

# Jewish Life and Ritual

Nic Abery, PaJES

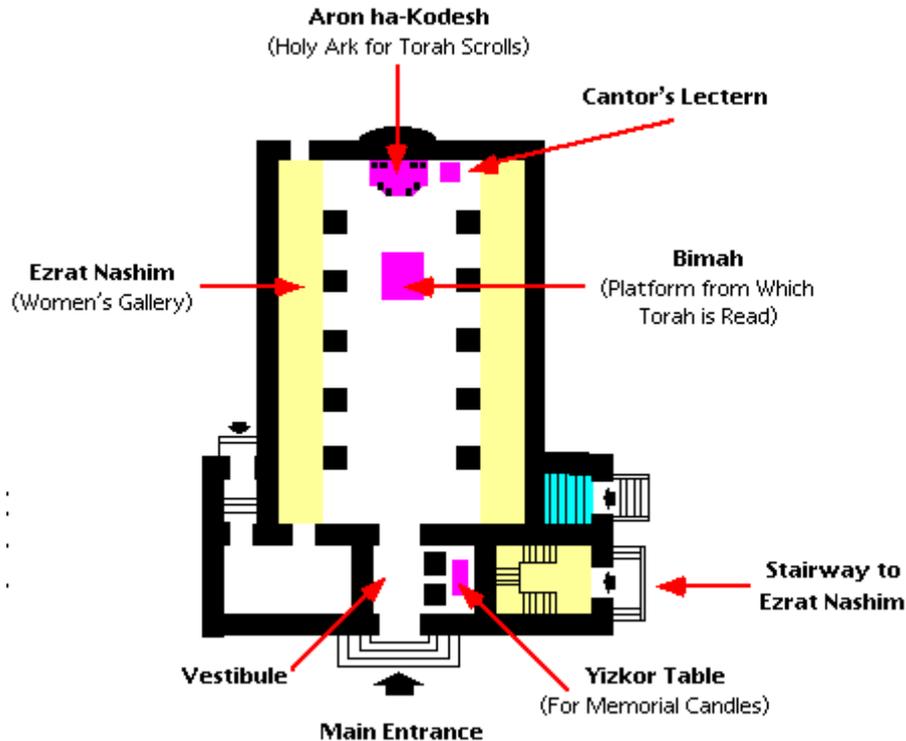
## Public Prayer and Synagogue



New West End Orthodox Synagogue, London



Reform Synagogue in Hamelin



The daily services where communal prayer occurs are called:

Shacharit (morning Prayer)

Mincha (afternoon prayer)

Ma'ariv (evening prayer)

## Private Prayer



Public services can occur anywhere but Orthodox Jews require a minyan (quorum) of 10 men over Bar Mitzvah to fully participate. Progressive congregations include women in the minyan. The prayers for all services are found in a book called the Siddur (order) and are organised by frequency of recitation. Within these services, prayers recited contemplatively, privately and in quiet. One is the Shema and the other is the Amidah.

Shema: This is a declaration of faith in one God. It consists of 3 biblical paragraphs. Each one has a different foci. The first paragraph commences with a verse that

requires total concentration and dedication. We cover our eyes with the right hand and say the words "*Shema Yisrael Adonai Elokenu Adonai Ehad*" aloud but quietly ([Deuteronomy 6:5-9](#)) before continuing in a hushed tone with "Blessed is the name of His Glorious Majesty forever and ever" (*Barukh shem kvod malkhuto l'olam va-ed*) which originates from the Temple service. We then continue with verses talking about the acceptance of divine rule, God's sovereignty over the world, an unconditional love of God and a commitment to continue teaching this to our children, place a mezuzah on our doors and wear tefillin. This is the paragraph placed in both of these objects.

The second paragraph is from Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and states how Jews must accept and adhere to the commandments as a display of loyalty and dedication to God. Reward and punishments for fulfilling these commandments are also cited here.

The final paragraph is found in Numbers 15:37-41 and speaks of the wearing of tzitzit (they are kissed when saying these verses) as a physical reminder of God's presence. The Exodus narrative is also mentioned, since we are obligated to recall it every day.

(<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/amidah.html>)

The Amidah: This privately recited prayer is comprised of 19 blessings of thanks and request and is said at all of our daily services. It is said standing (Amidah) facing Jerusalem with our feet together in a humble stance before God. The Amidah is so significant that we are not allowed to interrupt the prayer to move, talk or acknowledge anyone. The words of the prayer are recited in the quietest audible tone possible and at several places throughout the prayer, we bow at certain blessings. There are also opportunities within the Amidah to insert personal prayers such as to heal a sick relative or friend or a personal request. It is believed that the Amidah prayer was formed around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE by the Great Assembly of Rabbis.

(<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/amidah.html>)

## Shabbat

Shabbat is considered the most important of all Jewish holidays. It is the day of rest and weekly observance of God's completion of creation. Starting on Friday night an hour before sunset, it lasts for 25 hours until sunset on Saturday night. The biblical sources for the observance of Shabbat can be found in general terms ([Exodus 20:8-11](#); 23:12; 31:12-17; [Leviticus 23:3](#); [Deuteronomy 5:12-15](#)), though some of the 39 types of work (temple originated) prohibited mentioned include gathering food, plowing and reaping, kindling a fire, and chopping wood ([Exodus 16:29-30](#); 34:21; 35:3; [Numbers 15:32-36](#)). The positive specifications of Sabbath observance include giving rest to one's servants and animals ([Exodus 20:10](#); 23:12; [Deuteronomy 5:14](#)).



Shabbat in Synagogue- There are several additions to the regular prayer services on Shabbat which include a joyous welcoming service at the commencement on Friday night, additional prayers recited related to the Shabbat including a public recitation of the Prayer for the Royal Family and State of Israel and a weekly Torah portion reading on Saturday morning, an elongated afternoon service with mini Torah reading of the upcoming portion.

Shabbat at home- Shabbat observance at home is very family orientated. A festive meal commencing with special rituals, prayers and foods (Kiddush) are said on Friday night and Saturday lunchtime. Families traditionally welcome guests for meals and the day is spent relaxing from the stresses of the working week. A number of Shabbat enabling devices such as timing switches and food heating trays are prepared on Friday before the Shabbat commences.

## Rosh Hashanah- Jewish New Year (Sept-Oct)



The Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) is a serious holiday marked by festive meals with foods symbolizing our hopes for the new year—such as apples dipped in honey for a sweet new year and pomegranates for a year of plenty—and 2 days spent in prayer at synagogue when we contemplate our actions in the year gone. A ram's horn (shofar) is blasted 100 times to “wake us up” towards repenting our sins. The binding of Isaac is read on the first day as the Torah portion in synagogue.

## Yom Kippur

The most solemn day of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement offers an entire day devoted to self-examination.

Many spend the entire day in synagogue devoted to prayer and study while abstaining from food, drink, marital relations, washing and wearing leather shoes. The fast commences at dusk and lasts 25 hours. The goal is to begin the New Year with a clean slate.



## Sukkot

This seven-day festival celebrates the fall harvest and also commemorates the time when the Hebrews dwelt in the Sinai wilderness on their way to the Promised Land of Israel. The holiday is celebrated by building (and then dwelling in) ceremonial huts called Sukkot, waving of four different plant species (palm, myrtle, willow and citron), and many food-filled festive gatherings in the Sukkah.



## Shemini Atzeret

This holiday literally means the “8th day of assembly.” It is a festive day after the week-long festival of Sukkot, and is marked by the annual prayer for rain recited in synagogue.



## Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah marks the end and the beginning of the annual Torah reading cycle. Every week all over the world, the same Torah portion is read in Jewish communities. On Simchat Torah the cycle ends and begins again. This is accompanied by parading the Torah scrolls about and with singing and dancing.



## Chanukkah (Nov-Dec)

This 8-day Jewish winter festival celebrates the miracle of a small pot of oil burning for 8 days, instead of only one on the sacred candelabra (menorah) in the temple. It also celebrates the military victory of the Jewish Maccabees over the powerful Syrian Greek army in 167 BCE. The victory was followed by a rededication (Hanukkah) of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. It is from this act that the holiday gets its name.



The festival is celebrated at home by lighting an 8 branched candelabra called the Chanukiah, eating oily foods and exchanging gift or money.

## Tu B'Shevat (Jan-Feb)

This is the Jewish New Year of the Trees. Observances include planting of trees, purchasing trees to be planted in Israel, and a mystical Tu B'Shevat ritual meal that includes different coloured wine (from white to red) and the 7 species of grains and fruits found in the Torah. It has become a day dedicated to conservation.



## Purim (Feb- March)

The name of this holiday means “lots”, so named for the lots that were drawn to determine a dark day in Jewish history. As luck would have it, those dark days never arrived, as the evil villain’s plans were thwarted by the clever Jewish Queen Esther, whose story is recounted in the Biblical Scroll of Esther. Celebrations include an evening and morning public reading of the scroll, giving gifts to friends and to the needy, dressing up in costume, eating a special triangle-shaped pastry called hamantaschen, and the drinking of alcohol for those of drinking age.



## Pesach (March-April)

This eight day festival of freedom marks the biblical exodus of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. The story is told during a festive ritual meal called a “Seder.” During the festival, it is traditional to remove from our houses and abstain from eating all foods containing leaven; that is, foods made from grain that have not been prepared according to a strict Passover cooking procedure. Among the grain foods that are permitted is matzah, an unleavened bread that is baked before it has a chance to rise.



The 7 week period between Pesach and Shavuot is called the Omer.

## Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day)

Jews all over the world mourn the loss of six million Jewish lives lost during the Shoah (Holocaust.)

## Yom HaZikaron (Israeli Memorial Day) (May)

On this Memorial Day, we commemorate the soldiers who have fallen fighting for Israel's independence and defending its security. This holiday falls the day before Israel's Independence Day. In Israel a siren is sounded at 11am and everyone stops to observe 2 minutes silence (even on the motorway!)

## Yom HaAtzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) (May)

This holiday celebrates the independence of the Modern State of Israel. In Israel the day of Yom HaAtzmaut is marked with fireworks, barbeques, and outdoor celebrations. For Jewish communities outside of Israel it is a time to gather and celebrate our pride and connection to the Jewish homeland. It is common for school children to dress in blue and white – the colours found on the Israeli flag.

## Lag B'Omer (May)

This holiday marks the 33rd day of the 49-day "Omer" period between Passover and Shavuot but Lag B'Omer, which occurs on the 33rd day is an exception. Bonfires, outdoor parties and revelry rule the day, which is also a popular Jewish wedding date.

## Shavuot (May-June)

Shavuot is the holiday commemorating the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people. The celebration of Shavuot is also the Festival of First Fruits and Grains, a fulfilment of the promise of spring. The name means "weeks", so named for the 7-week period from Passover to Shavuot. Traditionally foods containing milk are eaten such as cheese cake.



## Tisha B'Av (July-August)

An important and sad fast day commemorating the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE and 70 CE. Many people observe the same abstentions as Yom Kippur and refrain from doing anything jolly or happy or sitting on comfortable chairs.



<http://www.pjcc.org/jewishlife/holidays/jewish-holidays-explained.html>

## Ritual Objects and Practices.

### Mezuzah

*And you shall write [the words that I command you today] on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. -Deuteronomy 6:9, 11:19*



On the doorposts of most Jewish homes, you will find a small case containing the Shema prayer. This case is known as a mezuzah (Heb.: doorpost), because it is placed upon all the doorposts of the house (with the exception of the bathroom). It is a constant reminder of God's presence and God's mitzvot (commandments).

### Tallit and Tzitzit

*“They shall make themselves tzitzit on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and they shall place on the tzitzit of each corner a thread of techeilet. And it shall be tzitzit for you, and you will see it, and you will remember all the mitzvot of the L-RD and do them and not follow your heart or your eyes and run after them.” -Numbers 15:38-40*



The Torah commands the wearing of tzitzit (fringes) at the corners of garments as a reminder of the mitzvot. There is a complex procedure for tying the knots of the tzitzit, filled with religious and numerological significance.

The mitzvah to wear tzitzit applies only to four-cornered garments, which were common in biblical times but are not common anymore. To fulfill this mitzvah, adult men wear a four-cornered shawl called a tallit (pictured above) during morning services, along with the tefillin (phylacteries). In



some Orthodox congregations, only married men wear a tallit; in others, both married and unmarried men wear one. In progressive synagogues, both men and women may wear a tallit, but men are somewhat more likely than women to do so. A blessing is recited when you put on the tallit.

### Kippah/Yamulke (skullcap)

The kippah (skullcap) is not actually a Torah obligation but has been customary for so long that it has been adopted as a requirement. In traditional communities it is worn only by boys and men whereas in the progressive community, women wear them too particularly at prayer or in synagogue. Its origins are rooted in the concept that God is over us watching.



[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/483387/jewish/Why-Do-We-Wear-a-Kippah.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/483387/jewish/Why-Do-We-Wear-a-Kippah.htm)

## Kashrut

The dietary laws of Kashrut extend beyond the items consumed to how they are cooked, the utensils and kitchen equipment we use and when we eat them. The most commonly known laws are concerning which types of meat acceptable.



**Meat:** *“You may eat any animal that has a split hoof completely divided and that chews the cud”* ([Leviticus 11:3](#)).

Beef and lamb are both acceptable and although venison and can be consumed, the requirements of ritual slaughter or shechita make it very difficult for it to be permitted and available. Following its slaughter, all blood has to be removed through a process of extensive salting and rinsing.

**Poultry:** Most birds of prey (eagle, osprey, hawk, falcon, owl); those that feed on carrion (vulture, buzzard, raven); certain waterbirds (pelican, stork, heron, swan, sea gull); and other birds (ostrich, bat, lapwing) are all forbidden. Poultry (goose, chicken, duck), pigeon and doves, and wild birds not on the above list were permitted ([Leviticus 11:13-19](#); [Deuteronomy 14:12-18](#)). Only the eggs of clean fowl could be eaten but these have to be checked for blood spots.

**Fish:** Only fish with fins and scales are permitted. This excludes all shellfish and fish that have only one of these features e.g., shark, catfish, and eels ([Leviticus 11:9-12](#); [Deuteronomy 14:9-10](#)).

**Separation of Milk and Meat:** *“The choicest first-fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother’s milk.”* ([Exodus 23:19](#); [34:26](#); [Deuteronomy 14:21](#)).



The main feature of a kosher kitchen is the separation of all meat and milk vessels, cutlery and dishes. This also extends to the actual consumption of meat based and dairy foods. English custom dictates that a separation of an hour is observed between milk and meat foods. The abstention extends to three hours for the reverse.

**Everyday life:** All ingredients within a kosher kitchen have to be permitted and many foods nowadays contain a hechsher to identify it as being kosher. There are also apps and a published book to assist in the identification of acceptable foods.

