



Unit U2.9 Why is the Torah so important to Jewish people?

Enquiry Questions

- What do Jews believe about God and how do they remember these beliefs?
- What is a Sefer Torah and how is it used?
- Are there particular laws that Jewish people need to follow?
- What happens during worship at a synagogue?

What will I know by the end of the unit?

Many Jews treat the name of God with the greatest of respect – no one word or name can sum up everything that God is, so many Jews don't try to limit God in this way, often referring to God as simply 'Hashem', meaning 'The Name'. Some Jews do not write the name of God out fully, instead they put 'G-d' as a mark of respect, and so that God's name cannot be erased or destroyed.

The Shema is a Jewish prayer containing some key Jewish beliefs about God. The words about God in the Shema are so important to Jewish people that they also keep them in important places and remember them in a number of ways. These include putting a mezuzah on a doorpost or wearing tefillin when praying.

The Torah is a sacred text for Jews and includes poems, commandments and stories. Many Jews believe the words in the Torah are the word of God; that Moses received the Torah from God when he was on Mount Sinai. Every synagogue has a Sefer Torah. This is a Torah written out by a specially trained scribe onto a special scroll. The Sefer Torah is treated with great respect. It is not allowed to be touched by human hands. When it is being read, a special stick called a yad is used to point to the words. When the Torah is not being read, it is kept in a special cupboard, called an ark, at the front of the synagogue.

The Torah includes many laws. Some of these are about which foods may or may not be eaten and how they should be prepared. These are called the laws of kosher. These include that meat should be from animals with split hooves and which chew the cud, fish should have fins and scales, no eating shellfish, no eating insects, dairy and meat should not be eaten together. Not all Jews follow the kosher laws.

People go to the synagogue to worship but also to study. Many synagogues are also community centres where local Jewish people can meet and take part in different activities and events. The services are led by a rabbi or a worshipper.

Key Vocabulary

Judaism, Jew, special, prayer, respect, Hashem, Shema, mezuzah, tefillin, Torah, commandments, synagogue, Sefer Torah, scroll, yad, kosher, rabbi