

POPULATION IN THE WORLD:

~13 million

POPULATION IN CANADA:

~329,000 or 1% of Canadians

HISTORY:

Over 3,500 years ago in the Middle East, Judaism came into being; it is known as the oldest of the three Abrahamic faiths (the other two are Christianity and Islam). The Prophet Moses received the Torah on behalf of the community, providing them with a charter for living as God's people. Through Moses as an emissary, God freed the Jewish community from enslavement in Egypt and led them to the Holy Land, an event referred to as the Exodus. Since then, the Jewish community has spread around the world, even in the presence of severe persecution, including the Holocaust, during which 6 million Jews were murdered.

Judaism embraces the diversity of the manifold communities and cultures of Jewish people, whose native tongues include Hebrew, Yiddish and Ladino. As in other faiths, there are many communities of interpretation in Judaism, including individuals who consider themselves Jewish but do not necessarily observe Jewish law. Some sources categorize four branches of Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist.

FORMAL PLACE OF WORSHIP:

Synagogue

SACRED SCRIPTURE(S):

Torah

- The Torah, part of the Hebrew scriptures, includes 613 *mitzvot* or divine commandments given to the Prophet Moses; specifically, the Torah refers to the five books of the Bible called the Pentateuch, and generally it refers to all of Jewish sacred literature, learning and law, and Judaism as a way of life.
- The Ten Commandments are the most well-known of the *mitzvot*; they teach about ethical living.
- The compilation of the oral Torah is referred to as the Talmud. The Talmud includes discussions around the Jewish legal system (the Way). The Jewish legal system is known as *halacha*.

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES:

- Judaism is a monotheistic faith: followers believe that there is only one God.
- Judaism can be understood as a triad of interconnected reference points: God, Torah and the people of Israel or the Jewish community (these symbols are interdependent but can vary in emphasis).
- Each individual has a personal and direct connection with God, and this is based on a covenant to uphold God's laws in daily life.
- In the covenant, the symbol of God represents the vertical relationship that human beings have with their creator, the symbol of Israel represents the horizontal relationship among members of the Jewish community, and the Torah represents the vertical and horizontal relationship as it outlines the way of living for an entire people in the context of their connection with God.
- Some sources identify social justice (understood particularly as respect for the dignity of others) as a central dimension of the Torah.

OTHER IMPORTANT TRANSLATIONS:

- *Torah* is a Hebrew word referring to instruction or teaching.

REFERENCES:

- BBC Religions – Judaism: bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism
- Harvard's The Pluralism Project – Judaism: pluralism.org/religion/judaism
- Statistics Canada – National Household Survey: statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130508/dq130508b-eng.htm
- Project Interfaith – Jewish: projectinterfaith.org/page/jewish
- On1Foot – Jewish Texts for Social Justice: on1foot.org