



A SHORT GUIDE TO JEWISH RELIGION & CULTURE AND HOLIDAYS & OBSERVANCES

A Jewish holiday guide and calendar for educational and professional spaces.

This short guide is intended to help:

- minimize scheduling conflicts with Jewish holidays
- foster a more inclusive workplace/school environment by offering useful tools for understanding and communicating with Jewish employees, students, and their families

It includes the following:

- Overview of Jewish religious denominations
- Short glossary of frequent and useful terms
- Summary of major Jewish holidays, life cycle events, and appropriate greetings
- **5-year planning calendar (2026-2031)**

JEWISH RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS

Reform: Liberal denomination that emphasizes Jewish ethics and the concept of tikkun olam - “repairing the world.” Religious dietary and observance laws are optional.

- Additional smaller liberal Jewish denominations include Reconstructionist, Renewal, and Humanistic.

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

- Note that “Conservative” in this case does not refer to political leanings.

Orthodox: Strict interpretation and observance of holidays (refraining from work, commerce, electricity) and dietary laws (kashrut).

- Modern Orthodox Jews tend to obtain high levels of secular education and live lives more integrated into mainstream society.
- Haredi (which means “those who tremble in fear of God”) Jews tend to live and learn separate from mainstream society.

JEWISH LIFE CYCLE EVENTS

Bar/Bat Mitzvah: Jewish coming-of-age ritual that involves extensive preparation and study, a ceremony at the synagogue, and a celebratory meal or party. Bar mitzvah (boys) at age 13; Bat mitzvah (girls) at age 12 or 13.

Greeting: Mazal Tov!

Bris/Brit Milah: The circumcision and naming ceremony on the 8th day after a baby boy’s birth, marking entrance into the Jewish community.

Greeting: Mazal Tov!

Simchat Bat: The naming ceremony for a baby girl, celebrated any time during the first year of life, marking the baby’s entrance into the Jewish community.

Greeting: Mazal Tov!

Shiva: A week-long period of mourning for direct relatives after the burial of the dead. Customary practice is a donation to a charity important to the deceased, in lieu of flowers.

Greeting: May your loved one’s memory be for a blessing.

JEWISH OBSERVANCE

Shabbat: Weekly sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends at nightfall on Saturday. This day of rest often involves disconnecting from technology, spending time with family and friends, and attending synagogue. A family meal on Friday night features candle lighting, challah bread, and wine.

High Holidays: The Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur occur in the fall (Sept./ Oct.) and are widely celebrated and observed by the vast majority of American Jews, who will refrain from work, attend synagogue, and gather with family.

Kosher/Kashrut: Jewish dietary laws that stipulate that meat and milk products cannot be eaten together, and certain animals cannot be eaten at all (e.g., pork; shellfish). 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 matzah (unleavened cracker-like flatbread) is eaten, and it is prohibited to eat leavened foods like bread and other grain products.

Synagogue: A place of worship for Jews. Not to be confused with church, which is not a Jewish term. Synagogues typically have a sanctuary for communal prayer, plus rooms for study and social events.

VARIATION IN OBSERVANCE

There is a wide variety of religious practices among Jews; therefore, some Jewish students and staff may be absent due to observance of holidays more than others. Most Jews across the religious spectrum do not work or attend school on the High Holidays (dates in red on calendar). Orthodox and some Conservative Jews will not work or attend school on “no-work” holidays (dates in blue on calendar). Jews who are strictly observant will also not write, drive, use any electricity or technology, or engage in commerce on these “no work” days (in red and blue).

MAJOR JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Shabbat (*shah-baht'*): The Jewish sabbath is observed each week from shortly before sunset on Friday until an hour after sunset on Saturday. Observant Jews refrain from work and commerce, and devote time to rest, prayer, religious study, and festive meals with family and friends.

Greeting: Shabbat Shalom!

Rosh Hashanah (*rosh' ha-shah-nah'*): One of two High Holidays, the Jewish New Year celebrates creation and renewal, and marks the beginning of 10 days of introspection. Jews attend synagogue, hear the blast of the shofar (ram's horn), and enjoy festive meals with family and friends.

Greeting: Happy New Year! Shana Tova
(Shah-nah' To-vah')

Yom Kippur (*yome kee-poor'*): The second High Holiday is the "Day of Atonement," the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Jews fast for 25 hours, pray, reaffirm their faith, and ask for God's forgiveness.

Greeting: Have a Meaningful Fast; G'mar Hatima Tova
(Guh-mar' Hah-tee-mah' To-vah')

Sukkot (*soo-kote'*): Week-long harvest festival during which Jews build and eat in outdoor booths that commemorate the huts Jews used as temporary dwellings in their biblical wanderings in the desert after the exodus from Egypt.

Greeting: Happy Holiday! Chag Sameach
(Hag Sah-may'ach)

Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah (*sheh-mee'nee ah-tzer'et & sim'hat to'rah*): Celebrates the completion of the year-long cycle of reading the first 5 books of the Hebrew Bible (Torah) and the start of the next cycle.

Greeting: Happy Holiday! Chag Sameach
(Hag Sah-may'ach)

Hanukkah (*ha'noo-kah*): Celebrates the rededication of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem when a small bit of oil burned miraculously for 8 days, after the Maccabees ousted the occupying Syrian Greeks and secured the Jews' religious and political freedom.

Greeting: Happy Hanukkah! Hanukkah Sameach
(Ha'noo-kah Sah-may'ach)

Purim (*poor'rim*): Celebrates the rescue of the Jews of ancient Persia from a plot to exterminate them, as recorded in the biblical Book of Esther.

Greeting: Happy Purim! Chag Purim Sameach
(Hag Poor'im Sah-may'ach)

Pesach (*pay'sach*) / Passover: Week-long festival celebrates the Jews' freedom and exodus from Egypt. Jews gather at home the first two nights for a special meal (seder) with family and friends.

Greeting: Happy Passover! Chag Pesach Sameach
(Hag Pay'sach Sah-may'ach)

Yom Hashoah (*yome ha-shoh'ah*)

Jewish Holocaust Remembrance Day:

Commemorates the Hebrew calendar date of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to honor those murdered in the Holocaust and the heroism of European Jews. Established by the State of Israel in 1951. This is the day the Jewish community commemorates the Holocaust, as distinguished from **International Holocaust Remembrance Day**, which the United Nations designated in 2005 to occur **annually on January 27**, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz.

Shavuot (*shah-voo-ote'*): Celebrates the Jewish people receiving the Torah (God's laws) on Mount Sinai.

Greeting: Happy Holiday! Chag Sameach
(Hag Sah-may'ach)

WHY DO THE DATES "MOVE"?

The exact dates of Jewish holidays and observances differ each year because the Hebrew (Jewish) calendar is lunar-based.

OBSERVANCE STARTS THE NIGHT BEFORE

All Jewish religious observances begin on the evening before the date indicated on conventional calendars and conclude at nightfall on the day of the holiday.

This 5-year calendar of major Jewish holidays and observances has been prepared by **American Jewish Committee** as an aid for planning and scheduling events (assemblies, conferences, exams, graduations, tournaments, trainings, etc.) to minimize conflicts that involve the absence of Jewish students and personnel.

Note that **observances begin on the evening before** the date indicated on conventional calendars and conclude at nightfall on the day of the holiday.

Expect virtually all Jewish students/employees to be absent on dates in red.

Expect some Jewish students/employees to be absent on dates in blue.

Two additional annual dates to note:

January 27*
International Holocaust Remembrance Day; date of the liberation of Auschwitz.

October 7*
Date of the 2023 attack on Israel that was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust.

*** It is permissible to work and attend school on these holidays.**

AJC
American Jewish Committee



Hebrew Calendar Year	5787	5788	5789	5790	5791
Shabbat Jewish Sabbath	Every Friday eve thru Saturday eve	Every Friday eve thru Saturday eve	Every Friday eve thru Saturday eve	Every Friday eve thru Saturday eve	Every Friday eve thru Saturday eve
FALL	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Rosh Hashanah Jewish New Year	Sept. 11-13 Fri. eve - Sun. eve	Oct. 1-3 Fri. eve - Sun. eve	Sept. 20-22 Wed. eve - Fri. eve	Sept. 9-11 Sun. eve - Tues. eve	Sept. 27-29 Fri. eve - Sun. eve
Yom Kippur Day of Atonement	Sept. 20-21 Sun. eve - Mon. eve	Oct. 10-11 Sun. eve - Mon. eve	Sept. 29-30 Fri. eve - Sat. eve	Sept. 18-19 Tues. eve - Wed. eve	Oct. 6-7 Sun. eve - Mon. eve
Sukkot Feast of Booths Beginning	Sept. 25-27 Fri. eve - Sun. eve	Oct. 15-17 Fri. eve - Sun. eve	Oct. 4-6 Wed. eve - Fri. eve	Sept. 23-25 Sun. eve - Tues. eve	Oct. 11-13 Fri. eve - Sun. eve
Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah End of Sukkot & High Holiday Season	Oct. 2-4 Fri. eve - Sun. eve	Oct. 22-24 Fri. eve - Sun. eve	Oct. 11-13 Wed. eve - Fri. eve	Sept. 30-Oct. 2 Sun. eve - Tues. eve	Oct. 18-20 Fri. eve - Sun. eve
Hanukkah* Festival of Lights	Dec. 4-12 Fri. eve - Sat. eve	Dec. 24-Jan. 1 Fri. eve - Sat. eve	Dec. 12-20 Tues. eve - Wed. eve	Dec. 1-9 Sat. eve - Sun. eve	Dec. 20-28 Fri. eve - Sat. eve
SPRING	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Purim* Festival of Esther	Mar. 22-23 Mon. eve - Tues. eve	Mar. 11-12 Sat. eve - Sun. eve	Feb. 28-Mar. 1 Wed. eve - Thurs. eve	Mar. 18-19 Mon. eve - Tues. eve	Mar. 8-9 Sat. eve - Sun. eve
Pesach Festival of Freedom Beginning of Passover	Apr. 21-23 Wed. eve - Fri. eve	Apr. 10-12 Mon. eve - Wed. eve	Mar. 30-Apr. 1 Fri. eve - Sun. eve	Apr. 17-19 Wed. eve - Fri. eve	Apr. 7-9 Mon. eve - Wed. eve
Pesach End of Passover	Apr. 27-29 Tues. eve - Thurs. eve	Apr. 16-18 Sun. eve - Tues. eve	Apr. 5-7 Thurs. eve - Sat. eve	Apr. 23-25 Tues. eve - Thurs. eve	Apr. 13-15 Sun. eve - Tues. eve
Yom Hashoah* Holocaust Remembrance Day	May 3-4 Mon. eve - Tues. eve	Apr. 23-24 Sun. eve - Mon. eve	Apr. 11-12 Wed. eve - Thurs. eve	Apr. 29-30 Mon. eve - Tues. eve	Apr. 20-21 Sun. eve - Mon. eve
Shavuot Feast of Weeks	June 10-12 Thurs. eve - Sat. eve	May 30-June 1 Tues. eve - Thurs. eve	May 19-21 Sat. eve - Mon. eve	June 6-8 Thurs. eve - Sat. eve	May 27-29 Tues. eve - Thurs. eve

**INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE
ABOUT THE JEWISH PEOPLE?**

Explore the breadth of educational programs AJC offers: **AJC.org**.

Reach out to request a presentation, workshop, or consultation with an AJC educator: **CEA@ajc.org**



AJC's mission is to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values in the United States and around the world.



AJC.org



/AJCGlobal



@AJCGlobal



@AJC.Global



@AmericanJewishCommittee