

Judaism 101



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Welcome!

Welcome to Judaism 101! Judaism 101 is an online encyclopedia of Judaism, covering Jewish beliefs, people, places, things, language, scripture, holidays, practices and customs. My goal is to make freely available a wide variety of basic, general information about Judaism, written from a traditional perspective in plain English. This web site is constantly growing, with new information added every few weeks.

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The information in this site is written predominantly from the [Orthodox](#) viewpoint, because I believe that is the starting point for any inquiry into Judaism. As recently as 200 years ago, this was the only Judaism, and it still is the only Judaism in many parts of the world. Be aware, however, that many Jews do not follow all of the traditions described here, or in the precise form described here. The [Conservative movement](#) believes that these laws and traditions can change to suit the times, and [Reform/Liberal/Progressive movements](#) believe that individuals can make choices about what traditions to follow. However, what I present here is the starting point, the traditions that are being changed or chosen. On some pages, I have identified variations in practice or belief in other movements.

About the Author








This site is created, written and maintained by Tracey Rich. I do not claim to be a [rabbi](#) or an expert on Judaism; I'm just a traditional, observant Jew who has put in a lot of research. I work as the Educational Director for [LegalEdge Software](#), a company that develops, markets and supports case management software for lawyers. I am also the co-author of several legal reference texts, including [Pennsylvania Damages: Personal Injury Verdicts and Settlements](#). I am a member of [Congregation Or Shalom](#), a Conservative synagogue in Chester County, PA.

If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, or corrections, please let me know at:

webmaster@jewfaq.org

I try to respond to all questions I get, but it usually takes me a week or more to respond.

Awards

		<p>"Judaism 101 is a must-see." Yahoo Internet Life - May 1998</p>	
			
 <p>From Jewish.com March 15, 2001</p>	<p>☆☆☆☆☆ From Suite101.com</p>		
		 <p>For Yom Kippur and Days of Awe Two years in a row! 1996 and 1997!</p>	



Where to Start

There are over sixty web pages on this site, comprising over 200 pages of text, a virtual book of information on Judaism. That's a lot of information! Where should you start? That depends on what you're looking for:

Just browsing?

If you're not sure what you're looking for, and you just want to see what's available on this site, look through the [Table of Contents](#).

Looking for something specific?

If you are looking for something specific, I now have a [Search Engine](#) for this site. Enter a term and it will search the glossary and index, giving you quick definitions and explanations, and pointing you to appropriate pages in this site.

Beginner, Intermediate or Advanced?

Judaism 101 was originally created as an introduction to Judaism for people with little or no knowledge. But like the [Passover](#) seder, this site now includes information for the wise son, who wants to know the ritual details; the simple son, who asks simple questions; and the son who does not know what to ask (the wicked son can go someplace else <grin>). All pages are now labeled appropriately:

Basic: Things that everyone should know, that require no prior knowledge

Intermediate: Beyond the basics

Advanced: More sophisticated concepts

Want to see what's new?

If you've been here before and just want to see what's new on the site, try the [What's Nu?](#) page, a chronological list of additions and significant changes to pages in this site. You can also join the JewFAQ mailing list at [Yahoo Groups](#) to receive the "What's Nu" updates by e-mail. Sign up for the group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/JewFAQ>. This mailing list will also send notices of upcoming Jewish holidays.

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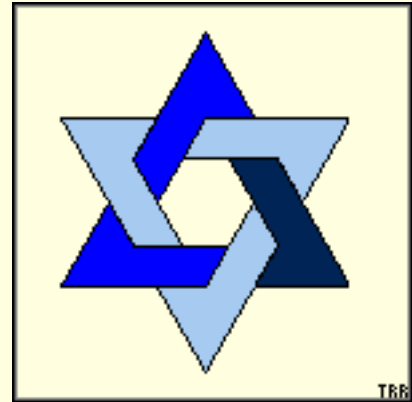
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Other useful Jewish links:

- [Maven - The Virtual Know-It-All](#) (a search engine of Jewish and Israel websites)
- [613.org](#) (a source of educational Orthodox Jewish audio and video files, all available for free viewing online using RealPlayer!)
- [The Jewish Dance](#) (A weird and wonderful site, full of Jewish animated .gifs, Yiddish proverbs, and Jewish MIDI's. Each .gif has a hidden link to a Jewish website.)
- [The Mining Company's Guide to Judaism](#) (a great resource for Jewish information with extensive links)
- [Shamash Home Page](#) (a little bit of everything!)
- [Virtual Jerusalem](#) (a wide variety of resources from a site based in Israel)

- [OU Online](#) (home page of the Orthodox Union)
- [Chabad in Cyberspace](#) (Lubavitcher Chasidic Judaism)
- [BSZ Net](#) (Sephardic Judaism)
- [Ethiopian Jewry Home Page](#) (also known as Falasahas or Beta Israel)
- [JewishGen: The Home of Jewish Genealogy](#) (an excellent resource for researching your family history!)
- [Jews for Judaism](#) (counter-missionary organization)
- [The Conversion to Judaism Home Page](#) (an extensive resource for people considering conversion to Judaism, written from a Conservative perspective)
- [AICE - American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise](#) (an activist organization to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship by emphasizing the values our nations share)

These sites offer e-mail courses in Jewish education and other valuable resources:

- [Project Genesis - Torah on the Information Superhighway](#)
- [Yeshivat Har Etzion - Virtual Beit Midrash](#)

What Is Judaism?

Level: Basic

What is Judaism? What does it mean to be a Jew? Most people, both Jewish and gentile, would instinctively say that Judaism is a religion. And yet, there are militant atheists who insist that they are Jews! Is Judaism a race? If you were to say so, most Jews would think you were an antisemite! So what is Judaism?

Is Judaism a Religion?

Clearly, there is a religion called Judaism, a set of ideas about the world and the way we should live our lives that is called "Judaism." It is studied in Religious Studies courses and taught to Jewish children in [Hebrew](#) schools. See [What do Jews Believe?](#) for details. There is a lot of flexibility about certain aspects of those beliefs, and a lot of disagreement about specifics, but that flexibility is built into the organized system of belief that is Judaism.

However, many people who call themselves Jews do not believe in that religion at all! More than half of all Jews in [Israel](#) today call themselves "secular," and don't believe in [G-d](#) or any of the religious beliefs of Judaism. Half of all Jews in the United States don't belong to any [synagogue](#). They may practice some of the rituals of Judaism and celebrate some of the [holidays](#), but they don't think of these actions as religious activities.

The most traditional Jews and the most liberal Jews and everyone in between would agree that these secular people are still Jews, regardless of their disbelief. See [Who is a Jew?](#) Clearly, then, there is more to being Jewish than just a religion.

Are Jews a Race?

In the 1980s, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Jews are a race, at least for purposes of certain anti-discrimination laws. Their reasoning: at the time these laws were passed, people routinely spoke of the "Jewish race" or the "Italian race" as well as the "Negro race," so that is what the legislators intended to protect.

But many Jews were deeply offended by that decision, offended by any hint that Jews could be considered a race. The idea of Jews as a race brings to mind nightmarish visions of Nazi Germany, where Jews were declared to be not just a race, but an inferior race that had to be rounded up into ghettos and exterminated like vermin.

But setting aside the emotional issues, Jews are clearly not a race.

Race is a genetic distinction, and refers to people with shared ancestry and shared genetic traits. You can't change your race; it's in your DNA. I could never become black or Asian no matter how much I might want to.

Common ancestry is not required to be a Jew. Many Jews worldwide share common ancestry, as shown by genetic research; however, you can be a Jew without sharing this common ancestry, for example, by

[converting](#). Thus, although I could never become black or Asian, blacks and Asians have become Jews (Sammy Davis Jr. and Connie Chung).

Is It a Culture or Ethnic Group?

Most secular American Jews think of their Jewishness as a matter of culture or ethnicity. When they think of Jewish culture, they think of the [food](#), of the Yiddish language, of some limited [holiday](#) observances, and of cultural values like the emphasis on education.

Those secular American Jews would probably be surprised to learn that much of what they think of as Jewish culture is really just [Ashkenazic](#) Jewish culture, the culture of Jews whose ancestors come from one part of the world. Jews have lived in many parts of the world and have developed many different traditions. As a [Sephardic](#) friend likes to remind me, [Yiddish](#) is not part of his culture, nor are [bagels and lox](#), chopped liver, [latkes](#), [gefilte fish](#) or [matzah ball soup](#). His idea of Jewish cooking includes bourekas, phyllo dough pastries filled with cheese or spinach. His ancestors probably wouldn't know what to do with a [dreidel](#).

There are certainly cultural traits and behaviors that are shared by many Jews, that make us feel more comfortable with other Jews. Jews in many parts of the world share many of those cultural aspects. However, that culture is not shared by all Jews all over the world, and people who do not share that culture are no less Jews because of it. Thus, Judaism must be something more than a culture or an ethnic group.

The Jews Are a Nation or a People

It is clear from the discussion above that there is a certain amount of truth in the claims that it is a religion, a race, or an ethnic group, none of these descriptions is entirely adequate to describe what connects Jews to other Jews. And yet, almost all Jews feel a sense of connectedness to each other that many find hard to explain, define, or even understand.

The best explanation is the traditional one given in the [Torah](#): that the Jews are a nation. The [Hebrew](#) word, believe it or not, is "[goy](#)." We use the word "nation" not in the modern sense meaning a territorial and political entity, but in the ancient sense meaning a group of people with a common history, a common destiny, and a sense that we are all connected to each other. We are, in short, an enormous extended family.

Some Jews don't like to use the word "nation." Jews have often been falsely accused of being disloyal to their own country because of their loyalty to the Jewish "nation." Antisemites routinely accuse Jews of being more loyal to [Israel](#) than to their home country. But whatever you want to call it, that sense of nationhood or peoplehood is probably the only thing about Judaism that we can all agree on and that we can all relate to. Anyone who feels any sense of Jewish identity shares that sense of Jewish peoplehood.

When we speak of that nation, however, we do not refer to it as "Judaism." We refer to that nation as "the Jewish people" or "the Children of Israel" (a reference to our patriarch, [Jacob](#), also known as Israel).

This notion of Jews as a nation or people encompasses many of the ideas above. As a nation or people, we share common ideas, ancestry, and culture, but there is also room for diversity in each of these areas.

The most important part of being a nation is that sense of interconnectedness.

Judaism as a religion is very communally-oriented. For example, our [prayers](#) are normally stated in the plural, and we are supposed to pray in communal groups. Many of our [holiday](#) observances are family or community-oriented. And yet, even people who are not religious at all feel that sense of Jewish community.

When Jews suffer or are persecuted, we all feel their pain. For example, in the 1980s, when Africa was suffering from droughts and famines, many Jews around the world learned for the first time about the Beta Israel, the Jews of Ethiopia. Their religion, race and culture are quite different from ours, and we had not even known that they existed before the famine. And yet, our hearts went out to them as our fellow Jews during this period of famine, and Jews from around the world helped them to emigrate to [Israel](#).

When a Jew does something illegal, immoral or shameful, we all feel the shame, and we all feel that it reflects on us. As Jews, many of us were embarrassed by the Monica Lewinsky scandal, because Lewinsky is a Jew. We were shocked when Israeli Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin was killed by a Jew, unable to believe that one Jew would ever kill another.

And when a Jew accomplishes something significant, we all feel proud. A perfect example of Jews (even completely secular ones) delighting in the accomplishments of our fellow Jews is the perennial popularity of Adam Sandler's [Chanukkah](#) songs, listing famous people who are Jewish. We all take pride in scientists like Albert Einstein or political leaders like Joe Lieberman (we don't all agree with his politics or his religious views, but we were all proud to see him on a national ticket). And is there a Jew who doesn't know (or at least feel pride upon learning) that Sandy Koufax declined to pitch in a World Series game that fell on [Yom Kippur](#)?

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What Do Jews Believe?

Level: Basic

This is a far more difficult question than you might expect. Judaism has no dogma, no formal set of beliefs that one must hold to be a Jew. In Judaism, actions are far more important than beliefs, although there is certainly a place for belief within Judaism.

The closest that anyone has ever come to creating a widely-accepted list of Jewish beliefs is [Rambam's](#) thirteen principles of faith. Rambam's thirteen principles of faith, which he thought were the minimum requirements of Jewish belief, are:

1. [G-d](#) exists
2. G-d is one and unique
3. G-d is incorporeal
4. G-d is eternal
5. [Prayer](#) is to be directed to G-d alone and to no other
6. The words of the [prophets](#) are true
7. [Moses's](#) prophecies are true, and Moses was the greatest of the prophets
8. The [Written Torah](#) (first 5 books of the Bible) and [Oral Torah](#) (teachings now contained in the [Talmud](#) and other writings) were given to Moses
9. There will be no other Torah
10. G-d knows the thoughts and deeds of men
11. G-d will reward the good and punish the wicked
12. The [Messiah](#) will come
13. The [dead](#) will be [resurrected](#)

As you can see, these are very basic and general principles. Yet as basic as these principles are, the necessity of believing each one of these has been disputed at one time or another, and the liberal [movements](#) of Judaism dispute many of these principles.

Unlike many other religions, Judaism does not focus much on abstract cosmological concepts. Although Jews have certainly considered the [nature of G-d](#), [man](#), the universe, [life](#) and the [afterlife](#) at great length (see [Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism](#)), there is no mandated, official, definitive belief on these subjects, outside of the very general concepts discussed above. There is substantial room for personal opinion on all of these matters, because as I said before, Judaism is more concerned about actions than beliefs.

Judaism focuses on relationships: the relationship between G-d and mankind, between G-d and the [Jewish nation](#), between the Jewish nation and the [land of Israel](#), and between human beings. Our scriptures tell the story of the development of these relationships, from the time of creation, through the creation of the relationship between G-d and [Abraham](#), to the creation of the relationship between G-d and the [Jewish people](#), and forward. The scriptures also specify the mutual obligations created by these relationships, although various movements of Judaism disagree about the nature of these obligations.

Some say they are absolute, unchanging laws from G-d (Orthodox); some say they are laws from G-d that change and evolve over time (Conservative); some say that they are guidelines that you can choose whether or not to follow (Reform, Reconstructionist). For more on these distinctions, see [Movements of Judaism](#).

So, what are these actions that Judaism is so concerned about? According to Orthodox Judaism, these actions include [613 commandments](#) given by G-d in the [Torah](#) as well as laws instituted by the [rabbis](#) and long-standing customs. These actions are discussed in depth on the page regarding [Halakhah: Jewish Law](#) and the pages following it.

Suggestions for Further Reading

As I said above, Judaism focuses more on actions than on beliefs, and books about Judaism tend to do the same. Most books emphasize holidays, practices and observances. The best summary of Jewish beliefs I've seen is Milton Steinberg's [Basic Judaism](#). This book presents and contrasts the traditional and modern perspectives, and shows that we have more in common than many of us realize.



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The Nature of G-d

Level: Intermediate

The nature of [G-d](#) is one of the few areas of abstract Jewish belief where there are a number of clear-cut ideas about which there is little dispute or disagreement.

G-d Exists

The fact of G-d's existence is accepted almost without question. Proof is not needed, and is rarely offered. The [Torah](#) begins by stating "In the beginning, G-d created..." It does not tell who G-d is or how He was created.

In general, Judaism views the existence of G-d as a necessary prerequisite for the existence of the universe. The existence of the universe is sufficient proof of the existence of G-d.

G-d is One

One of the primary expressions of Jewish faith, recited twice daily in [prayer](#), is the [Shema](#), which begins "Hear, Israel: The L-rd is our G-d, The L-rd is one." This simple statement encompasses several different ideas:

1. There is only one G-d. No other being participated in the work of creation.
2. G-d is a unity. He is a single, whole, complete indivisible entity. He cannot be divided into parts or described by attributes. Any attempt to ascribe attributes to G-d is merely man's imperfect attempt to understand the infinite.
3. G-d is the only being to whom we should offer praise. The Shema can also be translated as "The L-rd is our G-d, The L-rd alone," meaning that no other is our G-d, and we should not [pray](#) to any other.

G-d is the Creator of Everything

Everything in the universe was created by G-d and only by G-d. Judaism completely rejects the dualistic notion that evil was created by Satan or some other deity. All comes from G-d. As Isaiah said, "I am the L-rd, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil. I am the L-rd, that does all these things." (Is. 45:6-7).

G-d is Incorporeal

Although many places in scripture and [Talmud](#) speak of various parts of G-d's body (the Hand of G-d, G-d's wings, etc.) or speak of G-d in anthropomorphic terms (G-d walking in the garden of Eden, G-d laying [tefillin](#), etc.), Judaism firmly maintains that G-d has no body. Any reference to G-d's body is simply a figure of speech, a means of making G-d's actions more comprehensible to beings living in a material world. Much of [Rambam's](#) Guide for the Perplexed is devoted to explaining each of these anthropomorphic references and proving that they should be understood figuratively.

We are forbidden to represent G-d in a physical form. That is considered idolatry. The sin of the Golden Calf incident was not that the people chose another deity, but that they tried to represent G-d in a physical form.

G-d is Neither Male nor Female

This followed directly from the fact that G-d has no physical form. As one [rabbi](#) explained it to me, G-d has no body, no genitalia, therefore the very idea that G-d is male or female is patently absurd. We refer to G-d using masculine terms simply for convenience's sake, because Hebrew has no neutral gender; G-d is no more male than a table is.

Although we usually speak of G-d in masculine terms, there are times when we refer to G-d using feminine terms. The Shechinah, the manifestation of G-d's presence that fills the universe, is conceived of in feminine terms, and the word Shechinah is a feminine word.

G-d is Omnipresent

G-d is in all places at all times. He fills the universe and exceeds its scope. He is always near for us to call upon in need, and He sees all that we do. Closely tied in with this idea is the fact that G-d is universal. He is not just the G-d of the Jews; He is the G-d of all nations.

G-d is Omnipotent

G-d can do anything. It is said that the only thing that is beyond His power is the fear of Him; that is, we have [free will](#), and He cannot compel us to do His will. This belief in G-d's omnipotence has been sorely tested during the many persecutions of Jews, but we have always maintained that G-d has a reason for allowing these things, even if we in our limited perception and understanding cannot see the reason.

G-d is Omniscient

G-d knows all things, past, present and future. He knows our thoughts.

G-d is Eternal

G-d transcends time. He has no beginning and no end. He will always be there to fulfill his promises. When [Moses](#) asked for G-d's name, He replied, "Ehyeh asher ehyeh." That phrase is generally translated as, "I am that I am," but the word "ehyeh" can be present or future tense, meaning "I am what I will be" or "I will be what I will be." The ambiguity of the phrase is often interpreted as a reference to G-d's eternal nature.

G-d is Both Just and Merciful

I have often heard Christians speak of Judaism as the religion of the strict Law, which no human being is good enough to fulfill (hence the need for the sacrifice of Jesus). This is a gross mischaracterization of Jewish belief. Judaism has always maintained that G-d's justice is tempered by mercy, the two qualities perfectly balanced. Of the two [Names of G-d](#) most commonly used in scripture, one refers to his quality of justice and the other to his quality of mercy. The two names were used together in the story of

Creation, showing that the world was created with both justice and mercy.

G-d is Holy and Perfect

One of the most common names applied to G-d in the post-Biblical period is "Ha-Kadosh, Barukh Hu," The Holy One, Blessed be He.

Avinu Malkeinu: G-d is our Father and our King

Judaism maintains that we are all G-d's children. A well-known piece of Jewish [liturgy](#) repeatedly describes G-d as "Avinu Malkeinu," our Father, our King. The Talmud teaches that there are three participants in the formation of every human being: the mother and father, who provide the physical form, and G-d, who provides the soul, the personality, and the intelligence. It is said that one of G-d's greatest gifts to humanity is the knowledge that we are His children and [created in his image](#).

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Human Nature

Level: Advanced

On the question of human nature, as in most areas of abstract [belief](#) in Judaism, there is a lot of room for personal opinion. There is no dogma on the subject, no required belief about the nature of humanity. There are a variety of contrary opinions expressed on the subject, and one is no less a Jew (and no less a good Jew) for disagreeing with any or all of these opinions. Nevertheless, there are certain ideas that seem to reflect the majority opinion in Jewish thought that are worth discussing.

In the Image of G-d

The Bible states that humanity was created in the image of [G-d](#), but what does it mean to be created in the image of G-d?

Clearly, we are not created in the physical image of G-d, because Judaism steadfastly maintains that [G-d is incorporeal](#) and has no physical appearance. [Rambam](#) points out that the Hebrew words translated as "image" and "likeness" in Gen. 1:27 do not refer to the physical form of a thing. The word for "image" in Gen. 1:27 is "tzelem," which refers to the nature or essence of a thing, as in Psalm 73:20, "you will despise their image (tzel'mam)." You despise a person's nature and not a person's physical appearance. The word for physical form, Rambam explains, is "to'ar," as in Gen. 39:6, "and Joseph was beautiful of form (to'ar) and fair to look upon." Similarly, the word used for "likeness" is "damut," which is used to indicate a simile, not identity of form. For example, "He is like (damuno) a lion" in Ps. 17:12 refers not to similar appearance, but to similar nature.

What is it in our nature that is G-d-like? [Rashi](#) explains that we are like G-d in that we have the ability to understand and discern. Rambam elaborates that by using our intellect, we are able to perceive things without the use of our physical senses, an ability that makes us like G-d, who perceives without having physical senses.

The Dual Nature

In Genesis 2:7, the Bible states that [G-d](#) formed (vayyitzer) man. The spelling of this word is unusual: it uses two consecutive [Yods](#) instead of the one you would expect. The [rabbis](#) inferred that these Yods stand for the word "yetzer," which means impulse, and the existence of two Yods here indicates that humanity was formed with two impulses: a good impulse (the yetzer tov) and an evil impulse (the yetzer ra).

The yetzer tov is the moral conscience, the inner voice that reminds you of G-d's law when you consider doing something that is forbidden. According to some views, it does not enter a person until his 13th birthday, when he becomes responsible for following the commandments. See [Bar Mitzvah](#).

The yetzer ra is more difficult to define, because there are many different ideas about it. It is not a desire to do evil in the way we normally think of it in Western society: a desire to cause senseless harm. Rather, it is usually conceived as the selfish nature, the desire to satisfy personal needs (food, shelter, sex, etc.) without regard for the moral consequences of fulfilling those desires.

The yetzer ra is not a bad thing. It was created by G-d, and all things created by G-d are good. The [Talmud](#) notes that without the yetzer ra (the desire to satisfy personal needs), man would not build a house, marry a wife, beget children or conduct business affairs. But the yetzer ra can lead to wrongdoing when it is not controlled by the yetzer tov. There is nothing inherently wrong with hunger, but it can lead you to steal food. There is nothing inherently wrong with sexual desire, but it can lead you to commit rape, adultery, incest or other sexual perversion.

The yetzer ra is generally seen as something internal to a person, not as an external force acting on a person. The idea that "the devil made me do it" is not in line with the majority of thought in Judaism. Although it has been said that Satan and the yetzer ra are one and the same, this is more often understood as meaning that Satan is merely a personification of our own selfish desires, rather than that our selfish desires are caused by some external force.

People have the ability to choose which impulse to follow: the yetzer tov or the yetzer ra. That is the heart of the Jewish understanding of free will. The Talmud notes that all people are descended from Adam, so no one can blame his own wickedness on his ancestry. On the contrary, we all have the ability to make our own choices, and we will all be held responsible for the choices we make.

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Moshiach: The Messiah

Level: Intermediate

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the moshiach, and though he may tarry, still I await him every day.

- Principle 12 of [Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith](#)

The Messianic Idea in Judaism

Belief in the eventual coming of the moshiach is a basic and fundamental part of traditional Judaism. It is part of [Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith](#), the minimum requirements of Jewish [belief](#). In the [Shemoneh Esrei](#) prayer, recited three times daily, we pray for all of the elements of the coming of the moshiach: ingathering of the exiles; restoration of the religious courts of justice; an end of wickedness, sin and heresy; reward to the righteous; rebuilding of Jerusalem; restoration of the line of King David; and restoration of [Temple](#) service.

Modern scholars suggest that the messianic concept was introduced later in the history of Judaism, during the age of the prophets. They note that the messianic concept is not mentioned anywhere in the [Torah](#) (the first five books of the Bible).

However, traditional Judaism maintains that the messianic idea has always been a part of Judaism. The moshiach is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah, because the Torah was written in terms that all people could understand, and the abstract concept of a distant, spiritual, future reward was beyond the comprehension of some people. However, the Torah contains several references to "the End of Days" (achareet ha-yameem), which is the time of the moshiach; thus, the concept of moshiach was known in the most ancient times.

The term "moshiach" literally means "the anointed one," and refers to the ancient practice of anointing kings with oil when they took the throne. The moshiach is the one who will be anointed as king in the End of Days.

The word "moshiach" does not mean "savior." The notion of an innocent, divine or semi-divine being who will sacrifice himself to save us from the consequences of our own sins is a purely Christian concept that has no basis in Jewish thought. Unfortunately, this Christian concept has become so deeply ingrained in the English word "messiah" that this English word can no longer be used to refer to the Jewish concept. The word "moshiach" will be used throughout this page.

The Moshiach

The moshiach will be a great political leader descended from King David (Jeremiah 23:5). The moshiach is often referred to as "moshiach ben David" (moshiach, son of David). He will be well-versed in Jewish law, and observant of its commandments. (Isaiah 11:2-5) He will be a charismatic leader, inspiring others to follow his example. He will be a great military leader, who will win battles for [Israel](#). He will be a great judge, who makes righteous decisions (Jeremiah 33:15). But above all, he will be a human being, not a god, demi-god or other supernatural being.

It has been said that in every generation, a person is born with the potential to be the moshiach. If the time is right for the messianic age within that person's lifetime, then that person will be the moshiach. But if that person dies before he completes the mission of the moshiach, then that person is not the moshiach.

When Will the Moshiach Come?

There are a wide variety of opinions on the subject of when the moshiach will come. Some of Judaism's greatest minds have cursed those who try to predict the time of the moshiach's coming, because errors in such predictions could cause people to lose faith in the messianic idea or in Judaism itself. This actually happened in the 17th century, when Shabbatai Tzvi claimed to be the moshiach. When Tzvi converted to Islam under threat of death, many Jews converted with him. Nevertheless, this prohibition has not stopped anyone from speculating about the time when the moshiach will come.

Although some scholars believed that [G-d](#) has set aside a specific date for the coming of the moshiach, most authority suggests that the conduct of mankind will determine the time of the moshiach's coming. In general, it is believed that the moshiach will come in a time when he is most needed (because the world is so sinful), or in a time when he is most deserved (because the world is so good). For example, each of the following has been suggested as the time when the moshiach will come:

- if Israel repented a single day;
- if Israel observed a single [Shabbat](#) properly;
- if Israel observed two Shabbats in a row properly;
- in a generation that is totally innocent or totally guilty;
- in a generation that loses hope;
- in a generation where children are totally disrespectful towards their parents and elders;

What Will the Moshiach Do?

Before the time of the moshiach, there shall be war and suffering (Ezekiel 38:16)

The moshiach will bring about the political and spiritual redemption of the [Jewish people](#) by bringing us back to [Israel](#) and restoring Jerusalem (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5). He will establish a government in Israel that will be the center of all world government, both for Jews and gentiles (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10; 42:1). He will rebuild the [Temple](#) and re-establish its worship (Jeremiah 33:18). He will restore the religious court system of Israel and establish Jewish law as the law of the land (Jeremiah 33:15).

Olam Ha-Ba: The Messianic Age

The world after the messiah comes is often referred to in Jewish literature as Olam Ha-Ba (oh-LAHM hah-BAH), the World to Come. This term can cause some confusion, because it is also used to refer to a spiritual [afterlife](#). In English, we commonly use the term "messianic age" to refer specifically to the time of the messiah.

Olam Ha-Ba will be characterized by the peaceful co-existence of all people. (Isaiah 2:4) Hatred, intolerance and war will cease to exist. Some authorities suggest that the laws of nature will change, so that predatory beasts will no longer seek prey and agriculture will bring forth supernatural abundance (Isaiah 11:6-11:9). Others, however, say that these statements are merely an allegory for peace and prosperity.

All of the [Jewish people](#) will return from their exile among the [nations](#) to their home in [Israel](#) (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5). The law of the Jubilee will be reinstated.

In the Olam Ha-Ba, the whole world will recognize the Jewish [G-d](#) as the only true G-d, and the Jewish religion as the only true religion (Isaiah 2:3; 11:10; Micah 4:2-3; Zechariah 14:9). There will be no murder, robbery, competition or jealousy. There will be no sin (Zephaniah 3:13). [Sacrifices](#) will continue to be brought in the [Temple](#), but these will be limited to [thanksgiving offerings](#), because there will be no further need for expiatory offerings.

What About Jesus?

Jews do not believe that Jesus was the moshiach. Assuming that he existed, and assuming that the Christian scriptures are accurate in describing him (both matters that are debatable), he simply did not fulfill the mission of the moshiach as it is described in the biblical passages cited above. Jesus did not do any of the things that the scriptures said the messiah would do.

On the contrary, another Jew born about a century later came far closer to fulfilling the messianic ideal than Jesus did. His name was Shimeon ben Kosiba, known as Bar Kochba (son of a star), and he was a charismatic, brilliant, but brutal warlord. [Rabbi Akiba](#), one of the greatest scholars in Jewish history, believed that Bar Kochba was the moshiach. Bar Kochba fought a war against the Roman Empire, catching the Tenth Legion by surprise and retaking Jerusalem. He resumed [sacrifices](#) at the site of the [Temple](#) and made plans to rebuild the Temple. He established a provisional government and began to issue coins in its name. This is what the [Jewish people](#) were looking for in a moshiach; Jesus clearly does not fit into this mold. Ultimately, however, the Roman Empire crushed his revolt and killed Bar Kochba. After his death, all acknowledged that he was not the moshiach.

Throughout Jewish history, there have been many people who have claimed to be the moshiach, or whose followers have claimed that they were the moshiach: Shimeon Bar Kochba, Shabbatai Tzvi, Jesus, and many others too numerous to name. Leo Rosten reports some very entertaining accounts under the heading False Messiahs in his book, The Joys of Yiddish. But all of these people died without fulfilling the mission of the moshiach; therefore, none of them were the moshiach. The moshiach and the Olam Ha-Ba lie in the future, not in the past.

Biblical Passages Referring to the Moshiach

The following passages in the [Jewish scriptures](#) are the ones that Jews consider to be messianic in nature or relating to the end of days. These are the ones that we rely upon in developing our messianic concept:

- Isaiah 2, 11, 42; 59:20
- Jeremiah 23, 30, 33; 48:47; 49:39

- Ezekiel 38:16
- Hosea 3:4-3:5
- Micah 4
- Zephaniah 3:9
- Zechariah 14:9
- Daniel 10:14

If you want to know how Jews interpret the passages that Christians consider to be messianic, see the [Jews for Judaism](#) website, especially the Knowledge Base under Resources. The Knowledge Base addresses more than 130 of the most common common arguments that missionaries make to Jews.

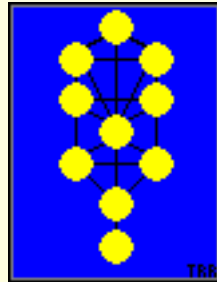
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Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism

Level: Advanced

Mysticism in Judaism

When non-Jews ask about Judaism, they commonly ask questions like: Do you believe in heaven and hell? In angels or the devil? What happens to the soul after death? What is the nature of [G-d](#) and the universe? The answers to questions like these define most religions; in fact, I have heard some people say that the purpose of religion is to answer these kinds of questions. Yet in Judaism, most of these cosmological issues are wide open to personal opinion. The areas of Jewish thought that most extensively discuss these issues, Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism, were traditionally not even taught to people until the age of 40, when they had completed their education in [Torah](#) and [Talmud](#).



Mysticism and mystical experiences have been a part of Judaism since the earliest days. The Torah contains many stories of mystical experiences, from visitations by angels to prophetic dreams and visions. The Talmud considers the existence of the soul and when it becomes attached to the body. Jewish tradition tells that the souls of all Jews were in existence at the time of the Giving of the Torah and were present at the time and agreed to the Covenant. There are many stories of places similar to Christian heaven and purgatory, of wandering souls and reincarnation. The Talmud contains vague hints of a mystical school of thought that was taught only to the most advanced students and was not committed to writing. There are several references in ancient sources to ma'aseh bereishit (the work of creation) and ma'aseh merkavah (the work of the chariot [of Ezekiel's vision]), the two primary subjects of mystical thought at the time.

In the middle ages, many of these mystical teachings were committed to writing in books like the Zohar. Many of these writings were asserted to be secret ancient writings or compilations of secret ancient writings.

Like most subjects of Jewish [belief](#), the area of mysticism is wide open to personal interpretation. Some traditional Jews take mysticism very seriously. Mysticism is an integral part of [Chasidic Judaism](#), for example, and passages from kabbalistic sources are routinely included in traditional prayer books. Other traditional Jews take mysticism with a grain of salt. One prominent [Orthodox Jew](#), when introducing a speaker on the subject of Jewish mysticism, said basically, "it's nonsense, but it's Jewish nonsense, and the study of anything Jewish, even nonsense, is worthwhile."

The mystical school of thought came to be known as Kabbalah, from the Hebrew [root](#) Qof-Bet-Lamed, meaning "to receive, to accept." The word is usually translated as "tradition." In Hebrew, the word does not have any of the dark, sinister, evil connotations that it has developed in English. For example, the English word "cabal" (a secret group of conspirators) is derived from the Hebrew word Kabbalah, but neither the Hebrew word nor the mystical doctrines have any evil implications to Jews.

Kabbalah: The Misunderstood Doctrine

Kabbalah is one of the most grossly misunderstood parts of Judaism. I have received several messages from non-Jews describing Kabbalah as "the dark side of Judaism." These misunderstandings stem largely from the fact that the teachings of Kabbalah have been so badly distorted by non-Jewish mystics and occultists. Kabbalah was popular among Christian intellectuals during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, who reinterpreted its doctrines to fit into their Christian dogma. For example, one such source (the *Kabbalah Denudata*, commonly available in new age bookstores) states that the Ten Sefirot (see [below](#)) have something to do with the Christian Trinity because they are sometimes divided up into groups of three, despite the fact that the Sefirot are divided up into many groups of varying numbers, that these groupings overlap, that the grouping he refers to is not comprised of a father, son and spirit, but of a male, a female and neutral, and so forth. Others have wrenched kabbalistic symbolism out of context for use in tarot card readings and other forms of divination and magic that were never a part of the original Jewish teachings.

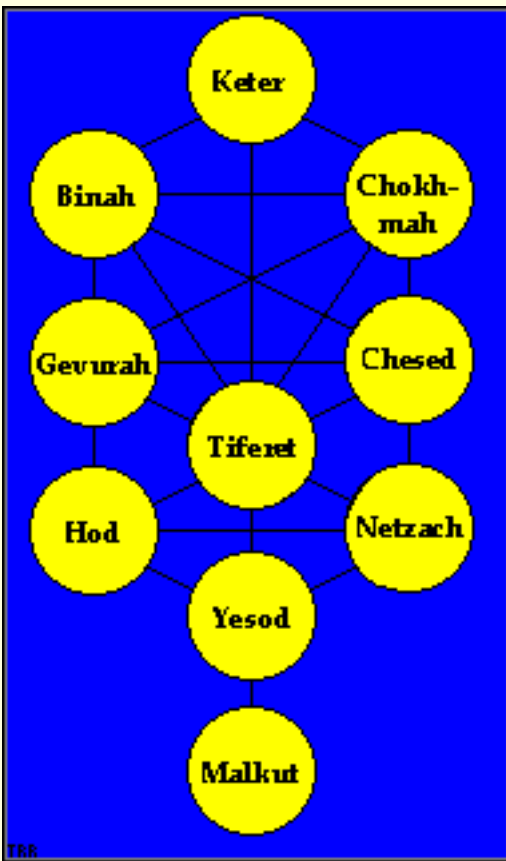
I do not mean to suggest that magic is not a part of Kabbalah. The most hidden, secretive part of Kabbalah, commonly known as "practical Kabbalah," involves use of hidden knowledge to affect the world in ways that could be described as magic. The [Talmud](#) and other sources ascribe supernatural activities to many great [rabbis](#). Some rabbis pronounced a name of [G-d](#) and ascended into heaven to consult with the G-d and the angels on issues of great public concern. One scholar is said to have created an artificial man by reciting various names of G-d. Much later stories tell of a rabbi who created a man out of clay (a golem) and brought it to life by putting in its mouth a piece of paper with a name of G-d on it. However, this area of Kabbalah is known by very few, and practiced by even fewer.

It is important to note that all of these magical effects were achieved through the power of G-d, generally by calling upon the name of G-d. These practices are no more "evil" than the miracles that Christians ascribe to Jesus; in fact, according to some of my mystically-inclined friends, Jesus performed his miracles using kabbalistic techniques. This fits in with historical evidence: many scholars believe Jesus was associated with the Essenes, a sect involved in Jewish mysticism.

Ein Sof and the Ten Sefirot

To give you an idea of the nature of Kabbalah, I will briefly discuss one of the better known, fundamental concepts of kabbalistic thought: the concept of [G-d](#) as Ein Sof, the Ten Sefirot, and the kabbalistic tree of life. This explanation is, at best, a gross oversimplification. I do not pretend to fully understand these ideas.

According to Kabbalah, the true essence of G-d is so transcendent that it cannot be described, except with reference to what it is not. This true essence of G-d is known as Ein Sof, which literally means "without end," which encompasses the idea of His lack of boundaries in both time and space. In this truest form, the Ein Sof is so transcendent that It cannot have any direct interaction with the universe. The Ein Sof interacts with the universe through ten emanations from this essence, known as the Ten Sefirot.



These Sefirot correspond to qualities of G-d. They consist of, in descending order, Keter (the crown), Chokhmah (wisdom), Binah (intuition, understanding), Chesed (mercy) or Gedulah (greatness), Gevurah (strength), Tiferet (glory), Netzach (victory), Hod (majesty), Yesod (foundation) and Malkut (sovereignty). The middle five qualities are mentioned explicitly and in order at I Chronicles 29:11: Yours, O L-rd, is the greatness (gedulah), the strength (gevurah), the glory (tiferet), the power (netzach), and the splendor (hod). I have seen this passage translated in widely varying ways, but the Hebrew corresponds to the names of the Sefirot in order.

The Ten Sefirot include both masculine and feminine qualities. Kabbalah pays a great deal of attention to the feminine aspects of G-d.

The Sefirot are commonly represented as in the diagram at left. This diagram is commonly known as the Tree of the Sefirot or the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. There is great significance to the position of these various attributes and their interconnectedness.

The Sefirot are not separate deities, as some might think by taking this too literally. They are intimately a part of G-d, and yet they are in contact with the universe in a way that the Ein Sof is not. The Sefirot

connect with everything in the universe, including humanity. The good and evil that we do resonates through the Sefirot and affects the entire universe, up to and including G-d Himself.

Suggested Reading

Readings in this area should be undertaken with extreme caution. There is entirely too much literature out there under the name "Kabbalah" that has little or nothing to do with the true Jewish teachings on this subject. Any book on the subject of practical Kabbalah should be disregarded immediately; no legitimate source would ever make such teachings available to a faceless mass audience. Books written by Christians should be viewed with extreme skepticism, because many Christian sources have reinterpreted Kabbalah to fit into Christian dogma.

There is a nice online introductory Kabbalah course available from Aish Ha-Torah at [Kabbala 101](#).

For an academic and scholarly information about Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah, check out the works of Professor Gershom Scholem. He was a prolific writer on the subject, and his writings are widely available and well-respected by both Jews and non-Jews. Dozens of his books are available at amazon.com. [Click here](#) to see a list.



For a more personal and experiential approach to Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah, see the works of Aryeh Kaplan. I am informed that his books are reliably authoritative and uncompromisingly Orthodox. I have found his materials on meditation and prayer, especially [Jewish Meditation](#), to be particularly useful in my own devotional practices. [Click here](#) to see a list of his books available at amazon.com

Of course, if you are serious about Kabbalah, you must get yourself a teacher that you can work with one-on-one, either online or in person.

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Who is a Jew?

Level: Basic

Origins of the Words "Jew" and "Judaism"

The original name for the [people](#) we now call Jews was Hebrews. The word "Hebrew" (in [Hebrew](#), "Ivri") is first used in the [Torah](#) to describe [Abraham](#) (Gen. 14:13). The word is apparently derived from the name Eber, one of Abraham's ancestors. Another tradition teaches that the word comes from the word "eyver," which means "the other side," referring to the fact that Abraham came from the other side of the Euphrates, or referring to the fact Abraham was separated from the other [nations](#) morally and spiritually.

Another name used for the people is Children of [Israel](#) or Israelites, which refers to the fact that the people are descendants of [Jacob](#), who was also called Israel.

The word "Jew" (in Hebrew, "Yehudi") is derived from the name Judah, which was the name of one of Jacob's twelve sons. Judah was the ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel, which was named after him. Likewise, the word Judaism literally means "Judah-ism," that is, the religion of the Yehudim. Other sources, however, say that the word "Yehudim" means "People of [G-d](#)," because the first three letters of "Yehudah" are the same as the first three letters of G-d's four-letter [name](#).

Originally, the term Yehudi referred specifically to members of the tribe of Judah, as distinguished from the other tribes of Israel. However, after the death of King Solomon, the [nation](#) of Israel was split into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel (I Kings 12; II Chronicles 10). After that time, the word Yehudi could properly be used to describe anyone from the kingdom of Judah, which included the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi, as well as scattered settlements from other tribes. The most obvious biblical example of this usage is in Esther 2:5, where Mordecai is referred to as both a Yehudi and a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

In the 6th century [B.C.E.](#), the kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria and the ten tribes were exiled from the land (II Kings 17), leaving only the tribes in the kingdom of Judah remaining to carry on Abraham's heritage. These people of the kingdom of Judah were generally known to themselves and to other nations as Yehudim (Jews), and that name continues to be used today.

In common speech, the word "Jew" is used to refer to all of the physical and spiritual descendants of Jacob/Israel, as well as to the patriarchs Abraham and [Isaac](#) and their wives, and the word "Judaism" is used to refer to their beliefs. Technically, this usage is inaccurate, just as it is technically inaccurate to use the word "Indian" to refer to the original inhabitants of the Americas. However, this technically inaccurate usage is common both within the Jewish community and outside of it, and is therefore used throughout this site.

Who is a Jew?

A Jew is any person whose mother was a Jew or any person who has gone through the formal process of [conversion](#) to Judaism.

It is important to note that being a Jew has nothing to do with what you believe or what you do. A person born to non-Jewish parents who has not undergone the formal process of conversion but who believes everything that [Orthodox](#) Jews believe and observes every law and custom of Judaism is still a non-Jew, even in the eyes of the most liberal [movements](#) of Judaism, and a person born to a Jewish mother who is an atheist and never practices the Jewish religion is still a Jew, even in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox. In this sense, Judaism is more like a nationality than like other religions, and being Jewish is like a citizenship. See [What Is Judaism?](#)

This has been established since the earliest days of Judaism. In the Torah, you will see many references to "the strangers who dwell among you" or "righteous proselytes" or "righteous strangers." These are various classifications of non-Jews who lived among Jews, adopting some or all of the beliefs and practices of Judaism without going through the formal process of conversion and becoming Jews. Once a person has [converted](#) to Judaism, he is not referred to by any special term; he is as much a Jew as anyone born Jewish.

Although all Jewish [movements](#) agree on these general principles, there are occasional disputes as to whether a particular individual is a Jew. Most of these disputes fall into one of two categories.

First, traditional Judaism maintains that a person is a Jew if his mother is a Jew, regardless of who his father is. The liberal movements, on the other hand, consider a person to be Jewish if either of his parents was Jewish and the child was raised Jewish. Thus, if the child of a Jewish father and a Christian mother is raised Jewish, the child is a Jew according to the Reform movement, but not according to the Orthodox movement. On the other hand, if the child of a Christian father and a Jewish mother is not raised Jewish, the child is a Jew according to the Orthodox movement, but not according to the Reform movement! The matter becomes even more complicated, because the status of that children's children also comes into question.

Second, the more traditional movements do not always acknowledge the validity of conversions by the more liberal movements. The more modern movements do not always follow the procedures required by the more traditional movements, thereby invalidating the conversion. In addition, Orthodoxy does not accept the authority of Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist [rabbis](#) to perform conversions, and the Conservative movement has debated whether to accept the authority of Reform rabbis.

About Matrilineal Descent

Many people have asked me why traditional Judaism uses matrilineal descent to determine Jewish status, when in all other things (tribal affiliation, priestly status, royalty, etc.) we use patrilineal descent.

The [Torah](#) does not specifically state anywhere that matrilineal descent should be used; however, there are several passages in the Torah where it is understood that the child of a Jewish woman and a non-Jewish man is a Jew, and several other passages where it is understood that the child of a non-Jewish woman and a Jewish man is not a Jew.

In Deuteronomy 7:1-5, in expressing the prohibition against [intermarriage](#), G-d says "he [ie, the non-Jewish male spouse] will cause your child to turn away from Me and they will worship the gods of others." No such concern is expressed about the child of a non-Jewish female spouse. From this, we infer that the child of a non-Jewish male spouse is Jewish (and can therefore be turned away from Judaism),

but the child of a non-Jewish female spouse is not Jewish (and therefore turning away is not an issue).

Leviticus 24:10 speaks of the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man as being "among the community of Israel" (ie, a Jew).

On the other hand, in Ezra 10:2-3, the Jews returning to Israel vowed to put aside their non-Jewish wives and the children born to those wives. They could not have put aside those children if those children were Jews.

Several people have written to me asking about King David: was he a Jew, given that one of his female ancestors, Ruth, was not a Jew? This conclusion is based on two faulty premises: first of all, Ruth was a Jew, and even if she wasn't, that would not affect David's status as a Jew. Ruth converted to Judaism before marrying Boaz and bearing Obed. See Ruth 1:16, where Ruth states her intention to convert. After Ruth converted, she was a Jew, and all of her children born after the conversion were Jewish as well. But even if Ruth were not Jewish at the time Obed was born, that would not affect King David's status as a Jew, because Ruth is an ancestor of David's father, not of David's mother, and David's Jewish status is determined by his mother.

About the Agudath Ha-Rabonim Statement

In March, 1997, the Agudath Ha-Rabonim issued a statement declaring that the [Conservative](#) and [Reform](#) movements are "outside of [Torah](#) and outside of Judaism." This statement has been widely publicized and widely misunderstood, and requires some response. Three points are particularly worth discussing: 1) the statement does not challenge the Jewish status of Reform and Conservative Jews; 2) the statement is not an official statement of a unified [Orthodox](#) opinion; 3) the statement was made with the intent of bringing people into Jewish belief, not with the intention of excluding them from it.

First of all, the Agudath Ha-Rabonim statement does *not* say that Reform and Conservative Jews are not Jews. Their statement does not say anything about Jewish status. As the discussion above explains, status as a Jew has nothing to do with what you believe; it is simply a matter of who your parents are. Reform and Conservative Jews *are* Jews, as they have always been, and even the Agudath Ha-Rabonim would agree on that point. The debate over who is a Jew is the same as it has always been, the same as was discussed above: the Reform recognition of patrilineal descent, and the validity of conversions performed by non-Orthodox rabbis.

Second, the Agudath Ha-Rabonim is not the official voice of mainstream Orthodoxy. Their statement does not represent the unified position of Orthodox Judaism in America. In fact, the Rabbinical Council of America (the rabbinic arm of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America) immediately issued a strong statement disassociating themselves from this "hurtful public pronouncement [which] flies in the face of [Jewish peoplehood](#)."

Finally, before one can denounce a statement like this, one should make an attempt to understand the position of those making the statement. According to Orthodoxy, the Torah is the heart of Judaism. All of what our people are revolves around the unchanging, eternal, mutually binding covenant between [G-d](#) and our people. That is the definition of Jewish belief, according to Orthodoxy, and all Jewish belief is measured against that yardstick. You may dispute the validity of the yardstick, but you can't deny that Conservative and Reform Judaism don't measure up on that yardstick. Reform Judaism does not believe

in the binding nature of Torah, and Conservative Judaism believes that the law can change.

The Agudath Ha-Rabonim did not intend to cut Reform and Conservative Jews off from their heritage. On the contrary, their intention was to bring Reform and Conservative Jews back to what they consider to be the only true Judaism. The statement encouraged Reform and Conservative Jews to leave their synagogues and "join an Orthodox synagogue, where they will be warmly welcomed." I believe the Agudath Ha-Rabonim were sincere, albeit misguided, in this intention. I have known several Orthodox and Chasidic Jews who believed that if there were no Reform or Conservative synagogues, everyone would be Orthodox. However, my own personal experience with Reform and Conservative Jews indicates that if there were no such movements, most of these people would be lost to Judaism entirely, and that would be a great tragedy.

The opinion of mainstream Orthodoxy seems to be that it is better for a Jew to be Reform or Conservative than not to be Jewish at all. While we would certainly prefer that all of our people acknowledged the obligation to observe the unchanging law (just as Conservative Jews would prefer that all of our people acknowledged the right to change the law, and Reform Jews would prefer that all of our people us to acknowledged the right to pick and choose what to observe), we recognize that, as Rabbi Kook said, "That which unites us is far greater than that which divides us."

Famous Jews

Would you like to know if your favorite TV star is Jewish? Do you want a list of famous Jewish scientists? Is Phillie Phanatic Jewish or isn't he? Then check out the website [Jewhoo!](#) Formatted to look like a parody of Yahoo, this site is not a search engine at all, but is a reference source listing famous Jews in every field of endeavor. It's a fun site, and worth checking out even if you don't want answers to specific questions.

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Jewish Population

Level: Basic

How many Jews are there in the world? That's a difficult question to answer, because not every country keeps track of such things, and not every Jew chooses to admit such things, particularly in countries where Jews are persecuted.

Most estimates I have seen suggest that there are about 13-14 million Jews in the world. The vast majority of these Jews live in either the United States and [Israel](#), each with approximately 5 million Jews. There are less than 2 million Jews in Europe, 400,000 in Latin America and 350,000 in Canada. In Africa, there are less than 100,000 Jews, about 90% of whom live in the country of South Africa. There are about 100,000 Jews in Australia and New Zealand combined. There are about 50,000 Jews in Asia (not including Israel).

Links to Population Resources

For extensive statistical information about Jews in America, see the [North American Jewish Databank](#) and their [1990 National Jewish Population Survey](#) (NJPS). A new survey was conducted in 2000; however, the results of this survey are not currently available online.

For more information about world population by religion, see the following sites:

- [World Jewish Population 2000](#)
- [CIA 1997 World Factbook](#)
- [Info Please / Society / Religion](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau International Database](#)

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Movements of Judaism

Level: Basic

The different sects or denominations of Judaism are generally referred to as movements. The differences between Jewish movements are not nearly as great as the differences between Christian denominations. The differences between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism are not much greater than the differences between the liberal and fundamentalist wings of the Baptist denomination of Christianity.

In general, when I speak of "movements" in this site, I am referring to movements in the United States in the 20th century.

Movements in Ancient Times

Perhaps the oldest records we have of a formal difference of opinion among Jews dates back to the time of the Maccabean revolt, which is the basis for the story of [Chanukkah](#). At that time, the land of [Israel](#) was under the relatively benevolent control of Greece, and was deeply influenced by Greek culture. Hellenizing Jews were opposed by a religious traditionalist group known as the Chasideans (no direct relation to the modern movement known as Chasidism). As the Selucid Greeks began to oppress the Jews, war broke out and the [Jewish people](#) united in their opposition to the Greeks.

The war continued for 25 years, and the Jewish people remained united in purpose. But after the war ended, the Jewish people became divided into three groups: the Essenes, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The Essenes were an ascetic and mystical group devoted to strict discipline. They lived in isolation from the world. The Dead Sea Scrolls are believed to be the product of an Essene sect. Some scholars believe that early Christianity was influenced by the mystical and hermetical teachings of the Essenes.

The Sadducees evolved out of the Hellenistic elements of Judaism. The movement was made up of the [priests](#) and the aristocrats of Jewish society. They were religiously conservative but socially liberal. The Sadducees believed in a strict, narrow and unchanging interpretation of the [written Torah](#), and they did not believe in [oral Torah](#). The [Temple](#) and its [sacrificial services](#) were at the center of their worship. Socially, they adopted the ways of the neighboring Greek culture.

The Pharisees believed that [G-d](#) gave the Jews both a written Torah and an oral Torah, both of which were equally binding and both of which were open to reinterpretation by the [rabbis](#), people with sufficient education to make such decisions. The Pharisees were devoted to study of the [Torah](#) and education for all.

After Judea was conquered by Rome and tensions with Rome began to mount, a fourth group appeared: the Zealots. The Zealots were basically a nationalistic movement, not a religious one. They favored war against Rome, and believed that death was preferable to being under Roman control. They would commit suicide rather than be taken prisoner. The most famous example of the Zealots was the defenders of Masada, who held the mountain fortress against the Roman Tenth Legion for months and ultimately committed suicide rather than surrender.

The Pharisaic school of thought is the only one that survived the destruction of the [Temple](#). The Zealots were killed off during the war with Rome. The Sadducees could not survive without the Temple, which was the center of their religion. The Essenes, who were never very numerous, were apparently killed off by the Romans (they were easily recognizable in their isolated communities).

For many centuries after the destruction of the Temple, there was no large-scale, organized difference of opinion within Judaism. Judaism was Judaism, and it was basically the same as what we now know as Orthodox Judaism. There were some differences in [practices and customs](#) between the Ashkenazic Jews of Eastern Europe and the Sephardic Jews of Spain and the Middle East, but these differences were not significant. See [Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews](#).

Karaites and Rabbinical Judaism

During the 9th century C.E., a number of sects arose that denied the existence of [oral Torah](#). These sects came to be known as Karaites (literally, People of the Scripture), and they were distinguished from the Rabbanites or Rabbinical Judaism.

The Karaites believed in strict interpretation of the literal text of the scripture, without rabbinical interpretation. They believed that rabbinical law was not part of an oral tradition that had been handed down from G-d, nor was it inspired by G-d, but was an original work of the sages. As such, rabbinical teachings are subject to the flaws of any document written by mere mortals.

The difference between Rabbanites and Karaites that is most commonly noted is in regard to [Shabbat](#): the Karaites noted that the Bible specifically prohibits lighting a flame on Shabbat, so they kept their houses dark on Shabbat. The Rabbanites, on the other hand, relied upon rabbinical interpretation that allowed us to leave burning a flame that was ignited before Shabbat. Karaites also prohibited sexual intercourse on Shabbat, while Rabbanites considered Shabbat to be the best time for sexual intercourse. The Karaites also follow a slightly different calendar than the Rabbanites.

According to the Karaites, this movement at one time attracted as much as 40% of the [Jewish people](#). Today, Karaites are a very small minority, and most Rabbinical Jews do not even know that they exist. For more information about the Karaites, see [The Karaite Jews of America](#).

Chasidim and Mitnagdim

In the 1700s, the first of the modern movements developed in Eastern Europe. This movement, known as Chasidism, was founded by [Israel ben Eliezer](#), more commonly known as the Baal Shem Tov or the Besht. Before Chasidism, Judaism emphasized education as the way to get closer to G-d. Chasidism emphasized other, more personal experiences and [mysticism](#) as alternative routes to G-d.

Chasidism was considered a radical movement at the time it was founded. There was strong opposition from those who held to the pre-existing view of Judaism. Those who opposed Chasidism became known as mitnagdim (opponents), and disputes between the Chasidim and the mitnagdim were often brutal. Today, the Chasidim and the mitnagdim are relatively unified in their opposition to the liberal modern movements. Orthodoxy and even the liberal movements of Judaism today have been strongly influenced by Chasidic teachings.

Chasidic sects are organized around a spiritual leader called a Rebbe or a tzaddik, a person who is considered to be more enlightened than other Jews. A Chasid consults his Rebbe about all major life decisions.

Chasidism continues to be a vital movement throughout the world. The Lubavitcher Chasidim are very vocal with a high media presence (see their website, [Chabad-Lubavitch in Cyberspace](#)), but there are many other active Chasidic sects today. For a simple, plain English introduction to Chasidism written by a modern Breslover Chasid, check out this [FAQ on Hasidic Culture and Customs](#).

Movements in the United States Today

Approximately 5 million of the world's 13 million Jews live in the United States. There are basically three major movements in the U.S. today: Reform, Conservative and Orthodox. Some people also include a fourth movement, the Reconstructionist movement, although that movement is substantially smaller than the other three. Orthodox and sometimes Conservative are described as "traditional" movements. Reform, Reconstructionist, and sometimes Conservative are described as "liberal" or "modern" movements.

Orthodoxy is actually made up of several different groups. It includes the modern Orthodox, who have largely integrated into modern society while maintaining observance of [halakhah](#) (Jewish Law), the [Chasidim](#), who live separately and dress distinctively (commonly, but erroneously, referred to in the media as the "ultra-Orthodox"), and the Yeshivish Orthodox, who are neither Chasidic nor modern. The Orthodox movements are all very similar in belief, and the differences are difficult for anyone who is not Orthodox to understand. They all believe that [G-d](#) gave [Moses](#) the whole [Torah](#) at Mount Sinai. The "whole Torah" includes both the [Written Torah](#) (the first five books of the Bible) and the [Oral Torah](#), an oral tradition interpreting and explaining the Written Torah. They believe that the Torah is true, that it has come down to us intact and unchanged. They believe that the Torah contains [613 mitzvot](#) binding upon Jews but not upon non-Jews. This web site is written primarily from the modern Orthodox point of view. The [1990 National Jewish Population Survey](#) (NJPS) performed by the Council of Jewish Federations found that 7% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Orthodox.

Reform Judaism does not believe that the [Torah](#) was written by [G-d](#). The movement accepts the critical theory of Biblical authorship: that the Bible was written by separate sources and redacted together. Reform Jews do not believe in observance of commandments as such, but they retain much of the values and ethics of Judaism, along with some of the practices and the culture. The original, basic tenets of American Reform Judaism were set down in the Pittsburgh Platform. Many non-observant, nominal, and/or agnostic Jews identify themselves as Reform simply because Reform is the most liberal movement, but that is not really a fair reflection on the movement as a whole. The NJPS found that 42% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Reform. There are approximately 900 Reform [synagogues](#) in the United States and Canada. For more information about Reform Judaism, see [The Union of American Hebrew Congregations](#).

Conservative Judaism grew out of the tension between Orthodoxy and Reform. It was formally organized as the [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism](#) in by Dr. Solomon Schechter in 1913, although its roots in the [Jewish Theological Seminary of America](#) stretch back into the 1880s. Conservative Judaism

maintains that the truths found in [Jewish scriptures](#) and other Jewish writings come from G-d, but were transmitted by humans and contain a human component. Conservative Judaism generally accepts the binding nature of [halakhah](#), but believes that the Law should change and adapt, absorbing aspects of the predominant culture while remaining true to Judaism's values. In my experience, there is a great deal of variation among Conservative [synagogues](#). Some are indistinguishable from Reform, except that they use more Hebrew; others are practically Orthodox, except that men and women sit together. Most are very traditional in substance, if not always in form. This flexibility is deeply rooted in Conservative Judaism, and can be found within their own Statement of Principles, Emet ve-Emunah. The NJPS found that 38% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Conservative. There are approximately 750 Conservative [synagogues](#) in the world today.

Reconstructionist Judaism is theoretically an outgrowth of Conservative, but it doesn't fit neatly into the traditional/liberal, observant/non-observant continuum that most people use to classify movements of Judaism. Reconstructionists believe that Judaism is an "evolving religious civilization." They do not believe in a personified deity that is active in history, and they do not believe that [G-d](#) chose the [Jewish people](#). From this, you might assume that Reconstructionism is to the left of Reform; yet Reconstructionism lays a much greater stress on Jewish observance than Reform Judaism. Reconstructionists observe the [halakhah](#) if they choose to, not because it is a binding Law from G-d, but because it is a valuable cultural remnant. Reconstructionism is a very small movement but seems to get a disproportionate amount of attention, probably because there are a disproportionate number of Reconstructionists serving as rabbis to Jewish college student organizations and Jewish Community Centers. Everyone I know seems to have had a Reconstructionist rabbi at college or in a community center, yet according to the NJPS, only 1% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Reconstructionist. There are less than 100 Reconstructionist synagogues world-wide. See the [Jewish Reconstructionist Federation](#) home page.

Though most Jews do not have any theological objections to praying in the [synagogues](#) of other movements, liberal services are not "religious" enough or "Jewish" enough for traditional Jews, and traditional services are too long, too conservative, and often basically incomprehensible to liberal Jews (because traditional services are primarily, if not exclusively, in Hebrew). Some Orthodox will not attend liberal services because of the mixed seating arrangements and because the liberal prayer book cuts many required prayers.

I have been to services in Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox [synagogues](#), and I have found that while there are substantial differences in length, language, and choice of reading materials, the overall structure is surprisingly similar. See [Jewish Liturgy](#) for more information about prayer services.

Movements in Israel Today

Approximately 5 million Jews live in [Israel](#). Orthodoxy is the only movement that is formally and legally recognized in Israel. Until very recently, only Orthodox Jews could serve on religious councils. The Orthodox rabbinate in Israel controls matters of personal status, such as [marriage](#), [conversion](#) and [divorce](#).

The other American movements have some degree of presence in Israel, but for the most part, Israelis do

not formally identify themselves with a movement. Most Israelis describe themselves more generally in terms of their degree of observance, rather than in terms of membership in an organized movement.

More than half of all Israelis describe themselves as hiloni (secular). About 15-20 percent describe themselves as haredi (ultra-Orthodox) or dati (Orthodox). The rest describe themselves as masorti (traditionally observant, but not as dogmatic as the Orthodox). It is important to remember, however, that the masorti and hiloni of Israel tend to be more observant than their counterparts in America. For example, the hiloni of Israel often observe some traditional practices in a limited way, such as lighting [Shabbat](#) candles, limiting their activities on Shabbat, or keeping [kosher](#) to some extent, all of which are rare among American Reform Jews, and unheard of among American Jews who describe themselves as secular.

Movements in the United Kingdom Today

There are an estimated 350,000 Jews in the UK. Of those, approximately 20% are Reform or Liberal, which are two separate movements. There is also a small but active Conservative movement called the Masoreti, which uses the same prayer book as the Conservative movement in the United States. The Lubavitcher Chasidim are also active and growing in the UK.

The liberal movements in the UK are generally more traditional than the Reform movement in the United States. For example, the British Reform movement does not accept patrilineal descent (although the Liberal movement does). See [Who Is a Jew](#).

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Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews

Level: Basic

The pages in this site are written from the Ashkenazic Jewish perspective. Ashkenazic Jews are the Jews of France, Germany, and Eastern Europe. Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East. The word "Ashkenazic" is derived from the Hebrew word for Germany. The word "Sephardic" is derived from the Hebrew word for Spain.

Most American Jews today are Ashkenazic, descended from Jews who emigrated from Germany and Eastern Europe in the mid- to late-1800s, although most of the early Jewish settlers of this country were Sephardic. The first Jewish congregation in North America, [Shearith Israel](#), founded in what is now New York in 1684, was Sephardic and is still active. The first Jewish congregation in the city of Philadelphia, [Congregation Mikveh Israel](#), founded in 1740, was also a Sephardic one, and is also still active.

The beliefs of Sephardic Judaism are basically in accord with those of [Orthodox Judaism](#), though Sephardic interpretations of [halakhah](#) (Jewish Law) are somewhat different than Ashkenazic ones. Although some individual Sephardic Jews are less observant than others, and some individuals do not agree with all of the beliefs of traditional Judaism, there is no formal, organized differentiation into [movements](#) as there is in Ashkenazic Judaism.

Historically, Sephardic Jews have been more integrated into the local non-Jewish culture than Ashkenazic Jews. In the Christian lands where Ashkenazic Judaism flourished, the tension between Christians and Jews was great, and Jews tended to be isolated from their non-Jewish neighbors, either voluntarily or involuntarily. In the Islamic lands where Sephardic Judaism developed, no such segregation existed. Sephardic Jewish thought and culture was strongly influenced by Arabic and Greek philosophy and science.

Sephardic Jews have a different pronunciation of a few Hebrew vowels and one Hebrew consonant, though most Ashkenazim are adopting Sephardic pronunciation now because it is the pronunciation used in [Israel](#). See [Hebrew Alphabet](#). Their [prayer services](#) are somewhat different from Ashkenazic ones, and they use different melodies in their services. Sephardic Jews also have different holiday customs and different traditional foods.

The Yiddish language, which many people think of as the international language of Judaism, is really the language of Ashkenazic Jews. Sephardic Jews have their own international language: Ladino, which was based on Spanish and Hebrew in the same way that Yiddish was based on German and Hebrew.

For more information on Sephardic Jewry, see [BSZNet](#).

There are some Jews who do not fit into this Ashkenazic/Sephardic distinction. Yemenite Jews, Ethiopian Jews (also known as Beta Israel and sometimes called Falashas), and Oriental Jews also have some distinct customs and traditions. These groups, however, are relatively small and virtually unknown in America. For more information on Ethiopian Jewry, see the [Index of Ethiopian Jewry Pages](#). For more information on Oriental Jewry, see [The Jews from Asia](#).

Jewish Attitudes Toward Non-Jews

Level: Basic

Judaism maintains that the righteous of all [nations](#) have a place in the [world to come](#). This has been the majority rule since the days of the [Talmud](#). Judaism generally recognizes that Christians and Moslems worship the same [G-d](#) that we do and those who follow the tenets of their religions can be considered righteous in the eyes of G-d.



TRR

Contrary to popular belief, Judaism does not maintain that Jews are better than other people. Although we refer to ourselves as G-d's chosen people, we do not believe that G-d chose the Jews because of any inherent superiority. According to the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 2b), G-d offered the [Torah](#) to all the [nations](#) of the earth, and the Jews were the only ones who accepted it. The story goes on to say that the Jews were offered the Torah last, and accepted it only because G-d held a mountain over their heads! (In Ex. 19:17, the words generally translated as "at the foot of the mountain" literally mean "underneath the mountain"!) Another traditional story suggests that G-d chose the [Jewish nation](#) because they were the lowliest of nations, and their success would be attributed to G-d's might rather than their own ability. Clearly, these are not the ideas of a people who think they are better than other nations.

Because of our acceptance of Torah, Jews have a special status in the eyes of G-d, but we lose that special status when we abandon Torah. Furthermore, the blessings that we received from G-d by accepting the Torah come with a high price: Jews have a greater responsibility than non-Jews. While non-Jews are only obligated to obey the [seven commandments](#) given to Noah, Jews are responsible for fulfilling the [613 mitzvot](#) in the Torah, thus G-d will punish Jews for doing things that would not be a sin for non-Jews.

The Seven Laws of Noah

According to traditional Judaism, [G-d](#) gave Noah and his family seven commandments to observe when he saved them from the flood. These commandments, referred to as the Noahic or Noahide commandments, are inferred from Genesis Ch. 9, and are as follows: 1) to establish courts of justice; 2) not to commit blasphemy; 3) not to commit idolatry; 4) not to commit incest and adultery; 5) not to commit bloodshed; 6) not to commit robbery; and 7) not to eat flesh cut from a living animal. These commandments are fairly simple and straightforward, and most of them are recognized by most of the world as sound moral principles. Any non-Jew who follows these laws has a place in the [world to come](#).

The Noahic commandments are binding on all people, because all people are descended from Noah and his family. The [613 mitzvot](#) of the [Torah](#), on the other hand, are only binding on the descendants of those who accepted the commandments at Sinai and upon those who take on the yoke of the commandments voluntarily (by [conversion](#)). In addition, the Noahic commandments are applied more leniently to non-Jews than the corresponding commandments are to Jews, because non-Jews do not have the benefit of [Oral Torah](#) to guide them in interpreting the laws. For example, worshipping G-d in the form of a man would constitute idolatry for a Jew; however, according to some sources, the Christian worship of Jesus does not constitute idolatry for non-Jews.

There is a growing movement of non-Jews who have consciously accepted these seven laws of Noah and chosen to live their lives in accordance with these laws. This movement is referred to as B'nei Noach (Children of Noah). For more information about the B'nei Noach movement and the Noachic commandments, see [Chavurath B'nei Noach of Fort Worth, Texas](#).

Goyim, Shikshas and Shkutzim

The most commonly used word for a non-Jew is goy. The word "goy" means "[nation](#)," and refers to the fact that goyim are members of other nations, that is, nations other than the Children of Israel.

There is nothing inherently insulting about the word "goy." In fact, the [Torah](#) occasionally refers to the [Jewish people](#) using the term "goy." Most notably, in Exodus 19:6, G-d says that the Children of Israel will be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," that is, a goy kadosh. Because Jews have had so many bad experiences with anti-Semitic non-Jews over the centuries, the term "goy" has taken on some negative connotations, but in general the term is no more insulting than the word "gentile."

The more insulting terms for non-Jews are shiksa (feminine) and shkutz (masculine). I gather that these words are derived from the [Hebrew root](#) Shin-Qof-Tzade, meaning loathsome or abomination. The word shiksa is most commonly used to refer to a non-Jewish woman who is dating or married to a Jewish man, which should give some indication of how strongly Jews are opposed to the idea of [intermarriage](#). The term shkutz is most commonly used to refer to an anti-Semitic man. Both terms can be used in a less serious, more joking way, but in general they should be used with caution.

Interfaith Marriages

I once received a message from a man who told me that many Jews do not like gentiles. He knew this because his (Jewish) girlfriend's friends and parents disapproved of him. I explained that these people did not disapprove of him because he was Christian; they disapproved of him because he was a Christian dating a Jew, which is another issue altogether.

Traditional Judaism does not permit interfaith marriages. The [Torah](#) states that the children of such marriages would be lost to Judaism (Deut. 7:3-4), and experience has shown the truth of this passage all too well. Children of intermarriage are rarely raised Jewish; they are normally raised Christian or non-religious. This may reflect the fact that Jews who intermarry are not deeply committed to their religion in the first place (if they were, why would they marry someone who did not share it?), but the statistics are sufficiently alarming to be a matter of great concern to the Jewish community. The [1990 National Jewish Population Survey](#) (NJPS) performed by the Council of Jewish Federations found that only 28% of the children of intermarriage today are being raised Jewish and the majority of converts out of Judaism are children of intermarriage. One Orthodox Jew I know went so far as to state that intermarriage is accomplishing what Hitler could not: the destruction of the [Jewish people](#). That is an extreme view, but it vividly illustrates how seriously many Jews take the issue of intermarriage.

Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin provide an excellent discussion of the issues involved in intermarriage in their book [The Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism](#) (Simon & Schuster, 1981). They note that if the non-Jewish spouse truly shares the same values as the Jewish spouse, then the non-Jew is welcome to convert to Judaism, and if the non-Jew does not share the same values, then the

couple should not be marrying in the first place.

Conversion

In general, Jews do not try to convert non-Jews to Judaism. In fact, according to [halakhah](#) (Jewish Law), [rabbis](#) are supposed to make three vigorous attempts to dissuade a person who wants to convert to Judaism.

As the discussion above explained, Jews have a lot of responsibilities that non-Jews do not have. To be considered a good and righteous person in the eyes of [G-d](#), a non-Jew need only follow the seven Noahic commandments, whereas a Jew has to follow all [613 commandments](#) given in the [Torah](#). If the potential convert is not going to follow those extra rules, it's better for him or her to stay a gentile, and since we as Jews are all responsible for each other, it's better for us too if that person stayed a gentile. The rabbinically mandated attempt to dissuade a convert is intended to make sure that the prospective convert is serious and willing to take on all this extra responsibility.

Once a person has decided to convert, the proselyte must begin to learn Jewish religion, law and customs and begin to observe them. This teaching process generally takes at least one year, because the prospective convert must experience each of the [Jewish holidays](#); however, the actual amount of study required will vary from person to person (a convert who was raised as a Jew might not need any further education, for example, while another person might need several years).

After the teaching is complete, the proselyte is brought before a Beit Din (rabbinical court) which examines the proselyte and determines whether he or she is ready to become a Jew. If the proselyte passes this oral examination, the rituals of conversion are performed. If the convert is male, he is [circumcised](#) (or, if he was already circumcised, a pinprick of blood is drawn for a symbolic circumcision). Both male and female converts are immersed in the mikvah (a ritual bath used for spiritual purification). The convert is given a Jewish name and is then introduced into the Jewish community.

In theory, once the conversion procedure is complete, the convert is as much a Jew as anyone who is born to the religion. In practice, the convert is often treated with caution, because we have had a lot of bad experiences with converts who later return to their former faith in whole or in part. However, it is important to remember that [Abraham](#) himself was a convert, as were all of the matriarchs of Judaism, as was Ruth, an ancestor of King David.

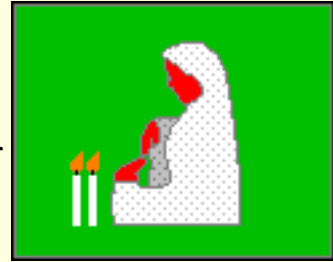
For more information about conversion to Judaism, see [The Conversion to Judaism Home Page](#). The information provided by Professor Epstein at that site is written from a [Conservative](#) perspective, but is valuable to anyone considering conversion to any [movement](#) of Judaism.

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The Role of Women

Level: Intermediate

The role of women in traditional Judaism has been grossly misrepresented and misunderstood. The position of women is not nearly as lowly as many modern people think; in fact, the position of women in [halakhah](#) (Jewish Law) that dates back to the biblical period is in many ways better than the position of women under American civil law as recently as a century ago. Most of the important feminist leaders of the 20th century (Gloria Steinem, for example) are Jewish women, and some commentators have suggested that this is no coincidence: the respect accorded to women in Jewish tradition was a part of their ethnic culture.



In traditional Judaism, women are for the most part seen as separate but equal. Women's obligations and responsibilities are different from men's, but no less important (in fact, in some ways, women's responsibilities are considered more important, as we shall see).

The equality of men and women begins at the highest possible level: [G-d](#). In Judaism, unlike Christianity, G-d has never been viewed as exclusively male or masculine. Judaism has always maintained that G-d has both masculine and feminine qualities. As one [rabbi](#) explained it to me, G-d has no body, no genitalia, therefore the very idea that G-d is male or female is patently absurd. We refer to G-d using masculine terms simply for convenience's sake, because Hebrew has no neutral gender; G-d is no more male than a table is.

Both man and woman were created in the image of G-d. According to most Jewish scholars, "man" was created in Gen. 1:27 with dual gender, and was later separated into male and female.

According to traditional Judaism, women are endowed with a greater degree of "binah" (intuition, understanding, intelligence) than men. The [rabbis](#) inferred this from the fact that woman was "built" (Gen. 2:22) rather than "formed" (Gen. 2:7), and the Hebrew [root](#) of "build" has the same consonants as the word "binah." It has been said that the matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah) were superior to the [patriarchs](#) ([Abraham](#), [Isaac](#) and [Jacob](#)) in prophesy. Women did not participate in the idolatry regarding the golden calf. Some traditional sources suggest that women are closer to G-d's ideal than men.

Women have held positions of respect in Judaism since biblical times. [Miriam](#) is considered one of the liberators of the [Children of Israel](#), along with her brothers [Moses](#) and [Aaron](#). One of the Judges (Deborah) was a woman. Seven of the 55 prophets of the Bible were women.

The Ten Commandments require respect for both mother and father. Note that the father comes first in Ex. 20:12, but the mother comes first in Lev. 19:3.

There were many learned women of note. The [Talmud](#) and later rabbinical writings speak of the wisdom of Berurya, the wife of Rabbi Meir. In several instances, her opinions on [halakhah](#) (Jewish Law) were accepted over those of her male contemporaries. In the [ketubah](#) (marriage contract) of [Rabbi Akiba](#)'s son, the wife is obligated to teach the husband [Torah](#)! Many rabbis over the centuries have been known to

consult their wives on matters of Jewish law relating to the woman's role, such as laws of [kashrut](#) and [women's cycles](#). The wife of a [rabbi](#) is referred to as a rebbetzin, practically a title of her own, which should give some idea of her significance in Jewish life.

There can be no doubt, however, that the [Talmud](#) also has many negative things to say about women. Various rabbis at various times describe women as lazy, jealous, vain and gluttonous, prone to gossip and particularly prone to the occult and witchcraft. Men are repeatedly advised against associating with women, although that is as much because of man's lust as it is because of any shortcoming in women. Women are discouraged from pursuing higher education or religious pursuits, but this seems to be primarily because women who engage in such pursuits might neglect their primary duties as wives and mothers. The rabbis are not concerned that women are not spiritual enough, but rather are concerned that women might become too spiritually devoted.

The rights of women in traditional Judaism are much greater than they were in the rest of Western civilization until this century. Women had the right to buy, sell, and own property, and make their own contracts, rights which women in Western countries (including America) did not have until about 100 years ago. In fact, Proverbs 31:10-31, which is read at Jewish weddings, speaks repeatedly of business acumen as a trait to be prized in women (v. 11, 13, 16, and 18 especially).

Women have the right to be consulted with regard to their [marriage](#). Marital [sex](#) is regarded as the woman's right, and not the man's. Men do not have the right to beat or mistreat their wives, a right that was recognized by law in many Western countries until a few hundred years ago. In cases of rape, a woman is generally presumed not to have consented to the intercourse, even if she enjoyed it, even if she consented after the sexual act began and declined a rescue! This is in sharp contrast to American society, where even today rape victims often have to overcome public suspicion that they "asked for it" or "wanted it." Traditional Judaism recognizes that forced sexual relations within the context of marriage are rape and are not permitted; in many states in America, rape within marriage is still not a criminal act.

There is no question that in traditional Judaism, the primary role of a woman is as wife and mother, keeper of the household. However, Judaism has great respect for the importance of that role. The [Talmud](#) says that when a pious man marries a wicked woman, the man becomes wicked, but when a wicked man marries a pious woman, the man becomes pious. Women are exempted from all positive [commandments](#) ("thou shalt" as opposed to "thou shalt not") that are time-related (that is, commandments that must be performed at a specific time of the day or year), because the woman's duties as wife and mother are so important that they cannot be postponed to fulfill a commandment. After all, a woman cannot be expected to just drop a crying baby when the time comes to perform a commandment.

It is this exemption from certain commandments that has led to the greatest misunderstanding of the role of women in Judaism. First, many people make the mistake of thinking that this exemption is a prohibition. On the contrary, although women are not obligated to perform time-based positive commandments, they are generally permitted to observe such commandments if they choose. Second, because this exemption diminishes the role of women in the [synagogue](#), many people perceive that women have no role in Jewish religious life. This misconception derives from the mistaken assumption that Jewish religious life revolves around the synagogue. It does not; it revolves around the home, where the woman's role is every bit as important as the man's.

The Role of Women in the Synagogue

To understand the limited role of women in [synagogue](#) life, it is important to understand the nature of [commandments](#) in Judaism and the separation of men and women.

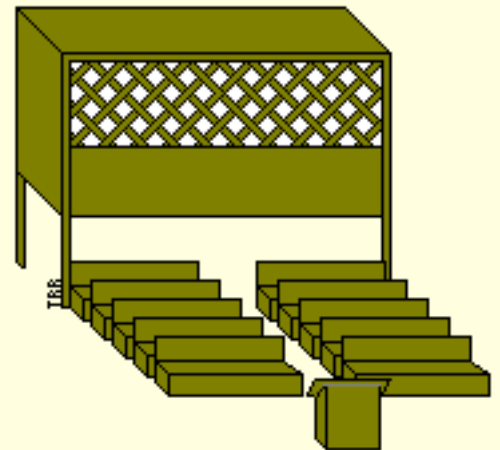
Judaism recognizes that it is mankind's nature to rebel against authority; thus, one who does something because he is commanded to is regarded with greater merit than one who does something because he chooses to. The person who refrains from pork because it is a commandment has more merit than the person who refrains from pork because he doesn't like the taste. In addition, the commandments, burdens, obligations, that were given to the [Jewish people](#) are regarded as a privilege, and the more commandments one is obliged to observe, the more privileged one is.

Because women are not obligated to perform certain commandments, their observance of those commandments does not "count" for group purposes. Thus, a woman's voluntary attendance at [daily worship services](#) does not count toward a [minyan](#) (the 10 people necessary to recite certain prayers), a woman's voluntary recitation of certain prayers does not count on behalf of the group (thus women cannot lead services), and a woman's voluntary reading from the [Torah](#) does not count towards the community's obligation to read from the Torah.

In addition, because women are not obligated to perform as many commandments as men are, women are regarded as less privileged. It is in this light that one must understand the man's prayer thanking [G-d](#) for "not making me a woman." The prayer does not indicate that it is bad to be a woman, but only that men are fortunate to be privileged to have more obligations. The corresponding women's prayer, thanking G-d for making me "according to his will," is not a statement of resignation to a lower status (hardly an appropriate sentiment for prayer!) On the contrary, this prayer should be understood as thanking G-d for giving women greater *binah*, for making women closer to G-d's idea of spiritual perfection, and for all the joys of being a woman generally.

The second thing that must be understood is the separation of men and women during prayer. According to Jewish Law, men and women must be separated during prayer, usually by a wall or curtain called a *mechitzah* or by placing women in a second floor balcony. There are two reasons for this: first, your mind is supposed to be on prayer, not on the pretty girl praying near you. Second, many pagan religious ceremonies at the time Judaism was founded involved sexual activity and orgies, and the separation prevents or at least discourages this.

The combination of this exemption from certain commandments and this separation often has the result that women have an extremely inferior place in the synagogue. In several synagogues that I have attended, the women's section is poorly climate controlled, and women cannot see (sometimes can't even hear!) what's going on in the men's section, where the services are being led. Women are not obligated by Jewish law to attend formal religious services, and cannot participate in many aspects of the services (traditional Jewish services have a very high degree of "audience participation" -- and I'm not just talking about community readings, I'm talking about actively taking part in running the service). Because of these issues, many [Orthodox](#)



women rarely attend services, and some of those who do attend spend much of the time talking and not paying attention.

But as I said before, this restriction on participation in synagogue life does not mean that women are excluded the Jewish religion, because the Jewish religion is not just something that happens in synagogue. Judaism is something that permeates every aspect of your life, every thing that you do, from the time you wake up in the morning to the time you go to bed, from what you eat and how you dress to how you conduct business. Prayer services are only a small, though important, part of the Jewish religion.

Links for Further Reading

[Project Genesis](#) offers an online course on [Women in Judaism](#), covering subjects such as equality between men and women in Judaism, faith, prayer, relationships, and feminine intuition.

[Kresel's Korner](#), written by an Orthodox woman, addresses many of the questions that people have about the role of women in Orthodoxy. Kresel is an intelligent, well-educated woman who responds to many feminist critiques of Orthodoxy and illustrates a very different kind of female empowerment.

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Rabbis, Priests and Other Religious Functionaries

Level: Basic

Rabbi



A rabbi is not a priest, neither in the Jewish sense of the term nor in the Christian sense of the term. In the Christian sense of the term, a priest is a person with special authority to perform certain sacred rituals. A rabbi, on the other hand, has no more authority to perform rituals than any other adult male member of the Jewish community. In the Jewish sense of the term, a priest ([kohein](#)) is a descendant of [Aaron](#), charged with performing various rites in the [Temple](#) in connection with religious rituals and [sacrifices](#). Although a kohein can be a rabbi, a rabbi is not required to be a kohein.

A rabbi is simply a teacher, a person sufficiently educated in [halakhah](#) (Jewish law) and tradition to instruct the community and to answer questions and resolve disputes regarding halakhah. When a person has completed the necessary course of study, he is given a written document known as a semikhah, which confirms his authority to make such decisions.

When I speak generally of things that were said or decided by "the rabbis" or "the sages," I am speaking of matters that have been generally agreed upon by authoritative Jewish scholars over the centuries. When I speak of rabbinical literature, I speak of the writings of the great rabbis on a wide variety of subjects.

Since the destruction of the [Temple](#), the role of the kohanim has diminished, and rabbis have taken over the spiritual leadership of the Jewish community. In this sense, the rabbi has much the same role as a Protestant minister, ministering to the community, leading community religious services and dealing with many of the administrative matters related to the [synagogue](#).

However, it is important to note that the rabbi's status as rabbi does not give him any special authority to conduct religious services. Any Jew sufficiently educated to know what he is doing can lead a religious service, and a service led by such a Jew is every bit as valid as a service led by a rabbi. It is not unusual for a community to be without a rabbi, or for Jewish services to be conducted without a rabbi.

Chazzan

A chazzan (cantor) is the person who leads the congregation in prayer. Any person with good moral character and thorough knowledge of the prayers and melodies can lead the [prayer services](#), and in many [synagogues](#), members of the community lead some or all parts of the prayer service. In smaller congregations, the rabbi often serves as both rabbi and chazzan. However, because music plays such a large role in Jewish religious services, larger congregations usually hire a professional chazzan, a person with both musical skills and training as a religious leader and educator.

Professional chazzans are ordained clergy. One of their most important duties is teaching young people

to lead all or part of a Shabbat service and to chant the [Torah](#) or [Haftarah reading](#), which is the heart of the [bar mitzvah](#) ceremony. But they can also perform many of the pastoral duties once confined to rabbis, such as conducting [weddings](#) and [funerals](#), visiting sick congregants, and teaching adult education classes. The rabbi and chazzan work as partners to educate and inspire the congregation.

Gabbai

A gabbai is a lay person who volunteers to perform various duties in connection with [Torah readings](#) at religious [services](#). Serving as a gabbai is a great honor, and is bestowed on a person who is thoroughly versed in the Torah and the Torah readings.

A gabbai may do one or more of the following:

- choose people who will receive an [aliyah](#) (the honor of reciting a blessing over the Torah reading)
- read from the [Torah](#)
- stand next to the person who is reading from the Torah, checking the reader's pronunciation and chanting and correcting any mistakes in the reading

Kohein

The kohanim are the descendants of [Aaron](#), chosen by [G-d](#) at the time of the incident with the Golden Calf to perform certain sacred work, particularly in connection with the [animal sacrifices](#) and the rituals related to the [Temple](#). After the destruction of the Temple, the role of the kohanim diminished significantly in favor of the rabbis; however, we continue to keep track of kohein lineage. DNA research supports their claims: a study published in Nature in June 1997 shows that self-identified kohanim in three countries have common elements in the Y-chromosome, indicating that they all have a common male ancestor. For more information about this and other recent genetic studies, see [The Cohanim/DNA Connection](#) at [Aish.com](#).

Kohanim are given the first [aliyah](#) on [Shabbat](#) (i.e., the first opportunity to recite a blessing over the Torah reading), which is considered an honor. They are also required to recite a blessing over the congregation at certain times of the year.

The term "Kohein" is the source of the common Jewish surname "Cohen," but not all Cohens are koheins and not all koheins are Cohens. "Katz" is also a common surname for a kohein (it is an acronym of "kohein tzadik," that is, "righteous priest"), but not all Katzes are koheins.

Levi

The entire tribe of Levi was set aside to perform certain duties in connection with the [Temple](#). As with the Kohanim, their importance was drastically diminished with the destruction of the Temple, but we continue to keep track of their lineage. Levites are given the second [aliyah](#) on [Shabbat](#) (i.e., the second opportunity to recite a blessing over the Torah reading), which is considered an honor.

Rebbe

Rebbe is the term for the spiritual master and guide of a [Chasidic](#) community. The term is sometimes translated as "Grand Rabbi," but literally it simply means "my rabbi." A rebbe is also considered to be a tzaddik (see [below](#)). The position is usually hereditary. A rebbe has the final word over every decision in a chasid's life.

Outside of the Chasidic community, the term "rebbe" is sometimes used simply to refer to ones own personal rabbi or any rabbi that a person has a close relationship with.

The term "rebbe" should not be confused with the term "reb," which is simply a Yiddish title of respect more or less equivalent to "Mister" in English.

Tzaddik

The word "tzaddik" literally means "righteous one." The term refers to a completely righteous individual, and generally indicates that the person has spiritual or mystical power. A tzaddik is not necessarily a rebbe or a rabbi, but the rebbe of a Chasidic community is considered to be a tzaddik.

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The Patriarchs and the Origins of Judaism

Level: Basic

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, known as the Patriarchs, are both the physical and spiritual ancestors of Judaism. They founded the religion now known as Judaism, and their descendants are the [Jewish people](#). Of course, technically, it is incorrect to refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as Jews, because the terms "Jew" and "Judaism" were not used generally to refer to this [nation](#) until hundreds of years after their time; nevertheless, for convenience I will use these terms.

The history below is derived from [written Torah](#), [Talmud](#), [Midrash](#) and other sources. Modern scholars question the existence of the Patriarchs and the historical accuracy of this information; however, it is worth noting that scholars also questioned the existence of Babylonia... until archaeologists found it.

Abraham

According to Jewish tradition, Abraham was born under the name Abram in the city of Ur in Babylonia in the year 1948 from Creation (circa 1800 [BCE](#)). He was the son of Terach, an idol merchant, but from his early childhood, he questioned the faith of his father and sought the truth. He came to believe that the entire universe was the work of a single Creator, and he began to teach this belief to others.

Abram tried to convince his father, Terach, of the folly of idol worship. One day, when Abram was left alone to mind the store, he took a hammer and smashed all of the idols except the largest one. He placed the hammer in the hand of the largest idol. When his father returned and asked what happened, Abram said, "The idols got into a fight, and the big one smashed all the other ones." His father said, "Don't be ridiculous. These idols have no life or power. They can't do anything." Abram replied, "Then why do you worship them?"

Eventually, the one true Creator that Abram had worshipped called to him, and made him an offer: if Abram would leave his home and his family, then [G-d](#) would make him a great [nation](#) and bless him. Abram accepted this offer, and the b'rit (covenant) between G-d and the [Jewish people](#) was established. (Gen. 12).

The idea of b'rit is fundamental to traditional Judaism: we have a covenant, a contract, with G-d, which involves rights and obligations on both sides. We have certain obligations to G-d, and G-d has certain obligations to us. The terms of this b'rit became more explicit over time, until the time of the Giving of the Torah (see [below](#)). Abram was subjected to ten tests of faith to prove his worthiness for this covenant. Leaving his home is one of these trials.

Abram, raised as a city-dweller, adopted a nomadic lifestyle, traveling through what is now the [land of Israel](#) for many years. G-d promised this land to Abram's descendants. Abram is referred to as a Hebrew (Ivri), possibly because he was descended from Eber or possibly because he came from the "other side" (eber) of the Euphrates River.

But Abram was concerned, because he had no children and he was growing old. Abram's beloved wife, Sarai, knew that she was past child-bearing years, so she offered her maidservant, Hagar, as a wife to

Abram. This was a common practice in the region at the time. According to tradition, Hagar was a daughter of Pharaoh, given to Abram during his travels in Egypt. She bore Abram a son, Ishmael, who, according to both Muslim and Jewish tradition, is the ancestor of the Arabs. (Gen 16)

When Abram was 100 and Sarai 90, G-d promised Abram a son by Sarai. G-d changed Abram's name to Abraham (father of many), and Sarai's to Sarah (from "my princess" to "princess"). Sarah bore Abraham a son, Isaac (in Hebrew, Yitzchak), a name derived from the word "laughter," expressing Abraham's joy at having a son in his old age. (Gen 17-18). Isaac was the ancestor of the [Jewish people](#). Thus, the conflict between Arabs and Jews can be seen as a form of sibling rivalry!

Isaac

Isaac was the subject of the tenth and most difficult test of Abraham's faith: [G-d](#) commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. (Gen 22). This test is known in Jewish tradition as the Akeidah (the Binding, a reference to the fact that Isaac was bound on the altar).

But this test is also an extraordinary demonstration of Isaac's own faith, because according to Jewish tradition, Isaac knew that he was to be sacrificed, yet he did not resist, and was united with his father in dedication.

At the last moment, G-d sent an angel to stop the sacrifice. It is interesting to note that child sacrifice was a common practice in the region at the time. Thus, to people of the time, the surprising thing about this story is not the fact that G-d asked Abraham to sacrifice his child, but that G-d stopped him!

Judaism uses this story as evidence that G-d abhors human sacrifice. In fact, I have seen some sources indicating that Abraham *failed* this test of faith because he did not refuse to sacrifice his son! Judaism has always strongly opposed the practice of human sacrifice, commonplace in many other cultures at that time and place.

Isaac later married Rebecca (Rivka), who bore him fraternal twin sons: Jacob (Ya'akov) and Esau. (Gen 25).

Jacob (Israel)

Jacob and his brother Esau were at war with each other even before they were born. They struggled within Rebecca's womb. Esau was Isaac's favorite, because he was a good hunter, but the more spiritually-minded Jacob was Rebecca's favorite.

Esau had little regard for the spiritual heritage of his forefathers, and sold his birthright of spiritual leadership to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew. When Isaac was growing old, Rebecca tricked him into giving Jacob a blessing meant for Esau. Esau was angry about this, and about the birthright, so Jacob fled to live with his uncle, where he met his beloved Rachel. Jacob was deceived into marrying Rachel's older sister, Leah, but later married Rachel as well, and Rachel and Leah's maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. Between these four women, Jacob fathered 12 sons and one daughter.

After many years living with and working for his uncle/father-in-law, Jacob returned to his homeland and sought reconciliation with his brother Esau. He prayed to G-d and gave his brother gifts. The night before he went to meet his brother, he sent his wives, sons, and things across the river, and was alone with G-d.

That night, he wrestled with a man until the break of day. As the dawn broke, Jacob demanded a blessing from the man, and the "man" revealed himself as an angel. He blessed Jacob and gave him the name "Israel" (Yisrael), meaning "the one who wrestled with G-d" or "the Champion of G-d." The [Jewish people](#) are generally referred to as the Children of Israel, signifying our descent from Jacob. The next day, Jacob met Esau and was welcomed by him.

Children of Israel

Jacob fathered 12 sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin. They are the ancestors of the tribes of Israel, and the ones for whom the tribes are named. Joseph is the father of two tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim.

Joseph's older brothers were jealous of him, because he was the favorite of their father, and because he had visions that he would lead them all. They sold Joseph into slavery and convinced their father that Joseph was dead. But this was all part of [G-d's](#) plan: Joseph was brought into Egypt, where his ability to interpret visions earned him a place in the Pharaoh's court, paving the way for his family's later settlement in Egypt.

The Exodus and the Giving of the Torah

As centuries passed, the descendants of Israel became slaves in Egypt. They suffered greatly under the hand of later Pharaohs. But [G-d](#) brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt under the leadership of [Moses](#).

G-d led them on a journey through the wilderness to Mount Sinai. Here, G-d revealed Himself to the Children of Israel and offered them a great covenant: if the people would hearken to G-d and observe His covenant, then they would be the most beloved of [nations](#), a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Ex 19). G-d revealed the [Torah](#) to his people, both the [written](#) and [oral Torah](#), and the entire nation responded, "Everything that the L-rd has spoken, we will do!" According to Jewish tradition, every Jewish soul that would ever be born was present at that moment, and agreed to be bound to this covenant.

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Moses, Aaron and Miriam

Level: Basic

Moses, Aaron and Miriam were the leaders of the Children of Israel at a pivotal time in our history: the Exodus from Egypt and the forty years of wandering in the desert before the people entered the [Promised Land](#).

An entire book could be written on the stories of these three people. Indeed, four books have already been written: the biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which tell the story of their life and times. This page can only begin to scratch the surface.

The history below is derived from [written Torah](#), [Talmud](#), [Midrash](#) and other sources. Where information comes directly from the [Bible](#), I have provided citations.

As with the stories of the [patriarchs](#), modern scholars question the historical accuracy of this information; however, scholars also claimed that the [Torah](#) could not have been written at that time because [alphabetic](#) writing did not exist ... and then archaeologists dug up 4000 year old samples of alphabetic writing.

Moses

Moses was the greatest [prophet](#), leader and teacher that Judaism has ever known. In fact, one of [Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith](#) is the belief that Moses's prophecies are true, and that he was the greatest of the prophets. He is called "Moshe Rabbeinu," that is, Moses, Our Teacher/[Rabbi](#).

Interestingly, the [numerical value](#) of "Moshe Rabbeinu" is 613: the number of [mitzvot](#) that Moses taught the Children of Israel! He is described as the only person who ever knew [G-d](#) face-to-face (Deut. 34:10) and mouth-to-mouth (Num. 12:8), which means that G-d spoke to Moses directly, in plain language, not through visions and dreams, as G-d communicated with other prophets.

Moses was born on 7 [Adar](#) in the year 2368 from Creation (circa 1400 [BCE](#)), the son of Amram, a member of the tribe of [Levi](#), and Yocheved, Levi's daughter (Ex. 6:16-20). Unlike the heroes of many other ancient cultures, Moses did not have a miraculous birth. Amram married Yocheved, and she conceived, and she gave birth (Ex. 2:1-2). The only unusual thing about his birth is Yocheved's advanced age: Yocheved was born while [Jacob](#) and his family were entering Egypt, so she was 130 when Moses was born. His father named him Chaver, and his grandfather called him Avigdor, but he is known to history as Moses, a name given to him by Pharaoh's daughter.

The name "Moses" comes from a [root](#) meaning "take out," because Moses was taken out of the river (Ex. 2:10). Some modern scholars point out that the root M-S-S in Egyptian means "son of" as in the name Ramases (son of Ra), but it is worth noting that Moses's name in Hebrew is M-Sh-H, not M-S-S. According to one Jewish source, Pharaoh's daughter actually named him Minios, which means "drawn out" in Egyptian, and the name Moshe (Moses) was a Hebrew translation of that name, just as a Russian immigrant named Ivan might change his name to the English equivalent, John.

Moses was born in a very difficult time: Pharaoh had ordered that all male children born to the Hebrew slaves should be drowned in the river (Ex. 1:22). Yocheved hid Moses for three months, and when she

could no longer hide him, she put him in a little ark and placed it on the river where Pharaoh's daughter bathed (Ex. 2:2-3). Pharaoh's daughter found the child and had compassion on him (Ex. 2:6). At the suggestion of Moses's sister [Miriam](#), Pharaoh's daughter hired Yocheved to nurse Moses until he was weaned (Ex. 2:7-10). Yocheved instilled in Moses a knowledge of his heritage and a love of his people that could not be erased by the 40 years he spent in the antisemitic court of Pharaoh.

Little is known about Moses's youth. The biblical narrative skips from his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter to his killing of an Egyptian taskmaster some 40 years later. One traditional story tells that when he was a child, sitting on Pharaoh's knee, Moses took the crown off of Pharaoh's head and put it on. The court magicians took this as a bad sign and demanded that he be tested: they put a brazier full of gold and a brazier full of hot coals before him to see which he would take. If Moses took the gold, he would have to be killed. An angel guided Moses's hand to the coal, and he put it into his mouth, leaving him with a life-long speech impediment (Ex. 4:10).

Although Moses was raised by Egyptians, his compassion for his people was so great that he could not bear to see them beaten by Pharaoh's taskmasters. One day, when Moses was about 40 years old, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, and he was so outraged that he struck and killed the Egyptian (Ex. 2:11-12). But when both his fellow Hebrews and the Pharaoh condemned him for this action, Moses was forced to flee from Egypt (Ex. 2:14-15).

He fled to Midian, where he met and married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest (Ex. 2:16-21). They had a son, Gershom (Ex. 2:22). Moses spent 40 years in Midian tending his father-in-law's sheep. A midrash tells that Moses was chosen to lead the Children of Israel because of his [kindness to animals](#). When he was bringing the sheep to a river for water, one lamb did not come. Moses went to the little lamb and carried it to the water so it could drink. Like [G-d](#), Moses cared about each individual in the group, and not just about the group as a whole. This showed that he was a worthy shepherd for G-d's flock.

I'm sure everyone knows what happened next - if you haven't read the book, then you've certainly seen the movie. G-d appeared to Moses and chose him to lead the people out of Egyptian slavery and to the [Promised Land](#) (Ex. Chs. 3-4). With the help of his brother [Aaron](#), Moses spoke to Pharaoh and triggered the plagues against Egypt (Ex. Chs. 4-12). He then led the people out of Egypt and across the sea to freedom, and brought them to Mount Sinai, where G-d gave the people the [Torah](#) and the people accepted it (Ex. Chs. 12-24).

G-d revealed the entire Torah to Moses. The entire Torah includes the first five books of the [Bible](#) (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) that Moses himself wrote as G-d instructed him. It also includes all of the remaining prophecies and history that would later be written down in the remaining books of [scripture](#), and the entire [Oral Torah](#), the oral tradition for interpreting the Torah, that would later be written down in the [Talmud](#). Moses spent the rest of his life writing the first five books, essentially taking dictation from G-d.

After Moses received instruction from G-d about the Law and how to interpret it, he came back down to the people and started hearing cases and judging them for the people, but this quickly became too much for one man. Upon the advice of his father-in-law, Yitro, Moses instituted a judicial system (Ex. 18:13-26).

Moses was not perfect. Like any man, he had his flaws and his moments of weakness, and the Bible faithfully records these shortcomings. In fact, Moses was not permitted to enter the [Promised Land](#) because of a transgression (Deut. 32:48-52). Moses was told to speak to a rock to get water from it, but instead he struck the rock repeatedly with a rod, showing improper anger and a lack of faith (Num. 20:7-13).

Moses died in the year 2488, just before the people crossed over into the Promised Land (Deut. 32:51). He completed writing the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) before he died. There is some dispute as to who physically wrote the last few verses of Deuteronomy: according to some, Moses wrote these last few verses from a vision of the future, but according to others, the last few verses were added by Joshua after Moses's death. In any case, these verses, like everything else in the Torah, were written by G-d, and the actual identity of the transcriber is not important.

Moses's position as leader of Israel was not hereditary. His son, Gershom, did not inherit the leadership of Israel. Moses's chosen successor was Joshua, son of Nun (Deut. 34:9).

Moses was 120 years old at the time that he died (Deut. 34:7). That lifespan is considered to be ideal, and has become proverbial: one way to wish a person well in Jewish tradition is to say, "May you live to be 120!"

As important as Moses was to the Children of Israel, it is always important to remember that Moses himself was not the deliverer or redeemer of Israel. It was G-d who redeemed Israel, not Moses. Moses was merely G-d's [prophet](#), His spokesman. The traditional text of the [Pesach haggadah](#) does not even mention Moses's name. In order to prevent people from idolatrously worshipping Moses, his grave was left unmarked (Deut. 34:6).

Aaron

Aaron was [Moses](#)'s older brother. He was born in 2365, three years before Moses, before the Pharaoh's edict requiring the death of male Hebrew children. He was the ancestor of all [koheins](#), the founder of the [priesthood](#), and the first Kohein Gadol (High Priest). Aaron and his descendants tended the altar and offered [sacrifices](#). Aaron's role, unlike Moses's, was inherited; his sons continued the priesthood after him (Num. 20:26).

Aaron served as Moses's spokesman. As discussed above, Moses was not eloquent and had a speech impediment, so Aaron spoke for him (Ex. 4:10-16). Contrary to popular belief, it was Aaron, not Moses, who cast down the staff that became a snake before Pharaoh (Ex. 7:10-12). It was Aaron, not Moses, who held out his staff to trigger the first three plagues against Egypt (Ex. 7:19-20; Ex. 8:1-2 or 8:5-6; Ex. 8:12-13 or 8:16-17). According to Jewish tradition, it was also Aaron who performed the signs for the elders before they went to Pharaoh (Ex. 4:30).

Aaron's most notable personal quality is that he was a peacemaker. His love of peace is proverbial; [Rabbi Hillel](#) said, "Be disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and drawing them near the [Torah](#)." According to tradition, when Aaron heard that two people were arguing, he would go to each of them and tell them how much the other regretted his actions, until the two people agreed to face each other as friends.

In fact, Aaron loved peace so much that he participated in the incident of the Golden Calf (Ex. 32), constructing the idol in order to prevent dissension among the people. Aaron intended to buy time until Moses returned from Mount Sinai (he was late, and the people were worried), to discourage the people by asking them to give up their precious jewelry in order to make the idol, and to teach them the error of their ways in time (Ex. 32:22).

Aaron, like Moses, died in the desert shortly before the people entered the [Promised Land](#) (Num. 20).

Miriam

Miriam was [Aaron](#) and [Moses](#)'s older sister. According to some sources, she was seven years older than Moses, but other sources seem to indicate that she was older than that. Some sources indicate that Miriam was Puah, one of the midwives who rescued Hebrew babies from Pharaoh's edict against them (Ex. 1:15-19).

Miriam was a [prophetess](#) in her own right (Ex. 15:20), the first woman described that way in scripture (although [Sarah](#) is also considered to be a prophetess, that word is not applied to her in scripture). According to tradition, she prophesied before Moses's birth that her parents would give birth to the person who would bring about their people's redemption.

Miriam waited among the bulrushes while Moses's ark was in the river, watching over him to make sure he was all right (Ex. 2:4). When the Pharaoh's daughter drew Moses out of the water, Miriam arranged for their mother, Yocheved, to nurse Moses and raise him until he was weaned (Ex. 2:7-9).

Miriam led the women of Israel in a song and dance of celebration after the Pharaoh's men were drowned in the sea (Ex. 15:20-21). She is said to be the ancestress of other creative geniuses in Israel's history: Bezalel, the architect of the mishkan (the portable sanctuary used in the desert) (Ex. 31:1-3) and King David.

According to tradition, because of Miriam's righteousness, a well followed the people through the desert throughout their wanderings, and that well remained with them until the day of Miriam's death.

Like her brothers, Miriam was not perfect. She led her brother Aaron to speak against Moses over a matter involving a Cushite woman he had married (Zipporah, or possibly a second wife) (Num. 12:1). They also objected to his leadership, noting that he had no monopoly on Divine Communication (Num 12:2). For this, Miriam was punished with tzaaras (an affliction generally translated as leprosy) (Num. 12:10). However, Aaron pled on her behalf, and she was cured (Num. 12:11).

Like her brothers, Miriam died in the desert before the people reached the [Promised Land](#) (Num. 20:1).

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Prophets and Prophecy

Level: Intermediate

What is a Prophet?

Many people today think of a prophet as any person who sees the future. While the gift of prophecy certainly includes the ability to see the future, a prophet is far more than just a person with that ability.

A prophet is basically a spokesman for [G-d](#), a person chosen by G-d to speak to people on G-d's behalf and convey a message or teaching. Prophets were role models of holiness, scholarship and closeness to G-d. They set the standards for the entire community.

The Hebrew word for a prophet, navi ([Nun-Bet-Yod-Alef](#)) comes from the term niv sefatayim meaning "fruit of the lips," which emphasizes the prophet's role as a speaker.

The [Talmud](#) teaches that there were hundreds of thousands of prophets: twice as many as the number of people who left Egypt, which was 600,000. But most of the prophets conveyed messages that were intended solely for their own generation and were not reported in [scripture](#). Scripture identifies only 55 prophets of Israel.

A prophet is not necessarily a man. Scripture records the stories of seven female prophets, listed below, and the Talmud reports that [Sarah's](#) prophetic ability was superior to [Abraham's](#).

A prophet is not necessarily a Jew. The Talmud reports that there were prophets among the gentiles (most notably Balaam, whose story is told in Numbers 22), although they were not as elevated as the prophets of Israel (as the story of Balaam demonstrates). And some of the prophets, such as Jonah, were sent on missions to speak to the gentiles.

According to some views, prophecy is not a gift that is arbitrarily conferred upon people; rather, it is the culmination of a person's spiritual and ethical development. When a person reaches a sufficient level of spiritual and ethical achievement, the Shechinah (Divine Spirit) comes to rest upon him or her. Likewise, the gift of prophecy leaves the person if that person lapses from his or her spiritual and ethical perfection.

The greatest of the prophets was [Moses](#). It is said that Moses saw all that all of the other prophets combined saw, and more. Moses saw the whole of the [Torah](#), including the [Prophets](#) and the [Writings](#) that were written hundreds of years later. All subsequent prophecy was merely an expression of what Moses had already seen. Thus, it is taught that nothing in the Prophets or the Writings can be in conflict with Moses's writings, because Moses saw it all in advance.

The Talmud states that the writings of the prophets will not be necessary in the [World to Come](#), because in that day, all people will be mentally, spiritually and ethically perfect, and all will have the gift of prophecy.

Who are the Prophets of the Jewish Scriptures?

The following list of prophets is based on the [Talmud](#) and [Rashi](#).

Abraham	Gen 11:26 - 25:10
Isaac	Gen 21:1 - 35:29
Jacob	Gen 25:21 - 49:33
Moses	Ex. 2:1 - Deut. 34:5
Aaron	Ex. 4:14 - Num. 33:39
Joshua	Ex. 17:9 - 14, 24:13, 32:17 - 18, 33:11; Num. 11:28 - 29, 13:4 - 14:38; 27:18 - 27:23, Deut. 1:38, 3:28, 31:3, 31:7 -Joshua 24:29
Pinchas	Ex. 6:25; Num. 25:7-25:11; Num. 31:6; Josh. 22:13 - Josh. 24:33; Judges 20:28
Elkanah	I Samuel 1:1 - 2:20
Eli	I Samuel 1:9 - 4:18
Samuel	I Samuel 1:1 - I Samuel 25:1
Gad	I Sam 22:5; II Sam 24:11-19; I Chron 21:9-21:19, 29:29
Nathan	II Sam 7:2 - 17; 12:1 - 25.
David	I Sam 16:1 - I Kings 2:11
Solomon	II Sam 12:24; 1 Kings 1:10 - 11:43
Iddo	II Chron 9:29, 12:15, 13:22
Michaiah son of Imlah	I Kings 22:8-28; II Chron 18:7-27
Obadiah	I Kings 18; Obadiah
Ahiyah the Shilonite	I Kings 11:29-30; 12:15; 14:2-18; 15:29
Jehu son of Hanani	I Kings 16:1 - 7; II Chron 19:2; 20:34
Azariah son of Oded	II Chron 15
Jahaziel the Levite	II Chron 20:14
Eliezer son of Dodavahu	II Chron 20:37
Hosea	Hosea
Amos	Amos
Micah the Morashtite	Micah
Amoz	(the father of Isaiah)
Elijah	I Kings 17:1 - 21:29; II Kings 1:10-2:15, 9:36-37, 10:10, 10:17

Elisha	I Kings 19:16-19; II Kings 2:1-13:21
Jonah ben Amittai	Jonah
Isaiah	Isaiah
Joel	Joel
Nahum	Nahum
Habakkuk	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Zephaniah
Uriah	Jeremiah 26:20-23
Jeremiah	Jeremiah
Ezekiel	Ezekiel
Shemaiah	I Kings 12:22-24; II Chron 11:2-4, 12:5-15
Barukh	Jeremiah 32, 36, 43, 45
Neriah	(father of Barukh)
Seraiah	Jeremiah 51:61-64
Mehseiah	(father of Neriah)
Haggai	Haggai
Zechariah	Zechariah
Malachi	Malachi
Mordecai Bilshan	
Oded	(father of Azariah)
Hanani	(father of Jehu)
Sarah	Gen 11:29 - 23:20
Miriam	Ex. 15:20-21; Num. 12:1-12:15, 20:1
Deborah	Judges 4:1 - 5:31
Hannah	I Sam 1:1 - 2:21
Abigail	I Sam 25:1 - 25:42
Huldah	II Kings 22:14-20
Esther	Esther

Why is Daniel Not a Prophet?

I am often asked why the Book of Daniel is included in the [Writings](#) section of the [Tanakh](#) instead of the [Prophets](#) section. Wasn't Daniel a prophet? Weren't his visions of the future true?

According to Judaism, Daniel is not one of the 55 prophets. His writings include visions of the future, which we believe to be true; however, his mission was not that of a prophet. His visions of the future were never intended to be proclaimed to the people; they were designed to be written down for future generations. Thus, they are Writings, not Prophecies, and are classified accordingly.

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Sages and Scholars

Level: Intermediate

Hillel and Shammai

These two great scholars born a generation or two before the beginning of the Common Era are usually discussed together and contrasted with each other, because they were contemporaries and the leaders of two opposing schools of thought (known as "houses"). The [Talmud](#) records over 300 differences of opinion between Beit Hillel (the House of Hillel) and Beit Shammai (the House of Shammai). In almost every one of these disputes, Hillel's view prevailed.

Rabbi Hillel was born to a wealthy family in Babylonia, but came to Jerusalem without the financial support of his family and supported himself as a woodcutter. It is said that he lived in such great poverty that he was sometimes unable to pay the admission fee to study [Torah](#), and because of him that fee was abolished. He was known for his kindness, his gentleness, and his concern for humanity. One of his most famous sayings, recorded in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers, a tractate of the [Mishnah](#)), is "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?" The Hillel organization, a network of Jewish college student organizations, is named for him.

Rabbi Shammai was an engineer, known for the strictness of his views. The [Talmud](#) tells that a gentile came to Shammai saying that he would convert to Judaism if Shammai could teach him the whole [Torah](#) in the time that he could stand on one foot. Shammai drove him away with a builder's measuring stick! Hillel, on the other hand, converted the gentile by telling him, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Go and study it."

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was the youngest and most distinguished disciple of Rabbi Hillel (see [above](#)). He has been called the "father of wisdom and the father of generations (of scholars)" because he ensured the continuation of Jewish scholarship after Jerusalem fell to Rome in 70 C.E.

According to tradition, ben Zakkai was a pacifist in Jerusalem in 68 C.E. when the city was under siege by General Vespasian. Jerusalem was controlled by the Zealots, people who would rather die than surrender to Rome (these are the same people who controlled Masada). Ben Zakkai urged surrender, but the Zealots would not hear of it, so ben Zakkai faked his own death and had his disciples smuggle him out of Jerusalem in a coffin. They carried the coffin to Vespasian's tent, where ben Zakkai emerged from the coffin. He told Vespasian that he had had a vision (some would say, a shrewd political insight) that Vespasian would soon be emperor, and he asked Vespasian to set aside a place in Yavneh (near modern Rehovot) where he could move his yeshivah (school) and study Torah in peace. Vespasian promised that if the prophesy came true, he would grant ben Zakkai's request. Vespasian became Emperor and kept his word, allowing the school to be established after the war was over. The yeshiva survived and was a center of Jewish learning for centuries.

Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph (approx. 15-135 C.E.)

A poor, semi-literate shepherd, Rabbi Akiba became one of Judaism's greatest scholars. He developed the exegetical method of the [Mishnah](#), linking each traditional practice to a basis in the biblical text, and systematized the material that later became the Mishnah.

Rabbi Akiba was active in the Bar Kokhba rebellion against Rome. He believed that Bar Kokhba was the [Moshiach](#) (messiah), though some other [rabbis](#) openly ridiculed him for that belief (the [Talmud](#) records another rabbi as saying, "Akiba, grass will grow in your cheeks and still the son of David will not have come.") When the Bar Kokhba rebellion failed, Rabbi Akiba was taken by the Roman authorities and tortured to death.

Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi (approx. 135-219 C.E.)

The Patriarch of the Jewish community, Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi was well-educated in Greek thought as well as Jewish thought. He organized and compiled the [Mishnah](#), building upon Rabbi Akiba's work.

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki) (1040-1105 C.E.)

A grape grower living in Northern France, Rashi wrote the definitive commentaries on the Babylonian [Talmud](#) and the Bible. Rashi pulled together materials from a wide variety of sources, wrote them down in the order of the Talmud and the Bible for easy reference, and wrote them in such clear, concise and plain language that it can be appreciated by beginners and experts alike. Almost every edition of the Talmud printed since the invention of the printing press has included the text of Rashi's commentary side-by-side with the Talmudic text. Many traditional Jews will not study the Bible without a Rashi commentary beside it.

Rambam (Maimonides; Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon) (1135-1204 C.E.)

A physician born in Moorish Cordoba, Rambam lived in a variety of places throughout the Moorish lands of Spain, the Middle East and North Africa, often fleeing persecution. He was a leader of the Jewish community in Cairo. He was heavily influenced by Greek thought, particularly that of Aristotle.

Rambam was the author of the Mishneh Torah, one of the greatest codes of Jewish law, compiling every conceivable topic of Jewish law in subject matter order and providing a simple statement of the prevailing view in plain language. In his own time, he was widely condemned because he claimed that the Mishneh Torah was a substitute for studying the Talmud.

Rambam is also responsible for several important theological works. He developed the [13 Principles of Faith](#), the most widely accepted list of Jewish beliefs. He also wrote the Guide for the Perplexed, a discussion of difficult theological concepts written from the perspective of an Aristotelian philosopher.

Ramban (Nachmanides; Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman) (1194-1270 C.E.)

Ramban was the foremost [halakhist](#) of his age. Like Rambam before him, Ramban was a Spaniard who was both a physician and a great Torah scholar. However, unlike the rationalist Rambam, Ramban had a strong mystical bent. His biblical commentaries are the first ones to incorporate the mystical teachings of [kabbalah](#).

He was well-known for his aggressive refutations of Christianity, most notably, his debate with Pablo Christiani, a converted Jew, before King Jaime I of Spain in 1263.

Ramban could be described as one of history's first [Zionists](#), because he declared that it is a [mitzvah](#) to take possession of [Israel](#) and to live in it (relying on Num. 33:53). He said, "So long as Israel occupies [the Holy Land], the earth is regarded as subject to Him." Ramban fulfilled this commandment, moving to the Holy Land during the Crusades after he was expelled from Spain for his polemics. He found devastation in the Holy Land, "but even in this destruction," he said, "it is a blessed land." He died there in 1270 C.E.

Do not confuse Ramban with Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (see [below](#)).

Baal Shem Tov (the Besht, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer) (1700-1760 C.E.)

The founder of [Chasidic](#) Judaism. Although many books of his teachings exist, the Besht himself wrote no books, perhaps because his teachings emphasized the fact that even a simple, uneducated peasant could approach [G-d](#) (a radical idea in its time, when Judaism emphasized that the way to approach G-d was through study). He emphasized prayer, the observance of commandments, and ecstatic, personal mystical experiences.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810 C.E.)

The great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov (see [above](#)), Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (sometimes called Bratzlav, Breslau or Bratislava) was the founder of the Breslover [Chasidic](#) sect. Breslov is a town in the Ukraine where Rabbi Nachman spent the end of his life, but some say the name Breslov comes from the Hebrew *bris lev*, meaning "covenant of the heart." He emphasized living life with joy and happiness. One of his best-known sayings is, "It is a great [mitzvah](#) to be happy." Collections of his Chasidic tales (or tales attributed to him) are widely available in print.

Do not confuse Rabbi Nachman with Ramban (see [above](#)).

Is there another scholar you would like to see on this list? Write and let me know at :

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The Land of Israel

Level: Basic

The Promised Land

The history of the [Jewish people](#) begins with [Abraham](#), and the story of Abraham begins when [G-d](#) tells him to leave his homeland, promising Abraham and his descendants a new home in the land of Canaan. (Gen. 12). This is the land now known as Israel, named after Abraham's [grandson](#), whose descendants are the Jewish people. The land is often referred to as the Promised Land because of G-d's repeated promise (Gen. 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8) to give the land to the descendants of Abraham.

The land is described repeatedly in the [Torah](#) as a good land and "a land flowing with milk and honey" (e.g., Ex. 3:8). This description may not seem to fit well with the desert images we see on the nightly news, but let's keep in mind that the land was repeatedly abused by conquerors who were determined to make the land uninhabitable for the Jews. In the few decades since the Jewish people regained control of the land, we have seen a tremendous improvement in its agriculture. Israeli agriculture today has a very high yield.

Jews have lived in this land continuously from the time of its original conquest by Joshua more than 3200 years ago until the present day, though Jews were not always in political control of the land, and Jews were not always the majority of the land's population.

The land of Israel is central to Judaism. A substantial portion of Jewish law is tied to the land of Israel, and can only be performed there. Some rabbis have declared that it is a [mitzvah](#) (commandment) to take possession of Israel and to live in it (relying on Num. 33:53). The [Talmud](#) indicates that the land itself is so holy that merely walking in it can gain you a place in the [World to Come](#). [Prayers](#) for a return to Israel and Jerusalem are included in daily prayers as well as many [holiday](#) observances and special events.

Living outside of Israel is viewed as an unnatural state for a Jew. The world outside of Israel is often referred to as "galut," which is usually translated as "diaspora" (dispersion), but a more literal translation would be "exile" or "captivity." When we live outside of Israel, we are living in exile from our land.

Jews were exiled from the land of Israel by the Romans in 135 [C.E.](#), after they defeated the Jews in a three-year war, and Jews did not have any control over the land again until 1948 C.E.

Zionism and the Formation of the State of Israel

The [Jewish people](#) never gave up hope that we would someday return to our home in Israel. That hope is expressed in the song Ha-Tikvah (The Hope), the anthem of the Zionist movement and the state of Israel.



Kol od baleivav p'nima
 Nefesh Y'hudi homiya
 Ul'fa-atey mizrach kadima
 Ayin L'Tziyon tzofiya
 Od lo avda tikvateynu
 Hatikva bat sh'not alpayim
 Lih'yot am chofshi b'artzenu
 Eretz Tziyon v'yirushalayim.
 Lih'yot am chofshi b'artzenu
 Eretz Tziyon v'yirushalayim.

As long as deep within the heart
 The Jewish soul is warm
 And toward the edges of the east
 An eye to Zion looks
 Our hope is not yet lost,
 The hope of two thousand years
 To be a free people in our own land
 In the land of Zion and Jerusalem.
 To be a free people in our own land
 In the land of Zion and Jerusalem.

But for a long time, this desire for our homeland was merely a vague hope without any concrete plans to achieve it. In the late 1800s, Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weizmann founded the Zionism, a political movement dedicated to the creation of a Jewish state in Israel. They saw the state of Israel as a necessary refuge for Jewish victims of oppression, especially in Russia, where pogroms were decimating the Jewish population.

The name "Zionism" comes from the word "Zion," which was the name of a stronghold in Jerusalem. Over time, the term "Zion" came to be applied to Jerusalem in general, and later to the Jewish idea of utopia.

Zionism was not a religious movement; it was a primarily political. The early Zionists sought to establish a secular state of Israel, recognized by the world, through purely legal means. Theodor Herzl, for example, was a completely assimilated secular Jewish journalist. He felt little attachment to his Jewish heritage until he covered the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French military who was (unjustly) convicted of passing secrets to Germany. The charges against Dreyfus brought out a wave of anti-Jewish sentiment that shocked Herzl into realizing the need for a Jewish state. Early Zionists were so desperate for a refuge at one point that they actually considered a proposal to create a Jewish homeland in Uganda.

After World War I, the land of Israel was part of Palestine, a British protectorate which included Israel and parts of Jordan and Egypt. In a letter from British foreign secretary Lord Balfour to Jewish financier Lord Rothschild, the British government expressed a commitment to creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This letter is commonly known as the Balfour Declaration of 1917. After the declaration, Jewish immigration to Israel expanded rapidly, but little actual progress was made toward the establishment of a Jewish state until after the Holocaust destroyed a third of the world's Jewish population.

In 1947, the British handed the problem of the Jewish state to the newly-founded United Nations, which developed a partition plan dividing Palestine into Jewish and Arab portions. The plan was ratified in November 1947, the new State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948 and British troops pulled out of Palestine.

As soon as the British troops pulled out, the surrounding Arab countries immediately pounced on the new Jewish state and fought a year-long war to drive the Jews out. Miraculously, the new state of Israel won this war, as well as every subsequent Arab-Israeli war, gaining territory every time the Arabs attacked them.

Israel Today

Today, approximately five million Jews, more than a third of the world's Jewish [population](#), live in the land of Israel. Jews make up more than eighty percent of the population of the land, and Jews are in political control of the land.



Jews continue to immigrate to Israel in large numbers. Immigration to Israel is referred to as *aliyah* (literally, ascension). Under Israel's Law of Return, any [Jew](#) who has not renounced the Jewish faith (by converting to another religion) can automatically become an Israeli citizen. [Gentiles](#) may also become citizens of Israel after undergoing a standard naturalization process, much like the one required to become a United States citizen.

Most Jews today support the existence of the state of Israel. However, there are a small number of secular Jews who are anti-Zionist. There is also a very small group of right-wing [Orthodox](#) Jews who object to the existence of the state of Israel, maintaining that it is a sin for us to create a Jewish state when the [messiah](#) has not yet come. However, this viewpoint does not reflect the mainstream opinion of Orthodoxy. Most Orthodox Jews support the existence of the state of Israel as a homeland, even though it is not the theological state of Israel that will be brought about by the messiah.

Israel Links

This page barely scratches the surface of all there is to say about Israel and Zionism. There are entire sites devoted to these subjects. Here are a few that are worth checking out:

[Virtual Jerusalem](#) is a great place to start your search for information about Israel. The site is based in Israel, and has lots of useful information, including Israeli news, travel information, information about making *aliyah*, and lots of great links.

You can also find a lot of useful information and links in [Shamash's Israel section](#).

[AICE](#) is an organization devoted to fostering political, military and economic cooperation between the United States and Israel.

If you are interested in the history of Zionism, you may want to read the founding treatise on the subject, Theodor Herzl's [The Jewish State](#), which you can buy from amazon.com by clicking the title above.



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Synagogues, Shuls and Temples

Level: Basic

The synagogue is the Jewish equivalent of a church, more or less. It is the center of the Jewish religious community: a place of prayer, study and education, social and charitable work, as well as a social center.

What's in a Name?

Throughout this site, I have used the word "synagogue," but there are actually several different terms for a Jewish "church," and you can tell a lot about people by the terms they use.

The Hebrew term is *beit k'neset* (literally, House of Assembly), although you will rarely hear this term used in conversation in English.

The [Orthodox](#) and [Chasidim](#) typically use the word "shul," which is Yiddish. The word is derived from a German word meaning "school," and emphasizes the synagogue's role as a place of study.

[Conservative](#) Jews usually use the word "synagogue," which is actually a Greek translation of *Beit K'neset* and means "place of assembly" (it's related to the word "synod").

[Reform](#) Jews use the word "temple," because they consider every one of their meeting places to be equivalent to, or a replacement for, [The Temple](#).

The use of the word "temple" to describe modern houses of prayer offends some traditional Jews, because it trivializes the importance of [The Temple](#). The word "shul," on the other hand, is unfamiliar to many modern Jews. When in doubt, the word "synagogue" is the best bet, because everyone knows what it means, and I've never known anyone to be offended by it.

Functions of a Synagogue

At a minimum, a synagogue is a *beit tefilah*, a house of [prayer](#). It is the place where Jews come together for community [prayer services](#). Jews can satisfy the obligations of daily prayer by praying anywhere; however, there are certain prayers that can only be said in the presence of a *minyan* (a quorum of 10 adult men), and tradition teaches that there is more merit to praying with a group than there is in praying alone. The sanctity of the synagogue for this purpose is second only to [The Temple](#). In fact, in rabbinical literature, the synagogue is sometimes referred to as the "little Temple."

A synagogue is usually also a *beit midrash*, a house of study. Contrary to popular belief, Jewish education does not end at the age of [bar mitzvah](#). For the observant Jew, the study of sacred texts is a life-long task. Thus, a synagogue normally has a well-stocked library of sacred Jewish texts for members of the community to study. It is also the place where children receive their basic religious education.

Most synagogues also have a social hall for religious and non-religious activities. The synagogue often functions as a sort of town hall where matters of importance to the community can be discussed.

In addition, the synagogue functions as a [social welfare](#) agency, collecting and dispensing money and

other items for the aid of the poor and needy within the community.

Organizational Structure

Synagogues are generally run by a board of directors composed of lay people. They manage and maintain the synagogue and its activities, and hire a [rabbi](#) for the community. It is worth noting that a synagogue can exist without a rabbi: religious services can be, and often are, conducted by lay people in whole or in part. It is not unusual for a synagogue to be without a rabbi, at least temporarily. However, the rabbi is a valuable member of the community, providing leadership, guidance and education.

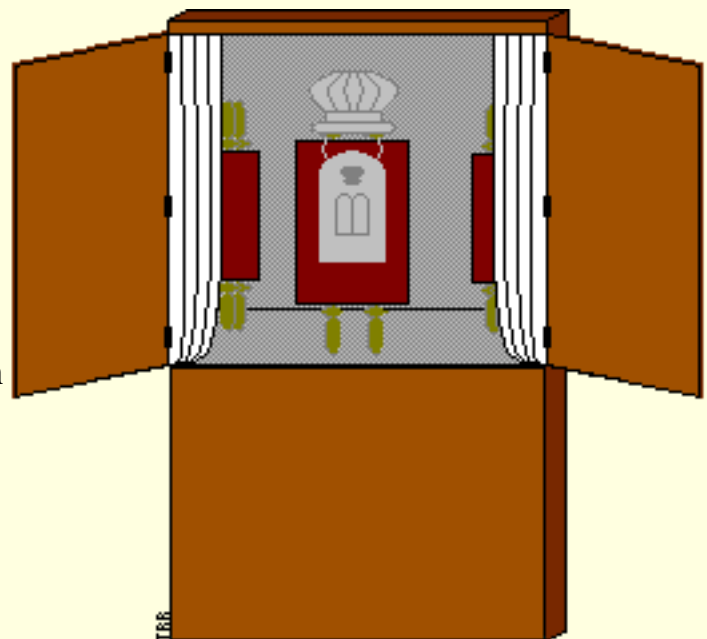
Synagogues do not pass around collection plates during services, as many churches do. This is largely because Jews are not permitted to carry money on [holidays](#) and [shabbat](#). Instead, synagogues are financed through membership dues paid annually, through voluntary donations, and through the purchase of reserved seats for services on [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Yom Kippur](#) (the holidays when the synagogue is most crowded). It is important to note, however, that you do not have to be a member of a synagogue in order to worship there. If you plan to worship at a synagogue regularly and you have the financial means, you should certainly pay your dues to cover your fair share of the synagogue's costs, but no synagogue checks membership cards at the door (except possibly on the High Holidays mentioned above, if there aren't enough seats for everyone).

Synagogues are, for the most part, independent community organizations. In the United States, at least, individual synagogues do not answer to any central authority. There are central organizations for the various [movements](#) of Judaism, and synagogues are often affiliated with these organizations, but these organizations have no real power over individual synagogues.

Ritual Items in the Synagogue

The portion of the synagogue where [prayer services](#) are performed is commonly called the sanctuary. Synagogues in the United States are generally designed so that the front of the sanctuary is on the side towards Jerusalem, which is the direction that we are supposed to face when reciting certain prayers.

Probably the most important feature of the sanctuary is the Ark. The name "Ark" is an acrostic of the Hebrew words "Aron Kodesh," which means "holy cabinet." The word has no relation to Noah's Ark, which is the word "teyvat" in Hebrew. The Ark is a cabinet or recession in the wall, which holds the [Torah scrolls](#). The Ark is generally placed in the front of the room; that is, on the side towards Jerusalem. The Ark has doors as well as an inner curtain called a parokhet. This curtain is in imitation of the curtain in the Sanctuary in The Temple, and is named for it. During certain prayers, the doors and/or curtain of the Ark may be opened or closed. Opening or closing the doors or curtain is performed by a member of the congregation, and is considered an honor.



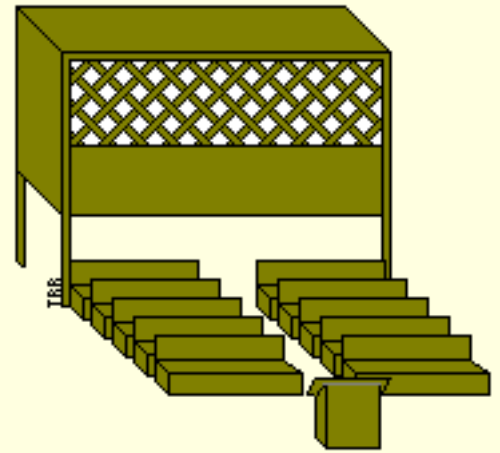
In front of and slightly above the Ark, you will find the ner tamid, the Eternal Lamp. This lamp symbolizes the commandment to keep a light burning in the Tabernacle outside of the curtain surrounding the Ark of the Covenant. (Ex. 27:20-21).



In addition to the ner tamid, you may find a [menorah](#) (candelabrum) in many synagogues, symbolizing the menorah in the Temple. The menorah in the synagogue will generally have six or eight branches instead of the Temple menorah's seven, because exact duplication of the Temple's ritual items is improper.

In the center of the room or in the front you will find a pedestal called the bimah. The Torah scrolls are placed on the bimah when they are read. The bimah is also sometimes used as a podium for leading services. There is an additional, lower lectern in some synagogues called an amud.

In [Orthodox](#) synagogues, you will also find a separate section where the women sit. This may be on an upper floor balcony, or in the back of the room, or on the side of the room, separated from the men's section by a wall or curtain called a mechitzah. Men are not permitted to pray in the presence of women, because they are supposed to have their minds on their prayers, not on pretty girls. See [The Role of Women in the Synagogue](#) for details.



Non-Jews Visiting a Synagogue

Non-Jews are always welcome to attend [services](#) in a synagogue, so long as they behave as proper guests. Proselytizing and "witnessing" to the congregation are not proper guest behavior. Would you walk into a stranger's house and criticize the decor? But we always welcome non-Jews who come to synagogue out of genuine curiosity, interest in the service or simply to join a friend in celebration of a Jewish event.

When going to a synagogue, you should dress as you would for church: nicely, formally, and modestly. A man should wear a [yarmulke](#) (skullcap) if Jewish men in the congregation do so; yarmulkes are available at the entrance for those who do not have one. In some synagogues, married women should also wear a head covering. A piece of lace sometimes called a "chapel hat" is generally provided for this purpose in synagogues where this is required. Non-Jews should not, however, wear a [tallit](#) (prayer shawl) or [tefillin](#), because these items are signs of our obligation to observe [Jewish law](#).

If you are in an [Orthodox](#) synagogue, be careful to sit in the right section: men and women are seated separately in an Orthodox synagogue. See [The Role of Women in the Synagogue](#) for details.

During services, non-Jews can follow along with the English, which is normally printed side-by-side with the Hebrew in the prayerbook. You may join in with as much or as little of the prayer service as you feel comfortable participating in. You may wish to review [Jewish Liturgy](#) before attending the service, to gain a better understanding of what is going on.

Non-Jews should stand whenever the Ark is open and when the [Torah](#) is carried to or from the Ark, as a

sign of respect for the Torah and for [G-d](#). At any other time where worshippers stand, non-Jews may stand or sit.

The Temple

When we speak of The Temple, we speak of the place in Jerusalem that was the center of Jewish religion from the time of Solomon to its destruction by the Romans in 70 [C.E.](#) This was the one and only place where [sacrifices](#) and certain other religious rituals were performed. It was partially destroyed at the time of the Babylonian Exile and rebuilt. The rebuilt temple was known as the Second Temple. The famous Wailing Wall is the western retaining wall of that Temple, and is as close to the site of the original Sanctuary as Jews can go today. The site of The Temple is currently occupied by a Moslem Mosque, the Dome of the Rock.

Traditional Jews believe that The Temple will be rebuilt when the [Moshiach](#) (Messiah) comes. They eagerly await that day and pray for it continually.

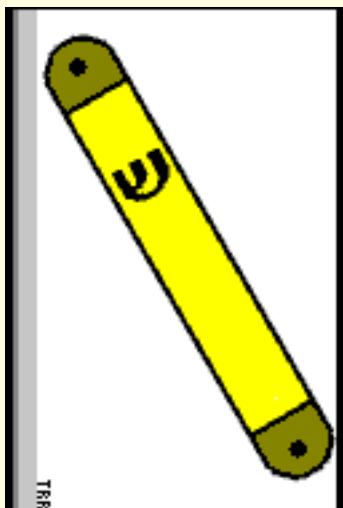
Modern Jews, on the other hand, reject the idea of rebuilding the Temple and resuming [sacrifices](#). They call their houses of prayer "temples," believing that such houses of worship are the only temples we need, the only temples we will ever have, and are equivalent to the Temple in Jerusalem. This idea is very offensive to some traditional Jews, which is why you should be very careful when using the word Temple to describe a Jewish place of worship.

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Signs and Symbols

Level: Basic

Mezuzah



On the doorposts of traditional Jewish homes (and many not-so-traditional homes!), you will find a small case like the one pictured at left. This case is commonly known as a mezuzah (Heb.: doorpost), because it is placed upon the doorposts of the house. The mezuzah is not, as some suppose, a good-luck charm, nor does it have any connection with the lamb's blood placed on the doorposts in Egypt. Rather, it is a constant reminder of [G-d's](#) presence and G-d's [commandments](#).

The commandment to place mezuzot on the doorposts of our houses is derived from Deut. 6:4-9, a passage commonly known as the [Shema](#) (Hear, from the first word of the passage). In that passage, G-d commands us to keep His words constantly in our minds and in our hearts, by (among other things) writing them on the doorposts of our house. The words of the Shema are written on a tiny scroll of parchment, along with the words of a companion passage, Deut. 11:13-21. On the back of the scroll, a [name of G-d](#) is written. The scroll is then rolled up placed in the case, so that the first letter of the Name (the letter [Shin](#)) is visible (or, more commonly, the letter Shin is written on the outside of the case).

The scroll must be handwritten in a special [style of writing](#) and must be placed in the case to fulfill the commandment. It is commonplace for gift shops to sell cases without scrolls, or with mechanically printed scrolls, because a proper scroll costs more than even an elaborately decorated case (\$30-\$50 for a valid scroll is quite reasonable). According to traditional authorities, mechanically printed scrolls do not fulfill the mitzvah of the mezuzah, nor does an empty case.

The case and scroll are then nailed or affixed to the right side doorpost on an angle, with a small ceremony called Chanukkat Ha-Bayit (dedication of the house - yes, this is the same word as [Chanukkah](#), the holiday celebrating the rededication of the Temple after the Maccabean revolt against Greece). A brief [blessing](#) is recited. See the text of the blessing at [Affixing the Mezuzah](#).

Why is the mezuzah affixed at an angle? The [rabbis](#) could not decide whether it should be placed horizontally or vertically, so they compromised!

Every time you pass through a door with a mezuzah on it, you touch the mezuzah and then kiss the fingers that touched it, expressing love and respect for G-d and his commandments and reminding yourself of the commandments contained within them.

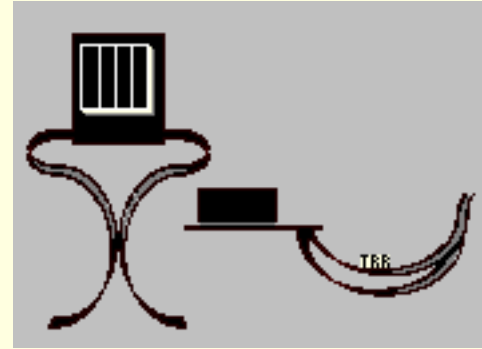
It is proper to remove a mezuzah when you move, and in fact, it is usually recommended. If you leave it in place, the subsequent owner may treat it with disrespect, and this is a grave sin. I have seen many mezuzot in apartment complexes that have been painted over by subsequent owners, and it breaks my heart every time I see that sort of disrespect to an object of religious significance.

For more information about mezuzot or to purchase valid scrolls for a mezuzah online, visit the [S.T.A.M.](http://www.s.t.a.m.org) website.

Tefillin

The Shema also commands us to bind the words to our hands and between our eyes. We do this by laying tefillin, that is, by binding to our arms and foreheads a leather pouch containing scrolls of [Torah](#) passages.

The word "tefillin" is usually translated "phylacteries," although I don't much care for that term, partly because it isn't very enlightening if you don't already know what tefillin are, and partly because it means "amulet," and suggests that tefillin are some kind of protective charm, which they clearly are not. On the contrary, the word "tefillin" is etymologically related to the word "tefilah" (prayer) and the [root](#) Pe-Lamed-Lamed (judgment).

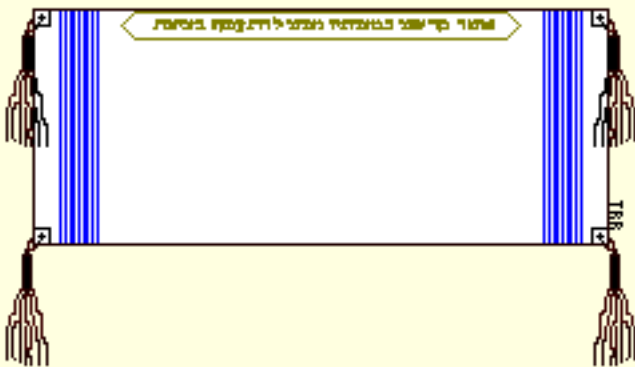


Like the mezuzah, tefillin are meant to remind us of [G-d's](#) commandments. At weekday morning [services](#), one case is tied to the arm, with the scrolls at the biceps and leather straps extending down the arm to the hand, then another case is tied to the head, with the case on the forehead and the straps hanging down over the shoulders. Appropriate [blessings](#) are recited during this process. The tefillin are removed at the conclusion of the morning services.

Like the scrolls in a mezuzah, the scrolls in tefillin must be hand-written in a special [style of writing](#). A good, valid set of tefillin can cost a few hundred dollars, but if properly cared for they can last for a lifetime.

For more information about tefillin or to purchase valid tefillin online, visit the [S.T.A.M.](http://www.s.t.a.m.org) website.

Tzitzit and Tallit



The [Torah](#) also commands us to wear tzitzit (fringes) at the corners of our garments as a reminder of the commandments. Num. 15:37-41. This commandment only applies to four-cornered garments, which were common in biblical times but are not common anymore. Observant Jewish men commonly wear a special four-cornered garment, similar to a poncho, called a tallit katan, so that they will have the opportunity to fulfill this important commandment. The tallit katan is worn under the shirt, with the tzitzit hanging out so they can be seen. A

four-cornered shawl called a tallit (pictured above) is worn by adult men during morning [services](#), along with the tefillin. There is a complex procedure for tying the knots of the tzitzit, filled with religious and numerological significance.

Menorah



One of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith is the menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum used in the [Temple](#). The [kohanim](#) lit the menorah in the Sanctuary every evening and cleaned it out every morning, replacing the wicks and putting fresh olive oil into the cups. The illustration at left is based on instructions for construction of the menorah found in Ex. 25:31-40.

It has been said that the menorah is a symbol of the [nation](#) of Israel and our mission to be "a light unto the nations." (Isaiah 42:6). The sages emphasize that light is not a violent force; Israel is to accomplish its mission by setting an example, not by using force. This idea is highlighted in the vision in Zechariah 4:1-6. Zechariah sees a menorah, and [G-d](#) explains: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit."

The lamp stand in today's synagogues, called the ner tamid (lit. the continual I usually translated as the eternal flame), symbolizes the menorah.

The nine-branched menorah used on [Chanukkah](#) is commonly patterned after this menorah, because Chanukkah commemorates the miracle that a day's worth of oil for this menorah lasted eight days.

Yarmulke

The most commonly known and recognized piece of Jewish garb is actually the one with the least religious significance. The word yarmulke (usually, but not really correctly, pronounced yammica) is Yiddish. According to Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish*, it comes from a Tartar word meaning skullcap. According to some [Orthodox](#) and [Chasidic rabbis](#) I know, it comes from the Aramaic words "yeraï malka" (fear of or respect for The King). The Hebrew word for this head covering is kippah (pronounced key-pah).

It is an ancient practice for Jews to cover their heads during prayer. This probably derives from the fact that in Eastern cultures, it is a sign of respect to cover the head (the custom in Western cultures is the opposite: it is a sign of respect to remove one's hat). Thus, by covering the head during prayer, one showed respect for [G-d](#). In addition, in ancient Rome, servants were required to cover their heads while free men did not; thus, Jews covered their heads to show that they were servants of G-d. In medieval times, Jews covered their heads as a reminder that G-d is always above them. Whatever the reason given, however, covering the head has always been regarded more as a [custom](#) rather than a [commandment](#).

There is no special significance to the yarmulke as a specific type of head covering. Its light weight, compactness and discreteness make it a convenient choice of head gear. I am unaware of any connection between the yarmulke and the similar skullcap worn by the Pope.

Magen David



The Magen David (shield of David, or as it is more commonly known, the Star of David) is the symbol most commonly associated with Judaism today, but it is actually a relatively new Jewish symbol. It is supposed to represent the shape of King David's shield (or perhaps the emblem on it), but there is really no support for that claim in any early rabbinic literature. In fact, the symbol is so rare in early Jewish literature and artwork that art dealers suspect forgery if they find the symbol in early works.

Scholars such as Franz Rosenzweig have attributed deep theological significance to the symbol. For example, some note that the top triangle strives upward, toward G-d, while the lower triangle strives downward, toward the real world. Some note that the intertwining makes the triangles inseparable, like the [Jewish people](#). Some say that the three sides represent the three types of Jews: [Kohanim](#), [Levites](#) and Israel. Some note that there are actually 12 sides (3 exterior and 3 interior on each triangle), representing the 12 tribes. While these theories are theologically interesting, they have little basis in historical fact.

The symbol of intertwined equilateral triangles is a common one in the Middle East and North Africa, and is thought to bring good luck. It appears occasionally in early Jewish artwork, but never as an exclusively Jewish symbol. The nearest thing to an "official" Jewish symbol at the time was the [menorah](#).

In the middle ages, Jews often were required to wear badges to identify themselves as Jews, much as they were in Nazi Germany, but these Jewish badges were not always the familiar Magen David. For example, a fifteenth century painting by Nuno Goncalves features a [rabbi](#) wearing a six-pointed badge that looks more or less like an asterisk.

In the 17th century, it became a popular practice to put Magen Davids on the outside of [synagogues](#), to identify them as Jewish houses of worship in much the same way that a cross identified a Christian house of worship; however, I have never seen any explanation of why this symbol was chosen, rather than some other symbol.

The Magen David gained popularity as a symbol of Judaism when it was adopted as the emblem of the [Zionist](#) movement in 1897, but the symbol continued to be controversial for many years afterward. When the modern state of [Israel](#) was founded, there was much debate over whether this symbol should be used on the flag.



Today, the Magen David is a universally recognized symbol of Jewry. It appears on the flag of the state of Israel, and the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross is known as the Red Magen David.

Chai

This symbol, commonly seen on necklaces and other jewelry and ornaments, is simply the Hebrew word Chai (living), with the two Hebrew letters Chet and Yod attached to each other. Some say it refers to the Living [G-d](#). Judaism as a religion is very focused on life, and the word chai has great significance. The typical Jewish toast is l'chayim (to life). Gifts to charity



are routinely given in multiples of 18 (the numeric value of the word Chai).

Hamesh Hand

The hamesh hand or hamsa hand is a popular motif in Jewish jewelry. Go into any Jewish gift shop and you will find necklaces and bracelets bearing this inverted hand with thumb and pinky pointing outward. The design commonly has an eye in the center of the hand or various Jewish letters in the middle.



There is nothing exclusively Jewish about the hamesh hand. Arab cultures often refer to it as the Hand of Fatima, which represents the Hand of G-d. Similar designs are common in many cultures. Why it has become such a popular symbol among Jews? I haven't been able to find an adequate explanation anywhere. My best guess: in many cultures, this hand pattern represents a protection against the evil eye, and the evil eye has historically been a popular superstition among Jews.

For some lovely illustrations of Jewish variations on this design, see:

[Chaim Peretz Vitrage](#)

Is there another Jewish sign or symbol you would like to know more about? Write and let me know at:

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Jewish Cooking

Level: Basic

Jewish cooking is a unique synthesis of cooking styles from the many places that Jews have lived throughout the centuries. Jewish cooking shows the influence of Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Spanish, German and Eastern European styles of cooking, all influenced by the unique dietary constraints of [kashrut](#) and other Jewish laws.

Many of the foods that we think of as Jewish are not unique to Jewish culture. Stuffed cabbage, a traditional Jewish dish, is common in Eastern Europe. Blintzes and knishes are familiar to all Germans, not just Jewish ones. Falafel and hummus, increasingly thought of as Israeli-Jewish foods, can be found in any Greek restaurant. But the combination of these varied foods into one style of cooking, along with our own innovations, is uniquely Jewish.

On this page, I will identify and describe several of the better-known, popular Jewish dishes. Most of these dishes are [Ashkenazic](#), because that's what I know. [Sephardic Jews](#) have their own distinct cooking traditions. I will provide recipes for those foods that I know how to cook, and will provide links to other recipes that I have scattered throughout this web site.

One ingredient you will see in many of these recipes is matzah meal. Matzah meal is crumbs of matzah (unleavened bread). You can find this in the kosher or ethnic section of your grocery store, if your grocery store has one (I have found it in such remote, goyishe places as Athens, Georgia), but if it is not available, you can usually substitute bread crumbs.

Challah

Any traditional Jewish meal begins with the breaking of bread. Challah is a special kind of bread used for [Shabbat](#) and [holidays](#). It is a very sweet, golden, eggy bread. The taste and texture is somewhat similar to egg twist rolls (those little yellow rolls that look like knots). The loaf is usually braided, but on certain holidays it may be made in other shapes. For example, on [Rosh Hashanah](#), it is traditional to serve round challah (the circle symbolizing the cycle of life, the cycle of the years).



A local deli makes French toast with challah. I highly recommend this. Challah is also wonderful in sandwiches with roast beef or corned beef. Traditionally, however, it is simply used as you might use rolls with a holiday dinner.

The word "challah" refers to the portion of dough set aside for the kohein (See the [List of Mitzvot](#), #394); that is, a portion that is taken out of the dough before it is baked. I am not certain how the term for the removed portion came to be used for the portion that is left over after it is removed.

Bagels and Lox

Is there anybody who doesn't know what a bagel is? A bagel is a donut-shaped piece of bread that is boiled before it is baked. They are often topped with poppy seeds or sesame seeds, or flavored with other ingredients. The bagel has been a part of Jewish cuisine for at least 400 years. According to Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish*, there are references to it as far back as Poland in 1610. In America, bagels are traditionally served with cream cheese and lox (smoked salmon) or other fish spreads (herring, whitefish, etc.). They are also quite good with cream cheese and a thick slice of tomato.

Those hockey pucks that you find in your grocer's freezer bear little resemblance to a real bagel. A real bagel is soft, warm and spongy inside, lightly crispy outside. A fresh bagel does not need to be toasted, and should not be. Toasting is a sorry attempt to compensate for a sub-standard bagel.

Gefilte Fish

Gefilte fish is a cake or ball of chopped up fish. My brother's girlfriend describes it as Jewish Scapple, although I suppose that is not very helpful to anybody outside of the Philadelphia area. It is usually made with white-fleshed freshwater fish, such as carp or pike. The fish is chopped into small pieces (a food processor is good for this), mixed with onions and some other vegetables (carrot, celery, parsley). The mixture is held together with eggs and matzah meal. It is then boiled in broth for a while. It can be served warm or cold, though it is usually served cold with red horseradish and garnished with carrot shavings. Sorry I can't produce a better recipe than that; I don't eat fish.

The word "gefilte" fish comes from German and means "stuffed." Some variations on gefilte fish involve stuffing the fish skin with chopped up fish.

Matzah Ball Soup

Also known as Jewish penicillin. Matzah balls are more traditionally known as knaydelach (Yiddish for dumplings). Matzah ball soup is generally a very thin chicken broth with two or three ping-pong-ball sized matzah balls (or sometimes one very large matzah ball) in it. Sometimes, a few large pieces of carrot or celery are added. Matzah balls can be very soft and light or firm and heavy. A friend of mine describes the two types as "floaters and sinkers." Matzah ball soup is commonly served at the [Passover seder](#), but is also eaten all year round.

Below is my recipe for matzah ball soup. The parsley in the matzah balls is not traditional, but I like it that way.

- 1/2 cup matzah meal
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp. oil or schmaltz (melted chicken fat)
- 2 tbsp. water or chicken broth
- 2 tbsp. fresh chopped parsley
- a little black pepper
- 2 quarts thin chicken broth or consommé

Beat the eggs, oil and water together thoroughly. Add the matzah meal, parsley and black pepper and mix until you achieve an even consistency. Let this sit for a few minutes, so the matzah meal absorbs the other ingredients, and stir again.

Bring the broth to a vigorous boil, then reduce the heat until the broth is just barely boiling. Wet your hands and make balls of about 1-2 tbsp. of the batter. Drop the balls gently into the boiling water. They will be cooked enough to eat in about 15 minutes; however, you may want to leave it simmering longer to absorb more of the chicken broth flavor. They are done when they float on top of the broth and look bloated.

For lighter matzah balls, use a little less oil, a little more water, and cook at a lower temperature for a longer time. For heavier matzah balls, do the reverse. If you are using this to treat a cold, put extra black pepper into the broth (pepper clears the sinuses).

Knishes

A knish (the k and the n are both pronounced) is a sort of potato and flour dumpling stuffed with various things. It is baked until browned and a little crisp on the outside. They are commonly filled with mashed potato and onion, chopped liver, or cheese. They are good for a snack, an appetizer or a side dish. You should be able to find them in any deli. The word "knish" is Ukrainian for "dumpling."

Blintzes

Blintzes are basically Jewish crepes. A blintz is a thin, flat pancake rolled around a filling. It looks a little like an egg roll. As a main dish or side dish, blintzes can be filled with sweetened cottage cheese or mashed potatoes and onion; as a dessert, they can be filled with fruit, such as apple, cherry or blueberry. They are usually fried in oil. They are generally served with sour cream and/or applesauce.

Cheese blintzes are the traditional meal for the festival of [Shavu'ot](#), when dairy meals are traditionally eaten. They are also commonly eaten during [Chanukkah](#), because they are cooked in oil.

The word "blintz" comes from a Ukrainian word meaning "pancake."

Cholent

Cholent (the "ch" is pronounced as in "chair" -- an exception to the usual rules of pronunciation) is a very slowly cooked stew of beans, beef, barley and sometimes potatoes. It is the traditional meal for the [Shabbat](#) lunch or dinner, because it can be started before Shabbat begins and left cooking throughout Shabbat. A [recipe for cholent](#) is on the Shabbat page.

Holishkes

Holishkes are cabbage leaves stuffed with meatballs in a tomato-based sweet-and-sour sauce. They are known by many different names (galuptzi, praakes, stuffed cabbage), and are made in many different ways, depending on where your grandmother came from. It is traditionally served during the holiday of [Sukkot](#), although I am not sure why. Below is my recipe.

- 8-10 leaves of cabbage
- Filling:
 - 1 lb. ground beef
 - 1/2 cup matzah meal
 - 1 large grated onion
 - 2 grated carrots
 - 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
 - a handful of minced parsley
 - 2 eggs
- Sauce:
 - 16 oz. can of tomato sauce
 - 1/4 cup of lemon juice
 - 1/2 cup of brown sugar

Gently remove the cabbage leaves from the head. You want them to be intact. It may help to steam the head briefly before attempting this. Boil the leaves for a minute or two to make them soft enough to roll.

Combine the sauce ingredients in a saucepan and simmer, stirring, until the sugar dissolves (it will dissolve faster if you pour the lemon juice over it). Pour about 1/4 of the sauce into the bottom of a casserole dish or lasagna pan.

Combine all of the filling ingredients in a bowl. Make a ball out of a handful of the filling and roll it up in a cabbage leaf, rolling from the soft end to the spiny end. Put the resulting roll into the casserole dish with the sauce. Do this until you use up all of the filling, making 8-10 cabbage rolls. Then pour the remaining sauce over the top.

Bake approximately 30 minutes at 350 degrees.

If you don't like so much refined sugar in your diet, you can substitute about a cup of raisins or prunes for the brown sugar.

Tzimmes

Tzimmes is any kind of sweet stew. It usually is orange in color, and includes carrots, sweet potatoes and/or prunes. A wide variety of dishes fall under the heading "tzimmes." On [Passover](#), I commonly make a tzimmes of carrots and pineapple chunks boiled in pineapple juice. On Thanksgiving, I serve a tzimmes of sweet potatoes, white potatoes, carrots, and stewing beef.

Tzimmes is commonly eaten on [Rosh Hashanah](#), because it is sweet and symbolizes our hopes for a sweet new year.

The word "tzimmes" is often used in Yiddish to mean making a big fuss about something.

This is the tzimmes recipe I use for Thanksgiving:

- 1 lb. stewing beef, cut into small chunks

- 1/2 cup of sugar
- 1 cup of water
- 3 sweet potatoes
- 3 white potatoes
- 5 carrots

Brown the stewing beef lightly in a little oil in a 2 quart saucepan. Add the water and sugar and bring to a boil, then reduce to a very low simmer. Peel and dice the potatoes and carrots and add to the pot. Let it stew covered at very low heat for at least an hour, adding water periodically if necessary. There should be water, but it should not be soggy. Once the potatoes are soft, take the cover off and let most of the water boil off. Mash the whole mixture until the potato part is the consistency of mashed potatoes. Put the mash into a casserole dish and bake for about 30 minutes at 350 degrees.

If you don't like so much refined sugar in your diet, you can substitute about a cup of raisins or prunes for the sugar.

Kugel

Kugel is another dish that encompasses several different things, and the relationship between them is hard to define. The word "kugel" is generally translated as "pudding," although it does not mean pudding in the Jell-O brand dairy dessert sense. It is pronounced "koo-gel" or "ki-gel," depending on where your grandmother comes from.

Kugel can be either a side dish or a dessert. As a side dish, it is a casserole of potatoes, eggs and onions. As a desert, it is usually made with noodles and various fruits and nuts in an egg-based pudding. Kugel made with noodles is called lokshen kugel. Below is my recipe for a noodle kugel.

- 3 eggs
- 1/4 cup melted margarine or butter
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 lb. wide noodles
- 1/4 cup raisins
- 1/4 cup almonds
- 1/2 cup chopped apples

Beat the eggs thoroughly in a large mixing bowl. Add the butter, sugar and cinnamon beat until thoroughly blended. Cook the noodles and rinse them in cold water. Do not drain them too thoroughly. Put the noodles into the egg mixture and stir until the noodles are coated with the mixture. Let them sit in the refrigerator for about 15-30 minutes, so the noodles absorb some of the egg mixture. Stir again.

Put about half of the egg-noodle mixture into a casserole dish. Put the raisins, almonds and apples on top. Put the remaining egg-noodle mixture on top of that. Bake for about 30-45 minutes at 350 degrees, until the egg part is firm and the noodles on top are crispy. Can be served warm or cold.

Jewish Apple Cake

Jewish deserts generally do not have any dairy products in them, because of the constraints of [kashrut](#). Under the kosher laws, dairy products cannot be eaten at the same meal as meat, thus Jewish deserts are usually pareve (neither meat nor dairy). An example of this kind of cooking is the Jewish apple cake, which I see in many grocery stores. I do not know if this kind of cake is actually a traditional Jewish dish; I cannot find any recipes for it in any of my Jewish cookbooks. However, the style of it is very much in accord with Jewish cooking styles. Jewish apple cake is a light, almost spongy cake with chunks of apples in it. It has no dairy products; the liquid portion that would usually be milk is replaced with apple juice, making a very sweet cake.

Links to Other Recipes

Elsewhere in this site, I have provided recipes for:

- [Latkes](#), potato pancakes traditionally served during Chanukkah.
- [Hamentaschen](#), filled cookies traditionally served during Purim.
- [Charoses](#), a mixture of fruit, nuts and wine traditionally served during Passover.

The ultimate traditional Jewish cookbook is Leah W. Leonard's [Jewish Cookery](#). It contains traditional [Ashkenazic](#) recipes for holidays and all year round. All of the recipes are [kosher](#). There is a special section for [Passover](#) recipes. The book contains a brief discussion of holiday food customs and the laws of kashrut.



Another cookbook that I've gotten a lot of good use out of is Josephine Levy Bacon's [Jewish Cooking from Around the World](#). Don't let that surprising last name fool you! These are kosher recipes from both Ashkenazic and [Sephardic](#) tradition, as well as Yemenite and Indian dishes. Jews have lived in just about every country in the world, and these recipes reflect the melding of Jewish traditions and dietary laws with the prevailing cooking styles in the countries where we have lived.

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Hebrew Alphabet

Level: Basic

The Hebrew and Yiddish languages use a different alphabet than English. The picture below illustrates the Hebrew alphabet, in Hebrew alphabetical order. Note that Hebrew is written from right to left, rather than left to right as in English, so Alef is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and Tav is the last. The Hebrew alphabet is often called the "alefbet," because of its first two letters.

Letters of the Alefbet

								
Tet (T)	Chet (Ch)	Zayin (Z)	Vav (V/O/U)	He (H)	Dalet (D)	Gimel (G)	Bet (B/V)	Alef (Silent)
								
Samech (S)	Nun (N)	Nun (N)	Mem (M)	Mem (M)	Lamed (L)	Khaf (Kh)	Kaf (K/Kh)	Yod (Y)
								
Tav (T/S)	Shin (Sh/S)	Resh (R)	Qof (Q)	Tzade (Tz)	Tzade (Tz)	Fe (F)	Pe (P/F)	Ayin (Silent)

If you are familiar with Greek, you will no doubt notice substantial similarities in letter names and in the order of the alphabet.

The "Kh" and the "Ch" are pronounced as in German or Scottish, a throat clearing noise, not as the "ch" in "chair."

Note that there are two versions of some letters. Kaf, Mem, Nun, Pe and Tzade all are written differently when they appear at the end of a word than when they appear in the beginning or middle of the word. The version used at the end of a word is referred to as Final Kaf, Final Mem, etc. The version of the letter on the left is the final version. In all cases except Final Mem, the final version has a long tail.








Vowels and Points

Like most early Semitic alphabetic writing systems, the alefbet has no vowels. People who are fluent in the language do not need vowels to read Hebrew, and most things written in Hebrew in [Israel](#) are written without vowels.

However, as Hebrew literacy declined, particularly after the Romans expelled the Jews from Israel, [the rabbis](#) recognized the need for aids to pronunciation, so they developed a system of dots and dashes called nikkudim (points). These dots and dashes are written above, below or inside the letter, in ways that do not alter the spacing of the line. Text containing these markings is referred to as "pointed" text.

Most nikkudim are used to indicate vowels. The table at right illustrates the vowel points, along with their pronunciations. Pronunciations are approximate; I have heard quite a bit of variation in vowel pronunciation.

Vowel points are shown in blue. The letter Alef, shown in red, is used to illustrate the position of the points relative to the consonents. The letters shown in purple are technically consonents and would appear in unpointed texts, but they function as vowels in this context.

	a as in father
	Sephardic: a as in father Ashkenazic: aw as in saw
 or 	ey as in they
	e as in met
 or 	i as in machine
 or 	o as in alone
 or 	oo as in moon
	At end of syllable: silent In middle of syllable: a schwa sound, like the a in alone
	A schwa sound, with just a hint of the a as in father
	A schwa sound, with just a hint of the aw as in saw
	A schwa sound, with just a hint of the e as in met

There are a few other nikkudim, illustrated and explained below.

												
Sh	S	U	O	V	T	T (S)	P	F	K	Kh	B	V

The dot that appears in the center of some letters is called a dagesh. With most letters, the dagesh does not significantly affect pronunciation. With the letters Bet, Kaf and Pe, however, the dagesh indicates that the letter should be pronounced with its hard sound (the first sound) rather than the soft sound (the second sound). In [Ashkenazic](#) pronunciation (the pronunciation used by many [Orthodox Jews](#) and by older Jews), Tav also has a soft sound, and is pronounced as an "s" when it does not have a dagesh.

Vav, usually a consonant pronounced as a "v," is sometimes a vowel pronounced "oo" (u) or "oh" (o). When it is pronounced "oo", pointed texts have a dagesh. When it is pronounced "oh", pointed texts have a dot on top.

Shin is pronounced "sh" when it has a dot over the right branch and "s" when it has a dot over the left

branch.

At right is an example of pointed text. Nikkudim are shown in blue. This line would be pronounced (in [Sephardic](#) pronunciation, which is what most people use today): V'ahavtah l'reyakhah kamokhah. (And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Leviticus 19:18).

וְאַהֲבַתָּ לְרֵעֲךָ כְּמוֹךָ

Styles of Writing

The style of writing illustrated above is the one most commonly seen in Hebrew books. It is referred to as block print or sometimes Assyrian text.

For sacred documents, such as [torah scrolls](#) or the scrolls inside [tefillin](#) and [mezuzot](#), there is a special writing style with "crowns" (crows-foot-like marks coming up from the upper points) on many of the letters. This style of writing is known as STA"M (an abbreviation for "Sifrei Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzot," which is where you will see that style of writing. For more information about the STA"M alphabet, including illustrations and relevant rules, see [Hebrew Alphabet used in writing STA"M](#).

There is another style used for handwriting, in much the same way that cursive is used for the Roman (English) alphabet. This modern script style is illustrated at right.

א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ ק ל מ נ ס ע פ צ ק ר ש ת

אבגדהוזחטיכךלמם
נוסעפףאזקרת

Another style is used in certain texts to distinguish the body of the text from commentary upon the text. This style is known as Rashi Script, in honor of [Rashi](#), the greatest commentator on the [Torah](#) and the [Talmud](#). The alefbet at left is an example of Rashi Script.

Transliteration

The process of writing Hebrew words in the Roman (English) alphabet is known as transliteration. Transliteration is more an art than a science, and opinions on the correct way to transliterate words vary widely. This is why the Jewish [festival of lights](#) (in Hebrew, Chet-Nun-Kaf-He) is spelled Chanukah, Chanukkah, Hanuka, and many other interesting ways. Each spelling has a legitimate phonetic and orthographic basis; none is right or wrong.

Numerical Values

Each letter in the alefbet has a numerical value. These values can be used to write numbers, as the Romans used some of their letters (I, V, X, L, C, M) to represent numbers. Alef through Yod have the values 1 through 10. Yod through Qof have the values 10 through 100, counting by 10s. Qof through Tav have the values 100 through 400, counting by 100s. Final letters have the same value as their non-final counterparts.

100	ק	10	י	1	א
200	ב	20	כ, כּ	2	ב
300	ש	30	ל	3	ג
400	ת	40	ד, דּ	4	ד
		50	ה, הּ	5	ה
		60	ו	6	ו
		70	ז	7	ז
		80	ח, חּ	8	ח
		90	ט, טּ	9	ט

The number 11 would be rendered Yod-Alef, the number 12 would be Yod-Bet, the number 21 would be Kaf-Alef, the word Torah (Tav-Vav-Resh-He) has the numerical value 611, etc. The only significant oddity in this pattern is the numbers 15 and 16, which if rendered as 10+5 or 10+6 would be a [name of G-d](#), so they are normally written Tet-Vav (9+6) and Tet-Zayin (9+7).

The order of the letters is irrelevant to their value; letters are simply added to determine the total numerical value. The number 11 could be written as Yod-Alef, Alef-Yod, Heh-Vav, Dalet-Dalet-Gimmel or many other combinations of letters.

Because of this system of assigning numerical values to letters, every word has a numerical value. There is an entire discipline of [Jewish mysticism](#) known as Gematria that is devoted to finding hidden meanings in the numerical values of words. For example, the number 18 is very significant, because it is the numerical value of the word Chai, meaning life. Donations to Jewish charities are routinely made in denominations of 18 for that reason.

I have received several e-mails pointing out that the numerical value of Vav (often transliterated as W) is 6, and therefore WWW has the numerical value of 666! It's an amusing notion, but Hebrew numbers just don't work that way. In Hebrew numerals, the position of the letter/digit is irrelevant; the letters are simply added up to determine the value. To say that Vav-Vav-Vav is six hundred and sixty-six would be like saying that the Roman numeral III is one hundred and eleven. The numerical value of Vav-Vav-Vav in Hebrew would be 6+6+6=18, so WWW is equivalent to life! (It is also worth noting that the significance of the number 666 is a part of Christian numerology, and has no basis that I know of in Jewish thought).

Hebrew Fonts and Word Processors

Several Hebrew fonts for PC (Windows), Mac and Unix (Linux) are available for free from <http://ftp.snunit.k12.il/pub/fonts/>. Please be patient! This site is in Israel and is often slow to load. The example of pointed text above uses Snuit's Web Hebrew AD font. These Hebrew fonts map to ASCII 224-250, high ASCII characters which are not normally available on the keyboard, but this is the mapping that most Hebrew websites use. I'm not sure how you use those characters on a Mac. In Windows, you can go to *Start | Programs | Accessories | System Tools | Character Map* and select them there. If you know the mappings in Windows, you can also type the letters by holding down the ALT key and pressing the number as 4 digits on the numeric keypad. For example, Alef maps to ASCII 224, so if you hold down ALT and press 0224 in the numeric keypad, it will type an Alef. In addition, MS Word

for Windows will let you assign shortcut keys to these Hebrew letters at *Insert / Symbol*.

If you use MS Internet Explorer version 5 or AOL version 5, you can download Hebrew support for your browser from the Windows Update center on Microsoft's website, <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com/>. Very few sites are using this Hebrew support at this time, but they may in the future. Microsoft's Hebrew support includes Hebrew versions of various standard fonts, such as Times New Roman and Arial, as well as a few new Hebrew fonts, such as Rod and Miriam. These fonts map in very strange ways and are not keyboard-accessible; however, you can set up shortcut keys in MS Word for Windows at *Insert / Symbol*.

If you have AOL, there are also Hebrew fonts that can be downloaded from AOL. Some of these have intuitive keyboard mappings, so you can for example type the letter H and get the letter Heh in these fonts. To find fonts on AOL, go to Keyword: File Search, select Shareware, and search for the term "hebrew font." You may also want to check out the Download area in AOL's Jewish Community (Keyword: Jewish Community). The big alefbet at the top of the page uses a font I downloaded from AOL years ago (it's just called Hebrew; I don't know if it's still there). Many of these Hebrew fonts have the same high-ASCII mappings as the Snuit fonts (which is good, because that's what most websites with Hebrew use), but some of them have intuitive keyboard mappings (a = Alef; b = Bet, g = Gimmel, etc.).

Of course, all of the above fonts would require you to type Hebrew backwards, because word processors go from left to right and Hebrew goes from right to left! If you are serious about writing a significant amount of text in Hebrew, you will need a Hebrew word processor. An excellent Hebrew word processor is

Davka
Associate Site

[DavkaWriter](#), available from [Davka Software](#). DavkaWriter comes with many attractive Hebrew fonts including both consonants and vowels that will map to your keyboard in an intuitive phonetic way or in the standard Israeli keyboard format. It is very easy to switch between Hebrew and English within a document. DavkaWriter even comes with little stickers to put on the keys of your keyboard so you can learn their keyboard mappings, and an onscreen display shows you their keyboard mappings. Davka also has a lot of fonts available, as well as a lot of other Hebrew and Judaic software.

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Hebrew Language: Root Words

Level: Intermediate

The vast majority of words in the Hebrew language can be boiled down to a three-consonant root word that contains the essence of the word's meaning. For example, the first word of the [Torah](#) is "bereishit," meaning "in the beginning." The root is Resh-Alef-Shin, which means "head" or "first." (See [Hebrew Alphabet](#) to learn the letters). It is the same root as the "Rosh" in "[Rosh Hashanah](#)" (first of the year, i.e., Jewish New Year).

רֶשֶׁת

Resh-Alef-Shin

There are surprisingly few root words in biblical Hebrew, but we get a lot of mileage out of the ones we have. For example, from the root word Qof-Dalet-Shin, meaning "holy," "sacred" or "sanctified," we get kedushah (holiness), kiddush (a prayer over wine sanctifying [Shabbat](#) or a [holiday](#)), [Kaddish](#) (an important prayer commonly thought of as a mourning prayer), aron kodesh (holy cabinet - the place in synagogue where the [Torah scrolls](#) are kept), and [kiddushin](#) (betrothal). Less obviously, from the root Samech-Dalet-Resh, meaning "order," we get siddur (the daily prayer book, which sets for the order of prayers), [seder](#) (the [Passover](#) family ritual, which must be performed in a specified order) and [sidrah](#) (the weekly Torah reading, also called a parshah).

קֹדֶשׁ

Qof-Dalet-Shin

סֵדֶר

Samech-Dalet-Resh

A substantial amount of [rabbinical](#) interpretation of the Bible is derived from the relation between root words. For example, the rabbis concluded that [G-d](#) created women with greater intuition and understanding than men, because man was "formed" (yeetzer, Gen. 2:7) while woman was "built" (yeeben, Gen. 2:22). The root of "built," Bet-Nun-Heh, is very similar to the word "binah" (Bet-Yod-Nun-Heh), meaning understanding, insight or intuition.

בְּנָה

Bet-Nun-Heh

If you are interested in Hebrew root words, an interesting book to look at, is Edith Samuel's [Your Jewish Lexicon](#), which looks at a lot of important Jewish concepts and idioms through their root words. Be aware that this book is written from a Reform perspective.



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Common Expressions and Greetings

Level: Basic

What is the proper Jewish thing to say when someone tells you she's pregnant? How do you wish someone a happy holiday in Hebrew? Below are some common Jewish phrases and expressions to answer these questions and more.

Sabbath-Related Greetings

Shabbat Shalom (shah-BAHT shah-LOHM)

Hebrew. Literally, sabbath peace or peaceful sabbath. This is an appropriate greeting at any time on [shabbat](#), although it is most commonly used at the end of a shabbat [service](#).

Gut Shabbes (GUT SHAH-biss; gut rhymes with put)

Yiddish. Literally, good Sabbath. Like shabbat shalom, this is a general, all-purpose shabbat greeting. In my experience, gut shabbes is more likely to be used in general conversation or when greeting people, while shabbat shalom is more commonly used at the conclusion of a service.

Shavua Tov (shah-VOO-ah TOHV)

Hebrew. Literally, good week. This greeting is used after [Havdalah](#) (the ceremony marking the conclusion of shabbat), to wish someone a good forthcoming week.

Holiday Greetings

Chag Sameach (KHAHG sah-MEHY-ahkh)

Hebrew. Literally, joyous festival. This is an appropriate greeting for just about any holiday, but it's especially appropriate for [Sukkot](#), [Shavu'ot](#) and [Pesach \(Passover\)](#), which are technically the only festivals (the other holidays are holidays, not festivals).

Gut Yontiff (GUT YAHN-tiff; gut rhymes with put)

Yiddish. Literally, good holiday. This greeting can be used for any holiday, not necessarily a festival.

L'Shanah Tovah (li-SHAH-nuh TOH-vuh; li-shah-NAH toh-VAH)

Hebrew. Lit. for a good year. A common greeting during [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Days of Awe](#). It is an abbreviation of L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem (May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year).

Have an easy fast

This is the proper way to wish someone well for [Yom Kippur](#). Please, don't wish people a Happy Yom Kippur; it's not a happy holiday.

Other Expressions

Shalom (shah-LOHM)

Hebrew. Literally, peace. A way of saying "hello" or "goodbye."

Mazel Tov (MAH-zl TAWV)

Yiddish/Hebrew. Literally, good luck. This is the traditional way of expressing congratulations. "Mazel tov!" is the correct and traditional response upon hearing that a person has gotten engaged or married, has had a child, or has become a bar mitzvah. It can be used to congratulate someone for getting a new job, graduating from college, or any other happy event. Note that this term is *not* be used in the way that the expression "good luck" is used in English; that is, it should *not* be used to wish someone luck in the future. Rather, it is an expression of pleasure at the good fortune someone has already had.

Yasher koach (YAH-shehyr KOH-ahkh)

Hebrew. Literally, straight strength. Figuratively, may you have strength, or may your strength be increased. A way of congratulating someone for performing a [mitzvah](#) or other good deed. In essence, you are wishing this person the strength to continue doing this good thing, and you are also recognizing the effort that the person put into doing this good thing. It is most commonly used in [synagogue](#), to congratulate someone after he or she has participated in some aspect of the [service](#).

L'Chayim (li-KHAY-eem)

Yiddish/Hebrew. Literally, to life. The toast you offer before drinking wine or other alcoholic beverages, used the way you would use "Cheers!" in English.

Gesundheit (g'-SUND-hahyt)

Yiddish. Literally, health. This is the normal response when somebody sneezes. The same expression is used in German (Yiddish is largely based on German), and is quite common even among non-Jews, but I thought it was worth pointing out because some non-Jews have told me they were afraid of offending by saying "bless you" to a Jew.

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The Name of God



Level: Basic

Please note: This page contains the Name of God. If you print it out, please treat it with appropriate respect.

The Significance of Names

In Jewish thought, a name is not merely an arbitrary designation, a random combination of sounds. The name conveys the nature and essence of the thing named. It represents the history and reputation of the being named.

This is not as strange or unfamiliar a concept as it may seem at first glance. In English, we often refer to a person's reputation as his "good name." When a company is sold, one thing that may be sold is the company's "good will," that is, the right to use the company's name. The Hebrew concept of a name is very similar to these ideas.

An example of this usage occurs in Ex. 3:13-22: [Moses](#) asks God what His "name" is. Moses is not asking "what should I call you;" rather, he is asking "who are you; what are you like; what have you done." That is clear from God's response. God replies that He is eternal, that He is the God of our ancestors, that He has seen our affliction and will redeem us from bondage.

Another example of this usage is the concepts of chillul Ha-Shem and kiddush Ha-Shem. An act that causes God or Judaism to come into disrespect or a commandment to be disobeyed is often referred to as "chillul Ha-Shem," profanation of The Name. Clearly, we are not talking about a harm done to a word; we are talking about harm to a reputation. Likewise, any deed that increases the respect accorded to God or Judaism is referred to as "kiddush Ha-Shem," sanctification of The Name.

Because a name represents the reputation of the thing named, a name should be treated with the same respect as the thing's reputation. For this reason, God's Names, in all of their forms, are treated with enormous respect and reverence in Judaism.

The Names of God

I have often heard people refer to the Judeo-Christian God as "the nameless God" to contrast our God with the ancient pagan gods. I always found this odd, because Judaism clearly recognizes the existence of a Name for God; in fact, we have many Names for God.

The most important of God's Names is the four-letter Name represented by the [Hebrew letters](#) Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh (YHVH). It is often referred to as the Ineffable Name, the Unutterable Name or the Distinctive Name. Linguistically, it is related to the [Hebrew root](#) Heh-Yod-Heh (to be), and reflects the fact that God's existence is eternal. In scripture, this Name is used when discussing God's relation with human beings, and when emphasizing his qualities of lovingkindness and mercy. It is frequently shortened to Yah (Yod-Heh), Yahu or Yeho (Yod-Heh-Vav), especially when used in combination with names or phrases, as in Yehoshua (Joshua, meaning "the Lord is my Salvation"), Eliyahu (Elijah, meaning "my God is the Lord"), and Halleluyah ("praise the Lord").

The first Name used for God in scripture is Elohim. In form, the word is a masculine plural of a word that looks feminine in the singular (Eloha). The same word (or, according to [Rambam](#), a homonym of it) is used to refer to princes, judges, other gods, and other powerful beings. This Name is used in scripture when emphasizing God's might, His creative power, and his attributes of justice and rulership. Variations on this name include El, Eloha, Elohai (my God) and Elohaynu (our God).

God is also known as El Shaddai. This Name is usually translated as "God Almighty," however, the derivation of the word "Shaddai" is not known. According to some views, it is derived from the root meaning "to heap benefits." According a [Midrash](#), it means, "The One who said 'dai'" ("dai" meaning enough or sufficient) and comes from the fact that when God created the universe, it expanded until He said "DAI!" (perhaps the first recorded theory of an expanding universe?). The name Shaddai is the one written on the [mezuzah](#) scroll. Some note that Shaddai is an acronym of Shomer Daltot Yisrael, Guardian of the Doors of Israel.

Another significant Name of God is YHVH Tzva'ot. This Name is normally translated as "Lord of Hosts." The word "tzva'ot" means "hosts" in the sense of a military grouping or an organized array. The Name refers to God's leadership and sovereignty. Interestingly, this Name is rarely used in scripture. It never appears in the [Torah](#) (i.e., the first five books). It appears primarily in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, as well as many times in the Psalms.

Writing the Name of God

Jews do not casually write any Name of God. This practice does not come from the commandment not to take the Lord's Name in vain, as many suppose. In Jewish thought, that commandment refers solely to oath-taking, and is a prohibition against swearing by God's Name falsely or frivolously (the word normally translated as "in vain" literally means "for falsehood").

Judaism does not prohibit writing the Name of God per se; it prohibits only erasing or defacing a Name of God. However, observant Jews avoid writing any Name of God casually because of the risk that the written Name might later be defaced, obliterated or destroyed accidentally or by one who does not know better.

The commandment not to erase or deface the name of God comes from Deut. 12:3. In that passage, the people are commanded that when they take over the promised land, they should destroy all things related to the idolatrous religions of that region, and should utterly destroy the names of the local deities. Immediately afterwards, we are commanded not to do the same to our God. From this, the [rabbis](#) inferred that we are commanded not to destroy any holy thing, and not to erase or deface a Name of God.

It is worth noting that this prohibition against erasing or defacing Names of God applies only to Names that are written in some kind of permanent form, and recent [rabbinical](#) decisions have held that writing on a computer is not a permanent form, thus it is not a violation to type God's Name into a computer and then backspace over it or cut and paste it, or copy and delete files with God's Name in them. However, once you print the document out, it becomes a permanent form. That is why observant Jews avoid writing a Name of God on web sites like this one or in newsgroup messages: because there is a risk that someone else will print it out and deface it.

Normally, we avoid writing the Name by substituting letters or syllables, for example, writing "G-d"

instead of "God." In addition, the number 15, which would ordinarily be written in Hebrew as Yod-Heh (10-5), is normally written as Tet-Vav (9-6), because Yod-Heh is a Name. See [Hebrew Alphabet](#) for more information about using letters as numerals.

Pronouncing the Name of God

Nothing in the [Torah](#) prohibits a person from pronouncing the Name of God. Indeed, it is evident from scripture that God's Name was pronounced routinely. Many common Hebrew names contain "Yah" or "Yahu," part of God's four-letter Name. The Name was pronounced as part of daily services in the [Temple](#).

The [Mishnah](#) confirms that there was no prohibition against pronouncing The Name in ancient times. In fact, the Mishnah recommends using God's Name as a routine greeting to a fellow Jew. Berakhot 9:5. However, by the time of the [Talmud](#), it was the custom to use substitute Names for God. Some [rabbis](#) asserted that a person who pronounces YHVH according to its letters (instead of using a substitute) has no place in the [World to Come](#), and should be put to death. Instead of pronouncing the four-letter Name, we usually substitute the Name "Adonai," or simply say "Ha-Shem" (lit. The Name).

Although the prohibition on pronunciation applies only to the four-letter Name, Jews customarily do not pronounce any of God's many Names except in [prayer](#) or study. The usual practice is to substitute letters or syllables, so that Adonai becomes Adoshem or Ha-Shem, Elohaynu and Elohim become Elokaynu and Elokim, etc.

With the [Temple](#) destroyed and the prohibition on pronouncing The Name outside of the Temple, pronunciation of the Name fell into disuse. Scholars passed down knowledge of the correct pronunciation of YHVH for many generations, but eventually the correct pronunciation was lost, and we no longer know it with any certainty. We do not know what vowels were used, or even whether the Vav in the Name was a vowel or a consonant. See [Hebrew Alphabet](#) for more information about the difficulties in pronouncing Hebrew. Some religious scholars suggest that the Name was pronounced "Yahweh," but others do not find this pronunciation particularly persuasive.

Some people render the four-letter Name as "Jehovah," but this pronunciation is particularly unlikely. The word "Jehovah" comes from the fact that ancient Jewish texts used to put the vowels of the Name "Adonai" (the usual substitute for YHVH) under the consonants of YHVH to remind people not to pronounce YHVH as written. A sixteenth century German Christian scribe, while transliterating the Bible into Latin for the Pope, wrote the Name out as it appeared in his texts, with the consonants of YHVH and the vowels of Adonai, and came up with the word JeHoVaH, and the name stuck.

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Torah

Level: Basic

The word "Torah" is a tricky one, because it can mean different things in different contexts. In its most limited sense, "Torah" refers to the Five Books of [Moses](#): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. But the word "torah" can also be used to refer to the entire Jewish bible (the body of scripture known to non-Jews as the Old Testament and to Jews as the Tanakh or Written Torah), or in its broadest sense, to the whole body of Jewish law and teachings.



Written Torah

To Jews, there is no "Old Testament." The books that Christians call the New Testament are not part of Jewish scripture. The so-called Old Testament is known to us as Written Torah or the Tanakh.

This is a list of the books of Written Torah, in the order in which they appear in Jewish translations, with the Hebrew name of the book, a translation of the Hebrew name (where it is not the same as the English name), and English names of the books (where it is not the same as the Hebrew name). The Hebrew names of the first five books are derived from the first few words of the book. The text of each book is more or less the same in Jewish translations as what you see in Christian bibles, although there are some occasional, slight differences in the numbering of verses and there are a few significant differences in the translations.

TORAH (The Law):

- Bereishith (In the beginning...) (Genesis)
- Shemoth (The names...) (Exodus)
- Vayiqra (And He called...) (Leviticus)
- Bamidbar (In the wilderness...) (Numbers)
- Devarim (The words...) (Deuteronomy)

NEVI'IM (The [Prophets](#)):

- Yehoshua (Joshua)
- Shoftim (Judges)
- Shmuel (I & II Samuel)
- Melakhim (I & II Kings)
- Yeshayah (Isaiah)
- Yirmyah (Jeremiah)
- Yechezqel (Ezekiel)
- The Twelve (treated as one book)
 - Hoshea (Hosea)
 - Yoel (Joel)
 - Amos

- Ovadyah (Obadiah)
- Yonah (Jonah)
- Mikhah (Micah)
- Nachum
- Chavaqquq (Habbakkuk)
- Tzefanyah (Zephaniah)
- Chaggai
- Zekharyah (Zechariah)
- Malakhi

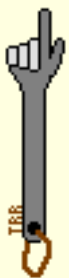
KETHUVIM (The Writings):

- Tehillim (Psalms)
- Mishlei (Proverbs)
- Iyov (Job)
- Shir Ha-Shirim (Song of Songs)
- Ruth
- Eikhah (Lamentations)
- Qoheleth (the author's name) (Ecclesiastes)
- Esther
- Daniel
- Ezra & Nechemyah (Nehemiah) (treated as one book)
- Divrei Ha-Yamim (The words of the days) (Chronicles)

Written Torah is often referred to as the Tanakh, which is an acronym of Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.

Torah Scrolls

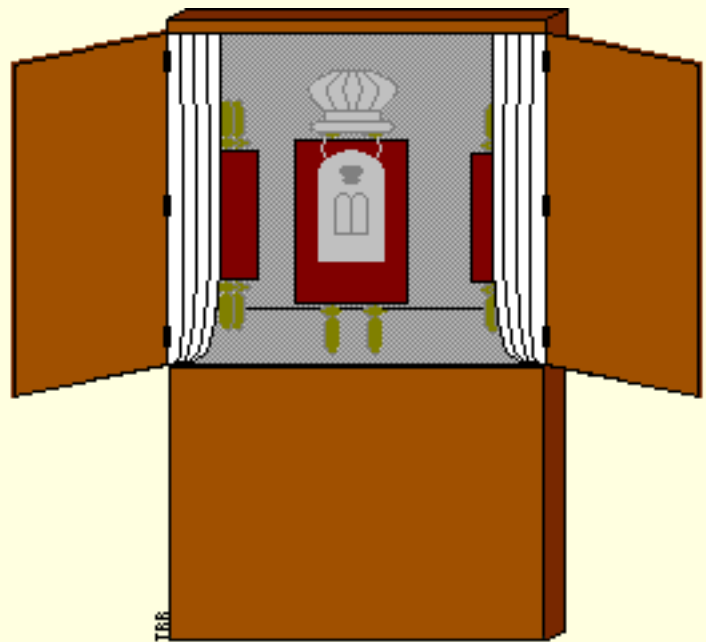
The scriptures that we use in services are written on parchment scrolls. They are always hand-written, in attractive Hebrew calligraphy with "crowns" (crows-foot-like marks coming up from the upper points) on many of the [letters](#). This style of writing is known as STA"M (an abbreviation for "Sifrei Torah, [Tefillin](#) and [Mezuzot](#)," which is where you will see that style of writing. For more information about the STA"M alphabet, including illustrations and relevant rules, see [Hebrew Alphabet used in writing STA"M](#).



You are not supposed to touch the parchment on these scrolls; some say because they are too holy; some say because the parchment, made from animal skins, is a source of ritual defilement; others say because your fingers' sweat has acids that will damage the parchment over time. Instead, you follow the text with a pointer, called a Yad. "Yad" means "hand" in Hebrew, and the pointer usually is in the shape of a hand with a pointing index finger (I always find this incredibly amusing). The scrolls are kept covered with fabric, and often ornamented with silver crowns on the handles of the scrolls and a silver breastplate on the front.

The scrolls are kept in a cabinet in the [synagogue](#) called an "ark," as in Ark of the Covenant, not as in Noah's Ark. The words are different and unrelated in Hebrew. The former is an acrostic of "aron kodesh," meaning "holy cabinet," while the latter is an English translation of the Hebrew word "teyvat" meaning "ship".

The Torah scrolls that we read from in synagogue are unpointed text, with no vowels or musical notes, so the ability to read a passage from a scroll is a valuable skill, and usually requires substantial advance preparation (reviewing the passage in a text with points). See [Hebrew Alphabet](#) for more on pointed and unpointed texts.



Chumash

Jewish scriptures are sometimes bound in a form that corresponds to the division into [weekly readings](#) (called parshiyot in Hebrew). Scriptures bound in this way are generally referred to as a chumash. The word "chumash" comes from the Hebrew word meaning five, and refers to the five books of the Torah. Sometimes, a chumash simply refers to a collection of the five books of the Torah. But often, a chumash contains the entire first five books, divided up by the weekly parshiyot, with the haftarah portion inserted after each week's parshah.

Talmud

In addition to the written scriptures we have an "Oral Torah," a tradition explaining what the above scriptures mean and how to interpret them and apply the Laws. Orthodox Jews believe [G-d](#) taught the Oral Torah to [Moses](#), and he taught it to others, down to the present day. This tradition was maintained in oral form only until about the 2d century [C.E.](#), when the oral law was compiled and written down in a document called the Mishnah.



Over the next few centuries, additional commentaries elaborating on the Mishnah were written down in Jerusalem and Babylon. These additional commentaries are known as the Gemara. The Gemara and the Mishnah together are known as the Talmud. This was completed in the 5th century [C.E.](#)

There are actually two Talmuds: the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. The Babylonian one is more comprehensive, and is the one most people mean when they refer to The Talmud. There have been additional commentaries on the Talmud by such noted Jewish scholars as [Rashi](#) and [Rambam](#). Adin Steinsalz is currently preparing a new edition of the Talmud, with his own commentary supplementing the Mishnah, Gemara, and Rashi commentaries.

The Mishnah is divided into six sections called sedarim (in English, orders). Each seder contains one or more divisions called masekhtot (in English, tractates). There are 63 masekhtot in the Mishnah. Approximately half of these masekhtot have been addressed in the Talmud. Although these divisions seem to indicate subject matter, it is important to note that the Mishnah and the Talmud tend to be engaged in quite a bit of free-association, thus widely diverse subjects may be discussed in a seder or masekhtah.

Below is the division of the Mishnah into sedarim and masekhtot:

- Zera'im (Seeds), dealing with agricultural laws
 - Berakhot
 - Peah
 - Demai
 - Kilayim
 - Shebiit
 - Terumot
 - Maaserot
 - Maaser Sheni
 - Challah
 - Orlah
 - Bikkurim
- Mo'ed (Festival), dealing with [shabbat](#) and [festivals](#)
 - Shabbat
 - Erubin
 - Pesachim
 - Sheqalim
 - Yoma
 - Sukkah
 - Besah
 - Rosh Hashanah
 - Taanit
 - Megillah
 - Moed Qatan
 - Hagigah
- Nashim (Women), dealing with [marriage](#), [divorce](#) and contracts
 - Yebamot
 - Ketubot
 - Nedarim
 - Nazir
 - Sotah
 - Gittin
 - Qiddushin
- Nezikin (Damages), dealing with tort laws and other financial laws
 - Baba Qamma

- Baba Mesia
- Baba Batra
- Sanhedrin
- Makkot
- Shabuot
- Eduyyot
- Avodah Zarah
- Avot (also known as Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers)
- Horayot
- Kodashim (Holy Things), dealing with [sacrifices](#) and the [Temple](#)
 - Zevachim
 - Menachot
 - Chullin
 - Bekhorot
 - Arakhin
 - Temurah
 - Keritot
 - Meilah
 - Tamid
 - Middot
 - Qinnim
- Toharot (Purities), dealing with laws of ritual purity and impurity
 - Kelim
 - Ohalot
 - Negaim
 - Parah
 - Tohorot
 - Miqvaot
 - Niddah
 - Makhshirin
 - Zabim
 - Tebul-Yom
 - Yadayim
 - Uqsin

In recent times, many observant Jews have taken up the practice of studying a page of Talmud every day. This practice, referred to as daf yomi, was started at the First International Congress of the Agudath Yisrael World Movement in August, 1923. Rav Meir Shapiro, the rav of Lublin, Poland, proposed

uniting people worldwide through the daily study of a page of Talmud. Daf Yomi is currently in its 11th cycle. A calendar of the cycle can be found at [Daf Yomi Calendar](#).

Other Writings

In addition to these works, we have midrashim, which are basically stories expanding on incidents in the Bible to derive principles or Jewish law or to teach moral lessons. For example, there is a midrash about why [Moses](#) wasn't a good speaker (he put coals in his mouth as a child basically as a way of proving that he wasn't greedy), and another one about Abram discovering monotheism and rejecting his father's idolatry (that's a nifty one: basically, he smashes up all his father's idols except the big one, then blames the mess on the big one, as a way of showing his father that the idols don't really have any power). Some of them fill in gaps in the narrative. For example, in Gen. 22:2, why does [G-d](#) say, "thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even [Isaac](#)." Wouldn't the name alone be enough? One story says that the narrative is skipping out [Abraham](#)'s responses. "Take thy son." "Which one?" "Thine only son." "But I have two!" "Whom thou lovest." "I love them both!" "Even Isaac." (I'm not sure this is a traditional one -- I got it from a questionable source -- but I like it).

There is also a vast body of responsa, answers to specific questions of [Jewish law](#). Beginning in the middle ages, when local [rabbis](#) were faced with difficult issues of Jewish law, they often wrote to the most respected rabbis in the world to get answers to these questions. The local rabbi would present the situation, often including detailed references to the [Talmudic](#) passages he had reviewed and his own interpretations of these authorities, and the world-renowned rabbi would provide a reasoned argument in favor of his answer. Over time, these responsa were collected into printed volumes. This tradition continues to the present day, and there are several rabbis in this century who have developed responsa on issues relating to modern technologies. For example, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, who died in the 1980s, wrote responsa on such diverse topics as the permissibility of cosmetic surgery, the [kashering](#) of dishwashers, and artificial insemination. There are literally thousands of volumes of responsa. A project at Bar-Ilan University is compiling these responsa into a computer database. See their website at [The Responsa Project](#) for more information.

As you can see, the body of Jewish tradition is very vast. Is there any place to get quick answers? In the middle ages, there were several attempts to create definitive codes of [Jewish law](#). The best-known of these codes are [Rambam](#)'s Mishneh Torah and Joseph Caro's Shulchan Arukh. In their own time, these works were very controversial, because they did not identify the Torah or Talmudic basis for their opinions and generally ignored conflicting opinions. There was concern that such works would discourage Jews from studying the primary sources: Torah and Talmud. Today, however, these sources are well-respected. In fact, the Shulchan Arukh is often treated as a primary source.

We also have a mystical tradition, known as [Kabbalah](#). The primary written work in the Kabbalistic tradition is the Zohar. Traditionally, rabbis discouraged teaching this material to anyone under the age of 40, because it is too likely to be misinterpreted by anyone without sufficient grounding in the basics.

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Torah Readings

Level: Intermediate

Each week in [synagogue](#), we read (or, more accurately, chant, because it is sung) a passage from the Torah. This passage is referred to as a parshah. The first parshah, for example, is Parashat Bereishit, which covers from the beginning of Genesis to the story of Noah. There are 54 parshahs, one for each week of a leap year, so that in the course of a year, we read the entire [Torah](#) (Genesis to Deuteronomy) in our services. During non-leap years, there are 50 weeks, so some of the shorter portions are doubled up. We reach the last portion of the Torah around a holiday called [Simkhat Torah](#) (Rejoicing in the Law), which occurs in October, a few weeks after [Rosh Hashanah](#) (Jewish New Year). On Simkhat Torah, we read the last portion of the Torah, and proceed immediately to the first paragraph of Genesis, showing that the Torah is a circle, and never ends.

In the synagogue service, the weekly parshah is followed by a passage from the prophets, which is referred to as a haftarah. Contrary to common misconception, "haftarah" does **not** mean "half-Torah." The word comes from the Hebrew root Feh-Tet-Resh and means "Concluding Portion". Usually, haftarah portion is no longer than one chapter, and has some relation to the Torah portion of the week.

The Torah and haftarah readings are performed with great ceremony: the Torah is paraded around the room before it is brought to rest on the bimah (podium). The reading is divided up into portions, and various members of the congregation have the honor of reciting a blessing over a portion of the reading. This honor is referred to as an aliyah (literally, ascension).

The first aliyah of any day's reading is reserved for a [kohein](#), the second for a [Levite](#), and priority for subsequent aliyoth are given to people celebrating major life events, such as [marriage](#) or the [birth of a child](#). In fact, a [Bar Mitzvah](#) was originally nothing more than the first aliyah of a boy who had reached the age to be permitted such an honor. Celebrants of life events are ordinarily given the last aliyah, which includes blessing the last part of the Torah reading as well as blessing the haftarah reading. The person given this honor is referred to as the maftir, from the same root as haftarah, meaning "the one who concludes."

For more information about services, see [Jewish Liturgy](#).

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Table of Weekly Parshiyot

Below is a table of the regular weekly scriptural readings. Haftarot in parentheses indicate [Sephardic](#) ritual where it differs from [Ashkenazic](#). There are other variations on the readings, but these are the most commonly used ones. If you want to know the reading for this week, check the [Current Calendar](#).

There are additional special readings for certain holidays and other special days, listed in a separate table [below](#).

Parashat	Torah	Haftarah
Bereishit	Genesis 1:1-6:8	Isaiah 42:5-43:11 (Isaiah 42:5-42:21)
Noach	Genesis 6:9-11:32	Isaiah 54:1-55:5 (Isaiah 54:1-10)
Lekh Lekha	Genesis 12:1-17:27	Isaiah 40:27-41:16
Vayeira	Genesis 18:1-22:24	II Kings 4:1-4:37 (II Kings 4:1-4:23)
Chayei Sarah	Genesis 23:1-25:18	I Kings 1:1-1:31
Toldot	Genesis 25:19-28:9	Malachi 1:1-2:7
Vayitzei	Genesis 28:10-32:3	Hosea 12:13-14:10 (Hosea 11:7-12:12)
Vayishlach	Genesis 32:4-36:43	Hosea 11:7-12:12 (Obadiah 1:1-1:21)
Vayyeshev	Genesis 37:1-40:23	Amos 2:6-3:8
Miqetz	Genesis 41:1-44:17	I Kings 3:15-4:1
Vayigash	Genesis 44:18-47:27	Ezekiel 37:15-37:28
Vayechi	Genesis 47:28-50:26	I Kings 2:1-12
Shemot	Exodus 1:1-6:1	Isaiah 27:6-28:13; 29:22-29:23 (Jeremiah 1:1-2:3)
Va'eira	Exodus 6:2-9:35	Ezekiel 28:25-29:21
Bo	Exodus 10:1-13:16	Jeremiah 46:13-46:28
Beshalach	Exodus 13:17-17:16	Judges 4:4-5:31 (Judges 5:1-5:31)
Yitro	Exodus 18:1-20:23	Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-9:6 (Isaiah 6:1-6:13)
Mishpatim	Exodus 21:1-24:18	Jeremiah 34:8-34:22; 33:25-33:26
Terumah	Exodus 25:1-27:19	I Kings 5:26-6:13
Tetzaveh	Exodus 27:20-30:10	Ezekiel 43:10-43:27
Ki Tisa	Exodus 30:11-34:35	I Kings 18:1-18:39 (I Kings 18:20-18:39)
Vayaqhel	Exodus 35:1-38:20	I Kings 7:40-7:50 (I Kings 7:13-7:26)
Pequdei	Exodus 38:21-40:38	I Kings 7:51-8:21 (I Kings 7:40-7:50)
Vayiqra	Leviticus 1:1-5:26	Isaiah 43:21-44:23
Tzav	Leviticus 6:1-8:36	Jeremiah 7:21-8:3; 9:22-9:23

Shemini	Leviticus 9:1-11:47	II Samuel 6:1-7:17 (II Samuel 6:1-6:19)
Tazria	Leviticus 12:1-13:59	II Kings 4:42-5:19
Metzora	Leviticus 14:1-15:33	II Kings 7:3-7:20
Acharei Mot	Leviticus 16:1-18:30	Ezekiel 22:1-22:19 (Ezekiel 22:1-22:16)
Qedoshim	Leviticus 19:1-20:27	Amos 9:7-9:15 (Ezekiel 20:2-20:20)
Emor	Leviticus 21:1-24:23	Ezekiel 44:15-44:31
Behar	Leviticus 25:1-26:2	Jeremiah 32:6-32:27
Bechuqotai	Leviticus 26:3-27:34	Jeremiah 16:19-17:14
Bamidbar	Numbers 1:1-4:20	Hosea 2:1-2:22
Nasso	Numbers 4:21-7:89	Judges 13:2-13:25
Beha'alotkha	Numbers 8:1-12:16	Zechariah 2:14-4:7
Shelach	Numbers 13:1-15:41	Joshua 2:1-2:24
Qorach	Numbers 16:1-18:32	I Samuel 11:14-12:22
Chuqat	Numbers 19:1-22:1	Judges 11:1-11:33
Balaq	Numbers 22:2-25:9	Micah 5:6-6:8
Pinchas	Numbers 25:10-30:1	I Kings 18:46-19:21
Mattot	Numbers 30:2-32:42	Jeremiah 1:1-2:3
Masei	Numbers 33:1-36:13	Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4 (Jeremiah 2:4-28; 4:1-4:2)
Devarim	Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22	Isaiah 1:1-1:27
Va'etchanan	Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11	Isaiah 40:1-40:26
Eiqev	Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25	Isaiah 49:14-51:3
Re'eh	Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17	Isaiah 54:11-55:5
Shoftim	Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9	Isaiah 51:12-52:12
Ki Teitzei	Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19	Isaiah 54:1-54:10
Ki Tavo	Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8	Isaiah 60:1-60:22
Nitzavim	Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20	Isaiah 61:10-63:9
Vayeilekh	Deuteronomy 31:1-31:30	Isaiah 55:6-56:8
Ha'azinu	Deuteronomy 32:1-32:52	II Samuel 22:1-22:51
Vezot Haberakhah	Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12	Joshua 1:1-1:18 (Joshua 1:1-1:9)

Table of Special Parshiyot

Below are additional readings for holidays and special shabbats. Haftarot in parentheses indicate [Sephardic](#) ritual where it differs from [Ashkenazic](#). Note that on holidays, the Maftir portion ordinarily comes from a different Torah scroll. The Maftir portion is usually the Torah portion that institutes the

holiday or specifies the holiday's [offerings](#).

Parashat	Torah	Maftir	Haftarah
Rosh Hashanah , Day 1	Gen 21:1-34	Num 29:1-6	I Sam 1:1-2:10
Rosh Hashanah , Day 2	Gen 22:1-24		Jer 31:1-19
Shabbat Shuvah			Hos 14:2-10 Mic 7:18-20
Yom Kippur , Morning	Lev 16:1-34	Num 29:7-11	Is 57:14-58:14
Yom Kippur , Afternoon	Lev 18:1-30		Jonah 1:1-4:11 Micah 7:18-20
Sukkot , Day 1	Lev 22:26-23:44	Num 29:12-16	Zech 14:1-21
Sukkot , Day 2			I Kings 8:2-21
Sukkot , Chol Ha-moed Day 1	Num 29:17-25		
Sukkot , Chol Ha-moed Day 2	Num 29:20-28		
Sukkot , Chol Ha-moed Day 3	Num 29:23-31		
Sukkot , Chol Ha-moed Day 4	Num 29:26-34		
Sukkot , Intermediate Shabbat	Ex 33:12-34:26		Ezek 38:18-39:16
Hoshanah Rabbah	Num 29:26-34		
Shemini Atzeret	Deut 14:22-16:17	Num 29:35-30:1	I Ki 8:54-9:1
Simkhat Torah	Deut 33:1-34:12 Gen 1:1-2:3	Num 29:35-30:1	Josh 1:1-18 (Josh 1:1-9)
Chanukkah , Day 1	Num 7:1-17		
Chanukkah , Day 2	Num 7:18-29		
Chanukkah , Day 3	Num 7:24-35		
Chanukkah , Day 4	Num 7:30-41		
Chanukkah , Day 5	Num 7:36-47		
Chanukkah , Day 6 (Rosh Chodesh)	Num 28:1-15 Num 7:42-47		
Chanukkah , Day 7 (not Rosh Chodesh)	Num 7:48-59		
Chanukkah , Day 7 (Rosh Chodesh)	Num 28:1-15 Num 7:42-47		
Chanukkah , Day 8	Num 7:54-8:4		

Chanukkah , First Shabbat		Day 6: Num 28:9-15	Zech 2:14-4:7
Chanukkah , Second Shabbat		Num 7:54-8:4	I Ki 7:40-50
Sheqalim		Ex 30:11-16	II Ki 11:17-12:17 (II Ki 12:1-17)
Zakhor	Deut 25:17-19		I Sam 15:1-34
Purim	Ex 17:8-16		
Parah		Num 19:1-22	Ezek 36:16-38 (Ezek 36:16-36)
Ha-Chodesh		Ex 12:1-20	Ezek 45:16-46:18 (Ezek 45:18-46:18)
Shabbat Ha-Gadol			Mal 3:4-24
Pesach (Passover) , Day 1	Ex12:21-51	Num 28:16-25	Josh3:5-7; 5:2-6:1; 6:27 (Josh 5:2-6:1)
Pesach (Passover) , Day 2	Lev 22:26-23:44		II Ki 23:1-9; 21-25
Pesach (Passover) , Chol Ha-moed Day 1	Ex 13:1-16; Num 28:19-25		
Pesach (Passover) , Chol Ha-moed Day 2	Ex 22:24-23:19; Num 28:19-25		
Pesach (Passover) , Chol Ha-moed Day 3	Ex 34:1-26; Num 28:19-25		
Pesach (Passover) , Chol Ha-moed Day 4	Ex 9:1-14; Num 28:19-25		
Pesach (Passover) Intermediate Shabbat	Ex 33:12-34:26	Num 28:19-25	Ezek 37:1-37:14 (Ezek 36:37-37:14)
Pesach (Passover) , Day 7	Ex 13:17-15:26		II Sam 22:1-51
Pesach (Passover) , Day 8 (weekday)	Deut 15:19-16:17		Is 10:32-12:6
Pesach (Passover) , Day 8 (Shabbat)	Deut 14:22-16:17		
Shavu'ot , Day 1	Ex19:1-20:23	Num 28:26-31	Ezek 1:1-28; 3:12
Shavu'ot , Day 2 (weekday)	Deut 15:19-16:17		Hab 2:20-3:19
Shavu'ot , Day 2 (Shabbat)	Deut 14:22-16:17		
Tisha B'Av , Morning	Deut 4:25-40		Jer 8:13-9:23
Tisha B'Av , Afternoon	Ex 32:11-14, 34:1-10		Isaiah 55:6-56:8 (Hosea 14:2-10; Micah 7:18-20)
Minor Fasts , Morning	Ex 32:11-14; 34:1-10		Is 55:6-56:8 (none)
Minor Fasts , Afternoon	Ex 32:11-14; 34:1-10		

Shabbat Mevarekhim (Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh)			I Sam 20:18-42
Rosh Chodesh (weekday)	Num 28:1-15		
Rosh Chodesh (Shabbat)		Num 28:9-15	Is 66:1-24

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Prayers and Blessings

Level: Intermediate

Tefilah: Prayer

The Hebrew word for prayer is tefilah. It is derived from the [root](#) Pe-Lamed-Lamed and the word l'hitpalel, meaning to judge oneself. This surprising word origin provides insight into the purpose of Jewish prayer. The most important part of any Jewish prayer, whether it be a prayer of petition, of thanksgiving, of praise of [G-d](#), or of confession, is the introspection it provides, the moment that we spend looking inside ourselves, seeing our role in the universe and our relationship to G-d.

The Yiddish word meaning "pray" is "daven," which ultimately comes from the same Latin root as the English word "divine" and emphasizes the One to whom prayer is directed.

For an observant Jew, prayer is not simply something that happens in [synagogue](#) once a week (or even three times a day). Prayer an integral part of everyday life. In fact, one of the most important prayers in Judaism, the [Birkat Ha-Mazon](#), is never recited in synagogue!

Observant Jews are constantly reminded of G-d's presence and of our relationship with G-d, because we are continually praying to Him. Our first thought in the morning, even before we get out of bed, is a prayer thanking G-d for returning our souls to us. There are prayers to be recited before enjoying any material pleasure, such as eating or wearing new clothes; prayers to recite before performing any [mitzvah](#) (commandment), such as washing hands or lighting candles; prayers to recite upon seeing anything unusual, such as a king, a rainbow, or the site of a great tragedy; prayers to recite whenever some good or bad thing happens; and prayers to recite before going to bed at night. All of these prayers are in addition to formal prayer services, which are performed three times a day every weekday and additional times on [shabbat](#) and [festivals](#). See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

The Need for Prayer

Many people today do not see the need for regular, formal prayer. "I pray when I feel inspired to, when it is meaningful to me," they say. This attitude overlooks two important things: the purpose of prayer, and the need for practice.

One purpose of prayer is to increase your awareness of [G-d](#) in your life and the role that G-d plays in your life. If you only pray when you feel inspired (that is, when you are already aware of G-d), then you will not increase your awareness of G-d.

In addition, if you want to do something well, you have to practice it continually, even when you don't feel like doing it. This is as true of prayer as it is of playing a sport, playing a musical instrument, or writing. The sense of humility and awe of G-d that is essential to proper prayer does not come easily to modern man, and will not simply come to you when you feel the need to pray. If you wait until inspiration strikes, you will not have the skills you need to pray effectively. Before I started praying regularly, I found that when I wanted to pray, I didn't know how. I didn't know what to say, or how to say it, or how to establish the proper frame of mind. If you pray regularly, you will learn how to express

yourself in prayer.

Kavanah: The Mindset for Prayer

When you say the same prayers day after day, you might expect that the prayers would become routine and would begin to lose meaning. While this may be true for some people, this is not the intention of Jewish prayer. As I said at the beginning of this discussion, the most important part of prayer is the introspection it provides. Accordingly, the proper frame of mind is vital to prayer.

The mindset for prayer is referred to as kavanah, which is generally translated as "concentration" or "intent." The minimum level of kavanah is an awareness that one is speaking to [G-d](#) and an intention to fulfill the obligation to pray. If you do not have this minimal level of kavanah, then you are not praying; you are merely reading. In addition, it is preferred that you have a mind free from other thoughts, that you know and understand what you are praying about and that you think about the meaning of the prayer.

Liturgical melodies are often used as an aid to forming the proper mindset. Many prayers and prayer services have traditional melodies associated with them. These can increase your focus on what you are doing and block out extraneous thoughts.

I also find it useful to move while praying. Traditional Jews routinely sway back and forth during prayer, apparently a reference to Psalm 35, which says "All my limbs shall declare, 'O L-rd, who is like You?'" Such movement is not required, and many people find it distracting, but I personally find that it helps me concentrate and focus.

Hebrew: The Language for Prayer

The [Talmud](#) states that it is permissible to pray in any language that you can understand; however, traditional Judaism has always stressed the importance of praying in Hebrew. A traditional [Chasidic](#) story speaks glowingly of the prayer of an uneducated Jew who wanted to pray but did not speak Hebrew. The man began to recite the only Hebrew he knew: the [alphabet](#). He recited it over and over again, until a [rabbi](#) asked what he was doing. The man told the rabbi, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, knows what is in my heart. I will give Him the letters, and He can put the words together."

Even the more liberal [movements](#) are increasingly recognizing the value of Hebrew prayer. My grandmother tells me that fifty years ago, you never heard a word of Hebrew in a [Reform synagogue](#). Today, the standard Reform prayer book contains the text of many prayers in Hebrew, and many of the standard prayers are recited in Hebrew, generally followed by [transliteration](#) and an English translation. I have heard several Reform rabbis read from the [Torah](#) in Hebrew, also generally followed by an English translation or explanation.

There are many good reasons for praying in Hebrew: it gives you an incentive for learning Hebrew, which might otherwise be forgotten; it provides a link to Jews all over the world; it is the language in which the covenant with [G-d](#) was formed, etc. To me, however, the most important reason to pray in Hebrew is that Hebrew is the language of Jewish thought.

Any language other than Hebrew is laden down with the connotations of that language's culture and religion. When you translate a Hebrew word, you lose subtle shadings of Jewish ideas and add ideas that

are foreign to Judaism. Only in Hebrew can the pure essence of Jewish thought be preserved and properly understood. For example, the English word "commandment" connotes an order imposed upon us by a stern and punishing G-d, while the Hebrew word "[mitzvah](#)" implies an honor and privilege given to us, a responsibility that we undertook as part of the covenant we made with G-d, a good deed that we are eager to perform.

This is not to suggest that praying in Hebrew is more important than understanding what you are praying about. If you are in [synagogue](#) and you don't know Hebrew well enough, you can listen to the Hebrew while looking at the translation. If you are reciting a prayer or blessing alone, you should get a general idea of its meaning from the translation before attempting to recite it in Hebrew. But even if you do not fully understand Hebrew at this time, you should try to hear the prayer, experience the prayer, in Hebrew.

Group Prayer

Most of our prayers are expressed in the first person plural, "us" instead of "me," and are recited on behalf of all of the [Jewish people](#). This form of prayer emphasizes our responsibility for one another and our interlinked fates.

In Judaism, prayer is largely a group activity rather than an individual activity. Although it is permissible to pray alone and it fulfills the obligation to pray, you should generally make every effort to pray with a group, short of violating a commandment to do so.

A complete formal prayer service cannot be conducted without a quorum of at least 10 adult Jewish men; that is, at least 10 people who are obligated to fulfill the commandment to recite the prayers. This prayer quorum is referred to as a minyan (from a Hebrew root meaning to count or to number). Certain prayers and religious activities cannot be performed without a minyan. This need for a minyan has often helped to keep the Jewish community together in isolated areas.

Berakhot: Blessings

A berakhah (blessing) is a special kind of prayer that is very common in Judaism. Berakhot are recited both as part of the [synagogue](#) services and as a response or prerequisite to a wide variety of daily occurrences. Berakhot are easy to recognize: they all start with the word barukh (blessed or praised).

The words barukh and berakhah are both derived from the Hebrew [root](#) Bet-Resh-Kaf, meaning "knee," and refer to the practice of showing respect by bending the knee and bowing. See animation at right. There are several places in [Jewish liturgy](#) where this gesture is performed, most of them at a time when a berakhah is being recited.



According to Jewish tradition, a person should recite 100 berakhot each day! This is not as difficult as it sounds. Repeating the [Shemoneh Esrei](#) three times a day (as all observant Jews do) covers 57 berakhot all by itself, and there are dozens of everyday occurrences that require berakhot.

Who Blesses Whom?

Many English-speaking people find the idea of berakhot very confusing. To them, the word "blessing" seems to imply that the person saying the blessing is conferring some benefit on the person he is speaking to. For example, in Catholic tradition, a person making a confession begins by asking the priest to bless him. Yet in a berakhah, the person saying the blessing is speaking to [G-d](#). How can the creation confer a benefit upon the Creator?

This confusion stems largely from difficulties in the translation. The Hebrew word "barukh" is not a verb describing what we do to G-d; it is an adjective describing G-d as the source of all blessings. When we recite a berakhah, we are not blessing G-d; we are expressing wonder at how blessed G-d is.

Content of a Berakhah

There are basically three types of berakhot: ones recited before enjoying a material pleasure (birkhot ha-na'ah), ones recited before performing a [mitzvah](#) (commandment) (birkhot ha-mitzvot) and ones recited at special times and events (birkhot hoda'ah).

Berakhot recited before enjoying a material pleasure, such as eating, drinking or wearing new clothes, acknowledge [G-d](#) as the creator of the thing that we are about to use. The berakhah for bread praises G-d as the one "who brings forth bread from the earth." The berakhah for wearing new clothing praises G-d as the one "who clothes the naked." By reciting these berakhot, we recognize that G-d is the Creator of all things, and that we have no right to use things without first asking his permission. The berakhah essentially asks permission to use the thing.

Berakhot recited before performing a [mitzvah](#) (commandment), such as washing hands or lighting candles, praise G-d as the one "who sanctified us with his commandments and commanded us..." to do whatever it is we are about to do. Reciting such a blessing is an essential element of the performance of a mitzvah. In Jewish tradition, a person who performs a mitzvah with a sense of obligation is considered more meritorious than a person who performs the same mitzvah because he feels like it. Recitation of the berakhah focuses our attention on the fact that we are performing a religious duty with a sense of obligation. It is worth noting that we recite such berakhot over both biblical commandments and rabbinical commandments. In the latter case, the berakhah can be understood as "who sanctified us with his commandments and commanded us to obey the rabbis, who commanded us to..." do whatever it is we are about to do. See [Halakhah: Jewish Law](#) for an explanation of the distinction between biblical and rabbinical commandments.

Berakhot recited at special times and events, such as when seeing a rainbow or a king or hearing good or bad news, acknowledge G-d as the ultimate source of all good and evil in the universe. It is important to note that such berakhot are recited for both good things and things that appear to us to be bad. When we see or hear something bad, we praise G-d as "the true Judge," underscoring the fact that things that appear to be bad happen for a reason that is ultimately just, even if we in our limited understanding cannot always see the reason.

Form of a Berakhah

Many of the berakhot that we recite today were composed by Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly nearly 2500 years ago, and they continue to be recited in the same form.

All berakhot use the phrase "Barukh atah [Ha-shem](#), [Elokaynu](#), melekh ha-olam," Blessed art thou [L-rd](#), our [G-d](#), King of the Universe. This is sometimes referred to as shem u'malkut (the name and the sovereignty), the affirmation of G-d as king.

The use of the word "thou" is worth discussing: in modern English, many people think of the word "thou" as being formal and respectful, but in fact the opposite is true. Thou (like the Hebrew atah) is the informal, familiar second person pronoun, used for friends and relatives. This word expresses our close and intimate relationship with G-d.

Immediately after this phrase, the berakhah abruptly shifts into the third person; for example, in the birkhot ha-mitzvot, the first two phrases are blessed art thou, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, who sanctifies us with his commandments and commands us... This grammatical faux pas is intentional. The use of the third person pronoun while speaking to a person in Hebrew is a way of expressing extreme respect and deference. This shift in perspective is a deliberately jarring way of expressing the fact that G-d is simultaneously close to us and yet far above us, intimately related to us and yet transcendent. This paradox is at the heart of the Jewish relationship with G-d.

Birkat Ha-Mazon: Grace After Meals

One of the most important prayers in Judaism, one of the very few that the Bible commands us to recite, is never recited in [synagogue](#). That prayer is birkat ha-mazon, grace after meals.

In Deuteronomy 8:10, we are commanded that when we eat and are satisfied, we must bless the [L-rd](#), our [G-d](#). This commandment is fulfilled by reciting the birkat ha-mazon (blessing of the food) after each meal. Reciting birkat ha-mazon is commonly referred to as bentsching, from the Yiddish word meaning "to bless." Although the word "bentsch" can refer to the recitation of any [berakhah](#), it is almost always used to refer to reciting birkat ha-mazon.

The grace after meals is recited in addition to the various berakhot over food recited before meals.

Birkat ha-mazon actually consists of four blessings, three of which were composed around the time of Ezra and the Great Assembly and a fourth which was added after the destruction of the Temple. These blessings are:

1. Birkat Hazan (the blessing for providing food), which thanks G-d for giving food to the world,
2. Birkat Ha-Aretz (the blessing for the land), which thanks G-d for bringing us forth from the land of Egypt, for making His covenant with us, and for giving us the [land of Israel](#) as an inheritance,
3. Birkat Yerushalayim (the blessing for Jerusalem), which prays for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of the [moshiach](#); and
4. Birkat Ha-Tov v'Ha-Maytiv (the blessing for being good and doing good), was added after the destruction of the Temple, although it existed before that time. It emphasizes the goodness of G-d's work, that G-d is good and does good.

In addition to these four blessings, the full birkat ha-mazon incorporates some psalms and additional blessings for various special occasions (holidays, guests, etc.)

If you would like to hear the Birkat Ha-Mazon, check out this [RealPlayer](#) recording of [Cantor Pinchas](#)

[Rabinovicz chanting Birkat Ha-Mazon](#) from [613.org](#), the best source of Jewish Torah Audio on the net!
(Please note: This recording uses [Ashkenazic pronunciation](#))

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Jewish Liturgy

Level: Intermediate

In the giving credit where credit is due department: much of the information in this page is derived from Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin's "[To Pray as a Jew](#): A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service", an excellent Orthodox resource on the subject of Jewish prayer.

Observant Jews daven (pray) in formal worship services three times a day, every day: at evening (Ma'ariv), in the morning (Shacharit), and in the afternoon (Minchah). Daily prayers are collected in a book called a siddur, which derives from the Hebrew root meaning "order," because the siddur shows the order of prayers. It is the same root as the word [seder](#), which refers to the [Passover](#) home service.

Central Prayers

Undoubtedly the oldest fixed daily prayer in Judaism is the Shema. This consists of Deut. 6:4-9, Deut. 11:13-21, and Num. 15:37-41. Note that the first paragraph commands us to speak of these matters "when you retire and when you arise." From ancient times, this commandment was fulfilled by reciting the Shema twice a day: morning and night.

The next major development in Jewish prayer occurred during the Babylonian Exile, 6th century [B.C.E.](#) People were not able to [sacrifice](#) in the [Temple](#) at that time, so they used prayer as a substitute for sacrifice. "The offerings of our lips instead of bulls," as Hosea said. People got together to pray three times a day, corresponding to the three daily sacrifices. There was an additional prayer service on [Shabbat](#) and certain [holidays](#), to correspond to the additional sacrifices of those days. Some suggest that this may already have been a common practice among the pious before the Exile.

After the Exile, these daily prayer services continued. In the 5th century [B.C.E.](#), the Men of the Great Assembly composed a basic prayer, covering just about everything you could want to pray about. This is the Shemoneh Esrei, which means "18" and refers to the 18 blessings originally contained within the prayer. It is also referred to as the Amidah (standing, because we stand while we recite it), or Tefilah (prayer, as in The Prayer, because it is the essence of all Jewish prayer). This prayer is the cornerstone of every Jewish service.

The blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei can be broken down into 3 groups: three blessings praising [G-d](#), thirteen making requests (forgiveness, redemption, health, prosperity, rain in its season, ingathering of exiles, etc.), and three expressing gratitude and taking leave. But wait! That's 19! And didn't I just say that this prayer is called 18?

One of the thirteen requests (the one against heretics) was added around the 2nd century [C.E.](#), in response to the growing threat of heresy (primarily Christianity), but at that time, the prayer was already commonly known as the Shemoneh Esrei, and the name stuck, even though there were now 19 blessings.

Another important part of certain prayer services is a reading from the [Torah](#) (first 5 books of the Bible) and the Prophets. The Torah has been divided into 54 sections, so that if each of these sections is read and studied for a week, we can cover the entire Torah in a year every year (our leap years are 54 weeks long; regular years are 50 or so, we double up shorter portions on a few weeks in regular years. At

various times in our history, our oppressors did not permit us to have public readings of the Torah, so we read a roughly corresponding section from the Prophets (referred to as a Haftarah). Today, we read both the Torah portion and the Haftarah portion. These are read on Mondays, Thursdays, [Shabbat](#) and some [holidays](#). The Torah and haftarah readings are performed with great ceremony: the Torah is paraded around the room before it is brought to rest on the bimah (podium), and it is considered an honor to have the opportunity to recite a blessing over the reading (this honor is called an aliyah). For more information, see [Torah Readings](#).

That's the heart of the Jewish prayer service. There are a few other matters that should be mentioned, though. There is a long series of morning [blessings](#) at the beginning of the morning service. Some people recite these at home. They deal with a lot of concerns with getting up in the morning, and things we are obligated to do daily. There is a section called Pesukei d'Zimra (verses of song), which includes a lot of Psalms and hymns. I like to think of it as a warm-up, getting you in the mood for prayer in the morning.

There are also a few particularly significant prayers. The most important is the [Kaddish](#), the only prayer in Aramaic to my knowledge, which praises [G-d](#). Here's a small piece of it, in English:

May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified in the world that He created as He willed.
May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire family of Israel, swiftly and soon. May His great Name be blessed forever and ever. Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, mighty...

There are several variations on it for different times in the service. One variation is set aside for [mourners](#) to recite, the congregation only providing the required responses. Many people think of the Kaddish as a mourner's prayer, because the oldest son is obligated to recite it for a certain period after a parent's death, but in fact it is much broader than that. Someone once told me it separates each portion of the service, and a quick glance at any [siddur](#) (daily prayer book) shows that it is recited between each section, but I don't know if that is its purpose.

Another important prayer is Aleinu, which is recited at or near the end of every service. It also praises [G-d](#). Here is a little of it in English, to give you an idea:

It is our duty to praise the Master of all, to ascribe greatness to the Molder of primeval creation, for He has not made us like the [nations](#) of the lands... Therefore, we put our hope in you, [L-rd](#) our G-d, that we may soon see Your mighty splendor... On that day, the L-rd will be One and His Name will be One.

On certain holidays, we also recite Hallel, which consists of Psalms 113-118.

Many holidays have special additions to the liturgy. See [Yom Kippur Liturgy](#) for additions related to that holiday.

Outline of Services

There are a few other things, but that's a pretty good idea of what's involved. Here is an outline of the order of the daily services:

1. Evening Service (Ma'ariv)

- a. Shema and it's blessings and related passages
 - b. Shemoneh Esrei
 - c. Aleinu
2. Morning Service (Shacharit)
- a. Morning Blessings
 - b. Pesukei d'Zimra
 - c. Shema and it's blessings and related passages
 - d. Shemoneh Esrei
 - e. Hallel, if appropriate
 - f. Torah reading (Mondays, Thursdays, Shabbat and holidays)
 - g. Aleinu, Ashrei (Psalm 145), and other closing prayers, Psalms and hymns (not on Shabbat and holidays; recited at the end of Musaf instead on those days)
3. Additional Service (Musaf) (Shabbat and holidays only; recited immediately after Shacharit)
- a. Shemoneh Esrei
 - b. Aleinu and other closing prayers, Psalms and hymns
4. Afternoon Service (Minchah)
- a. Ashrei (Psalm 145)
 - b. Shemoneh Esrei
 - c. Aleinu

This is based on the Ashkenazic service, but the Sephardic service has a very similar structure. They use different music, and have a few variations in choice of psalms, hymns, and prayers. See [Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews](#) for more information.

Variations from Movement to Movement

The above is from the Orthodox prayer book. The Reform service, although much shorter, follows the same basic structure and contains shorter versions of the same prayers with a few significant changes in content (for example, in one blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei, instead of praising G-d who "gives life to the dead," they praise G-d who "gives life to all" because they don't believe in resurrection). The Conservative version is very similar to the Orthodox version, and contains only minor variations in the content of the prayers (similar to the Reform example). See [Movements of Judaism](#) for more on the theological distinction between Orthodox, Conservative and Reform.

There are a few significant differences in the way that services are conducted in different movements:

1. In Orthodox, women and men are seated separately; in Reform and Conservative, all sit together. See [The Role of Women in the Synagogue](#).
2. In Orthodox and usually Conservative, everything is in Hebrew. In Reform, most is done in English, though they are increasingly using Hebrew.
3. In Orthodox, the person leading the service has his back to the congregation, and prays facing the same direction as the congregation; in Conservative and Reform, the person leading the service

faces the congregation.

4. Conservative and Reform are rather rigidly structured: everybody shows up at the same time, leaves at the same time, and does the same thing at the same time; Orthodox is somewhat more free-form: people show up when they show up, catch up to everybody else at their own pace, often do things differently than everybody else. This is **terrifying** if you don't know what you're doing, but once you've got a handle on the service, I find it much more comfortable and inspirational than trying to stay in unison.

Navigating the Siddur

If you've never been to a Jewish religious service, following along can be quite a challenge! Even if you are experienced, it's possible to get lost at times. In fact, a friend of mine tells me she once heard a song called "The I-Don't-Know-What-Page-We're-On-In-The-Siddur Blues"! Here are a few hints to help you stay with the group.

The biggest trick is being aware of the structure of the [siddur](#) itself. The siddurs most commonly used in [Orthodox](#) and [Conservative synagogues](#) include within a single volume all of the prayers for all four prayer services (Shacharit, Musaf, Minchah and Ma'ariv). Make sure you know which service you are attending. Normally, services are held at two times of the day: morning (Shacharit and Musaf) and early evening (Minchah and Ma'ariv). The morning services are generally at the beginning of the siddur, while the afternoon and evening services are normally in the middle.

Most siddurs include weekdays, Shabbat and most festivals in a single volume. (Exception: [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Yom Kippur](#) have such extensive additions that they have their own separate siddur called a machzor). To save space, the sections are not laid out exactly in the order they are recited, so you may need to skip around the book a bit for certain sections. Usually, the prayer leader will tell you when you are skipping around, but sometimes they will not. Watch for notes in the siddur that will tell you to skip to different sections depending on whether it is: 1) [Shabbat](#); 2) a [Festival](#) (i.e., non-working day); 3) [Chol Ha-Moed](#) (intermediate days of festivals); 4) [Rosh Chodesh](#) (the first day of a Jewish month); or 5) a weekday. Most of the major skips will occur at the breaks in sections described above under Outline of Services [above](#). For example, a Shabbat morning service on Rosh Chodesh (the first of the month) in my siddur would begin with a generic Morning Blessings, then would skip 200 pages forward for a Shabbat/Festival P'sukei D'Zimra, Shema and Shemoneh Esrei., then forward 200 pages to pick up Hallel (which is recited on Rosh Chodesh), then back to where I came from for the Torah reading, followed by the Musaf Shemoneh Esrei and the closing blessings.

Another skip that is confusing for most newcomers is the Shemoneh Esrei (also called the Amidah). At the beginning of the Shemoneh Esrei, the congregants stand. They read through the entire prayer silently, skipping the Kedushah blessing and the Priestly Blessing. This is a very long prayer -- 10-20 pages in my siddur. The process may take as much as five minutes, and the end is not always clearly marked. Watch for Oseh Shalom (May He who makes peace in his heights make peace for us and for all Israel, and let us say Amen). The Shemoneh Esrei ends with the paragraph after that one. The leader of the service then begins repeating the entire Shemoneh Esrei aloud, and you must flip back to the beginning to read along with it. (Note: the Shemoneh Esrei is not repeated at Ma'ariv).

What to Say and What to Do

Another source of confusion for newcomers is what to say and what to do. When do I say "Amen"? When do I stand or bow? Here are a few of the more common things to watch for. There are a lot of these, and not all of them are easy to spot the first time.

Saying "Amen"

As a general rule, you say "amen" whenever someone else says a [blessing](#). It's sort of the Hebrew equivalent of saying "ditto": when you say "amen," it's as if you said the blessing yourself. Whenever you hear someone say "Barukh atah...", get ready to say "amen." The "amen" may be at the end of the current sentence, or at the end of the current paragraph.

Keep in mind that you only say "amen" when someone *else* says a blessing. After all, it would be silly to say "ditto" after something you yourself said!

There are a few other places where "amen" is said. If the leader says "v'imru amen" (let's say "amen"), you join in on the word "amen," so watch for the word "v'imru." This comes up several times in the [Kaddish](#) prayer. There is also an additional "amen" within Kaddish: right at the beginning, after "sh'mei rabbah."

Other Responses to Prayer

On many occasions, when a person says, "Barukh atah [Adoshem](#)," others who hear him interject "Barukh Hu u'Varukh Shemo." This is generally recited very quickly, and often sounds like "Barukh Shemo" (and some people say it that way). However, you do not do this all the time, and I'm not sure how to explain the pattern of when you do and when you don't.

There are several congregational responses in the [Kaddish](#) prayer. We noted above the many "Amens" within Kaddish. In addition, after the first "v'imru amen," the congregation recites, "y'hei sh'mei rabbah m'varakh, l'alam u'l'almei almaya" (May His great Name be be blessed forever and ever). Also, after "sh'mei d'kudeshah" in the next paragraph, the congregation joins the reader in saying "b'rikh hu" (Blessed is He). All of this is usually clearly marked in the siddur. I have provided a text of the [Mourner's Kaddish](#), where you can see this all laid out.

Whenever someone says "Borkhu et [Adoshem](#) ha-m'vorakh" (Bless the L-rd, the Blessed One) the congregation responds "Barukh ha-m'vorakh l'olam va-ed" (Blessed is the L-rd, the Blessed One, forever and ever). There are two times when this happens: in the transition from P'sukei d'Zimra to the blessings over the Shema, and as each person blesses the Torah reading.

During the repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei, when the leader recites the three-part priestly blessing (May the L-rd bless you and safeguard you... May the L-rd illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you... May the L-rd turn His countenance to you and establish peace for you...), the congregation replies kayn y'hee ratzon (so be it) after each of the three blessings.

Standing

You should stand at the following times:

- When the [Ark](#) is open.
- When the [Torah](#) is being carried around the room.
- During the Shemoneh Esrei, from the beginning of the silent portion until after the Kedushah during the reader's repetition (Kedushah is the part that includes the "Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh" (Holy, Holy, Holy) blessing).
- During the Aleinu prayer, near the end of any service.

There are a few other prayers that require standing, but these are the most notable.

In addition, in [Orthodox synagogues](#), it is customary for everyone to stand when [Kaddish](#) is recited, except for the Mourner's Kaddish, where only the [mourners](#) stand. The prayer is usually rather clearly marked as Kaddish, and begins "Yitgadal v'yitkadash Sh'mei Rabbah" (May his great name grow exalted and sanctified). However, I have noticed in some non-Orthodox synagogues that the congregants do not stand during regular Kaddishes, or sometimes stand during Mourner's Kaddishes.

Bowing

Judaism has a special procedure for bowing during prayer: first you bend the knees, then you bend forward while straightening the knees, then you stand up. See the animation at right.

Bowing is done several times during the service:

- During the Aleinu prayer, when we say "v'anakhnu korim u'mishtachavim u'modim" (which quite literally means, "so we bend knee and bow and give thanks").
- Four times during the Shemoneh Esrei (at "Blessed art Thou, L-rd" in the beginning of the first blessing; at "Blessed art Thou, L-rd" at the end of the first blessing; at "We gratefully thank You" at the beginning of the Modim blessing and at "Blessed art Thou, L-rd" at the end of the Modim blessing). There is also a special bow during the Oseh Shalom blessing: at "He who makes peace in his heights," bow to the left; at "may he make peace," bow to the right; at "upon us and upon all Israel" bow forward.
- After P'sukei d'Zimra but before the Shema's blessings, the leader recites the Borchu blessing, during which he bows. The congregation responds with "Barukh Adoshem hamevorakh l'olam va-ed" and bows.
- During [Torah](#) readings, when a person recites a blessing over the Torah, this same Borchu and it's congregational response are recited, with the same bowing. Often, the bow here is less obvious: seated congregants just sort of lean forward out of their chairs.



Kissing the Torah

In any service where there is a [Torah reading](#), there is ordinarily a Torah procession. A congregant holds

the Torah while it is carried around the [synagogue](#). As the Torah passes congregants, they touch the cover with their hand (or sometimes with a prayer book, or with their tallit) and then kiss their hand (or whatever they touched it with). In Orthodox synagogues, where the Torah procession often does not encompass the women's section, women generally reach out in the direction of the Torah, then kiss their hands.

After a Torah reading, the Torah is held up in the air with its words facing the congregation. It is traditional to reach out toward the Torah, usually with the pinky finger, while reciting the congregational response (v'zot ha-Torah...), then kiss the finger.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Of course, the best place to read about a Jewish service is in a siddur! The one I use is [The Artscroll Siddur \(Siddur Kol Yaakov\)](#), which is also available in [Paperback](#). It is uncompromisingly Orthodox, but contains detailed commentary and instructions for those who are less familiar with the service.



In researching this page, I relied extensively on Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin's [To Pray as a Jew](#), and I recommend the book highly. I have also heard good things about the [Synagogue Survival Kit](#) by Jordan Lee Wagner, although I have not had a chance to review it myself.

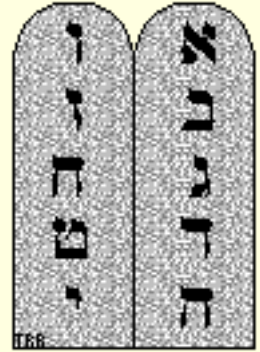
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Halakhah: Jewish Law

Level: Intermediate

What is Halakhah?

Judaism is not just a set of [beliefs](#) about [G-d](#), man and the universe. Judaism is a comprehensive way of life, filled with rules and practices that affect every aspect of life: what you do when you wake up in the morning, what you can and cannot [eat](#), what you can and cannot wear, how to groom yourself, how to conduct business, who you can [marry](#), how to observe the [holidays](#) and [Shabbat](#), and perhaps most important, how to treat G-d, [other people](#), and [animals](#). This set of rules and practices is known as halakhah.



The word "halakhah" is usually translated as "Jewish Law," although a more literal translation might be "the path that one walks." The word is derived from the Hebrew [root](#) Heh-Lamed-Kaf, meaning to go, to walk or to travel.

Some non-Jews and non-observant Jews criticize this legalistic aspect of traditional Judaism, saying that it reduces the religion to a set of rituals devoid of spirituality. While there are certainly some Jews who observe halakhah in this way, that is not the intention of halakhah, and it is not even the correct way to observe halakhah.

On the contrary, when properly observed, halakhah increases the spirituality in a person's life, because it turns the most trivial, mundane acts, such as eating and getting dressed, into acts of religious significance. When people write to me and ask how to increase their spirituality or the influence of their religion in their lives, the only answer I can think of is: observe more halakhah. Keep [kosher](#) or light [Shabbat](#) candles, [pray after meals](#) or [once or twice a day](#). When you do these things, you are constantly reminded of your faith, and it becomes an integral part of your entire existence.

What Does Halakhah Consist of?

Halakhah is made up of mitzvot from the [Torah](#) as well as laws instituted by the [rabbis](#) and long-standing customs. All of these have the status of Jewish law and all are equally binding. The only difference is that the penalties for violating laws and customs instituted by the rabbis are less severe than the penalties for violating Torah law, and laws instituted by the rabbis can be changed by the rabbis in rare, appropriate circumstances.

The 613 Mitzvot

At the heart of halakhah is the unchangeable 613 mitzvot that [G-d](#) gave to the [Jewish people](#) in the [Torah](#) (the first five books of the Bible). The word "mitzvah" means "commandment." In its strictest sense, it refers only to commandments instituted in the Torah; however, the word is commonly used in a more generic sense to include all of the laws, practices and customs of halakhah, and is often used in an even more loose way to refer to any good deed.

Some of the mitzvot are clear, explicit commands in the Bible (thou shalt not murder; to write words of Torah on the [doorposts](#) of your house), others are more implicit (the mitzvah to recite [grace after meals](#), which is inferred from "and you will eat and be satisfied and bless the L-rd your G-d"), and some can only be ascertained by [Talmudic](#) logic (that a man shall not commit incest with his daughter, which is derived from the commandment not to commit incest with his daughter's daughter).

Some of the mitzvot overlap; for example, it is a positive commandment to rest on [Shabbat](#) and a negative commandment not to do work on Shabbat.

Although there is not 100% agreement on the precise list of the 613 (there are some slight discrepancies in the way some lists divide related or overlapping mitzvot), there is complete agreement that there are 613 mitzvot. This number is significant: it is the [numeric value](#) of the word Torah (Tav = 400, Vav = 6, Resh = 200, Heh = 5), plus 2 for the two mitzvot whose existence precedes the Torah: I am the L-rd, your G-d and You shall have no other gods before Me. There is also complete agreement that these 613 mitzvot can be broken down into 248 positive mitzvot (one for each bone and organ of the male body) and 365 negative mitzvot (one for each day of the solar year).

The most accepted list of the 613 mitzvot is [Rambam](#)'s list in his Mishneh Torah. In the introduction to the first book of the Mishneh Torah, Rambam lists all of the positive mitzvot and all of the negative mitzvot, then proceeds to divide them up into subject matter categories. See [List of the 613 Mitzvot](#).

Many of these 613 mitzvot cannot be observed at this time for various reasons. For example, a large portion of the laws relate to [sacrifices and offerings](#), which can only be made in the [Temple](#), and the Temple does not exist today. Some of the laws relate to the theocratic state of Israel, its king, its supreme court, and its system of justice, and cannot be observed because the theocratic state of Israel does not exist today. In addition, some laws do not apply to all people or places. Agricultural laws only apply within the [state of Israel](#), and certain laws only apply to [kohanim](#) or [Levites](#). The modern scholar Rabbi Israel Meir of Radin, commonly known as the Chafetz Chayim, has identified 77 positive mitzvot and 194 negative mitzvot which can be observed outside of Israel today.

Gezeirah: A Fence around the Torah

A gezeirah is a law instituted by the [rabbis](#) to prevent people from accidentally violating a Torah [mitzvah](#). For example, the [Torah](#) commands us not to work on [Shabbat](#), but a gezeirah commands us not to even touch an implement that you would use to perform prohibited work (such as a pencil, money, a hammer), because someone holding the implement might forget that it was Shabbat and perform prohibited work.

It is important to note that from the point of view of the practicing Jew, there is no difference between a gezeirah and a Torah mitzvah. Both are equally binding; neither can be disregarded on a whim. The difference is generally in the degree of punishment: a violation of Shabbat was punishable by death under Torah law, while a violation of the gezeirah would result in a less severe punishment.

Another difference between a gezeirah and a mitzvah is that the rabbis can, in rare appropriate circumstances, modify or abrogate a gezeirah. Rabbis cannot change the Torah law that was commanded by [G-d](#).

Takkanah: A Law Instituted by the Rabbis

Halakhah also includes some laws that are not derived from [mitzvot](#) in the [Torah](#). A takkanah is a law that was instituted by the [rabbis](#). For example, the "mitzvah" to light candles on [Chanukkah](#), a post-biblical holiday, is a takkanah. The practice of public Torah readings every Monday and Thursday is a takkanah instituted by Ezra.

Some takkanot vary from community to community or from region to region. For example, around the year 1000 [C.E.](#), a Rabbenu Gershom Me'or Ha-Golah instituted a takkanah prohibiting polygyny, a practice clearly permitted by the Torah and the [Talmud](#). It was accepted by [Ashkenazic](#) Jews, who lived in Christian countries where polygyny was not permitted, but was not accepted by [Sephardic](#) Jews, who lived in Islamic countries where men were permitted up to four wives.

A takkanah, like a [gezeirah](#), is just as binding as a Torah mitzvah.

Minhag: A Custom with the Status of Law

A minhag is a custom that evolved for worthy religious reasons and has continued long enough to become a binding religious practice. For example, the [second, extra day of holidays](#) was originally instituted as a [gezeirah](#), so that people outside of [Israel](#), not certain of the day of a holiday, would not accidentally violate the holiday's [mitzvot](#). After the mathematical calendar was instituted and there was no doubt about the days, the added second day was not necessary. The [rabbis](#) considered ending the practice at that time, but decided to continue it as a minhag.

It is important to note that these "customs" are a binding part of halakhah, just like a [mitzvah](#), a [takkanah](#) or a [gezeirah](#).

The word "minhag" is also used in a looser sense, to indicate a community or an individual's customary way of doing some religious thing. For example, it may be the minhag in one synagogue to stand while reciting a certain prayer, while in another synagogue it is the minhag to sit during that prayer. Even in this looser sense, it is generally recommended that a person follow his own minhag, even when visiting another community.

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Love and Brotherhood

Level: Basic

Many people think of Judaism as the religion of cold, harsh laws, to be contrasted with Christianity, the religion of love and brotherhood. This is an unfair characterization of both Judaism and Jewish law. Laws are at the heart of Judaism, but a large part of Jewish law is about love and brotherhood, the relationship between man and his neighbors. Jewish law commands us to eat only [kosher](#) food, not to turn on lights on [shabbat](#), and not to wear wool woven with linen, but it also commands us to love both Jews and strangers, to give aid to the poor and needy, and to do no wrong to anyone in [speech](#) or in business. In fact, acts of love and kindness are so much a part of Jewish law that the word "mitzvah" (literally, "commandment") is commonly used to mean any good deed.

The [Talmud](#) tells a story of [Rabbi Hillel](#), who lived around the time of Jesus. A pagan came to him saying that he would convert to Judaism if Hillel could teach him the whole of the [Torah](#) in the time he could stand on one foot. Hillel replied, "What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole Torah; the rest is just commentary. Go and study it."

The "Golden Rule" is not an idea that began with Christianity. It was a fundamental part of Judaism long before Hillel or Jesus. It is a common-sense application of the Torah commandment to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18), which [Rabbi Akiba](#) described as the essence of the Torah.

The true difference between Judaism and Christianity lies in Hillel's last comment: Go and study it. Judaism is not content to leave love and brotherhood as a general ideal, to be fulfilled as each individual sees fit; Judaism spells out, in intricate detail, how we are meant to show that love.

Jewish law includes within it a blueprint for a just and ethical society, where no one takes from another or harms another or takes advantage of another, but everyone gives to one another and helps one another and protects one another. Again, these are not merely high ideals; the means for fulfilling these ideals are spelled out in the 613 commandments.

Everyone knows that the Ten Commandments command us not to murder. The full scope of Jewish law goes much farther in requiring us to protect our fellow man. We are commanded not to leave a condition that may cause harm, to construct our homes in ways that will prevent people from being harmed, and to help a person whose life is in danger. These commandments regarding the preservation of life are so important in Judaism that they override all of the ritual observances that people think are the most important part of Judaism.

We are commanded to help those in need, both in physical need and financial need. The Torah commands us to help a neighbor with his burden, and help load or unload his beast, to give money to the poor and needy, and not to turn them away empty handed. See [Tzedakah: Charity](#).

Jewish law forbids us from cheating another or taking advantage of another. Jewish law regarding business ethics and practices is extensive. It regulates conduct between a businessman and his customer (for example, not to use false weights and measures, not to do wrong in buying and selling, not to charge interest) and between a business man and his employee (to pay wages promptly, to allow a worker in the field to eat the produce he is harvesting, and not to take produce other than what you can eat from the

employer while harvesting).

Entire books have been written on the subject of Jewish laws against wronging another person in speech. We are commanded not to tell lies about a person, nor even uncomplimentary things that are true. We are commanded to speak the truth, to fulfill our promises, and not to deceive others. See [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#).

Contrary to what many people think, most of these laws regarding treatment of others apply not only to our treatment of our fellow Jews, but also to our treatment of gentiles, and in many cases even to our [treatment of animals](#). In fact, some of the laws instituted by the sages even extend kind treatment to inanimate objects. The bread on the [shabbat](#) table is covered during the [blessing](#) over the wine, so that it's "feelings" are not hurt by having the wine take precedence over it. Of course, we do not believe that bread actually has feelings, but this practice helps to instill an enormous sensitivity to others. If we can show concern for a loaf of bread, how can we fail to show concern for our fellow man?

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Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra

Level: Intermediate

When non-observant people talk about how difficult it is to observe [Jewish law](#), they usually mention the difficulty of observing [Shabbat](#) or keeping [kosher](#) or other similarly detailed rituals. Yet the laws that are most difficult to keep, that are most commonly violated even by observant Jews, are the laws regarding improper speech. This is a very important area of Jewish law; entire books have been written on the subject.

The Power of Speech

Judaism is intensely aware of the power of speech and of the harm that can be done through speech. The [rabbis](#) note that the universe itself was created through speech. Of the 43 sins enumerated in the [Al Chet](#) confession recited on [Yom Kippur](#), 11 are sins committed through speech. The [Talmud](#) tells that the tongue is an instrument so dangerous that it must be kept hidden from view, behind two protective walls (the mouth and teeth) to prevent its misuse.

The harm done by speech is even worse than the harm done by stealing or by cheating someone financially, because amends can be made for monetary harms, but the harm done by speech can never be repaired. For this reason, some sources indicate that there is no forgiveness for lashon ha-ra (disparaging speech). A [Chasidic](#) tale illustrates this point: A man went about the community telling malicious lies about the [rabbi](#). Later, he realized the wrong he had done, and began to feel remorse. He went to the rabbi and begged his forgiveness, saying he would do anything he could to make amends. The rabbi told the man, "Take a feather pillow, cut it open, and scatter the feathers to the winds." The man thought this was a strange request, but it was a simple enough task, and he did it gladly. When he returned to tell the rabbi that he had done it, the rabbi said, "Now, go and gather the feathers. Because you can no more make amends for the damage your words have done than you can recollect the feathers."

Speech has been compared to an arrow: once the words are released, like an arrow, they cannot be recalled, the harm they do cannot be stopped, and the harm they do cannot always be predicted, for words like arrows often go astray.

Tale-Bearing

There are two [mitzvot](#) in the [Torah](#) that specifically address improper speech: Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people (Lev. 19:16), and ye shall not wrong one another (Lev. 25:17, which according to tradition refers to wronging a person with speech).

Tale-bearing is, essentially, any gossip. The [Hebrew](#) word for tale-bearer is "rakheel" ([Resh-Kaf-Yod-Lamed](#)), which is related to a word meaning trader or merchant. The idea is that a tale-bearer is like a merchant, but he deals in information instead of goods. In our modern "Information Age," the idea of information as a product has become more clear than ever before, yet it is present even here in the Torah.

It is a violation of this [mitzvah](#) to say anything about another person, even it is true, even if it is not

negative, even if it is not secret, even if it hurts no one, even if the person himself would tell the same thing if asked! It is said that the telling of gossip leads to bloodshed, which is why the next words in the [Torah](#) are "you shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed." The story of Do'eig the Edomite (I Samuel Chs. 21-22) is often used to illustrate the harm that can be done by tale-bearing. Do'eig saw Achimelekh the [Kohein](#) give David bread and a sword, a completely innocent act intended to aid a leading member of Saul's court. Do'eig reported this to Saul. Do'eig's story was completely true, not negative, not secret, and Achimelekh would have told Saul exactly the same thing if asked (in fact, he did so later). Yet Saul misinterpreted this tale as proof that Achimelekh was supporting David in a rebellion, and proceeded to slaughter all but one of the [kohanim](#) at Nob.

The person who listens to gossip is even worse than the person who tells it, because no harm could be done by gossip if no one listened to it. It has been said that lashon ha-ra (disparaging speech) kills three: the person who speaks it, the person who hears it, and the person about whom it is told.

In [Jewish law](#), all things are considered to be secret unless a person specifically says otherwise. For this reason, you will note that in the [Torah](#), G-d constantly says to [Moses](#), "Speak to the Children of Israel, saying:" or "Speak to the Children of Israel and tell them:" If G-d did not specifically say this to Moses, Moses would be forbidden to repeat his words! Nor is there any time-limit on secrets. The [Talmud](#) tells the story of a student who revealed a secret after 22 years, and was immediately banished from the house of study!

The gravest of these sins of tale-bearing is lashon ha-ra (literally, "the evil tongue"), which involves discrediting a person or saying negative things about a person, even if those negative things are true. Some sources indicate that lashon ha-ra is equal in seriousness to murder, idol worship, and incest and adultery (the only three sins that you may not violate even to [save a life](#)).

It is forbidden to even imply or suggest negative things about a person. It is forbidden to say negative things about a person, even in jest. It is likewise considered a "shade of lashon ha-ra" to say *positive* things about a person in the presence of his enemies, because this will encourage his enemies to say negative things to contradict you!

One who tells disparaging things that are false is referred to as a motzi sheim ra, that is, one who spreads a bad report. This is considered the lowest of the low.

It is generally not a sin to repeat things that have been told "in the presence of three persons." The idea is that if it is told in the presence of three persons, it is already public knowledge, and no harm can come of retelling it. However, even in this case, you should not repeat it if you know you will be spreading the gossip further.

When Tale-Bearing is Allowed

There are a few exceptional circumstances when tale-bearing is allowed, or even required. Most notably, tale-bearing is required in a Jewish court of law, because it is a [mitzvah](#) to give testimony and that mitzvah overrides the general prohibition against tale-bearing. Thus, a person is required to reveal information, even if it is something that was explicitly told in confidence, even if it will harm a person, in a Jewish court of law.

A person is also required to reveal information to protect a person from immediate, serious harm. For example, if a person hears that others are plotting to kill someone, he is required to reveal this information. That is another reason why the commandment not to go about as a tale-bearer is juxtaposed with "you shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed."

In limited circumstances, one is also permitted to reveal information if someone is entering into a relationship that he would not enter if he knew certain information. For example, it may be permissible to tell a person that his prospective business partner is untrustworthy, or that a [prospective spouse](#) has a disease. This exception is subject to significant and complex limitations; however, if those limitations are satisfied, the person with the information is required to reveal it.

In all of these exceptions, a person is not permitted to reveal information if the same objective could be fulfilled without revealing information. For example, if you could talk a person out of [marrying](#) for reasons other than the disease, you may not reveal the disease.

Wronging a Person through Speech

Leviticus 25:17 says, "You shall not wrong one another." This has traditionally been interpreted as wronging a person with speech. It includes any statement that will embarrass, insult or deceive a person, or cause a person emotional pain or distress.

Here are some commonly-used examples of behavior that is forbidden by this [mitzvah](#):

- You may not call a person by a derogatory nickname, or by any other embarrassing name, even if he is used to it.
- You may not ask an uneducated person for an opinion on a scholarly matter (that would draw attention to his lack of knowledge or education).
- You may not ask a merchant how much he would sell something for if you have no intention of buying.
- You may not refer someone to another person for assistance when you know the other person cannot help (in other words, it's a violation of [Jewish law](#) to give someone the run-around!).
- You may not deceive a person, even if no harm is done by the deception; for example, you may not sell non-[kosher](#) meat to a non-Jew telling him that it is kosher, even though no harm is done to the non-Jew by this deception.
- You may not sell a person damaged goods without identifying the damage, even if the price you give is fair for the goods in their damaged condition.
- You may not offer a person a gift or invite a person to dinner if you know that the person will not accept.
- You may not compliment a person if you do not mean it.

Links for Further Reading

[Project Genesis](#) offers an online course on the [Ethics of Speech](#), studying the laws of proper speech as defined in the Sefer Chafetz Chayim.

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Kashrut: Jewish Dietary Laws

Level: Intermediate

Kashrut is the body of Jewish law dealing with what foods we can and cannot eat and how those foods must be prepared and eaten. "Kashrut" comes from the Hebrew [root](#) Kaf-Shin-Resh, meaning fit, proper or correct. It is the same root as the more commonly known word "kosher," which describes food that meets these standards. The word "kosher" can also be used, and often is used, to describe ritual objects that are made in accordance with Jewish law and are fit for ritual use.

There is no such thing as "kosher-style" food. Kosher is not a style of cooking. Chinese food can be kosher if it is prepared in accordance with Jewish law, and there are many fine kosher Chinese restaurants in Philadelphia and New York. Traditional Ashkenazic [Jewish foods](#) like [knishes](#), [bagels](#), [blintzes](#), and [matzah ball soup](#) can all be non-kosher if not prepared in accordance with Jewish law. When a restaurant calls itself "kosher-style," it usually means that the restaurant serves these traditional Jewish foods, and it almost invariably means that the food is not actually kosher.

Food that is not kosher is commonly referred to as treyf (lit. torn, from the commandment not to eat animals that have been torn by other animals).

Why Do We Observe the Laws of Kashrut?

Many modern Jews think that the laws of kashrut are simply primitive health regulations that have become obsolete with modern methods of food preparation. There is no question that some of the dietary laws have some beneficial health effects. For example, the laws regarding kosher slaughter are so sanitary that kosher butchers and slaughterhouses have been exempted from many USDA regulations.

However, health is not the only reason for Jewish dietary laws. Many of the laws of kashrut have no known connection with health. To the best of our modern scientific knowledge, there is no reason why camel or rabbit meat (both treyf) is any less healthy than cow or goat meat. In addition, some of the health benefits to be derived from kashrut were not made obsolete by the refrigerator. For example, there is some evidence that eating meat and dairy together interferes with digestion, and no modern food preparation technique reproduces the health benefit of the kosher law of eating them separately.

The short answer to why we observe these laws is: because the [Torah](#) says so. The Torah does not specify any reason for these laws, and for a Torah-observant, traditional Jew, there is no need for any other reason. Some have suggested that the laws of kashrut fall into the category of "chukkim," laws for which there is no reason. We show our obedience to [G-d](#) by following these laws even though we do not know the reason. Others, however, have tried to ascertain G-d's reason for imposing these laws.

In his book "To Be a Jew" (an excellent resource on traditional Judaism), Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin suggests that the dietary laws are designed as a call to holiness. The ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, pure and defiled, the sacred and the profane, is very important in Judaism. Imposing rules on what you can and cannot eat ingrains that kind of self control. In addition, it elevates the simple act of eating into a religious ritual. The Jewish dinner table is often compared to the [Temple](#) altar in [rabbinic literature](#).

How Difficult is it to Keep Kosher?

People who do not keep kosher often tell me how difficult it is. Actually, keeping kosher is not particularly difficult in and of itself; what makes it difficult to keep kosher is the fact that the rest of the world does not do so.

As we shall see below, the basic underlying rules are fairly simple. If you buy your meat at a kosher butcher and buy only kosher certified products at the market, the only thing you need to think about is the separation of meat and dairy.

Keeping kosher only becomes difficult when you try to eat in a non-kosher restaurant, or at the home of a person who does not keep kosher. In those situations, your lack of knowledge about your host's ingredients and the food preparation techniques make it very difficult to keep kosher. Some commentators have pointed out, however, that this may well have been part of what G-d had in mind: to make it more difficult for us to socialize with those who do not share our religion.

General Rules

Although the details of kashrut are extensive, the laws all derive from a few fairly simple, straightforward rules:

1. Certain animals may not be eaten at all. This restriction includes the flesh, organs, eggs and milk of the forbidden animals.
2. Of the animals that may be eaten, the birds and mammals must be killed in accordance with Jewish law.
3. All blood must be drained from the meat or broiled out of it before it is eaten.
4. Certain parts of permitted animals may not be eaten.
5. Meat (the flesh of birds and mammals) cannot be eaten with dairy. Fish, eggs, fruits, vegetables and grains can be eaten with either meat or dairy. (According to some views, fish may not be eaten with meat).
6. Utensils that have come into contact with meat may not be used with dairy, and vice versa. Utensils that have come into contact with non-kosher food may not be used with kosher food. This applies only where the contact occurred while the food was hot.
7. Grape products made by non-Jews may not be eaten.

The Details

Animals that may not be eaten

Of the "beasts of the earth" (which basically refers to land mammals with the exception of swarming rodents), you may eat any animal that has cloven hooves and chews its cud. Lev. 11:3; Deut. 14:6. Any land mammal that does not have both of these qualities is forbidden. The [Torah](#) specifies that the camel, the rock badger, the hare and the pig are not kosher because each lacks one of these two qualifications. Sheep, cattle, goats and deer are kosher.

Of the things that are in the waters, you may eat anything that has fins and scales. Lev. 11:9; Deut. 14:9.

Thus, shellfish such as lobsters, oysters, shrimp, clams and crabs are all forbidden. Fish like tuna, carp, salmon and herring are all permitted.

For birds, the criteria is less clear. The [Torah](#) lists forbidden birds (Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:11-18), but does not specify why these particular birds are forbidden. All of the birds on the list are birds of prey or scavengers, thus the [rabbis](#) inferred that this was the basis for the distinction. Other birds are permitted, such as chicken, geese, ducks and turkeys.

Of the "winged swarming things" (winged insects), a few are specifically permitted (Lev. 11:22), but the Sages are no longer certain which ones they are, so all have been forbidden.

Rodents, reptiles, amphibians, and insects (except as mentioned above) are all forbidden. Lev. 11:29-30, 42-43.

Some authorities require a post-mortem examination of the lungs of cattle, to determine whether the lungs are free from adhesions. If the lungs are free from such adhesions, the animal is deemed "glatt" (that is, "smooth"). In certain circumstances, an animal can be kosher without being glatt; however, the stringency of keeping "glatt kosher" has become increasingly common in recent years.

As mentioned above, any product derived from these forbidden animals, such as their milk, eggs, fat, or organs, also cannot be eaten. Rennet, an enzyme used to harden cheese, is often obtained from non-kosher animals, thus kosher hard cheese can be difficult to find.

Kosher slaughtering

The mammals and birds that may be eaten must be slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law. (Deut. 12:21). We may not eat animals that died of natural causes (Deut. 14:21) or that were killed by other animals. In addition, the animal must have no disease or flaws in the organs at the time of slaughter. These restrictions do not apply to fish; only to the flocks and herds (Num. 11:22).

Ritual slaughter is known as shechitah, and the person who performs the slaughter is called a shochet, both from the Hebrew [root](#) Shin-Chet-Tav, meaning to destroy or kill. The method of slaughter is a quick, deep stroke across the throat with a perfectly sharp blade with no nicks or unevenness. This method is painless, causes unconsciousness within two seconds, and is widely recognized as the most humane method of slaughter possible.

Another advantage of shechitah is that ensures rapid, complete draining of the blood, which is also necessary to render the meat kosher.

The shochet is not simply a butcher; he must be a pious man, well-trained in Jewish law, particularly as it relates to kashrut. In smaller, more remote communities, the [rabbi](#) and the shochet were often the same person.

Draining of Blood

The [Torah](#) prohibits consumption of blood. Lev. 7:26-27; Lev. 17:10-14. This is the only dietary law that has a reason specified in Torah: we do not eat blood because the life of the animal is contained in the blood. This applies only to the blood of birds and mammals, not to fish blood. Thus, it is necessary to

remove all blood from the flesh of kosher animals.

The first step in this process occurs at the time of slaughter. As discussed above, shechitah allows for rapid draining of most of the blood.

The remaining blood must be removed, either by broiling or soaking and salting. Liver may only be kashered by the broiling method, because it has so much blood in it and such complex blood vessels. This final process must be completed within 72 hours after slaughter, and before the meat is frozen or ground. Most butchers and all frozen food vendors take care of the soaking and salting for you, but you should always check this when you are buying someplace you are unfamiliar with.

An egg that contains a blood spot may not be eaten. This isn't very common, but I find them once in a while. It is a good idea to break an egg into a container and check it before you put it into a heated pan, because if you put a blood-stained egg into a heated pan, the pan becomes non-kosher.

Forbidden Fats and Nerves

The sciatic nerve and its adjoining blood vessels may not be eaten. The process of removing this nerve is time consuming and not cost-effective, so most American slaughterers simply sell the hind quarters to non-kosher butchers.

A certain kind of fat, known as chelev, which surrounds the vital organs and the liver, may not be eaten. Kosher butchers remove this. Modern scientists have found biochemical differences between this type of fat and the permissible fat around the muscles and under the skin.

Separation of Meat and Dairy

On three separate occasions, the [Torah](#) tells us not to "boil a kid in its mother's milk." (Ex. 23:19; Ex. 34:26; Deut. 14:21). The [Oral Torah](#) explains that this passage prohibits eating meat and dairy together. The [rabbi](#)s extended this prohibition to include not eating milk and poultry together. In addition, the [Talmud](#) prohibits cooking meat and fish together or serving them on the same plates, because it is considered to be unhealthy. It is, however, permissible to eat fish and dairy together, and it is quite common. It is also permissible to eat dairy and eggs together.

This separation includes not only the foods themselves, but the utensils, pots and pans with which they are cooked, the plates and flatware from which they are eaten, the dishwashers or dishpans in which they are cleaned, and the towels on which they are dried. A kosher household will have at least two sets of pots, pans and dishes: one for meat and one for dairy. See [Utensils](#) below for more details.

One must wait a significant amount of time between eating meat and dairy. Opinions differ, and vary from three to six hours. This is because fatty residues and meat particles tend to cling to the mouth. From dairy to meat, however, one need only rinse one's mouth and eat a neutral solid like bread, unless the dairy product in question is also of a type that tends to stick in the mouth.

The Yiddish words fleishig (meat), milchig (dairy) and pareve (neutral) are commonly used to describe food or utensils that fall into one of those categories.

Note that even the smallest quantity of dairy (or meat) in something renders it entirely dairy (or meat) for

purposes of kashrut. For example, most margarines are dairy for kosher purposes, because they contain a small quantity of whey or other dairy products to give it a dairy-like taste. Animal fat is considered meat for purposes of kashrut. You should read the ingredients very carefully, even if the product is kosher-certified.

Utensils

Utensils (pots, pans, plates, flatware, etc., etc.) must also be kosher. A utensil picks up the kosher "status" (meat, dairy, pareve, or treyf) of the food that is cooked in it or eaten off of it, and transmits that status back to the next food that is cooked in it or eaten off of it. Thus, if you cook chicken soup in a saucepan, the pan becomes meat. If you thereafter use the same saucepan to heat up some warm milk, the fleishig status of the pan is transmitted to the milk, and the milchig status of the milk is transmitted to the pan, making both the pan and the milk a forbidden mixture.

Kosher status can be transmitted from the food to the utensil or from the utensil to the food only in the presence of heat, thus if you are eating cold food in a non-kosher establishment, the condition of the plates is not an issue. Likewise, you could use the same knife to slice cold cuts and cheese, as long as you clean it in between, but this is not really a recommended procedure, because it increases the likelihood of mistakes.

Stove tops and sinks routinely become non-kosher utensils, because they routinely come in contact with both meat and dairy in the presence of heat. It is necessary, therefore, to use dishpans when cleaning dishes (don't soak them directly in the sink) and to use separate spoon rests and trivets when putting things down on the stove top.

Dishwashers are a kashrut problem. If you are going to use a dishwasher in a kosher home, you either need to have separate dish racks or you need to run the dishwasher in between meat and dairy loads.

You should use separate towels and pot holders for meat and dairy. Routine laundering kashers such items, so you can simply launder them between using them for meat and dairy.

Certain kinds of utensils can be "kashered" if you make a mistake and use it with both meat and dairy. Consult a [rabbi](#) for guidance if this situation occurs.

Grape Products

The restrictions on grape products derive from the laws against using products of idolatry. Wine was commonly used in the rituals of all ancient religions, and wine was routinely sanctified for pagan purposes while it was being processed. For this reason, use of wines and other grape products made by non-Jews was prohibited. (Whole grapes are not a problem, nor are whole grapes in fruit cocktail).

For the most part, this rule only affects wine and grape juice. This becomes a concern with many fruit drinks or fruit-flavored drinks, which are often sweetened with grape juice. You may also notice that it is virtually impossible to find kosher baking powder, because baking powder is made with cream of tartar, a by-product of wine making.

Kashrut Certification

The task of keeping kosher is greatly simplified by widespread kashrut certification. Approximately 3/4 of all prepackaged foods have some kind of kosher certification, and most major brands have reliable Orthodox certification.

The symbols at right are all widely-accepted kashrut certifications commonly found on products throughout the United States. Click the symbols to visit the websites of these organizations. With a little practice, it is very easy to spot these marks on food labels, usually near the product name, occasionally near the list of ingredients. There are many other certifications available, of varying degrees of strictness.



The most controversial certification is the K, a plain letter K found on products asserted to be kosher. All other kosher certification marks are trademarked and cannot be used without the permission of the certifying organization. The certifying organization stands behind the kashrut of the product. But you cannot trademark a letter of the alphabet, so any manufacturer can put a K on a product. For example, Jell-O brand gelatin puts a K on its product, even though every reliable Orthodox authority agrees that Jell-O is not kosher.

It is becoming increasingly common for kosher certifying organizations to indicate whether the product is fleishig, milchig or pareve. If the product is dairy, it will frequently have a D or the word Dairy next to the kashrut symbol. If it is meat, the word Meat or an M may appear near the symbol. If it is pareve, the word Pareve (or Parev) may appear near the symbol (Not a P! That means kosher for [Passover](#)!). If no such clarification appears, you should read the ingredient list carefully to determine whether the product is meat, dairy or pareve.

Kosher Links

You can find more information about kashrut at the websites of major kosher certification organizations.

The [Orthodox Union](#), which is responsible for "OU" certification, has some excellent information on its website, including a kosher primer, an explanation of their kosher policy, a philosophical discussion about "thinking kosher" and a questions and answers section. (Please note: the "Judaism 101" listed on some of their pages is not this website and has no connection with this website).

The [Star-K Kosher Certification](#) organization also has an excellent website. The wonderful thing about Star-K is, they give you an incredible amount of detail about the research that they put into determining whether a product is kosher. They tell you what products may be used without kosher certification, and they explain why such products can or cannot be used without kosher certification, giving complete detail about the research that went into making their determination. It also has articles about kashering appliances, and other useful information.

[KosherQuest](#) has a searchable database of kosher products as well as an extensive list of reliable kosher symbols and other interesting things.

Kosher Sex



Level: Intermediate

Note: This page addresses issues of Jewish law that may not be appropriate for younger readers. In places, it discusses sexual behavior in plain and frank terms. Please exercise appropriate discretion.

Jewish Attitudes Towards Sexuality

In [Jewish law](#), sex is not considered shameful, sinful or obscene. Sex is not a necessary evil for the sole purpose of procreation. Although sexual desire comes from the [yetzer ra](#) (the evil impulse), it is no more evil than hunger or thirst, which also come from the yetzer ra. Like hunger, thirst or other basic instincts, sexual desire must be controlled and channeled, satisfied at the proper time, place and manner. But when sexual desire is satisfied between a husband and wife at the proper time, out of mutual love and desire, sex is a [mitzvah](#).

Sex is permissible only within the context of a [marriage](#). In Judaism, sex is not merely a way of experiencing physical pleasure. It is an act of immense significance, which requires commitment and responsibility. The requirement of marriage before sex ensures that sense commitment and responsibility. Jewish law also forbids sexual contact short of intercourse outside of the context of marriage, recognizing that such contact will inevitably lead to intercourse.

The primary purpose of sex is to reinforce the loving marital bond between husband and wife. The first and foremost purpose of [marriage](#) is companionship, and sexual relations play an important role. Procreation is also a reason for sex, but it is not the only reason. Sex between husband and wife is permitted (even recommended) at times when conception is impossible, such as when the woman is pregnant, after menopause, or when the woman is using a permissible form of [contraception](#).

In the [Torah](#), the word used for sex between husband and wife comes from the [root](#) Dalet-Ayin-Tav, meaning "to know," which vividly illustrates that proper Jewish sexuality involves both the heart and mind, not merely the body.

Nevertheless, Judaism does not ignore the physical component of sexuality. The need for physical compatibility between husband and wife is recognized in Jewish law. A Jewish couple must meet at least once before the [marriage](#), and if either prospective spouse finds the other physically repulsive, the marriage is forbidden.

Sex should only be experienced in a time of joy. Sex for selfish personal satisfaction, without regard for the partner's pleasure, is wrong and evil. A man may never force his wife to have sex. A couple may not have sexual relations while drunk or quarreling. Sex may never be used as a weapon against a spouse, either by depriving the spouse of sex or by compelling it. It is a serious offense to use sex (or lack thereof) to punish or manipulate a spouse.

Sex is the woman's right, not the man's. A man has a duty to give his wife sex regularly and to ensure that sex is pleasurable for her. He is also obligated to watch for signs that his wife wants sex, and to offer it to her without her asking for it. The woman's right to sexual intercourse is referred to as onah, and it is one of a wife's three basic rights (the others are food and clothing), which a husband may not reduce. The

[Talmud](#) specifies both the quantity and quality of sex that a man must give his wife. It specifies the frequency of sexual obligation based on the husband's occupation, although this obligation can be modified in the [ketubah](#) (marriage contract). A man may not take a vow to abstain from sex for an extended period of time, and may not take a journey for an extended period of time, because that would deprive his wife of sexual relations. In addition, a husband's consistent refusal to engage in sexual relations is grounds for compelling a man to [divorce](#) his wife, even if the couple has already fulfilled the [halakhic](#) obligation to procreate.

Although sex is the woman's right, she does not have absolute discretion to withhold it from her husband. A woman may not withhold sex from her husband as a form of punishment, and if she does, the husband may divorce her without paying the substantial divorce settlement provided for in the [ketubah](#).

Although some sources take a more narrow view, the general view of [halakhah](#) is that any sexual act that does not involve sh'chatat zerah (destruction of seed, that is, ejaculation outside the vagina) is permissible. As one passage in the [Talmud](#) states, "a man may do whatever he pleases with his wife." (Nedarim 20b) In fact, there are passages in the Talmud that encourage foreplay to arouse the woman. (Nedarim 20a).

Niddah: The Laws of Separation

One of the most mysterious areas of Jewish sexual practices is the law of niddah, separation of husband and wife during the woman's menstrual period. These laws are also known as taharat ha-mishpachah, family purity. Few people outside of the [Orthodox](#) community are even aware that these laws exist, which is unfortunate, because these laws provide many undeniable benefits. The laws of niddah are not deliberately kept secret; they are simply unknown because most non-Orthodox Jews do not continue their religious education beyond [bar mitzvah](#), and these laws address subjects that are not really suitable for discussion with children under the age of 13.

According to the [Torah](#), a man is forbidden from having sexual intercourse with a niddah, that is, a menstruating woman. The law of niddah is the only law of ritual purity that continues to be observed to day. At one time, a large portion of Jewish law revolved around questions of ritual purity and impurity. All of the other laws had significance in the time of the [Temple](#), but are not applicable today.

The time of separation begins at the first sign of blood and ends in the evening of the woman's seventh "clean day." This separation lasts a minimum of 12 days. The [rabbis](#) broadened this prohibition, maintaining that a man may not even touch his wife or sleep in the same bed as her during this time. [Weddings](#) must be scheduled carefully, so that the woman is not in a state of niddah on her wedding night.

At the end of the period of niddah, as soon as possible after nightfall after the seventh clean day, the woman must immerse herself in a kosher mikvah, a ritual pool. The mikvah was traditionally used to cleanse a person of various forms of ritual impurity. Today, it is used almost exclusively for this purpose and as part of the ritual of [conversion](#). It is important to note that the purpose of the mikvah is solely ritual purification, not physical cleanliness; in fact, immersion in the mikvah is not valid unless the woman is thoroughly bathed before immersion. The mikvah is such an important part of traditional Jewish ritual life that a new community will build a mikvah before they build a [synagogue](#).

The [Torah](#) does not specify the reason for the laws of niddah, but this period of abstention has both physical and psychological benefits.

The fertility benefits of this practice are obvious and undeniable. In fact, it is remarkable how closely these laws parallel the advice given by medical professionals today. When couples are having trouble conceiving, modern medical professionals routinely advise them to abstain from sex during the two weeks around a woman's period (to increase the man's sperm count at a time when conception is not possible), and to have sex on alternate nights during the remaining two weeks. When you combine this basic physical benefit with the psychological benefit of believing that you are fulfilling [G-d's](#) will, it is absolutely shocking that more couples with fertility problems do not attempt this practice. The rejection of this practice by the liberal movements of Judaism is not a matter of "informed choice," but simply a matter of ignorance or blind prejudice.

In addition, women who have sexual intercourse during their menstrual period are more vulnerable to a variety of vaginal infections, as well as increased risk of cervical cancer.

But the benefits that the [rabbis](#) have always emphasized are the psychological ones, not the physical ones. The rabbis noted that a two-week period of abstention every month forces a couple to build a non-sexual bond as well as a sexual one. It helps to build the couple's desire for one another, making intercourse in the remaining two weeks more special. It also gives both partners a chance to rest, without feeling sexually inadequate. They also emphasized the value of self-discipline in a drive as fundamental as the sexual drive.

Birth Control

In principle, birth control is permitted, so long as the couple is committed to eventually fulfilling the [mitzvah](#) to be fruitful and multiply (which, at a minimum, consists of having two children, one of each gender). The issue in birth control is not whether it is permitted, but what method is permitted, and under what circumstances.

Birth control is rather clearly permitted in circumstances where pregnancy would pose a medical risk to the mother or her other children. For example, the [Talmud](#) recognizes the use of birth control by very young women, pregnant women or nursing women. However, there is some variance of opinion as to what other circumstances might permit birth control. If this is an issue for you, you should consult a competent rabbinic authority.

It is well-established that methods that destroy the seed or block the passage of the seed are not permitted, thus condoms are not permitted for birth control. However, the pill is well-recognized as an acceptable form of birth control under [Jewish law](#). I have also heard some say that a condom would be permitted under Jewish law to prevent the transmission of AIDS or similar diseases, because preserving the life of the uninfected spouse takes priority; however, I am not certain how authoritative this view is. If this is an issue for you, you should consult a competent rabbinic authority.

Abortion

[Jewish law](#) not only permits, but in some circumstances *requires* abortion. Where the mother's life is in jeopardy because of the unborn child, abortion is mandatory.

An unborn child has the status of "potential human life" until the majority of the body has emerged from the mother. Potential human life is valuable, and may not be terminated casually, but it does not have as much value as a life in existence. The [Talmud](#) makes no bones about this: it says quite bluntly that if the fetus threatens the life of the mother, you cut it up within her body and remove it limb by limb if necessary, because its life is not as valuable as hers. But once the greater part of the body has emerged, you cannot take its life to save the mother's, because you cannot choose between one human life and another.

Homosexuality

Sexual relations between men are clearly forbidden by the [Torah](#). (Lev. 18:22). Such acts are condemned in the strongest possible terms, as abhorrent. The only other sexual sin that is described in such strong terms is the sin of remarrying a woman you had divorced after she had been married to another man. (See Deut. 24:4). The sin of sexual relations between men is punishable by death (Lev. 20:13), as are the sins of adultery and incest.

It is important to note, however, that it is homosexual *acts* that are forbidden, not homosexual *orientation*. Judaism focuses on a person's actions rather than a person's desires. A man's desire to have sex with another man is not a sin, so long as he does not act upon that desire. In fact, it could be said that a man who feels such desires but does not act upon them is worthy of more merit in that regard than a man who does not feel such desires at all, just as one who refrains from pork because it is forbidden deserves more merit than one who refrains from pork because he doesn't like the taste.

I have seen some modern Orthodox sources suggest that if homosexuality is truly something hardwired in the brain, as most gay activists suggest, then a man who acts upon that desire is not morally responsible for his actions, but I am not sure how wide-spread that opinion is. Essentially, it is equivalent to saying that a kleptomaniac would not be held morally responsible for stealing.

Interestingly, female homosexual relations are not forbidden by the Torah. There is very little discussion of female homosexuality in the [Talmud](#). The few sources that mention lesbian relations say that they do not disqualify a woman from certain privileges of the [priesthood](#), because it is "merely licentiousness." There is a surprising lack of discussion of such issues as whether lesbianism would be grounds for [divorcing](#) a woman without her consent or without [ketubah](#). [Rambam](#) asserted that lesbian practices are forbidden because it was a "practice of Egypt" and because it constituted rebelliousness.

Promiscuity and Pre-Marital Sex

Under revision -- be back soon

Masturbation

Jewish law clearly prohibits male masturbation. This law is derived from the story of Onan (Gen. 38:8-10), who practiced coitus interruptus as a means of birth control to avoid fathering a child for his deceased brother. [G-d](#) killed Onan for this sin. Although Onan's act was not truly masturbation, Jewish law takes a very broad view of the acts prohibited by this passage, and forbids any act of ha-sh'cha'tat zerah (destruction of the seed), that is, ejaculation outside of the vagina. In fact, the prohibition is so strict that one passage in the [Talmud](#) states, "in the case of a man, the hand that reaches below the navel should be chopped off." (Niddah 13a)

The issue is somewhat less clear for women. Obviously, spilling the seed is not going to happen in female masturbation, and there is no explicit [Torah](#) prohibition against female masturbation.

Nevertheless, Judaism generally frowns upon female masturbation as "impure thoughts."

Suggestions for Further Reading

Rachel Biale's [Women and Jewish Law](#) contains many sections dealing with sexual issues, focusing on the woman's perspective. It addresses the laws of marital relations, sexuality outside of marriage, procreation and contraception, abortion and rape.



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Tzedakah: Charity



Level: Intermediate

Once in a comedy message board, we were listing oxymorons like "jumbo shrimp," "military intelligence" and "athletic scholarship." Somebody posted "Jewish charity" on the list. Normally, I have a pretty good sense of humor when it comes to jokes about cheap Jews, but that one bothered me, because charity is a fundamental part of the Jewish way of life.

Traditional Jews give at least ten percent of their income to charity. Traditional Jewish homes commonly have a pushke, a box for collecting coins for the poor, and coins are routinely placed in the box. Jewish youths are continually going from door to door collecting for various worthy causes. In many ways, charitable donation has taken the place of [animal sacrifice](#) in Jewish life: giving to charity is an almost instinctive Jewish response to express thanks to [G-d](#), to ask forgiveness from G-d, or to request a favor from G-d. According to Jewish tradition, the spiritual benefit of giving to the poor is so great that a beggar actually does the giver a favor by giving a person the opportunity to perform tzedakah.

The Meaning of "Tzedakah"

"Tzedakah" is the Hebrew word for the acts that we call "charity" in English: giving aid, assistance and money to the poor and needy or to other worthy causes. However, the nature of tzedakah is very different from the idea of charity. The word "charity" suggests benevolence and generosity, a magnanimous act by the wealthy and powerful for the benefit of the poor and needy. The word "tzedakah" is derived from the Hebrew [root](#) Tzade-Dalet-Qof, meaning righteousness, justice or fairness. In Judaism, giving to the poor is not viewed as a generous, magnanimous act; it is simply an act of justice and righteousness, the performance of a duty, giving the poor their due.

The Obligation of Tzedakah

Giving to the poor is an obligation in Judaism, a duty that cannot be forsaken even by those who are themselves in need. Some sages have said that tzedakah is the highest of all commandments, equal to all of them combined, and that a person who does not perform tzedakah is equivalent to an idol worshipper. Tzedakah is one of the three acts that gain us forgiveness from our sins. The High Holiday liturgy states that G-d has inscribed a judgment against all who have sinned, but teshuvah (repentance), [tefilah](#) (prayer) and tzedakah can reverse the decree. See [Days of Awe](#).

According to Jewish law, we are required to give one-tenth of our income to the poor. This is generally interpreted as one-tenth of our net income after payment of taxes. Those who are dependent on public assistance or living on the edge of subsistence may give less; no person should give so much that he would become a public burden.

The obligation to perform tzedakah can be fulfilled by giving money to the poor, to health care institutions, to [synagogues](#) or to educational institutions. It can also be fulfilled by supporting your children beyond the age when you are legally required to, or supporting your parents in their old age. The obligation includes giving to both Jews and gentiles; contrary to popular belief, Jews do not just "take

care of our own."

Judaism acknowledges that many people who ask for charity have no genuine need. In fact, the [Talmud](#) suggests that this is a good thing: if all people who asked for charity were in genuine need, we would be subject to punishment (from G-d) for refusing anyone who asked. The existence of frauds diminishes our liability for failing to give to all who ask, because we have some legitimate basis for doubting the beggar's sincerity. It is permissible to investigate the legitimacy of a charity before donating to it.

We have an obligation to avoid becoming in need of tzedakah. A person should take any work that is available, even if he thinks it is beneath his dignity, to avoid becoming a public charge.

However, if a person is truly in need and has no way to obtain money on his own he should not feel embarrassed to accept tzedakah. No person should feel too proud to take money from others. In fact, it is considered a transgression to refuse tzedakah. One source says that to make yourself suffer by refusing to accept tzedakah is equivalent to shedding your own blood.

Levels of Tzedakah

Certain kinds of tzedakah are considered more meritorious than others. The [Talmud](#) describes these different levels of tzedakah, and [Rambam](#) organized them into a list. The levels of charity, from the least meritorious to the most meritorious, are:

1. Giving begrudgingly
2. Giving less than you should, but giving it cheerfully.
3. Giving after being asked
4. Giving before being asked
5. Giving when you do not know the recipient's identity, but the recipient knows your identity
6. Giving when you know the recipient's identity, but the recipient doesn't know your identity
7. Giving when neither party knows the other's identity
8. Enabling the recipient to become self-reliant

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Treatment of Animals

Level: Intermediate

"Herod also got together a great quantity of wild beasts, and of lions in very great abundance, and of such other beasts as were either of uncommon strength or of such a sort as were rarely seen. These were trained either to fight one with another, or men who were condemned to death were to fight with them. And truly foreigners were greatly surprised and delighted at the vast expenses of the shows, and at the great danger of the spectacles, but to the Jews it was a palpable breaking up of those customs for which they had so great a veneration." -Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews.

Prohibition Against Cruelty to Animals

Judaism places great stress on proper treatment of animals. Unnecessary cruelty to animals is strictly forbidden, and in many cases, animals are accorded the same sensitivity as human beings. This concern for the welfare of animals is unusual in Western civilization. Most civilized nations did not accept this principle until quite recently; cruelty to animals was not outlawed until the 1800s.

Judaism expresses no definitive opinion as to whether animals are capable of experiencing physical or psychological pain as humans do; however, Judaism has always recognized the link between the way a person treats animals and the way a person treats human beings. A person who is cruel to a defenseless animal will undoubtedly be cruel to defenseless people, and a person who cares for the lowest of creatures will certainly care for his fellow man.

[Jacob](#), [Moses](#) and David were all shepherds, people who cared for animals. The [Talmud](#) specifically states that Moses was chosen for his mission because of his skill in caring for animals. "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, said 'Since you are merciful to the flock of a human being, you shall be the shepherd of My flock, Israel.'" Likewise [Rebecca](#) was chosen as a wife for [Isaac](#) because of her kindness to animals. When [Abraham](#)'s servant asked for water for himself, she volunteered to water his camels as well, and thereby proved herself a worthy wife.

On the other hand, the two hunters in the Bible, Nimrod and [Esau](#), are both depicted as villains. A great [rabbi](#) who was insensitive to the fear of a calf being led to slaughter was punished with years of pain.

In the [Torah](#), humanity is given dominion over animals, and has the right to use animals for legitimate needs. Animal flesh can be consumed for food; animal skins can be used for clothing; the Torah itself must be written on parchment, that is, animal hides.

However, we are permitted to use animals in this way only when there is a genuine, legitimate need, and we must do so in the manner that causes the animal the least suffering. [Kosher slaughtering](#) is designed to be as fast and painless as possible, and if anything occurs that might cause pain (such as a nick in the slaughtering knife or a delay in the cutting), the flesh may not be consumed. Hunting for sport is strictly prohibited, and hunting and trapping for legitimate needs is permissible only when it is done in the least painful way possible.

The laws regarding treatment of animals are referred to as Tzar Baalei Chayim, prevention of cruelty to animals.

Under [Jewish law](#), animals have some of the same rights as humans do. Animals rest on [Shabbat](#), as humans do. We are forbidden to muzzle an ox while it is working in the field, just as we must allow human workers to eat from the produce they are harvesting.

Several commandments demonstrate concern for the physical or psychological suffering of animals. We may not plow a field using animals of different species, because this would be a hardship to the animals. We are required to relieve an animal of its burden, even if we do not know its owner, or even if it is ownerless. We are not permitted to kill an animal in the same day as its young, and are specifically commanded to send away a mother bird when taking the eggs, because of the psychological distress this would cause the animal. In fact, the Torah specifically says that a person who sends away the mother bird will be rewarded with long life, precisely the same reward that is given for honoring mother and father. This should give some indication of the importance of this law.

We are permitted to violate [Shabbat](#) to some extent to rescue an animal in pain or at risk of death.

In the [Talmud](#), the [rabbis](#) further dictated that a person may not purchase an animal unless he has made provisions to feed it, and a person must feed his animals before he feeds himself.

Pets

Jewish law does not prohibit keeping pets, and indeed many observant Jews have dogs, cats or other household pets.

As with all animals, we are required to feed our pets before ourselves, and make arrangements for feeding our pets before we obtain them. Also, like all animals, household pets are entitled to Sabbath rest, thus you cannot have your dog retrieve the paper for you on [Shabbat](#), etc.

Pets are considered to be *muktzeh*, within the category of objects that cannot be handled on Shabbat. I haven't been able to get a clear idea of what exactly is and is not permitted with an animal on Shabbat. I have seen several sources say that walking a dog is permitted, but if an animal runs away on Shabbat, it is not permitted to trap the animal.

It is permissible to feed non-[kosher](#) food to pets, as long as you do not consume it yourself. This falls under the general rule that it is permissible to use products of non-kosher animals as long as you don't eat them; for example, it is permissible to use a toothpaste that contains non-kosher ingredients as long as the toothpaste is not fit for human consumption. However, it is not permissible to derive any benefit from a mixture of meat and dairy; therefore, any food you feed your pet cannot contain both meat and dairy. Similarly, during [Pesach](#), it is impermissible to have any chametz (leavened grain products) in your home, or to derive any benefit from chametz, thus you cannot use chametz to feed your pets. You must either feed your pet something that contains no chametz (such as 100% beef dog food, kosher for Passover table scraps, or matzah meal to feed fish or rodents) or temporarily sell the pets to a non-Jew, as you temporarily sell your pots and pans to a non-Jew during the holiday.

It is a violation of [Jewish law](#) to neuter a pet. The [Torah](#) prohibits castrating males of any species. Although this law does not apply to neutering female pets, neutering of females is prohibited by general laws relating to unnecessary cruelty to animals.

It is a violation of the general prohibition against cruelty to animals to have your pet physically altered in

any way without a genuine, legitimate need. For example, declawing cats and docking the ears or tails of dogs are forbidden.

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Qorbanot: Sacrifices and Offerings

Level: Advanced

For a long time I was reluctant to write a page on the subject of qorbanot, because it is a subject with little practical application today. However, I felt I had to address these issues, because it is one of the two subjects I receive the most questions about. Interestingly, the questions I receive on this subject are invariably from non-Jews. Most Jews don't seem to have much interest in ancient practices no longer observed.

I will begin by answering the questions I am most commonly asked on these subjects, and then proceed to a more comprehensive discussion of the subject of qorbanot.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do Jews offer sacrifices today?

No. To my knowledge, no Jews today offer any kind of animal sacrifice or offerings, nor have Jews offered sacrifices since the second century [C.E.](#) I have occasionally heard rumors that there are [Orthodox rabbis](#) in [Israel](#) who practice the techniques of ritual sacrifice, so that the knowledge will not be lost, but I do not know if these stories are reliable, and even if they are, this is not quite the same thing as offering a sacrifice.

When did Jews stop offering sacrifices, and why?

For the most part, the practice of sacrifice stopped in the year 70 [C.E.](#), when the Roman army destroyed the [Temple](#) in Jerusalem, the place where sacrifices were offered. The practice was briefly resumed during the Jewish War of 132-135 C.E., but was ended permanently after that war was lost. There were also a few communities that continued sacrifices for a while after that time.

We stopped offering sacrifices because we do not have a proper place to offer them. The [Torah](#) specifically commands us not to offer sacrifices wherever we feel like it; we are only permitted to offer sacrifices in the place that [G-d](#) has chosen for that purpose. Deut. 12:13-14. It would be a sin to offer sacrifices in any other place, akin to stealing candles and wine to observe [Shabbat](#).

The last place appointed by G-d for this purpose was the Temple in Jerusalem, but the Temple has been destroyed and a mosque has been erected in the place where it stood. Until G-d provides us with another place, we cannot offer sacrifices. There was at one time an opinion that in the absence of an assigned place, we could offer sacrifices anywhere. Based on that opinion, certain communities made their own sacrificial places. However, the majority ultimately ruled against this practice, and all sacrifice ceased.

[Orthodox](#) Jews believe that when the [messiah](#) comes, a place will be provided for sacrificial purposes.

Do Jews want to resume sacrifices?

[Orthodox](#) Jews do. There are several places in our [daily prayer services](#) where we pray for the restoration of the [Temple](#) and the resumption of its rituals, including the rituals of sacrifice.

Did the kohanim (priests) or anybody else eat the animals offered?

Yes! Most types of offerings could be eaten. Certain types were eaten by the [kohanim](#) only, or by a specific kohein. Other types were eaten by the person offering the sacrifice and his family. The types of offerings and who was permitted to eat them will be discussed further [below](#).

Isn't sacrifice cruelty to animals?

Animal sacrifice is no more cruel than slaughtering animals for food. In fact, the procedure for slaughtering livestock for sacrificial purposes is the same as the procedure used for slaughtering animals for food, a procedure that is designed to be as quick and painless as possible. See [Shechitah](#). Judaism is very concerned about the proper [treatment of animals](#), and would never advocate a cruel procedure for animal sacrifice.

How do Jews obtain forgiveness without sacrifices?

Forgiveness is obtained through repentance, [prayer](#) and [good deeds](#).

In Jewish practice, prayer has taken the place of sacrifices. In accordance with the words of Hosea, we render instead of bullocks the offering of our lips (Hosea 14:3) (please note: the KJV translates this somewhat differently). While dedicating the Temple, King Solomon also indicated that prayer can be used to obtain forgiveness (I Kings 8:46-50). Our [prayer services](#) are in many ways designed to parallel the sacrificial practices. For example, we have an extra service on [shabbat](#), to parallel the extra shabbat offering. For more information about this, see [Jewish Liturgy](#).

It is important to note that in Judaism, sacrifice was never the exclusive means of obtaining forgiveness, was not in and of itself sufficient to obtain forgiveness, and in certain circumstances was not even effective to obtain forgiveness. This will be discussed further [below](#).

But isn't a blood sacrifice required in order to obtain forgiveness?

No. Although animal sacrifice is one means of obtaining forgiveness, there are non-animal offerings as well, and there are other means for obtaining forgiveness that do not involve sacrifices at all.

The passage that people ordinarily cite for the notion that blood is required is Leviticus 17:11: "For the soul of the flesh is in the blood and I have assigned it for you upon the altar to provide atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that atones for the soul." But the passage that this verse comes from is not about atonement; it is about [dietary laws](#), and the passage says only that blood is used to obtain atonement; not that blood is the only means for obtaining atonement. Leviticus 17:10-12 could be paraphrased as "Don't eat blood, because blood is used in atonement rituals; therefore, don't eat blood."

Were sacrifices a symbol of the savior to come?

Not according to Judaism. That is a Christian teaching that has no basis in Jewish thought. Jews don't believe in a savior, and don't believe that sacrifice has anything to do with a savior or [messiah](#).

Quite the contrary, some would say that the original institution of sacrifice had more to do with the Judaism's past than with its future. [Rambam](#) suggested that the entire sacrificial cult in Judaism was ordained as an accommodation of man's primitive desires.

Sacrifice is an ancient and universal human expression of religion. Sacrifice existed among the

Hebrews long before the giving of the [Torah](#). When the laws of sacrifice were laid down in the Torah, the pre-existence of a system of sacrificial offering was understood, and sacrificial terminology was used without any explanation. The Torah, rather than creating the institution of sacrifice, carefully circumscribes and limits the practice, permitting it only in certain places, at certain times, in certain manners, by certain people, and for certain purposes. Rambam suggests that these limitations are designed to wean a primitive people away from the debased rites of their idolatrous neighbors.

Qorbanot

In ancient times, a major component of Jewish ritual was the offering of qorbanot. An entire order of the [Talmud](#) (Kodashim, that is, Holy Things) is devoted to the subject.

The word "qorbanot" is usually translated as "sacrifices" or "offerings"; however, both of these terms suggest a loss of something or a giving up of something, and although that is certainly a part of the ritual, that is not at all the literal meaning of the Hebrew word. The word qorbanot comes from the [root](#) Qof-Resh-Bet, which means "to draw near," and indicates the primary purpose of offerings: to draw us near to [G-d](#).

Parts of the rituals involved in the offering of qorbanot were performed exclusively by the [kohanim](#) (priests). These rituals were only performed in the [Temple](#) in Jerusalem. The procedures could not be performed by anyone else, and could not be performed in any other place. Because the Temple no longer exists, we can no longer offer qorbanot.

There are three basic concepts underlying qorbanot. The first the aspect of giving. A qorban requires the renunciation of something that belongs to the person making the offering. Thus, sacrifices are made from domestic animals, not wild animals (because wild animals do not belong to anyone). Likewise, offerings of food are ordinarily in the form of flour or meal, which requires substantial work to prepare.

Another important concept is the element of substitution. The idea is that the thing being offered is a substitute for the person making the offering, and the things that are done to the offering are things that should have been done to the person offering. The offering is in some sense "punished" in place of the offerer. It is interesting to note that whenever the subject of qorbanot is addressed in the [Torah](#), the [name of G-d](#) used is the four-letter name indicating G-d's mercy.

The third important concept is the idea coming closer. The essence of sacrifice is to bring a person closer to G-d.

Purposes of Qorbanot

Contrary to popular belief, the purpose of qorbanot is not simply to obtain forgiveness from sin. Although many qorbanot have the effect of expiating sins, there are many other purposes for bringing qorbanot, and the expiatory effect is often incidental, and is subject to significant limitations.

Certain qorbanot are brought purely for the purpose of communing with [G-d](#) and becoming closer to Him. Others are brought for the purpose of expressing thanks to G-d, love or gratitude. Others are used to cleanse a person of ritual impurity (which does not necessarily have anything to do with sin). And yes,

many qorbanot are brought for purposes of atonement.

The atoning aspect of qorbanot is carefully circumscribed. For the most part, qorbanot only expiate unintentional sins, that is, sins committed because a person forgot that this thing was a sin. No atonement is needed for violations committed under duress or through lack of knowledge, and for the most part, qorbanot cannot atone for a malicious, deliberate sin. In addition, qorbanot have no expiating effect unless the person making the offering sincerely repents his or her actions before making the offering, and makes restitution to any person who was harmed by the violation.

Types of Qorbanot

There are many different types of qorbanot, and the laws related to them are detailed and complicated. This section will merely introduce some of the major types of qorbanot, their names and their characteristics. There are many subtypes within these classifications, and some other types that do not fit neatly into these categories.

Olah: Burnt Offering

Perhaps the best-known class of offerings is the burnt offering. It was the oldest and commonest sacrifice, and represented submission to [G-d](#)'s will. The Hebrew word for burnt offering is olah, from the [root](#) Ayin-Lamed-Heh, meaning ascension. It is the same root as the word aliyah, which is used to describe moving to [Israel](#) or ascending to the podium to say a [blessing](#) over the [Torah](#). An olah is completely burnt on the outer altar; no part of it is eaten by anyone. Because the offering represents complete submission to G-d's will, the entire offering is given to G-d (i.e., it cannot be used after it is burnt). It expresses a desire to commune with G-d, and expiates sins incidentally in the process (because how can you commune with G-d if you are tainted with sins?). An olah could be made from cattle, sheep, goats, or even birds, depending on the offerer's means.

Zebach Sh'lamim: Peace Offering

A peace offering is an offering expressing thanks or gratitude to [G-d](#) for His bounties and mercies. The Hebrew term for this type of offering is zebach sh'lamim (or sometimes just sh'lamim), which is related to the word shalom, meaning "peace" or "whole." A representative portion of the offering is burnt on the altar, a portion is given to the [kohanim](#), and the rest is eaten by the offerer and his family; thus, everyone gets a part of this offering. This category of offerings includes thanksgiving-offerings (in Hebrew, Todah, which was obligatory for survivors of life-threatening crises), free will-offerings, and offerings made after fulfillment of a vow. Note that this class of offerings has nothing to do with sin; in fact, the [Talmud](#) states that in the age of the [messiah](#) (when there is no more sin), this will be the only class of offering that is brought to the [Temple](#).

Chatat: Sin Offering

A sin offering is an offering to atone for and purge a sin. It is an expression of sorrow for the error and a desire to be reconciled with [G-d](#). The Hebrew term for this type of offering is chatat, from the word chayt, meaning "missing the mark." A chatat could only be offered for unintentional sins committed through carelessness, not for intentional, malicious sins. The size of the offering varied according to the

nature of the sin and the financial means of the sinner. Some chatatot are individual and some are communal. Communal offerings represent the interdependence of the community, and the fact that we are all responsible for each others' sins. A few special chatatot could not be eaten, but for the most part, for the average person's personal sin, the chatat was eaten by the [kohanim](#).

Asham: Guilt Offering

A guilt offering is an offering to atone for sins of stealing things from the altar, for when you are not sure whether you have committed a sin or what sin you have committed, or for breach of trust. The Hebrew word for a guilt offering is asham. When there was doubt as to whether a person committed a sin, the person would make an asham, rather than a [chatat](#), because bringing a chatat would constitute admission of the sin, and the person would have to be punished for it. If a person brought an asham and later discovered that he had in fact committed the sin, he would have to bring a chatat at that time. An asham was eaten by the [kohanim](#).

Food and Drink Offerings

A meal offering (minchah) represented the devotion of the fruits of man's work to [G-d](#), because it was not a natural product, but something created through man's effort. A representative piece of the offering was burnt on the fire of the altar, but the rest was eaten by the [kohanim](#).

There are also offerings of undiluted wine, referred to as nesekh.

Parah Adumah: The Red Heifer

Some time in 1997, a red heifer was born in [Israel](#). This birth received quite a bit of press coverage, and I received many questions asking about the significance of it.

The ritual of the red heifer (in Hebrew, parah adumah) is part of one of the most mysterious rituals described in the [Torah](#). The purpose of this ritual is to purify people from the defilement caused by contact with the dead. The ritual is discussed in Numbers 19. If you find it difficult to understand, don't feel bad; the [sages](#) themselves described it as beyond human understanding. What is so interesting about this ritual is that it purifies the impure, but it also renders the pure impure (i.e., everybody who participates in the ritual becomes impure).

It is believed by many that this ritual will be performed by the [messiah](#) when he comes, because we have all suffered the defilement of contact with the dead. Thus, the existence of a red heifer is a possible, but not definite, sign of the messiah. If the messiah were coming, there would be a red heifer, but there could be a red heifer without the messiah coming.

I have not heard any definitive word on whether the animal born in Israel satisfies all the requirements of a parah adumah (e.g., that it be without spot, without blemish, and that it has never been yoked).

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A List of the 613 Mitzvot

Level: Advanced

Below is a list of the 613 mitzvot (commandments). It is based primarily on the list compiled by [Rambam](#) in the Mishneh Torah, but I have consulted other sources as well. As I said in the page on [halakhah](#), Rambam's list is probably the most widely accepted list, but it is not the only one. The order is my own.

For each mitzvah, I have provided a citation to the biblical passage or passages from which it is derived, based primarily on Rambam. For commandments that can be observed today, I have also provided citations to the Chafetz Chayim's Concise Book of Mitzvot (CCA refers to affirmative commandments; CCN refers to negative commandments; CCI refers to commandments that only apply in [Israel](#)). Commandments that cannot be observed today primarily relate to the [Temple](#), its [sacrifices](#) and services (because the Temple does not exist) and criminal procedures (because the theocratic state of Israel does not exist).

G-d

1. To know that G-d exists (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6) (CCA1). See [What Do Jews Believe?](#)
2. Not to entertain the idea that there is any god but the Eternal (Ex. 20:3) (CCN8). See [What Do Jews Believe?](#)
3. Not to blaspheme (Ex. 22:27; in Christian texts, Ex. 22:28), the penalty for which is death (Lev. 24:16) (negative).
4. To hallow G-d's name (Lev. 22:32) (CCA5). See [The Name of G-d](#).
5. Not to profane G-d's name (Lev. 22:32) (CCN155). See [The Name of G-d](#).
6. To know that G-d is One, a complete Unity (Deut. 6:4) (CCA2). See [What Do Jews Believe?](#)
7. To love G-d (Deut. 6:5) (CCA3). See [What Do Jews Believe?](#)
8. To fear Him reverently (Deut. 6:13; 10:20) (CCA4).
9. Not to put the word of G-d to the test (Deut. 6:16) (negative).
10. To imitate His good and upright ways (Deut. 28:9) (CCA6).

Torah

11. To honor the old and the wise (Lev. 19:32) (CCA17).
12. To learn Torah and to teach it (Deut. 6:7) (CCA14). See [Torah](#).
13. To cleave to those who know Him (Deut. 10:20) (the [Talmud](#) states that cleaving to scholars is equivalent to cleaving to Him) (CCA16).
14. Not to add to the commandments of the Torah, whether in the Written Law or in its interpretation received by tradition (Deut. 13:1) (CCN159). See [Torah](#).
15. Not to take away from the commandments of the Torah (Deut. 13:1) (CCN160). See [Torah](#).

16. That every person shall write a scroll of the Torah for himself (Deut. 31:19) (CCA15). See [Torah](#).

Signs and Symbols

17. To circumcise the male offspring (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3) (CCA47) See [Brit Milah: Circumcision](#).

18. To put tzitzit on the corners of clothing (Num. 15:38) (CCA10). See [Tzitzit and Tallit](#).

19. To bind tefillin on the head (Deut. 6:8) (CCA9). See [Tefillin](#).

20. To bind tefillin on the arm (Deut. 6:8) (CCA8). See [Tefillin](#).

21. To affix the mezuzah to the doorposts and gates of your house (Deut. 6:9) (CCA12). See [Mezuzah](#).

Prayer and Blessings

22. To pray to G-d (Ex. 23:25; Deut. 6:13) (according to the [Talmud](#), the word "serve" in these verses refers to prayer) (CCA7). See [Prayers and Blessings](#); [Jewish Liturgy](#).

23. To read the Shema in the morning and at night (Deut. 6:7) (CCA11). See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

24. To recite grace after meals (Deut. 8:10) (CCA13). See [Birkat Ha-Mazon: Grace After Meals](#)

25. Not to lay down a stone for worship (Lev. 26:1) (CCN161).

Love and Brotherhood

26. To love all human beings who are of the covenant (Lev. 19:18) (CCA60). See [Love and Brotherhood](#).

27. Not to stand by idly when a human life is in danger (Lev. 19:16) (CCN82). See [Love and Brotherhood](#).

28. Not to wrong any one in speech (Lev. 25:17) (CCN48). See [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#).

29. Not to carry tales (Lev. 19:16) (CCN77). See [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#).

30. Not to cherish hatred in one's heart (Lev. 19:17) (CCN78). See [Love and Brotherhood](#).

31. Not to take revenge (Lev. 19:18) (CCN80).

32. Not to bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18) (CCN81).

33. Not to put any Jew to shame (Lev. 19:17) (CCN79).

34. Not to curse any other Israelite (Lev. 19:14) (by implication: if you may not curse those who cannot hear, you certainly may not curse those who can) (CCN45).

35. Not to give occasion to the simple-minded to stumble on the road (Lev. 19:14) (this includes doing anything that will cause another to sin) (CCN76).

36. To rebuke the sinner (Lev. 19:17) (CCA72).

37. To relieve a neighbor of his burden and help to unload his beast (Ex. 23:5) (CCA70). See [Love and Brotherhood](#).

38. To assist in replacing the load upon a neighbor's beast (Deut. 22:4) (CCA71). See [Love and](#)

[Brotherhood](#).

39. Not to leave a beast, that has fallen down beneath its burden, unaided (Deut. 22:4) (CCN183). See [Love and Brotherhood](#).

The Poor and Unfortunate

40. Not to afflict an orphan or a widow (Ex. 22:21) (CCN51).
41. Not to reap the entire field (Lev. 19:9; Lev. 23:22) (negative) (CCI6).
42. To leave the unreaped corner of the field or orchard for the poor (Lev. 19:9) (affirmative) (CCI1).
43. Not to gather gleanings (the ears that have fallen to the ground while reaping) (Lev. 19:9) (negative) (CCI7).
44. To leave the gleanings for the poor (Lev. 19:9) (affirmative) (CCI2).
45. Not to gather ol'loth (the imperfect clusters) of the vineyard (Lev. 19:10) (negative) (CCI8).
46. To leave ol'loth (the imperfect clusters) of the vineyard for the poor (Lev. 19:10; Deut. 24:21) (affirmative) (CCI3).
47. Not to gather the peret (grapes) that have fallen to the ground (Lev. 19:10) (negative) (CCI9).
48. To leave peret (the single grapes) of the vineyard for the poor (Lev. 19:10) (affirmative) (CCI4).
49. Not to return to take a forgotten sheaf (Deut. 24:19) This applies to all fruit trees (Deut. 24:20) (negative) (CC10).
50. To leave the forgotten sheaves for the poor (Deut. 24:19-20) (affirmative) (CCI5).
51. Not to refrain from maintaining a poor man and giving him what he needs (Deut. 15:7) (CCN62). See [Tzedakah: Charity](#).
52. To give charity according to one's means (Deut. 15:11) (CCA38). See [Tzedakah: Charity](#).

Treatment of Gentiles

53. To love the stranger (Deut. 10:19) (CCA61). See [Love and Brotherhood](#).
54. Not to wrong the stranger in speech (Ex. 22:20) (CCN49).
55. Not to wrong the stranger in buying or selling (Ex. 22:20) (CCN50).
56. Not to intermarry with gentiles (Deut. 7:3) (CCN19). See [Interfaith Marriages](#).
57. To exact the debt of an alien (Deut. 15:3) (affirmative).
58. To lend to an alien at interest (Deut. 23:21) According to tradition, this is mandatory (affirmative).

Marriage, Divorce and Family

59. To honor father and mother (Ex. 20:12) (CCA41).
60. Not to smite a father or a mother (Ex. 21:15) (CCN44).
61. Not to curse a father or mother (Ex. 21:17) (CCN46).
62. To reverently fear father and mother (Lev. 19:3) (CCA42).

63. To be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28) (CCA43).
64. That a eunuch shall not marry a daughter of Israel (Deut. 23:2) (CCN136).
65. That a mamzer shall not marry the daughter of a Jew (Deut. 23:3) (CCN137). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
66. That an Ammonite or Moabite shall never marry the daughter of an Israelite (Deut. 23:4) (negative).
67. Not to exclude a descendant of Esau from the community of Israel for three generations (Deut. 23:8-9) (negative).
68. Not to exclude an Egyptian from the community of Israel for three generations (Deut. 23:8-9) (negative).
69. That there shall be no harlot (in Israel); that is, that there shall be no intercourse with a woman, without previous marriage with a deed of marriage and formal declaration of marriage (Deut. 23:18) (CCN133). See [Marriage](#).
70. To take a wife by kiddushin, the sacrament of marriage (Deut. 24:1) (CCA44). See [The Process of Marriage: Kiddushin and Nisuin](#).
71. That the newly married husband shall (be free) for one year to rejoice with his wife (Deut. 24:5) (affirmative).
72. That a bridegroom shall be exempt for a whole year from taking part in any public labor, such as military service, guarding the wall and similar duties (Deut. 24:5) (negative).
73. Not to withhold food, clothing or conjugal rights from a wife (Ex. 21:10) (CCN42). See [The Marital Relationship](#).
74. That the woman suspected of adultery shall be dealt with as prescribed in the [Torah](#) (Num. 5:30) (affirmative).
75. That one who defames his wife's honor (by falsely accusing her of unchastity before marriage) must live with her all his lifetime (Deut. 22:19) (affirmative).
76. That a man may not divorce his wife concerning whom he has published an evil report (about her unchastity before marriage) (Deut. 22:19) (negative).
77. To divorce by a formal written document (Deut. 24:1) (affirmative). See [The Process of Obtaining a Divorce](#).
78. That one who divorced his wife shall not remarry her, if after the divorce she had been married to another man (Deut. 24:4) (CCN134). See [Divorce](#).
79. That a widow whose husband died childless must not be married to anyone but her deceased husband's brother (Deut. 25:5) (CCN135) (this is only in effect insofar as it requires the procedure of release below).
80. To marry the widow of a brother who has died childless (Deut. 25:5) (this is only in effect insofar as it requires the procedure of release below) (CCA45).
81. That the widow formally release the brother-in-law (if he refuses to marry her) (Deut. 25:7-9) (CCA46).

Forbidden Sexual Relations

82. Not to indulge in familiarities with relatives, such as kissing, embracing, winking, skipping, which may lead to incest (Lev. 18:6) (CCN110).
83. Not to commit incest with one's mother (Lev. 18:7) (CCN112). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
84. Not to commit sodomy with one's father (Lev. 18:7) (CCN111).
85. Not to commit incest with one's father's wife (Lev. 18:8) (CCN113). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
86. Not to commit incest with one's sister (Lev. 18:9) (CCN127). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
87. Not to commit incest with one's father's wife's daughter (Lev. 18:9) (CCN128). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
88. Not to commit incest with one's son's daughter (Lev. 18:10) (CCN119) (Note: CC treats this and the next as one commandment; however, Rambam treats them as two). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
89. Not to commit incest with one's daughter's daughter (Lev. 18:10) (CCN119) (Note: CC treats this and the previous as one commandment; however, Rambam treats them as two). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
90. Not to commit incest with one's daughter (this is not explicitly in the [Torah](#) but is inferred from other explicit commands that would include it) (CCN120). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
91. Not to commit incest with one's father's sister (Lev. 18:12) (CCN129). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
92. Not to commit incest with one's mother's sister (Lev. 18:13) (CCN130). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
93. Not to commit incest with one's father's brother's wife (Lev. 18:14) (CCN125). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
94. Not to commit sodomy with one's father's brother (Lev. 18:14) (CCN114).
95. Not to commit incest with one's son's wife (Lev. 18:15) (CCN115). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
96. Not to commit incest with one's brother's wife (Lev. 18:16) (CCN126). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
97. Not to commit incest with one's wife's daughter (Lev. 18:17) (CCN121). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
98. Not to commit incest with the daughter of one's wife's son (Lev. 18:17) (CCN122). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#).
99. Not to commit incest with the daughter of one's wife's daughter (Lev. 18:17) (CCN123). See

[Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children.](#)

100. Not to commit incest with one's wife's sister (Lev. 18:18) (CCN131). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children.](#)
101. Not to have intercourse with a woman, in her menstrual period (Lev. 18:19) (CCN132).
102. Not to have intercourse with another man's wife (Lev. 18:20) (CCN124).
103. Not to commit sodomy with a male (Lev. 18:22) (CCN116).
104. Not to have intercourse with a beast (Lev. 18:23) (CCN117).
105. That a woman shall not have intercourse with a beast (Lev. 18:23) (CCN118).
106. Not to castrate the male of any species; neither a man, nor a domestic or wild beast, nor a fowl (Lev. 22:24) (CCN143).

Times and Seasons

107. That the new month shall be solemnly proclaimed as holy, and the months and years shall be calculated by the Supreme Court only (Ex. 12:2) (affirmative) (the authority to declare months is inferred from the use of the word "unto you").
108. Not to travel on Shabbat outside the limits of one's place of residence (Ex. 16:29) (CCN7). See [Shabbat.](#)
109. To sanctify Shabbat (Ex. 20:8) (CCA19). See [Shabbat.](#)
110. Not to do work on Shabbat (Ex. 20:10) (CCN6). See [Shabbat.](#)
111. To rest on Shabbat (Ex. 23:12; 34:21) (CCA20). See [Shabbat.](#)
112. To celebrate the festivals [Passover, Shavu'ot and Sukkot] (Ex. 23:14) (affirmative).
113. To rejoice on the festivals (Deut. 16:14) (CCA21).
114. To appear in the Sanctuary on the festivals (Deut. 16:16) (affirmative).
115. To remove chametz on the Eve of Passover (Ex. 12:15) (CCA22). See [Passover.](#)
116. To rest on the first day of Passover (Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:7) (CCA25). See [Passover.](#)
117. Not to do work on the first day of Passover (Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:6-7) (CCN147). See [Passover.](#)
118. To rest on the seventh day of Passover (Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:8) (CCA27). See [Passover.](#)
119. Not to do work on the seventh day of Passover (Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:8) (CCN148). See [Passover.](#)
120. To eat matzah on the first night of Passover (Ex. 12:18) (CCA23). See [Passover.](#)
121. That no chametz be in the Israelite's possession during Passover (Ex. 12:19) (CCN3). See [Passover.](#)
122. Not to eat any food containing chametz on Passover (Ex. 12:20) (CCN5). See [Passover.](#)
123. Not to eat chametz on Passover (Ex. 13:3) (CCN4). See [Passover.](#)
124. That chametz shall not be seen in an Israelite's home during Passover (Ex. 13:7) (CCN2). See [Passover.](#)
125. To discuss the departure from Egypt on the first night of Passover (Ex. 13:8) (CCA24). See [The](#)

[Passover Seder.](#)

126. Not to eat chametz after mid-day on the fourteenth of Nissan (Deut. 16:3) (CCN104). See [Passover](#).
127. To count forty-nine days from the time of the cutting of the Omer (first sheaves of the barley harvest) (Lev. 23:15) (CCA26). See [The Counting of the Omer](#).
128. To rest on Shavu'ot (Lev. 23:21) (CCA28). See [Shavu'ot](#).
129. Not to do work on the Shavu'ot (Lev. 23:21) (CCN149). See [Shavu'ot](#).
130. To rest on Rosh Hashanah (Lev. 23:24) (CCA29). See [Rosh Hashanah](#).
131. Not to do work on Rosh Hashanah (Lev. 23:25) (CCN150). See [Rosh Hashanah](#).
132. To hear the sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah (Num. 29:1) (CCA30). See [Rosh Hashanah](#).
133. To fast on Yom Kippur (Lev. 23:27) (CCA32). See [Yom Kippur](#).
134. Not to eat or drink on Yom Kippur (Lev. 23:29) (CCN152). See [Yom Kippur](#).
135. Not to do work on Yom Kippur (Lev. 23:31) (CCN151). See [Yom Kippur](#).
136. To rest on the Yom Kippur (Lev. 23:32) (CCA31). See [Yom Kippur](#).
137. To rest on the first day of Sukkot (Lev. 23:35) (CCA34). See [Sukkot](#).
138. Not to do work on the first day of Sukkot (Lev. 23:35) (CCN153). See [Sukkot](#).
139. To rest on the eighth day of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret) (Lev. 23:36) (CCA37). See [Shemini Atzeret and Simkhat Torah](#).
140. Not to do work on the eighth day of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret) (Lev. 23:36) (CCN154). See [Shemini Atzeret and Simkhat Torah](#).
141. To take during Sukkot a palm branch and the other three plants (Lev. 23:40) (CCA36). See [Sukkot](#).
142. To dwell in booths seven days during Sukkot (Lev. 23:42) (CCA35). See [Sukkot](#).

Dietary Laws

143. To examine the marks in cattle (so as to distinguish the clean from the unclean) (Lev. 11:2) (affirmative). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
144. Not to eat the flesh of unclean beasts (Lev. 11:4) (CCN93). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
145. To examine the marks in fishes (so as to distinguish the clean from the unclean) (Lev. 11:9) (affirmative). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
146. Not to eat unclean fish (Lev. 11:11) (CCN95). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
147. To examine the marks in fowl, so as to distinguish the clean from the unclean (Deut. 14:11) (affirmative). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
148. Not to eat unclean fowl (Lev. 11:13) (CCN94). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
149. To examine the marks in locusts, so as to distinguish the clean from the unclean (Lev. 11:21) (affirmative). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).

150. Not to eat a worm found in fruit (Lev. 11:41) (CCN98). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
151. Not to eat of things that creep upon the earth (Lev. 11:41-42) (CCN97). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
152. Not to eat any vermin of the earth (Lev. 11:44) (CCN100). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
153. Not to eat things that swarm in the water (Lev. 11:43 and 46) (CCN99). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
154. Not to eat of winged insects (Deut. 14:19) (CCN96). See [Animals that may not be eaten](#).
155. Not to eat the flesh of a beast that is terefah (lit torn) (Ex. 22:30) (CCN87). See [Kosher slaughtering](#).
156. Not to eat the flesh of a beast that died of itself (Deut. 14:21) (CCN86). See [Kosher slaughtering](#).
157. To slay cattle, deer and fowl according to the laws of shechitah if their flesh is to be eaten (Deut. 12:21) ("as I have commanded" in this verse refers to the technique) (CCA48). See [Kosher slaughtering](#).
158. Not to eat a limb removed from a living beast (Deut. 12:23) (CCN90). See [Kosher slaughtering](#).
159. Not to slaughter an animal and its young on the same day (Lev. 22:28) (CCN108).
160. Not to take the mother-bird with the young (Deut. 22:6) (CCN189). See [Treatment of Animals](#).
161. To set the mother-bird free when taking the nest (Deut. 22:6-7) (CCA74). See [Treatment of Animals](#).
162. Not to eat the flesh of an ox that was condemned to be stoned (Ex. 21:28) (negative).
163. Not to boil meat with milk (Ex. 23:19) (CCN91). See [Separation of Meat and Dairy](#).
164. Not to eat flesh with milk (Ex. 34:26) (according to the [Talmud](#), this passage is a distinct prohibition from the one in Ex. 23:19) (CCN92). See [Separation of Meat and Dairy](#).
165. Not to eat the of the thigh-vein which shrank (Gen. 32:33) (CCN1). See [Forbidden Fats and Nerves](#).
166. Not to eat chelev (tallow-fat) (Lev. 7:23) (CCN88). See [Forbidden Fats and Nerves](#).
167. Not to eat blood (Lev. 7:26) (CCN89). See [Draining of Blood](#).
168. To cover the blood of undomesticated animals (deer, etc.) and of fowl that have been killed (Lev. 17:13) (CCA49).
169. Not to eat or drink like a glutton or a drunkard (not to rebel against father or mother) (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 21:20) (CCN106).

Business Practices

170. Not to do wrong in buying or selling (Lev. 25:14) (CCN47).
171. Not to make a loan to an Israelite on interest (Lev. 25:37) (CCN54).
172. Not to borrow on interest (Deut. 23:20) (because this would cause the lender to sin) (CCN55).
173. Not to take part in any usurious transaction between borrower and lender, neither as a surety, nor

as a witness, nor as a writer of the bond for them (Ex. 22:24) (CCN53).

174. To lend to a poor person (Ex. 22:24) (even though the passage says "if you lend" it is understood as obligatory) (CCA62).
175. Not to demand from a poor man repayment of his debt, when the creditor knows that he cannot pay, nor press him (Ex. 22:24) (CCN52).
176. Not to take in pledge utensils used in preparing food (Deut. 24:6) (CCN58).
177. Not to exact a pledge from a debtor by force (Deut. 24:10) (CCN59).
178. Not to keep the pledge from its owner at the time when he needs it (Deut. 24:12) (CCN61).
179. To return a pledge to its owner (Deut. 24:13) (CCA63).
180. Not to take a pledge from a widow (Deut. 24:17) (CCN60).
181. Not to commit fraud in measuring (Lev. 19:35) (CCN83).
182. To ensure that scales and weights are correct (Lev. 19:36) (affirmative).
183. Not to possess inaccurate measures and weights (Deut. 25:13-14) (CCN84).

Employees, Servants and Slaves

184. Not to delay payment of a hired man's wages (Lev. 19:13) (CCN38).
185. That the hired laborer shall be permitted to eat of the produce he is reaping (Deut. 23:25-26) (CCA65).
186. That the hired laborer shall not take more than he can eat (Deut. 23:25) (CCN187).
187. That a hired laborer shall not eat produce that is not being harvested (Deut. 23:26) (CCN186).
188. To pay wages to the hired man at the due time (Deut. 24:15) (CCA66).
189. To deal judicially with the Hebrew bondman in accordance with the laws appertaining to him (Ex. 21:2-6) (affirmative).
190. Not to compel the Hebrew servant to do the work of a slave (Lev. 25:39) (negative).
191. Not to sell a Hebrew servant as a slave (Lev. 25:42) (negative).
192. Not to treat a Hebrew servant rigorously (Lev. 25:43) (negative).
193. Not to permit a gentile to treat harshly a Hebrew bondman sold to him (Lev. 25:53) (negative).
194. Not to send away a Hebrew bondman servant empty handed, when he is freed from service (Deut. 15:13) (negative).
195. To bestow liberal gifts upon the Hebrew bondsman (at the end of his term of service), and the same should be done to a Hebrew bondwoman (Deut. 15:14) (affirmative).
196. To redeem a Hebrew maid-servant (Ex. 21:8) (affirmative).
197. Not to sell a Hebrew maid-servant to another person (Ex. 21:8) (negative).
198. To espouse a Hebrew maid-servant (Ex. 21:8-9) (affirmative).
199. To keep the Canaanite slave forever (Lev. 25:46) (affirmative).
200. Not to surrender a slave, who has fled to the land of Israel, to his owner who lives outside Palestine (Deut. 23:16) (negative).
201. Not to wrong such a slave (Deut. 23:17) (negative).

202. Not to muzzle a beast, while it is working in produce which it can eat and enjoy (Deut. 25:4) (CCN188).

Vows, Oaths and Swearing

203. That a man should fulfill whatever he has uttered (Deut. 23:24) (CCA39).

204. Not to swear needlessly (Ex. 20:7) (CCN29).

205. Not to violate an oath or swear falsely (Lev. 19:12) (CCN31).

206. To decide in cases of annulment of vows, according to the rules set forth in the [Torah](#) (Num. 30:2-17) (CCA40).

207. Not to break a vow (Num. 30:3) (CCN184).

208. To swear by His name truly (Deut. 10:20) (affirmative).

209. Not to delay in fulfilling vows or bringing vowed or free-will offerings (Deut. 23:22) (CCN185).

The Sabbatical and Jubilee Years

210. To let the land lie fallow in the Sabbatical year (Ex. 23:11; Lev. 25:2) (affirmative) (CCI20).

211. To cease from tilling the land in the Sabbatical year (Ex. 23:11) (affirmative) (Lev. 25:2) (CCI21).

212. Not to till the ground in the Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:4) (negative) (CCI22).

213. Not to do any work on the trees in the Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:4) (negative) (CCI23).

214. Not to reap the aftermath that grows in the Sabbatical year, in the same way as it is reaped in other years (Lev. 25:5) (negative) (CCI24).

215. Not to gather the fruit of the tree in the Sabbatical year in the same way as it is gathered in other years (Lev. 25:5) (negative) (CCI25).

216. To sound the Ram's horn in the Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:9) (affirmative).

217. To release debts in the seventh year (Deut. 15:2) (CCA64).

218. Not to demand return of a loan after the Sabbatical year has passed (Deut. 15:2) (CCN57).

219. Not to refrain from making a loan to a poor man, because of the release of loans in the Sabbatical year (Deut. 15:9) (CCN56).

220. To assemble the people to hear the Torah at the close of the seventh year (Deut. 31:12) (affirmative)

221. To count the years of the Jubilee by years and by cycles of seven years (Lev. 25:8) (affirmative).

222. To keep the Jubilee year holy by resting and letting the land lie fallow (Lev. 25:10) (affirmative).

223. Not to cultivate the soil nor do any work on the trees, in the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25:11) (negative).

224. Not to reap the aftermath of the field that grew of itself in the Jubilee Year, in the same way as in other years (Lev. 25:11) (negative).

225. Not to gather the fruit of the tree in the Jubilee Year, in the same way as in other years (Lev. 25:11) (negative).

226. To grant redemption to the land in the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:24) (affirmative).

The Court and Judicial Procedure

227. To appoint judges and officers in every community of Israel (Deut. 16:18) (affirmative).
228. Not to appoint as a judge, a person who is not well versed in the laws of the [Torah](#), even if he is expert in other branches of knowledge (Deut. 1:17) (CCN64).
229. To adjudicate cases of purchase and sale (Lev. 25:14) (CCA67).
230. To judge cases of liability of a paid depositary (Ex. 22:9) (affirmative).
231. To adjudicate cases of loss for which a gratuitous borrower is liable (Ex. 22:13-14) (affirmative).
232. To adjudicate cases of inheritances (Num. 27:8-11) (CCA73).
233. To judge cases of damage caused by an uncovered pit (Ex. 21:33-34) (affirmative).
234. To judge cases of injuries caused by beasts (Ex. 21:35-36) (affirmative).
235. To adjudicate cases of damage caused by trespass of cattle (Ex. 22:4) (affirmative).
236. To adjudicate cases of damage caused by fire (Ex. 22:5) (affirmative).
237. To adjudicate cases of damage caused by a gratuitous depositary (Ex. 22:6-7) (affirmative).
238. To adjudicate other cases between a plaintiff and a defendant (Ex. 22:8) (affirmative).
239. Not to curse a judge (Ex. 22:27) (CCN63).
240. That one who possesses evidence shall testify in Court (Lev. 5:1) (affirmative).
241. Not to testify falsely (Ex. 20:13) (CCN39).
242. That a witness, who has testified in a capital case, shall not lay down the law in that particular case (Num. 35:30) (negative).
243. That a transgressor shall not testify (Ex. 23:1) (CCN75).
244. That the court shall not accept the testimony of a close relative of the defendant in matters of capital punishment (Deut. 24:16) (CCN74).
245. Not to hear one of the parties to a suit in the absence of the other party (Ex. 23:1) (CCN65).
246. To examine witnesses thoroughly (Deut. 13:15) (affirmative).
247. Not to decide a case on the evidence of a single witness (Deut. 19:15) (CCN73).
248. To give the decision according to the majority, when there is a difference of opinion among the members of the Sanhedrin as to matters of law (Ex. 23:2) (affirmative).
249. Not to decide, in capital cases, according to the view of the majority, when those who are for condemnation exceed by one only, those who are for acquittal (Ex. 23:2) (negative).
250. That, in capital cases, one who had argued for acquittal, shall not later on argue for condemnation (Ex. 23:2) (negative).
251. To treat parties in a litigation with equal impartiality (Lev. 19:15) (affirmative).
252. Not to render iniquitous decisions (Lev. 19:15) (CCN69).
253. Not to favor a great man when trying a case (Lev. 19:15) (CCN70).
254. Not to take a bribe (Ex. 23:8) (CCN71).
255. Not to be afraid of a bad man, when trying a case (Deut. 1:17) (CCN72).
256. Not to be moved in trying a case, by the poverty of one of the parties (Ex. 23:3; Lev. 19:15)

(CCN66).

- 257. Not to pervert the judgment of strangers or orphans (Deut. 24:17) (CCN68).
- 258. Not to pervert the judgment of a sinner (a person poor in fulfillment of commandments) (Ex. 23:6) (CCN67).
- 259. Not to render a decision on one's personal opinion, but only on the evidence of two witnesses, who saw what actually occurred (Ex. 23:7) (negative).
- 260. Not to execute one guilty of a capital offense, before he has stood his trial (Num. 35:12) (negative).
- 261. To accept the rulings of every Supreme Court in Israel (Deut. 17:11) (affirmative).
- 262. Not to rebel against the orders of the Court (Deut. 17:11) (CCN158).

Injuries and Damages

- 263. To make a parapet for your roof (Deut. 22:8) (CCA75). See [Love and Brotherhood](#).
- 264. Not to leave something that might cause hurt (Deut. 22:8) (CCN190). See [Love and Brotherhood](#).
- 265. To save the pursued even at the cost of the life of the pursuer (Deut. 25:12) (affirmative). See [Life](#).
- 266. Not to spare a pursuer, but he is to be slain before he reaches the pursued and slays the latter, or uncovers his nakedness (Deut. 25:12) (negative).

Property and Property Rights

- 267. Not to sell a field in the land of Israel in perpetuity (Lev. 25:23) (negative).
- 268. Not to change the character of the open land (about the cities of) the Levites or of their fields; not to sell it in perpetuity, but it may be redeemed at any time (Lev. 25:34) (negative). See [Levi](#).
- 269. That houses sold within a walled city may be redeemed within a year (Lev. 25:29) (affirmative).
- 270. Not to remove landmarks (property boundaries) (Deut. 19:14) (CCN85).
- 271. Not to swear falsely in denial of another's property rights (Lev. 19:11) (CCN30).
- 272. Not to deny falsely another's property rights (Lev. 19:11) (CCN36).
- 273. Never to settle in the land of Egypt (Deut. 17:16) (CCN192).
- 274. Not to steal personal property (Lev. 19:11) (CCN34).
- 275. To restore that which one took by robbery (Lev. 5:23) (CCA68).
- 276. To return lost property (Deut. 22:1) (CCA69).
- 277. Not to pretend not to have seen lost property, to avoid the obligation to return it (Deut. 22:3) (CCN182).

Criminal Laws

- 278. Not to slay an innocent person (Ex. 20:13) (CCN32). See [Life](#).
- 279. Not to kidnap any person of Israel (Ex. 20:13) (according to the [Talmud](#), this verse refers to stealing a person, distinguished from Lev. 19:11, regarding the taking of property) (CCN33).

- 280. Not to rob by violence (Lev. 19:13) (CCN35).
- 281. Not to defraud (Lev. 19:13) (CCN37).
- 282. Not to covet what belongs to another (Ex. 20:14) (CCN40).
- 283. Not to crave something that belongs to another (Deut. 5:18) (CCN41).
- 284. Not to indulge in evil thoughts and sights (Num. 15:39) (CCN156).

Punishment and Restitution

- 285. That the Court shall pass sentence of death by decapitation with the sword (Ex. 21:20; Lev. 26:25) (affirmative).
- 286. That the Court shall pass sentence of death by strangulation (Lev. 20:10) (affirmative).
- 287. That the Court shall pass sentence of death by burning with fire (Lev. 20:14) (affirmative).
- 288. That the Court shall pass sentence of death by stoning (Deut. 22:24) (affirmative).
- 289. To hang the dead body of one who has incurred that penalty (Deut. 21:22) (affirmative).
- 290. That the dead body of an executed criminal shall not remain hanging on the tree over night (Deut. 21:23) (negative).
- 291. To inter the executed on the day of execution (Deut. 21:23) (affirmative)
- 292. Not to accept ransom from a murderer (Num. 35:31) (negative).
- 293. To exile one who committed accidental homicide (Num. 35:25) (affirmative).
- 294. To establish six cities of refuge (for those who committed accidental homicide) (Deut. 19:3) (affirmative).
- 295. Not to accept ransom from an accidental homicide, so as to relieve him from exile (Num. 35:32) (negative).
- 296. To decapitate the heifer in the manner prescribed (in expiation of a murder on the road, the perpetrator of which remained undiscovered) (Deut. 21:4) (affirmative).
- 297. Not to plow nor sow the rough valley (in which a heifer's neck was broken) (Deut. 21:4) (negative).
- 298. To adjudge a thief to pay compensation or (in certain cases) suffer death (Ex. 21:16; Ex. 21:37; Ex. 22:1) (affirmative).
- 299. That he who inflicts a bodily injury shall pay monetary compensation (Ex. 21:18-19) (affirmative).
- 300. To impose a penalty of fifty shekels upon the seducer (of an unbetrothed virgin) and enforce the other rules in connection with the case (Ex. 22:15-16) (affirmative).
- 301. That the violator (of an unbetrothed virgin) shall marry her (Deut. 22:28-29) (affirmative).
- 302. That one who has raped a damsel and has then (in accordance with the law) married her, may not divorce her (Deut. 22:29) (negative).
- 303. Not to inflict punishment on Shabbat (Ex. 35:3) (because some punishments were inflicted by fire) (negative). See [Shabbat](#).
- 304. To punish the wicked by the infliction of stripes (Deut. 25:2) (affirmative).
- 305. Not to exceed the statutory number of stripes laid on one who has incurred that punishment (Deut.

25:3) (and by implication, not to strike anyone) (CCN43).

- 306. Not to spare the offender, in imposing the prescribed penalties on one who has caused damage (Deut. 19:13) (negative).
- 307. To do unto false witnesses as they had purposed to do (to the accused) (Deut. 19:19) (affirmative).
- 308. Not to punish any one who has committed an offense under duress (Deut. 22:26) (negative).

Prophecy

- 309. To heed the call of every prophet in each generation, provided that he neither adds to, nor takes away from the [Torah](#) (Deut. 18:15) (affirmative).
- 310. Not to prophesy falsely (Deut. 18:20) (CCN175).
- 311. Not to refrain from putting a false prophet to death nor to be in fear of him (Deut. 18:22) (negative).

Idolatry, Idolaters and Idolatrous Practices

- 312. Not to make a graven image; neither to make it oneself nor to have it made by others (Ex. 20:4) (CCN9).
- 313. Not to make any figures for ornament, even if they are not worshipped (Ex. 20:20) (CCN144).
- 314. Not to make idols even for others (Ex. 34:17; Lev. 19:4) (CCN10).
- 315. Not to use the ornament of any object of idolatrous worship (Deut. 7:25) (CCN17).
- 316. Not to make use of an idol or its accessory objects, offerings, or libations (Deut. 7:26) (CCN18). See [Grape Products](#).
- 317. Not to drink wine of idolaters (Deut. 32:38) (CCN15). See [Grape Products](#).
- 318. Not to worship an idol in the way in which it is usually worshipped (Ex. 20:5) (CCN12).
- 319. Not to bow down to an idol, even if that is not its mode of worship (Ex. 20:5) (CCN11).
- 320. Not to prophesy in the name of an idol (Ex. 23:13; Deut. 18:20) (CCN27).
- 321. Not to hearken to one who prophesies in the name of an idol (Deut. 13:4) (CCN22).
- 322. Not to lead the children of Israel astray to idolatry (Ex. 23:13) (CCN14).
- 323. Not to entice an Israelite to idolatry (Deut. 13:12) (CCN23).
- 324. To destroy idolatry and its appurtenances (Deut. 12:2-3) (affirmative).
- 325. Not to love the enticer to idolatry (Deut. 13:9) (CCN24).
- 326. Not to give up hating the enticer to idolatry (Deut. 13:9) (CCN25).
- 327. Not to save the enticer from capital punishment, but to stand by at his execution (Deut. 13:9) (negative).
- 328. A person whom he attempted to entice to idolatry shall not urge pleas for the acquittal of the enticer (Deut. 13:9) (CCN26).
- 329. A person whom he attempted to entice shall not refrain from giving evidence of the enticer's guilt, if he has such evidence (Deut. 13:9) (negative).

330. Not to swear by an idol to its worshipers, nor cause them to swear by it (Ex. 23:13) (CCN13).
331. Not to turn one's attention to idolatry (Lev. 19:4) (CCN16).
332. Not to adopt the institutions of idolaters nor their customs (Lev. 18:3; Lev. 20:23) (CCN21).
333. Not to pass a child through the fire to Molech (Lev. 18:21) (negative).
334. Not to suffer any one practicing witchcraft to live (Ex. 22:17) (negative).
335. Not to practice onein (observing times or seasons as favorable or unfavorable, using astrology) (Lev. 19:26) (CCN166).
336. Not to practice nachesh (doing things based on signs and portents; using charms and incantations) (Lev. 19:26) (CCN165).
337. Not to consult ovoth (ghosts) (Lev. 19:31) (CCN170).
338. Not to consult yid'onim (wizards) (Lev. 19:31) (CCN171).
339. Not to practice kisuf (magic using herbs, stones and objects that people use) (Deut. 18:10) (CCN168).
340. Not to practice kessem (a general term for magical practices) (Deut. 18:10) (CCN167).
341. Not to practice the art of a chover chaver (casting spells over snakes and scorpions) (Deut. 18:11) (CCN169).
342. Not to enquire of an ob (a ghost) (Deut. 18:11) (CCN172).
343. Not to seek the maytim (dead) (Deut. 18:11) (CCN174).
344. Not to enquire of a yid'oni (wizard) (Deut. 18:11) (CCN173).
345. Not to remove the entire beard, like the idolaters (Lev. 19:27) (CCN177).
346. Not to round the corners of the head, as the idolatrous priests do (Lev. 19:27) (CCN176).
347. Not to cut oneself or make incisions in one's flesh in grief, like the idolaters (Lev. 19:28; Deut. 14:1) (CCN28).
348. Not to tattoo the body like the idolaters (Lev. 19:28) (CCN163).
349. Not to make a bald spot for the dead (Deut. 14:1) (CCN164).
350. Not to plant a tree for worship (Deut. 16:21) (negative).
351. Not to set up a pillar (for worship) (Deut. 16:22) (CCN162).
352. Not to show favor to idolaters (Deut. 7:2) (CCN20).
353. Not to make a covenant with the seven (Canaanite, idolatrous) nations (Ex. 23:32; Deut. 7:2) (negative).
354. Not to settle idolaters in our land (Ex. 23:33) (negative) (CCI26).
355. To slay the inhabitants of a city that has become idolatrous and burn that city (Deut. 13:16-17) (affirmative).
356. Not to rebuild a city that has been led astray to idolatry (Deut. 13:17) (negative).
357. Not to make use of the property of city that has been so led astray (Deut. 13:18) (negative).

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

- 358. Not to cross-breed cattle of different species (Lev. 19:19) (according to the [Talmud](#), this also applies to birds) (CCN142).
- 359. Not to sow different kinds of seed together in one field (Lev. 19:19) (CCN107).
- 360. Not to eat the fruit of a tree for three years from the time it was planted (Lev. 19:23) (CCN105). See [Tu B'Shevat](#).
- 361. That the fruit of fruit-bearing trees in the fourth year of their planting shall be sacred like the second tithe and eaten in Jerusalem (Lev. 19:24) (affirmative) (CCI16). See [Tu B'Shevat](#).
- 362. Not to sow grain or herbs in a vineyard (Deut. 22:9) (negative).
- 363. Not to eat the produce of diverse seeds sown in a vineyard (Deut. 22:9) (negative).
- 364. Not to work with beasts of different species, yoked together (Deut. 22:10) (CCN180).

Clothing

- 365. That a man shall not wear women's clothing (Deut. 22:5) (CCN179).
- 366. That a woman should not wear men's clothing (Deut. 22:5) (CCN178).
- 367. Not to wear garments made of wool and linen mixed together (Deut. 22:11) (CCN181).

The Firstborn

- 368. To redeem the firstborn human male (Ex. 13:13; Ex. 34:20; Num. 18:15) (CCA54). See [Pidyon Ha-Ben: Redemption of the Firstborn](#).
- 369. To redeem the firstling of an ass (Ex. 13:13; Ex. 34:20) (CCA55).
- 370. To break the neck of the firstling of an ass if it is not redeemed (Ex. 13:13; Ex. 34:20) (CCA56).
- 371. Not to redeem the firstling of a clean beast (Num. 18:17) (CCN109).

Kohanim and Levites

- 372. That the kohanim shall put on priestly vestments for the service (Ex. 28:2) (affirmative). See [Kohein](#).
- 373. Not to tear the High Kohein's robe (Ex. 28:32) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
- 374. That the kohein shall not enter the Sanctuary at all times (i.e., at times when he is not performing service) (Lev. 16:2) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
- 375. That the ordinary kohein shall not defile himself by contact with any dead, other than immediate relatives (Lev. 21:1-3) (CCN141). See [Kohein](#), [Care for the Dead](#).
- 376. That the kohanim defile themselves for their deceased relatives (by attending their burial), and mourn for them like other Israelites, who are commanded to mourn for their relatives (Lev. 21:3) (CCA59). See [Kohein](#), [Care for the Dead](#); [Mourning](#).
- 377. That a kohein who had an immersion during the day (to cleanse him from his uncleanness) shall

- not serve in the Sanctuary until after sunset (Lev. 21:6) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
378. That a kohein shall not marry a divorced woman (Lev. 21:7) (CCN140). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#); [Kohein](#).
379. That a kohein shall not marry a harlot (Lev. 21:7) (CCN138). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#); [Kohein](#).
380. That a kohein shall not marry a profaned woman (Lev. 21:7) (CCN139). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#); [Kohein](#).
381. To show honor to a kohein, and to give him precedence in all things that are holy (Lev. 21:8) (CCA50). See [Kohein](#).
382. That a High Kohein shall not defile himself with any dead, even if they are relatives (Lev. 21:11) (negative). See [Kohein](#), [Care for the Dead](#).
383. That a High Kohein shall not go (under the same roof) with a dead body (Lev. 21:11) It has been learnt by tradition that a kohein, who does so, violates the prohibition, "Neither shall he go in ", and also the prohibition "He shall not defile himself" (negative). See [Kohein](#), [Care for the Dead](#).
384. That the High Kohein shall marry a virgin (Lev. 21:13) (affirmative). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#); [Kohein](#).
385. That the High Kohein shall not marry a widow (Lev. 21:14) (negative). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#); [Kohein](#).
386. That the High Kohein shall not cohabit with a widow, even without marriage, because he profanes her (Lev. 21:15) (negative). See [Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children](#); [Kohein](#).
387. That a person with a physical blemish shall not serve (in the Sanctuary) (Lev. 21:17) (negative).
388. That a kohein with a temporary blemish shall not serve there (Lev. 21:21) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
389. That a person with a physical blemish shall not enter the Sanctuary further than the altar (Lev. 21:23) (negative).
390. That a kohein who is unclean shall not serve (in the Sanctuary) (Lev. 22:2-3) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
391. To send the unclean out of the Camp of the Shechinah, that is, out of the Sanctuary (Num. 5:2) (affirmative).
392. That a kohein who is unclean shall not enter the courtyard (Num. 5:2-3) This refers to the Camp of the Shechinah (negative). See [Kohein](#).
393. That the kohanim shall bless Israel (Num. 6:23) (CCA58). See [Kohein](#).
394. To set apart a portion of the dough for the kohein (Num. 15:20) (CCA57). See [Kohein](#).
395. That the Levites shall not occupy themselves with the service that belongs to the kohanim, nor the kohanim with that belonging to the Levites (Num. 18:3) (negative). See [Kohein](#), [Levi](#).
396. That one not a descendant of Aaron in the male line shall not serve (in the Sanctuary) (Num. 18:4-7) (negative).
397. That the Levite shall serve in the Sanctuary (Num. 18:23) (affirmative). See [Levi](#).
398. To give the Levites cities to dwell in, these to serve also as cities of refuge (Num. 35:2)

(affirmative). See [Levi](#).

399. That none of the tribe of Levi shall take any portion of territory in the land (of Israel) (Deut. 18:1) (negative). See [Levi](#).
400. That none of the tribe of Levi shall take any share of the spoil (at the conquest of the Promised Land) (Deut. 18:1) (negative). See [Levi](#).
401. That the kohanim shall serve in the Sanctuary in divisions, but on festivals, they all serve together (Deut. 18:6-8) (affirmative). See [Kohein](#).

T'rumah, Tithes and Taxes

402. That an uncircumcised person shall not eat of the t'rumah (heave offering), and the same applies to other holy things. This rule is inferred from the law of the Paschal offering, by similarity of phrase (Ex. 12:44-45 and Lev. 22:10) but it is not explicitly set forth in the [Torah](#). Traditionally, it has been learnt that the rule that the uncircumcised must not eat holy things is an essential principle of the Torah and not an enactment of the Scribes (negative). See [Brit Milah: Circumcision](#)
403. Not to alter the order of separating the t'rumah and the tithes; the separation be in the order first-fruits at the beginning, then the t'rumah, then the first tithe, and last the second tithe (Ex. 22:28) (negative) (CCI19).
404. To give half a shekel every year (to the Sanctuary for provision of the public sacrifices) (Ex. 30:13) (affirmative).
405. That a kohein who is unclean shall not eat of the t'rumah (Lev. 22:3-4) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
406. That a person who is not a kohein or the wife or unmarried daughter of a kohein shall not eat of the t'rumah (Lev. 22:10) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
407. That a sojourner with a kohein or his hired servant shall not eat of the t'rumah (Lev. 22:10) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
408. Not to eat tevel (something from which the t'rumah and tithe have not yet been separated) (Lev. 22:15) (negative) (CCI18).
409. To set apart the tithe of the produce (one tenth of the produce after taking out t'rumah) for the Levites (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:24) (affirmative) (CCI12). See [Levi](#).
410. To tithe cattle (Lev. 27:32) (affirmative).
411. Not to sell the tithe of the heard (Lev. 27:32-33) (negative).
412. That the Levites shall set apart a tenth of the tithes, which they had received from the Israelites, and give it to the kohanim (called the t'rumah of the tithe) (Num. 18:26) (affirmative) (CCI13). See [Kohein](#), [Levi](#).
413. Not to eat the second tithe of cereals outside Jerusalem (Deut. 12:17) (negative).
414. Not to consume the second tithe of the vintage outside of Jerusalem (Deut. 12:17) (negative).
415. Not to consume the second tithe of the oil outside of Jerusalem (Deut. 12:17) (negative).
416. Not to forsake the Levites (Deut. 12:19); but their gifts (dues) should be given to them, so that they might rejoice therewith on each and every festival (negative). See [Levi](#).

417. To set apart the second tithe in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the sabbatical cycle to be eaten by its owner in Jerusalem (Deut. 14:22) (affirmative) (CCI14) (today, it is set aside but not eaten in Jerusalem).
418. To set apart the second tithe in the third and sixth year of the sabbatical cycle for the poor (Deut. 14:28-29) (affirmative) (CCI15) (today, it must be separated out but need not be given to the poor).
419. To give the kohein the due portions of the carcass of cattle (Deut. 18:3) (according to the [Talmud](#), this is not mandatory in the present outside of Israel, but it is permissible, and some observant people do so) (CCA51). See [Kohein](#).
420. To give the first of the fleece to the kohein (Deut. 18:4) (according to the [Talmud](#), this is not mandatory in the present outside of Israel, but it is permissible, and some observant people do so) (CCA52). See [Kohein](#).
421. To set apart t'rumah g'dolah (the great heave-offering, that is, a small portion of the grain, wine and oil) for the kohein (Deut. 18:4) (affirmative) (CCI11). See [Kohein](#).
422. Not to expend the proceeds of the second tithe on anything but food and drink (Deut. 26:14) Anything outside of things necessary for sustenance comes within the class in the phrase "Given for the dead" (negative).
423. Not to eat the Second Tithe, even in Jerusalem, in a state of uncleanness, until the tithe had been redeemed (Deut. 26:14) (negative).
424. Not to eat the Second Tithe, when mourning (Deut. 26:14) (negative).
425. To make the declaration, when bringing the second tithe to the Sanctuary (Deut. 26:13) (affirmative) (CCI17).

The Temple, the Sanctuary and Sacred Objects

426. Not to build an altar of hewn stone (Ex. 20:22) (negative).
427. Not to mount the altar by steps (Ex. 20:23) (negative).
428. To build the Sanctuary (Ex. 25:8) (affirmative).
429. Not to remove the staves from the Ark (Ex. 25:15) (negative).
430. To set the showbread and the frankincense before the L-rd every Shabbat (Ex. 25:30) (affirmative).
431. To kindle lights in the Sanctuary (Ex. 27:21) (affirmative).
432. That the breastplate shall not be loosened from the ephod (Ex. 28:28) (negative).
433. To offer up incense twice daily (Ex. 30:7) (affirmative).
434. Not to offer strange incense nor any sacrifice upon the golden altar (Ex. 30:9) (negative).
435. That the kohein shall wash his hands and feet at the time of service (Ex. 30:19) (affirmative). See [Kohein](#).
436. To prepare the oil of anointment and anoint high kohanim and kings with it (Ex. 30:31) (affirmative). See [Kohein](#).
437. Not to compound oil for lay use after the formula of the anointing oil (Ex. 30:32-33) (CCN145).
438. Not to anoint a stranger with the anointing oil (Ex. 30:32) (negative).

439. Not to compound anything after the formula of the incense (Ex. 30:37) (CCN146).
440. That he who, in error, makes unlawful use of sacred things, shall make restitution of the value of his trespass and add a fifth (Lev. 5:16) (affirmative).
441. To remove the ashes from the altar (Lev. 6:3) (affirmative).
442. To keep fire always burning on the altar of the burnt-offering (Lev. 6:6) (affirmative).
443. Not to extinguish the fire on the altar (Lev. 6:6) (negative).
444. That a kohein shall not enter the Sanctuary with disheveled hair (Lev. 10:6) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
445. That a kohein shall not enter the Sanctuary with torn garments (Lev. 10:6) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
446. That the kohein shall not leave the Courtyard of the Sanctuary, during service (Lev. 10:7) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
447. That an intoxicated person shall not enter the Sanctuary nor give decisions in matters of the Law (Lev. 10:9-11) (negative).
448. To revere the Sanctuary (Lev. 19:30) (today, this applies to synagogues) (CCA18). See [Synagogues, Shuls and Temples](#).
449. That when the Ark is carried, it should be carried on the shoulder (Num. 7:9) (affirmative).
450. To observe the second Passover (Num. 9:11) (affirmative).
451. To eat the flesh of the Paschal lamb on it, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Num. 9:11) (affirmative).
452. Not to leave any flesh of the Paschal lamb brought on the second Passover until the morning (Num. 9:12) (negative).
453. Not to break a bone of the Paschal lamb brought on the second Passover (Num. 9:12) (negative).
454. To sound the trumpets at the offering of sacrifices and in times of trouble (Num. 10:9-10) (affirmative).
455. To watch over the edifice continually (Num. 18:2) (affirmative).
456. Not to allow the Sanctuary to remain unwatched (Num. 18:5) (negative).
457. That an offering shall be brought by one who has in error committed a trespass against sacred things, or robbed, or lain carnally with a bond-maid betrothed to a man, or denied what was deposited with him and swore falsely to support his denial. This is called a guilt-offering for a known trespass (affirmative). See [Asham: Guilt Offering](#).
458. Not to destroy anything of the [Sanctuary](#), of [synagogues](#), or of houses of study, nor erase the holy names (of G-d); nor may sacred scriptures be destroyed (Deut. 12:2-4) (CCN157). See [The Name of G-d](#).

[Sacrifices and Offerings](#)

459. To sanctify the firstling of clean cattle and offer it up (Ex. 13:2; Deut. 15:19) (at the present time, it is not offered up) (CCA53).
460. To slay the Paschal lamb (Ex. 12:6) (affirmative).

461. To eat the flesh of the Paschal sacrifice on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan (Ex. 12:8) (affirmative).
462. Not to eat the flesh of the Paschal lamb raw or sodden (Ex. 12:9) (negative).
463. Not to leave any portion of the flesh of the Paschal sacrifice until the morning unconsumed (Ex. 12:10) (negative).
464. Not to give the flesh of the Paschal lamb to an Israelite who had become an apostate (Ex. 12:43) (negative).
465. Not to give flesh of the Paschal lamb to a stranger who lives among you to eat (Ex. 12:45) (negative).
466. Not to take any of the flesh of the Paschal lamb from the company's place of assembly (Ex. 12:46) (negative).
467. Not to break a bone of the Paschal lamb (Ex. 12:46) (negative).
468. That the uncircumcised shall not eat of the flesh of the Paschal lamb (Ex. 12:48) (negative). See [Brit Milah: Circumcision](#)
469. Not to slaughter the Paschal lamb while there is chametz in the home (Ex. 23:18; Ex. 24:25) (negative).
470. Not to leave the part of the Paschal lamb that should be burnt on the altar until the morning, when it will no longer be fit to be burnt (Ex. 23:18; Ex. 24:25) (negative).
471. Not to go up to the Sanctuary for the festival without bringing an offering (Ex. 23:15) (negative).
472. To bring the first fruits to the Sanctuary (Ex. 23:19) (affirmative).
473. That the flesh of a sin-offering and guilt-offering shall be eaten (Ex. 29:33) (affirmative). See [Qorbanot: Sacrifices and Offerings](#)
474. That one not of the seed of Aaron, shall not eat the flesh of the holy sacrifices (Ex. 29:33) (negative).
475. To observe the procedure of the burnt-offering (Lev. 1:3) (affirmative). See [Olah: Burnt Offering](#).
476. To observe the procedure of the meal-offering (Lev. 2:1) (affirmative). See [Food and Drink Offerings](#).
477. Not to offer up leaven or honey (Lev. 2:11) (negative).
478. That every sacrifice be salted (Lev. 2:13) (affirmative).
479. Not to offer up any offering unsalted (Lev. 2:13) (negative).
480. That the Court of Judgment shall offer up a sacrifice if they have erred in a judicial pronouncement (Lev. 4:13) (affirmative).
481. That an individual shall bring a sin-offering if he has sinned in error by committing a transgression, the conscious violation of which is punished with excision (Lev. 4:27-28) (affirmative). See [Chatat: Sin Offering](#).
482. To offer a sacrifice of varying value in accordance with one's means (Lev. 5:7) (affirmative).
483. Not to sever completely the head of a fowl brought as a sin-offering (Lev. 5:8) (negative).
484. Not to put olive oil in a sin-offering made of flour (Lev. 5:11) (negative).
485. Not to put frankincense on a sin-offering made of flour (Lev. 5:11) (negative).

486. That an individual shall bring an offering if he is in doubt as to whether he has committed a sin for which one has to bring a sin-offering. This is called a guilt-offering for doubtful sins (Lev. 5:17-19) (affirmative). See [Asham: Guilt Offering](#).
487. That the remainder of the meal offerings shall be eaten (Lev. 6:9) (affirmative).
488. Not to allow the remainder of the meal offerings to become leavened (Lev. 6:10) (negative).
489. That the High Kohein shall offer a meal offering daily (Lev. 6:13) (affirmative).
490. Not to eat of the meal offering brought by the kohanim (Lev. 6:16) (negative).
491. To observe the procedure of the sin-offering (Lev. 6:18) (affirmative). See [Chatat: Sin Offering](#).
492. Not to eat of the flesh of sin offerings, the blood of which is brought within the Sanctuary and sprinkled towards the Veil (Lev. 6:23) (negative).
493. To observe the procedure of the guilt-offering (Lev. 7:1) (affirmative). See [Asham: Guilt Offering](#).
494. To observe the procedure of the peace-offering (Lev. 7:11) (affirmative). See [Zebach Sh'lamin: Peace Offering](#).
495. To burn meat of the holy sacrifice that has remained over (Lev. 7:17) (affirmative).
496. Not to eat of sacrifices that are eaten beyond the appointed time for eating them (Lev. 7:18) The penalty is excision (negative).
497. Not to eat of holy things that have become unclean (Lev. 7:19) (negative).
498. To burn meat of the holy sacrifice that has become unclean (Lev. 7:19) (affirmative).
499. That a person who is unclean shall not eat of things that are holy (Lev. 7:20) (negative).
500. A kohein's daughter who profaned herself shall not eat of the holy things, neither of the heave offering nor of the breast, nor of the shoulder of peace offerings (Lev. 10:14, Lev. 22:12) (negative). See [Kohein](#).
501. That a woman after childbirth shall bring an offering when she is clean (Lev. 12:6) (affirmative). See [Birth](#).
502. That the leper shall bring a sacrifice after he is cleansed (Lev. 14:10) (affirmative).
503. That a man having an issue shall bring a sacrifice after he is cleansed of his issue (Lev. 15:13-15) (affirmative).
504. That a woman having an issue shall bring a sacrifice after she is cleansed of her issue (Lev. 15:28-30) (affirmative).
505. To observe, on Yom Kippur, the service appointed for that day, regarding the sacrifice, confessions, sending away of the scapegoat, etc. (Lev. 16:3-34) (affirmative).
506. Not to slaughter beasts set apart for sacrifices outside (the Sanctuary) (Lev. 17:3-4) (negative).
507. Not to eat flesh of a sacrifice that has been left over (beyond the time appointed for its consumption) (Lev. 19:8) (negative).
508. Not to sanctify blemished cattle for sacrifice on the altar (Lev. 22:20) This text prohibits such beasts being set apart for sacrifice on the altar (negative).
509. That every animal offered up shall be without blemish (Lev. 22:21) (affirmative).
510. Not to inflict a blemish on cattle set apart for sacrifice (Lev. 22:21) (negative).

511. Not to slaughter blemished cattle as sacrifices (Lev. 22:22) (negative).
512. Not to burn the limbs of blemished cattle upon the altar (Lev. 22:22) (negative).
513. Not to sprinkle the blood of blemished cattle upon the altar (Lev. 22:24) (negative).
514. Not to offer up a blemished beast that comes from non-Israelites (Lev. 22:25) (negative).
515. That sacrifices of cattle can only take place when they are at least eight days old (Lev. 22:27) (affirmative).
516. Not to leave any flesh of the thanksgiving offering until the morning (Lev. 22:30) (negative).
517. To offer up the meal-offering of the Omer on the morrow after the first day of Passover, together with one lamb (Lev. 23:10) (affirmative). See [The Counting of the Omer](#).
518. Not to eat bread made of new grain before the Omer of barley has been offered up on the second day of Passover (Lev. 23:14) (CCN101). See [The Counting of the Omer](#).
519. Not to eat roasted grain of the new produce before that time (Lev. 23:14) (CCN102). See [The Counting of the Omer](#).
520. Not to eat fresh ears of the new grain before that time (Lev. 23:14) (CCN103). See [The Counting of the Omer](#).
521. To bring on Shavu'ot loaves of bread together with the sacrifices which are then offered up in connection with the loaves (Lev. 23:17-20) (affirmative).
522. To offer up an additional sacrifice on Passover (Lev. 23:36) (affirmative).
523. That one who vows to the L-rd the monetary value of a person shall pay the amount appointed in the Scriptural portion (Lev. 27:2-8) (affirmative).
524. If a beast is exchanged for one that had been set apart as an offering, both become sacred (Lev. 27:10) (affirmative).
525. Not to exchange a beast set aside for sacrifice (Lev. 27:10) (negative).
526. That one who vows to the L-rd the monetary value of an unclean beast shall pay its value (Lev. 27:11-13) (affirmative).
527. That one who vows the value of a his house shall pay according to the appraisal of the kohein (Lev. 27:11-13) (affirmative). See [Kohein](#).
528. That one who sanctifies to the L-rd a portion of his field shall pay according to the estimation appointed in the Scriptural portion (Lev. 27:16-24) (affirmative).
529. Not to transfer a beast set apart for sacrifice from one class of sacrifices to another (Lev. 27:26) (negative).
530. To decide in regard to dedicated property as to which is sacred to the Lord and which belongs to the kohein (Lev. 27:28) (affirmative). See [Kohein](#).
531. Not to sell a field devoted to the Lord (Lev. 27:28) (negative).
532. Not to redeem a field devoted to the Lord (Lev. 27:28) (negative).
533. To make confession before the L-rd of any sin that one has committed, when bringing a sacrifice and at other times (Num. 5:6-7) (CCA33).
534. Not to put olive oil in the meal-offering of a woman suspected of adultery (Num. 5:15) (negative).
535. Not to put frankincense on it (Num. 5:15) (negative).

536. To offer up the regular sacrifices daily (two lambs as burnt offerings) (Num. 28:3) (affirmative).
537. To offer up an additional sacrifice every Shabbat (two lambs) (Num. 28:9) (affirmative).
538. To offer up an additional sacrifice every New Moon (Num. 28:11) (affirmative).
539. To bring an additional offering on Shavu'ot (Num. 28:26-27) (affirmative).
540. To offer up an additional sacrifice on Rosh Hashanah (Num. 29:1-6) (affirmative).
541. To offer up an additional sacrifice on Yom Kippur (Num. 29:7-8) (affirmative).
542. To offer up an additional sacrifice on Sukkot (Num. 29:12-34) (affirmative).
543. To offer up an additional offering on Shemini Atzeret, which is a festival by itself (Num. 29:35-38) (affirmative).
544. To bring all offerings, whether obligatory or freewill, on the first festival after these were incurred (Deut. 12:5-6) (affirmative).
545. Not to offer up sacrifices outside (the Sanctuary) (Deut. 12:13) (negative).
546. To offer all sacrifices in the Sanctuary (Deut. 12:14) (affirmative).
547. To redeem cattle set apart for sacrifices that contracted disqualifying blemishes, after which they may be eaten by anyone. (Deut. 12:15) (affirmative).
548. Not to eat of the unblemished firstling outside Jerusalem (Deut. 12:17) (negative).
549. Not to eat the flesh of the burnt-offering (Deut. 12:17). This is a Prohibition applying to every trespasser, not to enjoy any of the holy things. If he does so, he commits a trespass (negative).
550. That the kohanim shall not eat the flesh of the sin-offering or guilt-offering outside the Courtyard (of the Sanctuary) (Deut. 12:17) (negative).
551. Not to eat of the flesh of the sacrifices that are holy in a minor degree, before the blood has been sprinkled (on the altar), (Deut. 12:17) (negative).
552. That the kohein shall not eat the first-fruits before they are set down in the Courtyard (of the Sanctuary) (Deut. 12:17) (negative).
553. To take trouble to bring sacrifices to the Sanctuary from places outside the land of Israel (Deut. 12:26) (affirmative).
554. Not to eat the flesh of beasts set apart as sacrifices, that have been rendered unfit to be offered up by deliberately inflicted blemish (Deut. 14:3) (negative).
555. Not to do work with cattle set apart for sacrifice (Deut. 15:19) (negative).
556. Not to shear beasts set apart for sacrifice (Deut. 15:19) (negative).
557. Not to leave any portion of the festival offering brought on the fourteenth of Nissan unto the third day (Deut. 16:4) (negative).
558. Not to offer up a beast that has a temporary blemish (Deut. 17:1) (negative).
559. Not to bring sacrifices out of the hire of a harlot or price of a dog (apparently a euphemism for sodomy) (Deut. 23:19) (negative).
560. To read the portion prescribed on bringing the first fruits (Deut. 26:5-10) (affirmative).

Ritual Purity and Impurity

- 561. That eight species of creeping things defile by contact (Lev. 11:29-30) (affirmative).
- 562. That foods become defiled by contact with unclean things (Lev. 11:34) (affirmative).
- 563. That anyone who touches the carcass of a beast that died of itself shall be unclean (Lev. 11:39) (affirmative).
- 564. That a lying-in woman is unclean like a menstruating woman (in terms of uncleanness) (Lev. 12:2-5) (affirmative).
- 565. That a leper is unclean and defiles (Lev. 13:2-46) (affirmative).
- 566. That the leper shall be universally recognized as such by the prescribed marks So too, all other unclean persons should declare themselves as such (Lev. 13:45) (affirmative).
- 567. That a leprous garment is unclean and defiles (Lev. 13:47-49) (affirmative).
- 568. That a leprous house defiles (Lev. 14:34-46) (affirmative).
- 569. That a man, having a running issue, defiles (Lev. 15:1-15) (affirmative).
- 570. That the seed of copulation defiles (Lev. 15:16) (affirmative).
- 571. That purification from all kinds of defilement shall be effected by immersion in the waters of a mikvah (Lev. 15:16) (affirmative).
- 572. That a menstruating woman is unclean and defiles others (Lev. 15:19-24) (affirmative).
- 573. That a woman, having a running issue, defiles (Lev. 15:25-27) (affirmative).
- 574. To carry out the ordinance of the Red Heifer so that its ashes will always be available (Num. 19:9) (affirmative). See [Parah Adumah: Red Heifer](#).
- 575. That a corpse defiles (Num. 19:11-16) (affirmative). See [Care for the Dead](#).
- 576. That the waters of separation defile one who is clean, and cleanse the unclean from pollution by a dead body (Num. 19:19-22) (affirmative).

Lepers and Leprosy

- 577. Not to drove off the hair of the scall (Lev. 13:33) (negative).
- 578. That the procedure of cleansing leprosy, whether of a man or of a house, takes place with cedar-wood, hyssop, scarlet thread, two birds, and running water (Lev. 14:1-7) (affirmative).
- 579. That the leper shall shave all his hair (Lev. 14:9) (affirmative).
- 580. Not to pluck out the marks of leprosy (Deut. 24:8) (negative).

The King

- 581. Not to curse a ruler, that is, the King or the head of the College in the land of Israel (Ex. 22:27) (negative).
- 582. To appoint a king (Deut. 17:15) (affirmative).
- 583. Not to appoint as ruler over Israel, one who comes from non-Israelites (Deut. 17:15) (negative).
- 584. That the King shall not acquire an excessive number of horses (Deut. 17:16) (negative).

585. That the King shall not take an excessive number of wives (Deut. 17:17) (negative).
586. That he shall not accumulate an excessive quantity of gold and silver (Deut. 17:17) (negative).
587. That the King shall write a scroll of the Torah for himself, in addition to the one that every person should write, so that he writes two scrolls (Deut. 17:18) (affirmative). See [Torah](#).

Nazarites

588. That a Nazarite shall not drink wine, or anything mixed with wine which tastes like wine; and even if the wine or the mixture has turned sour, it is prohibited to him (Num. 6:3) (negative).
589. That he shall not eat fresh grapes (Num. 6:3) (negative).
590. That he shall not eat dried grapes (raisins) (Num. 6:3) (negative).
591. That he shall not eat the kernels of the grapes (Num. 6:4) (negative).
592. That he shall not eat of the skins of the grapes (Num. 6:4) (negative).
593. That the Nazarite shall permit his hair to grow (Num. 6:5) (affirmative).
594. That the Nazarite shall not cut his hair (Num. 6:5) (negative).
595. That he shall not enter any covered structure where there is a dead body (Num. 6:6) (negative).
596. That a Nazarite shall not defile himself for any dead person (by being in the presence of the corpse) (Num. 6:7) (negative).
597. That the Nazarite shall shave his hair when he brings his offerings at the completion of the period of his Nazariteship, or within that period if he has become defiled (Num. 6:9) (affirmative).

Wars

598. That those engaged in warfare shall not fear their enemies nor be panic-stricken by them during battle (Deut. 3:22, 7:21, 20:3) (negative).
599. To anoint a special kohein (to speak to the soldiers) in a war (Deut. 20:2) (affirmative). . See [Kohein](#).
600. In a permissive war (as distinguished from obligatory ones), to observe the procedure prescribed in the [Torah](#) (Deut. 20:10) (affirmative).
601. Not to keep alive any individual of the seven Canaanite nations (Deut. 20:16) (negative).
602. To exterminate the seven Canaanite nations from the land of Israel (Deut. 20:17) (affirmative).
603. Not to destroy fruit trees (wantonly or in warfare) (Deut. 20:19-20) (CCN191).
604. To deal with a beautiful woman taken captive in war in the manner prescribed in the Torah (Deut. 21:10-14) (affirmative).
605. Not to sell a beautiful woman, (taken captive in war) (Deut. 21:14) (negative).
606. Not to degrade a beautiful woman (taken captive in war) to the condition of a bondwoman (Deut. 21:14) (negative).
607. Not to offer peace to the Ammonites and the Moabites before waging war on them, as should be done to other nations (Deut. 23:7) (negative).
608. That anyone who is unclean shall not enter the Camp of the Levites (Deut. 23:11) (according to the

Talmud, in the present day this means the Temple mount) (CCN193).

609. To have a place outside the camp for sanitary purposes (Deut. 23:13) (affirmative).
610. To keep that place sanitary (Deut. 23:14-15) (affirmative).
611. Always to remember what Amalek did (Deut. 25:17) (CCA76).
612. That the evil done to us by Amalek shall not be forgotten (Deut. 25:19) (CCN194).
613. To destroy the seed of Amalek (Deut. 25:19) (CCA77).

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Jewish Calendar

Level: Basic

A few years ago, I was in a [synagogue](#), and I overheard one man ask another, "When is [Chanukkah](#) this year?" The other man smiled slyly and replied, "Same as always: the 25th of Kislev." This humorous comment makes an important point: the date of [Jewish holidays](#) does not change from year to year. Holidays are celebrated on the same day of the Jewish calendar every year, but the Jewish year is not the same length as a solar year on the Gregorian calendar used by most of the western world, so the date shifts on the Gregorian calendar.

Background and History

The Jewish calendar is primarily lunar, with each month beginning on the new moon, when the first sliver of moon becomes visible after the dark of the moon. In ancient times, the new months used to be determined by observation. When people observed the new moon, they would notify the Sanhedrin. When the Sanhedrin heard testimony from two independent, reliable eyewitnesses that the new moon occurred on a certain date, they would declare the rosh chodesh (first of the month) and send out messengers to tell people when the month began.

The problem with strictly lunar calendars is that there are approximately 12.4 lunar months in every solar year, so a 12-month lunar calendar loses about 11 days every year and a 13-month lunar gains about 19 days every year. The months on such a calendar "drift" relative to the solar year. On a 12 month calendar, the month of Nissan, which is supposed to occur in the Spring, occurs 11 days earlier each year, eventually occurring in the Winter, the Fall, the Summer, and then the Spring again. To compensate for this drift, an extra month was occasionally added: a second month of Adar. The month of Nissan would occur 11 days earlier for two or three years, and then would jump forward 29 or 30 days, balancing out the drift.

In the fourth century, Hillel II established a fixed calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. This calendar, still in use, standardized the length of months and the addition of months over the course of a 19 year cycle, so that the lunar calendar realigns with the solar years. Adar II is added in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years of the cycle. The current cycle began in Jewish year 5758 (the year that began October 2, 1997).

In addition, [Yom Kippur](#) should not fall adjacent to [Shabbat](#), because this would cause difficulties in coordinating the fast with Shabbat, and [Hoshanah Rabba](#) should not fall on Saturday because it would interfere with the holiday's observances. A day is added to the month of Cheshvan or subtracted from the month of Kislev of the previous year to prevent these things from happening.

Numbering of Jewish Years

The year number on the Jewish calendar represents the number of years since creation, calculated by adding up the ages of people in the Bible back to the time of creation. However, this does not necessarily mean that the universe has existed for only 5600 years as we understand years. Many [Orthodox](#) Jews will readily acknowledge that the first six "days" of creation are not necessarily 24-hour days (indeed, a

24-hour day would be meaningless until the creation of the sun on the fourth "day"). For a fascinating (albeit somewhat defensive) article by a nuclear physicist showing how Einstein's Theory of Relativity sheds light on the correspondence between the [Torah's](#) age of the universe and the age ascertained by science, see [The Age of the Universe](#).

Jews do not generally use the words "A.D." and "B.C." to refer to the years on the Gregorian calendar. "A.D." means "the year of our L-rd," and we do not believe Jesus is the L-rd. Instead, we use the abbreviations C.E. (Common or Christian Era) and B.C.E. (Before the Common Era).

Months of the Jewish Year

The "first month" of the Jewish calendar is the month of Nissan, in the spring, when [Passover](#) occurs. However, the [Jewish New Year](#) is in Tishri, the seventh month, and that is when the year number is increased. This concept of different starting points for a year is not as strange as it might seem at first glance. The American "new year" starts in January, but the new "school year" starts in September, and many businesses have "fiscal years" that start at various times of the year. Similarly, the Jewish calendar has different starting points for different purposes.

The names of the months of the Jewish calendar were adopted during the time of Ezra, after the return from the Babylonian exile. The names are actually Babylonian month names, brought back to Israel by the returning exiles. Note that most of the Bible refers to months by number, not by name.

The Jewish calendar has the following months:

Name	Number	Length	Gregorian Equivalent
Nissan	1	30 days	March-April
Iyar	2	29 days	April-May
Sivan	3	30 days	May-June
Tammuz	4	29 days	June-July
Av	5	30 days	July-August
Elul	6	29 days	August-September
Tishri	7	30 days	September-October
Cheshvan	8	29 or 30 days	October-November
Kislev	9	30 or 29 days	November-December
Tevet	10	29 days	December-January
Shevat	11	30 days	January-February
Adar	12	29 or 30 days	February-March
Adar II	13	29 days	March-April

In leap years, Adar has 30 days. In non-leap years, Adar has 29 days.

The length of Cheshvan and Kislev are determined by complex calculations involving the time of day of the full moon of the following year's Tishri and the day of the week that Tishri would occur in the following year. I won't pretend to understand the mathematics involved, and I don't particularly recommend trying to figure it out. There are plenty of easily accessible computer programs that will calculate the Jewish calendar for more than a millennium to come.

Note that the number of days between Nissan and Tishri is always the same. Because of this, the time from the first major festival ([Passover](#) in Nissan) to the last major festival ([Sukkot](#) in Tishri) is always the same.

Links to Jewish Calendars

If you would like to download a Jewish calendar for your use, I highly recommend Calendar Maven's Hebrew Calendar, a shareware program that is available for download at <http://www.calendarmaven.com>. With this program, you can see calendars for dates from the Gregorian year 1600 to the year 2200, including holidays, weekly Torah readings, candle lighting times and more.

If you would like to look up the date of a Jewish holiday, from the Gregorian year 1 to the Gregorian year 9999, try <http://www.hebcal.com>. I don't know how accurate this is (especially given that during the earlier dates, months were determined by observation), but I haven't caught any mistakes in it yet.

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Shabbat

Level: Basic

The Nature of Shabbat

The Sabbath (or Shabbat, as it is called in Hebrew) is one of the best known and least understood of all Jewish observances. People who do not observe Shabbat think of it as a day filled with stifling restrictions, or as a day of prayer like the Christian Sabbath. But to those who observe Shabbat, it is a precious gift from [G-d](#), a day of great joy eagerly awaited throughout the week, a time when we can set aside all of our weekday concerns and devote ourselves to higher pursuits. In Jewish literature, poetry and music, Shabbat is described as a bride or queen, as in the popular Shabbat hymn Lecha Dodi Likrat Kallah (come, my beloved, to meet the [Sabbath] bride). It is said "more than Israel has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept Israel."



Shabbat is the most important ritual observance in Judaism. It is the only ritual observance instituted in the Ten Commandments. It is also the most important special day, even more important than [Yom Kippur](#). This is clear from the fact that more [aliyoth](#) (opportunities for congregants to be called up to the Torah) are given on Shabbat than on any other day.

Shabbat is primarily a day of rest and spiritual enrichment. The word "Shabbat" comes from the [root](#) Shin-Bet-Tav, meaning to cease, to end, or to rest.

Shabbat is not specifically a day of [prayer](#). Although we do pray on Shabbat, and spend a substantial amount of time in synagogue praying, prayer is not what distinguishes Shabbat from the rest of the week. Observant Jews pray every day, three times a day. See [Jewish Liturgy](#). To say that Shabbat is a day of prayer is no more accurate than to say that Shabbat is a day of feasting: we eat every day, but on Shabbat, we eat more elaborately and in a more leisurely fashion. The same can be said of prayer on Shabbat.

In modern America, we take the five-day work-week so much for granted that we forget what a radical concept a day of rest was in ancient times. The weekly day of rest has no parallel in any other ancient civilization. In ancient times, leisure was for the wealthy and the ruling classes only, never for the serving or laboring classes. In addition, the very idea of rest each week was unimaginable. The Greeks thought Jews were lazy because we insisted on having a "holiday" every seventh day.

Shabbat involves two interrelated commandments: to remember (zachor) Shabbat, and to observe (shamor) Shabbat.

Zachor: To Remember

We are commanded to remember Shabbat; but remembering means much more than merely not forgetting to observe Shabbat. It also means to remember the significance of Shabbat, both as a commemoration of creation and as a commemoration of our freedom from slavery in Egypt.

In Exodus 20:11, after Fourth Commandment is first instituted, [G-d](#) explains, "because for six days, the

L-rd made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and on the seventh day, he rested; therefore, the L-rd blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it." By resting on the seventh day and sanctifying it, we remember and acknowledge that G-d is the creator of heaven and earth and all living things. We also emulate the divine example, by refraining from work on the seventh day, as G-d did. If G-d's work can be set aside for a day of rest, how can we believe that our own work is too important to set aside temporarily?

In Deuteronomy 5:15, while [Moses](#) reiterates the Ten Commandments, he notes the second thing that we must remember on Shabbat: "remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the L-rd, your G-d brought you forth from there with a might hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore the L-rd your G-d commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

What does the Exodus have to do with resting on the seventh day? It's all about freedom. As I said before, in ancient times, leisure was confined to certain classes; slaves did not get days off. Thus, by resting on Shabbat, we are reminded that we are free. But in a more general sense, Shabbat frees us from our weekday concerns, from our deadlines and schedules and commitments. During the week, we are slaves to our jobs, to our creditors, to our need to provide for ourselves; on Shabbat, we are freed from these concerns, much as our ancestors were freed from slavery in Egypt.

We remember these two meanings of Shabbat when we recite kiddush (the prayer over wine sanctifying Shabbat or a [holiday](#)). Friday night kiddush refers to Shabbat as both zikkaron l'ma'aseh bereishit (a memorial of the work in the beginning) and zeicher litzi'at mitzrayim (a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt).

Shamor: To Observe

Of course, no discussion of Shabbat would be complete without a discussion of the work that is forbidden on Shabbat. This is another aspect of Shabbat that is grossly misunderstood by people who do not observe it.

Most Americans see the word "work" and think of it in the English sense of the word: physical labor and effort, or employment. Under this definition, turning on a light would be permitted, because it does not require effort, but a [rabbi](#) would not be permitted to lead Shabbat services, because leading services is his employment. Jewish law prohibits the former and permits the latter. Many Americans therefore conclude that Jewish law doesn't make any sense.

The problem lies not in Jewish law, but in the definition that Americans are using. The Torah does not prohibit "work" in the 20th century English sense of the word. The Torah prohibits "melachah" ([Mem-Lamed-Alef-Kaf-Heh](#)), which is usually translated as "work," but does not mean precisely the same thing as the English word. Before you can begin to understand the Shabbat restrictions, you must understand the word "melachah."

Melachah generally refers to the kind of work that is creative, or that exercises control or dominion over your environment. The word may be related to "melekh" (king; [Mem-Lamed-Kaf](#)). The quintessential example of melachah is the work of creating the universe, which G-d ceased from on the seventh day. Note that G-d's work did not require a great physical effort: he spoke, and it was done.

The word melachah is rarely used in scripture outside of the context of Shabbat and holiday restrictions.

The only other repeated use of the word is in the discussion of the building of the sanctuary and its vessels in the wilderness. Exodus Ch. 31, 35-38. Notably, the Shabbat restrictions are reiterated during this discussion (Ex. 31:13), thus we can infer that the work of creating the sanctuary had to be stopped for Shabbat. From this, the [rabbis](#) concluded that the work prohibited on Shabbat is the same as the work of creating the sanctuary. They found 39 categories of forbidden acts, all of which are types of work that were needed to build the sanctuary:

1. Sowing
2. Plowing
3. Reaping
4. Binding sheaves
5. Threshing
6. Winnowing
7. Selecting
8. Grinding
9. Sifting
10. Kneading
11. Baking
12. Shearing wool
13. Washing wool
14. Beating wool
15. Dyeing wool
16. Spinning
17. Weaving
18. Making two loops
19. Weaving two threads
20. Separating two threads
21. Tying
22. Untying
23. Sewing two stitches
24. Tearing
25. Trapping
26. Slaughtering
27. Flaying
28. Salting meat
29. Curing hide
30. Scraping hide
31. Cutting hide up

32. Writing two letters
33. Erasing two letters
34. Building
35. Tearing a building down
36. Extinguishing a fire
37. Kindling a fire
38. Hitting with a hammer
39. Taking an object from the private domain to the public, or transporting an object in the public domain.

([Mishnah](#) Shabbat, 7:2)

All of these tasks are prohibited, as well as any task that operates by the same principle or has the same purpose. In addition, the rabbis have prohibited coming into contact with any implement that could be used for one of the above purposes (for example, you may not touch a hammer or a pencil), travel, buying and selling, and other weekday tasks that would interfere with the spirit of Shabbat. The use of electricity is prohibited because it serves the same function as fire or some of the other prohibitions, or because it is technically considered to be "fire."

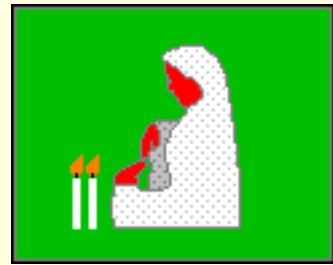
The issue of the use of an automobile on Shabbat, so often argued by non-observant Jews, is not really an issue at all for observant Jews. The automobile is powered by an internal combustion engine, which operates by burning gasoline and oil, a clear violation of the [Torah](#) prohibition against kindling a fire. In addition, the movement of the car would constitute transporting an object in the public domain, another violation of a Torah prohibition, and in all likelihood the car would be used to travel a distance greater than that permitted by rabbinical prohibitions. For all these reasons, and many more, the use of an automobile on Shabbat is clearly not permitted.

As with almost all of the commandments, all of these Shabbat restrictions can be violated if necessary to save a life.

A Typical Shabbat

At about 2PM or 3PM on Friday afternoon, observant Jews leave the office to begin Shabbat preparations. The mood is much like preparing for the arrival of a special, beloved guest: the house is cleaned, the family bathes and dresses up, the best dishes and tableware are set, a festive meal is prepared. In addition, everything that cannot be done during Shabbat must be set up in advance: lights and appliances must be set (or timers placed on them, if the household does so), the light bulb in the refrigerator must be removed or unscrewed, so it does not turn on when you open it, and preparations for the remaining Shabbat meals must be made.

Shabbat, like all Jewish days, begins at sunset, because in the story of creation in Genesis Ch. 1, you will notice that it says, "And there was evening, and there was morning, one day." From this, we infer that a day begins with evening, that is, sunset. For the precise time when shabbat begins in your area, consult the [list of candle lighting times](#) provided by the Orthodox Union or any Jewish calendar.



Shabbat candles are lit and a blessing is recited no later than eighteen minutes before sunset. This ritual, performed by the [woman](#) of the house, officially marks the beginning of Shabbat. Two candles are lit, representing the two commandments: zachor (remember) and shamor (observe), discussed below.

The family then attends a brief evening service (45 minutes - that's brief by Jewish standards - see [Jewish Liturgy](#)).

After services, the family comes home for a festive, leisurely dinner. Before dinner, the man of the house recites Kiddush, a prayer over wine sanctifying Shabbat. The usual prayer for eating bread is recited over two loaves of [challah](#), a sweet, eggy bread shaped in a braid. The family then eats dinner. Although there are no specific requirements or customs regarding what to eat, meals are generally stewed or slow cooked items, because of the prohibition against cooking during Shabbat. (Things that are mostly cooked before Shabbat and then reheated or kept warm are OK).

After dinner, the birkat ha-mazon (grace after meals) is recited. Although this is done every day, on Shabbat, it is done in a leisurely manner with many upbeat tunes.

By the time all of this is completed, it may be 9PM or later. The family has an hour or two to talk or study Torah, and then go to sleep.

The next morning Shabbat services begin around 9AM and continue until about noon. After services, the family says kiddush again and has another leisurely, festive meal. A typical afternoon meal is cholent, a very slowly cooked stew. My recipe is [below](#). By the time birkat ha-mazon is done, it is about 2PM. The family studies Torah for a while, talks, takes an afternoon walk, plays some checkers, or engages in other leisure activities. A short afternoon nap is not uncommon. It is traditional to have a third meal before Shabbat is over. This is usually a light meal in the late afternoon.

Shabbat ends at nightfall, when three stars are visible, approximately 40 minutes after sunset. At the conclusion of Shabbat, the family performs a concluding ritual called Havdalah (separation, division). Blessings are recited over wine, spices and candles. Then a blessing is recited regarding the division between the sacred and the secular, between Shabbat and the working days, etc. For details, see [Havdalah Home Ritual](#).

As you can see, Shabbat is a very full day when it is properly observed, and very relaxing. You really don't miss being unable to turn on the TV, drive a car or go shopping.

Recipe for Cholent

Cholent is a traditional Shabbat dish, because it is designed to be cooked very slowly. It can be started before Shabbat and is ready to eat for lunch the next day. The name "cholent" supposedly comes from the

French words "chaud lent" meaning "hot slow." If French seems like a strange source for the name of a traditional Jewish dish, keep in mind that the ancestors [Ashkenazic](#) Jews traveled from [Israel](#) to Germany and Russia by way of France.

- 2 pounds fatty meat (I use stewing beef, but brisket is more common)
- 2 cups dry beans (navy beans, great northern beans, pintos, limas are typical choices).
- 1 cup barley
- 6 medium potatoes
- 2 medium onions
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 3 tablespoons oil
- garlic, pepper and paprika to taste
- water to cover

Soak the beans and barley until they are thoroughly softened. Sprinkle the flour and spices on the meat and brown it lightly in the oil. Cut up the potatoes into large chunks. Slice the onions. Put everything into a Dutch oven and cover with water. Bring to a boil on the stove top, then put in the oven at 250 degrees before Shabbat begins. Check it in the morning, to make sure there is enough water to keep it from burning but not enough to make it soggy. Other than that, leave it alone. By lunch time Shabbat afternoon, it is ready to eat.

This also works very well in a crock pot on the low setting, but be careful not to put in too much water!

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Jewish Holidays

Level: Basic

This is the first in a series of pages on the Jewish holidays. Each of the pages in this series talks about the significance of a holiday, its traditional observances and related customs, the date on which each holiday will occur for the next five years, and in some cases recipes for traditional, [Ashkenazic](#) holiday-related foods.

Pages are available regarding the following holidays:

- [The Month of Tishri](#)
- [Rosh Hashanah](#)
- [Days of Awe](#)
- [Yom Kippur](#)
- [Sukkot](#)
- [Shemini Atzeret and Simkhat Torah](#)
- [Chanukkah](#)
- [Tu B'Shevat](#)
- [Purim](#)
- [Pesach: Passover](#)
- [The Counting of the Omer](#)
- [Shavu'ot](#)
- [Tisha B'Av](#)
- [Minor Fasts](#)
- [New Holidays](#)

A few general notes about Jewish holidays:

When Holidays Begin

All Jewish holidays begin the evening before the date specified. This is because a Jewish "day" begins and ends at sunset, rather than at midnight. If you read the story of creation in Genesis Ch. 1, you will notice that it says, "And there was evening, and there was morning, one day." From this, we infer that a day begins with evening, that is, sunset. For the precise time when a holiday begins in your area, consult the [list of candle lighting times](#) provided by the Orthodox Union or any Jewish calendar.

For a discussion of why Jewish holidays occur on different days every year, see [Jewish Calendar](#).

Work on Holidays

Work is not permitted on [Rosh Hashanah](#), [Yom Kippur](#), the first and second days of [Sukkot](#), [Shemini Atzeret](#), [Simkhat Torah](#), [Shavu'ot](#), and the first, second, seventh and eighth days of [Passover](#). The "work" prohibited on those holidays is the same as that prohibited on [Shabbat](#), except that cooking, baking, transferring fire and carrying, all of which are forbidden on Shabbat, are permitted on holidays. When a holiday occurs on Shabbat, the full Shabbat restrictions are observed.

Extra Day of Holidays

You may notice that the number of days of some holidays do not accord with what the [Bible](#) specifies. In most cases, we celebrate one more day than the Bible requires. There is an interesting reason for this additional day.

The [Jewish calendar](#) is lunar, with each month beginning on the new moon. The new months used to be determined by observation. When the new moon was observed, the Sanhedrin declared the beginning of a new month notice sent out messengers to tell people when the month began. People in distant communities could not always be notified of the new moon (and therefore, of the first day of the month), so they did not know the correct day to celebrate. They knew that the old month would be either 29 or 30 days, so if they didn't get notice of the new moon, they celebrated holidays on both possible days.

This practice of celebrating an extra day was maintained as a custom even after we adopted a precise mathematical calendar, because it was the custom of our ancestors. This extra day is not celebrated by Israelis, regardless of whether they are in [Israel](#) at the time of the holiday, because it is not the custom of their ancestors, but is celebrated by everybody else, even if they are visiting Israel at the time of the holiday.

[Rosh Hashanah](#) is celebrated as two days everywhere (in Israel and outside Israel), because it occurs on the first day of a month. Messengers were not dispatched on the holiday, so even people in Israel did not know whether a new moon had been observed, and everybody celebrated two days. The practice was also maintained as a custom after the mathematical calendar was adopted.

[Yom Kippur](#) is celebrated only one day everywhere, because extending the holiday's severe restrictions for a second day would cause an undue hardship.

List of All Holiday Dates

Below is a list of all major holiday dates for the next five years. All holidays begin at sundown on the date before the date specified here.

	5761	5762	5763	5764	5765
Rosh Hashanah	9/30/00	9/18/01	9/7/02	9/27/03	9/16/04
Yom Kippur	10/9/00	9/27/01	9/16/02	10/6/03	9/25/04
Sukkot	10/14/00	10/2/01	9/21/02	10/11/03	9/30/04
Shemini Atzeret	10/21/00	10/9/01	9/28/02	10/18/03	10/7/04

Simchat Torah	10/22/00	10/10/01	9/29/02	10/19/03	10/8/04
Chanukkah	12/22/00	12/10/01	11/30/02	12/20/03	12/8/04
Tu B'Shevat	2/8/01	1/28/02	1/18/03	2/7/04	1/25/05
Purim	3/9/01	2/26/02	3/18/03	3/7/04	3/25/05
Pesach (Passover)	4/8/01	3/28/02	4/17/03	4/6/04	4/24/05
Lag B'Omer	5/11/01	4/30/02	5/20/03	5/9/04	5/27/05
Shavu'ot	5/28/01	5/17/02	6/6/03	5/26/04	6/13/05
Tisha B'Av	7/29/01	7/18/02	8/7/03	7/27/04	8/14/05

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The Month of Tishri

Level: Basic

TISHRI 5761						
						1 Rosh Ha-Shanah
2 Rosh Ha-Shanah	3 Fast of Gedaliah	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 Yom Kippur	11	12	13	14	15 Sukkot
16 Sukkot	17 Sukkot	18 Sukkot	19 Sukkot	20 Sukkot	21 Sukkot	22 Shemini Atzeret
23 Simchat Torah	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

The month of [Tishri](#), which falls during the months of September and October on the Gregorian calendar, is probably the busiest time of the year for Jewish holidays. In the month of Tishri, there are a total of 13 days of special religious significance, 7 of them holidays on which work is not permitted.

These holidays include the holidays known as the "High Holidays," the most important holidays of the Jewish year: [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Yom Kippur](#). A 1990 survey showed that only 40% of all Jews affiliate themselves with a [synagogue](#), but 55% attend synagogue on these holidays. If a Jew ever goes to synagogue (other than for [weddings](#) or [bar mitzvahs](#)), it is for these holidays.

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Rosh Hashanah

Level: Basic

Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of [Tishri](#). In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah means, literally, "head of the year" or "first of the year." Rosh Hashanah is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. This name is somewhat deceptive, because there is little similarity between Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days of the year, and the American midnight drinking bash and daytime football game.

There is, however, one important similarity between the Jewish New Year and the American one: Many Americans use the New Year as a time to plan a better life, making "resolutions." Likewise, the Jewish New Year is a time to begin introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year. More on this concept at [Days of Awe](#).

The name "Rosh Hashanah" is not used in the Bible to discuss this holiday. The Bible refers to the holiday as Yom Ha-Zikkaron (the day of remembrance) or Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar). The holiday is instituted in Leviticus 23:24-25.

The shofar is a ram's horn which is blown somewhat like a trumpet. One of the most important observances of this holiday is hearing the sounding of the shofar in the [synagogue](#). A total of 100 notes are sounded each day. There are four different types of shofar notes: tekiah, a 3 second sustained note; shevarim, three 1-second notes rising in tone, teruah, a series of short, staccato notes extending over a period of about 3 seconds; and tekiah gedolah (literally, "big tekiah"), the final blast in a set, which lasts (I think) 10 seconds minimum. Click the shofar above to hear an approximation of the sound of Tekiah Shevarim-Teruah Tekiah. The Bible gives no specific reason for this practice. One that has been suggested is that the shofar's sound is a call to repentance. The shofar is not blown if the holiday falls on [Shabbat](#).



No [work](#) is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. Much of the day is spent in [synagogue](#), where the regular daily [liturgy](#) is somewhat expanded. In fact, there is a special prayerbook called the machzor used for Rosh Hashanah and [Yom Kippur](#) because of the extensive liturgical changes for these holidays.

Another popular observance during this holiday is eating apples dipped in honey, a symbol of our wish for a sweet new year. This was the second Jewish religious practice I was ever exposed to (the first one: lighting [Chanukkah](#) candles), and I highly recommend it. It's yummy. We also dip bread in honey (instead of the usual practice of sprinkling salt on it) at this time of year for the same reason.

Another popular practice of the holiday is Tashlikh ("casting off"). We walk to flowing water, such as a creek or river, on the afternoon of the first day and empty our pockets into the river, symbolically casting off our sins. This practice is not discussed in the Bible, but is a long-standing custom.

Religious services for the holiday focus on the concept of [G-d](#)'s sovereignty.

The common greeting at this time is L'shanah tovah ("for a good year"). This is a shortening of "L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem" (or to women, "L'shanah tovah tikatevi v'taihatemi"), which means "May you

be inscribed and sealed for a good year." More on that concept at [Days of Awe](#).

You may notice that the Bible speaks of Rosh Hashanah as occurring on the first day of the seventh month. The first month of the [Jewish calendar](#) is Nissan, occurring in March and April. Why, then, does the Jewish "new year" occur in Tishri, the seventh month?

Judaism has several different "new years," a concept which may seem strange at first, but think of it this way: the American "new year" starts in January, but the new "school year" starts in September, and many businesses have "fiscal years" that start at various times of the year. In Judaism, Nissan 1 is the new year for the purpose of counting the reign of kings and months on the calendar, Elul 1 (in August) is the new year for the tithing of animals, [Shevat 15](#) (in February) is the new year for trees (determining when first fruits can be eaten, etc.), and Tishri 1 (Rosh Hashanah) is the new year for years (when we increase the year number. Sabbatical and Jubilee years begin at this time).

See [Extra Day of Jewish Holidays](#) for an explanation of why this holiday is celebrated for two days instead of the one specified in the Bible.

List of Dates

Rosh Hashanah will [begin](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- September 18, 2001 (Jewish year 5762)
- September 7, 2002 (Jewish year 5763)
- September 27, 2003 (Jewish year 5764)
- September 16, 2004 (Jewish year 5765)
- October 4, 2005 (Jewish year 5766)

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Days of Awe

Level: Basic

The ten days starting with [Rosh Hashanah](#) and ending with [Yom Kippur](#) are commonly known as the Days of Awe (Yamim Noraim) or the Days of Repentance. This is a time for serious introspection, a time to consider the sins of the previous year and repent before Yom Kippur.

One of the ongoing themes of the Days of Awe is the concept that [G-d](#) has "books" that he writes our names in, writing down who will live and who will die, who will have a good life and who will have a bad life, for the next year. These books are written in on Rosh Hashanah, but our actions during the Days of Awe can alter G-d's decree. The actions that change the decree are "teshuvah, [tefilah](#) and [tzedakah](#)," repentance, prayer, good deeds (usually, charity). These "books" are sealed on Yom Kippur. This concept of writing in books is the source of the common greeting during this time is "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year."

Among the customs of this time, it is common to seek reconciliation with people you may have wronged during the course of the year. The Talmud maintains that Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and G-d. To atone for sins against another person, you must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs you committed against them if possible.

Another custom observed during this time is kapparot. This is rarely practiced today, and is observed in its true form only by [Chasidic](#) and occasionally [Orthodox](#) Jews. Basically, you purchase a live fowl, and on the morning before Yom Kippur you waive it over your head reciting a prayer asking that the fowl be considered atonement for sins. The fowl is then slaughtered and given to the poor (or its value is given). Some Jews today simply use a bag of money instead of a fowl. Most Reform and Conservative Jews have never even heard of this practice.

Work is permitted as usual during the intermediate Days of Awe, from Tishri 3 to Tishri 9, except of course for [Shabbat](#) during that week.

Two lesser special occasions occur during the course of the Days of Awe.

Tishri 3, the day after the second day of Rosh Hashanah, is the Fast of Gedaliah. This really has nothing to do with the Days of Awe, except that it occurs in the middle of them. For more information, see [Minor Fasts](#).

The [Shabbat](#) that occurs in this period is known as Shabbat Shuvah (the Sabbath of Return). This is considered a rather important Shabbat.

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Yom Kippur

Level: Basic

Yom Kippur is probably the most important holiday of the Jewish year. Many Jews who do not observe any other Jewish custom will refrain from work, fast and/or attend [synagogue](#) services on this day. Yom Kippur occurs on the 10th day of [Tishri](#). The holiday is instituted at Leviticus 23:26 et seq.

The name "Yom Kippur" means "Day of Atonement," and that pretty much explains what the holiday is. It is a day set aside to "afflict the soul," to atone for the sins of the past year. In [Days of Awe](#), I mentioned the "books" in which [G-d](#) inscribes all of our names. On Yom Kippur, the judgment entered in these books is sealed. This day is, essentially, your last appeal, your last chance to change the judgment, to demonstrate your repentance and make amends.

As I noted in [Days of Awe](#), Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and G-d, not for sins against another person. To atone for sins against another person, you must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs you committed against them if possible. That must all be done before Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a complete Sabbath; no work can be performed on that day. It is well-known that you are supposed to refrain from eating and drinking (even water) on Yom Kippur. It is a complete, 25-hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ending after nightfall on the day of Yom Kippur. The [Talmud](#) also specifies additional restrictions that are less well-known: washing and bathing, anointing one's body (with cosmetics, deodorants, etc.), wearing leather shoes ([Orthodox](#) Jews routinely wear canvas sneakers under their dress clothes on Yom Kippur), and engaging in sexual relations are all prohibited on Yom Kippur.

As always, any of these restrictions can be lifted where a threat to life or health is involved. In fact, children under the age of nine and women in childbirth (from the time labor begins until three days after birth) are **not permitted** to fast, even if they want to. Older children and women from the third to the seventh day after childbirth are permitted to fast, but are permitted to break the fast if they feel the need to do so. People with other illnesses should consult a physician and a [rabbi](#) for advice.

Most of the holiday is spent in the [synagogue](#), in prayer. In [Orthodox](#) synagogues, services begin early in the morning (8 or 9 AM) and continue until about 3 PM. People then usually go home for an afternoon nap and return around 5 or 6 PM for the afternoon and evening services, which continue until nightfall. The services end at nightfall, with the blowing of the tekiah gedolah, a long blast on the shofar. See [Rosh Hashanah](#) for more about the shofar and its characteristic blasts.

It is customary to wear white on the holiday, which symbolizes purity and calls to mind the promise that our sins shall be made as white as snow (Is. 1:18). Some people wear a kittel, the white robe in which the dead are [buried](#).

Yom Kippur Liturgy

See also [Jewish Liturgy](#) generally.

The liturgy for Yom Kippur is much more extensive than for any other day of the year. Liturgical changes are so far-reaching that a separate, special prayer book for Yom Kippur and [Rosh Hashanah](#). This prayer book is called the machzor.

The evening service that begins Yom Kippur is commonly known as Kol Nidre, named for the prayer that begins the service. "Kol nidre" means "all vows," and in this prayer, we ask G-d to annul all personal vows we may make in the next year. It refers only to vows between the person making them and G-d, such as "If I pass this test, I'll pray every day for the next 6 months!" Click the speaker to hear a portion of the traditional tune for this prayer.



This prayer has often been held up by anti-Semites as proof that Jews are untrustworthy (we do not keep our vows), and for this reason the [Reform movement](#) removed it from the liturgy for a while. In fact, the reverse is true: we make this prayer because we take vows so seriously that we consider ourselves bound even if we make the vows under duress or in times of stress when we are not thinking straight. This prayer gave comfort to those who were converted to Christianity by torture in various inquisitions, yet felt unable to break their vow to follow Christianity. In recognition of this history, the Reform movement restored this prayer to its liturgy.

There are many additions to the regular liturgy (there would have to be, to get such a long service <grin>). Perhaps the most important addition is the confession of the sins of the community, which is inserted into the Shemoneh Esrei (Amidah) prayer. Note that all sins are confessed in the plural (we have done this, we have done that), emphasizing communal responsibility for sins.

There are two basic parts of this confession: Ashamnu, a shorter, more general list (we have been treasonable, we have been aggressive, we have been slanderous...), and Al Chet, a longer and more specific list (for the sin we sinned before you forcibly or willingly, and for the sin we sinned before you by acting callously...) Frequent petitions for forgiveness are interspersed in these prayers. There's also a catch-all confession: "Forgive us the breach of positive commands and negative commands, whether or not they involve an act, whether or not they are known to us."

It is interesting to note that these confessions do not specifically address the kinds of ritual sins that some people think are the be-all-and-end-all of Judaism. There is no "for the sin we have sinned before you by eating pork, and for the sin we have sinned against you by driving on Shabbat" (though obviously these are implicitly included in the catch-all). The vast majority of the sins enumerated involve mistreatment of other people, most of them by [speech](#) (offensive speech, scoffing, slander, talebearing, and swearing falsely, to name a few). These all come into the category of sin known as "[lashon ha-ra](#)" (lit: the evil tongue), which is considered a very serious sin in Judaism.

The concluding service of Yom Kippur, known as Ne'ilah, is one unique to the day. It usually runs about 1 hour long. The ark (a cabinet where the scrolls of the Torah are kept) is kept open throughout this service, thus you must stand throughout the service. There is a tone of desperation in the prayers of this service. The service is sometimes referred to as the closing of the gates; think of it as the "last chance" to get in a good word before the holiday ends. The service ends with a very long blast of the shofar. See

[Rosh Hashanah](#) for more about the shofar and its characteristic blasts.

After Yom Kippur, one should begin preparing for the next holiday, [Sukkot](#), which begins five days later.

List of Dates

Yom Kippur will [occur](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- September 27, 2001 (Jewish Year 5762)
- September 16, 2002 (Jewish Year 5763)
- October 6, 2003 (Jewish Year 5764)
- September 25, 2004 (Jewish Year 5765)
- October 13, 2005 (Jewish Year 5766)

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Sukkot

Level: Basic

The Festival of Sukkot begins on [Tishri](#) 15, the fifth day after [Yom Kippur](#). It is quite a drastic transition, from one of the most solemn holidays in our year to one of the most joyous.

This festival is sometimes referred to as Zeman Simkhateinu, the Season of our Rejoicing. Sukkot lasts for seven days. The two days following the festival are separate holidays, [Shemini Atzeret](#) and [Simkhat Torah](#), but are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot.

The word "Sukkot" means "booths," and refers to the temporary dwellings that we are commanded to live in during this holiday. The name of the holiday is frequently translated "The Feast of Tabernacles," which, like many translations of technical Jewish terms, isn't terribly useful unless you already know what the term is referring to. The Hebrew pronunciation of Sukkot is "Sue COAT," but is often pronounced as in Yiddish, to rhyme with "BOOK us."

Like [Passover](#) and [Shavu'ot](#), Sukkot has a dual significance: historical and agricultural. The holiday commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Sukkot is also a harvest festival, and is sometimes referred to as Chag Ha-Asif, the Festival of Ingathering.

The festival of Sukkot is instituted in Leviticus 23:33 et seq. No [work](#) is permitted on the first and second days of the holiday. Work is permitted on the remaining days. These intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as Chol Ha-Mo'ed, as are the intermediate days of [Passover](#).

In honor of the holiday's historical significance, we are commanded to dwell in temporary shelters, as our ancestors did in the wilderness. The commandment to "dwell" in a sukkah can be fulfilled by simply eating all of one's meals there; however, if the weather, climate, and one's health permit, one should live in the sukkah as much as possible, including sleeping in it.



A sukkah must have at least three walls covered with a material that will not blow away in the wind. Canvas covering tied or nailed down is acceptable and quite common in the United States. A sukkah may be any size, so long as it is large enough for you to fulfill the commandment of dwelling in it.

The roof of the sukkah must be made of material referred to as sekhakh (literally, covering). To fulfill the commandment, sekhakh must be something that grew from the ground and was cut off, such as tree branches, corn stalks, bamboo reeds, sticks, or two-by-fours. Sekhakh must be left loose, not tied together or tied down. Sekhakh must be placed sparsely

enough that rain can get in, and preferably sparsely enough that the stars can be seen, but not so sparsely that more than ten inches is open at any point or that there is more light than shade. The sekhakh must be put on last.

It is common practice, and highly commendable, to decorate the sukkah. In the northeastern United States, Jews commonly hang dried squash and corn in the sukkah to decorate it, because these vegetables are readily available at that time for the American holidays of Halloween and Thanksgiving. Building

and decorating a sukkah is a fun, family project, much like decorating the Christmas tree is for Christians. It is a sad commentary on modern American Judaism that most of the highly assimilated Jews who complain about being deprived of the fun of having and decorating a Christmas tree have never even heard of Sukkot.

Many Americans, upon seeing a decorated sukkah for the first time, remark on how much the sukkah (and the holiday generally) reminds them of Thanksgiving. This is not entirely coincidental. Our American pilgrims, who originated the Thanksgiving holiday, were deeply religious people. When they were trying to find a way to express their thanks for their survival and for the harvest, they looked to the Bible for an appropriate way of celebrating and based their holiday in part on Sukkot. (Nifty facts they don't teach you in public school!)

Another observance related to Sukkot involves what are known as The Four Species (arba minim in Hebrew) or the lulav and etrog. We are commanded to take these four plants and use them to "rejoice before the L-rd." The four species in question are an etrog (a citrus fruit native to [Israel](#)), a palm branch (in Hebrew, lulav), two willow branches (arava)



and three myrtle branches (hadas). The six branches are bound together and referred to collectively as the lulav. The etrog is held separately. With these four species in hand, one recites a [blessing](#) and waves the species in all six directions (east, south, west, north, up and down, symbolizing the fact that [G-d](#) is everywhere).

The four species are also held during the [Hallel](#) prayer in religious services, and are held during processions around the bimah (the pedestal where the Torah is read) each day during the holiday. These processions commemorate similar processions around the alter of the ancient [Temple](#) in Jerusalem. The processions are known as Hoshanahs, because while the procession is made, we recite a prayer with the refrain, "Hosha na!" (please save us!). On the seventh day of Sukkot, seven circuits are made. For this reason, the seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshanah Rabbah (the great Hoshanah).

List of Dates

Sukkot will [begin](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- October 2, 2001 (Jewish Year 5762)
- September 21, 2002 (Jewish Year 5763)
- October 11, 2003 (Jewish Year 5764)
- September 30, 2004 (Jewish Year 5765)
- October 18, 2005 (Jewish Year 5766)

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Shemini Atzeret and Simkhat Torah

Level: Basic

[Tishri 22](#), the day after the seventh day of [Sukkot](#), is the holiday Shemini Atzeret. In [Israel](#), Shemini Atzeret is also the holiday of Simkhat Torah. Outside of Israel, where [extra days of holidays](#) are held, only the second day of Shemini Atzeret is Simkhat Torah. These two holidays are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot, but that is technically incorrect; Shemini Atzeret is a holiday in its own right and does not involve the special observances of Sukkot.

Shemini Atzeret literally means "the assembly of the eighth (day)." [Rabbinic literature](#) explains the holiday this way: [G-d](#) is like a host, who invites us as visitors for a limited time, but when the time comes for us to leave, He has enjoyed himself so much that He asks us to stay another day.

The annual cycle of [weekly Torah readings](#) is completed at this time. We read the last Torah portion, then proceed immediately to the first chapter of Genesis, reminding us that the Torah is a circle, and never ends. This completion of the readings is a time of great celebration. There are processions around the [synagogue](#) carrying Torahs and plenty of high-spirited singing and dancing. As many people as possible are given the honor of carrying a Torah scroll in these processions. This aspect of the holiday is known as Simkhat Torah, which means "Rejoicing in the Torah." As I said before, Simkhat Torah and Shemini Atzeret are separated in areas that observe an extra day of holidays, so outside of Israel, Shemini Atzeret is Tishri 22 and Simkhat Torah is Tishri 23.

In some synagogues, confirmation ceremonies or ceremonies marking the beginning of a child's Jewish education are held at this time.

Shemini Atzeret and Simkhat Torah are holidays on which [work](#) is not permitted.

List of Dates

Shemini Atzeret will [occur](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- October 9, 2001 (Jewish Year 5762)
- September 28, 2002 (Jewish Year 5763)
- October 18, 2003 (Jewish Year 5764)
- October 7, 2004 (Jewish Year 5765)
- October 25, 2005 (Jewish Year 5766)

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Chanukkah

Level: Basic

Chanukkah, the Jewish festival of rededication, also known as the festival of lights, is an eight day festival beginning on the 25th day of the Jewish month of [Kislev](#).

Chanukkah is probably one of the best known Jewish holidays, not because of any great religious significance, but because of its proximity to Christmas. Many non-Jews (and even many assimilated Jews!) think of this holiday as the Jewish Christmas, adopting many of the Christmas customs, such as elaborate gift-giving and decoration. It is bitterly ironic that this holiday, which has its roots in a revolution against assimilation and the suppression of Jewish religion, has become the most assimilated, secular holiday on our calendar.

The Story of Chanukkah

The story of Chanukkah begins in the reign of Alexander the Great. Alexander conquered Syria, Egypt and Palestine, but allowed the lands under his control to continue observing their own religions and retain a certain degree of autonomy. Under this relatively benevolent rule, many Jews assimilated much of Hellenistic culture, adopting the language, the customs and the dress of the Greeks, in much the same way that Jews in America today blend into the secular American society.

More than a century later, a successor of Alexander, Antiochus IV was in control of the region. He began to oppress the Jews severely, placing a Hellenistic priest in the [Temple](#), massacring Jews, prohibiting the practice of the Jewish religion, and desecrating the Temple by requiring the sacrifice of pigs (a non-[kosher](#) animal) on the altar. Two groups opposed Antiochus: a basically nationalistic group led by Mattathias the Hasmonean and his son Judah Maccabee, and a religious traditionalist group known as the Chasidim, the forerunners of the [Pharisees](#) (no direct connection to the modern movement known as [Chasidism](#)). They joined forces in a revolt against both the assimilation of the Hellenistic Jews and oppression by the Selucid Greek government. The revolution succeeded and the Temple was rededicated.

According to tradition as recorded in the [Talmud](#), at the time of the rededication, there was very little oil left that had not been defiled by the Greeks. Oil was needed for the [menorah](#) (candelabrum) in the Temple, which was supposed to burn throughout the night every night. There was only enough oil to burn for one day, yet miraculously, it burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply of oil for the menorah. An eight day festival was declared to commemorate this miracle. Note that the holiday commemorates the miracle of the oil, not the military victory: Jews do not glorify war.

Chanukkah Traditions

Chanukkah is not a very important religious holiday. The holiday's religious significance is far less than that of [Rosh Hashanah](#), [Yom Kippur](#), [Sukkot](#), [Passover](#), and [Shavu'ot](#). It is roughly equivalent to [Purim](#) in significance, and you won't find many non-Jews who have even heard of Purim! Chanukkah is not mentioned in [Jewish scripture](#); the story is related in the book of Maccabees, which Jews do not accept as scripture.



The only religious observance related to the holiday is the lighting of candles. The candles are arranged in a candelabrum called a menorah (or sometimes called a chanukkiah) that holds nine candles: one for each night, plus a shammus (servant) at a different height. On the first night, one candle is placed at the far right. The shammus candle is lit and three [berakhot](#) (blessings) are recited: l'hadlik neir (a general prayer over candles), she-asah nisim (a prayer thanking G-d for performing miracles for our ancestors at this time), and she-hekhanu (a general prayer thanking G-d for allowing us to reach this time of year). See [Chanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings](#) for the full text of these blessings. After reciting the blessings, the first candle is then lit using the shammus candle, and the shammus candle is placed in

its holder. The candles are allowed to burn out on their own after a minimum of 1/2 hour. Each night, another candle is added from right to left (like the [Hebrew](#) language). Candles are lit from left to right (because you pay honor to the newer thing first). On the eighth night, all nine candles (the 8 Chanukkah candles and the shammus) are lit.

Why the shammus candle? The Chanukkah candles are for pleasure only; we are not allowed to use them for any productive purpose. We keep an extra one around (the shammus), so that if we need to do something useful with a candle, we don't accidentally use the Chanukkah candles. The shammus candle is at a different height so that it is easily identified as the shammus.

It is traditional to eat fried foods on Chanukkah because of the significance of oil to the holiday. Among [Ashkenazic](#) Jews, this usually includes latkes (pronounced "lot-kuhs" or "lot-keys" depending on where your grandmother comes from. Pronounced "potato pancakes" if you are a goy.) My [recipe](#) is included later in this page.

Gift-giving is not a traditional part of the holiday, but has been added in places where Jews have a lot of contact with Christians, as a way of dealing with our children's jealousy of their Christian friends. It is extremely unusual for Jews to give Chanukkah gifts to anyone other than their own young children. The only traditional gift of the holiday is "gelt," small amounts of money.

Another tradition of the holiday is playing dreidel, a gambling game played with a square top. Most people play for matchsticks, pennies, M&Ms or chocolate coins. A dreidel is marked with four [Hebrew letters](#): Nun, Gimmel, Heh and Shin.



This supposedly stands for the Hebrew phrase "nes gadol hayah sham", a great miracle happened there. Actually, it stands for the Yiddish words nit (nothing), gantz (all), halb (half) and shtell (put), which are the rules of the game! There are some variations in the way people play the game, but the way I learned it, everyone puts in one coin. A person spins the dreidel. On Nun, nothing happens; on Gimmel (or, as we called it as kids, "gimme!"), you get the whole pot; on Heh, you get half of the pot; and on Shin, you put one in. When the pot is empty, everybody puts one in. Keep playing until one person has everything. Then redivide it, because nobody likes a poor winner.

You can play a virtual dreidel game [here](#)! Requires JavaScript.

Chanukkah Music

Maoz Tzur (Rocky Fortress)

The lyrics of this song date back to approximately the 13th century C.E. It is believed to be written by a man named Mordecai, because that name is encrypted in the first letters of the five stanzas. The music dates back to at least the 18th century, and possibly as far back as the 15th century. Most people are only familiar with the first stanza, which is reproduced below. This very literal translation is not what most people are used to seeing (it is usually translated as "Rock of Ages").

Rocky Fortress of my Salvation
It is delightful to praise You
Restore my House of Prayer
And there we will give thanks with an offering
When you have prepared the slaughter
for the blaspheming foe
Then I will complete with a song of hymn
the dedication of the altar
Then I will complete with a song of hymn
the dedication of the altar

Ma'oz tzur y'shuati
L'kha na-eh l'shabei-ach
Tikon beyt t'filati
V'sham todah n'zabei-ach
L'eit tachin matbei-ach
Mitzar ha-m'nabei-ach
Az egmor b'shir mizmor
Chanukat ha-mizbei-ach
Az egmor b'shir mizmor
Chanukat ha-mizbei-ach

A less literal but more singable translation:

Rock of Ages, let our song, Praise Thy saving power
Thou amidst the raging foes, Wast our sheltering tower
Furious they assailed us, But Thine arm availed us
And thy word broke their sword, When our own strength failed us.
And thy word broke their sword, When our own strength failed us.

Mi Y'maleil? (Who Can Retell?)

Although the translation is not quite literal, it's the closest thing to a literal translation I've been able to find. For some reasons, this popular Chanukkah song is usually translated with great liberties.

Who can tell of the feats of Israel
Who can count them?
In every age a hero arose to save the people.
Who can tell of the feats of Israel
Who can count them?
In every age a hero arose to save the people.
Hear! In those days at this time
Maccabee saved and freed us
And in our days the whole people of Israel
Arise united to save ourselves.

Mi yimalel g'vurot Yisrael
Otan mi yimneh?
Hein b'khol dor yakum hagibor, go-el ha-am.
Mi yemalel g'vurot Yisra-el
Otan mi yimneh?
Hen b'khol dor yakum hagibor, go-el ha-am.
Sh'ma! Ba-yamim ha-heim ba-z'man hazeh
Maccabee moshiya u'fodeh
U'v'yameinu kol am Yisrael
Yitacheid yakum l'higa-el.

A popular less literal but more singable translation:

Who can retell the things that befell us, who can count them?
 In every age a hero or sage came to our aid
 Who can retell the things that befell us, who can count them?
 In every age a hero or sage came to our aid

Hear! In days of yore in Israel's ancient land
 Maccabeus led the faithful band
 Now all Israel must as one arise
 Redeem itself through deed and sacrifice

Chanukkah, Oh Channukah

There are many variations on this popular Chanukkah tune. I've provided singable versions in both English and Yiddish. The lyrics of these two versions don't really correspond to each other, but both versions speak of the fun of the secular trappings of the holiday, with slight reference to the religious aspects.

Chanukkah, Oh Chanukkah
 Come light the menorah
 Let's have a party
 We'll all dance the hora
 Gather round the table, we'll have a treat
 Shiny tops to play with, latkes to eat

 And while we are playing
 The candles are burning low
 One for each night, they shed a sweet light
 To remind us of days long ago

Chanukkah, O Chanukkah
 A yontev a sheyner
 A lustiger a freylicher
 Nito noch azoyner
 Ale nacht in dreydl shpiln mir
 Zudigheyse latkes esn mir

 Geshvinder tsindt kinder
 Di dininke lichtelech on
 Zogt "al ha-nisim," loybt G-t far di nisim
 Un kumt gicher tantsn in kon

Recipe for Latkes

- 4 medium potatoes
- 1 medium onion
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 cup matzah meal (flour or bread crumbs can be substituted)
- salt and black pepper to taste
- vegetable oil

Shred the potatoes, onion and bell pepper into a large bowl. Press out all excess liquid. Add eggs and parsley and mix well. Add matzah meal gradually while mixing until the batter is doughy, not too dry. (you may not need the whole amount, depending on how well you drained the veggies). Add a few dashes of salt and black pepper. (don't taste the batter -- it's really gross!). Don't worry if the batter turns a little orange; that will go away when it fries.

Heat about 1/2 inch of oil to a medium heat. Form the batter into thin patties about the size of your palm. Fry batter in oil. Be patient: this takes time, and too much flipping will burn the outside without cooking the inside. Flip when the bottom is golden brown.

Place finished latkes on paper towels to drain. Eat hot with sour cream or applesauce. They reheat OK in a microwave, but not in an oven unless you cook them just right.

If you'd like to try something a little different, add some bell peppers, parsley, carrots, celery, or other vegetables to the batter to make veggie latkes!

List of Dates

Chanukkah will [begin](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- December 10, 2001 (Jewish Year 5762)
- November 30, 2002 (Jewish Year 5763)
- December 20, 2003 (Jewish Year 5764)
- December 8, 2004 (Jewish Year 5765)
- December 26, 2005 (Jewish Year 5766)

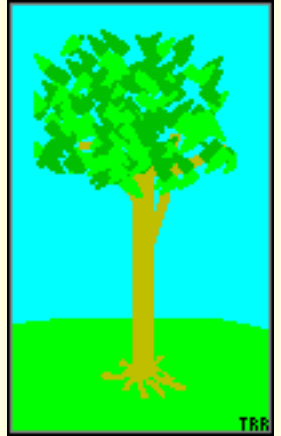
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Tu B'Shevat

Level: Basic

Tu B'Shevat, the 15th day of the Jewish month of [Shevat](#), is a holiday also known as the New Year for Trees. The word "Tu" is not really a word; it is the number 15 in Hebrew, as if you were to call the Fourth of July "Iv July" (IV being 4 in Roman numerals). See [Hebrew Alphabet](#) for more information about using letters as numbers and why the number 15 is written this way.

As I mentioned in [Rosh Hashanah](#), Judaism has several different "new years." This is not as strange a concept as it sounds at first blush; in America, we have the calendar year (January-December), the school year (September-June), and many businesses have fiscal years. It's basically the same idea with the various Jewish new years.



Tu B'Shevat is the new year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing. See Lev. 19:23-25, which states that fruit from trees may not be eaten during the first three years; the fourth year's fruit is for [G-d](#), and after that, you can eat the fruit. Each tree is considered to have aged one year as of Tu B'Shevat, so if you planted a tree on Shevat 14, it begins its second year the next day, but if you plant a tree two days later, on Shevat 16, it does not reach its second year until the next Tu B'Shevat.

Tu B'Shevat is not mentioned in the [Torah](#). I have found only one reference to it in the [Mishnah](#), and the only thing said there is that it is the new year for trees, and there is a dispute as to the proper date for the holiday (Beit Shammai said the proper day was the first of Shevat; Beit Hillel said the proper day was the 15th of Shevat. As usual, we follow Beit Hillel. For more on Hillel and Shammai, see [Sages and Scholars](#)).

There are few customs or observances related to this holiday. One custom is to eat a new fruit on this day. Some people plant trees on this day. A lot of Jewish children go around collecting money for trees for [Israel](#) at this time of year. That's about all there is to it.

List of Dates

Tu B'Shevat will [occur](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- January 28, 2002 (Jewish Year 5762)
- January 18, 2003 (Jewish Year 5763)
- February 7, 2004 (Jewish Year 5764)
- January 25, 2005 (Jewish Year 5765)
- February 13, 2006 (Jewish Year 5766)

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Purim

Level: Basic

Purim is one of the most joyous and fun holidays on the Jewish calendar. It commemorates a time when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination.

The story of Purim is told in the [Biblical book](#) of Esther. The heroes of the story are Esther, a beautiful young Jewish woman living in Persia, and her cousin Mordecai, who raised her as if she were his daughter. Esther was taken to the house of Ahasuerus, King of Persia, to become part of his harem. King Ahasuerus loved Esther more than his other women and made Esther queen, but the king did not know that Esther was a Jew, because Mordecai told her not to reveal her [nationality](#).

The villain of the story is Haman, an arrogant, egotistical advisor to the king. Haman hated Mordecai because Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, so Haman plotted to destroy the [Jewish people](#). In a speech that is all too familiar to Jews, Haman told the king, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm. Their laws are different from those of every other people's, and they do not observe the king's laws; therefore it is not befitting the king to tolerate them." Esther 3:8. The king gave the fate of the Jewish people to Haman, to do as he pleased to them. Haman planned to exterminate all of the Jews.

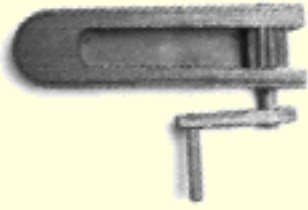
Mordecai persuaded Esther to speak to the king on behalf of the Jewish people. This was a dangerous thing for Esther to do, because anyone who came into the king's presence without being summoned could be put to death, and she had not been summoned. Esther fasted for three days to prepare herself, then went into the king. He welcomed her. Later, she told him of Haman's plot against her people. The Jewish people were saved, and Haman was hanged on the gallows that had been prepared for Mordecai.

The book of Esther is unusual in that it is the only book of the Bible that does not contain the name of [G-d](#). In fact, it includes virtually no reference to G-d. Mordecai makes a vague reference to the fact that the Jews will be saved by someone else, if not by Esther, but that is the closest the book comes to mentioning G-d. Thus, one important message that can be gained from the story is that G-d often works in ways that are not apparent, in ways that appear to be chance, coincidence or ordinary good luck.

Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of [Adar](#), which is usually in March. The 13th of Adar is the day that Haman chose for the extermination of the Jews, and the day that the Jews battled their enemies for their lives. On the day afterwards, the 14th, they celebrated their survival. In [leap years](#), when there are two months of Adar, Purim is celebrated in the second month of Adar, so it is always one month before [Passover](#). In cities that were walled in the time of Joshua, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of the month, because the book of Esther says that in Shushan (a walled city), deliverance from the massacre was not complete until the next day.

The word "Purim" means "lots" and refers to the lottery that Haman used to choose the date for the massacre.

The Purim holiday is preceded by a [minor fast](#), the Fast of Esther, which commemorates Esther's three days of fasting in preparation for her meeting with the king.

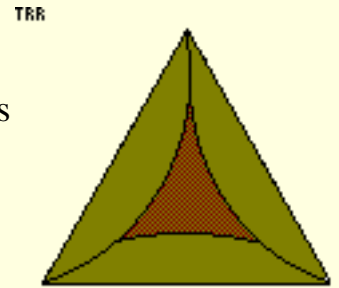


The primary [commandment](#) related to Purim is to hear the reading of the book of Esther. The book of Esther is commonly known as the Megillah, which means scroll. Although there are five books of [Jewish scripture](#) that are properly referred to as megillahs (Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations), this is the one people usually mean when they speak of The Megillah. It is customary to boo, hiss, stamp feet and rattle gragers (noisemakers; see

illustration) whenever the name of Haman is mentioned in the service. The purpose of this custom is to "blot out the name of Haman."

We are also commanded to eat, drink and be merry. According to the [Talmud](#), a person is required to drink until he cannot tell the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordecai," though opinions differ as to exactly how drunk that is. A person certainly should not become so drunk that he might violate other commandments or get seriously ill. In addition, recovering alcoholics or others who might suffer serious harm from alcohol are exempt from this obligation.

In addition, we are commanded to send out gifts of food or drink, and to make gifts to charity. The sending of gifts of food and drink is referred to as shalach manos (lit. sending out portions). Among Ashkenazic Jews, a common treat at this time of year is hamentaschen (lit. Haman's pockets). These triangular fruit-filled cookies are supposed to represent Haman's three-cornered hat. My recipe is included below.



It is customary to hold carnival-like celebrations on Purim, to perform plays and parodies, and to hold beauty contests. I have heard that the usual prohibitions against cross-dressing are lifted during this holiday, but I am not certain about that. Americans sometimes refer to Purim as the Jewish Mardi Gras.

Purim is not subject to the sabbath-like restrictions on [work](#) that some other holidays are; however, some sources indicate that we should not go about our ordinary business on Purim out of respect for the holiday.

Recipe for Hamentaschen

- 2/3 cup butter or margarine
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup orange juice (the smooth kind, not the pulpy)
- 1 cup white flour
- 1 cup wheat flour (DO NOT substitute white flour! The wheat flour is necessary to achieve the right texture!)
- Various preserves, fruit butters and/or pie fillings.

Blend butter and sugar thoroughly. Add the egg and blend thoroughly. Add OJ and blend thoroughly. Add flour, 1/2 cup at a time, alternating white and wheat, blending thoroughly between each. Refrigerate batter overnight or at least a few hours. Roll as thin as you can without getting holes in the batter (roll it

between two sheets of wax paper lightly dusted with flour for best results). Cut out 3 or 4 inch circles. Put a tablespoon of filling in the middle of each circle. Fold up the sides to make a triangle, overlapping the sides as much as possible so only a little filling shows through the middle. Squeeze the corners firmly, so they don't come undone while baking. Bake at 375 degrees for about 10-15 minutes, until golden brown but before the filling boils over!

Traditional fillings are poppy seed and prune, but apricot is my favorite. Apple butter, pineapple preserves, and cherry pie filling all work quite well.

List of Dates

Purim will [occur](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- February 26, 2002 (Jewish Year 5762)
- March 18, 2003 (Jewish Year 5763)
- March 7, 2004 (Jewish Year 5764)
- March 25, 2005 (Jewish Year 5765)
- March 14, 2006 (Jewish Year 5766)

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Pesach: Passover

Level: Basic

Of all the Jewish holidays, Pesach is the one most commonly observed, even by otherwise non-observant Jews. According to the [1990 National Jewish Population Survey](#) (NJPS), more than 80% of Jews have attended a Pesach seder.

Pesach begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month of [Nissan](#). It is the first of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are [Shavu'ot](#) and [Sukkot](#)). Agriculturally, it represents the beginning of the harvest season in [Israel](#), but little attention is paid to this aspect of the holiday. The primary observances of Pesach are related to the Exodus from Egypt after generations of slavery. This story is told in Exodus, Ch. 1-15. Many of the Pesach observances are instituted in Chs. 12-15.



The name "Pesach" (PAY-sahch, with a "ch" as in the Scottish "loch") comes from the Hebrew [root Peh-Samech-Chet](#) meaning to pass through, to pass over, to exempt or to spare. It refers to the fact that [G-d](#) "passed over" the houses of the Jews when he was slaying the firstborn of Egypt. In English, the holiday is known as Passover. "Pesach" is also the name of the [sacrificial offering](#) (a lamb) that was made in the [Temple](#) on this holiday. The holiday is also referred to as Chag he-Aviv (the Spring Festival), Chag ha-Matzoth (the Festival of Matzahs), and Z'man Cherutenu (the Time of Our Freedom) (again, all with those Scottish "ch"s).

Probably the most significant observance related to Pesach involves the removal of chametz (leaven; sounds like "hum it's" with that Scottish ch) from our homes. This commemorates the fact that the Jews leaving Egypt were in a hurry, and did not have time to let their bread rise. It is also a symbolic way of removing the "puffiness" (arrogance, pride) from our souls.

Chametz includes anything made from the five major grains (wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt) that has not been completely cooked within 18 minutes after coming into contact with water. [Orthodox Jews](#) of [Ashkenazic](#) background also avoid rice, corn, peanuts, and legumes (beans) as if they were chametz. All of these items are commonly used to make bread, thus use of them was prohibited to avoid any confusion. Such additional items are referred to as "kitniyot."

We may not eat chametz during Pesach; we may not even own it or derive benefit from it. We may not even feed it to our pets or cattle. All chametz, including utensils used to cook chametz, must either be disposed of or sold to a non-Jew (they can be repurchased after the holiday). Pets' diets must be changed for the holiday, or the pets must be sold to a non-Jew (like the food and utensils, the pets can be repurchased after the holiday ends). You can sell your chametz online at <http://www.chabadcenter.org/>. I have noticed that many non-Jews and non-observant Jews mock this practice of selling chametz as an artificial technicality. I assure you that this sale is very real and legally binding, and would not be valid under Jewish law if it were not. From the gentile's perspective, the purchase functions much like the

buying and selling of futures on the stock market: even though he does not take physical possession of the goods, his temporary legal ownership of those goods is very real and potentially profitable.

The process of cleaning the home of all chametz in preparation for Pesach is an enormous task. To do it right, you must prepare for several weeks and spend several days scrubbing everything down, going over the edges of your stove and fridge with a toothpick and a Q-Tip, covering all surfaces that come in contact with foil or shelf-liner, etc., etc., etc. After the cleaning is completed, the morning before the seder, a formal search of the house for chametz is undertaken, and any remaining chametz is burned.

The grain product we eat during Pesach is called matzah. Matzah is unleavened bread, made simply from flour and water and cooked very quickly. This is the bread that the Jews made for their flight from Egypt. We have come up with many inventive ways to use matzah; it is available in a variety of textures for cooking: matzah flour (finely ground for cakes and cookies), matzah meal (coarsely ground, used as a bread crumb substitute), matzah farfel (little chunks, a noodle or bread cube substitute), and full-sized matzahs (about 10 inches square, a bread substitute).

The day before Pesach is the Fast of the [Firstborn](#), a [minor fast](#) for all firstborn males, commemorating the fact that the firstborn Jewish males in Egypt were not killed during the final plague.

On the first night of Pesach (first [two nights](#) for traditional Jews outside [Israel](#)), we have a special family meal filled with ritual to remind us of the significance of the holiday. This meal is called a seder, from a Hebrew [root](#) word meaning "order," because there is a specific set of information that must be discussed in a specific order. It is the same root from which we derive the word "siddur" (prayer book). An overview of a traditional seder is included [below](#).

Pesach lasts for seven days (eight days outside of Israel). The first and last days of the holiday (first two and last two outside of Israel) are days on which no [work](#) is permitted. See [Extra Day of Holidays](#) for more information. Work is permitted on the intermediate days. These intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as Chol Ha-Mo'ed, as are the intermediate days of [Sukkot](#).

When Pesach Begins on a Saturday Night

Occasionally, Pesach begins on a motzaei [Shabbat](#), that is, on Saturday night after the sabbath has concluded. This will occur in the year 5761 (2001). This complicates the process of preparing for Pesach, because many of the preparations normally undertaken on the day before Pesach cannot be performed on Shabbat.

The [Fast of the Firstborn](#), normally observed on the day before Pesach, is observed on Thursday instead. The search for chametz, normally performed on the night before Pesach, is performed on Thursday night. The seder should be prepared for as much as possible before Shabbat begins, because time should not be taken away from Shabbat to prepare for Pesach. In addition, there are severe complications dealing with the conflict between the requirement of removing chametz no later than mid-morning on Saturday, the prohibition against eating matzah on the day before the seder, and the requirement of eating three meals with bread during Shabbat! For further details, see an excellent summary from the [Orthodox Union](#), the world's largest, oldest and perhaps most respected kosher certification agency.

The Pesach Seder

The text of the Pesach seder is written in a book called the haggadah. Suggestions for buying a haggadah are included [below](#). The content of the seder can be summed up by the following Hebrew rhyme:

**Kaddesh, Urechatz,
Karpas, Yachatz,
Maggid, Rachtzah,
Motzi, Matzah,
Maror, Korech,
Shulchan Orech,
Tzafun, Barech,
Hallel, Nirtzah**

Now, what does that mean?

1. Kaddesh: Sanctification

A [blessing](#) over wine in honor of the holiday. The wine is drunk, and a second cup is poured.

2. Urechatz: Washing

A washing of the hands without a blessing, in preparation for eating the Karpas.

3. Karpas: Vegetable

A vegetable (usually parsley) is dipped in salt water and eaten. The vegetable symbolizes the lowly origins of the [Jewish people](#); the salt water symbolizes the tears shed as a result of our slavery. Parsley is a good vegetable to use for this purpose, because when you shake off the salt water, it looks like tears.

4. Yachatz: Breaking

One of the three matzahs on the table is broken. Part is returned to the pile, the other part is set aside for the afikomen (see below).

5. Maggid: The Story

A retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the first Pesach. This begins with the youngest person asking The Four Questions, a set of questions about the proceedings designed to encourage participation in the seder. The Four Questions are also known as Mah Nishtanah (Why is it different?), which are the first words of the Four Questions. This is often sung. See [below](#).

The maggid is designed to satisfy the needs of four different types of people: the wise one, who wants to know the technical details; the wicked one, who excludes himself (and learns the penalty for doing so); the simple one, who needs to know the basics; and the one who is unable to ask, who doesn't even know enough to know what he needs to know.

At the end of the maggid, a blessing is recited over the second cup of wine and it is drunk.

6. Rachtzah: Washing

A second washing of the hands, this time with a blessing, in preparation for eating the matzah

7. Motzi: Blessing over Grain Products

The ha-motzi blessing, a generic blessing for bread or grain products used as a meal, is recited over the matzah.

8. Matzah: Blessing over Matzah

A blessing specific to matzah is recited, and a bit of matzah is eaten.

9. Maror: Bitter Herbs

A blessing is recited over a bitter vegetable (usually raw horseradish; sometimes romaine lettuce), and it is eaten. This symbolizes the bitterness of slavery. The maror is dipped charoset, a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine, which symbolizes the mortar used by the Jews in building during their slavery. (I highly recommend it -- it's the best tasting thing on the holiday, and goes surprisingly well with horseradish! My recipe is included [below](#).)

Note that there are two bitter herbs on the seder plate: one labeled Maror and one labeled Chazeret. The one labeled Maror should be used for Maror and the one labeled Chazeret should be used in the Korech, below.

10. Korech: The Sandwich

[Rabbi Hillel](#) was of the opinion that the maror should be eaten together with matzah and the paschal offering in a sandwich. In his honor, we eat some maror on a piece of matzah, with some charoset (we don't do [animal sacrifice](#) anymore, so there is no paschal offering to eat).

11. Shulchan Orech: Dinner

A festive meal is eaten. There is no particular requirement regarding what to eat at this meal (except, of course, that chametz cannot be eaten). Among [Ashkenazic](#) Jews, gefilte fish and matzah ball soup are traditionally eaten at the beginning of the meal. Roast chicken or turkey are common as a main course, as is beef brisket.

12. Tzafun: The Afikomen

The piece of matzah set aside earlier is eaten as "desert," the last food of the meal. Different families have different traditions relating to the afikomen. Some have the children hide it, while the parents have to either find it or ransom it back. Others have the parents hide it. The idea is to keep the children awake and attentive throughout the pre-meal proceedings, waiting for this part.

13. Barch: Grace after Meals

The third cup of wine is poured, and [birkat ha-mazon](#) (grace after meals) is recited. This is similar to the grace that would be said on any [Shabbat](#). At the end, a blessing is said over the third cup and it is drunk. The fourth cup is poured, including a cup set aside for the prophet Elijah, who is supposed to herald the [Messiah](#), and is supposed to come on Pesach to do this. The door is opened for a while at this point (supposedly for Elijah, but historically because Jews were accused of nonsense like putting the blood of Christian babies in matzah, and we wanted to show our Christian neighbors that we weren't doing anything unseemly).

14. Hallel: Praises

Several psalms are recited. A blessing is recited over the last cup of wine and it is drunk.

15. Nirtzah: Closing

A simple statement that the seder has been completed, with a wish that next year, we may celebrate Pesach in Jerusalem (i.e., that the [Messiah](#) will come within the next year). This is followed by various hymns and stories.

The Music of Pesach

Many people think of Pesach as a time of deprivation: a time when we cannot eat bread or other leavened foods. This is not the traditional way of viewing the holiday. Pesach is Zeman Herutenu, the Time of Our Freedom, and the joy of that time is evident in the music of the season. There are many joyous songs sung during the seder.

Mah Nishtanah (Why is it Different?)

This is the tune sung during the youngest participant's recitation of the Four Questions.

Why is this night different from all other nights, from all other nights?

Mah nishtanah ha-lahylah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-layloht, mi-kol ha-layloht?

On all other nights, we may eat chametz and matzah, chametz and matzah. On this night, on this night, only matzah.

She-b'khol ha-layloht anu okhlin chameytz u-matzah, chameytz u-matzah. Ha-lahylah ha-zeh, ha-lahylah ha-zeh, kooloh matzah.

On all other nights, we eat many vegetables, many vegetables. On this night, on this night, maror.

She-b'khol ha-layloht anu okhlin sh'ar y'rakot, sh'ar y'rakot. Ha-lahylah ha-zeh, ha-lahylah ha-zeh, maror.

On all other nights, we do not dip even once. On this night, on this night, twice.

She-b'khol ha-layloht ayn anu mat'bilin afilu pa'am echat, afilu pa'am echat. Ha-lahylah ha-zeh, ha-lahylah ha-zeh, sh'tay p'amim.

On all other nights, we eat either sitting or reclining, either sitting or reclining. On this night, on this night, we all recline.

She-b'khol ha-layloht anu okhlin bayn yosh'bin u'vayn m'soobin, bayn yosh'bin u'vayn m'soobin. Ha-lahylah ha-zeh, ha-lahylah ha-zeh, koolanu m'soobin.

Dahyenu (It Would Have Been Enough For Us)


This is one of the most popular tunes of the seder, a very up-beat song about the many favors that G-d bestowed upon us when He brought us out of Egypt. The song appears in the haggadah after the telling of the story of the exodus, just before the explanation of Pesach, Matzah and Maror. This is just one sample verse of a rather long song. The English does not include all of the repetition that is in the Hebrew.

Had He brought us out of Egypt, it would have been enough for us.

Ilu hotzi-hotzianu hotzianu mi-Mitzrayim hotzianu mi-Mitzrayim dahyenu.

(Chorus) It would have been enough for us.

Dahy-dahyenu, dahy-dahyenu, dahy-dahyenu, dahyenu, dahyenu, dahyenu.
Dahy-dahyenu, dahy-dahyenu, dahy-dahyenu, dahyenu, dahyenu!

Eliyahu Ha-Navi (Elijah, the Prophet) 


Many people sing this song when the Cup of Elijah is poured and the door is opened in anticipation of his return.

Elijah the Prophet, Elijah the Tishbite, Elijah,
Elijah, Elijah the Gileadite

Eliyahu ha-Navi, Eliyahu ha-Tishbi, Eliyahu,
Eliyahu, Eliyahu ha-Giladi.

Speedily and in our days, come to us, with the
messiah, son of David, with the messiah, son of
David.

Bimhayrah v'yamenu, yavo aleynu, im Moshiach
ben David, im Moshiach ben David.

Adir Hu (He is Mighty) 

Adir Hu is a great sing-along song, because it has a lot of repetition. You don't need to know much Hebrew to get by with this one! It's also got a catchy tune. It's sung as the seder comes to a close. It expresses our hope that the messianic age will begin soon, and the Temple will be rebuilt. Each line of praise begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in alphabetical order, a common gimmick in Jewish hymns.

He is mighty, He is mighty

Adir hu, adir hu

Chorus:
May He soon rebuild his house
Speedily, speedily and in our days, soon.
G-d, rebuild! G-d, rebuild!
Rebuild your house soon!

Chorus:
Yivneh vayto b'karov
Bim'hayrah, bim'hayrah, b'yamenu b'karov
E-yl b'nay! E-yl b'nay!
B'nay vayt'kha b'karov

He is distinguished, He is great, He is exalted
(Chorus)

Bachur hu, gadol hu, dagul hu,
(Chorus)

He is glorious, He is faithful, He is faultless, He is
righteous
(Chorus)

Hadur hu, vatic hu, zakay hu, chasid hu,
(Chorus)

He is pure, He is unique, He is powerful,
He is wise, He is King, He is awesome,
He is sublime, He is all-powerful, He is the
redeemer, He is all-righteous
(Chorus)

Tahor hu, yachid hu, kabir hu,
Lamud hu, melekh hu, nora hu,
Sagiv hu, izuz hu, podeh hu, tzadik hu
(Chorus)

He is holy, He is compassionate, He is almighty,
He is omnipotent
(Chorus)

Kadosh hu, rachum hu, shaddai hu,
takif hu
(Chorus)

Recipe for Charoset

This fruit, nut and wine mix is eaten during the seder. It is meant to remind us of the mortar used by the Jews to build during the period of slavery. It should have a coarse texture. The ingredient quantities listed here are at best a rough estimate; I usually just eye-ball it. The recipe below makes a very large quantity, but we usually wind up making more before the holiday is over. Other fruits or nuts can be used.

- 4 medium apples, 2 tart and 2 sweet

- 1/2 cup finely chopped almonds
- 1/4 cup sweet wine
- 1/4 cup dry wine
- 1 Tbs. cinnamon

Shred the apples. Add all other ingredients. Allow to sit for 3-6 hours, until the wine is absorbed by the other ingredients. Serve on matzah. Goes very well with horseradish.

Buying a Haggadah

If you want to know more about Pesach, the best place to start is with the haggadah. The haggadah was written as a teaching tool, to allow people at all levels to learn the significance of Pesach and its symbols.

There are a wide variety of Haggadahs available for every political and religious point of view: traditional haggadahs, liberal haggadahs, mystical haggadahs, feminist haggadahs, and others. I have even seen what might be described as an atheist haggadah: one that does not mention the role of [G-d](#) in the Exodus.



If you're buying a haggadah for study or collection, there are many haggadahs with extensive commentary or with pictures from illuminated medieval haggadahs. However, if you're buying haggadahs for actual use at a seder, you're best off with an inexpensive paperback. Keep in mind that you'll need one for everybody, you're likely to get food and wine on these things, and you'll be using them year after year.

I'm particularly partial to the Artscroll/Mesorah series' [The Family Haggadah](#). It has the full, Orthodox text of the haggadah in English side-by-side with Hebrew and Aramaic, with complete instructions for preparing for and performing the seder. The translations are very readable and the book includes marginal notes explaining the significance of each paragraph of the text. This book is usually only available at Jewish gift or book stores, and usually sells for about \$2.50.

Another good traditional one is Nathan Goldberg's [Passover Haggadah](#). This is the familiar "yellow and red cover" haggadah that so many of us grew up with. Believe it or not, it is frequently available in grocery stores in the Passover aisle. It usually sells for less than \$5, and is often given away free with certain grocery purchases.

Watch out for Christianized versions of the haggadah. The Christian "last supper" is generally believed to have been a Pesach seder, so many Christians recreate the ritual of the seder, and the haggadahs that they use for this purpose tend to reinterpret the significance of the holiday and its symbols to fit into their Christian theology. For example, they say that the three matzahs represent the Trinity, with the broken one representing Jesus on the cross (in Judaism, the three matzahs represent the three [Temples](#), two of which have been destroyed, and the third of which will be built when the [moshiach](#) comes). They speak of the paschal lamb as a prophecy of Jesus, rather than a remembrance of the lamb's blood on the doorposts in Egypt. If you want to learn what Pesach means to Jews, then these "messianic" haggadahs aren't for you.

Key Terms

Note: Pronunciations are intended to reflect the way these terms are most commonly pronounced by Jews in the United States, and may not be strictly technically correct.

Term	Meaning	Pronunciation
Pesach	Passover	PAY-sahkh or PEH-sahkh
Matzah	Unleavened bread	MAHTZ-uh
Chametz	Leavened things	KHUH-mitz
Seder	Home ritual performed on the first two nights of Pesach	SAY-d'r
Haggadah	The book read during the seder	huh-GAH-duh

List of Dates

Pesach will [begin](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- April 8, 2001 (Jewish Year 5761)
- March 28, 2002 (Jewish Year 5762)
- April 17, 2003 (Jewish Year 5763)
- April 6, 2004 (Jewish Year 5764)
- April 24, 2005 (Jewish Year 5765)

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The Counting of the Omer

Level: Basic

According to the Torah (Lev. 23:15), we are obligated to count the days from the second night of [Passover](#) to the day before [Shavu'ot](#), seven full weeks. This period is known as the Counting of the Omer. An omer is a unit of measure. On the second day of Passover, in the days of the [Temple](#), an omer of barley was cut down and brought to the Temple as an [offering](#).

Every night, from the second night of Passover to the night before Shavu'ot, we recite a [blessing](#) and state the count of the omer in both weeks and days. So on the 16th day, you would say "Today is sixteen days, which is two weeks and two days of the Omer."

The counting is intended to remind us of the link between Passover, which commemorates the Exodus, and Shavu'ot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah. It reminds us that the redemption from slavery was not complete until we received the Torah.

This period is a time of partial mourning, during which weddings, parties, and dinners with dancing are not conducted, in memory of a plague during the lifetime of [Rabbi Akiba](#). Haircuts during this time are also forbidden. The 33rd day of the Omer (the eighteenth of [Iyar](#)) is a minor holiday commemorating a break in the plague. The holiday is known as Lag b'Omer. The mourning practices of the omer period are lifted on that date. The word "Lag" is not really a word; it is the number 33 in Hebrew, as if you were to call the Fourth of July "Iv July" (IV being 4 in Roman numerals). See [Hebrew Alphabet](#) for more information about using letters as numbers.

List of Dates

Lag B'Omer will [occur](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- May 11, 2001 (Jewish Year 5761)
- April 30, 2002 (Jewish Year 5762)
- May 20, 2003 (Jewish Year 5763)
- May 9, 2004 (Jewish Year 5764)
- May 27, 2005 (Jewish Year 5765)

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Shavu'ot

Level: Basic

Shavu'ot, the Festival of Weeks, is the second of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are [Passover](#) and [Sukkot](#)). Agriculturally, it commemorates the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the [Temple](#), and is known as Hag ha-Bikkurim (the Festival of the First Fruits). Historically, it celebrates the giving of the [Torah](#) at Mount Sinai, and is also known as Hag Matan Torateinu (the Festival of the Giving of Our Torah).

The period from Passover to Shavu'ot is a time of great anticipation. We count each of the days from the second day of Passover to the day before Shavu'ot, 49 days or 7 full weeks, hence the name of the festival. See [The Counting of the Omer](#). Shavu'ot is also sometimes known as Pentecost, because it falls on the 50th day. The counting reminds us of the important connection between Passover and Shavu'ot: Passover freed us physically from bondage, but the giving of the Torah on Shavu'ot redeemed us spiritually from our bondage to idolatry and immorality.

It is noteworthy that the holiday is called the time of the *giving* of the Torah, rather than the time of the *receiving* of the Torah. The sages point out that we are constantly in the process of receiving the Torah, that we receive it every day, but it was first given at this time. Thus it is the giving, not the receiving, that makes this holiday significant.

Shavu'ot is not tied to a particular calendar date, but to a counting from Passover. Because the length of the months used to be variable, determined by observation (see [Jewish Calendar](#)), and there are two new moons between Passover and Shavu'ot, Shavu'ot could occur on the 5th or 6th of [Sivan](#). However, now that we have a mathematically determined calendar, and the months between Passover and Shavu'ot do not change length on the mathematical calendar, Shavu'ot is always on the 6th of Sivan (the 6th and 7th outside of [Israel](#). See [Extra Day of Holidays](#).)

[Work](#) is not permitted during Shavu'ot.

It is customary to stay up the entire first night of Shavu'ot and study [Torah](#), then pray as early as possible in the morning.

It is customary to eat a dairy meal at least once during Shavu'ot. There are varying opinions as to why this is done. Some say it is a reminder of the promise regarding the [land of Israel](#), a land flowing with "milk and honey." According to another view, it is because our ancestors had just received the Torah (and the dietary laws therein), and did not have both meat and dairy dishes available. See [Separation of Meat and Dairy](#).

The book of Ruth is read at this time. Again, there are varying reasons given for this custom, and none seems to be definitive.

List of Dates

Shavu'ot will [occur](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- May 28, 2001 (Jewish Year 5761)
- May 17, 2002 (Jewish Year 5762)
- June 6, 2003 (Jewish Year 5763)
- May 26, 2004 (Jewish Year 5764)
- June 13, 2005 (Jewish Year 5765)

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Tisha B'Av

Level: Basic

Tisha B'Av, the Fast of the Ninth of [Av](#), is a day of mourning to commemorate the many tragedies that have befallen the [Jewish people](#), many of which coincidentally have occurred on the ninth of Av.

Tisha B'Av means "the ninth (day) of Av." It usually occurs during August.

Tisha B'Av primarily commemorates the destruction of the first and second [Temples](#), both of which were destroyed on the ninth of Av (the first by the Babylonians in 586 [B.C.E.](#); the second by the Romans in 70 [C.E.](#)).

Although this holiday is primarily meant to commemorate the destruction of the Temple, it is appropriate to consider on this day the many other tragedies of the Jewish people, many of which occurred on this day, most notably the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.

Tisha B'Av is the culmination of a three week period of increasing mourning, beginning with the [fast of the 17th of Tammuz](#), which commemorates the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem, before the First Temple was destroyed. During this three week period, weddings and other parties are not permitted, and people refrain from cutting their hair. From the first to the ninth of Av, it is customary to refrain from eating meat or drinking wine (except on the [Shabbat](#)) and from wearing new clothing.

The restrictions on Tisha B'Av are similar to those on [Yom Kippur](#): to refrain from eating and drinking (even water); washing, bathing, shaving or wearing cosmetics; wearing leather shoes; engaging in sexual relations; and studying Torah. Work in the ordinary sense of the word is also restricted. People who are ill need not fast on this day. Many of the traditional [mourning](#) practices are observed: people refrain from smiles, laughter and idle conversation, and sit on low stools.

In synagogue, the book of Lamentations is read and mourning prayers are recited. The ark (cabinet where the Torah is kept) is draped in black.

List of Dates

Tisha B'Av will [occur](#) on the following days on the American calendar:

- July 29, 2001 (Jewish Year 5761)
- July 18, 2002 (Jewish Year 5762)
- August 7, 2003 (Jewish Year 5763)
- July 27, 2004 (Jewish Year 5764)
- August 14, 2005 (Jewish Year 5765)

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Minor Fasts

Level: Basic

There are five minor fasts on the [Jewish calendar](#). With one exception, these fasts were instituted by the Sages to commemorate some [national](#) tragedy. The minor fasts (that is, all fasts except [Yom Kippur](#) and [Tisha b'Av](#)) last from dawn to nightfall, and one is permitted to eat breakfast if one arises before sunrise for the purpose of doing so. There is a great deal of leniency in the minor fasts for people who have medical conditions or other difficulties fasting. The date of the fast is moved to Sunday if the specified date falls on [Shabbat](#).

Three of these five fasts commemorate events leading to the downfall of the first commonwealth and the destruction of the first [Temple](#), which is commemorated by the major fast of Tisha B'Av.

Following is a list of minor fasts required by Jewish law, their dates, and the events they commemorate:

The Fast of Gedaliah, [Tishri](#) 3, commemorates the killing of the Jewish governor of Judah, a critical event in the downfall of the first commonwealth.

The Fast of Tevet, [Tevet](#) 10, is the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. It has also been proclaimed a memorial day for the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust.

The Fast of Esther, [Adar](#) 13, commemorates the three days that Esther fasted before approaching King Ahasuerus on behalf of the [Jewish people](#). The fast is connected with [Purim](#). If Adar 13 falls on a Friday or Saturday, it is moved to the preceding Thursday, because it cannot be moved forward a day (it would fall on Purim).

The Fast of the Firstborn, [Nissan](#) 14, is a fast observed only by firstborn males, commemorating the fact that they were saved from the plague of the [firstborn](#) in Egypt. It is observed on the day preceding [Passover](#).

The Fast of Tammuz, [Tammuz](#) 17, is the date when the walls of Jerusalem were breached.

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New Holidays

Level: Basic

A few minor holidays have been added to the calendar to commemorate various significant events relating to the Holocaust and the modern state of [Israel](#). All of these holidays occur in the period between [Passover](#) and [Shavu'ot](#). These holidays are not universally acknowledged, the dates are not entirely agreed upon, and the observances are not yet standardized. Nevertheless, they are worth noting.

Yom Ha-Shoah

Also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day, this holiday occurs on the 27th of [Nissan](#). "Shoah" is the Hebrew word for the Holocaust. This is a memorial day for those who died in the Holocaust.

Yom Ha-Zikkaron

Israeli Memorial Day, observed on [Iyar](#) 4, remembers those who died in the War of Liberation and other wars in Israel.

Yom Ha-Atzmaut

Israeli Independence Day, marking the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948. It is observed on the 5th of [Iyar](#). Click the speaker to hear the Israeli national anthem, Hatikvah.

According to some views, the restrictions of the [Omer](#) period are lifted for this day. A few anti-Zionist Jews observe this day as a day of mourning for the sin of proclaiming the state of Israel without the [Messiah](#).

Yom Yerushalayim

The 28th day of [Iyar](#) commemorates the reunification of the city of Jerusalem in Israeli hands. According to some views, the restrictions of the [Omer](#) period are lifted for this day.

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Birth and the First Month of Life

Level: Basic

Birth

In [Jewish law](#), although the human soul exists before birth, human life begins at birth, that is, at the time when the child is more than halfway emerged from the mother's body. For more details about the consequences of this doctrine, see [Abortion](#).

Judaism completely rejects the notion of original sin. According to Judaism, a child is born pure, completely free from sin. We [pray](#) daily "Oh G-d, the soul which you gave me is pure. You created it, you fashioned it, you breathed it into me."

Birth by Caesarean section is permitted in Jewish law, as would be just about any procedure necessary to preserve the [life](#) of the mother or the child.

Immediately after birth, a woman is considered [niddah](#) and must remain sexually separated from her husband for a period of seven days after the birth of a male child and 14 days after the birth of a female child. Lev. 12:2. This separation is the same as the regular monthly niddah separation. In the days of the [Temple](#), when considerations of ritual purity were more important, a woman was considered partially impure for an additional period of 33 days after the birth of a male child and 66 days after the birth of a female child. No reason is stated why the period is longer for a female child than for a male child; however, one of my resources emphasizes that a female child is not more defiling than a male child, because the method of purification at the end of this period is the same for both genders.

After a child is born, the father is given the honor of an [aliyah](#) (an opportunity to bless the reading of the Torah) in [synagogue](#) at the next opportunity. At that time, a [blessing](#) is recited for the health of the mother and the child. If the child is a girl, she is named at that time.

Naming a Child

The formal Hebrew name is used in Jewish rituals, primarily in calling the person to the Torah for an [aliyah](#), or in the [ketubah](#) (marriage contract).

A girl's name is officially given in synagogue when the father takes an aliyah after the birth, discussed above. A boy's name is given during the brit milah (ritual circumcision), see [below](#).

The standard form of a Hebrew name for a male is [child's name] ben [father's name]. For a female, the form is [child's name] bat [father's name]. If the child is a [kohein](#), the suffix ha-Kohein is added. If the child is of the tribe of [Levi](#), the subject Ha-Levi is added.

There are no formal religious requirements for naming a child. The name has no inherent religious significance. In fact, the child's "Hebrew name" need not even be Hebrew; Yiddish names are often used, or even English ones.

It is customary among [Ashkenazic](#) Jews to name a child after a recently deceased relative. This custom comes partly from a desire to honor the dead relative, and partly from superstition against naming a child after a living relative. It is almost unheard of for an Ashkenazic Jew to be named after his own father, though it does occasionally happen. Among [Sephardic](#) Jews, it is not unusual to name a child after a parent or living relative.

Brit Milah: Circumcision

Of all of the [commandments](#) in Judaism, the brit milah (literally, Covenant of Circumcision) is probably the one most universally observed. It is commonly referred to as a bris (covenant, using the Ashkenazic [pronunciation](#)). Even the most secular of Jews, who observe no other part of Judaism, almost always observe these laws. Of course, until quite recently, the majority of males in the United States were routinely circumcised, so this doesn't seem very surprising. But keep in mind that there is more to the ritual of the brit milah than merely the process of physically removing the foreskin, and many otherwise non-observant Jews observe the entire ritual.

The [commandment](#) to circumcise is given at Gen. 17:10-14 and Lev. 12:3. The covenant was originally made with [Abraham](#). It is the first commandment specific to the Jews.

Circumcision is performed only on males. Although some cultures have a practice of removing all or part of the woman's clitoris, often erroneously referred to as "female circumcision," that ritual has never been a part of Judaism.

Like so many Jewish commandments, the brit milah is commonly perceived to be a hygienic measure; however the [biblical text](#) states the reason for this commandment quite clearly: circumcision is an outward physical sign of the eternal covenant between [G-d](#) and the [Jewish people](#). It is also a sign that the Jewish people will be perpetuated through the circumcised man. The health benefits of this practice are merely incidental. It is worth noting, however, that circumcised males have a lower risk of certain cancers, and the sexual partners of circumcised males also have a lower risk of certain cancers.

The commandment is binding upon both the father of the child and the child himself. If a father does not have his son circumcised, the son is obligated to have himself circumcised as soon as he becomes an adult. A person who is uncircumcised suffers the penalty of kareit, spiritual excision; in other words, regardless of how good a Jew he is in all other ways, a man has no place in the [World to Come](#) if he is uncircumcised.

Circumcision is performed on the eighth day of the child's life, during the day. The day the child is born counts as the first day, thus if the child is born on a Wednesday, he is circumcised on the following Wednesday. Keep in mind that Jewish [days begin](#) at sunset, so if the child is born on a Wednesday evening, he is circumcised the following Thursday. Circumcisions are performed on [Shabbat](#), even though they involve the drawing of blood which is ordinarily forbidden on shabbat. The [Bible](#) does not specify a reason for the choice of the eighth day; however, modern medicine has revealed that an infant's blood clotting mechanism stabilizes on the eighth day after birth. As with almost any commandment, circumcision can be postponed for health reasons. [Jewish law](#) provides that where the child's health is at issue, circumcision must wait until seven days after a doctor declares the child healthy enough to undergo the procedure.

Circumcision involves surgically removing the foreskin of the penis. The circumcision is performed by a mohel (lit. circumciser; rhymes with oil), a pious, observant Jew educated in the relevant Jewish law and in surgical techniques. Circumcision performed by a regular physician does not qualify as a valid brit milah, regardless of whether a [rabbi](#) says a blessing over it, because the removal of the foreskin is itself a religious ritual that must be performed by someone religiously qualified.

If the child is born without a foreskin (it happens occasionally), or if the child was previously circumcised without the appropriate religious intent or in a manner that rendered the circumcision religiously invalid, a symbolic circumcision may be performed by taking a pinprick of blood from the tip of the penis. This is referred to as hatafat dam brit.

While the circumcision is performed, the child is held by a person called a sandek. In English, this is often referred to as a godfather. It is an honor to be a sandek for a bris. The sandek is usually a grandparent or the family rabbi. Traditionally, a chair (often an ornate one) is set aside for Elijah, who is said to preside over all circumcisions. Various [blessings](#) are recited, including one over wine, and a drop of wine is placed in the child's mouth. The child is then given a formal Hebrew name.

It is not necessary to have a [minyan](#) for a bris, but it is desirable if feasible.

As with most Jewish life events, the ritual is followed by refreshments or a festive meal.

The Circumcision Controversy

In recent times, circumcision has become controversial. Some have hypothesized that infant circumcision has harmful psychological effects and may cause sexual dysfunction. Many websites have sprung up promoting this point of view, and even in Israel there are those who want to outlaw circumcision as child abuse.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no concrete, scientific evidence that circumcision has any harmful effect. The rate of complications from circumcision is one of the lowest of all surgical procedures, and the most common complication is simply excessive bleeding. At most, the latest scientific evidence indicates that the health benefits of circumcision are not as great as previously assumed, thus there is no reason to perform routine circumcisions for the purposes of hygiene. However, as stated above, Jewish circumcision is not performed for the purpose of hygiene.

From the traditional Jewish point of view, there is no controversy. The ritual of circumcision was commanded by our Creator, and He certainly knows what is and is not good for us. The G-d who commanded us not to harm ourselves certainly would not command us to do something harmful to ourselves, and even if He did, the observant Jew would nonetheless heed His wishes.

For more information on the traditional Jewish response to the circumcision controversy, see [Bris Milah: Beautiful or Barbaric?](#) at Aish ha-Torah's website.

Pidyon ha-Ben: Redemption of the First Born

The first and best of all things belong to [G-d](#). This is true even of the firstborn of children. Originally, it was intended that the firstborn would serve as the [priests](#) and [Temple](#) functionaries of Israel; however,

after the incident of the Golden Calf, in which the tribe of [Levi](#) did not participate, G-d chose the tribe of Levi over the firstborn for this sacred role. This is explained in Num. 8:14-18. However, even though their place has been taken by the Levites, the firstborn still retain a certain degree of sanctity, and for this reason, they must be redeemed.

The ritual of redemption is referred to as pidyon ha-ben, literally, Redemption of the Son.

A firstborn son must be redeemed after he reaches 31 days of age. Ordinarily, the ritual is performed on the 31st day (the day of birth being the first day); however, the ritual cannot be performed on [Shabbat](#) because it involves the exchange of money. The child is redeemed by paying a small sum (five silver shekels in biblical times; today, usually five silver dollars) to a [kohein](#) (preferably a pious one familiar with the procedure) and performing a brief ritual. This procedure is commanded at Num. 18:15-16.

It is important to remember that rabbis are not necessarily koheins and koheins are not necessarily rabbis. Redemption from a rabbi is not valid unless the rabbi is also a kohein. See [Rabbis, Priests and Other Religious Functionaries](#) for more information about this distinction.

The ritual of pidyon ha-ben applies to a relatively small number of Jews. It applies only to the firstborn male child if it is born by natural childbirth. Thus, if a female is the firstborn, no child in the family is subject to the ritual. If the first child is born by Caesarean section, the ritual does not apply to that child (nor, according to most sources, to any child born after that child). If the first conception ends in miscarriage after more than 40 days' term, it does not apply to any subsequent child. It does not apply to members of the tribe of Levi, or children born to a daughter of a member of the tribe of Levi.

Adoption

There is no formal procedure of adoption in [Jewish law](#). Adoption as it exists in civil law is irrelevant, because civil adoption is essentially a transfer of title from one parent to another, and in Jewish law, parents do not own their children. However, Judaism does have certain laws that are relevant in circumstances where a child is raised by someone other than the birth parents.

In most ways, the adoptive parents are to the child as any birth parent would be. The [Talmud](#) says that he who raises someone else's child is regarded as if he had actually brought him into the world physically. For those who cannot have children of their own, raising adoptive children satisfies the obligation to be fruitful and multiply. The child may be formally named (see [above](#)) as the child of the adoptive parents, owes the adoptive parents the same duty of respect as he would a birth parent, and observes formal [mourning](#) for the adoptive parents as he would for birth parents.

Matters relevant to the child's status are determined by the status of the birth parents, not by that of the adoptive parents. The child's status as a [Kohein](#), a [Levi](#), a [Jew](#), and/or a [firstborn](#), are all determined by reference to the birth parents.

This issue of status is particularly important in the case of non-Jewish children adopted by Jews. Children born of non-Jewish parents are *not* Jewish unless they are converted, regardless of who raises them or how they were raised. The status as a Jew is more a matter of citizenship than a matter of belief. For more information about this issue, see [Who is a Jew?](#)

If Jewish parents adopt a non-Jewish child, the child must be converted. This process is somewhat simpler for an infant than it is for an adult convert, because there is generally no need to try to talk the person out of converting and no need for prior education. It is really more of a formality. The conversion must be approved by a Bet Din (rabbinic court); a circumcision or hatafat dam brit must be performed; the child must be immersed in a kosher mikvah and the parents must commit to educating the child as a Jew. For more details about the process of conversion generally, See [Conversion](#).

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Bar Mitzvah, Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation

Level: Basic

"Bar Mitzvah" literally means "son of the commandment." "Bar" is "son" in Aramaic, which used to be the vernacular of the [Jewish people](#). "Mitzvah" is "commandment" in both Hebrew and Aramaic. "Bat" is daughter in Hebrew and Aramaic. (The [Ashkenazic](#) pronunciation is "bas")

Under Jewish Law, children are not obligated to observe the commandments, although they are encouraged to do so as much as possible to learn the obligations they will have as adults. At the age of 13 (12 for girls), children become obligated to observe the commandments. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony formally marks the assumption of that obligation, along with the corresponding right to take part in leading [religious services](#), to count in a [minyan](#) (the minimum number of people needed to perform certain parts of religious services), to form binding contracts, to testify before religious courts and to marry.

A Jewish boy automatically becomes a Bar Mitzvah upon reaching the age of 13 years. No ceremony is needed to confer these rights and obligations. The popular bar mitzvah ceremony is not required, and does not fulfill any commandment. It is a relatively modern innovation, not mentioned in the [Talmud](#), and the elaborate ceremonies and receptions that are commonplace today were unheard of as recently as a century ago.

In its earliest and most basic form, a Bar Mitzvah is the celebrant's first [aliyah](#). During [Shabbat services](#) on a Saturday shortly after the child's 13th birthday, the celebrant is called up to the [Torah](#) to recite a [blessing](#) over the [weekly reading](#).

Today, it is common practice for the Bar Mitzvah celebrant to do much more than just say the blessing. It is most common for the celebrant to learn the entire [haftarah](#) portion, including its traditional chant, and recite that. In some congregations, the celebrant reads the entire weekly torah portion, or leads part of the service, or leads the congregation in certain important prayers. The celebrant is also generally required to make a speech, which traditionally begins with the phrase "today I am a man." The father recites a blessing thanking [G-d](#) for removing the burden of being responsible for the son's sins.

In modern times, the religious service is followed by a reception that is often as elaborate as a wedding reception.

In [Orthodox](#) and [Chasidic](#) practice, [women](#) are not permitted to participate in religious services in these ways, so a bat mitzvah, if celebrated at all, is usually little more than a party. In other [movements](#) of Judaism, the girls do exactly the same thing as the boys.

It is important to note that a bar mitzvah is not the goal of a Jewish education, nor is it a graduation ceremony marking the end of a person's Jewish education. We are obligated to study [Torah](#) throughout our lives. To emphasize this point, some rabbis require a bar mitzvah student to sign an agreement promising to continue Jewish education after the bar mitzvah.

The [Reform movement](#) tried to do away with the Bar Mitzvah for a while, scorning the idea that a 13 year old child was an adult. They replaced it with a confirmation at the age of 16 or 18. However, due to

the overwhelming popularity of the ceremonies, the Reform movement has revived the practice. I don't know of any Reform [synagogues](#) that do not encourage the practice of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs today. In some [Conservative](#) synagogues, however, the confirmation practice continues as a way to keep children involved in Jewish education for a few more years.

The age set for bar mitzvah is not an outdated notion based on the needs of an agricultural society, as some suggest. This criticism comes from a misunderstanding of the significance of the bar mitzvah. Bar mitzvah is not about being a full adult in every sense of the word, ready to marry, go out on your own, earn a living and raise children. The [Talmud](#) makes this abundantly clear. In Pirkei Avot, it is said that while 13 is the proper age for fulfillment of the Commandments, 18 is the proper age for [marriage](#) and 20 is the proper age for earning a livelihood. Elsewhere in the Talmud, the proper age for marriage is said to be 16-24. Bar mitzvah is simply the age when a person is held responsible for his actions and minimally qualified to marry.

If you compare this to secular law, you will find that it is not so very far from our modern notions of a child's maturity. In Anglo-American common law, a child of the age of 14 is old enough to assume many of the responsibilities of an adult, including minimal criminal liability. In many states, a fourteen year old can marry with parental consent. Children of any age are permitted to testify in court, and children over the age of 14 are permitted to have significant input into custody decisions in cases of divorce.

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Marriage

Level: Basic

The [Torah](#) provides very little guidance with regard to the procedures of a marriage. The method of finding a spouse, the form of the wedding ceremony, and the nature of the marital relationship are all explained in the [Talmud](#).

Bashert: Soul Mates

According to the [Talmud](#), Rav Yehuda taught that 40 days before a male child is conceived, a voice from heaven announces whose daughter he is going to marry, literally a match made in heaven! In [Yiddish](#), this perfect match is called "bashert," a word meaning fate or destiny. The word "bashert" can be used to refer to any kind of fortuitous good match, such as finding the perfect job or the perfect house, but it is usually used to refer to one's soul mate. There are a number of statements in the Talmud that would seem to contradict the idea of bashert, most notably the many bits of advice on choosing a wife. Nevertheless, the idea has a strong hold within the Jewish community: look at any listing of Jewish personal ads and you're bound to find someone "Looking for my bashert."

Finding your bashert doesn't mean that your marriage will be trouble-free. Marriage, like everything worthwhile in life, requires dedication, effort and energy. Even when two people are meant for each other, it is possible for them to ruin their marriage. That is why Judaism allows [divorce](#).

Although the first marriage is bashert, it is still possible to have a good and happy marriage with a second spouse. The Talmud teaches that [G-d](#) also arranges second marriages, and a man's second wife is chosen according to his merits.

How do you know if you have found your bashert? Should you hold off on marrying someone for fear that the person you want to marry might not be your bashert, and there might be a better match out there waiting for you? The traditional view is that you cannot know who your bashert is, but once you get married, the person you married is by definition your bashert, so you should not let concerns about finding your bashert discourage you from marrying someone.

And while we're on the subject of G-d arranging marriages, I should share this delightful midrash: it is said that a Roman woman asked a [rabbi](#), if your G-d created the universe in six days, then what has he been doing with his time since then? The rabbi said that G-d has been arranging marriages. The Roman woman scoffed at this, saying that arranging marriages was a simple task, but the rabbi assured her that arranging marriages properly is as difficult as parting the Red Sea. To prove the rabbi wrong, the Roman woman went home and took a thousand male slaves and a thousand female slaves and matched them up in marriages. The next day, the slaves appeared before her, one with a cracked skull, another with a broken leg, another with his eye gouged out, all asking to be released from their marriages. The woman went back to the rabbi and said, "There is no god like your G-d, and your Torah is true."

Acquiring a Spouse

[Mishnah](#) Kiddushin 1:1 specifies that a woman is acquired (i.e., to be a wife) in three ways: through money, a contract, and sexual intercourse. Ordinarily, all three of these conditions are satisfied, although only one is necessary to effect a binding marriage.

Acquisition by money is normally satisfied by the wedding ring. It is important to note that although money is one way of "acquiring" a wife, the woman is not being bought and sold like a piece of property or a slave. This is obvious from the fact that the amount of money involved is nominal (according to the [Mishnah](#), a perutah, a copper coin of the lowest denomination, was sufficient). In addition, if the woman were being purchased like a piece of property, it would be possible for the husband to resell her, and clearly it is not. Rather, the wife's acceptance of the money is a symbolic way of demonstrating her acceptance of the husband, just like acceptance of the contract or the sexual intercourse.

To satisfy the requirements of acquisition by money, the ring must belong to the groom. It cannot be borrowed, although it can be a gift from a relative. It must be given to the wife irrevocably. In addition, the ring's value must be known to the wife, so that there can be no claim that the husband deceived her into marrying by misleading her as to its value.

In all cases, the Talmud specifies that a woman can be acquired only with her consent, and not without it. Kiddushin 2a-b.

As part of the wedding ceremony, the husband gives the wife a ketubah. The word "Ketubah" comes from the [root](#) Kaf-Tav-Bet, meaning "writing." The ketubah is also called the marriage contract. The ketubah spells out the husband's obligations to the wife during marriage, conditions of inheritance upon his death, and obligations regarding the support of children of the marriage. It also provides for the wife's support in the event of [divorce](#). There are standard conditions; however, additional conditions can be included by mutual agreement. Marriage agreements of this sort were commonplace in the ancient Semitic world.

The ketubah has much in common with prenuptial agreements, which are gaining popularity in the United States. In the U.S., such agreements were historically disfavored, because it was believed that planning for divorce would encourage divorce, and that people who considered the possibility of divorce shouldn't be marrying. Although one [rabbi](#) in the [Talmud](#) expresses a similar opinion, the majority maintained that a ketubah discouraged divorce, by serving as a constant reminder of the husband's substantial financial obligations if he divorced his wife.

The ketubah is often a beautiful work of calligraphy, framed and displayed in the home.

The Process of Marriage: Kiddushin and Nisuin

The process of marriage occurs in two distinct stages: kiddushin (commonly translated as betrothal) and nisuin (full-fledged marriage). Kiddushin occurs when the woman accepts the money, contract or sexual relations offered by the prospective husband. The word "kiddushin" comes from the [root](#) Qof-Dalet-Shin, meaning "sanctified." It reflects the sanctity of the marital relation. However, the root word also connotes something that is set aside for a specific (sacred) purpose, and the ritual of kiddushin sets aside the woman to be the wife of a particular man and no other.

Kiddushin is far more binding than an engagement as we understand the term in modern English; in fact, Rambam speaks of a period of engagement *before* the kiddushin. Once kiddushin is complete, the woman is legally the wife of the man. The relationship created by kiddushin can only be dissolved by death or divorce. However, the spouses do not live together at the time of the kiddushin, and the mutual obligations created by the marital relationship do not take effect until the nisuin is complete.

The nisuin (from a word meaning "elevation") completes the process of marriage. The husband brings the wife into his home and they begin their married life together.

In the past, the kiddushin and nisuin would routinely occur as much as a year apart. During that time, the husband would prepare a home for the new family. There was always a risk that during this long period of separation, the woman would discover that she wanted to marry another man, or the man would disappear, leaving the woman in the awkward state of being married but without a husband. Today, the two ceremonies are normally performed together.

Because marriage under Jewish law is essentially a private contractual agreement between a man and a woman, it does not require the presence of a [rabbi](#) or any other religious official. It is common, however, for rabbis to officiate, partly in imitation of the Christian practice and partly because the presence of a religious or civil official is required under United States civil law.

As you can see, it is very easy to make a marriage, so the rabbis instituted severe punishments (usually flogging and compelled divorce) where marriage was undertaken without proper planning and solemnity.

A Typical Wedding Ceremony

It is customary for the bride and groom not to see each other for a week preceding the wedding. On the [Shabbat](#) of that week, it is customary among [Ashkenazic Jews](#) for the groom to have an [aliyah](#) (the honor of reciting a blessing over the [Torah reading](#)). This aliyah is known as an ufruf. There are exuberant celebrations in the synagogue at this time.

The day before the wedding, both the bride and the groom fast.

Before the ceremony, the bride is veiled, in remembrance of the fact that Rebecca veiled her face when she was first brought to [Isaac](#) to be his wife.

The ceremony itself lasts 20-30 minutes, and consists of the kiddushin and the nisuin. For the kiddushin, the bride approaches and circles the groom. Two blessings are recited over wine: one the standard blessing over wine and the other regarding the commandments related to marriage. The man then places the ring on woman's finger and says "Be sanctified (mekudeshet) to me with this ring in accordance with the law of [Moses](#) and [Israel](#)."

After the kiddushin is complete, the ketubah is read aloud.

The nisuin then proceeds. The bride and groom stand beneath the chuppah, a canopy held up by four poles, symbolic of their dwelling together and of the husband's bringing the wife into his home. The importance of the chuppah is so great that the wedding ceremony is sometimes referred to as the chuppah. The bride and groom recite seven [blessings](#) (sheva brakchos) in the presence of a [minyan](#) (prayer quorum of 10 adult Jewish men). The essence of each of the seven blessings is:

1. ... who has created everything for his glory
2. ... who fashioned the Man
3. ... who fashioned the Man in His image ...
4. ... who gladdens Zion through her children
5. ... who gladdens groom and bride
6. ... who created joy and gladness ... who gladdens the groom with the bride
7. and the standard prayer over wine.

The couple then drinks the wine.

The groom smashes a glass (or a small symbolic piece of glass) with his right foot, to symbolize the destruction of the [Temple](#).

The couple then retires briefly to a completely private room, symbolic of the groom bringing the wife into his home.

This is followed by a festive meal, which is followed by a repetition of the sheva brakhos. Exuberant music and dancing traditionally accompany the ceremony and the reception.

The Marital Relationship

Marriage is vitally important in Judaism. Refraining from marriage is not considered holy, as it is in some other religions. On the contrary, it is considered unnatural. The [Talmud](#) says that an unmarried man is constantly thinking of sin. The Talmud tells of a [rabbi](#) who was introduced to a young unmarried rabbi. The older rabbi told the younger one not to come into his presence again until he was married.

Marriage is not solely, or even primarily, for the purpose of procreation. Traditional sources recognize that companionship, love and intimacy are the primary purposes of marriage, noting that woman was created in Gen. 2:18 because "it is not good for man to be alone," rather than because she was necessary for procreation.

According to the [Torah](#) and the [Talmud](#), a man was permitted to marry more than one wife, but a woman could not marry more than one man. Although polygyny was permitted, it was never common. The Talmud never mentions any [rabbi](#) with more than one wife. Around 1000 [C.E.](#), [Ashkenazic Jewry](#) banned polygyny because of pressure from the predominant Christian culture. It continued to be permitted for [Sephardic Jews](#) in Islamic lands for many years. To the present day, [Yemenite](#) and [Ethiopian Jews](#) continue to practice polygyny; however, the modern state of [Israel](#) allows only one wife, unless you come to Israel with more than one wife, in which case you can keep the wives you have but you cannot marry new ones.

A husband is responsible for providing his wife with food, clothing and [sexual relations](#) (Ex. 21:10), as well as anything else specified in the ketubah. Marital sexual relations are the woman's right, not the man's. A man cannot force his wife to engage in sexual relations with him, nor is he permitted to abuse his wife in any way (a practice routinely permitted in Western countries until quite recently).

A married woman retains ownership of any property she brought to the marriage, but the husband has the

right to manage the property and to enjoy profits from the property.

Prohibited Marriages and Illegitimate Children

The minimum age for marriage under Jewish law is 13 for boys, 12 for girls; however, the kiddushin can take place before that, and often did in medieval times. The [Talmud](#) recommends that a man marry at age 18, or somewhere between 16 and 24.

The [Torah](#) sets forth a laundry list of prohibited relations. Such marriages are never valid. A man cannot marry certain close blood relatives, the ex-wives of certain close blood relatives, a woman who has not been validly divorced from her previous husband, the daughter or granddaughter of his ex-wife, or the sister of his ex-wife during the ex-wife's life time. For a complete list, see [613 Mitzvot \(Commandments\)](#).

The offspring of such a marriage are mamzerim (bastards, illegitimate), and subject to a variety of restrictions; however it is important to note that only the offspring of these incestuous or forbidden marriages are mamzerim. Children born out of wedlock are not mamzerim in Jewish law and bear no stigma, unless the marriage would have been prohibited for the reasons above. Children of a married man and a woman who is not his wife are not mamzerim (because the marriage between the parents would not have been prohibited), although children of a married woman and a man who is not her husband are mamzerim (because she could not have married him).

There are other classes of marriages that are not permitted, but that are valid if they occur and that do not make the children mamzerim. The marriage of minors, of a Jew to a non-Jew, and of a [kohein](#) to the prohibited classes of women discussed below fall into this category.

A kohein is not permitted to marry a divorcee, a convert, a promiscuous woman, a woman who is the offspring of a forbidden marriage to a kohein, or a woman who is the widow of a man who died childless but who has been released from the obligation to marry her husband's brother. A kohein who marries such a woman is disqualified from his duties as a kohein, as are all the offspring of that marriage.

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Divorce

Level: Basic

Jewish Attitude Toward Divorce

Judaism recognized the concept of "no-fault" divorce thousands of years ago. Judaism has always accepted divorce as a fact of life, albeit an unfortunate one. Judaism generally maintains that it is better for a couple to divorce than to remain together in a state of constant bitterness and strife.

Under [Jewish law](#), a man can divorce a woman for any reason or no reason. The [Talmud](#) specifically says that a man can divorce a woman because she spoiled his dinner or simply because he finds another woman more attractive, and the woman's consent to the divorce is not required. In fact, Jewish law requires divorce in some circumstances: when the wife commits a sexual transgression, a man must divorce her, even if he is inclined to forgive her.

This does not mean that Judaism takes divorce lightly. Many aspects of Jewish law discourage divorce. The procedural details involved in arranging a divorce are complex and exacting. Except in certain cases of misconduct by the wife, a man who divorces his wife is required to pay her substantial sums of money, as specified in the [ketubah](#) (marriage contract). In addition, Jewish law prohibits a man from remarrying his ex-wife after she has married another man. [Kohanim](#) cannot marry divorcees at all.

The Process of Obtaining a Divorce

According to the [Torah](#), divorce is accomplished simply by writing a bill of divorce, handing it to the wife, and sending her away. To prevent husbands from divorcing their wives recklessly or without proper consideration, the [rabbis](#) created complex rules regarding the process of writing the document, delivery, and acceptance. A competent rabbinical authority should be consulted for any divorce.

The document in question is referred to in the Talmud as a *sefer k'ritut* (scroll of cutting off), but it is more commonly known today as a *get*. The *get* is not phrased in negative terms. The traditional text does not emphasize the breakdown of the relationship, nor does it specify the reason for the divorce; rather, it states that the woman is now free to marry another man.

It is not necessary for a husband to personally hand the *get* to the wife. If it is not possible or desirable for the couple to meet, a messenger may be appointed to deliver the *get*.

It is important to note that a civil divorce is not sufficient to dissolve a [Jewish marriage](#). As far as [Jewish law](#) is concerned, a couple remains married until the woman receives the *get*. This has been a significant problem: many liberal Jews have a religiously valid marriage, yet do not obtain a religiously valid divorce. If the woman remarries after such a procedure, her second marriage is considered an adulterous one, and her children are considered [mamzerim](#) (bastards, illegitimate).

Inequality of the Sexes

The position of husband and wife with regard to divorce is not an equal one. According to the [Talmud](#), only the husband can initiate a divorce, and the wife cannot prevent him from divorcing her. Later [rabbinical](#) authorities took steps to ease the harshness of these rules by prohibiting a man from divorcing a woman without her consent. In addition, a rabbinical court can compel a husband to divorce his wife under certain circumstances: when he is physically repulsive because of some medical condition or other characteristic, when he violates or neglects his marital obligations (food, clothing and sexual intercourse), or, according to some views, when there is sexual incompatibility.

A peculiar problem arises, however, if a man disappears or deserts his wife or is presumed dead but there is insufficient proof of death. Under [Jewish law](#), divorce can only be initiated by the man; thus, if the husband cannot be found, he cannot be compelled to divorce the wife and she cannot marry another man. A woman in this situation is referred to as agunah (literally, anchored). The rabbis agonized over this problem, balancing the need to allow the woman to remarry with the risk of an adulterous marriage (a grave transgression that would affect the status of offspring of the marriage) if the husband reappeared. No definitive solution to this problem exists.

To prevent this problem to some extent, it is customary in many places for a man to give his wife a conditional get whenever he goes off to war, so that if he never comes home and his body is not found, his wife does not become agunah.

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Life, Death and Mourning

Level: Basic

Life

In Judaism, life is valued above almost all else. The [Talmud](#) notes that all people are descended from a single person, thus taking a single life is like destroying an entire world, and saving a single life is like saving an entire world.

Of the [613 commandments](#), only the prohibitions against murder, idolatry, incest and adultery are so important that they cannot be violated to save a life. Judaism not only permits, but often *requires* a person to violate the commandments if necessary to save a life. A person who is extremely ill, for example, or a woman in labor, is not permitted to fast on [Yom Kippur](#), because fasting at such a time would endanger the person's life. Doctors are permitted to answer emergency calls on [Shabbat](#), even though this may violate many Shabbat prohibitions. [Abortions](#) where necessary to save the life of a mother are mandatory (the unborn are not considered human life in Jewish law, thus the mother's human life overrides).

Because life is so valuable, we are not permitted to do anything that may hasten death, not even to prevent suffering. Euthanasia, suicide and assisted suicide are strictly forbidden by Jewish law. The [Talmud](#) states that you may not even move a dying person's arms if that would shorten his life.

However, where death is imminent and certain, and the patient is suffering, Jewish law does permit one to cease artificially prolonging life. Thus, in certain circumstances, Jewish law permits "pulling the plug" or refusing extraordinary means of prolonging life.

Death

In Judaism, death is not a tragedy, even when it occurs early in life or through unfortunate circumstances. Death is a natural process. Our deaths, like our lives, have meaning and are all part of [G-d's](#) plan. In addition, we have a firm belief in an [afterlife](#), a world to come, where those who have lived a worthy life will be rewarded.

Mourning practices in Judaism are extensive, but they are not an expression of fear or distaste for death. Jewish practices relating to death and mourning have two purposes: to show respect for the dead (kavod ha-met), and to comfort the living (nihum avelim), who will miss the deceased.

Care for the Dead

After a person dies, the eyes are closed, the body is laid on the floor and covered, and candles are lit next to the body. The body is never left alone until after burial, as a sign of respect. The people who sit with the dead body are called shomerim, from the [root](#) Shin-Mem-Resh, meaning "guards" or "keepers".

Respect for the dead body is a matter of paramount importance. For example, the shomerim may not eat, drink, or perform a commandment in the presence of the dead. To do so would be considered mocking

the dead, because the dead can no longer do these things.

Most communities have an organization to care for the dead, known as the chevra kaddisha (the holy society). These people are volunteers. Their work is considered extremely meritorious, because they are performing a service for someone who can never repay them.

Autopsies in general are discouraged as desecration of the body. They are permitted, however, where it may save a life or where local law requires it. When autopsies must be performed, they should be minimally intrusive.

The presence of a dead body is considered a source of ritual impurity. For this reason, a [kohein](#) may not be in the presence of a corpse. People who have been in the presence of a body wash their hands before entering a home. This is done to symbolically remove spiritual impurity, not physical uncleanness: it applies regardless of whether you have physically touched the body.

In preparation for the burial, the body is thoroughly cleaned and wrapped in a simple, plain linen shroud. The Sages decreed that both the dress of the body and the coffin should be simple, so that a poor person would not receive less honor in death than a rich person. The body is wrapped in a [tallit](#) with its [tzitzit](#) rendered invalid. The body is not embalmed, and no organs or fluids may be removed. According to some sources, organ donation is permitted, because the subsequent burial of the donee will satisfy the requirement of burying the entire body.

The body must not be cremated. It must be buried in the earth. Coffins are not required, but if they are used, they must have holes drilled in them so the body comes in contact with the earth.

The body is never displayed at funerals; open casket ceremonies are forbidden by Jewish law. According to Jewish law, exposing a body is considered disrespectful, because it allows not only friends, but also enemies to view the dead, mocking their helpless state.

Mourning

Jewish mourning practices can be broken into several periods of decreasing intensity. These mourning periods allow the full expression of grief, while discouraging excesses of grief and allowing the mourner to gradually return to a normal life.

When a close relative (parent, sibling, spouse or child) first hears of the death of a relative, it is traditional to express the initial grief by tearing one's clothing. The tear is made over the heart if the deceased is a parent, or over the right side of the chest for other relatives. This tearing of the clothing is referred to as keriyah (lit. "tearing"). The mourner recites the [blessing](#) describing [G-d](#) as "the true Judge," an acceptance of G-d's taking of the life of a relative.

From the time of death to the burial, the mourner's sole responsibility is caring for the deceased and preparing for the burial. This period is known as aninut. During this time, the mourners are exempt from all positive commandments ("thou shalt"), because the preparations take first priority. This period usually lasts a day or two; Judaism requires prompt burial.

During this aninut period, the family should be left alone and allowed the full expression of grief. Condolence calls or visits should not be made during this time.

After the burial, a close relative, near neighbor or friend prepares the first meal for the mourners, the se'udat havra'ah (meal of condolence). This meal traditionally consists of eggs (a symbol of life) and bread. The meal is for the family only, not for visitors. After this time, condolence calls are permitted.

The next period of mourning is known as shiva (seven, because it lasts seven days). Shiva is observed by parents, children, spouses and siblings of the deceased, preferably all together in the deceased's home. Shiva begins on the day of burial and continues until the morning of the seventh day after burial. Mourners sit on low stools or the floor instead of chairs, do not wear leather shoes, do not shave or cut their hair, do not wear cosmetics, do not work, and do not do things for comfort or pleasure, such as bathe, have sex, put on fresh clothing, or study [Torah](#) (except Torah related to mourning and grief). Mourners wear the clothes that they wore at the time of learning of the death or at the funeral. Mirrors in the house are covered. Prayer services are held where the shiva is held, with friends neighbors and relatives making up the [minyan](#) (10 people required for certain prayers).

If a festival occurs during the mourning period, the mourning is terminated, but if the burial occurs during a festival, the mourning is delayed until after the festival. The [Shabbat](#) that occurs during the shiva period counts toward the seven days of shiva, and does not end the mourning period. Public mourning practices (such as wearing the torn clothes, not wearing shoes) are suspended during this period, but private mourning continues.

The next period of mourning is known as shloshim (thirty, because it lasts until the 30th day after burial). During that period, the mourners do not attend parties or celebrations, do not shave or cut their hair, and do not listen to music.

The final period of formal mourning is avelut, which is observed only for a parent. This period lasts for twelve months after the burial. During that time, mourners avoid parties, celebrations, theater and concerts. For eleven months of that period, starting at the time of burial, the son of the deceased recites the mourner's [Kaddish](#) every day.

After the avelut period is complete, the family of the deceased is not permitted to continue formal mourning; however, there are a few continuing acknowledgments of the decedent. Every year, on the anniversary of the death, family members observe the deceased's Yahrzeit (Yiddish, lit. "anniversary"). On the Yahrzeit, sons recite Kaddish and take an [aliyah](#) ([bless](#) the Torah reading) in synagogue if possible, and all mourners light a candle in honor of the decedent that burns for 24 hours. In addition, during services on [Yom Kippur](#), [Shemini Atzeret](#), the last day of [Passover](#), and [Shavu'ot](#), after the haftarah reading in synagogue, close relatives recite the mourner's prayer, Yizkor ("May He remember...") in synagogue. Yahrzeit candles are also lit on those days.

When visiting a mourner, a guest should not try to express grief with standard, shallow platitudes. The guest should allow the mourner to initiate conversations. One should not divert the conversation from talking about the deceased; to do so would limit the mourner's ability to fully express grief, which is the purpose of the mourning period. On the contrary, the caller should encourage conversation about the deceased.

When leaving a house of mourning, it is traditional for the guest to say, "May the Lord comfort you with all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

Kaddish

Kaddish is commonly known as a mourner's prayer, but in fact, variations on the Kaddish prayer are routinely recited at many other times, and the prayer itself has nothing to do with death or mourning. The prayer begins "May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified in the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days ..." and continues in much that vein. The real mourner's prayer is El Molai Rachamim, which is recited at grave sites and during funerals.

Why, then, is Kaddish recited by mourners?

After a great loss like the death of a parent, you might expect a person to lose faith in [G-d](#), or to cry out against G-d's injustice. Instead, Judaism requires a mourner to stand up every day, publicly (i.e., in front of a [minyan](#), a quorum of 10 adult men), and reaffirm faith in G-d despite this loss. To do so inures to the merit of the deceased in the eyes of G-d, because the deceased must have been a very good parent to raise a child who could express such faith in the face of personal loss.

Then why is Kaddish recited for only 11 months, when the mourning period is 12 months? According to Jewish tradition, the soul must spend some time purifying itself before it can enter the [World to Come](#). The maximum time required for purification is 12 months, for the most evil person. To recite Kaddish for 12 months would imply that the parent was the type who needed 12 months of purification! To avoid this implication, the Sages decreed that a son should recite Kaddish for only eleven months.

A person is permitted to recite Kaddish for other close relatives as well as parents, but only if his parents are dead.

See [Mourners' Kaddish](#) for the full text of the Mourners' Kaddish.

Tombstones

Jewish law requires that a tombstone be prepared, so that the deceased will not be forgotten and the grave will not be desecrated. It is customary in some communities to keep the tombstone veiled, or to delay in putting it up, until the end of the 12-month mourning period. The idea underlying this custom is that the dead will not be forgotten when he is being mourned every day. In communities where this custom is observed, there is generally a formal unveiling ceremony when the tombstone is revealed.

It is also customary in some communities to place small stones on a gravesite when visiting it. This custom has become well-known from the movie [Schindler's List](#), in which the children of Survivors place stones on the grave of Oscar Schindler. The custom is not universal, even among traditional Jews, and there seems to be some doubt as to how it originated. It seems to have superstitious origins. It's a little like leaving a calling card for the dead person, to let them know you were there. Stones, unlike flowers, are permanent and do not get blown away in the wind. Some other sources suggest that it was originally done because



we are required to erect a tombstone, and tombstones that actually looked like tombstones tended to get desecrated.

What is written on a tombstone? In most cases, it is very straightforward Hebrew text, similar to what you might see on a tombstone in English. An illustration of a typical Jewish tombstone is shown above.

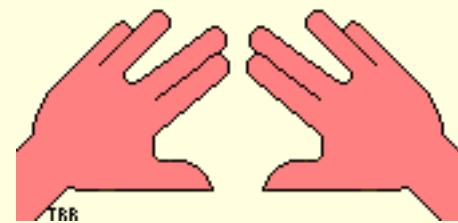
At the top is the abbreviation [Peh-Nun](#), which stands for either "poh nitman" or "poh nikbar", which means "here lies..." The marks that look like quotation marks are commonly used to indicate an abbreviation or a number written in letters.

The next line is the name of the decedent, in the form (decedent's name), son of or daughter of [father's name]. "Son of" is either ben (Bet-Final Nun) or bar (Bet-Resh). "Daughter of" is bat (Bet-Tav). The tombstone above says "Esther bat Mordecai" (Elsie, daughter of Morrice). Sometimes, one or both of the names is preceded by the letter Resh, which simply stands for "Reb" and means "Mr." The names may also be followed by the title ha-Kohein (Heh-Kaf-Heh-Final Nun), ha-Levi (Heh-Lamed-Vav-Yod) or ha-Rav (Heh-Resh-Bet), indicating that the person was a [kohein](#), a [Levite](#) or a [rabbi](#). See the [Hebrew Alphabet](#) page if you need help in identifying specific letters on a tombstone.

The third line indicates the date of death. This line begins with the abbreviation Nun-Peh followed by the date, the month, and the year. The date and year are written in Hebrew numerals, which are letters. The month name is sometimes preceded by a Bet (meaning "of"). The tombstone above indicates that the date of death was 18 Shevat 5761. Yod-Chet = 10+8 = 18. Shin-Bet-Tav is the month name Shevat. Tav-Shin-Samech-Alef = 400+300+60+1 = 761 (the 5000 is assumed). See [Hebrew Alphabet - Numerical Values](#) if you need help in identifying a number. See [Jewish Calendar - Months of the Jewish Year](#) if you need help identifying months. See [Jewish Calendar - Links to Jewish Calendars](#) if you need help converting a Hebrew date to a Gregorian date.

The last line is an abbreviation that stands for "tehe nishmatah tzerurah bitzror hachayim," which means "may her soul be bound in the bond of eternal life."

You may also find Jewish symbols on a tombstone, such as a [menorah](#), a [magen David](#), a [torah scroll](#), a lion, or the two tablets of the ten [commandments](#). Most of these symbols don't tell you anything about the decedent (other than the fact that he or she was Jewish). However, if you see a picture of hands in a position like the one at right, this normally indicates that the decedent was a [kohein](#), because this hand position is used when the kohanim bless the congregation at certain times of the year.



Recommended Reading

The definitive book on Jewish mourning practices is Maurice Lamm's [The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning](#). This book is available through most commercial bookstores, or click the link above to buy it online from amazon.com.



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Olam Ha-Ba: The Afterlife

Level: Basic

Traditional Judaism firmly believes that [death](#) is not the end of human existence. However, because Judaism is primarily focused on life here and now rather than on the afterlife, Judaism does not have much dogma about the afterlife, and leaves a great deal of room for personal opinion. It is possible for an [Orthodox](#) Jew to believe that the souls of the righteous dead go to a place similar to the Christian heaven, or that they are reincarnated through many lifetimes, or that they simply wait until the coming of the [messiah](#), when they will be resurrected. Likewise, Orthodox Jews can believe that the souls of the wicked are tormented by demons of their own creation, or that wicked souls are simply destroyed at death, ceasing to exist.

Biblical References to the Afterlife

Some scholars claim that belief in the afterlife is a teaching that developed late in Jewish history. It is true that the [Torah](#) emphasizes immediate, concrete, physical rewards and punishments rather than abstract future ones. See, for example, Lev. 26:3-9 and Deut. 11:13-15. However, there is clear evidence in the Torah of belief in existence after death. The Torah indicates in several places that the righteous will be reunited with their loved ones after death, while the wicked will be excluded from this reunion.

The Torah speaks of several noteworthy people being "gathered to their people." See, for example, Gen. 25:8 ([Abraham](#)), 25:17 ([Ishmael](#)), 35:29 ([Isaac](#)), 49:33 ([Jacob](#)), Deut. 32:50 ([Moses](#) and [Aaron](#)) II Kings 22:20 (King Josiah). This gathering is described as a separate event from the physical death of the body or the burial.

Certain sins are punished by the sinner being "cut off from his people." See, for example, Gen. 17:14 and Ex. 31:14. This punishment is referred to as kareit (kah-REHYT) (literally, "cutting off," but usually translated as "spiritual excision"), and it means that the soul loses its portion in the World to Come.

Later portions of the [Tanakh](#) speak more clearly of life after death and the World to Come. See Dan. 12:2, Neh. 9:5.

Resurrection and Reincarnation

Belief in the eventual resurrection of the dead is a fundamental belief of traditional Judaism. It was a belief that distinguished the [Pharisees](#) (intellectual ancestors of Rabbinical Judaism) from the [Sadducees](#). The Sadducees rejected the concept, because it is not explicitly mentioned in the [Torah](#). The Pharisees found the concept implied in certain verses.

Belief in resurrection of the dead is one of [Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith](#). The second blessing of the [Shemoneh Esrei prayer](#), which is recited three times daily, contains several references to resurrection. (Note: the [Reform](#) movement, which apparently rejects this belief, has rewritten the second blessing accordingly).

The resurrection of the dead will occur in the [messianic age](#), a time referred to in Hebrew as the Olam

Ha-Ba, the World to Come, but that term is also used to refer to the spiritual afterlife. When the [messiah](#) comes to initiate the perfect world of peace and prosperity, the righteous dead will be brought back to life and given the opportunity to experience the perfected world that their righteousness helped to create. The wicked dead will not be resurrected.

There are some [mystical](#) schools of thought that believe resurrection is not a one-time event, but is an ongoing process. The souls of the righteous are reborn in to continue the ongoing process of tikkun olam, mending of the world. Some sources indicate that reincarnation is a routine process, while others indicate that it only occurs in unusual circumstances, where the soul left unfinished business behind. Belief in reincarnation is also one way to explain the traditional Jewish belief that every Jewish soul in history was present at Sinai and agreed to the covenant with [G-d](#). (Another explanation: that the soul exists before the body, and these unborn souls were present in some form at Sinai). Belief in reincarnation is commonly held by many [Chasidic](#) sects, as well as some other mystically-inclined Jews. See, for example [Reincarnation Stories from Chasidic Tradition](#).

Olam Ha-Ba: The World to Come

The spiritual afterlife is referred to in Hebrew as Olam Ha-Ba (oh-LAHM hah-BAH), the World to Come, although this term is also used to refer to the [messianic age](#). The Olam Ha-Ba is another, higher state of being.

In the [Mishnah](#), one rabbi says, "This world is like a lobby before the Olam Ha-Ba. Prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall." Similarly, the Talmud says, "This world is like the eve of [Shabbat](#), and the Olam Ha-Ba is like Shabbat. He who prepares on the eve of Shabbat will have food to eat on Shabbat." We prepare ourselves for the Olam Ha-Ba through [Torah](#) study and good deeds.

The [Talmud](#) states that all Israel has a share in the Olam Ha-Ba. However, not all "shares" are equal. A particularly righteous person will have a greater share in the Olam Ha-Ba than the average person. In addition, a person can lose his share through wicked actions. There are many statements in the Talmud that a particular [mitzvah](#) will guarantee a person a place in the Olam Ha-Ba, or that a particular sin will lose a person's share in the Olam Ha-Ba, but these are generally regarded as hyperbole, excessive expressions of approval or disapproval.

Some people look at these teachings and deduce that Jews try to "earn our way into Heaven" by performing the mitzvot. This is a gross mischaracterization of our religion. It is important to remember that unlike some religions, Judaism is not focused on the question of how to get into heaven. Judaism is focused on life and how to live it. Non-Jews frequently ask me, "do you really think you're going to go to Hell if you don't do such-and-such?" It always catches me a bit off balance, because the question of where I am going after death simply doesn't enter into the equation when I think about the mitzvot. We perform the mitzvot because it is our privilege and our sacred obligation to do so. We perform them out of a sense of love and duty, not out of a desire to get something in return. In fact, one of the first bits of ethical advice in Pirkei Avot (a book of the [Mishnah](#)) is: "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward; instead, be like servants who serve their master not for the sake of receiving a reward, and let the awe of Heaven [meaning [G-d](#), not the afterlife] be upon you."

Nevertheless, we definitely believe that your place in the Olam Ha-Ba is determined by a merit system

based on your actions, not by who you are or what religion you profess. In addition, we definitely believe that humanity is capable of being considered righteous in G-d's eyes, or at least good enough to merit paradise after a suitable period of purification.

Do non-Jews have a place in Olam Ha-Ba? Although there are a few statements to the contrary in the [Talmud](#), the predominant view of Judaism is that the righteous of all [nations](#) have a share in the Olam Ha-Ba. Statements to the contrary were not based on the notion that membership in Judaism was required to get into Olam Ha-Ba, but were grounded in the observation that non-Jews were not righteous people. If you consider the behavior of the surrounding peoples at the time that the Talmud was written, you can understand the rabbis' attitudes. By the time of [Rambam](#), the belief was firmly entrenched that the righteous of all nations have a share in the Olam Ha-Ba.

Gan Eden and Gehinnom

The place of spiritual reward for the righteous is often referred to in Hebrew as Gan Eden (GAHN eh-y-DEHN) (the Garden of Eden). This is not the same place where Adam and Eve were; it is a place of spiritual perfection. Specific descriptions of it vary widely from one source to another. One source says that the peace that one feels when one experiences [Shabbat](#) properly is merely one-sixtieth of the pleasure of the afterlife. Other sources compare the bliss of the afterlife to the joy of sex or the warmth of a sunny day. Ultimately, though, the living can no more understand the nature of this place than the blind can understand color.

Only the very righteous go directly to Gan Eden. The average person descends to a place of punishment and/or purification, generally referred to as Gehinnom (guh-hee-NOHM) (in Yiddish, Gehenna), but sometimes as She'ol or by other names. According to one [mystical](#) view, every sin we commit creates an angel of destruction (a demon), and after we die we are punished by the very demons that we created. Some views see Gehinnom as one of severe punishment, a bit like the Christian Hell of fire and brimstone. Other sources merely see it as a time when we can see the actions of our lives objectively, see the harm that we have done and the opportunities we missed, and experience remorse for our actions. The period of time in Gehinnom does not exceed 12 months, and then ascends to take his place on Olam Ha-Ba.

Only the utterly wicked do not ascend at the end of this period; their souls are punished for the entire 12 months. Sources differ on what happens at the end of those 12 months: some say that the wicked soul is utterly destroyed and ceases to exist while others say that the soul continues to exist in a state of consciousness of remorse.

This 12-month limit is repeated in many places in the [Talmud](#), and it is connected to the mourning cycles and the recitation of [Kaddish](#). See [Life, Death and Mourning](#).

Recommended Reading

The following books can be found in many major bookstores, or click the links to buy the book online from amazon.com.

Adin Steinsaltz's [The Thirteen Petalled Rose \(Hardcover\)](#) or [\(Paperback\)](#) is a complete mystical cosmology written by one of the greatest Jewish scholars alive today. It



discusses the various levels of existence, the angels and demons that are created by our actions, the concept of reincarnation, and many other subjects of interest.

For an outline of Jewish thought on the afterlife, see [The Death of Death : Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought](#), by Neil Gillman. Gillman is a Conservative rabbi and a professor of Jewish philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary (a most important school for Conservative rabbis).

For information about the wide variety of Jewish views on what happens after death, see Simcha Paull Raphael's book, [Jewish Views of the Afterlife \(Hardcover\)](#) or [\(Paperback\)](#). Raphael, a Reconstructionist rabbi, takes a historical approach to life-after-death theories, exploring the views that predominated in each era of Jewish history.

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Recommended Books and Publishers

Level: Basic

The question I am most frequently asked is, "Where can I find a book on..." Below is information about some of the resources I have used in compiling the information on this site.

All of the books listed below can be purchased from the online bookseller amazon.com by clicking the links. You can help *support the Judaism 101 website* by using the links below to purchase these and other books from Amazon.



Suitable For Beginners

[Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures](#), Jewish Publication Society

There can be no resource more important than a text of the Bible itself. Those who cannot read Hebrew should use a translation prepared by Jews, with the Jewish understanding of the scriptures in mind and without a Christological bias. This version, often referred to as the JPS translation, is the first and most commonly used Jewish translation into English. The language is somewhat archaic, with a feel somewhat similar to the KJV.

[The Pentateuch and Haftorahs](#), Soncino Press

The complete text of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, along with the haftarot that go with each parshah. The pointed Hebrew text, along with complete cantillation (musical notation) is displayed side-by-side with the JPS English translation. The text is extensively annotated; footnotes routinely occupy one-third of each page, compiling information from a wide variety of traditional Jewish commentaries on the Bible. Sometimes referred to as the Soncino Chumash. This is the book used by most Orthodox synagogues, and many non-Orthodox synagogues.

[The Stone Tanach](#), Mesorah Publications

First published less than two years ago, the Stone Tanach is already becoming a standard reference material. Like the Soncino Chumash, the Stone Tanach has pointed, cantillated Hebrew text along side a Jewish translation of the text, but unlike the Soncino, this book contains the full text of the Jewish scriptures, not just the first five books plus haftarot. It also contains a number of useful charts and illustrations, and is very well indexed. The one down side: the commentary is less extensive than that in the Soncino.

[To Be a Jew](#), Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, Basic Books

Unquestionably the best resource on Orthodox Jewish belief and practice that is readily available to the general public. Donin begins with an extensive discussion of Judaism's underlying beliefs and ethical structure, then proceeds to discuss Shabbat, kashrut, family life, holidays, marriage, divorce, death and mourning, and many other important aspects of Jewish practice. Donin provides complete details on Orthodox customs as well as the elements necessary to fulfill the various commandments related to each of the subjects he discusses. The companion volume, [To Pray as a Jew](#), is also an excellent resource, but somewhat technical for a beginner.

[The Jewish Primer \(Hardcover\)](#), Rabbi Dr. Shmuel Himelstein, Facts on File, also available in [Paperback](#)

An excellent beginner's resource on Jewish belief and observance, written in a very readable question-and-answer style. It covers many of the same subjects that Donin does, but addresses Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist practice as well as Orthodox. It provides far less detail on the intricacies of observance than Donin's work does.

[Basic Judaism](#), Milton Steinberg, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

A concise discussion of Jewish belief, presenting and contrasting the traditional and modern perspectives. It discusses Torah, G-d, life, the Jewish people and our relation to the other nations, Jewish practice, Jewish law, and the World to Come. One of the things I like most about this book is that it shows the commonality underlying the various Jewish movements, and the fact that all Jewish movements have more in common with each other than any has with any other religion.

[The First Jewish Catalog](#), Richard Siegel et al, Jewish Publication Society

A funky, hands-on approach to traditional Jewish observance, with a very Sixties feel about it. It's a little hippy-dippy for my taste (make your own kiddush wine!), but it has a lot of very good information, it's a lot of fun, and it's just too popular not to mention. If you like this, you may also like the [Second Jewish Catalog](#) and the [Third Jewish Catalog](#).

[The Joys of Yiddish](#), Leo Rosten, Pocket Books

This is the first Jewish book I ever owned, and it holds a special place in my heart. Rosten describes this work as a lexicon of the Yiddish language, but it is vastly more than that. It is an extraordinary collection of Ashkenazic Jewish wit, wisdom and culture that manages to capture the Jewish soul better than any other book I have ever seen. The book uses common Yiddish words as a jumping off point for presenting a Jewish joke or story, or just for discussing a Jewish custom or practice. This is not written from a traditional perspective, but is generally respectful of the traditional perspective.

[Heritage: Civilization and the Jews](#), Abba Eban, Summit Books

From the PBS series of the same name. The history of the Jewish people from the time of Abraham to the present, relying on both biblical evidence and modern archaeological finds, with extensive illustrations.

[Jewish Cookery](#), Leah W. Leonard, Crown Publishers

Traditional Ashkenazic recipes for holidays and all year round. All of the recipes are kosher. There is a special section for Passover recipes. The book contains a brief discussion of holiday food customs and the laws of kashrut.

[The Jewish Fake Book](#), Velvel Pasternak, Tara Publications

This is an excellent collection of Jewish music, including shabbat and holiday songs, liturgical songs, Yiddish and Israeli folk songs, Klezmer music, wedding music and even some Sephardic tunes. Many of the MIDI's on this site were created with the assistance of the arrangements in this book. For those unfamiliar with fake books: a fake book has only the melody line, chords, and lyrics, rather than a complete piano arrangement.

[The Artscroll Siddur \(Siddur Kol Yaakov\) \(Hardcover\)](#), Mesorah Publications, also available in [Paperback](#)

This is the one that I did not get in a regular bookstore; I got it from a synagogue gift shop. It is an Orthodox daily prayer book, with beautiful, easy-to-read Hebrew text, plain English translations, detailed commentary, and extensive explanation of what to do (it even tells you when to sit down, stand up, bow, etc.) The Artsroll series has an extensive line of similar Jewish books, all of which share these fine qualities. I highly recommend their excellent Passover Haggadah, which I have been using for 10 years.

For More Advanced Study

[The Essential Talmud \(Hardcover\)](#), Adin Steinsaltz, Basic Books, also available in [Paperback](#)

Adin Steinsaltz is widely considered to be one of the greatest Talmudic minds of our century. His commentaries on the Talmud are gaining wide acceptance as standard study materials. In this relatively short book, Steinsaltz gives an overview of the Talmud, discussing its history, structure, content, and methodology. He gives brief summaries of significant Jewish law on matters like prayer, Shabbat, holidays, marriage and divorce, women, civil and criminal law, animal sacrifice, kashrut, ritual purity, ethics, and Jewish mysticism.

[Everyman's Talmud](#), A. Cohen, Schocken Books

A comprehensive summary of the Talmud's teachings about religion, ethics, folklore and jurisprudence. For the most part, Cohen allows the Talmud to speak for itself, quoting extensively and providing limited commentary. I am particularly fond of this book because it is one of the few books I have seen that seriously addresses the folklore contained in the Talmud (although Steinsaltz talks about mysticism, he mostly discusses the fact that it was taught to a select few). Cohen talks extensively about demonology, angelology, magic and dreams.

[Women and Jewish Law](#), Rachel Biale, Schocken Books

An in-depth examination of certain areas of Jewish law that pertain to women including marriage, divorce, sexuality, rape, abortion exemption from certain commandments and other subjects. Biale starts with the original biblical and talmudic texts and works her way up to present day commentaries. My only concern about this book is that it is sometimes hard to tell from her presentation where Orthodoxy ends and Reform begins.

[The Concise Book of Mitzvoth](#), The Chafetz Chayim, Feldheim Pubs

A list of all of the commandments that can be observed today, with a brief explanation of the source and meaning of the commandment. Printed with English and pointed Hebrew side by side.

[The Mishnah - a New Translation](#), Jacob Neusner, Yale University Press

Yes, the entire mishnah is available in a single (albeit very large) volume, in English. Neusner provides absolutely no commentary or explanation, but does break each passage down into phrases, which helps the reader figure out who said what and what the final decision was on each matter.

[To Pray as a Jew](#), Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, Basic Books

An in-depth examination of the form and content of Jewish prayer, explaining the significance and history of prayers and the procedures for reciting them.

Publishers and Booksellers On Line

Note: The links below will take you to several Jewish publishers and booksellers with sites on the Web. Many of these sources sell materials that are not Orthodox. Sites are listed in alphabetical order.

[1-800-JUDAISM](#)

An mail order service offering a wide variety of Judaic materials.

[Artscroll/Mesorah Publications](#)

Without a doubt the finest publisher of Orthodox Jewish materials. Their materials are suitable for readers at all levels.

[Feldheim Publishers](#)

One of the oldest publishers of Jewish books in the U.S. There is a lot of good material here, covering all movements of Judaism.

[Jason Aronson Publishers](#)


Their prices are a bit high, but they have an unusually broad selection of Judaic materials. They specialize in secondary sources, not primary reference material.

[KTAV Publishing House](#)

This is another of the oldest Jewish book publishers in the US. Your grandfather probably learned Hebrew from one of their books. KTAV specializes in Jewish religious objects, scholarly books and textbooks for Hebrew schools.

[amazon.com](#)

The online bookseller amazon.com is not specifically a Jewish bookseller, but they have an excellent selection of Jewish books. The link above will take you to their Judaism section, or use the form below to search for books or music from their catalog.

Search:
Keywords:


For additional sources, see the list of Jewish book publishers on [Yahoo](#). **NOTE:** Exercise extreme caution when searching for Jewish materials on Yahoo! They have a long history of failing to distinguish between real Judaism and Christian missionary activity targeted at Jews!

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Common Prayers and Blessings

Level: Intermediate

I am often asked for the text of various prayers and blessings. I am working on putting together pages of the most commonly requested prayers and blessings, as well as other liturgical materials that I think may be useful. Of course, this page is no substitute for owning your own siddur (prayer book). I recommend The Artscroll Siddur (Siddur Kol Yaakov), which is available from amazon.com. You can order it in [Hardcover](#) or [Paperback](#)

Please note that all of these prayers contain the name of [G-d](#). If you print them out, please treat them with appropriate respect.

Prayers Available

The following prayers are currently available. Others will be added soon:

- [Chanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings](#)
- [Havdalah Home Ritual](#)
- [Kaddish, Mourner's](#)
- [Mezuzah, Affixing](#)
- [Rosh Hashanah Blessings](#)
- [Shabbat Evening Home Ritual](#)
- [Shema](#)
- [Sukkot Blessings](#)

Special Supplement: I have added a page with some [Suggested Prayers in the Wake of the Terrorist Attacks in America](#).

Additional prayers can be found in [The Transliterated Siddur](#), a complete Shabbat liturgy available online in English and transliterated Hebrew!

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Glossary of Jewish Terminology

<#> [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

Following is a partial list of Hebrew, Yiddish and other Jewish terms used on this web site. Unless otherwise specified, the terms are Hebrew.

I have attempted to provide pronunciations for most of these terms. Some of the pronunciations may not be strictly, technically correct, but they are the way I usually hear the terms pronounced. Unfortunately, what I usually hear is a mix of Ashkenazic and Sephardic pronunciations. I have tried to present the Sephardic pronunciation as much as possible, but some things I never hear pronounced that way!

Guide to pronunciation:

- ' - a vowel that is not quite pronounced; a very short *u* or *i*
- a - as in *at*
- ah - as in *father*
- ahy - as in *my*
- aw - as in *awe* (often used as *awr* to sound like *or*)
- ay - as in *way*
- e - as in *bet*
- ee - as in *me*
- eh - as in *bet*
- ehy - as in *they*
- i - as in *it*
- oh - as in *hope*
- oo - as in *food*
- uh - as in *up*
- u - as in *put*
- kh - as in Scottish or German, a throat clearing noise
- tsch - as in *chair*
- ts - as in *paints*

- # -

13 Principles of Faith

The most widely accepted list of [Jewish beliefs](#), compiled by [Rambam](#).

613 Commandments

Judaism teaches that G-d gave the Jews 613 commandments, which are binding on Jews but not on non-Jews. See [Halakhah: Jewish Law](#); [A List of the 613 Mitzvot](#).

- A -

[Aaron](#)

Older brother of [Moses](#). Founder of the priesthood, and the first Kohein Gadol (High Priest). He helped Moses lead the Children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. See also [Rabbis, Priests, and Other Religious Functionaries - Kohein](#).

Abortion

Judaism permits abortion in appropriate circumstances, and sometimes even requires abortion. See [Kosher Sex - Abortion](#).

[Abraham \(Abram\)](#)

The first Jew, the founder of Judaism, the physical and spiritual ancestor of the Jewish people. One of the three [Patriarchs](#) of Judaism.

Adar

The twelfth month of the Jewish year, occurring in February/March. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

[Adoption](#)

There is no formal procedure for adoption in Judaism, but one who raises another person's child is acknowledged as the parent in many important ways.

Adoshem

A substitute for a [name of G-d](#).

Afikomen

From Greek meaning "dessert." A half piece of matzah set aside during the [Passover Seder](#), which is later hidden by children and then ransomed by parents, or hidden by parents and found by children. It is eaten as the last part of the meal.

[Afterlife](#)

Contrary to popular belief, Judaism does believe in an afterlife, but it is not the primary focus of our religion and there is a lot of room for personal opinion about the nature of the afterlife.

[Agunah](#)

Lit. anchored. A woman whose husband disappeared without [divorcing](#) her.

[Akiba \(uh-KEE-buh\)](#)

One of the greatest rabbis recorded in the [Talmud](#).

Al Cheit (AHL CHAYT)

Lit. for the sin. A confession of community sins recited repeatedly on [Yom Kippur](#). See [Yom Kippur Liturgy](#).

[Alefbet \(AH-lef-bet\)](#)

The Hebrew alphabet. The name is derived from the first two letters of the alefbet.

Aliyah (uh-LEE-uh; ah-lee-AH)

Lit. ascension. 1) Reading from the [Torah](#); (or reciting a [blessing](#) over the reading) during [services](#), which is considered an honor (generally referred to in English as having or getting an aliyah and pronounced uh-LEE-uh). See also [Bar Mitzvah](#). 2) Immigrating to [Israel](#) (generally referred to in English as making aliyah and pronounced ah-lee-AH).

Amidah (uh-MEE-duh)

Lit. standing. A prayer that is the center of any Jewish religious service. Also known as the Shemoneh Esrei or the Tefilah. See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

Amud (ah-MOOD)

A lower lectern found in some synagogues. Not to be confused with the bimah, which is the primary podium from which the Torah is read. See [Synagogues, Shuls and Temples](#).

Animals

See [Treatment of Animals](#); [Qorbanot: Sacrifices and Offerings](#).

Aninut

The period of [mourning](#) between the time of [death](#) and the time of [burial](#).

Antisemitism

The term "antisemitism" comes from the roots "anti" (against) and "Semite" (a term that applies to both Hebrews and Arabs). However, the word "antisemitism" is used specifically to refer to hatred of Jews and Judaism. Although the Holocaust is the best-known example of antisemitism, it is only the latest in a long and tragic history of expulsions, forced conversions, limitations of civil and political rights, lies and slanders such as the infamous Blood Libel and mass murders like the Russian pogroms and the mob violence incidental to the Crusades. An entire website could be devoted to the subject. I have made a conscious decision not to cover these subjects on this site, because this site is about Jews and Judaism and I refuse to let my people be defined by what others have done to us.

Arbah Minim

Lit. four species. Fruit and branches used to fulfill the commandment to "rejoice before the L-rd" during [Sukkot](#). See also [Blessing over the Arba Minim](#).

Ark

The English translation of aron kodesh, lit., holy chest. The cabinet where the [Torah scrolls](#) are kept. The word has no connection with Noah's Ark, which is "teyvat" in Hebrew. See [Ritual Items in the Synagogue](#).

Aron Kodesh (AH-rohn KOH-desh)

Lit. holy chest. The cabinet where the [Torah scrolls](#) are kept. See [Ritual Items in the Synagogue](#).

Asham (ah-SHAHM)

A guilt offering. A type of [sacrifice](#) used to atone for sins of stealing things from the altar, for when you are not sure whether you have committed a sin or what sin you have committed, or for breach of trust.

Asher

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Ashkenazic Jews (ahsh-ken-AH-zik)

Jews from eastern France, Germany and Eastern Europe, and their descendants.

Assyrian Text

A [style of writing](#) the [Hebrew Alphabet](#), commonly used in books.

Av

The fifth month of the Jewish year, occurring in July/August. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

Avelut

The year of [mourning](#) after the [burial](#) of a parent.

- B -

[Ba'al Shem Tov](#) (bahl shem tohv)

Lit. Master of the Good Name. Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer. The founder of [Chasidic](#) Judaism.

[Bagel](#) (BAY-g'l)

Donut-shaped bread that is boiled before it is baked.

Balfour Declaration

A letter from British foreign secretary Lord Balfour to Lord Rothschild expressing the British government's commitment to creating a Jewish state in Palestine. See [Zionism and the Formation of the State of Israel](#).

Bar Kokhba (BAHR KOHKH-buh)

Aramaic: Son of a Star. Simeon ben Kosiba, the leader of the last and most successful Jewish rebellion against Rome in 132-135 C.E. He died in battle when the rebellion was defeated. [Rabbi Akiba](#) believed he was the [Moshiach](#) (Messiah).

[Bar Mitzvah](#) (BAHR MITS-vuh)

Lit. son of the commandment. A boy who has achieved the age of 13 and is consequently obligated to observe the [commandments](#). Also, a ceremony marking the fact that a boy has achieved this age.

[Bashert](#) (bah-SHAYRT)

Yiddish: fate, destiny. 1) A soul mate, an ideal, predestined spouse. 2) Any good or fortuitous match, such as the perfect job or the perfect house.

[Bat Mitzvah](#) (BAHT MITS-vuh)

Lit. daughter of the commandment. A girl who has achieved the age of 12 and is consequently obligated to observe the [commandments](#). Also, a ceremony marking the fact that a girl has achieved this age.

[B.C.E.](#)

Before the Common (or Christian) Era. Another way of saying B.C.

Beginning of Day

A day on the Jewish calendar begins at sunset. When a date is given for a Jewish holiday, the holiday actually begins at sundown on the preceding day. See [When Holidays Begin](#).

Beit Din (BAYT DIN)

Lit. house of judgment. A rabbinical court made up of three [rabbis](#) who resolve business disputes under Jewish law and determine whether a prospective convert is ready for [conversion](#).

[Beit Hillel](#) (BAYT HIL-el; BAYT hil-EL)

Lit. House of Hillel. A school of thought during the [Talmudic](#) period, generally contrasted with the stricter, more legalistic views of Beit Shammai.

[Beit Kneset](#) (BAYT K'NESS-et)

Lit. house of assembly. A Hebrew term for a [synagogue](#).

[Beit Midrash](#) (BAYT MID-rahsh)

Lit. house of study. A place set aside for study of sacred texts such as the [Torah](#) and the [Talmud](#), generally a part of the [synagogue](#) or attached to it.

[Beit Shammai](#) (BAYT SHAH-mahy)

Lit. House of Shammai. A school of thought during the [Talmudic](#) period, generally contrasted with the more lenient, humanistic views of Beit Hillel.

Beliefs

Judaism has no dogma, no formal set of beliefs that one must hold to be a Jew. In Judaism, actions are far more important than beliefs, although there is certainly a place for belief within Judaism. See [What Do Jews Believe?](#); [The Nature of G-d](#); [Human Nature](#); [Kabbalah](#), [Olam Ha-Ba: The Afterlife](#).

[Benjamin](#)

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Bentsch (BENTSCH)

Yiddish: bless. To recite a blessing. Usually refers to the recitation of the [birkat ha-mazon \(grace after meals\)](#). See [Prayers and Blessings](#); [Common Prayers and Blessings](#).

Berakhah (B'RUHKH-khah; b'rukhk-KHAH); pl: Berakhot (b'rukhk-KHOHT)

A blessing. A prayer beginning with the phrase "barukh atah..." (blessed art Thou...). See [Prayers and Blessings](#); [Common Prayers and Blessings](#).

Berurya

A woman of great learning, and the wife of Rabbi Meir. The [Talmud](#) records several instances where her opinions on [Jewish Law](#) were accepted over those of her male contemporaries. See [The Role of Women](#).

Beta Israel

The black Jews of Ethiopia, sometimes referred to as Falashas. See [Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews](#).

Betrothal

The first part of the two-part process of Jewish [marriage](#), which creates the legal relationship without the mutual obligations. In Hebrew, it is called "kiddushin."

Bible

Also referred to as the Tanakh. The Jewish Bible more or less corresponds to what non-Jews call the "Old Testament." See [Torah](#).

[Bimah](#) (BEE-muh)

The pedestal on which the [Torah scrolls](#) are placed when they are being read in the [synagogue](#); i.e., the pulpit.

Binah (bee-NAH)

Intuition, understanding, intelligence. A quality that [women](#) supposedly have in greater degree than men. Also, in [kabbalistic](#) thought, one of the [Ten Sefirot](#).

[Birkat Ha-Mazon](#) (BEER-kaht hah mah-ZOHN)

Lit. blessing of the food. Grace after meals. The recitation of birkat ha-mazon is commonly referred to as bentsching.

Birth

See [Birth and the First Month of Life](#).

[Birth Control](#)

Jewish law permits certain methods of birth control in appropriate circumstances.

Blessing

A prayer beginning with the phrase "barukh atah..." (blessed art Thou...). See [Prayers and Blessings](#); [Common Prayers and Blessings](#).

[Blintz](#) (BLINTS)

Yiddish. A thin, crepe-like pancake rolled around a filling of potato and onion, cheese, or fruit.

Block Print

A [style of writing](#) the [Hebrew Alphabet](#), commonly used in books.

B'nai Mitzvah (b'NEHY MITS-vuh)

Lit. children of the commandment. Plural of Bar Mitzvah. Children who have achieved the age of 13 and are consequently obligated to observe the [commandments](#). Also, a ceremony marking the fact that children have achieved this age.

B'nei Noach (b'NEHY NOH-ahkh)

A movement of non-Jews who have consciously accepted the responsibility of following the [Seven Laws of Noah](#).

Books

See [Torah](#); [Recommended Books and Publishers](#).

[Brit Milah](#) (BRIT MEE-lah)

Lit. covenant of circumcision. The ritual circumcision of a male Jewish child on the 8th day of his life or of a male [convert](#) to Judaism. Frequently referred to as a bris.

Burial

Under Jewish law, the dead must be buried in the earth, not cremated, and must be buried in a simple coffin, simply dressed. See [Care for the Dead](#).

[Burnt Offering](#)

A type of [sacrifice](#) that represented complete submission to G-d's will. It was completely consumed by fire on the altar. In Hebrew, it was called an olah.

- C -

Calendar

Judaism uses a lunar/solar calendar consisting of months that begin at the new moon. Each year has 12 or 13 months, to keep it in sync with the solar year. See [Jewish Calendar](#); [Current Calendar](#); [Jewish Holidays](#).

Caro, Rabbi Joseph

Author of the [Shulchan Arukh](#), the last of the great medieval codes of Jewish law, and one of the most respected compilations of Jewish law ever written.

C.E.

Common (or Christian) Era. Used instead of A.D., because A.D. means "the Year of our L-rd," and we do not believe that Jesus is our L-rd.

Chag Sameach (KHAHG sah-MEHY-ahkh)

Hebrew. Literally, joyous festival. A greeting for any holiday, but especially [Sukkot](#), [Shavu'ot](#) and [Pesach \(Passover\)](#). See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

Chai (KHAHY, rhymes with Hi!)

Lit. living or life. The word is often used as a design on jewelry and other ornaments. Donations to charity are often made in multiples of 18, the [numerical value](#) of the word.

Challah (KHAH-luh)

A sweet, eggy, yellow bread, usually braided, which is served on [Shabbat](#) and [holidays](#).

Chametz (KHUH-mitz)

Lit. leaven. Leavened grain products, which may not be owned or consumed during [Passover](#).

Chanukkah (KHAH-nik-uh; KHAH-noo-kah)

Lit. dedication. An eight day holiday celebrating the rededication of the [Temple](#) in Jerusalem after it was defiled by the Selucid Greeks. See also [Chanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings](#).

Chanukat Ha-Bayit (KHAH-noo-KAHT hah BAHY-eet)

Lit. dedication of the house. A brief ceremony dedicating a Jewish household, during which the [mezuzah](#) is affixed to the doorposts. The procedure and prayers for [affixing the mezuzah](#) is available.

Chanukiah (KHAH-noo-KEE-ah)

A name sometimes use for a [Chanukkah](#) menorah.

Charity

In Judaism, helping the poor and needy is as much an obligation as any of the more familiar ritual observances. It is referred to as tzedakah (righteousness).

Charoset (khah-ROH-set; khah-ROH-ses)

A mixture of fruit, wine and nuts eaten at the [Passover](#) seder to symbolize mortar used by the Jewish slaves in Egypt.

Chasidism (KHAH-sid-ism); Chasidic (khah-SID-ic)

From the word "Chasid" meaning "pious." A branch of Orthodox Judaism that maintains a lifestyle separate from the non-Jewish world.

Chatat (khah-TAHT)

A sin offering. A type of [sacrifice](#) used to atone for and expiate unintentional sins.

Chazzan (KHAH-zen)

Cantor. The person who leads the congregation in prayer. May be a professional or a member of the congregation.

Chelev (KHE-lev)

The fat surrounding organs, as distinguished from the fat surrounding muscles. Forbidden to be eaten under the laws of [Kashrut](#).

Chevra Kaddisha (KHEV-ruh kah-DEESH-uh)

Lit. holy society. An organization devoted to [caring for the dead](#).

Children of Israel

The most common designation of the Jewish people used in Jewish literature. It signifies the fact that we are descended from [Jacob](#), who was also known as Israel. See [The Jews are a Nation or a People](#)

Chillul Ha-Shem (khil-LOOL hah SHEM)

Lit. profanation of the Name. Causing G-d or Judaism to come into disrespect, or causing a person to violate a commandment. See [The Name of G-d](#).

Chol Ha-Mo'ed (KHOHL hah MOH-ed; KHOHL hah moh-AYD)

The intermediate days of [Passover](#) and [Sukkot](#), when [work](#) is permitted.

Cholent (TSCHUH-lent)

A slow cooked stew of beef, beans and barley, which is served on [Shabbat](#).

Chukkim (hook-EEM)

Jewish religious laws for which no reason is given in the Torah. Some believe that they are meant to show our obedience to G-d.

Chumash (KHUH-mish)

Lit. five. A compilation of the first five books of the Bible and readings from the prophets, organized in the order of the [weekly Torah portions](#).

Chuppah (KHU-puh)

The wedding canopy, symbolic of the groom's home, under which the [nisuin](#) portion of the [wedding ceremony](#) is performed.

Circumcision

Removal of the foreskin, a commandment in Judaism performed on the 8th day of a male child's life or upon conversion to Judaism. See [Brit Milah: Circumcision](#).

Clergy

See [Rabbis, Priests and Other Religious Functionaries](#).

Clothing

Although [Chasidic Jews](#) wear special and distinctive clothing, other Jews have no special

requirements other than dressing modestly and not cross-dressing. For information about ritual clothing, see [Tzitzit and Tallit](#); [Yarmulke](#).

Commandments

Judaism teaches that G-d gave the Jews 613 commandments, which are binding on Jews but not on non-Jews. See [Halakhah: Jewish Law](#); [A List of the 613 Mitzvot](#).

Confirmation

A ceremony performed in some [Reform and Conservative](#) synagogues to replace or supplement the [Bar Mitzvah](#).

Conservative

One of the major [movements](#) of Judaism, accepting the binding nature of [Jewish law](#) but believing that the law can change.

Contraception

Jewish law permits certain methods of birth control in appropriate circumstances.

Conversion

Judaism does not seek out converts, and actively discourages converts (because a person does not need to be a Jew to be righteous in G-d's eyes), but conversion to Judaism is possible. See [Who is a Jew?](#); [Jewish Attitudes Towards Non-Jews](#); [Conversion](#).

Cooking

See [Jewish Cooking](#); [Kashrut: Jewish Dietary Laws](#).

Counting of the Omer

The counting of the days between [Passover](#) and [Shavu'ot](#).

- D -

Daf Yomi (DAHf yoh-MEE)

Lit. page of the day. Refers to the practice of studying a page of [Talmud](#) every day.

Dagesh (dah-GEHSH)

A dot found in the center of some Hebrew letters in pointed text, used as an aid to pronunciation. See [Vowels and Points](#).

Daniel

A book of the Torah, or the writer of that book. The book is included in the Writings, not the Prophets, because by definition prophecies are meant to be proclaimed, and his visions were meant to be written, not proclaimed. See [Prophets and Prophecy](#).

Dati (DAH-tee)

Orthodox Jews in [Israel](#).

Dan

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Daven (DAH-ven)

Yiddish: Pray. Observant Jews daven three times a day, in addition to reciting blessings over many

common activities. See [Prayers and Blessings](#); [Jewish Liturgy](#); [Common Prayers and Blessings](#).

[Days of Awe](#)

Ten days from [Rosh Hashanah](#) to [Yom Kippur](#), a time for introspection and considering the sins of the previous year.

Death

In Judaism, death is not a tragedy, even when it occurs early in life or through unfortunate circumstances. Death is a natural process. See [Life, Death and Mourning](#).

Diaspora

Any place outside of the [land of Israel](#) where Jews live. Refers to the fact that Jews were dispersed from the land of Israel by the Romans after the last Jewish War. The Hebrew/Yiddish term for this is "galut" (pronounced gah-LOOT or gah-LOOS).

Divorce

Judaism has always accepted divorce as a fact of life, albeit an unfortunate one, and permits divorce for any reason, but discourages divorce. See [Divorce](#); [Marriage](#).

Dreidel

A top-like toy used to play a traditional [Chanukkah](#) game.

Dreyfus, Captain Alfred

A Jewish officer in the French military who was unjustly convicted of passing secrets to the Germans. His trial sparked a wave of anti-Jewish sentiment that inspired the early [Zionist](#) political movement.

- E -

[Ein Sof](#) (ayn sohf)

Lit. without end. In Jewish mysticism, the true essence of G-d, which is so transcendent that it cannot be described and cannot interact directly with the universe.

Elokeynu

A substitute for a name of G-d. See [The Name of G-d](#).

[Elul](#)

The sixth month of the Jewish year, a time of repentance in preparation for [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Yom Kippur](#). See also [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

[Ephraim](#)

1) Son of [Joseph](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Esau

Son of [Isaac](#); older twin brother of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). He had little respect for the traditions of his ancestors, and sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew.

Essenes

A [movement](#) of Judaism that began approximately 2200 years ago. It died out shortly after the destruction of the [Temple](#).

Esther

One of the heroes of the story of [Purim](#). Also, the book in the [Bible](#) that tells her story.

Ethics

Laws are at the heart of Judaism, but a large part of Jewish law is about ethical behavior. See [Love and Brotherhood](#), [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#), [Tzedakah: Charity](#), and [Treatment of Animals](#).

Ethiopian Jews

The Jews of Ethiopia, whose customs and practices are somewhat different than those of Ashkenazic or Sephardic Jews. See [Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews](#).

Etrog (ET-rohg)

A citrus fruit native to [Israel](#), used to fulfill the commandment to "rejoice before the L-rd" during [Sukkot](#). See also [Blessing over the Arba Minim](#).

Euthanasia

Euthanasia, suicide and assisted suicide are strictly forbidden by Jewish law, because life is so precious. See [Life, Death and Mourning](#) for more information.

Evil Impulse

Humanity was created with a dual nature: an impulse to do what is right and a selfish (evil) impulse. Free will is the ability to choose which impulse to follow.

- F -

Falashas

The black Jews of Ethiopia, who prefer to be known as the Beta Israel. See [Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews](#).

Family Purity

Laws relating to the separation of husband and wife during the woman's menstrual period. Also referred to as the laws of [niddah](#) or taharat ha-mishpachah.

Fast Days

Several Jewish holidays are fasts, upon which we may neither eat nor drink. See [Yom Kippur](#); [Tisha B'Av](#); [Minor Fasts](#).

Festivals

See [Jewish Holidays](#) and pages following it, especially [Passover](#), [Shavu'ot](#) and [Sukkot](#).

Firstborn

If a woman's first child is a male child born by natural childbirth, then the child must be redeemed from a [kohein](#) (priest) by a procedure called [Pidyon Ha-Ben](#). In addition, firstborn males must observe a special [fast](#) the day before [Pesach](#) (Passover), commemorating the fact that they were saved from the plague of the first born.

Fleishig (FLAHYSH-ig)

Yiddish: meat. Used to describe kosher foods that contain meat and therefore cannot be eaten with dairy. See [Kashrut - Separation of Meat and Dairy](#).

Food

See [Jewish Cooking](#); [Kashrut](#).

Four Species

Fruit and branches used to fulfill the commandment to "rejoice before the L-rd" during [Sukkot](#). See also [Blessing over the Arba Minim](#).

Four Questions

A set of questions about [Passover](#), designed to encourage participation in the [seder](#). Also known as Mah Nishtanah (Why is it different?), which are the first words of the Four Questions.

Free Will

Humanity was created with a [dual nature](#): an impulse to do what is right and a selfish (evil) impulse. Free will is the ability to choose which impulse to follow.

Funerals

See [Life, Death and Mourning](#).

- G -

G-d

A way of avoiding writing a name of G-d, to avoid the risk of the sin of erasing or defacing the Name. See [The Name of G-d](#), [The Nature of G-d](#).

Gad

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Galut (gah-LOOT or gah-LOOS)

Lit. exile or captivity. Any place outside of the [land of Israel](#) where Jews live. Refers to the fact that Jews were exiled from the land of Israel by the Romans after the last Jewish War.

Gan Eden

Lit. Garden of Eden. A place of spiritual reward for the righteous dead. This is not the same place where Adam and Eve lived.

Gefilte Fish (g'-FIL-tuh)

Yiddish: lit. stuffed fish. A traditional Jewish dish consisting of a ball or cake of chopped up fish.

Gehinnom (g'hee-NOHM); Gehenna (g'HEHN-uh)

A place of spiritual punishment and/or purification for a period of up to 12 months after death. Gehinnom is the Hebrew name; Gehenna is Yiddish.

Gemara (g'-MAHR-uh)

Commentaries on the Mishnah. The Mishnah and Gemara together are the Talmud.

Gematria (g'-MAH-tree-uh)

A field of [Jewish mysticism](#) finding hidden meanings in the [numerical value](#) of words.

Gentiles

See [Jewish Attitudes Toward Non-Jews](#); [Non-Jews Visiting a Synagogue](#).

Gesundheit (g'-SUND-hahyt)

Yiddish. Literally, health. This is the normal response when somebody sneezes. See [Common](#)

[Expressions and Greetings.](#)

Get (GET)

A writ of [divorce](#). Also called a sefer k'ritut.

[Gezeirah](#) (g'-ZAY-ruh)

A law instituted by the rabbis to prevent people from unintentionally violating commandments.

Glatt Kosher (GLAHT KOH-sheer)

A standard of kashrut that requires an additional degree of stringency in the inspection of the lungs of cattle, to determine whether the lungs are free from adhesions. See [Kashrut: Jewish Dietary Laws](#).

Golem (GOH-luhm)

Lit. an unformed thing. 1) A term used in the [Talmud](#) to describe Adam before he had a soul. 2) A creature of Jewish folklore, a man made of clay and brought to life. See [Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism](#).

Gossip

Gossiping is a serious sin in Judaism. See [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#).

[Goy](#)

Lit. nation. A non-Jew, that is, a member of one of the other nations. There is nothing inherently insulting about the term; the word "goy" is used in the Torah to describe Israel. See [Jewish Attitudes Toward Non-Jews](#).

Grace After Meals

Referred to in Hebrew as [Birkat Ha-Mazon](#). It is one of the most important prayers in Judaism, one of the very few that the Bible commands us to recite.

Grager (GREG-er; GRAG-er)

A noisemaker used to blot out the name of Haman during the reading of the Megillah on [Purim](#).

Guide for the Perplexed

[Rambam](#)'s masterpiece of Jewish philosophy and theology, written from the perspective of an Aristotelian philosopher.

[Guilt Offering](#)

A type of [sacrifice](#) used to atone for sins of stealing things from the altar, for when you are not sure whether you have committed a sin or what sin you have committed, or for breach of trust.

Gut Shabbes (GUT SHAH-biss)

Yiddish. Literally, good Sabbath. A general, all-purpose [shabbat](#) greeting. See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

Gut Yontiff (GUT YAHN-tiff)

Yiddish. Literally, good holiday. A general, all-purpose [holiday](#) greeting. See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

Haftarah (hahf-TOH-ruh)

Lit. conclusion. A reading from the Prophets, read along with the [weekly Torah portion](#).

Haggadah (huh-GAH-duh)

The book read during the [Passover Seder](#), telling the story of the holiday.

Halakhah (huh-LUHKH-khuh)

Lit. the path that one walks. Jewish law. The complete body of rules and practices that Jews are bound to follow, including biblical commandments, commandments instituted by the rabbis, and binding customs. See also [Torah](#), [A List of the 613 Mitzvot](#).

Hallel

Lit. praise G-d. Psalms 113-118, in praise of G-d, which are recited on certain holidays. See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

Haman (HAY-men)

The villain of the story of [Purim](#).

Hamentaschen (HAH-men-TAH-shen)

Lit. Haman's pockets. Triangular, fruit-filled cookies traditionally served or given as gifts during [Purim](#).

Hamesh Hand; Hamsa Hand

An inverted hand with thumb and pinky curling outward. A popular motif in Jewish jewelry.

Haredi

Ultra-Orthodox Jews in [Israel](#).

Ha-Shem (hah SHEM)

Lit. The Name. [The Name of G-d](#), which is not pronounced. The phrase "ha-Shem" is often used as a substitute for G-d's Name.

Hatafat Dam Brit (hah-tah-FAHT DAHM BRIT)

A symbolic circumcision of a person who has already been circumcised or who was born without a foreskin. It involves taking a pinprick of blood from the tip of the penis. See [Brit Milah: Circumcision](#).

Ha-Tikvah

Lit. The Hope. The anthem of the [Zionist](#) movement and the state of [Israel](#).

Havdalah (Hahv-DAH-luh)

Lit. separation, division. A ritual marking the end of [Shabbat](#) or a [holiday](#). See [Havdalah Home Ritual](#).

Heaven

The place of spiritual reward for the righteous dead in Judaism is not referred to as Heaven, but as Olam Ha-Ba (the World to Come) or Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden). See [Olam Ha-Ba: The Afterlife](#).

Hebrew

The language of the Torah, in which all prayer should be recited. See [Hebrew Alphabet](#); [Hebrew Language: Root Words](#).

Hebrew Fonts and Word Processors

See [Hebrew Alphabet](#).

Hell

The place of spiritual punishment and/or purification for the wicked dead in Judaism is not referred to as Hell, but as Gehinnom or She'ol. According to most sources, the period of punishment or purification is limited to 12 months, after which the soul ascends to Olam Ha-Ba or is destroyed (if it is utterly wicked). See [Olam Ha-Ba: The Afterlife](#).

Herzl, Theodor

The founder of the [Zionist](#) political movement in the late 1800s.

High Holidays

The holidays of [Rosh Hashanah](#), [the Days of Awe](#) and [Yom Kippur](#) are commonly referred to as the High Holidays or the High Holy Days.

[Hillel](#) (HIL-el; hil-EL)

One of the greatest rabbis recorded in the [Talmud](#). His more liberal views of Jewish law are often contrasted with the stricter views of Shammai. Also: a Jewish college student organization under the auspices of B'nai Brith.

[Hiloni](#)

Secular Jews in [Israel](#).

History

See [The Patriarchs and the Origins of Judaism](#); [Moses, Aaron and Miriam](#).

Holidays

Judaism has over a dozen holidays, ranging from deeply solemn fast days like [Yom Kippur](#) to all-out parties like [Purim](#). See [Jewish Holidays](#) and pages following it.

[Holishkes](#) (HOH-lish-kuhs)

Cabbage leaves stuffed with meatballs served in a tomato-based sweet and sour sauce.

[Homosexuality](#)

Homosexual orientation is not a sin in Judaism, but homosexual acts are. Male-male sex is forbidden by the Torah. Lesbian sex is not prohibited by the Torah, but is generally considered prohibited as "licentiousness."

Hoshanah Rabba (hoh-SHAH-nuh RAH-buh)

Lit. great hosanna. The seventh day of [Sukkot](#), on which seven circuits are made around the synagogue reciting a prayer with the refrain, "Hosha na!" (please save us!).

[Human Nature](#)

Humanity is in the image of G-d, in that we have the ability to think, reason and understand. Humanity was created with a dual nature: an impulse to do what is right and a selfish (evil) impulse. Free will is the ability to choose which impulse to follow.

- I -

Image of G-d

Humanity was created [in the image of G-d](#), which means we have the ability to reason and discern; however, G-d has no physical form or image. See [The Nature of G-d](#).

[Interfaith Marriage](#)

Marriage to a non-Jew is not recognized as "marriage" in Jewish law. The increasing frequency of intermarriage is a source of great concern to traditional Jews. See also [Marriage](#).

[Isaac](#)

Son and spiritual heir of [Abraham](#). Father of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). One of the three [Patriarchs](#) of Judaism.

Ishmael

Firstborn son of [Abraham](#) by Sarah's Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. According to both Muslim and Jewish tradition, he is the ancestor of the Arabs.

[Israel](#)

1) The land that G-d promised to [Abraham](#) and his descendants. 2) The northern kingdom that was home to the "ten lost tribes." 3) Alternate name for [Jacob](#). 4) A country in the Middle East located in the ancient homeland that has a predominantly Jewish population and government.

[Issachar](#)

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Iyar

The second month of the Jewish year, occurring in April/May. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

- J -

[Jacob \(Israel\)](#)

Son of [Isaac](#). Father of twelve sons, who represent the tribes of Judaism. One of the three [Patriarchs](#) of Judaism.

Jew

A person whose mother was a Jew or who has converted to Judaism. According to the Reform movement, a person whose father is a Jew is also a Jew. Although the term is derived from the term "Judahite" (meaning a member of the tribe of [Judah](#) or a citizen of the kingdom of Judah), it has historically been applied to the [patriarchs](#), the matriarchs and all of the descendants of [Jacob](#) and all converts to their faith. See [Who Is a Jew?](#)

[Jewish Law](#)

The complete body of rules and practices that Jews are bound to follow, including biblical commandments, commandments instituted by the rabbis, and binding customs.

The Jewish People

Another name for the Children of Israel. It is a reference to the Jews as a nation in the classical sense, meaning a group of people with a shared history and a sense of a group identity rather than a territorial and political entity. See [The Jews Are a Nation or a People](#).

Jewish Race

The Jews are not a race. See [What is Judaism?](#); [Are Jews a Race?](#)

Jewish Religion

Judaism is the religion of the Children of Israel, that is, the Jewish people. Most of the pages on this site deal with the Jewish religion to one extent or another. See especially [What is Judaism?](#); [What Do Jews Believe?](#)

Jewish Star

The six-pointed star emblem commonly associated with Judaism, also known as the Magen David, the Shield of David or the Star of David.

Joseph

Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of two of the tribes of Israel. He was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, but became powerful in Egypt and paved the way for his family's settlement there.

Judah

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name; 3) The Southern Kingdom after the death of Solomon when Israel was split into two kingdoms; the Kingdom of Judah included the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and part of the tribe of Levi.

Judah Ha-Nasi (JOO-duh hah NAH-see)

Compiler of the [Mishnah](#).

Judaism (JOO-dee-ism; JOO-duh-ism)

The religion of the Children of Israel, that is, the Jewish people. See [What is Judaism?](#); [What Do Jews Believe?](#)

- K -

Kabbalah (kuh-BAH-luh)

Lit. tradition. Jewish mystical tradition.

Kaddish (KAH-dish)

Aramaic: holy. A prayer in Aramaic praising G-d, commonly associated with mourning practices. See also [Jewish Liturgy](#). Full text of the [Mourner's Kaddish](#) is available.

Kapparat

Lit. atonements. A custom during the [Days of Awe](#).

Kareit (kah-REHYT)

The penalty of spiritual excision, imposed by G-d. Certain sins, such as failure to [circumcise](#), are so severe that one who violates them has no place in the [World to Come](#).

Kashrut (KAHSH-rut; KAHSH-root; kahsh-ROOT)

From a root meaning "fit," "proper" or "correct." Jewish dietary laws.

Kavanah (kuh-VAH-nuh; kah-vah-NAH)

Concentration, intent. The frame of mind required for [prayer](#) or performance of a [mitzvah](#).

Kavod Ha-Met (kuh-VOHD hah MAYT)

Lit. respect for the dead. One of the purposes of Jewish practices relating to [death and mourning](#).

Keriyah (k'REE-yuh)

Lit. tearing. The tearing of one's clothes upon hearing of the [death](#) of a close relative. See [Mourning](#).

Ketubah (k'TOO-buh)

Lit. writing. The Jewish [marriage](#) contract.

Kiddush (KID-ish)

Lit. sanctification. A prayer recited over wine sanctifying [Shabbat](#) or a [holiday](#). See also [Common Prayers and Blessings](#).

Kiddush Ha-Shem (ki-DOOSH hah SHEM)

Lit. sanctification of The Name. Any deed that increases the respect accorded to G-d or Judaism, especially martyrdom. See [The Name of G-d](#).

[Kiddushin](#)

Lit. sanctification. The first part of the two-part process of Jewish [marriage](#), which creates the legal relationship without the mutual obligations.

[Kippah](#) (KEY-puh)

The skullcap head covering worn by Jews during services, and by some Jews at all times, more commonly known as a yarmulke.

Kislev

The ninth month of the Jewish year, occurring in November/December. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

Kitniyot (kit-NEE-yot; kit-NEE-yos)

Foods that are prohibited during [Pesach \(Passover\)](#) by the rulings of [Ashkenazic](#) rabbis. [Sephardic](#) Jews do not follow these restrictions. Includes rice, corn, peanuts, and legumes (beans).

Kittel (KIT-'l, rhymes with little, but the t is pronounced distinctly)

The white robes in which the dead are buried, worn by some during [Yom Kippur](#) services.

Knaydelach (KNAY-duhl-ahkh)

Yiddish: dumplings. Commonly refers to matzah balls. Can also be used as a term of affection for small children. See [Jewish Cooking](#).

[Knish](#) (KNISH)

Yiddish. A potato and flour dumpling stuffed with potato and onion, chopped liver or cheese.

[Kohein](#); (KOH-hayn) pl: Kohanim (koh-HAHN-eem)

Priest. A descendant of [Aaron](#), charged with performing various rites in the [Temple](#). This is not the same thing as a [rabbi](#).

Kol Nidre (KOHL NID-ray)

Lit. all vows. The evening service of [Yom Kippur](#), or the prayer that begins that service.

[Kosher](#) (KOH-sheer)

Lit. fit, proper or correct. Describes food that is permissible to eat under Jewish dietary laws. Can also describe any other ritual object that is fit for use according to Jewish law.

Kugel (KOO-gul; KI-gul)

Yiddish: pudding. A casserole of potatoes, eggs and onion, or a dessert of noodles, fruits and nuts in an egg based pudding.

- L -

Ladino (Luh-DEE-noh)

The "international language" of [Sephardic](#) Jews, based primarily on Spanish, with words taken from Hebrew, Arabic and other languages, and written in the [Hebrew Alphabet](#).

Lag b'Omer (LAHG BOH-mayr)

The 33rd day of the [Counting of the Omer](#). A minor holiday on which the mourning restrictions of the Omer period are lifted.

Latkes (LAHT-kuhs; LAHT-kees)

Potato pancakes traditionally eaten during [Chanukkah](#).

Lashon Ha-Ra (LAH-shohn HAH-rah; luh-SHOHN hah-RAH)

Lit. the evil tongue. Sins against other people committed by speech, such as defamation, gossip, swearing falsely, and scoffing.

L'Chayim (l'-KHAHY-eem)

Lit. to life. A common Jewish toast. See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

Leah

Wife of [Jacob](#). Mother of six of his [sons](#). Sister of Rachel. One of the Matriarchs of Judaism.

Leap Year

A year with an extra month, to realign the Jewish lunar calendar with the solar year. See [Jewish Calendar](#).

Levi (LAY-vee); Levite (LEE-vahyt)

1) A descendant of the tribe of Levi, which was set aside to perform certain duties in connection with the [Temple](#); 2) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of the tribe of Levi.

Liberal

One of the most liberal movements of Judaism in the United Kingdom, but somewhat more traditional than the American Reform Movement.

Life

In Judaism, life is valued above almost all else, and almost any commandment can be violated to save a life.

Life after Death

Contrary to popular belief, Judaism does believe in an afterlife, but it is not the primary focus of our religion and there is a lot of room for personal opinion about the nature of the afterlife.

Liturgy

Observant Jews pray three times a day, and Judaism has an extensive liturgy. See [Prayers and Blessings](#); [Jewish Liturgy](#); [Yom Kippur Liturgy](#); [Common Prayers and Blessings](#).

L-rd

A way of avoiding writing a name of G-d, to avoid the risk of the sin of erasing or defacing the Name. See [The Name of G-d](#).

Love and Brotherhood

Laws are at the heart of Judaism, but a large part of Jewish law is about love and brotherhood, the relationship between man and his neighbors.

Lox (LAHKS)

Smoked salmon. Commonly served on a [bagel](#).

L'Shanah Tovah (li-SHAH-nuh TOH-vuh; li-shah-NAH toh-VAH)

Lit. for a good year. A common greeting during [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Days of Awe](#). See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

Lubavitch (luh-BUH-vitsh)

A sect of [Chasidic](#) Judaism that is active in outreach to other Jews and has a high media presence.

Lulav (LOO-lahv)

Lit. palm branch. A collection of palm, myrtle and willow branches, used to fulfill the commandment to "rejoice before the L-rd" during [Sukkot](#). See also [Blessing over the Arba Minim](#).

- M -

Ma'ariv (MAH-reev)

Evening prayer services. See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

Machzor (MAHKH-zawr)

A special prayer book for the High Holidays of [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Yom Kippur](#).

Maftir (MAHF-teer)

Lit. The person who reads or blesses the reading of the last part of the [Torah reading](#) and the entire haftarah reading.

Magen David (mah-GAYN dah-VEED; MAH-gen DAH-vid; MOH-gen DAY-vid)

Lit. shield of David. The six-pointed star emblem commonly associated with Judaism.

Mah Nishtanah

Lit. Why is it different? A set of questions about [Passover](#), designed to encourage participation in the [seder](#). Also known as the Four Questions.

Maimonides (mahy-MAH-ni-dees)

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, one of the greatest medieval Jewish scholars. Commonly referred to by the acronym 'Rambam'.

Mamzer (MAHM-zer)

Lit. bastard. The child of a marriage that is prohibited and invalid under Jewish law, such as an incestuous union.

Manasseh

1) Son of [Joseph](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Marriage

Marriage is vitally important in Judaism, and refraining from marriage is considered unnatural. Marriage is not solely for the purpose of procreation, but is primarily for the purpose of love and companionship. See also [Interfaith Marriages](#); [Kosher Sex](#); [Divorce](#).

Masekhtot

A subdivision of the [Mishnah and Talmud](#).

Mashgiach

A person who certifies that food is [kosher](#).

Masorti

Jews in [Israel](#) who are traditionally observant but not Orthodox.

Masturbation

Jewish law strictly prohibits male masturbation. Female masturbation is a matter of less clarity, but it is also frowned upon.

Matzah (MAHTZ-uh)

Unleavened bread traditionally served during [Passover](#).

Matzah Ball Soup

Thin chicken soup with dumplings made from matzah meal.

Matzah Meal

Crumbs of matzah, commonly used in [Jewish Cooking](#) in much the same way that other cultures use flour or bread crumbs.

Mazel Tov (MAHZ-z'1 TAWV)

Lit. good luck. A way of expressing congratulations. Note that this term is *not* be used in the way that the expression "good luck" is used in English. See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

Meal Offerings

An [offering](#) of meal or grain.

Mechitzah (m'-KHEETZ-uh)

The wall or curtain separating men from [women](#) during religious [services](#).

Megillah (m'-GILL-uh)

Lit. scroll. One of five books of the Bible (Esther, Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes). The remaining books are referred to as sefers (books). Usually refers to the book of Esther. See [Purim](#). In Yiddish, the term can be used to refer to something that is long, drawn out and excessively detailed.

Melachah (m'-LUH-khuh)

Lit. work. Work involving creation or exercise of control over the environment, which is prohibited on [Shabbat](#) and certain [holidays](#).

Menorah (m'-NAW-ruh; me-NOH-ruh)

A candelabrum. Usually refers to the nine-branched candelabrum used to hold the [Chanukkah](#) candles. Can also refer to the [seven-branched](#) candelabrum used in the Temple. See also [Chanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings](#); [Ritual Items in the Synagogue](#).

Messiah

Anglicization of the Hebrew, "moshiach" (annointed). A man who will be chosen by G-d to put an end to all evil in the world, rebuild the [Temple](#), bring the exiles back to [Israel](#) and usher in the world to come. It is better to use the Hebrew term "moshiach" when speaking of the Jewish messiah, because the Jewish concept is very different from the Christian one.

Messianic Age

A period of global peace and prosperity that will be brought about by the messiah when he comes.

Mezuzah (m'-ZOO-zuh; m'-ZU-zuh)

Lit. doorpost. A case attached to the doorposts of houses, containing a scroll with passages of scripture written on it. The procedure and prayers for [affixing the mezuzah](#) is available.

Midrash (MID-rash)

From a root meaning "to study," "to seek out" or "to investigate." Stories elaborating on incidents in the Bible, to derive a principle of Jewish law or provide a moral lesson.

Mikvah (MIK-vuh)

Lit. gathering. A ritual bath used for spiritual purification. It is used primarily in [conversion](#) rituals and after the period of [sexual separation](#) during a woman's menstrual cycles, but many Chasidim immerse themselves in the mikvah regularly for general spiritual purification.

Milchig (MIL-khig)

Yiddish: dairy. Used to describe kosher foods that contain dairy products and therefore cannot be eaten with meat. See [Kashrut - Separation of Meat and Dairy](#).

Minchah (MIN-khuh)

1) Afternoon prayer services. See [Jewish Liturgy](#). 2) An [offering](#) of meal or grain. See [Food and Drink Offerings](#).

Minhag (MIN-hahg)

Lit. custom. A custom that evolved for worthy religious reasons and has continued long enough to become a binding religious practice. The word is also used more loosely to describe any customary religious practice.

Minyan (MIN-yahn; MIN-yin)

The quorum necessary to recite certain prayers, consisting of ten adult Jewish men. See [Group Prayer](#).

Miriam

Older sister of [Moses](#) and [Aaron](#), and a [prophetess](#) in her own right. She helped Moses and Aaron lead the Children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage.

Mishnah (MISH-nuh)

An early written compilation of Jewish oral tradition, the basis of the Talmud.

Mishneh Torah (MISH-ne TOH-ruh; MISH-nay TOH-ruh)

A code of Jewish law written by [Rambam](#). One of the most respected compilations of Jewish law ever written.

[Mitnagdim](#) (mit-NAG-deem)

Lit. opponents. Orthodox Jews who are not Chasidic.

Mitzvah (MITS-vuh); pl: Mitzvot (mits-VOHT)

Lit. commandment. Any of the 613 commandments that Jews are obligated to observe. It can also refer to any Jewish religious obligation, or more generally to any good deed. See [Halakhah: Jewish Law - The 613 Mitzvot](#); [A List of the 613 Mitzvot](#).

Mohel (Maw-y'l; rhymes with oil)

Lit. circumciser. One who performs the ritual circumcision of an 8-day-old male Jewish child or of a convert to Judaism. See [Brit Milah: Circumcision](#).

Mordecai (MOR-duh-khahy)

One of the heroes of the story of [Purim](#).

[Moses](#)

The greatest of all of the prophets, who saw all that all of the other prophets combined saw, and more. See also [Prophets and Prophecy](#).

[Moshiach](#) (moh-SHEE-ahkh)

Lit. anointed. A man who will be chosen by G-d to put an end to all evil in the world, rebuild the [Temple](#), bring the exiles back to [Israel](#) and usher in the world to come. Generally translated as "messiah," but the Jewish concept is very different from the Christian one.

Motzaei Shabbat (moh-tsah-AY shah-BAHT)

The night after Shabbat. Shabbat ends at nightfall on Saturday; the term motzaei shabbat is used to refer to the period on Saturday night after shabbat ends. See [Shabbat](#); [When Holidays Begin](#).

Motzi Sheim Ra (MOH-tsee SHAYM RAH)

A person who "spreads a bad report"; that is, who tells disparaging lies. It is the worst of the sins involving speech. See [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#).

[Mourning](#)

Judaism has extensive mourning practices broken into several periods of decreasing intensity.

[Movements](#)

The denominations, branches or sects of Judaism, although the distinctions between Jewish movements are not as great as those between Christian denominations.

Musaf (MOO-sahf; MU-sahf)

An additional prayer service for [Shabbat](#) and [holidays](#). See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

Music

See [The Music of Pesach \(Passover\)](#); [Chanukkah Music](#).

Mysticism

Mysticism and mystical experiences have been a part of Judaism since the earliest days, but specific beliefs in this area are open to personal interpretation.

- N -

Nachman of Breslov

An 18th century [Chasidic tzaddik](#) and founder of the Breslover Chasidic sect.

Nachmanides

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, one of the greatest medieval Jewish scholars. Commonly referred to by the acronym 'Ramban'.

Name of G-d

Judaism has a wide variety of names for the Creator; however, these names are not casually written down because of the risk that someone might destroy the writing, an act of disrespect for G-d and His Name.

Names

Jewish children are ordinarily given a formal Hebrew name to be used for religious purposes. See [Naming a Child](#).

Naphtali

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Nation

Throughout this site, the term "nation" is used in the classical sense, meaning a group of people with a shared history and a sense of a group identity. As the term is used in this site, a nation is not necessarily a territorial or political entity. When referring to a territorial or political entity, this site uses the term "country" or "state." The Jewish People are considered to be a nation, contrasted with the other nations of the world. See [The Jews Are a Nation or a People](#).

Navi (nah-VEE); pl. N'vi-im (n'-vee-EEM)

From niv sefatayim meaning "fruit of the lips." A [prophet](#). A spokesman for G-d, chosen to convey a message or teaching. Prophets were role models of holiness, scholarship and closeness to G-d. Also: A section of the [Tanakh](#) containing the writings of the prophets.

Ne'ilah (n'-EE-luh)

Lit. closing. The closing service of [Yom Kippur](#).

Ner Tamid (NAYR tah-MEED)

Lit. continual lamp. Usually translated "eternal flame." A candelabrum or lamp near the ark in the [synagogue](#) that symbolizes the commandment to keep a light burning in the Tabernacle outside of the curtain surrounding the Ark of the Covenant.

Nesekh

An [offering](#) of undiluted wine.

New Year

See [Rosh Hashanah](#).

Niddah (nee-DAH)

The separation of husband and wife during the woman's menstrual period. Also refers to a woman so separated. Also referred to as taharat ha-mishpachah or family purity.

Nihum Avelim

Lit. comforting mourners. One of the purposes of Jewish practices relating to [death and mourning](#).

Nikkud; pl. **N'kkudim**

A system of dots and dashes used to indicate vowels and other pronunciation in Hebrew.

Nissan

The first month of the Jewish year, occurring in March/April. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

Nisuin

Lit. elevation. The second part of the two-part Jewish [marriage](#) process, after which the bride and groom begin to live together as husband and wife.

Noahic Commandments

Seven commandments given to Noah after the flood, which are binding on both non-Jews and Jews.

Number of Followers

There are approximately 13-14 million Jews in the world. For details and links to population resources, see [Jewish Population](#).

Numbers

In Hebrew, all letters have a numerical value, and numbers are written using letters. See [Numerical Values of Words](#).

Numerology

See [Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism](#); [Numerical Values of Words](#).

- O -

Offerings

Jewish practices of sacrifices and offerings were extensive in ancient times, but have not been practiced since our Temple was destroyed, because we are not permitted to bring offerings anywhere else.

Olah (oh-LAH)

Derived from a root meaning ascension. A burnt offering, a type of [sacrifice](#) that represented complete submission to G-d's will. It was completely consumed by fire on the altar.

Olam Ha-Ba (oh-LAHM hah-BAH)

Lit. The World to Come. 1) The [messianic age](#); 2) the spiritual world that souls go to after death.

Old Testament

The Jewish Scriptures more or less correspond to what non-Jews call the "Old Testament." Jews call it Written [Torah](#) or the Tanakh.

Omer (OH-mayr)

A unit of measure, often translated as "sheaf." The period between Passover and Shavu'ot is known

as the Omer period, because we count the days from the time that the first omer of barley was brought to the Temple. See [The Counting of the Omer](#).

Onah

The wife's right to have regular sexual relations with her husband, a right that is fundamental to every Jewish marriage and that cannot be diminished by the husband. See [Kosher Sex](#); [Marriage](#).

Oral Torah (TOH-ruh)

Jewish teachings explaining and elaborating on the [Written Torah](#), handed down orally until the 2d century C.E., when they began to be written down in what became the Talmud.

Order

A division of the [Mishnah and Talmud](#).

Original Sin

Judaism completely rejects the doctrine of original sin. See [Birth](#); [The Dual Nature](#).

Origins of Judaism

According to Jewish tradition, the religion now known as Judaism was founded by our ancestor, Abraham, almost 4000 years ago.

Orthodox

One of the major [movements](#) of Judaism, believing that Jewish law comes from G-d and cannot be changed.

- P -

Parah Adumah (Pahr-AH ah-doo-MAH)

Lit. red heifer. An animal used as an [offering](#) in an unusual and mysterious ritual to purify from the defilement of contact with the dead.

Pareve (PAHR-ev)

Yiddish: neutral. Used to describe kosher foods that contain neither meat nor dairy and therefore can be eaten with either. See [Kashrut - Separation of Meat and Dairy](#).

Parokhet

The curtain inside the Ark (cabinet where the [Torah scrolls](#) are kept).

Parshah (PAHR-shah)

A [weekly Torah portion](#) read in synagogue. To find this week's portion, check the [Current Calendar](#).

Passover

Holiday commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. The holiday also marks the beginning of the harvest season.

Patriarchs

[Abraham](#), [Isaac](#) and [Jacob](#). The forefathers of Judaism.

Peace Offering

A type of [sacrifice](#) expressing thanks or gratitude.

Pentecost

A festival commemorating the giving of the Torah and the harvest of the first fruits, known to Jews as [Shavu'ot](#).

Perutah (pe-ROO-tuh)

A small copper coin, sufficient to [acquire a wife](#) by money.

[Pesach](#) (PEH-sahkh, PAY-sahkh)

Lit. exemption. 1) Holiday commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, known in English as [Passover](#). The holiday also marks the beginning of the harvest season. 2) The paschal lamb that, in [Temple](#) times, was [sacrificed](#) on this holiday.

[Pharisees](#) (PHAR-i-sees)

A movement of Judaism that began approximately 2200 years ago. It is the forerunner of rabbinic Judaism, which encompasses all of the movements of Judaism in existence today.

[Phylacteries](#)

Leather pouches containing scrolls with passages of scripture, used to fulfill the commandment to bind the commandments to our hands and between our eyes. Jews refer to them as tefillin. The Greek term "phylacteries" literally means "amulets" and is offensive to some.

[Pidyon Ha-Ben](#) (peed-YOHN hah-BEHN)

Lit. redemption of the son. A ritual redeeming the firstborn son from his obligation to serve in the Temple.

Pirkei Avot (PEER-kay ah-VOHT)

Lit. Ethics of the Fathers. A tractate of the [Mishnah](#) devoted to ethical advice from many of the greatest [rabbis](#) of the early [Talmudic](#) period.

[Points](#)

Marks used to indicate vowels and other pronunciation tips in certain Hebrew texts. Texts with such marks are referred to as "pointed texts."

Population

There are approximately 13-14 million Jews in the world. For details and links to population resources, see [Jewish Population](#).

Pork

One of the many foods forbidden under [Jewish dietary laws](#). The prohibition against eating pork is the one best known, because throughout history people have oppressed Jews by forcing us to eat pork.

Prayer

Prayer is a central part of Jewish life. Observant Jews pray three times daily and say blessings over just about every day-to-day activity. See [Prayers and Blessings](#); [Jewish Liturgy](#); [Common Prayers and Blessings](#).

[Pre-Marital Sex](#)

Although the Torah does not prohibit pre-marital sex, Jewish tradition strongly condemns the irresponseibility of sex outside of the context of marriage.

Priest

A descendant of [Aaron](#), charged with performing various rites in the [Temple](#). This is not the same thing as a [rabbi](#). See [Kohein](#).

Promised Land

The land of Israel, which G-d promised to [Abraham](#) and his descendants.

Pronunciation

Historically, [Ashkenazic Jews](#) have had a somewhat different pronunciation of certain Hebrew letters than [Sephardic Jews](#); however, the Sephardic pronunciation is becoming predominant because it is the one used in [Israel](#). See [Hebrew Alphabet](#).

Prophets

1) A spokesman for G-d, chosen to convey a message or teaching. Prophets were role models of holiness, scholarship and closeness to G-d; 2) A section of Jewish [scripture](#) containing the writings of the Prophets.

Purim (PAWR-im)

Lit. lots (as in "lottery"). A holiday celebrating the rescue of the Jews from extermination at the hands of the chief minister to the King of Persia.

Pushke (PUSH-kuh)

A box in the home or the [synagogue](#) used to collect money for donation to [charity](#).

- Q -

Qorban (Kawr-BAHN); pl. Qorbanot (kawr-BAHN-oh)

From a root meaning to draw near. A sacrifice or offering.

- R -

Rabbi (RA-bahy)

A religious teacher and person authorized to make decisions on issues of [Jewish law](#). Also performs many of the same functions as a Protestant minister. When I speak generally of things that were said or decided by "the rabbis," I am speaking of matters that have been generally agreed upon by authoritative Jewish scholars over the centuries.

Rabbinical Judaism (ruh-BIN-i-kul)

A general term encompassing all movements of Judaism descended from [Pharisaic Judaism](#); that is, virtually all movements in existence today.

Rachel

Favorite wife of [Jacob](#). Mother of [Joseph and Benjamin](#). One of the Matriarchs of Judaism.

Rakheel (Rah-KHEEL)

A tale-bearer. Derived from a word meaning trader or merchant. Tale-bearing is a serious sin in Judaism. See [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#).

Rambam

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, one of the greatest medieval Jewish scholars. Also known as

Maimonides.

Rashi (RAH-shee)

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, one of the greatest medieval Jewish scholars.

Rashi Script

A [style of writing](#) used to distinguish commentary from the text it comments upon. Named for [Rashi](#), the greatest commentator.

Rebbe (REHB-bee)

Usu. translated Grand Rabbi. The leader of a [Chasidic](#) community, often believed to have special, mystical power.

Rebbetzin (REB-i-tsin)

The wife of a rabbi. See [The Role of Women](#).

Rebecca

Wife of [Isaac](#). Mother of [Jacob](#) and Esau. One of the Matriarchs of Judaism.

Recipes

See [Jewish Cooking](#).

Reconstructionism

One of the major [movements](#) of Judaism, an outgrowth of Conservative that does not believe in a personified deity and believes that Jewish law was created by men.

Red Heifer (Red Cow)

An animal used as an [offering](#) in an unusual and mysterious ritual to purify from the defilement of contact with the dead.

Red Magen David (mah-GAYN dah-VEED; MAH-gen DAH-vid; MOH-gen DAY-vid)

The Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross. "[Magen David](#)" is the Hebrew name of the six-pointed Jewish star.

Reform

One of the major [movements](#) of Judaism, believing that Jewish law was inspired by G-d and one can choose which laws to follow.

Reincarnation

Belief in reincarnation is not in conflict with Judaism. Many [Chasidic](#) sects and other mystically-inclined Jews believe in reincarnation, either as a routine process or in extraordinary circumstances.

Responsa

Answers to specific questions of Jewish law, written by the most respected rabbis of their time.

Responsa Project

A project at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, to compile the vast body of responsa literature into a computer database. For more information, see their [website](#).

Resurrection

Belief in the eventual resurrection of the dead is a fundamental belief of traditional Judaism.

Reuben

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Rituals

See [Shabbat](#), [Jewish Holidays](#) and specific holidays listed under it, [Brit Milah: Circumcision](#), [Bar Mitzvah](#), [Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation](#), [Marriage](#), [Divorce](#), [Life, Death and Mourning](#), [Prayers and Blessings](#), [Common Prayers and Blessings](#), and [Qorbanot: Sacrifices and Offerings](#).

Root Word

A set of (usually) three consonants that conveys the central meaning of a Hebrew word. Prefixes, suffixes and vowels added to the root clarify the precise meaning.

Rosh Chodesh (ROHSH CHOH-desh)

Lit. first of the month. The first day of a month, on which the first sliver of the new moon appears. See [Jewish Calendar](#).

Rosh Hashanah (ROHSH hah SHAH-nuh; RUSH-uh SHAH-nuh)

Lit. first of the year. The new year for the purpose of counting years.

Rules

See [Halakhah: Jewish Law](#), [A List of the 613 Mitzvot \(Commandments\)](#), or pages dealing with specific rules, such as [Shabbat](#) or [Kashrut](#).

- S -

Sabbath

A day of rest and spiritual enrichment. See [Shabbat](#); [Shabbat Evening Home Ritual](#); [Havdalah Home Ritual](#).

Sacrifice

Jewish practices of sacrifices and offerings were extensive in ancient times, but have not been practiced since our [Temple](#) was destroyed, because we are not permitted to bring offerings anywhere else.

Sadducees (SAD-yoo-sees)

A movement of Judaism that began approximately 2200 years ago. It died out shortly after the destruction of the [Temple](#).

Sages

Refers generally to the greatest Jewish minds of all times. See [Sages and Scholars](#).

Sandek (SAN-dek)

The person given the honor of holding the baby during a ritual [circumcision](#). Sometimes referred to as a godfather.

Sarah

Wife of [Abraham](#). Mother of [Isaac](#). One of the Matriarchs of Judaism.

Script

A style of writing the [Hebrew Alphabet](#).

Scriptures

The Jewish Bible, also referred to as the Tanakh. More or less corresponds to what non-Jews call the "Old Testament." See [Torah](#).

Second Day of Holidays

An extra day is added to many holidays because in ancient times, there was doubt as to which day was the correct day.

Seder (SAY-d'r)

Lit. order. 1) The family home ritual conducted as part of the [Passover](#) observance. 2) A division of the [Mishnah and Talmud](#).

Sefer K'ritut (SAY-fayr KREE-toot)

Lit. scroll of cutting off. A writ of [divorce](#). Also called a get.

Sefirot (se-fee-ROHT)

Lit. emanations. In Jewish mysticism, the emanations from G-d's essence that interact with the universe.

Sekhakh (s'-KHAHKH)

Lit. covering. Material used for the roof of a sukkah during the holiday of [Sukkot](#).

Selichot (s'lee-KHOHT; SLI-khus)

Prayers for forgiveness, especially those that are added to the liturgy during the month of [Elul](#), as the High Holidays of [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Yom Kippur](#) approach.

Semikhah (s'-MIKH-uh)

Essentially, a [rabbinical](#) degree, authorizing a person to answer questions and resolve disputes regarding [Jewish law](#).

Sephardic Jews (s'-FAHR-dic)

Jews from Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants.

Services

Observant Jews pray three times a day in formal worship services. See [Jewish Liturgy](#), [Yom Kippur Liturgy](#), [Synagogues, Shuls and Temples](#).

Se'udat Havra'ah

Lit. the meal of condolence. The first meal that a family eats after the burial of a relative, prepared by a neighbor. See [Mourning](#).

Sex

Sex is not shameful, sinful or obscene. It is not solely for the purpose of procreation. When sexual desire is satisfied between a husband and wife at the proper time, out of mutual love and desire, sex is a [mitzvah](#). See also [Marriage](#).

Shabbat (shah-BAT; SHAH-bis)

Lit. end, cease, rest. The Jewish Sabbath, a day of rest and spiritual enrichment. See also [Shabbat](#)

[Evening Home Ritual](#); [Havdalah Home Ritual](#).

Shabbat Shalom (shah-BAHT shah-LOHM)

Hebrew. Literally, sabbath peace or peaceful sabbath. A general, all-purpose [shabbat](#) greeting. See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

Shacharit (SHAHKH-reet)

Morning prayer services. See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

Shalach Manos (SHAH-lahkh MAH-nohs)

Lit. sending out portions. The custom of sending gifts of food or candy to friends during [Purim](#).

Shalom (shah-LOHM)

Hebrew. Literally, peace. A way of saying "hello" or "goodbye." See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

[Shammai](#) (SHAH-mahy)

One of the great rabbis of the [Talmud](#). His stricter views of Jewish law are often contrasted with those of Hillel.

Shammus (SHAH-mis)

Lit. servant. 1) The candle that is used to light other [Chanukkah](#) candles; 2) the janitor or caretaker of a [synagogue](#). See also [Chanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings](#).

Shavua Tov (shah-VOO-ah TOHV)

Hebrew. Literally, good week. A greeting exchanged at the end of [shabbat](#). See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

[Shavu'ot](#) (shuh-VOO-oht; shah-VOO-uhs)

Lit. weeks. A festival commemorating the giving of the Torah and the harvest of the first fruits.

Shechinah (sh'-KHEE-nuh)

The Divine Presence of G-d, generally represented as a feminine quality. See [The Nature of G-d; Prophets and Prophecy](#).

[Shechitah](#) (sh'-KHEE-tuh)

Lit. destruction or killing. Kosher slaughter.

[Shema](#) (sh'-MAH)

One of the basic Jewish prayers. See also [Jewish Liturgy](#); [Signs and Symbols](#).

[Shemini Atzeret](#) (sh'MEE-nee aht-ZE-ret)

Lit. the eighth (day) of assembly. The day (or two days) after [Sukkot](#).

Shemoneh Esrei (sh'MOH-nuh ES-ray)

Lit. eighteen. A prayer that is the center of any Jewish religious service. Also known as the Amidah or the Tefilah. See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

[She'ol](#)

A place of spiritual punishment and/or purification for a period of up to 12 months after death.

Often referred to as Gehinnom.

Sheva Brakhos (SHE-vuh BRUH-khohs)

Lit. seven blessings. The seven blessings recited during the [nisuin](#) portion of the Jewish [wedding ceremony](#).

Shevarim (she-vahr-EEM)

One of four characteristic blasts of the shofar (ram's horn). See [Rosh Hashanah](#).

Shevat

The eleventh month of the Jewish year, occurring in January/February. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

[Shield of David](#)

The six-pointed star emblem commonly associated with Judaism.

[Shiksa](#)

A derogatory term for a non-Jewish female. See [Jewish Attitudes Toward Non-Jews](#).

Shiva (SHI-vuh)

Lit. seven. The seven-day period of [mourning](#) after the [burial](#) of a close relative.

[Shkutz](#)

A derogatory term for a non-Jewish male. See [Jewish Attitudes Toward Non-Jews](#).

[Sh'lamim \(shlah-MEEM\)](#)

Lit. peace [offering]. A type of [sacrifice](#) expressing thanks or gratitude.

Shloshim (shlohsh-EEM)

Lit. thirty. The thirty-day period of [mourning](#) after the [burial](#) of a close relative.

[Shochet \(SHOH-khet\)](#)

Kosher slaughterer.

Shofar (sho-FAHR)

A ram's horn, blown like a trumpet as a call to repentance. See [Rosh Hashanah](#).

Shomerim (shohm-REEM)

Lit. guards, keepers. People who sit with a body between the time of death and burial. See [Care for the Dead](#).

[Shul \(SHOOL\)](#)

The Yiddish term for a Jewish house of worship. The term is used primarily by [Orthodox](#) Jews.

[Shulchan Arukh \(SHUL-khahn AH-ruk\)](#)

A code of Jewish law written by Joseph Caro in the 16th century. The last of the great medieval codes of Jewish law, and one of the most respected compilations of Jewish law ever written.

Siddur (SID-r; sid-AWR)

Lit. order. Prayer book. See [Jewish Liturgy](#).

Sidrah (SID-ruh)

Lit. order. A [weekly Torah portion](#) read in synagogue.

Simeon

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Simkhat Torah (SIM-khat TOH-ruh)

Lit. rejoicing in the law. A holiday celebrating the end and beginning of the cycle of [weekly Torah readings](#).

Sin Offering

A type of [sacrifice](#) used to atone for and expiate unintentional sins.

Sivan

The third month of the Jewish year, occurring in May/June. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

Slander

Slander is a serious sin in Judaism, even if the disparaging comment is true. See [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#).

Songs

See [The Music of Pesach \(Passover\)](#).

Speech

For information about the power of speech and sins committed through speech, see [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#). For information about pronouncing the Name of G-d, see [The Name of G-d](#).

STA" M

A [type style](#) used in writing the [Hebrew Alphabet](#), distinguished by crowns on certain letters. Used in [Sifrei Torah](#), [Tefillin](#) and [Mezuzot](#).

Star of David

The six-pointed star emblem commonly associated with Judaism.

Stones on Graves

It is customary in some Jewish communities to place small stones or rocks on a gravesite. I have heard two explanations of this custom: 1) it's a like leaving a calling card for the dead person; or 2) it was a substitute for a tombstone in areas where tombstones tended to get desecrated. See [Life, Death and Mourning](#).

Sukkah (SUK-uh)

Lit. booth. The temporary dwellings we live in during the holiday of [Sukkot](#). See also [Blessing for Dwelling in the Sukkah](#).

Sukkot (soo-KOHT; SUK-uhs)

Lit. booths. A festival commemorating the wandering in the desert and the final harvest. See also [Sukkot Blessings](#).

Symbols

See [Signs and Symbols](#).

Synagogue (SIN-uh-gahg)

From a Greek root meaning "assembly." The most widely accepted term for a Jewish house of worship. The Jewish equivalent of a church, mosque or temple.

- T -

Tabernacles

A festival commemorating the wandering in the desert and the final harvest, known to Jews as [Sukkot](#).

Taharat Ha-Mishpachah (tah-HAH-rahT hah-meesh-PAH-khah)

Lit. family purity. Laws relating to the separation of husband and wife during the woman's menstrual period. Also referred to as the laws of [niddah](#).

Takkanah (t'-KAH-nuh)

A law instituted by the rabbis and not derived from any biblical commandment.

Tale-Bearing

Tale-bearing is a serious sin in Judaism. See [Speech and Lashon Ha-Ra](#).

Tallit (TAH-lit; TAH-lis)

A shawl-like garment worn during morning services, with tzitzit (long fringes) attached to the corners as a reminder of the commandments. Sometimes called a prayer shawl.

Tallit Katan (TAH-lit kuh-TAHN)

Lit. small tallit. A four-cornered, poncho-like garment worn under a shirt so that we may have the opportunity to fulfill the commandment to put tzitzit (fringes) on the corners of our garments.

Talmud (TAHL-mud)

The most significant collection of the Jewish oral tradition interpreting the Torah.

Tammuz

The fourth month of the Jewish year, occurring in June/July. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

Tanakh (tuhn-AHKH)

Acronym of Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings). Written Torah; what non-Jews call the Old Testament.

Tashlikh (TAHSH-likh)

Lit. casting off. A custom of going to a river and symbolically casting off one's sins. See [Rosh Hashanah](#).

Tefilah (t'-FEE-luh)

Prayer. Sometimes refers specifically to the Shemoneh Esrei prayer. See [Prayers and Blessings](#); [Jewish Liturgy](#); [Common Prayers and Blessings](#).

Tefillin (t'-FIL-lin)

Phylacteries. Leather pouches containing scrolls with passages of scripture, used to fulfill the commandment to bind the commandments to our hands and between our eyes.

Tekiah (t'-KEE-uh)

One of four characteristic blasts of the shofar (ram's horn). See [Rosh Hashanah](#).

Temple

1) The central place of worship in ancient Jerusalem, where [sacrifices](#) were offered, destroyed in 70 C.E. 2) The term commonly used for houses of worship within the [Reform movement](#).

Tenets

Judaism has no dogma, no formal set of beliefs that one must hold to be a Jew. In Judaism, actions are far more important than beliefs, although there is certainly a place for belief within Judaism. See [What Do Jews Believe?](#); [The Nature of G-d](#); [Human Nature](#); [Kabbalah](#), [Olam Ha-Ba: The Afterlife](#).

Teruah (t'-ROO-uh)

One of four characteristic blasts of the shofar (ram's horn). See [Rosh Hashanah](#).

Teshuvah (t'-SHOO-vuh)

Lit. return. repentance.

Tevet

The tenth month of the Jewish year, occurring in December/January. See [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

Tevilah (teh-VEE-luh)

Immersion in the mikvah, a ritual bath used for spiritual purification. It is used primarily in [conversion](#) rituals and after the period of [sexual separation](#) during a woman's menstrual cycles, but many Chasidim undergo tevilah regularly for general spiritual purification.

Tisha B'Av (TISH-uh BAHV)

Lit. The Ninth of [Av](#). A fast day commemorating the destruction of the First and Second [Temples](#), as well as other tragedies.

Tishri

The seventh month of the Jewish year, during which many important [holidays](#) occur. See also [Months of the Jewish Year](#).

Tombstone

Jewish law requires that a tombstone be prepared, so that the deceased will not be forgotten and the grave will not be desecrated.

Torah (TOH-ruh)

In its narrowest sense, Torah the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, sometimes called the Pentateuch. In its broadest sense, Torah is the entire body of Jewish teachings.

Torah Readings

Each week, a different portion of the [Torah](#) and the [Prophets](#) are read in [synagogue](#).

Torah Scroll

The [Torah](#) (Bible) that is read in [synagogue](#) is written on parchment on scrolls.

Tractate

A subdivision of the [Mishnah and Talmud](#).

Transliteration

The process of writing Hebrew using the Roman (English) alphabet. More an art than a science.

Treyf (TRAYF)

Lit. torn. Food that is not [kosher](#).

Trope

Cantillation. The distinctive melodies used for chanting readings from the Torah and Haftarah. See [Torah Readings](#).

Tu B'Shevat (TOO bish-VAHT)

Lit. 15th of Shevat. The new year for the purpose of counting the age of trees for purposes of tithing.

Tzaddik (TSAH-deek)

Lit. righteous person. A completely righteous person, often believed to have special, mystical power.

Tzedakah (tsi-DUH-kuh)

Lit. righteousness. Generally refers to charity.

Tzimmes (TSIM-is)

Yiddish. A sweet stew. The word can also refer to making a big fuss over something.

Tzitzit (TZIT-sit)

Fringes attached to the corners of garments as a reminder of the commandments.

- U -

Ufruf (UF-ruf)

The groom's aliyah on the [Shabbat](#) before his [wedding](#).

Unpointed Text

Hebrew text written without vowel points. Hebrew should be written without vowels; however, many texts add vowel points to aid pronunciation and comprehension. See [Hebrew Alphabet](#).

Unveiling

It is a custom in many Jewish communities to keep a deceased's tombstone covered for the first twelve months after death, and to ceremonially unveil the tombstone on the first anniversary of the death. See [Life, Death and Mourning](#).

- V -

Vowels

Traditionally, Hebrew is written without vowels. However, the [rabbis](#) developed a system of vowel markings as an aid to pronunciation.

- W -

Wedding

See [Marriage; A Typical Wedding Ceremony](#).

Weitzman, Chaim

A founder of the [Zionist](#) political movement, and the first president of the State of [Israel](#).

Western Wall

The western retaining wall of the ancient [Temple](#) in Jerusalem, which is as close to the site of the original Sanctuary as Jews can go today. Commonly known as the Wailing Wall.

Women

In traditional Judaism, women are for the most part seen as separate but equal. Women's obligations and responsibilities are different from men's, but no less important. See also [Marriage](#).

Work

Activities involving creation or exercise of control over the environment, which are prohibited on [Shabbat](#) and certain [holidays](#).

World to Come

1) The [messianic age](#); 2) the spiritual world that souls go to after death.

Writings

A section of Jewish [scripture](#) containing various writings.

Written Torah (TOH-ruh)

The scripture that non-Jews call the Old Testament.

- Y -

Ya'akov

Jacob (Israel). Son of [Isaac](#). Father of twelve sons, who represent the tribes of Judaism. One of the three [Patriarchs](#) of Judaism.

Yad (YAHD)

Lit. hand. Hand-shaped pointer used while reading from [Torah scrolls](#).

Yahrzeit (YAHR-tsahyt)

Yiddish: lit. anniversary. The anniversary of the death of a close relative. See [Mourning](#).

Yarmulke (YAH-mi-kuh)

From Tartar "skullcap," or from Aramaic "Yirei Malka" (fear of the King). The skullcap head covering worn by Jews during services, and by some Jews at all times.

Yasher koach (YAH-shehyr KOH-ahkh)

Hebrew. Literally, straight strength. Figuratively, may you have strength, or may your strength be increased. A way of congratulating someone for performing a [mitzvah](#) or other good deed. See [Common Expressions and Greetings](#).

Yavneh

Center of Jewish learning after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. See [Yochanan ben Zakkai](#).

Year

Judaism uses a lunar/solar calendar consisting of months that begin at the new moon. Each year has 12 or 13 months, to keep it in sync with the solar year. Years are counted from the date of Creation.

See [Jewish Calendar](#).

Yemenite Jews

The Jews of the Middle Eastern country of Yemen, whose customs and practices are somewhat different than those of Ashkenazic or Sephardic Jews. See [Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews](#).

Yetzer Ra (YAY-tser RAH)

Lit. evil impulse. The selfish desire for satisfaction of personal needs, which can lead a person to do evil if not restrained by the yetzer tov. See [Human Nature](#); [Kosher Sex](#).

Yetzer Tov (YAY-tser TOHV)

Lit. good impulse. The moral conscience, which motivates us to follow G-d's law. See [Human Nature](#).

Yiddish (YID-ish)

The "international language" of [Ashkenazic](#) Jews, based primarily on German with words taken from Hebrew and many Slavic languages, and written in the [Hebrew Alphabet](#).

Yitzchok

Isaac. Son and spiritual heir of [Abraham](#). Father of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). One of the three [Patriarchs](#) of Judaism.

Yizkor (YIZ-kawr)

Lit. may He remember... Prayers said on certain holidays in honor of deceased close relatives. See [Mourning](#).

Yochanan ben Zakkai

Founder of the school at Yavneh, which became the center of Jewish learning for centuries.

Yom Ha-Atzmaut (YOHM hah ahts-mah-OOT)

[Israeli](#) Independence Day.

Yom Ha-Shoah (YOHM hah shoh-AH)

Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Yom Ha-Zikaron (YOHM hah zee-kah-ROHN)

[Israeli](#) Memorial Day.

Yom Kippur (YOHM ki-PAWR)

Lit. Day of Atonement. A day set aside for fasting, depriving oneself of pleasures, and repenting from the sins of the previous year.

Yom Yerushalayim (YOHM y'-roo-shah-LAH-yeem)

Holiday celebrating the reunification of Jerusalem in the hands of the modern state of [Israel](#).

- Z -

Zealots

A movement of Judaism that began approximately 2200 years ago. It died out shortly after the destruction of the [Temple](#).

Zebach Sh'lamim (zeh-BAKH shlah-MEEM)

Lit. peace offering. A type of [sacrifice](#) expressing thanks or gratitude.

Zebulun

1) Son of [Jacob \(Israel\)](#). Ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; 2) The tribe that bears his name.

Zionism (ZAHY-uhn-ism)

A political movement to create and maintain a Jewish state. The word is derived from Zion, another name for Jerusalem.

Zohar (zoh-HAHR)

The primary written work in the mystical tradition of [Kabbalah](#).

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Chanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings




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One candle is added to the menorah each night. The first night, you light only the shammas (servant, the one at a different height) and one Chanukkah candle. By the eighth night, you light all of the candles.

Candles should be added to the menorah from right to left (like Hebrew writing). The shammas candle is lit first. While holding the shammas candle, recite the following blessings. They are usually sung, using the tunes indicated by .

If you would like to hear the blessings, check out this [RealPlayer](#) recording of [Cantor Pinchas Rabinovicz singing the blessings and other tunes](#) from [613.org](#), the best source of Jewish Torah Audio on the net! (Please note: This recording uses [Ashkenazic pronunciation](#))

Blessing over Candles

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם 

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe


אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
asher keed'shanu b'metzvotav v'tzeevanu

who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us

לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה (אָמֵן)

l'had'lik neir shel Chanukkah (Amein)
to light the candles of Chanukkah (Amen)

Blessing for Chanukkah


בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם 

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

שָׁעֲשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה
she-asah neeseem la-avotaynu ba-yameem ha-heim ba-z'man ha-zeh
who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time

(אָמֵן)
(Amein)
(Amen)

Shehecheyanu (first night only)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם 

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

שְׁהַחַיְנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהַגִּיעַנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה (אָמֵן)

she-hecheeyanu v'keey'manu v'heegeeyanu la-z'man ha-zeh (Amein)
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season (Amen)

After reciting the blessings, use the shammus to light the Chanukkah candles from left to right (newest to oldest).

Candles should be left burning until they go out on their own. They must burn for more than half an hour. Standard Chanukkah candles burn for about an hour.



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Havdalah Home Ritual



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The Havdalah service marks the end of Shabbat. It should be performed no earlier than nightfall on Saturday night. Nightfall is the time when three stars can be seen in the sky. It is normally about 45 minutes to an hour after sundown, depending on your latitude. For the precise time when Shabbat ends in your area, consult the list of candle lighting times provided by the [Orthodox Union](#).

You will need three things for this ritual: a glass of wine or other liquid, some fragrant spices, and a special Havdalah candle.

Wine

The first of the four havdalah blessings is made over wine or another liquid. If the blessing is made over wine, recite this blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן (אָמֵן)

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melek ha-olam, borei p'riy ha-gafen. (Amein)

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine. (Amen)

If the blessing is made over another liquid, recite this blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָ בְּדַבְּרוֹ (אָמֵן)

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melek ha-olam, she-ha-kol nih'yeh bid'varo. (Amein)

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, by Whose will all things exist. (Amen)

Spices

The second blessing is recited over fragrant spices. The spices represent a compensation for the loss of the special sabbath spirit. The spices commonly used are cloves, cinnamon or bay leaves. They are commonly kept in a special decorated holder called a b'samim box.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא מֵינֵי בְּשָׂמִים (אָמֵן)

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melek ha-olam, borei minei b'samim. (Amein)

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who creates varieties of spices. (Amen)

Fire

The third blessing is recited over the special, multi-wicked Havdalah candle. Havdalah candles can be obtained from Jewish gift stores. If you cannot obtain a Havdalah candle, you can hold two candles close together, so their flames overlap. I have also used party candles (long, very thin candles) that I warmed up and twisted together.

Lighting a flame is a vivid way of marking the distinction between the sabbath and the weekday, because we cannot kindle a flame on the sabbath.

After the blessing is recited, hold your hands up to the flame with curved fingers, so you can see the shadow of your fingers on your palms. This is done because it would be improper to recite a blessing for something and then not use the thing.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא מְאוֹרֵי הָאֵשׁ (אָמֵן)

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melek ha-olam, borei m'orei ha-eish. (Amein)

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who creates the light of the fire. (Amen)

Havdalah

The final blessing is the havdalah blessing itself, the blessing over the separation of different things. The blessing is recited over the wine. After the blessing is complete, the wine is drunk. A few drops of wine are used to extinguish the flame from the candle.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמְבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melek ha-olam, ha-mavdil bayn kodesh l'chol,

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who distinguishes between the sacred and the secular,

בֵּין אֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּים בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשֵׁשֶׁת יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה

bayn or l'choshekh, bayn yisrael la-amim, bayn yom ha-sh'vi'i l'shayshet y'may ha-ma'aseh

between light and dark, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six days of labor

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַמְבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל

Barukh atah Adonai, ha-mavdil bayn kodesh l'chol. (Amein)

Blessed are You, Lord, who distinguishes between the sacred and the secular. (Amein)



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Mourner's Kaddish



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If you would like to hear the Mourner's Kaddish, check out this [RealPlayer](#) recording of [Cantor Pinchas Rabinovicz chanting Mourner's Kaddish](#) from [613.org](#), the best source of Jewish Torah Audio on the net! (Please note: This recording uses [Ashkenazic pronunciation](#))

יְתַגְדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא (אָמֵן)

Yeetgadal v' yeetkadash sh'mey rabbah (Cong. Amein).
May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified (Cong. Amen.)

בְּעֻלְמָא דֵּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתֵיהּ

B'almah dee v'rah kheer'utey
in the world that He created as He willed.

וַיְמַלִּיךְ מַלְכוּתֵיהּ בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ

v' yamleekh malkhutei, b'chahyeykhohn, uv' yohmeykhohn,
May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days,

וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

uv'chahyei d'chohl beyt yisrael,
and in the lifetimes of the entire Family of Israel,

בְּעֻגְלָא וּבְזַמַּן קָרִיב וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

ba'agalah u'veez'man kareev, v'eemru: Amein.
swiftly and soon. Now respond: Amen.

(אָמֵן) (יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵינָא)

(Cong: Amein. Y'hey sh'met rabbah m'varach l'alam u'l'almey almahyah)
(Cong Amen. May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.)

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵינָא

Y'hey sh'met rabbah m'varach l'alam u'l'almey almahyah.
May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.

יְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא

Yeet'barakh, v' yeesh'tabach, v' yeetpa'ar, v' yeetrohmam, v' yeet'nasei,
Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled,

וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא

v' yeet'hadar, v' yeet'aleh, v' yeet'halal sh'mey d'kudshah b'reekh hoo
mighty, upraised, and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, Blessed is He

(בְּרִיךְ הוּא)

(*Cong. b'reekh hoo.*)
(*Cong. Blessed is He*)

לְעֵלָּא מִן כּוֹל בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא

L'eylah meen kohl beerkhatah v'sheeratah,
beyond any blessing and song,

תְּשַׁבְּחֵתָּא וְנַחֲמֵתָּא דְאַמְרֵינוּ בְּעֵלְמָא וְאַמְרוּ אָמֵן

toosh'b'chatah v'nechematah, da'ameeran b'al'mah, v'eemru: Amein
praise and consolation that are uttered in the world. Now respond: Amen.

(אָמֵן)

(*Cong. Amein.*)
(*Cong. Amen.*)

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים

Y'hei shlamah rabbah meen sh'mahyah, v'chahyeem
May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life

עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כּוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאַמְרוּ אָמֵן

aleynu v'al kohl yisrael, v'eemru: Amein
upon us and upon all Israel. Now respond: Amen.

(אָמֵן)

(*Cong. Amein.*)
(*Cong. Amen.*)

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם

Oseh shalom beem'roh'mahv, hoo ya'aseh shalom,
He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace,

עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

aleynu v'al kohl yisrael v'eemru: Amein
upon us and upon all Israel. Now respond: Amen.

(אָמֵן)

(*Cong. Amein*).

(*Cong. Amen*).



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Affixing the Mezuzah



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**Before affixing the mezuzah to the doorpost,
the following blessing should be recited:**

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְקַבֹּעַ מְזוּזָה
asher keedishanu b'meetzvotav v'tzeevanu leek'boa mezuzah
who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to affix a mezuzah

The mezuzah should then be affixed to the upper third of the doorpost on the right side as one enters the house or room. If the doorpost is wide enough to permit, the mezuzah should be tilted with the upper part slanting inward toward the house or room.



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Rosh Hashanah Blessings



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- [Candle Lighting](#)
- [Evening Kiddush](#)
- [Shehecheyanu](#)
- [Blessing for Apples and Honey](#)

Lighting Candles

On the first night, candles should be lit no later than 18 minutes before sundown. On the second night, candles should be lit immediately after sunset, kindled by an existing flame. For the candle lighting time in your area, consult the list provided by the [Orthodox Union](#) or any Jewish calendar.

The words in [brackets] should be read only on the sabbath.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam,
 Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe,

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu
 who sanctifies us with his commandments, and commands us

לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל [שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל] יוֹם טוֹב (אָמֵן)
l'had'lik neir shel [shabbat v'shel] yom tov (Amein)
 to light the candles of [Shabbat and of] the holiday (Amen)

Evening Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah

Kiddush is recited while holding a cup of wine or other liquid, no less than 3.3 ounces. If wine or grape juice is not used, you should substitute she-ha-kol niyeh bidvaro (by whose will all things come to be) for borei p'riy ha-gafen (who creates the fruit of the vine).

On Friday nights (Shabbat), insert the first paragraph of [Shabbat kiddush](#) here, that is, from *Vay'hiy erev* to *asher bara Elohiym la'asot*. On all other nights, skip words in [brackets].

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are You, Lord, our God, king of the universe

בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן (אָמֵן)

borei p'riy ha-gafen. (Amein)
who creates the fruit of the vine. (Amen)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל עַם וְרוֹמַמְנוּ מִכָּל לָשׁוֹן

asher bachar banu mee-kol am, v'rom'manu mee-kol lashon
who has chosen us from among all people, and exalted us above every tongue

וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְתַתָּן לָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

v'kee'd'shanu b'metzvotav, va-teeten lanu, Adonai Elohaynu,
and sanctified us with His commandments, and you gave us, Lord our God,

בְּאַהֲבָה אֶת יוֹם [הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה וְאֶת יוֹם]

b'ahavah et yom [ha-shabbat ha-zeh v'et yom]
with love this day of [Sabbath and this day of]

הַזְּכוֹרֹן הַזֶּה יוֹם [זִכְרוֹן] תְּרוּעָה

ha-zikkaron ha-zeh, yom zikhron t'ruah b'b'ahavah
remembrance, a day of [remembrance of] shofar blowing [with love]

[בְּאַהֲבָה] מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ זִכָּר לְיִצְיַאת מִצְרַיִם

[b'ahava] meekra kodesh, zeicher leetzeeyat meetz'rayeem
[with love] a holy convocation, a memorial of the exodus from Egypt

כִּי בָנוּ בְּחַרְתָּ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשַׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים

Kiy vanu vacharta v'otanu qidashta mikol ha'amiym
Indeed, You have chosen us and made us holy from all peoples

וְדְבָרְךָ אֱמֶת וְקַיָּם לְעַד

u'd'var'kha emet v'qayam la'ad
and Your word is true and established for ever.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ מֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ

Barukh atah Adonai, melekh al kol ha-aretz
Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King over all the world,

מְקַדֵּשׁ [הַשַּׁבָּת וְ]יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיוֹם הַזִּכְרוֹן

m'qadeish [ha-shabbat v']Yisra'el v'yom ha-zikkaron. (Amein)
Who sanctifies [the sabbath] and Israel and the Day of Remembrance. (Amen)

Shehecheyanu

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

שֶׁהֵחֵינּוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה (אָמֵן)

she-hecheyanu v'keey'manu v'heegeeyanu la-z'man ha-zeh (Amein)
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season (Amen)

Apples and Honey

During Rosh Hashanah, it is traditional to eat apples dipped in honey, to symbolize our hopes for a "sweet" new year. The apple is dipped in honey, the blessing for eating tree fruits is recited, the apple is tasted, and then the apples and honey prayer is recited.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ (אָמֵן)

borei p'riy ha-eitz. (Amein)
who creates the fruit of the tree. (Amen)

Take a bite from the apple dipped in honey, then continue with the following:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ

Y'hee ratzon mee-l'fanekha, Adonai Elohaynu v'elohey avoteynu
May it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors

שְׁתַּחֲדֵשׁ עֲלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וְמֵתוּקָה

sh'tichadeish aleinu shanah tovah um'tukah.

that you renew for us a good and sweet year.



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Shabbat Evening Home Ritual



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Setting the Table

The sabbath table should be set with at least two candles (representing the dual commandments to remember and observe the sabbath), a glass of wine, and at least two loaves of challah. The challah loaves should be whole, and should be covered with a bread cover, towel or napkin.

Lighting Candles

Candles should be lit no later than 18 minutes before sundown. For the precise time when shabbat begins in your area, consult the list of candle lighting times provided by the [Orthodox Union](#) or any Jewish calendar.

At least two candles should be lit, representing the dual commandments to remember and to keep the sabbath. The candles are lit by the woman of the household. After lighting, she waives her hands over the candles, welcoming in the sabbath. Then she covers her eyes, so as not to see the candles before reciting the blessing, and recites the blessing. The hands are then removed from the eyes, and she looks at the candles, completing the mitzvah of lighting the candles.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam,
 Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe,

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu
 who sanctifies us with his commandments, and commands us

לְהַדְלִיק נֵיר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת (אָמֵן)
l'had'lik neir shel shabbat (Amein)
 to light the candles of Shabbat (Amen)

Evening Services

Evening services should be attended in the synagogue or performed in the home between candle lighting and dinner on the evening of the sabbath.

Kiddush

Kiddush is recited while holding a cup of wine or other liquid, no less than 3.3 ounces. If wine or grape juice is not used, you should substitute she-ha-kol niyeh bidvaro (by whose will all things come to be) for borei p'riy ha-gafen (who creates the fruit of the vine).

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי
Vay'hiy erev vay'hiy voqeir yom ha-shishiy
And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day

וַיִּכְלֹ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם
Vay'khulu ha-shamayim v'ha-aretz v'khol tzva'am
The heavens and the earth were finished, the whole host of them

וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
Vay'khal Elohiym ba-yom ha-shviyiy melakhto asher asah
And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
vayishbot ba-yom ha-shviyiy mikhhol melakhto asher ashah
and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ
Vayivarekh Elohiym et yom ha-shviyiy vayiqadeish oto
And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it

כִּי בּו שָׁבַת מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת
kiy vo shavat mikhhol melakhto asher bara Elohiym la'asot
because in it he had rested from all his work which God created and done

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפְנוֹ (אָמֵן)

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melekh ha-olam, borei p'riy ha-gafen. (Amein)
Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine. (Amen)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melekh ha-olam
Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָּנוּ
asher qid'shanu b'mitzvotayv v'ratzah vanu
who sanctifies us with his commandments, and has been pleased with us

וְשַׁבַּת קֹדֶשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָנוּ וְזָכְרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית

v'shabat qadsho b'ahavah u'v'ratzon hinchilanu, zikaron l'ma'aseh v'reishit

You have lovingly and willingly given us Your holy shabbat as an inheritance, in memory of creation

כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ זֵכֶר לְיִצְיַאת מִצְרַיִם

Kiy hu yom t'chilah l'miqra'ey qodesh, zeikher liytziyat mitzrayim

The shabbat is the first among our holy days, and a remembrance of our exodus from Egypt

כִּי בָנוּ בְּחֵרְפָה וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים

Kiy vanu vacharta v'otanu qidashta mikol ha'amiym

Indeed, You have chosen us and made us holy among all peoples

וְשַׁבַּת קֹדֶשְׁךָ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ

v'shabat qadsh'kha b'ahavah u'v'ratzon hin'chal'tanu

and have willingly and lovingly given us Your holy shabbat for an inheritance

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ מִקְדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת (אָמֵן)

Barukh atah Adonai, m'qadesh ha-shabat. (Amein)

Blessed are You, who sanctifies the shabbat (Amen)

Washing Hands

After Kiddush and before the meal, each person in the household should wash hands by filling a cup with water and pouring it over the top and bottom of the right hand and then the left hand. Before wiping the hands dry on a towel, the following blessing should be recited.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam,

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe,

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַים

asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al n'tilat yadayim

who sanctifies us with his commandments, and commands us concerning washing of hands.

Ha-Motzi

Immediately after washing hands and before eating, the head of the household should remove the cover from the two challah loaves, lifting them while reciting the following blessing. The challah is then ripped into pieces or sliced and passed around the table, so that each person may have a piece. The family meal may then begin.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melek ha-olam
Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe

הַמוֹצֵיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ (אָמֵן)
ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz. (Amein)
who brings forth bread from the earth. (Amen)



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Shema



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Deuteronomy 6:4-9

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד: 

Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Elohaynu Adonai Echad.

Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

In an undertone:

בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Barukh Shem k'vod malkhuto l'olam va-ed

Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever

וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֵת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכֹל מְאֹדְךָ:

V-ahavta et Adonai Elohecha b-chol l'avvcha u-v-chol naf'sh'cha u-v-chol m'odecha.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבְךָ:

V-hayu ha-d'varim ha-ayleh asher anochi m'tzav'cha ha-yom al l'vavecha.

And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart.

וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבִנְיֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם

בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

V-shinantam l-vanecha, v-dibarta bam

b-shivt'cha b-vaytecha, u-v-lecht'cha ba-derech, u-v-shachb'cha u-v-kumecha.

And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up.

וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ:

U-k'shartam l'ot al yadecha, v-hayu l-totafot bayn aynecha.

And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל מְזוֹזוֹת בַּיְתְּךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

U-chtavtam al m'zuzot baytecha u-vi-sharecha.

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 11:13-21

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַ תְּשָׁמְעוּ אֶל מִצְוֹתַי
 אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
 וּלְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם:

V-haya im shamo'a tish'mu el mitzvotai

*asher anochi m'tzaveh etchem ha-yom, l-ahavah et Adonai Elohaychem,
 u-l-avdo b-chol l'vavchem u-v-chol nafsh'chem.*

And it shall come to pass if you surely listen to the commandments
 that I command you today, to love the Lord your God,
 and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul,

וְנָתַתִּי מִטֶּר אֶרְצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ
 וְאֶסְפַּף דְּגָנְךָ וְתִירוֹשְׁךָ וַיִּצְהָרְךָ:

V-natati m'tar artzchem b-ito, yoreh u-malkosh;

v-asafta d'ganecha, v-tirosh'cha v-yitzharecha.

That I will give rain to your land, the early and the late rains,
 that you may gather in your grain, your wine and your oil.

וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדֶךָ לְבַהֲמֹתֶךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ:

V-natati aysev b-sad'cha li-b'hem'techa; v-achalta v-savata.

And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle and you will eat and you will be satisfied.

הִשְׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם
 וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם:

Hishamru lachem, pen yifteh l'vavchem,

v-sartem va-avadtem elohim achayrim, v-hishtachavitem lahem.

Beware, lest your heart be deceived,
 and you turn and serve other gods, and worship them.

וְחָרָה אַף יְיָ בְּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא יִהְיֶה מָטָר
 וְהִאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֶּן אֶת יְבוּלָהּ
 וְאֲבַדְתֶּם מְהֵרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יְיָ נָתַן לָכֶם:

V-charah af Adonai bachem, v-atzar et ha-shamayim v-lo yihyeh matar,

v-ha-adama lo titayn et y'vulah;

va-avadtem m'hayrah mayal ha-aretz ha-tovah asher Adonai notayn lachem.

And anger of the Lord will blaze against you, and he will close the heavens and there will not be rain,
 and the earth will not give you its fullness,
 and you will perish quickly from the good land that the Lord gives you.

וּשְׁמַתֶּם אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים עַל לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל נַפְשְׁכֶם
וּקְשַׁרְתֶּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל יְדֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם:

V-sam'tem et d'varai ayleh al l'avchem v-al naf'sh'chem;

u-kshartem otam l-ot al yedchem, v-hayu ltotafot bayn aynaychem.

So you shall put these, my words, on your heart and on your soul;
and you shall bind them for signs on your hands, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

וּלְמַדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם
בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

V-limadtem otam et b'naychem l-daber bam

b-shivt'cha b-vaytecha, u-v-lecht'cha baderech, u-v-shachb'cha u-v-kumecha.

And you shall teach them to your children, and you shall speak of them
when you sit in your house, and when you walk on the way, and when you lie down, and when you
rise up.

וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

U-ch'tavtam al m'zuzot baytecha u-vi-sharecha.

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

לְמַעַן יִרְבּוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיְמֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְיָ
לְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם כִּי־יְמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ:

L'ma'an yirbu y'maychem vi-y'may v'naychem al ha-adamah asher nishba Adonai

la-avotaychem latayt lahem ki-y'may ha-shamayim al ha-aretz.

In order to prolong your days and the days of your children on the land that the Lord promised
your fathers that he would give them, as long as the days that the heavens are over the earth.

Numbers 15:37-41

וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

Vayomer Adonai el Mosheh laymor.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying...

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם
וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית עַל כַּנְּפֵי בְּגָדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם
וְנָתַנוּ עַל צִיצִית הַכַּנָּף פֶּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת:

*Daber el b'nay Yisrael v-amarta alayhem,
v-asu lahem tzitzit al can'fay vi-g'dayhem l-dorotam,
v-natnu al tzitzit ha-canaf p'til t'chaylet.*

Speak to the children of Israel and say to them,
they should make themselves tzitzit (fringes) on the corners of their clothing throughout their
generations,
and give the tzitzit of each corner a thread of blue.

וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת יְיָ
וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא תִתּוּרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם
וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אֵתֶם זִנִּים אַחֲרֵיהֶם:

*V-hayah lachem l-tzitzit, u-r'iytem oto u-z'chartem et kol mitzvot Adonai,
va-asiytem otam v-lo taturu acharay l-vavchem
v-acharay aynaychem, asher atem zonim acharaychem.*

And they shall be tzitzit for you, and when you look at them you will remember all of the Lord's
commandments
and do them and not follow after your heart
and after your eyes, which lead you astray.

לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי וְהֵייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם:

L'ma-an tiz'k'ru v-asitem et kol mitzvotai, vi-h'iytem k'doshim laylohaychem.
In order to remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.

אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

*Ani Adonai Elohaychem, asher hotzaytiy etchem mayeretz Mitzrayim,
li-h'yot lahem laylohim. Ani Adonai Elohaychem.*

I am the Lord, your God, who lead you from the land of Egypt
to be a god to you. I am the Lord, your God.



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Sukkot Blessings



Please note that this page contain the name of God. If you print it out, please treat it with appropriate respect.

- [Sukkot Kiddush](#)
- [Blessing for Dwelling in the Sukkah](#)
 - [Shehecheyanu](#)
- [Blessing over the Arba Minim](#)
 - [Farewell to the Sukkah](#)

On the first two nights, kiddush, the blessing for dwelling in the sukkah, and shehecheyanu should be recited over a cup of wine in the sukkah, if possible. Words in parentheses are read only on Shabbat.

If it is not possible to recite these blessings in the sukkah, omit the blessing for dwelling in the sukkah.

If wine or grape juice is not used, substitute she-ha-kol niyeh bidvaro (by whose will all things come to be) for borei p'riy ha-gafen (who creates the fruit of the vine) in the kiddush.

If you would like to hear the festival kiddush, check out these [RealPlayer](#) recordings of Cantor Pinchas Rabinovicz chanting Passover kiddush: (which is exactly the same as Sukkot kiddush with two exceptions: chag ha-Sukkot instead of chag ha-matzot, and z'man simkhateynu instead of z'man cheyruteynu).

[Friday night version \(Shabbat\)](#)

[Weeknight version](#)

[Additions for Saturday night version \(Motzaei Shabbat\)](#)

These recordings come from [613.org](#), the best source of Jewish Torah Audio on the net!
(Please note: These recordings use [Ashkenazic pronunciation](#))

Kiddush for Sukkot

On Friday nights, insert the first paragraph of Shabbat kiddush here, up to the first Barukh atah... On all other nights, skip words in [brackets].

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
 Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן (אָמֵן)

borei p'riy ha-gafen. (Amein)
who creates the fruit of the vine. (Amen)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל עַם וְרוֹמַמְנוּ מִכָּל לָשׁוֹן

asher bachar banu mee-kol am, v'rom'manu mee-kol lashon
who has chosen us from among all people, and exalted us above every tongue

וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְתַתָּן לָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

v'kee'd'shanu b'metzvotav, va-teeten lanu, Adonai Elohaynu,
and sanctified us with His commandments, and you gave us, Lord our God,

בְּאַהֲבָה [שַׁבָּתוֹת לְמִנוּחָה וְ] מוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה

b'ahavah [shabbatot lee-m'nuchah u'] mo'adeem l'seemchah,
with love [Sabbaths for rest, and] appointed festivals for gladness,

הַיָּמִים וְזִמְנֵים לְשִׂשׁוֹן אֶת יוֹם [הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה וְאֶת יוֹם]

chageem u-z'maneem l'sason, et yom [ha-shabbat hazeh v'et yom]
festivals and times for joy, this day of [Sabbath and this day of]

חַג הַשְּׂכּוֹת הַזֶּה זְמַן שִׂמְחָתֵנוּ

chag ha-Sukkot hazeh, z'man seemchateinu
the festival of Sukkot, the time of our gladness

[בְּאַהֲבָה] מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ זִכָּר לִיציאת מִצְרַיִם

[b'ahava] meekra kodesh, zeicher leetzeeyat meetz'rayeem
[with love] a holy convocation, a memorial of the exodus from Egypt

כִּי בָנוּ בְּחַרְתָּ וְאֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים

Kiy vanu vacharta v'otanu qidashta mikol ha'amiym
Indeed, You have chosen us and made us holy among all peoples

[וְשַׁבָּת] וּמוֹעֲדֵי קֹדֶשׁ [בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן]

[v'shabat] u-mo'aday qadsh'kha [b'ahavah u'v'ratzon]
and [the Sabbath and] your holy festivals [in love and favor]

בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשָׂשׂוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ

b'simchah u-v'sason hin'chal'tanu

in gladness and in joy you have given us for an inheritance

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ מְקַדֵּשׁ [הַשַּׁבָּת וְ] יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזְּמַנִּים. (אָמֵן)

Barukh atah Adonai, m'qadesh [ha-shabbat v'] Yisra'el v'ha-z'manim. (Amein)
Blessed are You, who sanctifies [the shabbat and] Israel and the seasons. (Amen)

Blessing for Dwelling in the Sukkah

This blessing should be recited at any time you are fulfilling the mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah, for example, before you eat a meal in the sukkah.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ

asher keed'shanu b'metzvotav v'tzeevanu

who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us

לֵישֵׁב בַּסֻּכָּה (אָמֵן)

leisheiv ba-sukkah (Amein)

to dwell in the sukkah (Amen)

Shehecheyanu (first night only)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

שֶׁהֲחַיְנוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה (אָמֵן)

she-hecheyanu v'keey'manu v'heegeeyanu la-z'man ha-zeh (Amein)

who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season. (Amen)

The following blessing is recited when fulfilling the commandment to "rejoice before the Lord" by waving the arba minim. The lulav, hadas and arava are taken in the right hand and the etrog is taken in the left, with the stem up. They are held together and the following blessing is recited.

Blessing over the Arba Minim

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam
 Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת לולב (אָמֵן)

asher keed'shanu b'metzvotav v'tzeevanu al n'tilat lulav
 who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the taking
 of the lulav. (Amen)

After reciting the above blessing, turn the etrog upside down (stem down) hold the four species together, and wave them to the east, south, west, north, up and down, symbolizing that God is everywhere.

The following prayer is recited before leaving the sukkah for the last time during the holiday season.

Farewell to the Sukkah

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
Y'hee ratzon mee-l'fanekha, Adonai Elohaynu v'elohey avoteynu
 May it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors

כְּשֵׁם שֶׁקִּיַּמְתִּי וַיֵּשְׁבֵתִי בַּסֻּכָּה זוֹ
k'sheim she-keeyam'tee v'yashavtee ba-sukkah zu
 that just as I have fulfilled and dwelled in this sukkah

כִּן אֶזְכֶּה לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה לֵישֵׁב בְּסֻכַּת עוֹרוֹ שֶׁל לוֹיָתָן
kein ezkeh l'shanah ha-ba'ah leysheiv b'sukkat oro shel leev'yatan
 so may I merit in the coming year to dwell in the sukkah of the skin of Leviathan

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם
L'shanah ha-ba'ah beyrushalayeem
 Next year in Jerusalem!



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Suggested Prayers in the Wake of the Terrorist Attacks in America



Please note that this page contain the name of God.
If you print it out, please treat it with appropriate respect.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, many are seeking appropriate prayers to express their feelings. I offer these suggestions. Thanks to the rabbi at AskMoses.com who provided me with many of these suggestions.

Jews have always relied on Tehillim (Psalms) in times of trouble. For example, when a relative is sick, people often recite psalms for their welfare. Psalms can be found in any bible. Some psalms that are particularly appropriate at this time include Psalm 20, 23, 79, 91 and 123.

Another prayer that will strike a chord with many at this time is Av Ha-Rachameem. It is a memorial prayer intended for martyrs who died for their faith; nevertheless, its themes of grief, of honoring the dead, and of faith that G-d will not allow their murderers to go unpunished are very appropriate to the mood of this country. I have included the full text of this prayer in Hebrew, transliteration and English [below](#).

Finally, a prayer for the welfare of our government is certainly in order. I have included the full text of that prayer in Hebrew, transliteration and English [below](#).

Av Ha-Rachameem

אב הרחמים שוכן מרומים ברחמי העצומים
הוא יפקוד ברחמים החסידים והישרים והתמימים
קהלות הקדש שמסרו נפשם על קדשת השם
הנאהבים והנעימים בחייהם ובמותם לא נפרדו
מנשרים קלו ומארות גברו
לעשות רצון קונם וחפץ צורם

*Av ha-rachameem shocheyn m'romeem, b'rachamayv ha-atzooeem
hu yeef'kod b'rachameem ha-chaseedeem, v'ha-y'shareem, v'ha-t'meemeem,
k'heelot ha-kodesh shemas'ru naf'sham al k'dooshat ha-Shem
Ha-ne'ehaveem v'han'eemeem b'chayayhem uv'motam lo neef'radu.
Meen'shareem kalu umey'arayat gaveyru
la'asot reetzon konam v'cheyfetz tzooram*

Compassionate Father Who dwells on high, in His powerful compassion
may he remember with compassion the devout, the upright, and the blameless ones,
the holy communities who gave their lives for the sanctification of the [Divine] Name
Those who were beloved and pleasant in their lifetime were not parted in their death.

They were quicker than eagles and stronger than lions
to do the will of their Creator's will and the wish of their Rock.

יִזְכְּרוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְטוֹבָה עִם שְׂאֵר צְדִיקֵי עוֹלָם
וְיִנְקוּם לְעֵינֵינוּ נְקָמַת דָּם עֲבָדָיו הַשְּׂפוּדִים
כְּפָתוּב בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים
הַרְנִינוּ גוֹיִם עִמּוֹ כִּי דָם עֲבָדָיו יִקּוּם
וְנִקָּם יִשִּׁיב לְצָרָיו
וְכִפֵּר אֲדָמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ

*Yeez'c'reym Eloheynu l'tovah eem sh'ar tzadeekay olam.
V-yeenkom l'eyneynu neekmat dam avadayv ha-shafookh.
Ka-katoov b'Torat Moshe, eesh ha-Eloheem,
Ha-r'neenu goyeem amo, kee avadayv yeekom
v'nakam yasheev l'tzrayv;
v'keeper ad'mato amo.*

May our G-d remember them for good with the other righteous of the world.
May He bring retribution before our eyes for the spilled blood of His servants.
As is written in the Torah of Moses, the man of G-d,
"Sing aloud, nations of His people, because He will avenge the blood of His servants
and He will bring retribution on His adversaries;
and He will expiate His land and His people." (Deuteronomy 32:43)

וְעַל יְדֵי עֲבָדֶיךָ הַנְּבִיאִים כְּתוּב לֵאמֹר
וְנִקִּיתִי דָמָם לֹא־נִקִּיתִי וַיִּי שִׁכּוֹן בְּצִיּוֹן
וּבְכַתְּבֵי הַקִּדָּשׁ נִאָּמַר
לָמָּה יֵאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֵיךְ אֱלֹהֵיהֶם יִנְדַע בַּגּוֹיִם
לְעֵינֵינוּ נְקָמַת דָּם עֲבָדֶיךָ הַשְּׂפוּדִים

*V'al y'day avadekha, han'vee'eem, katoov ley'mor
"V'neekeytee, damam lo neekeytee v'Adonay shocheyn b'Tzeeyon."
Uv'keet'vey hakodesh ne'emar,
"Lamah yo'm'ru ha-goyeem, 'ayey Eloheyhem?' Yeevada ba-goyeem
l'eyneynu, neekmat dam avadekha ha-shafookh."*

And by the hands of Your servants, the prophets, is written saying,
"Though I cleanse, their bloodshed I will not cleanse when G-d dwells in Zion." (Joel
4:21)
And in the Holy Writings it is said,

"Why should the nations say, 'Where is their G-d?' Let it be known among the nations, before our eyes, the avenging of Your servants' spilled blood." (Psalms 79:10).

וְאוֹמֵר כִּי־דָרַשׁ דְּמַיִם אוֹתָם זָכָר
לֹא־שָׁכַח צַעֲקַת עַבְדֶּיךָ
וְאוֹמֵר יָדִין בַּגּוֹיִם מִלְּא גּוֹיֹת
מִחַץ רֹאשׁ עַל־אֶרֶץ רַבָּה
מִנַּחַל בְּדָרְךָ יִשְׁתֶּה עַל־כֵּן יָרִים רֹאשׁ

*V'omeyr "Kee doreysh dameem otam zakhar;
Lo shakhach tza'a'kat anaveem."
V'omeyr "Yadeen ba-goyeem malay g'veeyot,
Machatz rosh al eretz rabah.
Meenachal ba-derekh yeesh'teh, al keyn yeereem rosh."*

And it says "For the Avenger of blood has remembered them;
He has not forgotten the cry of the humble." (Psalms 9:13).
And it says, "He will judge the nations filled with corpses,
He will crush the head of the large land.
From a river along the way he shall drink, therefore he may lift up his head." (Psalms 110:6-7)

Prayer for the Welfare of the Government

הַנּוֹתֵן תְּשׁוּעָה לְמַלְכִים וּמִמְשָׁלָה לְנֹסִיכִים
מַלְכוּתוֹ מַלְכוּת כָּל עוֹלָמִים
הַפּוֹצֵה אֶת דָּוִד עַבְדּוֹ מִכַּרְבַּב רָעָה
הַנּוֹתֵן בַּיָּם דֶּרֶךְ וּבַמַּיִם עֲזִים נְתִיבָה
הוּא יְבַרְךָ אֶת הַנְּשִׂיא וְאֶת מִשְׁנֵהוּ וְאֶת כָּל שְׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת הָאֵלוּ

*Ha-noteyn t'shu'ah lam'lakheem umem'shalah lan'seekheem,
malkhuto malkhut kol olameem,
ha-potzeh et David, avdo, maykherev ra'ah,
ha-noteyn ba-yam derekh uv'mayeem azeem n'teevah,
hu y'vareykh et ha-nasee, v'et meesh'neyhu, v'et kol saray ha-m'deenot ha-eylu.*

He Who grants victory to kings and dominion to rulers,
Whose kingdom is a kingdom for all ages,
Who released David, His servant, from the evil sword,
Who gave a road through the sea and a path through the mighty waters,

may He bless the President, the Vice President, and all the government officers of this country.

מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים בְּרַחֲמָיו יַחֲסֵם וְיִשְׁמְרֵם
וּמְכֹל צָרָה וְיָגוֹן וְנֹזֵק
יִצִּילֵם וְיִתֵּן בְּלִבָּם וּלְבַב כָּל יוֹעֲצֵיהֶם
וְשָׂרֵיהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹבוֹת עִמָּנוּ וְעִם כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲחֵינוּ
בְּיָמֵיהֶם וּבְיָמֵינוּ תְּיָשֵׁעַ יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁכּוֹן לְבֵטַח
וּבֵּא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל וְכֵן יְהִי רָצוֹן
וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן

*Melekh mal'khay ha-m'lakheem, b'rachamayv y'chayeym v-yeesh'm'reym
u-meekol tzara v-yagon vanezek.*

Yatzeleym v-yeeteyn b'leebam uv'leyv kol yo'atzeyhem

V'sareyhem la'asot tovot eemanu v'eem kol Yisrael aheyenu.

*Bee-y'meyhem uv-yameynu, teevasha Y'huda v'Yisrael yeesh'kon lavetach,
uva l'Tzeeyon Go'el. V'kheyn y'hee ratzon.*

V'nomar ameyn.

The King Who rules over kings, in His compassion may He sustain them and protect them from every trouble, woe and injury.

May he rescue them and put into their heart and into the heart of all their counsellors compassion to do good with us and with all Israel, our brothers.

In their days and our days, may Judah be saved and may Israel dwell securely, and may the Redeemer come to Zion. So may it be his will.

And let us say, Amen.



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