

Summary of Hebrew Religion and Judaism

Hebrew Religion

- 1 Ethical monotheism.
 - 2 God makes a covenant with the Hebrew people.
 - 3 He requires observance of his Law, the Torah.
 - 4 The Torah focuses especially on the Temple and ritual sacrifice.
 - 5 It also focuses on justice.
- ### Judaism
- 1 Judaism continues the Israelite conception of God.
 - 2 It transforms the conception of the Law to make allowance for the changed political circumstances following the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.
 - 3 Ritual sacrifices are eliminated.
 - 4 The synagogue system and rabbinic replace the Temple and priesthood.
 - 5 Its immediate basis is the Talmud rather than the Bible.
 - 6 Enlargement of the concept of Torah to include the Talmud.
 - 7 A religion of the individual and the family, and of everyday life, expressed in holy days, rites of passage, dietary laws, and the use of symbols in prayer.

* Exceptions must be made for the Kabbalah, which, like other mystical movements, has tended to regard the concept of personhood as too limited to apply to the divine reality, and to Recon-structionism, which has tended not to believe in a transcendent reality. Maimonides, the eminent medieval Jewish thinker, emphasized that we can know only what God is not, not what he is. It could perhaps be argued that it is just this discomfort with the personal conception of God that has made it difficult for these movements and thinkers to achieve full acceptance in the Jewish community.

Traditional faith of Judaism

Although the Jewish faith has never been enshrined in an official creed, its main outlines are sufficiently clear.

- The world is not the product of mere chance, but the deliberate creation of a supreme being, God.
- There is only one God. This fundamental conviction is expressed strongly in the Shema, a proclamation of faith: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."
- God not only brought the universe into being, but also sustains it in existence at each moment.
- God is not a material being, but spirit, that is, mind and will.
- God is supremely wise, good, and powerful.
- There is a natural moral law which is the expression of his will. To act contrary to God's will is sin (*bet, aberrant*).
- God has revealed his will additionally in the Torah.
- God acts constantly in human history, to guide and direct it according to his purposes, and to provide spiritual and material blessings to man.
- Because God is so far above men, however, there are severe limitations on the extent to which men can comprehend him.
- In the end the Jewish people will somehow be vindicated and liberated by God, in the Messianic Age, when a descendant of David will establish a perfect society.
- After death the individual will be judged by God, and rewarded or punished.

An ethnic religion

Although Judaism is a monotheistic religion, and considers that its God is the one true God of all men, it is also an ethnic or national religion, not a universal one. In the ancient world, it is true, Judaism for some centuries had universalistic aspirations, for to the polytheistic culture of the Roman Empire it took the message of a single God, coupled with high ethical ideals. But from the time the empire converted to Christianity, Judaism has been content to be the religion of the Jewish people, and no longer aspires to be a religion for all mankind. It is focused on the unique identity of the Jewish people as the people dedicated to preserving the worship of the one true God. Thus Judaism maintains the concept of the "Chosen People"; this is understood, however, to imply more of obligation than of privilege, namely the obligation to carry out the divine will, and to be a light to the Gentiles, those who are not Jewish (*kiddush ha shem, "sanctify the Name"*).

"If you can find humor in anything, you can survive it." - Bill Cosby

A cartoon I once saw humorously illustrated the results of cutbacks. Pictured were Mutt... without his longtime companion Jeff, the three horsemen of the Apocalypse, and Snow White and the six dwarfs. It might be amusing to laugh at cutbacks in cartoons but it possible to do so in the real world? I contend that you not only can but that it is essential if you are to deal with the current workplace environment without defeat. When you can find humor in trying times, one of the first and most important things that happens is that you see your problems in a new way—you suddenly have a new perspective of them. As a result of this new vantage point, you may also see new ways to deal with them.

There is an amusing tale that I sometimes tell in my workshops which illustrates this point. It comes from the Jewish tradition. The story says that the world will come to an end in three days. In three days, everything will be deluged by water and everyone will drown. After hearing this, the Pope goes on television and says, "Don't worry, if you all turn to Christ, you will be saved." The head of the Zen community also goes on TV and says, "Don't worry, if you put your faith in Buddha, you will be saved." Then the head Rabbi of Israel appears on TV and says, "Don't worry folks, we have three days to learn how to swim under water."

Humor can be one of our best survival tools. Victor Frankl knew this when he was incarcerated in a German concentration camp. Humor gave him hope for the future and something to look forward to each day.

It can do the same for you. At work, when you are forced to do more with less humor can give you the upper hand. You may not be able to change a situation but with humor you can change your attitude about it. As Frankl noted, "The last of human freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances...."

Your attitude are the crayons that color your world. Constantly color your picture black and your picture will always be bleak. Try adding some bright colors to the picture by including humor and your picture begins to fight up.

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* Jewish Samurai [An all time great!]

Back in the time of the Samurai there was a powerful emperor who needed a new head Samurai so he sent out a declaration throughout the country that he was searching for one. A year passed and only 3 people showed up. a Japanese Samurai, a Chinese Samurai and a Jewish Samurai.

The emperor asked the Japanese Samurai to come in and demonstrate why he should be head Samurai.

The Japanese Samurai opened a match box and out pops a little fly. Whoosh goes his sword and the fly drops dead on the ground in 2 pieces.

The emperor exclaimed: "That is very impressive!" The emperor then asked the Chinese Samurai to come in and demonstrate.

The Chinese Samurai also opened a match box and out pops a fly. Whoosh whoosh goes his sword. The fly drops dead on the ground in 4 pieces. The emperor exclaimed: "That is really very impressive!"

The emperor then had the Jewish Samurai demonstrate why he should be the head Samurai.

The Jewish Samurai also opened a match box and out pops a fly. His flashing sword goes whooooooosshhhhh whooooooosshhhhh whooooooosshhhhh whooooooosshhhhh whooooooosshhhhh. A gust of wind fills the room, but the fly is still alive and buzzing around.

The emperor, obviously disappointed, asks: "After all of that, why is the fly not dead?"

The Jewish Samurai smiled, "If you look closely, you'll see that the fly has been circumcised!"

When Ole quit farming and moved, he discovered he was the only Lutheran in his new town of all Catholics. That was okay, but the neighbors had a problem with his barbecuing beef every Friday. They were not allowed to eat red meat on Fridays, but the tempting aroma was getting the best of them. Beside themselves, they got together and confronted Ole.

"Ole," they said, "since you are the only Lutheran in this whole town and there's not a Lutheran church for many miles, we think you should join our church and become a Catholic." Ole thought about it for a minute and decided they were right. Ole talked to the priest, and they arranged it.

The big day came, and the priest had Ole kneel. He put his hand on Ole's head and said, "Ole, you were born a Lutheran, you were raised a Lutheran, and now," he said as he sprinkled some incense over Ole's head, "you are a Catholic!"

Both Ole and the neighbors were happy. But the following Friday evening, the aroma of grilled beef still wafted from Ole's yard. The neighbors went to talk to him about this, and as they approached the fence they heard Ole saying something strangely familiar to the steak: "You were born a beef, you were raised a beef, and now" he said as he sprinkled salt over the meat, "you are a fish!"