**Make Your Own Textbook: Tenants of Judaism**

**Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Hour \_\_\_\_\_**

**Directions:** You have been asked by a textbook publisher to act as their consultant on a chapter to be called “Tenants of Judaism.” Your job is to come up with a chapter (two page minimum) using the information below. Remember that text books include key terms, graphics et cetera. Consult a textbook for inspiration.

**The Main Teachings and Beliefs**

There is no formal creed that all Jews are obliged to accept, but certain basic teachings can be found in all periods of Jewish history, though they may not always have been understood in the same way. Foremost among these is the Shema, so called because it is the first word of the Hebrew sentence in Deuteronomy, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." Since ancient times this sentence has been recited by Jews every day in their prayer. It is spoken again before retiring and is the last utterance of one's life. It expresses the Jew's faith in a Creator of all that is. It is a way of saying that life is worth living no matter what difficulties have to be faced. It says that God is One and thereby rejects a belief in no god at all or a belief in two gods or three or many. This belief in one God is called monotheism.

**A Covenant with God**

According to the Bible an event took place at Mount Sinai that shaped the whole course of Jewish history. It was there that Moses — the leader of the Jewish people — spoke to the Children of Israel, in God's name, and presented to them all the laws by which they were to live. Among those laws are the Ten Commandments and many other laws and regulations covering every aspect of life for both the individual and society. According to the Bible, the Jewish people, or Children of Israel as they were then called, entered into a covenant, or agreement, with God, through which they were pledged to keep God's law. God, in turn, would look after them, making their land fertile and securing them from their enemies.

Because of the covenant, the Jewish people looked on themselves as a chosen people, not chosen for special advantage, but chosen for special responsibility: to obey God's law and to serve God always. So strong was this idea that even when the sacred city Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., and again by the Romans hundreds of years later, the people did not rebel against God but said it was because of their sins that tragedy had come upon them. They looked on their exile from their land as punishment for their failures, not the failure of their God to care for them. In modern times this idea was modified some by different forms of Judaism.

**A Jew's Responsibility**

It is the responsibility of the Jew to bear witness to God in everything he or she does, not only to observe the religious customs and practices of Judaism but to be examples of proper moral behavior. Almost a hundred years before the beginning of the Christian era, a great rabbi named Hillel was approached by a pagan who wanted to be taught all of Judaism in a brief statement. "What is hateful to you, do not do to another. This is the law, all the rest is commentary. Now go and study," was Hillel's prompt reply.

Failure to obey the law is a sin. To recover from sin, a person may repent, which in Hebrew means "to return" and try again. Repentance, therefore, is a way of recovering from doing something wrong and must be followed by an act of atonement, a way of making up for one's errors. So important is it for the Jew to be "at one" with God that the most important day of the religious calendar is called the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).’

**Life After Death**

In its thinking about the future, Judaism presents a wide variety of beliefs. In biblical times there was no belief in any real life after death. The dead went to a place called Sheol for an eternity of silence and sleep. There was a belief that someday all the world would accept God and would be united in keeping God's law. This joyous future was to be in this life on earth: Shortly before the beginning of Christianity, the idea of a life after death gained popularity and has remained a part of traditional Jewish belief to this day, although the nature of that life after death is not presented in any detail. The idea of a coming great day is still held by most Jews but is interpreted in several ways.

**Sacred Writings**

Foremost among the sacred writings of Judaism is the Bible, a collection of books composed over a period of a thousand years, from the 1100's to the 100's B.C. It is what Christians called the Old Testament, although the arrangement of some of the books is different in the Hebrew Bible. Of especial importance is the Torah, comprising the Five Books of Moses — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy — the main source for Jewish law.

Since the Bible was understood to contain all the laws necessary for personal and community life, it was continually studied and explained to make it applicable to change. Originally these explanations and comments were handed down orally from one generation of rabbis to the next. In the second century of the Christian era, this "Oral law" was arranged into a code and written down in a work called the Mishnah. Once written down, this code required interpretation and development, these interpretations, when joined with the Mishnah became known as Talmud’s. These great collections of Jewish law and lore became the basis for all later development of the Jewish tradition.

**Worship**

The worship of God is an essential part of the Jewish faith. Originally, this worship was expressed in both prayer and sacrifice. Sacrifices were offered during the four centuries of its existence in the Temple of Jerusalem built by Solomon and after that, for another five centuries, in the Temple built after the return from Babylonian exile. In addition to sacrifices, administered by the priests, psalms and prayers were sung by the Levites, a tribe that since earliest times had been charged with the supervision of Jewish worship.

While the Temple was still in existence, a popular institution emerged that became a house of prayer, a place of study, and also a place for community gathering. This institution came to be known as the synagogue, and when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70, it became the leading institution in Jewish life. It is found everywhere today and is the central institution of every Jewish community. It is the forerunner of the Christian church and the Muslim mosque.

The religious leader of the Jewish community is called a rabbi, which means "master" or "teacher." The position of the rabbi derives from Jewish tradition, which qualifies the rabbi to respond to all matters of Jewish law and ritual. Upon the completion of study, the rabbi is ordained by other rabbis who have supervised the instruction. In this way, the office has maintained a continuous history of more than 2,000 years. Until 1972 all rabbis were men, but by 1986 most sects allowed female rabbis.

The leader of a congregation in prayer need not be a rabbi but may be a member of the congregation with a knowledge of the prayer service or liturgy. When the knowledge necessary for leading a worship service is accompanied by a fine voice and a familiarity with the musical tradition of the synagogue, such a person is called a cantor. Until recent times all cantors were men, but now female cantors serve.

Jews are expected to pray three times each day: in the morning, afternoon, and evening. The prayers are read from a prayer book and may be recited either privately or with a congregation, which requires a group of at least ten worshipers. A Traditional service, which would count only males, is entirely in Hebrew. Women may now be counted and the prayers may contain varying amounts of English.

**Sabbath and Holy Days**

Since biblical times the Sabbath has been a day of utmost importance. It was set aside because God completed the creation of the world in six days and made the seventh day a day of holiness and blessing. It is also a reminder that the Children of Israel were once slaves in the land of Egypt and that Jews were therefore obliged to free their servants and slaves from labor on the Sabbath. The day is also referred to as a "sign of the covenant" between God and the Children of Israel. While no work is to be done on the Sabbath, rest is not its main purpose. Its goal is holiness, and the day is set apart in each week for prayer and study.

The Sabbath begins with the setting of the sun on Friday evening. Following the service of welcome for the Sabbath, a Sabbath meal is shared by members of the family. Shortly before sunset, Sabbath candles are lit, generally by female members of the family. The Sabbath meal begins with a kiddush (the sanctification of the Sabbath over a cup of wine) and the breaking of a special loaf of bread called a hallah. Following the meal, grace is recited and Sabbath songs are sung.

The Torah Scroll is read on Saturday morning and again at the Sabbath afternoon service. The day is ended with a special service of Havdalah ("distinction"), which notes the difference between the sacred and the profane, between the Sabbath and the ordinary days of the week.

In the fall of the year the High Holy Days are observed. They are days of reverence and awe and a time to look into one's heart and to begin a new religious year as a better person. The first of these days is Rosh Hashanah ("new year"), and it is followed on the tenth day by Yom Kippur ("Day of Atonement"). To assist in the act of repentance on Yom Kippur, it is customary to fast during the whole 24-hour period. According to the tradition, these days provide forgiveness for sins against God, but sins against others can be forgiven only when one has repaired the damage that has been done.

Passover comes in the spring and commemorates the Exodus from Egypt (when Moses led the Jews out of slavery) and the beginning of the planting season. Seven weeks later the Festival of the First Fruits is observed and is called Shabuoth. The third festival, called Sukkoth, is observed at the time of the last harvest. The last day of the Sukkoth Festival is called Simchat Torah ("Rejoicing of the Torah"), and it notes the completion of the annual cycle of weekly scripture readings from the Torah Scroll.

There are two holidays that commemorate historical events. There are special prayers for these days, but the usual restrictions against work do not apply. Hanukkah is an eight-day Festival of Lights that begins on the 25th of Kislev (late November or December); it commemorates the "Rededication" of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees in 165 B.C. Candles are lighted in an eight-branched candelabrum (menorah). The closeness of Hanukkah to Christmas has encouraged the giving of gifts, especially in America. Three months later, on the 14th of Adar, the holiday of Purim, or Feast of Lots, commemorates the rescue of the Jews of Persia with the help of Queen Esther, whose prime minister Haman had tried to destroy them. The Scroll of Esther (Megillah) is read, and the day is marked by merrymaking, costumes, and the exchange of food.

In the summer, on Tisha B'Av (the 9th of Av, or Ab), a fast day memorializes the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem and other sad occasions of Jewish history.

Three additional days marking recent events are observed by many Jews: Yom Ha-Shoah, or Holocaust day on the 27th of Nisan (usually in April); Yom Ha-Atzmaut, the anniversary of the founding (1948) of the State of Israel, on the 5th of Iyar (in April or May); and Yom Yerushalayim, the unification of Jerusalem (1967), on the 28th of Iyar (in May).

**Ceremonies and Rites**

Life-cycle events are important in Judaism and reflect a striving toward kedushah ("sanctification"), which is the goal of Jewish religious living.

*Birth*

The birth of a child is regarded as a blessing from God and an occasion for deep gratitude. Traditionally, a daughter would be named in the synagogue on the first Sabbath following her birth. A son is named at the Brit Milah ("Covenant of Circumcision") on the eighth day. Through the ceremony of circumcision, the child is brought into the Covenant of Abraham and enters into the Community of Israel.

When young people reach the age of 13, there is a special ceremony among the Orthodox for boys only and among Reform and Conservative Jews for girls as well. The young person is called to the reading of the Torah and may be counted henceforth in the minyan for the congregational worship. A boy is called a Bar Mitzvah ("Son of the Commandment"), and a girl is called a Bat Mitzvah or Bas Mitzvah ("Daughter of the Commandment"). In many synagogues the Bar and Bat Mitzvah participate in the conduct of the service of worship, read out of the Torah, and chant the prophetic portion or Haftarah. This is an important day in the life of the family, and guests are invited to the synagogue to share the joy.

*Death*

Following death and burial, the immediate family enters a seven-day period of mourning (shivah) during which they remain at home except for the Sabbath, when they may attend the synagogue. After the seven days, and until the 30th day, the mourning customs are eased and the bereaved begin a return to normal life. During this time, and for the next ten months, it is customary to recite the Kaddish (mourner's prayer), which concludes every congregational service of worship.

On the anniversary of a death, a yahrzeit ("anniversary") candle is lighted and the kaddish prayer recited in the synagogue. On Yom Kippur and each of the Pilgrimage Festivals a memorial service (yizkor) is held.

**Conversion to Judaism**

Judaism welcomes those who wish to accept the Jewish faith. A ceremony of conversion (gerut) is conducted by three rabbis who determine the candidate's preparation. Traditional Jews require a visit to the ritual bath (mikvah) for a woman and circumcision for a male. Reform Judaism does not officially require either, although many Reform rabbis request this of those they have instructed. Upon conversion the new convert, or proselyte (ger), is considered a Jew in every respect.

**Dietary Laws**

The Bible declares certain animals, fowl, and fish as acceptable for food, while others are prohibited. An animal must chew the cud and have cloven hooves, while fish must have both fins and scales. Forbidden or acceptable fowl are listed by names. A further restriction says, "Thou shalt not boil a kid in the milk of its mother." This has led, in Traditional Judaism, to a complete separation of meat and dairy foods, which may not be served out of the same dishes or eaten at the same meal or in close proximity of time to one another.

The laws of the Talmud further extend dietary restrictions, and even an acceptable animal must be ritually slaughtered by an official trained to perform the task with a minimum of pain to the animal. Only the forequarters of a properly slaughtered animal may be eaten because of the presence of a forbidden sinew in the hindquarters. The flesh of meat and fowl must be soaked and salted to remove all traces of blood.

The prohibition of bread or leaven on the Passover requires further dietary precautions. An unleavened bread called matzot is eaten.

Food that is acceptable according to Jewish law and the utensils that may be used are kosher. Foods not acceptable are called terefah.