

AFIKOMAN

Afikoman (based on Greek, epikomen or epikomion, meaning "that which comes after" or "dessert") is a half-piece of matzah hidden at the start of the Passover Seder and eaten at the end of the festive meal. After the afikoman is eaten, one may not consume any other food for the rest of the night, aside from the third and fourth cups of wine and beverages such as water or tea.

The hiding away of the afikoman has become an opportunity to maintain the interest and excitement of the children at the table. If the leader of the Seder hides it, the children are encouraged to locate it and demand a prize for its safe return. Alternately, the children hide the afikoman and the leader looks for it; when he or she gives up, the children demand the ransom for revealing its location. This game reinforces the importance of the afikoman, as the Seder cannot continue until it is eaten for "dessert."

ARON KODESH

The Ark in a synagogue is known as the Aron Kodesh among Ashkenazim and as Hechal among most Sephardim. It is generally a receptacle or ornamental closet which contains the synagogue's Torah scrolls. In most cases, the Ark is located on or near that wall of the sanctuary which is facing Jerusalem, considered by Jews to be the holiest spot in the world.



Aron Kodesh comes from the Hebrew words meaning "Holy Ark." This name is in reference to the Ark of the Covenant which was stored in the Holy of Holies in the ancient Tabernacle and in the Temple in Jerusalem. Hechal comes from the Hebrew word for "palace," a term which was also used in the time of the Temple in Jerusalem to refer to the inner sanctuary containing the Holy of Holies.

ASHKENAZI (ASHKENAZIC)

Ashkenazic Jews are the Jews of France, Germany, and Eastern Europe and their descendants. "Ashkenaz" is the medieval Hebrew name for Germany.

BAR MITZVAH/BAT MITZVAH

According to Jewish law, when Jewish children reach the age of maturity (12 years for girls, 13 years for boys), they become responsible for their actions. At this point a boy is said to become Bar Mitzvah (Hebrew: to whom the commandments apply); a girl is said to become Bat Mitzvah (Hebrew: to whom the commandments apply).



The current way of celebrating one's becoming a Bar Mitzvah did not exist in the time of the Bible but developed during medieval times. The current practice is that on a Sabbath or other day when the Torah is read in the synagogue, the 13-year-old recites the blessings for the Torah reading, reads from the Torah and Haftarah and may also lead part or all of the morning prayer services. The service is often followed by a celebratory meal with family, friends, and members of the community.

BIMAH

A bimah (among Ashkenazim) or tebah (among Sephardim) is the elevated area or platform in a Jewish synagogue which is intended to serve as the place where the person reading aloud from the Torah stands during the Torah reading service. The bimah is sometimes described as an altar or tower. A bimah in a synagogue will generally have the Ark, which contains the Torahs, as well as a table to rest the Torah scroll on.



CHALLAH

Challah is a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish braided bread eaten on the Sabbath (Shabbat) and on all Jewish holidays except Passover, when Jews are forbidden to eat leavened bread.



CHAMETZ

Chametz or Chometz is the Hebrew term for "leavened bread." It is any product that contains wheat, barley, oats, spelt or rye that has leavened (risen). The word is used generally in regard to the Jewish holiday of Passover (Pesach). The Torah prohibits one from owning, eating or benefiting from any chametz during Passover. The prohibition against eating chametz is found in Exodus 13:3. Since it is prohibited to possess chametz on Pesach, any remaining chametz is sold to a non-Jew by means of a legal contract, usually with a rabbi acting as the agent. The rabbi buys the chametz back at the end of Passover.



CHANUKAH

Chanukah, the Festival of Rededication (also known as the Festival of Lights) is an eight-day holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple after its desecration under Antiochus IV. According to the Talmud, at the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem following the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Empire, there was only enough consecrated olive oil to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days. The festival is observed by the kindling of lights on each of the festival's eight nights, one on the first night, two on the second, and so on.



CHUMASH

A book (or a set of five books) containing the five books of the Torah. The word "chumash" comes from the Hebrew word meaning five. Often a chumash contains the five books, divided up by the weekly Torah readings (each section called a parshah), and the weekly haftarah (a passage from the Prophets) portion.



CHUPPAH

A chuppah is a canopy traditionally used in the Jewish wedding ceremony. It consists of a cloth or sheet — sometimes a tallit ("prayer shawl") — stretched or supported over four poles and is sometimes carried by attendants to the location where the ceremony will take place. It is meant to symbolize the home which the couple will build together.



EITZ CHAYIM

Literally "Tree of Life." Used in the plural (atzei chayim), the wooden handles of the Torah scroll.

The Tree of Life (Eitz Chayim), in the Book of Genesis, was the tree in the Garden of Eden whose fruit gave everlasting life, i.e. immortality. After eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Biblical account states that Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden to prevent them from eating of the Tree of Life.

The Torah (Five Books of Moses) is also referred to as the Tree of Life.



ELIJAH'S CUP

The fifth ceremonial cup of wine poured during the family Seder dinner on Passover (Pesach). It is left untouched in honour of the prophet Elijah, who, according to tradition, will arrive one day as an unknown guest to herald the advent of the Messiah. During the Seder dinner, biblical verses are read while the door is briefly opened to welcome Elijah.



ELUL

Elul is the twelfth month of the Jewish ecclesiastical year and the sixth month of the civil year on the Hebrew calendar. Elul usually occurs in August–September on the Gregorian calendar.

The month of Elul is seen as a time to search one's heart and repent in preparation for the coming Day of Judgment, Rosh Hashanah, and Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

ESHET CHAYIL

A Woman of Valor, called Eshet Chayil in Hebrew, is a hymn which is customarily recited on Friday evenings, after returning from synagogue and before sitting down to the Sabbath evening meal. Eshet Chayil is a 22-verse poem (see text below) with which King Solomon concludes the book of Proverbs. According to Jewish mysticism, the poem is a reference to the Sabbath Queen, the spiritual soul-mate of the Jewish nation.



"A woman of valor, who can find? Her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and nothing shall he lack. She renders him good and not evil all the days of her life. She opens her hand to the needy and extends her hand to the poor. She is robed in strength and dignity and cheerfully faces whatever may come. She opens her mouth with wisdom. Her tongue is guided by kindness. She tends to the affairs of her household, and eats not the bread of idleness. Her children come forward and bless her. Her husband too, and he praises her. Many women have done superbly, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a God-fearing woman is much to be praised. Place before her the fruit of her hands. Wherever people gather, her deeds speak her praise."

ETROG

One of several varieties of citron, a citrus fruit of the orange and lemon family. It is one of the Four Species used in a special waving ceremony during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. The other species are the lulav (date palm frond), hadass (myrtle bough), and aravah (willow branch). The etrog is usually kept in an ornate protective box.



HAFTORAH

A short selection from the Prophets read in the synagogue following the reading of the Torah on Saturdays, holidays and fast days. It contains a message similar to that of the weekly Torah reading or speaks of the current holiday.



HAGGADAH

The Haggadah is a book which contains the order of the Passover Seder and which is read during the Seder. Haggadah, meaning "telling," is a fulfillment of the scriptural commandment to each Jew to recount the Jews' liberation from slavery in Egypt, as described in the book of Exodus.



HALLELUYAH

Halleluyah is a transliteration of Hebrew words meaning "Let us praise God." It is found mainly in the book of Psalms. The word has been accepted into the English language.

HAVDALLAH

Havdallah (Hebrew: separation) is a service held both in the synagogue and at home to mark the end of the Sabbath and holy festivals. Blessings are made over a plaited candle, a spice box, and wine or other beverage. The spice box is passed round for all to smell so that the sweet scent of the holy day lingers with them until the following Sabbath. The candle is then extinguished in the wine, symbolizing the end of the holy day.



IYAR

Iyar is the eighth month of the ecclesiastical year and the second month of the civil year on the Hebrew calendar. Iyar usually falls in April–May on the Gregorian calendar.

JERUSALEM

Jerusalem (Hebrew: Yerushalayim) is the holiest city in Judaism, King David's capital and the site of King Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple. Since ancient times, Jews have faced Jerusalem during prayer and have prayed daily for a return to Israel and to Jerusalem.



KADDISH

A prayer that praises God and expresses a yearning for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The emotional reactions inspired by the Kaddish come from the circumstances in which it is said: It is recited at funerals and by mourners, and sons are required to say Kaddish for eleven months after the death of a parent.

KETER TORAH (TORAH CROWN)

Keter is Hebrew for crown. A Torah scroll will often be "dressed" with ornamental breastplates, fine fabric, and occasionally, a crown, the metalwork often made of beaten silver.



The Book of Exodus, chapter 28, contains a description of the garb of the High Priest. His special clothing, each piece of which has been reproduced in some fashion for dressing and decorating the Torah, included a tunic (the Torah mantle, or covering), a belt (the sash around the Torah scroll), a miter (the crown of the Torah), and a breastplate.

KIDDUSH

The act of sanctifying the Sabbath (Shabbat) or a Jewish holiday through the recitation of a blessing over a cup of kosher wine or kosher grape juice.



KIPPA (KIPPAH)

A thin, usually slightly rounded cloth skullcap worn by observant Jewish men (literal meaning: dome; plural: kippot; Yiddish term: yarmulke). The Talmud says that the purpose of wearing a kippah is to remind us of God, who is the Higher Authority "above us" (Kiddushin 31a).



KOSHER

The Hebrew word kosher means fit or proper as it relates to kosher dietary law. Kosher foods are permitted to be eaten and can be used as ingredients in the production of additional food items. Contrary to popular misconception, rabbis or other religious officials do not "bless" food to make it kosher. Store-bought foods can be identified as kosher by the presence of a graphic symbol that indicates that the food has been certified as kosher by a rabbinical authority.

The basic laws of Kashrut (a Hebrew word referring to kosher and its application) are of Biblical origin (Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 17).

LION OF JUDAH

Lion of Judah has its origins in the Book of Genesis, where the Israelite tribe of Judah had the lion as its symbol. David, a descendant of Judah, is identified with the lion, as is the Davidic monarchy and the Messiah who will spring from this royal house.

The writings of the sages often draw moralistic analogies between the lion and righteous individuals. For these and other reasons, the lion is heavily represented in Jewish ceremonial art.



LIRA

The lira, or pound (plural lirot), was the currency of Israel from shortly after the creation of the State, in 1948, until 1980, when it was replaced by the shekel.



LULAV

A lulav is an unopened date palm branch, the palm branch being one of the "four species" (three branches and one fruit) required for the Sukkot holiday. When the two other foliage-related items (myrtle and willow branches) are tied to the lulav, the collection is referred to as a lulav as well.

The lulav branch and the other two branches of the four species strapped to it, together with the etrog (citron) fruit, are held in both hands and waved about in a specified sequence which attests to God's mastery over all of creation.



MAGEN DAVID

The Shield of David or Magen David in Hebrew is a generally recognized symbol of Judaism. It is named after King David of ancient Israel, and its usage began in the Middle Ages, alongside the more ancient symbol of the menorah. It is also referred to as the Star of David.



With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Star of David on the flag of Israel has also become a symbol of Israel.

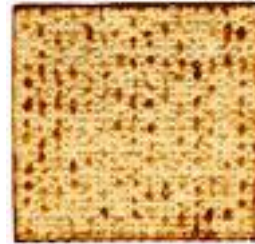
MANTLE (TORAH MANTLE)

A Torah mantle is a cover which dresses and protects the Torah (parchment scroll containing the Five Books of Moses).



MATZAH

A Jewish food item made of plain flour and water which is not allowed to ferment or rise before it is baked. The result is a flat, crispy, cracker-like bread. Matzah is the traditional substitute for bread during Passover (Pesach). According to the Torah, when the Children of Israel were leaving ancient Egypt, they had no time to wait until their bread rose, so they baked it before it had a chance to rise, and the result was matzah (Exodus 12:39).



MEGILLAH

The scroll containing the biblical narrative of the Book of Esther, which forms the basis for the holiday of Purim. Its full text is read aloud in synagogues twice during the holiday.



MENORAH

The menorah is a seven-branched candelabrum. In ancient times, it was lit by olive oil in the Tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem. The menorah is one of the oldest symbols of the Jewish people. An eight-branched menorah is used during the holiday of Chanukah.



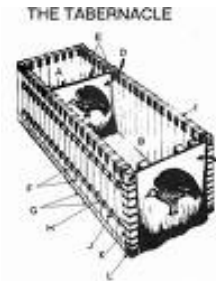
MEZUZAH

Mezuzah (Heb. literally "doorpost") refers to one of the 613 commandments in Judaism which requires that a small parchment (klaf) inscribed with two sections from the Torah's Book of Deuteronomy (6:4-9 and 11:13-21) be affixed to each doorpost and gate in a Jewish home and business. A small case or box typically covers the parchment.



MISHKAN

The portable tent-like structure that served the Israelites as a sanctuary during their wanderings in the wilderness after they left Egypt and in the early period of their life in Palestine.



PAROCHET

The curtain on the front of the Aron Kodesh (structure in a synagogue that holds the Torah scrolls). This curtain represents the covering that was on the original Ark of the Covenant.



PASSOVER (PESACH)

Passover (Hebrew: Pesach) is a Jewish holiday which commemorates the Exodus and freedom of the Israelites from ancient Egypt. As described in the Book of Exodus, Passover marks the "birth" of the Children of Israel, who become the Jewish nation, as the Jews' ancestors were freed from being slaves of Pharaoh and allowed to become followers of God instead.



Together with Sukkot ("Tabernacles") and Shavuot ("Pentecost"), Passover is one of the three "pilgrimage festivals," during which the entire Jewish populace made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the time when the Temple in Jerusalem was standing.

In Israel, Passover is a seven-day holiday, with the first and last days celebrated as a full festival (involving abstention from work, special prayer services and holiday meals). In the Jewish Diaspora, outside Israel, the holiday is celebrated for eight days, with the first two days and last two days celebrated as full festivals.

The primary symbol of Passover is the matzah, a flat, unleavened "bread" which recalls the hurriedly baked bread that the Israelites ate after their hasty departure from Egypt. (See also Seder.)

PURIM

A joyous Jewish holiday commemorating the deliverance of the Jewish people of the ancient Persian Empire from Haman's plot to annihilate them, as recorded in the Biblical Book of Esther. The holiday is characterized by public recitation of the Book of Esther, giving mutual gifts of food and drink, giving charity to the poor, and a celebratory meal (Esther 9:22). Other customs include drinking alcohol, wearing masks and costumes, and public celebration.



Purim is celebrated annually on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Adar.

RIMONIM

The rimonim (Torah finials) are the oldest of the Torah ornaments. Rimonim is the plural for rimon, which means pomegranate, the symbol of fertility and life in much of the Eastern world. According to Biblical writing, the pomegranate adorned the robes of the High Priest (Exodus 28:34), and it is appropriate that the symbol also tops the Torah rollers that are known as atzei chayim (trees of life).



ROSH HASHANAH

Rosh Hashanah is literally translated as "head of the year" and refers to the Jewish New Year. The Torah refers to the day as "The Day of the Blowing of the Shofar" (Leviticus 23:24), and rabbinic literature and the liturgy itself describe Rosh Hashanah as "The Day of Judgment" (Yom ha-Din) and "The Day of Remembrance" (Yom ha-Zikkaron). Some descriptions depict God as sitting upon a throne, while books containing the deeds of all humanity are opened for review. This holy day is the first of the Yamim Noraim (Hebrew, "Days of Awe"). A popular custom during this holiday is the eating of apples dipped in honey, symbolizing the wish for a sweet new year.



SEDER

Seder, literally "order" in Hebrew, is a religious meal served in Jewish homes on the 15th and 16th of the month of Nisan to commence the festival of Passover (Pesach). Though Passover commemorates the Exodus, the historical deliverance of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage in the days of Moses (13th century BCE), Jews are ever mindful that this event was a prelude to God's revelation on Mount Sinai. For each participant, therefore, the seder is an occasion to relive the Exodus as a personal spiritual event. Jews in Israel omit the second seder because they limit Passover to seven days. The text used for the seder is called a haggadah, and special ceremonial foods, as specified in the haggadah, are placed on a seder plate.



SEDER PLATE

A special plate containing symbolic foods used by Jews during the Passover seder. Each of the six items arranged on the plate have special significance to the retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt, which is the focus of this ritual meal. The seventh symbolic item used during the meal—a stack of three matzot (unleavened bread)—is placed on its own plate on the seder table.



SEPHARDI (SEPHARDIC)

Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants.

SHABBAT (OR SHABBAT KODESH)

Shabbat Kodesh, "Holy Sabbath" (Shabbes in Ashkenazic pronunciation), is the weekly day of rest, celebration and prayer in Judaism. It is observed from before sundown on Friday until after nightfall on Saturday. The Biblical commandment to observe the Sabbath is found in Exodus 20:8-11 and in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. The lighting of Shabbat candles ushers in the holy day, and a ceremony, Havdallah, is performed at the conclusion of the Sabbath.



SHAVUOT (SHAVUOS)

Shavuot, the "Feast of the Weeks," is the Jewish holiday celebrating the harvest season in Israel. Shavuot, which means "weeks," refers to the timing of the festival, which is held seven weeks after Passover. Shavuot also commemorates the anniversary of the giving of the Torah to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Some of the customs associated with Shavuot are the consumption of dairy products; the reading of the Book of Ruth at morning services; the decoration of homes and synagogues with greenery; and engaging in all-night Torah study.



SHEMINI ATZERET

Shemini Atzeret (Hebrew: "the Eighth [day] of Assembly") is a Jewish holiday celebrated on the 22nd day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. In the Diaspora it is celebrated for two days, the second day being separately referred to as Simchat Torah.

The Talmud declares the eighth day as a separate holiday and one dedicated to the love of God. References to the celebration can be found in Numbers 29:35 ("On the eighth day you shall hold a solemn gathering; you shall not work at your occupations").

In ancient Israel, Shemini Atzeret coincided with the beginning of the rainy season. Accordingly, prayers for rain and good crops were recited. Orthodox Jews still recite the ancient prayers at this time.

SHEVITI (SHIVVITI)

A sheviti is an elaborate papercut or a plaque with the verse "I have placed the Lord always before me" (Psalm 16:8) written in the form of a menorah. The Hebrew word sheviti means "I have placed." The purpose of the sheviti is to arouse a person's awareness of the presence of God. During the 18th and 19th centuries and up to the present, the synagogue plaques, most of them profusely decorated in shapes and colours, also contained verses concerning law and the Torah. The common decorative motifs were the seven-branched menorah (candelabrum) of the Temple and symbolic buildings representing different holy places in Israel. Others served as amulets, containing magical symbols, such as the Magen David (Shield of David).



Papercut sheviti are believed to have been exceedingly common around the 19th century in Ashkenazic Jewish homes. They served daily religious and other ritual needs, with the sheviti used, among other things, to indicate the direction of prayer (Diaspora Jews face east for the purpose of guiding the prayer to the direction of the holiest city, Jerusalem). The sheviti also featured the traditional symbols mentioned above and were supplemented with calligraphic inscriptions in Hebrew (and sometimes in other languages), mainly passages from the Bible, the interpretive texts and the prayerbook. Personal dedicatory and memorial inscriptions commemorating special family events were sometimes included as well.

SHOFAR

The shofar, a well known symbol of Rosh Hashanah and one of the earliest instruments used in Jewish music, is usually made from a ram's horn. The blowing of the shofar is the only specific commandment for Rosh Hashanah, during which time the shofar is blown 100 times on each of the two-day holiday. The aim of the sounding of the shofar is to arouse one's soul to repentance.



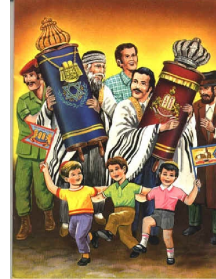
SIDDUR

The siddur is the prayerbook used by Jews over the world, containing a set order of daily prayers.



SIMCHAT TORAH

Simchat Torah is a Hebrew term which means "rejoicing with/of the Torah." The annual cycle of reading the Torah is completed and begun anew, with the last section of Deuteronomy and the first section of Genesis read in succession after a festival parade of the Torah scrolls along with singing and dancing. It is one of the happiest days in the Jewish calendar. In the Diaspora, Simchat Torah is the second day of the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, while in Israel, Shemini Atzeret is also the holiday of Simchat Torah. Both holidays follow immediately after Sukkot.



SUKKOT

Sukkot (Hebrew: "booths"), also known as the Feast of Booths, the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Ingathering, is one of three major holidays known collectively as the pilgrimage festivals, when historically the Jewish populace travelled to the Temple in Jerusalem. During Sukkot, Jews are instructed to construct a temporary structure (sukkah) in which to eat their meals, entertain guests, relax, and even sleep. The sukkah is reminiscent of the type of huts in which the ancient Israelites dwelt during their forty years of wandering in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt. The obligation to observe Sukkot is found in Leviticus Chapter 23.



TALLIT

The tallit is a prayer shawl, the most authentic Jewish garment. It is a rectangular-shaped piece of linen or wool (and sometimes, now, polyester or silk) with special fringes called tzitzit on each of the four corners.

Most tallitot (alternate plural: talleisim) have a neckband, called an atarah, which often has the blessing one recites when donning the Tallit embroidered across it.

In Numbers 15:37-4, one reads that God said to Moses: "Speak to the Israelites and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them... Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God...."

The purpose of the tallit, then, is to hold the tzitzit, and the purpose of the tzitzit (according to the Torah) is to remind us of God's commandments.

The tallit is worn during morning prayers and during the prayer recited in the synagogue at the beginning of the evening service on Yom Kippur.



TALMUD

The Talmud is a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, customs and history. The Talmud has two components: the Mishnah (c. 200 CE), the first written compendium of Judaism's oral law; and the Gemara (c. 500 CE), a discussion of the Mishnah and related writings. The terms Talmud and Gemara are often used interchangeably. The Gemara is the basis for all codes of rabbinic law and is much quoted in other rabbinic literature.



VAAD HA'IR

Vaad is a Hebrew term for council of rabbis, while Ha'ir means "of the city." It is often translated as "Jewish Community Council."

VALANCE

A valance is a short drapery hung above the curtain on a synagogue Torah Ark. It takes its Hebrew name, kapporet, from the covering for the original Ark of the Covenant that Jews carried in the Biblical desert.



WIMPLE

A long, linen sash used as a binding for the Torah by Jews of Ashkenazic origin. It is made from the cloth used to swaddle a baby boy at his brit milah (circumcision), uniting the communal world of the synagogue with the individual's own life cycle.



YAD

As one is not supposed to touch the Torah parchment, one follows the text with a pointer, called a yad. Yad means "hand" in Hebrew, and the pointer usually is in the shape of a hand with a pointing index finger.



Yahrzeit

A commemoration of the death of a Jew by a mourner (the child, sibling, spouse or parent of the deceased). The date of the yahrzeit, which is calculated according to the Hebrew calendar, is the anniversary of the death, not the burial. The main customs are the recitation of the mourner's prayer (Kaddish) and the lighting of a yahrzeit candle, a special memorial candle that burns for 24 hours.



YOM HASHOAH SEDER

Yom Hashoah is Hebrew for Holocaust Memorial Day. A modern Orthodox rabbi in New York, Rabbi Avraham Weiss, conceived of a seder (much like on Passover) in which the story of the Holocaust would be retold. He wrote a special haggadah for that purpose. The holding of a Yom HaShoah seder has become an institution in many communities.



YOM KIPPUR

Yom Kippur is the Jewish holiday of the Day of Atonement. It falls on the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. (Leviticus 23:27-28) The Bible calls the day Yom HaKippurim (Hebrew, "Day of the Atonements"). It is one of the Yamim Noraim (Hebrew, "Days of Awe") and involves a 25-hour fast and intensive prayer. It is considered to be one of the holiest and most solemn days of the year.

