



WHAT IT MEANS
TO BE JEWISH

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE JEWISH?

What does Judaism mean to you? What does it mean when you say "I am Jewish"?

THE FIRST JEWISH IDEA: WHAT WORDS OF TORAH WOULD YOU FIRST TEACH A CHILD?

Talmud Bavli Succah 42a	תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוכה מד עמוד א
When a child learns how to speak, his father should begin teaching him Torah.	יודע לדבר אביו לומדו תורה...

What words of Torah would you begin with?

Which Jewish idea is most fundamental?

GRATITUDE

Exodus 20:2-3	שמות כ:ב-ג
I am the Lord, your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.	אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: לֹא-יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, עַל-פָּנָי.

INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOUR

Exodus 20:18	שמות כ:יח
You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am HaShem	לֹא-תִקֹּם וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ, וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ: אֲנִי, ה'.

MONOTHEISM

Deuteronomy 6:4	דברים ו:ד
Hear, Israel: HaShem is our God, HaShem is One.	שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד.

- ❖ Which one of these teachings would you begin with?
- ❖ Why is it the most fundamental teaching for you?



TALMUD, SUCCAH, CONT.

Which verse of Torah should you begin teaching?	תורה מאי היא?
“The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the Morasha of the Congregation of Yaakov.” (Devarim 33:4)	תורה צוה לנו מורשה קהלת יעקב (דברים לג:ד)

What is a Morasha?

TALMUD, SANHEDRIN, 59A

The Talmud is discussing why the Torah is unique to the Jewish people...

“The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the Morasha of the Congregation of Yaakov	תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה
The Torah is uniquely connected to the Jewish people and not to any other nation	לנו מורשה ולא להם
According to one opinion, <i>Morasha</i> is understood to mean “ Inheritance ,” so if another nation claims such a connection to Torah it is like theft.	מאן דאמר מורשה מיגזל קא גזיל
According to another opinion <i>Morasha</i> means “ Engaged Bride ,” someone who neglects the relationship with Torah is like someone who violated the relationship of an engaged couple.	מאן דאמר מאורסה דינו כנערה המאורסה

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ❖ Do you have something you inherited? What is it? How do you treat it?
- ❖ Is Judaism an inheritance for you?
- ❖ Do you think of Judaism/Torah as a life-partner similar to a spouse?

A LETTER IN THE SCROLL



By Former Chief Rabbi Lord Dr. Jonathan Sacks

The Baal Shem Tov--founder of the Hassidic movement in the eighteenth century--said that the Jewish people is a living Sefer Torah, and every Jew is one of its letters. I am moved by that image, and it invites a question--***the*** question: **Will we, in our lifetime, be letters in the scroll of the Jewish people?**

At some stage, each of us must decide how to live our lives. We have many options, and no generation in

history has had a wider choice. We can live for work or success or fame or power. We can have a whole series of lifestyles and relationships. We can explore any of a myriad of faiths, mysticisms, or therapies. There is only one constraint--namely, that however much of anything else we have, we have only one life, and it is short. **How we live and what we live for are the most fateful decisions we ever make.**

We can see life as a succession of moments spent, like coins, in return for pleasures of various kinds. Or we can see our life as though it were a letter of the alphabet. A letter on its own has no meaning, yet when letters are joined to others they make a word, words combine with others to make a sentence, sentences connect to make a paragraph, and paragraphs join to make a story. That is how the Baal Shem Tov understood life. **Every Jew is a letter. Each Jewish family is a word, every community a sentence and the Jewish people through time constitutes a story, the strangest and most moving story in the annals of mankind.**

Will we, in our lifetime, be letter in the scroll of the Jewish people?

That metaphor is for me the key to understanding our ancestors' decision to remain Jewish even in times of great trial and tribulation. I suspect they knew that they were letters in this story, a story of great risk and courage. **Their ancestors had taken the risk of pledging themselves to a covenant with God and thus undertaking a very special role in history.**

I am a Jew because, knowing the story of my people, I hear their call to write the next chapter.

They had undertaken a journey, begun in the distant past and continued by every successive generation. At the heart of the covenant is the idea of *emunah*, which means faithfulness or loyalty. And Jews felt a loyalty to generations past and

generations yet unborn to continue the narrative. A Torah scroll that has a missing letter is rendered invalid, defective. I think that most Jews did not want theirs to be that missing letter...

I am a Jew because, knowing the story of my people, I hear their call to write the next chapter. I did not come from nowhere; I have a past, and if any past commands anyone, this past commands me. I am a Jew because only if I remain a Jew will the story of a hundred generations live on in me. I continue their journey because, having come this far, I may not let it and them fail. I cannot be the missing letter in the scroll. I can give no simpler answer, nor do I know of a more powerful one.

Do you consider yourself as part of something bigger?

How do you feel about the Chief Rabbi's approach?

Thinking Question: What chapter will you write in the Jewish story?