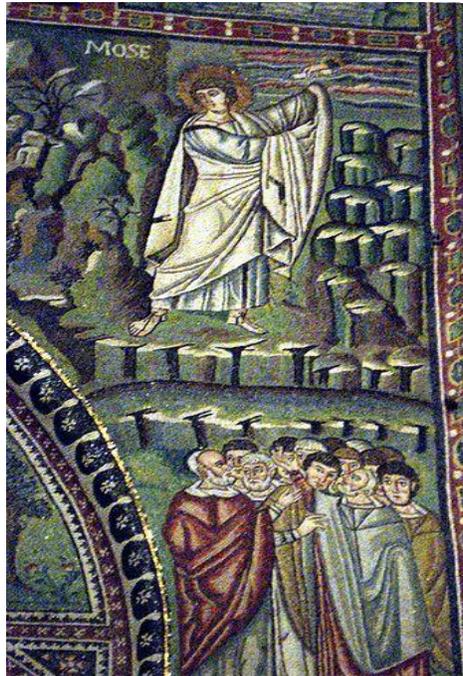# Judaism and Monotheistic Morality
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Judaism has been around for over 3,000 years, starting in the Middle East and eventually spreading all across the globe. Today it is a major world religion practiced by millions of people. Judaism is a monotheistic faith, believing in only one god, as opposed to many. Though there had been other faiths approaching monotheism, Judaism is considered to be the first true monotheistic religion. The morality of Judaism was influenced by this belief in one god. The system of Judaic ethics has had a large impact on Western ideas of morality and justice.

Through history, there has been much internal debate and disagreement between different sects of Jewish believers. Some of these sects broke off and became their own religion, like Christianity, which started off as a small group of Jews worshipping in their own unique way. In discovering and articulating their own beliefs, namely worshipping Jesus Christ as the promised savior from the Hebrew Bible, these early Christians began to grow distinct from Judaism, eventually becoming a powerful religion in its own right. Similarly, Islam was birthed from Judaism.

One of the major theological questions amongst the early Jews was about monotheism; some sects did not mind the idea of the Jewish god being worshipped alongside other

local deities. But this did not last long. Eventually, the idea of the Jewish god being the one and only god became central.

The bulk of the claims for this belief are contained in the holy texts of Judaism. The Hebrew Bible is the central text of the faith. It consists of a number of books, beginning with the Torah, which is the same as the Christian Old Testament. These books assert repeatedly that the Jewish god is the one god, and that all the other gods that other religions believe or have believed in are not real. This is told over and over from the revelation of God to Abraham in the Book of Genesis and the revelation to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. This belief is also upheld in today's Jewish theological discussion.

The case for monotheism was reinforced outside the faith as well. As different political and tribal forces gained and lost influence, so did their particular interpretation of Judaism. Certain elements of Judaism also became more emphasized because of practical matters. For example, kings and rulers would use Judaism to solidify and legitimize their power and authority over their subjects. The idea of one central all-powerful god was particularly useful for this purpose.

The idea of one god influenced the morality of Judaism. The Hebrew Bible and the authority of Jewish leaders crafted a morality and code of ethics that slowly became standardized for the faith. Morality is extremely important in Judaism; the rules and laws teaching how to live a good and moral life are a large part of the practice of Judaism.

This emphasis is particularly true because of the belief that the Jewish god is an active and personal force in people's lives. The Jewish god is very present. The Jewish faith does not believe in the Enlightenment idea of the Divine Watchmaker. This is the idea that God is like a watchmaker who builds a watch and then lets it run on its own, not touching, changing, or affecting it as it runs. That is, God created the universe and then let it run its own course without personally interfering. Judaism rejects this, saying that God is actively and personally involved in the universe at all times. Therefore, morality is important to practitioners of Judaism because God is paying attention to the actions of humans.

The authority of these morals comes from another belief about the Jewish god. The Hebrew Bible says that God is good and rules the universe with pure and correct morality. This gives God the authority to dictate to humans which morals to live by.

Since the Bible says God is the one and only god, and that God is wholly good, then God's morals are therefore the only set of right and good morals.

There are many morals and ethical rules in Judaism. The Torah lays out many of these ethics. These have been discussed, debated, added to and considered over the thousands of years of Jewish thought. The greatest and most well known example of morality as dictated by the Jewish god is the Ten Commandments. The commandments appear in the Torah book of Exodus, when Moses is given stone tablets upon which the commandments are carved. These form the basis of all Jewish morality, dictating people to act decently.

While the ethics in Judaism touch on many aspects of life and human existence, they do have some basic themes and common threads. Most broadly, Jewish morality dictates that people live righteous lives. Kindness, compassion, peace and goodwill are all important traits for a faithful Jewish practitioner. Benevolence and the kind treatment of fellow human beings are essential to being a successful and pious practitioner of Judaism.

As the first monotheistic form of morality, Judaic morality has been very influential. The other Abrahamic faiths of Islam and Christianity have very similar moral codes that demand the same strict adherence and emphasis on a good and benevolent god. Beyond the religious realm though, Jewish morality influenced secular life. Some scholars see its influence in the way we relate to laws and governments today. The idea that a ruler or government has our best interests at heart and therefore has the authority to dictate laws, and enforce that they are followed, is heavily indebted to codes of morality starting with Judaism.

The idea of morality stemming from one supreme god was a revolutionary development in human thought. Many thousands of years ago, when the Israelites embraced their god and their morals, they had no idea how widespread and influential it would become.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is a monotheistic faith?

    A a faith that believes in Jewish values
    B a faith that believes in many gods
    C a faith that believes in one god
    D a faith that believes in the Abrahamic god

2. What does the author describe in the beginning of the passage?

    A how Judaism became the first monotheistic faith
    B how the Judaic system of ethics influenced modern government
    C why morality is important to the Jewish faith
    D common threads among Jewish morality in the Torah

3. The belief that God plays an active role in people's lives is central to Jewish morality. What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

    A "The Jewish god is very present. The Jewish faith does not believe in the Enlightenment idea of the Divine Watchmaker."
    B "The other Abrahamic faiths of Islam and Christianity have very similar moral codes that demand the same strict adherence and emphasis on a good and benevolent god."
    C "The rules and laws teaching how to live a good and moral life are a large part of the practice of Judaism."
    D "Morality is important to practitioners of Judaism because God is paying attention to the actions of humans."

4. Read the following sentences: "There are many morals and ethical rules in Judaism. The Torah lays out many of these ethics. These have been discussed, debated, added to and considered over the thousands of years of Jewish thought."

Based on this information, what conclusion can be made about the development of Jewish morality?

    A Jewish morality has not been influenced by humans.
    B Jewish morality has changed over time.
    C Jewish morality has remained unchanged.
    D Jewish morality has been universally accepted within the faith.

5. What is this passage mostly about?

    A how Jewish morality has influenced secular life
    B how Christian and Islamic faiths grew out of Judaism
    C how Judaic monotheism affected Jewish morality
    D the Ten Commandments and their role in Jewish morality

6. Read the following sentences: "One of the major theological questions amongst the early Jews was about monotheism; some sects did not mind the idea of the Jewish god being worshipped alongside other local **deities**. But this did not last long. Eventually, the idea of the Jewish god being the one and only god became central."

What does the word "**deity**" (plural: "deities") mean?

    A priest or priestess
    B religious text
    C type of religion
    D god or goddess

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

There are three Abrahamic religions, _____ Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

    A although
    B namely
    C finally
    D for example

8. What is the most well-known example of morality dictated by the Jewish God?

_____

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_____

9. Describe two Jewish beliefs about the nature of God.

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_____

_____

10. Explain how Judaic monotheism and the nature of the Jewish God influenced the role of morality in Jewish faith. Use information from the passage to support your answer.

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