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JEWIS OF ISRAEL - INFORMATION SHEET

BACKGROUND

Israel, as it is known today, emerged from a UN decision to divide the region into Jewish and Arab states. The proposal was accepted by the Jews but rejected by the Arabs. Britain withdrew from Palestine in 1948. Since then the Jewish population has been made up of Jews from all corners of the world: from Yemen, Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, China, India, Iraq, Kurdistan, Ethiopia, Persia, Soviet Asia-Bucharest, Caucasia and Georgia. War broke out in response to the division of land and instability has marked the region since then. The population of Israel is 6.9 million. The worldwide Jewish population is 13 million. Israel is bordered by Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

LANGUAGE

Hebrew and Arabic are spoken. The population is predominantly Hebrew speaking Jews, but there are also Arabic speaking Israelis.

RELIGION

80% Jewish

15% Arab

5% Christian and other

KINDS OF JUDAISM: There are three main kinds of Judaism. They are Reform, Orthodox and Conservative. The same holy days are observed, but there are some differences in practice.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

CIRCUMCISION - Every Jewish baby boy is circumcised on the 8th day of his life. It is performed by a *mohel*, a man trained to perform the small operation. The baby is given his name during the circumcision. Baby girls are named in a synagogue service the week after their birth.

BATMITZVAH - At age 13 a Jewish boy is recognised as having achieved his religious majority. This is an important occasion. Girls have a bar mitzvah but it is not celebrated with such high regard.

SHABBAT - Shabbat is the Jewish name for Sabbath. It commences at sundown on Friday and goes to sundown on Saturday. Jews around the world observe Shabbat in different ways, but in general it begins with lighting candles to symbolise remembering and observing. A special meal is cooked and the family enjoys the time together. Observant Jews will not drive during Shabbat.

ROSH HASHONAH - the Jewish New Year. It begins with ten holy days when Jews are asked to repent for their sins. It is signaled by the blowing of a *shofar* (ram's horn).

YOM KIPPUR - the Day of Atonement occurring on the 10th day after *Rosh Hashonah*. Jews will fast on this day avoiding both food and water.

PASSOVER – This religious day celebrates the Jewish history as much as the freedom from slavery and is celebrated all around the world. It is celebrated with Jews sitting around a table retelling the story of the Jews' exodus from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

KIBBUTZ: A kibbutz is a community living arrangement. About 5% of Jews in Israel now live this kind of lifestyle. The history of the kibbutz movement has changed dramatically over time but one aspect of interest to child care workers is the raising of children in a children's house rather than by their parents. The children spend about three hours a day with their birth parents. Studies have not shown any adverse affects of this kind of living arrangement.

MARRIAGE: The line of a Jew is carried through the female. So if a Jewish woman marries a non-Jew, the children are considered Jews.

CLOTHING: Observant Jews dress modestly. Men always cover their heads, even inside and women do not wear trousers. But Reform Jews and less observant Jews tend to dress in Western style clothes.

CHILD REARING PRACTICES: Outside of the kibbutz, Jewish people are very family oriented. Children are given some leeway but are expected to be respectful of adults.

CUISINE

KOSHER FOOD: The term kosher refers to food that meets Jewish dietary laws. There are many rules, but only observant Jews follow all of them. Most Jews do not eat pork or certain fish such as prawns, crayfish and mussels. Those Jews who comply with strict rules of kosher food tend to only mix amongst likeminded people. So if a child is in a non-Jewish child care centre it is most likely they are not strict with their food requirements.

References:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kibbutz>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>