

**Note: The Ordnung is a set of rules for Amish, Old Order Mennonite and Conservative Mennonite living. Ordnung is the German word for order, discipline, rule, arrangement, organization, or system.**

### **"Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?"**

Answer: The Amish are a group of people who follow the teachings of Jacob Ammann, a 17th-century citizen of Switzerland. It is a Protestant denomination, closely related to the Mennonites. The Amish, most of whom live in the United States, follow simple customs and refuse to take oaths, vote, or perform military service. They shun modern technology and conveniences. Transportation for the Amish is by horse and buggy. They do not have electricity or telephones in their homes. The men usually wear beards and pants with buttons instead of zippers. The women wear white head coverings and plain dresses, usually without buttons—they use straight pins to fasten the clothing.

The Amish believe that James 1:27 "...and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" means to stay away from things the "world" does—like driving autos, having a TV, going to movies, wearing make-up, and the enjoying the conveniences of electricity and phones. They often use generators to create power to run their equipment and use horses, instead of tractors, to do farm work. The bishop (leader) of an Amish community (district) sets up the rules of conduct allowed for his district. Some bishops are more lenient than others. The Amish have church services in their own homes, taking turns hosting on Sundays, and do not have church buildings. They usually only go to a formal school until age 15.

The Amish groups have problems, just like anyone else. Most of these church groups try to keep their problems concealed from the outside world. The youth are given the opportunity to taste of "the world" in their late teens to determine if they want to join the church. Many young Amish people get involved in drugs, alcohol, sex, and other vices during this time period while they are allowed to own a motor vehicle, but a large number then do give up the vehicle and join the church. Others determine they will not join the church and attempt to fit into the secular world.

Spiritually speaking, the Amish are very similar to the traditional Jews that keep the Old Testament Law. They have a long list of do's and don'ts. If they fail to keep the list, they are in trouble with the church and are in danger of being shunned. Shunning is a form of excommunication. If they partake of the "worldly" things, they are shunned by the church people.

The Amish believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that He died for their sins, and that He is the way to salvation. However, many Amish also practice a works-based relationship with God. They view their good works as earning favour with God. If their good works outweigh the bad works, they feel God will allow them into heaven. The Amish are basically good, hard-working people, who have to make sure they stay on the right path, so they get final rewards in heaven when life is over.

### **What happens at Rumspringa?**

In many communities, Rumspringa is a period when some Amish youth, boys more than girls, experience greater freedom. They are no longer under the control of their parents on weekends and, because they are not baptized, they are not yet under the authority of the church. During this time, many Amish youth adhere to traditional Amish behaviour. Others, however, experiment with "worldly" activities—buying a car, going to movies, wearing non-Amish clothes, buying a television or a DVD player. In the larger Amish settlements, an adolescent's behaviour often depends on the peer group he or she chooses to join. Amish parents may worry about which group their child will join because the choice will influence the teen's behaviour.

Traditional youth activities may include volleyball, swimming, ice skating, picnics, hiking, and large outdoor "supper" parties. The most typical gatherings are "singings." Groups meet in a home and sing German hymns and English gospel songs for several hours and then enjoy a time of conversation and food. The "faster," more rebellious groups sometimes drive cars, rent a building for parties, or go to bars and nightclubs in nearby towns.

A fling with life outside their community reminds Amish youth that they have a choice regarding church membership. Knowing they have a choice likely strengthens their willingness to obey church standards and, in the long run, the authority of the church itself.

### **What happens if they return to the Amish community?**

If they choose to return and join the church, they do so with full knowledge of what they are giving up in order to be part of the community. If they do not return, family ties are still viable because they did not break an oath to the church.

The vast majority do return. If they choose to be baptized, they submit themselves to the order of the church for the rest of their lives. In doing so, candidates make a confession of faith and agree to comply with the order of the Amish community, or the Ordnung, an unwritten tradition that spells out expected behaviours and regulations.

After returning to the community young people get married after harvest - from late October through early December. They will then settle down to community life and begin a family, raising their children in the Amish way. Newly married couples usually set up housekeeping in the spring after their wedding. Until then the groom may live at the bride's home or continue to live with his parents. Couples do not take a traditional honeymoon, but visit relatives on weekends during the winter months. Several newlywed couples may visit together, sometimes staying overnight at the home of close relatives. During these visits, family and friends present gifts to the newlyweds to add to the bride's dowry, which often consists of furniture. Young men begin growing a beard, the functional equivalent of a wedding ring, soon after their marriage.

### **What happens if they don't return to the Amish community?**

Amish shunning is the use of social exclusion as method used to enforce Amish church rules.

Contrary to popular belief, Amish shunning does not end of all social interaction, but it does involve rituals that remind the wayward of their sin and seek to bring them back into fellowship.

Imagine that you have joined and then left the Amish Church and you have now been shunned.

When you are shunned:

- Amish members may no longer eat at the same table with you. This means that when you attend an Amish gathering like a wedding or funeral, you must sit apart from the Church members when food is served.
- Members may not do business with you. This can be a real hardship if you buy from and sell to your Amish neighbours.
- Members may not ride in your car. If you visit your family they are forbidden to ride with you, even though they are allowed to ride with their "English" neighbour.
- Members cannot receive anything from you. Friends and family can help you by giving you money or things that you need. But they are forbidden to accept anything from you.

For example, if when visiting your Amish family, you want to serve a glass of water to your parents, you must leave it on the table for one of your younger siblings to give to your parents. Since your siblings are not yet members of the Amish church, they are not yet bound to the rules applying to shunning.