



Judaism 101

A Resource Guide

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Shalom! This is a Hebrew word meaning hello, goodbye and peace. We welcome you to the Augusta Jewish Community Center and say, *Shalom!*

Basic Jewish Information

Beliefs

- Judaism is the world's oldest monotheistic (belief in one God) religion.
- Judaism teaches that the Messiah or Messianic age will usher in an era of world peace. Since this era has not come yet, we believe that the Messiah or Messianic age has not yet arrived.
- Jews do not celebrate Christmas or Easter, as these holidays commemorate the life of Jesus.
- Some Jews who were raised in traditional homes may choose not to write out the word for the "holy one;" and instead write "G-d". Some rabbis now say that it is permissible to spell out the word "God."
- God may be referred to in male and female terms, he/she, since to many Jews, God embodies both male and female attributes.
- God wants people to do what is just and merciful.
- God has no form or representation; therefore, we cannot draw or say what God looks like.
- Jews serve God by studying the Hebrew scriptures and practicing mitzvot (commandments, ritually and ethically).
- ***All people are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.***
- Jews are a people of action as well as believers in prayer. They are judged by God and other Jews by what they do and not just by how much/well they pray.
- ***Jews are judged for whether or not they do good deeds and practice righteousness.***



Torah (TOE rah) The Hebrew scriptures are known as the Torah or Hebrew Bible. The Torah is comprised of the first five books of the Hebrew bible.

Holidays/Celebrations

On what are Jewish observances based?

Jewish observances are based on a variety of concepts, including:

- *Agricultural ...celebrating the harvest, etc.
- *Life Cycle...birth, death, bar/bat mitzvah*, weddings, etc.
- *Relationship to God...high holidays, etc.
- *Historical...Chanukah, Passover, Purim, etc.
- *Shabbat - the Jewish Sabbath (Friday sundown to Saturday at dark).**

See following page for references for bar/bat mitzvah * and Shabbat.**

When do holidays begin?

Jewish holidays begin at sundown the evening before the holiday, with only the first full day usually noted on a non-Jewish calendar. Jewish holidays are based on the lunar or Jewish calendar, so the dates of observances may change from year to year.

Bar/bat mitzvah

Bar/bat mitzvah (BAHR/BAHT MITS vah) is the life cycle event where a boy age 13, or a girl age 12 or 13, will go in front of the congregation, traditionally during Shabbat services, and read or chant, in Hebrew, from the Torah scroll. After the service, he or she is technically considered an adult in the Jewish community, responsible for making decisions related to Jewish ritual observance, and is given/earns the rights of Jewish adulthood.* For example, now they are allowed to come up to the bimah (BEE ma), also known as the pulpit, and read or chant the Torah reading, the biblical portion for the week. They also count as part of a minyan (MIN yan), a community of at least 10 Jewish adults needed to say communal prayers. It is appropriate to bring a gift when invited to participate in a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. Gifts often reflect the recipient's personal interests or hobbies, but may be an item of Judaica (books, Kiddush cup or jewelry) or money.

Shabbat

**** Shabbat (shah BAT) is the Jewish day of rest. It begins on Friday evening** with the traditional lighting of Shabbat candles, drinking wine and breaking bread; in this case, a challah (braided egg bread) (HA lah). Blessings are said or chanted for all three. It is traditionally followed with a special family meal. ***This is the day set aside each week for family, attending Shabbat (Sabbath) services, and studying.*** Jews may refrain from all manner of work on this day. This could include no shopping or handling money of any kind, driving (most Conservative and Reform Jews will drive to and from the synagogue), cleaning, cooking, use of electricity or the telephone. ***Shabbat ends at nightfall on Saturday.*** As with many religious traditions, levels of observance differ among Jews of different movements. For example, some Jews may have a special meal Friday night but do not refrain from work on Saturday.

Rituals and observances related to death

Jews believe that the body is holy and deserves dignity in death, as in life. ***In the Orthodox and Conservative movements, Jews are customarily buried as soon as possible following death. Reform Jews generally are buried within 3 days.*** Jews may allow an autopsy if it will help save other lives as a result. All branches of Judaism do encourage at least a limited form of organ donation because saving a life is the highest value in Judaism. The funeral is very personal and reflects on the life of the individual who has died. Jews often choose to be buried in Jewish cemeteries next to loved ones.

Shiva (SHEE vah), the seven-day-mourning period, as well as the kaddish (KAH dish) or mourner's prayer (which does not even mention death but reaffirms one's faith in God), are two of the most important ways in which Judaism strives to comfort the mourners and perpetuate the memory of the deceased.

During shiva, it is more traditional to provide food for the grieving family than to send flowers. Also, the family may request that donations be sent to a favorite charity in lieu of flowers.

Since there are many rituals and customs related to death in a Jewish family, they will not be listed here. Additional information is available to anyone who is interested in knowing more about this topic.

Holiday Dates and Descriptions

Jewish Years 5765 - 5767

September 2005 - December 2007

5766 2005	5767 2006	5768 2007	Description	Observance
Oct 4 through Oct 5 Begins sundown on Oct 3	Sep 23 through 24	Sept 13 through 14	Rosh Hashanah (ROESH hah SHAHnah or RASH hah SHAH nah) Celebrates the Jewish New Year and marks the day of judgment (the day Jews believe God judges the world).	Begins at sundown of the first eve- ning with family observance and synagogue worship. Most people attend services until early after- noon on the first day. Conservative and Orthodox Jews observe this second day as a holiday. AJCC is closed first and second evenings and both days.
Oct 13 Begins sundown on Oct 12	Oct 2	Sept 22	Yom Kippur (YOME ki PORE) "Day of Atonement" is the holiest day of the year for Jews and is a day of cleansing ourselves of the year's sins. Traditions: Fast from sundown to sundown, spend the day in prayer, pledge charity, a time for forgiveness and wiping the slate clean. Holiday ends with a festive meal to break the fast. Also marked by no work or school.	The holiest day of the year. Most Jews attend services the first evening and the next day, all day, and will not take part in extra- curricular activities. Services from early morning to sundown on the day. As a fast day, males age thirteen and over, and females age 12 and over, will not eat or drink for 24 hours To observe the holi- day's conclusion, many partake in a family holiday "break-fast" meal the second evening. AJCC is closed first evening and day.
Oct 18 through Oct 24 Begins sundown on Oct 17	Oct 7 through Oct 13	Sept 27 through Sept 28	Sukkot (sue COAT or SOOK iss, rhymes with took) Celebration of fall harvest and a reminder of the fragile huts (sukkahs) the Jews made as Moses led them in their escape from Egypt through the desert. Traditions: Sukkahs are built to replicate those huts; hang corn stalks and harvest vegetables and fruits, visit other families' sukkahs and having meals and sleeping in the sukkah. AJCC often hosts a sukkah party.	Children attend services until late the first evening. Morning ser- vices are held on the first day; Conservative and Orthodox Jews observe the second day as well. These 2 days are days when writ- ing and other forms of work are for- bidden by traditional Jewish law. AJCC is closed first evening and day.
Oct 25 Begins sundown on Oct 24	Oct 14	Oct 4	Shemini Atzeret (SHMIN ee aht SAIR et) This day marks the completion of Sukkot. Yizkor (memorial) prayers are recited.	Observed with services and candle lighting. Restrictions from work and school are the same as for Shabbat. AJCC is closed first evening and day.

5 7 6 6 / 2005	5 7 6 7 / 2006	5 7 6 8 / 2007	Description	Observance
Oct 26 Begins sundown on Oct 25	Oct 15	Oct 5	Simchat Torah (SIM chat toe RAH) This holiday marks completion and renewal of the annual cycle of weekly readings of the Torah. A festive service is held.	Services until late on the first evening. Services on the mornings of these days. Restrictions from school and work, same as Shabbat. AJCC is closed first evening and day.
Dec 26 through Jan 2 Begins sundown on Dec 25	Dec 16 through Dec 23	Dec 5 through Dec 13	Chanukah (HAH nuh kuh) The "Festival of Lights" celebrates the Jews' military victory over the Greeks 2000 years ago and the rededication of the desecrated Temple. Traditions: Lighting the menorah to symbolize the miracle of one night's oil burning for eight nights; latkes (potato pancakes); dreidels (spinning tops). Holiday is celebrated for 8 days. The AJCC hosts a traditional Chanukah party.	No excused absences from school or work, no daytime services. AJCC is not closed.
Jan 25 Begins sundown on Jan 24	Feb 13	Feb 3	Tu B'Shevat (TOO bish VAHT) Celebrates the beginning of spring in Israel. Referred to as the Jewish Arbor Day. Traditions: Planting trees in Israel and at home.	No observance which would affect school attendance or activities. AJCC is not closed.
Mar 25 Begins sundown on Mar 24	Mar 14	Mar 4	Purim (POOR im) Celebrates the Jewish Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai's triumph over wicked Haman (advisor to the King) who wanted to exterminate the Jews of ancient Persia around 450 BCE. Traditions: Reading from the Book of Esther, costumes, gifts to the poor, exchanging gifts with friends, noisemakers, merrymaking, Purim carnival where children dress up as Purim "characters."	Many children and adults attend a service the first evening. AJCC is not closed. A Purim Festival is held at the AJCC every year.

5766 2005	5767 2006	5 7 6 8 2007	Description	Observance
Apr 23 through May 1 Begins sundown on Apr 22	Apr 13 through Apr 20	Apr 3 through April 10	Passover (PASS over) Recalls exodus of the Jews from Egypt about 3300 years ago and deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Commonly referred to as Pesach (PAY sahk). Traditions: Eating of matzah (unleavened bread) and conducting family seders (the ceremonial meal recounting the exodus).	This holiday is an 8-day holiday. The first 2 days and last 2 days are days when writing and other forms of work are forbidden by traditional Jewish law. The AJCC is closed these days. The first evening is extremely busy, as the main service (the "seder") occurs at this time, often at home or at friends or relatives out of town. Conservative and Orthodox families conduct a seder the second night as well. Most children will not attend activities this evening and will have little time to prepare homework.
May 5 Begins sundown on May 4	Apr 25	Apr 15	Yom HaShoah (YOME hah SHOW ah) This Holocaust remembrance day is marked in Augusta by a community observance.	Many attend a memorial service the first evening. The AJCC is not closed.
Jun 12 through Jun 13 Begins sundown on Jun 11	Jun 2 through Jun 3	May 23 through May 24	Shavuot (shuh VOO ote or shah VOO us) The day Moses and the Jews received the Ten Commandments from God at Mt. Sinai. Also agricultural festival celebrating first fruits of the season. Traditions: Eating a dairy meal.	Services are held on the first evening. Morning services are held on the first day and second day in Conservative and Orthodox congregations. Writing and other forms of work are forbidden by traditional Jewish law during the two days of this holiday. AJCC is closed the first evening and day.
Aug 14 Begins sundown on Aug 13	Aug 3	July 24	Tisha B'Av (TISH a bah AHV) Fast day mourning several historical events including destruction of Jerusalem temples, Holocaust and the crusades. Traditions: a twenty-four hour fast and prayer.	No observance which would affect school attendance or activities. AJCC is not closed.
Every Friday evening at sun- down.	Until every Satur- day eve- ning at sundown.		Shabbat (shah BAHT) The Jewish Sabbath: the most sacred day of the Jewish calendar.	Traditions: Observance includes refraining from work and day-to-day routines, lighting Shabbat candles, and praying. Services are held Friday night, Saturday morning and evening.

Jewish Practice and Culture

Israel

Israel is the Jewish Homeland and became a Jewish state officially in 1948.

Located in the Middle East, it is the land of Jewish ancestors, dating back over 4,000 years.

The official language is the ancient biblical language of Hebrew, written from right to left.

Many Jews today visit Israel, follow the political situation, and raise money for Israel.

Some choose to have a bar/bat mitzvah in Israel.

There are still Jews immigrating to Israel, especially from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. Some American Jews choose to live in Israel, and this is called "making aliyah (a LEE ah)."



Jewish Dietary Laws

also referred to as 'keeping kosher' or kashrut (kah SHROOT).

Jewish dietary laws are based on biblical tradition; there are actual passages in the Bible which allude to dietary laws. Some Jews keep kashrut to the letter of the law because they feel that this is God's will, or because of a connection with the past and family.

The kashrut laws include:

- No pork products (ham, pepperoni, etc.)*
- No shellfish (clams, shrimp, lobster, etc.)*
- No mixing of meat and milk in one dish, or served at the same meal.*
- Keeping separate dishes and silverware, one set for meat meals, one for dairy.
- Animals must be slaughtered in a special way to give dignity to the death of the animal.
- Buying only such food products that have reliable kosher supervision (except fresh produce).
- Kosher kitchens in kosher restaurants and synagogues are overseen by a mashgiach (mash GEE ak), an individual trained in the observance of the laws of kashrut.

Key Dates in Jewish History

Before the Common Era (B.C.E.)

- 1280 Jewish exodus from Egypt
- 950 Solomon dedicates first Temple
- 586 Destruction of Jerusalem and first Temple: Jewish exile to Babylonia
- 520 -515 Building of second Temple

Common Era (C.E.)

- 1135 -1204 Maimonides, great Jewish philosopher
- 1695 First Jews in America arrive in Charleston, SC
- 1786 Equal rights granted Jews of several American states
- 1791 Full civil rights granted Jews of France
- 1808 Beginning of emancipation of German Jews
- 1873 Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Hebrew Union College founded to train reform rabbis
- 1886 Jewish Theological Seminary founded to train conservative rabbis
- 1906-09 Peak of Jewish immigration to U.S.
- 1917 British conquer Israel; Balfour Declaration declared Britain's support for the return of Jews to Palestine
- 1918 Zionist Commission, led by Weizmann, explored establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine; Hebrew University, Jerusalem, founded
- 1933 Hitler becomes German Chancellor; first concentration camps
- 1936 World Jewish Congress established as the international political and diplomatic voice of Jewish communities; Kibbutz Movement Alliance founded
- 1945 Concentration camps liberated; Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin agree at the Yalta conference to occupy Germany and set up a new Polish government; Nuremberg trials
- 1947 The ship Exodus, carrying 4,500 Holocaust survivors, is forcibly turned away from the shores of Palestine by British forces and escorted back to Germany; Paris Peace Conference; ancient Dead Sea Scrolls containing text of the Hebrew bible found; U.N. voted Israel into existence by partitioning Palestine into Arab and Jewish sections
- 1948 State of Israel officially declared
- 1949 Chaim Weizmann first Israeli president; David Ben-Gurion prime minister
- 1956 Sinai Campaign was Israel's retaliation to continued terrorist attacks by neighboring Arab countries; Jews expelled from Egypt
- 1961 Eichmann (Nazi) brought to Israel for trial after years of freedom in Argentina, found guilty of war crimes and executed in 1962
- 1967 During the Six-Day War, Israel miraculously won a military victory over the combined efforts of the Arab states to annihilate the state of Israel, gaining for Israel the Golan Heights and establishing Israel as a military superiority in the Middle East
- 1969 Golda Meir, Israeli ambassador to the Soviet Union, elected Prime Minister, first woman leader of world country
- 1973 Yom Kippur War, military attack by Egypt and Syria on Israel on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar; death of Ben-Gurion, first prime minister of Israel
- 1979 Camp David Accords, which established peace, trade and communications between Egypt and Israel, signed by President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel at Camp David, Maryland
- 1981 Sadat assassinated
- 1986 The Intifada, Palestinian uprising against Jews in the West Bank and Gaza strip in Israel, begins
- 1993 Oslo Accord signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat, agreeing on peace and mutual recognition
- 1994 Rabin, Peres and Arafat awarded Nobel Peace Prize
- 1995 Rabin assassinated
- 1996 Binyamin Netanyahu, Israeli ambassador to the U.N., elected Prime Minister
- 1999 Ehud Barak elected prime minister
- 2000 New Intifada in Israel—increased tensions between Israelis and Palestinians
- 2001 Ariel Sharon elected prime minister

Ways to Be Jewish

Structure of Judaism

- *A Jewish house of worship is referred to as a synagogue or shul (shool, rhymes with school). Most Reform Jews use the term "temple".*
- Jews refer to their prayer time as services. It is customary to hold Shabbat services on Friday evening and/or Saturday morning.
- *A Jewish spiritual leader is called a rabbi.* The word rabbi in Hebrew means teacher.
- We do not have a hierarchy in Judaism. No rabbi has a higher authority than any other rabbi. Each rabbi and the congregants are responsible for their spiritual practice within the context of the movement they represent. Also, a rabbi is not considered "closer to God" than lay persons.
- Many houses of worship have a cantor, a professionally trained individual who will chant/sing parts of the service.
- Some temples or synagogues have a choir.
- The Reform movement also allows for organ or guitar to be part of its service.

Denominations/movements of Judaism

The three major movements in the U.S. are Reform, Conservative and Orthodox.

*The **Reform** movement is represented in Augusta by Congregation Children of Israel on Walton Way.*

The Reform Movement believes that the Bible has human authorship and is inspired by God, and that God's purpose is being understood anew and reinterpreted with each generation.

Prayers are recited in both Hebrew and English.

Head covering during worship is optional.

People may choose to keep kosher, but it is not a requirement.

It is a progressive movement promoting equality of men and women in Jewish life.

The house of worship is often called a temple.

*The **Conservative** movement is represented in Augusta at the Adas Yeshurun Synagogue on Johns Road.*

More traditional Jews believe in divine authorship of the Bible by God, while others believe that it has human authorship and is inspired by God.

Some congregations lean toward more ritual, while others lean toward less ritual.

Prayers are recited in Hebrew and English, but there is usually more Hebrew.

Dietary laws of keeping kosher are upheld.

Men are required to wear a head covering during worship services. In some Conservative houses of worship, women now wear a head covering, but it is not required.

While more lenient in their interpretation than the Orthodox, the Conservative Jews stay close to traditional interpretations of Jewish law, e.g. the prohibition against driving on the Sabbath. They may drive to and from the house of worship on the Sabbath, and refrain from driving all other times. *The house of worship is often called a synagogue* and not a temple because Conservative Jews believe that the only 'Temple' is the one in Jerusalem that was destroyed.

Adas Yeshurun, like most Conservative synagogues, extends equal religious rights and opportunities to men and women.

The Orthodox movement is represented in Augusta by Chabad on Broad Street.

The Orthodox Movement believes that the Bible was revealed to Moses at Mt. Sinai by God together with its companion-the Oral Law-which later became the Talmud.

They believe that there are 613 commandments or laws representing a perfect and permanent set of commandments to follow.

They believe that God revealed at Sinai the proper procedures for interpreting these laws in future situations.

Dietary laws are observed in the strictest sense.

Men are required to wear a head covering at all times.

Men and women sit separately during prayer services in a synagogue.

They celebrate the Sabbath with no creative work from Friday sundown to Saturday nightfall, no working, shopping, driving, etc. Sabbath is for worship, study and family.

The house of worship is referred to as either synagogue or shul (shool, an eastern European word).

The AJCC's pluralistic approach to Judaism

The Augusta JCC maintains a pluralistic approach, not placing a higher value on the ideology/theology of one movement over another. We maintain impartiality in giving information on each of the movements, regardless of the staff's personal affiliation.

Symbols of Judaism

The following is a list of some of the most important Jewish symbols and their meanings.



Candles/candlesticks

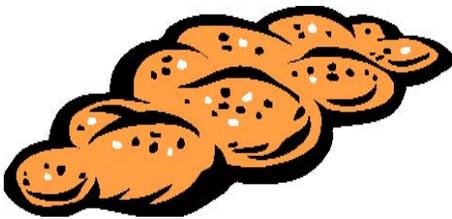
It is traditional to light candles just prior to sundown for holidays, including every Friday evening before sundown for the Sabbath, also referred to as Shabbat (shah BAHT).

Kiddush (KIH dish) cup

The wine cup that is used in saying a blessing over wine for holidays and the Sabbath (Shabbat) is called a kiddush cup.



Challah (HA lah)

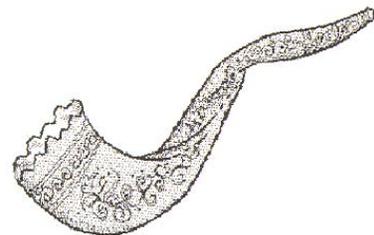


The braided egg bread that is blessed and eaten for holidays and the Sabbath. On Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, it is traditional to have a round challah to symbolize wholeness in the new year, and the circle of life.

Shofar (show FAR)

The shofar is a ram's horn.

It was originally used as a trumpet to communicate messages to far locations. Traditionally, the shofar is sounded on the holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.



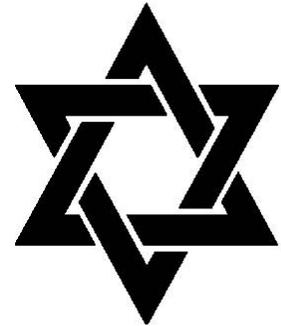
Jewish Star (also known as the Star of David)

The Jewish Star a six-pointed star.

It is a symbol of the Jewish religion comprised of two triangles, one pointing toward earth and one toward heaven, and can be found on the flag of Israel, jewelry, art work, etc.

Some of the many interpretations are that:

- 1) it represents the 6 days of creation
- 2) it represents the 6 pairs of tribes, referring to the 12 tribes that wandered in the desert after leaving Egypt
- 3) it represents the 6 orders of the Mishnah (MISH na), a portion of the massive volume of Jewish laws)



Menorah (meh NORE ah)



The menorah is a candelabra with seven branches for regular use in services and nine for Chanukah.

Menorah is the Hebrew name.

The original seven-branched menorah of the ancient temple was made by a biblical artisan for the sanctuary in the wilderness and later transferred to the temple in Jerusalem.

It became the most familiar symbol and was frequently found in decorations. It symbolized the tree of life, and the 7 branches represented the planets and the days of creation.

The State of Israel has made the menorah its official symbol.

Mezuzah (m'ZUH zah)

The mezuzah is a small, decorative case containing a miniature parchment scroll on which are written two of the most important passages from the Bible. The case is put on the main doorposts of Jewish homes and on all doorposts except bathrooms. Special prayers are said when the mezuzah is hung in a home or on a doorpost.

There are many specific rules on mounting a mezuzah for certain rooms, rental property, etc. They are not lucky charms, but are often worn as a symbol on jewelry similar to wearing the Star of David.

It is traditional for some Jews to touch the mezuzah, then kiss that hand.



Great Resources Regarding Judaism

Books :

Basic Judaism by Milton Steinberg, A Harvest Book / Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.

Jewish Literacy by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Judaism by Rabbi Benjamin Blech, Alpha Books

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Jewish History and Culture by Rabbi Benjamin Blech, Alpha

How to Explain Judaism to Your Non-Jewish Neighbor by Rabbi Edward Zerin, Ph.D., Isaac

Nathan Publishing Co., Inc.

To Be A Jew by Rabbi Hayim Haleby Donin, Basic Books, Inc.

What Happens After I Die? by Rifat Sonsino and Daniel B. Syme, UAH Press

What Does Being Jewish Mean? by Rabbi E. B. Freedman, Jan Greenberg and Karen A. Katz,

Fireside / Simon & Schuster

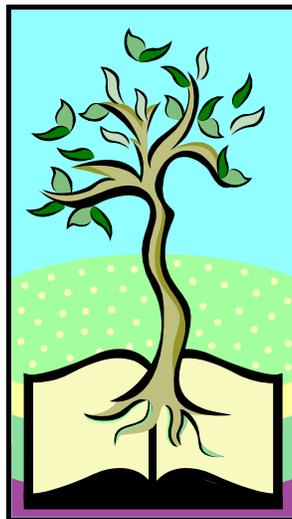
Where Judaism Differs by Abba Hillel Silver, Collier Books

Websites :

Jewishaugusta.org-Augusta Jewish Federation Website

www.jewhoo.com - About Judaism.com

augustajcc.org-Augusta JCC website



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