

Basic Jewish Ideas

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While Judaism is the evolving and changing religious expression of the Jewish people, Jews have always believed a basic core in all ages. Certainly, the core of our belief as understood by Reform Judaism is as follows:

1. GOD IS ONE--that is, there is one plan and purpose for the universe; there are no conflicting wills; no good god competing with a devil; nor are there greater and lesser gods or divine beings.

2. THE NATURE OF THIS GOD IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN TERMS OF CREATION, LAW, JUSTICE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS, LOVE--that is, He is not blind force, acting on sudden whim, nor is He angry and punitive (this understanding of the nature of God evolved over thousands of years and is open to new insights). God is not to be understood in terms of human powers or definitions and is beyond man's full comprehension.

3. THERE IS A TORAH, A MORAL LAW, UNDERGIRDING THE UNIVERSE, AND MAN'S HAPPINESS AND THE STABILITY OF SOCIETY DEPEND ON THE LEARNING AND OBSERVANCE OF THIS LAW.

4. A MAN'S RELIGIOSITY IS TO BE DEDUCED FROM HIS ACTIONS, NOT FROM HIS STATED BELIEFS. (CONDUCT, NOT PROFESSED FAITH, IS THE CRITICAL MATTER).

5. MAN IS BORN WITH THE POTENTIAL TO BE GOOD OR EVIL DEPENDING UPON HIS OWN CHOICE TO FOLLOW THE MORAL LAW. He is not born in "original sin," nor need he be mystically or miraculously "saved" from this "sin." Hence, the notion of the growth and improvement in the character of man by creating the good society becomes possible.

6. THIS WORLD IS THE CENTER OF MAN'S EXISTENCE. Whatever the "world to come" may be, man must correct the evil in this world. "It is not incumbent upon him to finish the task, but neither is he free to neglect it."

7. MEN MUST STRIVE TOWARDS A MESSIANIC DAY, WHEN ALL MEN SHALL LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY. There is a meaningful future ahead which men must strive to achieve with God's help. There is a part of the Messiah in all of us, and we must bring the pieces together to create "God's Kingdom."

8. MAN IS A CO-PARTNER WITH GOD IN THE CREATION THAT KNOWS NO END. God frequently relies on man to serve as His agent, and man must understand his responsibility. "Where there are no men . . . be thou the man."

9. JEWS ARE BOUND TO GOD IN A SPECIAL COVENANT OR AGREEMENT. Since they were the first to proclaim the idea of one God and one mankind, since they were the first to proclaim the moral law, they have a special responsibility to be exemplary in character and to teach these ideas, by example, to the world.