

## Key Teachings of Judaism

Jewish teachings provide Jews with guidance on how to practice their religion and lead good lives. These teachings come from multiple sources including sacred Jewish texts - the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud - and later writings by Jewish rabbis and philosophers.

Among the most famous Jewish teachings are the Ten Commandments. These commandments are contained within the Hebrew Bible. Many Jews and Christians identify them with the two stone tablets which, according to the Hebrew Bible, God gave to Moses along with other religious instructions. Religious Jews see the Ten Commandments as a notable summary of how God wants Jews to live. But it is important to note that the Jewish tradition explicitly teaches that other religious instructions are as obligatory and as sacred as the Ten Commandments.

Jewish sages have provided guidance as to the most important Jewish teachings. According to the Talmud, a man challenged Hillel, one of Judaism's most revered sages and the highest ranking jurist from 31 BCE through 9 CE, to teach him the whole Torah in the time he could stand on one foot. The term *Torah* is best known to non-Jews as the Jewish name for the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. But the word literally means "instruction," and it can refer to the entire body of Jewish teachings as it does here. Hillel responded, "What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole Torah; the rest is just commentary. Go and study it." Likewise, Rabbi Akiba, the foremost Jewish scholar in the late 1<sup>st</sup> through the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, taught that the Hebrew Bible's commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself" is "the greatest principle of the Torah."

Therefore, it is essential that any discussion of Judaism include its teachings about treating others well. However, the discussion should also include other essential teachings that give a more complete understanding of the religion. The six items identified below are among the most important and influential ideas in Judaism. It is important to bear in mind that this list was created as a useful reference for those who want a better understanding of the religion; there is no official list of Judaism's most important teachings.

1. There is only one God and God provides standards of right and wrong that people should follow. Judaism introduced this belief, called ethical monotheism, to the world. This belief differs from other ancient religions, which believed in many gods. Jewish ethics flow in large measure from this idea; Judaism teaches that there is such a thing as "right" and "wrong" and that people have an obligation to do what is right.
2. Treat others well. The Hebrew Bible contains broad principles such as "Be kind to strangers" and "Love your neighbor" as well as specific instructions to ensure others are treated fairly. The Talmud states, "Charity is equal in importance to all other commandments combined." Since the Hebrew Bible states that all people are created in the image of God, Jews believe that every individual is important and deserves to be treated with respect.
3. Honor the Sabbath. Judaism teaches that Jews should spend one day a week, the Sabbath, focusing on things other than work and material concerns. This is the origin of the idea of a weekly day of rest that is part of many religions and is widely followed in many parts of the world.



4. Pray. Judaism teaches that people can communicate with God through prayer. Traditionally observant Jews have daily prayers in the morning, afternoon, and evening, and also pray before and after meals, before beginning a journey, when they see a natural wonder, and at other times when they need help or want to express thanks.
5. Study. Judaism teaches that studying the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish texts leads to wisdom and good deeds, so Jewish culture emphasizes the importance of learning. Throughout the centuries, Jews greatly respected scholars and depended on them to determine how to apply Jewish teachings to new situations. Today, most Jews build on this tradition to respect all forms of scholarship and to see knowledge as valuable and worth pursuing.
6. The Land of Israel is Judaism's most important spiritual center. Most of the events in sacred Jewish scripture occurred there. Judaism's most sacred sites are there, including Jerusalem, which is its holiest city and the site where the Jewish Temple once stood. Jews face towards Jerusalem, the ancient and modern Jewish capital, during their daily prayers. The daily prayers address the importance of the Land of Israel to the Jewish past and future.

