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# Judaism 101: A Brief Introduction to Judaism

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## **Judaism: A Brief Introduction**

Judaism (in Hebrew: *Yahadut*) is the religion, philosophy and way of life of the Jewish people. Judaism is a monotheistic religion, with its main inspiration being based on or found in the Tanakh which has been explored in later texts, such as the Talmud. Judaism is considered to be the expression of the covenantal relationship God established with B'nei Yisrael.

Judaism is not a homogenous religion, and embraces a number of streams and views. Today, Rabbinic Judaism is the most numerous stream, and holds that God revealed his laws and commandments to Moses. Today, the largest Jewish religious movements are Orthodox Judaism, Conservative/Masorti Judaism and Reform/Progressive Judaism. A major source of difference between these groups is their approach to Jewish law.

Orthodox Judaism maintains that the Torah and Jewish law are divine in origin, eternal and unalterable, and that they should be strictly followed. Conservative and Reform Judaism are more liberal, with Conservative Judaism generally promoting a more “traditional” interpretation of Judaism’s requirements than Reform Judaism. A typical Reform position is that Jewish law should be viewed as a set of general guidelines rather than as a set of restrictions and obligations whose observance is required of all Jews. However it must be realized that there is a great amount of variance within each of these movements and they are not monolithic. Authority on theological and legal matters is not vested in any one person or organization, but in the sacred texts and rabbis and scholars who interpret them.<sup>1</sup>

The very idea of Jewish denominationalism is contested by some Jews and Jewish organizations, which consider themselves to be “trans-denominational” or “post-denominational” such as:

- Jewish day schools, both primary and secondary, lacking affiliation with any one movement;
- The International Federation of Rabbis (IFR), a non-denominational rabbinical organization for rabbis of all movements and backgrounds; and
- The Hebrew College seminary, in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, near Boston.

Organizations such as these believe that the formal divisions that have arisen among the “denominations” in contemporary Jewish history are unnecessarily divisive, as well as religiously and intellectually simplistic. According to Rachel Rosenthal, “the post-denominational Jew refuses to be labeled or categorized in a religion that thrives on stereotypes. He has seen what the institutional branches of Judaism have to offer and believes that a better Judaism can be created.” Such Jews might, out of necessity, affiliate with a synagogue associated with a particular movement, but their own personal Jewish ideology is often shaped by a variety of influences from more than one denomination.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“Judaism.” *wikipedia.org*. Wikipedia, n.d. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism>]

<sup>2</sup>“Jewish Religious Movements.” *wikipedia.org*. Wikipedia, n.d.

[\[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post\\_Denominational\\_Judaism#Emergence\\_of\\_trans- and\\_post-denominational\\_Judaism\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post_Denominational_Judaism#Emergence_of_trans- and_post-denominational_Judaism)

## **Karaite Judaism**

According to the followers of Karaite Judaism, it is the original form of Judaism as shown throughout the Tanakh from the time of the Revelation beginning at Har Sinai. Karaites are a sect of Judaism that believes only in the authority of the Tanakh. Karaite Judaism truly began with the national revelation at Har Sinai. Those who followed God's laws were at first called "Righteous."<sup>1</sup>

*Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the clear-sighted and upset the pleas of those who are in the right. [tzadek]. (Shemot 23:8)<sup>2</sup>*

It was really only in the ninth-century CE that the followers of God's law began being called Yahadit Qara'it. At first, everyone who followed Torah were of one mind and one sect – that of the Yahadit Qara'it. Throughout Jewish history a variety of sects – such as the Sadducees, Boethusians, Ananites, and Pharisees – came into existence. It was in this atmosphere that the followers of Torah became known as the Yahadit Qara'it.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the Biblical period – in the first century BCE – two opposing sects came into being in Yisrael. The Sadducees (also known as the Zadokites) followed only the Torah as sacred text. Josephus explains that the Sadducees "take away fate, and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose that all our actions are in our own power, so that we are ourselves the causes of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly."<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees taught of an "Oral Torah" that was added to the Written Torah. This sect taught "that some actions, but not all, are the work of fate, and some of them are in our own power, and that they are liable to fate, but are not caused by fate."<sup>3</sup> Two additional sects arose during the Second Temple Period – the Essenes and the Boethusians. The Essenes was a sect of Judaism that added several books to the Torah. They taught "that fate governs all things, and that nothing befalls men but what is according to its determination."<sup>3</sup> The Boethusians were a sect like the Sadducees who only follow the Written Torah and rejected any additions to the mitzvot given to Moshe haNavi.<sup>1</sup>

In the early Middle-Ages the Pharisees continued to thrive and began calling themselves "Rabbis." In the seventh-century the Muslims completely swept the Middle-East. They had no real interest in imposing Islam on the Jews and gave them a degree of autonomy under a system of Rosh Galut, also known by the Greek name Exilarch. With the establishment of the Rosh Galut, the Rabbinate became a political power throughout the Middle-East. They began to force upon all Jews within the Empire the Rabbinate laws contained within the Talmud Bavli. There was fierce resistance to the Rabbinate by those who had never heard of the Talmud Bavli. One resistance leader, Abu Isa al-Isfahani, led an army of Jews against the Muslim government. However all attempts to cast off the Rabbinate rulers failed.<sup>1</sup>

In the eighth-century, Anan ben-David organized various non-Talmudic Jewish groups and lobbied the Caliphate to establish a second Rosh Galut for those Jews who refused to follow the

man-made laws of the Talmud Bavli. The Muslims granted Anan and his followers the freedom to practice Judaism as their ancestors had practiced it. Anan was not a Karaite but he did reject the Talmud. His followers became known as Ananites and this group continued to exist until the tenth-century. Another group of Jews who continued to practice Judaism only according to the Tanakh became known as B'nei Miqra (Followers of Scripture). Their name was shorted to Kara'im (Scripturalists) which became transliterated to Karaites. This name is derived from the Hebrew word for the Tanakh – Miqra and its root Kara. The name Kara'im means “Scripturalists” and distinguished these Jews from the Rabbis who call themselves Rabanyin (Followers of the Rabbis) or Talmudiyin (Followers of the Talmud).<sup>1</sup>

Even though Karaites live and worship only according to the Tanakh, the Tanakh is not taken literally. Karaites believe that every text, including the Tanakh, needs some type of interpretation. However, Karaites believe that the interpretation of the Tanakh must be based upon the peshat (plain) meaning of the text as it would have been understood by the Yisraelites when it was given. It is up to each individual to learn Tanakh and ultimately decide on their own the correct interpretation. Of course, this interpretation must be based upon proof-texts from the Tanakh, the peshat meaning of the text, and the Hebrew grammar of the text.

Karaites do not accept the idea of an “Oral Law” or “Oral Torah.” They also do not believe or follow the teachings as set down in the Mishnah or Talmud. Karaites are known to study the Mishnah and Talmud as well as other Rabbinical writings but this does not mean that Karaites believe these books are divine writings or the rulings must be followed. Karaites believe that these Rabbinical writings can hold clues to help everyone understand the Tanakh and Jewish history and philosophy. These writings are simply used as commentary and nothing more. In addition, Karaites completely reject the Zohar, Tanya, and any other mystical teachings since they are completely anti-Torah.

Karaites do not accept the “New Testament” as scripture. There are unfortunately individuals and groups that are calling themselves “Karaites” but they actually follow Christian doctrines – just as Rabbinic Judaism is plagued by so-called “Messianic Judaism.” The New Testament is not considered divine nor is it considered scripture by Karaites. In addition, just like Rabbinic Judaism, Karaite Judaism also rejects the idea that Jesus was the messiah, prophet, part of a trinity, or God-incarnate.

Unlike Rabbinic Judaism that declares “Rosh Hashannah” to be the beginning of the year, Karaites follow the Tanakh and declare the beginning of the new year at the sign of the first new moon after the sighting of the Aviv (ripening of the barley) in Eretz Yisrael. The Karaites follow the mandates of the yomim tovim (holidays) as prescribed in the Tanakh which means that they are often followed differently than how the Rabbinate follow them. Two other major differences between Rabbinate and Karaites involve tefillin and mezuzot and familial descent. Karaites do not take the passages from Shemot and Devarim literally and as a result do not wear tefillin or place mezuzot upon their doors. Karaites, unlike Rabbinate, follow the Tanakh when it comes to determining familial descent. Karaites maintain that a child is born a Jew only if the father is a Jew – the opposite of Rabbinic Judaism. This is the tradition according to the Tanakh and is therefore the tradition amongst the Karaites.

Karaite Judaism is the original form of Judaism. The Torah was given to Moshe ha-Navi and the entire Tanakh is considered sacred text. Karaites believe that only the Tanakh must be consulted for the determination of how one is to live according to God's will. There is no "Oral Law" and Rabbinical law is not valid. Karaites maintain the original path of following God's laws.

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<sup>1</sup>Nehemia Gordon. "History of Karaism." [karaite-korner.org](http://karaite-korner.org). World Karaite Movement, 3 April 2011, accessed 15 April 2012. [<http://karaite-korner.org/history.shtml>]

<sup>2</sup>David Stein (ed.). JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

<sup>3</sup>William Whiston (trans.). "The Works of Flavius Josephus." (1737) 13:5:9. [<http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/index.htm#aoj>]

### The Adderet Eliyahu?

Rav Eliyahu ben Moshe Bashyatzi wrote *Adderet Eliyahu* in late 15th – early 16th century Turkey and is known as the most renowned compendium of Karaite Law. Even though it was never completed it nevertheless covers a wide range of Karaite halakhah in breadth and depth. *Adderet Eliyahu* is written clearly and well-organized exposition of the legal positions and practical consequences of Karaite halakhah. This work is often misunderstood as an attempt to bend Karaite halakhah to be more consistent with Rabbinic halakhah. However, Rav Bashyatzi's work is strictly within the halakhich framework of Karaite Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

*Adderet Eliyahu* is sometimes confused for a work that is expressly attempting to make Karaite practice more consistent with the Rabbinic practice. However, this is not the purpose of the *Adderet Eliyahu* even though there are certainly some issues where the *Adderet Eliyahu* and the Rabbinic halakhah can come into some sort of agreement. Part of the *Adderet Eliyahu* is also a refutation to the Rabbinates of their challenges to the Karaite practices. Rav Eliyahu ben Moshe Bashyatzi wrote *Adderet Eliyahu* in order to summarize "the opinions of his great predecessors and the 'standard' Karaite halakhah that had been refined by generations of Karaite sages studying the peshat (or 'plain meaning')." <sup>1</sup>

The *Adderet Eliyahu* explains how the Tanakh is organized as well as how Karaite halakhah is determined.<sup>2</sup> There are three pillars that Rav Eliyahu ben Moshe Bashyatzi used when writing the *Adderet Eliyahu*: katur, hekeish, and sevel hayerusha.<sup>1</sup>

The katur ("what is written") refers to the peshat, or plain meaning, of the text. However it must be noted that peshat only refers to the plain meaning and not necessarily to the literal meaning of the text. Karaites, unlike Rabbinates have historically used the divinely revealed text of the Prophets and Writings to also determine halakhah. The Karaite sages have held that "every commandment that is clarified in the prophets has its basis and its essence in the Torah, from which that commandment is derived."<sup>2</sup>

Hekeish are rational inferences found in the text. These are mitzvot (commandments) that are not found explicitly with the text but can be logically derived from other mitzvot within the text. Hekeish infers that there are mitzvot which are not explicitly stated. In addition, hekeish clarify those mitzvot which are written. Rav Eliyahu ben Moshe Bashiya teaches that there are seven forms of hekeish:

- “1. When a commandment is ambiguous or obscure in one verse it can be clarified by using another.
2. From the particular we may derive the general.
3. When two scenarios are equal in nature we may apply to them equal rulings.
4. If something is true for the minor case it is true for the major case.
5. Linguistic analysis.
6. It is possible to broaden the application of a law using reason alone without any textual support.
7. That which is forbidden to its counterpart is also forbidden to itself.”<sup>2</sup>

Sevel hayerusha (“the yoke of inheritance”) refers to legally binding information that has been passed down from the time of Moses. As opposed to the Rabbinite “Oral Law,” the sevel hayerusha never contradicts the katuv (that which is written) and always has a basis within the katuv. Sevel hayerusha only includes legally binding tradition as opposed to general Karaite traditions. “Legally binding traditions are exclusively those that are needed to properly follow the laws that have explicitly been written down in the biblical text.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Tomer Mangoubi, Baroukh Ovadia, & Shawn Lichaa. “Mikdash Me’at: Introduction.” Karaite Jews of America, n.d.

[[http://www.karaites.org/uploads/7/4/1/3/7413835/mikdash\\_meat\\_introduction.pdf](http://www.karaites.org/uploads/7/4/1/3/7413835/mikdash_meat_introduction.pdf)]

<sup>2</sup>Tomer Mangoubi, Baroukh Ovadia, & Shawn Lichaa. “Mikdash Me’at: Adderet Eliyahu’s Introduction.” Karaite Jews of America, n.d.

[[http://www.karaites.org/uploads/7/4/1/3/7413835/mikdash\\_meat\\_adderet\\_eliyahus\\_introduction.pdf](http://www.karaites.org/uploads/7/4/1/3/7413835/mikdash_meat_adderet_eliyahus_introduction.pdf)]

## **Rabbinic Judaism**

Rabbinic Judaism – Yahadut Rabanit – grew out of Pharisaic Judaism and has been considered the mainstream form of Judaism since the codification of the Talmud Bavli. With the redaction of the “Oral Law” and the Talmud Bavli becoming the authoritative interpretation of the Tanakh, Rabbinic Judaism became the dominant form of Judaism in the Diaspora. Rabbinic Judaism encouraged the practice of Judaism when the sacrifices and other practices in Eretz Yisrael were no longer possible.

When the Romans were attempting to breach the walls of Yerushalayim, Yohanan ben Zaccai abandoned Yerushalayim even though the Beit HaMikdash still stood. He foresaw the fall of Yerushalayim and had himself smuggled out of the city in a coffin in order to speak to the Romans (Gittin 56a).<sup>1</sup>

*When he reached the Romans he said, Peace to you, O king, peace to you, O king. He [Vespasian] said: Your life is forfeit on two counts, one because I am not a king and you call me king, and again, if I am a king, why did you not come to me before now? He replied: As for your saying that you are not a king, in truth you are a king, since if you were not a king Jerusalem would not be delivered into your hand, as it is written, And Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one. 'Mighty one' [is an epithet] applied only to a king, as it is written, And their mighty one shall be of themselves etc.; and Lebanon refers to the Sanctuary, as it says, This goodly mountain and Lebanon. As for your question, why if you are a king, I did not come to you till now, the answer is that the biryani among us did not let me.*

*He said to him; If there is a jar of honey round which a serpent is wound, would they not break the jar to get rid of the serpent? He could give no answer. R. Joseph, or as some say R. Akiba, applied to him the verse, [God] turns wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish. He ought to have said to him: We take a pair of tongs and grip the snake and kill it, and leave the jar intact.*

*At this point a messenger came to him from Rome saying, Up, for the Emperor is dead, and the notables of Rome have decided to make you head [of the State]. He had just finished putting on one boot. When he tried to put on the other he could not. He tried to take off the first but it would not come off. He said: What is the meaning of this? R. Johanan said to him: Do not worry: the good news has done it, as it says, Good tidings make the bone fat. What is the remedy? Let someone whom you dislike come and pass before you, as it is written, A broken spirit dries up the bones. He did so, and the boot went on. He said to him: Seeing that you are so wise, why did you not come to me till now? He said: Have I not told you? — He retorted: I too have told you.*

*He said; I am now going, and will send someone to take my place. You can, however, make a request of me and I will grant it. He said to him: Give me Jabneh and its Wise Men, and the family chain of Rabban Gamaliel, and physicians to heal R. Zadok. (Gittin 56a-56b).<sup>2</sup>*

There can be no historical proof of this tale but the narrative in the Talmud shows the shift in the religious and political life of the Yehudim following the destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash. This narrative about the founding of Yavneh in fact represents the birth of Rabbinic Judaism. A way that focused on Torah and halakhah (Jewish law) rather than the Beit HaMikdash worship.<sup>1</sup>

Rabbinic Judaism, as opposed to Karaite Judaism, is based upon the belief that Moshe received from God not only the Written Torah but also an Oral Torah. This Oral Torah (or Oral Law) was given as additional oral explanations of the revelation at Har Sinai.



According to Rabbinic Judaism tradition has the binding force of law. The revelation to Moshe consisted of both the Written Law and the Oral Law along with the implied exposition by the sages of Yisrael.<sup>3</sup>

*Levi b. Hama says further in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish: What is the meaning of the verse [Exodus 24:12]: And I will give thee the tables of stone, and the law and the commandment, which I have written that you may teach them? 'Tables of stone': these are the ten commandments; 'the law': this is the Torah; 'the commandment': this is the Mishnah; 'which I have written': these are the Prophets and the Writings; 'that you may teach them': this is the Gemara. It teaches [us] that all these things were given to Moses on Sinai. (Berachot 5a)<sup>4</sup>*

The validity of the Oral Law was challenged by the Sadducees. Josephus records that the Sadducees held that the only obligatory observances are those in the Written Law. After the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash by the Romans the Sadducees disappeared and the body of tradition continued to grow. New rites were introduced as replacement for rituals that had been performed in the Beit HaMikdash.<sup>3</sup>

*[Avraham] then said before Him: Sovereign of the Universe, This is very well for the time when the Temple will be standing, but in the time when there will be no Temple what will befall them? He replied to him: I have already fixed for them the order of the sacrifices. Whenever they will read the section dealing with them, I will reckon it as if they were bringing me an offering, and forgive all their iniquities. (Megilah 31b)<sup>5</sup>*

Rabbinic Judaism recognizes the Oral Law as divine authority and follows the Rabbinic procedures used to interpret the Tanakh. Even though not all sects within Rabbinic Judaism view the Oral Law as being binding halakhah, each sect does define itself as coming from the tradition of an Oral Law. Maimonides wrote the Mishneh Torah showing a direct connection between the Written Law and the explanations in the Oral Law. In addition, Rabbi Yosef Caro produced the Shulkhan Arukh which has become the “most comprehensive compendium of Jewish law and tradition to this day.”<sup>3</sup>

*Rabbinic Judaism, in its classical writings produced from the first through the seventh century of the Common Era, sets forth a theological system that is orderly and reliable. Responding to the generative dialectics of monotheism, Rabbinic Judaism systematically reveals the justice of the one and only God of all creation. Appealing to the truths of Scripture, the Rabbinic sages constructed a coherent theology, cogent structure, and logical system to reveal the justice of God. These writings identify what Judaism knows as the logos of God—the theology fully manifest in the Torah. (Jacob Neusner)<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>Alieza Salzberg. “Judaism after the Temple: Coping with destruction and building for the future.” MyJewishLearning, n.d.

[[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Ancient\\_and\\_Medieval\\_History/539\\_BCE-632\\_CE/Palestine\\_Under\\_Roman\\_Rule/Judaism\\_after\\_the\\_Temple.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Ancient_and_Medieval_History/539_BCE-632_CE/Palestine_Under_Roman_Rule/Judaism_after_the_Temple.shtml)]

<sup>2</sup>I. Epstein. “Tractate Gittin.” [<http://halakhah.com/pdf/nashim/Gittin.pdf>]

<sup>3</sup>American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. "Tradition." Jewish Virtual Library, 2008. [[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0020\\_0\\_19989.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0020_0_19989.html)]

<sup>4</sup>I. Epstein. "Tractate Berachot." [<http://halakhah.com/pdf/zeraim/Berachoth.pdf>]

<sup>5</sup>I. Epstein. "Tractate Megilah." [<http://halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Megilah.pdf>]

<sup>6</sup>Jacob Neusner. "Rabbinic Judaism: The Theological System." 2003 [<http://www.brill.com/rabbinic-judaism-0>]

## The Talmud

The Talmud ("instruction, learning") is a central text of Rabbinic Judaism. It is also traditionally referred to as *Shas*, a Hebrew abbreviation of *shisha sedarim*, the "six orders". The Talmud has two components. The first part is the Mishnah, the written compendium of Judaism's "Oral Torah." The second part is the Gemara, an elucidation of the Mishnah and related Tannaitic writings that often ventures onto other subjects and expounds broadly on the Tanakh. The terms *Talmud* and *Gemara* are often used interchangeably, though strictly speaking that is not accurate. The whole Talmud consists of 63 tractates, and in standard print is over 6,200 pages long. It is written in Tannaitic Hebrew and Aramaic. The Talmud contains the teachings and opinions of thousands of rabbis on a variety of subjects, including Halakha (law), Jewish ethics, philosophy, customs, history, lore and many other topics. The structure of the Talmud follows that of the Mishnah, in which six orders (*sedarim*; singular: *seder*) of general subject matter are divided into 60 or 63 tractates (*masekhtot*; singular: *masekhet*) of more focused subject compilations, though not all tractates have Gemara. Each tractate is divided into chapters (*perakim*; singular: *perek*), 517 in total, that are both numbered according to the Hebrew alphabet and given names, usually using the first one or two words in the first mishnah. A *perek* may continue over several (up to tens of) pages. Each *perek* will contain several *mishnayot* with their accompanying exchanges that form the "building-blocks" of the Gemara; the name for a passage of gemara is a *sugya* (סוגיא; plural *sugyot*). A *sugya*, including *baraita* or *tosefta*, will typically comprise a detailed proof-based elaboration of a Mishnaic statement, whether halakhic or aggadic. A *sugya* may, and often does, range widely off the subject of the mishnah. In a given *sugya*, scriptural, Tannaic and Amoraic statements are cited to support the various opinions. In so doing, the Gemara will highlight semantic disagreements between Tannaim and Amoraim (often ascribing a view to an earlier authority as to how he may have answered a question), and compare the Mishnaic views with passages from the Baraita. Rarely are debates formally closed; in some instances, the final word determines the practical law, but in many instances the issue is left unresolved. *Zera'im* (Seeds):

- [Berachot](#): laws of blessings and prayers
- [Pe'ah](#): laws concerning the mitzvah of leaving the corner of one's field for the poor as well as the rights of the poor in general
- [Demai](#): laws concerning the various cases in which it is not certain whether the Priestly donations have been taken from the produce
- [Kil'ayim](#): laws concerning the forbidden mixtures in agriculture, clothing, and breeding of animals
- [Shevi'it](#): laws concerning with the agricultural and fiscal regulations concerning the Sabbatical Year
- [Terumot](#): laws concerning with the terumah donation given to the Priests

- [Ma'aserot](#): laws concerning the tithes to be given to the Levites
- [Ma'aser Sheni](#): laws concerning the tithes that is to be eaten in Jerusalem
- [Challah](#): laws concerning the offering of dough to be given to the Priests
- [Orlah](#): laws concerning the prohibition of the immediate use of a tree after it is planted
- [Bikurim](#): laws concerning the first fruit gifts to the Priests and the Temple

*Moed* (Appointed Season):

- [Shabbat](#): laws concerning the 39 prohibitions of work on Shabbat
- [Eruvin](#): laws concerning the Eruv (Shabbat boundaries) concerning public and private domains
- [Pesachim](#): laws concerning Pesach and the paschal sacrifice
- [Shekalim](#): laws concerning the collection of the half-shekel and the expenses and expenditures of the Temple
- [Yoma](#): laws concerning the mitzvot of Yom Kippur (primarily the ceremony of the Kohen Gadol)
- [Sukkah](#): laws concerning the mitzvot of Sukkot as well as the sukkah and the four species
- [Beitzah](#): laws concerning the mitzvot on Yomim Tovim (holidays)
- [Rosh Hashannah](#): laws concerning the regulation of the calendar by the new moon and the services of the festival of Rosh Hashannah
- [Taanit](#): laws concerning the special fast days in times of drought and other occurrences
- [Megillah](#): laws concerning the mitzvot of reading Megillah Esther on Purim as well as other passages from the Torah and Nevi'im
- [Moed Katan](#): laws concerning the Chol HaMoed (intermediate festival days) of Pesach and Sukkot
- [Chagigah](#): laws concerning the Three Pilgrimage Festival (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot) and the pilgrimage offerings that are to be brought to Jerusalem

*Nashim* (Women):

- [Yevamot](#): laws concerning the duty of a man to marry his deceased brother's childless widow, prohibited marriages, halizah, and the right of a minor to have her marriage annulled
- [Ketubot](#): laws concerning the settlement made upon the bride, fines paid for seduction, mutual obligations of the husband and wife, and the rights of the widow and stepchild
- [Nedarim](#): laws concerning the various forms of vows, invalid vows, renunciation of vows, and the power of annulling vows made by a wife or daughter
- [Nazir](#): laws concerning a Nazirite's vow, renunciation of a Nazirite vow, enumeration of what is forbidden to a Nazirite, and the Nazirite vows of women and slaves
- [Sotah](#): laws concerning the rules and rituals imposed upon a woman suspected by her husband of adultery, religious formulas made in Hebrew or other languages, seven types of Pharisees, reforms of John Hyrcanus, and the civil war between Aristobulus and Hyrcanus
- [Gittin](#): laws concerning various circumstances of delivering a get (bill of divorce)
- [Kiddushin](#): laws of the rites connected to betrothal and marriage, the legal acquisition of slaves, chattels and real estate, and the principles of morality

### *Nezikin* (Damage):

- [Bava Kamma](#): laws concerning civil matters (damages and compensation)
- [Bava Metzia](#): laws concerning civil matters (torts and property)
- [Bava Batra](#): laws concerning civil matters (land ownership)
- [Sanhedrin](#): laws concerning the rules of court proceedings in the Sanhedrin, the death penalty, and other criminal matters
- [Makkot](#): laws concerning deals with collusive witnesses, cities of refuge, and the punishment of lashes
- [Shevuot](#): laws concerning the oaths and their consequences
- [Eduyot](#): case studies of legal disputes in Mishnaic times and the miscellaneous testimonies illustrating various sages and principles of halakhah
- [Avodah Zarah](#): laws concerning interactions between Jews and idolators
- [Avot](#): collection of the sages' favorite ethical maxims
- [Horayot](#): laws concerning the communal sin-offering brought for major errors by the Sanhedrin

### *Kodashim* (Holy Things):

- [Zevachim](#): laws concerning animal and bird sacrifices
- [Menachot](#): laws concerning grain-based offerings
- [Chullin](#): laws concerning slaughter and meat consumption
- [Bechorot](#): laws concerning the sanctification and redemption of the firstborn animal and firstborn human
- [Erachin](#): laws concerning dedicating a person's value or a field to the Temple
- [Temurah](#): laws concerning the substitution for an animal dedicated for a sacrifice
- [Kereitot](#): laws concerning the penalty of karet and sacrifices associated with their unwitting transgression
- [Me'ila](#): laws concerning restitution for the misappropriation of Temple property
- [Tamid](#): laws concerning the Tamid sacrifice
- [Middot](#): laws concerning the measurements of the second Temple
- [Kinnim](#): laws concerning the complex laws of the mixing of bird offerings

### *Tohorot* (Purities):

- [Kelim](#): laws concerning various utensils and their purity
- [Oholot](#): laws concerning the uncleanness of a corpse and objects around the corpse
- [Negaim](#): laws concerning the laws of tzaraath
- [Parah](#): laws concerning the Red Heifer
- [Tohorot](#): laws concerning purity (especially contracting impurity and the impurity of food)
- [Mikavot](#): laws concerning the mikvah
- [Niddah](#): laws concerning the niddah (woman during her menstrual cycle or shortly after giving birth)
- [Machshirin](#): laws concerning liquids that make food susceptible to ritual impurity
- [Zavim](#): laws concerning a person who has seminal emissions

- [Tevul Yom](#): laws concerning a special kind of impurity where a person immerses in a mikvah but remains unclean for the remainder of the day
- [Yadayim](#): laws concerning impurity related to the hands
- [Uktzin](#): laws concerning the impurity of the stalks of fruit

The *Mishnah* is a compilation of legal opinions and debates. Statements in the Mishnah are typically terse, recording brief opinions of the rabbis debating a subject; or recording only an unattributed ruling, apparently representing a consensus view. The rabbis recorded in the Mishnah are known as Tannaim. Since it sequences its laws by subject matter instead of by biblical context, the Mishnah discusses individual subjects more thoroughly than the Midrash, and it includes a much broader selection of halakhic subjects than the Midrash. The Mishnah's topical organization thus became the framework of the Talmud as a whole. But not every tractate in the Mishnah has a corresponding talmud. Also, the order of the tractates in the Talmud differs in some cases from that in the *Mishnah*. In addition to the Mishnah, other tannaitic teachings were current at about the same time or shortly thereafter. The Gemara frequently refers to these tannaitic statements in order to compare them to those contained in the Mishnah and to support or refute the propositions of Amoraim. All such non-Mishnaic tannaitic sources are termed *baraitot* (lit. outside material, "Works external to the Mishnah"; sing. *baraita*). The *baraitot* cited in the Gemara are often quotations from the Tosefta (a tannaitic compendium of halakha parallel to the Mishnah) and the Halakhic Midrashim (specifically Mekhilta, Sifra and Sifre). In the three centuries following the redaction of the Mishnah, rabbis throughout Palestine and Babylonia analyzed, debated, and discussed that work. These discussions form the Gemara. *Gemara* means "completion" (from the Hebrew *gamar*: "to complete") or "learning" (from the Aramaic: "to study"). The Gemara mainly focuses on elucidating and elaborating the opinions of the Tannaim. The rabbis of the Gemara are known as Amoraim (sing. *Amora*). Much of the Gemara consists of legal analysis. The starting point for the analysis is usually a legal statement found in a Mishnah. The statement is then analyzed and compared with other statements used in different approaches to Biblical exegesis in rabbinic Judaism (or – simpler – interpretation of text in Torah study) exchanges between two (frequently anonymous and sometimes metaphorical) disputants, termed the *makshan* (questioner) and *tartzan* (answerer). Another important function of Gemara is to identify the correct Biblical basis for a given law presented in the Mishnah and the logical process connecting one with the other: this activity was known as *talmud* long before the existence of the "Talmud" as a text. The Talmud is a wide-ranging document that touches on a great many subjects.

Traditionally Talmudic statements are classified into two broad categories, *halakhic* and *aggadic* statements. Halakhic statements directly relate to questions of Jewish law and practice (halakha). Aggadic statements are not legally related, but rather are exegetical, homiletical, ethical, or historical in nature. In addition to the six Orders, the Talmud contains a series of short treatises of a later date, usually printed at the end of Seder Nezikin. These are not divided into Mishnah and Gemara. The process of "Gemara" proceeded in what were then the two major centers of Jewish scholarship, the Land of Israel and Babylonia. Correspondingly, two bodies of analysis developed, and two works of Talmud were created. The older compilation is called the Jerusalem Talmud or the *Talmud Yerushalmi*. It was compiled in the 4th century in Israel. The Babylonian Talmud was compiled about the year 500 CE, although it continued to be edited later. The word "Talmud", when used without qualification, usually refers to the Babylonian Talmud. While the

editors of Jerusalem Talmud and Babylonian Talmud each mention the other community, most scholars believe these documents were written independently. The Jerusalem Talmud was one of the two compilations of Jewish religious teachings and commentary that was transmitted orally for centuries prior to its compilation by Jewish scholars in Israel. It is a compilation of teachings of the schools of Tiberias, Sepphoris and Caesarea. It is written largely in a western Aramaic dialect that differs from its Babylonian counterpart. This Talmud is a synopsis of the analysis of the Mishnah that was developed over the course of nearly 200 years by the Academies in Israel (principally those of Tiberias and Caesarea.) Because of their location, the sages of these Academies devoted considerable attention to analysis of the agricultural laws of the Land of Israel.

Traditionally, this Talmud was thought to have been redacted in about the year 350 CE by Rav Muna and Rav Yossi in the Land of Israel. It is traditionally known as the *Talmud Yerushalmi* ("Jerusalem Talmud"), but the name is a misnomer, as it was not prepared in Jerusalem. It has more accurately been called "The Talmud of the Land of Israel". Its final redaction probably belongs to the end of the 4th century, but the individual scholars who brought it to its present form cannot be fixed with assurance. By this time Christianity had become the state religion of the Roman Empire and Jerusalem the holy city of Christendom. In 325 CE Constantine, the first Christian emperor, said "let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd." This policy made a Jew an outcast and pauper. The compilers of the Jerusalem Talmud consequently lacked the time to produce a work of the quality they had intended. The text is evidently incomplete and is not easy to follow. The apparent cessation of work on the Jerusalem Talmud in the 5th century has been associated with the decision of Theodosius II in 425 CE to suppress the Patriarchate and put an end to the practice of formal scholarly ordination. Despite its incomplete state, the Jerusalem Talmud remains an indispensable source of knowledge of the development of the Jewish Law in Israel. It was also an important resource in the study of the Babylonian Talmud by the Kairouan school of Hananel ben Hushiel and Nissim Gaon, with the result that opinions ultimately based on the Jerusalem Talmud found their way into both the Tosafot and the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides. Following the formation of the modern State of Israel there is some interest in restoring *Eretz Yisrael* traditions. For example, Rabbi David Bar-Hayim of the *Makhon Shilo* institute has issued a siddur reflecting *Eretz Yisrael* practice as found in the Jerusalem Talmud and other sources. The Talmud Bavli consists of documents compiled over the period of Late Antiquity (3rd to 5th centuries). During this time the most important of the Jewish centres in Mesopotamia, later known as Iraq, were Nehardea, Nisibis, Mahoza (just to the south of what is now Baghdad), Pumbeditha (near present-day al-Anbar), and the Sura Academy near present-day Falluja. *Talmud Bavli* (the "Babylonian Talmud") comprises the Mishnah and the Babylonian Gemara, the latter representing the culmination of more than 300 years of analysis of the Mishnah in the Babylonian Academies. The foundations of this process of analysis were laid by Rab, a disciple of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi. Tradition ascribes the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud in its present form to two Babylonian sages, Rav Ashi and Ravina. Rav Ashi was president of the Sura Academy from 375 to 427 CE. The work begun by Rav Ashi was completed by Ravina, who is traditionally regarded as the final Amoraic expounder. Accordingly, traditionalists argue that Ravina's death in 499 CE is the latest possible date for the completion of the redaction of the Talmud. However, even on the most traditional view a few passages are regarded as the work of a group of rabbis who edited the Talmud after the end of the Amoraic period, known as the *Saboraim* or *Rabbanan Savora'e* (meaning

“reasoners” or “considerers”). The question as to when the Gemara was finally put into its present form is not settled among modern scholars. Some, like Louis Jacobs, argue that the main body of the Gemara is not simple reportage of conversations, as it purports to be, but a highly elaborate structure contrived by the *Saboraim*, who must therefore be regarded as the real authors. On this view the text did not reach its final form until around 700. Some modern scholars use the term *Stammait* (from the Hebrew *Stam*, meaning “closed”, “vague” or “unattributed”) for the authors of unattributed statements in the Gemara.

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Source: “Talmud.” wikipedia.org. Wikipedia, n.d. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud>]

### The Mishneh Torah

The *Mishneh Torah* (“Repetition of the Torah”) subtitled *Sefer Yad HaHazaka* (“Book of the Strong Hand,”) is a code of Rabbinic halakhah (Jewish religious law) authored by Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as *RaMBaM* or “Rambam”), one of history’s foremost rabbis. The *Mishneh Torah* was compiled between 1170 and 1180, while Maimonides was living in Egypt, and is regarded as Maimonides’ *magnum opus*. Accordingly, later sources simply refer to the work as “*Maimon*“, “*Maimonides*” or “*RaMBaM*“, although Maimonides composed other works. *Mishneh Torah* consists of fourteen books, subdivided into sections, chapters, and paragraphs. It is the only Medieval-era work that details all of Jewish observance, including those laws that are only applicable when the Holy Temple is in existence, and remains an important work in Judaism. Its title is an appellation originally used for the Sefer Devarim (Book of Deuteronomy), and its subtitle, “Book of the Strong Hand,” derives from its subdivision into fourteen books: the numerical value fourteen, when represented as the Hebrew letters Yod (10) Dalet (4), forms the word *yad* (“hand”).

#### *Sefer HaMadda* (Knowledge):

- *Yesodei ha-Torah*: belief in God and other Jewish principles of faith
- *De’ot*: general proper behavior
- *Talmud Torah*: see Torah study
- *Avodah Zarah*: the prohibition against idolatry
- *Teshuvah*: the law and philosophy of repentance

*Sefer Ahavah* (Love): the precepts which must be observed at all times if the love due to God is to be remembered continually (prayer, tefillin).

- *Kri’at Shema*: laws of the Kri’at Shema
- *Tefilah and Birkat Kohanim*: laws of prayer and the Priestly Blessing
- *Tefillin, Mezuzah, and Sefer Torah*: laws of the tefillin, mezuzah, and Torah Scroll
- *Tzitzit*: laws of the tzitzit
- *Berachot*: laws of blessings at meal times
- *Milah*: laws of circumcision
- *Order of Prayers*: text of various prayers

### Sefer Zemanim (Times):

- *Shabbat*: laws of shabbat
- *Eruvin*: laws of a Rabbinic device that facilitates Sabbath observance
- *Shevitat `Asor*: laws of Yom Kippur, except for the Temple
- *Yom Tov*: prohibitions on major Jewish holidays which are different from the prohibitions of Sabbath
- *Chametz u-Matzah*: laws of Passover
- *Shofar, Sukkah, ve-Lulav*: laws of Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot
- *Shekalim*: laws regarding money
- *Kiddush HaChodesh*: laws of the calendar
- *Ta'aniyot*: laws of times of stress and difficulties
- *Megillah vChanukah*: laws of Chanukah and Purim

### Sefer Nashim (Women):

- *Ishut*: laws of marriage, including kiddushin and the ketubah
- *Geirushin*: laws of divorce
- *Yibum vChalitzah*: laws of levirate marriage
- *Na'arah Betulah*: the law of a man who seduces or rapes an unmarried woman
- *Sotah*: laws concerning a woman suspected of infidelity

### Sefer Kedushah (Holiness)

- *Issurei Biah*: forbidden sexual relations, including niddah, incest and adultery. Since intermarriage with non-Jews is forbidden, the laws of conversion to Judaism are also included.
- *Ma'akhalot Assurot*: laws of forbidden foods
- *Shechitah*: laws of ritual slaughter

### Sefer Hafla'ah (Separation): laws of vows and oaths

- *Shevuot*: laws of vows (to refrain from doing an action)
- *Nedarim*: laws of oaths (to do an action)
- *Nezirot*: laws of Nazirites
- *Arachim Vacharamim*: laws of donations to the temple

### Sefer Zera'im (Seeds): agricultural laws

- *Kilayim*: laws of forbidden mixtures
- *Matnot Aniyim*: laws of obligatory gifts to the poor
- *Terumot*: laws of obligatory gifts to the priests
- *Maaser*: laws of tithes
- *Maaser Sheini*: laws of secondary tithes
- *Bikurim*: laws of first fruit offerings
- *Shemita*: laws of the sabbatical year



[Sefer Avodah](#) (Divine Service): the laws of the Temple in Jerusalem

- *Beit Habechirah*: laws about the Temple building
- *Kli Hamikdash*: laws about the Temple religious objects
- *Biat Hamikdash*: laws regarding the Temple, priests, and worshippers
- *Issurei Mizbeach*: laws of sacrifices
- *Maaseh Hakorbonot*: laws of sacrifices
- *Temidin uMisafim*: laws of daily sacrifices
- *Pesulei Hamukdashim*: slaughter and offerings of sacrificial animals
- *Avodat Yom HaKippurim*: laws of sacrifices on Yom HaKippurim
- *Me'ilah*: laws of misappropriating consecrated articles

[Sefer Korbanot](#) (Offerings): laws for offerings in the Temple, excepting those of the whole community

- *Korban Pesach*: laws of the Passover sacrifice
- *Chagigah*: laws of the pilgrimage festivals
- *Bechorot*: laws of the firstborn
- *Shegagot*: laws of sin-offerings
- *Mechussarey Kapparah*: laws of impurity
- *Temurah*: laws of holiness

[Sefer Taharah](#) (Cleanness): the rules of ritual purity

- *Tum'at Met*: laws of impurity imparted by a human corpse
- *Parah Adummah*: laws of the red heifer
- *Tum'at Tzara'at*: laws of impurity imparted by tzara'at
- *Metamme'ey Mishkav uMoshav*: laws of persons who impart impurity to places where they lay or sit
- *She'ar Avot ha'Tumah*: laws of other primary sources of impurity
- *Tum'at Okhalin*: laws of the impurity of foods
- *Kelim*: laws pertaining keilim
- *Mikvot*: laws pertaining to mikveot

[Sefer Nezikim](#) (Injuries): criminal and tort law

- *Hilchot Nizkei Mammon*: laws regarding damages
- *Genevah*: laws pertaining to theft
- *Gezelah va'Avedah*: laws pertaining to robbery and the return of lost articles
- *Chovel uMazzik*: laws of injury and damage
- *Rotseah uShmirat Nefesh*: laws of murderers and the protection of life

[Sefer Kinyan](#) (Acquisition): laws of the marketplace

- *Mechirah*: laws of selling
- *Zechiyah uMattanah*: laws of acquisition and gifts

- *Shechenim*: laws of neighbors
- *Sheulchin veShuttafin*: laws pertaining to agents and partners
- *Avadim*: laws of servants

*Sefer Mishpatim* (Rights): civil law

- *Sechirut*: laws of rental and employer-employee relations
- *She'elah uFikkadon*: laws of borrowing and entrusted objects
- *To'en veNit'an*: laws pertaining to disputes between plaintiffs and defendants
- *Nehalot*: laws pertaining to inheritances
- *Malveh veLoveh*: laws pertaining to lenders and borrowers

*Sefer Shoftim* (Judges): the laws relating legislators, the Sanhedrin, the king, and the judges. It also addresses the Noahide Laws and those pertaining to messianic times.

- *Sanhedrin veHa'Onashin haMesurin lahem*: laws of the courts and the penalties placed under their jurisdiction
- *Edut*: laws of witnesses
- *Mamrim*: laws of the rebellious ones
- *Avel*: laws of corpses
- *Melachim uMilchamot*: laws of the king, the land, specific peoples, military, and wartime

Maimonides intended to provide a complete statement of the “Oral Law,” so that a person who mastered first the Written Torah and then the *Mishneh Torah* would be in no need of any other book. Contemporary reaction was mixed, with strong and immediate opposition focusing on the absence of sources and the belief that the work appeared to be intended to supersede study of the Talmud. Maimonides responded to these criticisms, and the *Mishneh Torah* endures as an influential work in Jewish religious thought. According to several authorities, a decision may not be rendered in opposition to a view of Maimonides, even where he apparently militated against the sense of a Talmudic passage, for in such cases the presumption was that the words of the Talmud were incorrectly interpreted. Likewise: “One must follow Maimonides even when the latter opposed his teachers, since he surely knew their views, and if he decided against them he must have disapproved their interpretation.” Maimonides sought brevity and clarity in his *Mishneh Torah* and, as in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, he refrained from detailing his sources, considering it sufficient to name his sources in the preface. He drew upon the Torah and the rest of Tanakh, both Talmuds (Jerusalem and Babylonia), Tosefta, and the halakchic Midrashim, principally Sifra and Sifre. Later sources include the responsa (*teshuvot*) of the Geonim. The maxims and decisions of the Geonim are frequently presented with the introductory phrase “The Geonim have decided” or “There is a regulation of the Geonim”, while the opinions of Isaac Alfasi and Alfasi’s pupil Joseph ibn Migash are prefaced by the words “my teachers have decided” (although there is no direct source confirming ibn Migash as Maimonides’ teacher). According to Maimonides, the Geonim were considered “unintelligible in our days, and there are but few who are able to comprehend them.” There were even times when Maimonides disagreed with what was being taught in the name of the Geonim. A number of laws appear to have no source in any of the works mentioned; it is thought that Maimonides deduced them through independent interpretations of the Bible or that they are based on versions of previous

Talmudic texts no longer in our hands. Maimonides himself states a few times in his work that he possessed what he considered to be more accurate texts of the Talmud than what most people possessed at his time. The latter has been confirmed to a certain extent by versions of the Talmud preserved by the Yemenite Jews as to the reason for what previously were thought to be rulings without any source. The *Mishneh Torah* is written in Hebrew in the style of the *Mishnah*. As he states in the preface, Maimonides was reluctant to write in Talmudic Aramaic, since it was not widely known. His previous works had been written in Arabic. The *Mishneh Torah* never cites sources or arguments, and confines itself to stating the final decision on the law to be followed in each situation. There is no discussion of Talmudic interpretation or methodology, and the sequence of chapters follows the factual subject matter of the laws rather than the intellectual principle involved.

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### The Shulkhan Arukh

The *Shulkhan Arukh*, also known as the Code of Jewish Law, is the most authoritative legal code of Rabbinic Judaism. It was authored in Tzfat, Ottoman Eyalet of Damascus, by Yosef Karo in 1563 and published in Venice two years later. Together with its commentaries, it is the most widely accepted compilation of Jewish law ever written. The Shulkhan Arukh consists of four parts:

- **Orach Chayim** (“Way of Life”) – Daily, Sabbath, and holiday laws
- **Yoreh De’ah** (“It Teaches Knowledge”) – Laws about food; relations with non-Jews; usury; menstruation and immersion; vows and oaths; honoring parents and scholars; Torah study; charity; circumcision; proselytes and slaves; Torah and doorpost scrolls; new crops; mixtures; firstborn; offerings from bread, crops, and flocks; the ban; illness, death, burial, and mourning.
- **Even Ha-Ezer** (“Stone of Help”) – Laws of procreation, marriage, and divorce
- **Choshen Mishpat** (“Breastplate of Judgment”) – Laws about judges and witnesses; loans and claims; agents, partners and neighbors; acquisition, purchases and gifts; legacies and inheritance; lost and found property; depositing, renting, and borrowing; theft, robbery, damage and injury.

The *halakhic* rulings in the Shulkhan Arukh generally follow Sephardic law and customs whereas Ashkenazi Jews will generally follow the halachic rulings of Moses Isserles whose glosses to the Shulkhan Arukh note where the Sephardic and Ashkenazic customs differ. These glosses are widely referred to as the *mappah* (literally: the “tablecloth”) to the Shulkhan Arukh’s “Set Table”. Almost all published editions of the Shulkhan Arukh include this gloss, and the term “Shulkhan Arukh” has come to denote *both* Karo’s work as well as Isserles’, with Karo usually referred to as “the *mechaber*” (“author”) and Isserles as “the Rema”. The *Shulkhan*

*Arukh* is largely based on an earlier work by Karo, titled *Beth Yosef* (Hebrew: “House of Joseph”). The latter is a vast and comprehensive commentary on Jacob ben Asher’s (1269–1343) *Arba’ah Turim* (“*Tur*”), citing and analyzing the Talmudic, Geonic, and major subsequent halachic authorities. This work analyzes the theories and conclusions of those authorities cited by the *Tur*, and also examines the opinions of authorities not mentioned by the latter.

Karo began the *Beth Yosef* in 1522 at Adrianople, finished it in 1542 at Tzfat in the Land of Israel; he published it in 1550-59. Thirty-two authorities, beginning with the Talmud and ending with the works of Rabbi Israel Isserlein (1390–1460 and known as the *Terumath ha-Deshen*), are summarized and critically discussed in *Beth Yosef*. No other rabbinical work compares with it in wealth of material. Karo evidences not only an astonishing range of reading, covering almost the entire rabbinic literature up to his time, but also remarkable powers of critical investigation. He evidences no inclination to simply accept the opinions of ancient authorities, notwithstanding his great respect for them. In the introduction to his monumental compilation, Karo clearly states the necessity of, and his reasons for undertaking such a work. The expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian peninsula and the invention of printing had endangered the stability of religious observances on their legal and ritual sides.

By the 15th century, the Jews in Spain and the Jews of Portugal followed two main traditions: the older tradition of Maimonides, whose school of thought is heir to the Talmudic academies of Babylonia via the scholars of North Africa; and the Ashkenazi school of the Tosafists whose tradition is based on analytical thinking (related to pilpul), a methodology that was developed in the yeshivot of France and Germany that taught the importance of the minhagim or “customs” of the country. Jews then living in the different kingdoms of Spain had their standard authorities to which they appealed. The most prominent of these were Maimonides (Rambam), whose opinions were accepted in Andalusia, Valencia, Israel and the Near East; Nahmanides and Solomon ben Adret, whose opinions were accepted in Catalonia; and Asher ben Jehiel and his family, of German origin, whose opinions were accepted in Castile. When the Spanish-Portuguese exiles who were followers of Rambam came to the various communities in the East and West, where usages entirely different from those to which they had been accustomed prevailed, the question naturally arose whether the newcomers, some of whom were men of greater learning than the members of the host communities in Europe, should be ruled by the latter, or vice versa. The proliferation of printed books, moreover, dramatically increased the availability of halakhic literature; so that many half-educated persons, finding themselves in possession of legal treatises, felt justified in following any ancient authority at will.

Karo undertook his *Beth Yosef* to remedy this problem, quoting and critically examining in his book the opinions of all the authorities then known. Although the *Shulkhan Arukh* is largely a codification of the rulings of the *Beth Yosef*, it includes various rulings that are not mentioned at all in the *Beth Yosef*, because after completing the *Beth Yosef* Karo read opinions in books he hadn’t seen before, which he then included in the *Shulkhan Arukh*. Karo initially intended to rely on his own judgment relating to differences of opinion between the various authorities, especially where he could support his own view based on the Talmud. But he abandoned this idea because, as he wrote: “Who has the courage to rear his head aloft among mountains, the heights of God?” and also because he may have thought, though he does not mention his conclusion, that he could gain no following if he set up his authority against that of the ancient

scholars. Hence Karo adopted the *Halakhot* of Rabbi Isaac Alfasi (the *Rif*), Maimonides, and Asher ben Jehiel (the *Rosh*) as his standards, accepting as authoritative the opinion of two of the three, except in cases where most of the ancient authorities were against them or in cases where there was already an accepted custom contrary to his ruling. The net result of these last exceptions is that in a number of cases Karo rules in favour of the Catalonian school of Nahmanides and ben Adret, thus indirectly reflecting Ashkenazi opinions, even against the consensus of Alfasi and Maimonides. Karo very often decides disputed cases without necessarily considering the age and importance of the authority in question, expressing simply his own views. He follows Maimonides' example, as seen in Mishneh Torah (the *Yad Hachazakah*), rather than that of Jacob ben Asher, who seldom decides between ancient authorities. Several reasons induced Karo to connect his work with the "*Tur*", instead of Maimonides' code. In the first place, the "*Tur*", although not considered as great an authority as Maimonides' code, was much more widely known; the latter being recognized only among the Spanish Jews, while the former enjoyed a high reputation among the Ashkenazim (Eastern European Jews) and Sephardim (Spanish and Northern African Jews), as well as the Italian Jews. Secondly, it was not Karo's intention to write a code similar in form to Maimonides' work; he intended to give not merely the results of his investigations, but also the investigations themselves. He wished not only to aid the officiating rabbi in the performance of his duties, but also to trace for the student the development of particular laws from the Talmud through later rabbinical literature. Unlike the *Tur*, Maimonides' code includes all fields of Jewish law, of both present-day relevance and those dealing with prior and future times (such as laws of sacrifices, Messiah, Kings, etc.). For Karo, whose interest lay in ruling on the practical issues, the *Tur* seemed a better choice.

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### The Midrash

In Rabbinic Judaism, the *Midrash* is the body of homiletic stories told by Jewish rabbinic sages to explain passages in the Tanakh. Midrash is a method of interpreting biblical stories that goes beyond simple distillation of religious, legal, or moral teachings. It fills in gaps left in the biblical narrative regarding events and personalities that are only hinted at. The purpose of midrash was to resolve problems in the interpretation of difficult passages of the text of the Hebrew Bible, using Rabbinic principles of hermeneutics and philology to align them with the religious and ethical values of religious teachers. According to the PaRDeS approaches to exegesis, interpretation of Biblical texts in Judaism is realized through *peshat* (literal or plain meaning, lit. "plain" or "simple"), *remez* (deep meaning, lit. "hints"), *derash* (comparative meaning, from Hebrew *darash*—"to inquire" or "to seek") and *sod* (hidden meaning or philosophy, lit. "secret" or "mystery"). The Midrash concentrates somewhat on *remez* but mostly on *derash* (Some thinkers divide PaRDeS into pshat, remez, *din* (law) and sod. In this understanding, midrash aggada deals with remez and midrash halakha deals with din). Many different exegetical methods are employed to derive deeper meaning from a text. This is not limited to the traditional thirteen textual tools attributed to the Tanna Rabbi Ishmael, which are used in the interpretation

of *halakha* (Jewish law). Presence of apparently superfluous words or letters, chronology of events, parallel narratives or other textual anomalies are often a springboard for interpretation of segments of Biblical text. In many cases, a dialogue is expanded manifold: handfuls of lines in the Biblical narrative may become long philosophical discussions. It is unclear whether the midrash assumes these dialogues took place in reality or if this refers only to subtext or religious implication.

Many midrashim start off with a seemingly unrelated sentence from the Biblical books of Psalms, Proverbs or the Prophets. This sentence later turns out to metaphorically reflect the content of the rabbinical interpretation offered. This strategy is used particularly in a sub-genre of midrash known as the *petikhta*. Some Midrash discussions are highly metaphorical, and many Jewish authors stress that they are not intended to be taken literally. Rather, other midrashic sources may sometimes serve as a key to particularly esoteric discussions. Later authors maintain that this was done to make this material less accessible to the casual reader and prevent its abuse by detractors. *Midrash halakha* are the works in which the sources in the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) of the traditionally received laws are identified. These Midrashim often predate the Mishnah. The Midrash linking a verse to a *halakha* will often function as a proof of a law's authenticity; a correct elucidation of the Torah carries with it the support of the *halakhah*, and often the reason for the rule's existence (although many rabbinical laws have no direct Biblical source). The term is applied also to the derivation of new laws, either by means of a correct interpretation of the obvious meaning of scriptural words themselves or by the application of certain hermeneutic rules.

Homiletic midrashim embraces the interpretation of the non-legal portions of the Hebrew Bible. These midrashim are sometimes referred to as *aggadah* or *haggadah*, a loosely defined term that may refer to all non-legal discourse in classical rabbinic literature. Aggadic explanations of the non-legal parts of Scripture are characterized by a much greater freedom of exposition than the halakhic Midrashim (midrashim on Jewish law.) Aggadic expositors availed themselves of various techniques, including sayings of prominent rabbis. These aggadic explanations could be philosophical or mystical disquisitions concerning angels, demons, paradise, hell, the messiah, Satan, feasts and fasts, parables, legends, satirical assaults on those who practice idolatry, etc. Some of these midrashim entail mystical teachings. The presentation is such that the Midrash is a simple lesson to the uninitiated, and a direct allusion, or analogy, to a Mystical teaching for those educated in this area.

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Source: "Midrash." wikipedia.org. Wikipedia, n.d. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midrash>]

## **Conversion**

The idea of conversion to a Torah life has been around since the time of Abraham. During the time of Abraham he was given the promise of the eternal covenant with God which would be passed down through his son Isaac.

*God further said to Abraham, “As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days. As for the homeborn slave and the one bought from an outsider who is not of your offspring, they must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact.” (Genesis 17:9-13)<sup>1</sup>*

We learn from Josephus that Abraham publically taught monotheism.

*...he determined to renew and to change the opinion all men happened then to have concerning God; for he was the first that ventured to publish this notion, That there was but one God, the Creator of the universe; and that, as to other [gods], if they contributed any thing [sic] to the happiness of men, that each of them afforded it only according to his appointment, and not by their own power. (Antiquities of the Jews, 1.7.1)<sup>2</sup>*

We also see that Abraham’s descendants took wives from amongst the relatives of Abraham as well as – we can assume – the nations surrounding them. In antiquity the wives would take on the religious beliefs of the husband. So, we can see that Abraham taught his son and grandson monotheism which was then passed on also to their wives who also became monotheists. There was no formal “conversion” at that time and the only requirement was that of male circumcision in order to enter into the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants.

The idea of conversion to a life of following Torah – which includes the covenant with Abraham – came about during the giving of the Torah. Becoming a Yehudi (one who worships the Eternal One) did not officially start until the revelation at Mount Sinai. We are told that a mixed multitude came out of Egypt with Abraham’s descendants. We can easily deduce that at least some of those mixed multitude converted to what would ultimately come to be known as Judaism. We can see this clearly with Caleb.

*...none except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they remained loyal to the Eternal One. (Numbers 32:12)<sup>1</sup>*

*...none except Caleb son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his descendants will I give the land on which he set foot, because he remained loyal to the Eternal One. (Deuteronomy 1:36)<sup>1</sup>*

The Kenizzites were a people from the land of Canaan as described in Genesis 15:19. It is obvious that Caleb’s father was a gentile yet Caleb is shown as being one who “remained loyal to the Eternal One.” He is adopted into the tribe of Judah and is given a tract of land in Canaan (Numbers 34:19; Joshua 14:13). It is quite obvious that Caleb was a convert to Torah. There is however no record of his conversion so we cannot determine how he converted, only that he did indeed convert.

We do get a glimpse of conversion however in the story of Ruth.

*But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Eternal One do to me if anything but death parts me from you." When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her; and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem. (Ruth 1:16-19)<sup>1</sup>*

We see clearly that Ruth made a plea to Naomi that she be permitted to return to Israel with Naomi. Naomi tried to dissuade her and tell her of the hardships that will await her yet Ruth insists on going with Naomi. The simple phrase the "your people shall be my people and your God my God" proved Ruth's determination and her acceptance of God – and ultimately Torah. From this we get a glimpse as to how one would convert to Judaism during Biblical times.

The basis of conversion is found in the Torah.

*If a stranger (ger) who dwells with you would offer the Passover to the Eternal One, all his males must be circumcised; then he shall be admitted to offer it; he shall then be as a citizen of the country. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you. (Exodus 12:48-49)<sup>1</sup>*

Since Ruth is a female there is no need for circumcision in her case. But, we can see that there is one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among the Israelites. Ruth attached herself to Naomi and as a result she went to dwell among the Israelites and was considered a righteous convert.

According to Japheth ben-Eli Ruth made an oath before Naomi to which she was bound.

*Her oath, may the Lord do unto me thus and thus, and even more, is a curse oath; she undoubtedly mentioned the things which were to happen to her if she violated her oath, but the narrator omitted them for the sake of brevity. (Karaites Anthology, p.96)<sup>3</sup>*

How seriously were oaths taken in the Torah?

*The vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, however, whatever she has imposed on herself, shall be binding upon her. (Numbers 30:10)<sup>1</sup>*

Ruth became bound by this oath she made to Naomi. If she breaks that oath she shall be cut off from her people – in this case, the Israelites whom she has adopted.

We can plainly see just from these examples that conversion was always an option in Judaism. So how is conversion done in the post-Temple era?

According to Nehemiah Gordon, for those wishing to convert to Karaite Judaism he or she must accept the three fundamental principles of Karaite Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

1. Believe in the Eternal One as the only God and renounce all others.



2. Believe in the Tanakh as the words of the Eternal One and the only religious authority – renounce all other writings, doctrines, and creeds as words of men.

3. Study and keep the Tanakh while striving to interpret the Tanakh according to its peshat (plain) meaning.

In addition, the person will also need to accept the principles expressed in the ancient Karaite Vow:

*By the covenant of Mount Sinai and the statutes of Mount Horev I will keep the holy appointed times of the Eternal One according to the New Moon and the finding of the Aviv in the Holy Land of Yisrael, when possible.*<sup>4</sup>

According to the Hakhamim of the Karaites we learn from Exodus 12:48-49 the following regarding conversion<sup>5</sup>:

1. The potential convert must live in a Karaite community (although this is not necessarily a requirement today).
2. All males must be circumcised.
3. All converts must purify themselves and their homes.
4. A period of learning in (or with) a Karaite community must take place.
5. Conversion candidates must refrain from celebrating Passover until their conversion is complete.
6. Upon finalizing the conversion the candidate must make a public declaration of his/her intent to convert and leave all other faith systems.

According to Rabbinic Judaism conversion includes three things:

1. Circumcision for the male
2. Ablution (immersion) for both male and female
3. Proper witnesses as to the conversion

We see these three requirements listed in the Talmud:

*R. Hiyya b. Abba stated in the name of R. Johanan: A man can never become a proselyte unless he has been circumcised and has also performed the prescribed ritual ablution. Is not this obvious? [In a dispute between] an individual and a majority the halachah is, surely, in agreement with the majority! — The expression 'Sages' is in fact meant for 'R. Jose'. For it was taught: If [a proselyte] came and stated, 'I have been circumcised but have not performed ritual*

*ablution' he is 'permitted to perform the ablution and [the proper performance of the previous circumcision] does not matter; so R. Judah. ... R. Hiyya b. Abba stated in the name of R. Johanan: The initiation of a proselyte requires the presence of three men; for law has been written in his case. (B. Talmud – Yevamoth 46b)<sup>6</sup>*

Rambam (Maimonides) also speak of these requirements and adds more specifics to them in his Mishneh Torah (M.T. Issurei Biah 14:1-6)<sup>7</sup>:

1. Make sure the person has no ulterior motives
2. Remind the person that the Jews are persecuted
3. Tell the person the fundamentals of the faith
4. Teach the person some of the easy mitzvot and some of the more difficult mitzvot
5. Teach the person the curses and blessings of following the mitzvot
6. The male must be circumcised
7. The male and female must immerse before a Beit Din

One difference between the Talmudic rules regarding conversion and the Tanakh rules is really the Beit Din. According to the Tanakh any Yehudi may be a witness but according to the Talmudic rules, only certain people can be on a Beit Din. The other difference is that of ablution. While today Karaite Judaism does have some Hakhamim who insist on immersion (which can be immersion in a living body of water or even a running shower) this is not a necessary part of the conversion process as it is in the Talmudic conversion process.

The process of conversion in both the Karaite and the Rabbinic worlds today takes at least a year. The much simpler process in the Tanakh has been replaced in both sects. If you are interested in converting please use the links in the sidebar to contact a Hakham (Karaite) or Rabbi (Rabbinic).

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<sup>1</sup>David Stein (ed.). JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>William Whiston (trans.). *The Works of Flavius Josephus*. sacred-texts.com, 1737.

[<http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/index.htm#aoj>]

<sup>3</sup>Leon Nemoy (ed.). *Karaite Anthology: Excerpts from the Early Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

<sup>4</sup>Nehemia Gordon. *Conversion FAQ*. karaite-korner.org, n.d. [[http://www.karaite-korner.org/conversion\\_faq.htm](http://www.karaite-korner.org/conversion_faq.htm)]

<sup>5</sup>al-Qirqisani Center. *An Introduction to Karaite Judaism: History, Theology, Practice, and Custom*. Troy, NY: al-Qirqisani Center for the Promotion of Karaite Studies, 2003.

<sup>6</sup>Halakhah.Com. *Yevamoth*. halakhah.com, n.d. [<http://halakhah.com/pdf/nashim/Yevamoth.pdf>]

<sup>7</sup>Eliyahu Touger. *Mishneh Torah: Issurei Biah*. chabad.org, n.d.

[\[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/960662/jewish/Issurei-Biah-Chapter-Fourteen.htm\]](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/960662/jewish/Issurei-Biah-Chapter-Fourteen.htm)

## Common Conversion Questions

\*Please be aware that I am putting these questions here since Jews outside Israel only have the ability to convert to Karaite Judaism through the [Karaite Jewish University](#) (KJU). The KJU is undergoing restructuring and as of November, 2014 is not offering conversion classes. Many converts are (or have) converted through Rabbinic streams of Judaism and are (usually) considered Jews by the Karaite world.

### **If I convert to non-Orthodox Judaism, will I be considered a Jew?**

Orthodox Judaism does not recognize any conversions done through any of the three non-Orthodox movements. Conservative Judaism will accept any Orthodox conversion and some Reform and Reconstructionist conversions (on a case-by-case basis). Reform Judaism accepts all four movements conversions as does Reconstructionist Judaism.

Karaite Judaism generally accepts Orthodox and Conservative conversions. The conversions completed under Reform or Reconstructionist Judaism may be acceptable conversions depending upon the requirements of the conversions. This is an issue best addressed by the [official Karaite community](#).

### **Can only one spouse convert if the other is not willing to convert?**

Orthodox and Conservative rabbis will not convert only one spouse because this would cause an inter-marriage which is against halakhah (Jewish law) and Torah. Some Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis will convert only one spouse but others will not perform such a conversion.

Karaite Judaism will, like Conservative and Orthodox Judaism, refrain from converting only one spouse. This is an issue best addressed by the [official Karaite community](#).

### **If I convert through “Messianic Judaism,” “Hebrew Roots,” or “Natzari Judaism” am I considered a Jew?**

No, you are not considered a Jew by anyone outside Messianic Judaism, Hebrew Roots, or Natzari Judaism. These three movements are not movements within Judaism but are instead movements of evangelical Christianity.

Karaite Judaism also will not accept a Messianic Judaism, Hebrew Roots, or Natzari Judaism conversion nor will it accept a Hebrew Roots, Natzari Judaism, or other type of conversion outside the four recognized movements of Judaism.

### **Must I move to a Jewish community after I convert?**

If you convert Orthodox you will be expected to move to a Jewish community either before or after your conversion. The ideal for non-Orthodox Judaism is to live in a Jewish community but it is not necessarily required (check with your rabbi).

Karaite Judaism in general recognizes that a convert should live within a Jewish community. For those outside of Israel there is only one option available – [B'nai Israel](#) in Daley City, California. If this is not an option it is recommended that you be connected to a Jewish community. This is an issue best addressed by the [official Karaite community](#).

### **If I convert, may I make aliyah (move to Israel)?**

Yes, converts to the four recognized movements of Judaism may make aliyah. However, it is important to remember that non-Orthodox converts will be considered Jews by the State but not by the Rabbinat.

According to Israeli officials converts under Karaite Judaism are permitted to make aliyah. The laws concerning aliyah can be confusing however so it is best to talk to someone within the Israeli Karaite community. This is an issue best addressed by the [official Karaite community](#).

### **Must I learn Hebrew?**

Yes, you will need to learn Hebrew. Most of the services in Orthodox and Conservative (and many Reform and Reconstructionist) synagogues are done in Hebrew. The only real way to learn Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) is through the Hebrew language. Without knowledge of Hebrew many writings are off-limits because they have not been translated.

Yes, according to Karaite Judaism you must know Hebrew. The basis of Karaite Judaism is to know Hebrew and learn from the Tanakh how you must conduct your life according to God's word.

### **Must I keep kosher?**

Yes, for Orthodox and Conservative converts, you will need to keep kosher. For converts within Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism, generally you will not be required to keep kosher but it is best to ask the rabbi.

Karaite Judaism does demand that one keep "Biblically Kosher" which is different from "Rabbinic/Talmudic Kosher." There are differences in how Karaites slaughter animals for meat and how Rabbinate slaughters animals for meat. Rabbinic Judaism also permits some Biblically forbidden fats. Karaite Judaism, unlike Rabbinic Judaism, permits one to mix meat and dairy. This is an issue best addressed by the [official Karaite community](#).

### **What happens at the bet din?**

The bet din is a rabbinic court that will determine if someone is ready to complete their conversion. Each bet din is different but in general you will be asked why you want to convert and various questions about your background and what you have learned. For Orthodox and Conservative conversion you will also be asked if you are willing to follow all 613 mitzvot, only marry within the faith, and raise any children as Jews.

### **Must I believe that the Written Torah is directly from God and written by Moses?**

For Orthodox conversion and some Conservative conversions, this would be a requirement. Don't worry if this is not your initial stance since it may change over time after you learn more about Judaism and the Torah.

This is the belief according to most Jews within Karaite Judaism. There are some varying beliefs within the community however. This is an issue best addressed by the [official Karaite community](#).

**Must I believe that the Mishnah (Oral Torah) is directly from God and given to Moses?**

For Orthodox conversion and some Conservative conversions, this would be a requirement. Don't worry if this is not your initial stance since it may change over time after you learn more about Judaism and the Torah.

Karaite Judaism firmly disregards the idea of an "Oral Torah." Therefore, belief in an "Oral Torah" from God to Moses as defined by Conservative and Orthodox Judaism is actually counter to Karaite Judaism. However, as Hakham Meir Yosef Rekhavi [says](#): "we don't outright reject the Oral traditions of the Rabbis we consider them as commentary and judge them in view of the Written Tanakh."

**Can I still believe in Jesus and convert?**

No, you cannot still believe in a trinity, Jesus as God, or Jesus as the messiah and convert to Judaism. You may still believe in his existence and even that he was a teacher but that is the extent that would be permitted.

No, you cannot continue to believe in Jesus as God, a prophet, or the messiah and convert to Karaite Judaism. Believing in his existence or believing in him as a simple teacher can be acceptable but that is the extent of "belief in Jesus" that is permitted in Karaite Judaism.

Conversion Issues

When choosing a rabbi please remember the following

- Orthodox Judaism only accepts Orthodox conversions as valid
- Conservative Judaism accepts Orthodox and Conservative conversions as valid
- Reform Judaism accepts Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform conversions as valid
- Reconstructionist Judaism accepts Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform conversions as valid

There are some general guidelines for you to follow in discussing becoming Jewish

- The most important part of discussing conversion is not to be afraid or reluctant to discuss the subject.
- Remember that conversion is a long process, and not a single action.
- Because a welcoming attitude is the most important contribution you can make, remember not to use any emotional pressure.

Here are some suggestions for telling people about your conversion to Judaism

- Think through your feelings and practice talking them out.

- Most experts think telling parents in person and to both parents at the same time is best.
- Telling your parents as soon as possible is best.
- There is no special time to tell but such an announcement shouldn't be made during days of obvious religious significance or personal significance.
- It is better to speak to parents alone.
- In telling your parents about your conversion, discuss what you find attractive about Judaism, how it met a particular need, how it helped a relationship, how you feel closer to – not further from – your parents, in part because of Judaism's emphasis on family.
- Be prepared for a range of reactions from support to shock to total disapproval.
- Follow up a visit with a letter or phone call.

### Jewish Movements

Note: The differences discussed here are based upon shared generalities of that movement. There are of course differing opinions within each movement.

[Find an Orthodox Synagogue near you](#)

[Find a Chabad Center near you](#)

Orthodox Judaism (also known as Traditional Judaism) is the oldest sect of Judaism – and in fact, was the only sect until Reform Judaism came into being in 19th century Germany.

Orthodox Judaism is a formulation of Judaism that adheres to a relatively strict interpretation and application of the laws and ethics first canonized in the Talmudic texts (“Oral Torah”) and as subsequently developed and applied by the later authorities known as the Gaonim, Rishonim, and Acharonim.

Orthodox Judaism is characterized by belief that the Torah and its laws are Divine, were transmitted by Hashem to Moses, are eternal, and are unalterable; belief that there is also an oral law in Judaism, which contains the authoritative interpretation of the written Torah's legal sections, and is also Divine by virtue of having been transmitted by Hashem to Moses along with the Written Law, as embodied in the Talmud, Midrash, and innumerable related texts, all intrinsically and inherently entwined with the written law of the Torah; belief that Hashem has made an exclusive, unbreakable covenant with the Children of Israel to be governed by the Torah; adherence to Halakha, or Jewish law, including acceptance of codes, mainly the Shulchan Aruch, as authoritative practical guidance in application of both the written and oral laws, as well as acceptance of halacha-following Rabbis as authoritative interpreters and judges of Jewish law; belief in Jewish eschatology. Orthodox beliefs may be most found in their adherence to the thirteen Jewish principles of faith as stated by the Rambam (Maimonides).<sup>1</sup>

The [2000 National Jewish Population Survey](#) (NJPS) performed by the Council of Jewish Federations found that 21% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Orthodox as compared to 7% in the [1990 NJPS](#).

[Find a Conservative Synagogue near you](#) (Canada/America)  
[Find a Masorti Synagogue near you](#) (Outside Canada/America)

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

The principles of Conservative Judaism include:

1. A deliberately non-fundamentalist teaching of Jewish principles of faith;
2. A positive attitude toward modern culture; and
3. An acceptance of both traditional rabbinic modes of study and modern scholarship and critical text study when considering Jewish religious texts.

Conservative Judaism has its roots in the school of thought known as Positive-Historical Judaism, developed in 1850s Germany as a reaction to the more liberal religious positions taken by Reform Judaism. The term conservative was meant to signify that Jews should attempt to conserve Jewish tradition, rather than reform or abandon it.<sup>2</sup>

The term Conservative Judaism doesn't refer to a narrowly defined movement or school of thought. Rather, it refers to a broad religious movement with an overlapping range of beliefs and practices that are more liberal than what is affirmed in Orthodoxy, and more traditional than what is affirmed in Reform. This definition covers a wide range of groups and individual prayer communities outside of the formal Conservative movement.<sup>2</sup>

The Conservative movement, more narrowly defined, refers to a specific religious group with a well-defined organizational structure, specifically the LCCJ, Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism, and any people affiliated with any of these organizations.<sup>2</sup>

Conservative Jewish groups in the broader sense include Traditional-Egalitarian synagogues, and many non-movement affiliated synagogues, kehillot and chavurot, and any people affiliated with any of these organizations.<sup>2</sup>

The [2000 National Jewish Population Survey](#) (NJPS) found that 33% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Conservative as compared to 38% in the [1990 NJPS](#).

[Find a Reform Synagogue near you](#) (Canada/America)

[Find a Progressive Synagogue near you](#) (Outside Canada/America)

Leopold Zunz suggested that Jews study their history and learn of the great achievements of the past. While Zunz was implementing his ideas, a movement began to make religious services better understood, by incorporating music and the local language. Rabbi Abraham Geiger suggested that observance might also be changed to appeal to modern people. Between 1810 and 1820, congregations in Seesen, Hamburg and Berlin instituted fundamental changes in traditional Jewish practices and beliefs, such as mixed seating, singleday observance of festivals and the use of a cantor/choir. Many leaders of the Reform movement took a very "rejectionist" view of Jewish practice and discarded traditions and rituals.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional Reform Judaism does not believe that the Torah was written by Hashem but was written by separate sources and redacted together. Many non-observant, nominal, and/or agnostic Jews identify themselves as Reform simply because Reform is the most liberal movement.

The classical approach of Reform Judaism towards halakha was based on the views of Rabbi Samuel Holdheim (1806-1860), leader of Reform Judaism in Germany, and other reformers. Holdheim believed that Reform Judaism should be based solely upon monotheism and morality. Almost everything connected with Jewish ritual law and custom was of the ancient past, and thus no longer appropriate for Jews to follow in the modern era. Since the 1940s, the American Reform movement has continued to change, sometimes evolving in what appears to be a traditional direction. Many Reform congregations use more Hebrew in their religious services and are incorporating aspects of laws and customs, in a selective fashion, into their lives. This is a departure from the classical Reform position in favor of more traditional Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

The [2000 National Jewish Population Survey](#) (NJPS) found that 39% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Reform as compared to 42% in the [1990 NJPS](#).

#### [Find a Reconstructionist Synagogue near you](#)

Reconstructionist Judaism is a modern American-based Jewish movement based on the ideas of Mordecai Kaplan. The movement views Judaism as a progressively evolving civilization. It originated as the radical left branch of Conservative Judaism before it splintered. The movement developed from the late 1920s to 1940s, and it established a rabbinical college in 1968.<sup>5</sup>

There is substantial theological diversity within the movement. Halakha is not considered binding, but is treated as a valuable cultural remnant that should be upheld unless there is reason for the contrary. The movement emphasizes positive views towards modernism, and has an approach to Jewish custom which aims toward communal decision making through a process of education and distillation of values from traditional Jewish sources.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike classical Reform Judaism, Reconstructionism holds that a person's default position should be to incorporate Jewish laws and tradition into their lives, unless they have a specific reason to do otherwise. The most important distinction between Reconstructionist Judaism and traditional Judaism is that Reconstructionism feels that all of halakha should be categorized as "folkways", and not as law.<sup>5</sup>

Reconstructionism promotes many traditional Jewish practices, while holding that contemporary Western secular morality has precedence over Jewish law. Thus, mitzvot (commandments) have been replaced with "folkways", non-binding customs that can be democratically accepted or rejected by the congregations. Folkways that are promoted include keeping Hebrew in the prayer service, studying Torah, daily prayer, wearing kipot (yarmulkas), tallitot and tefillin during prayer, and observance of the Jewish holidays.<sup>5</sup>

According to the [2000 National Jewish Population Survey](#) (NJPS), only 3% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Reconstructionist as compared to 1% in the [1990 NJPS](#).



[Congregation B'nai Israel](#) (USA)  
[Universal Karaite Judaism](#) (Israel)

Karaite Judaism is an ancient form of Judaism based upon the teachings of Anan ben David. The movement views Judaism as a being totally reliant upon the Tanakh and its peshat (plain) meaning. The movement emphasizes the idea of studying the Tanakh and interpreting the text according to the individual's own interpretation. Karaites also believe in using external writings (even portions of the Talmud) to understand the Tanakh but these external writings are only used as commentaries.<sup>6</sup>

Halakhah is formed within Karaite Judaism but it is based entirely upon the peshat meaning of the Tanakh in contrast to the halakhah of Rabbinical Judaism. It is only the Tanakh that was divinely given and accordingly, Karaites reject any Oral Torah and subsequent halakhah and traditions. However, Karaite Judaism does not outright reject Rabbinical oral traditions but they are strictly commentaries and must be judged according to the peshat of the Tanach.<sup>6</sup>

There are approximately 30,000 Karaite Jews worldwide – most of them living in Israel.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wikipedia contributors. "Orthodox Judaism." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 25 Nov. 2014. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodox\\_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodox_Judaism)]

<sup>2</sup>Wikipedia contributors. "Conservative Judaism." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 25 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Nov. 2014. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative\\_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Judaism)]

<sup>3</sup>"The Origins of Reform Judaism." *jewishvirtuallibrary.org* Jewish Virtual Library, n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2014. [[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/The\\_Origins\\_of\\_Reform\\_Judaism.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/The_Origins_of_Reform_Judaism.html)]

<sup>4</sup>Wikipedia contributors. "Reform Judaism." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 26 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Nov. 2014. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform\\_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_Judaism)]

<sup>5</sup>Wikipedia contributors. "Reconstructionist Judaism." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 8 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Nov. 2014. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reconstructionist\\_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reconstructionist_Judaism)]

<sup>6</sup>Yochanan Zaquantov. Karaite Judaism: Teachings of Yochanan Zaquantov. Karaite Judaism, n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2014. [<http://www.karaitejudaism.org/>]

<sup>7</sup>Nehemia Gordon. "Karaite Fact Sheet." *Karaite Korner*, n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2014 [[http://www.karaite-korner.org/fact\\_sheet.shtml](http://www.karaite-korner.org/fact_sheet.shtml)]

## **True Nature of God**

God has many names such as El, El Shaddai, Adonai, Elohim, Almighty, Lord, King of the Universe. No matter what name we use, God is One and Indivisible. God has no human form and the use of terms such as "the hand of God" is a metaphor since the human mind cannot comprehend God on such a profound metaphysical level.

The following are some basic Jewish beliefs about God in comparison to those beliefs held by normative Christianity.

### **God Exists and is eternal**

The Torah begins by stating “In the beginning, God created...” It does not tell who God is or how He came into being. The fact of God’s existence is accepted almost without question. In general, Judaism views the existence of God as a necessary prerequisite for the existence of the universe. The existence of the universe is sufficient proof for the existence of God.

God has no beginning and no end. He will always be there to fulfill His promises. When Moshe asked for God’s name, He replied, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh,” the Hebrew 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 interpreted as a reference to God’s eternal nature.

On this topic Judaism agrees in part with Christianity. However, Christianity also teaches that not only is God eternally existent but Jesus and the Holy Spirit are also eternally existent. This comes from the idea of the trinity which Christianity claims is Biblically-based.

Assuming that Jesus existed, he was a created being. He was not eternally existent. This is attested to by the Christian text itself.

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (Colossians 1:15)<sup>1</sup>*

This is a traditional rendering of this verse but the Greek actually says “the firstborn **of** all creation” (πρωτότοκος πάσης). This indicates that Jesus was in fact a created being – not eternally existent. Christianity will then point to the first chapter of John as proof of Jesus’ eternal existence.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5)<sup>1</sup>*

The argument is that the “Word” was in fact Jesus and through Jesus everything was created. This argument is based upon a false rendering of the actual Greek text. If one looks at verse two in the original Greek one would notice that it says “**This** was in the beginning with God.” “This” is a reference to the word of God. Bereishit makes it quite clear that God created through His words – through His speech. Reading this verse from John correctly supports the idea of how creation came into being – that is through the word or speech of God. Verse three, correctly rendered from the Greek, reads “All things were made **by** Him...” This is also supported by Bereishit where we see God Himself – and only God – is the creator. The final two verses also refer to God as being the creator and the life-giver.

These verses should be translated as:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **This** was

in the beginning with God. All things were made **by** Him [God], and without Him [God] nothing was made that was made. In Him [God] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5)

The “Holy Spirit” or Spirit of God is a created being just as the angels are created beings. The Spirit of God is the manifestation of a messenger of God that is a means for God to interact with the world. The Spirit of God brings dreams and visions to the prophets. The Spirit of God leads the Yisraelites through the Wilderness and also settles over the Mishkan and Beit HaMikdash as a sign of God’s presence and willingness to remain with Yisrael. The Spirit of God is not eternally existent and is not part of a trinity or triune god head.

### **God has a name**

Throughout the Tanakh we see various names and titles for God – such as El, El Shaddai, King, Lord, Merciful, Ruler, Master of the Universe, Creator, etc. We are first introduced to God’s true name in Bereishit.

*Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. When the Eternal One God made earth and heaven... (Bereishit 2:4)<sup>2</sup>*

Even though we see this name throughout Bereishit we do not get formally introduced to God’s name until the time of Moshe ha-Navi during Moshe’s encounter with God through a burning bush.

*And God said to Moshe, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.” He continued, “Thus shall you say to the Yisraelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’” And God said further to Moshe, “Thus shall you speak to the Yisraelites: the Eternal One, the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Yaakov, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity.”(Shemot 3:14-15)<sup>2</sup>*

Thus we learn God’s real, eternal name.

We are told that anyone who calls upon God’s name will be delivered from troubles and find refuge in God’s name.

*But everyone who invoked the name the Eternal One shall escape; for there shall be a remnant on Har Tzyion and in Yerushalayim, as the Eternal One promised. Anyone who invokes the Eternal One will be among the survivors. (Yoel 3:5)<sup>2</sup>*

Christianity also agrees that God has a name but Christianity misinterprets and misunderstands this passage from Shemot. Christianity claims that the name of God given to Moshe ha-Navi is “I Am.” This is supported in the Book of John.

*Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” (John 8:58)<sup>1</sup>*

However, the name of God is not “I Am” as postulated by Christianity.

*And God said to Moshe, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.” He continued, “Thus shall you say to the Yisraelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’” And God said further to Moshe, “Thus shall you speak to the Yisraelites: the Eternal One, the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Yaakov, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity.”(Shemot 3:14-15)<sup>2</sup>*

Notice that God is telling Moshe about His nature – that is, God is stating that He is eternal and Moshe is to let the people know that God’s nature includes His eternal nature. In the following verse we see that God gives His name as YHVH [the Eternal One] and this name shall be God’s name forever and His appellation for eternity.

## **God is One**

One of the primary expressions of Jewish faith, recited twice daily in prayer, is the Shema, which begins Hear, O Israel: the Eternal One is our God, the Eternal One is one. This single statement contains three central Jewish beliefs:

There is only one God.

God is a unity. He cannot be divided into parts or described by attributes.

God is the only Being to whom we should offer praise. God is the Creator of everything.

Everything in the universe was created by God and only by God. As Yeshayahu said:

*So that they may know, from east to west, that there is none but Me. I am the Eternal One and there is none else, I form light and create darkness, I make peace and create woe – I the Eternal One do all these things. (Yeshayahu 45:6-7)<sup>2</sup>*

Normative Christianity teaches that God is really a three-in-one godhead – that there are in fact three beings that are one God. Judaism absolutely rejects this idea. There are many “proof texts” used by Christianity to try and prove the idea of the trinity. However, all of these “proof texts” are easily debunked.

One of the main “proofs” used by Christianity is the Hebrew word Elohim. The two-letter root of the word Elohim is El which means “mighty one.” This two-letter root is also used as a “name” for God.

*But Avram said to the king of Sodom, “I swear to the Eternal One, God (El) Most High, Creator of heaven and earth...” (Bereishit 14:22)<sup>2</sup>*

Here we see that God is called El – singular – explicitly proving that God is One and only One. There is no indication of a trinity in this particular name of God. God is also known by the name Eloha.

*So Yeshurun grew fat and kicked – You grew fat and gross and coarse – He forsook the God (Elohim) who made him and spurned the Rock of his support. (Devarim 32:15)<sup>2</sup>*

Again we see God called by a singular name – Eloha – explicitly proving that God is One and not a member of a trinity. God is also known by the name Elohim.

*When God (Elohim) began to create heaven and earth... (Bereishit 1:1)<sup>2</sup>*

We see God referred to by a seemingly plural name – however, the name Elohim can also be used in the singular. We have already seen in Bereishit that Avraham referred to God as El – singular – as being the creator. In Bereishit we again see God being portrayed as the creator with a name that is also singular within the context of the text. We see the use of the word Elohim used in the singular sense in other places in the Tanakh as well.

*The king answered her, “Don’t be afraid. What do you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I see a divine being (Elohim) coming up from the earth.” (Shmu’el Aleph 28:13)<sup>2</sup>*

In this example we see that the woman saw a “divine being” coming up from the earth. The word translated as “divine being” is Elohim yet the woman only saw one (singular) being – that of the spirit of Shmu’el.

*The Eternal One replied to Moshe, “See I place you in the role of God (Elohim) to Par’o, with your brother Aharon as your prophet.” (Shemot 7:1)<sup>2</sup>*

In this example we notice that Moshe is acting in the role of God when Moshe confronts Par’o. Moshe is not acting as a trinity – as three Moshes-in-one. Moshe is a singular individual and acts as a singular individual just as God is One, singular, and indivisible.

### **God is Incorporeal**

Although many places in the Tanakh speak of various parts of God’s body or speaks of God in anthropomorphic terms, Judaism firmly maintains that God has no body. Any reference to God’s body is simply a means of making God’s actions more comprehensible to beings living in a material world. The human mind cannot comprehend the totality of God so man uses euphemisms to describe God (i.e. the hand of God). We are forbidden to represent God 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 God in a physical form. Even though God does not have a physical body but He does control this world.

*Then Moshe held out his arm over the sea and the Eternal One drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split... (Shemot 14:21)<sup>2</sup>*

Christianity, unlike Judaism, teaches that God does in fact have a physical body – although Christianity couches this in terms of the trinity. Christianity teaches that God has a physical body through the beings of the “Holy Spirit” and Jesus.

*Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. (Matthew 3:16)<sup>1</sup>*

*And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. (Mark 1:16)<sup>1</sup>*

I have already shown that the “Holy Spirit” and Jesus are both created beings and are therefore not part of a triune godhead.

### **God is Neither Male nor Female**

God has no body, no genitalia, therefore the very idea that God is male or female is completely incorrect. We refer to God using masculine terms simply for convenience’s sake, because Hebrew has no neutral gender; God is no more male than a book. There are times when we refer to God using feminine terms. The Shechinah (a feminine word) is the manifestation of God’s presence that fills the universe and is conceived of in feminine terms.

Christianity, unlike Judaism, teaches that God does in fact have a physical body which means that God can be male or female. Christianity teaches that God has a physical body through the “Holy Spirit” and Jesus. The “Holy Spirit” is often times seen as an ethereal being without a gender but Christianity also refers to the “Holy Spirit” in male terms.

*However when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 16:13)<sup>1</sup>*

Since Jesus was born as a male, referred to as the Son of God, and considered God-incarnate Christianity teaches that God can be a member of the male gender.

*And Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)<sup>1</sup>*

I have already shown that the “Holy Spirit” and Jesus are both created beings and are therefore not part of a triune godhead and therefore the gender of these beings cannot be attributed to God.

### **God is Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient**

God is in all places at all times. He fills the universe and exceeds its scope. Closely tied in with this idea is the fact that God is universal. He is not just the God of the Jews; He is the God of all nations. God can do anything. The belief in God’s omnipotence has been tested during the many persecutions of Jews, but Jews have always maintained that God has a reason for allowing these things, even if we cannot see the reason. God knows all things, past, present and future.

Like Judaism, Christianity teaches that God is also omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. However, the fact that Christianity teaches that God is in fact a trinity means that Christianity does not in fact believe that God has these aspects.

The “Holy Spirit” is not omnipresent since he is earth-bound.

*Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. (Matthew 3:16)<sup>1</sup>*

The “Holy Spirit” is not omnipotent for he had no power of his own.

*And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35)<sup>1</sup>*

The “Holy Spirit” is not omniscient for his knowledge is limited.

*However when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 16:13)<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus is considered God-incarnate – a member of the trinity.

Jesus is not omnipresent for he was earth-bound for approximately 32 years.

*And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. (Mark 1:16)<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus is not omnipotent for he was not all-powerful and could not save himself from his death.

*Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” ... And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, “Father, ‘into Your hands I commend My spirit.’” (Luke 23:29,46)<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus is also not omniscient for his knowledge was limited.

*But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Mark 13:32)<sup>1</sup>*

I have already shown that the “Holy Spirit” and Jesus are both created beings and are therefore not part of a trinity and therefore these aspects of God cannot be attributed to God.

## **God created the world out of nothingness**

*When God began to create heaven and earth – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water... (Bereishit 1:1-2)<sup>2</sup>*

When God began His creation of the world – of the entirety of creation – He began with nothingness. God was the only thing in existence at the time of creation. God is above and beyond time and space and there was nothing in the beginning beside God Himself.

Christianity agrees that God made the world and all of creation out of nothing but Christianity also teaches that God created everything through Jesus.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5)<sup>1</sup>*

The argument is that the “Word” was in fact Jesus and through Jesus everything was created. This argument is based upon a false rendering of the actual Greek text. If one looks at verse two in the original Greek one would notice that it says something very different than what Christianity touts.

These verses should be translated as:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **This** was in the beginning with God. All things were made **by** Him [God], and without Him [God] nothing was made that was made. In Him [God] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5)

“This” is a reference to the word of God. Bereishit makes it quite clear that God created through His words – through His speech. Reading this verse from John correctly supports the idea of how creation came into being – that is through the word or speech of God. Verse three, correctly rendered from the Greek, reads “All things were made **by** Him...” This is also supported by Bereishit where we see God Himself – and only God – is the creator. The final two verses also refer to God as being the creator and the life-giver.

## **God is Both Just and Merciful**

Judaism has always maintained that God’s justice is tempered by mercy, the two qualities perfectly balanced.

*For My part, I am about to bring the Flood – waters upon the earth – to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall perish. But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives. (Bereishit 6:17-18)<sup>2</sup>*



In general Christianity agrees with Judaism that God is both just and merciful. However, since Christianity believes that Jesus is part of the trinity – and therefore God-incarnate then Christianity disagrees with its own teachings about a just and merciful God. Jesus was in fact not always just or merciful.

*Then another of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:21-22)<sup>1</sup>*

The fact that Jesus was a created being means that the eternal nature of God’s justice and mercy cannot be attributed to Jesus.

### **God is Holy and Perfect**

We are told time and again in the Tanakh that we are to be holy because God is holy.

*For I the Eternal One am He who brought you up from the land of Mitzrayim to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy. (Vayikra 11:45)<sup>2</sup>*

We are also told in the Tanakh that God is not like man – for God is perfect and what He wills will occur.

*God is not man to be capricious, or mortal to change His mind. Would He speak and not act, promise and not fulfill? My message was to bless: When He blesses, I cannot reverse it. (Bamidbar 23:19-20)<sup>2</sup>*

The fact that God is holy and perfect is a point of agreement between Judaism and Christianity – at least on the surface. If Christianity insists that Jesus is God-incarnate and a member of a triune godhead then Christianity disagrees with itself for Jesus was not always holy or perfect.

*Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, “Look why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” ... And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:23-24,27-28)<sup>1</sup>*

God tells Yisrael that they are to keep Shabbat for they are holy just as God is holy. Since Jesus permitted his followers to break Shabbat law then he is guilty of not being holy.

### **God is our Father and our King**

Judaism maintains that we are all God’s children. It is said that one of God’s greatest gifts to humanity is the knowledge that we are His children and created in God’s image. God is our father for he formed the world and all of creation and he also gave us the instructions by which we are to live our lives.

*Surely You are our Father: Though Avraham regard us not, and Yisrael recognize us not, You, the Eternal One, are our Father; from of old, Your name is "Our Redeemer." (Yeshayahu 63:16)<sup>2</sup>*

As the creator and the giver of life's instructions, God is also considered the king of all creation.

*I am your Holy One, the Eternal One, Your King, the Creator of Yisrael. (Yeshayahu 43:15)<sup>2</sup>*

Christianity says that it agrees with Judaism that God is humanity's father and king but they negate this concept by arguing that Jesus – part of the trinity – is also God. Jesus is not the creator or master of creation and is therefore not creation's father and king.

*Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (John 18:36)<sup>1</sup>*

If Jesus is not the creator or master of creation (for his kingdom is "not of this world") yet Christianity says that he is part of the triune godhead then Christianity only pays lip-service to the idea of God as father and king.

### **God requires ethical behavior of humans**

God demands ethical behavior of humans. We are to be stewards of the world and care for the earth and all the creatures contained therein. We are to act ethically toward our family members and our neighbors. We must act in ways that are caring for the orphan, the poor, and the stranger. We are commanded by God to act in responsible ways so as not to cause damage or harm to others or other people's property.

Judaism and Christianity both agree that God requires ethical behavior of humans however, Jesus – part of Christianity's triune godhead – does not always teach that one is to behave ethically.

*And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. ... Then she came and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord help me!" But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." (Matthew 15:22-23,25-26)<sup>1</sup>*

God commanded that Yisrael have mercy upon the stranger and not oppress the stranger yet we see Jesus – part of the triune godhead – being oppressive and unmerciful toward a stranger. If Jesus is part of the trinity then Christianity claims that God in fact does not require ethical behavior of humans since Jesus himself is not behaving ethically.

### **God is a personal God**

God is a personal God. He is not far away from those who seek Him and do His will. Even if he turns His face from Yisrael at times He has always vowed to return to Yisrael if only Yisrael

would return to Him. God has a personal name – that of the Eternal One – which is used throughout the Tanakh. God has what we humans would call emotions – love, pity, mercy, and anger. God is always near if only man would reach out to Him.

Unlike Judaism Christianity does not believe that God is a personal God.

*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)<sup>1</sup>*

Christianity teaches that mankind cannot commune with God except through the intercession of Jesus. This automatically means that God is not a personal God for Christianity teaches that mankind must go through an intercessor. This teaching is the exact opposite of what Judaism and Tanakh teaches about the relationship between mankind and God.

### **God hears and answers prayers**

We see throughout the Tanakh that mankind offers us prayers to God. We also see that God hears and answers the prayers of man. God may not answer the way that man hopes He will answer neither does God always answer immediately. However, we are assured throughout the Tanakh that God does indeed hear and answer the prayers of man.

*In those days Hizqiyahu fell dangerously ill. The prophet Yeshayahu son of Amoz came and said to him, “Thus said the Eternal One: Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die; you will not get well.” Thereupon Hizqiyahu turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Eternal One. ... Before Yeshayahu had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Eternal One came to him: “Go back and say to Hizqiyahu, the ruler of My people: Thus said the Eternal One, the God of your father David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. I am going to heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the House of the Eternal One.” (Melakhim Beit 20:1-2, 4-5)<sup>2</sup>*

Christianity also teaches that God hears and answers prayers but, unlike Judaism, Christianity teaches that one must go through an intercessor – Jesus – for prayers to be heard or answered.

*And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14)<sup>1</sup>*

In other words, Christianity teaches that it really is Jesus who hears one's prayers and then takes those prayers to God. If God wills to answer the prayer then Jesus will actually answer the prayer. Christianity teaches the opposite of the true nature of God for there is no need for an intercessor since mankind can go directly to God.

### **God has made a special relationship with Yisrael**

God has a special relationship with Yisrael. This relationship began with Avraham when he agreed to follow the commands of God, circumcise himself and all the males of his household, and declare that God is the only God. This relationship was passed down to Yitzchak and Yaakov and the tribes of Yisrael. Moshe led the tribes of Yisrael out of Mitzrayim to Har Sinai.

At Har Sinai the tribes officially became a nation with God as their king. God has sworn to protect Yisrael and give her Eretz Yisrael for as long as the people shall obey God's commands.

God made a special covenant with Yisrael – beginning with the promises made to Avraham and continuing through the time of Moshe and the prophets. Christianity however teaches that the church has replaced this relationship between God and Yisrael – this theological concept is known as supersessionism.

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, not is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)<sup>1</sup>*

In other words, even though Christianity teaches that at one point God had a special relationship with Yisrael that relationship was replaced due to Yisrael rejecting the messiah and “Son of God.” This goes completely counter to Tanakh where we are told repeatedly that God will never permanently or completely turn His back on the relationship with Yisrael.

We must understand that God is One and not a trinity or triune godhead. God has a special relationship with Yisrael which is eternal and will never be broken. God is the Master, King, and Father of everyone. It is our responsibility to come closer to Him and follow His laws.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Nelson Inc. *Holy Bible: New King James Version*. New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984.

<sup>2</sup>Stein, David (ed.). *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2000.

## **The Tanakh**

The Tanakh is made up of the Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuv'im. The Tanakh is the basis of understanding the laws, philosophy, and history of Judaism. As such, studying the Tanakh is the first step to understanding the whole of Judaism.

The Tanakh is divided into three sections: Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuv'im.

The Torah (the Five Books of Moses) is made up of five books that were given to Moses directly from God shortly after the Exodus from Egypt around 1230BCE. The Written Torah was handed down through the successive generations from the time of Moses.

### **Books of the Torah**

- Bereishit (Genesis) – written by Moshe
- Shemot (Exodus) – written by Moshe
- Vayikra (Leviticus) – written by Moshe
- Bamidbar (Numbers) – written by Moshe

- Devarim (Deuteronomy) – written by Moshe

The Nevi'im (Prophets) covers the time period from the death of Moses through the Babylonian exile (ca.1200BCE-587BCE) and contains 19 books. The Nevi'im covers the time from the Hebrews entering the Land of Israel, conquest of Jericho, conquest of the Land of Israel and its division among the tribes, judicial system, Era of Saul and David, Solomon's wisdom and the construction of the First Temple, kings of the Land of Israel, prophecy, messianic prophecies, and the Babylonian exile.

### Books of the Nevi'im

- Nevi'im Rishonim (Early Prophets)
  - Yehoshua (Joshua) – written by Yehoshua
  - Shoftim (Judges) – written by the Shoftim
  - Shmu'el (Samuel) – written by Shmu'el
  - Melakhim (Kings) – written by the Melakhim
- Nevi'im Aharonim (Latter Prophets)
  - Yeshayahu (Isaiah) – written by Yeshayahu
  - Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) – written by Yirmiyahu
  - Yechezkiel (Ezekiel) – written by Yechezkiel
- Trei Asar (Twelve Prophets)
  - Hoshea (Hosea) – written by Hoshea
  - Yoel (Joel) – written by Yoel
  - 'Amos (Amos) – written by 'Amos
  - Ovadiah (Obadiah) – written by Ovadiah
  - Yonah (Jonah) – “written by Yonah
  - Michah (Micah) – written by Michah
  - Nachum (Nahum) – written by Nachum
  - Chavakuk (Habakkuk) – written by Chavakuk
  - Tzefaniah (Zephaniah) – written by Tzefaniah
  - Chaggai (Haggai) – written by Chaggai
  - Zechariah (Zechariah) – written by Zechariah
  - Malachi (Malachi) – written by Malachi

The Ketuv'im (Writings) covers the period after the return from the Babylonian exile (6th century BCE) and contains 12 books. The Ketuvim is made up of various writings that do not have an overall theme. This section of the Tanakh includes poems and songs, the stories of Job, Ruth, and Esther, the writings and prophecies of Daniel, and the history of the kings of the Land of Israel.

### Books of the Ketuv'im

- Tehillim (Psalms) – written by David, Solomon, Moshe, Jeduthun, Korach, Asaph, Sons of Korach, Heman, Ethan/Abraham, Melchizedek
- Mishlei (Proverbs) – written by Solomon
- Iyov (Job) –written by Moses

- Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) – written by Solomon
- Rut (Ruth) – written by Samuel
- Eichah (Lamentations) – written by Jeremiah
- Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) – written by Solomon
- Ester (Esther) – written by Mordechai
- Dani’el (Daniel) – written by Daniel
- Ezra (Ezra) – written by Ezra
- Nechemiah (Nehemiah) –written by Ezra
- Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles) – written by Ezra

The Tanakh is also called Miqra (meaning “reading” or “that which is read”). The three-part division reflected in the acronym “Tanakh” is well attested to in documents from the Second Temple period. During that period, however, “Tanakh” was not used as a word or term. Instead, the proper title was Miqra, because the biblical texts were read publicly. Miqra continues to be used in Hebrew to this day alongside Tanakh to refer to the Hebrew scripture. In modern spoken Hebrew both are used interchangeably.

The Tanakh was not originally broken into chapter and verses. The idea of chapter and verses – as well as the breaking apart of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles – is a leftover from Christians in the 13th century. The chapter divisions and verse numbers have no significance in the Jewish tradition. Nevertheless, they are noted in all modern editions of the Tanakh so that verses may be located and cited. The division of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into parts I and II is also indicated on each page of those books in order to prevent confusion about whether a chapter number is from part I or II, since the chapter numbering for these books follows their partition in the Christian textual tradition. The adoption of the Christian chapter divisions by Jews began in the late Middle Ages in Spain, partially in the context of forced clerical debates (the debates required a common system for citing biblical texts) which took place against a background of harsh persecution and of the Spanish Inquisition.

From the standpoint of the Jewish textual tradition, the chapter divisions are not only a foreign feature with no basis in the mesorah (tradition) but are also open to severe criticism of three kinds:

- The chapter divisions often reflect Christian exegesis of the Bible.
- Even when they do not imply Christian exegesis, the chapters often divide the biblical text at numerous points that may be deemed inappropriate for literary or other reasons.
- They ignore the accepted closed and open space divisions which are based on the mesorah.

Nevertheless, because they proved useful for citations, they are often included in most Hebrew editions of the biblical books.

A parsha formally means a section of a biblical book in the Masoretic text of the Tanakh. In common usage today the word often refers to the Weekly Torah portion.

The weekly Torah portion is a section of the Torah read during Shabbat services. In Judaism, the Torah is read publicly over the course of a year, with one major portion read each week in the Shabbat morning service. Each weekly Torah portion adopts its name from one of the first

unique word or words in the Hebrew text. Dating back to the time of the Babylonian captivity (6th Century BCE), public Torah reading mostly followed an annual cycle beginning and ending on Simchat Torah, with the Torah divided into 54 weekly portions to correspond to the Hebrew calendar. There was also an ancient triennial cycle of readings which was established by the Egyptian and Palestinian Jewish communities.

In the masoretic text, parasha sections are designated by various types of spacing between them, as found in:

- Torah scrolls
- Scrolls of the books of Nevi'im or Ketuvim (especially megillot)
- Masoretic codices from the Middle Ages
- Printed editions of the Masoretic text.

The division of the text into parashiot for the biblical books is independent of chapter and verse numbers, which are not part of the Masoretic tradition. Parashiot are not numbered, but some have special titles. The division of parashiot found in the modern-day Torah scrolls of all Jewish communities is based upon the systematic list provided by Maimonides in his section of the *Mishneh Torah* known as the *Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzah and Torah Scrolls*. Maimonides based his division of the parashiot for the Torah on the Aleppo Codex.

The division of parashiot for the books of Nevi'im and Ketuvim was never completely standardized in printed Hebrew bibles and handwritten scrolls, though important attempts were made to document it and create fixed rules.

A parsha break creates a textual pause, roughly analogous to a modern paragraph break. Such a pause usually has one of the following purposes:

1. In most cases, a new parasha begins where a new topic or a new thought is clearly indicated in the biblical text.
2. In many places, however, the parasha divisions are used even in places where it is clear that no new topic begins, in order to highlight a special verse by creating a textual pause before it or after it (or both).
3. A special example of #2 is for lists: The individual elements in many biblical lists are separated by parasha spacing of one type or another.

To decide exactly where a new topic or thought begins within a biblical text involves a degree of subjectivity on the part of the reader. This subjective element may help explain differences amongst the various Masoretic codices in some details of the section divisions (though it should be emphasized that their degree of conformity is high).

The idea of spacing between portions is mentioned in Midrashic literature, and the idea of "open" and "closed" portions is mentioned in the Talmud. Early Masoretic lists detailing the Babylonian tradition include systematic and detailed discussion of exactly where portions begin and which type they are. Tiberian Masoretic codices have similar but not identical parasha divisions throughout the Bible. Unlike the Babylonian Mesorah, however, Tiberian Masoretic

notes never mention the parasha divisions or attempt to systematize them. This is related to the fact that the Babylonian lists are independent compositions, while the Tiberian notes are in the margins of the biblical text itself, which shows the parashiot in a highly visible way. In the centuries following the Tiberian Mesorah, there were ever-increasing efforts to document and standardize the details of the parasha divisions, especially for the Torah, and even for Nevi'im and Ketuvim as time went on.

In most modern Torah scrolls and Jewish editions of the Bible, there are two types of parashiot: An “open portion” and a “closed portion.” An “open portion” is roughly similar to a modern paragraph: The text of the previous portion ends before the end of the column (leaving a space at the end of the line), and the new “open” portion starts at the beginning of the next line (but with no indentation). A “closed portion”, on the other hand, leaves a space in the *middle* of the line of text, where the previous portion ends before the space, and the next portion starts after it, towards the end of the line of text. An “open portion” is often abbreviated with the Hebrew letter “פ” (*peh*), and a “closed portion” with the Hebrew letter “ס” (*samekh*). Rough English equivalents are “P” and “S” respectively.

In Masoretic codices and in medieval scrolls, these two spacing techniques allowed for a larger range of options:

- An “open portion” always started at the beginning of a new line. This could happen the way already described, but also by leaving a blank line between the two portions, thus allowing the previous portion to sometimes entirely fill its last line of text.
- A “closed portion” never began at the beginning of a line. This could happen as in modern scrolls (a space in the middle of a line), but also by the previous portion ending before the end of the line, and the new portion beginning on the next line after an indentation.

Most printed Hebrew bibles today represent the parashiot using the more limited techniques found in typical modern Torah scrolls: A space in the middle of a line for a closed portion, and beginning at the start of the next line for an open portion (not a blank line).

Medieval Ashkenazic sources beginning with the Mahzor Vitry also refer to a third spacing technique called a *parasha sedurah*. This involved starting a new parasha at the same point in the line where the previous parasha ended on the line above.

Due to the influence of Maimonides, the parasha divisions in the Torah have become highly standardized, and there is close to exact agreement amongst Torah scrolls, printed Jewish bibles, and similar online texts.

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David Stein (ed.). JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999.



# Jewish Calendar

## Biblical Calendar

*This month shall be to you the head of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year. (Shemot 12:2)*

The first mitzvah (command) given by the Eternal One to Moshe and Aharon was to start counting the beginning of the year from the month in which Chag HaMatzot (Passover) is held.

*Today you are going out, in the month of aviv. (Shemot 13:4)*

We are commanded to begin the Biblical year in the spring and not in the fall (“Rosh HaShannah”) as the Talmud teaches.

Aviv refers to the stage of the barley crops in Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel). Aviv refers to the mature stage of the barley crops – a time when the barley becomes more brittle and turns a yellowish color.

Before the Babylonian Exile only four months are given names in the Tanakh.

Aviv – First month (Shemot 12:2, 13:4)  
Ziv – Second month (Melakhim Aleph 6:1)  
Ethanim – Seventh month (Melakhim Aleph 8:2)  
Bul – Eighth month (Melakhim Aleph 6:38)

After the return of the Yisraelites to Eretz Yisrael, new names – based upon the Babylonian language – were attached to the months.

Nisan – First month (Ester 3:7)  
Iyar – Second month  
Sivan – Third month  
Tammuz – Fourth month  
Av – Fifth month  
Elul – Sixth month (Nechemiah 6:15)  
Tishri – Seventh month  
Cheshvan – Eighth month  
Kislev – Ninth month (Zechariah 7:1)  
Tevet – Tenth month (Ester 2:16)  
Shevat – Eleventh month (Zechariah 1:7)  
Adar – Twelfth and Thirteenth month (Ester 3:7)

The Biblical calendar follows a seven-day weekly cycle. The names of the days of the week are simply referred to as the number of the day within the seven-day cycle.

Yom Rishon – First Day (“Sunday”)  
 Yom Sheni – Second Day (“Monday”)  
 Yom Shlishi – Third Day (“Tuesday”)  
 Yom Revi’I – Fourth Day (“Wednesday”)  
 Yom Chamishi – Fifth Day (“Thursday”)  
 Yom Shishi – Sixth Day (“Friday”)  
 Yom Shabbat – Seventh Day (“Saturday”)

### Jewish Calendar (Calculated)

The Jewish calendar, like the Chinese calendar, is a lunisolar calendar. This means that the Jewish calendar is a combination of a solar calendar and a lunar calendar. The Jewish calendar attempts to have the year coincide with the solar calendar and its months coincide with the lunar calendar. Since the twelve months of the Jewish calendar are about eleven days short of a 365-day year, a leap month is added to the calendar on a 19-year cycle developed by Hillel II in the fourth century. The current cycle began in 5758 (1997-1998). An extra month is added on the third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth years during this cycle. (This is why one will see Adar I and Adar II on some calendars).

The year is calculated as the number of years since creation (5775 = September 2014 – September 2015). The year was calculated by adding up the ages of people in the Tanakh back to the time of creation. However, this does not necessarily mean that the universe has existed for only 57750 years as we understand years. An ordinary Jewish calendar year has 353-355 days and a leap year has 383-385 days. Each month begins on Rosh Chodesh (new moon).

Before the Babylonian Exile, the months of the Jewish calendar were remembered by numbers and not names. The first month of the Jewish calendar is Nisan – however, it was referred to as “the first month”. According to Maimonides (Talmud Yerushalmi-Rosh Hashannah 1:2) the names for the months came with the Jews when they returned to Israel from their Babylonian exile.

### Months of the Year

Hebrew Month	Secular Months	No. of Days	Associated Holidays
Nisan	March-April	30	Chodesh Nisan, Pesach, Yom HaShoah
Iyar	April-May	29	Yom HaZikaron, Yom Ha’Atzmaut, Lag B’Omer, Yom Yerushalayim
Sivan	May-June	30	Chodesh Sivan, Shavuot
Tammuz	June-July	29	Chodesh Tammuz, Shiva Asar B’Tammuz
Av	July-August	30	Chodesh Av, Tish B’Av
Elul	August-September	29	
Tishri	September-October	30	Rosh Hashanah, Tzom Gedaliah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hoshanah Rabbah, Shemini

			Atzeret, Simchat Torah
Cheshvan	October-November	29 – 30	
Kislev	November-December	29 – 30	Chanukah
Tevet	December-January	29	Asarah B'Tevet
Shevat	January-February	30	Tu B'Shevat
Adar I*	February-March	30	Fast of Esther, Purim
Adar**	February-March	29	Fast of Esther, Purim

\* Leap year only

\*\* Adar II in Leap Years

Days of the Week

Hebrew	Secular
Yom Rishon	Sunday
Yom Sheni	Monday
Yom Shlishi	Tuesday
Yom Revii	Wednesday
Yom Chamishi	Thursday
Yom Shishi	Friday
Yom Shabbat	Saturday (Shabbat)

## Shabbat

The Sabbath lasts for 25 hours. Shabbat begins 18 minutes before sundown on Friday night with the lighting of the Shabbat candles and Kiddush and ends an hour after sunset on Saturday night with the Havdalah celebration. There are 39 kinds of work that are forbidden on Shabbat. There are synagogue services held on Friday night and Saturday morning (some synagogues have other afternoon and evening services on Saturdays as well).

There are special Shabbatot throughout the year. Some have additional Torah readings (Maftir) that are read after the regular Torah readings - replacing the regular Maftir readings.

The four parshiot:

These are special Torah readings added to the regular weekly parsha in preparation for Pesach.

Shabbat Shekalim is the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Adar (Adar II in a leap year). The maftir reading (Exodus 30:11-16 recalls the census taken in the wilderness.

Haftarah (Ashkenazi): II Kings 12:1-17

Haftarah (Sephardi): II Kings 11:17-12:17

Shabbat Zachor is the Shabbat before Purim. The maftir reading (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) recalls the treachery of Amalekites and the command to blot out their memory.

Haftarah (Ashkenazi): I Samuel 15:2-34

Haftarah (Sephardi): I Samuel 15:1-34

Shabbat Parah is the Shabbat after Purim. The maftir reading (Numbers 19:1-22) recalls the preparation for Pesach.

Haftarah (Ashkenazi): Ezekiel 36:16-38

Haftarah (Sephardi): Ezekiel 36:16-36

Shabbat HaChodesh is the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Nisan or Rosh Chodesh Nisan if it falls on Shabbat. The maftir reading (Exodus 12:1-20) recalls the establishment of the Jewish calendar.

Haftarah (Ashkenazi): Ezekiel 45:16-46:18

Haftarah (Sephardi): Ezekiel 45:18-46:15

Other special Shabbatot:

Shabbat Bereishit is the first Shabbat after Simchat Torah when Parsha Bereishit (Genesis 1:1-6:8) is read.

Shabbat Chazon is the Shabbat before Tish B'Av. The haftarah reading (Isaiah 1:1-27) recalls Isaiah's vision of the destruction of the Temple.

Shabbat HaGadol is the Shabbat before Pesach. The haftarah reading (Malachi 3:4-24) recalls the promise of the return of Prophet Elijah and the ushering in of the end times.

Haftarah (Ashkenazi): Malachi 3:4-24

Haftarah (Sephardi): Malachi 3:4-24

Shabbat Mevarchim is the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh when a special blessing (Birkat HaChodesh) is said before the beginning of the mussaf prayer.

Haftarah (Ashkenazi): I Samuel 20:18-42

Haftarah (Sephardi): I Samuel 20:18-42

Shabbat Nachamu is the Shabbat after Tish B'Av. The reading is one of the first of seven readings between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashannah that are designed to comfort the Jews with the promise that the Temple will be rebuilt (Lamentations 1:2).

Shabbat Shirah is the Shabbat when Parsha Beshalach (Exodus 13:17-17:16) which includes the reading of the Song at the Sea.

Haftarah (Ashkenazi): Judges 4:4-5:31

Haftarah (Sephardi): Judges 5:1-31

Shabbat Shuva is the Shabbat between Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. The readings deal with repentance and G-d's mercy.

Haftarah (Ashkenazi): Hosea 14:2-10, Joel 2:11-27, Micah 7:18-20

Haftarah (Sephardi): Hosea 14:2-10, Micah 7:18-20

The Sabbath candle-lighting is obligatory upon all adults (including teens who are bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah). It is traditional for the woman of the house to light the candles. By her lighting the candles and saying the brocha (blessing) all adults in the house are considered to have lit the candles. If the woman of the house is not present the man is to perform the mitzvot. If neither is at home the mitzvot falls upon a bar/bat mitzvah child (preferably a female). All single adults who live on their own (such as in a dorm) are required to light the Shabbat candles. After the candles have been lit the parents bless their children and the husband blesses his wife. The family performs the mitzvot of Kiddush with the proper brocha and has their festive Shabbat meal.

## Holidays

### Asarah B'Tevet

Asarah B'Tevet is a Rabbinic fast day that occurs on 10 Tevet (in December or January) and is celebrated as a day-fast. It is a day of grief and mourning over the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar that led to the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews to Babylon. It has become a day of mourning for those lost in the Shoah (Holocaust). Asarah B'Tevet is also a day of remembrance for two other tragedies that occurred during this time. The first tragedy is the Torah being translated to Greek on the eighth of Tevet in the second or third century BCE. The second tragedy was the death of Ezra that occurred on the ninth of Tevet. It is a time of fasting, prayer, and self-reflection.

Fasting begins at dawn and ends at sundown. This is one of the public fast days (the others being Tzom Gedaliah, Shiva Asarah B'Tammuz, and the Fast of Esther). If Asarah B'Tevet falls on Shabbat, the fast is delayed. Eating and drinking are not permitted. Those in ill health, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children are exempt from the fast. In Israel, Kaddish (prayer for the dead) is said for those whose date or place of death is not known (and this, is a day of mourning for those lost in the Shoah).

II Kings 25:1-4: (1) And it was in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylonia came, he and his entire army, against Jerusalem and encamped against it, and they built works of siege around it. (2) And the city came under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. (3) On the ninth of the month, the famine became severe in the city, and the people of the land had no food. (4) The city was broken into, and all the men of war [fled] at night by way of the gate between the two walls that was near the king's garden, and the Chaldees were surrounding the city, and he went by way of the Arabah.

On the tenth day of the tenth month (Tevet) in the ninth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (588 BCE), the Babylonian king began his siege of Jerusalem. On the ninth of Tammuz - two-and-one-half years later - Nebuchadnezzar broke through the walls of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 52:6-7: (6) In the fourth month, on the ninth of the month, the famine became severe in the city, and the people of the land had no food. (7) The city was broken into, and all the men of

war fled and emerged from the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls that was near the king's garden, and the Chaldeans were surrounding the city, and they went by way of the Arabah.

The siege ended on the ninth of Av, three weeks later and the Jews were taken captives to Babylon.

The first reference to Asarah B'Tevet as a fast appears in Zechariah 8:19:

So said the Lord of Hosts: The fast of the fourth [month], the fast of the fifth [month], the fast of the seventh [month], and the fast of the tenth [month] shall be for the house of Judah for joy and happiness and for happy holidays-but love truth and peace.

Other references can be found in:

Ezekiel 24:1-2: (1) Then the word of the Lord came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying: (2) "Son of man, write for yourself the name of the day, this very day; the king of Babylon has besieged Jerusalem on this very day...."

Jeremiah 52:4-6: (4) And it was in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, that Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon came, he and his entire army, against Jerusalem and encamped against it, and they built works of siege around it. (5) And the city came under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. (6) In the fourth month, on the ninth of the month, the famine became severe in the city, and the people of the land had no food.

### Chanukah

Chanukah, the festival of lights, is a Rabbinic celebration that begins on 25 Kislev (in November or December). Chanukah celebrates the miracle of the oil in the Temple in Jerusalem after the Maccabees' defeat of the Greek army as well as the Jew's freedom in the current time. Chanukah is not mentioned in the Hebrew Scripture but 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 chanukiah that holds nine candles: one for each night, plus a shamus (servant) at a different height. It is traditional to eat fried foods, such as latkes (potato pancakes), on Chanukah because of the significance of oil to the holiday. 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 Chanukah gifts to anyone other than their own young children. The only traditional gift of the holiday is gelt, small amounts of money (often chocolate coins). 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 gelt.

When the Second Temple in Jerusalem was looted and the services stopped, Judaism was effectively outlawed. In 167 BCE Antiochus ordered an altar to Zeus erected in the Temple. He banned circumcision and ordered pigs to be sacrificed at the altar of the Temple.

Antiochus's actions proved to be a major miscalculation as they were massively disobeyed and provoked a large-scale revolt. Mattathias, a Jewish priest, and his five sons Jochanan, Simeon,

Eleazar, Jonathan, and Judah led a rebellion against Antiochus. Judah became known as Yehuda HaMakabi ("Judah the Hammer"). By 166 BCE Mattathias had died, and Judah took his place as leader. By 165 BCE the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid monarchy was successful. The Temple was liberated and rededicated.

The festival of Hanukkah was instituted by Judah Maccabee and his brothers to celebrate this event. After recovering Jerusalem and the Temple, Judah ordered the Temple to be cleansed, a new altar to be built in place of the polluted one and new holy vessels to be made. According to the Talmud, olive oil was needed for the menorah in the Temple, which was required to burn throughout the night every night. But 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 by the Jewish sages to commemorate this miracle.

Chanukah candles are placed in the chanukiah from right to left. On each night, the left-most (newest) candle is lit first. On Shabbos, the Chanukah candles are lit before the Shabbos candles. The chanukiah should be placed outside the door opposite the mezuzah or in a window in order to proclaim the miracle of Chanukah which demonstrated the omnipotence of G-d. The candles are lit before the blessings are read.

### Hoshanah Rabbah

Hoshanah Rabbah occurs on the seventh day of Sukkot (21 Tishri-in September or October). Seven circuits are made around the bimah while carrying The Four Species. For this reason, the seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshanah Rabbah (the great Hoshanah). It is celebrated by the beating of the aravah, prayer, and marching around the bimah.

Hoshana Rabbah is known as the day of the final sealing of judgment which began on Rosh Hashana. The Zohar says that while the judgment for the new year is closed on Yom Kippur, it is not "sealed" until the end of Sukkot (i.e., Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of Sukkot), during which time one can still repent.

Among Sephardi Jews, prayers known as "Selichot" (forgiveness) are recited before the regular morning service (these are the same prayers recited before Rosh Hashanah). In the different prayers of this day, Syrian Jews pray in the same maqam (melody) as on the high holidays. In Amsterdam and in a few places in England, America, and elsewhere, the shofar is also sounded in connection with the processions. The latter practice reflects the idea that Hoshana Rabbah is the end of the High Holy Day season, when the world is judged for the coming year.

### Lag B'Omer

Lag B'Omer is the thirty-third day in the counting of the Omer and occurs on 18 Iyar (in April or May). The mourning practices of the Omer period are lifted on that date. It is celebrated by family gatherings, picnics, and the celebration of Yahrtzeit at the graves of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar b'Rabbi Shimon.

The 33rd day of the counting of the Omer is Lag BaOmer. The origins of the Omer count are found in the Torah itself:

Leviticus 23:15-16: (15) And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day from the day you bring the omer as a wave offering seven weeks; they shall be complete. (16) You shall count until the day after the seventh week, [namely,] the fiftieth day, [on which] you shall bring a new meal offering to the Lord.

The 49 days of the Omer correspond both to the time between physical emancipation from Egypt and the spiritual liberation of the giving of the Torah at the foot of Mount Sinai on Shavuot, as well as the time between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest in ancient Israel.

The Talmud (Yevamot 62b) states that during the time of Rabbi Akiva 24,000 of his students died from a divine-sent plague during the counting of the Omer. The Talmud then goes on to say that this was because they did not show proper respect to one another, befitting their level; they begrudged each other the spiritual levels attained by their comrades. Jews celebrate Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the count, as the traditional day that this plague ended.

After the death of Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students, he taught just five students, among them Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The latter went on to become the greatest teacher of Torah in his generation. The day of Lag BaOmer is also celebrated as the Yahrzeit, the anniversary of the death, of bar Yohai, who is purported to have authored the Zohar, a landmark text of Jewish mysticism.

## Pesach

Pesach (Passover) is a Biblical festival that begins on 15 Nisan (in March or April). Pesach is an eight-day holiday that celebrates the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt and our freedom from oppression in modern days. The holiday is also referred to as Chag he-Aviv (the Spring Festival), Chag ha-Matzoth (the Time of Our Freedom). It is the first of the three pilgrimage festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Shavuot and Sukkot). Agriculturally, it represents the beginning of the harvest season in Israel.

The primary observances of Pesach are related to the Exodus from Egypt after generations of slavery. This story is told in Exodus, Chapters 1-15. Many of the Pesach observances are instituted in Chapters 12-15. Probably the most significant observance related to Pesach involves the removal of leaven/chametz (the five major grains-wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt) from our homes. Ashkenazi Jews also avoid kitniyot (rice, corn, peanuts, and legumes-beans) as if they were chametz. We may not own, benefit from, or eat chametz during Pesach (this includes food for the animals). All chametz, including utensils and other kitchen accessories used to cook chametz, must either be disposed of or sold to a non-Jew (they can be repurchased after the holiday). This commemorates the fact that the Jews leaving Egypt were in a hurry, and did not have time to let their bread rise.

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. 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 which 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.

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. It is traditional to study a tractate of Talmud during the night which then allows these men to avoid the fast (one must celebrate when finishing a tractate of Talmud). On the first night of Pesach (first two nights for Jews outside Israel), a seder is held. 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. Work is permitted on the intermediate days (Chol Ha-Mo'ed).

*Order of the Seder:*

**Kaddesh** - Recite the Kiddush elevating this night above the mundane

**Urechatz** - Wash the hands before eating karpas

**Karpas** - Eat a vegetable dipped in salt water so we may taste the tears of anguish and despair of our ancestors when they were slaves in Egypt

**Yachatz** - Break the middle matzah and put away the larger half for the afikoman while the smaller piece personifies the spiritual and material destitution of our ancestors in Egypt

**Maggid** - Narrate the story of the Exodus beginning with a child asking "Why is this night different from all other nights?" to put us back in touch with childhood innocence

**Rachtzah** - Wash the hands prior to the meal to internalize humbleness

**Motzi** - Recite hamotzi (over matzah) implying that the raw energy from food can give us energy to better serve G-d

**Matzah** - Recite the blessing over the matzah to exemplify selfless ego and remind us that our ancestors accepted G-d-given freedom with selfless ego rather than arrogance

**Maror** - Recite the blessing for the eating of the maror in order to taste the bitterness of the exile and clarify the significance of the exile

**Korech** - Eat the sandwich of matzah and maror to emphasize that now that we are free of slavery we are to reach out to others and share our freeing experience

**Shulchan Orech** - Prepare the table for the festive meal that begins with dipping a hardboiled egg in saltwater to symbolize our ongoing mourning for the destruction of the Temple and the meal represents our ongoing, common, goal of redemption

**Tzafun** - Eat the afikoman that had been hidden during the seder as a symbol that we are connected to G-d and we must go through the trials of life (represented by the other parts of the Seder) and listen to our yearning to become connected with G-d

**Barech** - Recite the Birchat HaMazon and fill the Cup of Elijah after which we stand at the open door with a candle reciting the passage inviting Elijah to appear and usher in the redemption

**Hallel** - Recite the Hallel (Psalms of Praise) as a way of revealing G-d's kindness and compassion

**Nirtzah** - Conclusion of the Seder with the wish "Next year in Jerusalem" invoking the idea that daily we leave Egypt when we reach for higher levels of holiness

## Purim

Purim (which means lots) is a Rabbinic celebration that occurs on 14 Adar (in February or March). Purim is one-day holiday that celebrates the victory of Esther and Mordechai over the evil Haman who plotted to kill the Jews as described in the Book of Esther.

The primary mitzvot of Purim is to hear the reading of the Megillah (Book of Esther). It is customary to boo, hiss, stamp feet and rattle groggers (noisemakers) 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. 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 (sending out portions). Among Ashkenazic Jews, a common treat at this time of year is hamentaschen (Haman's pockets). These triangular fruit-filled cookies are supposed to represent Haman's three-cornered hat. It is customary to hold carnival-like celebrations on Purim and to perform plays and parodies.

The Book of Esther begins with a six month drinking feast given by king Ahasuerus, for the army of Persia and Media, for the civil servants and princes in the 127 provinces of his kingdom, at the conclusion of which a seven day drinking feast for the inhabitants of Shushan, rich and poor with a separate drinking feast for the women organised by the Queen Vashti in the pavilion of the Royal courtyard.

At this feast Ahasuerus orders his wife Vashti to display her beauty before the people and nobles wearing her royal crown. She refuses, and Ahasuerus decides to remove her from her post. He then orders all young women to be presented to him, so he can choose a new queen to replace Vashti. One of these is Esther, who was orphaned at a young age and was being reared by her cousin Mordecai. She finds favor in the king's eyes, and is made his new wife. Esther does not reveal that she is Jewish.

Shortly afterwards, Mordecai discovers a plot by courtiers Bigthan and Teresh to kill Ahasuerus. They are apprehended and hanged, and Mordecai's service to the king is recorded.

Ahasuerus appoints Haman as his prime minister. Mordecai, who sits at the palace gates, falls into Haman's disfavor as he refuses to bow down to him. Having found out that Mordechai is Jewish, Haman plans to kill not just Mordecai but the entire Jewish minority in the empire. He obtains Ahasuerus' permission to execute this plan, and he casts lots to choose the date on which to do this - the thirteenth of the month of Adar.

When Mordecai finds out about the plans he orders widespread penitence and fasting. Esther discovers what has transpired; she requests that all Jews of Shushan fast and pray for three days together with her, and on the third day she seeks an audience with Ahasuerus, during which she invites him to a feast in the company of Haman. During the feast, she asks them to attend a further feast the next evening. Meanwhile, Haman is again offended by Mordecai and builds a gallows for him.

That night, Ahasuerus suffers from insomnia, and when the court's records are read to him to help him sleep, he learns of the services rendered by Mordecai in the previous plot against his life. Ahasuerus is told that Mordecai had not received any recognition for saving the king's life. Haman then appears, and King Ahasuerus asks Haman what should be done for the man that the King wishes to honor. Thinking that the King is referring to Haman himself, Haman says that the honoree should be dressed in the king's royal robes and led around on the king's royal horse. To Haman's horror, the king instructs Haman to do so to Mordecai.

Later that evening, Ahasuerus and Haman attend Esther's second banquet, at which she reveals that she is Jewish and that Haman is planning to exterminate her people, which includes her. Ahasuerus instead orders Haman hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. The previous decree against the Jews could not be annulled, so the King allows Mordecai and Esther to write another decree as they wish. They write one that allows the Jews to defend themselves during attacks. As a result, on 13 Adar, five hundred attackers and Haman's ten sons are killed in Shushan. Throughout the empire an additional 75,000 are slain. On the 14th, another 300 are killed in Shushan.

Mordecai assumes the position of second in rank to Ahasuerus, and institutes an annual commemoration of the delivery of the Jewish people from annihilation.

### Rosh Chodesh

Rosh Chodesh, the celebration of the New Moon, occurs on the first (and sometimes the second) day of each month. In ancient times, two witnesses would appear before the Sanhedrin stating they saw the first sliver of the moon after the dark of the moon. If the Sanhedrin determined that it was in fact true, messengers were sent out throughout the land to announce the new month.

The day after the moon appeared became a day of celebration and special sacrifices. Since the destruction of the Holy Temple, the sacrifices stopped and are now replaced by prayers. It remains a custom in some communities for women to refrain from work on Rosh Chodesh, as a reward for their refusal to participate in the incident of the Golden Calf.

### Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year – falls on the first and second days of the Hebrew month Tishrei. The Torah calls Rosh Hashanah Yom Ha-Zikkaron (the day of remembrance) or Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar). Rosh Hashanah is the day that Hashem created man. Rosh Hashanah 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. Work is forbidden on Rosh Hashanah and most of the day is spent in shul. The regular daily prayers are expanded and a special siddur – called the Machzor – is used during the High Holy Days. The religious services for the holiday focus on the concept of the sovereignty of Hashem.

*And the Eternal One spoke unto Moses, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial*

*proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation. You shall do no manner of servile work; and you shall bring an offering made by fire unto the Eternal One. (Leviticus 23:23-25)*

Rosh Hashanah is set aside as the day to begin calculating the years of the Shemitah (or Sabbatical) year and the Yovel (or Jubilee) year.

“On the first of Tishri is new year for years, for release and jubilee years, for plantation [of trees] and for [tithe of] vegetables.” (Rosh Hashanah 2a)<sup>[1]</sup>

The Mishnah references Rosh Hashanah as being one of four seasons of Divine judgment. “At four seasons [Divine] judgment is passed on the world...At New Year all creatures pass before Him like children of Maron [one by one], as it says, ‘He that fashions the heart of them all, that considers all their doings’ [Psalm 33:15].” (Rosh Hashanah 16a)<sup>[1]</sup>

Rosh Hashanah was declared a day of Divine judgment for two reasons. First, on this day the creation of the world was completed. It was the intention of Hashem that the world would be ruled by the trait of strict justice. Second, it was on this day that Adam was judged. After Adam repented, Hashem forgave him.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Tanakh in Bamidbar 29:1 refers to the holiday as Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar) and in Vayikra 23:24 as Tzikron Teruah (the memorial of the sounding of the shofar).

The shofar is a horn (typically a ram’s horn) that was used by the Children of Israel to announce the holidays, beginning of a new month, start of Shabbat, and in times of war. After the destruction of the Temple, the shofar became used mainly during the High Holy Days, and (in Israel) to announce the beginning of Shabbat.

According to Rambam, when one hears the shofar on Rosh Hashanah it seems to say: “Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator. Those who forget the truth in the vanities of time and throughout the entire year, devote their energies to vanity and emptiness which will not benefit or save: Look to your souls. Improve your ways and your deeds and let every one of you abandon his evil path and thoughts.” (Teshuva 3:4)<sup>[3]</sup>

Hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a positive mitzvah as it is stated in Bamidbar 29:1: “And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation: you shall do no manner of servile work; it is a day of blowing the horn unto you.” Even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah that the sounding of the shofar must occur on Rosh Hashanah it was determined to be a mitzvah by the Sages. The Torah states in Vayikra (25:9) that the yovel (jubilee) year must be proclaimed by the sounding of the shofar. The Sages go on to say that “just as the ‘sounding’ required by the Torah in the *yovel* requires a shofar, so, too, the ‘sounding’ on Rosh HaShanah requires a shofar.” (Shofar, Sukkah, and Lulav 1:1)<sup>[4]</sup>

According to the Shulkhan Arukh (586:1), the shofar that is to be used for the mitzvah concerning Rosh Hashanah must be a ram’s horn and must be bent or curved. A cow’s horn is invalid as are the horns of most other animals since they are solid bone. The horns of non-kosher

animals are also not to be used for the shofar. “The time for blowing the Shofer is during the day and not during the night. The Mitzvah is after sunrise. But if you blew the Shofer at daybreak, you fulfill the commandment. If you hear part of the blowing of the Shofer before daybreak and part after daybreak, you do not fulfill the commandment. . . . If Rosh Hashanah falls out on Shabbat, we do not blow the Shofer.” (Shulkhan Arukh 588:1,5)<sup>[5]</sup>

The Shulkhan Arukh (589:3,4,6,7) lists three categories of people who may blow the shofar and fulfill the mitzvah for sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>[5]</sup>

1. A hermaphrodite may sound the shofar for other hermaphrodites.
2. Women are exempt for sounding the shofar (since it is a time-bound mitzvah) however women are permitted to sound the shofar.
3. A person may sound the shofar for a friend as long as the person is not deriving any benefit from his friend.

Our Rabbis taught that all males have the obligation to sound the shofar. “Priests, Levites and lay Israelites, proselytes and emancipated slaves, tumtum [one of uncertain gender] and androgynus [hermaphrodite], and one who is half slave and half free [a slave of two masters where one master has released him]. A tumtum cannot perform [a religious duty] either for a fellow-tumtum or for anyone else. An androgynus can perform [a religious duty] for a fellow-androgynus but nor for anyone else. One who is half a slave and half free can perform [a religious duty] neither for one in the same condition nor for anyone else”.<sup>[1]</sup>

According to Rambam nine shofar blasts are to be sounded on Rosh Hashanah. This number is based upon the Torah’s mention of the word *teruah* – sounding the shofar – three times in association with the yovel year and Rosh Hashana. Every *teruah* is to be preceded by a single long blast (*tekiah*) and followed by a single long blast. According to the oral tradition “all the soundings of the shofar of the seventh month are a single entity.” (Shofar, Sukkah, and Lulav 3:1)<sup>[4]</sup>

For those in the Diaspora, Rosh Hashanah is celebrated for two days. In this case, the shofar is sounded on the second day just as it was sounded on the first day. (Shofar, Sukkah, and Lulav 3:1) Rambam teaches that every male is obligated to hear the sounding of the shofar – Priests, Levites, Israelites, Converts, freed slaves, half-slaves, the tumtum, and the androgynous. Women, slaves, and minors are free from this obligation. (Shofar, Sukkah, and Lulav 2:1) “The congregation is obligated to hear the shofar blasts together with the order of blessings” of the Amidah and the intermediate blessings. (Shofar, Sukkah, and Lulav 3:7-8)<sup>[4]</sup>

In the commonly accepted custom for communal services on Rosh Hashanah the blowing of the shofar takes place after the Torah is read and returned to its place. The congregation will be seated and one person will stand to recite the blessing:

“Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the universe who sanctified us with His commandments, commanding us to hear the sound of the shofar.”<sup>[6]</sup>

The Shehecheyanu is then recited by the same person:

“Praise are You, Lord our God, King of the universe who granted us life, who sustained us, and who enabled us to reach this day.” After which the 30 shofar blasts are sounded.<sup>[6]</sup>

Kaddish is then recited and the musaf service follows during which the final shofar blasts are sounded.<sup>[6]</sup>

A popular observance during this holiday is eating apples dipped in honey, a symbol of our wish for a sweet new year. 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 (generally this means casting bread into the water), symbolically casting off our sins. 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."

Candles are lit and blessings are said on the first night and the second night in order to help usher in the Holy Day. Kiddush (blessing over wine/grape juice) is said as well as the blessing over the challah (braided bread). Slices of the challah and apple slices are dipped in honey, representing sweetness and hope for the new year.

### *Blessings*

[light candles]

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us to kindle the Holy Day light.

[Shehehyanu]

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

[Kiddush]

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has chosen and distinguished us from among all others by adding holiness to our lives with His mitzvot. Lovingly have You given us the gift of this Day of Remembrance, a day of the shofar sound, a day of sacred assembly recalling the Exodus from Egypt. Thus You have chosen us, endowing us with holiness from among all peoples. Your faithful word endures forever. Blessed are You, Hashem, King of the universe who hallows the people Israel and the Day of Remembrance.

[ritual washing of hands]

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe Whose mitzvot add holiness to our lives and Who gave us the mitzvah of washing hands.

[blessing over challah]

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe Who brings forth bread from the earth.

[blessing over challah/apple dipped in honey]

May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, to renew this year for us with sweetness and happiness.

Selichot is the first service of Rosh Hashanah that takes place the Saturday before Rosh Hashanah. Prayers and requests for forgiveness, said throughout the Ten Days of Awe, are heard for the first time. This service usually takes place at or near midnight.

Services are held during both days of Rosh Hashanah. A special siddur (prayerbook), called the Machzor, is used during these services. Special prayers and pleas for forgiveness are recited in addition to the regular weekday and Shabbos prayers. The shofar (typically a ram's horn) is sounded during the services (except on Shabbos).

Tashlich, a special service, is typically held on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. This service is meant to represent a casting away of sins. The community gathers at a body of water (typically a stream or creek) containing fish where people empty their pockets of crumbs and recite blessings.

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<sup>[1]</sup>Epstein, I. [\*Soncino Babylonian Talmud: Rosh Hashanah\*](#). (London: Soncino Press, 1949).

<sup>[2]</sup>Kitov, Eliyahu. [\*Day of Judgment\*](#). Chabad. Web. 18 September 2011.

<sup>[3]</sup>Touger, Eliyahu (ed.). [\*Mishneh Torah: Teshuva\*](#).(New York: Moznaim Publishers, 1990).

<sup>[4]</sup>Touger, Eliyahu (ed.). [\*Mishneh Torah: Shofar, Sukkah, V'Lulav\*](#).(New York: Moznaim Publishers, 1998).

<sup>[5]</sup>Dinovitser, Jay. [\*Free English Translation of the Shulchan Aruch: Jewish Code of Law\*](#). ShulchanArach. Web. 18 September 2011.

<sup>[6]</sup>Harlow, Jules. *Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1978).

## Shavuot

Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks, is a Biblical festival that occurs on 6 and 7 Sivan—seven weeks after Pesach—(in May or June). Shavuot is the second of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Passover and Sukkot). The word Shavuot means "weeks." It marks the completion of the seven week counting period between Passover and Shavuot. Agriculturally, it commemorates the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the Temple, and is known as Chag 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 giving of the Torah was a far-reaching spiritual event—one that touched the essence of the Jewish soul for all times. Our Sages have compared it to a wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. Shavuot also means oath and on this day G-d swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him.<sup>[1]</sup>

On the 6th Sivan of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), seven weeks after the Exodus, G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai.<sup>2</sup> The entire people of Israel (600,000 heads of households and their families), as well as the souls of all future generations of Jews, heard G-d declare the first

two of the Ten Commandments and witnessed G-d's communication of the other eight through Moses.<sup>2</sup> Following the revelation, Moses ascended the mountain for 40 days, to receive the remainder of the Torah from G-d.<sup>[2]</sup>

At Sinai, G-d rescinded the "decree" and "divide" (*gezeirah*) that had been in force since the 2nd day of creation separating the spiritual and the physical into two hermetic worlds; from this point on, "the higher realms could descend into the lower realms, and the lower could ascend to the higher."<sup>[2]</sup> Thus was born the "mitzvah" -- a physical deed that, by virtue of the fact that it is commanded by G-d, brings G-dliness into the physical world.<sup>[2]</sup>

It is customary to stay up the entire first night of Shavuot and study Torah (Tikkun Leil Shavuot), then pray as early as possible in the morning. Torah study is regarded as the most important of all mitzvot, because it opens the door for observance of the other mitzvot. Says the Talmud (Shabbat 127a): "The study of Torah is equal to the sum total of all other mitzvot. When we study Torah, we are not studying an abstract and arcane text of the ancient world. We are studying the way in which God wants us to live on this earth... (We) are in fact engaged in discovering the essence of Judaism, which is to say, the essence of ourselves."<sup>[3]</sup>

It is customary to eat a dairy meal at least once during Shavuot. It is a reminder of the promise regarding the land of Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey. A second reason is that the day that Moshe Rabbeinu was pulled from the water by the daughter of Pharaoh, was the Sixth of Sivan, the day on which we celebrate Shavuot. And Baby Moshe refused to nurse from a non-Jewish woman, so that Miriam, Moshe's sister, was able to get Moshe's real mother, Yocheved, to be his nurse. A third reason given is that the "gematria," sum of the numerical equivalents of the Hebrew letters making up the word, of "chalav," milk, is forty (letter "chet" (8) plus letter "lamed" (30) plus letter "beit" (2) equals forty) which corresponds to the number of days that Moshe studied the Torah with Hashem on the top of Mt. Sinai.<sup>[4]</sup>

There exists a beautiful custom of decorating the synagogue on Shavuot with flowers and greens, because of the vegetation on Mt. Sinai. Some have the custom of adorning the Sefer Torah with roses. That, in particular, seems to have been an ancient custom, because Haman criticized the Jewish People to Achashverosh because of their observance of that custom.<sup>[4]</sup>

The Megillah (Book of Ruth) is read at this time as an honor to King David (Ruth was his ancestor) who was born on this day and also died on this day. The Book of Ruth was recorded by the prophet Samuel. It is appropriate to read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot for two reasons: First, because Shavuot is a harvest festival and the Book of Ruth gives us a picture of the harvest, and how the poor were treated in the harvest season with sympathy and love. Secondly, because Shavuot is the anniversary of the passing of King David, who was the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz, whose story is told in the Book of Ruth. But perhaps the main reason for our reading the Book of Ruth on this festival is because it gives us such a vivid picture of the *ger tzedek*, true proselyte. Shavuot is the "time of the giving of our Torah," and when we received it, we too, like the *ger tzedek*, pledged to accept the Torah and fulfill its 613 commandments.<sup>[5]</sup>

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[1]"[What is Shavuot.](#)" *chabad.org* Chabad, n.d.

[2]"[Giving of the Torah.](#)" *chabad.org* Chabad, n.d.

[3]Simmons, Shraga. *All Nite Torathon* Aish, 14 May 2002.

[4]"Shavuot Customs" *ou.org* Orthodox Union, n.d. ([Old Link](#))

[5]"[Mother of Royalty.](#)" *chabad.org* Chabad, n.d.

### Shemini Atzeret

Shemini Atzeret occurs on 22 Tishri (in September or October). It brings the celebration of Sukkot into a state of perfection and is celebrated by prayer and the ending of the stay in the sukkah. Shemini Atzeret literally means the assembly of the eighth (day). No work is permitted on Shemini Atzeret. (In Israel Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated on the same day).

### Shiva Asarah B'Tammuz

Shiva Asar B'Tammuz (Fast of the 17th of Tammuz) is a Rabbinic fast day that occurs on 17 Tammuz (in June or July). The 17th of Tammuz is a day-fast commemorating the many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people on this day. This day is celebrated by the fast, special prayers, and the beginning of the Three Weeks (the annual period of mourning over the destruction of the First and Second Temples).

Five tragedies ([Taanit 26b](#)) that have befallen the Jewish people on this date are:

Moses smashed the Tablets of the Covenant at Mount Sinai

Daily tamid (twice-daily sacrificial) offerings ceased

The walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans

Roman military leader Apostomus burned a Sefer Torah (Torah Scroll)

An idol was erected in the Holy Temple by King Menashe

### Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah (Rejoicing in the Torah) occurs at the conclusion of Sukkot on 23 Tishri (in September or October). No work is permitted on Simchat Torah. Simchat Torah celebrates the conclusion of the annual reading of the Torah and the immediate beginning of the annual cycle. It is a time to celebrate the central symbol of Judaism, the Torah through prayer and celebration. 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.

### Sukkot

Sukkot, the Harvest Festival, occurs on 15 Tishri (in September or October). The word Sukkot means booths, and refers to the temporary dwellings (sukkah) that we are commanded to live in during this holiday. 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 23:34. It is the

third of the three pilgrimage festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Pesach and Shavuot). No work is permitted on the first and second days of the holiday.

The holiday commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. 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. 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.

Another observance related to Sukkot involves what are known as The Four Species (arba minim) or the lulav and etrog. We are commanded to take these four plants and use them to rejoice before the Lord. 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 each day during the holiday. These processions, known as Hoshanahs, commemorate similar processions around the altar of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

### Ta'anit Esther

Taanit (Fast of) Esther is a Rabbinic fast day that occurs on 13 Adar-the day before Purim-(in February or March). It is a day-fast that commemorates the three-day fast of Esther, Mordechai, and all of Klal Yisrael as described in the book of Esther. It is celebrated by fasting, giving to the poor, prayer, and reading the Book of Esther (Megillah Esther).

Fasting begins at dawn and ends at sundown. This is one of the public fast days (the others being Tzom Gedaliah, Shiva Asarah B'Tammuz, and Asarah B'Tevet). If the Fast of Esther falls on Shabbat, the fast is observed the preceding Thursday. Eating and drinking are not permitted. Those in ill health, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children are exempt from the fast.

### Three Weeks

The Three Weeks is a time of deep mourning for the destruction of the First and Second Temples. During these weeks, the Haftarah on Shabbat are taken from Jeremiah and Isaiah which deal with the exiles and the destructions of the Temples. Joy and celebration is minimized during this time as an act of mourning. During the three weeks weddings are not performed, music is not listened to, Jews avoid celebrations and pleasure trips, haircuts and shaving are not done, and the Shehecheyanu blessing is not recited over new food or clothes (except on Shabbat).

The Nine Days (the first of Av through the ninth of Av) is an even more intense period of mourning. During this period, purchasing new, joyful products is not done, home improvement or planting trees/flowers is suspended, meat and wine is not consumed (except on Shabbat),

cleaning clothing is not done and newly laundered clothes are not worn (except on Shabbat), and bathing for pleasure is not permitted.

### Tisha B'Av

Rosh Chodesh Av – the first day of the Hebrew month of Av – begins the most intense mourning period of The Three Weeks. This nine-day mourning period culminates in the fast of Tisha B'Av.

Tisha B'Av is a Rabbinic fast day that occurs on 9 Av (in July or August). This day is a day of fasting and commemorating the multiple tragedies that have occurred on this day, most notably the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Tisha B'Av primarily commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples, both of which were destroyed on the ninth of Av. 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 Shabbat) and from wearing new clothing. The restrictions on Tisha B'Av include refraining 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. 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.

Five tragedies ([Taanit 26b](#)) that have befallen the Jewish people on this date are:

Decree that the Hebrews would not enter Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel)

Destruction of the first Holy Temple

Destruction of the Second Holy Temple

Betar was captured

Jerusalem was razed

### Tu B'Av

Tu B'Av occurs on 15 Av (in July or August). This day is a day of commemorating joyous occasions - including the end of the 40 years of wandering in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt. There are no real rituals or customs for this day except confessions of sins and other related portions of the daily prayers are not read.

### Tu B'Shevat

Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish Ecology Day, occurs on 15 Shevat (in January or February). Tu B'Shevat is an agricultural holiday that celebrates the earth and its produce. It is the new year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing (Leviticus 19:23-25). It is celebrated

through prayer, celebration, and eating the seven types of plant produce that are cited in Deuteronomy 8:8 (wheat, barley, grape, fig, pomegranate, olives, and date-honey). Other customs include eating a new fruit on this day, planting trees on this day, collecting money for trees for Israel, and holding a seder.

### Tzom Gedaliah

Tzom Gedaliah – the Fast of Gedaliah – is a Rabbinic fast day that falls on the day after Rosh Hashanah (3 Tishrei). It is a fast that was instituted as a lamentation over the assassination of the governor of Judea which ended Jews rule in Eretz Yisrael following the First Temple's destruction.

*And as for the people that were left in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, governor. ... But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal seed, came, and ten men with him, and struck Gedaliah, so that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldeans that were with him at Mizpah. (II Kings 25:22,25)*

Among the refugees who had joined Gedaliah in Mizpah was Yishmael, the son of Nataniah, a descendant of the royal house of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. Baalis the king of Ammon, who had been following with apprehension the regrowth of Judah under its new governor Gedaliah, encouraged and sent Yishmael to assassinate him. In the seventh month (Tishrei) Yishmael came to Gedaliah in the town of Mizpah in Benjamin, and was received cordially. Gedaliah had been warned of his guest's murderous intent, but refused to believe his informants, believing that their report was mere slander. Yishmael murdered Gedaliah, together with most of the Jews who had joined him and many Babylonians whom Nebuchadnezzar had left with Gedaliah.

*And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the ten men who were with him arose and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, with the sword, and he slew him, whom the king of Babylon had appointed in the land, and all the Jews who were with him, with Gedaliah in Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war, Ishmael struck. (Jeremiah 41:2-3)*

This fast day is spoken about two separate times in Zechariah. The first is in chapter seven which says: *Then came the word of the Eternal One of hosts unto me, saying: 'Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying: When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month, even these seventy years, did you at all fast unto Me, even to Me? (Zechariah 7:4-5)*

The second time this fast is spoken about is in chapter eight when this day will be turned into a day of joy in the Messianic Age. *And the word of the Eternal One of hosts came unto me, saying: 'Thus says the Eternal One of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful seasons; therefore love truth and peace. (Zechariah 8:18-19)*

According to the Rabbis the fast of the seventh month “is the third of Tishri on which Gedaliah the son of Ahikam was killed. Who killed him? Ishmael the son of Nethaniah killed him; and [the fact that a fast was instituted on this day] shows that the death of the righteous is put on a level with the burning of the House of our God. Why is it called the seventh? As being the seventh in the order of months.” (Rosh Hashanah 18b)<sup>[1]</sup>

The fast is observed from daybreak until the stars appear in the sky that same night. Additional prayers are added to the daily prayers on this day and the Thirteen Divine Attributes are said. Since the fast falls during the High Holy Days, an extra portion is added to the Selichot prayer on this fast.

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<sup>[1]</sup>Epstein, I. [\*Soncino Babylonian Talmud: Rosh Hashanah\*](#). (London: Soncino Press, 1949).

### Yom HaAtzmaut

Yom HaAtzmaut, also known as Israel Independence Day, occurs on 5 Iyar (in April or May). It is a day of celebration commemorating the day Israel declared its independence.

The Chief Rabbinate along with many other religious authorities declared that Yom Ha'atzmaut is one of the Jewish holidays in which Hallel should be said. Many Israelis celebrate the day with picnics. On the eve of the holiday, people sing and dance in the streets. Balconies are decorated with Israeli flags, and small flags are attached to car windows

### Yom HaShoah

Yom HaShoah, also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day, occurs on 27 Nisan (in March or April). Yom HaShoah is a one-day holiday that celebrates the remembrance of the Shoah during the 1930s and 1940s. It is celebrated by special prayers, reading the names of those who perished, and visiting museums and other places of remembrance. Each family and community has its own way of remembering those who perished in this genocide as well as those who survived.

On the eve of Yom HaShoah in Israel, there is a state ceremony at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes Authority. At 10:00 am on Yom HaShoah, throughout Israel, air-raid sirens are sounded for two minutes. During this time, people stop what they are doing and stand at attention; cars stop, even on the highways; and the whole country comes to a standstill as people pay silent tribute to the dead. On the eve of Yom HaShoah and the day itself, places of public entertainment are closed by law. Israeli television airs Holocaust documentaries and Holocaust-related talk shows, and low-key songs are played on the radio. Flags on public buildings are flown at half-staff.

Also during this day, tens of thousands of Israeli high-school students, and thousands of Jews from around the world, hold a memorial service in Auschwitz, in what has become known as "The March of the Living," in defiance of the Holocaust Death Marches. This event is endorsed

and subsidized by the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Holocaust Claims Conference, and is considered an important part of the school curriculum – a culmination of several months of studies on World War II and the Holocaust.

### Yom HaZikaron

Yom HaZikaron, also known as Israel Remembrance Day, occurs on 4 Iyar (in April or May). It is a day to remember those who fought for Israeli independence. Kaddish, the prayer for the dead is said on this day.

This holiday honors veterans and fallen military personnel of the Israel Defense Forces and other Israeli security services who died in the modern Arab Israeli conflict, as well as fallen members of the Jewish Brigade, and of the various paramilitary organization of the Yishuv, such as the Haganah and Irgun, who died before the establishment of Israel (starting from 1860, when Mishkenot Sha'ananim, the first modern Jewish settlement outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, was built). Yom Hazikaron also commemorates civilians murdered by acts of terrorism.

### Yom Kippur

The Biblical holiday of Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement – is the last day of the High Holy Days. The fast of Yom Kippur begins at sundown on the ninth of Tishri and continues until the stars can be seen in the sky on the tenth of Tishri.

*However on the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; there shall be a holy convocation unto you, and you shall afflict your souls; and you shall bring an offering made by fire unto the Eternal One. And you shall do no manner of work in that same day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement for you before the Eternal One your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from his people. And whatsoever soul it be that does any manner of work in that same day, that soul will I destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be unto you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; in the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening unto evening, shall you keep your Sabbath. (Vayikra 23:27-32)*

Yom Kippur is a day set aside to “afflict the soul,” to atone for one’s sins of the past year. This Day of Atonement only atones for sins between man and Hashem and not for sins between man and man. According to the Torah Yom Kippur is a day of rest and no work may be done. This day is also a day of afflicting one’s soul (Vayikra 23:32).

In addition to these commands in the Torah, the Mishnah (Yoma 8:1) also speaks of five additional prohibitions:<sup>[1]</sup>

1. No eating or drinking
2. No wearing of leather shoes
3. No bathing or washing

4. No anointing oneself with perfume or lotion
5. No marital relations

It has been suggested that there is a parallel between the five prohibitions and man's expulsion from Gan Eden. At the point of the expulsion, free will choices between good and evil truly began and hard work and death became part of mankind's world. On Yom Kippur, mankind attempts to symbolically return to Gan Eden through repentance.<sup>[2]</sup>

*By the sweat of your face shall you eat bread...* (Bereishit 3:19). Before the transgression all food was given to mankind and there was no need to produce food. On Yom Kippur, in order to atone for mankind's transgression and symbolically return to Gan Eden, one refrains from eating and drinking.<sup>[2]</sup>

*Thorns also and thistles shall it [the ground] bring forth to you...* (Bereishit 3:18). When man was in Gan Eden there was no need for shoes to protect against thorns or thistles or even against other creatures. Upon being expelled from Gan Eden, mankind lost the originally given security and was forced to wear leather garments. On Yom Kippur one does not wear leather shoes as a symbolic return to the safety of Gan Eden.<sup>[2]</sup>

*By the sweat of your face...* (Bereishit 3:19). Traditionally, it was understood that man did not sweat while in Gan Eden. As a result of the expulsion from Gan Eden mankind was forced to work hard for his or her basic needs. On Yom Kippur one refrains from bathing or anointing oneself as a symbolic return to the state of mankind in Gan Eden.<sup>[2]</sup>

*Unto the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply your pain and your travail; in pain you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you.'* (Bereishit 3:16) In Gan Eden marital relations were not necessary for the propagation of mankind. After the expulsion mankind found it necessary to have relations to ensure the survival of mankind. As a result marital relations are forbidden on Yom Kippur as a symbolic return to Gan Eden.<sup>[2]</sup>

On Erev Yom Kippur – the night of nine Tishri – the Day of Atonement begins with the service commonly known as Kol Nidre. Kol Nidre is a legal formula where the person asks Hashem to annul all personal vows that he or she may make in the coming year.

A special siddur – known as the Machzor – is used on Yom Kippur. Shachrit – the morning prayer – is preceded by penitential prayers, known as Selichot. This service is followed by an additional Musaf prayer. During the Musaf portion of the Yom Kippur service, a recitation of the sacrificial service of the Temple – known as the Seder Ha'avodah – is recited. The Sefer Ha'avodah recounts the detail of the sacrificial ceremonies that took place on Yom Kippur when the Temple stood in Jerusalem. The main section of the Seder Ha'avodah is a threefold recitation of the Kohen Gadol's actions in the Holy of Holies.<sup>[3]</sup> The actions of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur when the Temple stood are described in tractate Yoma. This section of the Talmud is studied on Yom Kippur and integrated into the Musaf portion of the Yom Kippur service. When the Temple stood in Jerusalem the Kohen Gadol had to follow a precise order of services, sacrifices, and purifications on Yom Kippur.

During the Yom Kippur service the Kohen Gadol “wore five sets of garments (three golden and two white linen), immersed in the *mikvah* five times, and washed his hands and feet ten times. Sacrifices included two (daily) lambs, one bull, two goats, and two rams, with accompanying *mincha* (meal) offerings, wine libations, and three incense offerings (the regular two daily and an additional one for Yom Kippur). The Kohen Gadol entered the Holy of Holies three times. The [personal Name of Hashem] was pronounced three times, once for each confession.”<sup>[4]</sup>

The Mincha (afternoon prayer) includes a haftarah which includes the entire Book of Jonah. The Rabbis gave four reasons for reading the Book of Jonah on Yom Kippur.<sup>[5]</sup>

1. The Book of Jonah reminds one of Hashem’s infinite mercy.
2. The Book of Jonah teaches about teshuva (repentance).
3. The Book of Jonah reminds one that the entire world is in Hashem’s hands.
4. The Book of Jonah reminds one that he or she can still be saved even as the day comes to an end.

The final service of Yom Kippur is called the Neilah service which literally means “closing.” This service references the closing of the gates of heaven. During this portion of Yom Kippur, the doors of the Ark remain open – revealing the Torah Scrolls inside. While the Ark doors are open it is tradition to remain standing. The ending of Yom Kippur comes with the first stars appearing in the sky. It is at this point that the shofar is blown one last time indicating the end of the High Holy Days.

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<sup>[1]</sup>Epstein, I. [Soncino Babylonian Talmud: Yoma](#).

<sup>[2]</sup>Rabinowitz, Avi. “[The Inuyim of Yom Kippur & the Expulsion from Eden](#)”. *Mail-Jewish*. Volume 37 Number 16. Ottmall.Com, 11 September 2002. Web. 17 September 2011.

<sup>[3]</sup>Harlow, Jules. *Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1978).

<sup>[4]</sup>“[Yom Kippur](#)”. *Wikipedia.org*. Wikipedia. 17 September 2011. Web. 17 September 2011.

<sup>[5]</sup>Bernstein, Maya. “[Jonah & Yom Kippur](#)”. *My Jewish Learning*. My Jewish Learning. n.d. Web. 17 September 2011.

### Yom Yerushalayim

Yom Yerushalayim occurs on 28 Iyar (in April or May) and is the celebration of the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967. It is a day of national celebration and remembrance of those who fought for the reunification of the eternal capital of Israel.

The day is marked by state ceremonies, memorial services for soldiers who died in the battle for Jerusalem, parades through downtown Jerusalem, reciting the Hallel prayer in synagogues, lectures on Jerusalem-related topics, singing and dancing, and special television programming. Schoolchildren throughout the country learn about significance of Jerusalem, and schools in Jerusalem hold festive assemblies. The day is also marked in Jewish schools around the world.



## **T'filah (Prayer)**

T'filah (prayer) is an ancient way of connecting with God and bringing God into our lives on a daily basis. It was prophesied that prayer would one day take the place of the sacrifices since the Jews would be without the Temple. Proper prayer takes practice just as anything else (such as sports or giving a good speech) takes practice. It is important to have kavanah – the proper mindset for prayer each time we pray. It is important to remind oneself that one is speaking to God with the intention to fulfill the mitzvah of prayer whenever one prays. Some people use liturgical melodies (nigunim) to help them come to a place of kavanah. It is important to free one's mind from distractions and concentrate on speaking to God. Hebrew is the language of Jewish prayer. It is permissible to pray in one's language but it is best to pray in Hebrew. Jewish prayer is overwhelmingly a communal act. It is permissible (and even encouraged) to pray on an individual basis but communal prayer is ideal.

T'filah (prayer) is a communal responsibility according to the Karaite teachings but t'filah can be said individually in any tahor (clean) place where there are no images. T'filah is mandatory twice daily as temporary replacements of the twice-daily sacrificial offerings of the Beit HaMikdash. Additional voluntary t'filah may be said at any time by an individual and do not need to follow a prescribed formula. T'filah is not only a temporary substitute for the offerings of the Beit HaMikdash but they are also a means of communicating with the Eternal One and a way of understanding our relationship to the Eternal One.

Rabbinic Jews pray (daven) three times daily, every day: the Shacharit (morning) service, the Minchah (afternoon prayer) service and the Maariv (evening) service. It is believed that Abraham began the Shacharit service, Isaac began the Minchah service, and Jacob began the Maariv service. In addition to the prayers during these services there are specific prayers added during various Jewish holidays and synagogue services and lifecycle events. These prayers are collected in a prayer book known as a siddur (from the Hebrew root meaning order).

The oldest fixed daily prayer in Judaism, the Shema, consists of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Deuteronomy 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41. From ancient times, the commandment to speak of these matters “when you retire and when you arise” has been fulfilled by reciting the Shema twice a day: morning and night.

During the 6th century BCE, during the Babylonian Exile, the Jewish people had no Temple in which to offer sacrifices. Prayers were used as a substitute for these sacrifices. Therefore, the prayers were said three times a day according to the thrice-daily sacrifice times at the Temple. Additional prayers were added for Shabbat and some holidays in accordance with the additional sacrifices at the Temple on Shabbat and some holidays.

After the Exile, in the 5th century BCE, these daily prayer services continued. The Men of the Great Assembly composed a basic prayer, 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.

## Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)

Tikkun olam is a Hebrew phrase that means, “repairing the world” or “perfecting the world.” In Judaism, the concept of *tikkun olam* originated in the early rabbinic period. The concept was given new meanings in the kabbalah of the medieval period and further connotations in modern Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

The expression *tikkun olam* is used in the Mishnah in the phrase *mip'nei tikkun ha-olam* (“for the sake of *tikkun* of the world”) to indicate that a practice should be followed not because it is required by Biblical law, but because it helps avoid social chaos.<sup>2</sup> One example is in Gittin 4:2.

At first a person was allowed to bring together a court wherever he was and cancel the *get*. Rabban Gamliel HaZakan, however, enacted that for the good of the community [*mip'nei tikkun ha-olam*], this should not be done. ... At first ... the husband was allowed to use ... the assumed name of himself or of his wife, or the assumed name of his town or of his wife's town. Rabban Gamliel HaZakan, however, enacted that for the good of the community he write (in the *get*): This man so-and-so or by any other name that he goes by, [is divorcing] this woman so-and-so or by any other name she goes by, (to prevent tragedies).<sup>3</sup>

The rabbis made this rule because they were concerned that a woman might receive a *get* (divorce document) and think she was divorced when in fact she was not. She might then remarry in good faith not knowing that she was not yet a free woman. In Jewish tradition there are severe consequences if a married woman engages in sexual relations outside of her marriage. She may not marry the man with whom she had sex and her children are ineligible to marry most other Jews because they acquire the technical status of *mamzerim*.<sup>4</sup>

As an explanation of rabbinic laws, the phrase *mip'nei tikkun ha-olam* is also invoked for laws about the collection of the ketubah money for a widow (Gittin 4:3), the limit on payments to redeem captives (Gittin 4:6), purchasing religious articles from non-Jews (Gittin 4:6), divorce threatened by vows (Gittin 4:7), and the bringing of first fruits for land purchased from non-Jews (Gittin 4:9). Several additional uses are found in Gittin 5:3.<sup>1</sup>

During Talmudic period, the principle of *mip'nei tikkun ha-olam* is applied to a very limited number of additional cases. (For example, see Pesahim 88b.) In both the Mishnah (Gittin 4:6) and the Talmud, applications of the principle are contested at times.<sup>1</sup>

The phrase *tikkun olam* is included in the Aleinu, a Jewish prayer that is traditionally recited three times daily. The Aleinu praises God for allowing the Jewish people to serve God, and expresses hope that the whole world one day will recognize God and abandon idolatry. The phrase *tikkun olam* is used in the longer expression *l'takken olam b'malkhut Shaddai*, “to perfect the world under God's sovereignty.” In other words, when all people of the world abandon false gods and recognize God, the world will have been perfected.<sup>1</sup>

Some Jews believe that performing of ritual mitzvot is a means of *tikkun olam*, helping to perfect the world, and that the performance of more *mitzvot* will hasten the coming of the Messiah and the Messianic Age. This belief dates back at least to the early Talmudic period. According to

Rabbi Yochanan, a rabbi who lived during that period, the Jewish people will be redeemed when every Jew observes Shabbat (the Sabbath) in two consecutive weeks.<sup>1</sup>

According to the philosopher Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, the physical world is connected to the spiritual worlds above and these spiritual worlds in turn influence the physical world. Accordingly, Jews have the ability through physical deeds and free will to direct and control spiritual forces. Included in the forces is tikkun. God's desire in creation is that His creations will ultimately recognize God's unity and overcome evil. This, according to Luzzatto, will constitute the perfection (tikkun) of creation. Jews have the Torah and are aware of God's unity and when all of humanity recognizes this fact, the rectification will be complete.<sup>1</sup>

In Jewish thought ethical *mitzvot* as well as ritual *mitzvot* are important to the process of *tikkun olam*. Some Jews believe that performing *mitzvot* will create a model society among the Jewish people, which will in turn influence the rest of the world. By perfecting themselves, their local Jewish community or the state of Israel, the Jews set an example for the rest of the world. The theme is frequently repeated in the sermons and writings of across the Jewish spectrum: Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox.<sup>1</sup>

Some Jews believe that performing mitzvot will create a model society among the Jewish people. This society will in turn influence the remainder of the world. This idea is attributed to scripture that describes the Jews as "a kingdom of princes and a holy nation" (Shemot [Exodus] 19:6) as well as a "a light to nations" (Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 42:6, 49:6). The philosophy of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch is prominent in this field in terms of rational kehillot (communities) of Jews in the Diaspora influencing their non-Jewish neighbors. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's philosophy is also influential in mystical terms as well as in Zionist terms of a Jewish state influencing the other nations of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Modern Orthodox philosophy purports the idea that mitzvot have practical this-worldly sociological and educational affects upon those who perform them. By this reasoning, the mitzvot that are performed will perfect the Jews and the world at large.<sup>1</sup>

"According to the rationalist philosophy of Hirsch and others, the social and ethical mitzvot have nearly self-explanatory purposes, while ritual mitzvot may serve functions such as education people or developing relationships between people and [God]. As examples, prayer either inculcates a relationship between people and [God] or strengthens beliefs and faith of the one who prays, and keeping kosher or wearing tzitzit serve as educational symbols of moral and religious values. This, the ultimate goal of mitzvot is for moral and religious values and deeds to permeate the Jewish people and ultimately the entire world, but the ritual mitzvot nevertheless play a vital role in this model of tikkun olam, strengthening what is accomplished by the ethical."<sup>1</sup>

By perfecting themselves, Jews also set an example for the rest of the world. Thus, the additional distinction that mitzvot have a practical, this-world effect. For example, charity benefits the poor, constituting tikkun olam by its improvement of the world.<sup>1</sup>

For many Jews, the phrase tikkun olam means that Jews are not only responsible for creating a model Jewish society for themselves, they are also responsible for the welfare for the society at large. This responsibility may be understood in religious, social, or political terms and there are many differing opinions about how religion, society, and politics interplay.<sup>1</sup>

Tikkun Olam “is a conception which can be used to justify the widest range of activities and views. We have also seen that it can easily be lifted out of its original context and transformed into a ‘normative’ Jewish value. A contemporary idea is thus legitimated and rendered all the more significant by clothing it in the garb of tradition, a process as old as ‘tradition’ itself.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“Tikkun Olam.” wikipedia.org. Wikipedia, n.d. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tikkun\\_olam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tikkun_olam)]

<sup>2</sup>“Tikkun Olam: Orthodoxy’s Responsibility to Perfect God’s World.” ou.org. Orthodox Union, n.d. [[http://www.ou.org/public/Publib/tikkun.htm#\\_ftnref26](http://www.ou.org/public/Publib/tikkun.htm#_ftnref26)] (no updated link)

<sup>3</sup>“Gittin 4:2.” emishnah.com. eMishnah, 2009. [[http://www.emishnah.com/Nashim\\_Vol\\_2/Gittin4.pdf](http://www.emishnah.com/Nashim_Vol_2/Gittin4.pdf)]

<sup>4</sup>Jill Jacobs. “Talmud is not a Code of Law .” myjewishlearning.com. My Jewish Learning, n.d. [[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Rabbinics/Talmud/Talmud/In\\_Jewish\\_Culture/Not\\_a\\_Law\\_Code.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Rabbinics/Talmud/Talmud/In_Jewish_Culture/Not_a_Law_Code.shtml)]

<sup>5</sup>Lawrence Fine. “Tikkun Olan in Contemporary Jewish Thought.” myjewishlearning.com. My Jewish Learning, n.d. [[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Caring\\_For\\_Others/Tikkun\\_Olan\\_Repairing\\_the\\_World\\_/Contemporary\\_Jewish\\_Thought.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Caring_For_Others/Tikkun_Olam_Repairing_the_World_/Contemporary_Jewish_Thought.shtml)]

## **Tzedakah (Charity)**

We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of charity than any other positive commandment because charity is the sign of a righteous man, the seed of Abraham our Father, as it is said, “For I know him, that he will command his children . . . to do righteousness” (Genesis 18:19). The throne of Israel is established and the religion of truth is upheld only through charity, as it is said, “In righteousness shall you be established” (Isaiah 54:14). Israel is redeemed only through charity, as it is written, “Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and they that return of her with righteousness” (ibid. 1:27).<sup>1</sup>

Tzedakah is derived from tzedek – meaning righteousness, justice, or fairness, but has come to mean charity in English.

The words justice and charity have different meanings in English. How is it that in Hebrew, one word, tzedakah, has been translated to mean both justice and charity?<sup>2</sup>

This translation is consistent with Jewish thought as Judaism considers charity to be an act of justice. Judaism holds that people in need have a legal right to food, clothing and shelter that must be honored by more fortunate people. According to Judaism, it is unjust and even illegal for Jews to not give charity to those in need.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, giving charity in Jewish law and tradition is viewed as obligatory self-taxation, rather than voluntary donation.<sup>2</sup>

Giving charity is an obligation in Judaism (Leviticus 25:35-38, Deuteronomy 19:20-24). This obligation means providing charity to both Jew and non-Jew. In many homes one will find a tzedakah box – a box or other container where coins are dropped in and collected for charity. It is a tradition for Jews to give tzedakah on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, Pesach, Shavuot, and Purim as well as during other celebratory events such as weddings.

According to halachah, everyone (including the poor) is to give 10% of one's net income. One may give more than 10% but no more than 20%. If one cannot give that amount, any amount will be satisfactory. One is forbidden from giving so much that one becomes impoverished. 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. It is acknowledged that not everyone who asks for tzedakah is truly in need so there is some legitimate basis for doubting a beggar's sincerity. It is permissible (and some say ethical) to investigate a charity before offering any donation.

Everyone has an obligation to avoid becoming in need of tzedakah. A person should take any work available to him/her even if the work is "beneath" him/her to avoid becoming needful of tzedakah. Of course, if one is truly in need of tzedakah, one is obligated to accept any that is offered. Contrary to popular belief, Jewish scholars, teachers, and rabbis must earn an income from employment other than teaching Torah and relying on tzedakah.

The idea of tzedakah implies that the recipient deserves the gift. ... When a Jew gives tzedakah, he is in a sense confirming a partnership with G-d to care for others. This is an obligation, it is not an act of kindness, *chesed*.<sup>3</sup>

There are different levels of tzedakah described in the Talmud that were organized into eight levels by Maimonides in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Charity, 10:7-14).

1. Enable the recipient to become self-sufficient (i.e. loans, grants, employment).
2. To give without knowing the recipient's identity and the recipient does not know one's identity.
3. To give knowing the recipient's identity but the recipient does not know one's identity.
4. To give without knowing the recipient's identity but the recipient knows one's identity.
5. To give before being asked.
6. To give after being asked.
7. To give less than one should, but giving cheerfully.
8. To give begrudgingly.

In practice, most Jews carry out tzedakah by donating a portion of their income to charitable institutions, or to needy people that they may encounter; the perception among many modern day Jews is that if donation of this form is not possible, the obligation of tzedakah still requires that something is given.<sup>4</sup>

As for the more limited form of *tzedakah* expressed in the biblical laws, namely leaving of *gleanings* from certain crops, the Shulchan Aruch argues that Jewish farmers are no longer obliged to obey it. Nevertheless, in modern Israel, rabbis ... insist that Jews allow *gleanings* to be consumed by the poor and by strangers, and all crops (not just *gleanings*) by anyone and everyone (free, not bought nor sold) during Sabbatical years.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, one must be very careful about how one gives out tzedakah money. It is not sufficient to just give to anyone or any organization, rather, one must check the credentials and finances to be sure that your Tzedakah money will be used wisely, efficiently and effectively.

We learn this from both the [Tanakh] (Proverbs 22:22 – Do not rob a poor man because he is poor, and do not crush the poor man in the gate.) and from Talmudic-era commentaries including [Bamidbar] Rabba 5:2 [Do not rob the impoverished because he is impoverished]. It is taught that tzedakah money was never yours to begin with, rather, it always belongs to the recipient, and hence you have an obligation to give it and to give it away to places that use it efficiently and effectively.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isadore Twersky. *A Maimonides Reader*. Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, Inc., 1972.  
[<http://books.google.com>]

<sup>2</sup>Lisa Katz. *Tzedakah*. About.Com Judaism, n.d.  
[[http://judaism.about.com/od/beliefs/a/tzedakah\\_what.htm](http://judaism.about.com/od/beliefs/a/tzedakah_what.htm)]

<sup>3</sup>“Power of Tzedakah.” *aish.com*. Aish HaTorah, n.d. [defunct link – no new link provided by Aish]

<sup>4</sup>“[Tzedakah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzedakah).” *wikipedia.org*. Wikipedia, n.d. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzedakah>]

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