



A Journalist's Guide To  
**Judaism**

## Foreword

Canadians, by an overwhelming majority, are people with spiritual values and religious beliefs. According to the 2001 Canadian census, eighty-four percent of Canadians indicated they had religious affiliations.

Yet there are only a handful of full time religion news reporters in Canada. With an increase in immigration and changing world events, stories involving religious communities and spiritual issues at home as well as around the world are dramatically increasing. General assignment reporters who must find accurate information about highly complex, sensitive concerns most often cover these stories.

The Centre for Faith and the Media exists in part to help journalists have access to quick and accurate information, and the right contacts for Canada's diverse religious community. On our Web site, contacts in major centres for religious communities and traditions are available, as well as a growing body of background information.

With these printed guides on major world faiths, we hope to help busy journalists to cover stories involving faith. We hope these resources are both helpful and informative.

Richelle Wiseman  
Managing Director  
The Centre for Faith and the Media

## About the Author:

Ron Csillag is the Canadian correspondent for Religion News Service (RNS) in Washington, D.C. His work also appears in the Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail and a variety of faith-based publications, including the Canadian Jewish News.

# Introduction

For a democracy to function at peak level, its citizens need to be well informed. And for its citizens to be well informed and accurately informed, it is essential that the conveyers of information, the media, are themselves well informed.

That is easier said than done. The media, given the best of intentions, are often under heavy pressure to meet deadlines. They would like to take courses in every general area of their coverage, but there simply is not enough time for them to do so, even if these courses are readily available.

So, it stands to reason that we should help the media with the media. Ron Csillag has done just that, by composing a short, concise volume that touches all of the main points that media reports relating to Jewish topics might address.

With this handy, readily accessible guide, all of the most basic facts about Jewish life are literally right in front of any reporter. And for the items that may need more information or clarification, there are reference numbers and addresses.

The idea of doing this type of volume is so simple that it is brilliant. And Ron Csillag has addressed the challenge to put together a short and comprehensive volume with his usual clarity. That is good not only for this volume and the impact it will have. It is also good as a model for other such similar volumes.

Working together to help each other, to enhance and to enlighten, with factual accuracy, is a most profound and necessary expression of true caring for the welfare of society.

Congratulations to all those involved in this effort.

Rabbi Reuven P. Bulka, Ottawa

## Some Quick Facts About Judaism

Judaism originated with God's covenant with Abraham nearly 4,000 years ago.

---

The name is derived from Judah, the ancient Southern Kingdom of the Holy Land.

---

Jews are monotheistic. Judaism is one of the three main monotheistic religions of the world. Christians and Muslims believe in the same God as Jews. Arguably, so do followers of other faiths.

---

Jews sometimes refer to God by the Hebrew names HaShem (The Name) or Adonai (Lord).

With varying degrees, Jews believe in the centrality of the Torah and Talmud, and that Israel is the Jewish homeland.

Jews believe God created the universe, and that humans are fundamentally good. God rewards the good and punishes the wicked.

Jews believe the messiah, a human, is yet to come.

There are slightly over 13 million Jews in the world, with 5.8 million in the United States, 4.8 million in Israel, and 370,000 in Canada.

Major holy days are the weekly Sabbath (Friday nights and Saturdays), Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur, (the Day of Atonement), Passover, Shavuoth and Sukkot. Observant Jews suspend work on holy days. Chanukah and Purim are not major holy days.

## Some Practical Tips for Covering Judaism

Should a reporter consult an Orthodox, Conservative or Reform rabbi for a story?

Much depends on the issue at hand. If the story is about dietary laws, how a municipality is accommodating observant Jews or the building of a new ritual bath, an Orthodox spokesperson would be appropriate. But if the story is about same-sex marriage, women as clergy or the fight against poverty, a more liberal voice might be sought. Of course, nothing prevents a reporter from seeking comment from a conservative on a liberal issue. Many Orthodox rabbis have strong thoughts on same-sex marriage, for example, while some Conservative rabbis have strongly disagreed with their own movement on several issues they have regarded as too progressive.

Use words judiciously. Phrases such as feminazi and nico-nazi show insensitivity, and minimize and even mock Nazism (not to mention insult feminists and anti-smoking activists). The term “nuclear holocaust” is problematic; better to use nuclear war.

Avoid the redundancies of Jewish rabbi or Jewish synagogue. However, most Reform congregations are called temples.

An historical revisionist who questions the veracity of the Holocaust or the extent of its victims should be described as a Holocaust denier.

The term Old Testament is Christian. Use only when necessary, such as when differentiating between the two testaments. However, in a purely Jewish context, use Hebrew Bible.

Try to avoid the term ultra-Orthodox to describe very observant Jews, partly because ultra implies extremism. The term also lumps

all fervently religious Jews together (there is much diversity among the observant). As well, there is no analogue on the other end of the religious spectrum (there are no ultra-Reform Jews.) The term Chassidic is preferable but sometimes, ultra-Orthodox cannot be avoided.

Recognize there is a wide diversity of views among Canadian Jews. While the term Jewish community is convenient, it falsely implies that Canada's Jews are a monolith. There is no central Jewish authority in Canada, or the world. There is no such thing as the Jewish vote or the Jewish consensus.

Exercise care and sensitivity when reporting on the activities of so-called Hebrew-Christian groups, such as Jews for Jesus or Chosen People Ministries. While these groups regard themselves as Jews who accept Jesus as the Jewish messiah, they are regarded by Jews as aggressive Christian missionaries who deceptively target members of the community for conversion. Often, these groups make no secret of that very goal. These organizations have been criticized for appropriating Jewish symbols and language to intentionally blur the line between Judaism and Christianity in order to proselytize immigrants, the elderly and other vulnerable Jews.

This booklet is not meant to help journalists wade through the minefield of Middle East reporting. Suffice it to say that Israel, and reporting on it, is a passionate issue for almost all Jewish media consumers, who have developed a keen eye for bias, whether real or perceived. Even in coverage of local rallies or marches in support of Israel, reporters may favour the term occupied territories, but many Jews would prefer disputed territories or the biblical names Judea and Samaria for those areas conquered by Israel following the 1967 Six Day War.

Very few countries, including Canada, recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. But to almost all Jews, Jerusalem is the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel and the epicentre of the Jewish people.

## What do Jews Believe?

Judaism is a monotheistic and rational religion. Jews believe there is one God who created and rules the world. In rabbinic sources, God is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing) and omnipresent (in all places at all times). God is also just and merciful.

Judaism is an ethical religion based on law. When the Israelites accepted the Ten Commandments from God at Mount Sinai, they committed themselves to follow a code regulating how they worship and how they treat others.

Judaism has no dogma, no formal set of beliefs that one must hold to be a Jew. In Judaism, actions are far more important than beliefs, although there is certainly a place for belief.

The closest anyone has ever come to creating a widely-accepted list of Jewish beliefs is the 13 Principles of Faith enunciated by the medieval sage Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 CE). These are considered the minimum requirements of Jewish belief:

1. God exists
2. God is one and unique
3. God is incorporeal
4. God is eternal
5. Prayer is to be directed to God alone and to no other
6. The words of the prophets are true
7. Moses' prophecies are true, and Moses was the greatest of the prophets
8. The Torah (both written and oral) was given to Moses
9. There will be no other Torah
10. God knows the thoughts and deeds of men
11. God will reward the good and punish the wicked
12. The Messiah will come
13. The dead will be resurrected

It is believed that each person is created in the image of God. Therefore, all people are created equal. Jews believe our likeness to God is in our intellectual ability to understand. Judaism believes that people have free will and are responsible for the choices made.

Judaism believes the Land of Israel was part of the covenant made between God and the Jewish people through Abraham and reinforced at Mount Sinai.

Jews believe the Messiah will be a person from the family of King David who will lead the world to unity and peace in his lifetime.

Unlike many other religions, Judaism does not stress abstract, cosmological concepts. There is a concept of heaven and hell, but Judaism is more concerned about temporal actions than beliefs.

Judaism focuses on relationships: the relationship between God and humans; between God and the Jewish nation, between the Jewish nation and the Land of Israel; and between all human beings.

The essence of Judaism has often been summarized in one story from the Talmud: A non-Jew asked Rabbi Hillel to teach him all about the Torah while standing on one foot. Rabbi Hillel replied: "What is hateful to you, do not do unto your neighbour. The rest is commentary."

## Common Questions

Are Jews a race, religion, nation or people?

Jews are not a race because they do not share one common ancestry or genetic distinction. People of many different races are Jewish.

Being Jewish is not a nationality because Jews have been dispersed throughout the world for almost 2,000 years. People of many different nationalities are Jewish.

To be Jewish means to be part of a religious movement. However, the great majority of Jews achieve that through birth and not due to their beliefs or actions. In this way, being Jewish is like being a citizen of a religious movement. A Jewish identity is automatically bestowed on the children of Jewish mothers. And this identity stays with them throughout life no matter what they believe or how they act.

A person who was born to a Jewish mother or has gone through the conversion process is considered a Jew.

Of course, there are non-religious, or secular Jews. This is not a contradiction. In fact, more than half of all Jews in Israel today call themselves secular.

There are certainly cultural traits and behaviours that are shared by many Jews—but not by all, and they are no less Jews because of it. Thus, Judaism is more than a culture or an ethnic group.

The best explanation is the traditional one given in the Torah: that the Jews are a nation—not in the modern sense of a territorial and political entity, but in the ancient sense meaning a group of people with a common history, a shared destiny, and a sense of connectedness.

Jews often think of themselves as an enormous extended family.

What are the Torah and Talmud?

The Torah (“teaching”) is God’s revealed instructions to the Jewish people. It contains 613 commandments (mitzvot), not all of which apply to everyone. The Ten Commandments are considered the most important commandments of the Torah.

Specifically, the Torah refers to the first five books of the Bible, also called the Pentateuch. It may also be used to refer to the entire Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and to all Jewish holy texts.

The Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) were given to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai during their exodus from Egypt approximately 3,500 years ago.

There are two parts to the Torah: The written and the oral.

The Oral Torah—explanations of the written—was originally passed down verbally from generation to generation. But after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, it was decided the Oral Torah should be written down so it would not be forgotten or lost. In the second century C.E. a group of sages compiled the Mishnah, a written outline of the Oral Torah.

Over the next few centuries, scholarly discussions, questions and decisions about the Mishnah were preserved in writing and became known as the Gemara.

Taken together, the Mishnah and Gemara form the Talmud.

What is the status of women in Judaism?

In traditional Judaism, women are for the most part seen as separate but equal. Women's obligations and responsibilities are different from men's, but considered no less important, and not subordinate.

Do all Jews keep dietary laws?

No. In fact, most do not. It's estimated that between 20% and 25% of Canadian Jews keep kosher completely—both in and out of the home. However, many Jews abide by dietary laws to varying degrees (in the home, but not out; or simply avoiding certain non-kosher foods.)

Why is there a separate category of racism just for Jews?

Ironically, the term anti-Semitism was coined by an anti-Semite in order to focus on his specific hatred of Jews and Judaism. German writer and politician Wilhelm Marr (1819-1904) introduced the term in 1879, and founded the first Anti-Semitic League, which was later folded into the Nazi Party.

Anti-Semitism goes back to the Greco-Roman world. Theologians have long noted a strong anti-Jewish bias in the New Testament. Over time, it has come in many guises, including the enduring blood libel (the accusation that Jews kill non-Jews to obtain blood for their food and rituals) that is still accepted in many parts of the Arab world today. Over time, Jews have been blamed for the Black Death, the Great Depression, both world wars, the Russian Revolution, capitalism and communism. Modern anti-Semitism has the Jews controlling the world's finances, media and other levers of power. Of late, it has become linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and has achieved particular virulence in the Muslim world.



Are all Jews rich?

No, that is an enduring stereotype. In fact, studies show that poverty among Jewish Canadians is as prevalent as in the general population. One in six—or about 17 percent of all Jews in Canada—is poor. Studies have also shown that Jews contribute to charity in disproportionate numbers.

## Jewish History: Key Dates and Events

(bce: Before the Common Era; ce: Common Era)

c. 17th c. bce: Abraham. The original covenant (formal agreement) is reached with God. The teaching emphasizes faith in and obedience to the one God. In return, God will give blessings and Abraham's offspring will multiply greatly. Famine forces the Israelites to settle in Egypt.

c. 13th c. bce: Moses leads the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, followed by forty years of wandering in the desert. Moses receives the oral and written law, including the Ten Commandments, from God at Mount Sinai. Israelites settle in the Land of Israel following Joshua's conquest of the Canaanites.

c. 1220 bce: Jewish monarchy established. Saul is first king.

c. 1000 bce: King David makes Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom.

c. 960 bce: King Solomon builds the First Jewish Temple.

c. 930 bce: Insurrection splits the land into the northern kingdom of Israel (populated by 10 of the 12 Hebrew tribes) and the southern kingdom of Judah, populated by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

722 bce: Israel crushed by Assyrians; ten tribes are exiled (Ten "Lost Tribes").

586 bce: Judah conquered by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Temple is destroyed; most Jews exiled.

539 bce: Persia conquers Babylon and allows many Jews to return. Temple is rebuilt.

332 bce: Conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great.

166-160 bce: Hasmonean (Jewish) revolt against imposition of Greek culture and restrictions on religious practice.

142-63 bce: Jewish autonomy and independence under Hasmonean rule.

63 bce: Roman general Pompey conquers Palestine.

37-4 bce: Rule of vassal king Herod.

c. 50-90: New Testament is written.

66-70: Jewish rebellion against Rome, ending in 70 with the destruction of the Second Temple.

132-135: Second Jewish Revolt. Romans decimate the Jewish community, rename Judea as Palaestina. Jews are dispersed to the Diaspora.

c. 200: The Mishnah, part of the Talmud, is compiled.

313-636: Byzantine rule. Israel largely Christian.

c. 500: Completion of the Babylonian Talmud.

636-1099: Arab rule. Jews granted customary protection accorded to non-Muslims, which safeguard their lives and permit freedom of worship, but Jews are also subject to heavy taxes on their lands and property.

900-1000: Golden Age of Spanish Jewry.

1099-1291: Crusades. Muslim army under Saladin defeats Crusaders in 1187 but Christians retake land following Saladin's death.

1135-1204: Moses Maimonides, one of the greatest interpreters of Talmud.

1182-1198: Expulsion of Jews from France.

1290: Expulsion of Jews from England.

1462: First Jewish ghetto established in Frankfurt.

1492: Inquisition; Expulsion of Jews from Spain.

1517-1917: Ottoman rule of Land of Israel. Starts with about 1,000 Jewish families in the land, and ends with 85,000.

1700-1800: Rise of Chassidic Judaism in Poland.

1770s-1880s: Jewish Enlightenment. Based on rationality; Jews encouraged to study secular subjects, to learn both the European and Hebrew languages, and to enter fields such as agriculture, crafts, the arts and science. Period marked in Western Europe by assimilation into European society in dress, language, education, demeanour and loyalty to the ruling power. However, in Eastern Europe (Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary), Jews retain much tradition.

c. 1850: Reform Judaism founded.

1860-1904: Theodor Herzl, founder of modern Zionism.

1880-1920: Severe pogroms in Russia spur Jewish emigration to the U.S. and Palestine.

1894-1899: Dreyfus affair in France.

1889: Conservative Judaism separates from Reform in the U.S.

1987: First Zionist Congress held in Basel.

1908: Tel Aviv, the first Jewish city, is founded.

1917: British conquest ends Ottoman rule. Balfour Declaration supports creation of Jewish homeland in Palestine.

1920: Nazi Party established in Germany.

1922: League of Nations grants Britain a mandate to secure establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

1933: Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany.

1935: Nuremberg Laws.

1938: Kristallnacht. Widespread pogroms across Germany.

1939-1945: The Holocaust. Systematic, state-sanctioned and implemented murder of 6 million European Jews.

1947: United Nations votes to partition Palestine between Arabs and Jews.

1948: Creation of modern State of Israel. War of Independence.

1956: Sinai Campaign.

1962-1965: Second Vatican Council absolves Jews of charge of deicide.

1967: Six Day War. Jerusalem reunited.

1973: Yom Kippur War.

1979: Peace treaty signed between Israel and Egypt.

1982: Invasion of Lebanon.

1987-1992: First Palestinian intifadah (uprising).

1993: Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government (Oslo Accords) signed.

1994: Peace treaty between Israel and Jordan.

1995: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin assassinated.

2000: Second intifadah begins, escalates with suicide bombings.

2003: Following war in Iraq, U.S. President George W. Bush proposes "Road Map" to Mideast peace.

## Jews in Canada Today

The story of Canadian Jewry has been one of success, and diversity. From the black-garbed ultra-Orthodox to secular but intensely cultural Jews, members of the faith have found a largely tolerant and peaceful home in this country. McGill University sociologist Morton Weinfeld, in his book *Like Everyone Else But Different*, puts it best when he said the Jewish story in Canada is one of paradox. Canada's Jews are a diverse and sometimes fractious group, yet that diversity is a source of their strength and vitality. As a group, they enjoy high levels of education, distinction in business, science, media, politics and the arts and, for the most part, financial success. As Weinfeld puts it, they are on their way to becoming the world's second most important Jewish community outside Israel, and enjoy a virtually unrivalled quality of life.

The Jewish presence is felt everywhere in Canada, in every city and town. Jews first settled in Quebec (then Lower Canada) where they were emancipated a full 26 years before their brethren elsewhere in the British empire.

Canada's Jewish community is known to be more committed to religious and communal involvement than its counterpart in the United States, and here Jewish practise overall is more small-conservative than south of the border. For example, while nearly half of American Jewry follows Reform Judaism, the faith's most liberal denomination, the figure is roughly 11% among Canadian Jews. Twice as many Canadian Jews are Orthodox (20% of the total) than in the U.S. Two-thirds of Canadian Jews belong to a synagogue, while only half of American Jews do. Only an estimated one-third of Jews in Canada have never visited Israel; the figure in the U.S. is said to be 65%. And the average donation to the community's central charity in Canada is more than twice what it is in the U.S.

Within Canada, Montreal, despite its continued decline in overall numbers, continues to be the community with the country's highest levels of religious and communal involvement, synagogue membership, adherence to traditions, closeness to Israel, the number of children receiving a Jewish education, and Jewish volunteerism and philanthropy per capita. It is a close-knit, more traditional community with lower levels of assimilation and intermarriage than other cities. But it is also home to Canada's oldest and poorest Jews.

Anti-Semitism in Canada is a growing concern. In 2002, B'nai Brith Canada's annual audit found 459 anti-Jewish "incidents" in Canada, a 60% increase over the previous year and the highest total

reported in the League's twenty-year history. In the previous five years, the number of anti-Semitic incidents had more than doubled.

However, the vast majority of incidents in 2002 were non-violent in nature. Most (60%) were classified as harassment, one-third as vandalism, and just over 6% as violent.

Anti-Semitism in Canada is often linked to events in the Middle East. However, it can also be home-grown, beginning with pro-German fascist movements in Quebec in the 1930s, and seen in more modern days in the cases of neo-Nazi publisher Ernst Zundel and Jewish conspiracists Jim Keegstra and Malcolm Ross. However, Canadian Jews also took heart in the immediate and forceful condemnation in all quarters of the anti-Jewish remarks in 2003 of native leader David Ahenakew.

Canadian hate groups over the years have included the Heritage Front, Aryan Nations, White Aryan Resistance (WAR), the Church of the Creator (COTC), and the Ku Klux Klan. Their ties to counterparts in the U.S. and overseas have been well-documented.

According to the anti-hate Nizkor Project, Canadian hate mongers tend to be less violent than their U.S. counterparts, instead relying on hate propaganda, racist rock concerts, and rallies. Hate groups in this country tend to promote themselves as legitimate political and academic movements, usually under the guise of free-speech, European or White Pride and Holocaust inquiry. In addition, several members of hate groups have joined mainstream political movements, most notably the Reform party, precursor of the Canadian Alliance, although party leaders expelled them when their memberships were exposed.

Jewish officials today agree that most of the anti-Semitism in Canada today emanates from domestic Muslim and Arab quarters.

As of this writing, there are an estimated 15,000-20,000 Holocaust survivors in Canada.

Officially, Canada views Judaism as both a religion and an ethnicity. The last census found 329,995 Jews by religious affiliation in Canada and 348,605 Canadians with "Jewish" as an ethnic origin. The Jewish community blends the figures for a final total of 370,520 Jews in Canada as of 2001, up 4% over the previous decade. As of the last census, Jews were eclipsed by Muslims as Canada's largest non-Christian group. Between 1991 and 2001, Jews as a percentage of the total population dropped from 1.2% to 1.1%.

The numbers show Canada's Jewish population is significantly older than the national average. The median age among Jews is 41.5 years, compared to 37 for the population as a whole.

The breakdown by city is as follows:

Toronto: 179,000	Edmonton: 4,925
Montreal: 92,970	Hamilton: 4,675
Vancouver: 22,585	London: 2,295
Winnipeg: 14,760	Halifax: 1,985
Ottawa: 13,450	Windsor: 1,525
Calgary: 7,950	Rest of country: 24,305

### Key Dates in Canadian Jewish History

1759: Aaron Philip Hart, a British-born Jewish officer in the army of Gen. Jeffrey Amherst, settles in Trois-Rivieres, Que.

1768: Canada's first synagogue, She'Arith Israel, commonly called the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, is established in Montreal.

1807: Ezekiel Hart, son of Aaron Hart, is elected to the legislature of Lower Canada but cannot take his seat because he would not "swear on the truth faith of a Christian."

1831: A census records 107 Jews in Upper and Lower Canada.

1832: Legislation grants Jews in Lower Canada full civil and political rights.

1850-1920: More than 135,000 Jewish immigrants come to Canada.

1914-1918: Nearly 5,000 Jews serve in World War I; over 100 lose their lives.

1919: Canadian Jewish Congress founded.

1929: Ordre Patriotique des Goglus, a pro-fascist group, formed in Quebec.

1930-1940: About 11,000 Jewish immigrants enter Canada, of whom 200 families are settled on farms in the West.

1933: Christie Pits riots in Toronto. Violent clashes between Jews and Nazi supporters.

1933-1945: Canada adopts highly restrictive immigration policies on Jewish refugees fleeing Nazism, later chronicled in the book *None is Too Many*.

1939-1945: Over 17,000 Jews—one-fifth of the entire male Jewish population—serve in Canada's armed forces, with over 400 losing their lives.

1948: Over 250 Canadians volunteer to fight in Israel's War of Independence. Eleven are killed or missing.

1948-1960: Over 40,000 Jews immigrate to Canada, many from North Africa. Over 1,000 are brought as skilled tailors and furriers.

1955: David Croll becomes Canada's first Jewish senator.

1969: Herb Gray becomes Canada's first Jewish cabinet minister.

1970: Bora Laskin becomes Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

1985: Pro-Nazi publisher Ernst Zundel convicted on charges of spreading false news. Ontario's Court of Appeal orders a new trial. In 1988, Zundel is again convicted. In 1992, the Supreme Court of Canada overturns the conviction and strikes down the false news law as a violation of free speech.

1986: The Deschenes Commission of Inquiry into Nazi war criminals in Canada submits its report to Parliament.

1987: Canada's first war crimes charge is laid against Imre Finta of Toronto. Finta is acquitted in 1990, and in 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada upholds the acquittal.

1991: Canada appointed gavel holder of talks on plight of Palestinian refugees as part of multilateral round of Mideast peace negotiations.

2000: Jean Chretien becomes the first prime minister to visit Israel while in office.

2002: Riot at Concordia University in Montreal. Pro-Palestinian students successfully prevent a planned speech by former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

## Jewish Denominations

### Chassidism

Not strictly speaking a branch of Judaism, but worth discussing separately. Very Orthodox Jews, Chassidim (or Hasidim) strictly observe Jewish laws and generally do not integrate into modern society, instead dressing distinctively and living separately. Study of Torah and Talmud are highly valued. In the synagogue, men and women are separated by a barrier or curtain.

### Orthodox

An umbrella term that takes in a wide definition, Orthodox Jews believe God gave Moses the whole Torah (written and oral) at Mount Sinai. They believe the Torah contains 613 commandments. They generally adhere to dietary laws and observe all holidays. Modern

Orthodox Jews observe Jewish law but still integrate into modern society. Men and women sit separately in the synagogue.

About 20% of Canadian Jews are Orthodox.

#### Conservative

Comes midway between Orthodox and Reform. Holds that the ideas in the Torah come from God but were transmitted by humans and contain a human component. It generally accepts the binding nature of Jewish law but believes the law should adapt, absorbing aspects of the predominant culture while remaining true to Judaism's values. Ordains women as rabbis, but not every congregation may accept them. Men and women may sit together in the synagogue.

A little more than one-third of Jews in Canada consider themselves Conservative.

#### Reform

The liberal branch of Judaism, Reform hold that Jewish law was inspired by God but written by humans. While the law reflects Jewish values and ethics, it is not wholly binding or immutable, and must be continually reinterpreted to reflect today's language and context. Reform Jews are generally committed to equality for women and the pursuit of social justice. Ordains women as rabbis. Men and women sit together in the synagogue.

Over 11% of Jews in Canada are Reform.

#### Reconstructionism

This is the smallest branch of Judaism. An outgrowth of the Conservative movement, Reconstructionist Judaism does not believe in a personified deity. Adherents believe Jewish law was created by humans. Stresses the importance of Jewish civilization and culture, and free inquiry. Ordains women as rabbis. Men and women sit together in the synagogue.

#### Secular

Followers of secular or Humanistic Judaism eschew belief in God and instead embrace cultural values that also stress the power of the individual. The last Canadian census found thousands of people who regarded themselves as Jewish ethnically and culturally, but not from a religious standpoint. Many of these would be considered secular Jews.

It's important to remember that while almost all synagogues in Canada belong to one of the above denominations (some are not affiliated), each congregation may function semi-autonomously and



establish its own rules, within set boundaries, on ritual, membership, and the roles of women, laity, and non-Jewish spouses of members.

## A Word About *The Chosen People*

Perhaps no other description of the Jewish people has caused more misconception, antagonism and defensiveness than the term Chosen People. It has been used as a pillar of anti-Semitic thought and deed, and misinterpreted as a belief that Jews regard themselves as superior.

The term is derived from the Hebrew Bible: "For you are a holy people unto the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be a special people unto Himself..." (Deut. 7:6).

History shows that life for the Jews has been anything but easy. Until only recently, the plight of the Jews has been marked by degradation, humiliation, expulsion, quotas, even murder. Some may believe suffering is what the Jews were chosen for, but this is not the case either.

Judaism sees itself as chosen for a unique mission: God chose the Jewish people to bring ethical monotheism to the entire world through righteous behaviour.

At no time should the Jewish concept of chosenness be construed as conferring superiority, but rather the obligation of all humankind to fulfill religious and moral duties.

## Jewish Holy Days

Jewish holy days begin at sundown the preceding day. Because Judaism follows the lunar calendar, holy days occur at different times each year on the Christian calendar. Many are associated with special foods and meals, but nearly all involve families getting together.

**High Holy Days:** Comprise Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish new year) followed by Yom Kippur (a fast day), the Day of Atonement or Repentance. The entire period is called the Ten Days of Repentance. Occurs in early autumn.

**Sukkot:** (Lit. "booths"). A seven-day early autumn festival commemorating the Jews' wandering in the desert, and the final harvest. Many Jews live in, or eat meals in, temporary booths erected for the week.

**Simchat Torah:** Marks the end and beginning of the cycle of weekly Torah readings. Occurs right after Sukkot.

**Chanukah:** (Lit. "Dedication.") The eight-day "Festival of Lights" celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem

by the Maccabees after it was defiled by the Hellenists. Usually in December.

**Purim:** A joyous holiday celebrating the rescue of the Jews from annihilation at the hands of the chief minister to the King of Persia. Revellers often don costumes or masks. Occurs in later winter/early spring.

**Passover:** Eight-day holiday commemorating the Jews' exodus from Egypt. Also marks the beginning of the harvest season. The first two nights feature a ceremonial meal called the Seder, at which the exodus is recounted from a work called the Haggadah. Occurs in early spring.

**Yom Ha'Shoah:** Holocaust Remembrance Day, usually in April, a few days after Passover.

**Yom Ha-Zikaron:** Israeli Memorial Day. Remembers those who died in Israel's wars. Marked the day before Yom Ha'Atzmaut.

**Yom Ha-Atzmaut:** May 14, Israeli Independence Day, but marked on the Jewish calendar.

**Yom Yerushalayim:** Celebrates the reunification of Jerusalem following the 1967 Six Day War. Marked a week before Shavuot.

**Shavuot:** The Festival of Weeks (and Pentecost), it celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and commemorates the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the Temple. Occurs in late spring.

## Practice and Rituals:

Judaism is a religion as well as a comprehensive way of life, filled with rules and practices governing every aspect of living. These include what one can and cannot eat, when and how to pray, how to conduct business, whom one can marry, how to observe the Sabbath and holy days, how to relate to God, how to treat other people, and the care of animals. This set of rules and practices is known as Halakhah.

The word Halakhah is usually translated as Jewish Law, although a more literal translation might be the path that one walks.

Halakhah includes many laws instituted by Jewish sages. But at its heart are the 613 commandments God gave to the Jewish people in the Torah. The 10 Commandments form the foundation for the 613—not all of which apply to everyone.

For example, lighting candles to herald the Sabbath and holy days usually falls to women and girls. Males 13 and over are required to pray three times a day.

Some non-observant Jews criticize Halakhah, saying it reduces Judaism to a set of rigid rituals devoid of spirituality. Observant Jews say Halakhah boosts one's spiritual life because it turns the most trivial, mundane acts, such as eating and even grooming oneself, into acts of religious significance.

Among the most regulated of Jewish activities is diet. These are known as the laws of kashrut, and adherence to them is sometimes called keeping kosher. Although the details are extensive, the laws derive from a few straightforward rules:

1. Certain animals, such as swine and horses, may not be eaten at all. This restriction includes the flesh, organs, eggs and milk of the forbidden animals.
2. Animals that may be eaten (including mammals with cloven hooves and which chew their cud) must be ritually prepared in accordance with Jewish law.
3. All blood must be neutralized from meat before it is eaten, either by soaking and salting, or by broiling.
4. Certain parts of permitted animals—usually some fats—may not be eaten.
5. Meat cannot be consumed or prepared with dairy. Eggs, fruits, vegetables and grains may be eaten with either meat or dairy.
6. Fish must have both fins and scales to be considered kosher. Thus, all shellfish and shrimp are not kosher. Fish is not eaten with meat.
7. Utensils which have come into contact with meat usually may not be used with dairy, and vice-versa. Utensils that have come into contact with non-kosher food likewise may not be used with kosher food.
8. Wines must be prepared in a special way to be considered kosher.

The Torah does not specify a reason for these laws, but for observant Jews, there is no need for any. They say dietary laws regulate holiness in daily life, encourage self-discipline, and are God's way of ensuring physical and spiritual health.

Kosher products have a symbol on them to denote their status. There are over four hundred different symbols from all over the world. Their acceptability is usually determined by a community's rabbinic authorities.

An estimated 20-25% of Canadian Jews keep completely kosher. Others keep kosher to varying degrees, both in and out of the home. Some do not keep kosher at all.

## Glossary of Jewish Terms

**Abraham:** The first Jew, the founder of Judaism, the physical and spiritual ancestor of the Jewish people.

**Agunah:** (Lit. "Chained.") A woman whose husband has refused to grant her a Jewish divorce.

**Aliyah:** (Lit. "Ascension.") 1) Being called to read a passage from the Torah, or recite a blessing over the reading. Considered an honour in the synagogue. 2) Immigrating to Israel. Because the word literally means to go up, Jews regard moving to Israel as a spiritual ascension.

**Ark:** The cabinet in the synagogue where Torah scrolls are stored. Not to be confused with Noah's Ark. Bears only a passing resemblance to the Ark of the Covenant, the box in which the ancient Hebrews carried the Ten Commandments during their desert wanderings.

**Ashkenazic Jews:** Originally, Jews from Poland, Germany, and Russia but today, also those from Eastern and Central Europe and their descendants. About three-quarters of all Jews today are Ashkenazic.

**Bar Mitzvah:** (Lit. Son of the commandment.) A boy who has reached the age of thirteen and is obliged to observe the commandments. Also the ceremony marking the milestone.

**Bat Mitzvah:** (Lit. Daughter of the commandment.) For girls, a bat mitzvah is usually marked at age twelve.

**B.C.E.:** Before the Common (or Christian) Era. A neutral way of saying B.C. without invoking another deity.

**Bet Din:** (Lit. "House of judgment.") A rabbinical court comprised of three rabbis who resolve disputes under Jewish law.

**Bible:** Also referred to as the Tanakh. The Jewish Bible more or less corresponds to what non-Jews call the Old Testament. See Torah.

**Brit Milah, or Bris:** (Lit. "Covenant of circumcision.") The ritual circumcision of a male Jewish child on the eighth day of his life or of a male convert to Judaism.

**C.E.:** Common (or Christian) Era. Used instead of A.D., because A.D. means the Year of our Lord, referring to Jesus.

**Chassidism, Chassidic:** From the word Chasid meaning pious. A blanket term for ultra-Orthodox Jews and Judaism.

**Crypto-Jews:** Secret Jews; those who secretly maintained some tie to Judaism but were forced to uphold another religion in public. Although the term is almost always used with respect to Conversos (Spanish Jews who converted to Catholicism after the 1492 expulsion),

it could also apply to the secret Judaism practiced under various Islamic regimes.

**Diaspora:** Any place outside the land of Israel where Jews live. Refers to the fact that Jews were dispersed from Israel by the Romans.

**Eruv:** A symbolic enclosure defining a geographic area in which observant Jews are permitted tasks that would otherwise be forbidden, such as carrying items on the Sabbath and other holy days. Most Canadian cities have an eruv.

**G-d:** A way of avoiding writing "God" to avert the sin of erasing or defacing the Name.

**Get:** A document of divorce.

**Goy:** (Lit. "Nation.") A non-Jew. A member of one of the "other" nations. A much-misunderstood term, there is nothing inherently insulting about it. The term is applied to Jews themselves.

**Halakhah:** (Lit. "The path one walks.") Jewish law.

**Kabbalah:** Jewish mysticism, incorporating cosmology and numerology.

**Kashrut:** Jewish dietary laws (Adj.: "Kosher.")

**Kohen:** A priest in temple times. A descendant of Aaron, charged with performing various rites in the Temple. Not the same as a rabbi.

**Ladino:** The language of Sephardic Jews, based primarily on Spanish with words taken from Hebrew, Arabic and other languages, and written in the Hebrew alphabet.

**Lubavitch (also Chabad):** A branch of Chassidic Judaism that is aggressive in outreach to other Jews and has a high media presence.

**Matriarchs:** There are four matriarchs in Judaism: Sarah, wife of Abraham, mother of Isaac; Rebecca, wife of Isaac, mother of Jacob and Esau; Rachel, favourite wife of Jacob, mother of two of his sons; and Leah, wife of Jacob.

**Menorah:** These seven-branched candelabrum used as a symbol by many Jewish groups (including the State of Israel.) Can also refer to the eight-branched candelabrum used on Chanukah, which is also called a chanukiyah.

**Messiah:** Anglicization of the Hebrew *mashiah* (anointed). A human man who will be chosen by God to end all evil in the world, rebuild the Temple, bring the exiles back to Israel and usher in a golden age. The Jewish concept of the messiah is very different from the Christian one.

**Mezuzah:** A case attached to the doorposts of houses, containing a scroll with passages of scripture written on it.

**Mikvah:** A ritual bath used for spiritual purification following a woman's menstrual cycles, and in conversion rituals. Also used by men for general spiritual purification.

**Minyan:** The quorum necessary to recite certain prayers, consisting of ten Jewish males aged 13 and over.

**Mitzvah:** (Lit. Commandment or Obligation.) Any of the 613 commandments that Jews are obligated to observe. It can also refer to a good deed.

**Moses:** Led the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and to the Promised Land. Received the oral and written law from God at Mount Sinai.

**Patriarchs:** Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The forefathers of Judaism.

**Rabbi:** (Lit. teacher or master.) A religious teacher and person authorized to make decisions on issues of Jewish law. Also presides over life-cycle events. The Rabbis, in historical terms, refers to authoritative Jewish scholars over the centuries.

**Rebbetzin:** The wife of a rabbi.

**Sabbath:** Biblically-mandated day of cessation from many activities, including work. Begins Friday just before sunset and ends Saturday after nightfall.

**Sephardic Jews:** Those from Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants.

**Shivah:** Seven-day period of mourning for close relatives in which loved ones sit Shivah. Well-wishers visit a Shivah house to offer condolences.

**Shofar:** Ceremonial ram's horn sounded on some holidays and auspicious occasions.

**Shul:** Yiddish word for synagogue.

**Sukkot:** (booth.) a temporary shelter erected for the holiday of Sukkot.

**Tallit:** A prayer shawl.

**Talmud:** Consisting of the Mishnah and Gemara, the compilation of Jewish oral tradition interpreting the Torah.

**Tefillin:** Phylacteries. Leather straps and small boxes containing scrolls with passages of scripture. Worn by men on their arms and heads during weekday morning prayers.

**Torah:** In its narrowest sense, the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, sometimes called the Pentateuch. In its broadest sense, Torah is the entire body of Jewish teachings.

**Yarmulke:** Skullcap worn by Jews in synagogue, and by some Jews at all times. Called a kippah in Hebrew.

**Yeshiva:** School or academy dedicated to the study of Torah and Talmud.

**Yiddish:** The lingua franca of Ashkenazic Jews, based primarily on German with words taken from Hebrew and many Slavic languages, and written in Hebrew.

**Zionism:** Ideological and political movement dedicated to the return of the Jewish people to Israel.

## Jewish Contacts in Canada

**B'nai Brith Canada:**

([www.bnaibrith.ca](http://www.bnaibrith.ca))

**National Office:**

15 Hove St.

Toronto, ON M3H 4Y8

Tel.: (416) 633-6224

Fax: (416) 630-2159

[bnb@bnaibrith.ca](mailto:bnb@bnaibrith.ca)

**Government Relations:**

**Joseph Ben-Ami**

Larry Lederman

100 Gloucester St., Suite #502

Ottawa, ON K2P 0A4

Tel.: (613) 598-0060

Fax: (613) 598-0059

[govrelations@bnaibrith.ca](mailto:govrelations@bnaibrith.ca)

**Regional Offices:**

**Quebec:**

Bill Surkis—Regional Director

B'nai Brith Montreal

6900, Decarie Blvd, Suite 219

Montreal, QC H3X 2T8

Tel.: (514) 733-5377

Fax: (514) 342-9632

[bnaibrith@total.net](mailto:bnaibrith@total.net)

**Ontario Region:**

Arieh Rosenblum

Regional Director

15 Hove St.

Toronto, ON M3H 4Y8

Tel.: (416) 633-6224 ext.132

Fax: (416) 630-2159

[arosenblum@bnaibrith.ca](mailto:arosenblum@bnaibrith.ca)

Halton/Peel Region:

Joyce Aster  
B'nai Brith Halton/Peel  
7330 Goreway Drive, Unit 01  
Mississauga, ON L4T 4J2  
Tel.: (905) 678-9691  
jaster@bnaibrith.ca

Midwest Region:

Alan Yusim - Director  
123 Doncaster St., Suite C403  
Winnipeg, MB R3N 2B2  
Tel.: (204) 487-9623  
Fax: (204) 487-9648  
bnaiwpg@ilos.net

Western Region:

Shoshana Szlachter,  
c/o Jewish Community Centre  
7200-156 St.  
Edmonton, AB T5R 1X3  
Tel.: (780) 483-6939  
bnaibrith.westcan@shaw.ca

Canadian Jewish Congress:  
(www.cjc.ca)

National Office:

Jack Silverstone,  
Executive Director,  
100 Sparks Street, Suite 650  
Ottawa, ON  
K1P 5B7  
canadianjewishcongress@cjcc.ca  
Tel.: (613) 233-8703  
Fax: (613) 233-8748  
Ron Singer  
Media spokesman  
cell: (613) 794-1724  
rons@cjcc.ca

Atlantic:

Jon Goldberg,  
Executive Director  
Atlantic Jewish Community  
Council  
5670 Spring Garden Road,  
Suite 508  
Halifax, NS B3J 1H6  
jgoldberg@theajc.ns.ca  
Tel.: (902) 422-7491  
Fax: (902) 425-3722

Quebec:

David Birnbaum,  
Executive Director,  
CJC Quebec Region  
1 Cummings Square  
Montreal, QC H3W 1M6  
cjc-quebec@cjcc.ca  
Tel.: (514) 345-6411  
Fax: (514) 345-6412

Ontario Region:

Bernie Farber,  
Executive Director  
(416) 635-2883  
cell: (416) 996-7631  
bfarber@on.cjcc.ca  
Len Rudner,  
Director, Community Relations  
(416) 635-2883, ext. 147  
cell: 416-948-1716  
lrudner@on.cjcc.ca  
Mitchell Bellman,  
Executive Director  
Ottawa Jewish Community  
Council  
1780 Kerr Ave.  
Ottawa, ON K2A 1R9  
vaad@jccottawa.com  
Tel.: (613) 798-4696  
Fax: (613) 798-4695



Hamilton:  
Gerald Fisher  
Executive Director  
UJA/Federation of Hamilton  
1-905-648-0606, ext. 305

London:  
Esther Markus,  
Executive Director  
London Jewish Community  
Centre  
(519) 673-3310  
jccexec@ljf.on.ca

Windsor:  
Harvey Kessler,  
Executive Director, Windsor  
Jewish Federation  
(519) 973-1772  
harveykessler@jewishwindso  
r.org

Kingston:  
Toby Abramsky,  
(613) 546-5555

Manitoba Region:  
Shelley Faintuch  
C300-123 Doncaster St.  
Winnipeg, MB R3N 2B2  
sfaintuch@aspercampus.mb.ca  
Tel.: (204) 447-7423  
Fax: (204) 477-7405

CJC Saskatchewan Region—  
North  
c/o Congregation Agudas Israel  
715 McKinnon Ave.  
Saskatoon, SK S7H 2G2  
Tel.: (306) 343-7023  
Fax: (306) 343-1244

Saskatchewan Region—South  
c/o Beth Jacob Synagogue  
4715 McTavish St.  
Regina, SK S4S 6H2  
Tel.: (306) 569-8166  
Fax: (306) 569-8166

CJC Alberta:  
Riki Heilik  
Calgary Jewish Community  
Council  
1607 - 90th Avenue S.W.  
Calgary, AB T2V 4V7  
cjcc@jewish-calgary.com  
Tel.: (403) 253-8600  
Fax: (403) 253-7915  
Gail Tallman  
Jewish Federation of Edmonton  
7200 - 156th Street  
Edmonton, AB T5R 1X3  
edjfed@attcanada.ca  
Tel.: (780) 487-5120  
Fax: (780) 481-1854

Pacific Region:  
Erwin Nest,  
Executive Director  
950 West 41st Avenue, Suite 201  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 2N7  
erwinn@cjc.ca  
Phone: (604) 257-5101  
Fax: (604) 257-5131

## Helpful Websites

Association for Canadian Jewish Studies:  
<http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~acjs/>

---

B'nai Brith Canada:  
[www.bnaibrith.ca](http://www.bnaibrith.ca)

---

Canada-Israel Committee:  
[www.cicweb.ca](http://www.cicweb.ca)

---

Canadian Jewish Congress:  
[www.cjc.ca](http://www.cjc.ca)

---

Canadian Jewish News:  
[www.cjnews.com](http://www.cjnews.com)

---

Countering Anti-Semitism and Hate in Canada Today:  
[www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/m/mock-karen/countering-hate.html](http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/m/mock-karen/countering-hate.html)

---

Jewish Canada:  
[www.haruth.com/JewsCanada.html](http://www.haruth.com/JewsCanada.html)

---

Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance—Judaism:  
[www.religioustolerance.org/judaism.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/judaism.htm)

---

Right-Wing Extremism in Canada:  
[www1.ca.nizkor.org/hweb/orgs/canadian/league-for-human-rights/heritage-front/right-wing-extremism.html](http://www1.ca.nizkor.org/hweb/orgs/canadian/league-for-human-rights/heritage-front/right-wing-extremism.html)

---





## A Journalist's Guide To Judaism

P.O. Box 5694, Station "A"

Calgary, Alberta T2H 1Y1

Telephone: 1.877.210.0077

Fax: 403.278.7354

Email: [faithandmedia@telus.net](mailto:faithandmedia@telus.net)

Web: [www.faithandmedia.org](http://www.faithandmedia.org) Centre for Faith & the Media

