

This is an excerpt from one of our text-books, **LIVING JUDAISM,**  
**The Complete Guide to Jewish Belief, Tradition and Practice,**  
by Rabbi Wayne D. Dosick Ph.D.

(Note that there are versions with different covers)

These pages (119-126 and 210-218) are required for completion of the first Introductory trial unit.

Should you decide to register for the complete course, you will be required to purchase a copy of this book (available in print or as an e-book), together with several others.

Where Rabbi Dosick, who writes from an American perspective, uses the term 'Reform', this can be roughly translated as 'Progressive' in the Australasian context. Some communities in Australasia have adopted the term 'Temple' for their place of worship, whilst others use 'Synagogue'.

Colloquially, the more intimate term 'shul' is also used.

THE FIRST SECTION EXCERPTED –pages 119-126 – deal with the Calendar and Festivals.

# 4

## JEWISH DAYS AND HOLIDAYS

### 1. DATING JEWISH TIME

In antiquity, the counting of years was marked in relationship to events: for example, the forty days and nights of the flood; the 175 years of the lifetime of Abraham; the forty-year journey in the desert; the twenty-year reign of King Saul.

When Christianity began counting years in chronological order, counting from the year that was considered as the birth-year of Jesus, Judaism's rabbis and sages devised a method of counting the years that would be acceptable to Jewish sensibilities.

In their simple naiveté—or their abiding faith—the sages decided to determine the actual historical date of the day of the creation of the world, and then use that date as a basis for counting the years forward.

Using all the biblical accounts, historical records, and oral tradition available, the sages of the Rabbinic Period counted backward in history to determine the moment of creation. They counted the number of years of the reigns of each of the kings; the number of years that each of the Holy Temples stood; the number of months and years of various battles and wars; the number of years of the lifetimes of all the biblical figures; the number of years of all of the events described in the Bible.

Using this method, the sages concluded that the destruction of the Second Temple had taken place 3,830 years since the creation of the world.

Since the destruction of the Second Holy Temple took place in the year 70 C.E., then the year 1 (the year popularly acknowledged as the year of the birth of Jesus) would be the year 3760 since creation (that is, 3,830 minus 70).

Each year Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish new year, celebrates the anniversary of the day of creation and one year is added to the Jewish counting of the years.

Thus, to determine the Jewish year, add 3,760 (the time from creation until year 1) to the civil year (the time since the year 1).

The Jewish year when this book is being completed—in the civil year 1995—is the year 5755 (3,760 plus 1,995 equals 5,755). Since the Jewish year changes at Rosh HaShanah, which occurs in September or October, for the time period between Rosh HaShanah and January 1, add 3,761 to determine the equivalent year.

The problem with the Jewish dating system, of course, is that while the Rabbinic sages may have truly believed the biblical accounting of the passage of time—and therefore believed that their count of the years back to the time of creation was accurate—modern science teaches that it has been millions of years—not just under 6,000—since the time of creation.

We accept the notion that the ancient sages did the best they could in devising a counting system based on the best available information at the time. But how do we—knowing what we do about scientific theory and fact—continue to count the years one by one every Rosh HaShanah, pretending that it is only some 6,000 years since creation?

Surely, we place ourselves in the continuum of Jewish history: Our ancestors believed the counting of the years to be accurate and true; we know it to be poetic and metaphorical.

But beyond that, while we recognize that the *physical* world is millions of years old, we equally recognize that it has been but some 6,000 years since humankind became aware of its place in the universe and began to tell and record its own story. So we can accurately say that on Rosh HaShanah we celebrate the new year, counting the years since the recorded dawning of human history in this multimillion-year-old universe.

## 2. THE JEWISH CALENDAR

The secular calendar, by which most of the contemporary world functions, is a solar calendar.

In this calendar, which has months named January, February, March, and so on, the new day begins and ends at midnight.

One year is 365 days, the time it takes for the earth to revolve around the sun.

Because it actually takes 365¼ days for the earth's revolution, once every four years an extra day is added to the year (February 29) and the year is known as a leap year.

The Jewish calendar is a soli-lunar calendar, based on the revolution of the moon around the earth, with certain adjustments to account for the revolution of the earth around the sun.

The use of the lunar calendar recognizes the natural ebb and flow of the universe: the gravitational pull of the moon on the earth; the movement of the waters and the tides; and the process of a woman's reproductive cycle, offering the possibility of new life as each month turns into the next.

In this calendar, the new day begins at sundown and ends approximately twenty-four hours later at sundown of the next secular day. This pattern follows the account of creation, recorded in the opening chapter of the biblical book of Genesis: "And there was *evening* and there was *morning*, a first day . . . a second day . . . a third day . . . a fourth day . . . a fifth day . . . the sixth day" (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Thus, for example, the Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday, and ends after sundown on Saturday.

Each month in the lunar calendar consists of  $29\frac{1}{2}$  days—the time that it takes for the moon to revolve around the earth. Since a month cannot have a half-day, the months in the Jewish calendar alternate numbers of days: one month, 29 days; the next month, 30 days. At the end of a full year, the 12 half days have been regarded as 6 full days—the thirtieth day of every other month.

Each 12-month lunar year has 354 days ( $29\frac{1}{2}$  days  $\times$  12 months)—which is  $11\frac{1}{4}$  days shorter than the solar year of  $365\frac{1}{4}$  days.

To keep the solar and lunar calendar years in equal balance—and to keep the seasons in sync—the Jewish calendar is arranged on a 19-year cycle, with 12 years of 12 months each, and 7 leap years of 13 months each.

The mathematical formula goes like this: The number of days in 19 solar years is equal to 235 lunar months, which is 19 years, plus 7 months. Thus the extra 7 months are inserted within the 19-year cycle—in the third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth years—creating the leap years of 13 months each.

The leap month—called Adar Sheni, the Second Adar (Adar II)—is inserted in late winter, somewhere around February/March, thus keeping the observance of Passover in the springtime season.

Jewish holidays always occur on the same date on the Jewish calendar. For example, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is always on the tenth day of the month of Tishri; Chanukah always begins on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev. But because the solar and lunar calendars do not coincide, the Jewish holidays fall on different days of the solar calendar each year. So Chanukah may be very early in December one year, and the next year begin late in December, even going over into January.

### 3. THE HEBREW MONTHS

There are twelve Hebrew months. The following table shows the months and their approximate dates on the secular calendar. (In a leap year, there are two Adars, Adar I and Adar II. The celebration of the holiday of Purim passes over into Adar II, in order to keep the holidays in sync with their correct seasons.)

MONTH		OCCURS
תשרי	Tishri	September/October
חשוון	Cheshvan	October/November
כסלו	Kislev	November/December
טבת	Tevet	December/January
שבט	Shevat	January/ February
אדר	Adar	February/March
ניסן	Nisan	March/April
אייר	Iyar	April/May
סיון	Sivan	May/June
תמוז	Tammuz	June/July
אב	Av	July/August
אלול	Elul	August/September

The first day of each Hebrew month is designated as ראש חודש *Rosh Chodesh* (literally, “head of the month”). *Rosh Chodesh* is the day that the new moon appears in the sky, beginning its 29½-day cycle of revolving around the earth.

Since a month cannot have a half day, each year six Hebrew months have twenty-nine days and six months have thirty days—the twelve half days counting as a full day every other month.

In the months that have thirty days, the thirtieth day is designated *Rosh Chodesh*, along with the first day of the new month. Since half of the thirtieth day technically belongs to the old month, and the other half technically belongs to the new month, the whole thirtieth day is considered an “honorary” part of the new month.

At one point in Jewish history—before the calendar was formally fixed, and when the declaration of *Rosh Chodesh* literally depended on the physical sighting of the new moon—this two-day *Rosh Chodesh* was the insurance against being late in declaring the new month to have begun. The two-day *Rosh Chodesh*, occurring every other month, permitted enough leeway for slight miscalculation and kept the calendar as accurate as possible.

Since Judaism is very conscious of the need to sanctify time, the coming of each new month is recognized and celebrated.

On the Sabbath preceding the week in which the new month will begin, a special prayer called **ברכת החדש** *Bircat HaChodesh*, the Blessing of the New Month, is recited in the synagogue. The prayer serves to remind the worshipers that Rosh Chodesh is coming, and asks God for a multitude of blessings in the new month ahead.

On the day of Rosh Chodesh, special prayers are added to the synagogue service and a short portion is read from the Torah at the morning service, in honor of the day.

Rosh Chodesh is considered a “half-holiday.” Traditionally, it has been known as a “women’s holiday” because on Rosh Chodesh women would stop their work early in the day and come together to study and celebrate.

Today many women have reclaimed the spirit of Rosh Chodesh as a celebration of and for women by writing new prayers and liturgies and gathering together in prayer and study groups to mark the monthly observance.

#### 4. JEWISH HOLIDAYS

A Jewish holiday is called a **חג** *chag* (plural, *chagim*). The most important and holy days of the Jewish holidays are called **יום טוב** *Yom Tov* (literally, “Good Day”). In Yiddish, *Yom Tov* has been contracted and shortened to be pronounced *Yontiv* or *Yontif*.

On *Yom Tov* the holiday is observed with all its worship, ritual, and celebrations, and with certain restrictions, including prohibitions against engaging in everyday secular activities such as work.

The most important of all Jewish holidays—the central observance of Jewish life—is **שבת** Shabbat, the Sabbath. Shabbat is the once-a-week day of physical rest and spiritual rejuvenation on which the Jewish People emulate God, who rested on the seventh day after the six days of creation.

In addition to Shabbat, the Torah describes five major holidays:

**ראש השנה** Rosh HaShanah is the Jewish new year.

**יום כפור** Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement.

**סוכות** Succot is the fall harvest and is a reminder of God’s continuing blessings.

**פסח** Pesach (Passover) celebrates the coming of spring and commemorates the exodus from Egypt.

**שבועות** Shavuot marks the spring harvest and celebrates the giving of Torah at Sinai.

Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are commemorated in the fall to foster personal and communal introspection and self-evaluation and to celebrate new beginnings. Together, Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are called יָמֵי נֹרָאִים *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe, reflecting their solemn and most important purpose and nature. In English they are known as the High Holidays, or the High Holy Days.

The three other Torah-mandated holidays are collectively known as שלש רגלים *Shalosh Regalim*, the Three (Walking or) Pilgrimage Festivals. They were given this designation because, in ancient times, Jews would celebrate each of these three festivals by walking to Jerusalem from all over the Land of Israel, making pilgrimage to Jerusalem to bring sacrifices to the Holy Temple.

Two holidays commemorate historical events.

פּוּרִים *Purim*, chronicled in the biblical book of Esther, celebrates the defeat of an enemy who was foiled in his plot to destroy the Jewish People.

The postbiblical holiday of חֲנֻכָּה *Chanukah* celebrates the military uprising that recaptured the Holy Temple from the oppressor and its rededication to God.

Other minor holidays, fast days, and commemorations fill the Jewish calendar and give rhythm to the Jewish year.

In recent years, the calendar of Jewish observances has been expanded to include יוֹם הַשּׂוֹאָה *Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day, paying tribute to the martyrs who perished in the horrors of the Holocaust, and יוֹם הָעֲצִמָּאוּת *Yom HaAtzmaut*, Israeli Independence Day, celebrating the establishment of the modern State of Israel.

The Jewish holiday cycle reflects the same three themes that summarize the Torah. The fall holidays, beginning with Rosh HaShanah and concluding with Succot, reflect the theme of *creation*—the creation of the universe and everything in it, the continual creation and recreation of the human spirit, and the ongoing creation and recreation of God's gifts of nature.

Pesach, the early-spring festival, reflects the theme of *redemption*—the historical redemption of the Children of Israel from Egyptian slavery, and the hope for the ultimate redemption of the universe and humankind when the world will be perfected under the Kingdom of God.

Shavuot, the late-spring festival, reflects the theme of *revelation*—the giving of Torah at Mt. Sinai, when God revealed His word and will for all His children.

These three themes—reiterated in the Torah, in the holiday cycle, and also in the fixed structure of the Jewish prayer service—give a strong and significant unity to Judaism and the Jewish People. By linking God, Torah, and the *mitzvot* of prayer and holiday celebration, these oft-repeated themes weave the Jewish experience into a harmonious whole.

Since a Jewish day begins and ends at sundown, a twenty-four hour holiday begins at sundown of one secular day, and ends at sundown on the next secular day. For example, the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday.

The beginning of the holiday—the evening before the full secular day—is known as **ערב יום טוב** Erev Yom Tov, because the Hebrew word **ערב** *erev* means “evening.” Thus, for example, Friday night is **ערב שבת** Erev Shabbat, the evening of the Sabbath; and the evening when the holiday of Succot begins is called **ערב סוכות** Erev Succot.

The evening when the holiday ends (for example, the Sabbath ends on Saturday night) is called **מוצאי שבת** Motza’ay Shabbat (literally, the “going out” or “leaving” of the Sabbath), or **מוצאי יום טוב** Motza’ay Yom Tov (literally, the “going out” or “leaving” of the holiday) because the Hebrew word **מוצאי** *motza’ay* means “going out” or “leaving.”

According to the Torah, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Shavuot are to be observed for one day each; and Succot and Pesach are to be observed for seven days each.

When the Jews were exiled from the Land of Israel, the sages mandated that an extra day be added to all the holidays except Yom Kippur.

Because the calendar was not yet fixed, and because in exile the affirmation of the sighting of the new moon (indicating the first day of each new Hebrew month) might take longer than it had in pre-exilic times, the sages were concerned that the holidays might not be celebrated on their proper days. By adding the extra day to the holiday, there would be less doubt that the holiday was being properly commemorated.

This second, extra, day of the holiday was called **יום טוב שני של גלויות** *Yom Tov sheni shel galuyot* (literally, “the second day of the holiday of the diaspora”). So Rosh HaShanah and Shavuot became two days instead of one. Succot and Pesach became eight days instead of seven. Only Yom Kippur remained its one original day, because adding a second day would have required extending the Yom Kippur fast to forty-eight hours.

Today—reasoning that the calendar was fixed long ago, and that there is no longer any reason to doubt that the holiday is being observed at its proper time—Reform Jews have returned to the biblically mandated one- or seven-day holiday commemorations.

Jews who live in Israel have also returned to the one- or seven-day observance (except for Rosh HaShanah, which still remains two days). Israeli Jews reason that since the second day of the holiday was for diaspora Jewry, and since they are living in Israel, the reason for the added day no longer applies.



Orthodox and Conservative Jews living outside of the Land of Israel are now the only ones still observing the second, extra, day of the holidays, although some Reform and Reconstructionist Jews observe two days of Rosh HaShanah.

The first one (or two) day(s) and the last one (or two) day(s) of Succot and Pesach are observed as Yom Tov, full holidays, with all their celebrations and certain restrictions.

The five (or four) days in between the full Yom Tov days are known as חול המועד Chol HaMo'ed, the “secular” or “intermediate” days of the holiday, when ritual observances and restrictions are lessened.

Thus, for those who celebrate Pesach as a seven-day holiday, the first and seventh days are observed as the full Yom Tov, and the five middle days as Chol HaMo'ed. For those who celebrate Pesach as an eight-day holiday, the first two days and the seventh and eighth days are observed as the full Yom Tov, with the four middle days as Chol HaMo'ed.

The observance of the holiday of Succot is more complicated.

In the Bible, Succot is a seven-day holiday. However, the Bible itself adds an additional day—called Shemini Atzeret, the Eighth Day of Assembly—onto the seven days of Succot. So, in biblical times, Succot—along with its additional Shemini Atzeret day—was observed for eight days, with the first and eighth days being the full Yom Tov and the six middle days as Chol HaMo'ed.

Much later, after the yearly Torah cycle was established and fixed, another additional day was added onto the end of the Succot holiday. This day was called Simchat Torah, the Rejoicing of the Torah, when the yearly Torah-reading cycle was completed and begun again.

Since Simchat Torah was added when the Jews were already living in the diaspora and had already established the second day of Yom Tov, the holiday became a nine-day observance, with the first two days and the last two days—Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah—as the full Yom Tov, and the five middle days as Chol HaMo'ed.

This is how Jews living in the diaspora today continue to observe Succot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah.

For those who have returned to the original biblical observance, the Succot holiday is observed for a total of eight days. The first and the last days are the full Yom Tov, with the six middle days as Chol HaMo'ed. On the eighth day, the observances of Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are combined.

Although the Jewish calendar is calculated with astronomical precision and fixed with exact structure, the calendar merely represents the *measure* of time. Part of the genius of Judaism throughout the ages has been the desire and the ability to sanctify time: to recognize the uniqueness of each year, month, day, hour, and moment, and to infuse time with special meaning and purpose.

THE SECOND SECTION EXCERPTED IS FROM PAGES 210-218, introducing details of the Synagogue.

You are not required to learn and remember all the terms introduced.

## THE SYNAGOGUE AND ITS RITUAL OBJECTS

### 8. THE SYNAGOGUE

From its origins until today, the synagogue—a Greek word meaning “place of assembly/gathering/meeting”—has been the central communal institution of Jewish life, the space where the central public activities of Jewish life—including most public worship—take place.

There are three Hebrew name-designations for synagogue, each of which describes one function of its threefold purpose: *Beit HaKnesset*, בית הכנסת, House of Gathering; *Beit HaTefilah*, בית התפילה, House of Prayer; and *Beit HaMidrash*, בית המדרש, House of Study/Learning. The synagogue is also sometimes called *shul*, שול, a Yiddish word meaning “school.” Since Jewish learning and worship most often take place within the same building—especially lessons for the children in a synagogue schoolroom—the name is most appropriate.

In modern times, especially in the Reform community, the synagogue is often called temple. This name has become a clear designation for a Jewish place of worship, but many Jews prefer not to call a modern synagogue a temple, contending that the name rightly and solely belongs to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, which was destroyed in 70 C.E., at the time the Jews were sent into exile.

In modern times, some Jews gather to worship in smaller, more intimate settings than the formal, communal synagogue. These “alternative synagogues” are called *chavurot* (singular, *chavurah*) meaning “friendship groups” or “associations”; or alternately *minyanim* (singular, *minyan*) from the word for “prayer quorum,” meaning “prayer group.”

The *chavurot* or *minyanim* are formed by people who find contemporary synagogues—some with 1,000 or more family members—to be too large and impersonal. These people want fully participatory—and, in most cases, fully egalitarian—worship services, intense study, and a close-knit groups of friends with whom to experience Jewish life and celebrate Jewish holidays.

The groups most often meet in private homes, or are sometimes invited to gather in the classroom, library, or basement of a synagogue building. A *chavurah* or *minyan* may have as few as ten to as many as sixty or eighty members—a small enough group so that each member, including all the children, can personally participate in all the services and activities, and so that close friendships can be formed.

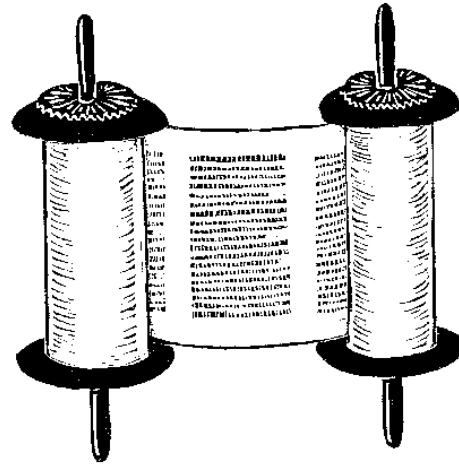
Some contemporary Jews find the modern *chavurah* or *minyan* to be a viable companion or alternative to the modern synagogue—a place where personal involvement and the intimacy of community are the central commitments.

Jews can pray anywhere, but an ordinary building or room becomes a synagogue—a specially designated sacred space—through its special structures and ritual objects.

## 9. ספר תורה SEFER TORAH

is the Torah Scroll, the handwritten parchment containing the text of the Torah, the Five Books of Moses.

The Sefer Torah—containing God’s word and will, the history and the laws of the Jewish People—is the primary and most sacred ritual object of Jewish life, indispensable for Jewish worship, and essential in establishing and maintaining a synagogue. It is kept in a place of honor in the synagogue, and is read on specific occasions during the worship services.



Every synagogue needs at least one Torah Scroll in order to function properly. Most synagogues try to have at least three Torah Scrolls, because at certain services, the ritual calls for reading from two different sections in the Torah; and at certain services, in certain years, the ritual calls for reading from three separate sections in the Torah. So, to avoid delay in the service while rolling the Torah scroll from section to section, two or three separate Torah Scrolls are used.

In Ashkenazic synagogues, the Sefer Torah is dressed in a beautiful velvet or silk covering, and is often decorated with a beautiful *keter*, a crown, and a *choshen*, a breastplate of silver or gold. In Sephardic synagogues, the Torah scroll is often kept in a decorative silver or gold cylindrical container.



## 10. יָד YAD

(literally, “hand”) is the Torah pointer.



It is custom not to touch the parchment of the Torah Scroll as it is being read. Yet the reader needs to follow along in the text to keep the correct place. The *yad* serves as the pointer, with which the reader can keep place and not falter in the reading of the Torah. Because it is shaped like a hand with a pointed finger the pointer is called the *yad*, which means “hand.”

## 11. בִּמְהָ BIMAH

is the raised platform—the pulpit—in the synagogue,  
where the Torah Scroll is kept.

The *bimah* is usually at the eastern wall of the synagogue because Jews face east at worship, toward Israel and Jerusalem. (Jews living in Israel worship facing toward Jerusalem.)

In Ashkenazic synagogues, the service is conducted from this *bimah* at the eastern wall. In Sephardic synagogues, there is a second *bimah*, in the center of the room, from which the service is conducted.

## 12. אָרוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ ARON HAKODESH

is the Holy Ark, which houses the Torah Scrolls in the synagogue.

When the Children of Israel received the Ten Commandments in the desert, they were commanded to make an ark in which to place the Tablets of the Law (Exodus 25:10). In this ark—sometimes called the Ark of the Covenant (Numbers 10:33) or the Ark of God (2 Samuel 5:3)—the Tablets were carried from place to place. Later, when the Holy Temple was built in Jerusalem, the Tablets in the ark became the centerpiece of the Holy of Holies, the most sacred spot in the Temple.

The modern version of this ancient ritual object is the *Aron HaKodesh*, the Holy Ark, on the *bimah* of the synagogue. In this Holy Ark, the Torah Scrolls are kept. The modern ark is a cabinet-like structure—sometimes built into the wall, sometimes freestanding. In many synagogues, the *Aron HaKodesh* is an extremely beautiful piece of decorative art that enhances the beauty and the sanctity of the synagogue.

## 13. פָּרֹכֶת PAROCHET

is the curtain-covering of the ark, behind which the Torah Scrolls are kept.

In the Tabernacle in the desert, a veil of blue, purple, and scarlet linen separated the ark from the rest of the Tabernacle. It effectively separated the holy space of the sanctuary from the holiest space where the Tablets of the Law were kept (Exodus 26:31).

The modern version of the ark covering is the *parochet*, which separates the holy space of the synagogue from the holiest space where the Torah Scrolls are kept in the Holy Ark.

The modern *parochet* is most often a very fine piece of cloth, velvet or silk, decorated in a beautiful way to bring honor through artistic beauty to the Torah Scrolls and the synagogue.

#### 14. נֵר תָּמִיד NER TAMID

is the Eternal Light, which hangs over (and in front of) the *Aron HaKodesh*, the Holy Ark.

The Tabernacle in the desert contained a “lamp to burn continually” as a physical symbol of the presence of God (Exodus 27:20). The modern version of the lamp is the *Ner Tamid*, the Eternal Light, which is continually illuminated over the Holy Ark in the synagogue.



Originally, the *Ner Tamid* burned oil. Now, however, it is most often powered by electricity. Yet its purpose is the same as in antiquity. It burns day and night, every day of the year, as a physical symbol of God’s eternal spiritual presence.

#### 15. עֲמוּד AMUD

(literally, “pillar” or “standing-place”) is the leader’s lectern.

The prayer leader conducts the worship service from a specially designated lectern, an *amud*.

In Orthodox synagogues, the *amud* is placed facing toward the Holy Ark, so the prayer leader conducts the service facing the Torah Scrolls and facing east toward Israel. In liberal synagogues, the *amud* is most often placed stage-style, facing toward the congregation, so that the prayer leader conducts the service facing the worshippers.

Since the prayer leader stands at the *amud*, it supplies the central focus for the worship service. Thus, when inquiring as to who is leading the service, one commonly asks, “Who is *davening* for the *amud* today?”

#### 16. שֻׁלְחָן SHULCHAN

(literally, “table”) is the table or lectern from which the Torah is read.

In the Tabernacle in the desert was a table made of wood overlaid with gold. It was to hold the showbread, the loaves that were brought on the Sabbath and later eaten by

the priests (Exodus 25:23). While the purpose of the showbread remains unclear, most understand it to be an expression of gratitude to God, who provides all that is necessary for sustenance.

The modern version of the Tabernacle table is a *shulchan*, the table that is on the *bimah*. During the service, when it is time for the scriptural reading, the Torah scroll is taken from the *Aron HaKodesh*, placed on the *shulchan*, unrolled, and read. The *shulchan* is usually covered with a fine piece of decorative silk or velvet cloth.

## 17. עזרת נשים EZRAT NASHIM

(literally, “women’s court[yard]”) is the women’s section in the (Orthodox) synagogue.

When the Holy Temple existed, only men were obligated to bring and witness sacrificial offerings. However, there was a specially designated area called the *ezrat nashim*, the women’s court(yard), where women could stand to observe the proceedings.

Later, when worship services took the place of sacrifices and the synagogue took the place of the Holy Temple, the separation of men and women during worship was extended to the synagogue.

Some explain that since men are obligated to worship and women are not, those with the obligation sit together and those without the obligation sit together—separately. Others explain that men were concerned that seeing beautiful women and hearing their beautiful voices during worship might cause distraction from the sacred task of prayer.

Based on either or both of these reasons, a separate section of the synagogue—an elevated section, a balcony, or a back or side room—was designated as the separate women’s section—the place for women to worship without sitting with or being seen by the men. In buildings where constructing a distinctly separate section was not practical, a *mechitza* (literally, “partition”), a wall or a curtain, was set up to separate the men from the women.

In contemporary times, the words *ezrat nashim* and *mechitza* are often used interchangeably, indicating and designating the separate seating of men and women during worship. In Orthodox synagogues, men and women continue to sit separately from each other during worship services. In all non-Orthodox synagogues—Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist—men and women sit together during worship.

## SYNAGOGUE PEOPLE

### 18. רב RAV

(literally, “master” or “teacher”) is a rabbi.

A rabbi is a trained scholar in Judaica, a teacher of Jewish texts and traditions. He (and in modern times, in Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaism, she) is an interpreter and decider of Jewish law.

As the preeminent Jewish authority in a particular congregation or community—whose legal rulings are to be accepted and applied—the rabbi is designated as the *מרא דאתרא* *mara d'atra* (Aramaic, meaning “master of the land or locale”). In modern times the role and responsibility of the rabbi has expanded. He or she is a pastor-counselor, a community organizer or leader, and a professionally trained leader of Jewish institutions.

The most visible role of the rabbi is as the leader of the synagogue worship service, although any learned and capable Jew can lead the worship. The contemporary rabbi also most often acts as the officiant at life-cycle ceremonies, such as circumcisions, baby namings, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals.

Despite the rabbi's great responsibility and authority, he or she has no special powers or relationship with God. The rabbi learns and transmits God's word and will, attempting to inspire Jews to a relationship with God, to living a life committed to Jewish values and ethics, to observance of Jewish rituals, and to participation in the life of the Jewish community.

In modern times, calling a rabbi *Rav* or *HaRav* (*the* rabbi/master) usually implies that rabbi's status as an outstanding scholar and expert in matters of Jewish law.

Calling a rabbi *Rebbe* usually implies that the rabbi has status as a beloved and often charismatic spiritual guide.

### 19. שליח צבור SHALIACH TZIBBUR

(literally, “messenger or agent of the community”) is the prayer leader.

Any Jew (in Orthodoxy, only men) who is knowledgeable, trained, and capable can conduct and lead a worship service. The *shaliach tzibbur*—alternately called the *בעל תפלה* *ba'al tefilah* (literally, “master of prayer”)—is the one who conducts the worship service, serving, as the name implies, as the prayer leader and messenger-



agent of the community, standing before God to represent and offer the prayers of the community.

## 20. חַזָּן CHAZZAN

is a cantor.

To enhance the beauty and artistry of the worship service, many synagogues have a *chazzan* who serves as the *shaliach tzibbur*.

The *chazzan* is a fine singer, especially trained in the music of the synagogue, who chants the worship service and leads the musical and vocal parts of the prayers. He (and in modern times, in Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaism, she) uses music to inspire worshipers, and to lead all of the participants in the service closer to God.

## 21. בַּעַל קוֹרָא BA'AL KORAY

(literally, “master of reading”) is the Torah reader.

When the Torah is read during the synagogue service, it is chanted according to a series of musical notes and notations.

However, the musical notes do not appear in the Torah text that is in the handwritten parchment Torah Scroll. The notes are only annotated in books, in printed copies of the Torah.

It takes special knowledge, training, skill, and preparation to chant the Torah reading directly from the Torah Scroll. The *ba'al koray* is this specially trained Torah reader.

Any Jew (in Orthodoxy, only men) who possesses this knowledge and training can serve as the *ba'al koray*.

## 22. גַּבַּי GABBAI

(literally, “collector”) is the synagogue official.

Originally, the *gabbai* was the fiscal officer of the synagogue and community, collecting funds to maintain the ongoing functions of the synagogue, and collecting and distributing funds for the needings.

The *gabbai*—usually a learned and respected member of the congregation—now holds an honorary position.

The main role of the *gabbai* is to stand next to the *shulchan* during the Torah reading, following along in a printed text, and offering assistance or correction to the *ba'al koray*, should it be needed. The *gabbai* is often the one to select the members of the congregation who will be called to the Torah for an *aliyah* (the recitation of the blessings over the reading of a section of the Torah).

In most synagogue services when the Torah is read, there are two *gabbaim*, one standing on each side of the reading table.

In some synagogues, this role is played by a volunteer (or, sometimes, a synagogue employee) called the *שמש* *shammash* (literally, "servant.") In addition to distributing the honors and assisting the *ba'al koray*, the *shammash* often sees to the scheduling of services, the upkeep of the ritual objects, and all the other tasks that it takes to keep the synagogue functioning smoothly. The *shammash* is the "jack-of-all-trades," "the religious handyman."

This is the end of the excerpted section required for Introductory session 1