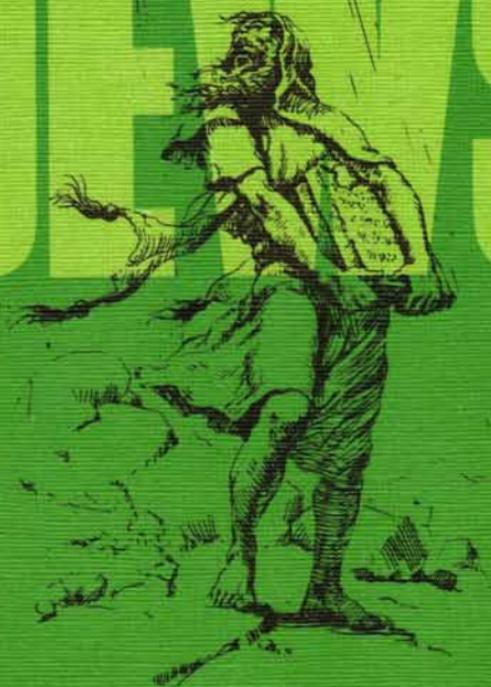




# THE WAY OF THE JEWS



by Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs

THE WAY OF THE JEWS

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*L. Jacobs*  
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*by*

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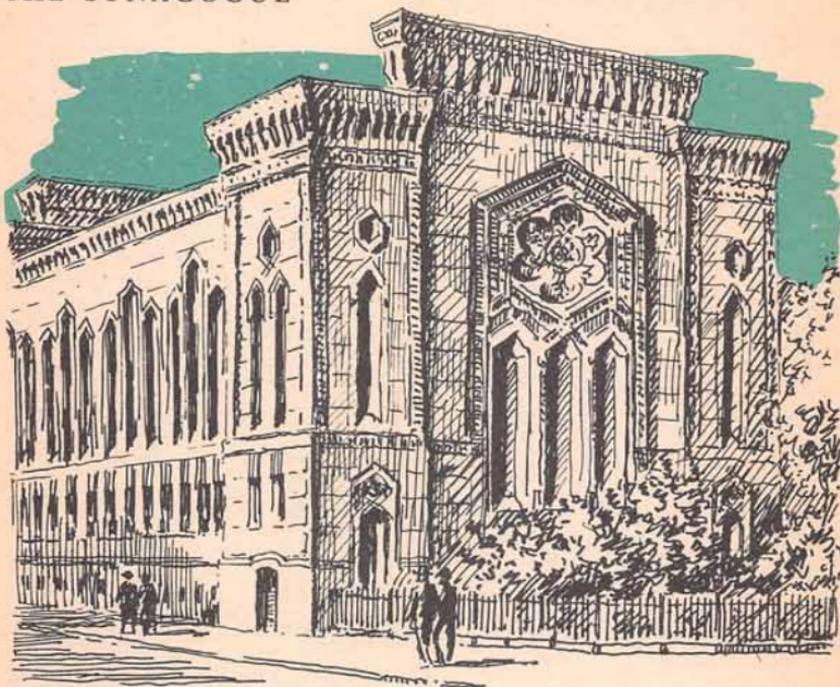
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## The Jews

Judaism is the religion of the Jews. It differs from most other religions in having as its hero not a single great person but a whole people. Judaism knows, too, of great men such as Abraham, the founder of the Jewish people who lived about 4,000 years ago, Moses, King David and so on. But while it is impossible to think of Christianity without Jesus, of Buddhism without Buddha, of Islam without Mohammed, it is quite possible to think of Judaism as existing without Abraham or Moses or David. The ideal of Judaism is that of a whole people doing what God wants them to do, which is to be just and kind and to worship Him. There have been outstanding men among the Jews but, as Judaism sees it, these do not count more in the eyes of God than the ordinary good Jew who carries out his duties faithfully and well. There are about 14 million Jews in the world today. Two and a half million Jews live in the State of Israel; five million in the United States of America; three million in Soviet Russia and the rest in many other countries. In Great Britain there are around half a million Jews, a half of them living in London. For all the differences in language and dress the main features of Jewish life are the same in every part of the world. A Jew from New York who visited

## THE SYNAGOGUE



A Synagogue

London or Shanghai or Jerusalem would feel at home among the Jews there. He would find the same pattern of religious life that he knew in the place where he was born.

## The Synagogue

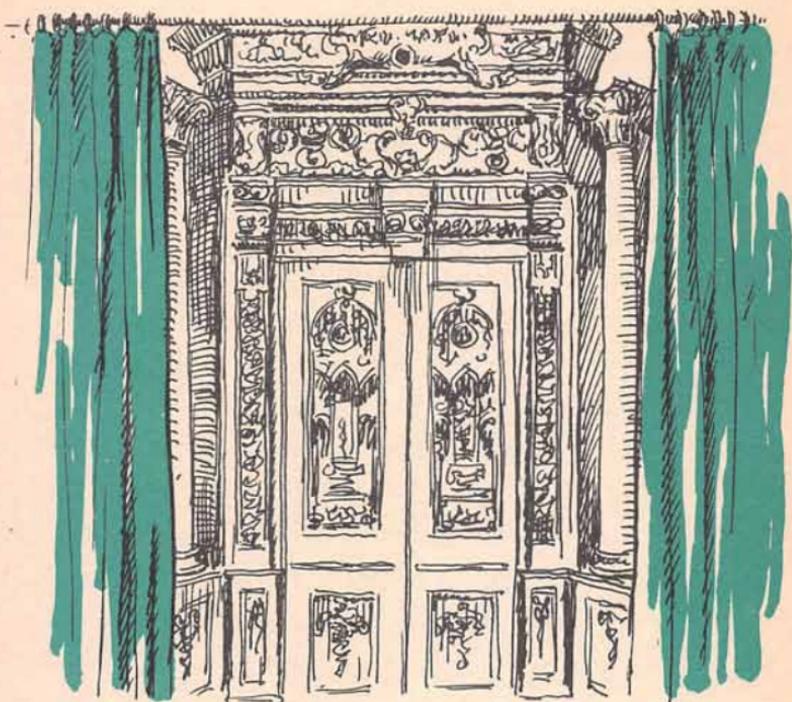
Jews worship God in the synagogue and the language in which they recite their prayers is Hebrew. Hebrew is the language in which the greater part of the Bible is written because it was the language used in Palestine

## THE SYNAGOGUE

by the ancestors of the Jewish people. The letters are shaped quite differently from those of the European languages and Hebrew is read from right to left. The actual word "synagogue" is not Hebrew but comes from the Greek word meaning a "gathering". The meaning is a gathering of people who come together to worship God and the name is given to the building in which they are gathered. There are no rules as to how a synagogue should be built. Some synagogues are very splendid affairs with marble pillars, huge stained glass windows and costly fabrics. Others are quite simple structures, four walls and a few benches. Indeed any room, even a room in a private house, can serve as a synagogue if people choose to worship there.

The central place in the synagogue is in the east and is a kind of built-in cupboard with a curtain across it. This is known as the "ark". In the ark are scrolls made of parchment on which are written by hand the Five Books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. The scrolls are beautifully written. It takes a good deal of training to produce a skilful scribe who is able to write a scroll. Skilful though he is, it generally takes him about a year to complete a single scroll. He uses a special dark ink, the secret of whose manufacture is handed down from one scribe to the other. The scrolls are wrapped round with mantles of fine material and are decorated with bells and other ornaments of gold or silver.

## THE SYNAGOGUE



The ark containing the scrolls

On the great festivals of the Jewish year and at certain other times the scrolls are removed from the ark and taken in procession around the synagogue, the bells tinkling as they are moved. A portion of a scroll is then read aloud so that the congregation can hear the Biblical teachings and follow them in their lives.

The worshippers in the synagogue wear shawls made of wool or silk with tassels at the four corners. The tassels are to remind them that they must never forget God's law, rather as we sometimes tie a knot in our handkerchief if we want to remind ourselves of some-

## THE SYNAGOGUE

thing we do not wish to forget. There are no special priests in the synagogue. The services can be conducted by anyone who knows enough Hebrew and whose voice is good enough to sing properly the melodies to which the prayers are recited. This is because, as we have seen, Judaism does not like to single out any one person or group of persons. All the people are priests. There is a Rabbi (the word simply means "teacher") but he is not a priest. His job is to teach the Torah (a word we shall now examine) to his congregation.



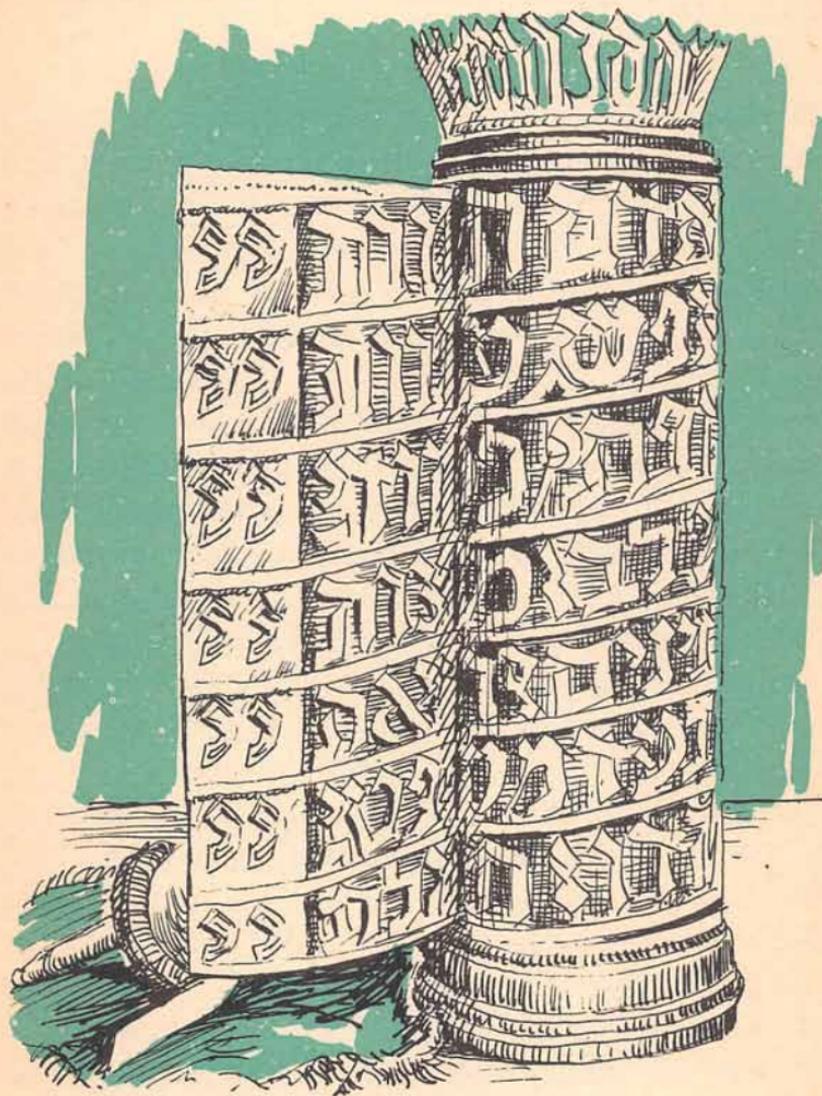
A Rabbi

## The Torah

The word Torah, one of the key words in Judaism, means "teaching". It means first of all the Bible but it includes, too, all the teachings of Judaism. All the explanations of the Bible and all the new ideas of the Jewish scholars throughout the ages are called the Torah. Judaism believes that one of the most precious gifts God has given to man is his brain. Man is a being who thinks about life. That is why Judaism has always had respect for those who use their minds to think and that is why the Jew is expected to study the Torah. This study of the Torah is never ending. There is so much to learn and so little time in which to do it. Jewish children, for instance, begin to learn Hebrew — and this is by no means easy — at an early age so that they can read the teachings of the Torah in the language in which they were written, as well as recite and understand the Hebrew prayers. But it does not stop there. For the whole of the Jew's life he is expected to set aside some time in which he studies the Torah. It is not wealth or power or fame that win a Jew respect among his fellow-Jews. The greatest respect is only paid to those who are learned in the Torah and the more a man knows of the Torah the more he is admired. In former times no Jew could hold any office in the Jewish community unless

## THE TORAH

he was a learned man. It is still the fondest hope of Jewish parents to have children who know the Torah.



The Torah