



JUDAISM

Simplified key term definitions

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| Synagogue | house of assembly; building for Jewish public prayer, study and assembly |
| Shekinhah | the place where God's presence rests and can be felt |
| Shabbat | day of spiritual renewal and rest. Beginning at sunset on Friday and closing at nightfall on Saturday |
| Kosher | ('fit' or 'proper') - foods that are permitted to be eaten according to Leviticus (chapter 11) |
| Torah | the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) |
| Mitzvoth | the term has a mix of meanings. It is often used to refer to duties (such as the 613 in the Torah) and good deeds |
| Messiah | the anointed one who Jews believe will bring in a new era or age of peace for humankind |
| Covenant | a promise or agreement between two parties (e.g. as made between God and Noah/Abraham/Moses) |

Useful sources of authority

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| Tanakh | The Jewish Bible – its name comes from its three sections: Torah , Nevim (the prophets) and Ketuvim ('writings') |
| Oral Torah | All the traditions that have been passed down to explain and interpret the five books of Moses (written Torah) |
| Talmud | A work which contains the <i>Mishnah</i> (a written version of the oral Torah) and the <i>Gemara</i> (a rabbinic commentary on the <i>Mishnah</i>) |
| Shema | A prayer from Deuteronomy declaring belief in one God: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one' |
| Maimonides | A 12 th century rabbi and philosopher who wrote <i>The 13 Principles</i> – considered a source of authority by Orthodox Jews, but less so by Reform Jews |
| The 13 Principles of Judaism | A work by Maimonides outlining what he saw as the key beliefs of Judaism, including belief in the resurrection of the dead and the coming of the Messiah |
| Siddur | Jewish prayer book containing a set order of prayers for Jews to say each day |

5.1 The nature of God: One, Creator Law-Giver and Judge



- Jews believe there is ONE God who is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful) and omnipresent (present everywhere at the same time)
- Jewish monotheism (belief in the oneness of God) is emphasised in the Torah through the *Shema*, which contains the words 'the LORD our God; the LORD is one'
- These words are found in mezuzah on doorframes throughout Jewish houses
- The first of the Ten Commandments forbids the worshipping of other (false) gods ('You shall have no other gods before me'), reinforcing Jewish monotheism
- The *Torah's* six-day creation story (Genesis 1) shows God as an omnipotent CREATOR, bringing everything into existence by the power of his word
- Many Jews say the world is too wonderful and complex to have happened by chance and so must have a creator
- They also believe he continues to sustain the world by providing sufficient resources for life to prosper on it
- Jews see God as a LAW-GIVER, as shown in the *Torah* when he gave Moses the Ten Commandments
- In addition, many Jews believe all 613 mitzvot contained in the Torah were given by God at Mt Sinai
- Jews see following these laws as a way of getting closer to God and leading a good life
- Judaism teaches that God is a JUDGE; a God of both justice and mercy
- The Talmud states, 'The LORD judges the people' (Psalm 7:8)
- *Rosh Hashanah* is the 'Day of Judgement' and is a time when Jews believe God judges people, weighing their good deeds against the bad
- In the ten days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, Jews ask for forgiveness and try to make up for any bad deeds

Possible/past exam questions:

- (b) Describe Jewish beliefs about God as creator. [5] **2018 exam Q!**
- (b) Describe Jewish beliefs about God as Judge. [5] **2020 exam Q!**
- (c) Explain Jewish beliefs about the nature of God. [8] **2023 exam Q!**
- (c) Explain Jewish beliefs about God as One AND God as Creator. [8] **2022 exam Q!**
- (d) 'The most important Jewish belief is that there is only one God.' Discuss.

(c) Explain Jewish beliefs about God as One AND God as Creator. [8] (Both of these paragraphs would score full marks for a (b) task asking you to describe Jewish beliefs about the oneness of God or his role as a creator.)

Jewish monotheism (belief in the oneness of God) stems from the Torah. The most important Jewish prayer – the Shema – is taken from Deuteronomy and contains the words, ‘The LORD our God, the LORD is one’. This is so important Jews say this prayer three times a day. The Ten Commandments (Exodus) also emphasise God’s oneness. The Commandments explicitly forbid the worshipping of other (false) gods.

Jewish belief that God is the creator also stems from the Torah. The Genesis creation account describes how God made the universe by the power of his word in six days before resting on the seventh. This shows God’s omnipotent, creative nature. Jews also believe that God continues to sustain the world by providing resources for us to survive. Many Jews think the beauty and complexity of the world show that it must have a divine creator.

(d) ‘The most important Jewish belief is that there is only one God.’ Discuss. (For this task, the agreeing view should contain 2xPEE ideas about why monotheism is so important to Jews, while the disagreeing view should give 2xPEE ideas about why other beliefs might be considered more important.)

Some Jews would agree with this statement. One reason is because it is the focus of Judaism’s most important prayer, the Shema. This is a prayer from Deuteronomy that declares ‘The LORD our God, the LORD is one’, which Jews say three times a day. Since the focus of Judaism’s most important prayer is the oneness of God, some Jews would say this shows that belief is the most important. Furthermore, they might point out that the first of the Ten Commandments highlights the oneness of God. In Exodus, the Ten Commandments begin by God saying ‘You shall have no other gods before me’. Since the Ten Commandments are Judaism’s most important rules, having this at the start of them suggests belief in the oneness of God is the most important belief.

Other Jews might disagree and say that belief in God as creator is the most important belief. The Torah starts with the Genesis creation account of God making the universe out of nothing by the power of his word. Since this is how the most sacred text in Judaism begins, some Jews might say that belief in God as creator is the most important belief. Moreover, some might suggest that belief that God as a judge is the most important belief. Psalm 7:8 says, ‘The LORD judges the people’, with Jews believing God delivers both justice and mercy. Since Jews believe that where they will spend their afterlife depends on how God judges them, with Rosh Hashanah being a time when they think especially about God as a judge, some might say that this is the most important Jewish belief.

In conclusion, I agree with this statement. I find the agreeing view strong because belief in the oneness of God impacts on Jewish day-to-day life, with Jews saying the Shema three times a day and having mezuzah with a monotheistic declaration on doorframes throughout their houses. I find the disagreeing view weak because God’s role as creator and judge is linked to his being the only God – he is the God of everything because there is only one God.

5.2 – The Shekhinah



- *Shekhinah* refers to God's presence in the world (where he can be felt)
- Although the word 'shekhinah' does not feature in the Tanakh, there are stories in it that show God being present on earth and involved in it (immanent)
- For example, God walks around the Garden of Eden (Genesis) and takes the form of a pillar of cloud and fire to guide the Israelites to the Promised Land (Exodus)
- The Tanakh also describes God being present in the tabernacle (initially a tent in which the Ark of the Covenant was kept)
- Some Jews think the *Shekhinah* remains in the area where the Temple in Jerusalem used to be (so they can experience the Shekhinah by pilgrimaging to its ruins)
- Others think it followed the Jewish community (so can be experienced when worshipping at the synagogue and when celebrating Shabbat at home)
- The Talmud says 'the Shekhinah rests on man neither through gloom, nor through sloth'
- In mystical Judaism, *Shekhinah* refers to the feminine qualities of God (loving/caring)

Possible exam questions:

- (b) Describe Jewish beliefs about the Shekhinah (divine presence). [5] **2021 exam Q!**
- (c) Explain the nature and significance of the Shekhinah. [8]

A quick tip about (c) tasks in Judaism: most (c) tasks are best answered using three PEE paragraphs. However, if the task asks you to explain two things (like the one above), two detailed paragraphs would probably work better.

(c) Explain the nature and significance of *Shekhinah*.

The nature of *Shekinhah* is interpreted in various ways. Sometimes the term is used to refer to God himself, while mystical Jews use it to refer to God's feminine characteristics, but usually it's used to mean the presence of God in the world. In the Tanakh, the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple used to be considered the dwelling place of God's presence - after its destruction, some Jews believe it stayed where it was, while others think it followed the Jewish community.

The significance of *Shekhinah* links to its nature. For Jews who believe the *Shekhinah* remained where the Jerusalem Temple once was, the area around that site takes on huge significance. This is why Israel remains spiritually important for Jews and why they want a homeland there. (One of the Psalms focuses on the sadness of Jews being separated from Jerusalem.) For others, God's presence can be felt within the Jewish community. *Shekhinah* is therefore a significant aspect of Jewish gatherings (for example, when Jews worship at synagogue).

(b) Describe Jewish beliefs about the *Shekhinah* (divine presence).

Judaism teaches that the *Shekinah* is the place where God's presence rests and can be felt. The *Shekinah* is meant to show the immanent nature of God. This means he is close to his creation and involved with the world. An example of this in the Tenakh is when God guides the Israelites as a pillar of cloud/fire (Exodus 13:21). Mystical Jews believe the *Shekhinah* is the feminine aspect of God (i.e. loving, caring).

5.3 – The Messiah



- The term Messiah comes from the Hebrew *Mashiach*
- It means 'the anointed one' who will bring about a new, peaceful age
- There are no references to the Messiah in the *Torah*, but other parts of the Tenakh hint at a Messianic Age
- For example, Isaiah says it will be a time when the wolf lives with the lamb
- Maimonides said belief in the Messiah was one of 13 Principles of Judaism
- The Tenakh gives no specific time when the Messiah might come - various people in history have claimed to be the Messiah, but none convinced all Jews
- Orthodox Jews believe the Messiah will come when most needed and be a political leader who will judge everyone and bring peace
- The Tenakh also suggests he will be a man (not God) descended from King David...
- ...who will bring Jews back to Israel and rebuild the Temple in a restored, Jewish Jerusalem
- Reform Jews don't really believe in an individual Messiah
- Instead they believe that people should be responsible for bringing about the peaceful Messianic Age by working to improve society

Strengths (+) and weaknesses (-) to the argument that belief in the Messiah is important

- + Maimonides is a respected rabbi, so if he says belief in the Messiah is a key principle of Judaism then some would say it should be considered one
- If it was that important, though, some would say it would be mentioned in the Torah, as that is the most important of all Jewish scriptures
- + Others would point out that other significant figures in Judaism (e.g. Elijah and David) aren't mentioned in the Torah, making the above argument a weak one. Also, Isaiah is a significant book in the Tenakh, and it describes a Messianic Age

Possible exam questions:

- (b) Describe Jewish beliefs about the Messiah. [5]
- (c) Explain different Jewish beliefs about the Messiah. [8] **2018 exam Q!**
- (d) 'Belief in the Messiah is not that important in Judaism.' Discuss. **2020 exam Q!**

(d) 'Belief in the Messiah is not that important in Judaism.' Discuss. (The answer below uses 2xPEE ideas in each of the two main viewpoints – this is a straightforward way of presenting a developed viewpoint that allows examiners to award higher marks.)

Some Jews, such as Orthodox Jews, would disagree with this statement. This is because the arrival of the Messiah is a part of the Tenakh (the Jewish Bible). For example, Isaiah writes of a Messianic Age when 'the wolf will live with the lamb'. This conveys the Jewish idea that the Messianic Age will be a peaceful one, and since the Messiah is seen as a bringer of peace, his arrival would be seen as important because without it, there may always be conflict. Furthermore, belief in the Messiah was identified as one of the 13 Principles of Judaism by the Jewish philosopher Maimonides. Maimonides saw him as a figure who would be descended from King David and who would rebuild the Temple in a restored, Jewish Jerusalem. Because the Temple was such a significant part of Jewish religious history, Orthodox Jews would say the arrival of the Messiah to rebuild it must be important.

Other Jews, such as Reform Jews, would be more likely to agree with the statement. One reason for this is that there is no reference to a Messiah in the Torah, which is the most important part of the Tenakh. If the Messiah is not mentioned in the most important part of the Jewish scriptures, the arrival of the Messiah cannot be that important. Moreover, many Reform Jews do not believe in an actual Messiah figure. They believe instead that it is people's responsibility to bring about a Messianic Age of peace by working to improve society. Since Reform Jews reject the idea of an individual Messiah, they would agree that belief in one is not important.

In conclusion, I would disagree with the statement. I find the agreeing view weak because while Reform Jews may say that the lack of reference to the Messiah in the Torah means belief in him cannot be important, there are many important Jewish figures who do not feature in the Torah, but do appear in other parts of the Tenakh (e.g. Elijah, David and Daniel). I find the disagreeing view strong because the Messiah is a figure who it is said will do great things and bring peace. I think belief in such a figure is important because it is important to have hope in a better world.

5.4 - The covenant with Abraham



- A covenant is an agreement between two parties
- In the Torah, God makes covenants with Abraham and Moses
- Abraham is important because of the covenant God made with him and because he is seen as the founder of Judaism, with many Jews using the term 'father' for him
- He is also a role model for rejecting polytheism and embracing monotheism (the *midrash* contains stories of him smashing his father's idols)
- As part of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis, God promises that Abraham will have DESCENDANTS as numerous as the stars in heaven (Gen 15:5)
- These descendants would become the Jewish people
- God promises these descendants will have LAND – 'I assign the land you sojourn in to you' (Gen. 17)
- This land is now called Israel, which Jews sometimes refer to as 'The Promised Land'
- Israel remains hugely significant to Jews as it is where the remains of the Temple are and became a sanctuary for the Jewish people after the suffering of the holocaust in WW2
- God also promised Abraham BLESSINGS – 'all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you' (Gen. 12)
- Many Jews interpret this promise of blessings as an important sign of their special relationship with God
- Jewish males are circumcised as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant – 'throughout all generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days' (Gen. 17)

Possible/past exam questions:

- (b) Describe the Abrahamic covenant. [5 marks] **2019 exam Q!**
- (c) Explain why the Abrahamic covenant is important for Jews. [8]
- (c) Explain why the Promised Land is important for Jews. [8]
- (d) 'Without Abraham there would be no Judaism.' Discuss. [15]
- (d) 'The most important promise God made to Abraham was the promise of land.' Discuss. [15]

(c) Explain why Abraham is important in Judaism. (Many (c) tasks for this topic ask you to explain why ___ is important to Jews/Judaism, and responding with three PEE paragraphs is a straightforward way of sticking to a few points and developing them for maximum marks.)

One reason why Abraham is important in Judaism is because Abraham was the first to teach that there is only one God. In the *midrash* there are a number of stories about Abraham smashing his father's idols when he realised that there could be only one God. Since monotheism is such a fundamental part of Judaism (as shown by the *Shema*), the person who was the first to preach this must be important.

Another reason is because God promises Abraham descendants. In Genesis, God tells him he will increase his numbers 'very much'. Jews see themselves as Abraham's descendants, making Abraham very important in Judaism (as Jews would not exist without him).

Thirdly, Abraham is important in Judaism because God promised land to him. In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham that he will give him his own country (Canaan, which would become Israel). This makes Abraham important in Judaism because Israel is the Jewish holy land/spiritual home.

(b) Describe God's covenant with Abraham.

God makes a covenant (promise or agreement between two parties) with Abraham in the Torah (Genesis). As part of the covenant, God promises Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in heaven. Jews see themselves as Abraham's descendants and often refer to him as 'father'. God also promises Abraham land and blessings. As a sign of the covenant, God tells Abraham that all his male descendants should be circumcised at eight days old, so this still happens to Jewish males today.

(c) Explain why the Promised Land is important for Jews. [8]

One reason why the Promised Land is important for Jews is because they see it as part of the Abrahamic covenant. In the Torah (Genesis), God tells Abraham, 'I assign the land you sojourn in to you'. Jews therefore trace the Promised Land right back to the beginnings of Judaism.

Another reason is because Jerusalem is in the Promised Land. This was the base for various kings of Israel and is where the remains of the Temple are. This is important to Jews because many see the Temple as the location of the Shekinah (where God's presence rests and can be felt).

Thirdly, the Promised Land can be seen as a sanctuary. Following the persecution of the Jews during the holocaust, the modern state of Israel was created on the site of the Promised Land to provide a country where Jews could live under a Jewish government. So the Promised Land has modern political significance for Jews as well as historic, religious significance.

5.5 - The covenant with Moses / The Ten Commandments



- Moses is important to Jews because of his role in the Mosaic covenant: rescuing the Jews from slavery, teaching them the Torah and leading them to the Promised Land
- As part of his covenant with Moses in the Torah (see especially the book of Exodus), God helps to rescue the Jewish people (Israelites) from slavery in Egypt, sending 10 plagues
- Moses leads the Israelites through the desert before crossing the Red Sea and eventually reaching the Promised Land
- At Mt Sinai, Moses receives the Torah from God (including the 613 *mitzvot*) before teaching its laws to the Israelites
- The *mitzvot* are recorded in the Written Torah, while questions around how to fulfil the *mitzvot* faithfully are discussed through the Oral Torah (the traditions passed down to explain and interpret the Written Torah)
- These *mitzvot* include the Ten Commandments, given to Moses on tablets of stone
- The Ten Commandments appear in the *Torah* (Exodus 20:2-14)
- Four rules relating to God were on one stone - the other six (relating to relationships with others) appeared on the second stone
- They forbid: worshipping false gods; taking God's name in vain; adultery; stealing; murder; falsely accusing someone; envy of another's wife or property
- They require: keeping the Sabbath day holy; honouring parents
- These rules are important because they are to be kept by every Jew (as part of the covenant) and because they are central to Jewish beliefs and practices

Strengths (+) and weaknesses (-) to the argument that the Ten Commandments are still important today

- + Many of the rules underpin the laws of civilised society (e.g. don't murder or steal)
- Non-religious people (e.g. secular Jews) might argue that certain rules have lost their relevance (e.g. don't envy your neighbour's slave, ox etc.)

Possible/past exam questions:

- (b) Describe the covenant with Moses. [5] **2022 exam Q!**
- (c) Explain how the Ten Commandments are important in Jewish belief and practice. [8] **2021 exam Q!**
- (d) 'All Jews should keep the Ten Commandments.' Discuss. [15] **2022 exam Q!**

(c) Explain why the Ten Commandments are important in Judaism. [8]

One reason why the Ten Commandments are important in Judaism is because they are given to Moses in the *Torah* as part of God's covenant with the Jews. Exodus 20 describes God giving the Commandments on tablets of stone for Moses to share with the Israelites. The *Torah* and its covenants are the foundation of Jewish belief, making the rules contained within them (e.g. Ten Commandments) very important.

Secondly, the Ten Commandments have shaped Jewish belief and practice. For example, the instruction to keep the Sabbath holy is the reason why many Jews attend synagogue and avoid work on *Shabbat*. These things are a distinctive feature of Judaism and so show the importance of the Ten Commandments to the religion.

Thirdly, the Ten Commandments help Jews in their relationships with God and each other. The rules against taking God's name in vain help them to show God respect, while the rules against envy, murder, stealing etc. help to create a peaceful and civilised society. Love of God and neighbour are important *Torah* teachings, which means that the Commandments which help to show this love must be important too.

(d) 'All Jews should keep the 10 Commandments.' Discuss.

Some Jews, especially Orthodox ones, would agree with the statement. One reason is because the Ten Commandments are given by God in the *Torah*. In Exodus, God gives Moses ten rules on tablets of stone to share with the Israelites. Since Jews see God as eternal and omniscient, many would regard his rules as still essential for Jews to follow today. Furthermore, the Ten Commandments help Jews in their relationship with God and each other. For example, Commandments like 'Don't take God's name in vain' remind Jews to show God respect, while ones such as 'Do not steal' remind Jews that 'that which is hateful to you is hateful to others' (Talmud). Since Jews should try to maintain a good relationship with God and others, keeping the Ten Commandments remains essential to being Jewish.

Other Jews, including secular and possibly some Reform Jews, might disagree with the statement. One reason is because they might think some of the Commandments are outdated. For example, one says not to be jealous of your neighbour's ox or servant. Since these are things most people don't have these days, they are no longer essential to keep. Moreover, some Commandments could be seen as too strict for today's world. For example, the Commandment about keeping Shabbat holy forbids doing any work, but Saturdays are important business days for many industries (or homework days for schoolchildren). Many Jews would say it's unrealistic to follow such rules nowadays, and that they are not therefore an essential part of being Jewish today.

In conclusion, I agree with the statement. I find the agreeing view strong because many of the Commandments are at the heart of the laws of the land (e.g. do not kill). As such, many have to be kept if you want to stay out of prison! I find the disagreeing view weak. If you are Jewish, you can avoid jobs that require Saturday work, and while people may not have slaves or oxen any more, the rule quoted is about not being jealous – the specifics of what not to be jealous of are only examples from the time and can be replaced with modern ones.

(b) Describe the covenant with Moses. [5]

In the *Torah* (Exodus), God promises to help Moses lead the Israelites' escape from Egypt. He does this by sending ten plagues. On their way to the Promised Land, God presents Moses with the *Torah* at Mt Sinai. This included rules for Jews to follow as part of the covenant. The most significant rules were the Ten Commandments, written on tablets of stone. These forbade the Jews from worshipping other gods and stealing, adultery etc.

5.6 - The Sanctity of Life / Pikuach Nefesh

For YOU created
my inmost being;
you knit me together in
my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am
fearfully and
wonderfully
made;
your works are
WONDERFUL. I
know that full well.
Psalm 139: 13-14

- Judaism regards life as sacred because the *Torah* identifies God creator (see esp. Gen. 1:26-7)
- Psalm 139 and Jeremiah 1:5 also describe God's role in our hint at how precious such life is
- Since God created life, only he should choose when to end it (hence why Orthodox Jews in particular tend to oppose euthanasia)
- **The term *pikuach nefesh* is used to describe the setting aside of certain *mitzvot* to save a life**
- Life is so important that Jews can break most of the 613 *mitzvot* to save it, which some suggest means *pikuach nefesh* is the most important Jewish belief
- Examples of how *mitzvot* can be broken to save life: a doctor working on the Sabbath; removing organs from the dead for a life-saving transplant
- In the *Talmud*, God says his people will 'live by' the *Torah*, as opposed to 'dying by' it
- There are three *mitzvot* which can never be broken, not even to save life: idolatry (i.e. worshipping false gods), incest and adultery

Strengths (+) and weaknesses (-) to the argument that Pikuach Nefesh is Judaism's most important belief

- + Most *mitzvot* can be broken to save life, so it's even more important than those
- But idolatry can't be broken, suggesting monotheism is the more important belief

Possible/past exam questions:

- (b) Describe the teachings of Judaism regarding the sanctity of life. [5 marks]
- (c) Explain beliefs about Pikuach Nefesh (sanctity of life) in Judaism. [8] **2020 exam question.**
- (d) 'The most important belief in Judaism is pikuach nefesh (sanctity of life).' Discuss. **2023 exam question.**

(b) Describe the teaching of Judaism regarding the sanctity of life. [5]

Judaism teaches that life is sacred because it comes from God (as described in the Genesis creation stories from the Torah). As life is so sacred, there is a concept called pikuach nefesh which allows most mitzvot to be set aside in order to save a life (partly because the Talmud says that people should live by the law rather than die by it). For example, a doctor would be allowed to break the Commandment to rest on Shabbat if they were responding to an emergency call to save a person's life. Only three mitzvot can never be broken to save a life: adultery, idolatry and incest.

(d) 'The most important belief in Judaism is Pikuach Nefesh (sanctity of life).' Discuss. (The answer below uses 2xPEE ideas in each of the two main viewpoints – this is a straightforward way of presenting a developed viewpoint that allows examiners to award higher marks.)

Some Jews would agree with the statement. One reason is because Pikuach Nefesh links to Jewish understanding of God's role as the sole sovereign of life and death. Genesis describes God creating life on earth, while Psalm 139 and Jeremiah 1:5 make reference to God forming each person in their mother's womb. Since life itself comes from God, some would agree that the sanctity of life is the most important Jewish belief. Furthermore, Jews can break most of the mitzvot to save a life. For example, although the Torah requires people to rest on Shabbat, a doctor could work on Shabbat to perform a life-saving procedure. Since Pikuach Nefesh allows rules from the Torah to be broken, some Jews might say that this is because Pikuach Nefesh is more important than belief in those rules.

Other Jews might disagree with the statement and say that belief in the oneness of God is the most important Jewish belief. One reason is because it is the focus of Judaism's most important prayer, the Shema. This is a prayer from Deuteronomy that declares 'The LORD our God, the LORD is one', which Jews say three times a day. Since the focus of Judaism's most important prayer is the oneness of God, some Jews would say this shows that belief is the most important. Moreover, they might point out that the first of the Ten Commandments highlights the oneness of God. In Exodus, the Ten Commandments begin by God saying 'You shall have no other gods before me'. Since the Ten Commandments are Judaism's most important rules, having this at the start of them suggests belief in the oneness of God is the most important belief.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the agreeing viewpoint weak because while Pikuach Nefesh allows most mitzvot to be broken to save a life, it doesn't allow them all to be broken, so presumably the ones that can't be broken (idolatry, incest and adultery) are based on more important beliefs. I find the disagreeing view strong because belief in the oneness of God impacts on Jewish day-to-day life, with Jews saying the Shema three times a day and having mezuzah with a monotheistic declaration placed on doorframes throughout their houses.

5.7 - Free will and the mitzvot



- There are 613 *mitzvot* (duties/good deeds) in the *Torah*, though some are no longer relevant because they relate to the now-destroyed Temple
- Orthodox Jews believe keeping the *mitzvot* is very important because they are taken from the *Torah*, which is seen as the word of God
- They will apply mitzvot even if it is inconvenient (e.g. not driving on Shabbat to observe the rule to rest on the Sabbath) because they see it as obeying God
- Reform Jews think some mitzvot are incompatible with 21st century life (e.g. some Reform synagogues allow gay weddings)...
- ...and that the Orthodox interpretation of some is too strict (e.g. Reform Jews might drive on Shabbat as they may think that is a more restful way to get to synagogue than walking)
- In the Talmud, Rabbi Hillel summarises the *mitzvot* saying to not treat others as you wouldn't wish to be treated - "This is the whole of the *Torah*"
- Mitzvah Day is a new initiative where Jews focus on helping the community on a day devoted to the values of the *mitzvot*
- Three concepts are important on Mitzvah Day: *tikkun olam* (healing the world), *gemilut hasadim* (showing kindness without expecting something back) and *tzedakah* (pursuing justice through social action)
- The *Torah* teaches that humans are free to keep the *mitzvot* or not
- God decides when we're born/will die, but we decide how to act
- We have two inclinations - *yetzer ha tov* (the urge to do good) and *yetzer ha ra* (the urge to do bad) - and can choose which to follow
- Evil is caused by humans responding to their *yetzer ha ra*, for which they should seek forgiveness through repentance

Possible/past exam questions:

- (b) Describe Jewish beliefs about free will and the mitzvot. [5]
- (c) Explain the importance of the mitzvot in Judaism. [8 marks]
- (d) 'All Jews should keep the 613 mitzvot (duties).' Discuss this from more than one viewpoint. **2019 exam Q!**

(b) Describe Jewish beliefs about free will and the mitzvot. [5]

The Torah teaches that humans are given choice and that, having been made in God's image, they have the ability to choose correctly. These ideas are found in the stories of Adam and Eve's creation and fall. Since the Torah is the most important holy text for religious Jews, they would be likely to accept its ideas about human freedom. Judaism also teaches that people have two inclinations: yetzer ha tov (the urge to do good) and yetzer ha ra (the urge to do evil actions). While these can influence people, it is up to them which urge to follow, giving Jews the freedom to keep the *mitzvot* or not.

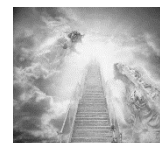
(d) 'All Jews should keep the 613 mitzvot (duties).' Discuss. (The answer below uses 2xPEE ideas in each of the two main viewpoints – this is a straightforward way of presenting a developed viewpoint that allows examiners to award higher marks.)

Some Jews, especially Orthodox ones, would agree with the statement. One reason is because the mitzvot are given by God in the Torah. In Exodus, God gives Moses ten rules on tablets of stone to share with the Israelites, with Jews believing he gave all of the other duties described throughout the Torah at the same time. Since Jews see God as eternal and omniscient, many would regard his rules as still essential for Jews to follow today. Furthermore, the mitzvot can help Jews in their relationship with God and each other. For example, the mitzvah 'Don't take God's name in vain' reminds Jews to show God respect, while others such as 'Do not steal' remind Jews that 'that which is hateful to you is hateful to others' (Talmud). Since Jews should try to maintain a good relationship with God and others, keeping the mitzvot remains essential to being Jewish.

Other Jews, including secular and possibly some Reform Jews, might disagree with the statement. One reason is because they might think some of the mitzvot are outdated. For example, homosexuality is forbidden in the Torah. Since many people today believe people should be free to love whoever they want, they might regard a mitzvah like this offensive nowadays. Moreover, some mitzvot could be seen as too strict for today's world. For example, the rule about keeping Shabbat holy forbids doing any work, but Saturdays are important business days for many industries (or homework days for schoolchildren). Many Jews would say it's unrealistic to follow such rules nowadays, and that they are not therefore obligatory.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the agreeing view weak because some of the mitzvot relate to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem – since this was destroyed a long time ago, it's simply impossible to keep all 613 mitzvot. I find the disagreeing view strong because I think parts of the Torah reflect the ideas of the writers and the time that they wrote, rather than divine rules that are eternally binding. As such, some of the mitzvot are very outdated.

5.8 – Jewish beliefs about the afterlife



- Judaism does not focus much on the nature of the afterlife because living a good life is more important, and God's ways aren't for us to understand
- The afterlife is called *Olam Ha-Ba* ('the world to come'), and preparing for the afterlife involves being good (e.g. keeping *mitzvot*)
- Past Jewish rabbis taught about the resurrection of the dead (ROTD), though Nahmanides and Maimonides disagreed over whether *Olam Ha-Ba* would coincide with the ROTD, or come after it
- Other rabbis disagreed over whether the ROTD would coincide with or come after the Messianic Age, and over whether everyone gets resurrected
- Judaism teaches that God will judge people on how well they have lived, with that judgement determining how they spend their afterlife (see 5.1 and 6.7a)
- Some Jews believe there will be a final Day of Judgement after the Messiah's arrival, when God will judge the living and the dead
- But Jews also believe in an annual day of judgement (Rosh Hashanah), where Jews reflect on their actions and try to repent for their sins in the ten days before Yom Kippur
- Resurrection is part of Orthodox belief, is mentioned in daily prayers and is linked to a passage from the Tanakh: 'Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake'
- Belief in the ROTD leads many Orthodox Jews to be against cremation and removing organs from the dead for transplant
- Reform Jews don't believe in resurrection, believing in the immortality of the soul instead (the Genesis description of God breathing life into Adam is interpreted as God giving humans a soul)
- A minority of Jews believe in reincarnation (the soul taking on a new body after the death of its previous one) to allow completion of missed *mitzvot*

Strengths (+) and weaknesses (-) to the argument that belief in the afterlife is important to Jews

- + Maimonides is a respected rabbi, and he identified belief in the ROTD as one of the 13 Principles of Judaism
- There is minimal reference to the afterlife in the Torah (only the occasional mention of Sheol, a dwelling place for the dead)

Possible/past exam questions:

- (b) Describe Jewish beliefs about resurrection. [5] **2023 exam question!**
- (c) Explain different Jewish beliefs about the afterlife. [5] **2019 exam Q!**
- (d) 'Jews believe this life matters more than the next life.' Discuss. [15] **2021 exam Q!**
- (d) 'Belief in the afterlife is not important in Judaism.' Discuss. [15] **2018 exam Q!**

(c) Explain different Jewish beliefs about resurrection. [8]

Orthodox Jews tend to believe in some form of resurrection of the dead. This is because it is stated in daily prayers and at funerals. It was also commonly accepted by significant rabbis such as Nahmanides and Maimonides, even though they disagreed about whether *Olam Ha-Ba* ('the world to come') would coincide with or come after the resurrection of the dead. Other rabbis disagreed over whether the resurrection of the dead would happen *during* the Messianic Age or *after* it. Belief in the resurrection of the dead leads many Orthodox Jews to oppose cremation and the removal of organs from the dead for transplant.

Reform Judaism has rejected a belief in resurrection, removing references to it from prayer books and worship. This may be because there is very little detail regarding the afterlife in the Tanakh. Many Reform Jews believe that the soul will live on after death, but not in a resurrected body.

A minority of Jews believe that, if someone has not completed all the mitzvot, their soul lives on in a different body (reincarnation), which is not the same as resurrection. All Jews tend to think that people should be more focused on living a good life than worrying about what will happen to them after death.

(d) 'Belief in the afterlife is not important in Judaism.' [15] (The answer below uses 2xPEE ideas in each of the two main viewpoints – this is a straightforward way of presenting a developed viewpoint that allows examiners to award higher marks.)

Orthodox Jews would disagree with this statement. One reason for this is because they believe in the resurrection of the dead. Maimonides said that belief in the resurrection of the dead was one of the 13 Principles of Judaism. This makes belief in this form of afterlife important, and is why Orthodox Jews often refuse to be cremated or to donate organs. Furthermore, they also believe that when they die they will be judged by God. The idea of God as a judge comes from the Tanakh, and Jews celebrate a Day of Judgement each year at Rosh Hashanah. Since Jews believe they will face judgement by God that will affect how they spend their afterlife, this must in turn mean that belief in the afterlife is important.

Reform Jews would agree with this statement. One reason for this is they think it is more important to focus on the here and now. Reform Jews believe that what will happen in the future can only be known by God, and so humans should just focus on leading a good life now by completing mitzvot from the Torah. If our focus should be on this life, this means worrying about the afterlife is not important. Moreover, there is very little focus on the afterlife in the Torah. While the Torah mentions a place called Sheol (which is seen as a physical place where the dead dwell), it's not described in detail or referred to much. Since the Torah is the most important of the Jewish scriptures, the lack of detail in it about *Olam Ha-ba* ('the world to come') suggests belief in the afterlife is not important.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the agreeing viewpoint weak - just because focusing on the here and now may be more important than focusing on the afterlife, it doesn't mean belief in the afterlife isn't important at all. I find the disagreeing viewpoint strong because Maimonides is a respected rabbi, and if he says belief in the resurrection of the dead is a key principle of Judaism then it must be important.

6.1 - Orthodox and Reform synagogue services



- Prayers can be said anywhere in Judaism and are seen as a bridge between God and humans
- Prayer is so important that a whole part of the Talmud (called *Berachot*) is based on prayer
- Observant Jews will pray before performing mitzvot, upon seeing unusual things (like rainbows) and before going to bed
- Three main types of prayer are praise, thanksgiving and requests, with examples of each found in the *siddur* (Jewish prayer book)
- Communal worship at the synagogue is especially valued because it encourages less selfish prayer and creates a more spiritual experience
- Shabbat services at the synagogue take place on Friday night, with two more on Saturdays (am+pm) - the a.m. service includes the Shema+Amidah
- Compared to Orthodox services, Reform services use less Hebrew, while references to angels, bodily resurrection and a personal Messiah are absent
- Men and women sit together in Reform synagogue services, but separately in Orthodox ones, while females can read from the Sefer Torah in Reform synagogues, whereas in Orthodox synagogues only males can
- The Amidah (a.k.a. *HaTefillah* - 'The prayer') is the 'standing prayer' and is the core of every Jewish worship service
- It features 18 blessings and contains all three types of prayer (see above)
- It's recited in silence and concludes with a request for peace
- Symbolic steps are taken at the beginning and end of the prayer to symbolise entering and leaving the presence of God

Possible/past exam questions:

- (c) Explain why prayer is important in Judaism. [8]
- (b) Describe how Jews pray at the synagogue. [5]
- (c) Explain how worship in Orthodox and Reform synagogues is different. [8]
- (b) Describe what happens during the Amidah. [5]

(c) Explain why prayer is important to Jews. [8]

One reason why prayer is important to Jews is because a section of the Talmud is dedicated to it. For example, the section called Berachot is all about prayer. Since the Talmud is an important source of authority for Jews, having a section of it dedicated to prayer shows the importance of prayer.

Another reason is because it's seen as a bridge between God and humans. Through prayer, people can praise God, ask him for things or offer him thanks. This brings humans closer to God, which is why it's important to a religious group like Jews.

A third reason is because prayer can help Jews to think about the needs of others. Communal prayer at the synagogue is especially valued because it encourages less selfish prayer and creates a more spiritual experience. Since many mitzvot relate to acting for the needs of others, prayer that focuses on communal needs are also important.

(c) Explain how worship in Orthodox and Reform synagogues is different. [8]

One difference between Orthodox and Reform synagogue worship relates to seating. In Orthodox synagogues, men and women are seated separately (e.g. women sitting in a balcony section) because the *Talmud* says this helps both to concentrate on worship better. In Reform synagogues, men and women sit together because there is more of an emphasis on equality in Reform Judaism.

Another difference also relates to women. In Orthodox synagogues, women are not allowed to worship with the *Sefer Torah* (the scrolls with the *Torah* handwritten on them) because it is not traditional for them to do so and the *mitzvot* in the Torah do not require them to. In Reform synagogues, women can read from the *Sefer Torah* because the reasons they once didn't come from a different time when women weren't seen as equals.

A third difference is in the use of Hebrew. In Orthodox synagogues, Hebrew is used more to reflect the language that the Torah was written in. In Reform synagogues, there is less Hebrew and greater use of the language of the congregation so that people can better understand what is being said.

(b) Describe what happens during the Amidah. [5]

During the Amidah (literally meaning 'standing' and sometimes called *HaTefillah*), Jews stand to show that they are in God's presence. It features 18 blessings that reflect three different types of prayer (praise, requests and thanksgiving of or to God). It can be said alone or in a group, and in both cases is recited in silence. If it is said communally, though, the prayer leader (cantor) will repeat the words aloud with the group responding 'Amen' to each blessing. The Amidah ends with a request for God to 'bring peace to us and all of the people, Israel.' This is said while taking three steps backward, bowing to both sides and then taking three steps forward, symbolising retreat from God's presence.

6.2a - Worship in the home/Shabbat



- For Jews, home (not just synagogue) is a place for worship
- Former chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks emphasised the importance of the home by describing it as the place 'where one generation passes on its values to the next'
- The modeh ani is said upon waking, and the Shema is said 3 times a day
- The mezuzah is a scroll with the Shema on it and is kept in a small case attached to door posts at the front/inside the house (but not bathroom)
- Often Jews will touch these cases as they pass by them and then kiss their fingers as a reminder to live according to the words of the Shema
- The siddur is a prayer book that guides Jews in prayer at home + synagogue
- It's considered holy - if it falls, it will be lifted and kissed by way of respect
- Shabbat is important for Jewish families to come together each week
- 'Keeping' Shabbat follows one of the Torah's Ten Commandments, as well as God's example of resting on the 7th day in the Genesis creation story
- Shabbat starts around sunset on Friday - the woman of the family lights two candles before the family dines together
- This meal (prepared before Shabbat starts because work on the Shabbat - including cooking - is forbidden) includes blessings and symbolic challah bread
- Saturday is when Jews would go to synagogue as a family (Orthodox Jews often walk as driving or using electricity is seen as work)
- Shabbat ends with a ritual that involves lighting a havdallah candle, sharing wine and sniffing at a sweet-smelling spice box

Past/possible exam questions:

- (b) Describe how Jews celebrate Shabbat. [5]
- (c) Explain why the home is important in Judaism. [8] **2018 exam Q!**
- (c) Explain ways in which Jews worship in the home. [8] **2020 exam Q!**
- (c) Explain how Jews show the importance of Shabbat. [8] **2023 exam Q!**
- (d) 'Shabbat is the most important celebration for Jews.' Discuss this from various viewpoints. **2019 exam Q! (See also 6.7 and 6.8 to find ideas for disagreeing.)**
- (d) 'The synagogue is more important to Jews than the home.' Discuss this from various viewpoints. **2021 exam Q! (See also 6.1 and 6.3 to find ideas for agreeing.)**

(c) Explain why Shabbat is important in Judaism.

One reason why Shabbat is important in Judaism is because it is mentioned in the Ten Commandments. In Exodus, God gives the instruction to remember Shabbat and keep it holy. Since keeping the *mitzvot* is an important part of Judaism, Shabbat is therefore important.

Another reason is because it is a time for rest and for family. In Genesis, God rests on the seventh day, so Jews do too. Away from school and work, families can spend time and relax together, with the shared Shabbat meal a particularly important celebration.

A third reason is because it is the most spiritual time of the week. Observant Jews 'keep holy' the Shabbat by going to synagogue, allowing them to gather as a community in worship of God. This helps Jews with their spiritual development and may make them feel closer to God and other members of their community.

(d) 'Shabbat is the most important celebration for Jews.' Discuss.

Some Jews would agree with this statement. One reason is because Shabbat is mentioned in the Ten Commandments. In Exodus, God gives the instruction to remember Shabbat and keep it holy. Since keeping the *mitzvot* is an important part of Judaism, and the Ten Commandments are seen as the most important mitzvot, Shabbat may be seen as the most important celebration for Jews. Furthermore, Shabbat is a time for rest and for family. In Genesis, God rests on the seventh day, so Jews do too. Away from school and work, families can spend time and relax together, with the shared Shabbat meal making it a particularly important celebration.

Some Jews would disagree with this statement. One reason is because they might think Rosh Hashanah is more important. Rosh Hashanah is a new year festival that celebrates the day when God made the world (as described in Genesis). Since we wouldn't be able to have a day of rest like Shabbat if God hadn't created the world in the first place, a celebration of the creation of the world must be more important. Moreover, some Jews might say that Pesach is more important. This is the Passover festival which celebrates the Israelites' escape from Egypt (as described in Exodus). If the Israelites hadn't escaped from Egypt, then the Jewish religion might have died out as the Israelites may have adopted Egyptian religious ideas.

In conclusion, I agree with the statement. I find the agreeing view strong because by being mentioned in the Ten Commandments, Shabbat is the only celebration mentioned in Judaism's most important set of rules. I find the disagreeing view weak because Rosh Hashanah and Pesach are only celebrated once a year, whereas Shabbat is celebrated every week. Something that you are supposed to do every week is more important than something you only do annually.

(c) Explain why the home is important in Judaism.

One reason why the home is important in Judaism is because it is where children are brought up. Former chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks said the home is 'where one generation passes on its values to the next'. So the home is an important place for the continuation of Judaism.

Another reason is because it is a place of worship. At home, Jews will say the *modeh ani* when rising and the *Shema* (from Deuteronomy) three times a day. Since worship is important to Jews, the home is important.

Thirdly, the home is where families gather for key Jewish celebrations. For example, Jews celebrate Shabbat (the day God rested in Genesis) with a special meal involving blessings and symbolic *challah* bread. Thus the home is an important place for remembering and celebrating significant events in the Jewish calendar.

6.2b - Items worn for worship



- The *kippah* is a skullcap worn by all men and married women as a symbol of Jewish identity and respect to God
- Some Jews wear them most of the time; others just for worship
- A *tallit* is a male prayer shawl with lots of fringes (*tzitzit*)
- The *Torah* (Numbers 15:37-41) gives instructions to wear clothing with fringed corners
- *Tallit* have 613 fringes (*tzitzit*) as a reminder of the 613 *mitzvot*
- The *tefillin* is made up of 2 boxes attached to a long strap worn around the arms and head
- The boxes contain passages from the *Shema*
- One box is bound to the head as a reminder to serve God with the mind (e.g. by developing good thoughts)
- The other box, worn on the arm, should lean towards the heart as a reminder to serve God with the heart (e.g. through kind acts)
- Some (e.g. Reform Jews) think that women should be able to wear the *tallit* and *tefillin* because women should be allowed to do whatever men do, plus the instruction in Numbers to wear *tallit* doesn't say it's only for men
- The *Talmud* describes a daughter of King Saul wearing *tefillin*, but the *Mishnah* states women don't have to do this
- Maimonides said women could wear *tzitzit*, but not recite the blessing with them
- Some (e.g. Orthodox Jews) object to women wearing these things because it's like cross dressing (forbidden in the *Tenakh*) and is seen as women trying to draw attention to themselves

Strengths (+) /weaknesses (-) of arguments for/against women wearing items for worship:

+ The argument that women should be allowed to do what men can could be seen as strong because the Genesis creation story describes men and women both being made in God's image, so both are equal

- The argument against women wearing worship items because the *Mishnah* states they don't have to could be seen as weak because not having to do something is not the same as not being allowed to do something (students aren't banned from reading for more than 20 minutes per night just because they don't have to)

Past/possible exam questions:

(b) Describe two religious items worn for Jewish worship. [5] **2021 exam Q!**

(d) 'Items for Jewish worship should only be worn by men.' Discuss. [15]

(d) 'Items for Jewish worship should only be worn by men.'

Some Jews, such as Orthodox Jews, would agree with this statement. This is because *tallit* and *tefillin* are traditionally worn by males, and cross dressing goes against traditional Jewish teaching. For example, in the *Tanakh*, men are forbidden from wearing skirts. Many Orthodox Jews would apply the spirit of this rule to items worn by males for worship. Furthermore, the *Mishnah* shows that women don't need to wear *tefillin*. Berakhot 3:3 lists women, slaves and minors as exempt from *tefillin* and reciting the *Shema*. So for many Orthodox Jews, women would be drawing attention to themselves by wearing such things, which goes against Jewish teaching.

Other Jews, especially Reform Jews, would disagree with this statement. They might think that women should be able to do what men can. Also, the *Talmud* records how King Saul's daughter wore *tefillin* without causing upset, while the respected rabbi Maimonides said that women could wear *tzitzit* (part of the *tallit*) if they wished. Many Reform Jews believe, therefore, that there is nothing wrong with women wearing *tallit* and *tefillin*, and that if there was, this would have been made clear in the *Torah*'s instructions for wearing *tallit* (Numbers 15:38-39).

In conclusion, I would disagree with the statement. The argument that women are just drawing attention to themselves by wearing *tallit* and *tefillin* is very sexist - they could just want to wear them for the same reasons as men (i.e. to show devotion to their faith and to God). The argument that it's fairer to let women do what men can is stronger. This is because the *Torah* states in the Genesis creation story that God made both men and women in his own image, so they should be treated as equals.

(b) Describe two religious items worn for Jewish worship. [5]

One of the items worn for Jewish worship is a kippah. The kippah is a skull cap worn by men and married women as a sign of their Jewish identity and respect to God. Another item worn for worship would be a tallit. This is a prayer shawl with lots of fringes (tzitzit). The tzitzit are a reminder/representation of the 613 mitzvot in the Torah. The *Torah* (Numbers) gives instructions to wear clothing with fringed corners.

6.3a - Features of a synagogue

- Synagogues have various designs but all have certain common features
- All have no images of living things because of they're seen to break one of the Ten Commandments
- All have an 'ark' (*aron hakodesh*), which is a kind of closet to house the *Torah* scrolls
- It is the most important place in a synagogue and is opened when important prayers are said (e.g. during the days between *Rosh Hashanah*+*Yom Kippur*)
- All synagogues have *Sefer Torah* (scrolls with the books of the *Torah* handwritten on them) which are their most sacred contents
- In Orthodox synagogues, women can't worship with *Sefer Torah*
- They're wrapped in silk or velvet when not used to show their importance
- The *Torah* is read from the *bimah*, which is platform/stand
- In Orthodox synagogues, the *bimah* is usually in the middle so the rabbi faces the congregation...
- ...whereas in Reform synagogues everyone sits together and the *bimah* (combined with the ark) is at the front
- The eternal lamp (*ner tamid*) hangs by the ark and is kept constantly burning because the Israelites were told to keep a lamp burning 'from evening to morning before the LORD' (Exodus 27:21)
- It symbolises (i) the menorah (7-branched lamp) that was kept burning in the ancient Jerusalem Temple; and (ii) God's eternal presence
- Men and women are seated separately in Orthodox synagogues because the *Talmud* says this helps both to concentrate more on their worship
- Both should remain close to the ark, though, so the separation is often created by a curtain or through balcony seating
- Men and women sit together in Reform synagogues

Possible exam questions:

- (b) Describe two features of a synagogue. [5]
- (c) Explain some of the differences between Orthodox and Reform synagogues. [8]

(c) Explain the differences between Orthodox and Reform synagogues.

One difference between Orthodox and Reform synagogues relates to seating. In Orthodox synagogues, men and women are seated separately (e.g. women sitting in a balcony section) because the *Talmud* says this helps both to concentrate on worship better. In Reform synagogues, men and women sit together because there is more of an emphasis on equality in Reform Judaism.

Another difference also relates to women. In Orthodox synagogues, women are not allowed to worship with the *Sefer Torah* (the scrolls with the *Torah* handwritten on them) because it is not traditional for them to do so and the *mitzvot* in the *Torah* do not require them to. In Reform synagogues, women can read from the *Sefer Torah* because the reasons they once didn't come from a different time when women weren't seen as equals.

A third difference is the location of the *bimah*. In Orthodox synagogues, this platform is in the middle so that the rabbi can face the congregation. In Reform synagogues, everyone sits together and the *bimah* is kept at the front so that it is nearer the ark (*aron hakodesh*).

(b) Describe two features of a synagogue. [5]

One feature of a synagogue is the seating. In Orthodox synagogues, men and women are seated separately because the *Talmud* states that this helps both to concentrate more on their worship. The separation is often created by a curtain or through balcony seating. Another feature is the eternal lamp (*ner tamid*) that hangs by the ark and is kept constantly burning. This is because the Israelites were told to keep a lamp burning 'from evening to morning before the LORD' (Exodus). It symbolises the menorah (7-branched lamp) that was kept burning in the ancient Jerusalem Temple.

6.3b – The Roles of a Synagogue



- Synagogues are not just places of Jewish worship, although this is their most well-known function
- As a house of prayer (*beit tefilah*), it is the place the Jewish community gathers to worship, especially to observe the Exodus commandment 'keep holy the sabbath'
- Since some prayers can only be said in the presence of a *minyan* (ten adult men), in practice they are only generally said at the synagogue
- Synagogues are also a house of study (*beit midrash*) where holy texts are kept and studied and where children receive basic religious education
- Children preparing for their bar/bat mitzvah will learn Hebrew at the synagogue and there is usually a well-stocked library of texts to support study
- Synagogues also serve as a kind of Jewish community centre where social events are run and important matters are discussed
- The community role of the synagogue also comes through in its charity work, with money collected there to be used to help the poor and needy
- A big challenge facing British synagogues is that of small memberships who may not be able to afford to maintain the building
- Also, because Orthodox Jewish law forbids motorised travel on Shabbat, synagogues need to be located in Jewish neighbourhoods so people can walk to them

Past/possible exam questions:

- (c) Explain why the synagogue is important in Judaism. [8] **2019 exam Q!**
- (d) 'The most important role of the synagogue is as a place of worship.' Discuss this from various viewpoints. [15] **2023 exam Q!**
- (d) 'The synagogue is more important to Jews than the home.' Discuss this from various viewpoints. [15] **2021 exam Q! (See also 6.1 and 6.2)**
- (d) 'You have to go to the synagogue to be a Jew.' Discuss this from various viewpoints. [15] **(See also 6.1)**

(d) 'You have to go the synagogue to be a Jew.' [15]

Many Jews would agree with this statement. One reason is because the synagogue is a Jewish place of worship (*beit tefilah* - 'house of prayer'). Many Jews would regard attending synagogue as the way to observe the *mitzvot* to keep Shabbat holy. Since this *mitzvot* is one of the Ten Commandments from Exodus, and these are the rules that God set for the Jewish people as part of his covenant with them, attending synagogue for worship would be seen as essential to being a Jew. Furthermore, a synagogue is a *beit midrash* (house of study). At the synagogue, children can learn Hebrew in readiness to read from the Torah for their Bar (or Bat) Mitzvah, while everyone is welcome to study the sacred texts (e.g. the *Torah*) which are central to Jewish identity. Since learning about their faith is an important part of being Jewish, this is another reason why many Jews would say going to the synagogue is essential to being Jewish.

Some Jews, especially secular Jews, would disagree. They might argue that being a Jew is more a cultural than religious thing. For example, they might say that they are Jews by heritage and upbringing rather than by synagogue attendance. Since they think 'Jewishness' is more of an identity than a religious description, they might reject the idea that you have to go to synagogue to be a Jew. Moreover, some religious Jews might also argue that while it is good to go to synagogue, it is not always possible. For example, some Jews might not be well enough to attend, while Orthodox Jews who live far away from a synagogue may not be able to make Shabbat services due to the rule against motorised travel on that day. Jews in such circumstances might argue that worshipping at home is an acceptable alternative to going to the synagogue and does not stop them from being a Jew.

In conclusion, I would mostly agree with the statement. I find the disagreeing view weak because, while I agree that you could feel Jewish because of your upbringing and culture rather than your religious beliefs and practice, I think 'being a Jew' means following Jewish rules. I'd agree that when it is not possible to attend synagogue this doesn't stop you from being a Jew, but choosing not to go is different. I find the agreeing view strong because I think being a Jew means believing in and following Judaism - other than in exceptional circumstances, this would involve attending synagogue.

(c) Explain why the synagogue is important in Judaism. [8]

One reason why the synagogue is important in Judaism is because it is a Jewish place of worship (*beit tefilah* - 'house of prayer'). Many Jews would regard attending synagogue as the way to observe the *mitzvot* to keep Shabbat holy. Since this *mitzvot* is one of the Ten Commandments from Exodus, and these are the rules that God set for the Jewish people as part of his covenant with them, attending synagogue for worship would be seen as essential to being a Jew.

Secondly, a synagogue is a *beit midrash* (house of study). At the synagogue, children can learn Hebrew in readiness to read from the Torah for their Bar (or Bat) Mitzvah, while everyone is welcome to study the sacred texts (e.g. the *Torah*) which are central to Jewish identity. Since learning about their faith is an important part of being Jewish, this is another reason why many Jews would say going to the synagogue is essential to being Jewish.

Thirdly, synagogues act as a kind of Jewish community centre. At the synagogue, various social events take place there and charitable works (e.g. supporting the poor) are organised there. Since looking after the needy is a *mitzvah*, this aspect of the synagogue adds to its overall importance.

6.4 - Birth ceremonies and Bar/Bat Mitzvah



- Jewish children usually receive their name at the first public gathering in the synagogue after their birth
- In modern times, a celebration called a *brit bat* has been introduced by some Reform Jews to welcome Jewish girls into the covenant
- Boys undergo a circumcision ritual called a *brit milah* when they're 8 days old
- The boy is placed on a cushion on an empty chair (called Elijah's chair because it's believed the spirit of the prophet Elijah visits every circumcision) and is circumcised in front of a *minyan* (ten Jewish men)
- This is in keeping with instructions from the *Torah* which formed part of the covenant between God, Abraham and his descendants (Jews), and so is therefore one of the *mitzvot*
- As such, circumcision is a mark of a boy's Jewish identity, as is the receiving of a Hebrew name that's used in synagogue and on formal occasions
- Traditionally, only men attended *brit milah* ceremonies, but Reform Jews encourage all family members to be present regardless of gender
- Unlike in Orthodox Judaism, Reform Jews allow female circumcisers (*mohelet*) as well as male ones (*mohe*)
- At age 13, Jewish boys have a coming-of-age ceremony where they become *bar mitzvah* ('son of the mitzvah [Jewish duties]')
- The ceremony involves reading a portion from the Torah, for which the boy will have spent time learning some Hebrew
- The ceremony marks a boy's entry into Jewish adulthood, requiring him to observe all mitzvot (inc. wearing tefillin) and allowing him to be part of a minyan
- *Bar mitzvahs* take place in a synagogue on the first Shabbat after a boy's 13th birthday
- They are witnessed by friends and relatives and usually celebrated with a party afterwards
- In Reform Judaism, girls aged 12 have an equivalent to the above called a *bat mitzvah* ('daughter of the mitzvah') after which she can lead prayers in the synagogue and read from the Torah
- Orthodox Jews do not have *bat mitzvahs* because females don't have to fulfil the same religious duties as males
- Orthodox Jewish girls have a *bat chayil* ('daughter of worth') ceremony instead
- This usually involves a synagogue service followed by the girl giving a presentation of some things she's learned studying Judaism

Past/possible exam questions

- (b) Describe two features of a Bar Mitzvah ceremony. [5] **2020 exam Q!**
- (b) Describe two features of a Brit Milah ceremony. [5] **2023 exam Q**

(b) Describe two features of a *bar mitzvah*. [5]

One feature of a *bar mitzvah* (a ceremony takes place in a synagogue on the first Shabbat after a Jewish boy's 13th birthday to mark his entry into the covenant God made with Moses and the Israelites in the Torah) involves the boy reading. The boy is called up to the *bimah*, from where he recites a blessing on the *Torah* before reading a passage from it (the boy will have spent time learning Hebrew to be able to do this). Another feature involves the boy putting on his tefillin for the first time. This is a strap with two boxes containing the Shema (a prayer from Deuteronomy).

(c) Explain why a *brit milah* is an important Jewish ceremony. [8]

One reason why a *brit milah* is an important Jewish ceremony is because it is a family occasion. While it was traditionally only attended by men, the event is celebrated by Jewish families, with females increasingly attending the ceremony itself in Reform Judaism. Since family is so important in Judaism, ceremonies like a *brit milah* that bring families together are also important.

Secondly, a *brit milah* follows an instruction from the *Torah*. In Genesis, God tells Abraham that through all generations, every male should be circumcised at eight days old as a sign of the covenant between him and Abraham (and Abraham's descendants). Therefore a *brit milah* is important because it is a sign of an agreement made with God.

Thirdly, a *brit milah* reinforces a boy's Jewish identity. During the ceremony, the boy is given his Hebrew name to be used in the synagogue and on formal occasions. This, in addition to his circumcision, is a distinctive mark of a boy's Jewishness.

6.5 - Marriage and Mourning Rituals



- MARRIAGE is holy (*kiddushin*) and referenced in the Torah creation stories
- God commands humans to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1) and describes how man and wife unite to 'become one flesh' (Gen. 2)
- Grooms sign a *ketubah* (contract) promising to support their brides
- The main part of a wedding takes place under a *chuppah* (a 4-sided, open shelter symbolising the Jewish home the couple will create)
- Under the *chuppah*, blessings are said during the kiddushin part of the wedding
- The groom gives the bride a ring and says, "Behold, you are consecrated to me by means of this ring according to the rituals of Moses and Israel" (the ring is round, symbolising (love's) eternity)
- At the end of the ceremony, the groom stomps on a glass as a reminder of (a) the fragility of marriage; or (b) the Jerusalem Temple's destruction
- Some Reform synagogues perform same-sex weddings, but Orthodox synagogues do not as homosexual activity is forbidden in the *Torah*
- MOURNING: If possible, a person's last moments are spent reciting the Shema
- The burial society (*Chevre Kadisha*) attached to the synagogue prepares the body for burial by washing it and wrapping it in plain white gowns
- Corpses are carefully treated as bodies are souls' earthly containers and so deserve dignity
- The *onan* (chief mourner) arranges the funeral and burial and is spared from all non-burial related *mitzvot* until after the burial
- The corpse should not be left alone as a mark of respect for a body created in the image of God (Genesis 1)
- Funerals (often involving Psalms) are simple, as are coffins - this is to show rich and poor are alike in death
- Burials are much more common than cremations in Judaism and involve reciting mourning prayers and the *kaddish*
- The first week after the burial is called *shiva* (meaning '7'), during which mourners stay indoors and are visited by relatives and synagogue members
- During *shiva*, some mourners sit on low stools and all mirrors are covered, while a candle is kept lit day and night to represent the deceased's soul
- *Shloshim* is the first four weeks of mourning, during which parties and hair-cutting are avoided
- Before the 1st anniversary of the deceased's death, a ceremony to unveil the tombstone is held, by which Jews leave stones rather than flowers (just as Abraham did at the place where his wife Sarah was buried)
- On each anniversary of the deceased's death, a *yarzheit* ceremony is held - prayers are said and a candle is lit for 24 hrs

Past/possible exam questions (with model answers)

(b) Describe a Jewish marriage ceremony. [5] (2022 exam question)

A Jewish wedding will feature a *chuppah*. This is an open, four-sided shelter under which the main part of the ceremony takes place. The *chuppah* symbolises the Jewish home that the couple will build together, where they will hope to 'be fruitful and multiply' (a purpose of marriage identified in the Torah). The ceremony also involves the giving of a ring. The groom places this on the index finger of the bride's right hand as it's believed this finger is connected to the heart. The unending, round shape of the ring symbolises the eternal love the couple should have.

(c) Explain why mourning rituals are important in Judaism. [8]

One reason why mourning rituals are important in Judaism is because they help to keep the memory of the deceased alive. For example, candles representing the deceased's soul are kept lit during *shiva* and at annual *yahrzeit* ceremonies. Proverbs 20:27 describes the soul as 'the candle of the Lord', and these candle-lighting rituals help to remind Jews of their dead loved ones.

Secondly, mourning rituals are a way of showing respect to the deceased. Burial societies (*Chevra Kadisha*) take care of dead bodies when preparing them for burial, while efforts are made to ensure the dead person is never left alone. These respectful gestures are important because bodies are made in God's image (Gen. 1) and are the earthly containers for souls.

Thirdly, mourning rituals give mourners a chance to properly grieve. For example, the chief mourner (*onan*) is spared the obligation of observing most *mitzvot* to allow them to focus on funeral arrangements, while there is no expectation for mourners to leave the house during *shiva*. These mourning rituals spare mourners from having to 'carry on as normal', recognising that life is not normal when grieving.

6.6 - The Torah and Daily Life



- The Torah is only one part of the Jewish Bible (albeit the most important one), which is called the *Tenakh*
- The Tenakh also includes the *Nevim* (prophets) and *Ketuvim* (holy writings)
- The *Talmud* combines the *Mishnah* and *Gemara* - it is also an important source for Jews as it helps to explain the Torah and is used in worship
- Food laws are one of the most significant aspects of the Torah for daily life
- At the start of the Torah, meat is forbidden to humans (Gen. 1:29), but after the Flood, God allowed Noah and his family to eat meat
- Leviticus 11:1-23 lists foods that are acceptable (*kosher*) and forbidden (*treifah*)
- Forbidden meats include: shellfish; fish without fins and scales; many birds; and animals that don't chew the cud or have completely parted hooves
- Tolerated meats require all the blood to have been drained to be kosher - a *shochet* is a person who carries out the slaughter in a kosher way
- Meat and milk products cannot be eaten together as Exodus says not to boil a kid in its mother's milk
- Jews who keep kosher often separate their kitchens into dairy sections and meat sections to help keep to this rule (fruit and vegetables are parev – neutral – and can be eaten with anything)

Arguments for/against Jews having to keep kosher, and their strengths (+) and weaknesses (-)

- * Orthodox Jews would say Jews do have to keep kosher because kosher rules come from the Torah
- + A strength of this is that the Torah is seen by many Jews as the eternal, perfect word of God...
- ...others might say it also contains the ideas of the writers, so its rules reflect their ideas more than God's
- * Some Reform Jews might say it's unrealistic to expect Jews to keep kosher in modern western society
- + A strength to this is that there is a lot of advertising of non-kosher foods, and it can be hard to keep kosher when eating out...
- ...but many big supermarkets now have kosher aisles, while you could keep kosher by being vegetarian (as the Torah suggests people were instructed to be before the Flood)

Past/possible exam questions:

- (c) Explain how Jews might keep the kosher dietary laws. [8] **2022 exam Q!**
- (d) 'You have to keep kosher to be Jewish.' Discuss. [15] **2018 exam Q!**
- (d) 'It is easy for Jews to keep kosher dietary laws in Britain.' Discuss. [15] **2020 exam Q!**

(d) 'You have to keep kosher to be Jewish.' [15]

Some Jews, especially Orthodox ones, would agree with this statement. They would argue that the rules about keeping kosher are found in the Torah. Leviticus 11 lists various forbidden (treifah) animals for food (e.g. pigs). Orthodox Jews will therefore avoid eating such animals. Furthermore, they would also not eat tolerated meats with dairy products. This is because elsewhere in the Torah (Exodus), there is a verse about not boiling a kid in its mother's milk. Since the Torah is seen by Orthodox Jews as the bedrock of Judaism, containing laws given by God to Moses for the Jewish people, they would say that all Jews are expected to live by its rules and keep kosher.

Secular Jews, and even some Reform Jews, might disagree with the statement. One reason is because they might say it's an unrealistic expectation. In a society where we eat a lot of food that we don't prepare ourselves, it's not possible to always know whether meals contain only kosher ingredients. It might also be hard when getting fast food to know whether animals for meat products have been killed in a kosher way (having all its blood drained and killed by a *shochet*) or cooked separately from dairy produce. Moreover, they might say being Jewish involves a variety of things. For example, they might say observing Shabbat or going through Jewish rituals like a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is what makes them Jewish. Keeping kosher may be considered by such Jews as an optional extra.

In conclusion, I would agree with the statement. I find the disagreeing arguments in the second paragraph weak. While I agree that our fast food industry (and the advertising of it) must make it hard to keep kosher, this isn't the same as making it unrealistic. I find the agreeing arguments in the first paragraph strong because there is a very straightforward way of keeping kosher, and that is to be vegetarian. This is because all plants (or combination of plants) are parev (neutral). Thousands of people in Britain today manage this, so it can't be unrealistic. Indeed, Genesis 1:29 points to mankind being vegetarian before sin corrupted the world, so perhaps this is a way Jews should be encouraged to keep kosher.

(c) Explain how Jews might keep the kosher dietary laws. [8]

One way Jews can keep kosher is by avoiding certain meats. In the Torah, food that is permitted to be eaten is identified especially in Leviticus 11. Not eating forbidden (treifah) animals (such as pigs) is therefore a way of observing Jewish dietary laws.

Another way is by only eating meat that has had its blood drained. Kosher laws demand this, and shochets are trained to ensure the animal is slaughtered in the right way. For example, the animal's throat has to be cut with a sharp knife.

A third way is by not mixing meat and dairy products. Exodus has a verse about not boiling a kid in its mother's milk, so meat and milk products are not eaten in the same meal. Jews who keep kosher often separate their kitchens into dairy sections and meat sections to help keep to this rule.

6.7a - Rosh Hashanah



ORIGINS AND MEANING OF ROSH HASHANAH

- Rosh Hashanah is a new year festival and, along with Yom Kippur, is one of the 'Days of Awe' (awe = amazement/wonder)
- Rosh Hashanah celebrates the day when God made the world (as described in Genesis)
- Leviticus also describes Rosh Hashanah as a day of rest, echoing the creation story
- The Talmud says it is the annual Day of Judgement (when God judges people for their deeds that year)

CELEBRATING ROSH HASHANAH

- It is celebrated with services in the synagogue, during which the shofar (ram's horn) is blown 100 times to represent the soul crying to be reunited with God
- The instruction to mark the day with trumpet blasts comes from the Torah (Leviticus 23:24)
- Home celebrations include eating apple dipped in honey and challah bread that, unlike the ones eaten for Shabbat, is round (a reminder of the year's cycle)
- Jews also observe the Tashlich ritual, where they throw crumbs into a river to show the hope that sins can be cast away
- There are 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur
- These are called the 'ten days of returning' during which Jews try to make amends for the previous year's sins

Past/possible exam questions:

- (b) Describe the origin and meaning of Rosh Hashanah. [5]
- (b) Describe how Jews celebrate Rosh Hashanah. [5]
- (c) Explain the importance of Rosh Hashanah for Jews. [8]
- (d) 'Rosh Hashanah is the most important Jewish festival.' Discuss. [15]

(b) Describe how Jews celebrate *Rosh Hashanah*.

One way Jews celebrate Rosh Hashanah is by attending a synagogue service at which the shofar horn is blown a hundred times. The sound represents the crying of the soul asking to be united with God, and follows an instruction from the Torah (Leviticus) to mark the day with trumpet sounds. Another way Jews celebrate the festival is by eating a round challah loaf. This loaf is shaped differently to the ones eaten on Shabbat because it represents the cycle of the year, and Rosh Hashanah is a new year festival.

(b) Describe the origins and meaning of *Rosh Hashanah*.

Rosh Hashanah is a new year festival. Along with Yom Kippur, it is also one of the 'Days of Awe' ('awe' meaning 'amazement' or 'wonder'). Rosh Hashanah celebrates the day when God made the world, an event described in Genesis. Leviticus also describes Rosh Hashanah as a day of rest, echoing the Genesis creation story. The Talmud says it is the annual Day of Judgement (when God judges people for their deeds that year).

(c) Explain the importance of *Rosh Hashanah*.

Rosh Hashanah is important because it is the 'Day of Judgement'. This festival is believed to be when God judges people for their year's actions, as indicated in the Talmud. This is important because hopes for a good afterlife in Olam Ha Ba ('the world to come') are linked to a good judgement from God.

Another reason why Rosh Hashanah is important is because it is a celebration of God's creation. It is seen as the anniversary of when God made Adam and Eve, as described in the Torah (Genesis 2). Jews think this is important because we wouldn't exist if God hadn't created us.

A third reason why Rosh Hashanah is important is because it is a new year festival. At home, Jews will have foods that include apples dipped in honey. This is important as it is symbolic of the hope for a sweet new year.

(d) '*Rosh Hashanah is the most important Jewish celebration.*' Discuss.

Some Jews would agree with this statement. One reason is because Rosh Hashanah is the 'Day of Judgement'. This festival is believed to be when God judges people for their year's actions, as indicated in the Talmud. Some Jews might say this makes Rosh Hashanah more important because hopes for a good afterlife in Olam Ha Ba ('the world to come') are linked to a good judgement from God. Furthermore, Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of God's creation. It is seen as the anniversary of when God made Adam and Eve, as described in the Torah (Genesis 2). Since we wouldn't exist if God hadn't created us, some Jews would say the celebration of creation is the most important festival.

Some Jews would disagree with this statement and suggest Shabbat is more important. One reason is because Shabbat is mentioned in the Ten Commandments. In Exodus, God gives the instruction to remember Shabbat and keep it holy. Since keeping the *mitzvot* is an important part of Judaism, and the Ten Commandments are seen as the most important mitzvot, Shabbat may be seen as the most important celebration for Jews. Moreover, Shabbat is a time for rest and for family. In Genesis, God rests on the seventh day, so Jews do too. Away from school and work, families can spend time and relax together, with the shared Shabbat meal making it a particularly important celebration.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the disagreeing view strong because by being mentioned in the Ten Commandments, Shabbat is the only celebration mentioned in Judaism's most important set of rules. I find the agreeing view weak because Rosh Hashanah is only celebrated once a year, whereas Shabbat is celebrated every week. Something that you are supposed to do every week is more important than something you only do annually.

6.7b - Yom Kippur



ORIGINS AND MEANING OF YOM KIPPUR

- Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year and the 'day of atonement'
- This idea is found in the Torah (Leviticus), which describes an ancient Yom Kippur custom of people laying their hands on a goat to symbolically place their sins on it before leading the goat out into the desert to carry their sins away
- Leviticus also forbids work on YK and says to practice self-denial, so for 25 hours, observant Jews deny themselves food, drink, perfume, sex and the wearing of leather shoes

CELEBRATING YOM KIPPUR

- The day before Yom Kippur, Jews remember the poor by donating to charity or (traditionally) bringing them chickens, which is seen as *tzedakah* (justice in action)
- Five prayer services are held at the synagogue over Yom Kippur, during which the doors of the aron hakodesh are opened to symbolise the gates of heaven being open
- Each of these five services has a prayer of confession to God
- One service has the story from the Tanakh of Jonah (because it shows God forgiving the sorry, and Yom Kippur is about atoning for your sins)
- Yom Kippur ends at nightfall with a blast of the Shofar
- Jews end their fast at this point, make havdalah candles and children begin building booths for Sukkot

Possible exam questions:

- (b) Describe the origins and meaning of Yom Kippur. [5]
- (c) Explain how Jews celebrate Yom Kippur. [8]
- (d) 'Rosh Hashanah is more important than Yom Kippur.' Discuss. [15]

(b) Describe the origins and meaning of Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year and the 'day of atonement'. This idea is found in the Torah. Leviticus describes an ancient Yom Kippur custom of people laying their hands on a goat to symbolically place their sins on it before leading the goat out into the desert to carry their sins away. Leviticus also forbids work on Yom Kippur and says to practice self-denial. For 25 hours, therefore, observant Jews deny themselves food, drink, perfume, sex and the wearing of leather shoes.

(c) Explain how Jews celebrate Yom Kippur. [8]

One way Jews celebrate Yom Kippur is by fasting. Leviticus gives instruction for Yom Kippur to be a day of self-denial. For 25 hours, therefore, observant Jews deny themselves food, drink, perfume, sex and the wearing of leather shoes.

Another way is by attending synagogue. Five prayer services are held at the synagogue over Yom Kippur, during which the doors of the aron hakodesh are opened to symbolise the gates of heaven being open. One service has the story from the Tanakh of Jonah (because it shows God forgiving the sorry, and Yom Kippur is about atoning for your sins).

A third way is through *tzedakah*. The day before Yom Kippur, Jews remember the poor, nowadays by donating to charity. Traditionally, however, the poor were remembered at Yom Kippur by bringing them chickens.

(d) 'Rosh Hashanah is more important than Yom Kippur.' Discuss.

Some Jews would agree with this statement. One reason is because Rosh Hashanah is the 'Day of Judgement'. This festival is believed to be when God judges people for their year's actions, as indicated in the Talmud. Some Jews might say this makes Rosh Hashanah more important because hopes for a good afterlife in Olam Ha Ba ('the world to come') are linked to a good judgement from God. Furthermore, Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of God's creation. It is seen as the anniversary of when God made Adam and Eve, as described in the Torah (Genesis 2). Since we wouldn't exist if God hadn't created us, some Jews would say the celebration of creation is more important than Yom Kippur.

Other Jews might disagree. One reason is because Yom Kippur is the 'Day of Atonement'. On this day, Jews can receive forgiveness from God, as emphasised by the reading from the book of Jonah in the synagogue. Some Jews might say that getting forgiveness from God makes Yom Kippur the more important festival for Jews as it brings them closer to him, and being close to God is the most important thing for a religious person. Moreover, Yom Kippur is seen as the holiest day of the year. Leviticus describes this day of holiness as one of fasting, rest and a chance to be cleansed of sin. If Jews consider the festival the holiest day, some would say that must make it more important than Rosh Hashanah.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the arguments for either festival being the more important weak as I think they are so closely linked, with judgement and forgiveness being flip sides of the same coin. I think this is shown by the fact that both festivals are among the 'Days of Awe' and connected by the 'days of returning' between each during which Jews try to make amends for the previous year's sins. They are also connected by the belief that on Rosh Hashanah God makes a record in the Book of Life and on Yom Kippur that book is sealed for the year. As such, I think they are both as important as each other.

6.8 – Pesach and Sukkot



- **SUKKOT** is a harvest festival of thanks to God that starts on the fifth day after Yom Kippur
- Sukkot remembers the 40 years the Israelites spent living in temporary shelters (sukkot) as they wandered the desert after their escape from Egypt, as described in the Torah
- Jews build 3-walled sukkah with a thin plant-covered roof to represent this time
- A *mitzvah* in Leviticus states that Jews must dwell in these shelters for a week - this can involve just eating meals in it
- Leviticus also mentions two objects associated with Sukkot: the lulav (a combo of palm leaf, myrtle and willow branches) and etrog (a fruit that looks like a lemon)
- Together, the palm, myrtle, willow and etrog are called the 'four species'
- One theory says each of the four species link to a different part of the body...
- ...Palm = spine (actions); myrtle = eye (how you see life); willow = mouth (your speech); etrog = heart (your emotions)
- Another theory says they represent different types of Jews...
- ...e.g. etrog = good Jews who know the Torah and keep the mitzvot, while palm = Jews who know the Torah but don't keep the mitzvot
- On each morning of Sukkot (apart from the Shabbat), Jews wave the lulav and etrog in six directions to show that God's power is everywhere
- **PESACH** (meaning 'Passover') celebrates the Israelites' escape from Egypt...
- ...and how the angel of death 'passed over' Jewish homes during the final plague (as described in Exodus)
- Yeast products (*chametz*) are removed from the house for Pesach to remember how the Israelites had to flee in a hurry (no time to allow bread to rise)
- After a synagogue service, Jews have a special 'Seder' meal at home
- The meal starts with the youngest child asking questions about the festival's origins, which (along with the symbolic elements) are then explained
- Meaning of Seder items: egg = new life after Egypt; lamb bone = sacrifice; salt water = tears of the slaves; bitter herbs = the bitterness of slavery; charoset (a paste made of wine, nuts and apples) = the cement slaves used to build bricks
- Matzah (unleavened bread) are also eaten as a reminder of fleeing Egypt without having time to wait for bread to rise (as described in the Torah)
- Four glasses of wine accompany the meal, though one is left by an open door to welcome the prophet Elijah, who it's traditionally believed will return at the end of Pesach to announce the coming of the Messiah

(d) 'Pesach is the most important festival in the Jewish year.' Discuss. (2022 exam Q!)

Some Jews would agree with this statement. One reason is because the Jewish religion might not exist without the event Pesach celebrates. As slaves in Egypt, the Israelites may have ultimately died out or become submerged by Egyptian culture. As such, their escape (described in Exodus) was a turning point in Jewish history. Furthermore, it was during Passover that Moses emerged as a leader for the Jews. Without Pesach, Moses would not have gone on to make a covenant with God, nor receive the Ten Commandments and the Torah from Him. Since these things - along with the Seder meal - are so central to Jewish faith and identity, Pesach is seen by some Jews as the most important of the festivals. For Orthodox Jews, Pesach might be particularly important as it's the festival at which they expect Elijah to return in order to announce the coming of the Messiah.

Other Jews would disagree. Some might say that Rosh Hashanah is more important than Pesach. This festival is believed to be when God judges people for their year's actions, and is also a celebration of creation (an event described in Genesis). Some Jews might say these things are more important than Pesach because they help you think about how to improve going forward rather than dwelling on the past. Moreover, some might say that Yom Kippur is the most important festival. Yom Kippur is the 'Day of Atonement' and one where Jews can receive forgiveness from God (the doors of the aron hakodesh are open at Yom Kippur to symbolise the gates of heaven being open). Some Jews might say that getting forgiveness from God makes Yom Kippur the most important festival for Jews as it brings them closer to him, and being close to God is the most important thing for a religious person.

In conclusion, I would disagree with the statement. I think the argument that Pesach is the most important festival because Jewish history turned on it is a weak one. I think this because Pesach wouldn't have happened if God hadn't created the world (as described in Genesis), and since that event is celebrated at Rosh Hashanah, that line of argument would suggest it is more important than Pesach. Furthermore, I think each festival marks a piece of the jigsaw that makes up Jewish history - all pieces of a jigsaw make up the whole, and no single piece is more important than the other.

(b) Describe the origin and meaning of Sukkot. [5] (2019 exam Q!)

Sukkot is a harvest festival of thanks to God that starts on the fifth day after Yom Kippur. It remembers the 40 years the Israelites spent living in temporary shelters (sukkot) as they wandered the desert after their escape from Egypt, as described in the Torah. Jews build a 3-walled sukkah with a thin plant-covered roof to represent this time. A *mitzvah* in Leviticus states that Jews must dwell in these shelters for a week, though this can involve just eating meals in it.

SUGGESTED VIDEOS FOR REVISION

Search the following on YouTube and click on the first result each search brings

Judaism Beliefs 9 Commandments Short 20

myjewishlearning afterlife

Judaism Beliefs and Teachings iStudyBells

Bimbam Marriage

(there are a number of relevant videos this search brings up)

Jewish clothing explained to Muslims

Bimbam brit milah

Bimbam brit bat

Bimbam bar mitzvah

Bimbam mourning rituals

Bimbam kosher

Bimbam Shabbat

Bimbam Rosh Hashanah

Bimbam Yom Kippur

Bimbam Lego Sukkot

Bimbam Passover

www.youtube.com/@rebeck9420 also has a lot of exam-specific Judaism revision videos