

# Beliefs about God

## objective

to understand Jewish beliefs about God

## glossary

Creator  
Free will  
Orthodox Jew  
Shema  
Ten Commandments



**A** This is the most important belief in Judaism – the **Shema**.

God gives people **free will** – We are free to decide whether or not we follow the rules that God sets. Those who do will be rewarded, and those who do not will be punished.

God the **creator** – God made everything that exists, the earth, the planets and all the universes. God made them out of nothing. God continues to create every single day as new life appears on earth. 'In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate' (Genesis 1:1).

God knows everything – God knows what happened in the past. He knows exactly what is going on everywhere at the moment and what will happen in the future.

God cares – God looks after his creation. He provides everything it needs to survive. He loves and protects the people he made.

**B**  
**One God – There is only one God who cannot be divided into parts like a father or a son.**

God gives people rules to live by – God has shown people the correct way to lead their lives.

God is a spirit – God does not have a body or gender like us, although it is customary to refer to God as He, using a capital letter as a sign of respect. God is a spirit that is everywhere and in everything. His greatness can be seen in the wonders of nature. 'His glory fills the world' (Isaiah 6:3).

God is powerful – God can make things happen if he wants to. He is stronger than anything else that has ever existed or ever will exist.

God has revealed himself to humanity – This happened once in ancient times when God descended on to Mount Sinai.

God is outside of time – Nothing made God because he had no beginning. He will not die because he has no end. God is active in the world today.

Diagram B shows the basic Jewish beliefs about God. Any one of these ideas is mind-blowing! When they are all put together, it is very hard to get an idea of God in your mind.

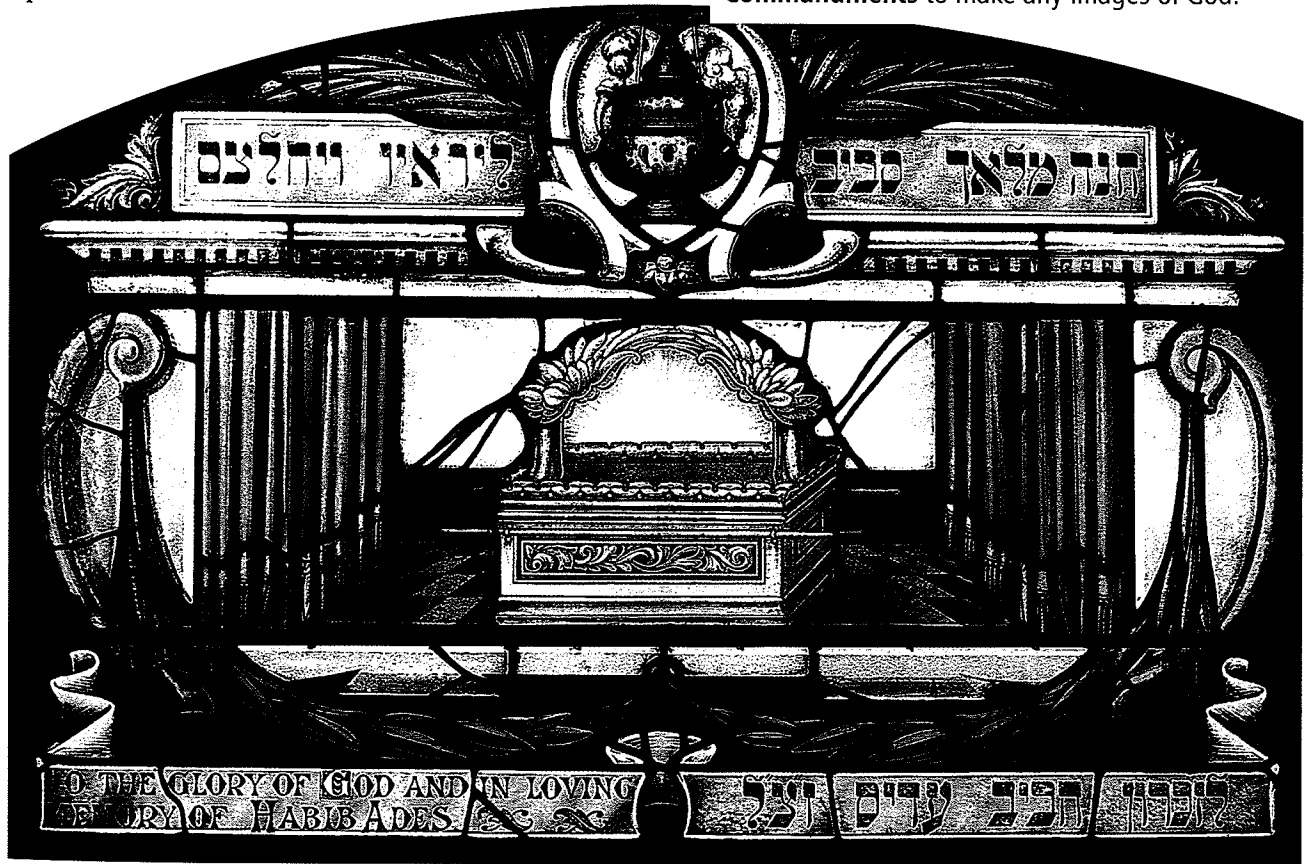
Jews believe that, although God is a unique and powerful being, it is still possible for people to have a personal relationship with him. They believe they can get closer to God through prayer and reading the words he handed down to them in the holy scriptures.

It is important to remember that Jews believe God is such a holy being that it is wrong to attempt to draw pictures of him. For some Jews, it is also offensive to even write his name in full, so you may well come across 'G-d' in some books. This is because books are written on paper which can easily be destroyed or thrown away. **Orthodox Jews**, who follow God's rules as closely as possible, believe treating a piece of paper with the name of God on in that way is deeply offensive. You can probably understand this view if you think how upset you would be if a photograph of someone you cared deeply about was thrown in the mud and stamped on.



- 1 Design a poster to display some of the different aspects of God given on these pages. To do this without causing offence to Orthodox Jews you will need to use symbols that represent these different aspects. You could draw them or cut them out of a magazine. For instance, you might choose a picture of hands cradling something as an example of God caring.
- 2 What *three* questions would you like to e-mail to God who knows everything?
- 3 Imagine you are in charge of a school. You have the power to make rules; to put pupils in detention or exclude them; and to sack teachers who do not do their job properly. Describe what sort of head teacher you would be and how your school would be run.

**C** This is a stained-glass window from a synagogue in Manchester. It portrays the story of the travelling Ark of the Covenant but you will notice that God is not depicted in the picture. It is forbidden in the **Ten Commandments** to make any images of God.



# Beliefs about humanity

## objective

to learn what Jews believe about God's relationship with humanity and especially the Jewish people

## glossary

Covenant  
Mezuzah  
Moses Maimonides  
Noahide Laws

It says in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, that God created everything in six days. It also describes how on the final day, 'God created human beings, making them to be like himself' (Genesis 1:27). Humans were the highest point of God's creation and he was pleased with them. When it says humans are like God, Jews do not think this means people actually look like God. They think it means everyone has a spark of God within them and is capable of doing great things.

**B** This small box is a **mezuzah** case which is fixed to the door of a Jewish home. It contains a piece of parchment with the Shema prayer on it (you can read part of the Shema on page 30). The mezuzah symbolises the close link between God and his people.

'What are human beings, that you think of them; mere mortals, that you care for them?

Yet you made them inferior only to yourself; you crowned them with glory and honour.

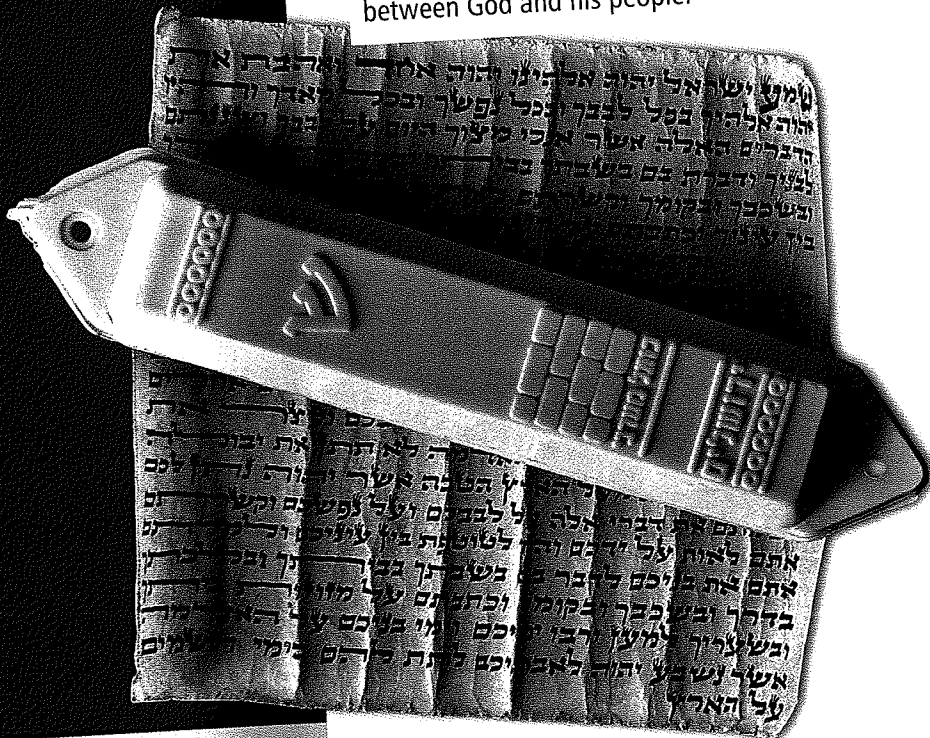
You appointed them rulers over everything you made...'

(Psalm 8:4-6)

One important gift Jews believe God gave people was free will. This means people can choose what they do. As the great Jewish teacher **Moses Maimonides** explained:

Man has been given free will: if he wishes to turn towards the good way and to be righteous, the power is in his own hands; if he wishes to turn towards the evil way and to be wicked, the power is likewise in his own hands.

To help people lead the sort of life that God wants, seven basic rules were handed down in ancient times. They are called the **Noahide Laws** because God gave them to Noah after the flood. These are considered basic rules that everyone on earth should live by, no matter what their religion. Later, God gave the Jews more detailed rules.



### The Noahide Laws

- 1 People should set up courts of justice.
- 2 They should not insult God.
- 3 They should not worship idols.
- 4 There should be no sexual misconduct.
- 5 It is wrong to murder.
- 6 Stealing is wrong.
- 7 Hurting animals is wrong.

The Bible makes it clear that everyone was created by God. This means everyone is equal no matter what race, colour or religion they are.

The book of Genesis also describes how God put humans in charge of the world telling them:

'Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control.'

(Genesis 1:28)

Controlling the planet sounds a huge responsibility for humanity but Jews believe we are not on our own. They say we are partners with God in caring for the world.

- 1 Complete a piece of writing that starts: 'If I ruled the world...'
- 2 It is easy to think of ways in which we harm the planet, but can you name *two* projects which bring good to the earth?
- 3 Plan *seven* basic rules that you think would make a good school, no matter what type of school it is.
- 4 What does the psalmist, whose words appear in A, say about the position of people in God's creation?

**D** A deal is a two-way agreement. People often shake hands as a sign they agree to the deal. The Covenant is an agreement between God and the Jews. Circumcision is the sign Jews agree with it.

## The Covenant

Jews believe that, although God is powerful, he made a special agreement with humanity. It is like striking a deal with someone. Each side agrees to do something; it is a two-way thing. In order to show both sides have agreed on the terms, people often shake hands.

The special deal God made with the Jews is called the **Covenant**. Below is what each side promised.

God promised:

- to look after the Jews
- to make them his chosen people
- to give them the land of Canaan, now called Israel.

The Jews promised:

- to love God
- to keep his commandments.

## The sign

In order to show they agreed with the terms God set out, the Jews were asked to circumcise all their males. This is a simple operation which involves removing the foreskin of the penis. It is still carried out today when a baby boy is eight days old.

The relationship between Jewish people and God is central to their religion. Jews do not think they are better than anyone else, it is simply that God has chosen them to have special responsibilities and these are not easy ones.

- 5 When Jews pray they often address God as 'Our Father, our King'. What does this show about their relationship with God?