The A, B, C's of Jewish Life:
An Intro to Judaism Glossary

BIBLE & JEWISH SACRED TEXTS

Abraham: The founding Patriarch of the Jewish People, whose story is told in Genesis 12-25. Married to Sarah, his sons are Isaac and Ishmael.

David: The Jewish People's greatest king, who established Jerusalem as his capital and expanded Israel's territory, and also a deeply morally flawed man whose life is marred by tragedy. David ruled over Israel from 1005-968 BCE.

Deuteronomy: The fifth and final book of the Torah, which primarily contains Moses' final speech to the Jewish People before they cross into the Land of Israel, which recaps the story of their journey and emphasizes many ritual and ethical laws.

Elijah: A Biblical prophet who, according to Tradition, never died and instead was brought to Heaven alive in a fiery chariot and who will return to be the harbinger of the Messianic Age. Elijah is said to visit every Passover Seder (where a cup is left out for him) and Brit Milah (where a chair is placed for him).

Exodus: The second of the five books of the Torah, which tells the story of the enslavement and oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, the rise of Moses and the Ten Plagues against Pharaoh, the escape of the Jewish People from Egyptian bondage, and the revelation at Mount Sinai, which confirms the covenant between God and the Jewish People.

Gemara: The massive rabbinic commentary on the Mishnah, produced in both Babylonia and in the Land of Israel, in the 3rd – 5th centuries. The Talmud is the combination of the Mishnah and the Gemara.

Genesis: The first book of the Torah, which begins by telling the primordial history of the world (Genesis 1-11), and then transitions to telling the stories of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jewish People, including Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and Joseph.

Guide for the Perplexed: Maimonides' masterwork of Jewish philosophy, which attempts to reconcile classical philosophy and science with Jewish theology and law.

Haftarah: A selection from the Books of the Prophets, which is paired with the weekly Torah reading (*parasha*). Haftarahs are usually selected based on a thematic or linguistic link to the parasha, and may bolster or even occasionally challenge its message.

Isaac: The second Jewish patriarch, married to Rebekah, generally overshadowed by his more dynamic father, Abraham, and son, Jacob. Isaac is the first and only character in the Bible who is described as having loved his wife.

Jacob/Israel: The third Jewish patriarch, married to Rachel and Leah and the father of thirteen children (twelve boys and a girl) who begins his life as a trickster, but has a transformative, late-night encounter with an angel, earning him the new name of "*Yisrael*," meaning "one who wrestles with God."

Joseph: The son of Jacob and Rachel, who is sold into slavery in Egypt, only to use his gift for in-

terpreting dreams to rise to great power and save his family from famine. The Joseph story is one of the richest and most detailed narratives in the Torah, and is found in Genesis 37-50.

Ketuvim: "Writings." The third and final section of the Tan- akh, which contains within it a miscellany of material — ranging from the poetry of Psalms and the Song of Songs to the wisdom of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to the moral meditations of Job to the bawdy court farce of Esther to the history of Chronicles and Ezra. Five of the scrolls from Ketuvim, called *megillot*, are read on Jewish holidays: Esther on Purim, Song of Songs on Pesach, Ruth on Shavuot, Lamentations of Tisha b'Av, and Ecclesiastes on Sukkot.

Leah: The first, less-loved wife of Jacob, and mother of six of their sons and their only daughter.

Leviticus: The third book of the Torah, which focuses primarily on ritual law, but also contains some of the Torah's most important ethical pronouncements, including the obligation to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

Midrash: Rabbinic exegesis, legends, and expansion on the Biblical texts. The Jewish Tradition has always seen our sacred texts as works in progress, to which we add new layers of interpretation in every succeeding generation.

Mishnah: The earliest collection of rabbinic teachings, written in Hebrew and edited in the Land of Israel around 200 CE. The Mishnah contains discussions of a wide range of issues, from holidays to civil and criminal law. Unlike a traditional law code, the Mishnah is written in the form of discussions and debates, with both majority and minority opinions recorded.

Mishneh Torah: The first, comprehensive code of Jewish law, written by Maimonides in the 12th century. Mishneh Torah literally means "Second Torah," and Maimonides' goal was to create a work that was so simple and complete that one need only read the original Torah and the "Second Torah" in order to know everything one needed to know to live an observant Jewish life.

Moses: The principal character, along with God, of the Torah. Moses was born a Hebrew, raised in privilege in the Egyptian palace, and eventually receives a call from God to lead his People to freedom. Moses serves as the leader and teacher of the Jewish People through the Exodus and their forty-year journey in the wilderness, dying just before they are to cross over into the Promised Land. Moses is such a central personality that the Torah is often referred to as the "Five Books of Moses."

Nevi'im: "Prophets." The second section of the Tanakh, which can be further divided into two sections — Early and Later Prophets. The early prophetic books are actually more historical in nature, telling the story of the conquest of the Land of Israel, the establishment of the Jewish monarchy, and the construction of the First Temple. The later prophets include the writings of figures like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos who preach morality, social justice, and a return to God, in poignant poetry.

Numbers: The fourth book of the Torah begins with the decampment of the Israelites from the base of Mount Sinai, and follows them through their forty-year trek through the wilderness. Famous stories from the Book of Numbers include the incident of the Twelve Spies, the rebellion of Korach, and the prophecy of Balaam.

Oral Torah: Jewish Tradition maintains that, along with the Written Torah, there was a companion Oral Tradition that was also transmitted by God to the Jewish People. It is this Oral Tradition that eventually comes to be written down in the Mishnah and the Gemara and forms the backbone of the rabbinic Judaism that we practice today.

Parasha: The Torah is divided into fifty-four sections, with one read each week on Shabbat, in order to complete the reading of the entire Torah each year. When the Torah is completed, on the holiday of Simchat Torah, we immediately roll back to the beginning and start the reading again, to indicate that the study of Torah goes on forever.

Prophet: The Prophets of Israel, recorded in the Hebrew Bible, are primarily concerned with summoning the Jewish People to return to faith and to care for the most vulnerable among them. The orations of prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Micah are among the most beautiful texts in Jewish Scripture.

Psalms: The Psalms, traditionally ascribed to King David, are a collection of one-hundred-and-fifty poems to God found in the Hebrew Bible. The tone of the Psalms range from songs of praise to outcries of rage, and many of them have become well-known classics of religious literature, like Psalm 23, which begins: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

Rebekah: The second Jewish matriarch, wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau. She is the one who decides that her family's line will run through her younger son, Jacob, and hatches a plan to trick her blind husband into bestowing his blessing on her favored child.

Rachel: The most beloved wife of Jacob and the last of the Jewish Matriarchs, whose two children are Joseph and Benjamin.

Ruth: The Book of Ruth is chanted on Shavuot and tells the story of one of the first converts to Judaism. Ruth is a non-Jew, married to an Israelite. After she is widowed, she chooses to stay with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and adopt her Jewish faith, with the famous words: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

Sarah: The first Jewish matriarch — wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac and a powerful force in shaping her family's future.

Shulchan Aruch: The most authoritative code of Jewish Law. Written by Rabbi Joseph Karo, with additional notes by Rabbi Moses Isserles, it is one of the few Jewish legal books that contains both the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic interpretations of most laws.

Sinai: The mountain at which the Israelites encamp and formally enter into their covenant with God by accepting the Torah.

Talmud: The collection of rabbinic discussions from approximately 100 BCE–500 CE, which form the heart of Jewish life and practice. The Rabbis of the Talmud re-created Judaism for a world without a Temple, enabling it to be practiced without the offering of sacrifices. The Talmud expands upon some of the Torah's laws, like the laws of Shabbat or kashrut, and limits the applicability of others, like the laws regarding capital punishment and warfare.

Tanakh: An acronym for the Hebrew Bible (what the non-Jewish world often refers to as the "Old Testament.") The first part of the Tanakh is the Torah, which is comprised of its first five books; the second division is "Nevi'im," meaning Prophets; and the third section is "Ketuvim," meaning writings.

Torah: The first Five Books of the Hebrew Bible, which include: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Torah is written down on a parchment scroll, and a section from the Torah is chanted in synagogue each week on an annual cycle.

Zohar: One of the central texts of Jewish mysticism, which is traditionally ascribed to the 2nd century sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, but which first appeared in 13th century Spain and is generally thought to have been composed by the Spanish Jew Moses de Leon. The Zohar is written as a commentary on the Torah and purports to reveal a much deeper, symbolic meaning to the text.

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

Afikomen: "Dessert." The final piece of matzah eaten at the Passover Seder, traditionally hidden at the start of the meal and found by the kids and ransomed back to the leader at the end. This game is a teaching tool for keeping kids engaged throughout the Seder.

Aseret Y'mei Teshuvah: The Ten Days of Repentance, connecting Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, during which we are taught to seek out those we have offended in the previous year and attempt to make amends.

Dreidel: A spinning top played with on Hanukkah. The four letters on the dreidel — Nun, Gimmel, Heh, and Shin — stand for the phrase: "*Nes Gadol Haya Sham*," meaning "A great miracle happened there."

Elijah's Cup: A cup of wine placed on the Seder Table for Elijah the Prophet, who is traditionally thought to visit each home on Passover, and we hope will signal the coming of the Messiah and a universal era of peace.

Elul: The month preceding the High Holy Days in which we are taught to take an accounting of ourselves (*heshbon ha-nefesh*) and prepare for the work of teshuvah ahead.

Etrog: A lemon-like citrus fruit, which is waved together with the lulav on Sukkot as a celebration of the bounty of the harvest.

Hag: "Holiday." A holy day on which most types of work are prohibited. The formal *haggim* of the Jewish calendar are Rosh Ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur, the first two and last two days of Sukkot (including Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah), the first two and last two days of Pesach, and Shavuot.

Hag Sameach: "Happy Holiday!" The traditional greeting on a Jewish Festival. On Hanukkah, one may say, "*Hag Urim Sameach!*" meaning "Happy Festival of Lights!"

Haggadah: The book which we use to conduct the Passover seder. There are thousands of haggadot in print, and many families choose to create their own.

Hallah: The rich, braided loaves of bread used on Shabbat. It is traditional to cover the hallot with a cloth and then uncover them when the time comes to recite the hamotzi blessing and break bread together.

Hametz: Leavened items (or products from grains, including wheat, barley, oats, spelt, and rye, which could become leavened) that are forbidden to eat, or even have in one's possession, during the holiday of Pesach.

Hanukkah: The eight-day Festival of Lights, celebrated in the Winter, which commemorates the Maccabee's successful revolt against Syrian-Greek oppression and the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. Hanukkah teaches us the importance of religious freedom, and reminds us that the miraculous is possible.

Hanukiyah: A nine-branched Hanukkah candelabra. On each successive night of Hanukkah, another candle is lit, until, on the final night it is completely full of light. Often referred to as a *menorah*, which simply means "lamp."

Haroset: Typically a mixture of sweet fruits and nuts (Ashkenazi haroset generally contains apples and walnuts; Sephardic haroset often contains dates and dried fruits), which is included on the Seder plate to commemorate the mortar that the Israelites used to build bricks in Egypt.

Havdalah: The brief ceremony that concludes Shabbat, which includes four blessings said over a cup of wine, a braided candle, and a spice-box. After the blessings have been said, the candle is extinguished in the wine and all wish each other a "*Shavuah Tov*," a good week.

Hol HaMoed: The intermediate days of Sukkot and Passover, which are not considered *hag* and therefore on which work is permitted, but certain rituals — including dwelling in the *sukkah* or refraining from eating *hametz* — continue.

Kabbalat Shabbat: The series of psalms and prayers that begin the Friday-evening service, centered on the poem "*Lecha Dodi*," which personifies Shabbat as a bride and welcomes her to join us with blessings of rest and of peace.

Karpas: Green vegetables, symbolizing Spring and re-birth, which are dipped in salt water, symbolizing tears, as part of the Passover seder.

Kiddush: The prayer, recited over a cup of wine, which begins Shabbat or a holiday meal.

Kitniyot: Additional grains and other foods forbidden by the Ashkenazi rabbis (though not the Sephardic) during Passover; including, corn, soy, rice, and beans.

Kol Nidre: The famous, majestic declaration chanted on Erev Yom Kippur, which releases us from promises made over the previous year that we meant to keep but were unable to fulfill. This prayer has come to be so important that the entire Erev Yom Kippur service is generally referred to simply as "Kol Nidre."

Lag B'Omer: The 33rd day of the counting of the Omer, celebrated as a minor holiday. Traditions for Lag B'Omer include building bonfires, getting haircuts, and having weddings.

L'Shanah Ha'ba'ah B'Yerushalayim: "Next year in Jerusalem!" The final, hopeful words of the Passover seder expressing the belief that just as the Israelites were liberated from Egyptian slavery, so, too, someday soon, Jews will be able to freely return to a Jerusalem at peace.

L'Shanah Tovah: "Happy New Year." The traditional greeting for Rosh Ha-Shanah. May be extended to "*L'Shanah Tovah Tikateivu*", meaning "May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a good new year."

Lulav: The collection of palm, willow, and myrtle branches that, together with the etrog, are waved on Sukkot as a celebration of God's bounty and as part of a ritual prayer for rain.

Makhzor: The High Holy Day prayerbook, which is distinct from the siddur, which is used year-round.

Maror: Bitter herbs eaten on Passover to commemorate the suffering of Egyptian slavery. For a truly mind-and-sinus-blowing experience, try substituting wasabi for the traditional horseradish.

Matzah: The unleavened cracker bread that is the central symbol of Passover. Matzah commemorates the rush with which the Israelites left slavery, not even taking time to allow their bread to rise. So, too, when faced with the opportunity of liberation, we should rush to grab it and not let it slip through our fingers.

Megillah: One of the five scrolls from Ketuvim that are read on several of the Jewish holidays. The most famous megillah is Esther, which is chanted on Purim and when someone refers simply to "the Megillah" they are almost always talking about the Book of Esther.

Melakha: Creative labor, forbidden on Shabbat. Shabbat is a day of rest and peace, and the Jewish Tradition strictly regulates the performance of any action that creates, destroys, or otherwise changes the world during that 25-hour period. Instead, we are taught to live in harmony with the planet and to accept whatever we currently have with gratitude. Examples of *melakha* include: writing, purchasing, building, cooking, or making a fire.

Menorah: The generic Hebrew word for "lamp." A Hanukiyah is a special form of menorah with nine branches that is used on Hanukkah. The seven-branched menorah, the kind that was found in the ancient Temple, is the official symbol of the contemporary State of Israel.

Miriam's Cup: A recent addition to the Passover table — today, many families put out a cup of water commemorating the miracle of Miriam's well, which followed the sister of Moses throughout the desert to provide the people with water. This, and other new customs honoring women's contributions to Jewish history, are part of an ongoing effort in the progressive Jewish movements to reclaim the place of women in Jewish life.

Mishloach Manot: The Purim tradition of sending gifts of food to friends and loved ones to commemorate this joyful holiday.

Neilah: The final prayer service of Yom Kippur, recited in the late afternoon before the Ark, which remains open the entire time. Neilah means "locking," and its dominant image is that of the gates of heaven swinging shut at the end of a long

day of prayer and spiritual introspection. Neilah concludes with a long blast of the shofar.

Omer: The period between Passover and Shavuot is referred to as the "Counting of the Omer," referencing the ancient practice of bringing sheaves from the barley harvest each day during this time. Every evening, beginning with the 2nd night of Passover and culminating with Shavuot, a special prayer is recited and the day is counted. Some Jews refrain from shaving or cutting their hair, as well as getting married, during the Omer period (except on Lag B'Omer).

Pesach: "Passover." Pesach is the Jewish festival commemorating our liberation from Egyptian slavery. Observed for eight days in the Spring, we refrain from eating *hametz*, leavened products, instead substituting matzah, which symbolizes freedom. We hold ritual meals, called seders, in which we re-tell portions of the story of our Exodus. One of the most important ideas of Pesach is that we are meant to truly identify with the story of our liberation, to not just think of it as something that happened once in history to our ancestors, but, as the Haggadah says, "In every generation we are to see ourselves as though we personally came out of Egypt."

Purim: The joyful holiday that commemorates the victory of Queen Esther and her cousin, Mordechai, over the wicked royal vizier Haman in ancient Persia. Haman wanted to destroy the Jewish community of the City of Shushan based on a personal grudge against Mordechai, who refused to bow to him. It is up to Esther, a Jewish woman who had become an unlikely Queen through winning a royal beauty pageant, to save her People. Purim is celebrated with costume parties and carnivals, as well as the reading of the Megillah of Esther and the giving of Mishloach Manot, gifts of food to friends, as well as charity to the poor. On topsy-turvy Purim, it is traditional to drink a little bit too much, until one is unsure who is the hero and who is the villain of this ancient tale.

Rosh Ha-Shanah: The Jewish New Year, celebrated over two days in the Fall. Rosh Ha-Shanah is a time for contemplating the events of the past year, and resolving to make change (*teshuvah*) in anticipation of Yom Kippur. The most important symbol of Rosh Ha-Shanah is the shofar, or ram's horn, which is blown one hundred times over each day of the holiday and is used to stir the soul to wakefulness and repentance. In addition to synagogue services, Jews often gather for festive meals on Rosh Ha-Shanah, at which Ashkenazim eat apples dipped in honey for a sweet new year and Sephardim eat a variety of traditional foods each with a symbolic meaning.

Rosh Hodesh: The beginning of the new Hebrew month, starting with the New Moon. In antiquity, these would be major festivals. Today, they are only minor observances marked by the recitation of Hallel, a collection of joyful Psalms, in the synagogue. The Hebrew months (beginning in the Spring with the month that contains Passover) are: *Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Elul, Tishrei, Heshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Sh'vat,* and *Adar.*

Seder: The festive, symbolism-rich meal for Passover, in which we re-tell and re-experience the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The seder is conducted out of the haggadah and remains one of the most practiced of all Jewish rituals.

Seudat Shlishit: The third meal on late Shabbat afternoon, which is understood by the Jewish mystical tradition to be the most spiritually powerful time of the day and is accompanied by singing, teaching, and storytelling.

Shabbat: The greatest of Jewish spiritual institutions — an entire day each week dedicated to rest, relationship, and gratitude for life's blessings. From sundown on Friday night until the appearance of three stars in the sky on Saturday, the Jewish Tradition forbids us from engaging in any form of creative labor, instead commanding us to just accept and appreciate the world as it is. During the course of Shabbat, we eat communal meals, attend synagogue services, spend time with our families and friends, and engage in restorative activities that renew us for the week ahead.

Shabbat Shalom: The traditional greeting for Shabbat. "May you have a Shabbat of peace."

Shalosh Regalim: The Three Pilgrimage Festivals — Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot — when the Israelites would all travel to the Temple in Jerusalem. These correspond with the three major harvest seasons — Spring, Summer, and Fall — of the year. Passover and Sukkot are both eight-day-long festivals, while Shavuot lasts for just two days.

Shamash: "Helper." On Hanukkah, the candle used to light the other candles.

Shavuot: The holiday commemorating the establishment of the covenant at Mount Sinai. Shavuot is celebrated by staying up late at night (some stay up all night) and studying, in commemoration of the revelation. Traditionally, Jews eat dairy foods on Shavuot, symbolizing that Torah is like mother's milk to us. In the synagogue, the Book of Ruth is recited.

Shmini Atzeret: The eighth and final day of the festival of Sukkot is considered a special holiday unto itself, when work is prohibited. Yizkor, the special prayer service for those who have died, is recited in the synagogue on this day.

Shofar: The ram's horn, which is blown on the High Holy Days. The cry of the shofar is meant to arouse one to spiritual wakefulness and to stir the desire to do teshuvah. It is blown on each of the days of Elul leading up to the High Holy Days, one hundred times on Rosh Ha-Shanah, and at the close of Yom Kippur services.

Simchat Torah: A joyful holiday celebrating the completion of the annual Torah-reading cycle, and its restarting. We remove the Torah scrolls from the Ark and sing and dance with them. Then we read the final chapters of Deuteronomy and immediately roll the Torah all the way back to Genesis and begin reading again, demonstrating that the learning of Torah goes on forever.

Sukkah: The temporary structures, reminiscent of what the Israelites might have dwelt in during their desert journey, are built each Fall during the harvest festival of Sukkot. A sukkah requires at least two and a half walls, and an open roof through which one can see the stars. During the week of Sukkot, many people transfer most of their activities into the sukkah: Eating meals, visiting with friends, even sleeping outdoors.

Sukkot: The eight-day harvest festival, celebrated in the Fall. In memory of our ancestors' journey through the desert, we construct temporary structures and spend as much of our time as possible in them. We also shake the *lulav*, a collection of leafy branches, and *etrog*, a citrus fruit, which likely began as an ancient ritual to summon the winter rains. Sukkot is a joyful holiday for focusing on gratitude for life's bounty.

Tashlikh: A folk ritual, practiced sometime in between Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, which involves going down to a body of water and casting either bread crumbs or something similar onto the water as a way of symbolically "throwing away" our sins from the year past.

Tisha b'Av: The 9th of Av, which commemorates all of the tragedies and persecutions of Jewish History—including the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Tisha b'Av is observed by fasting and the chanting of the Book of Lamentations (*Eicha*).

Tishrei: The Hebrew month that contains the High Holy Days. Rosh Ha-Shanah is observed on the 1st and 2nd of Tishrei and Yom Kippur on the 10th of Tishrei.

Tu B'Shvat: The Jewish Arbor Day — a minor holiday, usually observed in February or March, which celebrates trees and nature.

Yom Ha-Atzmaut: Israel's Independence Day, marking the anniversary of Israel's Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948. Celebrated on the 5th of Iyar, which generally corresponds to late April or early May.

Yom Ha-Shoah: Holocaust Memorial Day, commemorating the murder of six million Jews, and

five million others, by the Nazis. It is observed on the 27th of Nisan, which generally corresponds to late-April or early-May.

Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur is the most sacred day of the Jewish calendar, and is spent in intense prayer, reflection, and fasting. Yom Kippur marks the culmination of annual process of teshuvah — examining our past deeds and attempting to reconcile with those whom we have harmed through our words or actions.

Zeroah: The roasted shank bone that is placed on the seder plate, in memory of the Pesach sacrifice that was given in the Temple every year on the holiday.

LIFECYCLE

Aninut: The period of intense mourning between a death and the burial. During this period, all Jewish ritual obligations on the mourners are suspended so that they can devote their full attention to preparing for the funeral.

Aufruf: The celebration of an engaged couple on the Shabbat before their wedding day. The couple will generally be called up for an *aliyah* at the Torah, and will receive a special blessing from the rabbi.

Aveilut: The period of mourning prescribed by Jewish law. Halakha recognizes seven official categories of those for whom one is obligated to mourn: mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, and spouses.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah: The ceremony recognizing that a young person has reached the Jewish age of majority — twelve for girls and thirteen for boys — and thus gains all of the rights and responsibilities of Jewish adulthood.

Bedeken: The ceremony that immediately precedes the wedding, in which the bride is veiled after her groom has checked to ensure that she is indeed who he intends to marry. This comes from the story of Jacob in Genesis 29 who is fooled into marrying Leah rather than his beloved Rachel.

Beit Din: A rabbinic court composed of three rabbis, who oversee ritual proceedings including conversion and Jewish divorce (*get*).

Breaking a Glass: The tradition at the end of a Jewish wedding ceremony, which recalls that even in the time of a person's greatest joy they should also recognize the existence of brokenness in the world and the duty to participate in the work of *tikkun olam*.

Brit Milah (Bris): The ceremony of circumcision, performed by a mohel on the 8th day of life, which initiates a Jewish baby boy into the covenant.

Chuppah: The wedding canopy, symbolic of a couple's first shared home as a married couple, under which the wedding takes place. The chuppah should be open on all sides and is generally held up by four poles, which special guests may have the honor of being asked to hold.

El Maalei Rachamim: The Jewish funeral prayer, which asks that God shelter the soul of the person who has died and that their spirit be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

Get: A Jewish bill of divorce, formalized in front of a Beit Din, which formally dissolves a marriage between two Jews.

Hatafat Dam Brit: The ritual drawing of a single drop of blood from the penis of a man who was previously circumcised but did not have a religious *brit milah*. This is a requirement for conversion for men in the Conservative and Orthodox denominations.

Hesped: A eulogy, delivered at a funeral. It is common practice today for friends and family members to join the rabbi in delivering eulogies at a funeral.

Hevre Kadisha: "The holy society." A group of volunteers who take responsibility for ritually preparing a body for Jewish burial, including performing the traditional washing of the body (*taharah*), dressing the body in shrouds (*takhrikhin*), and sitting watch with the body (*shmirah*) until burial.

Kriah: The ritual of tearing a garment (now most often performed symbolically on a black ribbon attached to one's shirt) by the close mourners at the start of a funeral service, as a way of symbolizing the heartbreak of loss.

Kaddish: The Aramaic prayer recited by mourners and those who are observing the anniversary of a death. Even though the Kaddish is associated with bereavement, it never mentions death — instead, it focuses on sanctifying God and giving thanks for the gift of life. Different versions of the Kaddish are also recited throughout the service by the leader, as a way of punctuating the beginning and end of different "units" of prayer.

Kavod Ha-Met: "Honoring the dead." This is the general principle that all the rituals we do between the time of death and the burial are meant to show honor to the body of the person who has died. We do this by treating the body simply, washing it and dressing it in plain shrouds, and burying it as soon as possible, generally within 72 hours, if not sooner.

Ketubah: The Jewish wedding document, which outlines the terms of the commitment between the partners in the couple. The ketubah is signed by two witnesses prior to the wedding ceremony and serves as a reminder of both the joys and duties of marriage.

Kiddushin: The exchange of rings and declarations in the first half of the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, which sanctifies the couple to one another and formally binds them in matrimony. Sometimes also referred to as erusin.

Kvatter/Kvatterin: The honor of carrying in the baby to the brit milah or simchat bat. From the German word for "godparent."

Mazal Tov: Lit. "Good luck," though almost always used to mean "Congratulations." Another alternative is *"Yashar Koach,"* which also means that someone has accomplished something praiseworthy.

Mikvah: The ritual pool, which we immerse in order to purify ourselves and mark significant transitions in life. Converts use the mikvah to affirm their place in the Jewish People, brides and grooms visit the mikvah to enter their marriage in a state of holiness, others use the mikvah to give spiritual depth to major life events. Traditional couples also use the mikvah to mark the end of a woman's monthly menstrual cycle and for purification before resuming sexual relations, in accordance with the Laws of Family Purity (*Taharat ha-Mishpaha*).

Mohel: A Mohel is a person trained to perform ritual circumcisions (*milah*). Today, many mohelim are also physicians; though some who are not doctors are extremely experienced in the procedure (it is said that the Queen of England used a mohel, rather than a doctor, to circumcise her son and grandchildren, because of their expertise.)

Nihum Avelim: "Comforting mourners." Following the completion of the burial rites, Jewish mourning rituals turn their attention from honoring the deceased to caring for the bereaved. Practices like sitting shiva and reciting Kaddish are meant to give the mourner the strength and support to come to terms with their loss and begin to heal.

Sandek: The sandek is the individual given the honor of holding a baby boy during his circumcision. This is the highest honor given at a Brit Milah, and is often given to a family patriarch such as a grandfather or uncle.

Sheva Brakhot: The Seven Blessings from the Talmud that are recited to a couple during their wedding. The words speak about the primordial love between the first two human beings in the Garden of Eden, and of the love of a world redeemed with the coming of the Messiah.

Shiva: The seven-day period of intense mourning, beginning with the day of burial. During the shiva period, the mourners are encouraged to stay at home while the community comes to them to offer comfort and support, and to form a minyan so that the bereaved can recite Kaddish. On the morning of the seventh day, the mourners

get up from shiva and symbolically walk outside, indicating the start of their return to the world.

Shloshim: The 30-day mourning period following burial. After the conclusion of shiva, the next 21 days are designated for less intense mourning — the bereaved returns to work, but doesn't attend parties or social gatherings, and men may refrain from shaving. During this period, mourners traditionally visit the synagogue every day, or at least every Shabbat, in order to recite the Kaddish.

Simchat Bat: The ceremony welcoming a baby girl and giving her a Hebrew name.

Taharah: "Purification." The ritual washing of a body prior to burial.

Taharat Ha-Mishpaha: "Family Purity." This refers to the practice, common among Orthodox Jews, but rarer among more liberal Jews, of refraining from sexual intimacy during and immediately following a woman's menstrual period. After the completion of her period, a woman who follows these laws will wait a number of days and then immerse in the mikvah, after which she can return to sexual partnership.

Takhrikhin: The simple, linen shrouds that a body is dressed in for burial.

Unveiling: The ceremony for erecting the gravestone, which generally takes place one year following burial. This is an opportunity for the family to gather at the cemetery to remember their loved one and to officially dedicate a memorial in their honor.

Yartzeit: The anniversary of a death. On the Yartzeit of a loved one, it is a traditional to light a 24-hour candle, and to go to synagogue on the closest Shabbat to recite Mourners Kaddish.

Yizkor: The special memorial service that takes place in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, and on the last day of each of the *Shalosh Regalim* (Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot). All those who have lost a loved one are invited to stand and say Kaddish.

PRAYER AND RITUAL

Adonai: A traditional name for God, used as a substitute for God's personal name, spelled YHVH, and meaning "My Lord."

Aliyah: "To ascend." (1) Going up to the Torah to bless a portion of the reading. (2) Moving to live in Israel.

Amidah: The standing prayer, which forms the heart of every Jewish service. It contains within it an opening section that evokes the merit of our ancestors and praises God; a middle section that varies depending on whether it is said on a weekday, Shabbat, or holiday; and a final section thanking God for our blessings and praying for peace.

Aron Kodesh (Ark): The cabinet in which the Torah scrolls are kept in the synagogue.

B'rakha: A blessing, beginning with the six-word formula: "*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam.*" Jews are taught to strive to say at least one hundred blessings every day.

Bima: The area of the synagogue, sometimes raised, where the leaders stand and conduct the service.

Birkat Ha-Mazon: The long series of blessings following a meal.

D'var Torah: "Words of Torah." This is the sermon, generally delivered by the rabbi, at a religious service.

Daven: The Yiddish word for prayer.

Elohim/Eloheinu: A name for God used through the Bible and the Hebrew prayerbook. Eloheinu is in the plural possessive, meaning "our God."

Erev: "Evening." A new Jewish day begins with sundown, so holidays begin on the night before the actual day on the secular calendar. Erev Shabbat is Friday night, while Shabbat day is Saturday.

Hazzan (Cantor): A branch of Jewish clergy who specialize in leading services and preserving the rich Jewish musical tradition. Synagogue services often will be officiated by a rabbi and a hazzan,

and hazzanim are empowered to lead many Jewish lifecycle rituals including weddings and funerals.

Kavannah: Intention and inwardness in prayer. Praying with kavannah means focusing not just on the mechanical act of prayer, but on the meaning of the words, and often includes spontaneous, free-form prayer from the heart, as opposed to the fixed liturgy (*keva*) of the prayerbook.

Keva: Spiritual discipline and repetition in prayer. This is the form of Jewish prayer, often contrasted with *kavannah*, which is fixed and formal and is found in the siddur, the Hebrew prayerbook. While our culture generally favors spontaneous prayer over fixed liturgy, it is important to reflect on the fact that it is often only through consistency and dedication that spiritual insight may be achieved.

Kippah: The traditional Jewish head covering, worn while engaging in prayer, study, or eating, which indicates respect for God. Some wear the kippah at all times, to indicate that they are always in the Presence of the Divine. Also referred to as a yamulke, in Yiddish.

Ma'ariv: The evening service, one of the three daily prayer periods for Jews. Ma'ariv is related to the Hebrew word, *erev*, meaning "evening."

Mezuzah: The box placed on the doorposts of a Jewish home, containing the words of the Sh'ma and the proceeding paragraph from Deuteronomy which commands us to "take these words to heart... and write them on the doorposts of your homes and on your gates."

Mincha: The afternoon prayer service, which is the shortest of the three daily prayer times, on weekdays consisting only of the recitation of a psalm (*Ashrei*), the Amidah, Aleinu, and the Kaddish.

Minyan: The quorum of ten adult Jews necessary to be able to say certain prayers, including the Kaddish, and to read publicly from the Torah. In the Orthodox world, a minyan must be made up of ten adult Jewish men; however, in the Conservative and Reform traditions, both Jewish men and women past the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah count in a minyan.

Musaf: The additional prayer service, added following the Torah reading, on Shabbat morning. This commemorates the additional offering that was given on Shabbat in the Temple, and reflects the additional leisure time we have on Shabbat to dedicate to prayer and community. Musaf is generally only a part of Conservative and Orthodox prayer services, Reform and Reconstructionist communities tend to skip it.

Ner Tamid: The eternal light, present in most synagogue sanctuaries, which remains perpetually on as a symbol of God's Presence in the space. An eternal flame was kept lit in the Temple, and the story of Hanukkah centers around the Maccabees' efforts to re-light it upon recapturing the Sanctuary.

Sh'ma: The central declaration of Jewish faith: "*Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad*", meaning "Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One." The Sh'ma is recited morning and evening, as well as immediately before bed. It is the first Hebrew phrase taught to small children and the last words that one is supposed to say before dying. From Deuteronomy 6:4.

Shacharit: The morning prayer service. This is the longest of the three daily prayer services, including the recitation of Psalms, the Sh'ma, the Amidah, and other prayers. On Shabbat, as well as on Mondays and Thursdays, we read from the Torah at Shacharit services. Shacharit is also the time for wearing ritual garb, including *tallit* and (on weekdays only) *tefilin*.

Shehehiyanu: The blessing for all new things — the first day of a holiday, the first cherries of summer, the first time wearing a new set of clothes, the arrival at a significant birthday or lifecycle moment. The words are: "*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, she'he'heyanu v'kiye'manu, v'higiyanu l'zman ha-zeh,*" meaning "Blessed are You God, who has kept us alive, and sustained us, and allowed us to reach this special time."

Shul: The Yiddish word for synagogue. More commonly used in Orthodox and Conservative communities.

Siddur: The Jewish prayerbook, which contains the liturgy for both weekdays and holidays (except the High Holy Days, on which we use the *machzor*).

Tallit: The prayer shawl, which has four *tzitzit*, fringes, tied to its corners as reminders of the mitzvot. Jews wear a tallit during daytime prayer services.

Tefilah: "Prayer." The word tefilah comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to judge/examine oneself." True prayer is a reflective activity, finding and expressing the words and emotions that are contained in the deepest part of the heart.

Tefilin: The leather boxes which are bound onto the arm and forehead with straps, and contain the words of the Sh'ma and the commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul, and might. Tefilin are worn during weekday morning prayer services.

Tzitzit: Knotted fringes attached to the corners of the tallit, which serve as reminders of the mitzvot, as commanded in Numbers 15.

Yad: "Hand." The pointer used to keep one's place when reading from the Torah scroll.

Yamulke: see, Kippah.

YHVH: The four letter, personal name of God. The Name was only pronounced by the High Priest in the Holy of Holies in the Temple on Yom Kippur. Today, when we come to YHVH in the prayerbook, we substitute the word "Adonai," meaning "my God."

KASHRUT AND JEWISH EATING

Fleshig: (Yiddish) Food that is made from meat (either mammal or poultry) that, according to kashrut, must be kept separate from dairy foods. In Hebrew: *basari.*

Heksher: A printed certification that a particular food is kosher. The most common heksher in the United States is issued by the Orthodox Union and looks like a letter "U" within a circle. Hekshers will often also indicate if a food is *fleshig*, *milchig*, or *pareve*, and whether it may be eaten on Passover.

Kashrut: The Jewish dietary laws. This system of law, which includes restrictions on eating the flesh of certain animals (pork, shellfish, etc), the separation of meat and dairy, and specific regulations about how animals are slaughtered and prepared, introduce spiritual discipline and awareness to the act of consumption.

L'Chaim: "To Life!" The quintessential Jewish toast at any festive occasion.

Milchig: (Yiddish) Foods containing dairy ingredient that, according to kashrut, must be kept separate from foods containing meat. In Hebrew: *chalavi*

Motzi: The blessing before eating a meal containing bread. It goes like this: "*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam, ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz,*" meaning "Blessed are You, God of all the Universe, who brings forth bread from the Earth."

Netilat Yadayim: The prayer recited after ritually washing hands before eating bread. The traditional handwashing is modeled after the way that the priests used to purify themselves before offering sacrifices. Water is first poured into a vessel, and then spilled over each hand three times. After completing the handwashing and saying the blessing it is customary to maintain silence until bread has been eaten.

Pareve: A food that is neither meat nor dairy, and can thus be eaten with either. Pareve foods include fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, eggs, and fish. One should be careful to check the ingredients of processed foods, as sometimes they will contain dairy or animal-based ingredients.

Shechita: The method of kosher slaughter, involving an extremely sharp knife and a single cut to the animal's throat, rendering an almost immediate and painless death.

Shochet: A person who is trained to perform kosher slaughter.

Treif: Un-kosher.

Tzaar Baalei Hayim: The mitzvah of showing compassion to animals. While the Jewish Tradition permits the consumption of meat, it is a violation of Jewish law to raise or slaughter animals in a way that is unethical or causes unnecessary suffering.

CONCEPTS AND ETHICS

Bal Tashkhit: The mitzvah not to abuse the Earth by wantonly wasting its resources, based on a verse from Deuteronomy 20. The Jewish Tradition teaches that we are guardians of the planet, and that we must serve as responsible stewards of Creation.

Bikkur Holim: The mitzvah of visiting the sick.

Brit: "Covenant." One of the dominant themes of the Torah is the ongoing development of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish People, beginning with Abraham, reaffirmed by Jacob, and formalized with the giving of Torah at Mount Sinai.

Gemilut Hasidim: Acts of compassion. The Mishnah teaches that the world stands on three things-- on Torah, on prayer, and on acts of compassion.

Halakha: "Jewish law." Based on the root verb "to walk," halakha describes the Jewish path through life, which contains traditions and prescriptions for all aspects of daily living.

Kabbalah: Jewish mysticism; the branch of Jewish thought that attempts to describe who and what God is and seeks to experience God's Presence directly. There have been many kabbalistic systems developed over time, including the ideas presented in the Zohar in the 13th century, and those of Isaac Luria in Tsfat in the 16th century.

Kedushah: "Holiness." Leviticus 19, the famous "Holiness Code," begins with the commandment: "Be holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy." As Jews we are commanded to sanctify all aspects of life, and to strive for both ritual and moral holiness in all of our actions.

Mensch: Yiddish: A good, moral, upstanding person. The highest aspiration of a Jewish parent is to raise a child to be a mensch.

Minhag: A custom, as distinct from a mitzvah (commandment) Many well-worn Jewish practices, like wearing a kippah or refraining from eating kitniyot on Pesah, are examples of minhagim rather than actual laws.

Mitzvah: Though often mistranslated as a "good deed," a mitzvah is in fact a religious commandment. Some mitzvot are primarily ethical, such as the commandment to give charity to the poor or to feed the hungry, while other mitzvot are primarily ritual, such as the commandment to light Shabbat candles or to refrain from eating pork. Some suggest that the origin of the word mitzvah comes from the Aramaic root meaning "to connect," which is to say that the mitzvot are our unique Jewish means of connecting with God and with each other.

Moshiach: Messiah. Jewish Tradition teaches that someday a messianic figure will emerge who will inaugurate an era of universal peace and justice, when "nation will not lift up sword against nation, and neither shall they again know war." Judaism does not accept Jesus as the messiah because this time of justice and peace clearly has not yet arrived.

Pikuach Nefesh: "Saving a life." Halakha requires that in any case where Jewish ritual practice endangers life or health, we set aside ritual strictness in favor of human compassion. For example, a pregnant woman is exempt from fasting on Yom Kippur, because to do so would compromise her health or the health of her baby.

Rabbi: A term of respect meaning, "my teacher," given to those who have received ordination as clergy in the Jewish Tradition. The first rabbis emerge in the last centuries before the Common Era, and are the figures who update Judaism for a post-Temple era and compose the Talmud. Today, in the

Orthodox community only men can serve as rabbis; however, in the Conservative and Reform communities both men and women study and receive rabbinic ordination.

Shalom: Peace, wholeness, completion. Nearly all Jewish prayer services close with a prayer for peace.

Sh'mirat ha-Lashon: The mitzvah of "guarding one's tongue" from hurtful, destructive, or gossipy speech, often referred to as *"lashon ha-ra."*

Talmud Torah: The mitzvah of engaging in Jewish learning. Study is a lifelong pursuit, and an essential component of living a Jewish life.

Teshuvah: "Repentance." Stemming from the Hebrew root meaning "return," teshuvah is the process of identifying our transgressions and making amends — with others, with God, and with ourselves. The month of Elul, leading up to the High Holy Days, is dedicated to taking stock of one's actions, and the ten days that connect Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur are designated for actively doing teshuvah by seeking out those we have wronged and asking their forgiveness. The Jewish Tradition is clear that Yom Kippur only provides for teshuvah between people and God; teshuvah between people must come from actively reaching out to those we have harmed and making amends.

Tikkun Olam: "Healing the World." Many believe that Judaism's essential mission is to teach people to be God's partners in healing the brokenness in the world. By actions big and small, ritual and ethical, we can all take part in making a more peaceful, compassionate, holy planet.

Tzadik: A righteous person. The mystical tradition teaches that there are always at least thirty six true tzaddikim alive in any given generation, and it is through their merit that the world is sustained.

Tzelem Elohim: "The Image of God." One of the fundamental principles of Jewish theology is that all human beings are created in the Image of God (Genesis 1:26), and therefore possess an unalienable dignity and worth.

Tzedakah: Righteous giving. Unlike the concept of charity, which derives from the Greek word caritas and means "kindness," tzedakah comes from the root *tzedek*, meaning justice. Giving to those in need and to causes that we believe in is not simply an act of kindness, it is our obligation as Jews.

Yisrael: One of the primary names of the Jewish People, which comes from the name given to the Patriarch Jacob after his confrontation with the angel in Genesis 37, meaning "God-wrestler." This attitude of wrestling with God — asking questions and struggling with faith — characterizes Jewish religious life.

JEWISH LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Amharic: The language of the Jews of Ethiopia.

Aramaic: The spoken language of the Ancient Near East during the period of the Rabbis. The majority of the Talmud, as well as some prayers — including the Kaddish — are written in Aramaic.

Ashkenazi: The ethnic designation of Jews whose ancestry comes from Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe.

Conservative: The Jewish denomination founded in Germany and developed in the United States, which attempts to preserve Jewish Tradition and the binding nature of Jewish law, while also adapting to change in the modern world.

Hasidim: A type of Orthodox Judaism that is particularly noted for its inclusion of singing, dance, ecstatic worship, and storytelling in religious practice. The largest Hasidic group in America today is Chabad.

Ladino: A mixture of Spanish and Hebrew, spoken by Jews throughout the Sephardic world.

Mizrachi: Jews from the Arabian Peninsula and Iran often refer to themselves as Mizrachi, meaning "Eastern."

Orthodox: Orthodox Judaism affirms the eternally binding and essentially unchanging nature of Jewish law, and thus resists making compromises with modernity. Orthodox Judaism is a diverse branch of the Jewish People, containing both Modern Orthodox Jews who obtain secular educations and keep traditional practice while pursuing professional careers and ultra-Orthodox Jews who tend to reject all aspects of the contemporary world and isolate themselves from secular society, which they perceive as a threat.

Reconstructionist: The Reconstructionist Movement is based on the thought of Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan, who taught that Judaism should be seen as a civilization rather than just as a religion — complete with its own language, culture, art, and folkways. Reconstructionist Judaism tends to de-emphasize both a supernatural God and idea of Jews as the "Chosen People."

Reform: The Reform Movement began in 19th century Germany as a response to the Enlightenment and the Emancipation of the Jews as full citizens in Western Europe. The early leaders of the Reform Movement sought to modernize Judaism by adopting many features of the Protestant Church. The Reform Movement maintains that while Judaism's ethical commandments remain in force, the ritual mitzvot are no longer binding on contemporary Jews. In recent decades, the Reform Movement has begun to re-emphasize the importance of ritual and the use of Hebrew in services.

Sephardic: Jews who trace their ancestry back to the countries of the Mediterranean region; including, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, and North Africa.

Yiddish: The primary spoken language of Ashkenazi Jewry, formed from a blend of German and Hebrew. Many common Yiddish words continue to pepper the speech of American Jews.

JEWISH HISTORY & PERSONALITIES

Anti-Semitism: Hatred of Jews. Anti-Semitism has taken many forms throughout the centuries, from historic villains like Haman and Antiochus to religious oppression by Christian and Muslim governments to the horrific rise of Nazism in the early 20th century.

Abraham Joshua Heschel: One of the greatest rabbinic figures of the 20th century, whose wide-ranging writings meditate on the meaning of faith and action, blended the traditions of Hasidic thought with contemporary philosophy and an overriding concern for social justice. Among his most important works are *God in Search of Man*, *The Prophets*, and *The Sabbath*.

Akiva: The greatest rabbi of the Talmud, who only began formally studying at age 40. He was martyred by the Romans in 135 CE, following the disastrous Bar Kochba Revolt.

Baal Shem Tov: The founder of the Hasidic Movement, which revolutionized Jewish life and thought with its focus on personal prayer, spirituality, and joy. He lived in Ukraine from 1698-1760.

Beit Ha-Mikdash (The Temple): The Temple in Jerusalem, which was the center of Jewish worship and sacrifice in ancient times. The First Temple was built by Solomon in 950 BCE and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. The Temple was rebuilt in 515 BCE and destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

Deicide: The charge that the Jews killed Jesus, which was used to justify fear and hatred of Jews over many centuries, and was officially repudiated by the Catholic Church by Vatican II in the 1960s.

Diaspora: The condition of living outside of one's native land. Significant portions of the Jewish People have lived in diaspora from the Land of Israel since the 6th century BCE.

Hillel: One of the earliest and most important rabbinic figures, whose most famous teaching was that the essential message of the Jewish Tradition is: "What is hateful to you, don't do to others — the rest is commentary."

Isaac Luria: Often referred to as "Ha-Ari," the Lion, was a mystic who lived in the Northern Israeli city of Tsfat in the 16th century. His complex doctrine includes an alternate Creation story, in which the world is created through a explosion of God's light, and the purpose of existence is to re-collect and liberate the hidden sparks of God that exist throughout the Universe.

Joseph Karo: The 16th century author of the Shulchan Aruch, still the most authoritative code of Jewish law.

Martin Buber: A 20th century Jewish philosopher who is best known for his concept of "I-Thou," which teaches that we encounter God through our most intense and personal relationships.

Rambam (Maimonides): 1135-1204 CE. The greatest Jewish legalist and philosopher of the medieval period, author of the Mishneh Torah and the Guide for the Perplexed.

Rashi: The greatest commentator of the Tanakh and the Talmud, who lived and wrote in 11th century France. Jewish texts are almost always studied together with Rashi's comments.

Shoah: The Hebrew word for the Nazi genocide of the Jewish community of Europe during WWII. Many prefer this word, which means "destruction," to the more common word "Holocaust," which originally refers to a "burnt offering."

ISRAEL

Aliyah: "To ascend." Moving to live in Israel. Also, the term for going up to the Torah to bless a portion of the reading.

Am Yisrael: The People of Israel.

David Ben-Gurion: The first Prime Minister of the State of Israel.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda: The father of the modern Hebrew language, who single-handedly updated an ancient, virtually extinct language to allow it to become the spoken language of the modern State of Israel.

Eretz Yisrael: The Land of Israel.

Hatikvah: "The Hope." Israel's national anthem, written by Naphtali Hirsch Imber, which speaks of the 2000-year-long Jewish yearning to return to the Land of Israel.

Jerusalem: Israel's 3000-year-old capital city, established by King David and the site of the holy Temple. Today, a thriving, complex metropolis considered sacred by each of the world's three major monotheistic faiths.

Kibbutz: A collective farming community in Israel. Much of the early settlement of modern Israel came through the kibbutzim.

Law of Return: The Israeli law, passed in 1950, that permits Jews anywhere in the world to come to Israel and immediately receive citizenship. The Law of Return applies to those who have only one Jewish parent, and also to converts through any religious movement.

Medinat Yisrael: The State of Israel.

Six Day War: In June 1967, Israel fought a war with all of her neighbors simultaneously. In less than a week, it had tripled in size, capturing the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, Sinai Peninsula, and all of Jerusalem. Many of the political conflicts in Israel today, especially the question of Israeli-Palestinian relations, are a debate over the fate of the territories conquered during that war.

Theodor Hertzl: An early advocate of modern, political Zionism. With his writings and speeches, Hertzl popularized the idea of rebuilding a Jewish State.

Yitzhak Rabin: A general who became a peacemaker, the fifth Prime Minister of the State of Israel and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Rabin was assassinated in 1995 by a Jewish extremist.

Zionism: The belief that the Jewish People is entitled to a state of its own. While Jews longed to return to the Land of Israel for two-thousand years, modern Zionism as a political movement began in Europe in the 19th century.