



# Easy Guide to Jewish Ceremonies and Traditions

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## Preface

Jewish service in the United States armed forces can be traced back to the first war we ever fought as a nation, the Revolutionary War. Through the Civil War, both World Wars, and every conflict and war the United States has been a part of since this nation's inception, Jews have served, on through our present-day global war on terror. Jews have been a part of the battles that have defined us as a nation; from the fields of Bunker Hill and Antietam, the sands of Normandy and Baghdad, Jewish Americans have been defending this country since its birth.

When it came to aiding those Jewish servicemembers, chaplains were left to their own devices to find the answers to all questions surrounding faith and practice. This guide is designed to help chaplains of all faiths answer questions that arise concerning the major holidays and practices of Jewish servicemembers and their families. It is by no means meant to answer every question—there is no guide, of any length, that can answer every question that may come up—but the guide is presented as a place to start and a necessary foundation upon which chaplains can build a Jewish library of resources to answer further questions and learn more about the Jewish faith. It is my hope that this guide is the beginning of that journey of learning; that it inspires and informs chaplains of all faith backgrounds and leads us all to more learning from, and about, people of other faiths.

This guide was a true labor of love, and I want to thank the many people who helped me produce this completed guide. First and foremost, this guide would not be possible without the people at JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, led by Rabbi Irving Elson, CAPT, USN (Ret). It is because of his incredible leadership, foresight, and guidance that I am doing the work I love and that Jewish chaplains everywhere are able to serve and lead. I also want to thank the incredible chaplains I've served with—Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, and so many more, who have inspired me and pushed me in every one of my assignments. Keep doing the holy work you are doing. And finally, to my family: My wife, Jennifer, my sister, Yali, and my parents, Jonathan and Deena (z"l)—you are the reason I am here. You are the people I think about every time I have the honor of putting the uniform on and go out in the defense of freedom. I would not be the person I am today without you, without the love and kindness you show me, and without the education you provided for me. I am here because of you, and for that, my debt to you is endless. I love you, forever and always.

*Zevi Lowenberg, 2nd Lt., USAF*

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# Life Cycle Events

## Marriage

The traditional Jewish marriage ceremony consists of two parts: *kiddushin/erusin* (betrothal) and *nisuin* (the actual marriage ceremony).

The first part of the ceremony begins when the couple reaches the *chuppah*, or wedding canopy, and is greeted by the officiant. The wedding canopy can be as simple as a prayer shawl on four poles or something more intricate, though it also must be supported on the four corners, and open on all sides. It is open on all sides to signify the home that the new couple is creating will be open and welcoming to the community, and to the blessings of God.

As the ceremony begins, the bride circles the groom seven times (though in recent years there have been changes as couples want to create more equal footing for the bride and groom, so some grooms will also choose to circle their bride). At the end of the circling, the officiant will recite the blessing over the wine and a special blessing for the wedding. It is at this point that the groom gives his bride the wedding ring, with the words, “Be sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel.” Some couples also choose for the bride to give the groom his ring at this time. The betrothal section of the ceremony concludes with the reading of the legal marriage document, the *ketubah*.

The second half of the wedding begins— *nisuin*—when the *sheva brachot*, literally, seven wedding blessings, are recited. They praise God for the blessings of the wedding, for the future well-being of the bride and groom, and they praise God for His creation of people. After the blessings are recited, the bride and groom drink from the cup of wine. The ceremony ends with the groom smashing a glass, which is to remind us of the destruction of the Temple.

The presiding bodies of Conservative and Reform Judaism allow for same-sex marriage, and ceremonies have been created for these occasions. Orthodox clergy are prohibited from performing such marriages. Traditionally, a Jewish marriage ceremony is exclusively for a Jewish man marrying a Jewish woman. While many liberal rabbis may perform such weddings, Jewish military chaplains are forbidden to do so.

## Divorce

In Judaism, there are legal processes that one must go through to obtain a divorce. According to tradition, only men can initiate a divorce, but many couples are now adding language to the *ketubah* (the marriage contract) so that the woman can also initiate the divorce.

In order to get a divorce, the initiator must ask for and obtain a *get*, a Jewish bill of divorce. A *get* should be obtained by asking a rabbi to write one or obtain one on your behalf. The requester must then give it to his spouse in the presence of an assembled Jewish court, which then allows both people to remarry. Traditionally, one cannot be remarried without having obtained a *get* from a previous marriage, regardless of the civil status of the marriage. Reform Judaism recognizes civil divorce as meeting the standards for divorce. *Kohanim*, the descendants of the priests, are not permitted to marry divorcees.

## Birth of a Child (*Brit Milah* and Baby Naming)

According to Jewish law, life begins at birth. While Jews believe that the soul given to the child exists far before birth (as the soul is owned by God and is given to and then returned to God), life itself does not begin until the baby is born. There is no belief in Judaism in original sin. The baby is born perfect and pure. The prayer recited in the morning talks of this as well, as it says, “My God, the soul You have given me is pure. You created it, You formed it, and You breathed it into me.” Caesarian sections are allowed in Judaism, as are any other procedures that may be necessary to save the life of the baby or mother.

According to Jewish tradition, the baby is not named at birth either. For male babies, Jews wait until the eighth day after birth to name the baby (done at the same time as the *brit milah* [circumcision], discussed below). Girls are named on the Shabbat that follows, as their parents (or father, in Orthodox synagogues) are honored with an *aliyah* during the Torah reading. As times have changed, many parents elect to have a special baby naming ceremony on the Sunday following birth. It is at this time—the *brit milah* or baby naming—that the baby gets Hebrew name, which will be used for all religious and Jewish legal purposes.

The Hebrew name format is “Baby name *ben* (for male) /*bat* (for female) father’s name v’ (and) mother’s name.”

Circumcision: On the eighth day following birth, a *mohel* (a specialized role for someone who performs circumcisions) is called and performs the surgical removal of the foreskin. This ritual cannot be performed by a doctor/surgeon, unless they are also trained as a *mohel*. It is a simple procedure and can be performed at home or in the synagogue, and family and friends are typically invited.

## Bar/Bat Mitzvah

The *bar/bat mitzvah* is the Jewish coming-of-age ritual for 13-year-old boys and 12- or 13-year-old girls. A boy will become a *bar mitzvah*, while girls will become a *bat mitzvah*. *Bar mitzvah* means simply “son of the commandment,” *bat mitzvah* means “daughter of the commandment.” In its simplest and most basic form, there is no ritual requirement of the children or parents for becoming a *bar/bat mitzvah*. It is simply the moment in a child’s life when he or she is required to observe the commandments. Before the age of 13 there is no requirement, though many families still choose to include their children, but at 13, the children are said to take on the obligations set forth in the Bible, or *Torah*.

While the simplest observation of it is just turning 13, many families choose to honor this coming of age in the synagogue, where the child will be honored by being called to the *Torah* as a new Jewish adult. Some families (or the children) will choose to participate more fully in the services, but this is by no means a requirement, and should be decided by the Jewish clergy and the desires of the family and child.

A *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony should not be seen or treated as the stopping point of Jewish education—it is more like a major stepping stone in the growth of any Jewish member of the community. The growth does not end here, but instead more is taken on—the obligations of the commandments, and hopefully, the continuation of a Jewish education and participation at synagogue or in the community.

In the Orthodox community, the *bat mitzvah* ceremony is designed to honor the celebrant while also often reflecting the perspective that women do not have equal status as men with regard to synagogue-based rituals.

## Death and Mourning

The most important value in Judaism is saving a life; it takes precedence in almost every situation and is the foundation for many laws. However, in terminal cases, it is permitted to stop the artificial continuation of life if doctors declare that death would be imminent upon removal and it would alleviate suffering.

After the death of an individual, burial must happen as quickly as possible, ideally within 48-72 hours. Burial cannot be done on the Sabbath or on a holiday, but arrangements should be made for the soonest possible time afterwards. Immediately after death, the eyes should be closed and body covered, as a show of respect for the dead.

Autopsies are allowed in Judaism, when required by law enforcement or medical professionals, or when it can be done in order to save another's life. With that, organ donation is allowed in Judaism, and may be considered a final *mitzvah* that one is able to perform—saving the life of another.

Before burial, the body is prepared without the use of embalming. It is washed thoroughly and ritually, dressed simply in a white shroud, with no pockets, or a *tallit* with the fringes removed, and laid in a simple wooden coffin. In more religious communities, and depending on the law of the state/country, it is ideal to have small holes drilled in the bottom of the casket, so that the body may go “from dust to dust.” Cremation and open-caskets are both forbidden in Judaism, as the body must wholly return to the earth, and showing the body off is considered disrespectful. However, many Jews, unfamiliar with these traditions, opt for embalming and cremation.

Jewish mourning practice states that those closest to the deceased remove themselves from the community for a week to mourn. This week is called *shiva*, and it is required to be done for a parent, sibling, child, and spouse. Members of the community may pay their respects by visiting the home where the bereaved are mourning. It is up to the family to decide where they “sit *shiva*” and the visiting hours. The family will also typically hold services in the home, in order that they be given the opportunity to recite the mourner's prayer with their community. During the week of mourning, those family members should wear a piece of clothing that has been ripped as a sign of mourning (although a piece of cloth may be attached to the shirt and ripped instead). They should sit low to the floor, and they do not participate in joyous activities. There are other restrictions that are taken on by some, including restrictions on personal grooming, wearing leather, etc. On the Sabbath, none of this is done and the family should go to the synagogue; there is no outward mourning on the Sabbath. The traditional greeting for one in a house of mourning is “May the Lord comfort you with all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

Through this week, and then for an additional 30 days (for the death of a sibling, spouse, or child), or for 11 months (for the death of a parent), the bereaved recite the *Mourner's Kaddish*, the prayer recited as a praising of God in memory of the deceased. The *kaddish* is also recited on the anniversary of the death each year. After the week of *shiva* concludes, the mourners should take a short walk outside as a sign of reintegration into the community, and return to work and their normal, daily lives.

# Holidays

## Shabbat

*Shabbat*, or the Sabbath, is the Jewish day of rest. It begins on Friday evening and continues until nightfall on Saturday evening. *Shabbat* is a reminder of creation, when the world was created in six days, and on the seventh day, God rested. Just as God rested on the seventh day, Jews also rest on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is considered holy, and therefore work may not be done.

Included in doing work, for *Shabbat* and other holy days, are things like using electricity, driving a car, handling money, cooking, and anything else which may take away from the holiness and rest that one should have on *Shabbat*. This list is far from exhaustive, but the spirit of the rule is to avoid that which takes away from the community and takes oneself away from the spirit of *Shabbat*. Many communities will amend the rules for the betterment of their community (e.g. some communities will allow driving to and from the synagogue because people live too far away and can't walk). It should always be the ideal to follow all the commandments and rules set forward, but exceptions can be made.

*Shabbat* is mentioned in the Ten Commandments, which says to both remember (Exodus 20:8) and observe/protect (Leviticus 26:2) the Sabbath, in order to keep it holy. Many families will begin with a large meal on Friday evening, having prepared all the food they will need for the night and the entire Sabbath day, since no cooking may be done. Included in the rituals of the Friday evening meal are blessings over the candles, the wine, and the *challah*, a braided loaf of bread. The Sabbath ends the next evening after dark, when a service called *havdalah* is held (the same service is held to end other holy days as well), which includes blessings over wine, spices, and a special braided candle.

## Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah, literally, "head of the year," is the Jewish new year. It is one of the holiest times of the year and is the focal point for the season of repentance. It is said in Jewish liturgy that on Rosh Hashanah the metaphorical "Book of Life," in which God writes all the names down of who will live and who will die in the next year, is written, and on Yom Kippur (discussed later), the book is sealed. Rosh Hashanah is a holy day, and therefore work may not be done.

Most Jews, even those who are not religious and do not typically attend religious services, will go to synagogue on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*. In some communities, e.g. Conservative and Orthodox outside of Israel, *Rosh Hashanah* is a two-day holiday, and members of those communities will typically observe both days by going to synagogue. Services take on a special meaning that day, as Jews begin to ask for forgiveness, looking back on the year and looking at what they should have done better. The liturgy for these High Holidays, that is, *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, focuses on God's kingship and sovereignty. For the High Holidays, there is a special prayer book called a *machzor* that is used. It cannot be substituted by the *siddur*, which is used the rest of the year.

One of the observances in synagogue is the sounding of the *shofar*, the ram's horn. There are four different kinds of notes blown on a *shofar*, and they are repeated throughout the service. The *shofar* serves as the wake-up call to the season, alerting the community members that the time for repentance and introspection has come. Traditionally, the *shofar* is not sounded on the Sabbath.

A typical treat on *Rosh Hashanah* is apples and honey, signifying that the year ahead should be a sweet one.

## Yom Kippur

*Yom Kippur* is the holiest day on the calendar for Jews worldwide. It is a major fast day and just as with other holy days, no work may be done. The fast for *Yom Kippur* begins before sundown the evening prior, and ends after nightfall on the evening of *Yom Kippur*. The fast includes all food and drink, including water. *Yom Kippur* is observed eight days after *Rosh Hashanah* ends. (If *Rosh Hashanah* fell on Sept. 1, *Yom Kippur* would be Sept. 10.) Work may not be done on *Yom Kippur*.

As previously noted, *Yom Kippur* is the day on which the liturgy imagines the “Book of Life” is sealed for the next year. This creates a day of “one final push” for atonement from all the sins of the past year. The liturgy includes different confessionals, some that seem more personal, some which are community focused. Some are much shorter, while others are very long and inclusive of every type of sin the congregants may have committed. All of the confessions are said in the plural form, as they emphasize communal responsibility for one another. The day’s liturgy concludes with an evening service, as the gates of heaven are closing, with a final plea for atonement and forgiveness. The service ends with the final blowing of the *shofar*, a blast to end the season of repentance, with a renewed focus on trying to make the next year a better one.

It is typical for people to spend most of the evening and day in services. The services are much longer and more drawn out than the normal week, and people tend to attend all of the services, as opposed to just the morning one. Some will spend all day in the synagogue, though many synagogues will have a short afternoon break so that people can rest before finishing the service and the fast.

In addition to fasting, there are added restrictions on *Yom Kippur*. Just as when one is in mourning, it is forbidden to wear leather, one should refrain from showering/bathing, and engaging in sexual contact. The fasting portion of the restrictions should only be taken on if it is healthy to do so and if one is of age (post *bar/bat mitzvah*). The elderly, pregnant women, and those who need to for medical reasons, may eat.

## Sukkot

The holiday of *Sukkot* begins five days after *Yom Kippur* and lasts for nine days. The first two and last two days are considered holy and work may not be done, while the intermediate five days are considered *chol*, or regular days, and work may be done. This holiday provides one of the quickest emotional transitions in the Jewish calendar, as Jews go from the solemn nature of *Yom Kippur* to the season of rejoicing with *Sukkot*.

On *Sukkot*, there is a requirement to dwell in the temporary booths that are reminiscent of the ones the Israelites built in the desert after they left Egypt. Many Jews will build their own booths, though synagogues will also build communal ones so that everyone can fulfill the commandment. The typical *sukkah* is one that can fit a table and chairs so that meals may be eaten inside, as per the requirement. Some will just say the blessings and eat a small portion of the meal before moving inside because of falling temperatures or inclement weather, depending on the area. Others will choose to sleep in the *sukkah* at night, in accordance with the commandment of “dwelling.”

There are companies that sell pre-fabricated *sukkot* (the plural form of *sukkah*). A *sukkah* must have a loose roof covering, made from natural materials that grew from the ground, typically tree branches, with holes so that when sitting in it, one can look up and see the stars. The walls must also be temporary, though one wall may be a permanent wall (e.g. one wall of the *sukkah* may be an outside wall of a house.)

In addition to the *sukkah*, Jews must also have a *lulav* and *etrog*, the “four species.” The *lulav* is made up of a palm branch, two willow branches, and three myrtle branches, while the *etrog* is a citron fruit with the stem/point attached. While it is good to purchase and own your own set, it can be expensive to do so each year, so many synagogues will have extras for everyone to share and use. These species are put together for use at home and in the synagogue, where they are used to praise and rejoice before God.

## Hanukkah

*Hanukkah* (or *Chanukah*, or any number of different English spellings) means rededication and is the first Jewish festival of the winter season. It celebrates the Maccabean victory over the Greeks and their rededication of the previously defiled Temple. It is there that the miracle of the oil is said to have occurred—when they thought there was only enough oil to light the *menorah*, the Temple lamp, for one day, but instead it burned for eight. For that reason, Jews celebrate the rededication for eight days in the winter time. All eight days are considered as normal days, and work may be done.

Many Jews know and celebrate this holiday because of the American custom of giving presents to the children, which most likely came as a response to the Christian tradition of giving presents on Christmas. There are, however, religious observances and more traditional ones, as well. The candelabra (*chanukkiyah*) is lit each night as a reminder of the miracle in the Temple. On the first night, one candle is lit, on the second night two, and it increases until there are eight candles on the final night. There is also a “helper” candle, called the *shamash*, whose purpose is to be the main holder of the flame and help light the other candles. Candles are inserted into the *chanukkiyah* from right to left and lit from left to right.

It is also traditional to eat fried foods, typically jelly filled donuts, called *sufganiyot*, and fried potato pancakes, called *latkes*. All of this is done because of the focus on oil’s importance on the holiday. Children will also play with *dreidels*, or spinning tops, adorned with four Hebrew letters: *nun, gimel, hey, shin*, which is an acrostic for the phrase “*Nes gadol hayah sham*,” or in translation, “A great miracle happened there.”

## Purim

Purim is the Jewish holiday celebrating the events described in the Scroll of Esther, also known as *Megillat Esther*. The holiday takes place each year on the day after Haman had chosen—through the drawing lots, known as *pur*, and from which the holiday takes its name—to decide to kill the Jews. Because the Jews survived, a celebration ensued. Purim is not considered a holy day, and therefore work may be done.

There are, however, traditions that should be followed for the holiday. These traditions include giving food/charity to the poor; sending gifts (usually the traditional cookies, *hamantaschen*) to friends and family; hearing a complete reading of the *megillah*—the reading of the Scroll of Esther, which generally happens in the synagogue the evening preceding the full day of Purim, though it can happen in



any place and at any time during Purim; and finally, Jews observing the commandment to drink until they don't know the difference between Haman (the villain) and Mordechai (the hero). There are exceptions to the final rule—children under age should not drink, neither should people who might do serious harm to someone else or to themselves by drinking. And as with anything involving alcohol, a person should know their own limit and not exceed it. This command is not an excuse for inappropriate or illegal behavior.

There is a minor fast the day before Purim, the Fast of Esther, which commemorates the fasting that Esther did before she went to see the king without having been invited, knowing she could be sentenced to death for that. Many religious Jews will fast on this day, though it is not considered a major fast like *Yom Kippur* or *Tisha B'Av* (discussed later).

## Passover

Passover is one of the most well-known and widely observed holidays of the Jewish calendar. Passover is an eight-day holiday, with the first two and final two days being holy (i.e. work may not be done, many go to synagogue for services), while the middle four days are not (and therefore, work may be done). Passover celebrates and commemorates the exodus story of the Bible, with a retelling of the story done at home during the *seder* meal.

The *seder*, which means order, is a meal hosted on the first two nights of the holiday (in Reform communities, typically only one *seder* is held), which follows an order of retelling, coupled with prayers of thanksgiving; remembrance of the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians, and those who died because of them; and traditional foods, which serve as a reminder of the exodus story. Jews are commanded to imagine themselves as though they, too, had left Egypt, and the night is a journey from slavery to freedom. There are visual reminders throughout the *seder* of both the status of enslaved people and those of free people. Traditionally, people drink four cups of wine during the *seder*, though grape juice may be substituted for those who should not consume alcohol in that, or any, amount. A special book is read from during the *seder*, called a *haggadah*. Different communities use different versions of the *haggadah*, but much of the Hebrew text is the same regardless of which version one uses.

Observance of Passover includes strict dietary restrictions for the eight days. Nothing that is considered *chametz*, that is, food made from wheat, barley, rye, oats, or spelt, may be eaten. Some add legumes to the list of restricted foods. It is up to the individual whether they also consider liquids derived from legumes to be consumed. Different communities have different standards of observance, and each family or person may or may not adhere to all of those. Many will not eat foods prepared on non-Passover dishes, and families will typically have a separate set of dishes, pots, pans, cutlery, etc. for Passover.

In order to completely rid one's home and life of *chametz*, it is required that the *chametz* too valuable to be thrown out be sold to a non-Jew for the eight days. Typically, the rabbi of a community will handle all the sales of *chametz*, as congregants will give the rabbi permission to sell the *chametz* in their homes.

The food that is most often associated with Passover is called *matzah*, and is a cracker made from wheat flour that has been cooked for 18 minutes exactly. It is reminiscent of the bread the Israelites were able to make as they escaped Egypt, and so for eight days, Jews remind themselves of the affliction and escape from slavery.

## Shavuot

*Shavuot* comes exactly seven weeks after the second night of Passover, and literally means “weeks.” Jews are commanded to count 49 days from the second *seder* of Passover, and on the 50th day it is said that the Torah was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The holiday also celebrates the harvest festival, when the first fruits of the year were brought to the Temple. *Shavuot* is considered a holy day, and therefore work may not be done. In many communities, *Shavuot* is a two-day holiday (the 50th and 51st days in the counting,) and both are considered holy.

There are some traditions associated with the holiday. Some celebrate the giving of the laws by spending the entire night studying Jewish texts with friends and family, usually with snacks and drink, until daybreak, when they will hold morning services. The meals on *Shavuot* are traditionally dairy meals, including blintzes and cheesecake.

## Tisha B’Av

While *Yom Kippur* is the most solemn day on the Jewish calendar, *Tisha B’Av* is the saddest day. Like *Yom Kippur*, *Tisha B’Av* is a 25-hour fast day, beginning in the evening prior to sundown and ending the next day after nightfall. *Tisha B’Av* literally means the 9th of Av, the Jewish month in which it falls. The holiday typically falls in late July/early August in the English calendar. Unlike *Yom Kippur*, *Tisha B’Av* is not a holy day, and light work that does not preclude fasting is permitted (albeit discouraged because of the mourning practices). In some communities, it is typical not to work in the morning and return to work after midday.

The holiday commemorates the destruction of both the first Temple in 586 BCE and the second Temple in 70 CE. It is also said that other tragedies throughout Jewish history occurred on the 9th of Av, and regardless of historical fact, Jews should remember all of them during this day of mourning.

# Daily Living

## Dietary Laws—*Kashrut* (Keeping Kosher)

Keeping kosher is one of the ways that Jews are unique from the rest of the world population. It is a standard set in the Bible, interpreted by the rabbis of Talmudic times, and tweaked by modern standards. In its simplest form, it is a set of rules that dictate what Jews can and cannot eat. Foods must be labeled “kosher” for those who are strict observers of the laws to eat it.

Foods can be kosher without a rabbi blessing it—it is the process by which the food is made, or by which the animal is kept and slaughtered, that makes a food kosher or not.

There are some basic rules of keeping kosher, as well as more complicated ones. For the purposes of this guide, the basic rules will be discussed, while the intricacies of *kashrut* should be discussed with a rabbi on a case-by-case basis.

Meat and milk cannot be eaten or prepared together. In kosher homes, there are two sets of dishes, pots and pans, cutlery, etc. One for meat and one for milk. It was discussed in the Passover section

that many families also have separate dishes for Passover. In families that keep kosher, many will have four different sets of dishes: meat and milk for the year, and meat and milk for Passover.

One must also wait between eating meat and dairy. The standard is waiting six hours after eating meat before one can eat dairy. However, after one eats dairy, one need only to rinse one's mouth out and clean one's hands before eating meat. Even if the time has elapsed and the dishes have been cleared, meat and milk should not be eaten at the same meal.

Certain animals may not be eaten, and certain parts of the animal, regardless of the animal being a kosher animal or not, may not be eaten. For example, pigs and shellfish are not kosher, while cows and chickens are. However, one may not eat the heart of a cow or chicken. Blood must also be drained from the animal before it is consumed, though that is often a part of the preparation process to certify meat as kosher. There are additional steps in the slaughtering and preparation processes, and they must be done in the correct manner, under supervision from an authority on *kashrut* (the body of Jewish law that governs the practice of keeping kosher) in order to receive certification. Any meat (or any food) that is purchased must be labeled as kosher (there are dozens of certifications that are considered trustworthy, so research can be done to see if the label on a food product is trusted or not).

Fruits, vegetables, eggs, and grain can be eaten with either meat or dairy, as they are neither meat nor dairy. All packaged foods must be certified kosher.

## **Grooming Standards**

According to the Bible, it is forbidden to shave one's face with a razor. Leviticus 19:27 reads, "You shall not round the corners of your head, and do not destroy the corners of your beard." The rabbis understood this to mean the upper and lower parts of the cheek (on both sides), as well as the chin. Furthermore, this applies to taking a razor to the beard, which at one point was the only way to shave. This prohibition also relates to the side locks or sideburns, which should not be cut. In many communities this is no longer the standard, and many Jewish men will cut their sideburns and/or shave their beards. However, even for those who do shave on a regular basis, on the Sabbath and holy days, the weeks between Passover and Shavuot, the three weeks prior to Tisha B'Av, as well as the periods of personal mourning after the death of a close relative, there is a prohibition on shaving, which many will follow.

There are differing opinions on other methods of shaving that may be permissible, but many conclude that trimming with scissors, because they wouldn't touch the face, is OK. Some believe that shaving with modern electric razors is not acceptable, because the modern technology lets them get as close, or closer, than a razor. However, all traditional opinions agree that shaving with a straight razor is prohibited. Additionally, there are some strictly adherent for whom all shaving of the beard and sideburns is religiously prohibited regardless of the method used (to include electric razor or even depilatory powder).

As with most any law in Judaism, if one must shave to save their own life, or to be prepared to save their own life, they can and/or must shave.

# Local Contacts

We encourage you to fill in this page with Jewish resources in your community.

Synagogues:

Jewish Community Center:

Kosher food markets: