

RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY FOR WORLD RELIGIONS

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TERMS FOR JUDAISM

Amidah – central prayer of Rabbis in prayer service, meaning “standing,” recited three times a day. It is often called the “18 benedictions” (actually containing 19)

Ashkenazi – Jews from Germany and surrounding European countries, particularly Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. This is the vast majority of American Jews who originally came from Europe. It is distinguished from *Sepharadim* who came from Spain, North Africa, the Middle East.

Avodah – worship or service

Babylonian Talmud – edited in Babylon about 550 B.C.

Bar Kochva Revolt – revolt against Rome from 132-135 B.C.

Bar Mitzvah – the coming of age celebration for a boy. *Bat mitzvah* is for a girl. Means “son or daughter of the commandment.” For boys it’s age 13, and for girls it’s age 12

Basic beliefs and behaviors - no official creed, but *Maimonides* (1135-1204) gave these:

1) the existence of a creator and of providence; 2) in the unity of God and only one God and there is nothing else like Him; 3) God is spiritual in nature, and He does not have corporeal aspects (physical form); 4) God is everlasting, without beginning nor end; 5) that God alone is the appropriate object of worship and prayer; 6) the Hebrew prophets spoke truth from God; 7) Moses was the greatest of God’s prophets; 8) God gave Moses both the written and oral Torah at Sinai; 9) that belief is in the unchangeable nature of the revealed Law; 10) that God is omniscient; 11) belief in retribution in this world and in the hereafter; 12) At the end of the age God will send a special time and person, the Messiah, who will preside over a time of peace and prosperity; 13) belief in the resurrection of the dead. The following are a few more:

14) This God has chosen one people, the Jews; 15) God’s choice of these people is an expression of His love as a special call to obey Him; 16) Jews who live up to their calling from the Torah will receive an eternal recompense, yet the main concern is not to find a way to heaven but simply to live in conformity to divine expectations; 17) God is aware of every thought and action of human beings; 18) All human beings who have ever lived will be raised from the dead.

Branches of Judaism – there are several subgroups and divisions of among the Jews:

1) **Orthodox** – involves strict adherence to the Law, observing all the rules, amplified by the Talmud, in all respects; 2) **Hasidic** - practiced by orthodox Jews whose heritage goes back to a reformer Baal Shem Tov in eighteenth century Poland. They wear the long black coats; 3) **Reformed** – arose out of a new mindset that was born in the Enlightenment in Germany in the eighteenth century, that Jews should be at home in all cultures, that the Talmud is not binding;

4) **Reconstructionist** – views Judaism as a civilization with religion as one component, with the way not binding, yet more traditional than Reformed; 5) **Conservative** – recognizes the Law as binding but permits adaptation of it in light of modern developments. Motto is “tradition and change.” Tries to steer a middle path between Orthodox and Reformed

Brit Milah - rite of circumcision

Dead Sea Scrolls – texts discovered in 1947 in the Dead Sea area. They belonged to a sect of the Second Temple era (520 B.C.) They contain portions of all the O.T., and date from 3rd to 1st century B.C.

Enlightenment Jews – *Haskalah* movement in 18th to 19th century, beginning in Germany. Parallels the French Enlightenment. Traditional Jewish values suffered

Essenes – Second Temple sect that was ascetic and apocalyptic, one group lived by the Dead Sea

First Temple Era – Built in Jerusalem by King Solomon in the mid-10th century 950 B.C. and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

Gemarah – Aramaic for “learning” of rabbis which combined with the *Mishnah* to bring related legal and non-legal material to form the Talmud

Genizah – Hebrew for “concealment” where old worn out texts are buried. Most famous is the Cairo *genizah* discovered in the late 19th century

Great Revolt – Jewish revolt against Rome from 66-70 A.D.

Hagaddah – the Rabbinic script to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt used at the Seder during the Passover

Hagiographa – the third part of Jewish writings (the other two parts being the Law and the Prophets) These include the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

Halachah – legal component of Judaism that developed out of rabbinical writings

Hanukkah – winter holiday, the eight day festival commemorating the lights in the rededicated temple after the Maccabean revolt – usually celebrated around Christmas

Hashgahah – divine election and mission of Israel, from Psa. 33:14

Hasidism – an ultra-Orthodox movement in Poland in the 18th century A.D. characterized by strict observance of the Law, mystical teachings, devotional posture, and separationism.

Hasmoneans – Jewish rebellion against the Syrians in 167 B.C. of the *Maccabees*, means a “hammer” and it also the first letters of the words for “Who is like YHWH among the gods.” Exo. 15:11 They were successful in reestablishing traditional rites up to time of the Romans conquest of 63 B.C.

Hellenistic Period – Late 4th to 1st century B.C., in Judaea from the conquests of Alexander the Great (332 B.C.) to the Roman conquest (63 B.C.)

Hillel – a prominent rabbi who founded the Hillel School. Considered more liberal than the strict *Shammai* school

Holocaust – wholly burnt offering to God. *Shoah* means catastrophe of Holocaust

Kabbalah – emphasis on personal mystical relationship, sometimes occultic. Book of Zoahar is most famous of thirteenth century

Kaddish- a Jewish prayer, meaning “sanctification” and recited in God’s name at the conclusion of prayer. Especially recited by mourners

Karaism – spinoff group from Judaism, denying the legitimacy of the oral tradition and the authority of the rabbis to interpret the authentic meaning of the biblical Jews.

Kashruth – Jewish dietary regulations

Kiddushin – meaning “betrothal,” the first stage in the marriage process. It begins by the groom placing a ring on the right forefinger, saying “Behold, you are betrothed to me with this ring according to the law of Moses and Israel”

Kippa - also called *yarmulke*, a skull cap worn by Jewish men during worship

Kosher – amplification of Jewish dietary ordinances, permitting almost all vegetables, but prohibiting non four-footed animal meat and permitting those who have cloven feet and chew the cud, allowing seafood that has scales and fins, and only a few birds like chickens and ducks, drained of all blood. Meat and milk products cannot be eaten together, and the food must have been properly prepared for eating

Maccabees – Books describing the *Hasmonean* uprising. *I Maccabees* written in Hebrew in Judea, *II Maccabees* written in Greek in No. Africa. Nick-name of Judas Maccabee was “the hammer”

Matzah - unleavened bread eaten at *Passover*

Menorah – seven-branched candlestick for celebration mentioned in Exo. 25:31-40

Messiah – the one whom the Jews expected to come and deliver Israel from oppression and establish a kingdom of righteousness. It can refer to a historical person or to a supernatural being

Mezuzah - a small (about three or four inches long) stylized cylinder containing a parchment of the *Shema*. They pass by it and touch it with their fingers and then kiss the fingers. Idea alluded to in Deut. 6:9

Midrash – rabbinic exposition explaining the meaning of the scriptures. Much of these texts is legal but some is *aggadic*, containing materials of non-legal character such as stories and parables

Minyan – the requisite 10 people required for a public prayer service

Mishnah – interpretive teachings of the rabbis compiled about 200 A.D. It records the discussions of rabbis on how best to live according to the Torah, divided into six sections each dealing with a particular aspect of Jewish law: agriculture, Sabbath and festivals, marriage, torts and civil law, sanctities of temple and sacrifices, and laws of ritual purity

Mitzvah – a response in obedience to God; the goal of Judaism

Mitzvot – the 613 commandments of Moses, recorded in the *Torah*, made up of statutes concerning ritual performance of obligations and judgments consisting of ritual laws of society

Orthodox Judaism – one of the three main branches of Judaism; the most traditional, it emphasizes tradition and strict obedience to the Law of Moses as interpreted by rabbis

Passover – from word *pesach*, “to pass over/protect/have mercy,” a Jewish holiday in the spring. It celebrates God’s deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt during the time of Moses

Pharisees – had an oral tradition to interpret the *Torah*, the spiritual ancestors of the Rabbis

Purim – in March, the celebration of Queen Esther’s saving the Jews from persecution and destruction under the Persians

Rabbi – a teacher of the law

Reform Judaism – one of the three main branches of Judaism. More liberal, it emphasizes modern ways of thinking and doing, and the ethics of the prophets as opposed to the Law of Moses.

Rosh Hashanah – Jewish New Year; a time of repentance and self-examination

Shabbat – derived from Hebrew word for “to cease.” It is first used to describe God’s seventh day rest from His Creation in Gen. 1 and 2. It is generally a weekly day of rest and/or time of worship observed by Abrahamic religions.

Sadducees – a Second Temple sect that denied oral tradition, and hence the resurrection

Second Temple – completed under Ezra in 516 B.C. and destroyed by Romans in 70 A.D.

Seder – guided by the *Haggadah*, a meal of unleavened bread eaten after sundown at the beginning of Passover

Shavuot – literally the feast of “weeks,” held 50 days after Passover to celebrate the Torah

Shechinah – term meaning “dwelling” it denotes the manifestation of God upon the stage of the world, although it abides in the heavenlies

Shema – meaning “hear,” the Jewish declaration of faith based in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and a few other portions. It is said twice daily. It begins, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”

Shofar – a horn that is blown as a reminder of God’s creation and a petition for God’s blessings.

Star of David – recognized symbol of Judaism, blue two interlaced triangles making a star

Sukkoth – right after *Yom Kippur* comes the weeklong celebration of the feast of booths which commemorates Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness

Synagogue – term meaning “assembling,” a religious building for worship, prayer, and instruction. Remember that the home is the central place of worship for all the holidays, for most the holy days are intentionally family-oriented.

Talmud – collection of the standard rabbinic teachings on all aspects of Jewish tradition. It includes the Jerusalem Talmud completed by 400 A.D., and the Babylonian Talmud completed in 500 A.D. It was finished by A.D. 600. Mishnah and Gemara together make up the Talmud

Tallit – prayer shawl is rectangular, about two feet by one foot, white with blue stripes and tassels on the ends, which is wrapped over one’s shoulder, and sometimes over the head

TaNakh – complete Jewish Bible with three parts: *Torah*, the books of Moses; *Nevi’im*, the books of the prophets; and *Ketuvim*, writings

Tefillin – also called *phylacteries*, are little boxes, about one inch cubed, that are strapped to the forehead and the left forearm, containing little parchment of scripture verses.

Ten Commandments – referred to as the *Decalogue*, these were the decrees issued by God to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, following the Exodus. The *613 Laws* are expanded by the Jews, 365 for days of year plus 248 for parts of body, covering all of life.

Ten Lost Tribes – when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., the tribes were scattered all over the world

Torah – meaning “teaching,” the first five books of the Bible, also called the *Pentateuch*, (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*)

Yom Kippur – the day of atonement, tenth day after *Rosh Hashanah* in the fall, a 24-hour period of fasting and repentance, the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar

Zionism – the movement for national Jewish restoration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, leading to the founding of the State of Israel in 1948

Resources:

- Cherry, Shai, “Introduction to Judaism,” from the audio book in, *The Great Courses*, The Teaching Company, 2004. ISBN 1565859243
- Corduan, Winfried, *Pocket Guide to World Religions*. InterVarsity Press, 2006. ISBN9780830827053
- Gafni, Isaiah M., “Great World Religions: Judaism,” from the audio book in, *The Great Courses*, The Teaching Company, 2003. ISBN 1565857933
- House, Wayne, H., *Charts of World Religions*. Zondervan, 2006. ISBN 9780310204954