

Glossary for *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*
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Abulafia, Abraham (1240–ca. 1291): Jewish mystic, known for his messianism.

aggadah: All non-legal rabbinic literature, e.g., stories. Often contrasted with *halakhah*.

Agudath Ha-Rabbanim: Founded in 1902, an organization of ultra-Orthodox rabbis.

agunah: “Anchored” woman, one whose husband can or will not grant her a divorce.

Alfasi, Rabbi Isaac ben Jacob (1013–1103): Also known as the Rif, head of the yeshiva in Lucena (Andalusia), and author of *Sefer Halakhot*.

Aliyah: Literally, in Hebrew, “ascent,” refers to moving to Israel. Can also refer in a synagogue to “ascent” to the *bimah* (podium) to say a blessing over the Torah reading.

Almohads: Conservative Muslims from North Africa who overthrew the Almoravids.

Almoravids: Berbers from the area of Morocco; conservative Muslims.

Am yisrael: “People of Israel,” a concept of Israel as a cohesive social group.

Amoraim: Rabbis who lived ca. 250 CE - 500.

Amram ben Sheshna (mid- ninth century, CE): One of the geonim; authored the earliest extant siddur.

Anan ben David (flourished, 770 CE): Opposed the rabbinic notion of the Oral Torah, ultimately seen as the founder of Karaism.

Apocrypha: A collection of Jewish texts not included in the Tanakh, but accepted into the Catholic Bible.

Aramaic: A Semitic language much like Hebrew; used as the official language of the Persian empire.

Arba’ah Turim: Written by Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (Toledo, ca. 1270–ca. 1343; Toledo), a law code upon which the *Shulhan Arukh* builds.

Aristobolus: A Jewish-Greek philosopher who probably lived in the second or first centuries BCE.

Ashkenazim: Those Jews who trace their heritage back to medieval Germany (“Ashkenaz”).

ba’al shem: “Master of the name,” Eastern European Jewish wonder-worker.

Ba’al Shem Tov: “The Master of the Good Name,” refers to Israel ben Eliezer (1698–1760), considered the founder of Hasidism.

Babylonian Talmud (Bavli): Redacted around 500 CE, a sprawling work of rabbinic literature containing commentary on the Mishnah, law, stories, and dialectical argumentation.

Bar Kokhba: “Son of the star,” the name applied to the leader of a Jewish uprising in Palestine in 132 CE.

Bar, bat mitzvah: The marking (and sometimes celebration) of a Jewish child’s attainment of the age of legal responsibility (twelve for a female, thirteen for a male).

Bimah: The raised area dais in a synagogue, on which either prayers are led or the Torah read.

Biur: Translation (finished 1783), led by Moses Mendelssohn, of the Torah into German, with commentary.

Book of Beliefs and Opinions: Philosophical tract written by Sa’adyah Gaon in 933 CE.

Brit milah: “Covenant of circumcision,” circumcision of a Jewish boy when eight days old as a mark of God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants.

Cairo Geniza: A store of ancient Jewish texts found in the attic of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo.

Canonization: The process or act through which a text is designated as sacred.

Conservative Judaism: A modern ideological movement that seeks to maintain a traditional but flexible stance toward Jewish law.

Creatio ex nihilo: The idea that God created the world from nothing; there was no pre-existent matter.

Crescas, Hasdai ben Abraham (1340–1410): Jewish philosopher, author of *Light of the Lord*.

Dead Sea Scrolls: Assorted ancient texts found near the Dead Sea that are thought to testify to a Jewish sect from the Second Temple period.

Devekut: “Cleaving,” used by Hasidim (drawing on Lurianic Kabbalah) to refer to a cleaving to God.

Dhimmi: An Islamic category of “protected minorities,” referring to Jews and Christians.

Diaspora: Refers to the land outside of Palestine (land of Israel).

Ecclesiasticus (Ben Sirah): A biblical book found today only in the Apocrypha.

Enoch: A minor biblical character around whom a strong apocalyptic tradition grew in the Second Temple period, resulting in pseudepigraphical books such as 1 Enoch.

Eruv: A rabbinic legal institution that transforms a “public” space into a “private” one, and thus allows a Jew to carry in it during Shabbat.

Eschatology: The concept of the end of time.

Essenes: A Jewish sect during the Second Temple period; perhaps the authors of the Dead Sea scrolls.

Essentialism: The idea that a thing has a unique essence.

Etrog: A citron, used on Sukkot (the festival of Tabernacles).

Eyn Sof: The concept of the “infinite” in kabbalistic thought, the source out of which the sefirot emanate.

Exilarch: The political leader of the Jews in Babylonia; the office continued into the Muslim period.

Ezra: Biblical figure, said to lead exiles from Persia to Jerusalem (ca. 420 BCE); seems to have had the Torah in his possession.

Fatwa: An Islamic legal responsum.

Frank, Jacob (1726–1791): Polish leader of an antinomian Jewish group known, after his name, eponymously as the Frankists.

Frankel, Zacharias (1801–1875): A German Jew who developed a school of historical Judaism, a forerunner to Conservative Judaism.

Geiger, Abraham (1810–1874): A German rabbi whose writings were seminal for the development of the Reform movement.

Gemara: The rabbinic commentary on the Mishnah, which together with the Mishnah comprise the Talmud.

Gematria: An interpretive technique of translating letters into numerical values and then back into other words that have the same value

Geonim: The leaders of the rabbinic academies from ca. 550 CE—1050.

Gersonides (Levi ben Gershom or the Ralbag; 1288–1344): Jewish philosopher and author of *The Wars of the Lord*.

Get: A Jewish document of divorce.

Graetz, Heinrich (1817–1891): Jewish German Jewish historian.
Guide of the Perplexed: Written in Arabic by Maimonides; finished in 1190.
Gush Emmunim: Literally, “Block of the Faithful,” a religious-Zionist movement in Israel.
Hadith: Sayings of the prophet Muhammad.
Haggadah: The liturgy for the Passover seder.
Halakhah: Jewish law.
Halakhot Gedolot: Geonic legal guide to the Babylonian Talmud.
Halakhot Pesukot: Geonic legal work that survives only in fragments.
Halav yisrael: “Milk of an Israelite,” the idea that kosher dairy products need to be produced and handled only by Jews.
Halevi, Judah (1075?–ca. 1140): A Spanish poet and writer, author of the *Kuzari*.
Hannukah: Eight-day minor holiday commemorating of the rededication of the Temple in 165 BCE.
Haredi: “Trembler,” refers today to an ultra-Orthodox Jew.
Hasidism: A revivalist movement that began in eighteenth-century Poland.
Haskalah: The Jewish “Enlightenment” of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
Hasmoneans: The descendant monarchs of the Maccabees.
Havdallah: Ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath.
Havurah Movement: An anti-institutional Jewish movement in the United States in the 1960’s and 1970’s.
Hebrew Union College: Founded in 1885 in Cincinnati; now, after merging with the Jewish Institute of Religion, the central seminary for the training of Reform rabbis in North America.
Hekhalot literature: A collection of texts from late antiquity or the geonic period that describe ascents to heaven.
Hellenism: A complex of linguistic, political, and cultural features that marked the Near East.
Herzl, Theodor (1860–1904): An Austrian Jew who is credited with founding modern political Zionism.
Hirsh, Samson Raphael (1808–1888): German rabbi normally credited with founding “neo-Orthodoxy” or “Modern Orthodoxy.”
Holocaust: Also known as the Shoah in Hebrew, refers to the murder of over six million Jews during World War II.
Hoshanna Rabba: The last day of Sukkot; thought to end the annual period of judgment.
Ibn Ezra, Abraham (1092–1167): Spanish commentator on the Tanakh; notable for his philological interests.
Ibn Gabirol, Samuel (ca. 1021–ca. 1058): Jewish poet and philosopher, author of *Fons Vitae*.
Ibn Janah, Abulwalid Merwan (Rabbi Jonah; born ca. 990 CE): A native of Cordoba, author of *The Book of Embroidery* and *The Book of Roots*, some of the first works of Hebrew grammar.
Israel: Can refer to (1). Jacob, the biblical character; (2). Jacob’s descendants (the “children of Israel”); (3). the land that the Torah promises to Abraham’s descendants; (4). the modern political state.
Isserles, Rabbi Moses (1530–1572): Polish rabbi who glossed the Shulhan Arukh from an

Ashkenazic perspective.

Jacob of Marvège (twelfth to thirteenth centuries): Author of *Responsa from Heaven*.

Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism: Moses Mendelssohn's best-known work (1783); a contemporary definition of Judaism and argument for Jewish civic rights.

Jewish Theological Seminary of America: Founded in 1887 in New York; now the central seminary for the training of Conservative rabbis in North America.

Josephus: Jewish historian who lived in the first century, CE.

Judah, Rabbi, the "Prince" (or Patriarch): Redacted the Mishnah and served as some kind of Jewish communal leader.

Judenstaat, Der: "The Jewish State," Theodor Herzl's Zionist manifesto.

Kabbalah: "Tradition," the distinctive Jewish mysticism that arose in the Middle Ages and was exemplified by the Zohar.

Kabbalat Shabbat: A collection of psalms and hymns recited immediately prior to Shabbat; added to the liturgy by Lurianic kabbalists in the sixteenth century.

Kagen, Rabbi Israel Meir (1838–1933): Polish rabbi known as the Hafetz Hayyim who authored an influential commentary on part of the Shulhan Arukh, the *Mishnah Berurah*.

Kaplan, Mordecai (1881–1983): An American thinker whose ideas founded the Reconstructionist movement.

Karaim: Movement in the geonic period that rejected the Oral Torah and authority of the rabbis.

Karo, Rabbi Joseph (1488–1575): Author of the Shulhan Arukh.

Kashrut, kosher: The Jewish dietary laws.

Kehillah: "Community," designating the local, semi-autonomous Jewish communities of medieval Europe.

Ketubbah: Refers primarily to the statutory payment that a husband (or his estate) owes to his wife on dissolution of the marriage; can also (and more colloquially) refer to the marriage contract itself.

Kibbutz: A communal settlement in the modern State of Israel.

Kippah (yarmulke): A form of head-covering traditionally worn by some Eastern European men, and is now a standard custom.

Kol Nidre: Geonic prayer annulling all vows; traditionally recited the eve of the Day of Atonement.

Kook, Rabbi Abraham Isaac (1865–1935): Rabbi in Palestine well-known for his distinctive mystical theology that incorporated Zionism.

Kuzari: Written in Arabic by Judah Halevi, a purported dialogue between a king, a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, and a philosopher.

Lekha Dodi: Kabbalistic hymn written in sixteenth century by Solomon Alkabez; now incorporated into most modern versions of Kabbalat Shabbat.

Leeser, Isaac (1806–1868): Spiritual leader of Mikve Israel in Philadelphia; retranslated the Hebrew Bible into English, published by the Jewish Publication Society.

Lubavitch Hasidim. Also known as Habad, a group of Hasidim.

Lulav: A bunching of three species of foliage, waved together on Sukkot.

Luria, Isaac (1534–1572): A kabbalist in Safed, credited with developing a new kabbalistic system.

Maamad: The council of lay leaders in Sephardic communities in Amsterdam and the New World.

Maccabean Revolt: The uprising against the Seleucids led in 165 BCE by the Maccabee brothers.

Maccabees, Book 1: A court history of the Maccabees and the Hasmonean kings, probably originally written in Hebrew around 100 BCE and now in the Apocrypha.

Maccabees, Book 2: A theological account of the Maccabean uprising, written in the Diaspora, probably in Greek, around 100 BCE and now in the Apocrypha.

Maimonides (1135–1204): Jewish philosopher and legal codifier.

Mamzer: The child of an adulterous or incestuous union.

Marranos: “Pigs,” the insulting term given in Spain to the Jewish converts to Christianity who continued to practice Judaism secretly.

Maskilim: “Enlighteners,” the active participants of the Haskalah.

Masorettes, Masoretic Text: The scribes who, during the Geonic period, punctuated the Tanak, creating a stable Hebrew text of the Bible.

Matzah: The unleavened bread eaten on Pesach.

Mendelssohn, Moses (1729–1786): Jewish German Jewish philosopher and writer.

Mepharshim: Medieval rabbinic scholars whose comments on the Tanak generally followed the peshat method.

Messianic Jews: Modern -day Jews who accept Jesus as the messiah.

Mechitzah: A partition that separates men from women in a place of prayer.

Midrash: A distinctively rabbinic genre of biblical interpretation.

Mikveh: A body of water, immersion in which can remove ritual impurity.

Minhag: A local, Jewish custom.

Minyan: A prayer quorum, either ten Jewish men, (traditionally), or, in modern liberal Judaism, any combination of ten Jewish men and/or women.

Mishnah: Redacted ca. 220 CE, the first work of Oral Torah.

Mishneh Torah: A code of law written by Maimonides in Hebrew; completed in 1178.

Mitnagdim: “Opponents,” referring to those who opposed Hasidism.

Mitzvah, mitzvot (plural): A commandment.

Nahmanides (Rabbi Moses ben Nahman; 1194–ca. 1270): Wrote scriptural and halakhic commentaries; member of conservative kabbalistic circle in Catalonia.

Nebuchadnezzar: The Babylonian king who destroyed the first Jerusalem Temple in 586 BCE.

Niddah: A menstruant.

Omer: Grain offering that immediately follows Passover and begins the seven week countdown to Pentecost (Shavuot).

Oral Torah: A rabbinic concept that God’s revelation on Sinai included what would become the rabbinic tradition.

Orthodox Judaism, Modern: A movement founded by Samson Raphael Hirsch in nineteenth-century Germany, seeks to integrate secular knowledge with tradition.

Orthodox Union: Founded in 1898 as the Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America, it is the central institution for Modern Orthodoxy in North America

Palestinian Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, Yerushalmi): The Mishnah together with its amoraic commentary, redacted in Palestine about 400 CE.

Passover (Pesach): The festival of unleavened bread that also commemorates the exodus from Egypt.

Patrilineal descent: Refers to the Reform movement's decision in 1983 to recognize as Jewish the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers who are committed to Judaism.

Paul: Jew from Asia Minor who believed that Jesus was the messiah.

Pentecost (Shavuot): Holiday that occurs fifty days after Passover.

Peshat: A "contextual" approach to biblical interpretation, that seeks to employ contemporary "scientific" techniques.

Pharisees: A Jewish sect of the Second Temple period; perhaps predecessors of the Rabbis.

Philo (ca. 30 BCE —30 CE): A Jewish philosopher writing in Greek in Alexandria, Egypt.

Pittsburgh Platform (1885): An important early codification of Reform Judaism in America.

Piyyut: A form of Jewish liturgical poetry that begins in late antiquity.

polythetic: A method of categorizing things based on overlapping sets of shared characteristics.

Priest (*kohen*): Officiated in the Temple when it stood, but now only observing vestigial functions. Thought to be a descendent of Aaron, through the father's line.

Prophet: One who received a direct communication from God. The Rabbis thought that prophecy ceased during the Second Temple period.

Purim: Minor holiday marked by the reading of the book of Esther.

Qumran: The site near the Dead Sea where the Dead Sea scrolls were found.

Rabad (Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquières; 1125–1198): Objected to Maimonides's codification of the halakhah.

Rabbanite: During the Geonic period, a supporter of the rabbinic tradition and institutions, against the Karaites.

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS): Founded in New York in 1897 to train Orthodox rabbis; now part of Yeshiva University.

Rabbis: "The Rabbis" refers to the authors of the classical rabbinic literature, ca. 70 CE CE—640; "rabbi" literally means "my teacher," and has been used as an official title from the rabbinic period to the present.

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac; 1049–1105): The most preeminent commentator on the Tanakh and Talmud; lived in Provence.

Rebbe: The leader of a Hasidic group (see also, *Tzadik*). "The Rebbe" today often refers to Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the leader of Lubavitch, who died in 1994.

Reconstructionist Judaism: A modern ideological movement based on the ideas of Mordecai Kaplan.

Redaction: The process of editing separate documents to make them into a single text.

Reform Judaism: A modern ideological movement that began in nineteenth-century Germany. Today, the largest of the modern movements.

Rosh Hashanah: A holiday marking the Jewish new year and the beginning of the "Ten Days of Repentance." In the Torah, called the holiday of "trumpeting."

Sabbatai Zvi (1625–1676): A "failed messiah" who, toward the end of his life, converted to Islam.

Sadducees: A Jewish sect from the Second Temple period.

Satmar Hasidim: Now settled primarily in New York, a Hasidic sect.

Schlesinger, Akiva Joseph (1837–1922): A leader of Haredi Judaism.

Se'adyah ben Joseph: Served as Geon of Sura, 928–942.

Seder: The ceremonial meal held on the first night (or, in the Diaspora, first two nights) of Passover. The *Haggadah* is read during it.

Sefer haBahir: “The Book of Illumination,” written in twelfth-12th or thirteenth-13th century Provence, an early kabbalistic text.

Sefer HaRazim: Book of mystical (and “magical”) formulae and experiences, written in late antiquity.

Sefirah, Sefirot: “sphere,”; the kabbalistic term for the emanations of the Godhead.

Seleucids: A Hellenistic dynasty based in Syria, and winning control over Palestine in 200 BCE.

Sephardim: Those Jews who trace their heritage back to medieval Spain (Sepharad).

Septuagint: The Greek translation of the Torah (and ultimately the rest of the Tanak), prepared in Egypt about 200 BCE.

Shabbat: The Jewish Sabbath, starting Friday at sunset and ending Saturday night.

Shatnez: The biblical prohibition of mixing wool and linen in the same garment.

Shearith Israel: The first Jewish congregation (1704; New York) founded in America.

Shekhinah: God’s “presence.” Used by kabbalists to denote the last emanation, closest to humans, and God’s feminine side.

Sheloshim: The thirty-day period of mourning for a close relative; less restrictive than the shiva.

Shema: Deuteronomy 6:4, although can also refer to the paragraph that follows it together with some other biblical passages. Part of the traditional Jewish liturgy.

Shemini Atzeret: A semi-independent holiday immediately following Sukkot.

Shiva: The seven -day period of intensive mourning for a close relative.

Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745–1813): Founder of Habad (Lubavitch) Hasidism and author of the *Tanya*.

Shofar: A trumpet made from a ram’s horn and associated especially with Rosh Hashanah.

Shulhan Arukh: Joseph Karo’s sixteenth -century Jewish law code.

Siddur: Literally, “order”; The Jewish prayer- book.

Sitra ahara: The “other side”; used by kabbalists to refer to the power of evil.

Six -Day War: In a short war in 1967, Israel emerged victorious over her Arab neighbors and occupied Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, Gaza, and the Sinai Desert.

Sofer, Rabbi Moses (1763–1839): Also known as the Hatam Sofer, urged little accommodation of modernity.

Spinoza, Baruch (1632–1677): Jewish philosopher in Amsterdam.

Sukkah: A booth in which Jews are to eat (and sleep) during the holiday of Sukkot.

Synagogue: A Jewish prayer -house, usually permanently housing a scroll of the Torah.

Takkanah: A rabbinic legal decree.

Tallit: A four -cornered fringed garment shawl worn at Jewish prayer services.

Tallit katan: A four- cornered fringed garment traditionally worn by men all the time, usually underneath one’s shirt.

Talmud Torah: The activity of studying rabbinic texts, thought by the rabbis to be a religious obligation in its own right.

Tanak: Corresponds more or less to the “Old Testament.” An acronym of its three parts,

Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).

Tannaim: Rabbis who lived from 70 CE—ca. 250.

Tekhines: Popular supplications, written mainly in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Tefillin: phylacteries, leather boxes containing portions of the Torah that are worn by men during some prayer services as well as in private prayer.

Temple: Usually refers to the Temple in Jerusalem; now a frequent designation for a synagogue.

Temple Scroll: One of the Dead Sea scrolls; contains an idealized model of the Jerusalem Temple.

Ten Days of Repentance: The period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom

Kippur.

Teshuvah: Can refer to “turning,” the act of repentance, or to “response,” denoting a rabbinic legal responsum.

Theodicy: The “problem” of God’s justice.

Theurgy: The use of certain practices and verbal formulas to harness the divine power to do one’s will.

Thirteen Principles of Faith: Maimonides’s codification of what he saw as the “essential beliefs” of Judaism.

Tikkun: A “fixing”; a concept in Lurianic Kabbalah that repairs defects in the Godhead.

Tisha b’Av: A minor holiday on the ninth day of the month of Av, a fast day, commemorating the destruction of both the first and second Temples. A fast day.

Torah: Can refer to the Pentateuch; the scroll on which it is written; or the entire and continuing content of God’s revelation.

Tu b’shevat: The fifteenth day of the month of Shevat, marking the “new year for the trees.”

Tzadik: “Righteous one”; Hasidim used this term to refer to their leader, whom they saw as exceptionally holy.

Ulama: The Islamic scholarly class.

Union of Reform Judaism: The union of North American Reform congregations.

Upsheerin: The Eastern European custom of cutting the hair of a Jewish boy for the first time around his third birthday.

Vilna Gaon (Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman; 1720–97): Legendary scholar and opponent of the emerging Hasidim.

Vulgate: The Latin translation of the Bible, produced by Jerome in the fifth-century CE.

Western Wall: The western retaining wall of the Jerusalem Temple, and today a popular and revered Jewish holy site.

Wise, Isaac Meyer (1819–1900): Early Reform rabbi in America, founded Hebrew Union College in 1875.

Wissenschaft des Judentums: “Science of Judaism,” the German movement in the nineteenth century to study Judaism academically.

Yavneh: According to the Rabbis, the site of the first rabbinic academy.

YHWH: The tetragrammaton, the four-lettered name of God found in the Torah.

Yiddish: A Jewish language that developed in medieval Germany but was used by Eastern European Jews well into the twentieth century.

Yiddishkeit: Denotes Jewish culture in an Eastern European context.

Yigdal: Metrical Hebrew hymn based on Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith," written in 1404 and part of many modern Jewish liturgies

Yohanan ben Zakkai, Rabban: Credited with founding the rabbinic academy at Yavneh.

Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement, a major fast day.

Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel: Established the foundations of the Second Temple ca. 515 BCE.

Zion: Another term for the Promised Land.

Zionism: The political movement to establish a Jewish country in Palestine.

Zohar: Mystical, Aramaic commentary on the Torah, attributed to Rabbi Shimon bar

Yohai but probably written (or compiled) in the thirteenth century by Moses de Leon.