

## Judaism

### GLOSSARY OF JEWISH TERMS

#### JEWISH CALENDAR AND SHABBAT

##### BCE and CE

“Before the common era” attempts to use a neutral term for the period traditionally labeled “BC” (before Christ). Thus 586 B.CE is identical to 586 BC. “Common era” uses a neutral term for the period traditionally labeled “AD” (Latin *anno domini* or “year of the Lord”). Thus, 2005 CE is identical to AD 2005.

##### Calendar

In general, Christianity operates on a "solar" calendar based on the relationship between the sun and the earth (365.25 days per year). The Islamic calendar is "lunar," based on the relationship of the earth and moon (354 days in a year). Thus, every 100 solar years are equal to about 103 lunar years. Judaism follows a lunar calendar adjusted every three years or so to the solar cycle (by adding a second 12th month) - thus “lunisolar.”

##### Challah

During antiquity, the portion of bread dough which is burned entirely as a sacrifice to God; today, however, the term is used to refer to a braided loaf of egg bread used to celebrate Shabbat.

##### Eruv

The Torah prohibits carrying on Shabbat between a public domain and a private domain; however, the Torah permits carrying within an enclosed “private” area. Public domains are typically non-residential areas including streets, thoroughfares, plazas, highways, etc. Private domains are residential areas, and originally referred to an individual’s home or apartments that were surrounded by a “wall” and can be deemed to be “closed off” from the surrounding public domains. The rabbis of the Talmud developed a means to render a larger area as a private domain by surrounding it. Such an enclosure is called an “Eruv” and in modern cities consists of a continuous wire suspended between poles. An Eruv integrates a number of private and public properties into one larger private domain to permit individuals to carry objects during Shabbat.

##### Havdalah

The ritual that concludes Shabbat. Includes a multi-wicked candle, spices and wine.

##### Sabbath/Shabbat

The seventh day of the week recalling the completion of the creation and the Exodus from Egypt. It is a day symbolic of new beginnings and one dedicated to God, a most holy day of rest. The commandment of rest is found in the Bible and has been elaborated by the rabbis. The three celebratory aspects of Shabbat are *menucha* (rest), *oneg* (celebration), and *kedusha* (holiness).

#### JEWISH HOLIDAYS

##### Chanukah/Hanukka(h)

This Hebrew word, meaning “dedication,” refers to the eight day winter celebration said to commemorate a miracle during the Hasmonean revolt against the Hellenized Syrian government. When the Hasmoneans sought to rededicate the Jerusalem temple, they found only a small bottle of holy oil. Miraculously, that small jar lasted eight days, long enough for a new supply to be prepared. The Chanukiah/Hanukkiah is the nine branched candelabra/menorah used to celebrate the holiday.

**Chol HaMoed**

The Festivals of Passover and Sukkot both have holidays at the beginning and end and “intermediate days” (Chol HaMoed) in the middle. During these days, much work is permitted, but many holiday laws remain in effect.

**Chometz (chametz, hametz)**

Leavened food, which is forbidden during Pesach. The five prohibited grains considered chometz are wheat, rye, barley, spelt and oats. Ashkenazi practice also considers corn, beans, rice and legumes as chometz.

**Days of Awe**

Ten day period from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, a time for introspection and considering the sins of the previous year.

**Dreidel**

Four-sided, top-like toy used during Chanukah.

**Four Species**

(Heb. "arba minim"). Fruit and branches used to fulfill the commandment to “rejoice before the Lord” during the festival of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles). Included are an etrog (citron), “the fruit of goodly trees” (Leviticus 23.40); and the lulav (branches of palm, myrtle and willow bundled together). They are carried in procession in the synagogue during Sukkot.

**Haggada(h)**

(Heb., “narration”). In a general sense, in classical Jewish literature and discussion, what is not halakah (legal subject matter) is (*h*)*aggada* (pl. *haggadot*). Technically, "the Haggada(h)" is the liturgical manual used in the Jewish Passover Seder.

**High Holy Days**

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and frequently used to refer to the 10-day period between them, as well.

**Kol Nidre**

The Yom Kippur Eve service is referred to as Kol Nidre, the name of a prominent prayer recited at the beginning of the service.

**Megillah**

(Heb., “scroll”). Usually refers to the biblical scroll of Esther read on the holiday of Purim.

**Menorah**

Jewish candelabrum with special religious significance; a nine-branched menorah is used at Hanukkah, while the seven- branched menorah was used in the ancient Temple.

**Passover/Pesach**

The major Jewish spring holiday also known as *hag hamatzot* (festival of unleavened bread) commemorating the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (see Exodus 12-13). Passover lasts eight days, during which Jews refrain from eating all leavened foods and products. A special ritual meal called the Seder is prepared, and a traditional narrative called the Haggadah, supplemented by hymns and songs, marks the event.

**Purim**

A Jewish holiday commemorating the deliverance of Jews in Persia as described in the biblical book of Esther. Held in late winter (between Hanukkah and Passover), on the 14th of Adar.

**Rosh Hashanah**

(Heb., “beginning of the year”). Jewish New Year celebration in the fall of the year,

**Seder**

(Heb., for “order”). The traditional Jewish evening service and opening of the celebration of Passover, which includes special food and narratives. The order of the service is highly regulated, and the traditional narrative is known as the Passover Haggadah.

**Shavuot**

(Pentecost; Heb., “weeks”). Observed 50 days from the beginning of Passover; also known as the Festival of First Fruits. Commemorates the giving of the Torah to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

**Shofar**

In Jewish worship, a ram's horn sounded at Rosh Hashanah morning worship and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur.

**Simhat Torah**

(Heb., “rejoicing with the Torah”). A festival that celebrates the conclusion of the annual reading cycle of the Torah. Occurs at the end of Sukkot.

**Sukkah**

(Lit. booth). The temporary dwellings the Jews use during the holiday of Sukkot. One is supposed to eat meals there and some Jews have the custom of sleeping in the Sukkah.

**Sukkot**

(Tabernacles, Heb., “booths, tabernacles”). Seven-day Jewish fall festival commemorating the Sukkot where the Israelites lived in the wilderness after the Exodus; also known as the Festival of Ingathering (of the harvest).

**Teshuvah(h)**

The days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur demand atonement or reconciliation between God and humanity which is achieved by the process of repentance (*teshuvah*), seeking forgiveness and making amends with other people.

**Tu B'Shevat**

(Lit. 15th of Shevat). The new year for counting the age of trees for purposes of tithing. Usually falls in January/February.

**Yom Ha-Azmaut**

Israeli Independence Day. Occurs in the spring.

**Yom Ha-Shoah**

Holocaust Remembrance Day. Occurs in the spring.

**Yom Ha-Zikaron**

Israeli Memorial Day. Occurs in the spring.

**Yom Kippur**

(Heb., “Day of Atonement”). Annual day of fasting and atonement, occurring in the fall ten days after Rosh Hashanah; the most solemn and important occasion of the Jewish religious year.

**Yom Yerushalayim**

Holiday celebrating the 1967 reunification of Jerusalem by the modern State of Israel.

**JEWISH LIFECYCLE: BIRTH – COMING OF AGE****Bar (Bat) Mitzvah**

(Heb., “son (daughter)-of-the-commandment(s)”). The phrase originally referred to a person responsible for performing the divine commandments of Judaism; it now refers to the occasion when a boy or girl reaches the age of religious maturity and responsibility (thirteen years for a boy; twelve years and a day for a girl).

**Brit (or Berit) Milah/Circumcision**

The minor surgical removal of the skin covering the tip of the penis. It is ritually performed when a boy is eight days old in a ceremony called *brit milah*, which indicates that the ritual establishes a covenant between God and the individual.

**Confirmation**

Confirmation usually marks the end of formal religious school training (age 15-16), and often occurs around the time of Shavuot. Confirmation in Judaism was invented in the 19th century by the Reform movement as a replacement for the Bar Mitzvah.

**Pidyon Haben**

The rite of relieving the first-born male child born to parents not descended from Aaron or Levi of certain religious obligations by redeeming him from a member of the priestly class. It is celebrated 30 days after the child's birth. The father pays five silver shekels (today, typically five dollars in coins) to have the child released from his obligations.

**JEWISH LIFE CYCLE: MARRIAGE, DEATH, & CONVERSION TO JUDAISM****B'deken**

The ritual veiling of the bride by the groom. This custom developed from the biblical story of Jacob, who married Leah by mistake, instead of Rachel, the woman he loved.

**Bet Din**

Court of Jewish law. Converts must appear before a bet din prior to becoming Jewish.

**Chevra Kadisha**

("holy society") The group that prepares a body for burial.

**Huppah or Chuppah**

The special canopy under which a marriage ceremony is conducted.

**L'Chaim**

("To Life"). Used as a toast.

**Mazel Tov**

Congratulations and good luck.

**Mikvah, Miqvah, Mikveh, Mikva, Mikve**

A Jewish communal bath for washing away spiritual impurity by immersion. Converts must immerse in the mikva at the end of the conversion ceremony and women use the mikvah at the conclusion of their menstrual cycle as part of the laws of *taharat hamishpacha* (family purity).

**Shiva**

(Heb., "seven"). Seven days of mourning after the burial of a close relative (as in, "to sit shiva").

**Shloshim**

(Heb., "thirty"). An intermediate stage of 30 days of less severe mourning, including shiva.

**Simcha**

Happy occasion.

**Yahrzeit**

Anniversary of a death; a 24-hour candle lit to commemorate the death anniversary of a close relative, also lit on holy days when *Yizkor* (prayer of remembrance) is recited.

**JEWISH WORSHIP****Ark/aron kodesh**

The cabinet where the Torah scrolls are kept. The word has no connection with Noah's Ark.

**Amida(h)**

(Heb., "standing"). The main section of Jewish prayers, recited in a standing posture; also known as *tefillah* ("prayer") or *shemoneh esreh* ("eighteen [benedictions]").

**Bimah**

Location in a synagogue from which worship is led. Usually located in the front of the room, but may also be in the center in traditional synagogues.

**Cantor/hazzan**

The reciter and chanter/singer of liturgical texts in the synagogue.

**D'var torah**

(pl. *divrei torah*, "word of Torah"). A Torah discourse, homily or sermon.

**Haftara(h)**

A specific section of the biblical prophets read in synagogue services immediately after the corresponding Torah section.

**Kaddish**

A Jewish prayer (composed in Aramaic) with eschatological focus extolling God's majesty and kingdom. It is recited at the conclusion of each major section of each liturgical service. It is also a prayer recited by mourners during the first year of bereavement and on the anniversary of the death of close relatives.

**Kiddush**

(Heb., “sanctification”; derived from *kadosh*, “holy”). A Shabbat and holy day ritual accompanied by a cup of wine, which proclaims the holiness of the day.

**Kippah/yamulke**

A Jewish head covering worn for worship, religious study, meals, or at any other time.

**Machzor**

Prayerbook used for the High Holy Days or pilgrimage festivals.

**Minhag**

Custom or practice of a particular individual or group. Minhag takes precedence over Jewish law when the two come in conflict with each other.

**Minyan**

A quorum of ten men (in liberal congregations, ten Jews) above age thirteen necessary for public services and certain other religious ceremonies to be considered valid.

**Sefer Torah**

Torah scroll used for public reading in the synagogue.

**Shaliach Tzibur**

The person leading services.

**Shema**

Title of the fundamental, monotheistic statement of Judaism, found in Deut. 6:4 (“Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is One”). This statement of the unity of God is recited daily in the liturgy (along with Deut. 6:5-9, 11.13-21; Num. 15.37- 41 and other passages), and customarily before sleep at night. This proclamation also climaxes special liturgies (like Yom Kippur), and is central to the confession before death and the ritual of martyrdom. The *Shema* is inscribed on the mezuzah and the tefillin. In public services, it is recited in unison.

**Siddur**

(from Heb., “to order”). Jewish prayer book used for all days except special holidays.

**Tallis(t)**

A large, four-cornered shawl with fringes and special knots at the corners, worn during Jewish morning prayers. The fringes, according to the Bible (Numbers 15.38-39), remind the worshiper of God's commandments. It is traditional for the male to be buried in his tallit, but without its fringes.

**Tefillin**

Usually translated as “phylacteries.” Box-like appurtenances that accompany prayer, worn by Jewish adult males at the weekday morning services. The boxes have leather straps attached and contain scriptural excerpts. One box (with four sections) is placed on the head, the other (with one section) is placed (customarily) on the left arm, near the heart.

**Torah**

(Heb., “teaching, instruction”). In general, Torah refers to study of the whole gamut of Jewish tradition or to some aspect thereof. Torah also refers to the “five books of Moses” in the Hebrew scriptures.

**THE JEWISH HOME****Kosher**

“Proper” or “ritually correct”; kashrut refers to ritually correct Jewish dietary practices and food products. Traditional Jewish dietary laws are based on biblical legislation. Only land animals that chew the cud and have split hooves (sheep, beef; not pigs, camels) are permitted and must be

slaughtered in a special way. Further, meat products may not be eaten with milk products or immediately thereafter. Of sea creatures, only those (fish) having fins and scales are permitted. Fowl is considered a meat food and also has to be slaughtered in a special manner.

**Magen David**

(Heb., “shield of David”). The distinctive six-pointed Jewish star, used especially since the 17th century.

**Mensch**

A special person with worth and dignity. One who behaves admirably and can be respected.

**Mezuzah**

(pl. *mezuzot*; "doorpost"). A parchment scroll with selected Torah verses (Deuteronomy 6.4-9; 11.13-21) placed in a container and affixed to the exterior doorposts (at the right side of the entrance) of Jewish homes (see Deuteronomy 6.1-4), and sometimes also to interior doorposts of rooms.

**Treif**

Prohibited foods.

**FORMATIVE JUDAISM**

**Abraham**

The patriarch who is acknowledged as a special early figure in the histories and folklore of Judaism. Presumed to have lived sometime in the period 2000-1700 B.CE; father of Ishmael by Hagar and of Isaac by Sarah. Considered the first Jew.

**Aramaic**

A Semitic language known since the ninth century B.CE, and used extensively in southwest Asia and by the Jews after the Babylonian exile. Today Aramaic is spoken by only a few groups near the region of modern Kurdistan.

**David, King**

Jewish folk hero around 1000 B.CE, to whom many biblical psalms are attributed and who is credited with politically and militarily uniting the ancient Israelite amphictyony into a centralized kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital. David is said to have planned for the Temple that his son and successor Solomon built.

**Exodus**

The event of the Israelites leaving Egypt.

**Fertile Crescent**

The crescent-shaped region stretching along the Mediterranean coast from Asia to southern Palestine. It includes parts of what is today Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan.

**First Temple Period (ca. 850 - 586 B.C.)**

Ended with destruction of the First Temple and exile of the Israelites to Babylonia.

**Intertestamental Period**

The period in which early Judaism develops, between about 400 B.CE (the traditional end date for the Jewish Bible) and the 1st century CE (composition of the Christian “New Testament”). The Jewish intertestamental literature includes the Apocrypha (mostly preserved in Greek) and the Pseudepigrapha (works from this period ascribed to ancient authors like Enoch, the patriarchs, and Moses).

**Judaism, Jew**

From the Hebrew name of the patriarch Judah, whose name also came to designate the tribe and tribal district in which Jerusalem was located. Thus, the inhabitants of Judah and members of the tribe of Judah come to be called “Judahites” or, in short form, “Jews.” The religious outlook associated with these people after about the 6th century B.CE comes to be called “Judaism,” and has varying characteristics at different times and places.

**Moses**

The great biblical personality (c. thirteenth century B.CE) who is credited with leading the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage and teaching them the divine laws at Mt. Sinai. He is also described as first of the Jewish prophets.

**Solomon, King**

(965-930 BCE) son of King David. He further strengthened the kingdom, built many new towns and erected the Temple in Jerusalem.

**TaNaKh (Tanakh)**

A relatively modern acronym for the Jewish Bible, made up of the names of the three parts of the Torah (Pentateuch or Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings)—thus TNK pronounced TaNaKh.

**Temple**

In the ancient world, temples were the centers of outward religious life, places at which public religious observances were normally conducted by the priestly professionals. In traditional Judaism, the only legitimate Temple was the one in Jerusalem, built first by King Solomon around 950 B.CE, destroyed by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar around 587/6 B.CE, rebuilt about 70 years later, and again destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. The site of the ancient Jewish Temple is now occupied, in part, by the “Dome of the Rock” Mosque. In recent times, “temple” has come to be used synonymously with synagogue in liberal Jewish usage.

**Temple Mount**

An area of roughly 40 acres on Mount Moriah on which the Jewish Temple was built in 950 B.CE. The Temple was destroyed in 586 B.CE by the Babylonians and rebuilt 70 years later. It was razed by the Romans in 70 CE. The Muslims subsequently built the mosque known as the Dome of the Rock on a plaza above the Western Wall in 691 and added a second mosque, El-Aqsa, 20 years later.

**YHWH (Yahweh)**

The sacred name of God in Jewish scriptures and tradition; also known as the tetragrammaton. Since Hebrew was written without vowels in ancient times, the four consonants YHWH contain no clue to their original pronunciation. They are generally rendered “Yahweh” in contemporary scholarship. In traditional Judaism, the name is not pronounced, but *Adonai* (“Lord”) or something similar is substituted. In most English versions of the Bible the tetragrammaton is represented by “LORD”.

**RABBINIC JEWISH THOUGHT****Akiba (Aqiba, Akiva) ben Joseph**

Famous Jewish rabbi (c. 50-135 CE) in ancient Palestine; a major legal scholar, who established an academy in B'nai Brak, and was also a legendary mystic and martyr. He was tortured and killed by the Romans in 135 CE.

**Anthropomorphism**

Greek term for the attribution of human behavior or characteristics to inanimate objects, animals, natural phenomena or deity. With regard to deity, anthropomorphism became a point of theological discussion in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

**Babylonian exile**

This refers to the period between 587 and 538 BCE when many Jewish families were held captive in Babylon. After Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon in 538, Jews were given permission to return to Judea.

**Bar Kokhba Revolt**

The second Jewish revolt against Rome (131-135 CE), led by the warrior Bar Kokhba and the prominent sage Rabbi Akiva. The Roman emperor Hadrian promised at first to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, but later changed his mind and decided to establish a Roman colony there.

instead. After the defeat of the revolt at Betar the Romans leveled Jerusalem and exiled the population.

### **Berit or Brit**

(Heb., “covenant”). A pact between two parties. The major covenants in Jewish scriptures are God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15), and the Sinai/Moses covenant (Exodus 19-24) between God and the people Israel. In Judaism, the covenant is a major theological concept referring to the eternal bond between God and the Jews grounded in God's gracious and steadfast concern (*hesed*) that calls for the nation's obedience to the divine commandments (*mitzvot*) and instruction (Torah).

### **Byzantine Period**

In 313 CE, the Byzantine Empire was established in the eastern part of the Roman Empire after the emperor Constantine adopted Christianity. The Land of Israel had become a predominantly Christian country, and Jews were deprived of most of the little autonomy they still had.

### **Chosen People**

According to the Torah, Jews were chosen by God to receive the Torah and were given the special obligation to be “A Light Unto The Nations.”

### **Commandments**

(*mitzvot*; sing., *mitzvah*). There are 613 religious commandments (*mitzvot*) referred to in the Torah (and elaborated upon by the rabbinic sages). Of these, 248 are positive commandments and 365 are negative. The numbers respectively symbolize the fact that divine service must be expressed through all one's bodily parts during all the days of the year. In general, a *mitzvah* refers to any act of religious duty or obligation; more colloquially, a *mitzvah* refers to a “good deed.”

### **Diaspora**

(Greek “scattering”). Refers to the Jewish communities living outside of the Land of Israel.

### **God – Torah – Israel**

The three aspects of Judaism. God is the spiritual and Divine part of Jewish life and belief; Torah refers to the laws and commandments through which Jews express their relationship with God; and Israel refers to the Jewish people.

### **Eretz Yisrael/Israel**

(Heb., “land of Israel”). In Jewish thought, the special term for the land promised to the Jewish people by God in the Torah.

### **Galut**

(Heb., “exile”). The term refers to the various expulsions of Jews from the ancestral homeland. Over time, it came to express the broader notion of Jewish homelessness and the state of being aliens. Thus, colloquially, “to be in galut” means to live in the diaspora and also to be in a state of physical and even spiritual alienation from the land of Israel.

### **HaShem**

(“the name”). Commonly used to refer to God, while avoiding casual use of God's name in conversation.

### **Hellenism**

This term refers to the adaptation of Greek thought and patterns of behavior by non-Greeks. In the ancient Near East, Hellenism became predominant after Alexander the Great and his successors tried to instill Hellenic culture throughout their empires. The Jewish communities in Alexandria, Egypt, in Jerusalem and its environs, and throughout the Roman Empire adopted Hellenistic ways.

### **Hillel**

Probably a Babylonian, Hillel was an important sage of the early Jewish period in Palestine around the turn of the era. His teachings convey the Pharisaic ideal through many epigrams on humility and peace (found in *Sayings of the Fathers*, 1-2), and were fundamental in shaping the Pharisaic traditions and modes of interpretation. In rabbinic lore, Hillel is famous for a negative

formulation of the “golden rule” (recited to a non-Jew): “What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.” His style of legal reasoning is continued by his disciples, known as Beit Hillel (“House/School of Hillel”), and is typically contrasted with that of Shammai (a contemporary) and his school.

### **Messiah**

("anointed one"). Ancient priests and kings (and sometimes prophets) of Israel were anointed with oil. In early Judaism, the term came to mean a royal descendant of the dynasty of David who would restore the united kingdom of Israel and Judah and usher in an age of peace, justice and plenty. The concept developed in many directions over the centuries. The messianic age was believed by some Jews to be a time of perfection of human institutions; others believed it to be a time of radical new beginnings, a new heaven and earth, after divine judgment and destruction.

### **Rabbi**

(adj. rabbinic, Heb., “my master”). An authorized teacher of the classical Jewish tradition after the fall of the second Temple in 70 CE. The role of the rabbi has changed considerably throughout the centuries. Traditionally, rabbis serve as the legal and spiritual guides of their congregations and communities. The title is conferred after considerable study of traditional Jewish sources. This conferral and its responsibilities is central to the chain of tradition in Judaism.

### **Rabbinical Judaism**

A general term encompassing all movements of Judaism descended from Pharisaic Judaism, and includes all movements in existence today.

### **Sanhedrin**

(from Greek for “assembly” [of persons seated together]). A legislative and judicial body from the period of early Judaism and into rabbinic times. Traditionally composed of 71 members.

### **Shekinah**

Jewish term for the divine presence; the Holy Spirit. In Kabbalism it sometimes took on the aspect of the feminine element in the deity.

### **Western Wall**

(Heb., *kotel*). The only remaining structure from the Second Temple left standing after the Roman destruction. Actually, part of the retaining wall of the mount on which the Temple stood. Since the Jews are considered to be in a state of “ritual impurity” until certain special sacrifices can be brought (notably the ashes of the red heifer), some authorities hold religious Jews are forbidden to set foot on the actual site of the Temple and therefore, the Western Wall is the closest they can come to praying at the Temple site. Others hold, however, that Jews may ascend the Temple Mount compound and are only forbidden to enter certain areas inside it. Sometimes called the “Wailing Wall.”

## **MISHNAH**

### **Halaka(h)/Halakha/Halacha**

(adj. *halakic*). Any normative Jewish law, custom, practice, or rite - or the entire complex. Halakah is law established or custom ratified by authoritative rabbinic jurists and teachers. Colloquially, if something is deemed *halakhic*, it is considered proper and normative behavior.

### **Mishnah/Oral Law**

The Mishnah is the digest of Jewish oral *halakah* as it existed at the end of the 2nd century; it was collated, edited and revised by Rabbi Judah the Prince. The code is divided into six major units and sixty-three minor ones. The work is the authoritative legal tradition of the early sages and is the basis of the legal discussions of the Talmud. In traditional Jewish pharisaic/rabbinic thought, God reveals instructions for living through both the written scriptures and through a parallel process of orally transmitted traditions (oral law).

## TALMUD

### Babylonian Talmud and Palestinian/Jerusalem/Eretz Yisrael Talmud

More than a century after the rabbis of Palestine edited their discussions of the Mishnah and created the Palestinian Talmud (*Talmud Yerushalmi*), some of the leading Babylonian rabbis compiled another editing of the discussions on the Mishnah. By then, these deliberations had been going on some three hundred years. The Babylonian edition was far more extensive than its Palestinian counterpart, and the Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*) became the most authoritative compilation of the Oral Law. When people speak of studying "the Talmud," they almost invariably mean the *Bavli* rather than the *Yerushalmi*.

### Beit Hillel

(Lit. "House of Hillel"). A school of thought during the Talmudic period named after the students of Hillel, sometimes contrasted with the generally stricter, more legalistic views of Beit Shammai.

### Beit Shammai

(Lit. "House of Shammai"). A school of thought during the Talmudic period named after the students of Shammai, sometimes contrasted with the generally more lenient views of Beit Hillel.

### Gemara

(Heb., "completion"). Popularly applied to the Jewish Talmud as a whole, to discussions by rabbinic teachers on the Mishnah, and to decisions reached in these discussions. In a more restricted sense, the work of the generations of the *Amoraim* in "completing" the Mishnah to produce the Talmuds.

### Hermeneutics

Principles of interpretation (from the Greek, "to interpret, translate"). The term is often used with reference to the study of Jewish scripture.

### Shulhan Aruch

(Heb., "prepared table"). A code of Jewish law attributed to Joseph Karo in 1565 CE, which became authoritative for classical Judaism.

## MIDRASH

### Aggada(h)

(adj. aggadic; Heb., "telling, narration"). Jewish term for non-halakhic (nonlegal) matter, especially in Talmud and Midrash; includes folklore, legend, theology/theosophy, scriptural interpretations, biography, etc.; also spelled haggada(h), not to be confused, however, with the Passover manual called "the Haggada(h)."

### Midrash

From *darash*, "to inquire," whence it comes to mean "exposition" (of scripture). Refers to the "commentary" literature developed in classical Judaism (but that has continued in contemporary times) that attempts to interpret Jewish scriptures in a thorough manner. Literary Midrash may focus either on *halakha*, directing a Jew to specific patterns of religious practice, or on (*h*)*aggada*, dealing with theological ideas, ethical teachings, popular philosophy, imaginative exposition, legend, allegory, and even animal fables - that is, whatever is not *halakah*.

## MEDIEVAL JUDAISM

### Ashkenazi(m)

(adj. Ashkenazic). The term now used for Jews who derive from northern Europe and who generally follow the customs originating in medieval German Judaism, in contradistinction to Sephardic Judaism, which has its distinctive roots in Spain and the Mediterranean. Originally the designation Ashkenaz referred to a people and country bordering on Armenia and the upper Euphrates; in medieval times, it came to refer to the Jewish area of settlement in northwest Europe (northern France and western Germany). By extension, it now refers to Jews of northern and eastern European background (including Russia) with their distinctive liturgical practices or religious and social customs.

**Blood Libel**

An allegation, recurring during the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries (after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 declared the consecrated host Christ's real body and the wine real blood), that Jews were killing Christian children to use their blood for the ritual of making unleavened bread (matzah).

**Genizah**

A hiding place or storeroom, usually connected with a Jewish synagogue, for worn-out holy books. The most famous is the Cairo Genizah, which contained books and documents that provide source material for Jewish communities living under Islamic rule from about the 9th through the 12th centuries. It was discovered at the end of the 19th century.

**Rashi (1040-1105)**

Acronym for Rabbi Solomon (Sholomo) ben Isaac, a great medieval sage of Troyes, France. He is the author of fundamental commentaries on the Talmud, and one of the most beloved and influential commentaries on the Bible. Characterized by great lucidity and pedagogy, his comments emphasized the plain, straightforward sense of a text.

**Sephardi, Sephardim (pl.)**

(adj. Sephardic). The designation Sepharad in biblical times refers to a colony of exiles from Jerusalem (Obadiah 20); in the medieval period, Sephardic Jews are those descended from those who lived in Spain and Portugal (the Iberian peninsula) before the expulsion of 1492. As a cultural designation, the term refers to the complex associated with Jews of this region and its related diaspora in the Balkans and Middle East (especially in Islamic countries). The term is used in contradistinction to Ashkenazi, but it does not refer, thereby, to all Jews of non-Ashkenazi origin.

**MAIMONIDES****Guide for the Perplexed**

Maimonides' masterpiece of Jewish philosophy and theology, written from the perspective of an Aristotelian philosopher.

**Maimonides, or Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204)**

A major medieval rabbi, physician, scientist, and philosopher, known by the acronym RaMBaM (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon). Born in Spain, Maimonides fled from persecution to Morocco and finally settled in Egypt. His Major works include a legal commentary on the Mishnah (the *Mishnah Torah*) and the preeminent work of medieval Jewish rational philosophy, *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

**KABBALAH AND JEWISH MYSTICISM****Kabbalah**

The specific term for the esoteric or mystic doctrine concerning God and the universe, asserted to have come down as a revelation to elect saints from a remote past, and preserved only by a privileged few. At first consisting only of empirical lore, it assumed, under the influence of Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean philosophy, a speculative character. In the geonic period it is connected with a Mishnah-like text-book, the "Sefer Ye□irah. From the thirteenth century onward the Kabbalah branched out into an extensive literature, alongside of and in opposition to the Talmud. It was written in a peculiar Aramaic dialect, and was grouped as commentaries on the Torah, around the Zohar as its holy book, which suddenly made its appearance.

**Zohar**

A pseudepigraphic work which pretends to be a revelation from God communicated through R. Simeon ben Yohai to the latter's select disciples. Under the form of a commentary on the Pentateuch, written partly in Aramaic and partly in Hebrew, it

contains a complete cabalistic theosophy, treating of the nature of God, the cosmogony and cosmology of the universe, the soul, sin, redemption, good, evil, etc. It first appeared in Spain in the thirteenth century, being made known through the agency of the cabalistic writer Moses ben Shem-Tob de Leon, who ascribed it to the miracle-working tanna Simeon ben Yohai.

#### **EASTERN EUROPE: SHTETL JUDAISM, MITNAGDIM AND HASIDIM BESHT**

This name, an acronym for Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name), suggests the charismatic power associated with this leader and putative founder of Polish Hasidism. During his life (1700-1760) the Hasidic movement developed and became a potent element in eastern European Judaism.

#### **Chabad/HaBaD**

This acronym, standing for the mystical values of *Hesed*, *Binah*, and *Daat* (loving-kindness, understanding, and knowledge) refers to the Lubavitch dynasty of Polish Hasidism (named for the town in which it began), which has had a profound influence on Judaism in the United States and modern Israel.

#### **Gematria**

An interpretative device in rabbinic Judaism that focuses on the numerical value of each letter and word.

#### **Hasidim, Hasidism**

(Heb., "pious ones"). The term may refer to Jews in various periods: (1) a group that resisted the policies of Antiochus Epiphanes in the 2nd century BCE at the start of the Maccabean revolt; (2) pietists in the 13th century; (3, most common) followers of the movement of Hasidism founded in the first half of the 18th century by Israel Baal Shem Tov.

#### **Kabala(h) or Kabbala(h)**

(Heb., *qabbala*, "receiving, tradition"). A system of Jewish theosophy and mysticism.

#### **Mitnagdim**

This term refers to traditionalist Jews who opposed the mystical movement of Polish Hasidism when it developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

#### **Yiddish**

Uses the same alphabet as Hebrew but is a blend of Hebrew and several European languages, primarily German. Yiddish was the vernacular of East European and Russian Jews.

#### **RESPONSA**

##### **Responsa**

Also called *teshubot*, from *shelot uteshuvot* (questions and answers); answers to questions on *halakah* and observances, given by Jewish scholars on topics addressed to them. Responsa literature originated during the geonic period, and is still used as a means of modern updating and revising of *halakah*.

#### **ENLIGHTENMENT, EMANCIPATION & THE RISE OF SECULARISM**

##### **Assimilation**

The process of becoming incorporated into mainstream society. Strict observance of Jewish laws and customs pertaining to dress, food, and religious holidays tends to keep Jews separate and distinct from the culture of the country within which they are living. Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), a German Jew, was one of the key people working for the assimilation of the Jews in the German cultural community.

**Haskalah**

This Hebrew term refers to a modernizing Jewish movement in eastern Europe that invented the term, a translation of the word *enlightenment*, to emphasize its connection to Hebraic culture even while adapting to modernity. A member of this movement is called, in Hebrew, *maskil*, an enlightened one.

**AMERICAN JUDAISM****Conservative Judaism**

A modern development in Judaism, reacting to early Jewish Reform movements in an attempt to retain clearer links to classical Jewish law while at the same time adapting it to modern situations. Its scholarly center in the U.S. is the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

**Hadassah**

Jewish women's Zionist organization headquartered in the United States.

**Orthodox Judaism**

Modern Orthodox Judaism has its roots in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and maintains a traditional interpretation of a commanding God. The scholarly center of Modern Orthodox Judaism is Yeshiva University in New York.

**Reconstructionist Judaism**

Founded by Mordecai M. Kaplan (1881-1982), this represents a recent development in American Judaism, and attempts to focus on Judaism as a civilization and culture constantly adapting to insure survival in a natural social process. The central academic institution is the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia.

**Reform Judaism**

Modern movement originating in 18th century Europe that attempts to see Judaism as a rational religion adaptable to modern needs and sensitivities. The ancient traditions and laws are historical relics that need have no binding power over modern Jews. The central academic institution of American Reform Judaism is the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, Los Angeles, Cincinnati and New York.

**MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT****Martin Buber**

This Jewish philosopher (1878-1965) advocated recognizing that human beings experience the world either through “relationship” among equal subjects or as subjects manipulating an object. Buber wrote “I and Thou,” in which he proposes different levels of relationships, and our ability to recognize a profound relationship with God.

**SHOAH****Antisemitism**

Refers to modern anti-Jewish activities. Sometimes written as anti-Semitism, which does not make sense as a literal phrase because there is no such thing as “Semitism.”

**Aryan**

“Aryan” was a 19th-century linguistics term used to describe the Indo-European languages. The term was subsequently perverted to refer to the people who spoke those languages, which the Nazis deemed superior to those people who spoke Semitic languages. Thus, Aryan came to describe people of “proven” non-Jewish and purely Teutonic (“racial”) background.

**Auschwitz**

Concentration and extermination camp in upper Silesia, Poland, 37 miles west of Krakow. Established in 1940 as a concentration camp, it became an extermination camp in early 1942.

**Buchenwald**

One of the largest concentration camps on German soil. It was constructed in 1937 in Weimar, Germany. Originally a camp for political prisoners, 10,000 Jews were imprisoned there after Kristallnacht.

**Bergen-Belsen**

Nazi concentration camp in northwestern Germany. Erected in 1943. Thousands of Jews, political prisoners, and POWs were killed there. Liberated by British troops in April 1945, although many of the remaining prisoners died of typhus after liberation.

**Dachau**

Nazi concentration camp in southern Germany. Erected in 1933, this was the first Nazi concentration camp. Used mainly to incarcerate German political prisoners until late 1938, whereupon large numbers of Jews, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, and other supposed enemies of the state and anti-social elements were sent as well. Nazi doctors and scientists used many prisoners at Dachau as guinea pigs for experiments. During the war, construction began on a gas chamber, but it never became operational. Dachau was liberated by American troops in April 1945.

**Eichmann, Adolf (1906-1962)**

SS Lieutenant-colonel and head of the "Jewish Section" of the Gestapo. He was instrumental in implementing the "Final Solution" by organizing the transportation of Jews to death camps from all over Europe. He was arrested at the end of World War II in the American zone, but escaped, went underground, and disappeared. On May 11, 1960, members of the Israeli Secret Service uncovered his whereabouts and smuggled him from Argentina to Israel. Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem (April-December 1961), convicted, and sentenced to death. He was executed on May 31, 1962, the only person ever executed by the State of Israel.

**Einsatzgruppen**

The four (A, B, C, D) mobile units of the Security Police and SS Security Service that followed the German armies into the Soviet Union in June 1941. Their charge was to kill all Jews, as well as Soviet commissars and "mental defectives." They were supported by units of the uniformed German Order Police and used local Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian volunteers for the killings. The victims were shot and buried in mass graves. At least 1.3 million Jews were killed in this manner.

**Final Solution**

In Nazi terminology, the planned mass murder and total annihilation of the Jews.

**Genocide**

The partial or entire destruction of religious, racial or national groups.

**Ghetto**

The ghetto was a section of a city where all Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to reside. Surrounded by barbed wire or walls, the ghettos were often sealed so that people were prevented from leaving or entering. Established mostly in Eastern Europe (e.g., Lodz, Warsaw, Vilna, Riga, Minsk), the ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, starvation and forced labor. All were eventually destroyed as the Jews were deported to death camps.

**Holocaust Revisionists**

Those who deny that the Holocaust ever happened.

**Kristallnacht**

(Ger. "crystal night," meaning "night of broken glass"). Organized destruction of synagogues, Jewish houses and shops, accompanied by arrests of individual Jews, which took place in Germany and Austria under the Nazis on the night of Nov. 9-10, 1938.

**Protocols of the Elders of Zion**

A major piece of antisemitic propaganda, compiled at the end of the 19th century by members of the Russian Secret Police. Essentially adapted from a nineteenth century French polemical satire directed against Emperor Napoleon III, substituting Jewish leaders, the Protocols maintained that

Jews were plotting world dominion by setting Christian against Christian, corrupting Christian morals and attempting to destroy the economic and political viability of the West. It gained great popularity after World War I and was translated into many languages, encouraging antisemitism in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. Long repudiated as an absurd and hateful lie, the book currently has been reprinted and is widely distributed by Neo-Nazis and others who are committed to the destruction of the State of Israel.

### **Shoah**

Denotes the catastrophic destruction of European Jewry during World War II. The term is used in Israel, and the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) has designated an official day, called Yom ha-Shoah, as a day of commemorating the Shoah or Holocaust.

### **Warsaw Ghetto**

Established in November 1940, the ghetto, surrounded by a wall, confined nearly 500,000 Jews. Almost 45,000 Jews died there in 1941 alone, due to overcrowding, forced labor, lack of sanitation, starvation, and disease. From April 19 to May 16, 1943, a revolt took place in the ghetto when the Germans, commanded by General Jürgen Stroop, attempted to raze the ghetto and deport the remaining inhabitants to Treblinka. The uprising, led by Mordecai Anielewicz, was the first instance in occupied Europe of an uprising by an urban population.

## **ZIONISM & ISRAEL TODAY**

### **Al-Aqsa Intifada**

An uprising by the Palestinians, sometimes called the second intifada. The Palestinians blame a visit by Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount in September 2000 for sparking the violence, but the Palestinian Authority Communications Minister admitted the uprising had been planned after the failure of the Camp David summit in July 2000.

### **Al-Aqsa Mosque**

Third holiest shrine in the Muslim world, situated on the Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif) in Jerusalem.

### **Aliya(h)**

(Heb., "going up") —A term used in Judaism especially for immigration to the land of Israel (although it can also be used for "going up" to the *bema* to read from Torah). The major waves of such emigration as part of the modern Zionist movement are usually thought of as the BILU movement: The First Aliya (1882-1903), the Second Aliya (1904-1913), and the Third Aliya (1919-1924). During the Nazi period, when Great Britain imposed its Passfield White Paper and severely limited immigration, immigration continued with the illegal smuggling of refugees.

### **Arab Nations**

Those countries where Arabic is the principal language spoken. Islamic nations are those non-Arabic speaking countries where Islam is the dominant religion and often the source of the government's legitimacy. All the Arab nations have Islam as their official religion.

### **Balfour Declaration**

Statement issued by the British Government in 1917 recognizing the Jewish people's right to a national home in the land of Israel. Named for Lord Balfour who signed it on Britain's behalf.

### **Ben-Gurion, David**

This Polish Jewish immigrant to Palestine (1886-1973) became the first prime minister of Israel.

### **BILU**

This name is an acronym for the phrase from Isaiah 2:5, "House of Jacob, let us go up in the light of the Lord," that has been secularized and made to refer only to going up to the land of Israel (aliya). It refers to the first great migration of eastern European Jews to Israel from 1882-1903.

### **Cultural Zionism**

The counterpoint to Herzl's political Zionism was provided by Asher Ginsberg, better known by his pen name Ahad HaAm (One of the People). Ahad HaAm realized that a

new meaning to Jewish life would have to be found for the younger generation of East European Jews who were revolting against traditional Jewish practice. While Herzl focused on the plight of Jews alone, Ahad HaAm was also interested in the plight of Judaism, which could no longer be contained within the limits of traditional religion. Ahad HaAm's solution was cultural Zionism: the establishment in Palestine of small settlements aimed at reviving the Jewish spirit and culture in the modern world. Ahad HaAm believed that by settling in that ancient land, religious Jews would replace their metaphysical attachment to the Holy Land with a new Hebrew cultural renaissance. Palestine and the Hebrew language were important not because of their religious significance but because they had been an integral part of the Jewish people's history and cultural heritage.

### **The Dreyfus Affair**

In 1894, in the aftermath of military defeat at the hands of Prussia, Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935), an assimilated Jewish captain in the French military, was tried for selling military secrets to Germany. He was found guilty and sentenced to internment at Devil's Island. During the controversy surrounding the trial, anti-Jewish riots broke out in various French cities. Under pressure from French intellectuals who recognized Dreyfus was being used because he was a Jew as a scapegoat for France's military defeat, a retrial freed Dreyfus for time served. Eventually, Dreyfus was fully exonerated and reinstated as a major in the army. Jews worldwide were shocked that enlightened France and much of her citizenry could act in such a blatantly anti-Semitic manner. The lesson learned by many was that assimilation is no defense against anti-Semitism. As a result of the anti-Semitic overtones of the trial and much of the French press, Theodore Herzl, a reporter covering the trial, involved himself with the Zionist movement.

### **Hatikvah**

National anthem of Israel. The words were written by Naftali Herz Imber (about 1870). The melody is a folk song based on a tune which is known in many European countries in various forms.

### **Intifada**

Palestinian civil uprising in Gaza and the West Bank, December 1987-September 1993, to protest Israeli occupation. A second uprising began in 2000 and was essentially over by the end of 2004.

### **Israel**

A name given to the Jewish patriarch Jacob according to the etiology of Genesis 32.38. In Jewish biblical times, this name refers not only to the northern tribes, but also to the entire nation. Historically, Jews have continued to regard themselves as the true continuation of the ancient Israelite national-religious community. The term thus has a strong cultural sense. In modern times, it also refers to the political State of Israel.

### **Israeli Arabs**

Arabs who are citizens of Israel, including Palestinian Arabs who chose to stay in their homes rather than flee in 1947-1949, and other Arabs who were allowed to become naturalized citizens. Approximately 20 percent of the Israeli population are Arabs. Israeli Arabs enjoy equal rights with Israeli Jews in Israel. The one exception is that Israeli Arabs are not required to serve in the military, though some, including all Druze, do choose to serve.

### **Jerusalem**

The capital of Israel, in the east-central part of the country. King David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel 3,000 years ago, and the city has played a central role in Jewish existence ever since. The Western Wall inside the Old City of Jerusalem is the part of the Temple Mount on which the ancient Temple stood, and is the holiest site in Judaism.

### **Kibbutz**

Communal settlement in modern Israel. Originally, kibbutzim (plural) focused on agriculture, but many of them are now engaged in a variety of activities including tourism, high-tech ventures, and other industries.

**Knesset**

The parliament of the State of Israel. Its name and the number of its members are based on the “Knesset Hagdola” of the early Second Temple period. It is composed of 120 representatives of different political parties, elected for a four-year term.

**Labor Zionism**

The belief that anti-Semitism stemmed from the Jews distancing themselves from land of Israel. A.D. Gordon felt the way to national rebirth was to banish the exile felt in Jewish soul through labor on the land of Israel.

**Land for Peace**

Slogan often associated with the Israeli left, which actually reflects longstanding Israeli government willingness to negotiate a withdrawal from parts of the territory captured in 1967 in exchange for an end to the conflict with the Arab nations and the Palestinian people.

**Law of Return**

Legislation adopted in 1950 that allows all Jews the legal right to immigrate to Israel and immediately become citizens if they choose to do so. Every Jew settling in Israel is considered a returning citizen, and this law recognized the connection between the Jewish people and their homeland.

**Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**

Umbrella organization, a coalition of groups including the Fatah, the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and several others. The PLO was formed in 1964 by the first Arab summit conference as the embodiment of the notion of a Palestinian entity. It was originally controlled by the Arab states but after the 1967 war was taken over by genuine Palestinian nationalist groups and became autonomous. The PLO’s longtime leader was Yasser Arafat, who died in 2004.

**Palestinian Authority (PA)**

The Palestinian autonomous government in the West Bank and Gaza areas from which the Israeli Defense Forces have redeployed since the 1994 Gaza-Jericho agreement and the 1995 Interim Agreement (“Oslo II”).

**Palestinian Refugees**

About 600,000 Palestinian (other estimates range from 500,000 to 800,000) fled Israel between 1947 and 1949, fundamentally because of the Arab states' rejection of the United Nation partition plan and invasion of Israel. The refugees fled out of fear of war and in response to Arab leaders' calls for Arabs to evacuate the areas allocated to the Jews until Israel had been eliminated. In a handful of cases, Palestinians were expelled. A majority of the refugees and their descendants now live in the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the West Bank. About 360,000 Palestinians fled eastern Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights during and after Israel's defensive 1967 War. Palestinians who fled in 1967 are technically considered displaced persons and do not have official refugee status. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency estimated that 175,000 of these 360,000 Palestinians were refugees from the 1948 War. The May 4, 1994, Gaza-Jericho Accord calls for Israel, the Palestinians, Jordan, and Egypt to form a Continuing Committee to discuss the 1967 displaced persons. The problem of the 1947-1949 refugees, on the other hand, is to be left for the “final status” negotiations under the terms of the Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles of September 13, 1993.

**Political Zionism**

Stressed the importance of political action and deemed the attainment of political rights in Palestine a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the Zionist enterprise. Political Zionism is linked to the name of Theodor Herzl, who considered the Jewish problem a political one that should be

solved by overt action in the international arena. His aim was to obtain a charter, recognized by the world leadership, granting the Jews sovereignty in a Jewish owned territory.

**Religious Zionism**

Based on a fusion of Jewish religion and nationhood, it aims to restore not only Jewish political freedom but also Jewish religion in the light of the Torah and its commandments. For Religious Zionism, Judaism based on the commandments is a sine qua non for Jewish national life in the homeland.

**Sinai Campaign**

War fought from October-November 1956 when Israel occupied the Sinai peninsula in reaction to Egyptian terrorist attacks and the blockade of the Straits of Tiran.

**Six-Day War**

War fought in June 1967 when Israel reacted to Arab threats and the blockade of the Straits of Tiran. Stunning victory over the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian armies.

**Yom Kippur War**

In October 1973, Syrian and Egyptian forces, assisted by other Arab nations, launched a surprise attack on Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year for Jews. Although placed on the defensive for the first two days, Israel eventually was able to counter-attack and defeat the Arabs. An internationally-brokered cease-fire was established after three weeks of fighting.