

SIMPLE STEPS FOR
SHARING MESSIAH
WITH YOUR
JEWISH FRIENDS



STEVEN G. COOK, TH.D.
JEWISH END-TIME MINISTRIES, INC.
EVANGELISM OUTREACH DIRECTOR



1829 County Road 6 – Ironton, OH 45638
www.stevecook.org / www.jem-missions.com
Phone: 740-550-9403 – Email: stevecook22@sbcglobal.net

Table of Contents

I.	First Steps in Sharing Messiah	2-7
II.	Top 50 Countries of Jewish Population (2005)	8-9
III.	Top 45 Cities of Jewish Population (2002)	10
IV.	Who Is a Jew?	11-14
V.	Ashkenazic, Sephardic, & Mizrahi Jews	15-16
VI.	Jewish Attitudes Toward Non-Jews	17-19
VII.	Movements of Judaism	20-22
VIII.	What Do Jews Believe?	23-44
	• Mitzvot & Halakhah: Jewish Law	25-27
	• Moshiach: The Messiah	28-31
	• Olam Ha-Ba: The Afterlife	32-35
	• Kabbala & Jewish Mysticism	36-38
	• Shabbat (Sabbath)	39-43
	• Rosh Chodesh	44-45
IX.	Major Jewish Holidays	46-58
	• Pesach: Passover	46-50
	• The Counting of Omer	51
	• Shavuot	52
	• Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year)	53-54
	• Days of Awe	55
	• Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)	56
	• Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles)	57-58
	• Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah	59
	• Chanukkah (Festival of Lights)	60-61
	• Tu B'Shevat (New Year for Trees)	62
	• Purim	63-64
	• Tisha B'Av (Fast of the Ninth Day of Av)	65
	• Minor Fasts	66
X.	New Jewish Holidays	67
XI.	The Month of Elul & Selichot.....	68-69
XII.	A Gentile's Guide to the Jewish Holidays	70-75
XIII.	Jewish Tract: "The Jerusalem Road"	76-77

“First Steps in Sharing Messiah”

I. Introduction

- A. There is a belief, even among evangelical Christians, that ALL Jews will be saved because they are Jews – Not True!
- B. **Ezekiel 34:11** – *“For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.”*
- C. Jews need Jesus as much as Gentiles – *“ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23); *“There is NONE righteous, no not one”* (Romans 3:10).
- D. The Apostle Paul identified himself as the “Apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13), yet he was burdened for his brethren in the flesh (the Jews), that they would be saved (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1-3; 1:16; Acts 20:21).
- E. Why should Christians be concerned with evangelizing the Jew?
- F. Let me suggest **10 Good Reasons** –
 - 1. “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16)
 - 2. God desires all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4)
 - 3. God makes no distinction between men regarding salvation (Romans 10:12a; John 3:1-18)
 - 4. God is rich unto all who call upon Him (Romans 10:12b; Romans 10:13)
 - 5. Salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22; John 1:11-12)
 - 6. No one will be saved apart from the Word of God (Romans 1:16; 10:17; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 6:17; John 6:44)
 - 7. Israel is the “Apple of God’s Eye” (Psalm 135:4; Deut. 32:9-10; Zech. 2:8)
 - 8. God has always had a remnant – More Jews saved in last 20 years than in the last 2,000 years (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 11:17-22)
 - 9. God has “Commanded” (not “commissioned”) believers to evangelize (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8)
 - 10. God promises “blessings” upon all those who love the Jew (Gen. 12:3; Psalm 122:6)
- G. For these reasons, and many more, I would like to discuss some “First Steps in Sharing Messiah” with our Jewish friends.

II. First Steps in Sharing Messiah

- A. Many believers would like to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with their Jewish friends, but do not know where to begin.
- B. First of all, Jews do not accept the New Testament as God’s inspired, inerrant, infallible, immutable, and eternal Word; therefore, one must be well versed in Old Testament Scriptures.
- C. Secondly, Jews have been reared from birth to reject anything that resembles Christianity or Jesus Christ.
- D. Furthermore, to compound the problem of evangelizing Jews, most are extremely suspicious and skeptical of Christians.

- E. Jews are taught from childhood that Christians committed the atrocities that Jews have suffered throughout their history.
- F. As a matter of fact, many Jews consider anyone who is not Jewish to be Christian.
- G. For these reasons, and many others, evangelizing Jews is somewhat more difficult than evangelizing Gentiles.
- H. Let us discuss briefly some important steps in witnessing and winning Jews.

III. **“Go to Learn” Principle**

- A. The most important step to learn about evangelizing Jews is that one should **“Go to Learn”**.
- B. Applying the **“Go to Learn” Principle**:
 1. Approach the Jew with openness and friendliness
 2. Try to win the Jew as a friend before trying to win them to Christ
 3. Try to discover how religious they are (many Jews are not religious at all)
 4. Do not be abrasive or condescending to Jewish people
 5. Be sensitive to their customs and cultures
 6. Ask questions sincerely with a desire to learn about them and their culture (ie. – *mezuzah*; *bar-mitzvah*; *Purim*; etc.)
 7. Ask questions that probe their belief concerning miracles, creation, or holidays such as Chanukah, Passover, or Shabbat.
 8. Try to ask questions in a way to avoid simple “yes” or “no” answers
 9. Listen in order to Learn
 10. Resist the urge to tell your Jewish friend your beliefs unless he or she asks you to tell them
- C. You will find that Jews, like most people, enjoy talking about themselves and what they believe.
- D. By observing the “Go to Learn” Principle, you will be able to build a strong friendship with a Jewish person, and in time, you will be able to share the Gospel of Christ with them.
- E. It is helpful to be wise and sympathetic to the persecutions of Jews throughout their history (past and present).
- F. Jews are cautious and perceptive – They will want to know that you have a genuine concern for them nationally as well as spiritually.
- G. BE PATIENT! Trust God to provide you with an opportunity to share the truth of Yeshua Ha Meshiach (Jesus the Messiah).

IV. **Do’s & Don’ts of Jewish Evangelism**

There are a few simple, basic **Do’s & Don’ts** to keep in mind in Jewish evangelism – Let us examine a few of the more important ones.

Do’s of Jewish Evangelism –

- **DO** give your testimony of salvation when the opportunity presents itself

- **DO** explain that you have put your faith in the Jewish Messiah as your Saviour (many Christians have tried to de-Judaize Jesus)
- **DO** share Old Testament Scripture that explains the basis for forgiveness of sins (i.e. – Isaiah 44:22 – “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins.”)
- **DO** explain that the question for your own sin has been forever settled
- **DO** include prayer whenever possible – Jews welcome prayer, especially during meals, during crisis (especially when “Sitting Shiva” - mourning the death of family or friend)
- **DO** testify of answered prayers in your own life
- **DO** invite your Jewish friend to your church (many Jews are curious about our worship services, just as most Christians are of theirs)
- **DO** use proper gospel literature/tracts (JEM Missions is a resource center for Jewish evangelistic literature specifically designed for reaching Jews)
- **DO** remain sensitive to Jewish heritage, customs, and cultural differences
- **DO** remember that our responsibility is to “sow the seed” – God still gives the increase by saving souls

Don'ts of Jewish Evangelism –

- **DON'T** use New Testament titles of Christ (some Jews think of Jesus as a “swear word” and do not realize Jesus was a Jew)
- **DON'T** use the word “Testament”; Instead use the word “Covenant” or Tenach (Tanakh) to refer to the Old Testament Scriptures
- **DON'T** use the word “Missions” or “Missionary” (most Jews have a misconception of what a missionary really is; if a Jew asks you IF you are a missionary; you can respond by asking, “Tell me what a missionary is, and I will tell you whether or not I am one.”)
- **DON'T** argue the philosophies of men (contend the Scriptures only; you should be able to use the Old Testament to present portraits of Jesus as Messiah)
- **DON'T** call upon a Jewish friend on Friday evenings (Shabbat begins at 6:00pm weekly)
- **DON'T** call upon a Jewish friend on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) because it is a time of fasting and worship
- **DON'T** call upon a Jewish friend during the busy days of Pesach (Passover)
- **DON'T** call upon a Jewish friend at his or her work place
- **DON'T** call upon a Jewish friend during other important Jewish holidays and observances
- **DON'T** “dump the truck” on a Jewish friend; instead, leave the door of opportunity open for someone else in the future

V. Using Old Testament Scriptures

- A. It is not as difficult as one might think to use Old Testament Scriptures to witness to people in general, and especially to Jews.
- B. Keep in mind that there were 2 things the New Testament church did not have –
 - 1. The New Testament church did not have a New Testament
 - 2. The New Testament church did not have a church
- C. The greatest sermon preached in the Bible is found in **Luke 24:13-27** (Jesus preaching Jesus from the Old Testament).
- D. There are **324 Messianic Prophecies** in the Old Covenant that were fulfilled by Jesus Christ when He came during the 1st Advent.
- E. Most Torah observant Jews believe in a coming Messiah, though there are differences in their beliefs.
- F. A good question to ask a Jew is, “Do you believe in the coming of Messiah?”
- G. If their answer is “yes”, another good question to ask is, “How would you recognize Messiah IF He were to come today?”
- H. Acknowledge your belief in such a Jewish Messiah as prophesied in Scripture.
- I. Share a sampling of **Messianic Prophecies** that speak of the character and coming of Messiah.
- J. The following is a sampling of the **324 Messianic Prophecies** you can use – The first verses are from the Old Covenant (Jewish Scriptures), and the second verses reference the fulfillment by Jesus recorded in the New Covenant:

- 1. **The Seed of a woman and not a man** (Genesis 3:15 / Galatians 4:4)
- 2. **The Seed of Abraham** (Genesis 22:18 / Hebrews 2:16)
- 3. **The Star of Jacob** (Numbers 24:17 / Revelation 22:16)
- 4. **From the Tribe of Judah** (Genesis 49:10 / Luke 3:33)
- 5. **Heir to David's Throne** (Isaiah 9:7 / Luke 1:32-33)
- 6. **Born in Bethlehem** (Micah 5:2 / Luke 2:4,5,7)
- 7. **The Time of His Birth** (Daniel 9:25 / Luke 2:1-2)
- 8. **Born of a Virgin** (Isaiah 7:14 / Luke 1:26-27,30-31)
- 9. **Called Out of Egypt** (Hosea 11:1 / Matthew 2:15)
- 10. **Given a Special Name** (Isaiah 7:14 / Matthew 1:22-23)
- 11. **The Time He Would Appear** (Daniel 9:25 / Galatians 4:4)
- 12. **His Forerunner** (Isaiah 40:3 / Matthew 3:3)
- 13. **His Family** (Psalm 132:11 / Luke 1:32-33)
- 14. **Willingness of His Service** (Psalm 40:6,8; Isaiah 50:5 / Hebrews 10:7-9)
- 15. **His Absolute Poverty** (Isaiah 53:2 / Luke 9:58)
- 16. **Character of His Ministry** (Isaiah 9:1-2 / Luke 4:18-19)
- 17. **His Ministry Beginning in Galilee** (Isaiah 9:1-2 / Matthew 4:12-16)
- 18. **Meekness of His Character** (Isaiah 42:2 / Matthew 12:18-21)
- 19. **His Steadfastness and Purpose** (Isaiah 50:7 / Luke 9:51)
- 20. **The Intensity of His Zeal** (Psalm 69:9 / John 2:17)
- 21. **His Miracles** (Isaiah 35:5 / Matthew 11:46)
- 22. **His Anointing by the Spirit** (Isaiah 11:2 / Acts 10:38)
- 23. **His Betrayal for Thirty Pieces of Silver** (Zechariah 11:13 / Matthew 27:9)
- 24. **His Riding into Jerusalem Upon an Ass** (Zechariah 9:9 / Matthew 21:4-5)

25. **Scattering of His Disciples** (Zechariah 13:7 / Matthew 26:31)
26. **His Rejection by Man** (Isaiah 53:3 / Matthew 26:67)
27. **His Sorrowful Character** (Isaiah 53:3 / Matthew 26:37)
28. **His Visage Being Marred** (Isaiah 52:14 / John 19:1)
29. **His Back Scarred** (Isaiah 50:6 / John 19:1)
30. **His Face Spat Upon** (Isaiah 50:6 / Mark 14:65)
31. **His Hands and Feet Nailed to a Cross** (Psalm 22:16 / John 19:34-35)
32. **His Face Smitten** (Micah 5:1 / Matthew 27:30)
33. **His Side Pierced** (Zechariah 12:10 / John 19:37)
34. **His Bones Unbroken** (Psalm 34:20 / John 19:36)
35. **Born of the Household of David** (2 Samuel 7:12-13 / Luke 1:32-33)
36. **He Would Become a Shepherd** (Isaiah 40:11 / John 10:11-16)
37. **He Was to Be a King** (Zechariah 9:9 / Matthew 21:4)
38. **He Would Be Rejected by His Own** (Psalm 69:8 / John 1:11)
39. **His People Would Hate Him** (Isaiah 49:7 / John 15:24-25)
40. **Character of His Sufferings** (Isaiah 50:6 / Matthew 26:67)
41. **His Substitutionary Death** (Isaiah 53:5 / 1 Peter 2:24-25)
42. **Died with Transgressors** (Isaiah 53:9 / Mark 15:28)
43. **God's Punitive Act in His Death** (Isaiah 53:10 / 2 Corinthians 5:21)
44. **Words Spoken on the Cross** (Psalm 22:1 / Matthew 27:46)
45. **Parting of His Garments** (Psalm 22:18 / John 19:23)
46. **Casting Lots for His Vesture** (Psalm 22:18 / John 19:23)
47. **His Utter Helplessness** (Psalm 22:14-15 / John 19:34-36)
48. **Taunted by His Enemies** (Psalm 22:8 / Luke 23:35)
49. **His Bodily Resurrection** (Psalm 16:9-11 / Acts 2:27-31)
50. **His Intercession for Others** (Isaiah 53:12 / Luke 23:34)
51. **His Ascension** (Psalm 68:18 / Acts 1:9)
52. **His Burial with the Rich** (Isaiah 53:9 / Matthew 27:57)
53. **Healer of the Brokenhearted** (Isaiah 61:1-2 / Luke 4:18-19)
54. **His Triumphal Entry** (Zechariah 9:9 / Mark 11:7,9,11)
55. **Betrayed by a Friend** (Psalm 41:9 / Luke 22:47-48)
56. **He Is the Messiah of Israel** (Isaiah 11:10 / Romans 15:12)
57. **The Glorious Messiah** (Isaiah 53:1 / Revelation 19:11-16)
58. **Messiah as King** (Psalm 2:6-9 / Revelation 19:15)
59. **Submissions of Nations to Him** (Isaiah 2:4 / Revelation 2:4)
60. **Gentiles Seek Messiah of Israel** (Isaiah 11:10 / Romans 11:25)

- K. IF your Jewish friend accepts these Scriptures, they should begin to see that the only One who could have possibly fulfilled ALL of these Messianic prophecies is Jesus Christ.

VI. The Main Objection to Christ

- A. The most common, and usually unspoken, objection for accepting Christ for Jews is the personal consequences they will suffer for doing so.
- B. Most Jews who accept Jesus as Messiah are set apart from the majority of his or her own people, and often they are labeled a "traitor".

- C. Sadly, there are many Jews who have come to realize that Yeshua IS Messiah, but who have counted the cost and deemed it too great a cost.
- D. The best way to counter this problem is with the “voice of reason” (Isaiah 1:18).
- E. You might ask, *“IF the Bible is true, and IF Jesus is Messiah after all, are you willing to learn the truth and bring about severe consequences?”*
- F. At this point, you might remind your Jewish friend that following God has never been easy. Abraham, Moses, King David, and Elijah all suffered because they chose to follow God’s way rather than the popular way of their day.
- G. You should be as prepared as possible to answer any objections, but keep in mind that whatever the outcome; no one will be saved apart from God giving the increase.
- H. To reach the Jew, one must reach him in his fortress of defensiveness with love and understanding so that he will willingly “let down the barriers instilled by his heritage, culture, and religion.”
- I. Winning the Jew is often a tediously, slow process compared to Gentiles; however, God promises blessings to those who love the Jew (Genesis 12:3; Psalm 122:6).

Top 50 Countries of Jewish Population: 2005

(Source: Jewish Virtual Library)

{<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/jewpop.html#region>}

Rank	Country	Jews	% Jewish	% of Total
1	United States	5,914,682	2%	40.5%
2	Israel	5,021,506	80%	34.4%
3	Russia	717,101	0.5%	4.91%
4	France	606,561	1%	4.16%
5	Argentina	395,379	1%	2.71%
6	Canada	393,660	1.2%	2.70%
7	United Kingdom	302,207	0.5%	2.07%
8	Ukraine	142,276	0.3%	0.975%
9	Germany	107,160	0.13%	0.734%
10	Brazil	95,125	0.051%	0.652%
11	Australia	90,406	0.45%	0.619%
12	South Africa	88,688	0.2%	0.608%
13	Belarus	72,103	0.7%	<0.5%
14	Hungary	60,041	0.6%	<0.5%
15	Mexico	53,101	0.05%	<0.5%
16	Belgium	51,821	0.5%	<0.5%
17	Spain	48,409	0.12%	<0.5%
18	Netherlands	32,814	0.2%	<0.5%
19	Moldova	31,187	0.7%	<0.5%
20	Uruguay	30,743	0.9%	<0.5%
21	Italy	30,213	0.052%	<0.5%
22	Venezuela	25,375	0.1%	<0.5%
23	Poland	24,999	0.065%	<0.5%
24	Chile	20,900	0.131%	<0.5%
25	Iran	20,405	0.03%	<0.5%
26	Ethiopia	20,000	0.027%	<0.5%
27	Sweden	18,003	0.2%	<0.5%
28	Uzbekistan	17,453	0.065%	<0.5%
29	Turkey	17,415	0.025%	<0.5%

30	Switzerland	14,978	0.2%	<0.5%
31	Panama	10,029	0.33%	<0.5%
32	Latvia	9,092	0.397%	<0.5%
33	Austria	8,184	0.1%	<0.5%
34	Georgia	7,951	0.17%	<0.5%
35	Azerbaijan	7,911	0.1%	<0.5%
36	Denmark	7,062	0.13%	<0.5%
37	Romania	6,029	0.027%	<0.5%
38	New Zealand	5,447	0.135%	<0.5%
39	India	5,401	0.0005%	<0.5%
40	Greece	5,334	0.05%	<0.5%
41	Morocco	5,236	0.016%	<0.5%
42	Kazakhstan	4,100	0.027%	<0.5%
43	Lithuania	3,596	0.1%	<0.5%
44	Colombia	3,436	0.008%	<0.5%
45	Czech Republic	3,072	0.03%	<0.5%
46	Slovakia	3,041	0.056%	<0.5%
47	Peru	2,792	0.01%	<0.5%
48	Costa Rica	2,409	0.06%	<0.5%
49	Bulgaria	2,300	0.031%	<0.5%
50	Estonia	1,818	0.136%	<0.5%

Top 45 Cities of Jewish Population: 2002

1.	New York City, NY, Metro Area.....	1,900,000
2.	Tel Aviv, Israel.....	1,860,000
3.	Los Angeles, CA.....	591,000
4.	Miami, FL.....	535,000
5.	Haifa, Israel.....	454,000
6.	Jerusalem, Israel.....	450,000
7.	Philadelphia, PA.....	315,000
8.	Paris, France.....	310,000
9.	Chicago, IL, Metro Area.....	261,000
10.	London, England.....	215,000
11.	San Francisco Bay Area, CA.....	210,000
12.	Buenos Aires, Argentina.....	180,000
13.	Ft. Lauderdale, FL.....	174,000
14.	Washington, D.C.....	165,000
15.	Toronto, Canada.....	163,000
16.	Moscow, Russia.....	150,000
17.	Miami – Dade County, FL.....	145,000
18.	Kiev, Ukraine.....	110,000
19.	Montreal, Canada.....	101,000
20.	Baltimore, MD.....	100,000
21.	Detroit, MI.....	95,000
22.	Rockland County, NY.....	83,000
23.	Atlanta, GA, Metro Area.....	70,000
24.	San Diego, CA.....	70,000
25.	Johannesburg, South Africa.....	70,000
26.	Palm Beach – Delray Beach, FL.....	67,000
27.	Cleveland, OH.....	65,000
28.	Hollywood – South Broward, FL.....	63,000
29.	Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine.....	60,000
30.	St. Louis, MO.....	54,000
31.	Phoenix, AZ.....	50,000
32.	Cherry Hill, NJ.....	49,000
33.	Denver, CO.....	46,000
34.	Pittsburgh, PA.....	45,000
35.	Kharkov, Ukraine.....	45,000
36.	Odessa, Ukraine.....	45,000
37.	Houston, TX.....	42,000
38.	Dallas, TX.....	35,000
39.	Sydney, Australia.....	35,000
40.	Newton, MA.....	34,000
41.	Minneapolis, MN.....	31,500
42.	Manchester, England.....	30,000
43.	Seattle, WA.....	29,000
44.	Milwaukee, WI.....	28,000
45.	Boston, MA, Metro Region.....	28,000

Who Is a Jew?

Origins of the Words "Jew" and "Judaism"

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

Another name used for the people is Children of Israel or Israelites, which refers to the fact that the people are descendants of Jacob, who was also called Israel. The word "Jew" (in Hebrew, "Yehudi") is derived from the name Judah, which was the name of one of Jacob's twelve sons. Judah was the ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel, which was named after him. Likewise, the word Judaism literally means "Judah-ism," that is, the religion of the Yehudim. Other sources, however, say that the word "Yehudim" means "People of God," because the first three letters of "Yehudah" are the same as the first three letters of God's four-letter name.

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

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

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

Who is a Jew?

A Jew is any person whose mother was a Jew or any person who has gone through the formal process of conversion to Judaism. It is important to note that being a Jew has nothing to do with what you believe or what you do. A person born to non-Jewish parents who has not undergone the formal process of conversion but who believes everything that Orthodox Jews believe and observes every law and custom of

Judaism is still a non-Jew, even in the eyes of the most liberal movements of Judaism, and a person born to a Jewish mother who is an atheist and never practices the Jewish religion is still a Jew, even in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox. In this sense, Judaism is more like a nationality than like other religions, and being Jewish is like a citizenship.

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

Although all Jewish movements agree on these general principles, there are occasional disputes as to whether a particular individual is a Jew. Most of these disputes fall into one of two categories. First, traditional Judaism maintains that a person is a Jew if his mother is a Jew, regardless of who his father is. The liberal movements, on the other hand, consider a person to be Jewish if either of his parents was Jewish and the child was raised Jewish. Thus, if the child of a Jewish father and a Christian mother is raised Jewish, the child is a Jew according to the Reform movement, but not according to the Orthodox movement. On the other hand, if the child of a Christian father and a Jewish mother is not raised Jewish, the child is a Jew according to the Orthodox movement, but not according to the Reform movement! The matter becomes even more complicated, because the status of that child's children also comes into question.

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

About Matrilineal Descent

Many people have asked me why traditional Judaism uses matrilineal descent to determine Jewish status, when in all other things (tribal affiliation, priestly status, royalty, etc.) Jews use patrilineal descent. The Torah does not specifically state anywhere that matrilineal descent should be used; however, there are several passages in the Torah where it is understood that the child of a Jewish woman and a non-Jewish man is a Jew, and several other passages where it is understood that the child of a non-Jewish woman and a Jewish man is not a Jew.

In Deuteronomy 7:1-5, in expressing the prohibition against intermarriage, God says, "he [i.e., the non-Jewish male spouse] will cause your child to turn away from Me and they will worship the gods of others." No such concern is expressed about the child of a non-Jewish female spouse. From this, we infer that the child of a non-Jewish male spouse is Jewish (and can therefore be turned away from Judaism), but the child of a non-Jewish female spouse is not Jewish (and therefore turning away is not an issue).

Leviticus 24:10 speaks of the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man as being "among the community of Israel" (i.e., a Jew). On the other hand, in Ezra 10:2-3, the Jews returning to Israel vowed to put aside their non-Jewish wives and the children

born to those wives. They could not have put aside those children if those children were Jews.

Several people have asked if King David was a Jew, given that one of his female ancestors, Ruth, was not a Jew? Ruth 1:16 reveals that Ruth converted to Judaism. After Ruth converted, she was considered a Jew, and all of her children born after the conversion were Jewish as well. However, Ruth is an ancestor of David's father, not of David's mother, and David's Jewish status is determined by his mother.

About the Agudath Ha-Rabonim Statement

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

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

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

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

The Agudath Ha-Rabonim did not intend to cut Reform and Conservative Jews off from their heritage. On the contrary, their intention was to bring Reform and Conservative Jews back to what they consider to be the only true Judaism. The statement encouraged Reform and Conservative Jews to leave their synagogues and "join an Orthodox synagogue, where they will be warmly welcomed." Most Jews would contend that the Agudath Ha-Rabonim were sincere, albeit misguided, in its intention.

Many Orthodox and Chasidic Jews believe that if there were no Reform or Conservative synagogues, everyone would be Orthodox. However, some would also contend that if there were no such movements, most of these people would be lost to Judaism entirely.

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

Ashkenazic, Sephardic, & Mizrachi Jews

The pages in this booklet are written from the Ashkenazic Jewish perspective. Ashkenazic Jews are the Jews of France, Germany, and Eastern Europe. Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East. Sephardic Jews are often subdivided into Sephardim (from Spain and Portugal) and Mizrachim (from the Northern Africa and the Middle East), though there is much overlap between those groups. Until the 1400s, Muslims, who generally allowed Jews to move freely throughout the region, controlled all the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa and the Middle East. When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, many of them were absorbed into existing Mizrachi communities in Northern Africa and the Middle East.

The word "Ashkenazic" is derived from the Hebrew word for Germany. The word "Sephardic" is derived from the Hebrew word for Spain. The word "Mizrachi" is derived from the Hebrew word for Eastern.

Most American Jews today are Ashkenazic, descended from Jews who emigrated from Germany and Eastern Europe from the mid 1800s to the early 1900s, although most of the early Jewish settlers of this country were Sephardic. The first Jewish congregation in North America, Shearith Israel, founded in what is now New York in 1684, was Sephardic and is still active. The first Jewish congregation in the city of Philadelphia, Congregation Mikveh Israel, founded in 1740, was also a Sephardic one, and is also still active.

In Israel, a little more than half of all Jews are Mizrachim, descended from Jews who have been in the land since ancient times or who were forced out of Arab countries after Israel was founded. Most of the rest are Ashkenazic, descended from Jews who came to the Holy Land (then controlled by the Ottoman Turks) instead of the United States in the late 1800s, or from Holocaust survivors, or from other immigrants who came at various times. About 1% of the Israeli population is the black Ethiopian Jews who fled during the brutal Ethiopian famine in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The beliefs of Sephardic Judaism are basically in accord with those of Orthodox Judaism, though Sephardic interpretations of halakhah (Jewish Law) are somewhat different than Ashkenazic ones. The best-known of these differences relates to the holiday of Pesach (Passover): Sephardic Jews may eat rice, corn, peanuts and beans during this holiday, while Ashkenazic Jews avoid them. Although some individual Sephardic Jews are less observant than others, and some individuals do not agree with all of the beliefs of traditional Judaism, there is no formal, organized differentiation into movements as there is in Ashkenazic Judaism.

Historically, Sephardic Jews have been more integrated into the local non-Jewish culture than Ashkenazic Jews. In the Christian lands where Ashkenazic Judaism flourished, the tension between Christians and Jews was great, and Jews tended to be isolated from their non-Jewish neighbors, either voluntarily or involuntarily. In the Islamic lands where Sephardic Judaism developed, there was less segregation and oppression. Sephardic Jewish thought and culture was strongly influenced by Arabic and Greek philosophy and science.

Sephardic Jews have a different pronunciation of a few Hebrew vowels and one Hebrew consonant, though most Ashkenazim are adopting Sephardic pronunciation

now because it is the pronunciation used in Israel. Sephardic prayer services are somewhat different from Ashkenazic ones, and they use different melodies in their services. Sephardic Jews also have different holiday customs and different traditional foods.

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

There are some Jews who do not fit into this Ashkenazic/Sephardic distinction. Yemenite Jews, Ethiopian Jews (also known as Beta Israel and sometimes called Falashas), and Oriental Jews also have some distinct customs and traditions. These groups, however, are relatively small and virtually unknown in America.

Jewish Attitudes toward Non-Jews

Judaism maintains that the righteous of all nations have a place in the world to come. This has been the majority rule since the days of the Talmud. Judaism generally recognizes that Christians and Moslems worship the same God that Jews do, and those who follow the tenets of their religions can be considered righteous in the eyes of God.

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

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

The Seven Laws of Noah

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

Judaism teaches that the Noahic commandments are binding on all people, because all people are descended from Noah and his family. The 613 mitzvot of the Torah, on the other hand, are only binding on the descendants of those who accepted the commandments at Sinai and upon those who take on the yoke of the commandments voluntarily (by conversion). In addition, the Noahic commandments are applied more leniently to non-Jews than the corresponding commandments are to Jews, because non-Jews do not have the benefit of Oral Torah to guide them in interpreting

the laws. For example, worshipping God in the form of a man would constitute idolatry for a Jew; however, according to some sources, the Christian worship of Jesus does not constitute idolatry for non-Jews.

There is a growing movement of non-Jews who have consciously accepted these seven laws of Noah and chosen to live their lives in accordance with these laws. This movement is referred to as B'nei Noah (Children of Noah).

Goyim, Shiksas and Shkutzim

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

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

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

Interfaith Marriages

I once read a story of a man who stated that many Jews do not like Gentiles. He knew this because his (Jewish) girlfriend's friends and parents disapproved of him. It was explained that these people did not disapprove of him because he was a Christian; rather they disapproved of him because he was a Christian dating a Jew, which is another issue altogether.

Traditional Judaism does not permit interfaith marriages. The Torah states that the children of such marriages would be lost to Judaism (Deut. 7:3-4), and experience has shown the truth of this passage all too well. Children of intermarriage are rarely raised Jewish; they are normally raised Christian or non-religious. This may reflect the fact that Jews who intermarry are not deeply committed to their religion in the first place (if they were, why would they marry someone who did not share it?), but the statistics are sufficiently alarming to be a matter of great concern to the Jewish community. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) performed by the Council of Jewish Federations found that only 28% of the children of intermarriage

today are being raised Jewish and the majority of converts out of Judaism are children of intermarriage. One Orthodox Jew went so far as to state that intermarriage is accomplishing what Hitler could not: the destruction of the Jewish people. That is an extreme view, but it vividly illustrates how seriously many Jews take the issue of intermarriage.

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

Conversion

In general, Jews do not try to convert non-Jews to Judaism as they once did (Matthew 23:15). In fact, according to halakhah (Jewish Law), rabbis are supposed to make three vigorous attempts to dissuade a person who wants to convert to Judaism.

According to Judaism, Jews have a lot of responsibilities that non-Jews do not have. To be considered a good and righteous person in the eyes of God, a non-Jew need only follow the seven Noahic commandments, whereas a Jew has to follow all 613 commandments given in the Torah. If the potential convert is not going to follow those extra rules, it is better for him or her to stay a Gentile, and since Jews are all responsible for each other, it is better for them too if that person stayed a Gentile. The rabbinically mandated attempt to dissuade a convert is intended to make sure that the prospective convert is serious and willing to take on all this extra responsibility.

Once a person has decided to convert, the *proselyte* (Matthew 23:15) must begin to learn Jewish religion, law and customs and begin to observe them. This teaching process generally takes at least one year, because the prospective convert must experience each of the Jewish holidays; however, the actual amount of study required will vary from person to person (a convert who was raised as a Jew might not need any further education, for example, while another person might need several years).

After the teaching is complete, the proselyte is brought before a Beit Din (rabbinical court), which examines the proselyte and determines whether he or she is ready to become a Jew. If the proselyte passes this oral examination, the rituals of conversion are performed. If the convert is male, he is circumcised (or, if he was already circumcised, a pinprick of blood is drawn for a symbolic circumcision). Both male and female converts are immersed in the mikvah (a ritual bath used for spiritual purification). The convert is given a Jewish name and is then introduced into the Jewish community. In theory, Judaism teaches that once the conversion procedure is complete, the convert is as much a Jew as anyone who is born to the religion. In practice, the convert is often treated with caution, because Jews have had a lot of bad experiences with converts who later return to their former faith in whole or in part.

Movements of Judaism

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

Movements in the United States Today

Approximately 6 million of the world's 14.1 million Jews live in the United States. There are basically three major movements in the U.S. today: **Reform**, **Conservative** and **Orthodox**. Some people also include a fourth movement, the **Reconstructionist** movement, although that movement is substantially smaller than the other three. Orthodox and sometimes Conservative are described as "traditional" movements. Reform, Reconstructionist, and sometimes Conservative are described as "liberal" or "modern" movements.

Orthodoxy is actually made up of several different groups. It includes the modern Orthodox, who have largely integrated into modern society while maintaining observance of halakhah (Jewish Law), the Chasidim, who live separately and dress distinctively (commonly, but erroneously, referred to in the media as the "ultra-Orthodox"), and the Yeshivish Orthodox, who are neither Chasidic nor modern. The Orthodox movements are all very similar in belief, and the differences are difficult for anyone who is not Orthodox to understand.

They all believe that God gave Moses the whole Torah at Mount Sinai. The "whole Torah" includes both the Written Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and the Oral Torah, an oral tradition interpreting and explaining the Written Torah. They believe that the Torah is true, that it has come down to us intact and unchanged. They believe that the Torah contains 613 mitzvot binding upon Jews but not upon non-Jews. This information is written primarily from the modern Orthodox point of view. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) performed by the Council of Jewish Federations found that 7% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Orthodox.

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

Conservative Judaism grew out of the tension between Orthodoxy and Reform. Dr. Solomon Schechter formally organized it as the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in 1913, although its roots in the Jewish Theological Seminary of America stretch back into the 1880s. Conservative Judaism maintains that the truths found in Jewish scriptures and other Jewish writings come from God, but were transmitted by humans and contain a human component. Conservative Judaism generally accepts the binding nature of halakhah, but believes that the Law should change and adapt, absorbing aspects of the predominant culture while remaining true to Judaism's values. There is a great deal of variation among Conservative synagogues. Some are indistinguishable from Reform, except that they use more Hebrew; others are practically Orthodox, except that men and women sit together. Most are very traditional in substance, if not always in form. This flexibility is deeply rooted in Conservative Judaism, and can be found within their own Statement of Principles, Emet ve-Emunah. The NJPS found that 38% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Conservative. There are approximately 750 Conservative synagogues in the world today.

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

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

Movements in Israel Today

Approximately 5.5 million Jews live in Israel. Orthodoxy is the only movement that is formally and legally recognized in Israel. Until very recently, only Orthodox Jews could serve on religious councils. The Orthodox rabbinate in Israel controls matters of personal status, such as marriage, conversion and divorce.

The other American movements have some degree of presence in Israel, but for the most part, Israelis do not formally identify themselves with a movement. Most

Israelis describe themselves more generally in terms of their degree of observance, rather than in terms of membership in an organized movement.

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

What Do Jews Believe?

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

The closest that anyone has ever come to creating a widely accepted list of Jewish beliefs is *Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith*. These 13 Principles, which he thought were the minimum requirements of Jewish belief, are as follows:

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

As you can see, these are very basic and general principles. Yet as basic as these principles are, the necessity of believing each one of these has been disputed at one time or another, and the liberal movements of Judaism dispute many of these principles. Unlike many other religions, Judaism does not focus much on abstract cosmological concepts. Although Jews have certainly considered the nature of God man, the universe, life and the afterlife at great length (see Kabala and Jewish Mysticism), there is no mandated, official, definitive belief on these subjects, outside of the very general concepts discussed above. There is substantial room for personal opinion on all of these matters because Judaism is more concerned about actions than beliefs.

Judaism focuses on relationships: the relationship between God and mankind, between God and the Jewish nation, between the Jewish nation and the land of Israel, and between human beings. Our scriptures tell the story of the development of these relationships, from the time of creation, through the creation of the relationship between God and Abraham, to the creation of the relationship between God and the Jewish people, and forward. The scriptures also specify the mutual obligations created by these relationships, although various movements of Judaism disagree about the nature of these obligations. Some say they are absolute, unchanging laws from God (Orthodox); some say they are laws from God that change and evolve over time

(Conservative); some say that they are guidelines that you can choose whether or not to follow (Reform, Reconstructionist).

So, what are these actions that Judaism is so concerned about? According to Orthodox Judaism, these actions include **613 commandments** given by God in the Torah as well as laws instituted by the rabbis and long-standing customs.

Mitzvot & Halakha: Jewish Law

Mitzvah (MITS-vuh); pl: Mitzvot (mits-VOHT)

Literal: *commandment*. Any of the 613 commandments that Jews are obligated to observe. It can also refer to any Jewish religious obligation, or more generally to any good deed.

What is Halakha?

According to Judaic teaching, Judaism is not just a set of beliefs about God, man and the universe. Judaism is a comprehensive way of life, filled with rules and practices that affect every aspect of life: what you do when you wake up in the morning, what you can and cannot eat, what you can and cannot wear, how to groom yourself, how to conduct business, who you can marry, how to observe the holidays and Shabbat, and perhaps most important, how to treat God, other people, and animals. This set of rules and practices is known as *halakha*. The word "halakha" is usually translated as "Jewish Law," although a more literal translation might be "the path that one walks." The word is derived from the Hebrew root Heh-Lamed-Kaf, meaning "to go, to walk or to travel".

Jews contend that some non-Jews and non-observant Jews criticize this legalistic aspect of traditional Judaism, saying that it reduces the religion to a set of rituals devoid of spirituality. While there are certainly some Jews who observe halakha in this way, Jewish Orthodoxy contends that is not the intention of halakha nor is it even the correct way to observe halakha. Jews believe that when properly observed, halakha increases the spirituality in a person's life, because it turns the most trivial, mundane acts, such as eating and getting dressed, into acts of religious significance.

What Does Halakha Consist of?

Halakha is made up of mitzvot from the Torah as well as laws instituted by the rabbis and long-standing customs. Jews believe these have the status of Jewish law and all are as equally binding. The only difference is that the penalties for violating laws and customs instituted by the rabbis are less severe than the penalties for violating Torah law, and the rabbis in rare, appropriate circumstances can change laws instituted by the rabbis.

The 613 Mitzvot

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

Some of the mitzvot are clear, explicit commands in the Bible (thou shalt not murder; to write words of Torah on the doorposts of your house), others are more implicit (the mitzvah to recite grace after meals, which is inferred from "and you will eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God"), and some can only be ascertained by Talmudic logic (that a man shall not commit incest with his daughter, which is derived from the commandment not to commit incest with his daughter's daughter). Some of the mitzvot overlap; for example, it is a positive commandment to rest on Shabbat and a negative commandment not to do work on Shabbat.

Although there is not 100% Jewish agreement on the precise list of the 613, there is complete agreement that there are 613 mitzvot. This number is significant: it is the numeric value of the word Torah (Tav = 400, Vav = 6, Resh = 200, Heh = 5), plus 2 for the two mitzvot whose existence precedes the Torah: "I am the Lord, your God and You shall have no other gods before Me." There is also complete agreement that these 613 mitzvot can be broken down into 248 positive mitzvot (one for each bone and organ of the male body) and 365 negative mitzvot (one for each day of the solar year). The most accepted list of the 613 mitzvot is Rambam's list in his Mishnah Torah.

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

Gezeirah: A Fence around the Torah

A gezeirah is a law instituted by the rabbis to prevent people from accidentally violating a Torah mitzvah. For example, the Torah commands Jews not to work on Shabbat, but a gezeirah commands them not to even handle an implement that you would use to perform prohibited work (such as a pencil, money, a hammer) without a good reason, because someone holding the implement might forget that it was Shabbat and perform prohibited work.

It is important to note that from the point of view of the practicing Jew, there is no difference between a gezeirah and a Torah mitzvah. Both are equally binding; neither can be disregarded on a whim. The difference is generally in the degree of punishment: a violation of Shabbat was punishable by death under Torah law, while a violation of the gezeirah would result in a less severe punishment. Another difference between a gezeirah and a mitzvah is that the rabbis can, in rare appropriate circumstances, modify or abrogate a gezeirah. Rabbis cannot change the Torah law that was commanded by God.

Takkanah: A Law Instituted by the Rabbis

Halakha also includes some laws that are not derived from mitzvot in the Torah. A takkanah is a law that was instituted by the rabbis. For example, the "mitzvah" to light candles on Chanukah, a post-biblical holiday, is a takkanah. The practice of public Torah readings every Monday and Thursday is a takkanah instituted by Ezra. Some takkanot vary from community to community or from region to region. For example, around the year 1000 C.E., a Rabbenu Gershom Me'or Ha-Golah instituted a takkanah prohibiting polygamy, a practice clearly permitted by the Torah and the Talmud. It was accepted by Ashkenazic Jews, who lived in Christian countries where polygamy was not permitted, but was not accepted by Sephardic Jews, who lived in Islamic countries where men were permitted up to four wives. A takkanah, like a gezeirah, is just as binding as a Torah mitzvah.

Minhag: A Custom with the Status of Law

A minhag is a custom that evolved for worthy religious reasons and has continued long enough to become a binding religious practice. For example, the second, extra day of holidays was originally instituted as a gezeirah, so that people outside of Israel, not certain of the day of a holiday, would not accidentally violate the holiday's mitzvot. After the mathematical calendar was instituted and there was no doubt about the days, the added second day was not necessary. The rabbis considered ending the practice at that time, but decided to continue it as a minhag. It is important to note that these "customs" are a binding part of halakhah, just like a mitzvah, a takkanah or a gezeirah. The word "minhag" is also used in a looser sense, to indicate a community or an individual's customary way of doing some religious thing. For example, it may be the minhag in one synagogue to stand while reciting a certain prayer, while in another synagogue it is the minhag to sit during that prayer. Even in this looser sense, it is generally recommended that a person follow his own minhag, even when visiting another community.

Moshiach: The Messiah

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

[Principle 12 of Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith]

The Messianic Idea in Judaism

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

Modern Jewish scholars suggest that the messianic concept was introduced later in the history of Judaism, during the age of the prophets. They note that the messianic concept is not mentioned anywhere in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). However, traditional Judaism maintains that the messianic idea has always been a part of Judaism. They claim that *Messiah* is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah, because the Torah was written in terms that all people could understand, and the abstract concept of a distant, spiritual, future reward was beyond the comprehension of some people. However, the Torah contains several references to "the End of Days" (achareit ha-yameem), which is the time of the Messiah; thus, the concept of Messiah was known in the most ancient times.

The term "Messiah" literally means "the anointed one," and refers to the ancient practice of anointing kings with oil when they took the throne. The Messiah is the one who will be anointed as king in the End of Days. According to some Jewish scholars, the word "Messiah" does not mean "savior." They contend that the notion of an innocent, divine or semi-divine being who will sacrifice himself to save us from the consequences of our own sins is a purely Christian concept that has no basis in Jewish thought. They also attest that the Christian concept has become so deeply ingrained in the English word "Messiah" that this English word can no longer be used to refer to the Jewish concept, therefore, the word "Moshiach" is often substituted for "Messiah" or "Meshiach".

The Messiah

The most common Jewish belief about Messiah or "Moshiach" is that He will be a great political leader descended from King David (Jeremiah 23:5). The Messiah is often referred to as "Meshiach Ben David" (Moshiach, son of David). He will be well versed in Jewish law, and observant of its commandments. (Isaiah 11:2-5) He will be a charismatic

leader, inspiring others to follow his example. He will be a great military leader, who will win battles for Israel. He will be a great judge, who makes righteous decisions (Jeremiah 33:15). But above all, he will be a human being, not a god, demi-god or other supernatural being.

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

When Will the Messiah Come?

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

Although some scholars believed that God has set aside a specific date for the coming of the Messiah, most authorities suggest that the conduct of mankind will determine the time of the Messiah's coming. In general, it is believed that Messiah will come in a time when He is most needed (because the world is so sinful), or in a time when he is most deserved (because the world is so good). For example, each of the following has been suggested as the time when the Messiah will come:

- **If Israel repented a single day**
- **If all Jews observed a single Shabbat properly**
- **If Israel observed two Shabbats in a row properly**
- **In a generation that is totally innocent or totally guilty**
- **In a generation that loses hope**
- **In a generation where children are totally disrespectful towards their parents and elders**

What Will Messiah Do?

Before the time of Messiah, there shall be war and suffering (Ezekiel 38:16) Messiah will bring about the political and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people by bringing them back to Israel and restoring Jerusalem (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5). He will establish a government in Israel that will be the center of all world government, both for Jews and Gentiles (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10; 42:1). He will rebuild the Temple and re-establish its worship (Jeremiah 33:18). He will restore the religious court system of Israel and establish Jewish law as the law of the land (Jeremiah 33:15).

Olam Ha-Ba: The Messianic Age

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

Olam Ha-Ba will be characterized by the peaceful co-existence of all people. (Isaiah 2:4) Hatred, intolerance and war will cease to exist. Some authorities suggest that the laws of nature will change, so that predatory beasts will no longer seek prey and agriculture will bring forth supernatural abundance (Isaiah 11:6-11:9). Others, however, say that these statements are merely an allegory for peace and prosperity. All of the Jewish people will return from their exile among the nations to their home in Israel (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5). The law of the Jubilee will be reinstated.

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

What About Jesus?

Jews do not believe that Jesus was Messiah. Assuming that Jesus really existed, and assuming that the Christian scriptures are accurate in describing Him (both matters that are debatable according to Jewish rabbis), Jews believe He did not fulfill the mission of the Messiah as it is described in the biblical passages cited above. They contend that Jesus did not do any of the things that the scriptures said the Messiah would do. However, Jews are blinded to the fact that Jesus fulfilled 324 Messianic prophecies in His first advent.

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

Throughout Jewish history, there have been many people who have claimed to be the Messiah, or whose followers have claimed that they were the Messiah: Shimeon Bar Kochba, Shabbatai Tzvi, Jesus, and many others too numerous to name. Leo Rosten reports some very entertaining accounts under the heading "False Messiahs" in his

book, *The Joys of Yiddish*. But all of these people died without fulfilling the mission of Messiah; therefore, none of them were Messiah. Jews believe that both Messiah and the Olam Ha-Ba lie in the future, not in the past.

Biblical Passages Referring to the Moshiach

The following passages in the Jewish Scriptures are the ones that Jews consider to be messianic in nature or relating to the end of days. These are the main scriptures they rely upon in developing their messianic concept:

- Isaiah 2, 11, 42; 59:20
- Jeremiah 23, 30, 33; 48:47; 49:39
- Ezekiel 38:16
- Hosea 3:4-3:5
- Micah 4
- Zephaniah 3:9
- Zechariah 14:9
- Daniel 10:14

Olam Ha-Ba: The Afterlife

Traditional Judaism firmly believes that death is not the end of human existence. However, because Judaism is primarily focused on life here and now rather than on the afterlife, Judaism does not have much dogma about the afterlife, and leaves a great deal of room for personal opinion. It is possible for an Orthodox Jew to believe that the souls of the righteous dead go to a place similar to the Christian heaven, or that they are reincarnated through many lifetimes, or that they simply wait until the coming of the Messiah, when they will be resurrected. Likewise, Orthodox Jews can believe that the souls of the wicked are tormented by demons of their own creation, or that wicked souls are simply destroyed at death, ceasing to exist.

Biblical References to the Afterlife

Some scholars claim that belief in the afterlife is a teaching that developed late in Jewish history. It is true that the Torah emphasizes immediate, concrete, physical rewards and punishments rather than abstract future ones. See, for example, Lev. 26:3-9 and Deut. 11:13-15. However, there is clear evidence in the Torah of belief in existence after death. The Torah indicates in several places that the righteous will be reunited with their loved ones after death, while the wicked will be excluded from this reunion.

The Torah speaks of several noteworthy people being "gathered to their people." See, for example, Gen. 25:8 (Abraham), 25:17 (Ishmael), 35:29 (Isaac), 49:33 (Jacob), Deut. 32:50 (Moses and Aaron) II Kings 22:20 (King Josiah). This gathering is described as a separate event from the physical death of the body or the burial.

Certain sins are punished by the sinner being "cut off from his people." See, for example, Gen. 17:14 and Ex. 31:14. This punishment is referred to as *kareit* (kah-REHYT) (literally, "cutting off," but usually translated as "spiritual excision"), and it means that the soul loses its portion in the World to Come.

Later portions of the Tanakh (Old Testament) speak more clearly of life after death and the World to Come. See Dan. 12:2, Neh. 9:5.

Resurrection and Reincarnation

Belief in the eventual resurrection of the dead is a fundamental belief of traditional Judaism. It was a belief that distinguished the Pharisees (intellectual ancestors of Rabbinical Judaism) from the Sadducees. The Sadducees rejected the concept, because it is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah. The Pharisees found the concept implied in certain verses.

Belief in resurrection of the dead is one of Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith. The second blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei prayer, which is recited three times daily,

contains several references to resurrection. (Note: the Reform movement, which apparently rejects this belief, has rewritten the second blessing accordingly).

The resurrection of the dead will occur in the Messianic age, a time referred to in Hebrew as the Olam Ha-Ba, the World to come, but that term is also used to refer to the spiritual afterlife. When the Messiah comes to initiate the perfect world of peace and prosperity, the righteous dead will be brought back to life and given the opportunity to experience the perfected world that their righteousness helped to create. The wicked dead will not be resurrected.

There are some mystical schools of thought that believe resurrection is not a one-time event, but rather an ongoing process. They believe that the souls of the righteous that are reborn continue the ongoing process of tikkun olam, mending of the world. Some sources indicate that reincarnation is a routine process, while others indicate that it only occurs in unusual circumstances, where the soul left unfinished business behind. Belief in reincarnation is also one way to explain the traditional Jewish belief that every Jewish soul in history was present at Sinai and agreed to the covenant with God. (Another explanation: that the soul exists before the body, and these unborn souls were present in some form at Sinai). Many Chasidic sects, as well as some other mystically inclined Jews commonly hold belief in reincarnation.

Olam Ha-Ba: The World to Come

The spiritual afterlife is referred to in Hebrew as Olam Ha-Ba (oh-LAHM hah-BAH), the World to come, although this term is also used to refer to the Messianic age. The Olam Ha-Ba is another, higher state of being.

In the Mishnah, one rabbi says, "This world is like a lobby before the Olam Ha-Ba. Prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall." Similarly, the Talmud says, "This world is like the eve of Shabbat, and the Olam Ha-Ba is like Shabbat. He who prepares on the eve of Shabbat will have food to eat on Shabbat." We prepare ourselves for the Olam Ha-Ba through Torah study and good deeds.

The Talmud states that all Israel has a share in the Olam Ha-Ba. However, not all "shares" are equal. A particularly righteous person will have a greater share in the Olam Ha-Ba than the average person. In addition, a person can lose his share through wicked actions. There are many statements in the Talmud that a particular mitzvah will guarantee a person a place in the Olam Ha-Ba, or that a particular sin will lose a person's share in the Olam Ha-Ba, but these are generally regarded as hyperbole, excessive expressions of approval or disapproval.

It is obvious that Jews believe in a "works-based salvation" - trying to "earn their way into Heaven" by performing the mitzvot. However, Judaism is unlike other religions, Judaism is not focused on the question of how to get into heaven; rather it is focused on life and how to live it. If you ask most Jews, "Do you really think you're going to go to Hell if you don't do such-and-such," they would likely tell you that they are more

concerned about life before death than life after death. Jews perform the mitzvot (commandments) because they believe it is both their privilege and sacred obligation to do so. Jews say that they perform them out of a sense of love and duty, not out of a desire to get something in return. In Pirkei Avot (a book of the Mishnah) it is written, "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward; instead, be like servants who serve their master not for the sake of receiving a reward, and let the awe of Heaven [meaning God, not the afterlife] be upon you."

Nevertheless, Jews definitely believe that one's place in the Olam Ha-Ba is determined by a merit system based on their actions, and this constitutes a "works-based" salvation (Romans 10:1-4). In addition, Jews believe that humanity is capable of being considered righteous in God's eyes, or at least good enough to merit paradise after a suitable period of purification.

How do Jews regard non-Jews in regard to Olam Ha-Ba? Although there are a few statements to the contrary in the Talmud, the predominant view of Judaism is that the righteous of all nations has a share in the Olam Ha-Ba. Statements to the contrary were not based on the notion that membership in Judaism was required to get into Olam Ha-Ba, but were grounded in the observation that non-Jews were not righteous people. If you consider the behavior of the surrounding Gentiles at the time that the Talmud was written, one can understand the rabbis' attitudes. By the time of Rambam, the belief was firmly entrenched that the righteous of all nations has a share in the Olam Ha-Ba.

Gan Eden and Gehinnom

The place of spiritual reward for the righteous is often referred to in Hebrew as Gan Eden (GAHN ehy-DEHN) (the Garden of Eden). This is not the same place where Adam and Eve were; it is a place of spiritual perfection. Specific descriptions of it vary widely from one source to another. One source says that the peace that one feels when one experiences Shabbat properly is merely one-sixtieth of the pleasure of the afterlife. Other sources compare the bliss of the afterlife to the warmth of a sunny day. Ultimately, Jews believe the living can no more understand the nature of this place than the blind can understand color.

Only the very righteous go directly to Gan Eden. The average person descends to a place of punishment and/or purification, generally referred to as Gehinnom (guh-hee-NOHM) (in Yiddish, Gehenna), but sometimes as Sheol or by other names. According to one mystical view, every sin we commit creates an angel of destruction (a demon), and after we die we are punished by the very demons that we created. Some views see Gehinnom as one of severe punishment, a bit like the Christian Hell of fire and brimstone. Other sources merely see it as a time when a person can see the actions of their lives objectively, see the harm that we have done, the opportunities missed, and then experience remorse for our actions. Jews believe that the period of time in Gehinnom does not exceed 12 months, and then one ascends to take his place on Olam Ha-Ba.

Some Jews differ in their beliefs on what happens at the end of 12 months: some say that the wicked soul is utterly destroyed and ceases to exist while others say that the soul continues to exist in a state of consciousness of remorse. This 12-month limit is repeated in many places in the Talmud, and it is connected to the mourning cycles and the recitation of Kiddush.

Kabbala & Jewish Mysticism

When non-Jews ask about Judaism, they commonly ask questions like, "Do you believe in heaven and hell? in angels or the devil? What happens to the soul after death? What is the nature of God and the universe? The answers to questions like these define most religions. Yet in Judaism, most of these cosmological issues are wide open to personal opinion. The areas of Jewish thought that most extensively discuss these issues, Kabbala and Jewish mysticism, were traditionally not even taught to people until the age of 40, when they had completed their education in Torah and Talmud.

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

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

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

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

Kabbalah: The Misunderstood Doctrine

Kabbalah is said to be one of the most grossly misunderstood parts of Judaism. Several people describing Kabbalah as "the dark side of Judaism," describing it as evil or black magic. On the other hand, it has become a trendy doctrine popularized by various Jewish and non-Jewish celebrities.

These misunderstandings stem largely from the fact that the teachings of Kabbalah have been distorted by mystics and occultists. Kabbalah was popular among Christian intellectuals during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, who reinterpreted its doctrines to fit into their Christian dogma. In more recent times, many have wrenched kabbalistic symbolism out of context for use in tarot card readings and other forms of divination and magic that was never a part of the original Jewish teachings. Today, many well-known celebrities have popularized a new age pop-psychology distortion of Kabbalah (it has been derisively referred to as "crap-balah") that has more in common with the writings of Deepak Chopra than with any authentic Jewish source.

There are many traditional Jewish stories that involve the use of hidden knowledge to affect the world in ways that could be described as magic. The Talmud and other sources ascribe supernatural activities to many rabbis. Some rabbis pronounced a name of God and ascended into heaven to consult with the God and the angels on issues of great public concern. One scholar is said to have created an artificial man by reciting various names of God. Much later stories tell of a rabbi who created a man out of clay (a golem) and brought it to life by putting in its mouth a piece of paper with a name of God on it. However, this area of Kabbalah (if indeed it is more than mere legend) is not something that is practiced by the average Jew, or even the average rabbi. There are a number of stories that discourage the pursuit of such knowledge and power as dangerous and irresponsible. If you see any books on the subject of "practical Kabbalah," you can safely dismiss them as not authentic Jewish tradition because, as these stories demonstrate, this kind of knowledge was traditionally thought to be far too dangerous to be distributed blindly to the masses.

Many Jews believe that all of these magical effects were achieved through the power of, generally by calling upon the name of God. They say that these practices are no more "evil" than the miracles of the prophets, or the miracles that Christians ascribe to Jesus. In fact, according to some mystically-inclined Jewish people, they believe that Jesus performed miracles using kabbalistic techniques learned from the Essenes, a Jewish sect of that time that was involved in mysticism.

Ein Sof and the Ten Sefirot

To give you an idea of the nature of Kabbalah, let us briefly discuss one of the better known, fundamental concepts of kabbalistic thought: the concept of God as Ein Sof, the Ten Sefirot, and the kabbalistic tree of life. This explanation is, at best, a gross oversimplification. I do not pretend to fully understand these ideas, but according to

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

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

The Ten Sefirot include both masculine and feminine qualities. Kabbalah pays a great deal of attention to the feminine aspects of God. The Sefirot are commonly represented as in the diagram at left. This diagram is commonly known as the Tree of the Sefirot or the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. There is great significance to the position of these various attributes and their interconnectedness.

The Sefirot are not separate deities, as some might think by taking this too literally. They are intimately a part of God, and yet they are in contact with the universe in a way that the Ein Sof is not. The Sefirot connect with everything in the universe, including humanity. The good and evil that we do resonates through the Sefirot and affects the entire universe, up to and including God Himself.

Shabbat



The Nature of Shabbat

The Sabbath or Shabbat, as it is called in Hebrew, is one of the best known of all Jewish observances. Jews contend that those who do not observe Shabbat think of it as a day filled with stifling restrictions, or as a day of prayer like the Christian Sabbath. They state that for those who observe Shabbat, it is a precious gift from God, a day of great joy eagerly awaited throughout the week, a time when they can set aside all their weekday concerns and devote themselves to higher pursuits. In Jewish literature, poetry and music, Shabbat is described as a bride or queen, as in the popular Shabbat hymn *Lecha Dodi Likrat Kallah* (come, my beloved, to meet the [Sabbath] bride). It has been said by rabbis, "more than Israel has kept Shabbat; Shabbat has kept Israel."

Shabbat is the most important ritual observance in Judaism. It is the only ritual observance instituted in the Ten Commandments. It is also the most important special day, even more important than Yom Kippur. This is clear from the fact that more aliyoth (opportunities for congregants to be called up to the Torah) are given on Shabbat than on any other day.

Shabbat is primarily a day of rest and spiritual enrichment. The word "Shabbat" comes from the root Shin-Bet-Tav, meaning to cease, to end, or to rest. Shabbat is not specifically a day of prayer. Although Jews do pray on Shabbat and spend a substantial amount of time in synagogue praying, prayer is not what distinguishes Shabbat from the rest of the week. Observant Jews pray every day, three times a day.

To say that Shabbat is a day of prayer is no more accurate than to say that Shabbat is a day of feasting: Jews eat every day, but on Shabbat, they eat more elaborately and in a more leisurely fashion. The same can be said of prayer on Shabbat.

In modern America, most take the five-day workweek so much for granted that they forget what a radical concept a day of rest was in ancient times. The weekly day of rest has no parallel in any other ancient civilization. In ancient times, leisure was for the wealthy and the ruling classes only, never for the serving or laboring classes. In addition, the very idea of rest each week was unimaginable. The Greeks thought Jews were lazy because Jews insisted on having a "holiday" every seventh day.

Shabbat involves two interrelated commandments: to remember (Zachor) Shabbat, and to observe (Shamor) Shabbat.

Zachor: To Remember

Jews are commanded to remember Shabbat; but remembering means much more than merely not forgetting to observe Shabbat. It also means to remember the significance of Shabbat, both as a commemoration of creation and as a commemoration of their freedom from slavery in Egypt.

In Exodus 20:11, after the Fourth Commandment was instituted, God explained, "For *in* six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." By resting on the seventh day and sanctifying it, Jews remember and acknowledge that God is the Creator of heaven and earth and all living things. Jews also refrain from work

on the seventh day. They contend that if God work can be set-aside for a day of rest, their work is not too important to set aside.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, while Moses reiterates the Ten Commandments, he notes the second thing that we must remember on Shabbat: "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and *that* the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day."

What does the Exodus have to do with resting on the seventh day? Freedom. In ancient times, leisure was confined to certain classes; slaves did not get days off. Thus, by resting on Shabbat, Jews are reminded that they are free. But in a more general sense, Shabbat frees the Jews from their weekday concerns, from their deadlines, schedules, and commitments. During the week, Jews contend that they are slaves to their jobs, to their creditors, to their need to provide for themselves; on Shabbat, they feel they are freed from these concerns, much as their ancestors were freed from slavery in Egypt.

Jews remember these two meanings of Shabbat as they recite Kiddush (the prayer over wine sanctifying Shabbat or a holiday). Friday night Kiddush refers to Shabbat as both zikkaron l'ma'aseh bereishit (a memorial of the work in the beginning) and zeicher litzit'at mitzrayim (a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt).

Shamor: To Observe

No discussion of Shabbat would be complete without a discussion of the work that is forbidden on Shabbat. This is another aspect of Shabbat that Jews say is grossly misunderstood by people who do not observe it.

Most Americans see the word "work" and think of it in the English sense of the word: physical labor and effort, or employment. Under this definition, turning on a light would be permitted, because it does not require effort, but a rabbi would not be permitted to lead Shabbat services, because leading services is his employment. Jewish law prohibits the former and permits the latter. Many Americans therefore conclude that Jewish law doesn't make any sense.

According to one Jewish source, the problem lies not in Jewish law, but in the definition that most are using. The Torah does not prohibit "work" in the 20th century English sense of the word. The Torah prohibits "melachah" (Mem-Lamed-Alef-Kaf-Heh), which is usually translated as "work," but does not mean precisely the same thing as the English word. Before one can begin to understand the Shabbat restrictions, the word "melachah" must first be understood.

Melachah generally refers to the kind of work that is creative, or that exercises control or dominion over one's environment. The word may be related to "melekh" (king; Mem-Lamed-Kaf). The quintessential example of melachah is the work of creating the universe, which God ceased from on the seventh day. Note that God's work did not require a great physical effort: He spoke, and it was done.

The word melachah is rarely used in scripture outside of the context of Shabbat and holiday restrictions. The only other repeated use of the word is in the discussion of the building of the sanctuary and its vessels in the wilderness (Exodus Ch. 31, 35-38). Notably, the Shabbat restrictions are reiterated during this discussion (Ex. 31:13), thus

one can infer that the work of creating the sanctuary had to be stopped for Shabbat. From this, Jewish rabbis concluded that the work prohibited on Shabbat is the same as the work of creating the sanctuary.

They found 39 categories of forbidden acts, all of which are types of work that were needed to build the sanctuary:

- 1. Sowing**
- 2. Plowing**
- 3. Reaping**
- 4. Binding sheaves**
- 5. Threshing**
- 6. Winnowing**
- 7. Selecting**
- 8. Grinding**
- 9. Sifting**
- 10. Kneading**
- 11. Baking**
- 12. Shearing wool**
- 13. Washing wool**
- 14. Beating wool**
- 15. Dyeing wool**
- 16. Spinning**
- 17. Weaving**
- 18. Making two loops**
- 19. Weaving two threads**
- 20. Separating two threads**
- 21. Tying**
- 22. Untying**
- 23. Sewing two stitches**
- 24. Tearing**
- 25. Trapping**
- 26. Slaughtering**
- 27. Flaying**
- 28. Salting meat**
- 29. Curing hide**
- 30. Scraping hide**
- 31. Cutting hide up**
- 32. Writing two letters**
- 33. Erasing two letters**
- 34. Building**
- 35. Tearing a building down**
- 36. Extinguishing a fire**
- 37. Kindling a fire**
- 38. Hitting with a hammer**

39. Taking an object from the private domain to the public, or transporting an object in the public domain.

(Mishnah Shabbat, 7:2)

All of these tasks are prohibited, as well as any task that operates by the same principle or has the same purpose. In addition, the rabbis have prohibited handling any implement that is intended to perform one of the above purposes (for example, a hammer, a pencil or a match) unless the tool is needed for a permitted purpose (using a hammer to crack nuts when nothing else is available) or needs to be moved to do something permitted (moving a pencil that is sitting on a prayer book), or in certain other limited circumstances. Objects that may not be handled on Shabbat are referred to as "muktzeh," which means, "that which is set aside," because you set it aside (and don't use it unnecessarily) on Shabbat.

The rabbis also prohibited travel, buying and selling, and other weekday tasks that would interfere with the *spirit of Shabbat*. The use of electricity is prohibited because it serves the same function as fire or some of the other prohibitions, or because it is technically considered to be "fire."

The issue of the use of an automobile on Shabbat, so often argued by non-observant Jews, is not really an issue at all for observant Jews. The automobile is powered by an internal combustion engine, which operates by burning gasoline and oil, a clear violation of the Torah prohibition against kindling a fire. In addition, the movement of the car would constitute transporting an object in the public domain, another violation of a Torah prohibition, and in all likelihood the car would be used to travel a distance greater than that permitted by rabbinical prohibitions. For all these reasons, and many more, the use of an automobile on Shabbat is clearly not permitted. As with almost all of the commandments, all of these Shabbat restrictions can be violated if necessary to save a life.

A Typical Shabbat

At about 2PM or 3PM on Friday afternoon, observant Jews leave the office to begin Shabbat preparations. The mood is much like preparing for the arrival of a special, beloved guest: the house is cleaned, the family bathes and dresses up, the best dishes and tableware are set, a festive meal is prepared. In addition, everything that cannot be done during Shabbat must be set up in advance: lights and appliances must be set (or timers placed on them, if the household does so), the light bulb in the refrigerator must be removed or unscrewed, so it does not turn on when you open it, and preparations for the remaining Shabbat meals must be made.

Shabbat, like all Jewish days, begins at sunset, because in the story of creation in Genesis Ch.1, you will notice that it says, "And the evening and the morning were the first day." From this, Jews infer that a day begins with evening, that is, sunset. For the precise time when Shabbat begins in your area, consult the list of candle lighting times provided by the Orthodox Union or any Jewish calendar.

Shabbat candles are lit and a blessing is recited no later than eighteen minutes before sunset. This ritual, performed by the woman of the house, officially marks the beginning of Shabbat. Two candles are lit, representing the two commandments: Zachor

(remember) and Shamor (observe). The family then attends a brief evening service (45 minutes - that's brief by Jewish standards).

After services, the family comes home for a festive, leisurely dinner. Before dinner, the man of the house recites Kiddush, a prayer over wine sanctifying Shabbat. The usual prayer for eating bread is recited over two loaves of challah, a sweet, eggy bread shaped in a braid. The family then eats dinner. Although there are no specific requirements or customs regarding what to eat, meals are generally stewed or slow cooked items, because of the prohibition against cooking during Shabbat. (Things that are mostly cooked before Shabbat and then reheated or kept warm are considered OK).

After dinner, the birkat ha-mazon (grace after meals) is recited. Although this is done every day, on Shabbat, it is done in a leisurely manner with many upbeat tunes. By the time all of this is completed, it may be 9PM or later. The family has an hour or two to talk or study Torah, and then go to sleep.

The next morning Shabbat services begin around 9AM and continue until about noon. After services, the family says kiddush again and has another leisurely, festive meal. A typical afternoon meal is cholent, a very slowly cooked stew. By the time birkat ha-mazon is done, it is about 2PM. The family studies Torah for a while, talks, takes an afternoon walk, plays some checkers, or engages in other leisure activities. A short afternoon nap is not uncommon. It is traditional to have a third meal before Shabbat is over. This is usually a light meal in the late afternoon.

Shabbat ends at nightfall, when three stars are visible, approximately 40 minutes after sunset. At the conclusion of Shabbat, the family performs a concluding ritual called Havdalah (separation, division). Blessings are recited over wine, spices and candles. Then a blessing is recited regarding the division between the sacred and the secular, between Shabbat and the working days, etc. As you can see, Shabbat is a very full day when it is properly observed.

In Hebrew, Rosh Chodesh means, literally, "head of the month" or "first of the month." Rosh Chodesh is the first day of any new month. If a month is 30 days long, then the 30th day is treated as part of the Rosh Chodesh for the next month, and the Rosh Chodesh for next month extends for two days (the 30th of the earlier month and the 1st of the later month).

In ancient times, Rosh Chodesh was a significant festival day. At that time, the new months were determined by observation. Each month began when the first sliver of moon became visible after the dark of the moon. Observers would watch the sky at night for any sign of the moon. If they saw the moon, they would report their sightings to the Sanhedrin, which would interrogate them to make sure that they were not mistaken. Where in the sky did the moon appear? Which direction was it pointing? If two independent, reliable eyewitnesses confirmed that the new moon had appeared and described it consistently, the Sanhedrin would declare the new month and send out messengers to tell people when the month began.

The day after the moon appeared was a festival, announced with the sounding of the shofar, commemorated with solemn convocations, family festivities and special sacrifices. The importance of this holiday in ancient times should not be underestimated. The entire calendar was dependent upon these declarations; without the declarations, there would be no way of knowing when holidays were supposed to occur.

In later days, however, the calendar was fixed by mathematical computation. After the destruction of the Temple, sacrifices were no longer available. Accordingly, the significance of this festival has substantially diminished. There are some slight changes to the liturgy for Rosh Chodesh, including the addition of part of Hallel after the Shemoneh Esrei, and some additional Torah readings, but that is about the only observance of Rosh Chodesh today. 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. See [The Role of Women](#).

Shabbat Mevarekhim

The Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh is known as Shabbat Mevarekhim, which means "the sabbath of blessing." After the Torah reading in the Shabbat service, the prayer leader holds the Torah scroll, recites a blessing hoping for a good month, then announces the day of the upcoming week when the new month will begin and the name of the new month.

Shabbat Mevarekhim is not observed during the month of Elul to announce the beginning of the month of Tishri, the month in which Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) occurs. The common-sense explanation of this omission is simply that the month of Tishri is anticipated throughout the month of Elul with increasing intensity as Rosh Hashanah approaches, making a formal announcement of the date unnecessary.

However, a Chasidic tradition teaches that God himself blesses the first of Tishri, the anniversary of Creation, and gave the privilege of blessing the rest of the months to the Jewish people.

Note that Shabbat Mevarekhim is not necessarily the last Shabbat of the month. In a 30-day month, the 30th is part of Rosh Chodesh for the next month. If the 30th falls on Shabbat, it is the last Shabbat of the month, but Shabbat Mevarekhim occurs on the 23rd, which is the last Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh.

Major Jewish Holidays

Pesach: Passover



Of all the Jewish holidays, Pesach is the one most commonly observed, even by otherwise non-observant Jews. According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), more than 80% of Jews have attended a Pesach Seder.

Pesach begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nissan. It is the first of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Shavu'ot and Sukkot). Agriculturally, it represents the beginning of the harvest season in Israel, but little attention is paid to this aspect of the holiday. The primary observances of Pesach are related to the Exodus from Egypt after generations of slavery. This story is told in Exodus, Ch. 1-15. Many of the Pesach observances are instituted in Ch. 12-15.

The name "Pesach" (PAY-sahch, with a "ch" as in the Scottish "loch") comes from the Hebrew root Peh-Samech-Chet פִּיחֵ, meaning to pass through, to pass over, to exempt or to spare. It refers to the fact that God "passed over" the houses of the Jews when he was slaying the firstborn of Egypt. In English, the holiday is known as Passover. "Pesach" is also the name of the sacrificial offering (a lamb) that was made in the Temple on this holiday. The holiday is also referred to as Chag he-Aviv חַג הָאָבִיב, (the Spring Festival), Chag ha-Matzoth חַג הַמַּצּוֹת, (the Festival of Matzahs), and Z'man Cherutenu זְמַן חֵרֻתֵנוּ, (the Time of Our Freedom) (again, all with those Scottish "ch"s).

Probably the most significant observance related to Pesach involves the removal of chametz (leaven; sounds like "hum it's" with that Scottish ch). This commemorates the fact that the Jews leaving Egypt were in a hurry, and did not have time to let their bread rise. It is also a symbolic way of removing the "puffiness" (arrogance, pride) from our souls.

Chametz includes anything made from the five major grains (wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt) that has not been completely cooked within 18 minutes after coming into contact with water. Orthodox Jews of Ashkenazic background also avoid rice, corn, peanuts, and legumes (beans) as if they were chametz. All of these items are commonly used to make bread, thus use of them was prohibited to avoid any confusion. Such additional items are referred to as "kitniyot."

Jews may not eat chametz during Pesach; Jews may not even own it or derive benefit from it. They may not even feed it to their pets or cattle. All chametz, including utensils used to cook chametz, must either be disposed of or sold to a non-Jew (they can be repurchased after the holiday). Pets' diets must be changed for the holiday, or the pets must be sold to a non-Jew (like the food and utensils, the pets can be repurchased after the holiday ends). Many non-Jews and non-observant Jews mock this practice of

selling chametz as an artificial technicality. However, such sales are very real and legally binding, and would not be valid under Jewish law if not. From the Gentile's perspective, the purchase functions much like the buying and selling of futures on the stock market: even though he does not take physical possession of the goods, his temporary legal ownership of those goods is very real and potentially profitable.

The process of cleaning the home of all chametz in preparation for Pesach is an enormous task. To do it right, one must prepare for several weeks and spend several days scrubbing everything down, going over the edges of their stove and fridge with a toothpick and a Q-Tip, covering all surfaces that come in contact with foil or shelf-liner, etc., etc. After the cleaning is completed, the morning before the Seder, a formal search of the house for chametz is undertaken, and any remaining chametz is burned.

The grain product we eat during Pesach is called matzah. Matzah is unleavened bread, made simply from flour and water and cooked very quickly. This is the bread that the Jews made for their flight from Egypt. Jews have come up with many inventive ways to use matzah; it is available in a variety of textures for cooking: matzah flour (finely ground for cakes and cookies), matzah meal (coarsely ground, used as a bread crumb substitute), matzah farfel (little chunks, a noodle or bread cube substitute), and full-sized matzahs (about 10 inches square, a bread substitute).

The day before Pesach is the *Fast of the Firstborn*, a minor fast for all firstborn males, commemorating the fact that the firstborn Jewish males in Egypt were not killed during the final plague.

On the first night of Pesach (first two nights for traditional Jews outside Israel), Jews have a special family meal filled with ritual to remind them of the significance of the holiday. This meal is called a Seder סדר, from a Hebrew root word meaning "order," because there is a specific set of information that must be discussed in a specific order. It is the same root from which is derived the word "siddur" סידור, (prayer book). An overview of a traditional Seder is included below.

Pesach lasts for seven days (eight days outside of Israel). The first and last days of the holiday (first two and last two outside of Israel) are days on which no work is permitted. Work is permitted on the intermediate days. These intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as Chol Ha-Mo'ed, as are the intermediate days of Sukkot.

When Pesach Begins on a Saturday Night

Occasionally, Pesach begins on a motzai Shabbat, that is, on Saturday night after the Sabbath has concluded. This occurred in the year 5761 (2001). This complicates the process of preparing for Pesach, because many of the preparations normally undertaken on the day before Pesach cannot be performed on Shabbat.

The Fast of the Firstborn, normally observed on the day before Pesach, is observed on Thursday instead. The search for chametz, normally performed on the

night before Pesach, is performed on Thursday night. The Seder should be prepared for as much as possible before Shabbat begins, because time should not be taken away from Shabbat to prepare for Pesach. In addition, there are severe complications dealing with the conflict between the requirement of removing chametz no later than mid-morning on Saturday, the prohibition against eating matzah on the day before the Seder, and the requirement of eating three meals with bread during Shabbat! For further details, see an summary from the Orthodox Union, the world's largest, oldest and perhaps most respected kosher certification agency.

The Pesach Seder

הסדר של פסח

The text of the Pesach Seder is written in a book called the Haggadah. Suggestions for buying a Haggadah are included below. The content of the Seder can be summed up by the following Hebrew rhyme:

Kaddesh, Urechatz,
Karpas, Yachatz,
Maggid, Rachtzah,
Motzi, Matzah,
Maror, Korech,
Shulchan Orech,
Tzafun, Barech,
Hallel, Nirtzah

קדש ורחץ
כרפס יחץ
מגיד רחצה
מוציא מצה
מרור כורך
שלחן עורך
צפון ברכת
הלל נרצה

Now, what does that mean?

1. Kaddesh: Sanctification

קדש

A blessing over wine in honor of the holiday. The wine is drunk, and a second cup is poured.

2. Urechatz: Washing

ורחץ

A washing of the hands without a blessing, in preparation for eating the Karpas.

3. Karpas: Vegetable

כרפס

A vegetable (usually parsley) is dipped in salt water and eaten. The vegetable symbolizes the lowly origins of the Jewish people; the salt water symbolizes the tears shed as a result of our slavery. Parsley is a good vegetable to use for this purpose, because when you shake off the salt water, it looks like tears.

4. Yachatz: Breaking

יחץ

One of the three matzos on the table is broken. Part is returned to the pile, the other part is set aside for the Afikomen (see below).

5. Maggid: The Story

מגיד

A retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the first Pesach. This begins with the youngest person asking The Four Questions, a set of questions about the proceedings designed to encourage participation in the seder. The Four Questions are also known as Mah Nishtanah (Why is it different?), which are the first words of the Four Questions. This is often sung.

The maggid is designed to satisfy the needs of four different types of people: the wise one, who wants to know the technical details; the wicked one, who excludes himself (and learns the penalty for doing so); the simple one, who needs to know the basics; and the one who is unable to ask, who doesn't even know enough to know what he needs to know.

At the end of the maggid, a blessing is recited over the second cup of wine and it is drunk.

6. Rachtzah: Washing

רְחִצָּה

A second washing of the hands, this time with a blessing, in preparation for eating the matzo

7. Motzi: Blessing over Grain Products

מוֹצִיא

The ha-motzi blessing, a generic blessing for bread or grain products used as a meal, is recited over the matzah.

8. Matzah: Blessing over Matzah

מַצָּה

A blessing specific to matzah is recited, and a bit of matzah is eaten.

9. Maror: Bitter Herbs

מָרֹר

A blessing is recited over a bitter vegetable (usually raw horseradish; sometimes romaine lettuce), and it is eaten. This symbolizes the bitterness of slavery. The maror is dipped charoset, a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine, which symbolizes the mortar used by the Jews in building during their slavery.

Note that there are two bitter herbs on the seder plate: one labeled Maror and one labeled Chazeret. The one is labeled Maror should be used for Maror and the one is labeled Chazeret should be used in the Korech, below.

10. Korech: The Sandwich

קֹרֵךְ

Rabbi Hillel was of the opinion that the maror should be eaten together with matzah and the paschal offering in a sandwich. In his honor, we eat some maror on a piece of matzah, with some charoset (we don't do animal sacrifice anymore, so there is no paschal offering to eat).

11. Shulchan Orech: Dinner

שֻׁלְחַן עֹרֵךְ

A festive meal is eaten. There is no particular requirement regarding what to eat at this meal (except, of course, that chametz cannot be eaten). Among Ashkenazic Jews, gefilte fish and matzah ball soup are traditionally eaten at the beginning of the meal. Roast chicken or turkey are common as a main course, as is beef brisket.

12. Tzafun: The Afikomen

צָפוֹן

The piece of matzah set aside earlier is eaten as "desert," the last food of the meal. Different families have different traditions relating to the afikomen. Some have the children hide it, while the parents have to either find it or ransom it back. Others have the parents hide it. The idea is to keep the children awake and

attentive throughout the pre-meal proceedings, waiting for this part.

13. Barch: Grace after Meals

בָּרַךְ

The third cup of wine is poured, and birkat ha-mazon (grace after meals) is recited. This is similar to the grace that would be said on any Shabbat. At the end, a blessing is said over the third cup and it is drunk. The fourth cup is poured, including a cup set aside for the prophet Elijah, who is supposed to herald the Messiah, and is supposed to come on Pesach to do this. The door is opened for a while at this point (supposedly for Elijah, but historically because Jews were accused of nonsense like putting the blood of Christian babies in matzah, and we wanted to show our Christian neighbors that we weren't doing anything unseemly).

14. Hallel: Praises

הַלֵּל

Several psalms are recited. A blessing is recited over the last cup of wine and it is drunk.

15. Nirtzah: Closing

נִרְצָה

A simple statement that the seder has been completed, with a wish that next year, we may celebrate Pesach in Jerusalem (i.e., that the Messiah will come within the next year). This is followed by various hymns and stories.

The Counting of the Omer

סְפִירַת הָעוֹמֵר

According to the Torah (Lev. 23:15), we are obligated to count the days from the second night of Passover to the day before Shavu'ot, seven full weeks. This period is known as the Counting of the Omer. An omer is a unit of measure. On the second day of Passover, in the days of the Temple, an omer of barley was cut down and brought to the Temple as an offering.

Every night, from the second night of Passover to the night before Shavu'ot, Jews recite a blessing and state the count of the omer in both weeks and days. So on the 16th day, you would say, "Today is sixteen days, which is two weeks and two days of the Omer."

The counting is intended to remind Jews of the link between Passover, which commemorates the Exodus, and Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah. It reminds them that the redemption from slavery was not complete until they received the Torah.

This period is a time of partial mourning, during which weddings, parties, and dinners with dancing are not conducted, in memory of a plague during the lifetime of Rabbi Akiba. Haircuts during this time are also forbidden. The 33rd day of the Omer (the eighteenth of Iyar) is a minor holiday commemorating a break in the plague. The holiday is known as Lag b'Omer. The mourning practices of the omer period are lifted on that date. The word "Lag" is not really a word; it is the number 33 in Hebrew, as if you were to call the Fourth of July "Iv July" (IV being 4 in Roman numerals).

Shavu'ot, the Festival of Weeks, is the second of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Passover and Sukkot). Agriculturally, it commemorates the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the Temple, and is known as Hag ha-Bikkurim (the Festival of the First Fruits). Historically, it celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and is also known as Hag Matan Torateinu (the Festival of the Giving of Our Torah).

The period from Passover to Shavu'ot is a time of great anticipation. Jews count each of the days from the second day of Passover to the day before Shavu'ot, 49 days or 7 full weeks, hence the name of the festival. See The Counting of the Omer. Shavu'ot is also sometimes known as Pentecost, because it falls on the 50th day. Jews consider this counting a reminder of the important connection between Passover and Shavu'ot: Passover delivered the Jews physically from bondage, but the giving of the Torah on Shavu'ot redeemed them spiritually from bondage to idolatry and immorality.

It is noteworthy that the holiday is called the time of the *giving* of the Torah, rather than the time of the *receiving* of the Torah. The sages point out that Jews are constantly in the process of receiving the Torah that they receive it every day, but it was first given at this time. Thus it is the giving, not the receiving, that makes this holiday significant.

Shavu'ot is not tied to a particular calendar date, but to a counting from Passover. Because the length of the months used to be variable, determined by observation, and there are two new moons between Passover and Shavu'ot could occur on the 5th or 6th of Sivan. However, now that Jews have a mathematically determined calendar, and the months between Passover and Shavu'ot do not change length on the mathematical calendar, Shavu'ot is always on the 6th of Sivan (the 6th and 7th outside of Israel). Work is not permitted during Shavu'ot. It is customary for Jews to stay up the entire first night of Shavu'ot and study Torah, and then pray as early as possible in the morning.

It is customary for Jews to eat a dairy meal at least once during Shavu'ot. There are varying opinions as to why this is done. Some say it is a reminder of the promise regarding the land of Israel, a land flowing with "milk and honey." According to another view, it is because their ancestors had just received the Torah (with the dietary laws therein), and did not have both meat and dairy dishes available. The book of Ruth is read at this time. Again, there are varying reasons given for this custom, and none seems to be definitive.

Rosh Hashanah

רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה

Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of Tishri. In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah means, literally, "head of the year" or "first of the year." Rosh Hashanah is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. This name is somewhat deceptive, because there is little similarity between Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days of the year, and the American midnight drinking bash and daytime football game.

There is, however, one important similarity between the Jewish New Year and the American one: Many Americans use the New Year as a time to plan a better life, making "resolutions." Likewise, the Jewish New Year is a time to begin introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year.

The name "Rosh Hashanah" is not used in the Bible to discuss this holiday. The Bible refers to the holiday as Yom Ha-Zikkaron (the day of remembrance) or Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar). The holiday is instituted in Leviticus 23:24-25.

The shofar is a ram's horn that is blown somewhat like a trumpet. One of the most important observances of this holiday is hearing the sounding of the shofar in the synagogue. A total of 100 notes are sounded each day. There are four different types of shofar notes: tekiah, a 3 second sustained note; shevarim, three 1-second notes rising in tone, teruah, a series of short, staccato notes extending over a period of about 3 seconds; and tekiah gedolah (literally, "big tekiah"), the final blast in a set, which lasts for 10 seconds minimum. The Bible gives no specific reason for this practice. One that has been suggested is that the shofar's sound is a call to repentance. The shofar is not blown if the holiday falls on Shabbat.

No work is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. Much of the day is spent in synagogue, where the regular daily liturgy is somewhat expanded. In fact, there is a special prayer book called the machzor used for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur because of the extensive liturgical changes for these holidays.

Another popular observance during this holiday is eating apples dipped in honey, a symbol of the Jewish wish for a sweet new year. This is often one of the first Jewish religious practices that a Jewish child is exposed to (the most common being the lighting of the Chanukkah candles and participation in Pesach). Bread is also dipped in honey (instead of the usual practice of sprinkling salt on it) at this time of year for the same reason.

Another popular practice of the holiday is Tashlikh ("casting off"). Jews walk to flowing water, such as a creek or river, on the afternoon of the first day and empty their pockets into the river, symbolically casting off our sins. This practice is not discussed in the Bible, but is a long-standing custom.

Religious services for the holiday focus on the concept of God's sovereignty. The common greeting at this time is L'shanah tovah ("for a good year"). This is a shortening of "L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem" (or to women, "L'shanah tovah tikatevi v'taihatemi"), which means "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year."

You may notice that the Bible speaks of Rosh Hashanah as occurring on the first day of the seventh month. The first month of the Jewish calendar is Nissan, occurring in March and April. Why, then, does the Jewish "new year" occur in Tishri, the seventh month?

Judaism has several different "new years," a concept which may seem strange at first, but think of it this way: the American "new year" starts in January, but the new "school year" starts in September, and many businesses have "fiscal years" that start at various times of the year. In Judaism, Nissan 1 is the new year for the purpose of counting the reign of kings and months on the calendar, Elul 1 (in August) is the new year for the tithing of animals, Shevat 15 (in February) is the new year for trees (determining when first fruits can be eaten, etc.), and Tishri 1 (Rosh Hashanah) is the new year for years (when we increase the year number. Sabbatical and Jubilee years begin at this time).

Days of Awe

יָמֵי נֹרָאִים

The ten days starting with Rosh Hashanah and ending with Yom Kippur are commonly known as the Days of Awe (Yamim Noraim) or the Days of Repentance. This is a time for serious introspection, a time to consider the sins of the previous year and repent before Yom Kippur.

One of the ongoing themes of the Days of Awe is the concept that God has "books" that He writes everyone's name in, writing down who will live and who will die, who will have a good life and who will have a bad life, for the next year. These books are written in on Rosh Hashanah, but our actions during the Days of Awe can alter God's decree. The actions that change the decree are "teshuvah, tefilah and tzedakah," repentance, prayer, good deeds (usually, charity). These "books" are sealed on Yom Kippur. This concept of writing in books is the source of the common greeting during this time is "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year."

Among the customs of this time, it is common for Jews to seek reconciliation with people they may have wronged during the course of the year. The Talmud maintains that Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and God. To atone for sins against another person, Jews believe one must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs they committed against them if possible.

Another custom observed during this time is *kapparot*. This is rarely practiced today, and is observed in its true form only by Chasidic and occasionally Orthodox Jews. Basically, they purchase a live fowl, and on the morning before Yom Kippur they waive it over their head reciting a prayer asking that the fowl be considered atonement for sins. The fowl is then slaughtered and given to the poor (or its value is given). Some Jews today simply use a bag of money instead of a fowl. Most Reform and Conservative Jews have never even heard of this practice.

Work is permitted as usual during the intermediate Days of Awe, from Tishri 3 to Tishri 9, except of course for Shabbat during that week. Two lesser special occasions occur during the course of the Days of Awe. Tishri 3, the day after the second day of Rosh Hashanah, is the Fast of Gedaliah. This really has nothing to do with the Days of Awe, except that it occurs in the middle of them. The Shabbat that occurs in this period is known as Shabbat Shuvah (the Sabbath of Return). This is considered a rather important Shabbat.

Yom Kippur is probably the most important holiday of the Jewish year. Many Jews who do not observe any other Jewish custom will refrain from work, fast and/or attend synagogue services on this day. Yom Kippur occurs on the 10th day of Tishri. The holiday is instituted at Leviticus 23:26.

The name "Yom Kippur" means "Day of Atonement," and that pretty much explains what the holiday is. It is a day set aside to "afflict the soul," to atone for the sins of the past year. In Days of Awe, "books" are mentioned in which God inscribes all of names. On Yom Kippur, Jews teach that the judgment entered in these books is sealed. This day is essentially a Jew's last appeal or chance to change the judgment and to demonstrate true repentance and possibly to make amends.

As noted in Days of Awe, Jews believe Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and God, not for sins against another person. To atone for sins against another person, they teach that one must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs they have committed against them if possible. This must all be done before Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a complete Sabbath; no work can be performed on that day. It is well known that Jews are supposed to refrain from eating and drinking (even water) on Yom Kippur. It is a complete, 25-hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ending after nightfall on the day of Yom Kippur. The Talmud also specifies additional restrictions that are less well-known: washing and bathing, anointing one's body (with cosmetics, deodorants, etc.), wearing leather shoes (Orthodox Jews routinely wear canvas sneakers under their dress clothes on Yom Kippur), and engaging in sexual relations are all prohibited on Yom Kippur.

As always, any of these restrictions can be lifted where a threat to life or health is involved. In fact, children under the age of nine and women in childbirth (from the time labor begins until three days after birth) are not permitted to fast, even if they want to. Older children and women from the third to the seventh day after childbirth are permitted to fast, but are permitted to break the fast if they feel the need to do so. People with other illnesses are urged to consult a physician and a rabbi for advice.

Most of the holiday is spent in the synagogue, in prayer. In Orthodox synagogues, services begin early in the morning (8 or 9 AM) and continue until about 3 PM. People then usually go home for an afternoon nap and return around 5 or 6 PM for the afternoon and evening services, which continue until nightfall. The services end at nightfall, with the blowing of the tekiah gedolah, a long blast on the shofar.

It is customary to wear white on the holiday, which symbolizes purity and calls to mind the promise that one's sins shall be made as white as snow (Is. 1:18). Some people wear a kittel, the white robe in which the dead are buried.

The Festival of Sukkot begins on Tishri 15, the fifth day after Yom Kippur. It is quite a drastic transition, from one of the most solemn holidays of the Jewish year to one of the most joyous.

This festival is sometimes referred to as Zeman Simkhateinu, the Season of our Rejoicing. Sukkot lasts for seven days. The two days following the festival are separate holidays, Shemini Atzeret and Simkhat Torah, but are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot.

The word "Sukkot" means "booths," and refers to the temporary dwellings that Jews live in during this holiday. The name of the holiday is frequently translated "The Feast of Tabernacles," which, like many translations of technical Jewish terms, isn't terribly useful unless you already know what the term is referring to. The Hebrew pronunciation of Sukkot is "Sue COAT," but is often pronounced as in Yiddish, to rhyme with "BOOK us."

Like Passover and Shavu'ot, Sukkot has a dual significance: historical and agricultural. The holiday commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Sukkot is also a harvest festival, and is sometimes referred to as Chag Ha-Asif, the Festival of Ingathering.

The festival of Sukkot is instituted in Leviticus 23:33. No work is permitted on the first and second days of the holiday. Work is permitted on the remaining days. These intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as Chol Ha-Mo'ed, as are the intermediate days of Passover.

In honor of the holiday's historical significance, Jews are commanded to dwell in temporary shelters, as their ancestors did in the wilderness. The commandment to "dwell" in a sukkah can be fulfilled by simply eating all of one's meals there; however, if the weather, climate, and one's health permit, one should live in the sukkah as much as possible, including sleeping in it.

A sukkah must have at least three walls covered with a material that will not blow away in the wind. Canvas covering tied or nailed down is acceptable and quite common in the United States. A sukkah may be any size, so long as it is large enough for you to fulfill the commandment of dwelling in it. The roof of the sukkah must be made of material referred to as sekhakh (literally, covering). To fulfill the commandment, sekhakh must be something that grew from the ground and was cut off, such as tree branches, corn stalks, bamboo reeds, sticks, or two-by-fours. Sekhakh must be left loose, not tied together or tied down. Sekhakh must be placed sparsely enough that rain can get in, and preferably sparsely enough that the stars can be seen, but not so

sparsely that more than ten inches is open at any point or that there is more light than shade. The sekhakh must be put on last.

It is common practice, and highly commendable, to decorate the sukkah. In the northeastern United States, Jews commonly hang dried squash and corn in the sukkah to decorate it, because these vegetables are readily available at that time for the American holidays of Halloween and Thanksgiving. Building and decorating a sukkah is a fun, family project, much like decorating the Christmas tree is for Christians. It is a sad commentary on modern American Judaism that most of the highly assimilated Jews who complain about being deprived of the fun of having and decorating a Christmas tree have never even heard of Sukkot.

Many Americans, upon seeing a decorated sukkah for the first time, remark on how much the sukkah (and the holiday generally) reminds them of Thanksgiving. According to some rabbis, this is not entirely coincidental. American pilgrims, who originated the Thanksgiving holiday, were deeply religious people. When they were trying to find a way to express their thanks for their survival and for the harvest, they looked to the Bible for an appropriate way of celebrating and, according to rabbinical teaching, based their celebration in part on Sukkot.

Another observance related to Sukkot involves what are known as The Four Species (arba minim in Hebrew) or the lulav and etrog. Jews are commanded to take these four plants and use them to "rejoice before the Lord." The four species in question are an etrog (a citrus fruit native to Israel), a palm branch (in Hebrew, lulav), two willow branches (arava) and three myrtle branches (hadas). The six branches are bound together and referred to collectively as the lulav. The etrog is held separately. With these four species in hand, one recites a blessing and waves the species in all six directions (east, south, west, north, up and down, symbolizing the fact that God is everywhere).

The four species are also held during the Hallel prayer in religious services, and are held during processions around the bimah (the pedestal where the Torah is read) each day during the holiday. These processions commemorate similar processions around the altar of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. The processions are known as Hoshanahs, because while the procession is made, Jews recite a prayer with the refrain, "Hosha na!" (please save us!). On the seventh day of Sukkot, seven circuits are made. For this reason, the seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshanah Rabbah (the great Hoshanah).

Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

שְׁמִינִי עֶזְרֶת
שְׂמֵחַת תּוֹרָה

Tishri 22, the day after the seventh day of Sukkot, is the holiday Shemini Atzeret. In Israel, Shemini Atzeret is also the holiday of Simchat Torah. Outside of Israel, where extra days of holidays are held, only the second day of Shemini Atzeret is Simchat Torah. These two holidays are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot, but that is technically incorrect; Shemini Atzeret is a holiday in its own right and does not involve the special observances of Sukkot.

Shemini Atzeret literally means "the assembly of the eighth (day)." Rabbinic literature explains the holiday this way: God is like a host, who invites us as visitors for a limited time, but when the time comes for us to leave, He has enjoyed himself so much that He asks us to stay another day.

The annual cycle of weekly Torah readings is completed at this time. Jews read the last Torah portion, then proceed immediately to the first chapter of Genesis, reminding us that the Torah is a circle, and never ends. This completion of the readings is a time of great celebration. There are processions around the synagogue carrying Torahs and plenty of high-spirited singing and dancing. As many people as possible are given the honor of carrying a Torah scroll in these processions. This aspect of the holiday is known as Simchat Torah, which means "Rejoicing in the Torah." Simchat Torah and Shemini Atzeret are separated in areas that observe an extra day of holidays, so outside of Israel, Shemini Atzeret is Tishri 22 and Simchat Torah is Tishri 23.

In some synagogues, confirmation ceremonies or ceremonies marking the beginning of a child's Jewish education are held at this time. Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are holidays on which work is not permitted.

Chanukkah, the Jewish festival of rededication, also known as the festival of lights, is an eight-day festival beginning on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev.

Chanukkah is probably one of the best-known Jewish holidays, not because of any great religious significance, but because of its proximity to Christmas. Many non-Jews (and even many assimilated Jews) think of this holiday as the Jewish Christmas, adopting many of the Christmas customs, such as elaborate gift giving and decoration. It is bitterly ironic that this holiday, which has its roots in a revolution against assimilation and the suppression of Jewish religion, has become the most assimilated, secular holiday on the Jewish calendar.

The Story of Chanukkah

The story of Chanukkah begins in the reign of Alexander the Great. Alexander conquered Syria, Egypt and Palestine, but allowed the lands under his control to continue observing their own religions and retain a certain degree of autonomy. Under this relatively benevolent rule, many Jews assimilated much of Hellenistic culture, adopting the language, the customs and the dress of the Greeks, in much the same way that Jews in America today blend into the secular American society.

More than a century later, a successor of Alexander, Antiochus IV was in control of the region. He began to oppress the Jews severely, placing a Hellenistic priest in the Temple, massacring Jews, prohibiting the practice of the Jewish religion, and desecrating the Temple by requiring the sacrifice of pigs (a non-kosher animal) on the altar. Two groups opposed Antiochus: a basically nationalistic group led by Mattathias the Hasmonean and his son Judah Maccabee, and a religious traditionalist group known as the Chasidim, the forerunners of the Pharisees (no direct connection to the modern movement known as Chasidism). They joined forces in a revolt against both the assimilation of the Hellenistic Jews and oppression by the Seleucid Greek government. The revolution succeeded and the Temple was rededicated.

According to tradition as recorded in the Talmud, at the time of the rededication, there was very little oil left that had not been defiled by the Greeks. Oil was needed for the menorah (candelabrum) in the Temple, which was supposed to burn throughout the night every night. There was only enough oil to burn for one day, yet miraculously, it burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply of oil for the menorah. An eight-day festival was declared to commemorate this miracle. Note that the holiday commemorates the miracle of the oil, not the military victory: Jews do not glorify war.

Chanukkah Traditions

Chanukkah is not a very important religious holiday. The holiday's religious significance is far less than that of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and Shavu'ot. It is roughly equivalent to Purim in significance, and you won't find many non-Jews who have even heard of Purim! Chanukkah is not mentioned in Jewish scripture; the story is related in the book of Maccabees, which Jews do not accept as scripture.

The only religious observance related to the holiday is the lighting of candles. The candles are arranged in a candelabrum called a menorah (or sometimes called a chanukiah) that holds nine candles: one for each night, plus a shammas (servant) at a different height. On the first night, one candle is placed at the far right. The shammas candle is lit and three berachot (blessings) are recited: l'hadlik neir (a general prayer over candles), she-asah nisim (a prayer thanking God for performing miracles for our ancestors at this time), and she-hekhanu (a general prayer thanking God for allowing us to reach this time of year). After reciting the blessings, the first candle is then lit using the shammas candle, and the shammas candle is placed in its holder. The candles are allowed to burn out on their own after a minimum of 1/2 hour.

Each night, another candle is added from right to left (like the Hebrew language). Candles are lit from left to right paying honor to the newer thing first. On the eighth night, all nine candles (the 8 Chanukkah candles and the shammas) are lit.

Why the shammas candle? The Chanukkah candles are for pleasure only; they are not allowed to use them for any productive purpose. Jews always keep an extra one around (the shammas), so that if a candle is needed for some purpose, they do not accidentally use the Chanukkah candles. The shammas candle is at a different height so that it is easily identified as the shammas.

It is traditional to eat fried foods on Chanukkah because of the significance of oil to the holiday. Among Ashkenazic Jews, this usually includes latkes (pronounced "lot-kuhs" or "lot-keys" depending on where your grandmother comes from. Pronounced "potato pancakes" if you are a goy).

Gift giving is not a traditional part of the holiday, but has been added in places where Jews have a lot of contact with Christians, as a way of dealing with our children's jealousy of their Christian friends. It is extremely unusual for Jews to give Chanukkah gifts to anyone other than their own young children. The only traditional gift of the holiday is "gelt," small amounts of money.

Another tradition of the holiday is playing dreidel, a gambling game played with a square top. Most people play for matchsticks, pennies, M&Ms or chocolate coins. The traditional explanation of this game is that during the time of Antiochus' oppression, those who wanted to study Torah (an illegal activity) would conceal their activity by playing gambling games with a top (a common and legal activity) whenever an official or inspector was within sight.

A dreidel is marked with four Hebrew letters: Nun, Gimmel, Heh and Shin. These letters stand for the Hebrew phrase "Nes Gadol Hayah Sham", a great miracle happened there, referring to the miracle of the oil.

The letters also stand for the Yiddish words nit (nothing), gantz (all), halb (half) and shtell (put), which are the rules of the game! There are some variations in the way people play the game, but traditionally everyone puts in one coin. A person spins the dreidel. On Nun, nothing happens; on Gimmel (or, as we called it as kids, "gimme!"), you get the whole pot; on Heh, you get half of the pot; and on Shin, you put one in. When the pot is empty, everybody puts one in. Keep playing until one person has everything. Then redivide it, because nobody likes a poor winner.

Tu B'Shevat

Tu B'Shevat, the 15th day of the Jewish month of Shevat, is a holiday also known as the New Year for Trees. The word "Tu" is not really a word; it is the number 15 in Hebrew, as if you were to call the Fourth of July "IV July" (IV being 4 in Roman numerals).

As mentioned in Rosh Hashanah, Judaism has several different "new years." This is not as strange a concept as it first sounds; in America, we have the calendar year (January-December), the school year (September-June), and many businesses have fiscal years. It's basically the same idea with the various Jewish new years.

Tu B'Shevat is the New Year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing. See Lev. 19:23-25, which states that fruit from trees may not be eaten during the first three years; the fourth year's fruit is for God and after that, you can eat the fruit. Each tree is considered to have aged one year as of Tu B'Shevat, so if you planted a tree on Shevat 14, it begins its second year the next day, but if you plant a tree two days later, on Shevat 16, it does not reach its second year until the next Tu B'Shevat.

Tu B'Shevat is not mentioned in the Torah. There is only one reference to it in the Mishnah, and the only thing said there is that it is the new year for trees, and there is a dispute as to the proper date for the holiday (Beit Shammai said the proper day was the first of Shevat; Beit Hillel said the proper day was the 15th of Shevat).

There are few customs or observances related to this holiday. One custom is to eat a new fruit on this day. Some people plant trees on this day. A lot of Jewish children go around collecting money for trees for Israel at this time of year. That's about all there is to it.

Purim is one of the most joyous and fun holidays on the Jewish calendar. It commemorates a time when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination.

The story of Purim is told in the Biblical book of Esther. The heroes of the story are Esther, a beautiful young Jewish woman living in Persia, and her cousin Mordecai, who raised her as if she were his daughter. Esther was taken to the house of Ahasuerus, King of Persia, to become part of his harem. King Ahasuerus loved Esther more than his other women and made Esther queen, but the king did not know that Esther was a Jew, because Mordecai told her not to reveal her nationality.

The villain of the story is Haman, an arrogant, egotistical advisor to the king. Haman hated Mordecai because Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, so Haman plotted to destroy the Jewish people. In a speech that is all too familiar to Jews, Haman told the king, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm. Their laws are different from those of every other people's, and they do not observe the king's laws; therefore it is not befitting the king to tolerate them." Esther 3:8. The king gave the fate of the Jewish people to Haman, to do as he pleased to them. Haman planned to exterminate all of the Jews.

Mordecai persuaded Esther to speak to the king on behalf of the Jewish people. This was a dangerous thing for Esther to do, because anyone who came into the king's presence without being summoned could be put to death, and she had not been summoned. Esther fasted for three days to prepare herself, then went into the king. He welcomed her. Later, she told him of Haman's plot against her people. The Jewish people were saved, and Haman was hanged on the gallows that had been prepared for Mordecai.

The book of Esther is unusual in that it is the only book of the Bible that does not contain the name of God. In fact, it includes virtually no reference to God. Mordecai makes a vague reference to the fact that the Jews will be saved by someone else, if not by Esther, but that is the closest the book comes to mentioning God. Thus, one important message that can be gained from the story is that God often works in ways that are not apparent, in ways that appear to be chance, coincidence or ordinary good luck.

Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar, which is usually in March. The 13th of Adar is the day that Haman chose for the extermination of the Jews, and the day that the Jews battled their enemies for their lives. On the day afterwards, the 14th, they celebrated their survival. In cities that were walled in the time of Joshua, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of the month, because the book of Esther says that in Shushan (a walled city), deliverance from the massacre was not complete until the next day. The 15th is referred to as Shushan Purim.

In leap years, when there are two months of Adar, Purim is celebrated in the second month of Adar, so it is always one month before Passover. The 14th day of the first Adar in a leap year is celebrated as a minor holiday called Purim Katan, which means "little Purim." There are no specific observances for Purim Katan; however, a person should celebrate the holiday and should not mourn or fast. Some communities also observe a "Purim Katan" on the anniversary of any day when their community was saved from a catastrophe, destruction, evil or oppression. The word "Purim" means "lots" and refers to the lottery that Haman used to choose the date for the massacre.

The Purim holiday is preceded by a minor fast, the Fast of Esther, which commemorates Esther's three days of fasting in preparation for her meeting with the king.

The primary commandment related to Purim is to hear the reading of the book of Esther. The book of Esther is commonly known as the Megillah, which means scroll. Although there are five books of Jewish scripture that are properly referred to as megillahs (Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations), this is the one people usually mean when they speak of The Megillah. It is customary to boo, hiss, stamp feet, and rattle gragers (noisemakers) whenever the name of Haman is mentioned in the service. The purpose of this custom is to "blot out the name of Haman."

Jews are also commanded to eat, drink and be merry. According to the Talmud, a person is required to drink until he cannot tell the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordecai," though opinions differ as to exactly how drunk that is. However, Jews say that a person certainly should not become so drunk that he might violate other commandments or get seriously ill. In addition, recovering alcoholics or others who might suffer serious harm from alcohol are exempt from this obligation.

In addition, Jews are commanded to send out gifts of food or drink, and to make gifts to charity. The sending of gifts of food and drink is referred to as shalach manos (lit. sending out portions). Among Ashkenazic Jews, a common treat at this time of year is hamentaschen (lit. Haman's pockets). These triangular fruit-filled cookies are supposed to represent Haman's three-cornered hat.

It is customary to hold carnival-like celebrations on Purim, to perform plays and parodies, and to hold beauty contests. It has been reported that the usual prohibitions against cross-dressing are lifted during this holiday. Americans sometimes refer to Purim as the Jewish Mardi Gras. Purim is not subject to the Sabbath-like restrictions on work that some other holidays are; however, some sources indicate that Jews should not go about ordinary business on Purim out of respect for the holiday.

Tisha B'Av

תְּשֻׁעָה בְּאָב

Tisha B'Av, the Fast of the Ninth of Av, is a day of mourning to commemorate the many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, many of which coincidentally have occurred on the ninth of Av. Tisha B'Av means "the ninth (day) of Av." It usually occurs during August.

Tisha B'Av primarily commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples, both of which were destroyed on the ninth of Av (the first by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E.; the second by the Romans in 70 C.E.).

Although this holiday is primarily meant to commemorate the destruction of the Temple, it is appropriate to consider on this day the many other tragedies of the Jewish people, many of which occurred on this day, most notably the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.

Tisha B'Av is the culmination of a three-week period of increasing mourning, beginning with the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, which commemorates the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem, before the First Temple was destroyed. During this three-week period, weddings and other parties are not permitted, and people refrain from cutting their hair. From the first to the ninth of Av, it is customary to refrain from eating meat or drinking wine (except on the Shabbat) and from wearing new clothing.

The restrictions on Tisha B'Av are similar to those on Yom Kippur: to refrain from eating and drinking (even water); washing, bathing, shaving or wearing cosmetics; wearing leather shoes; engaging in sexual relations; and studying Torah. Work in the ordinary sense of the word is also restricted. People who are ill need not fast on this day. Many of the traditional mourning practices are observed: people refrain from smiles, laughter and idle conversation, and sit on low stools.

In synagogue, the book of Lamentations is read and mourning prayers are recited. The ark (cabinet where the Torah is kept) is draped in black.

There are five minor fasts on the Jewish calendar. With one exception, these fasts were instituted by the Sages to commemorate some national tragedy. The minor fasts (that is, all fasts except Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av) last from dawn to nightfall, and one is permitted to eat breakfast if one arises before sunrise for the purpose of doing so. There is a great deal of leniency in the minor fasts for people who have medical conditions or other difficulties fasting. The date of the fast is moved to Sunday if the specified date falls on Shabbat.

Three of these five fasts commemorate events leading to the downfall of the first commonwealth and the destruction of the first Temple, which is commemorated by the major fast of Tisha B'Av.

Following is a list of minor fasts required by Jewish law, their dates, and the events they commemorate:

The Fast of Gedaliah, Tishri 3, commemorates the killing of the Jewish governor of Judah, a critical event in the downfall of the first commonwealth.

The Fast of Tevet, Tevet 10, is the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. It has also been proclaimed a memorial day for the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust.

The Fast of Esther, Adar 13, commemorates the three days that Esther fasted before approaching King Ahasuerus on behalf of the Jewish people. The fast is connected with Purim. If Adar 13 falls on a Friday or Saturday, it is moved to the preceding Thursday, because it cannot be moved forward a day (it would fall on Purim).

The Fast of the Firstborn, Nissan 14, is a fast observed only by firstborn males, commemorating the fact that they were saved from the plague of the firstborn in Egypt. It is observed on the day preceding Passover.

The Fast of Tammuz, Tammuz 17, is the date when the walls of Jerusalem were breached.

New Holidays

A few minor holidays have been added to the calendar to commemorate various significant events relating to the Holocaust and the modern state of Israel. All of these holidays occur in the period between Passover and Shavu'ot. These holidays are not universally acknowledged, the dates are not entirely agreed upon, and the observances are not yet standardized. Nevertheless, they are worth noting.

Yom Ha-Shoah

יום השואה

Also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day, this holiday occurs on the 27th of Nissan. "Shoah" is the Hebrew word for the Holocaust. This is a memorial day for those who died in the Holocaust.

Yom Ha-Zikkaron

יום הזכרון

Israeli Memorial Day, observed on Iyar 4, remembers those who died in the War of Liberation and other wars in Israel.

Yom Ha-Atzmaut

יום העצמאות

Israeli Independence Day, marking the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948. It is observed on the 5th of Iyar. According to some views, the restrictions of the Omer period are lifted for this day. A few anti-Zionist Jews observe this day as a day of mourning for the sin of proclaiming the state of Israel without the Messiah.

Yom Yerushalayim

יום ירושלים

The 28th day of Iyar commemorates the reunification of the city of Jerusalem in Israeli hands. According to some views, the restrictions of the Omer period are lifted for this day.

The Month of Elul and Selichot

The month of Elul is a time of repentance in preparation for the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Tradition teaches that the month of Elul is a particularly propitious time for repentance. This mood of repentance builds through the month of Elul to the period of Selichot, to Rosh Hashanah, and finally to Yom Kippur.

The name of the month (spelled Alef-Lamed-Vav-Lamed) is said to be an acronym of "Ani l'dodi v'dodi li," "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine," a quote from Song of Songs 6:3, where the Beloved is God and the "I" is the Jewish people. In Aramaic (the vernacular of the Jewish people at the time that the month names were adopted), the word "Elul" means "search," which is appropriate, because this is a time of year when we search our hearts.

According to tradition, the month of Elul is the time that Moses spent on Mount Sinai preparing the second set of tablets after the incident of the golden calf. (Ex. 32; 34:27-28) He ascended on Rosh Chodesh Elul and descended on the 10th of Tishri, at the end of Yom Kippur, when repentance was complete. Other sources say that Elul is the beginning of a period of 40 days that Moses prayed for God to forgive the people after the Golden Calf incident, after which the commandment to prepare the second set of tablets was given.

Customs of Elul

During the month of Elul, from the second day of Elul to the 28th day, the shofar (a hollowed out ram's horn) is blown after morning services every weekday. The shofar is not blown on Shabbat. It is also not blown on the day before Rosh Hashanah to make a clear distinction between the rabbinical rule of blowing the shofar in Elul and the biblical mitzvah to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Four blasts are blown: tekiah, shevarim-teruah, tekiah. Rambam explained the custom of blowing shofar as a wake-up call to sleepers, designed to rouse us from our complacency. It is a call to repentance. The blast of the shofar is a very piercing sound when done properly.

Elul is also a time to begin the process of asking forgiveness for wrongs done to other people. According to Jewish tradition, God cannot forgive us for sins committed against another person until we have first obtained forgiveness from the person we have wronged. This is not as easy a task as you might think, if you have never done it. This process of seeking forgiveness continues through the Days of Awe.

Many people visit cemeteries at this time, because the awe-inspiring nature of this time makes us think about life and death and our own mortality. In addition, many people use this time to check their mezuzot and tefillin for defects that might render them invalid.

Selichot

As the month of Elul draws to a close, the mood of repentance becomes more urgent. Prayers for forgiveness called Selichot (properly pronounced "s'lee-KHOHT," but often pronounced "SLI-khus") are added to the daily cycle of religious services. Selichot are recited in the early morning, before normal daily shacharit service. They add about 45 minutes to the regular daily service.

Selichot are recited from the Sunday before Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. If Rosh Hashanah begins on a Monday or Tuesday, selichot begins on the Sunday of the week before Rosh Hashanah, to make sure that there are at least 3 days of Selichot. The first selichot service of the holiday season is usually a large community service, held around midnight on Motzaei Shabbat (the night after the Sabbath ends; that is, after nightfall on Saturday). The entire community, including men, women and older children, attend the service, and the rabbi gives a sermon. The remaining Selichot services are normally only attended by those who ordinarily attend daily shacharit services in synagogue.

A fundamental part of the Selichot service is the repeated recitation of the *"Thirteen Attributes,"* a list of God's thirteen attributes of mercy that were revealed to Moses after the sin of the golden calf (Ex 34:6-7): Ha-shem [1], Ha-shem [2], God [3], merciful [4], and gracious [5], long-suffering [6], abundant in goodness [7] and truth [8], keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation [9], forgiving iniquity [10] and transgression [11] and sin [12], who cleanses [13]. Why is "Ha-shem" listed twice as an attribute? And why are three of these "attributes" Names of God? Different names of God connote different characteristics of God. The four-letter Name of God (rendered here as "Ha-shem") is the Name used when God is exhibiting characteristics of mercy, and the Talmud explains that this dual usage indicates that God is merciful before a person sins, but is also merciful after a person sins. The third attribute is a different Name of God that is used when God acts in His capacity as the almighty ruler of nature and the universe.

A Gentile's Guide to the Jewish Holidays

I know Weinstein's parents were upset, Superintendent, but I was sure it was a phony excuse. I mean, it sounds so made up: "Yom Kippur."

- Principal Skinner, The Simpsons

If you want a general understanding of what your Jewish friends' and colleagues' holidays are, or if you just want to avoid making Principal Skinner's mistake when you schedule Jewish employees, co-workers, colleagues or students, then this is the section for you. This page just tells you what you minimally need to know to avoid embarrassing yourself or offending Jews.

Why do Jewish holidays keep changing dates?

Congregant 1: When is Chanukkah this year?

Congregant 2: Same as always, 25th of Kislev.

- Overheard at Congregation Children of Israel, Athens Georgia

Jewish holidays actually occur on the same day every year: the same day on the Jewish calendar! The Jewish calendar has a different number of days than the calendar you use because the Jewish calendar is tied to the moon's cycles instead of the sun's. The Jewish calendar loses about 11 days relative to the solar calendar every year, but makes up for it by adding a month every two or three years. As a result, the holidays don't always fall on the same day, but they always fall within the same month or two. The Chinese calendar (which is also lunar) works the same way, which is why Chinese New Year occurs on different days but is always in late January or early February. The Muslim calendar is lunar but does not add months, which is why Ramadan circles the calendar.

When Does a Jewish Holiday Start and End?

Attorney 1: Thursday is Rosh Hashanah, but I'm available for trial on Friday

Attorney 2: Thursday and Friday are Rosh Hashanah for me.

Attorney 3: I have to leave early on Wednesday for Rosh Hashanah.

Judge: Is this holiday one day, two or three?

Attorney 1: One day.

Attorney 2: Two days.

Attorney 3: Two days.

- Inspired by a true story

How long is a Jewish holiday? It depends on who you ask! In ancient times, because of confusion about the calendar, an extra day was added to some holidays. In modern times, some branches of Judaism have abandoned this custom, returning the holidays to the length specified in the Bible. Other branches continue the ancient tradition of adding a day to certain holidays. Thus for some Jews, Thursday is a holiday but Friday is not, while for others, both Thursday and Friday are holidays.

Adding to the confusion is the fact that a Jewish "day" starts at sunset, and holidays start the evening before the day on your secular calendar. For example, if your calendar says that Passover starts on April 24, families will be getting together for Passover dinner on the night of April 23. A few secular calendars mark the preceding day as "Erev Passover," which basically means Passover Eve. If your calendar says "Erev" or "Eve" before a holiday name, it means the holiday starts the evening of that day and continues into the next day.

Popular Jewish Holidays

The holidays discussed below are not necessarily the most important Jewish holidays, but they are the holidays that are most commonly observed by American Jews, and they are the holidays that American Jews will expect you to be familiar with.

Passover

This holiday commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. If you've seen Cecil B. DeMille's "The Ten Commandments," then you know the story of Passover, more or less. Passover is celebrated for seven or eight days (depending on your branch of Judaism) starting on the night of a full moon in April. Passover usually overlaps with Easter, though occasionally Passover occurs a month after Easter.

Almost all American Jews observe Passover to some extent, even if only to go to their parents' house for a ritual dinner (called a seder, pronounced SAY-der) on the first and/or second night of the holiday. Most (though not all) American Jews avoid bread and grain products to one extent or another throughout this holiday, in memory of the fact that our ancestors left Egypt in a hurry and didn't have time to wait for their bread to rise. You should avoid scheduling events involving food during this holiday, and should avoid scheduling travel for Jews because it may be hard for them to find suitable food away from home.

Strictly observant Jews do not work, go to school or carry out any business on the first two and last two days of Passover (first one day and last one day for some branches). This is a requirement of Jewish law; however, only about 10% of the American Jewish population observes this rule strictly. Most American Jews will work through Passover, although many may want to take time off the day before Passover, to prepare for the big family dinner. To put this in perspective: imagine if you had to work during the day of Thanksgiving, then prepare for Thanksgiving dinner after getting home from work.

Remember that Passover, like all Jewish holidays, begins the evening before the date that it appears on your calendar. If your calendar says that Passover starts on April 24, then Passover really begins with the family dinner on the night of April 23.

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is Jewish New Year, the day when the year number on the Jewish calendar increases. It occurs between Labor Day and Columbus Day. It lasts for one or two days, depending on your branch of Judaism.

Rosh Hashanah is a happy, festive holiday, but somewhat more solemn than American New Year. Like American New Year, it is a time to look back at the past year

and make resolutions for the following year. It is also a wake-up call, a time to begin mental preparations for the upcoming Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

Many Jews who do not go to synagogue any other time of year will go to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah. You've heard of "twice-a-year Christians" who go to church only on Christmas and Easter? "Twice-a-year Jews" go to synagogue only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Most American Jews expect Gentiles to be aware of Rosh Hashanah. It is, after all, listed on most calendars you buy in the store, but remember: the holiday starts at sunset the night before the day shown on your calendar! Many will be offended if you schedule important events, meetings or tests on Rosh Hashanah. Even those who do not go to synagogue and do not observe the holiday may be offended. Imagine how you would feel if someone scheduled such activities on Christmas or Easter, even if you didn't have anything special planned for the day, and you will understand how Jews feel about this holiday.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the Jewish Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and repentance to reconcile ourselves with the Creator for the mistakes we have made in the last year. It occurs on the ninth day after the first day of Rosh Hashanah (Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first day of the Jewish month; Yom Kippur occurs on the 10th), so it is usually in late September or early October, sometimes falling on Columbus Day. For obvious reasons, nobody adds an extra day to this 25-hour fast!

Remember that this holiday starts the evening before the day it appears on your secular calendar. Some secular calendars will mark the preceding day as Kol Nidre, which is the name of the first service of the holiday, in the evening.

Most (but not all) Jews take off from work or school on this day, even ones who are not religious at other times. This is the busiest day of the year for synagogues, even though many synagogues charge for tickets to this day's services (to defray the cost of serving so many extra people). Many will also want to leave work early the night before, so they have time for a large, slow meal before this 25-hour fast. Like Rosh Hashanah, most American Jews expect gentiles to be aware of this day, and almost all will be offended if you schedule important activities on it.

Chanukkah

Chanukkah is the festival of lights, commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after a successful revolt against the Seleucid Greeks. As part of the rededication, the victorious Jews needed to light the Temple's menorah (candelabrum), but they had only enough oil to last one day and it would take eight days to prepare more oil. Miraculously, the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days. The miracle of the oil is commemorated with this eight-day candle lighting holiday.

Chanukkah begins between Thanksgiving and Christmas. About half of the time, it overlaps with Christmas, but there are many years when Chanukkah ends long before Christmas. In 2002, for example, Chanukkah began on Thanksgiving and ended in the first week of December, but that is unusual.

Almost all Jews light candles with their families for at least some nights of the holiday, so people like to be at home during this holiday. Although almost nobody takes

off from work or school for this holiday, many may not want to work nights or travel during the holiday so they can light candles with the family, and accommodations should be made for this.

The most important thing to remember about Chanukkah is that it is not Jewish Christmas, no matter what the card shops and toy stores want you to believe. Chanukkah is a very minor holiday. It's not about joy to the world and peace on Earth and presents galore for everyone you've ever met; it's about lighting candles and playing games for chocolate coins and eating potato pancakes. Many Jewish parents give their children gifts during Chanukkah because they don't want their children to feel left out of Christmas, but Chanukkah gift giving rarely extends much beyond one's own children.

Most American Jews feel a sort of ambivalence about Chanukkah. On the one hand, most of them know that Chanukkah is not a big deal, and they don't want to make a big deal about it. On the other hand, Christmas is everywhere, unavoidable and overwhelming, and Jews want something Jewish to counterbalance it. This is the primary motivation behind elaborate Chanukkah decorations and enormous Chanukkah menorahs in public areas: Chanukkah is not very important, but asserting our Jewish identity and distinctiveness and existence in the face of overwhelming pressure to conform to a non-Jewish norm is important. Pressuring Jews to conform to that norm or to participate in Christmas events if they don't want to is inconsiderate at best.

Other Jewish Holidays

There are many other Jewish holidays, but most American Jews do not celebrate these holidays as strictly or as regularly as the holidays above, and most do not expect gentiles to be aware of them. In fact, there are a surprising number of Jews who don't know about many of these holidays.

Sukkot

This festival of booths commemorates the Biblical period of wandering in the desert, and is commemorated by building a temporary shelter (called a Sukkah, usually rhymes with "book a") in the yard and eating meals in it. Some spend considerable time in the Sukkah, even sleeping there. Sukkot begins on the fifth day after Yom Kippur, in late September or October, and lasts for 7 days. From the perspective of the Bible and Jewish law, this holiday is every bit as important as Passover, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but most American Jews don't see it that way. About 10% of Jews do not work on the first two days of this holiday (one day for some branches), in accordance with Jewish law, and will not want to travel during this holiday, because they want to be able to have meals in the Sukkah.

Shemini Atzeret / Simchat Torah

These two holidays fall immediately after Sukkot. Shemini Atzeret is sort of an extra day tacked onto the end of Sukkot; Simchat Torah celebrates the completion of the annual cycle of Bible readings in sabbath services. About 10% of Jews will take both of these days off from work. Some branches celebrate these two holidays on the same day, which is the first day after Sukkot.

Tu B'Shevat

Jewish Arbor Day, used for calculating the age of trees for certain religious purposes. Occurs in late January or early February. There are no restrictions on this holiday that would require accommodation.

Purim

Jewish Mardi Gras, more or less. This is a partying holiday celebrating the rescue of the Jews from a Hitler-like figure bent on genocide. Occurs in March, a month before Passover, and lasts for one day. Although work is technically not forbidden on this holiday, a small number of Jews prefer not to work on it because of rabbinical dictum that no good will come from work done on this day.

Yom Ha-Shoah

Holocaust Memorial Day; a day to remember the victims of the Holocaust. Occurs in late April or early May. No accommodations are usually needed.

Yom Ha-Atzmaut, Yom Ha-Zikkaron, Yom Yerushalayim

Israeli Independence Day, Israeli Memorial Day and Jerusalem Day. Yom Ha-Atzmaut, in late April or May, commemorates the day that the British Palestinian mandate expired, and David Ben-Gurion declared the creation of the State of Israel within the lands that the UN had set aside for a Jewish state in Palestine. Yom Ha-Zikkaron in May is a memorial day for Israeli soldiers who died defending the state of Israel in its many wars. Yom Yerushalayim in late May or early June commemorates the reunification of Jerusalem in Israeli hands during the 1967 War. No accommodations are usually needed. Cities with large Jewish populations often have parades on a Sunday for Israeli Independence Day, just as cities with large Italian populations have Columbus Day parades. The other two Israel-related holidays get little acknowledgement in America. If gentiles choose to acknowledge these holidays, they should be sensitive to the feelings of Arabs, who may not think that the creation of the state of Israel or the reunification of Jerusalem in the hands of Jews is a cause for celebration, or that the death of Israeli soldiers is a cause for mourning.

Shavu'ot

Commemorates the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Occurs between Memorial Day and Independence Day, and lasts for one or two days, depending on your branch. Like Sukkot, this holiday is every bit as important as Passover, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but most American Jews don't see it that way. About 10% of Jews do not work on this holiday, in accordance with Jewish law.

Tisha B'Av

A fast commemorating the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and other tragedies. Occurs in late July or August. About 10% of Jews observe this fast. Although work is not forbidden on this day, some prefer not to work on this day because it is difficult to fast while working with others who are not fasting.

Minor Fasts

There are five other fast days scheduled at various times of the year, which are observed only from sunrise to sunset. For the 10% or so of Jews who observe these fasts, no accommodations are usually needed, other than sensitivity for the fact that they are not eating.

THE JERUSALEM ROAD

By Henry A. Benach

One of the greatest desires of all Jewish people is to walk up the roads of Jerusalem. God's greatest desire is that they walk the road that leads to eternal blessedness. The Bible tells us the direction each one needs to take to reach their final destination.

God Is Holy

"Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy." (Leviticus 19:2)

"And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." (Joshua 24:19)

There Is None Without Sin

"They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Psalm 14:3)

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." (The words of King David, Psalm 51:5)

"For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

Good Deeds Cannot Purify Us

"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isaiah 64:5 in Jewish Bible or 64:6 KJV)

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:2)

God Requires a Blood Sacrifice

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." (Leviticus 17:11)

Jewish and non-Jewish historians agree that both the Tabernacle and the genealogical records (whereby we could know who are the sons of Aaron) were destroyed by Titus in 70 A.D. No longer is there a system of blood sacrifices whereby the Jewish people can have their sins forgiven. Since we have seen it is not by good deeds, has God left his precious people with no hope? Of course not! **He has not failed either you or me.**

Applying the Blood of the Messiah

You can be forgiven - and know it! How?

The children of Israel applied the blood to their doorposts and lintel to prevent the death angel from killing their firstborn. (Exodus 12:21-23)

The priest applied the blood to the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the nation. (Leviticus 16:15-19)

But since the destruction of the Temple and the ending of Temple sacrifices, God has provided salvation through the blood of Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Messiah) by His sacrifice for you and me. (Hebrews 9:12)

Safety and Refuge Is in God's Messiah

Who is this Messiah? He was -

A. Born of a virgin. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

B. Born in Bethlehem. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; who goings forth have been from old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2)

C. Slain for our sins. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:5-6)

D. Resurrected. "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Psalm 16:10)

Would YOU Accept Yeshua Ha Mashiach into your life now?

*"Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."
(Proverbs 27:1)*

Heavenly Father, knowing Thou art holy and that I am a sinner, I now ask the Almighty God, the Creator of the heavens and of the earth, the one and only True Messiah of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come into my heart and to wash away my sin. I pray this in Messiah's name.

Amen.

If YOU prayed this prayer, we would like for you to let us know so we could send you some additional literature to help you grow in your new life in Yeshua Ha Mashiach.

Contact Dr. Steve Cook at the address listed below:

www.stevecook.org

stevecook22@sbcglobal.net / 740-550-9403

