewish migrants and refugees from Central and Eastern Europe, many of whom had fled Nazi persecution.
- According to demographers, Australia currently has approximately 110,000 people identified as Jewish, making up approximately 0.5% of the Australian population.
- Jews in Australia come from a diverse range of nationalities.



Respecting Religious and Cultural Diversity at UWS

UWS Equal Opportunity Policy

It is the policy of the University of Western Sydney to provide equal opportunity for all staff and students regardless of sex, pregnancy, race, marital status, homosexuality, age, family responsibilities, disability, transgender, political conviction or religious belief.

Multifaith Facilities

Multifaith facilities are available for students and staff on all UWS campuses. For Meditation and Prayer Room locations: http://www.uws.edu.au/students/ods/chaplains



References and Further Information

ABC Religion and Ethics: Judaism http://www.abc.net.au/religion/stories/s796551.htm

Australia is Religiously Diverse http://www.harmony.gov.au/_docs/ReligiouslyDiverseHD.pdf

S Rossel Basic Judaism http://www.rossel.net/basic06.htm

National Archives of Australia: Jews in Australia http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/publications/fact-sheets/fs217.aspx

BBC Religion and Ethics http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism

Jewish Virtual Library http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaism.html

Kashrut: Jewish Dietary Law http://www.jewfaq.org/kashrut.htm

Faith and Food Fact Files: Judaism http://www.faithandfood.com/Judaism.php

Australian Bureau of Statistics Year Book http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/46d1bc47ac9d0c7bca256c470025f f87/BFDDA1CA506D6CFACA2570DE0014496E?opendocument

Religion Facts: Judaism http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism

Aish http://www.aish.com

Judaica Mall Glossary of Terms http://www.judaica-mall.com/glossary-terms.htm

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