

# Basic Beliefs and Observances

## Monotheism

The most basic belief of Judaism is monotheism. A *midrash*, a Jewish legend, teaches that Abraham's father was an idol-maker; and one day when Abraham was young, his father left him in charge of the store. Abraham took a wooden club and smashed every idol in the store except for the largest one, and placed the club in its hand. When his father returned and asked Abraham what had happened, Abraham told him that the idols got in a fight, and the largest one smashed all of the smaller ones! His father said, "Do you expect me to believe that an idol can do that? They are just wood and stone. Tell me what really happened!" Abraham responded, "If you really believe that idols are only stone and wood, why do you worship them?"

## Chosen People

Another belief of Judaism is that the Jews are the "chosen people." This does not mean that Jews believe they are better than other people or that people need to convert to Judaism in order to be loved by God. Rather, it means that God chose the Jewish people for the special responsibility of receiving the Torah and observing all of its mitzvot and passing the special ethical messages of the Torah to the rest of the world.

## Messiah

Both Judaism and Christianity believe in a *Messiah*. The word Messiah is a Hebrew word which means "anointed." In Biblical times the coronation of a new king involved pouring a small amount of oil on his head, called *anointing*. Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah (the name *Christ* comes from a Greek word meaning messiah) and that he will return. Christians also believe that the Messiah is the son of God. Jews believe that the Messiah will be a human being, a descendant of King David, who will bring the world to a time of complete peace in which every person will recognize and worship one God. Some Jews also believe that the Messiah will gather all Jews to the land of Israel, the Temple will be rebuilt, and there will be a resurrection of the dead.