Generations of Jewish men and women have made a profound impact on the social, cultural, economic and scientific progress of our region, our country and our world. Grounded in the ancient principles of their faith, their lives represent stories of hope, determination, struggle and achievement—an inspiring American chapter in the nearly 4,000-year history of the Jewish people.

An American Story

Welcome to the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. We invite you and your students to learn, experience and share the story of:

- **Cleveland History** and the Immigrant Experience that shaped our lives and changed the world;
- **Jewish Holidays and Traditions** that play a dynamic role in the life of a diverse people;
- **Local Heroes**, past and present, who made their mark in industry, government, education and the arts;
- **The Holocaust** and the importance of teaching tolerance in today's world.

It is our aim that your visit here will inspire you and your students with the hope and determination of those who have left their mark upon our city, our country and our world.
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PRE-VISIT DISCUSSION PROMPTS
Find out what students expect to see and do at the Maltz Museum. These discussion prompts are intended to guide your classroom preparation:

- Why is it important to study history?
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- How do ordinary people participate in and make history?
- Why is it important to learn about other cultures, religions and ethnic groups?
- How can learning about others help us to understand ourselves?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What are the origins of the Jewish religion?
- What are the basic practices and beliefs of the Jewish people?
- What diversity exist within Jewish practice?
- Why are cultural celebrations and traditions important?
- What are some of the major Jewish holidays?
- What makes an object special?

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WHAT IS JUDAISM?

The Jewish people trace their heritage back to a semi-nomadic people of the ancient Near East known as the Hebrews. According to the Bible, the Hebrew patriarch, Abraham, introduced the concept of monotheism, which became a central belief of the Jewish religion. The tradition says that after serving as slaves in Egypt, the Hebrews escaped to the promised land of Canaan, led by the prophet Moses.

By about 3,000 years ago, the ancient Hebrews had built a thriving kingdom in Canaan (today called Israel). They developed a religious system based on sacrificial worship of the God Yahweh and closely tied to the agricultural cycle. For these ancient Israelites, religion, culture, nationality, and daily life were all bound up together.

When the Babylonians (and later the Romans) destroyed their central Temple in Jerusalem, many of the Israelites were exiled. With the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora, the religion was forced to change: prayer replaced sacrifice and new traditions developed. Judaism as we know it was born. Although Jews now live in many different countries around the world, Judaism remains a culture, a people, and a way of life, as well as a religion.

Judaism is based around the belief in one God and the performance of mitzvot, or commandments. Holiday observance, text study, communal prayer, deeds of kindness, and celebration of lifecycle events are all important aspects of Jewish practice.

The Torah, comprising the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, is the central text of Judaism. In order to apply the words of the Torah to daily practice, however, Jewish leaders interpreted and expounded on the biblical laws in the early centuries of the first millennium. Their interpretations were written down in the Talmud. If the Torah is the basis for Judaism, the Talmud is the instruction manual.

As Jews spread out around the world, new traditions developed—often influenced by surrounding cultures. Three main divisions exist among the Jewish communities of the world. Ashkenazic Jews trace their lineage to Central and Eastern Europe. Sephardic Jews are descended from Spanish and Portuguese ancestors. And Mizrahi Jews come originally from Middle Eastern lands. Each group follows certain unique customs and cultural practices. The basic mitzvot, however, always remain the same.

HOW DO JEWS PRACTICE TODAY?

Jewish practice today takes many forms. The past two centuries have seen the development of several new movements that offer diverse options for interpreting Jewish tradition. Orthodox Judaism adheres most closely to the traditional practices of earlier generations. Conservative Jews believe in preserving Jewish law, but they choose to reinterpret the traditions within a contemporary context. Reform Judaism is more liberal. It openly accepts changes in Jewish practice that make the religion more relevant to modern Jews—as long as the basic ethics and beliefs are preserved. Other contemporary movements, such as Reconstructionism, seek new understandings to the...
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Where do Jews pray?

A synagogue, or temple, is a place where members of a Jewish community come together to pray, study, and participate in communal events. Although a Jew can pray anywhere, the ideal is to pray in a community of at least ten people. Traditionally, this meant ten men, but many contemporary Jews count women as well. Usually, a synagogue will have a cabinet at the front of the room (known as an “ark”) that holds the scroll or scrolls of the Torah. Often, prayers in the synagogue are led by a rabbi or a cantor (a prayer leader).

Why do Jews cover their heads?

Some Jewish men wear a head covering called a kippah or yarmulke all the time, while others only wear it to pray. It is considered respectful to cover one’s head because it reminds the wearer that God is constantly present.
The Gregorian calendar we use today is known as a solar calendar, because it is based on the sun’s movements over the course of a year. The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar. Each month begins with the new moon and lasts 29 or 30 days. Every two or three years, an extra month is added so the 354-day lunar calendar will match up (more or less) with the 365-day secular calendar.

MANY SPECIAL DAYS PUNCTUATE THE CYCLE OF THE JEWISH YEAR:

The Jewish year begins in the fall with the holiday of Rosh Hashanah (“Head of the Year”). Unlike the secular New Year, the Jewish New Year is a solemn time, when people are encouraged to consider their behavior during the past year and make amends. The sounding of the ram’s horn, or shofar, on Rosh Hashanah is a call to action and repentance.

Yom Kippur (“Day of Atonement”) arrives ten days after Rosh Hashanah. It is the holiest day of the year. Many Jews fast and spend all day in prayer, asking God to forgive them for past mistakes. The sounding of the ram’s horn, or shofar, on Rosh Hashanah is a call to action and repentance.

These “High Holidays” are followed almost immediately by Sukkot, the first of the “pilgrimage holidays.” In ancient times, Jews would journey to the Jerusalem Temple on these days to offer sacrifices. The pilgrimage festivals were agricultural holidays, and even today when we celebrate them we remember the agricultural roots of the Jewish people. Sukkot, for example, is the autumn harvest festival. The pilgrimage holidays are also tied to events in Jewish history. Sukkot recalls the ancient Israelites’ journey in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt. For the week of Sukkot, many Jews build a sukkah (a small hut) just as their ancestors did in the desert.

Winter brings the holidays of Hanukkah and Purim. Both of these joyous festivals commemorate historical or semi-historical events in which the Jews survived potential destruction at the hands of their enemies. Hanukkah is a celebration of the Jewish victory over the Syrian Greeks in 2nd-century Israel. Hanukkah is also known as the Festival of Lights. Jewish homes are illuminated by the candles of the menorah during the eight days of the holiday.

Purim recalls the heroism of Mordecai and Queen Esther of Persia, who, according to tradition, saved their people from the murderous intentions of the king’s evil advisor, Haman. The story of Esther is read every year on the holiday, usually accompanied by raucous merrymaking.

The springtime holiday of Passover is the second of the pilgrimage festivals. In addition to marking the season of rebirth, it commemorates the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt and the birth of the Jewish nation. For the week of Passover, no bread is eaten—only the flat matzahs like those eaten in ancient Egypt.

Passover is followed seven weeks later by Shavuot (the “Festival of Weeks”), which marks the early summer harvest and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Tisha B’Av (the “Tenth of Av”) completes the cycle of the year. It is a mournful day, when observers fast in remembrance of the
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The American Jewish community is a mosaic of these many approaches to Judaism. Cities with large Jewish communities generally support several synagogues that reflect these different strands of contemporary Jewish life. Jewish schools, community centers and charitable institutions provide Jewish communities with many ways to meet the social, religious, educational and spiritual needs of their members.

### What Are the Cycles of Jewish Life?

All religions include important rituals, traditions and celebrations. Such practices bring communities together and help reinforce communal values and beliefs. They also provide opportunities to impart the traditions and wisdom of the religion to the next generation. In addition, rituals and holidays help mark important events in the year and life of an individual or community.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, a 20th-century Jewish scholar and civil rights activist, described Judaism as a “religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time.” Much of Jewish ritual is organized around the observance of key moments in the calendar and in the cycle of life. These rituals help unite the diverse Jewish communities that are spread around the world.

### THE YEARLY CYCLE

Ancient peoples kept track of time based on the movements of the sun and moon. They created calendars that told them when to plant their crops and harvest their food, when the winter was coming and when the days would grow long again. These calendars also helped mark special days in the cycle of the year.

How do Jews count years?
The Jewish calendar reckons years from the traditionally held date of the world’s creation. For example, the year 2000 on the secular calendar was counted as the year 5760-5761 on the Jewish calendar.

Why do Jewish holidays begin at sundown?
According to Jewish tradition, a day is reckoned from one evening to the next—not midnight to midnight. This is because of the way the world’s creation is described in the Book of Genesis. It says, “There was evening, and there was morning, the first day.”

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THE LIFECYCLE

Judaism honors and sanctifies the key transitions of life, beginning with the transition to life. Jewish babies are publicly welcomed into the Jewish community in a number of ways. Often, parents will bring the infant to the synagogue on a Shabbat shortly after the birth and announce the child’s Hebrew name before the entire congregation.

For boys, the eighth day of life is also the traditional time for the brit milah, or circumcision ceremony. Like their ancestor Abraham, Jewish boys are circumcised to symbolize the ongoing covenant between God and the Jewish people. In some communities today, baby girls are also welcomed into the community through special covenant ceremonies.

When a child reaches adolescence, Judaism marks this transition with the bar or bat mitzvah. A boy becomes a bar mitzvah at age 13; a girl becomes a bat mitzvah at 12 or 13. Now officially an adult, he or she accepts the responsibility of a Jewish life. Traditionally, a boy (and now often a girl) will be called up to the Torah in front of the community to mark this passage publicly.

Marriage is the next important transition that is honored in Jewish tradition. The love between a man and a woman is sanctified with public ritual and celebration, as the couple stands beneath a wedding canopy, or huppah, to symbolize the new home they will build together. Bride and groom also sign the elaborately decorated ketubah, or marriage contract. Yet even at the most joyous of occasions, we recall the sorrowful events of our history. At the end of the wedding ceremony, the groom breaks a glass in remembrance of the destruction of the ancient Temple.

The complex rituals surrounding death and mourning complete the cycle of life in Jewish tradition. These traditions are designed to give the bereaved proper time and space to mourn their loss. The first seven days after the funeral are known as shiva, during which the mourners traditionally stay at home. Gradually, they re-enter the life of the community but continue to observe the yahrzeit, or anniversary of the death, each year.

WHAT IS A SACRED OBJECT?

Ritual objects—such as wine cups, Hanukkah lamps, and Torah ornaments—are important in the observance of holidays, lifecycle events, and other Jewish traditions. Often, these objects are not merely functional, but are also works of art.

A ritual is enhanced when it is performed with a beautiful object. This concept is known as Hiddur Mitzvah, or “beautification of a commandment.” For centuries, Jewish artists have created extraordinary ritual objects that incorporate a range of materials, artistic styles, decorative motifs, and symbols. In every period and in every location, Jewish artists are affected by the context in which they work, and Jewish ceremonial art often reflects a unique combination of influences. This continues today, as judaica artists interpret traditional objects in contemporary ways.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Lower Grades

- What are the important events in your family and how are they celebrated? Make a calendar that reflects important annual family events such as birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and special memories.

- Why is it important to know what time it is, what year it is, what month it is or what day it is? If you didn’t have a calendar, how could you tell when it was your birthday?

- A tradition is something that people do over and over again, usually to celebrate or remember something. Can you name any birthday or holiday traditions?

- If your family follows a religious tradition, describe some of the religious objects you use. Could you celebrate without them? Why are these objects so special? Name some objects we use to show we are Americans.

For Upper Grades

- Why is it important to have a formal way of marking time? Compare the Jewish calendar to other cultural calendars such as the Mayan, Islamic, Indian, Chinese or Gregorian. How are they different? How are they the same?

- Why are cultural traditions important? What are some of the cultural traditions of your family and how are these traditions passed down from one generation to the next?

- All religions make use of ritual objects, both in their place of worship and in the home. Choose a ritual object from your home that has been passed down from at least one generation and write about the associations this object has for you and your family.

- The Jewish concept of Hiddur Mitzvah means beautifying a commandment by adorning the ritual object used to perform it. Do other religions share this concept? What objects might you see in a church or mosque that are similar to Judaic objects?

- Do the American people have “sacred objects” that are used to mark important occasions in the life of the nation?

- There are numerous branches of Judaism that practice the religion in different ways, yet there are common elements that unite them. Despite differences in political belief, religion, race or ethnic background, what are some common practices and beliefs that unite us as Americans?

CLEVELAND VOICES

- Cleveland’s first rabbi was Isadore Kalisch. He was the spiritual leader of Tifereth Israel—now called The Temple-Tifereth Israel. Rabbi Kalisch is perhaps best known today for his excellent English translation of Sefer Yetzira, an ancient book of Jewish mysticism.

- In 1972, the Reform movement decided for the first time to ordain women as rabbis. Sally Jane Priesand grew up in Cleveland’s Reform Beth-Israel-West Temple with a strong commitment to Jewish life. On June 3, 1972, Priesand was ordained as the world’s first woman rabbi by the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

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**VOCABULARY**

Ashkenazi  Relating to the Jewish communities that trace their origins back to Eastern, Central, and Northern Europe.

Bar/bat mitzvah  Means "son of the commandment," and bat mitzvah means "daughter of the commandment." The words are used to refer to a male or female who has reached the age of 13 and is considered an adult by Jewish law. The terms also refer to the ceremony marking this coming of age.

Brit milah  Means "covenant of circumcision." On the eighth day of a Jewish boy’s life, he is circumcised to symbolize his entry into the covenant of the Jewish people. It is sometimes known as a "bris."

Conservative Judaism  A branch of modern Judaism that follows the traditional laws, but believes they can be reinterpreted for a contemporary context.

Diaspora  Literally "dispersion," Diaspora refers to Jews living outside the Land of Israel.

Huppah  The canopy under which the marriage rite of Judaism takes place.

Judaism  The religion of the Jews, based on the concept of one God and the principles set down in the Torah and the Talmud.

Ketubah  A marriage contract, that spells out the obligations of a Jewish husband to his wife or those of both spouses to each other.

Kippah or Yamulke  The skullcap head covering worn by Jewish men during services and by some Jews at all times.

Lunar calendar  A calendar that is fixed according to the phases of the moon.

Matzah  Unleavened bread eaten on Passover in remembrance that there was no time for the bread to rise when the ancient Israelites left Egypt.

Menorah  One of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith. This seven-branched candelabrum is used in the synagogue. A nine-branched menorah is used during Hanukkah.

Mitzvah  Means "commandment" (plural: Mitzvot) and usually refers to any of the laws that Jews are obligated to observe. Sometimes it is used more generally to mean to any good deed.

Mizrahi  Jews of Middle Eastern origin.

Monotheism  Belief in one God.

Orthodox Judaism  A branch of Judaism that strictly observes the traditional laws.

Rabbi  A religious leader who is trained in Jewish ritual and law. The word comes from the Hebrew term for "my teacher."

Reconstructionist Judaism  A modern branch of Judaism that focuses on cultural, communal, and ethical aspects of the religion.

Reform Judaism  A branch of Judaism that believes the laws of the religion can be modified in accordance with the modern world.

Sephardic  Relating to Jews or Jewish communities that trace their heritage to Spain and Portugal.

Shabbat  The day of rest and reflection that begins on Friday evening and ends on Saturday night.

Shiva  Traditional seven day period of mourning, observed by family members, following the funeral of a Jewish person.

Shofar  Traditional instrument, usually a ram’s horn, blown on Rosh Hashanah.

Synagogue  A Jewish house of prayer. Also sometimes called a "temple" or a "shul."

Talmud  A collection of Jewish traditions and legal opinions from the ancient rabbis of Israel and Babylonia.

Torah  Literally means "Teaching," but it usually refers to the first five books of the Bible or a hand-written scroll containing the text of those books.

Yahrzeit  The anniversary commemoration of the death of a Jew by mourners.

**RESOURCES**

Books for Teachers

- Kadden, Barbara Binder and Bruce. *Teaching Jewish Life Cycle: Traditions and Activities*. A.R.E. Publishing, 1997. For each phase of the lifecycle, the authors offer background information, textual sources, activity ideas for all ages, and further resources.
- Kertzer, Morris N. (revised by Lawrence A. Hoffman). *What is a Jew?* Collier Books, 1993. General information on Jewish belief and practice is presented in the form of concise answers to basic questions (e.g., What is the Talmud? Do Jews believe in life after death?).

Books for Students

- Jaffe, Nina. *The Uninvited Guest and Other Jewish Holiday Tales*. Scholastic, 1995. Jaffe, a seasoned storyteller, has collected tales for each of the major holidays from a variety of traditional sources, and also included an original story of her own in this engaging collection. Elementary.

**WEBSITES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- Cycles of Jewish Life: An Interactive Multimedia Virtual Exhibit, produced by the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Images, texts, and sound-clips help users of this two-CD set explore holidays, lifecycle events, and Jewish ritual objects.
- Heritage: Civilization and the Jews, produced by Thirteen/WNET New York. This four-DVD set includes the award-winning, nine-episode PBS series, as well as an interactive DVD-ROM about Jewish history and practice.
- *The Personal Gateway to Jewish Exploration*  [http://www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com)
- *Jewish Holidays*, produced by the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Images, texts, and sound-clips help users of this two-CD set explore holidays, lifecycle events, and Jewish ritual objects.
VOCABULARY

Ashkenazic Relating to the Jewish communities that trace their origins back to Eastern, Central, and Northern Europe.

Bar/bat mitzvah Means "son of the commandment," and bat mitzvah means "daughter of the commandment." The words are used to refer to a male or female who has reached the age of 13 and is considered an adult by Jewish law. The terms also refer to the ceremony marking this coming of age.

Brit milah Means "covenant of circumcision." On the eighth day of a Jewish boy's life, he is circumcised to symbolize his entry into the covenant of the Jewish people. It is sometimes known as a "bris."

Conservative Judaism A branch of modern Judaism that follows the traditional laws, but believes they can be reinterpreted for a contemporary context.

Diaspora Literally "dispersion." Diaspora refers to Jews living outside the Land of Israel.

Huppah The canopy under which the marriage rite of Judaism takes place.

Judaism The religion of the Jews, based on the concept of one God and the principal set down in the Torah and Talmud.

Ketubah A marriage contract, that spells out the obligations of a Jewish husband to his wife or those of both spouses to each other.

Lunar calendar A calendar that is fixed according to the phases of the moon.

Mitzvah Unleavened bread eaten on Passover in remembrance that there was no time for the bread to rise when the ancient Israelites left Egypt.

Menorah One of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith. This seven-branched candelabrum is used in the synagogue. A nine-branched menorah is used during Hanukkah.

Mizrachi Jews of Middle Eastern origin.

Monothism Belief in one God.

Orthodox Judaism A branch of Judaism that strictly observes the traditional laws.

Rabbi A Jewish religious leader who is trained in Jewish ritual and law. The word comes from the Hebrew term for "my teacher."

Reconstructionist Judaism A modern branch of Judaism that focuses on cultural, communal, and ethical aspects of the religion.

Reform Judaism A branch of Judaism that believes the laws of the religion can be modified in accordance with the modern world.

Sephardic Relating to Jews or Jewish communities that trace their heritage to Spain and Portugal.

Shabbat The Jewish Sabbath, a day of spiritual rest and reflection that begins on Friday evening and ends on Saturday night.

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Books for Students


Jacob, Louis. The Book of Jewish Practice, Behrman House, 1987. Jacob's straightforward, even-handed guide is divided into 20 easy-to-digest chapters and illustrated with numerous photos and drawings. Middle school to adult.

Jaffe, Nina. The Uninvited Guest and Other Jewish Holiday Tales. Scholastic, 1995. Jaffe, a seasoned storyteller, has collected tales for each of the major holidays from a variety of traditional sources, and also included an original story of her own in this engaging collection. Elementary.


WEBSITES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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www.myjewishlearning.com “The Personal Gateway to Jewish Exploration”

www.jewish-holiday.com Information and articles about Jewish holidays

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/index.html A vast collection of articles on a wide range of Jewish topics, presented by the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise

http://www.jewfaq.org/ “Judaism 101"
The Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage joins an elite group of world-class institutions as a living testament to the courage, conviction, aspirations and achievements of Cleveland’s Jewish community. The stories of individuals and families – past and present – come to life through state-of-the-art exhibitions, interactive and films, oral histories, photographs and artifacts.

The Museum includes The Temple-Tifereth Israel Gallery, an internationally-recognized collection of Judaica, and a special exhibition gallery featuring significant exhibitions of national and international acclaim.

The Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage is a partnership between The Maltz Family Foundation, the Jewish Community Federation’s Centennial Initiative and The Temple-Tifereth Israel with research support from the Western Reserve Historical Society.