

WORKING WITH SAMPLE RESPONSES – JUDAISM

HSC Depth Study: Belief Systems & Ideologies

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Syllabus Content

- how belief systems and ideologies express values and beliefs and ways of perceiving the world at the micro, meso and macro levels
- traditions and culture in the belief system or ideology: the role of symbols, rituals and customs

Syllabus Outcomes

- H1 evaluates and effectively applies social and cultural concepts
- H2 explains the development of personal, social and cultural identity
- H3 analyses relationships and interactions within and between social and cultural groups

Related concepts

values, customs, beliefs, worldview, symbols, ritual

Rationale

The following resource is a collection of sample responses for the depth study of Judaism. Complementary strategies and ideas for utilising this resource in the classroom have also been included. Use this to best effect within your programs before a major assessment, at the end of a unit, or during class revision time before the HSC exam so students come to the task with a depth of understanding that supports the development of critical thinking.

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a. How are values and ways of perceiving the world (worldview) expressed by ideologies. Support answer with relevant examples. (5 marks)

Values and worldviews are generally dictated by a combination of micro, meso and macro influences. A significant example in Judaism is the extent to which Jewish diaspora uphold the worldview of an "Israeli state" or Zionist ideology. Zionism is often referred to as being synonymous with being Jewish however, due to an individual's personal values this may change a Jewish person's perception of the state of Israel in its current politically organised form. Some scholars argue that if the messiah '*moshiach*' has not arrived, then the Israeli state or the *Holy Land (Eretz Yisrael)* is still not available for Jewish claim and as such the Jewish occupation can be argued to be potentially against Jewish law. Such a worldview would suggest that some communities of observant Haredi or Chassidic Jews would not uphold this shared value of an Israeli state but would rather await biblical confirmation or the return of the messiah. This would further suggest a rejection of the Zionist ideology. Conversely, some Jewish communities, especially amongst modern orthodox and progressive Jews aggressively defend the state of Israel, often basing their religion and their faith on the existence of the Holy Land in its political and biblical form. This would suggest that Zionism for these communities one form of religious and ideological expression and culturally embedded into their value system.

b. To what extent has the significance of rituals, symbols and customs changed over time in ONE belief system or ideology. (15 marks)

Change over time in Judaism with regards to rituals, symbols and customs have been evident throughout history and have experienced change in their significance, meaning and practice. Namely, constant religious persecution of the Jewish people led them to alter their ways of observing customs, rituals, and symbols to blend into the communities they would eventually find themselves in. This inevitably has led to several levels of adherence from Ultra-orthodox 'Haredi' Jews but also progressive, secular, and cultural Judaism as well.

Firstly, rituals have changed over time especially between progressive and orthodox Judaism. In orthodox Judaism, girls read bat mitsvah age at 12, whereas boys at 13. Furthermore, boys would be required to attend a shabbat service to read a parsha (psalm) portion from the Torah to the congregations – girls would ordinarily be excluded from this ritual as the halacha states that as girls have more "ruach hakodesh" or holiness, this means that as the "givers of life" they do not need to pray as much and as such have a stronger connection with God. However, progressive Judaism has altered this somewhat, by allowing girls equal footing with boys, creating Bat Mitzvahs where girls read the "Haf Torah" at a congregation and also at the age of 13 and not 12. Some orthodox sages argue that this is taking away from the gift god bestowed on young women and have accused progressive synagogues of "cherry picking" to suit the modernising world in meso communities. Progressive sages retort that, with post WWII, it is up to synagogues to prolong their congregations and providing consolations such as equal Haf Torah to boys and girls then it should be encouraged to maintain congregation numbers and the confirmed births of more Jewish children.

As a symbol, synagogues are also seen to represent the gathering of Jewish men and women around the world in holy prayer. Synagogues are also the cornerstone to many Jewish high holidays, births, and marriages. However, the importance of synagogues to adherents has changed over time. In most Secular Jewish diasporic communities outside of Israel, the level of synagogue visits is no longer as frequent – for most it is only a requirement for high holidays weddings, birth, and the occasional *minyan*. Ordinarily and by *halacha* Jews are expected to attend weekly for shabbat services and for the most adherent, 3 times a day for prayer e.g. mayriv, mincha and shacharit which are categorised into morning, afternoon and evening prayers respectively. Since WWII, many Jewish families either converted or became more progressive resulting in many of Jewish diaspora no longer attending

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regular synagogue sessions unless for a major family event. Synagogues who rely on adherent's attendance and donations are therefore leaning to more progressive strands of the religion and thus changing how communities on the meso level conduct religious services. Often, some synagogues attempt to cater to both orthodox and progressive Jews this improving community opinion of the less religious but at times at the whims and criticisms of the orthodox Jewish community. All over Europe, parts of southeast Asia and the Western nations, are examples of historical synagogues who allow the mixing of men and women, 13-year-old female bat mitzvahs and weddings between Jews and non-Jews.

Customs can be very similar but also unique between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews. In Israel specifically, many rituals between these strands of Jewish communities are often conducted with different or alternative customs. For example, in Ashkenazi congregations, prayer is often done together, with loud boisterous singing, sometimes louder than the cantor, whereas in Mizrahi tradition it is more respectful to let the cantor sing, and adherents pray quietly in the background in the pews. Change in customs can often be reflected in the dress style between orthodox and secular Jewish communities where the length and style of *tzniut* (modesty laws) are often interpreted differently e.g. on the knee or below the knee depending on which Jewish demographic adherents belong to. Language is also a significant custom that has changed for Jewish communities. Language for the Jewish people has changed significantly over time due to a variety of macro reasons, however the origins mainly remained Semitic in nature, for example, these include, Babylonian, Aramaic, Rashi (biblical text) and Ancient Hebrew and finally modern Hebrew. Ashkenazi Jews also developed Yiddish a combination of German, Hebrew and Russian originally used to ensure Ancient Roman insurgents and officials wouldn't understand how Jews were communicating. These changes within Yiddish alone are a sign of the language and its customary use dwindling, especially post WWII. A further example can be applied to the way the laws of Kashrut are upheld where there is also a constant debate between Jewish communities on the halacha regarding crustaceans.

Ultimately, due to varying differences amongst Jewish meso communities and diaspora throughout Jewish history, approaches from Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews as well as, the level of adherence amongst Jews from progressive to orthodox meso communities demonstrates that symbolism, rituals, and customs manifest differently and have also changed over time in their meaning, significance and practice.

Strategies for engaging with Sample Responses in your class

- Have the students (individually or in groups) break the structure of the sample down using the writing structure or models used in your class (eg PEEL, SEEL, PECEAL, ALARM etc). Have them use highlighters to colour code the different elements, and print the work out on A3 sheets for display around the classroom.
- Print off and distribute the samples without the questions. Have the students read the responses and attempt to guess the question. Students should share several points of justification with the class.
- Work with marking criteria, assign a mark and write feedback for the 'student'. Focus on what was done well, what could be improved and how they might improve it.