

# Being Jewish in the 21st Century

**JEWISH  
MUSEUM OF  
AUSTRALIA**  
Gandel Centre of Judaica

Dear Teacher,

This new program replaces our program that was called the Ritual Reporter.

Being Jewish in the 21st Century is designed to explain the Museum's Belief and Ritual Gallery in a way that puts a realistic and contemporary face to the Jewish religion. Your students will have access to the photograph albums of 3 young Australian Jews who reveal their lives. Some of the photographs are of secular events such as playing soccer or netball and would connect to most young Australians. There are other photographs that reveal Jewish practice and identity. At the same time, there are questions inside the album which ask the student for greater detail which can be found by exploring the Museum's exhibits and or questioning their guide. Extension questions are provided which encourage the student to consider their own views and to reflect more deeply on the topic.

For your convenience, we have supplied suggested answers to the questions the students encounter in the photo albums. We hope that this will extend the activity into the classroom and be used as a starting point for further discussion.

This activity forms part of a standard program for secondary school students who visit the Jewish Museum of Australia.

If you have any further questions please email [J.better@jewishmuseum.com.au](mailto:J.better@jewishmuseum.com.au)

Kind Regards

**Jenny Better**

School Education Coordinator at Jewish Museum of Australia

## Important background knowledge

**Foundational text of the Jewish religion** is The Jewish or Hebrew Bible

- The first five books, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, comprise the **Torah** (also referred to in Jewish tradition as the Written Torah).
- According to rabbinic tradition, the Torah contains 613 commandments. Many of these only relate to a time when Judaism was a Temple based religion, but many others form the basis of contemporary Jewish religious life

**An oral tradition develops** alongside the Written Torah

- This is referred to as the **Oral Torah** which interpreted and elaborated upon the text of the Written Torah. For example, the Written Torah prohibits work on the Sabbath but does not define work, a concept which is discussed in considerable detail in the Oral Torah.
- The Oral Torah includes the debates and discussions of the Rabbis over many centuries from about 200BCE. These discussions and debates were first brought together in the **Mishna** (ca. 200). Continuing debates and discussions of the Mishna were compiled in the **Gemara** (ca.400 and 600). Together, the Mishna and Gemara make up the **Talmud**, regarded as the foundational text of the Jewish legal system. The Responsa literature (beginning in the late 7th century) comprises a body of written decisions and rulings given by rabbinic legal scholars in response to questions addressed to them. Today this continues to be the primary mechanism through which Jewish legal decisions are made.
- The 11th–12th centuries saw the beginning of the codification of Jewish law or **Halacha**.
- When rabbis today produce Responsa on questions of Jewish law, they draw on various codes of Jewish law, earlier Responsa and discussions and debates recorded in the Talmud

**Various Denominations** develop and during the 19th century, Judaism splits into a number of denominations

- **Orthodox Judaism** maintains the traditional Jewish belief that both the Written and Oral Torah are the divinely revealed word of God and cannot therefore be altered. Halacha is regarded as both authoritative and binding. Ultra-Orthodox and modern Orthodox Jews are distinguished by the degree to which they engage and integrate with the modern world, including such aspects as dress codes.
- **Conservative Judaism** does not adhere to the view that the Oral Torah is the actual revealed word of God. It thus regards Halacha as authoritative but not necessarily binding in every respect. There are situations in which particular aspects can (and sometimes should) be altered or discarded. However, it regards as authoritative and binding those aspects of Jewish law (e.g., observance of the Sabbath and dietary laws) which have played a positive role in the historical development of Judaism
- **Reform Judaism** (known as Progressive Judaism in Australia) emphasises the idea of individual autonomy. Whilst Halacha is not regarded as binding, in making personal decisions about Jewish observance Progressive Jews are encouraged to refer to Halacha as a source of guidance.

**Who is a Jew?**

- A Jew can be defined as someone who is born a Jew or who has converted to Judaism

**The question of Jewishness – What makes a Jew?**

- There are Jews who regard their Jewishness as synonymous with Judaism; in other words, they would define their Jewish identity in exclusively religious terms.
- At the other end of spectrum, there are Jews who reject all aspects of Jewish religious life and regard themselves totally as secular Jews.
- Between these extremes, Jews differ in the extent to which they see Judaism, the religious aspect, defining their Jewishness and Jewish identity
- The majority of Australian Jews would describe themselves as “traditional” but more in cultural rather than strictly religious terms
- Many (though not all) Jews would also describe themselves as **Zionist**; in other words, committed to a belief in the centrality of Israel to Jewish life.

Answers to the questions in the photo albums that students were assigned during their Jewish Museum visit

TOPIC	QUESTIONS	ANSWER
Prayer	Some people say their prayers every day. Do Jewish people pray alone or in a group? Find out something about Jewish prayers and what is the name of the special prayer one says when a close family member dies? (Prayer)	<p>Prayer is an important part of religious life. The religious obligation is to pray 3 times a day, morning, noon and night. This tradition dates back to the times of the ancient Temple where offerings were made 3 times a day. When the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70CE the sacrifices were replaced by communal prayer. Essentially the purpose of prayer is to serve as a reminder of the presence of God, to acknowledge God's providence, sanctify life and ask God for help, guidance and consolation. The daily prayers can be found in a Jewish prayer book called a <i>siddur</i>. There are certain prayers that are recited aloud, others are silent and others are sung. In the Jewish tradition, religious <b>men</b> (over the age of 13) will try to pray as part of a quorum of 10 men known as a <i>Minyan</i>. But if this is not possible then modified prayers can be said alone. In non-orthodox traditions, a quorum can be made up of ten men AND women. According to Jewish law, women are exempt from praying at prescribed times of the day, but are still encouraged to pray.</p> <p>A special prayer that is recited by people who are in mourning is called <i>Kaddish</i>. (pronounced "Kuddish")</p>
	Part of our weekly activities is a prayer session. How do Jewish people pray? (Prayer)	<p>Communal prayer can take place in a synagogue, but this venue is not compulsory. If religious Jews are away from their homes/synagogue, they will gather as a group to recite their prayers at the airport or at the office depending on where they are. The daily prayers can be found in a Jewish prayer book called a <i>siddur</i>. There are certain prayers that are recited aloud, others are silent and others are sung.</p>
	Sarah is looking forward to saying prayers with her friends at kinder. How do Jewish people pray and in what language? (Prayer)	<p>Some prayers are sung, others are read. Although prayers may be memorised, Jews are encouraged to read their prayers.</p> <p>Jewish people can pray on their own and as part of a group known as a <i>Minyan</i>, depending on the circumstances. A Rabbi is not needed to lead prayer. Community members who are able can do this.</p> <p>Prayer is almost entirely in Hebrew, the ancient language of the Bible, which unites Jews wherever they live. The prayers could be (depending on the tradition of the community) in Hebrew or the language of the country in which the people live.</p> <p>A Jewish daily prayer book is called a <i>siddur</i>. As part of their Jewish education children are taught to pray at a young age.</p>

TOPIC	QUESTIONS	ANSWER
<b>Birth</b>	<p>What is a Brit Milah? How would this ceremony be different if Josh were born a girl? <b>(Birth)</b></p> <p>Find out about the ceremonies that are connected to the birth of Jewish boys and the birth of Jewish girls. <b>(Birth)</b></p> <p>What do the naming ceremonies for boys and girls involve? When and where was Sarah given her name? <b>(Birth)</b></p> <p>How will Jessica be announced to the world and where will this take place? <b>(Birth)</b></p>	<p>Brit Milah refers to the ceremony that takes place 8 days after a boy child is born. It symbolises his covenant with God and involves the removal of the foreskin by a qualified practitioner known as a Mohel. This could be either a medical person or a skilled religious person or someone who is both. At this ceremony the child is blessed and also given his Hebrew and sometimes English names. Please note, that the health of the child is foremost and if the child is unwell then the ceremony is postponed. This practise dates back to Abraham the founding father of the Jewish people who according to Genesis 17, circumcised himself at the age of 40.</p> <p>Girls receive their names at the synagogue on the Sabbath after their birth. When the baby girl's father is called to the reading of the Torah he will reveal the name of the baby and it is announced by the prayer leader to the community, then she and the family are blessed. Some congregations and parents now have more formal naming ceremonies for their daughters.</p> <p>There is a special format for Hebrew names used in orthodox communities, this is as follows: <i>Name of the child</i> in Hebrew – <i>son of</i> – <i>Name of the father</i> in Hebrew. The same format works for girls and in some non-orthodox, egalitarian communities the mother's name is included. The Hebrew word for "son of" is <i>Ben</i>, the Hebrew word "for daughter of" is <i>Bat</i>. Eg Solomon son of David, Sarah daughter of Miriam becomes Solomon ben David, Sarah bat Miriam</p>

<b>Bar /Bat Mitzvah (Coming of Age)</b>	<p>What is a Bar Mitzvah and what does it signify? What does the Bar Mitzvah boy do? <b>(Bar Mitzvah)</b></p>	<p>Bar Mitzvah literally means son of the commandment and it represents the time when a boy is regarded as an adult in the religious sense. He undertakes to follow the commandments in his own right and can be counted as part of a minyan (quorum of 10 men) that is required for worship. At the Bar Mitzvah ceremony the boy is called to read from the Torah for the first time. This is a big moment in his and his family's life, and friends and family will come from around the world if possible to witness this great moment. In order to prepare, the boy will be learning to read from the Torah scroll in Hebrew and the tunes that are required for this task.</p>
	<p>What did Daniel have to do when he had his Bar Mitzvah? What is the biggest crowd you have ever made a speech to? <b>(Bar Mitzvah)</b></p>	<p>After the religious ceremony, it is quite common for there to be a party with food, and music, gifts for the young man. At his party he may make a speech discussing the lessons that can be learnt from the portion that he has read from the Torah.</p>
	<p>What did Sarah talk about during her Bat Mitzvah? Have you ever had to speak in front of a large audience? Explain <b>(Bat Mitzvah)</b></p>	<p>In Progressive Jewish congregations, girls may also read from the Torah. Amongst more traditionally observant families, the coming of age of a daughter is not publicly celebrated, whereas in other parts of the community, the girl will make a speech about the portion in the Torah that coincides with her 12th birthday. There is much greater flexibility as to how a Bat Mitzvah is celebrated; it is a more recent observance than a Bar Mitzvah. For a girl, this event will usually take place when she is 12 years of age and it too identifies the fact that in the religious sense the girl is now regarded as an adult and is responsible in her own right for carrying out the commandments. Like the boys, she too may have a party and receive gifts, and may make a speech at this celebration as well as in the synagogue.</p>

TOPIC	QUESTIONS	ANSWER
<b>Marriage</b>	Sarah just turned 23 and she's not sure if she wants to get married so she discussed this with her Rabbi. What is Judaism's approach to Marriage? <b>(Marriage)</b>	The Jewish religion regards marriage as an ideal state, where individuals find the partner that completes them. Traditionally the marriages are not only about love, but also emphasise respect and caring and creating a new family. The Jewish bride is protected in her marriage and what she can expect legally is outlined in the marriage contract.
	Sam has been told that his bride will walk around him seven times during the wedding ceremony. What does this symbolise? What other things happen at a Jewish wedding? <b>(Marriage)</b>	The marriage ceremony takes place under a canopy called a chuppah, under which the celebrant/Rabbi, the young couple and the bridal party stand. The canopy represents the home. The groom gives his bride a ring that he bought with his own money. * The bride circles the groom either 3 or seven times depending on her preference. The groom will break a glass by stamping on it. This represents the destruction of Jerusalem so, that on the happiest day of their life a young couple remember the destruction of the ancient Temple with sadness. On their wedding day, the bride and groom fast from sunrise until after the ceremony. Tradition has it that on their wedding day the bride and groom are like a king and a queen and the role of the guests is to treat them well, amuse them and participate energetically in the celebrations. *
	What is the Jewish view about Marriage? <b>(Marriage)</b>	The Jewish religion regards marriage as an ideal state, where individuals find the partner that completes them. Traditionally the marriages are not only about love, but also emphasise respect and caring. The Jewish bride is protected in her marriage and what she can expect legally is outlined in the marriage contract known as the Ketubah.  However it is possible to divorce should it turn out that a marriage is not working.
	David was told that he needed to wear strong shoes at the wedding so that he can break a glass. How and why does he break a glass? Find out about another Jewish marriage tradition. <b>(Marriage)</b>	The groom will break a glass by stamping on it, representing the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple. Thus, on the happiest day of their lives a young couple remember this event with sadness.  For details of other Jewish marriage traditions see * above.

TOPIC	QUESTIONS	ANSWER
<b>Death</b>	Josh's grandfather wanted to be buried in a Jewish way. What are some of the things that Josh should do in order to fulfil his grandfather's request? <b>(Death)</b>	Once a Jewish person dies their body is taken to the Jewish Funeral Society for preparation for burial. Before burial, the body is not left alone, with prayers and psalms recited in its presence. The body is ritually bathed by volunteers from the community and then dressed in a special simple garment for burial. Men and women wear a white garment – similar to a long nightie. In addition, men are wrapped in their prayer shawl (minus its fringes). Then the body is placed in a simple plain coffin and buried in a Jewish burial ground. The mourners are the parents, children, husband or wife, and siblings. The standard mourning periods are as follows. * 7 days of <i>shiva</i> – sitting on low chairs, covered mirrors, no work, no cooking, no washing. Visitors are encouraged to sit and talk about the deceased, to bring food for the mourners and to pray with the mourners 3 times a day which includes the special mourner's prayer called <i>Kaddish</i> . On day 8, people resume their normal lives minus music or entertainment, but with the 3 times daily prayer and the <i>Kaddish</i> recited until day 30. From day 30 a child who is mourning the passing of a parent will continue with the mourning standard of days 8 – 30 until the end of the year. It is at this time that the tombstone is placed on the grave and normality returns for all.
	Why was Sarah's uncle buried in such a plain coffin? <b>(Death)</b>  What sort of coffin was Sarah's uncle buried in? Why is it so plain? <b>(Death)</b>	Judaism is democratic in death – we are all considered equal. Rich and poor are buried in the same way wearing the identical garment in the same style of plain coffin.
	How many days will Josh and his family need to mourn the death of his Grandfather? What sort of coffin would he be buried in? <b>(Death)</b>	Josh's parent will be mourning for up to 12 months. Josh and the rest of the family depending on their relationship eg brother of the deceased will mourn as explained earlier (See *)

<b>Synagogue</b>	What is a synagogue and what role does it have in local Jewish life? <b>(Synagogue)</b>	The Synagogue is a Jewish place of prayer. There are no specifications as to how they are built. Some are big, others small, it all depends on the means and desires of the community. There are however 3 elements that are required in a synagogue; an eternal light that burns 24/7, a Torah and a table upon which to read the Torah, and a cupboard that keeps the Torah scroll (called an Ark). In addition it is common for synagogues to be orientated so that when worshipping Jews face towards Jerusalem, in Australia they may face north.  The synagogue is at the heart of religious and cultural life. Communities as they grow build a synagogue.
	What is a Synagogue? Where do you find them? <b>(Synagogue)</b>	There are many things that can happen in a synagogue, there could be religious lessons, lectures, concerts, prayer sessions, weddings – it is a place of gathering. In a synagogue you would find an eternal light, a Torah and a table upon which to read the Torah. Decoration would be geometric. In more traditional synagogues one would not be able to identify people or animals in the decor. They are oriented towards the direction of Jerusalem. Jewish people pray both sitting down or standing up so there are usually chairs or benches.
	Sarah had her Batmitzvah in her synagogue. Where do you find synagogues and what are they? <b>(Synagogue)</b>	The synagogue is at the heart of religious and cultural life. As Jewish communities grow they build a synagogue.

TOPIC	QUESTIONS	ANSWER
<b>Torah</b>	At school Josh learns things like maths, English and science. He also learns about the Torah. What is the Torah and what are the names of the 5 books it contains? <b>(Torah)</b>	The Torah contains the 5 books of Moses. The orthodox view is that the Torah was given to Moses, directly from God on Mt Sinai. This represents a covenant between God and children of Israel, who later became the Jews. It is because of this that Jewish people regard the Torah as the core of the religion. Jews are committed to following the laws that are contained in the Torah and this is what forms a Jewish life. In the synagogue the Torah is treated with the respect accorded to royalty.
	The whole community decided to produce a Torah in my Grandfather's honour. Who will write the Torah and what happens when it is finished? <b>(Writing the Sefer Torah) * Sefer = Hebrew for the word book</b>	The Torah is written on parchment by a sofer (scribe), a specially trained individual who is devout and knowledgeable in the laws governing the proper writing and assembling of a Torah scroll. When the Torah has been completed, there is a dedication of the Torah and a ceremony that welcomes it to the community. The Torah is paraded under the marriage canopy through the streets and into the synagogue. These are moments of great joy and celebration, there is singing and dancing.
	Who writes the Torah and what is it written on? <b>(Writing the Sefer Torah) * Sefer = Hebrew for the word book</b>	The Torah is written on parchment by a sofer (scribe). The parchment that is used is made from the skin of a kosher animal.
	The Jewish Bible is very famous, traditionally it is written in a scroll which is called a Torah. Describe how a Torah is produced and what it is written on? <b>(Writing the Sefer Torah) * Sefer = Hebrew for the word book</b>	The Torah is written on a scroll which is the way that things were written in ancient times. It was not until recent time that there was technology to create books. A quill is used and the sections are sewn together using the sinews from a kosher animal

<b>Kashrut</b>	What does kosher mean and what does this mean in terms of plates and cutlery? <b>(Kashrut) * Kashrut = Hebrew for the word Kosher</b>	The word <i>Kosher</i> means "fit" or "acceptable". Mainly it refers to food and indicates that it is prepared and cooked in a way that is compliant with the Jewish food rules. In terms of cutlery and plates, and also cooking utensils, there will be various sets designated for different types of food eg one set designated for eating/cooking meat foods, another designated as dairy, for eating/cooking dairy foods with yet another designated for foods that are declared parve- neither dairy nor meat.
	Glicks is a kosher bakery/cafe. What things would not be on a Glicks menu? <b>(Kashrut) * Kashrut = Hebrew for the word Kosher</b>	In a Kosher bakery or café, you would not find any foods that comprise non – kosher ingredients, eg prawns, pork, flake, or foods that combine dairy and meat in the same dish eg meat lasagne because this would not be acceptable according to the rules of Kashrut.
	What are some of the foods that wouldn't have been allowed at the birth celebration? <b>(Kashrut) * Kashrut = Hebrew for the word Kosher</b>	Foods that do not fulfil the requirements of Kashrut, eg pork, rabbit, kangaroo, crocodile, emu, prawns, flake, or foods that combine dairy and meat in the same dish, eg meat lasagne, or cream chicken.

<b>Rabbi</b>	What is a Rabbi? What is their role? <b>(Rabbi)</b>	The Rabbi is a teacher, one of the people, an ordinary Jew. The Rabbi has attained a very high standard of Jewish education and is expected to have a religious conviction. Thus, a Rabbi is expected to encourage faith, to teach the Torah and to act as a judge with regard to moral and religious matters and to encourage religious practice.
	At Sarah's naming ceremony, the Rabbi says a few prayers. What else do rabbis do? <b>(Rabbi)</b>	A Rabbi is expected to encourage faith, to teach the Torah and to act as a judge with regard to moral and religious matters and to encourage religious practise. They can also support a family in times of sadness and offer advice on key life decisions should the individual wish it.
	My family discussed what name to choose with the Rabbi. What is a Rabbi and what are some of the things that Rabbis do? <b>(Rabbi)</b>	The Rabbi is a teacher, one of the people, an ordinary Jew. The Rabbi has a certain standard of Jewish education and is expected to have a religious conviction. In this situation the rabbi would discuss the considerations for a child's name with the new parents, discovering if there are relatives that the child should be named after, or if there is a person in the relevant torah reading that could also suggest an appropriate name.