



### FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

**Subject Category (circle one):** Religion/Ceremony    Celebration    History    Prayer  
Gathas    **Comparative Religion**    Shahnameh

**Age Group (circle one):** PreK-K    Grades 1-3    Grades 4-5    Grades 6-8    **Grades 9-12**

**Lesson # (if applicable):** 5

**Subject of the Lesson:** Judaism

#### Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

##### Judaism

Judaism comprises the religious beliefs and practices and the way of life of the Jews. Judaism also encompasses many different things for different people—some might identify themselves as Jewish ethnically or culturally, without practicing the religion. It is the main religion practiced in Israel. Hebrew is the language spoken in Israel and by some Jews around the world. One of their prophets, Moses (Moshe in Hebrew) was born circa 1300 BCE. He led his people out of bondage in Egypt to the edge of Canaan (an ancient region made up of Palestine or the part of it between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea).

It is believed that Moses was divinely protected as an infant, and as a young man he received a special calling from God. Through him God declared His Law, including the Ten Commandments, the criminal code, and the whole liturgical law (a prescribed form or set of forms of public religious worship). In his old age, when the Hebrew were at the Jordan River ready to cross, God gave Moses a view of the Promised Land from Mt. Pisgah; but he did not enter it, for he died and was buried in Moab (an ancient kingdom east of the Dead Sea in present-day southwest Jordan).

The divine teachings from God to the people were put together in 5 books which together are known as the TORAH. The Torah is written in Hebrew, the oldest of Jewish languages. It is also known as Torat Moshe, the Law of Moses.

The Torah, which in Hebrew means ‘teaching’ or ‘learning’, which includes all teachings of Judaism, is also known as the five books of Moses, the Law of Moses, or the Pentateuch. It laid down the fundamental laws of moral and physical conduct. The Torah begins with a description of the origin of the universe and ends on the word *Israel* (in Hebrew it means ‘Triumphant with God’ or God Contended’), after the story of the death of Moses, just before the conquest of Canaan by the Jews.

Central to this religion is the notion of monotheism, which most scholars believe to have been the outgrowth of a process that began with polytheism, progressed to henotheism (the worship of one god without denying the existence of others), and ended in the belief in a single Lord of the universe, uniquely different from all His creatures. He is compassionate toward His creation, and in turn humans



are to love and fear (i.e., stand in awe of) Him. Because God is holy, He demands that His people be holy, righteous, and just, to assist in the fulfillment of His designs for humankind and the world.

In Judaism, a place of assembly for worship, education, and communal affairs is called the Synagogue. A Jewish spiritual leader/teacher/priest is known as the Rabbi. Rabbis have traditionally been male, but in the 20th century, women are also ordained in a number of different Jewish movements.

The Bar Mitzvah is the Jewish ceremony in which the young male is initiated into the religious community, according to tradition at the age of 13 years and a day. The celebrant performs his first act as an adult, saying the blessing for the reading in the synagogue of part of the weekly portion of the Torah or, more traditionally, performing the actual reading. Today the religious ceremony is accompanied by a social celebration that is considered a Seudat Mitzvah, a feast in celebration of the fulfillment of a commandment. In the 20th century, a comparable ceremony for the young female has also been introduced called the Bat Mitzvah, or B'nai Mitzvah for those who prefer less explicitly gendered language.

Some of the most important holy days in Judaism are given below:

The weekly Shabbat or **Sabbath**, last day of the week (Saturday), observed as a rest day for the twenty-five hours commencing around sundown on Friday. In the biblical account of creation, the seventh day is set as a Sabbath to mark God's rest after his work. In Jewish law, starting with both versions of the Ten Commandments, the rules for the Sabbath are given in careful detail.

**Rosh Hashanah**, the Jewish New Year, is one of Judaism's holiest days. Rosh Hashanah commemorates the creation of the world and marks the beginning of the Days of Awe, a 10-day period of introspection and repentance that culminates in the **Yom Kippur holiday**, also known as the Day of Atonement. Even though Nisan is considered the first month of the Jewish calendar year, they celebrate their new year, Rosh Hashanah, on the first day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar year.

**Yom Kippur**, falling on the 10th day of the Jewish month of Tishri (usually late September or early October) is a day of fasting and prayer for forgiveness for sins committed during the year. Jews gather in synagogues on the Eve of Yom Kippur, when the fast begins, and return the following morning to continue confessing, doing penance, and praying for forgiveness.

**Sukkot** is one of the oldest and most joyous of Jewish holidays. The holiday begins on the 15th day of Tishri, the seventh month in the Jewish calendar, and lasts for eight days (seven days in Israel).

**Simchat Torah:**

On the 22nd day of Tishri, the day after the seventh day of Sukkot, faithful Jews celebrate the holiday of Sh'mini Atzeret, a two-day holiday. In Israel, Sh'mini Atzeret is also the holiday of Simchat Torah.



Outside of Israel, where extra days of holidays are held, only the second day of Sh'mini Atzeret is Simchat Torah.

The two holidays are often thought to be a part of the observance of Sukkot. Sh'mini Atzeret is a holiday in its own right, commanded in the book of Leviticus. Sh'mini Atzeret literally means "the assembly of the eighth." Rabbinic tradition explains the holiday by pointing to the fact that the Lord is like a host, who invites visitors into His home for a limited time. But when the visit is over and it is time to leave, He has enjoyed the stay so much that He asks the guests to stay another day.

Simchat Torah simply means "rejoicing in the Torah." This holiday marks the completion of the cycle of weekly Torah readings.

During the course of the year, portions of the Torah are publicly read each Sabbath in the synagogue. On Simchat Torah, the last portion of the book of Deuteronomy is read and immediately followed by the first chapter of Genesis. This reminds the listener that the Torah is a circle, never-ending in its message to God's people. It also emphasizes the cyclical nature of the relationship between the Jewish people and the reading of the Torah.

**Passover**, in Judaism, is one of the most important and elaborate of religious festivals. Its celebration begins on the evening of the 14th of Nisan (first month of the religious calendar, corresponding to March–April) and lasts seven days in Israel, eight days for some in the Diaspora (Jews settled outside of Israel in different parts of the world). It involved an elaborate retelling of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt, a founding story in which the Israelite slaves were brought out of Egypt by God through Moses. It reminds Jews of the need to pursue freedom for all, for they knew the hardship of slavery.

**Shavuot**, Jewish feast celebrated on the 6th of the month of Sivan (usually sometime in May) in Israel and on the sixth and seventh days in the Diaspora.

**Hanukkah** (Chanukah) - the Festival of Lights, or the Feast of Dedication. An eight-day festival beginning on the 25th day of Kislev, commemorating two things:

- 1) the victory in 165 BCE of Jewish patriots in the liberation of Judea (an ancient region of southern Palestine comprising present-day southern Israel and southwest Jordan) from Syrian rule; and
- 2) the rededication of the Temple at Jerusalem.

**Purim**, a Jewish festival is celebrated on the fourteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month of their calendar.

**Tikkun olam** (Hebrew: תְּקִינַת עוֹלָם, lit. 'repair of the world') is a concept in Judaism, which refers to various forms of action intended to repair and improve the world.

In classical rabbinic literature, the phrase referred to legal enactments intended to preserve social order. In the Aleinu prayer, it refers to the eradication of idolatry. In Lurianic Kabbalah, the "repair" is mystical: to return the sparks of Divine light to their source by means of ritual performance.



In the modern era, particularly among the post-Haskalah movements, *tikkun olam* has come to refer to the pursuit of social justice<sup>[1]</sup> or "the establishment of godly qualities throughout the world"<sup>[2]</sup> based on the idea that "Jews bear responsibility not only for their own moral, spiritual, and material welfare, but also for the welfare of society at large".

### Movements in the United States Today:

Approximately 5.7 million of the world's 14.8 million Jews live in the United States. The only country with a higher Jewish population is Israel at 6.3 million. **There are basically three major movements in the U.S. today: Reform, Conservative and Orthodox.** Some people also include a fourth movement, the Reconstructionist movement, although that movement is substantially smaller than the other three. Orthodox and sometimes Conservative are described as "traditional" movements. Reform, Reconstructionist, and sometimes Conservative are described as "liberal" or "modern" movements. And a lot of American Jews (about 35%) identify themselves as "just Jewish" with no affiliation with any movement.

**Orthodoxy** is actually made up of several different groups. It includes the modern Orthodox, who have largely integrated into modern society while maintaining observance of halakhah (Jewish Law), the Chasidim, who live separately and dress distinctively (commonly, but erroneously, referred to in the media as the "ultra-Orthodox"), and the Yeshivish Orthodox, who are neither Chasidic nor modern. The Orthodox movements are all very similar in belief, and the differences are difficult for anyone who is not Orthodox to understand. They all believe that God gave Moses the whole Torah at Mount Sinai. The "whole Torah" includes both the Written Torah (the Jewish Bible, what Christians call the "Old Testament") and the Oral Torah, an oral tradition interpreting and explaining the Written Torah. They believe that the Torah is true, that it has come down to us intact and unchanged. They believe that the Torah contains 613 mitzvot binding upon Jews but not upon non-Jews.

**Reform Judaism** does not believe that the Torah was written by God. The movement accepts the critical theory of Biblical authorship: that the Bible was written by separate sources and redacted together. Reform Jews do not believe in observance of commandments as such, but they retain much of the values and ethics of Judaism, along with some of the practices and the culture. The original, basic tenets of American Reform Judaism were set down in the Pittsburgh Platform. Many non-observant, nominal, and/or agnostic Jews used to identify themselves as Reform when pressed to specify simply because Reform is the most liberal movement, but that is not really a fair reflection on the movement as a whole. There are plenty of Reform Jews who are religious in a Reform way. In recent years, those non-religious people have tended to identify themselves as "just Jewish," which gives a more accurate reflection of Reform Judaism. The PRRI report found that 28% of American Jews by religion identify themselves as Reform, which is down from the past but probably because the "just Jewish" have been filtered out. There are approximately 900 Reform synagogues in the United States and Canada.



**Conservative Judaism** grew out of the tension between Orthodoxy and Reform. It was formally organized as the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in by Dr. Solomon Schechter in 1913, although its roots in the Jewish Theological Seminary of America stretch back into the 1880s. Conservative Judaism maintains that the truths found in Jewish scriptures and other Jewish writings come from God, but were transmitted by humans and contain a human component. Conservative Judaism generally accepts the binding nature of halakhah, but believes that the Law should change and adapt, absorbing aspects of the predominant culture while remaining true to Judaism's values. In my experience, there is a great deal of variation among Conservative synagogues. Some are indistinguishable from Reform, except that they use more Hebrew; others are practically Orthodox, except that men and women sit together. Some are very traditional in substance, but not in form; others are traditional in form but not in substance. This flexibility is deeply rooted in Conservative Judaism and can be found within their own Statement of Principles, Emet ve-Emunah. The PRRI report found that 14% of American Jews by religion identify themselves as Conservative. There are approximately 600 Conservative synagogues in the world today.

**Reconstructionist Judaism** is theoretically an outgrowth of Conservative, but it doesn't fit neatly into the traditional/liberal, observant/non-observant continuum that most people use to classify movements of Judaism. Reconstructionists believe that Judaism is an "evolving religious civilization." They do not believe in a personified deity that is active in history, and they do not believe that God chose the Jewish people. From this, you might assume that Reconstructionism is to the left of Reform; yet Reconstructionism lays a much greater stress on Jewish observance than Reform Judaism. Reconstructionists observe the halakhah if they choose to, not because it is a binding Law from God, but because it is a valuable cultural remnant. Reconstructionism is a very small movement but seems to get a disproportionate amount of attention, probably because there are a disproportionate number of Reconstructionists serving as rabbis to Jewish college student organizations and Jewish Community Centers. In fact, even the Conservative movement now allows affiliated synagogues to use a Reconstructionist rabbi if they cannot find an acceptable Conservative one, and Reconstructionist rabbis at Conservative synagogues are becoming increasingly common. Only about 2% of the Jews in America identify themselves as Reconstructionist. There are about a hundred Reconstructionist synagogues world-wide.

For students interested in learning further, please check these out:

- 1. Text Study:** In Judaism, they often go back to the sources. I would suggest the students read Genesis 1, the very beginning of the Torah, and practice close reading. In Judaism, they often embrace different perspectives and interpretations of the text, so take a look at: [https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.1.1?ven=The Contemporary Torah, Jewish Publication Society, 2006&vhe=Miqra according to the Masorah&lang=bi&aliyot=0](https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.1.1?ven=The_Contemporary_Torah,_Jewish_Publication_Society,_2006&vhe=Miqra_according_to_the_Masorah&lang=bi&aliyot=0)
- 2. Learn about Talmud:** I'd also suggest learning about the Torah, the Mishnah and Gemara (Mishnah and Gemara together are called the Talmud). The Mishnah is something of a commentary on the Torah, and the Gemara is a type of commentary on the Mishnah.



3. **Holocaust and Israel:** Two other major parts of Jewish life today are remembering the Holocaust, and also having some relationship to Israel. It may be worth doing some research on and learning more about it.
4. **Halakhah:** Jewish law. Some Jews feel bound by halakhah, a system of rules that comes from the Torah but was developed and made specific by ancient rabbis, and others do not feel bound to follow halakhah.

Other readings to consider for students interested in learning more:

1. <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/tikkun-olam> Tikkun Olam is very important especially in Reform/liberal Judaism, so you might want to teach them this concept. I might share this page or similar (but stop before the people section, it's a bit long and the rest isn't top priority I would say). The page also has some good key terms to teach them.
2. You might browse the Chabad website for more Orthodox content: [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/1676841/jewish/Ethics-Morality.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1676841/jewish/Ethics-Morality.htm)
3. The Union for Reform Judaism is on the liberal end of Judaism, for something different from Orthodox Judaism: [https://reformjudaism.org/learning/judaism-classes/introduction-to-judaism?gclid=Cj0KCQjwmpSSBhCNARIsAH3cYgayQx5-A6Pw6HGqNJsQmtlmEupWRpcLaA1To5TS1obVYLLnXBA\\_WsAaAiKkEALw\\_wcB](https://reformjudaism.org/learning/judaism-classes/introduction-to-judaism?gclid=Cj0KCQjwmpSSBhCNARIsAH3cYgayQx5-A6Pw6HGqNJsQmtlmEupWRpcLaA1To5TS1obVYLLnXBA_WsAaAiKkEALw_wcB)

**Note: The above material was read and approved by Rabbi Allyson Zacharoff, working at NYU, NY and prepared by Bakhtavar Desai.**

Jewish Prophets:

Prophets and prophecy are integral to Judaism. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the forefathers of the Jewish people, were prophets. Moses—the giver of the Law—is considered the most important prophet for Jews.

Abraham is traditionally considered to be the first Jew and to have made a covenant with God. Because Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize Abraham as their first prophet, they are also called the Abrahamic religions.

When people refer to the Abrahamic religions they are usually thinking of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. There are, in fact, more Abrahamic religions, such as the Baha'i Faith, Yezidi, Druze, Samaritan and Rastafari.

Today's Most Common Symbol of Judaism:

Star of David: Six-pointed star (two triangles, one facing up and the other down). It is mentioned in Torah that this protected and made King David's armor sturdier than his opponents'.



### Purpose of Life in Judaism:

([https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/108390/jewish/What-is-Lifes-Purpose.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/108390/jewish/What-is-Lifes-Purpose.htm))

It was the Creator's Will that the soul – which is truly a "part" of the Divine, should descend into a physical body and a physical world, a state that is opposed to its nature. All this is for the purpose of a Divine mission which the soul has to perform to purify and spiritualize the physical body and its related physical environment, making this world an abode for the Divine Presence.

This can be done only through a life of Torah and mitzvot (plural of mitzvah). Mitzvot refers to the Divine commandments to the Jewish people, things God wants us to do or not do. Examples include such diverse acts as having children, declaring God's oneness, resting on the seventh day, not eating pork, wrapping tefillin on the arm and head, building a Temple in Jerusalem, appointing a king, obeying the sages and providing an interest-free loan.

Through Torah and mitzvot, one connects with God. Man has the ability to connect his entire being with God. Upon achieving this task, he creates an abode for God in this world, hence fulfilling the purpose of creation.

### Can one be initiated into Judaism?

Today more and more communities accept initiates. The following are common steps in joining the faith.

1. Study and learn the scriptures.
2. Circumcision
3. Beit Din (Rabbinic Court)  
A three-person court rules on the initiate's knowledge, intent, and readiness for conversion.
4. Mikveh (Ritual bath)  
Immersion in a body of water (bath, lake, swimming pool, etc.)
5. Accepting a Hebrew name.

Video on steps to conversion to Judaism:

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-conversion-process/>

### Life After Death in Judaism

One of the fundamental beliefs of Judaism is that life does not begin with birth, nor does it end with death.

While there are numerous stations in a soul's journey, these can generally be grouped into four general phases:



- i. the wholly spiritual existence of the soul before it enters the body.
- ii. physical life
- iii. post-physical life in Gan Eden (the “Garden of Eden,” also called “Heaven” and “Paradise”);
- iv. the “world to come” (*olam haba*) that follows the resurrection of the dead.

#### Post Physical Life:

When the soul departs from the body, it stands before the heavenly court to give a “judgment and accounting” of its earthly life.<sup>9</sup> But the heavenly court does only the “accounting” part; the “judgment” part—that, only the soul itself can do.<sup>10</sup> Only the soul can pass judgment on itself; only it can know and sense the true extent of what it accomplished, or neglected to accomplish, in the course of its physical life. Freed from the limitations and concealments of the physical state, it can now see Godliness; it can now look back at its own life and experience what it truly was. The soul’s experience of the Godliness it brought into the world with its mitzvot and positive actions is the exquisite pleasure of Gan Eden (the “Garden of Eden”—Paradise); its experience of the destructiveness it wrought through its lapses and transgressions is the excruciating pain of Gehinnom (“Gehenna” or “Purgatory”).

The soul, for its part, remains involved in the lives of those it leaves behind when it departs from physical life. The soul of a parent continues to watch over the lives of his or her children and grandchildren, to derive pride (or pain) from their deeds and accomplishments, and to intercede on their behalf before the heavenly throne; the same applies to those to whom a soul was connected with bonds of love, friendship and community.

#### Reincarnation:

The holy Ari explained it most simply: every Jew must fulfill all 613 mitzvot, and if he doesn't succeed in one lifetime, he comes back again and again until he finishes. This is the concept of *gilgul neshamot* (*gilgul* means “cycle or wheel” and *neshamot* is pl for “souls”)—commonly referred to as “reincarnation”—extensively discussed in the teachings of Kabbalah.<sup>12</sup> This is why we often find ourselves powerfully drawn to a particular mitzvah or cause and make it the focus of our lives, dedicating to it a seemingly disproportionate part of our time and energy: it is our soul gravitating to the “missing pieces” of its divinely ordained purpose.

#### End of the Era of Achievement:

The prophets of Israel spoke of a time when all who died will be restored to life: their bodies will be regenerated<sup>15</sup> and their souls restored to their bodies. “Death will be eradicated forever,” and “the world will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the seabed.” This, of course, will spell the end of the “Era of Achievement.”





### **Lesson for students:**

1. Make a PowerPoint of the Material for teacher. Use PowerPoint to teach the lesson and to stop at appropriate sections to start a discussion.
2. Make a printout of the Material for teacher for each student or use a projector to display it on classroom wall (in a virtual class share screen the information). Have each student read a section before discussing it as a class.
3. Enhance the lesson by following up with a YouTube video.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VAyIWxDQfk>

### **Activity for Students:**

1. Fill out the comparative religion chart for Judaism and discuss the results with the class. Using the chart to compare each section with Zoroastrianism.
2. Plan a field day to a Synagogue close to your center.
3. Invite a representative of the Jewish faith to your virtual or in person class to share information about the religion. Have each student have a question ready to ask the representative.
4. Have each student write one thing they found interesting about Judaism on a small sheet of paper along with their name, fold it, and place it in a jar. Then have each student take out one of the folded sheets of paper, read the content, and ask the person whose name is on the sheet of paper why they found what they have written interesting and discuss with class.
5. How can we use Jewish teachings today to improve ourselves and our world? Give current event examples when possible.
6. Visit the Teacher's Guide section of [fezana.org/education](http://fezana.org/education) and get ideas for in class and virtual activities by using "Activity Menu" and "Virtual Class ideas".



## Sources:

1. See J. L. Blau, *Modern Varieties of Judaism* (1966); M. M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (2d ed. 1957, repr. 1967); J. Neusner, *There We Sat Down* (1972);
2. R. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought* (1980);
3. A. Eisen, *The Chosen People in America* (1983);
4. M. Idel, *Kabbalah* (1988);
5. M. A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement* (1988);
6. G. Robinson, *Essential Judaism* (2000);
7. The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia® Copyright © 2005, Columbia University Press. Licensed from Columbia University Press. [www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/cup/](http://www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/cup/)
8. <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/tikkun-olam/>;
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10. [https://reformjudaism.org/learning/judaism-classes/introduction-to-judaism?gclid=Cj0KCQjwmPSSBhCNARIsAH3cYgayQx5-A6Pw6HGqNJsQmtImEupWRpcLaA1To5TS1obVYLLnXBA\\_WsAaAiKkEALw\\_wcB](https://reformjudaism.org/learning/judaism-classes/introduction-to-judaism?gclid=Cj0KCQjwmPSSBhCNARIsAH3cYgayQx5-A6Pw6HGqNJsQmtImEupWRpcLaA1To5TS1obVYLLnXBA_WsAaAiKkEALw_wcB)
11. [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/108390/jewish/What-is-Lifes-Purpose.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/108390/jewish/What-is-Lifes-Purpose.htm)
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13. [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/604381/jewish/Mitzvah-Minutes.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/604381/jewish/Mitzvah-Minutes.htm)
14. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-conversion-process/>
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16. [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/4058906/jewish/21-Jewish-Prophets-Everyone-Should-Know.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4058906/jewish/21-Jewish-Prophets-Everyone-Should-Know.htm)
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20. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Diaspora-Judaism>
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23. [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3009476/jewish/Why-Havent-Jews-Rebuilt-the-Temple-Yet.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3009476/jewish/Why-Havent-Jews-Rebuilt-the-Temple-Yet.htm)
24. <https://aish.com/9-common-jewish-symbols/>

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