

Glossary: Jewish worldview traditions

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Adonai

DEFINITION: A Hebrew word meaning, 'My Lord'.

Ark

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Aron Hakodesh

DEFINITION: The cupboard, which is often ornately decorated, that houses the Torah scrolls in a synagogue.

Ashkenazi

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ashkenazic

DEFINITION: Jews whose family roots are mainly in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe.

Bal Tashchit

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Bal Tashschit, BalTaschit

DEFINITION: This literally translates as 'do not destroy,' and it refers to the mitzvot not to destroy or waste things that come from the natural world.

Bar Mitzvah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Bar-Mitzvah

DEFINITION: 'Son of the commandments.' A ceremony at the synagogue that marks when a Jewish boy takes responsibility for his own religious life, often at age 13. In Orthodox and Progressive communities, the boy will read a section of the Torah in the synagogue. There is usually a family celebration too.

Bat Mitzvah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Bat-Mitzvah

DEFINITION: 'Daughter of the commandments.' A ceremony that marks when a Jewish girl takes responsibility for her own religious life, often at age 12. In progressive communities, the girl will often read a section of the Torah in the synagogue. In some Orthodox communities, girls read a section of the Torah and in others, girls give a talk about an aspect of Judaism. There is usually a family celebration too.

Beitzah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Beitza

DEFINITION: A roasted egg. A symbol of new life and hope. It is found on the Seder plate at Pesach.

Bimah

DEFINITION: A raised platform in a synagogue, from which the Torah is read, and services are led.

Challah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Hallah

DEFINITION: A doughy bread, often plaited and slightly sweet, which is eaten on Shabbat, and during other Jewish festivals this can be found in other forms: e.g. a round version is eaten at Rosh Hashanah.

Chametz

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Hametz

DEFINITION: This is food that is not eaten during Pesach (Passover), to help Jews remember the enslaved people who had to leave Egypt so quickly, that they did not have time to let their bread rise. The night before Pesach begins, children search the house to remove any Chametz. This is also a reason that Jews eat Matzah, unleavened flatbread, at Pesach.

Chanukah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Hanukkah, Chanukkah

DEFINITION: An 8-day festival that remembers the winning back of the second temple in Jerusalem after it had been occupied by foreign forces in 165 BCE. There was only enough oil to light the menorah in the temple for one night, but the menorah stayed lit for 8 days. During the Chanukah festival, candles are progressively lit, day by day (see Chanukiah).

Chanukiah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Hanukiah, Hanukkiyah,

DEFINITION: A 9-branched candlestick which is used at the festival of Chanukah. The extra ninth candle is called the shamash, or helper candle, used to light the other 8 candles. One candle is lit each night of Chanukah.

Charoset

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Haroset, Charoseth, Dukkeh,

DEFINITION: A sweet paste made of apples, nuts, spice and wine. It reminds those celebrating Pesach (Passover) of the mortar that the Jews (then called Hebrews or Israelites) had to use whilst they were enslaved in Egypt. It is found on the Seder plate at Pesach.

Cheder

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Cheider

DEFINITION: Classes for children to attend at the synagogue, where they learn about sacred stories, celebrations and traditions.

Covenant

DEFINITION: A solemn vow between two parties. There are several examples of these in the Torah. For example, God promised Noah that he would not destroy the world again. This covenant is shown in a rainbow. Another important covenant for Jewish people, is God's covenant with Abraham, whom he promised would be the father of a great nation, and would have so many descendants that there would be too many to count like the stars in the sky.

Dreidel

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Dreidl, dreidel, dreidel, Sevivon

DEFINITION: A four-sided spinner used to play games during the festival of Chanukah. On each of the sides of the dreidel you will find a Hebrew letter. Each letter reminds

players of the key message of the story of Chanukah: Nun – great, Gimel – miracle, Hay – happened, Shin – there.

Etrog

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Esrog

DEFINITION: A yellow citrus fruit that is waved, along with the lulav, during prayers at Sukkot.

Gemillut Chasadim

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Gemilut Hasadim

DEFINITION: Acts of kindness. A central principle that Jews should undertake acts of kindness, generosity and love.

Haggadah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Haggada

DEFINITION: A book which tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt, sets out the order for the ritual meal, and includes the special blessings for the Seder meal at Pesach (Passover). While there is a central text which is included in the Haggadah, many will also include contemporary texts and sources to stimulate discussion during the Seder.

Halakhah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Halacha, Halakah

DEFINITION: The code of conduct for all aspects of Jewish life, which explains how to follow the 613 commandments (mitzvot) in the Torah.

Hebrew Bible

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tanakh, TaNaKh

DEFINITION: The collection of sacred texts for Jewish people in three parts; Torah (law; teaching), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings) e.g. Psalms.

Jewish

DEFINITION: Member of the Jewish community, the religion of Jewish people or relating to the religion of Judaism.

Karpas

DEFINITION: A vegetable, often parsley, but sometimes celery or lettuce. It is dipped in salt water to symbolise the tears of the Jews (then called Hebrews or Israelites). It is found on the Seder plate at Pesach.

Kashrut

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kashruth, Kashrus

DEFINITION: Acceptable in Jewish law. This is most commonly used to refer to Jewish food laws relating to what can and cannot be eaten. The laws come from the Torah. Jews may not eat pork or shellfish as they are named as unclean in the Hebrew Bible. They also have to ensure that animals are slaughtered in the right way so that meat is fit for eating (kosher), and that meat and milk products are not mixed in the same meal.

Ketubah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ketuba

DEFINITION: A marriage contract. This has inscribed on it the promises that the two people getting married make to one another. Many Jewish couples have their ketubah designed specifically for them, with beautiful images behind the words.

Kiddush

DEFINITION: A prayer said over wine to celebrate a significant day, e.g. at the beginning of Shabbat.

Kippah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Yarmulke, Kippa, kappel, koppel

DEFINITION: A cap without a brim, used to cover the head as a sign of respect to God. It is sometimes called a skull cap or a yarmulke.

Kosher

DEFINITION: Something that is allowed by Jewish law. It is often used to refer to foods that are permitted to be eaten.

Lulav

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Lulab

DEFINITION: A bundle of different types of branches (specifically palm, willow and myrtle) tied together, that is waved along with an etrog to say special blessings at Sukkot.

Maror

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Marror

DEFINITION: Bitter herbs symbolising the terrible times that the Jews (then called Hebrews or Israelites) underwent when enslaved in Egypt. It is found on the Seder plate at Pesach.

Matzah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Matza, Matzoh

DEFINITION: Flat bread made without yeast. Eaten at Pesach (Passover).

Menorah

DEFINITION: A lamp. This term is most often used to refer to a 7-branched candlestick which was used in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Mezuzah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Mezuza, mezzuzah

DEFINITION: This word literally comes from the Hebrew for 'doorpost,' but usually refers to the small box containing the Shema prayer on parchment scroll. The Shema prayer is found in the Torah. The mezuzah is fixed to the doorposts in Jewish homes and buildings, such as the synagogue. Some Jews will often touch the mezuzah as they walk through the door, as a way of both connecting with God, and as a reminder that they should live by the word of God.

Mitzvot

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Mitzvos, Mitzvah (s)

DEFINITION: Commandments. There are said to be 613 mitzvots in Jewish law. An example of these is the ten commandments, which are displayed above or near the ark in the synagogue. The word also refers to a good deed.

Mizrachi

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Mizrahi

DEFINITION: Jews who have their roots mainly in North Africa (e.g. Morocco, Tunisia), the Middle East (Western Asia, e.g. Syria, Iraq, Yemen), Central Asia (Iran, Bukhara) and the Caucasus (Georgia).

Ner Tamid

DEFINITION: The everlasting light that hangs in the synagogue above the ark as a reminder of the presence of God.

Orthodox

DEFINITION: A stream or branch of Judaism, following the traditional interpretation of Jewish law.

Pesach

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Passover

DEFINITION: Pesach is one of three pilgrimage festivals mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The Jews remember how Moses led the Jewish people (then called Hebrews or Israelites) out of slavery in Egypt. This is called 'The Exodus'. It is celebrated each Spring.

Progressive

DEFINITION: A form of Judaism which says that the laws of the Torah should be interpreted for modern day life.

Purim

DEFINITION: A spring festival full of joy to celebrate the saving of the Jewish people in Persia by Queen Esther from Haman, who sought to destroy the Jews.

Rabbi

DEFINITION: A Jewish teacher with a high level of Jewish learning who is able to make rulings or verdicts for their community. The rabbi is often the religious leader of a Jewish community. While women rabbis are much more common in Progressive communities, there are also women rabbis in some Orthodox communities.

Rosh Hashanah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Rosh HaShana, Yom Hadin, Yom Hazikaron

DEFINITION: A celebration of the Jewish new year, a major festival of Judaism. The shofar is blown to mark the beginning of Rosh Hashanah; it is a sign of the call for repentance. Prayers are said and the Torah is read in the synagogue. Sweet foods, such as apples dipped in honey, are eaten to represent that people hope for a good and sweet year. The festival occurs in September or October.

Seder meal

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Seder

DEFINITION: A ritual meal eaten on the first night, and for some Jewish people, the second night of Pesach, at which the story of the Exodus from Egypt is retold using a book called a Haggadah, which contains the story and special blessings for the meal. Seder translates from Hebrew as 'order' because there is a specific order for the meal, which is set down in the Haggadah. The Seder meal includes different types of food that symbolise aspects of the Exodus story.

Seder plate

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Seder plate

DEFINITION: Used at the important Jewish festival of Pesach, where symbolic foods are placed on it to represent the story of the Jewish people's enslavement and escape from Egypt. The symbolic foods have traditional interpretations, but over the years, those traditional interpretations have also been added to with contemporary explanations and significances.

Sefer Torah

DEFINITION: A Torah scroll, which has been handwritten by a scribe (sofer). The scribe writes out the words of the Torah onto parchment or vellum. These are kept in the Ark in the synagogue.

Sephardi

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sefardi

DEFINITION: Jews who have their roots mainly in the Iberian Peninsula (e.g. Spain and Portugal) and Turkey.

Shabbat

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sabbath, Shabbos

DEFINITION: The Jewish day of rest. In the Torah, God creates the world in six days, then rests on the seventh, blessing it and making it holy. Shabbat begins at sunset on Friday

and ends at sunset on Saturday evening. Shabbat is welcomed with the lighting of two candles. Many Jewish families share a meal with friends and family on Friday evening. On Friday evening and Saturday, many Jewish people go to the synagogue.

Shavuot

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Shavuos

This is one of three pilgrimage festivals mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. It celebrates the time when Moses was given the words of the Torah on Mount Sinai. It takes place in the summer, around the time of the grain harvest, seven weeks after Pesach. At Shavuot, Jews traditionally use dairy products in their meals; milk is a symbol of the Torah because it nourishes, as milk does for a baby.

Shema

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Shma, Sh'ma

DEFINITION: A Jewish prayer, stating belief in one God. The text of the prayer is found in the Torah. It literally means listen. It is on the scroll that is rolled up inside the mezuzah. Many Jews will say it twice a day, and it also is written on scrolls, which are rolled up and placed inside a mezuzah.

Shoah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: HaShoah, Ha-Shoah

DEFINITION: The Holocaust. Many Jewish communities hold commemorative ceremonies on Yom HaShoah, which is held in April or May, to remember the victims of the Holocaust. Synagogue services are held, candles lit, and prayers said.

Shul

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Schul

DEFINITION: A Jewish place of worship. It is often called a synagogue. The word is derived from the word 'school'. It is a place of prayer, learning and community.

Simchat Torah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Simchas Torah

DEFINITION: An autumn festival which marks both the end and the beginning of the yearlong cycle of reading the Torah.

Sofer

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Soferet, scribe

DEFINITION: A person who is qualified to hand write a Sefer Torah scroll.

Star of David

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Magen David

DEFINITION: A six-pointed star, which is a symbol of Judaism also known as the Magen David or Shield of David.

Sukkah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Succah

DEFINITION: The temporary shelter or booth, built from natural materials, and used during the festival of Sukkot. It is constructed so you can see the stars through the roof. Many Jewish communities will build them in synagogues and schools, and those with gardens may build them at home too.

Sukkot

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Succos

DEFINITION: The autumn harvest festival where Jews remember how God looked after his people when they were in the wilderness, having escaped from Egypt. It is one of the three pilgrimage festivals. At this festival, many Jews will construct a Sukkah, a temporary shelter, in which they will eat meals and some will sleep.

Synagogue

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Shul

DEFINITION: A Jewish place of worship. It is sometimes called a shul. It is a place of prayer, learning and community.

Tallit

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tallis, Tallith

DEFINITION: A large 4-cornered shawl, which is worn at synagogue services. It is traditionally worn by men, but some women, especially from the Progressive community, also wear them. It has 4 fringes (tzitzit) at the corners, which are to remind the wearer of the 613 mitzvot (commandments).

Talmud

DEFINITION: The Talmud is a book of law, ethics, philosophy, history and culture, and is an important book for Jewish people as it contains the teachings and opinions of thousands of rabbis across more than two thousand years.

Tashlich

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tashlikh

DEFINITION: A ceremony that takes place during Rosh Hashanah. Many Jews symbolically sprinkle crumbs into bodies of water (for example, a river) to symbolise sins being cast out.

Tefillin

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tefillin

DEFINITION: Black leather boxes holding prayers (including passages from the Shema), worn by some Jews on their arm and head during weekday morning synagogue services

TeNaKh

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tanakh, TeNaKh, TeNaCh

The three capital letters of T, N and Ch (or 'K') form this word, which is used to represent the three main parts of the Hebrew Bible, the holy books for Jews:

Torah (law; teaching): the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) – known as the Chumash (Five) when used as a separate book in the home or synagogue.

Nevi'im (Prophets): e.g. the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea.

Ketuvim (Writings): the books of poetry, wisdom, history, e.g. Psalms, Proverbs, Chronicles.

The Western Wall

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kotel

DEFINITION: It is the last remaining piece of the Second Temple, which was destroyed in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70CE. Jews often visit the site to pray, celebrate Bar Mitzvahs and to post prayers into the cracks in the wall.

Tikkun Olam

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tikkun HaOlam, Tikkun Ha'olam

DEFINITION: To mend or repair the world. The meaning has grown to mean a variety of social action.

Torah

DEFINITION: The Jewish sacred text that is made up of Bereshit (Genesis), Shemot (Exodus), Vayikra (Leviticus), Bemidbar (Numbers and Devarim [Deuteronomy]). The five books found in the Torah are the same as the first five books found in the Christian Bible.

Treif

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Treyf, trefah

DEFINITION: Food that is not Kosher, food that it is not permitted to eat under Jewish law. The word literally translates to 'torn'.

Tu B'Shevat

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tu Bishvat

DEFINITION: The Jewish festival of trees, or the Jewish new year for trees, which is celebrated in January or February. It reminds Jews of the importance of the Land, and also the importance of the land of Israel. Jews often celebrate the festival by planting trees and eating fruit.

Tzedakah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tsedaka

DEFINITION: Justice, or charitable giving, to those who need help. It literally means, 'justice, fair action' or 'righteousness'.

Yad

DEFINITION: This is used by the person reading the Sefer Torah in the synagogue to help them keep their place while reading. It also helps them to avoid touching the Torah scroll. The word literally means 'hand' in Hebrew. The yad is often a long rod with a pointing finger at the end.

Yom Kippur

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Yom Kipur, Yom HaKippurim

DEFINITION: A solemn festival, one of the major festivals, which occurs ten days after Rosh Hashanah. It is also known as the 'Day of Atonement'. A day to reflect on the sins of the previous year. It comes at the end of the ten 'days of awe' when Jews ask for forgiveness. For many Jews, this day is marked with 25 hours of fasting. The book of Jonah is often read in the Synagogue. The festival occurs in September or October. The shofar is blown to mark the end of Yom Kippur.

Zeroah

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Z'roa

DEFINITION: A roasted shank bone, which symbolises how Jews (then called Hebrews or Israelites) had to mark their doors with blood, so the plagues would pass by their house. It is found on the Seder plate at Pesach.