

JUDAISM – PAST EXAM QUESTIONS AND MODEL ANSWERS

JEWISH BELIEFS

PART A QUESTIONS:

GENERAL TIPS ABOUT PART A OF THE QUESTION:

- This is always worth 8 marks so your answer must be detailed (aim for one page of A4)
- Always write in sentences and paragraphs
- It always asks you to describe which means giving key facts about the topic, in this case Jewish beliefs
- To get full marks use Jewish words (spelt correctly) and explain what they mean
- Try to include important quotes from the Torah e.g. the Shema
- Include as many facts as possible and for each fact explain what it means.

QUESTION:

Describe Jewish beliefs about the nature of God (8)

ANSWER:

Jews believe in one God, this is called monotheism. This key belief is expressed in the first sentence of the Shema, the special prayer Jews say every morning and evening; *Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.*

Jews believe God created the world out of nothing. They believe this because it is written in the Torah; *In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.* This shows that God is all powerful (omnipotent) and he created the world how he wanted it to be. Jews view creation as a continuous event, it only exists while God is pouring His creative energies into it. Jews praise God for creating the world. Jews believe God holds back His power to allow people to choose whether they will do good or evil. Sometimes God will use His power to step in and perform miracles.

Jews also believe God's knowledge is different from human knowledge. God is omniscient which means He knows everything. God is also omnipresent which means He exists everywhere.

These qualities show that God is very different from humans. He is holy, good and merciful and expects people to try to be the same as him, this is written in the Torah; *You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.* Jews believe God will answer their prayers but sometimes not in the way they expect. When Jews pray to God they can address him as *You*, this shows they believe everyone can have a personal relationship with Him. When they pray they can refer to God as father because they believe God will look after them, healer because they believe God has the power to heal them or king because they believe God rules over the kingdom He has created.

Jewish beliefs about the nature of God mean they have tremendous respect for Him and will only speak God's names in worship. Jews often refer to God as *Hashem*, a word that means *the name* and shows that Jews will not say His name unnecessarily.

QUESTION:

Describe Jewish beliefs about the special relationship they have with God (8).

ANSWER:

Jews believe God made a special agreement with them long ago which is still in existence today. In ancient times God appeared to Abraham (the founder of the Jewish religion) and told him about this special agreement which is called a covenant or promise. For Jews this means believing in one God and obeying his commandments. These commandments were given to Moses and are written in the Torah. In return God promised to make the Jews his chosen people and give them a land of their own. The Jews believe this land to be Israel.

The Torah which contains the early history of the Jewish race provides many examples of God looking after his chosen people and helping them out in difficult times. One example is when the Jews were slaves in Egypt, Moses turned to God for help and it was given. He said *Now I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians have enslaved, and I remembered my covenant.* God set the Israelites free from slavery and Moses led them to their promised land.

Jews take their side of the agreement very seriously and follow the commandments given to them by God. These include the Ten Commandments and other commandments like the food laws. They will also say sorry to God if they break these commandments and ask for his forgiveness.

Jews are also aware of the responsibilities of being God's chosen people which means they have to live as an example of how God wanted all people to live. They also believe Israel to be a place where every Jew should have the opportunity to live and believe this will happen when their Messiah comes.

As a sign the Jews agreed to the deal God demanded every Jewish baby boy to be circumcised when he is eight days old. This ceremony has been carried out ever since and modern Jews believe this connects them to their Jewish ancestors.

PART B QUESTIONS:**GENERAL TIPS ABOUT PART B OF THE QUESTION:**

- **This is perhaps the most difficult part of the question because you have to apply your knowledge on Judaism**
- **The question will always ask you to explain how a topic e.g. belief in God will affect the way Jews live their lives**
- **Do not be afraid to repeat the information from section A**
- **Give factual information on the topic but always provide EXAMPLES of how this affects a Jew's way of life**
- **A lot of the application is thinking about why Judaism is so important to Jews (in the same way as Christianity is important to Christians)**
- **Often the question will be about groups of Jews (the Jewish community) and why it is important they share their religion**
- **As this question is worth 7 marks detail is still important (aim for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page of A4)**
- **Try to provide a fact followed by an example**
- **Do not be afraid to explain a fact in detail if it is relevant to the question**
- **Keep using Jewish words and refer to the Torah (if possible give references)**

- It is very easy to make this answer too general, use examples and keep checking what you are writing is relevant to the question
- You cannot remember every fact relating to a particular question (not every exam answer is going to be the same) but you must revise as much as possible so the facts you do give provide enough detail to get full marks.

QUESTION:

Explain how keeping the Ten Commandments might affect the way Jews live their daily lives. (7)

ANSWER:

The Ten Commandments are part of the 613 mitzvot given to Moses by God. These are found in the Torah (meaning The Law) which describes how God gave these commandments to Moses, who taught them to the Israelites in the desert. The commandments are part of the covenant God made with the Israelites and Jews take them very seriously. Jews believe by obeying the commandments in their daily lives they are communicating with God.

Jews believe these commandments are universal which means they must be kept by every Jew, everywhere and at all times. This means Jews constantly refer to them to guide them in their daily lives. One example is the commandment that tells Jews *You must not use the name of the Lord your God without reason*. Jews will only pronounce God's names in worship and they often refer to him as *Hashem* which means the name we treat respectfully and do not pronounce unnecessarily. So Jews will be careful to address God in a way that shows their deep respect for him.

A lot of the commandments Jews think of as subject headings for other commandments. For example *Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy; on it you must not do any work*. Jews set aside the Sabbath as a special day (*Shabbat*) and follow the laws which forbid them to do any work. This is a special day of the week for all Jews and there are lots of rituals they enact to remind them of this.

Apart from specific commandments relating to God e.g. *You must have no other Gods beside me* the rest of the commandments form an ethical guide for Jews in their treatment of others throughout their life. Jews must *not murder, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear false witness* and *not covet* (desire things which are not theirs). Jews are also reminded of their responsibility to their parents; *Respect your father and mother*.

It is therefore impossible to separate a Jew from the ten commandments because their responsibility to follow these commandments means they become an integral part of their life, and many of the rituals and festivals relate directly to them. Their importance to the Jewish religion is shown by their prominent position in the Torah, read weekly in the Synagogue.

QUESTION:

Explain the role of the Torah in Jewish life. (7)

ANSWER:

Torah means *instruction* and is a guide for all areas of Jewish life. It is the collective name given to the first five books of the *Tenakh* (Hebrew Bible). It also means the Law because it describes how God gave the 613 commandments (including the Ten Commandments) to Moses who taught them to the Jews in the desert. These books (the Five Books of Moses) contain the commandments (*mitzvot*) and the ethical

ideas of the Jewish people, set in a historical framework. The Torah's words have been copied onto Jewish scrolls; *Sefer Torah* (the holiest object in the Synagogue). These are read weekly in the Synagogue on Shabbat and are a source of strength and inspiration for Jews. Jewish families will read the Torah as a printed version at home to remind themselves that the commandments are part of the *Covenant* that God made with the Israelites.

The keeping of the *mitzvot* influence every aspect of Jewish life e.g. prayer, festivals, food laws and are central to the ways Jews have lived in the past and continue to live today. You cannot therefore separate the Jewish lifestyle from the Torah because it is a response to the Torah e.g. Jews set aside a weekly day of rest called *Shabbat* in response to one of the Ten Commandments which instructs Jews to keep the Sabbath as a holy day and a day of rest. On this day they devote themselves to prayer and Torah study. The *mitzvot* in the Torah tells the Jews the jobs they are not allowed to do. Orthodox Jews who believe the Torah is the exact word of God will follow these *mitzvot* rigidly e.g. they will not drive on the Sabbath but reform or liberal Jews believe the Torah was inspired by God but written by men so they will interpret the *mitzvot* for the modern world and will not follow them as rigidly.

The fundamental role of the Torah in Jewish life is shown in the way it is introduced to Jewish children. They will read it as soon as they are able to read and it is every Jewish parent's wish their children will grow up to live by the Torah's teachings. It is the central part of the ceremonies that are part of Jewish life e.g. *Bar Mitzvah* (where a portion of the Torah is learnt and read out by a boy seeking to become an adult in the Jewish religion) and sections of it are written on scrolls as *mezuzah* which are put in cases and attached the doorpost of Jewish homes. Passages from the Torah are also written onto scrolls and put into the boxes called *Tefillin* that all adult male Jews wear. These are constant reminders to Jews of the importance of the Torah and the responsibility Jews have to live the Torah in their daily lives.

PART C QUESTIONS:

GENERAL TIPS ABOUT PART C OF THE QUESTION:

- **These questions are always in the form of a statement where you are asked about your opinion**
- **They are only worth five marks so you should write about ½ side of A4**
- **You can repeat information you used in parts a and b of your answer because one or both of them is often related to part c**
- **It is very easy to provide a lot of material that is not relevant by just writing about your views on a particular topic**
- **You must show your knowledge and understanding of the topic by providing Jewish opinions on a topic**
- **To get full marks you must give Jewish arguments for and against the statement**
- **These opinions have to be supported by relevant facts, general comments that do not relate to Judaism will not get you any marks**
- **Sometimes it easier to argue one side of the argument in detail, this is fine as long as you can give at least one argument for the other side to show that you have thought about different points of view**
- **Use words from the statement in your answer and this will help to make your answer more relevant**

- Use appropriate language to ensure your answer is in argument form e.g. on one hand, some Jews may say, it can be argued, a different view is etc
- Try to include an opening statement that sets the scene and provides structure to your answer and a summary at the end because it shows you have thought about different points of view
- Do not be afraid to quickly write out two columns (for and against) as a plan for your answer at the beginning
- If you are struggling to answer the question (because a lot of these questions are very general) go back to the key facts about the Judaism you know and try to use them to argue for and against the statement.

QUESTION:

All Jews should believe the same things and practise the same traditions.

Do you agree? Give reasons to support your answer and show that you have thought about different points of view. (5)

ANSWER:

In every religion there are different groups who interpret key elements of that religion differently and this is shown in the different ways they worship and celebrate festivals. Jews are slightly different because a person is Jewish if they are born Jewish and some Jews hold no religious beliefs (they are called *secular* Jews).

Amongst religious Jews, however, there are two main groups, the *Orthodox* Jews who try to follow the scriptures as strictly as possible and the *Reform* Jews who believe that Judaism is a living religion and should move with the times.

Just because these two groups do things differently it does not make them any less Jewish and they still see themselves as belonging to the Jewish family. There are similarities between the two groups in that the *Torah* is central to the way they practise their religion and they celebrate the same festivals and follow the same ceremonies that mark different stages of a Jew's life. So it can be argued that there is no problem doing things slightly differently because the fundamentals are the same.

On the other hand the different ways these two groups do things may create tensions e.g. an Orthodox Jewish girl may object to the way her coming of age ceremony is different to the Orthodox Boy's *Bar Mitzvah* and point to the *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony of a Liberal Jewish girl. Orthodox Jews may say that the real meaning of the Torah is being lost through reforming the old way of doing things and the link modern Jews have with their ancestors is made less important. Some Jews may say that different interpretations of Judaism encourages debate about the religion and helps Jews become more knowledgeable and informed about aspects of their religion.

In summary it is difficult for Jews to have the same opinions about every aspect of their religion because everyone will have a different interpretation according to their view point and this is human nature, but all Jews would probably agree that a belief in God and the *Covenant* is essential to being a Jew.

QUESTION:

Jews should fit in with their non-Jewish neighbours; they should not try to be different.

Do you agree? Give reasons to support your answer and show that you have thought about different points of view. (5)

ANSWER:

Judaism is seen as a living religion, this means that Jews cannot separate their religion from their way of life. This means that by practising different aspects of Judaism e.g. worship, festivals, ceremonies Jews are going to be different from their non-Jewish neighbours. Jews are proud of their religion and the fact God chose them to be his special people. They take the *covenant* they made with God very seriously and it is seen as a responsibility, so in some ways it would be impossible for Jews to fit in with their non-Jewish neighbours because just by following their religion they are being different.

Being a Jew, however, does not mean that you are totally different from your non-Jewish neighbour. The Ten Commandments form the basis of modern society and all members of society will see the importance of following them. Jews can therefore celebrate similarities with their neighbours and explain how their religion makes them different. Just because they are Jewish does not mean they will not fit in with their neighbours because society is filled with many different religions and races. It is important to respect individuality and learn why some members of society chose to live in a different way to others because this is the human condition.

Religion has an important role for people in society and every member of society has a right to follow the religion they choose and express their religious beliefs so society would argue against anyone having to fit in with their neighbours. Sentiments like the one in the statement may give rise to anti-Semitism and this has led to terrible persecution of Jews on the basis of their religious beliefs in the past e.g. the Holocaust.

PLACES AND FORMS OF WORSHIP

PART A QUESTIONS:

QUESTION:

Describe the inside of a synagogue. (8)

ANSWER:

The synagogue is the Jewish house of worship and Jews will use it to meet on *Shabbat* and for other important festivals and ceremonies. The layout of a synagogue is based on the original Jewish temple which was based on the Sanctuary built by the Israelites in the desert. Synagogues are always built facing Jerusalem where the Temple stood. A lot of the items found in the synagogue have special importance and reflect Jewish beliefs and practices.

The holiest area of the synagogue is the Ark (*aron hakodesh*) or sacred bookcase. It is a cupboard holding the Torah scrolls (*sefer torah*) which Jews believe contain the word of God. To show the importance of the scrolls the ark is in a raised position facing Jerusalem. A curtain is drawn across the closed doors of the ark

protecting them when they are not in use. Near the ark are a seat and reading stand for the rabbi and seats for special officials.

Above the ark hangs the eternal lamp (*ner tamid*). This light is kept burning to show the everlasting presence of God and reminds Jews of the menorah that burned in the original Temple.

Fixed to the wall above the ark are the Ten Commandments, the rules of life God gave to Moses on two tablets of stone in Hebrew.

In the middle of the Synagogue is a raised platform called a *bimah*. On it is a desk where the Torah scroll can be unrolled for reading. The *bimah* is raised to show the word of God is above people. It also makes it easy for people to see and hear what is being read.

In an Orthodox synagogue men and women will sit apart so they will not distract each other during worship, women sit in a gallery above or a separate section at the back and do not take an active part in the service.

In a Reform synagogue men and women sit together and take an equal part in the service.

Pictures of humans are never found in a synagogue because the second commandment says *do not worship idols*.

PART B QUESTIONS

QUESTION:

Explain how the objects found in a synagogue might help strengthen the faith of a Jewish community. (7)