



A Jewish mother and daughter light the Sabbath candles.

unlike Tisha B'Av there are no prohibitions on work or other activities. Nevertheless, it has become customary in recent years for Jews to gather on the evening of the twenty-seventh of Nisan and to recite memorial prayers for the roughly one-third of the Jewish world population who lost their lives during the war.

### The Sabbath

Although it is neither a major nor a minor festival, the weekly Sabbath (Hebrew, *Shabbat*) forms the core of the sacred calendar in Judaism. Like the major festivals, it is a day of prayer and rest, with its own liturgical tradition and pattern of observance; but, unlike any other sacred occasion in Judaism, its observance is explicitly mandated in the Ten Commandments. The Torah provides two different rationales for Shabbat: in the Book of Exodus (20:8–11), it is identified as the day on which God rested from His creative labors; in the Book of Deuteronomy (5:12–15), however, it is associated with the

Exodus from Egypt and liberation from slavery. Each of these explanations provides a distinctive interpretation of the meaning of Shabbat; the first rationale is supernatural, whereas the second, the Exodus, is historical. For both interpretations, however, the commanding lesson of the Sabbath remains the same: God's actions, whether at the beginning of human time or at a turning point in the history of Israel, serve as a model for human behavior. The Creator/Liberator has separated sacred time from ordinary time, and so must we.

Shabbat begins at dusk on Friday and concludes at sundown on Saturday. This 24-hour period is ushered in by the lighting of two candles in the home, reminiscent of the first act of creation. Customarily, it is the woman of the house who lights these candles. Once the Sabbath formally begins, observance shifts to the synagogue, where the *Erev Shabbat* (Sabbath evening) service is conducted. The liturgy for Sabbath evening identifies the Sabbath itself as a "bride," and the feelings aroused by the "joy of the Sabbath" are similar to the emotions evoked by a wedding. With the return of the family from prayer, the Sabbath meal begins with a prayer of sanctification recited over wine and a blessing said over two loaves of bread. Sabbath bread is called challah, and it is usually baked in a shape that suggests a woman's braided hair (yet another allusion to the Sabbath "bride").

Sabbath morning observance shifts to the synagogue, where, in addition to the Shabbat liturgy, a weekly portion of the Torah is read, accompanied by a portion from the prophetic books. That service concluded, the remainder of the day is spent quietly until the evening, when the last two worship services of the day are celebrated, and a separation ceremony, known as Havdalah, is observed with a cup of wine, a braided

candle, and a spice box—all reminiscent of the sweetness and calm of the Sabbath. The rabbis of the Talmud once observed that it was not just Israel that had kept the Sabbath but the Sabbath that had kept Israel. As the most direct link to the ancient past, Shabbat serves as one of Judaism's primary symbols of historical and spiritual continuity.

### Life-Cycle Events

At each stage in the cycle of living and dying, Judaism offers a distinctive ceremony that marks the passage from birth to death. The ultimate object of these rites of passage is the sanctification of human life and the desire to deepen the covenant relationship between Israel and God.

**Birth** The ritual process of entering the Jewish community begins, for male babies, on the eighth day of life with the rite of circumcision. Jews are not the only people today who circumcise male infants (nor were they in antiquity), but in Judaism circumcision is much more than a medical procedure. It is a mitzvah, a divine commandment imparted to the biblical patriarch Abraham and incumbent upon all of his male descendants from that time forward.

Historically, circumcision has been one of the distinctive physical marks of Jewish identity. Its importance for Jews can be gauged by the fact that the circumcision ritual takes precedence over the Sabbath or any other holy day in the sacred calendar. The only thing that would delay the performance of this mitzvah would be concern for the health of the child. During this ceremony, after the mohel (a ritual circumciser, who is usually a medically trained professional) has removed a portion of the infant's foreskin, the newborn receives his Hebrew name, which traditionally consists of the child's own name and that of the father (for example, Isaac son of Abraham). From this moment on, this is the name by which the child will be known in the Jewish community, particularly on ritual occasions. In many Conservative and Reform communities, it has become the custom to add the mother's name to the father's.

Baby girls enter the Jewish community under slightly different circumstances. There has never been any form of female circumcision in Judaism, nor any fixed naming ritual for the infant female. However, one popular custom today among Jews worldwide is the practice of bringing the newborn to the synagogue on the first (or, in some communities, the fourth) Sabbath after birth. On that occasion, either the

A table set for Shabbat: Challah, candlesticks, and wine.



child's father or both parents are called up to the Torah and recite the customary blessings. Then the baby girl is given a Hebrew name, and, like her male counterpart's, it is the name that she will use on all ritual occasions for the rest of her life.

**Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation** Jewish males traditionally enter the stage of religious maturity at the age of thirteen, whether or not they have engaged in the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. There is no reference to such a ritual in the Hebrew Bible, nor do the rabbis of the Talmud make mention of any specific rite of passage that marks a young man's assumption of responsibilities as an observant Jew. Nevertheless, by the later Middle Ages, something like the Bar Mitzvah ceremony practiced today had already begun to evolve, consisting of some demonstration of Hebrew literacy and an ability to read a weekly portion of the Torah. Of all the commonly practiced rituals of contemporary Judaism, the Bar Mitzvah is the one ritual that is likely to be familiar to non-Jews.

After years of study, the young man who becomes a Bar Mitzvah is taught to see himself as a scholar-in-training whose entry into adult Jewish life is just the beginning of a lifelong program of study. Although the celebration that follows is often joyous, there is a serious underlying purpose: the preparation of a young person to assume what the rabbis have called the "yoke of Torah." Thus, in addition to reading a portion from both the Torah and the prophetic literature, a Bar Mitzvah is expected to deliver a brief scholarly explanation of the portion he has just read, thereby demonstrating a mature comprehension of Jewish Scriptures.

The practice of requiring young women (between the ages of twelve and thirteen) to furnish similar proof of both literacy and religious commitment is of much more recent origin. The first Bat Mitzvah to be performed in the United States was conducted in 1922 for Judith Kaplan, daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of the Reconstructionist Movement. Beginning as a gesture designed to affirm gender equality in modern Judaism, the Bat Mitzvah soon evolved into an alternative form of the Bar Mitzvah ritual, and today the Bat Mitzvah ceremony is as common as the Bar Mitzvah in non-Orthodox communities.

Another innovative practice, known as a Confirmation, is almost as commonplace today in non-Orthodox communities as the Bar and Bat Mitzvah, and it too involves a process of study and ritual performance by both young men and young women. The Confirmation ceremony can be traced back to the early decades of the Reform Movement in nineteenth-century Germany, where some Reform-minded rabbis attempted to find an alternative rite of passage for adolescents rather than the traditional Bar Mitzvah, believing that the latter had become little more than a ceremonial occasion. Their solution was to borrow a practice from the Christian church and to require sixteen-year-old males (and later females) to make a profession of faith during the Shavuot service, thus connecting their religious coming of age with the traditional celebration of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. This practice was integrated into the traditional life cycle after World War II, as many Reform and several Conservative

Compare the Bar or Bat Mitzvah in Judaism with the confirmation ceremony in various forms of Christianity. How are they alike, and how do they differ?

congregations added the Confirmation ceremony to the now-lengthened process of Jewish education. Thus, instead of supplanting the Bar Mitzvah, the Confirmation ceremony simply became a secondary stage of the passage to adulthood.

**Marriage and Divorce** In Judaism, marriage is a contractual relationship between a man and a woman, rooted in mutual love and respect, and presumed to be both monogamous and enduring—a relationship on which divine blessings can be invoked. However, like all contracts, the marriage contract can be dissolved.

Over time, Jews have devised formal procedures for regulating and solemnizing the processes of marriage and divorce. Many centuries ago, the marriage ceremony consisted of two separate rites: the betrothal and the actual nuptials. According to this ancient custom, the future bride and groom became engaged to one another through the exchange of a ring. The couple then returned to the homes of their respective parents for a year, after which time the bride and groom gathered, along with their families, under a marriage canopy (known as the chuppah). A rabbi would recite seven blessings, praising God and sanctifying the union, and only at the conclusion of this ceremony would the marriage be consummated. Today, these two ceremonies have been combined and are accompanied by other, largely symbolic rituals: first, having the bride and groom drink from the same wine cup, and second, having the groom present the bride with her marriage contract (Hebrew, *ketuvah*). Finally, at the conclusion of the ceremony, the groom crushes a wine glass with his shoe—traditionally understood to symbolize the destruction of the two temples—whereupon the attending guests shout *Mazel Tov* (Hebrew, "good luck").



The bride and groom will stand under this chuppah during the wedding ceremony.

From a traditional point of view, the presentation of the *ketubah* by the groom is the core of the marriage rite in Judaism because it states publicly the groom's intention to provide for his bride's well-being while he lives and her financial security after he dies, or after they divorce. Traditionally, the groom alone vows to set aside monies in escrow as "marriage insurance," but many modern Jewish couples have opted for a very different kind of *ketubah*, vowing mutual commitment and support, symbolized by an exchange of rings.

Jewish divorce proceedings are no less formal than the marriage ceremony. After marital counseling has been tried and failed, the couple comes before a rabbinic court that hears the case. The divorce document is then drawn up, releasing both parties from any future obligation to one another. At that moment, the husband (or his representative) must hand the divorce document to his soon-to-be ex-wife. He is then declared to be free of their union and eligible to marry again—that very day, if he chooses. The wife, however, must wait three months to marry again, on the presumption that she may be pregnant and therefore carrying the child of her former spouse. Moreover, if her husband refuses to grant her a divorce—or cannot do so because he is missing—traditional Jewish law leaves her few options for dissolving the marriage. She may find herself bound by religious law to a husband who has abandoned her or who may have died without witnesses to his death. Orthodox communities continue to struggle with this legal dilemma today.

**Death and Mourning** In Judaism the deceased are treated with as much dignity as the living, and the ceremonies associated with the burial of the dead and mourning are invested with sanctity and respect. Whenever possible, a Jewish burial will take place within twenty-four hours of death (unless the Sabbath or a festival intervenes). The body is prepared for burial by being bathed and wrapped in a shroud, then traditionally placed in a simple pine box, thus discouraging ostentation. During the burial service, mourners express their sorrow by a symbolic tearing of their clothes—often wearing a strip of torn black cloth, pinned to a garment—while reciting prayers of praise for God and comfort for the soul of the deceased in the afterlife.

Once burial occurs, those mourners who were closest to the deceased—parents, siblings, children, or spouse—enter into a week-long period of mourning known as *shivah* (Hebrew, "seven"), interrupted only by the Sabbath. During this period, mourners do not work, remain at home, and receive well-wishers who join with the mourning family in "sitting *shivah*." Because mourners are not expected, during this week, to attend synagogue, it is customary for friends to join the family in the home to recite morning and evening prayers.

Once *shivah* is over, however, mourners are expected to return to the world and everyday obligations, with the understanding that for the remainder of that month mourners will abstain from entertainments and remain in a somber state of mind. Once this thirty-day period of diminished mourning is completed, restrictions on the mourner's participation in celebratory events are lifted, though most Orthodox Jews

continue a modified mourning protocol until the first anniversary of a parent's death has passed. The erecting of a tombstone does not normally occur until eleven months have passed; thereafter, close relatives are expected to visit the grave at least once a year—usually on the anniversary of the death of that family member—as well as to recite prayers in memory of the dead during memorial services held during all the major festivals. Finally, it is customary to light candles in the home at the time of the yearly anniversary of a loved one's death, and, whenever possible, to place small stones on the gravestone as a sign of one's remembrance of the deceased.

### Other Sacred Practices

As a way of life, Judaism seeks to shape every facet of one's behavior: from the food one eats (or doesn't eat) to the way husbands and wives relate to one another. To those living within those traditions, these practices provide a sense of meaning and order, endowing all of life's activities with an aura of holiness.

**The Dietary Code** Since antiquity, Jews have observed a restricted diet. Although the details have changed over the centuries, the underlying assumptions behind these practices have not. In the Torah, the people of Israel are told, repeatedly, that God wishes them to be in a state of "holiness," and when that principle is applied to diet, it becomes a discipline of selective food consumption and careful food preparation.

The essentials of the Jewish dietary code are as follows:

1. The only animals that may be eaten are those that have been properly slaughtered; no animal that has been killed by another or that has died a natural death may be consumed.
2. The only quadrupeds that may be eaten are those with split hooves who also chew the cud (like cows or goats), and, once properly slaughtered, their blood must be drained away.
3. No fish may be eaten that does not have both fins and scales.
4. No insects may be consumed at all.
5. No meat dish may be eaten at the same time as a milk dish.

The practical consequences for anyone who observes this diet are obvious: such a person will not dine at a stranger's home without first inquiring whether the food about to be served is really "kosher" (meaning in conformity to rabbinic standards of food selection and preparation) and whether the plates and cooking utensils are also completely free of contamination from forbidden foods. Within all Orthodox and many Conservative Jewish homes, it is customary to find not only kosher foodstuffs on the table but also duplicate sets of ovens, refrigerators, and dinnerware to make it easier to separate meat dishes from milk dishes. Kosher restaurants carry this process one step further by ordering only meat prepared by kosher butchers and by obtaining rabbinical certification that all food preparation procedures have been followed

scrupulously. The phrase “kosher-style” food is deceptive: foods and cooking processes are either kosher or non-kosher, but never both. Over the centuries, attempts have been made to rationalize this system of food taboos and culinary practices by suggesting an underlying concern with food safety and dietary well-being. But any benefits derived from not consuming infected meats are peripheral to the primary intent of the dietary code, namely, that of separating the observant Jew from a nonobservant food-consuming culture, thereby making the commonplace act of eating a religiously self-conscious event.

**Family Purity** All Orthodox, and some Conservative and Reform, women, in addition to maintaining kosher homes, are also equally attentive to the practice of ritual “purity,” and as a consequence attend a mikveh (Hebrew, “pool”) at the conclusion of their menstrual periods. In a truly orthodox Jewish home, husband and wife abstain from sexual intimacy not only during the entire period of menstruation but for seven days thereafter, and only then will the wife attend the mikveh. The purpose of this rite of purification, however, is not merely to bathe. Immersion in a mikveh is, rather, a symbolic act of spiritual preparation, and although it is used primarily by women preparing to resume sexual relations with their husbands, it is also used for conversion ceremonies and by orthodox males on the afternoon before Yom Kippur.

The origin of these practices can be found in the Hebrew Bible, where men are warned against having intimate relations with a menstruating woman. Nowhere, however, in either the Hebrew Bible or in rabbinic literature does Judaism suggest that women’s bodies are “unclean” in a hygienic sense. As with the dietary code, so with the laws of family purity: the ceremonial discipline of traditional Judaism requires a heightened degree of self-awareness about the routines of everyday life. Among Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, however, such practices are rarely observed, and today rigorous application of the purity laws is only a distinguishing mark of family life within the Orthodox Jewish home.

### Prayer

From its earliest beginnings, Judaism developed a distinctive culture of prayer. The Hebrew Bible includes examples of the principal types of prayer that make up the traditional Judaic liturgy: prayers of praise, confession, petition, and thanksgiving. In the Book of Psalms, for example, the legendary King David (to whom much of that book is attributed) petitions God in the following prayer-like poem:

Hear my cry, O God,  
Heed my prayer.  
From the end of the earth I call to You;  
When my heart is faint,  
You lead me to a rock that is high above me.  
For you have been my refuge,

A tower of strength against the enemy.  
O that I might dwell in Your tent forever,  
Take refuge under Your protecting wings.

—Psalms 61:2–5

In poems like this, biblical writers addressed God in a language that is at once intimate and awestruck, praising His providential care of those who trust in Him, while requesting His continued protection against evil and misfortune. But no matter what the character of any particular prayer, all prayers in Judaism are addressed directly to God, and all assume His compassion and just concern.

With the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., the principal site of Jewish prayer shifted to the synagogue, where prayer alone, disconnected from animal sacrifices, became the norm. From that point on, the practice of offering prayer—now no longer primarily the privilege of temple priests—became more democratic. Each community constructed its own house of worship, and before long a recognized liturgy emerged that consisted, in part, of selections from the Hebrew Bible and prayers for various occasions composed by rabbinic authors. By the Middle Ages, these prayers were collected in the Siddur.

The daily routine of prayer appears to have been established during the late biblical period, where we find the exiled Daniel, living in Persia, praying three times a day while turning toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:11). The architectural arrangement of early synagogues echoed this practice by orienting the entire building in the direction of Jerusalem, though in later centuries Jews were content with placing the Ark—a large, upright cupboard designed to hold several scrolls of the Torah—on the eastern wall. As the rabbinic protocol of prayer developed during the early Middle Ages, the rules governing thrice-daily prayer became increasingly elaborate and formalized, with an additional early afternoon service added on the Sabbath.

The most common setting for prayer in Judaism is communal, and although individual prayer is always valid, the full complement of prayers in any prayer service can only be said once a quorum of worshipers has assembled, either in the home or, more commonly, in a synagogue. That quorum is referred to in Hebrew as a minyan, and in Orthodox communities it consists of at least ten males thirteen years of age or older; in Conservative and Reform synagogues, a minyan consists simply of ten adults of either gender.

During the morning service, men traditionally wear a prayer shawl (Hebrew, **tallit**) and phylacteries or prayer-amulets (Hebrew, **tefillin**) throughout, and then remove them at the conclusion of prayers. On the Sabbath it is customary, even in many Reform synagogues, to wear the tallit during prayer services,

Holding a prayer book and wearing a tallit, tefillin, and a kippah, a young man prepares to recite morning prayers.



with tefillin worn only during weekday prayers. In most synagogues today, a head covering (known as a kippah or a yarmulke) is worn during prayer, chiefly by males, and as a sign of respect. Prayer services are conducted in the late afternoon and early evening as well.

One of the most powerful of all the prayers recited during the morning and evening services is the Shema, which consists of biblical verses that first declare the unity of God and then declare Israel's commitment to His service:

Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one!  
 Blessed is God's glorious kingdom forever and ever!  
 And you shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. Set these words, which I command you this day, upon your heart. Teach them faithfully to your children; speak of them in your home and on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. Bind them as a sign upon your hand, and let them be symbols before your eyes; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

—Deuteronomy 6:4–9

This passage is one of the first prayers taught to children and it is, traditionally, the last prayer one utters before death. It is one of several prayers that are recited every day in the week, on major festivals, and on the Sabbath.

In Orthodox and many Conservative congregations, it is customary to read aloud a portion from the Torah every week, on Monday and Thursday mornings, and especially on the Sabbath (morning and late afternoon). In addition, an extra passage from the prophetic books is read on both the Sabbath and the major festivals. On each occasion, the portion selected from the prophetic books either echoes the themes of the Torah portion or reflects the themes of the festival itself. All these readings are normally recited or chanted in Hebrew, with translations in the local language available to the congregation. Today, all Jewish communities employ Hebrew in both the recitation of prayers and in readings from the Torah. Orthodox synagogues conduct services almost entirely in Hebrew, while Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist communities use both Hebrew and the congregation's native language.

## CONCLUSION

Judaism has not merely survived over a period of three millennia; it has also evolved, responding and adapting to changing circumstances as it developed from a geographically and philosophically circumscribed religious culture into a global faith. As the oldest of the Abrahamic religions, it carries within itself the longest memory of formative events and personalities, and with it an abiding sense of the divine purposefulness of human history. Judaism exists, therefore, at a point of intersection between history and theology, as the life experiences of a people intertwine with their experience of the sacred.

At the summit of Jewish faith lies a singular Creator-God—at once familiar and mysterious, judgmental and forgiving—whose very existence guarantees the order and meaning of the universe; at the heart of Jewish faith lies a covenanted relationship between that God and those who are committed to serving and obeying His will. And even those who doubt the very existence of that God, but who persist in identifying themselves with Jewish history and values, continue to believe in a moral covenant that makes all human communities possible.

## SEEKING ANSWERS

### What Is Ultimate Reality?

The one God of Jewish faith is understood to be not only the source of all created things but also the highest and most complete form of reality the human mind can imagine. Jewish mystics often refer to this transcendent reality as the *Ein Sof*, or Infinite One. Traditionalists believe that God revealed Himself to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai and that Jewish Scriptures provide a reliable account of that revelation. The biblical view of Creation is, initially, positive: when God views the world He has brought into being He declares it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). However, later mystics, like Rabbi Luria, traced the evil in the world back to a mysterious cosmic error that subverted the design for the created world that God had originally intended. Nevertheless, the presence of divine “sparks” in each of us inspires us to believe that goodness and not evil will prevail.

### How Should We Live in This World?

The divine commandments that make up the core of the Torah are designed to enable human beings to achieve true righteousness, that is, to bring the human moral will into conformity with God's will, and thereby ensure that justice and peace will prevail in the world. All

ideas of right and wrong—such as the Ten Commandments—must, therefore, be referred back to God's revelation of His will at Sinai and the Torah's laws that govern human conduct. Both biblical writers and their rabbinic commentators believed that human beings are created in the “image of God” and, at the same time, are torn between good and bad impulses. In the mystical tradition, this conflict can be resolved through study, prayer, and meditation, all of which draw us closer to God.

### What Is Our Ultimate Purpose?

Judaism has never believed that human beings are hopelessly evil, nor does it support the view that humanity can never make moral progress. The High Holy Days are dedicated to the belief that both individuals and whole societies are capable of changing their behavior and that, through active repentance, they are even capable of drawing closer to each other and to God.

Jews have long believed that the soul is immortal and survives death. The fate of the soul in the “world to come” and God's judgment of that soul remain a subject of speculation and wonder, even today; some, however, regard these beliefs as obsolete and no longer a part of contemporary Jewish faith.

## REVIEW QUESTION

## For Review

1. What are mitzvot, and where can they be found?
2. What does the word "Torah" literally mean, and how many other meanings can be derived from it?
3. What are Maimonides's thirteen Principles of Faith?
4. Who was Mordecai Kaplan, and to which movement in modern Judaism is he connected?
5. What does the term Shoah mean, and how is it different from the word "Holocaust"?

## For Further Reflection

1. What are the implications for Judaism of the concepts of election and covenant? Do Jews see themselves as the only people with whom the Creator-God has communicated? Is it ever possible for a non-Jew to enter into a covenant relationship with Israel's God?
2. How did Judaism recover from the loss of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E.? Why do you think that some Jews living today are hoping to

## GLOSSARY

**Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760)** A charismatic faith healer, mystic, and teacher (whose given name was Israel ben Eliezer) who is generally regarded as the founder of the Hasidic movement.

**Bar/Bat Mitzvah** A rite of passage for adolescents in Judaism, the Bar Mitzvah (for males age thirteen) and the Bat Mitzvah (for females ages twelve to thirteen) signal their coming of age and the beginning of adult religious responsibility.

**covenant** A biblical concept that describes the relationship between God and the Jews in contractual terms, often thought of as an eternal bond between the Creator and the descendants of the ancient Israelites.

**Dead Sea Scrolls** Religious literature hidden in caves near the shores of the Dead Sea (c. second–first centuries B.C.E.).

rebuild the temple and resume the practice of animal sacrifice? Why are the majority of the world's Jews content with the synagogue and its prayer routines?

3. How does Maimonides's approach to both God and Torah differ from that of the mystics? Do the kabbalists really believe that it is possible for human beings to seek union with God or to find the presence of God within oneself?
4. Among the varied responses to the Shoah that modern Jewish philosophers have proposed, which response seems the most compelling to you? If you were a Holocaust survivor, what would your view of life and of faith be now? Would you still find it possible to believe in a just and loving God?
5. What does the word "Zionism" refer to, and what role did Theodor Herzl play in promoting Zionist ideas?
6. What are the Ten Commandments, and where can they be found?
7. What is the Talmud, and how many volumes (or tractates) does the Babylonian Talmud contain?

**Diaspora** A Greek word in origin, it refers to those Jewish communities that live outside of the historical land of Israel.

**election** The belief that the biblical God "chose" the people of Israel to be His "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation." This biblical concept is logically connected to the idea of the covenant, and it entails the belief that the Jews' relationship with God obliges them to conform to His laws and fulfill His purposes in the world.

**eschatological** Any belief in an "End-Time" of divine judgment and world destruction.

**ethical monotheism** A core concept of Judaism: the belief that the world was created and is governed by only one transcendent Being, whose ethical attributes provide an ideal model for human behavior.

**Exodus** The escape (or departure) of Israelite slaves from Egypt as described in the Hebrew Bible (c. 1250 B.C.E.).

**halacha** An authoritative formulation of traditional Jewish law.

**Hasidism** A popular movement within eighteenth-century eastern European Judaism, Hasidism stressed the need for spiritual restoration and deepened individual piety. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Hasidic movement spawned a number of distinctive communities that have physically separated themselves from the rest of the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds and who are often recognized by their attire and their devotion to a dynasty of hereditary spiritual leaders.

**Holocaust** The genocidal destruction of approximately six million European Jews by the government of Nazi Germany during World War II. This mass slaughter is referred to in Hebrew as the Shoah.

**immanence** The divine attribute of in-dwelling, or God being present to human consciousness.

**Kabbalah** One of the dominant forms of Jewish mysticism, kabbalistic texts began to appear in Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Mystics belonging to this tradition focus on the emanative powers of God—referred to in Hebrew as *Sephirot*—and on their role within the Godhead, as well as within the human personality.

**Luria, Isaac** A sixteenth-century mystic who settled in Safed (Israel) and gathered around him a community of disciples. Lurianic mysticism seeks to explain the mystery surrounding both the creation of the world and its redemption from sin.

**Maimonides** A twelfth-century philosopher and rabbinic scholar whose codification of Jewish beliefs and religious practices set the standard for both in subsequent centuries.

**Messiah** A possibly supernatural figure who will judge and transform the world.

**mikveh** A ritual bath in which married Jewish women immerse themselves each month, after the end of their menstrual cycle and before resuming sexual relation with their husbands.

**mitzvot** Literally translated, the Hebrew word *mitzvot* means "commandments," and it refers to the 613 commandments that the biblical God imparted to

the Israelites in the Torah (i.e., the first five books of the Hebrew Bible).

**Moses** The legendary leader and prophet who led the Israelite slaves out of Egypt, Moses serves as a mediator between the people of Israel and God in the Torah and is later viewed as Israel's greatest prophet. It is to Moses that God imparts the Ten Commandments and the teachings that later became the Torah.

**omnipotence** The divine attribute of total and eternal power.

**omniscience** The divine attribute of total and eternal knowledge.

**Pesach** An early spring harvest festival that celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, Pesach (better known as "Passover" in English) is celebrated for seven days in Israel and eight days in the Diaspora. The first two nights are celebrated within a family setting.

**Rosh Hashanah** The Jewish New Year, it is celebrated for two days in the fall (on the first day of the month of Tishrai) and accompanied by the blowing of a ram's horn (a shofar, in Hebrew). It signals the beginning of the "ten days of repentance" that culminate with Yom Kippur.

**Seder** A ritualized meal, observed on the first two nights of Pesach, that recalls the Exodus from Egypt.

**Shavuot** A later spring harvest festival that is celebrated for two days and is associated with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Along with Pesach and Sukkot, it was one of the "pilgrimage" festivals in ancient times.

**Siddur** The prayer book that is used on weekdays and on the Sabbath.

**Sukkot** A fall harvest festival that is associated with the huts (in Hebrew, *sukkot*) in which the ancient Israelites sought shelter during the Exodus. It is celebrated for seven days in Israel (eight days in the Diaspora). During that time, Jews take their meals and, if possible, sleep in huts that are partly open to the sky.

**synagogue** Jewish houses of worship. The focal point of every synagogue is the Ark, a large cabinet where scrolls of the Torah are stored.

**tallit** A prayer shawl that is worn during morning prayers (traditionally by men). The fringes of this

shawl represent, symbolically, the 613 mitzvot found in the Torah.

**Talmud** A multivolume work of commentary on the laws of the Torah and on the teachings of the entire Hebrew Bible, composed in two stages: the Mishnah (edited in approximately 200 C.E.) and the Gemara (edited, in its Babylonian version, around 500 C.E.). Traditionally, Jews refer to the Talmud as the “Oral Torah” and regard it as an extension of sacred scripture.

**Tanakh** An acronym standing for the entire Hebrew Bible: **T**orah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible); **N**eviim (or “Prophets,” which includes works of both prophecy and history); and **K**hetuvim (or “Writings,” a miscellaneous gathering of works in poetry and prose). Taken together, the twenty-four books that make up this collection constitute the core “scriptures” of Judaism.

**tefillin** Taken from the word for “prayer,” the term tefillin refers to two small boxes to which leather straps are attached. Traditionally, Jewish males from the age of thirteen wear tefillin during weekday morning prayers. Inside each of these boxes is a miniature parchment containing biblical verses; one box is placed on the forehead and the other is placed on the left arm, signifying that the individual’s mind and will are devoted to God.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Akenson, Donald Herman. *Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. An ambitious, and sometimes argumentative, history of the evolution of biblical and rabbinic literature.

Ariel, David. *What Do Jews Believe?* New York: Schocken Books, 1995. An accessible and nuanced account of traditional and nontraditional Jewish beliefs.

Bauer, Yehuda. *A History of the Holocaust*. New York: Franklin Watts, 2001. A well-researched and readable account of the Holocaust, written by the “dean” of contemporary Shoah historians.

Eisenberg, Ronald. *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004.

**Torah** Literally, the word *torah* means “teaching,” and in its most restrictive sense it refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Less restrictively, it signifies the totality of God’s revelations to the Jewish people, which includes not only the remaining books of the Hebrew Bible but also the writings contained in the Talmud.

**transcendence** The divine attribute of being above and beyond anything human beings can know or imagine.

**YHWH** These four consonants constitute the most sacred of names associated with the biblical God. The exact pronunciation of this name, according to ancient Jewish tradition, was known only to the High Priest, but after the destruction of the Second Temple the precise vocalization of these letters was lost—only to be recovered in the days of the Messiah.

**Yom Kippur** Referred to as the “Day of Atonement,” it is the most solemn of all of the fast days in the Jewish religious calendar.

**Zionism** A modern political philosophy that asserts a belief in Jewish national identity and in the necessity of resuming national life within the historic land of Israel.

**Zohar** A kabbalistic *midrash* based on the biblical Book of Genesis (c. 1280 C.E.).

A well-researched and comprehensive guide to traditional and nontraditional Jewish religious practices.

Fredricksen, Paula. *From Jesus to Christ*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988. A close scholarly reading of the gospels that traces the separation of emergent Christianity from normative Judaism of the first four centuries.

Neusner, Jacob, and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2003. A collection of diverse articles on the history of Judaism, written by some of the leading scholars in Jewish studies.

Plaskow, Judith. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper

and Row, 1990. A seminal work of feminist reconceptualization of normative Judaism.

Robinson, George. *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to the Beliefs, Customs and Rituals*. New York: Pocket Books, 2000. A well-written and comprehensive description of Jewish beliefs and practices.

Sarna, Jonathan D. *American Judaism: A History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

#### My Jewish Learning

myjewishlearning.com

A well-researched site for historical subjects and religious practices.

#### The Jewish Virtual Library

jewishvirtuallibrary.org

The best account to date of the historical development of the Jewish community in the United States.

Strassfeld, Michael. *The Jewish Holidays*. New York: HarperCollins, 1985. A nicely illustrated presentation of major and minor Jewish festivals with detailed accounts of religious observances from around the world.

A good site for contemporary subjects such as Israel and the Holocaust.

#### The Jewish Women’s Archive

jwa.org

A comprehensive site for research articles on women in Judaism.