

Key Words

Shekhinah	Beit Tefilah	Orthodox	Divine	Pilgrimage	Yom Kippu
Synagogue	Beit Midrash	Minyan	Western Wall	Beit Knesset	Mitzvah

Sacred Places: The Synagogue

Jews believe that God's **divine** presence in the world is still at work today. This is known as **Shekhinah**. As Jews believe in God's **omnipresence** they believe that they are able to worship anywhere. However, whenever possible they should worship in a community so that God's presence can be felt and experienced. Anywhere where Jews gather to worship God could be considered a sacred place. However, the Talmud refers to the synagogue as a 'miniature sanctuary' which replicates the ancient Temple in Jerusalem and as a result, many Jews believe it offers the best place to connect with God, whether for prayer, for study, or for performing mitzvot. Some Jews may also travel to Jerusalem as part of a **pilgrimage** as they believe that God's presence can be felt at the **Western Wall**, the remaining wall of the Jewish Temple.

However, for most Jews the synagogue (along with the home) is the main place of worship. This provides Jews with a place to assemble, pray publicly and to study. **Synagogue** means 'bringing together' or 'assembly'. Synagogues need to be accessible to the elderly and disabled, and need to react to falling attendance numbers. The various beliefs and practices of the different Jewish groups are reflected in the various designs of different synagogues. Nevertheless, all synagogues serve four main functions:

- **Beit Tefilah** - A place of prayer. Many **Orthodox** Jews will go to the synagogue each evening to make up the ten men (**minyan**) needed before a service of community prayer can take place.
- **Beit Midrash** – A place of study. The synagogue is a place of learning; in fact some Jews refer to it as shul, which is the Yiddish word for school. They spend time learning Hebrew and studying the Torah.
- **A place of celebration:** Bar and Bat **Mitzvah**, weddings and festivals are all celebrated at the synagogue. Most Jews will also attend the synagogue on **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement) as this is considered the holiest day of the year.
- **Beit Knesset** – The House of Assembly. The synagogue provides the focus for many community-based activities, e.g. discussing important community events or actions, helping the poor, youth clubs, and various social events (religious and non-religious).

Key Concepts

- Can God be worshipped anywhere?
- How can God's presence be experienced in the world today?
- What is the role of the synagogue in Jewish life.
- What are the challenges faced by synagogues?

Key Sources of Authority

- **The Tenakh** - The Torah (the Law), the Nevi'im (the Prophets) and the Ketuvim (the Writings).
- **The Talmud** – this is the written version of the Oral Torah which provides a commentary to explain the meaning behind the scriptures and how to apply the laws.

Relevant past paper questions 2019 'All Jews should attend synagogue.'

Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view.
(You must refer to religion and belief in your answer.) **15 marks**