

## We call it JUDAISM

What does it mean to be a “Jew”?

Here are three different interpretations from different times in history.

*Ivri (Hebrew) – One who crosses boundaries OR One is a bridge*

- First used c. 1600 BCE.
- According to Torah, Judaism’s founders Avraham and Sarah crossed the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to move from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan.
- For that reason, the Hittites living in Canaan called them *Ivrim*.

*Yisrael – One who wrestles with God*

- First used c. 1400 BCE.
- According to Torah, the name Jacob received during the night that he wrestled with the angel.
- This became the name of the clan that descended from Jacob.
- Also according to Torah, the first person to speak of the “Nation of Israel” was Pharaoh, King of Egypt.

*Yehudi (Jew) – One who is of God*

- A term dating back to c. 538 BCE.
- At that time, Cyrus, Emperor of Persia, allowed the Jews to form an autonomously governed province called “Judea.”
- Previously, the southern Israelite kingdom had been called “Judah,” as the tribe of Judah owned most of the land in that area.
- The term contains three of the four letters of the unpronounceable Name; the extra letter (“*yud*”) means “of.”

## Theological Paradigms in Judaism

### Caveats:

This is a standard teaching about the history of Judaism.

It is standard because it helps us think about the evolution of Judaism.

It has limitations because it is very oversimplified.

Actually, every era of Judaism included competing paradigms.

Finally, not everyone teaches that the *Hassidic* paradigm is the third paradigm or that the *Haskalah* is still active. Personally, I believe we live in a moment of paradigm shift.

### **Priestly**

Dates: approx. 1200 BCE – 70 CE

Spiritual Technology: Sacrifices

Texts: Torah, *Tanach*

### **Rabbinic**

Dates: Approx. 70 CE – present

Spiritual Technology: Prayer, text study

Texts: *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, *Midrash*, *Halachic* codes

### **Kabbalistic-Hassidic**

Dates: Approx. 1200-present

Spiritual Technology: Meditation, music, self-study

Texts: *Zohar*, *Hassidic* teachings

### **Enlightenment (Haskalah)**

Dates: Approx. 1750-present

Spiritual Technology: Ethics, reason, politics

Texts: Writings in philosophy and history

BOOKS TO OWN, general reference; Jewish history

*Jewish Literacy*, Joseph Telushkin

a tome of 1-2pp statements on an exhaustive number of topics

*A Short History of the Jewish People*, Raymond Scheindlin

## Introducing the Jewish Year

### **The Jewish Calendar:**

12 months of 28 days; follow the lunar cycle.

Months begin on the new moon.

Most holidays begin on the full moon.

### BOOKS TO OWN, on holidays:

*Seasons of our Joy*, Arthur Woskow

*The Jewish Holidays*, Michael Strassfeld

### **Beginning the Year with Spiritual Consciousness**

#### **Rosh Hashanah:**

in Torah: a special day, 6 months into the year

in Talmud: crowning God as King, Day of Judgment

in Modern practices: reflection, *teshuvah*, *shofar*, honey, *tashlich*

#### Mood:

Joy – reflected in sweet foods, festive meals with guests

Reflection – prayer that emphasizes *teshuvah*, *shofar*

Rededication

#### **Yom Kippur:**

in Torah: Aaron cleanses the sanctuary after death of his sons

in Talmud: Day for Atonement, purifying our inner selves

in Modern practices: reflection, fasting, prayers, wearing white, *Kol Nidre*

#### Mood:

Solemnity: feeling the precariousness of life, the gift to be alive

#### **Sukkot:**

Torah: celebrate in “booths” for 7 days, beginning on the full moon of *Tishrei*

Double themed: festival at end of harvest; commemoration of desert wandering

Four Species – Arbah Minim, ie *Lulav* and *Etrog* – added (citron, date palm, myrtle, willow)

Talmud: a book of the Talmud! explicating detail of rituals

Modern practices: earth based

#### Mood:

Joy - in Torah called “*zman simchateinu*” – “the season of our joy”

Gratitude

## TESHUVAH

***Teshuvah – Level One*** adapted from Rabbi Reuven Hammer, *Entering the High Holy Days*

On Rosh Hashanah, and especially on Yom Kippur, Jews are asked to engage in *teshuvah*. The Hebrew word *teshuvah* is usually translated as “repentance.” But the meaning of *teshuvah* cannot really be captured in one English word.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Hebrew prophets implored the Israelites: “*Shuvu!* – Return to God.” The Hebrew word *teshuvah* comes from the same root as *shuvu*, “return.”

The Mishnah, our earliest code of Jewish Law (compiled in the year 200) teaches that returning involves more than a change of heart. If we commit a sin against a fellow human being, we must return to that person and appease him or her.

Our great moral teachers of the Middle Ages broke the process of *teshuvah* into four steps:

1. Acknowledging that we did wrong.
2. Feeling bad about it.
3. Seeking forgiveness and making reparation.
4. Not repeating the behavior.

When we teach our young students today, we remind them that through *teshuvah* we can actually change and become better human beings. We remind them that God loves *teshuvah*. We remind them that every step we take towards becoming a better person is a step towards God.

***Teshuvah – Level Two*** adapted from Rabbi Miles Krassen

*Provide yourself with judges and enforcers in all your gates. (Devarim/Deteronomy 16:18)*

We read these words at the beginning of the month of Elul, the last month of the Jewish year. Elul is the gate through which we enter Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish spiritual New Year. During Elul we formally begin the process of *teshuvah*, return to the right path. We review our moral and spiritual selves. We make resolutions for improving them in the coming year.

In this context, the words “judges” and “enforcers” take on new meaning. When making our new year’s resolutions, we must be both judges and enforcers. We must discern what is the right thing to do, and we must do it. As we enter the gates of spiritual renewal, we must activate both inner capacities.

This verse also invites us into *teshuvah* – return - on a deeper level. “In our gates” can refer to events within our thoughts and feelings. If we post judges and enforcers within those gates, we can learn to recognize what is arising in our thought and feeling, and intervene before we act. If we do this, we plant *teshuvah* within us. Instead of a yearly process of making new year’s resolutions, *teshuvah* becomes a lasting process of moral and spiritual growth.

***Bein Adam laMakom*** – between a person and the Ever Present (vertical axis)

***Bein Adam l’Chavero*** – between a person and their fellow (horizontal axis)

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***Bein Adam ‘Atzmo*** – internally (on a sagittal plane)

## THE AXES OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS

### Vertical Axis

my place and my bearings between heaven and earth  
my grounded-ness, my gravity and my yearning to transcend  
my rising and falling  
my fluctuating relationship with the divine  
my self as both creature and image of my Creator

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### Horizontal Axis

at the center of my own web of human relationships  
reaching out to others  
sensitivity to others, caring, giving  
offering blessing and doing harm  
how I listen and how I speak  
my touch  
how I walk in the world

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### Sagittal Plane

(which passes through from front to back)  
in and out of myself  
the layers of my self  
my relationship to my personal history: what was, is and will be  
my relationship to ancestral generations and my own legacy  
letting go  
hope

## The Season of Our Newborn Joy

At the end of the Day of Atonement we petition: "Breathe into me of Your spirit, and I will live a new life, the life of an infant reborn." And when the shofar blasts we look around at the nursery that is our prayer community feeling fragile and seeing fragility in others. We emerge from our houses of worship full of newborn hope.

It's a season of great possibility and there is quiet joy in our fresh start. But there has also been pain inherent in our repentance. Now, the tenderness of relinquishing aspects of self must to be folded into the overarching sweetness of life. And the swell of our sacred year, with its flow from one holiday to the next, bears us on its course.

We are carried from otherworldly interiority back to bodily being, into the simple joy of sitting elbow to elbow with family and friends under an arbor decorated with the fruits of the season. The holiday that's called "The Season of Our Joy" mediates between our deep internal work and resumption of our work in the world. As transitional as the *sukkah* is nomadic, this next holiday transports us from the shock of re-birth to the vigor of life through a series of reintroductions to the most basic joys of being a human being on this earth.

Today I am a woman in overalls making sugar cookie dough for my great grandmother's plum pie, the one containing concentric rings of plums standing on end so the pie looks like a crown for the "Head" (*Rosh*) of the year. And my husband is a be-aproned man par-boiling cabbage for his mother's stuffed cabbage recipe, the one he keeps in our recipe file in her ten pages of longhand. We have been to the botanical garden to load our car full of palm tree clippings. We've solved a simple engineering problem in our slight *sukkah* design modification. Soon our young adult daughter will come to sift through the box of decorations and we'll indulge in some nostalgia as we laugh over the slightly mouse-eaten paper bag pumpkins our daughters made decades ago.

There's no time to linger in the gestational womb that was Yom Kippur. There's so much to Do!

The current is fast and it's moving me out of my precious transcendence but, even so, on into new stages of *teshuva*, if I think of *teshuva* as return. I am still in the process of returning to my serious missions in life, forgiven for my mid-deeds but not dismissed from my responsibility to follow through with my unique contribution to creating a heaven on earth. I am returning by way of this interim passage through engagement in my most elemental gratifications: my motherhood, being a partner and a daughter and a friend, being out of doors, using my ingenuity, building things, creating beauty, and preparing to feed wave after wave of the people I love most.

When I really get back to work I will have sat under the stars every night for a week. I will have experienced still more Days of a different Awe in a different House of the Lord. The progression of our festivals will have completed my "return," carrying me from my rebirth, home.

Hannah Dresner with permission of My Jewish Learning RWB blog

## SUKKOT

An important underlying theme of Sukkot is its messianic and universalistic character.

Coming at the end of the agricultural year and the end of the pilgrimage cycle, Sukkot marks the end of a passage of time. It thereby anticipates the messianic end of days for all people.

During Sukkot a total of 70 sacrifices were brought into the temple, corresponding to the tradition's count of the number of nations in the world. In the days to come, all nations will go up to Jerusalem on Sukkot to worship God, as it is written: "And it shall come to pass that everyone that is left of all the nations shall go up from year to year to worship the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" [Zechariah 14:16].

This vision of universal brotherhood is reflected in the sukkah, whose door and roof are open to all.

The sukkah, in turn, evokes a vision of God's sukkah as a house of prayer for all nations. In that future, God will spread a *sukkat shalom*—a sheltering cover made of peace and harmony. Even as we remember the desert period of old, having reached the end of time, we eagerly await the redemption, the crossing over into the promised land.

And yet the sukkah, while evoking the image of God sheltering us in the future, raises another, opposing image: The sukkah as a temporary structure open to the winds of autumn cannot help but remind us of the Jewish people's experience of the last 2000 years of exile and wandering.

Are we not the prototypical alien—the wandering Jew? Are not the 40 years in the desert—the period Sukkot commemorates—the archetype of our 2000 years of wandering?

The sukkah, then, evokes opposing sets of images: rootlessness and home, wandering and return, exposure and shelter. Just as matzah is both slave bread and free bread, the sukkah stands for the contradictory realities of our lives. From exile to eternity and back again—this, too, is contained in the four walls of the sukkah.

## Suggested Books for Enrichment

### Jewish Renewal:

*Jewish with Feeling*, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

### Holidays:

*Seasons of our Joy*, Arthur Waskow

*The Jewish Holidays*, Michael Strassfeld

### Shabbat:

*The Sabbath*, Abraham Joshua Heschel

### Daily Practice:

*Meaning & Mitzvah*, Goldie Milgram's

### Meditation:

*God is a Verb*, David Cooper

*The Handbook of Jewish Meditation Practices*, David Cooper

### Prayer Book Prayer:

*My People's Prayer Book* (9 volume series), Lawrence Hoffman

### One Volume Encyclopedias of Judaism:

*Essential Judaism*, George Robinson

*Living Judaism*, Wayne Dosick

*Jewish Literacy*, Joseph Telushkin

### Feminism:

*She Who Dwells Within*, Lynn Gottlieb

*The Receiving*, Tirzah Firestone

### Jewish History:

*A Short History of the Jewish People* (quite short!), Raymond Scheindlin

### Hebrew:

*Hebrew Talk – 101 Hebrew Roots and the Stories They Tell*, Joseph Lowin

### Marriage:

*The Jewish Wedding*, Anita Diamant

### Conversion:

*Choosing A Jewish Life*, Anita Diamant