

TORAH AND SYNAGOGUE



The Jewish Bible is called the *TeNaKh*, which stands for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings).

The Torah is the most important section. It is also known as the 'Five Books of Moses'. When it is read, a pointer called a *yad* (hand) is used, to show respect for the Torah scroll and keep it clean.

The Torah contains many *mitzvot* (commandments) that guide a Jewish life. It also describes the creation of the world and the early history of the Jewish people.

Torah scrolls are handwritten in Hebrew on parchment. The *sofer* (scribe) uses a feather pen (quill) and ink. It takes about a year to write a Torah.



Mezuzah scrolls are put on doorposts on Jewish buildings, and are usually contained in protective, often ornamental cases. They contain the *shema* prayer (which comes from the Torah) and are written in the same way.

Torah scrolls are usually kept in synagogue in a special cupboard called the *Aron HaKodesh* (Holy Ark). In front of the Ark is a lamp called the *Ner Tamid* (Everlasting Light). It is like the lamp that always burned in the Temple, showing that G-d is always there. A section of the Torah is read in synagogue each week.



The Hebrew for synagogue is *Beit Knesset* (House of meeting) as it may also include classrooms, a kitchen, a community centre, and rooms for social events. Many people also use the Yiddish word *Shul*.

In some synagogues, men and women sit separately. In some men and women may sit together. Most prayers are said or sung in Hebrew and can be read from a *siddur* (prayerbook). The spiritual leader of a community is called a *rabbi* (teacher).

