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INTRODUCTION

Originally, artistic embodiments of God were proscribed by the Ten Commandments: ‘You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth’ (Exodus 20 4). The order was given to Moses to distinguish the new religion from idolatry, and help people to realise that no image could adequately express the power and presence of God.

Nevertheless, since modern times Jewish artistry has produced exquisite ritual ornaments, such as crowns and mantles to cover the Torah (holy books), decorated Arks for its safekeeping, candlesticks and spice boxes; these all use costly materials and are of explicit and intricate design. Moreover, as the Jewish peoples spread across the western world (map) contacts with Christian art led to a greater tolerance of human representations, even in early mosaics and paintings, not in sculpture.

Judaic art thus displays a great diversity, through its willingness to absorb the styles and techniques of a ‘host culture’. Yet, within this artistic tradition two distinct strains can be distinguished — the Ashkenazi from Eastern Europe and the Sephardi, or ‘Moorish’ from Spain.

Part 1 of this guide traces the fundamentals of Jewish history through the Torah, in some instances using pictures by non-Jewish artists. Part 2 portrays Jewish worship and domestic life. Part 3 outlines religious observances and festivals in the Jewish calendar, and Part 4 discusses the history of Jews living in Britain.

“A highly recommended resource”

This is a refreshingly adaptable series for schools...the selection provides a comprehensive and flexible series of pictures which, used in their entirety, provide a balanced introduction to each faith...the notes are clearly produced and provide a good overview of the faith.

Teachers from all key stages will find them a valuable resource although they will be of particular relevance at key stages 3 and 4. They could work very well in group activities.

RE Today (reviewing the printed version)
The Sabbath is a time spent with the family, away from daily chores.

The Sabbath starts at sunset.

The most important occasion of the Jewish week is the Sabbath. This is the day when ancestries and origins are remembered. It starts at sunset on a Friday and lasts until dark on Saturday evening.

The religious function is to observe the Fourth Commandment:

*Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh is a sabbath of the Lord your God…*

In ancient times this idea, handed down to herdsmen, would have seemed revolutionary. It would have effectively separated Jews from other peoples, who would have continued to move about and graze animals.

Fundamentally the Sabbath is the Creation — Jews remember that God rested; they halt their own lives to contemplate that. Another aspect is a belief in social justice, that everyone deserves a Sabbath, and one should not make others work on that day.

Studying the Torah

It had always been the duty of every male Jew to learn the Torah, which originally existed only in oral form, although as far back as 458 BCE Ezra read the Torah to Jews who had returned from exile. The book was given its definitive order and contents in about 500 CE.

Women have also learned the Torah, and the Talmud (a kind of encyclopaedia), but to a lesser extent. The role of women in the practices of Judaism is controversial; but even in Orthodox circles many now study in similar ways to men. In the past, the reason given for women’s exclusion from certain duties was that as mothers they could not observe time-bound commandments.

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Hebrew instruction begins at an early age, and children start with the first prayer, the Shema, and the Hebrew alphabet. At puberty they celebrate their Bar Mitzvah (Bat Mitzvah for girls), becoming a Son or Daughter of the Commandments. These and other ceremonies, such as weddings and funerals, are overseen by the Rabbi, whose main task is to help a congregation to understand and observe the Jewish ways of life. He (or she) will be distinguished by sometimes wearing a traditional garment and will be expected to play a teaching and a pastoral role. Rabbis are chosen for their strength in understanding the Torah, for having good relationships with people of all ages, and for their wisdom and fairness.

Adherence to the Tenach and Talmud unites all practising Jews. The effects of the Diaspora (the prolonged period when Jews were scattered across the world, as a consequence of forced resettlement see map) long ago created the two distinct cultural groups, Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Within both, two sects have developed: the Orthodox and the Reform. Orthodox Jews believe that the laws of God should be followed as they were given. Reform Jews see a need for certain changes.
ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

Studying religions through their works of art can support teaching and learning in Religious Education in both learning from and learning about religion.

Learning about religion
☐ This resource contains concise information about the teachings, beliefs, practices and forms of worship within Judaism.

☐ An extensive collection of images which can be used as a stimulus for investigation and dialogue, helping to develop skills of analysis, interpretation, and explanation.

☐ Content that helps to build a thorough vocabulary of specialist terms.

Learning from religion
☐ The combination of images and text can encourage students to be observant, creative, curious, informed and reflective.

☐ It can enable them to make connections between religious belief and real people and events.

☐ It can encourage questions about identity and belonging, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitments.

☐ It can help to stimulate conversation around individual responses to artistic expressions within a religion.

Also supports Art teaching
☐ By helping to build awareness of the cultural, historical and social context in which art is used; developing understanding of how art expresses meaning, and how it is often directed for a specific audience and purpose.

☐ By providing many opportunities to encounter, explore, compare and contrast works of art from different periods, places and perspectives.

☐ By allowing students to investigate different styles of artistic expression, develop personal responses to art styles and use these to draw on for their own art.

Other aims
☐ Themes and concepts have been suggested that relate to specific images.

☐ Possible activities are suggested which can be adapted to meet specific learning objectives at different key stages.

☐ These can be used as starting points to stimulate questions and discussion about aspects of religious study or to develop extension activities.

Working with the pictures
☐ Click* looking at the images to see the 30 selected works. Click on the required image to go to the captioned picture, which can then be printed out and/or displayed on a whiteboard.

*Please note that the links are not active in this preview