



Introducing religions

Everyday Jewish Life

Narrator:

Les & Irene Lancaster have been married for over 30 years.

Irene:

So that's my uncle Shimak from Paris, who was obviously born in Poland like my mum. What I like most about Les was his sense of humour. I now realise it's a very Jewish sense of humour. Which I hadn't realised then. And the other thing is, if you're going to have children, if you have a partner that's the same religion as you, it's quite a lot easier to bring them up in the Jewish way.

Les:

So much of Judaism revolves around the family. And of course children. And educating children and so on. And I don't think.. It has to be there from the whole of the family. I don't think it could work with one of the partners not being Jewish. I don't think you'd have that sense of the Jewish presence in the house.

Irene:

Hi, hello. What can you recommend today?

Butcher:

Well we've got a special on the chicken stir fry.

Irene:

This mince looks really nice, have you got some... I can see it's on special offer.

Butcher:

Yes we have we just did some now about 5 minutes ago

Irene

Kosher meat is where you get meat that has been authorised by the Beth din. Which is the authority of Jewish Law. The difference between Kosher and non Kosher meat is that in the Jewish religion, you're not allowed to eat any blood whatsoever. And the way the animal is killed is called 'Shechita'. And the person that does it is called the 'Shochet'. And that person has to be authorised and expert. But also there are certain meat that you can't eat. Such as pork for instance. And this is to do with the Bible. That the animal that you can get the cuts from has to chew the cud, and can't have cloven hooves.

Because I believe in the laws that I've just described to you, and also I'm continuing a tradition. It's not primarily just a faith tradition. But it's what you do in life that's important to be religious. So if I said I believed in God, and didn't buy Kosher meat, I wouldn't be regarded as an Orthodox Jew. It's not actually what you say, it's what you do that's important.

A Kosher kitchen will have different cupboards for meat and dairy dishes. And it will also have different crockery, cutlery for the dairy and the meat. I have one shelf where I put meat produce, including poultry. And then milk stuff. Cheese, yogurt, butter and milk would be on a different shelf. The way to create a difference between meat and milk dishes, is to have them different colours. So in my case, our meat dishes are blue. And our milk dishes tend to be green. And I also put them in different cupboards. I for instance have different dish cloths as well. So this would be milk, blue. Meat, this is red. And I've got a third one which is pareve, which neither meat nor milk. For instance something like hummus, or various dips you can get. And pareve, you can have with either meat or milk, but it is neither, meat nor

dairy produce itself. And this is because of the injunction in the book of Exodus. Which says that you shouldn't boil a kid. That means a young goat kid, in its mother's milk. Because the concept of milk is that of mercy. And of meat is that of severity. So they didn't want these concepts to mix at a higher level either.

Les:

It is very important to be able to walk to the Shul. On Shabbat and the Jewish festivals, we don't use a car. The laws of Shabbat are quite complex. But it involves not doing creative work. So for example if I'm turning the ignition in the car, I'm certainly making some kind of creative work. Shabbat is the reminder of God's creation of the world. And on the seventh day, he rested from creative work. So we emulate that by doing no creative work.

Les:

There are really two focal points in the Synagogue. The most important is at the front, facing towards Jerusalem. Which is the Ark. In the Ark, we have the sacred scrolls, the Torah. And at some stage in the service we bring out the scrolls to read from them. The decoration on the scrolls. It differs somewhere in different communities. There's the Saphardi tradition. There's the Ashkenazi tradition. But essentially there's deep meaning in the idea that we clothe the Torah.

The second focal area is the Bimah. Which is in the centre of the synagogue. Bimah just means a raised platform. Obviously as it were physically raised. But I think it's really talking about a spiritual plane as well. So the Bimah is in the centre of the synagogue. The all is very symbolic. The Bimah is in the centre, because it's amongst the people. In the community. In the congregation. So when we bring the scrolls from the Ark it is brought specifically to the Bimah so that it is coming from its special place. Into the heart of the community. And that is where it has to be. Judaism makes a lot of stall by the fact that the Torah is not something up in heaven. But it's something amongst us. It's a living presence. A living presence of the divine amongst ourselves.

Above the aron ha-kodesh, that's the Ark. Above the Ark, we have the ner tamid which means eternal light. As the term says, this light is always kept on. Light is always a symbol of the divine presence. And the idea that the Torah which is in the Ark, is our guiding light. Is really it says everything about Judaism. So we have a light above the Ark, which is at it were, as a physical light, is representing that guiding light.

In an orthodox synagogue like this one, then men and women are seated separately. With a division between them. We called it a Mechitza. In this synagogue, there's some ornate metal work with the Magen David, and some glass as well. The essential point is there has to be a separation. As far as Judaism is concerned, the home life revolves around the woman. And the man's role is more in the public areas. Those roles derive from what it is to be a man. And what it is to be a woman, in the eyes of god.

In the morning prayer service, we put on the tallit and the tefillin, every day except Shabbat. One of the basic ideas in Jewish thought is the idea of imitating God in some way.

There's a little meditation there, just before I put the tallit on. Which says in Hebrew 'O'te or ka-salma, no'te shamayim ka-y'ri'a'. which means that God wears light like a garment. And he spreads the heavens like a curtain. As if it's to say that God is in wraps with light. And so wearing the Tallit is a way of connecting with that idea. So one enwraps oneself with the Tallit. In another sense it's good way of focusing. Sometimes I will bring the Tallit over my head, and it just stops me being distracted by other things going on around.

In fact symbolically within the knottings, the twists and the knots in the fringes themselves, symbolically it eludes to the 613 misvot, the commands of the Torah. The tefillin. Well that's to do with binding. It actually connects back to the biblical story of the binding of Isaac. And symbolically Abraham we always associate with the right side. And Isaac is the left side in the whole symbolism, there. So it's the left side that you bind, the left arm. The tefillin are related to the heart and to the brain. So the one that is going on the left arm is directed, is trying to be close to the heart. The one on the head is related to the brain.

And the idea is that these different aspects, these faculties of the person, are brought together to express that focus, that intensity in prayer.

The boxes have within them [one word]. That is extracts from the Torah. Extracts to do with the shema. Which actually include the command to wear tefillin. And also extracts about coming out of Egypt. In the more mystical areas of Judaism, the idea of unification is very important. And there's this idea that the worlds created by God require a human input to effect that unification. And of course this relinks also to the prayer from which we get the command to wear the tefillin, which is the shema. And the shema is all about unification. shema is (hebrew). The word 'Ahad' means one. And that line, that first line is saying that here Israel the Lord is our God. The Lord is one. Three different names of God. Which we're trying to bring together into that final word of oneness, unity. To recognise the unity. So it's a unity of the world. A unity of god. And a little sense of unity in ourselves.