A SHORT GUIDE TO JEWISH RELIGION AND CULTURE

This short guide to Jewish religion and culture is intended to help foster a more inclusive workplace that offers you and your team useful tools for communicating with Jewish employees and/or students, and scheduling events in and around Jewish holidays. It includes:

- A glossary of useful terms and concepts

- An easy-to-follow guide to the Jewish calendar, including holiday-specific greetings, and dates for Jewish holidays for 2023, 2024, and 2025.

Feel free to consult and use this guide whenever you're looking for the right language to describe Jewish traditions or holidays in emails to employees and students, or for figuring out which days are likely to conflict with Jewish religious and family obligations.

Your Jewish employees and students wholeheartedly appreciate it!

Jewish Religious Denominations (Liberal-Egalitarian)

Conservative Movement | Centrist denomination that maintains many traditional practices, but updates some to suit modern sensibilities. Many Conservative Jews keep kosher and some observe Shabbat and Jewish holidays by refraining from work.

Reform Movement | The most religiously liberal denomination of Judaism centered on the concept of *tikkun olam*—"bettering the world"—which means engaging in social justice work. Religious laws like keeping kosher and observing shabbat are optional.

Reconstructionist Movement | Denomination that views Judaism as an evolving culture with a shared philosophy and historical memory, and not solely as a religion. "Jewish peoplehood" is a key concept.

Jewish Religious Denominations (Orthodox)

Orthodox Movement | Denomination that adheres to a strict interpretation and application of Jewish law. Orthodox Jews typically keep strictly kosher, and observe the sabbath and holidays by refraining from weekday work, using electricity, and interacting with money.

Modern Orthodox | Jews tend to obtain high levels of secular education and often have mainstream careers in which they are well integrated into general society.

Haredi Jews tend to live lives that are more separate from mainstream American society. They dress more distinctively (for example, men might wear black suits and black fedora hats and women dress very modestly). Although Haredi Jews are sometimes referred to as "ultra-Orthodox," they generally prefer to be called Haredi, which means those who tremble in fear of God.

Jewish Observance and Ritual

High Holidays | The Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). These holidays usually fall in September or early October, and are widely celebrated and observed by American Jews by attending synagogue and gathering with family.

Kosher/Kashrut | Jewish dietary laws. According to the laws of Kashrut, meat and milk cannot be eaten together, and certain animals, such as pigs and shellfish, cannot be eaten at all. Many Jews who keep kosher, particularly Orthodox Jews, will only eat food that has been prepared under the supervision of a rabbi to ensure that all kashrut laws have been strictly followed.

Kosher for Passover | Special dietary laws for the 8 days of Passover, when the unleavened cracker-like flatbread matzah is eaten, and it is prohibited to eat leavened foods like bread and other grain products.

Shabbat (Sabbath) | Weekly holiday that begins at sundown on Friday and ends at nightfall on Saturday. This day of rest often involves disconnecting from technology and spending time with family and friends. A family meal on Friday night will often feature challah, wine, and candle-lighting.

Synagogue | (shul; temple) A place of worship for Jews. Not to be confused with church, which is not a Jewish term. Synagogues often have a place for prayer in the main sanctuary plus rooms for study and social events.

Jewish Life Cycle Events

Bar/Bat Mitzvah | Jewish coming-of-age ritual. Bar-mitzvah (for boys) is at 13 and bat-mitzvah (for girls) is at either 12 or 13. Both typically involve extensive preparation and study, a ceremony at synagogue on Shabbat and a party.

Bris or Brit Milah | The circumcision and naming ceremony on the eighth day after a baby boy's birth marking the baby's entrance into the Jewish community, followed by a celebratory meal.

Shiva | A week-long period of mourning for direct relatives after the burial of the dead.

HOLIDAY GUIDE

Holiday	# of days	Greeting	Work permitted?	2023	2024	2025
Rosh Hashanah (High Holiday—Jewish New Year)	2	Shana Tova! Happy New Year!	No	Sept. 16-17	Oct. 3-4	Sept. 22-24
Yom Kippur (High Holiday—Day of Atonement)	1	G'mar hatima tova	No	Sept. 25	Oct. 12	Oct. 2
Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles)	6	Chag Sameach! Happy holiday!	No on days 1 and 2	Sept. 30 - Oct. 1	Oct. 17-18	Oct. 7-8

Holiday	# of days	Greeting	Work permitted?	2023	2024	2025
Shemini Atzeret/ Simchat Torah (Holiday of Rejoicing of the Torah)	2	Chag Sameach! Happy holiday!	No	Oct. 7-8	Oct. 24-25	Oct. 14-15
Hanukkah/ Festival of Lights	8	Hanukkah Sameach! Happy Hanukkah!	Yes	Dec. 7-15	Dec. 25-Jan. 2	Dec. 14-22
International Holocaust Remembrance Day	1	n/a	Yes	Jan. 27	Jan. 27	Jan. 27
Purim	1	Happy Purim! Chag Purim sameach!	Yes	March 7	March 24	March 14
Passover	8	Happy Passover! Chag Pesach sameach!	No on days 1, 2, 7, 8	April 5-13	April 22-30	April 12-20
Shavuot	2	Chag Sameach!	No	May 26-27	June 12-13	June 2-3
Yom HaShoah/ Jewish Holocaust Memorial Day	1	none	Yes	April 18	May 6	April 23

■ This list includes major Jewish holidays that may impact work or educational spaces.

  • Many Jews across the religious spectrum don't work or attend school on the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur).

  • Orthodox Jews and some Conservative Jews will not work or attend school on "no-work" holidays. They also don't write, use a phone or any other electronics, drive a car, or use money on these days.

■ Jewish holidays begin at sundown the night before and end at nightfall on the day of the holiday. Judaism uses a lunar calendar so Jewish holidays appear on different dates on the Christian (solar) calendar each year.