

Masorti
Shabbat



שבת מסורתי



Masorti

UNWRAPPED



A MASORTI VIEW OF...

...God

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg • *New North London Synagogue and Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism*

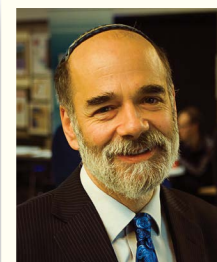
Judaism is not only a culture or collective identity, but a living faith. Trust in God is its soul, service of God through compassion and justice its ideal. Judaism calls us not to a dogmatic creed, but to live in heartfelt relationship with God, facilitated by prayer, Torah study, the experience of sabbaths and festivals and the challenge and opportunity of the commandments.

God is One, yet experienced differently by each person. The heart can know God, whom the mind cannot conceptualise.

To some, God rules the world. Manifest in the Exodus, God was hidden during the Holocaust, but will be revealed again in the future.

To others, such an understanding is contradicted by history and injustice. God is rather the hidden presence within and beyond all consciousness, calling the heart and conscience.

To all, faith is struggle: moments of intimate experience, silences between. We are all seekers and questioners.



...Halacha

Rabbi Chaim Weiner • *Director of the Masorti Bet Din*



V'lo ha'midrash hu ha-ikar, eilah hama'aseh: 'It's not 'study' that matters – it's 'action'. Avot 1:17

One of the basic tenets of Judaism is that it is not enough to have high ideals if they are not also accompanied by appropriate deeds. Over the centuries, the Jewish tradition has developed a way of life that seeks to translate these ideals into everyday actions. This is known as *halacha*.

Masorti Judaism is committed to the observance of halacha, but it differs from Orthodox Judaism in two important ways. Firstly, it is based on a historical understanding of the Jewish tradition. Jewish law didn't just come down from heaven: it developed over time in response to people's changing lives. Secondly, we take not only technological change, but also social change into consideration. That is the reason that Masorti halacha differs from Orthodoxy particularly in those areas where there has been a profound social change in society – such as our acceptance of the equal role of women.

The observance of halacha remains for Masorti Jews a core element of our Jewish tradition. We believe it broadens our horizons, deepens our understanding and enriches our lives.

...Torah

Rabbi Jeremy Gordon • *New London Synagogue*

At its most limited, Torah is the Five Books of Moses – the *Humash*. More broadly, Torah includes the rest of the written Hebrew Bible, and also the Oral Torah – with the latter including not only Talmud and Midrash, but also, 'that which a committed student will innovate in the future,' even that which, 'was already said to Moses at Sinai' (TY, Peah, 17b).

More broadly still, Torah is the path by which Jews make lives of meaning. That's something beyond quill and ink, and even beyond the Talmudic sage Reish Lakish's eloquent image of black fire carved on white fire (TY, Shekalim 49d). Ultimately, Torah is the will of God; an ineffable, infinite complexity beyond human ken. Midrash Bereshit Rabba 1:1 suggests that Torah was the blueprint from which God created this world.

These broad conceptions should draw some of the sting out of the old arguments about Divine authorship – it's not really the point.



...Prayer

Chazan Jaclyn Chernett • *Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue*



The Hebrew for Jewish 'prayer' is *t'filla*, which means to search inside one's self. *T'filla* is entered into three times a day – evening, morning and afternoon. We express it in Hebrew, through the Siddur – our daily prayer book, and through the Machzor on festivals.

There are various aspects of *t'filla* – thanks, praise, joy, remorse, pleading and so on. All of them express the depths of Jewish yearning. Not only are we obliged to engage with this on a private basis (a basic human need), but also as a community, enabling and empowering each other to join in – particularly through the beautiful traditions of our music.

T'filla is central to an engaged Jewish life. It is for everyone, and even if we don't understand the words, we can immerse ourselves in its sounds and be part of it.

...Jewish Learning

Rabbi Roni Tabick • *New Stoke Newington Shul and New North London Synagogue*

Talmud Torah, the obligation to study, is part of the core of Masorti Judaism. To be able to learn with your whole self, including the parts that are critical and academic, is our inheritance from Rabbi Louis Jacobs and a legacy that we take seriously.

The great Louis Finkelstein once said, 'When I pray, I speak to God. When I study Torah, God speaks to me.' Learning and prayer are supposed to be balanced against one another – both spiritual practices that connect us to the divine, but acting on different aspects of ourselves. All communities need both prayer and learning if they are to survive and thrive.

To learn is to open up our heritage, to enrich our lives with the wisdom of our ancestors and to challenge ourselves to grow. When done with the right spirit, Jewish learning is the well of energy where we go to recharge, enabling us to reengage with the struggles of the world.



...Social Justice

Rabbi Adam Zagoria-Moffet • St Albans Masorti Synagogue



For Masorti Judaism, social justice is not a pursuit motivated by compassion or contemporary values. Instead, it is an obligation – part of the halachic system which moulds every aspect of life.

To walk the path of halachah, we must take seriously the calls to protect the poor, fight on behalf of the oppressed and care for the vulnerable members of society. We do so not only because we believe it is right, but because we believe that the Master of the World requires it of us.

This frees us from the capricious whims of whatever politics are en vogue and allows us the liberty necessary to make our quest for justice timeless. We should remind ourselves that we walk in God's

ways when we do these things – loving mercy and doing justice – and that is what it means to live halachah as a holistic path upon which the course of our lives carries us.

...Inclusion

Rabbi Oliver Joseph • New North London Synagogue and the Chavurah

Are we here to realise our unity as a people or are we here to find our disunity, to cherish our independence? The story of the Tower of Babel describes how the people of the Earth speak one language and seek to maintain their unity by building a great tower. God does not want them using their unity in this way, and instead chooses to confuse the people of the world by creating individual languages.

The story sets up a dichotomy between power found in unity and humility found in difference. When the Torah commands us to, 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18), the challenge presented is to see our neighbour as both a stranger – lonely and separated, and as our fellow human – part of a whole, part of our community.

As we look beyond our own experience of the world and see that others, too, are both included and excluded, we might understand that our greatest piety, our highest calling, is to welcome all – to include everyone.



...Community

Rabbi Mijael Even-David • Edgware Masorti Synagogue



Masorti Judaism is formed by communities everywhere in the world. Most of these are synagogue communities in the conventional sense; others take different forms, such as Noam (youth), Marom (students) or the Havurah (a non-traditional group meeting in different locations).

Community comes from the Latin *communis*: 'as one'. This Godlike unity enables us to form a *minyan* and recite particular prayers known as *devarim shebikdushah* – prayers of special sanctity – such as the Kaddish or the Torah service. We can carry out most prayers alone, but the most holy ones require the unity only a community can provide.

A community may begin with the aim of providing a *minyan*, but this unity should in time extend to caring for each other, helping in times

of need, rejoicing in happy moments, studying Torah and just enjoying each other's presence. A Masorti community is a place to be together, to pray, eat, laugh, study and just to feel at home.

...Israel

Rabbi Joel Levy • Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue and the Conservative Yeshiva



Judaism is, broadly speaking, a communitarian tradition. Spirituality and morality are viewed not as the isolated, lonely ventures of a heroic individual but as communal projects. Because of this, Judaism regards the collective as extremely important.

Masorti/Conservative Judaism was fully supportive when the Jewish people acted, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to re-establish the Jewish national collective – the State of Israel.

What happens in Israel matters. The Jewish collective is responsible for a deep range of mitzvah-rich activities, from ensuring national defense to protecting the country's environment. Only in Israel can Jews argue about what a just society should look like and then have the

power to put those communal decisions into effect.

Diaspora Jews must also be involved in shaping the kind of Jewish national collective that we believe in. Masorti Judaism is heavily invested in pushing Israeli society to be more peaceful, ecological, pluralistic, non-coercive, feminist and egalitarian. That investment is Masorti Zionism.

...Mitzvot

Chazan Bex Blumenfeld • Oxford Masorti Group

The scholar Arnold M. Eisen writes, 'The voice of mitzvah that has been sounding among Jews since Sinai cannot but sound somewhat different today.' Thus, Masorti Judaism, while maintaining a deep desire to be guided by law and the tradition, recognises the need to simultaneously engage with modern society.

According to Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, head of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly in the USA, '...practising mitzvot... is the pathway to uncovering the full richness of Judaism in our lives.'

This is the baseline of the Masorti creed. We understand that our performance of said mitzvot are, in her words, '...the sacred vehicle by which we carry our vision of justice and lovingkindness to the next generation'. Central to our commitment to perform mitzvot is our belief that we must focus not only on those that relate to ritual, but also those concerned with leading an ethical life.



...Jewish Peoplehood

Rabbi Daniella Kolodny • Masorti Judaism



The Passover Haggadah relates the story of four sons. The contrarian asks, 'What does this rite mean to you?' The Haggadah answers, 'To you and not to him. And since he excluded himself from the community, he is a heretic.'

Klal Yisrael, or Jewish peoplehood, is the concept that all Jews are inextricably bound to each other through a shared history, culture, religious tradition and destiny. The Torah is an expression of our religious life but also describes the divine imperative for the Jewish people to care for each other and for our neighbours.

Masorti Judaism believes that *all* the children of the Haggadah, even the contrarian, are welcome at the Masorti seder table. The

Jewish people and the Jewish tradition are more complex and nuanced than the parable suggests; consequently, to be part of the Jewish people is to sit down at the proverbial seder table together.



Noam – the Masorti Youth Movement



We are the Zionist youth movement for Masorti Judaism, home to a welcoming and dynamic community that has been empowering young people to learn and lead for thirty years.

Noam was created to give Masorti young people somewhere to grow; a place to build their own Jewish identity, to develop their values and understand what it means to live out their ideals.

We are proud of our vibrant ideology, which is shaped by our members. At the heart of everything we do are our five ideological branches – Masorti Judaism, *Zionism*, *Gemilut Hasadim* (Acts of Loving Kindness), *Hagshama Atzmit* (Personal Development) and *Kehilla* (Community).

Through summer camps, trips to Israel, weekly club, sleepovers and our two-year leadership programme

(Meltam and Masa), Noam gives young people life-long friendships – and through those friendships, our community has blossomed.

Noam graduates are a remarkable group of people. They can be found in leadership roles in every sector, from charity and education to law and business. Noam has taught them to care about the world, to live authentic Jewish lives, and to find meaning in everything they do.

Noam gives children the chance to connect with their Jewish identity, to strengthen community bonds and be part of something that is bigger than themselves.

Thirty years on, we have learnt a lot – but this is only just the beginning.

Come be part of our next chapter. Visit www.masortiyouth.org or call 020 8349 6650 to make sure you don't miss out!






There are **15**
Masorti communities
in the UK.



We have over
6,000 members –
up by more than **60%**
in 15 years.



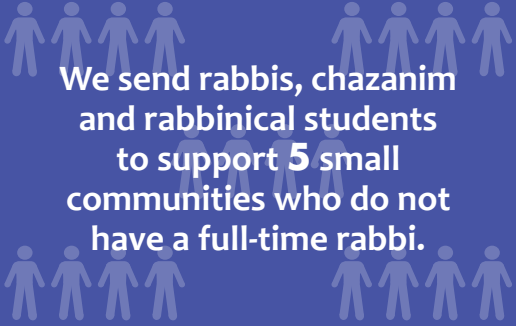
We are funding two
rabbinical students and
employ two new rabbis
working across four
separate communities.



100 young leaders had a
transformative educational
experience at **noam**
pre-camp in 2017, enabling
them to engage with
Jewish values and
pressing social issues.




Nearly **200** children
took part in **noam** summer
and winter camps in the
last year.



We send rabbis, chazanim
and rabbinical students
to support **5** small
communities who do not
have a full-time rabbi.



In the last year, **76**
young people went on
Israel tour and **69** took
part in **noam's** flagship
youth leadership training
programme, Merkaz Noam.



Over **300** generous donors
have helped us raise nearly
£**200,000** in the last 12
months, which has meant all
of these things could happen
– and much more.