

LEARNING MADE EASY



Judaism

ALL-IN-ONE

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



6
Books
in one!

The Experts
at Dummies

Judaism All-in-One For Dummies®

To view this book's Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and search for “Judaism All-in-One For Dummies Cheat Sheet” in the Search box.

Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Introduction](#)

[About This Book](#)

[Foolish Assumptions](#)

[Icons Used in This Book](#)

[Beyond the Book](#)

[Where to Go from Here](#)

[**Book 1: Getting Started with Judaism**](#)

[**Chapter 1: What Jews Generally Believe**](#)

[Recognizing Who's a Jew and Why](#)

[It's All One: Judaism and God](#)

[A Never-Ending Torah: The Unfolding of a Tradition](#)

[A Path of Blessing: Judaism as a Daily Practice](#)

[Examining Jewish Mysticism](#)

[Facing Ethical Challenges](#)

Chapter 2: From Womb to Tomb: The Life Cycle

[In the Beginning: Birth and Bris](#)

[Coming of Age: The Bar/Bat Mitzvah](#)

[Get Me to the Chuppah On Time: Weddings](#)

[Stepping through the Valley: The Shadow of Death](#)

Chapter 3: Exploring Jewish History

[Let My People Go: From Abraham to Exodus](#)

[The Kings of Israel: The First Temple](#)

[Bracketed by Exile: The Second Temple](#)

[The Exiles Continue: The First Millennium](#)

[The Greatest Horror, the Greatest Triumph](#)

[Jewish Buddhists and Other Challenges of the New Age](#)

[The Problem of Anti-Semitism](#)

[Ten People Who Helped Shape Judaism](#)

Chapter 4: Eyeing Celebrations and Holy Days

[A Taste of Paradise: Shabbat](#)

[In with the New: Rosh Hashanah](#)

[Getting Serious: Yom Kippur](#)

[The Great Outdoors: Sukkot](#)

[Seeking Light in Dark Times: Chanukah](#)

[Celebrating Renewal: Tu B'Shvat](#)

[A Jewish Carnival: Purim](#)

[From Groan to Glee: Passover](#)

[Spring Is Busting Out All Over: Shavuot](#)

[A Day of Mourning: Tisha B'Av](#)

Chapter 5: Answering Common Questions about Judaism

[Why Don't Jews Believe in Jesus?](#)

[What Does It Mean to Be the "Chosen" People?](#)

[Why Is Israel Important to the Jews?](#)

[Why Are So Many Doctors, Lawyers, and Entertainers Jewish?](#)

[What Is "Jewish Humor"?](#)

[What Role Does Music Play in Jewish Culture?](#)

[Who's In Charge of Judaism?](#)

[Can You Convert to Judaism?](#)

[What's the Relationship between Judaism and Islam?](#)

Book 2: Perusing the Torah

Chapter 1: The Torah 101 — Just the Basics

[Beginning with Torah Basics](#)

[Encountering God, the Ultimate Author](#)

[Examining the Torah's Structure](#)

[Getting a Grip on What the Torah Isn't](#)

Chapter 2: Navigating the Books of the Torah

[The Five Books of Moses](#)

[Focusing on the Book of Genesis](#)

[Exploring the Book of Exodus](#)

[Explaining the Book of Leviticus](#)

[Perusing the Book of Numbers](#)

[Looking At the Book of Deuteronomy](#)

Chapter 3: The Torah: An Operating Manual

[Defining the Essence of the Torah](#)

[Being a Mensch: Personal Behavior](#)

[Living by the Word of the Torah in the Community](#)

[Observing the Holy Days in Torah Time](#)

[Shabbat: Observing the Holiest Day](#)

[Celebrating Holy Days in the Torah](#)

[Following Jewish Customs](#)

[Eating Kosher](#)

Chapter 4: Exploring the Torah Synagogue Service

[Appreciating the Basic Customs of Torah Readings](#)

[Preparing for the Torah Service](#)

[Storing the Torah Scroll](#)

[Understanding the Torah Scroll Procession](#)

[Undressing the Torah Scroll](#)

[Blessing the Holy Words](#)

[The Big Event: Reading the Torah Out Loud](#)

[Concluding the Torah Service](#)

Chapter 5: Digging Deeper into the Torah

[Writing a Torah Scroll](#)

[Analyzing the Torah](#)

[Studying the Torah](#)

[Explaining Biblical Archaeology](#)

Book 3: Exploring the Talmud

Chapter 1: Introducing the Talmud

[Recognizing What the Talmud Is](#)

[Tracing the History of the Talmud](#)

[Blessings for Studying Torah \(Including the Talmud\)](#)

[The Antisemitic War against the Talmud](#)

[Identifying Key Terms and Concepts from the Talmud](#)

Chapter 2: Opening the Talmud

[Navigating the Talmud](#)

[Introducing the Talmud's Parts](#)

[Understanding the Layout of a Talmud Page](#)

[Meeting the Stories and Laws of the Talmud](#)

[Greeting the Great Talmudic Masters](#)

[Apologies and Reflections on Women in the Talmud](#)

[Thinking Like a Talmudic Rabbi](#)

Chapter 3: Living the Talmud Way

[Observing the Holidays as Holy Days](#)

[Eating — But Only If It's Kosher](#)

[Praying and Blessing](#)

[Breaking Taboos: Sexual Intimacy in the Talmud](#)

[Litigating the Talmudic Way](#)

Book 4: Examining the Kabbalah

Chapter 1: Unmasking Kabbalah

[Understanding What Kabbalah Is](#)

[Magic, Mishegas, and Other Things That Kabbalah Isn't](#)

[Looking Back: A Brief History of Kabbalah](#)

[Eyeing Kabbalah Today](#)

Chapter 2: Cutting to the Core of Kabbalah

[The Link between Heaven and Earth: Kabbalah's Own Top-Ten Countdown](#)

[Everything \(Even a Traffic Jam\) Is for the Best](#)

[Bodies Don't Have Souls; Souls Have Bodies](#)

[Like Déjà Vu All Over Again: Reincarnation](#)

[Instant Karma's Gonna Get You](#)

Chapter 3: Living the Life of a Kabbalist

[Living One Day at a Time](#)

[Living One Week at a Time](#)

[Living a Year in the Life of a Kabbalist](#)

[Exploring a Kabbalist's Lifecycle](#)

Chapter 4: Fine-tuning the Essential Skills of the Kabbalist

[Discovering Kabbalistic Books](#)

[Studying Like a Kabbalist](#)

[Praying Like a Kabbalist](#)

[Knowing the Unknowable God](#)

Book 5: The Basics of Hebrew

Chapter 1: Starting with Hebrew

[Speaking Hebrew Like a Native](#)

[Counting in Hebrew](#)

[Reading Hebrew](#)

Chapter 2: Delving into Basic Hebrew Grammar

[Making Sense of Hebrew Syntax](#)

[Questioning](#)

[Meeting Parts of Speech](#)

Chapter 3: Meeting and Greeting

[Shalom! Shalom!](#)

[Making Grand Introductions](#)

[Getting Better Acquainted](#)

[Extending and Responding to Invitations](#)

[Asking Questions: The Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How](#)

[Recognizing Some Favorite Hebrew Expressions](#)

Book 6: Jewish Cooking

Chapter 1: Divinely Inspired and Downright Delicious

[Living by the Jewish Holidays](#)

[Keeping Kosher](#)

[Exploring Jewish Cuisine](#)

[Adding Flavor](#)

Chapter 2: Cooking for the Holidays

[Rosh Hashanah: A New Year as Sweet as Apples and Honey](#)

[Yom Kippur: A Fast Surrounded by Feasts](#)

[Sukkot: When Camping Out Is a Commandment](#)

[Hanukkah: The Light-Hearted Festival of Lights and Latkes](#)

[Purim: When the Mitzvah Is](#)

[Passover: What Happened When the Bread Didn't Rise](#)

[Shavuot: The Holiday Devoted to Dairy Delights](#)

[Shabbat: A Weekly Excuse to Rejoice](#)

Chapter 3: Beginning the Feast

[Starting with Spreads and Noshes](#)

[Sipping on Soups, the Jewish Mother's Cure-All](#)

Chapter 4: The Heart of the Celebration

[Preparing Brunch Favorites](#)

[Making Dinner Recipes for the Win](#)

[Giving Low Effort, Getting Lots of Flavor](#)

[Creating Ground Meat Meals](#)

Chapter 5: Side Dishes and Pareve Entrees

[Using More Than Your Noodle](#)

[Focusing on the Pareve Plate](#)

[Preparing Vegetables: To Each Its Own](#)

[Making a Salad a Day](#)

Chapter 6: Sweet Noshes

[Cakes You Crave](#)

[Treats You Make in Miniature](#)

[Old-Country Fruit Is Back in Fashion](#)

[Old-Fashioned Comfort Food Never Goes Out of Vogue](#)

Index

About the Authors

Dedication

Acknowledgments

Connect with Dummies

End User License Agreement

List of Tables

Book 3 Chapter 2

[TABLE 2-1 Overview of the Talmud Structure](#)

[TABLE 2-2 The Sedarim of the Mishna](#)

Book 5 Chapter 1

[TABLE 1-1 Counting from 1 to 10](#)

[TABLE 1-2 The Hebrew Alphabet](#)

[TABLE 1-3 The Long Vowels](#)

[TABLE 1-4 The Short Vowels](#)

Book 5 Chapter 2

[TABLE 2-1 Personal Pronouns Used as Subjects](#)

[TABLE 2-2 Personal Pronouns Used as Objects](#)

[TABLE 2-3 Stand-Alone Possessive Pronouns](#)

[TABLE 2-4 Exploring Some Common Adjectives](#)

[TABLE 2-5 Some Common Present-Tense Verbs](#)

[TABLE 2-6 Common Adverbs](#)

[TABLE 2-7 Hebrew Prepositions](#)

Book 5 Chapter 3

[TABLE 3-1 Words to Describe How You Feel](#)

List of Illustrations

Book 4 Chapter 2

[FIGURE 2-1: The ten sefirot as the Tree of Life.](#)



Judaism

ALL-IN-ONE

by The Experts at Dummies

**for
dummies®**
A Wiley Brand

Judaism All-in-One For Dummies®

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2026 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial technologies or similar technologies.

Media and software compilation copyright © 2026 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial technologies or similar technologies.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

The manufacturer's authorized representative according to the EU General Product Safety Regulation is Wiley-VCH GmbH, Boschstr. 12, 69469 Weinheim, Germany, email: Product_Safety@wiley.com.

Trademarks: Wiley, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and may not be used without

written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY:
THE PUBLISHER AND THE AUTHOR MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES OR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERY SITUATION. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AUTHOR OR THE PUBLISHER ENDORSES THE INFORMATION THE ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT INTERNET WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002. For technical support, please visit <https://hub.wiley.com/community/support/dummies>.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026935272

ISBN 978-1-394-40888-7 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-394-40889-4 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-394-40890-0 (ebk)

Introduction

We're amazed by how many people have become interested in Judaism in recent years. Some people interested in Judaism are in search of meaningful connections to the past. Some have a hunger for deeper understanding and ritual, a longing for something precious to pass on to their children, something nourishing and loving to live by. For many Jews (and non-Jews, too), this interest has meant exploring the rich tapestry of Judaism — some discovering the religion for the first time, others re-examining the lost or forgotten traditions from their youth.

Whether you're Jewish or not, you may be curious about the many aspects of Judaism. With that in mind, we offer you *Judaism All-in-One For Dummies*. Wherever you're coming from — whether you're interested in the religion or the spirituality, the culture or the ethnic traditions — this book offers you a taste of Judaism, right down to the Jewish cooking recipes!

About This Book

Judaism All-in-One For Dummies offers you a glimpse into Judaism. You find out what Jews generally believe and discover the special days they celebrate. You even get a quick primer on the Hebrew language and popular Jewish recipes.

Although this book doesn't cover everything about Judaism, you find out the basics so that the next time you're invited to a holiday celebration, Jewish wedding, or synagogue, you know why it's happening, what to expect, and what food you might be eating. You can even

talk intelligently about the Torah, the Talmud, and the Kabbalah.

Even better, we've packaged all this great information in six easy-to-read minibooks that are organized in easy-to-access chapters:

- » [Book 1](#): Judaism
- » [Book 2](#): The Torah
- » [Book 3](#): The Talmud
- » [Book 4](#): The Kabbalah
- » [Book 5](#): Hebrew
- » [Book 6](#): Jewish Cooking

Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, we assumed that our readers didn't know anything about Jews and Judaism. Toward that end, we explain all the rituals, ideas, and terms that you need to know in a way that you can understand, even if you're reading about these things for the first time.

We also don't assume that you're Jewish, nor do we assume that you want to be or want to adopt every practice, custom, and rituals.

If you fit into any of these assumptions, this book is for you:

- » You feel pretty educated as a Jewish person, but you never really understood what the Torah or Talmud is all about.
- » You know nothing about the Torah or Talmud, or you're aware of some common misconceptions about them that you want to clear up.

- » You want to find out more about Judaism, but you don't want to struggle through an academic book about it. Instead, you want a friendly, informal, but accurate treatment of the subject.
- » You've heard about the Torah and are curious about it because you know that it's the central book and foundation of Judaism.
- » You're a spiritual seeker, and you've heard that the Torah is the cornerstone of the Jewish path and the hiding place of all the secrets of Kabbalah.
- » You're Jewish but realize that you never received a good Jewish education or you want to supplement, enrich, broaden, and expand your Jewish knowledge.
- » You're not Jewish, but you want to understand more about Jewish life, including that of your Jewish friends and neighbors.
- » You've attended a synagogue service, and you'd like to know more about it.

Whatever the reason for your journey, we're happy you're here — and hopefully, you'll leave this book with a lot more knowledge than what you opened it with, no matter where you are on your path!

Icons Used in This Book

All *For Dummies* books feature icons (little pictures that grab your attention) in the margins to serve you well. Think of them as road signs pointing to different kinds of information in the chapters.



TIP

This icon points out useful tidbits to help you make more sense out of something.



REMEMBER

This icon highlights ideas you should keep in mind as you explore or practice Judaism.



WARNING

The text next to this icon helps you steer clear of any road blocks or mistakes.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When we present interesting, but not essential information, we use this icon.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information that we provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at Dummies.com. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for "Judaism All-in-One For Dummies Cheat Sheet."

Where to Go from Here

This book is a reference, meaning that you don't need to read it in order like a bestselling novel. You don't have to read these minibooks or even the chapters in order — you can skip directly to what interests you.

Our suggestion is to start with what interests you. If you know nothing about Judaism, you may want to start with [Book 1](#). If you want to prepare a Jewish dish to share, check out [Book 6](#). And if you're heading to your first synagogue, check out Book 2, [Chapter 4](#).

If you're not sure where to start, flip through the Table of Contents or index, find a topic that piques your interest, and flip to the book or chapter. No matter where you choose to start, you can find enough to get started in your exploration of Judaism.

Book 1

Getting Started with Judaism

Contents at a Glance

Chapter 1: What Jews Generally Believe

[Recognizing Who's a Jew and Why](#)

[It's All One: Judaism and God](#)

[A Never-Ending Torah: The Unfolding of a Tradition](#)

[A Path of Blessing: Judaism as a Daily Practice](#)

[Examining Jewish Mysticism](#)

[Facing Ethical Challenges](#)

Chapter 2: From Womb to Tomb: The Life Cycle

[In the Beginning: Birth and Bris](#)

[Coming of Age: The Bar/Bat Mitzvah](#)

[Get Me to the Chuppah On Time: Weddings](#)

[Stepping through the Valley: The Shadow of Death](#)

Chapter 3: Exploring Jewish History

[Let My People Go: From Abraham to Exodus](#)

[The Kings of Israel: The First Temple](#)

[Bracketed by Exile: The Second Temple](#)

[The Exiles Continue: The First Millennium](#)

[The Greatest Horror, the Greatest Triumph](#)

[Jewish Buddhists and Other Challenges of the New Age](#)

[The Problem of Anti-Semitism](#)

[Ten People Who Helped Shape Judaism](#)

Chapter 4: Eyeing Celebrations and Holy Days

[A Taste of Paradise: Shabbat](#)

[In with the New: Rosh Hashanah](#)

[Getting Serious: Yom Kippur](#)

[The Great Outdoors: Sukkot](#)

[Seeking Light in Dark Times: Chanukah](#)

[Celebrating Renewal: Tu B'Shvat](#)

[A Jewish Carnival: Purim](#)

[From Groan to Glee: Passover](#)

[Spring Is Busting Out All Over: Shavuot](#)

[A Day of Mourning: Tisha B'Av](#)

Chapter 5: Answering Common Questions about Judaism

[Why Don't Jews Believe in Jesus?](#)

[What Does It Mean to Be the "Chosen" People?](#)

[Why Is Israel Important to the Jews?](#)

[Why Are So Many Doctors, Lawyers, and Entertainers Jewish?](#)

[What Is "Jewish Humor"?](#)

[What Role Does Music Play in Jewish Culture?](#)

[Who's In Charge of Judaism?](#)

[Can You Convert to Judaism?](#)

[What's the Relationship between Judaism and Islam?](#)

Chapter 1

What Jews Generally Believe

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Exploring the difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews
 - » Discovering the many names of God
 - » Looking at the Torah and the Talmud
 - » Exploring the worlds of the Kabbalah
 - » Pondering Jewish ethics
-

In this chapter, you find out why you can never be sure someone is Jewish (or not) just by how they look. Plus, you get the skinny on all the details about being Jewish, like is it a race or a tribe? Is it a religion or a practice? Do you have to believe in God? And what's all this about meditation and the kabbalah? That stuff isn't Jewish, is it?

Recognizing Who's a Jew and Why

Judaism isn't a race or even a particular culture or ethnic group. A little more than 15 million Jews are spread around the world, including about 6 million in the United States and about 5 million in Israel — so Judaism obviously isn't "a nation."

So what *does* it mean to be Jewish? Here are the basics:

- » **Being *Jewish* (being “a Jew”) means you’re a Member of the Tribe (an M-O-T).** The tribe started with a couple named Abraham and Sarah more than 4,000 years ago, it grew over time, and it’s still here today. (For more on Jewish history, see [Chapter 3](#).)
- » ***Judaism* is a set of beliefs, practices, and ethics based on the Torah (see [Book 2](#)).** You can practice Judaism and not be Jewish, and you can be a Jew and not practice Judaism.

Jews far and wide

The Jewish people have always tended to fan out across the known world. Evidence indicates that even centuries before Jesus, Jewish communities inhabited the North African and East African coasts, Europe, and Asia. Jews were among the first people to come to the Americas from Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. Some evidence suggests that at least one Jew was aboard the ship with Columbus.

Everywhere the Jews went, their population grew through intermarriage and conversion, and — most importantly — they kept their basic religion while adopting the culture and norms of the local area. That’s why up to 20 percent of Jews descended from European ancestors have blue eyes, and why some Jews are Black, Hispanic, or Asian. It’s also why a Jew from New York looks and acts different than a Jew from Bombay.

Similarly, Jewish food, music, and humor from Iraq and Yemen are much more Arabic in nature than the Spanish flavor of Jews from Brazil and Argentina, which is different than the borscht soup and klezmer music of Jews from Europe. They even all speak Hebrew with

different dialects! Jews just don't fit any consistent set of stereotypes or expectations.

And yet, all Jews are inextricably linked together simply by being Jewish. Perhaps it's a common practice and belief in Judaism. Perhaps it's a common sense of history or a shared sense of being an outsider from the broader culture. Or perhaps it's a deep, innate feeling of connection to the tribe.

Who decides if you're Jewish?

Two years after the new government of Israel came to power in 1948, it passed the Law of Return, which states that anyone born of a Jewish mother or anyone who has converted to Judaism can move to Israel and claim citizenship. This immediately reignited a controversy that began much earlier and continues to this day: Who gets to say whether or not someone is really Jewish?

Whether someone practiced Judaism wasn't an issue for citizenship, because Israel was founded for the most part by secular Jews. But what about people born Jewish who had been raised as Christians or Muslims or who practiced another religion? Some say you have to not only identify yourself as Jewish, but also not practice any other religion. Others say that religion has nothing to do with it and point out that the Nazis killed thousands of people who were Jewish by birth but practiced some other religion. Each year, Israeli courts consider cases arguing over whether someone is or is not Jewish.

And what about people who convert? Technically, someone who converts to Judaism is no different from someone who was born Jewish. However, not everyone sees it that way. Various denominations of Judaism, including the Orthodox Jews, refuse to acknowledge the conversion of anyone converted by a Reform or Conservative rabbi.

Many people say, “I’m half Jewish” (if one parent is Jewish) or “I’m a quarter-Jewish” (if one grandparent is Jewish). Traditional Jews argue that either you’re Jewish or you’re not. To them, if your mother’s mother was Jewish, then your mother is Jewish, and if your mother is Jewish, then you’re Jewish. Among Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, if only your father is Jewish and you were raised Jewish, then you’re considered Jewish, too.

After all, it’s a small world

Jews have long spread out to the corners of the world, so significant Jewish communities (more than 100,000 people) live in France, Australia, Argentina, and South Africa. In fact, more Jewish people live outside of Israel than within today — it has been this way for more than 2,500 years. And no matter where they live, most Jews today identify with one of two groups:

- » **Ashkenazi:** The descendants of Jews who, until around 1900, lived anywhere from northwest Europe (like France and Germany) to eastern Europe (including Russia, Ukraine, and Lithuania) are usually called *Ashkenazi* (*Ashkenazim* is plural). The majority of Jews in the world are Ashkenazi.
- » **Sephardi:** The descendants of Jews who lived in Spain up until the 15th century are called *Sephardi* (*Sephardim* is plural). After the expulsion (see [Chapter 3](#)), these Jews traveled to North Africa, Italy, the Ottoman Empire (Turkey), and back to the Middle East. Of course, many Jews started out in those areas (never having traveled as far as Spain to begin with), but they’re generally called Sephardi anyway. You also hear Jews from the Middle East called *Mizrachi* (“from the East”; remember that Hebrew has no “ch” sound, so this is the guttural “kh” sound).

Over the past 500 years, the Sephardim primarily interacted with Muslims, especially African and Arab Muslims. Today, much of their culture (music, language, liturgical melodies, food, festival customs, and so on) is based on those cultures. The Ashkenazim, on the other hand, mostly interacted with European Christian cultures, resulting in a very different ethnic feeling.

Although Israel was founded primarily by Ashkenazi Jews, more than half of Israelis have always been Sephardim. However, the very different cultures have caused a number of difficulties. Many Ashkenazi Jews mistrust Sephardi Jews and think they've "ruined" Israel, and vice versa. Fortunately, as time goes by, things seem to be getting better.

Major branches of the tree

Although Judaism is a set of beliefs and practices, it encompasses a lot of different sets of beliefs and practices. In some ways, you can see Judaism as a tree with many branches; there's a common trunk and root system, but each sect or denomination is off on its own branch, and in many cases, each synagogue is on its own little twig.

Most Jews see the biggest branches of the tree as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Non-Religious — plus, they might add a few others, like Ultra-Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Renewal, and Humanistic. On the other hand, some traditional Orthodox Jews see it differently: To them, Orthodoxy is the whole tree, and what everyone else is doing is something else — maybe a whole other tree, but certainly not practicing Judaism.

The basic difference between the groups is that while the Orthodox believe that the Torah (both written and oral;

see [Book 2](#)) was literally given by God to Moses, word for word, more liberal Jews tend to believe that the Torah and *halakhah* (Jewish law) may have been Divinely inspired, but were expressed by humans influenced by their own time and place.

Orthodox Jews

When you hear the term “Orthodox Jew,” you probably think of a man in a long black coat, with long locks of hair over his sideburns, a big beard, and a black hat. But in reality, there are dozens of different styles within Jewish Orthodoxy, each of them with a different culture, educational philosophy, leadership model, and set of policies. True, many of them do, in fact, wear black hats and coats, but many others — typically called Modern Orthodox Jews — almost always wear modern dress, and you might not be able to even tell them apart from non-Jews.

However, all Orthodox Jews technically accept the Torah as the word of God. So although you can see a massive cultural difference between the Orthodox Jew who wears a *shtreimel* (the black fur hat worn by some Ultra-Orthodox) and the Orthodox Jew who wears jeans and a T-shirt, most people would find it extremely difficult to discern a difference between their religious beliefs and observance.

A “who’s who” of all the different Orthodox groups and their doctrines would fill a small book by itself. However, they all basically fall into one of two types:

- » **Hasidism** was a movement founded in the 18th century by the Ba’al Shem Tov (see [Chapter 3](#)), focusing on sincere, joyful, and intense prayer — including ecstatic dancing, singing, and storytelling as a way to connect with God. Shortly after 1760, when

Acknowledgments

Kelly Ewing: To my family — thanks for putting up with me during my deadline frenzy! A big thank you goes out to Lindsay Berg and Carmen Krikorian for giving me the opportunity to return to my true passions: writing, editing, and helping others! I've enjoyed every minute of these projects! Also, thank you to Chad Sievers, Sofia Malik, and everyone else at Wiley Publishing for your behind-the-scenes work for getting this book to market.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

Executive Editor: Lindsay Berg

Editorial Assistant: Shannon Kujac

Project Manager and Copy Editor: Chad R. Sievers

Senior Managing Editor: Kristie Pyles

Compiler: Kelly Ewing

Production Editor: Tamilmani Varadharaj

Cover Image: © Victor Moussa/stock.adobe.com

Take Dummies with you everywhere you go!



Go to our [Website](#)



Like us on [Facebook](#)



Follow us on [Twitter](#)



Watch us on [YouTube](#)



Join us on [LinkedIn](#)



Pin us on [Pinterest](#)



Subscribe to our [newsletter](#)



Create your own [Dummies book cover](#)

**for
dummies®**
A Wiley Brand