

Access World Religions Judaism Glossary

bar/bat mitzvah – Meaning “son/daughter of the commandments,” a coming-of-age ceremony in which Jewish boys and girls become obligated to fulfill Jewish laws.

challah – Traditional braided bread eaten on the Sabbath and holidays.

Conservative Judaism – A branch of Judaism that accepts the binding nature of Jewish law but believes that the law is an evolving system that can be interpreted for modern times.

Ecclesiastes – A book of the Hebrew Bible.

eulogy – A memorial speech or tribute given for someone who has died.

fast – To abstain from eating.

Genesis – The first book of the Hebrew Bible.

Hasidic Judaism – A religious movement of strictly observant Orthodox Jews that arose in eighteenth-century Eastern Europe and emphasizes prayer, religious zeal and joy. Today, Hasidic Jewish men are recognized by their black coats and hats.

Jewish Renewal – A worldwide, trans-denominational movement grounded in Judaism’s prophetic and mystical traditions. Like Reconstructionists, Renewal Jews view Judaism as an evolving religious civilization.

Mishna – The systematic codification of Jewish law that constitutes the first part of the Talmud.

Numbers – One of the first five books of the Jewish Bible.

numerology – The study of the hidden meaning of numbers and their influence on human life.

Orthodox Judaism – The most traditional branch of Judaism. Orthodox Jews believe that all of Jewish law is the direct word of God as revealed to Moses and passed down from generation to generation.

Psalms – A book of the Hebrew Bible consisting of 150 religious poems.

Reconstructionist Judaism – A branch of Judaism that sees the Torah as the Jewish people’s response to God’s presence in the world (and not the direct word of God). Reconstructionists define Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people.

Reform Judaism – A branch of Judaism that combines respect for Jewish law and Jewish tradition with a progressive religious outlook designed to remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary North American Jews.

synagogue – A Jewish house of worship.

tallit (also pronounced tallis) – A Jewish prayer shawl.

Talmud – The legal commentary on the Jewish Bible that explains how its commandments are to be carried out.

Tisha b'Av – A solemn Jewish holiday that commemorates the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

Torah – The first five books of the Hebrew Bible; also used to refer to the entire Jewish Bible.

Tractate – A systematic argument in writing; an essay.

Tzedakah – Justice or righteousness; charity.

Tzitzit (also pronounced “tzitzis”) – Ritual fringes attached to Jewish prayer shawls and to four-cornered garments worn under the clothing of strictly observant Orthodox Jewish men.

yarmulke (in Hebrew, kippah) – A skullcap worn by Orthodox Jewish males almost all the time, and by Conservative and some Reform Jews in synagogue and sometimes when eating.

yeshiva – A Jewish school devoted to the study of Talmud.