
The Contribution Of People, Schools Of Thought And Ethical Teaching To Judaism

Judaism, as a living religion has grown and developed over time and influences the lives of its adherents through aspects of their principal beliefs and core ethical teachings. This is due to significant people such as Moses Maimonides and core ethical teachings such as sexual ethics, which heavily contribute greatly to making Judaism a living religion as it allows adherents of Judaism to deeply interact with these characteristics of the Jewish religious tradition

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) significantly contributed to the development of Judaism as a living tradition. His written literary works including the Commentary on the Mishnah Torah, Mishneh Torah and the Guide for the Perplexed, which guided Jewish adherents by giving them a deeper insight into how they should act and worship God in their daily lives. The commentary on the Mishnah torah provided a summary of each parts of the Mishnah. This had a major impact to the development and expression of Judaism as the commentary on the Mishnah also made Jewish law easily accessible without large amounts of Talmud study. It was also written in Arabic, which made it accessible to Jewish adherent living in Arabic areas. The commentary of the Mishnah also remains relevant today as it included the “Thirteen articles of faith” which is still used as a foundation to Jewish faith and is based on the Migdal prayer, which is often he closing prayer of Friday evening service at Sephardic gatherings and is significant for Jewish adherents as it reminds them of God’s power.

Furthermore, the Mishnah torah contained another 13 books detailing Jewish civil and ritual laws on practices. Maimonides summarised the Talmud and re-organised the discussion of mitzvot into 14 logical sections. This significantly impacted the development and expression of Judaism as it enabled Jewish adherents to know how to act in a given situation without reference to the Talmud and all people could relate to his code of Jewish law as it was clear and logical. As past writings were randomly arranged and were difficult to follow, the Mishnah Torah was set out in a more logical way, making it easier for adherents to understand. As a result, a full range of Jewish law was made more accessible and relevant. For example, the 8 Degrees of Tzedakah, states how Jews can live out the Torah through charity. The highest degree is to “to strengthen the hand of a Jew who is poor” so that “the person will not need to ask for assistance from others. The Mishnah torah has also impacted Judaism’s development and expression, as they are still relevant and influential today as it set the foundations of the 16th century code of Jewish law by Joseph Karo and modern rabbis base their legal decisions on the code of the 16th century law that was influenced by Maimonides and the Mishnah torah has become a part of the orthodox liturgy. Moreover, the “Guide for the Perplexed” addressed the relationship between religion and philosophy to demonstrate that Jewish beliefs had a sound basis in rational thought. Therefore, helping to enhance Jewish thought and helped the validity of Judaism from the threats of classical philosophy. The guide for the perplexed significantly impacted the development and expression of Judaism as showed that faith were compatible and encouraged Jewish adherents to base their faith on reason. It also enabled Judaism to withstand the threat from philosophy by showing that it could be open to intellectual debate and inspection. The book also makes the religion applicable to modern society as Jewish and non-Jewish philosophers continue to study it and it is considered one of the great philosopher’s works. Thus, the literary writings by Moses Maimonides have inevitably impacted Judaism’s

development and expression, as they are still relevant and influential today.

Ethics can be defined as principles of morality which distinguish right from wrong in the context of human life. Religious traditions maintain significance in their ability to lay foundational ethical teachings for adherents. Sexual ethics in Judaism provides guidance for sexual behaviour and seek to establish correct codes for sexual behaviour. Sexual ethics including the general attitude towards sex, premarital and extramarital sex, contraception and homosexuality evoke a variety of responses from different Jewish variants due to different understandings and create varying issues based off core Jewish teachings. In regards to the general attitude of sex, Jewish adherents believe that sexual relationships should be reserved for and expressed within the significant practice of marriage. Jewish adherents also believe that the mutual satisfaction of sexual desire between a husband and wife is a mitzvah, as it is seen to reinforce the bonds of love and attachment. Jewish adherents also believe that husband and wife are companions in a relationship designed to create a family and mutual comfort. Marriage is Kiddushin (holiness) and a celibate or unmarried life is considered wrong as it is reneging on the ideal expressed within the creation story. Divorce is permitted in Judaism and is called a 'get'. Attitudes towards divorce differ among Jewish variants, but it is generally not ideal, for "it is not good that a man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18.) Progressive teachings express a more liberal approach.

Furthermore, Jewish adherents firmly believe that the covenant of marriage is to be devoted and faithful to your partner and sexual relations should be expressed within the covenant of marriage "Thou shall not commit adultery" (7th commandment) and adherents believe that committing the act of adultery denigrates the sacredness of marriage. Furthermore, many Jewish adherents believe extramarital sex takes sex outside of the loving, caring and committed relationship as the word for 'sex' in Judaism literally translates to 'to know' and is taught that the ideal unit for this concept to be expressed is marriage, meaning that sexual intercourse has immense spiritual significance and should thus only occur in a relationship where loyalty and fidelity is present.

Furthermore, contraception is the use of a physical (condom) or chemical device to interfere with the normal process of conception so that pregnancy does not develop. In Judaism, one main purposes of marriage is procreation and commandment to marry and have children. "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). As such, contraception is not encouraged especially among Orthodox Jews and is forbidden to waste 'the seed'. The methods of contraception allowed under Jewish law are those that do not damage the sperm or stop it from reaching its intended destination. Female birth control pill is favoured as male contraceptive methods such as condoms 'waste the seed'. The use of condoms are seen to block the passage of semen and reduce the pleasure husband and wife get from sex and so interfere with the marital purposes of intercourse. Condoms are also rejected because they interfere with becoming 'one flesh' "And he shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This ethical teaching differs among the variants due to their interpretation of the Torah. Progressive take a more liberal view as they take into account modern context. The modern orthodox position permits the use of contraception in cases when pregnancy or childbirth may harm the mother and if limiting the number of children is for the benefit of the existing family and to delay or space out having children. However, a married couple should not use contraception for the selfish reason of avoidance. In recent times such as with the outbreak of sexually transmitted infections (STI'S) and AIDS, the progressive and conservative variants have been willing to adapt their teachings to suit modern concepts. The sexual issue of homosexuality differs in

Judaism. Due to the firm belief in Judaism that one of main purposes of marriage is to procreate, homosexuality is forbidden and is considered 'wasting the seed' and many believe homosexual acts refutes the commandment to marry and have children. This view differs among the variants due to their interpretation of the Torah. The torah forbids male homosexuality, although there is nothing said about female acts. In the book of Leviticus, there are two verses that relate directly to male homosexuality. 'Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence' and 'If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing, they shall be put to death. Some believe that the use of such strong language in the Torah is because the homosexual lifestyle is one in which conception is not possible, and thus is not considered to be the 'natural' process for sexual intercourse. Some also believe homosexuality undermines the Jewish ideal of family that is articulated in the Torah. Progressive and conservative Jewish adherents are more likely to accept homosexuality, though even strictly Orthodox adherents distinguish between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts. In contemporary Judaism, homosexually oriented individuals are discouraged from the physical expression. The progressive Jewish community for the most part, understand the reality of sexual orientation as something that is beyond simple personal preference. Thus, these issues challenge Jewish ethical teachings which are based on respect for God's creation, marriage, procreation and faithfulness. These ethical teachings provide adherents with clarification and guidance on how to live a moral and faithful Jewish life.

In conclusion, it is clear that significant people such as Moses Maimonides and core ethical teachings such as sexual ethic heavily contribute greatly to making Judaism a living religion as it allows adherents of Judaism to deeply interact with these characteristics of the Jewish religious tradition.