



The journey to Sinai

By Frederick Cook

The Journey to Sinai
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Faithfully dedicated to Rabbi Eli Freedman, Rabbi Jill Maderer, Cantor Rita Glassman, Cantor Brad Hyman, Rabbi David Ackerman, Professor Henry Israeli, to my wife Samantha Cook and our four children; Adrian, Gabriel, Jocelyn, and Cordelia. I cannot express my gratitude or love enough for you all!

Introduction

This book being written here today, is a miracle unto itself, it is a testament to the power of change and the human capacity to become something holy, at any stage of life. I was a leader in the neo-Nazi movement, and a household name in the Hellenic occult world, who found out I am Ethnically Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jewish. During my studies to learn about being a Jew, I found Hashem, waiting for me, yearning for me inasmuch as I yearned for him in my heart of hearts.

For more in-depth information on my transformation, please check out <http://www.sonofsinai.com>

I began reading more and more and the more I read the more I pained to learn, and I inevitably began the conversion process and converted to Reform Judaism. I was not just any reform Jew however, I wanted to know as much about the various sects and peoples of Judaism as I could, to add as much Jewish meaning to my life as possible and in a year and a half I'd read 75 books and the complete Talmud.

From Haredi, to Orthodox, to Conservative, to Karaite, and of course Reform, I studied as much as a human possibly could, and I did so with an obsessive furor. I have been told by Jews in the various sects that I have the "fire" of Hashem in me, that my thirst for knowledge is what Jews should aspire to, but then I am told "It's a shame you're Reform," in the same breath. Reform is exactly WHY I read and study and want to know everything so badly, being free to explore what is spiritually meaningful to me and told to explore the entirety of Jewish history, thought, sage wisdom, and the like, is exactly why I am here writing this book.

In a year and a half I learned how to pray, the songs, the holidays, the entire shabbat service to the point that I could perform it at home, on my own in Hebrew. I learned the culture and peoplehood, the foods, a love for Eretz-Yisrael, the shared history of the Jewish people. I learned how to read the Tanakh, I learned how to interpret it myself, I learned what Mussar and Kabbalah were and began studying them. All in all, I learned to be Jewish, but not just from one standpoint, but from the entirety of the Jewish people, regardless of their sect or culture, I learned to live a fully Jewish life.

When I attend shabbat services, I don't need a Siddur, I know the prayers, I know the songs, I know the structure of the service, I know exactly what is and when, and I know it in Hebrew and English... and I owe it all to the absolute beauty and free will that Reform Judaism affords us!

I adore our congregation (Congregation Rodeph Shalom), I love our leadership and staff, I love each person in our community so incredibly much, and I love being... simply being counted amongst them. The love and acceptance I've received from those in the Reform movement, in spite of my past, is far beyond any and every expectation I could have ever fathomed, and it's because of that love and acceptance, that I am who and where I am today.

After a couple of months into the conversion process, I created the Son of Sinai website to document my conversion and what I've learned and to let people know who I was, so that there were no surprises. The website grew tremendously and has a ton of content today, with more constantly being added, and all for free. This spiritual journey would not have been possible outside of Reform Judaism or within a static wing of Judaism, it would have been their sect or not...period!

So, as you read these words, remember, I am a Reform Jew, an educated one, who has undertaken this journey not under a static lens, but as a Jew of many colors, sects, stripes, and cultures. I am but one Jew of many, with my own thoughts, concepts, views, practices, and spiritual meanings that are my own.

Too often we hear the question, "Who is a Jew," cast towards people of Jewish identity, and often you'll hear, "Your mother has to be Jewish," or in Karaite circles "Your father has to be Jewish." So, what of the convert? I have much Jewish DNA, but grew up Christian, then occultist who was a household name, then converted and love all Jewish and Gentile people, what of me?

I returned my family to Judaism, from the Shearers to the Tupper's, from the Cook's (Kook's) to the Deitzman's, I brought my family back into its Jewish roots. No, I am not Orthodox, I am not Haredi/Ultra-Orthodox, no, I am not Karaite; I am Reform, and one whose life revolves around all Jewish life, practices, beliefs, cultures, peoplehood. I live a fully Jewish life; I pray three times a day, I fast and feast, and celebrate the holidays, I celebrate life cycle events, I eat Jewish foods, I study Torah religiously (Pun intended), I listen to Jewish music (Klezmer for the win!) and discuss/debate torah interpretation (for the sake of holiness) this with my wife daily, our house is decorated as a Jewish home, we raise our children Jewish, and I love Hashem with every fiber of my being... is that Jewish enough?

How about, I give tzedakah to many charities, I volunteer my time, I help those less fortunate even when I do not have much, I learn as much about Israel and the Israeli people and the conflict from many sources, I feel a connection to the land and history, am I Jewish enough yet? So, who is a Jew if not me? I believe a Jew is a Jew, is a Jew, and Hitler didn't care what sect you came from, they/we were all in it together, they/we all suffered as one.

I do not care what branch of the Jewish family tree a person comes from, who are any of us to declare absolute authority over all of Judaism, isn't that G-d's job? We are all one, one people regardless of culture or race or gender, one G-d, one voice and that voice shouts "peace," one history, one tree of life, with many branches. Isn't it division amongst the Jewish people that caused the destruction of our temples after all?

So, read on to see the ramblings of an obsessively studied Reform Jew, and who knows, you might like what you read. If anything I write offends anyone, that was never my intention, I love everyone and am simply expressing things from my own layman perspective.

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My first steps

I found out I was Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jewish (Thank you Ancestry.com) and didn't know where to turn, so I did a quick Google search and found the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia. I knew nothing, nadda, zip, zilch about Jewish anything then and I sent them an email that went something like this;

"Hey, to whom it may concern,

I was a well-known neo-Nazi and occultist, you might have heard of me, anyway, I left Nazism nearly a decade ago and found out I'm Jewish and want to know about who and what I am. Can you help me out?

Sincerely,
Me"

That was the beginning of something indescribable that I am attempting to describe here, but it was the start of something amazing. I had no plans on converting, I just wanted to know more about the Jewish people other than the holocaust we heard about in school. I was contacted by Laura Frank from the Federation, and we emailed back and forth a few times, then set up a zoom meeting online.

We met and talked for quite some time, and she asked for my address to send me some things. I received a box with my first Kippah from her wedding, a shabbat candle from Israel, a Hanukkah, and a lot of books for me to read. I was explicit in that I had no desire to convert to Judaism, I just wanted to know about the Jewish people whom my DNA said I was born of, and the books mostly reflected that.

In all honesty, I wouldn't be here today if she'd have just written me off, so I owe a huge debt of gratitude and love to her. We continued emailing back and forth, and as I read the books, I kept seeing a theme of connection between G-d and the Jewish people and being completely honest, at first, I rolled my eyes. Then I got to one book in particular, "On Judaism, by Martin Buber," and my world was thrown upside down.

I read about how Jews have different views and concepts of G-d, something Christians (as I was raised) do not, hence the "G-d of Abraham, G-d of Jacob, etc..." line that kept reoccurring. Then I learned about wrestling with G-d, how Jews struggle to reconcile G-d with the struggles they'd faced, and still seeing G-d in their lives. I got to the "I,Thou," section and by then, I was addicted like a fiend and needed more.

Less than a year before reading Buber, I was giving occult lectures online in front of literally 1.5 and 1.2 million people and had three books written to wide acclaim. I was a well respected occult artist as well, selling hundreds of paintings to people around the globe. Buber was a massive turning point for me and it turned my from wanting to know more about just the Jewish people, to wanting to know more about everything Jewish, including Judaism!

Laura put me in contact with Rabbi David, a Conservative Rabbi and I attended a few Shabbat services, literally weeping at the beautiful songs in Hebrew, without control and without my knowledge why. Was I losing my mind, why did I go from an enemy of monotheism, to falling in love with G-d and the Jewish people in such a short period of time, was I meshuggenah?

I started buying books on my own and studying for hour on end online, and when I learned of the different sects of Judaism, I found that I fit in more so with Reform Judaism than Conservative. I had no idea how to contact a synagogue, but I found one Congregation Rodeph Shalom and I wrote an email to their president like a fool and got no response. I then read about conversion and read that I should contact a Rabbi and I found the first Rabbi mentioned on a post via the synagogue's website, Rabbi Eli Freedman.

I'm pretty sure my email went something like;

"Slalom Rabbi,

My wife, my four kids and I are looking into conversion, I am an idiot but am learning more and more by the day... please help!

Thank you,

(P.S. I used to be a Nazi but left that life 8 years ago and love everyone, just thought you should know!)

Fred"

Okay, I am adding a bit of levity here, but it's not far off from the truth to be honest. I never wanted people to find out who I was in the past on accident and think I was some sort of Nazi infiltrator or something. I have been open and honest from the beginning and have wrote about my past extensively, have given interviews are the globe and online, I've helped numerous anti-extremist organizations (Simon Wiesenthal Center, ISCVE, a college doing a deep dive in the Netherlands, I gave a talk at Drexel University, The Jewish Exponent newspaper, and several others).

Now I sit as an Associate Director of Beyond Barriers, a 501(c) nonprofit based around combating extremism and hate groups and helping individuals leave that life behind and become normal members of society... now back on topic.

Rabbi Eli invited us to attend Shabbat services and to get involved and we immediately took him up on the offer. This was during the age of zoom and Covid-19 at its onset, so we did everything online at the time, but it was great getting to meet so many members of the community. We attended every Shabbat online and when in-person services came back, we would often attend those as well (But Covid was terrifying to us, as I have a weakened immune system).

The minute I told Rabbi Eli we for sure wanted to commit to conversion and to becoming fully Jewish members of the community, we started monthly meetings. Our kids started attending Jewish school every week and Rabbi Eli's daughter became good friends with our oldest daughter. I continued to add to my Son of Sinai website, to read copious online and book sources, some of which surprised the Rabbi at times.

We dove in headfirst and celebrated all of the holidays, learned some Hebrew (which we're still learning), learning the prayers, how to pray, etc... it was a process, and we were steadfast that nothing would keep us from converting in mind, body, and spirit (I was already ethnically Ashkenazi and Mizrahi). Hashem became everything to us; Torah became the guide to... well everything in our life. Culturally we were learning everything we could, we experimented with foods and eat Jewish, clothing changed, everything in fact changed.

[Note: I will be the first to say this, it is not easy to convert, you're not just joining a religion, you're joining a people, a culture, a tribe of many colors, races, and national origins. Jews don't proselytize and many will turn away a potential convert three times before accepting them, because it's a journey and a major life change. You're not simply joining Judaism the religion, it is so much more than that and if you aren't ready for that commitment or to make that change, don't make a decision until you are ready.]

Honestly, we have built up a library of books in physical copy, plus my wife and I have both filled up our Kindle eBook readers with Jewish books, there's a lot to learn if you're serious.

So, we attended Shabbat services religiously (pun intended), met with our sponsoring rabbi monthly, went through a taste of Judaism mini class, then an intro to Judaism four-month program, read constantly, made our home a Jewish home, celebrated Jewish holidays, made a lot of Jewish friends from all over the globe and within the community, learned 4,000 years of Jewish history, connected with the Jewish homeland Israel, pray three times a day, say blessings... all of the time it seems, celebrate life cycle events (births, deaths, weddings, graduations, etc... with the community)... it was a lot and even after conversion, we're still studying pretty much constantly.

Music, entertainment, food, language, religion, style of dress, and a lot more changed throughout the conversion process. In total it took a year and a half through the process, and now we're in B'nei Mitzvah classes to boot, but this was optional.

The Beit Din and Mikveh

July 26th, 2022 (27th Tamuz 8752) my family and I went before the Beit Din; after, we packed into our Ford Focus, and went to Temple Beth Hillel/ Beth El to utilize their Mikveh. What an incredible experience... one that will live within our hearts and minds forever. Special thank you To Rabbi Freedman, Rabbi Maderer, Jennifer James, and Lori from the Mikveh, you all made today something that brought tears of joy to my life and to the lives of our family.

The Beit Din was an amazing conversation on my past, the journey we've undergone since beginning this process, and what we've thus far learned. We got to talk about holiday celebrations we've gone through and how we've all been adjusting to life as Jews, and everyone loved talking to our two Rabbis and the head of the Jewish/Hebrew school of the synagogue about our journey. They all signed our certificates officially welcoming us and literal tears had to be withheld from pouring out of my eyes.



Then we had a couple of hours before the Mikveh, and I came home to decompress from the heaviness of the talks during the Beit Din. The kids ate lunch and cleaned up and we all showered and were ready to go to the spa of the spirit!

We arrived almost thirty minutes early at Temple Beth Hillel/Beth El in Wynnewood PA, which gave us a bit of time to see all the iron and bronze age Judaica they had on display, and it really drove home the connection Jews of today have with those of yesterday. It helped us feel a deeper connection to the people of the book, which even though it wasn't planned as such, really made the moment that much more powerful for us (especially since I'm an obsessive Archaeology and Anthropology nerd).

Then our Rabbi arrived with the Mikveh attendant Lori who was incredible and kind and there just isn't enough descriptors I can put to describe how amazing she was. She showed us around the synagogue a little and led us to the mikveh giving us a tour and directions on using the Mikveh properly. We'd decided that I'd go first, then after I'd preside over my two sons as my first Mitzvot as a Jew, then my wife would do the same for our two daughters. This was all supervised through a slotted door which sound came through, but no one could see into (because of modesty and having to submerge nude so nothing stands between any part of the body and the living waters).

I already knew the Hebrew prayers, but the Mikveh had them on laminated sheets for those who didn't, it was a perfect setting at a perfect Mikveh!

I dunked once and said my prayer, taking in the meaning of the entire experience and the prayers themselves having full intentions placed where they should be. Emotion somewhat overwhelmed me after the first dunk and my second one, I didn't entirely submerge so I had to do it over (I'm glad I had our Rabbi there to notice, much appreciated!) I dunked again and said my prayer, a favorite prayer of mine, the Shehekeyanu. Then my third dunk and prayer were completed, and a wave of emotion came over me that I'm still processing as I type this in. Tears of joy just fell over me like rain and I even told our Rabbi it's a good thing I'm dripping wet, the kids won't notice my tears and be afraid to submerge.



Then I oversaw my sons in the Mikveh and my most skeptical child, Gabriel, said how amazing it was and how much he loved being in the Mikveh and said how different it was from anything they'd experienced before. Then my wife went into the Mikveh and is now thinking of going for monthly visits to it, and she oversaw our daughters. It was very emotional and very celebratory all at once for each of us. After the submersion, we took a picture with our Rabbi to remember the occasion forever...

...and when we arrived home, my wife had a cake ready to celebrate the conversion and we all devoured it.

...it was an emotional day, seconded only to my wedding and the birth of my children. The journey has been long and although conversion is now completed, it is only a beginning for us, as we continue learning and growing together as a Jewish family.

The journey Continues

The conversion process was the start of the journey, it certainly was not the end. After converting, my own studies intensified tenfold; learning to tie fully kosher Tzitzit (fringes), studying more halacha and debating it next to the Tanakh with my wife and friends, learning dozens of songs and new prayers/blessings in Hebrew and teaching my kids a ton more. If anything, conversion was really a new beginning for us, more than an end.

Judaism and living a fully Jewish life, have wholly encompassed my family's life and as our library grows and our knowledge grows, so does our yearning to learn more still. The funny thing is, the more we learn, the more we love being Reform, because it affords us spiritual autonomy to blend things, we find relevant from the numerous sects of Judaism. I've been told I'm the most orthodox reform Jew people know, but numerous people, but I also blend elements of Karaitem, Kabbalah and Musar into our beliefs and practices.

I have nearly a dozen favorite rabbinical sages, from Rabbi Nachman to Rambam to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, so much wisdom to learn and absorb and not enough years in one lifetime. I could easily spend all day and night in study, contemplation, meditation, and prayer!

Living a Jewish life and Hashem finding me and me practicing Judaism has also altered life for me in way that are almost indescribable. I am more at peace and calm, I feel things more deeply, I see Hashem in everything and am in an almost constant state of wonderment and joy. I am not in this journey alone either, my wife helps me to dissect what we learn, and research it through the Tanakh to ensure it meets exacting standards laid out in it. She and I debate (for the sake of holiness) everything, and it's led to us finding deep spiritual meaning that has enriched every avenue of our lives.

When we learn new things, we are sure to practice it as instructed by Moses and Hashem, and to add it to our spirituality. After we "practice what we preach," so to speak, we teach it to our kids and show them how we reached the conclusions we did, to help them learn and find interest in it. The truth is that our Judaism isn't static, it is dynamic and ever growing, that which does not move or doesn't grow, dies, such is in nature, such is in human kind, and such is in spirituality and religiosity.

This work unto itself wouldn't have been possible six months ago, and it would have been unthinkable a year ago, but today, it feels comfortable, not because of our conversion, but because of how much we have learned, applied, and grown. Reform Judaism has offered us spiritual autonomy, an exploration of all Jewish thought, wisdom, and practices and we've taken it and have grown within it. The structure of Reform allowed us to spiritually find ourselves within Judaism, instead of merely adopting it, or saying, "Okay so and so said this and that's final."

My position is that no one, regardless of the fame as a sage or rabbinical scholar, has all of the answers, if you as a deep theological question to ten rabbis, or ten Jews for that matter,

you'll get eleven answers. So, which one is right, which one has the absolute authority to dictate the will of G-d? Exactly!

So, for the sake of holiness, for the sake of deep, soulful, spiritual meaning, we look to them all, we look to the Tanakh and the many commentaries, then we debate as a family and draw our own conclusions. We look through the entire host of Jewish wisdom, ignorant of very little, and learn, absorb, and grow from all of that, our Judaism, and our practices. Therefore, our beliefs, practices, and spirituality are unique, ever expanding, and truly and deeply alive.

I will however add this caveat, everything we believe, practice, etc... is adamantly centered around Torah and the Hebrew Bible, and when we find something that doesn't fit what G-d gave to Israel, it isn't included, plain and simple. The Tanakh is our absolute, our guide, our all-access book of who and what we should aspire to be, and no matter how famous the sage or practice, if it deviates from Torah, it is dismissed.

The G-d I know

Adonai (meaning: “the lord,”) is a god of many attributes, and titles but is in fact one god, the God of the Jewish people. Adonai, YHWH, Heshem, Tetragramaton, Shemhamforas, and countless other names and titles have been attributed to G-D from Judaism and the 72 names from the Kabbalah. This one God of many names (per attributes and titles) is even evident in one of the most sacred prayers of the Jewish people, the Sh’ma prayer which starts;



Sh'ma Yisra'eil Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad.
Hear, O' Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One

Baruch Shayim K'vod Ma-l'chutoh L'o-lahm Va-ed
Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever.

Jews wrestle with G-D, that is that we struggle to understand it, as well as struggle to apply its lessons, and we struggle to understand G-D in times of great fear, sorrow, and grief. It is because of this, that every Jew shares the same G-D, but see's it in a different way, through their own unique understanding, perceptions, and transformed through a Jewish lens. Therefore, I must state that this work, at this point in my studies and what I've absorbed and believe, is my view of Adonai, and my view alone. While some of my views are shared with others throughout history, each of these sections on G-D that I discuss, these are inherently my own.

When I talk in the context of G-D, I don't believe it is female or male, G-D to me encompasses both feminine and masculine qualities, as is evident throughout the Tanakh and in the fact of the following portion of the Torah;

בראשית א':כ"ו-כ"ז

(וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמּוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:) כז (וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

Genesis 1:26-27

(26) And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." (27) And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

If both men and women are created equally in the image of G-D, then we can ascertain that G-D itself is both male and female and that our equality as such, is entirely implied therein. G-D is shown in numerous portions of the Torah to be loving, kind, nurturing, and motherly and in other portions stern, punishing, lesson teaching, and fatherly. I do not call G-D "it," out of disrespect, but out of lack of proper words to define what G-D is. I find that words, much like idols, often shrink and demean the wholeness of what G-D is and while putting it into a context easy for humans to digest, often takes away from and dilutes the whole of what G-D is. In our infinitesimal minds, we cannot hope to fully and entirely grasp the infinite of the world in which we live or of existence as it stands, let alone the immeasurable nature of the G-D which birthed it.

G-D is not a thing, it is not tangible, it is not a he or she (in the Torah, created within a patriarchal ancient society they used "He,") and so "it," is the closest I can possibly come to the descriptor of G-D. G-D is "it," so when I say something like "G-D in its infinite wisdom," I do not mean it disrespectfully and in fact, I mean it with the utmost respect to G-D being neither wholly male nor wholly female. That is the first of my understandings of Adonai I have gleaned.

Adonai is infinite in scope, it is not an invisible man in the sky, long of beard, sitting on a throne judging us. God is everywhere, in everything, within everyone; it is nature and the laws which govern nature, it is within the eyes of a loved one, G-D is the smile of someone helping another living being. G-D is within the rains that nurture crops, the cool breeze on a hot summer day, the waters which cleanse and nurture all things. G-D is the millions of stars in the night sky, the respite after something traumatic, the comforting of the one grieving after losing a loved one. G-D permeates and motivates all living things, it places and protects the soul and feeds it with the waters of life, sentience, and intellect.

Adonai is the healing of the sick, the comforting of the dying, and the blessing of new life. G-D is the joy of spending time with loved ones and family, it is the kindness of strangers and the feeling of contentment. Even during one's darkest times, you can find glimmers of G-D, its hand outstretched to comfort and lead us to better days. G-D cannot be said to be invisible when it is everywhere and within everything, you must have eyes that see it. G-D cannot be delineated to the typical visage of the old, bearded man on a throne, because that would directly dissolve the importance and true nature of what it is, reducing it to nothing more than an idol.

G-d is both creator and creation, creating the world and imbuing the divine spark of creativity that inspires and illicit a spiritual nurturing. Music, art, writing, poetry, and all other creative outlets we can find the glimmer of G-d, striking us with emotion, empathy, yearning, and deep introspection. How many times have you heard "That song really moves me," or "I read that, and it changed my life," before? Because we have the divine, the holiness within us to create, just as G-d has created, and given to us by Hashem to make the world something better, something more beautiful.

Human beings were made in Adonai's image, and as such, we can create wonderful and stirring things, just as it has created wonderful and stirring things on Earth. My first time in a synagogue I felt Hashem in the music, in the sung Hebrew that I didn't understand the words even, I met Adonai for the first time in my life and I wept, something I seldom do even from extreme pain. This human creation of prayers being sung, lulled me from the natural world and I felt Hashem, I heard Hashem in the voices and melodies, I knew then on, that Adonai Echad, the lord is one.

Experiencing G-d

As aforementioned, my first experience with Hashem came in the form of music, the prayers sung in the synagogue, but that would not be my last. I've learned on my own and later read, that if you view the splendors of the world in wonderment and awe, you will come to experience G-d more. Seeing the mountains, the trees, the animals, the kindness and compassion in human beings, the moon, and stars in all their celestial majesty, these will help you to experience Hashem. The feelings of true contentment, peace, Joy unrestrained, the energy in dance, through these you will experience G-d.

Genuinely and wholly looking for G-d in these things, will lead you to find it, because as I found out myself, Hashem is also looking for all of us.

Open yourself up to these elements I've mentioned, and you will develop Emuna, faith (not to be mistaken with blind faith), because you will have had direct spiritual connection to Hashem yourself. I live in the big city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and in the trees, the squirrels, the children playing, the elderly woman being helped across the street, the person helping the homeless and injured, I see G-d for myself without question. I walk around smiling most days and nights, just happy to be alive and to know that the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob is real and is a part of my life, without question. G-d can be found everywhere if you look, and when you experience it once, you will do so time and time again.

Have you ever done something creative, even if it was just creative problem solving, and you zone out, as if something were working through you, as if you were on autopilot? The end result surprised even you, and you were proud of it and loved it and the world felt right in that moment, you've experienced G-d, as both the creator and creativity in one. If you've ever been truly moved by a piece of art, a song, something you've read even if it's fiction, a poem, or just about anything creative, you've experienced G-d.

How is it that we can connect with animals so deeply that we feel they are family and cry when they pass away, when we cannot even speak with them, because we share in creation by the divine. Have you ever been made speechless by the beauty of a natural place, been made breathless at the sight of it, in that wonderment there is Hashem. Have you ever seen a creature and you think to yourself, "Is that real?" almost in utter disbelief, then you have seen the divine at work. Have you ever had something bad happen, only for something tremendously better to take its place, then you have felt the touch of Hashem providing better.

To deny that Hashem's hand is in any of these things, is to sadly deny your own divine spark that G-d has given to you and all of humanity. This gift connects us with our creator, indelibly marking us as Hashem's, who wants for us desperately to come to know it inasmuch as our human brains can comprehend.

Every Mitzvah we perform brings us closer to Hashem, each and every holy act we commit is a love letter to G-d, letting it know that we want to be closer. Therefore, we were given the

commandments in the first place, to live a moral and holy life and to become closer to the creator. The mitzvahs are each a gift we give to Adonai, as thanks for the gifts it has given to all of us, and brings us closer, therefore it is also a gift to us. This is something that I cannot stress enough, the mitzvahs we were given are a powerful means to come to know Hashem on a deeper level, and the more we do, the more we experience G-d.

In orthodox rabbinical Judaism, you learn about the tefillin, boxes containing kosher scrolls with segments of the torah inside of them. Tefillin are worn on the head, hand, and inner arm close by the heart, and this comes from the passage in Deuteronomy 6:8;

וְקָשְׁתָּם לְאֹזֶן עַל־יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ:

Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol* on your forehead;*

We do not believe this should be taken literally thereby necessitating tefillin, instead we believe G-d was instructing us to do the mitzvahs with our hands (act not just speak), keep them in your mind, and to keep G-d in our hearts. Words are cheap, even when spoken beautifully, but truly loving G-d, thinking of it and its mitzvahs, and doing the mitzvahs, are worth more to Hashem than gold. Hashem knows, as we all know, that actions speak louder than words ever could.

These are just some of the ways we can come to directly experience G-d in our lives, and to bring us closer in knowing the divine as much as we can.

G-d as the father

Many Jews consider G-d as the father, though Hashem is sexless, the patriarchal past chose father as the descriptive, just think mother when you see that word if it feels better. As the father, Hashem plays out in many roles; firstly, in the creation of humanity, then in giving the Torah as our guide, then in teaching us morality and correcting us when we falter like a parent. He is seen as nurturing and loving, as well as stern and a force of anger at times, the healer and forgiver, and that which wrought punishment upon us.

Hashem, the father, is the parent some desire, and to others is the parent they need. It teaches us lessons, helps us grow and genuinely loves us and wants us to love them back, as any parent would. We could easily see the correlation between G-d the creator and teacher, and G-d as a sort of parental figure, especially to the Jewish people and their covenantal relationship.

There are many passages in the Torah where we see this relationship, with G-d taking both direct and indirect parental roles. In Genesis 2:18 we see;

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הָיִית הָאָדָם לְבֶדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֶזְרָא כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:

God יהוה said, "It is not good for the Human to be alone; I will make a fitting counterpart for him."

This was Hashem recognizing the need for humans to have companionship and helping to remedy the situation, like a parent setting up their son or daughter on a date. G-d recognized a need of his creation and sought to fulfill that need, to help them be happy and content in life. Next in Genesis 3:3 we see the following;

וּמִפְרֵי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ־הַגֶּן אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בּוֹ פֶּן־תָּמוּתוּ:

It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'

This is G-d trying to tell his creation that the tree would alter their life and they would no longer be immortal and would in fact, come to know death. As any parent could attest, saying, "Don't touch that," or, "it's hot," often leads to the child learning such for themselves, yet we warn them anyway. Then in Genesis 3:14, G-d punishes the serpent who told Eve to eat the fruit and caused the two to know shame and death saying;

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הַנָּחָשׁ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ זֹאת אַחֲרַי אֶתֶּר מְכַל־הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה עַל־גֻּחֲנֶךָ תֵּלֵךְ וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

Then God יהוה said to the serpent,

"Because you did this,

More cursed shall you be

Than all cattle
And all the wild beasts:
On your belly shall you crawl
And dirt shall you eat
All the days of your life.

As a parent, when a child causes our children to do something wrong, we tell their parents and expect them to punish them, such as when Hashem punished the serpent. There are countless passages in the Torah whereas G-d is very much so a parental figure and does these things, hence some choose to refer to Hashem as the father.

Another reason G-d is known as the father, is that it is through Adonai, that Israel was promised and given to the Jewish people. Like a parent leaving their child a home, someplace which they can call their own, a place by which they can feel a connection, like where we grow up in our youth. G-d is not the “father,” in a sense that it replaces our familial bonds, but instead stands as the father of all, it is the father of your father and his before him and further still, the father of all our ancestors. G-d has healed, he has protected, he has taught lessons, he has comforted the grieving and lost, he has done everything a parental figure would and should do, hence he is known as the father.

Exploring G-d

We are a wholly Jewish family, including my children, however we teach our children the traditions and practices we adhere too, as well as how to explore the concepts associated with G-d. We do not say, “This is how you need to see Hashem,” instead we give to them the same spiritual autonomy afforded to us from Reform Judaism. We do teach them many views on G-d and expect them to come to their own conclusions, which will include some concept of the divine, even if it is a more naturalistic or humanistic view.

The concept, the veritable “what/who/how” of Hashem has been incredibly varied by rabbinical and nonrabbinical sources for several millennia now. You will notice a common phrase used throughout Judaism, “The G-d of Abraham, The G-d of Isaac and The G-d of Jacob,” so why before each does it say “The G-d of,” instead of just, “The G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?” This is because each has their own individual concepts of the same G-d!

No two Jews will have the same exact concept of what or who G-d is, even though they share the same exact G-d. Judaism is a religion which requires study, and one of the first points of study is on the many views of G-d throughout the ages. There are dozens if not hundreds of concepts on G-d to wade through, from a wholly transcendent being to nature, to simply the laws that govern our natural world, to something no one can understand, and everything in between. In our own synagogue, we even welcome secular Jews who believe in humanism as the root of what G-d is, so it is incredibly varied in scope.

Countless books have been written, websites abound, and lectures can be found online by the thousands. The truth is, to understand and begin to delve into this area, there are some sincere questions you should ask, before just reading and studying wildly. These are simple questions, but when you know what to ask, the answers will begin to formulate from your studies much easier. Ask;

1. Who is G-d?
2. What is G-d?
3. What do I believe if anything, that G-d is?
4. Does my concept of G-d fit into the Jewish landscape and if so, what portions of the Tanakh elucidate my concepts?
5. What do the Rabbinical sages and prophet’s say about G-d?

Then, once you have several concepts that stick with you, that you feel more so than think is right, reference them, study them and explore them inasmuch depth as you can before adopting them. Remember, you aren’t trying to figure something out like a math problem, you’re trying to know and understand G-d deeper and on a more personal spiritual level. This is the beginning of a journey that is one on one, between your spirit and Hashem, this is how you come to understand it and better build a connection.

Exploration into the nature of who and what Hashem is, is something uniquely personal and individual, and if you maintain a Jewish lens, there is no right or wrong concepts. Now, what do I mean by a Jewish lens? Here's a short checklist to ensure you're viewing G-d under a Jewish lens;

- God is one, not a trinity, and not polytheism.
- Learning historical Jewish views on G-d and borrowing much of your concept from them.
- Not deviating from Torah.
- No physical characteristics imagined, nor anything resembling idols.

To mesh into the framework of authentic Judaism, those aspects mentioned should be kept in mind, but the rest is free. Don't rush through your exploration, take your time, and truly absorb what you learn, as this is quite possibly the most important task you'll undertake. Having a definitive conceptualization of G-d is paramount to just about everything else in Judaism, so don't rush it.

Tefillin, Mezuzah, Tallit

In Judaism there are many spiritual items a person should acquire, but none more important to most than the mezuzah, tefillin, and tallit. This is because in our Shema prayer G-d commands us directly to obtain them.

Deuteronomy 6:8 – Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your “frontlet”; cf. Exod. 13.16. on your forehead;

This is where it gets a little trickier, as Jews do not read the Torah as a literal translation, yet Orthodoxy takes these words as literal, and this is where we get Tefillin from. Tefillin is generally worn on the forehead, the inner arm facing the heart, and wrapped around the hand, but what if G-D didn't mean to strap black boxes all of yourself... what if the meaning was deeper and more meaningful? Instead of strapping black boxes and leather straps, what if G-D meant to bind the act of study, meditation, reflection on Torah and G-D in your mind, to forever hold G-D in your heart, and to do the Mitzvot of G-d with your hands?

That is exactly how we interpret that passage and our Tefillin are not physical things, it is our mind to study, our hearts to love, and our hands to perform worshipful deeds aka Mitzvot. Just yesterday my wife witnessed a car crash, it was 98 degrees outside, and she parked her car and ran over to make sure the people were okay, then took it upon herself to buy them water and call for police to come to check everyone out. We are not wealthy people, but a couple of dollars for water, genuine concern for everyone's safety, and making sure no one was injured, this is the tefillin on our hand to us.

We do not wear the physical Jewish phylacteries, but we wear tefillin in our minds, our hearts, and on our hands every day, all day, without fail!

Deuteronomy 6:9 – inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This is a reference to Mezuzah, the thin, small box with a tiny kosher scroll inside, angled to point towards the door, and this we do, as there is no other interpretation possible. This is also a sign to other Jews, that our house is a safe haven, should they need it, that they will be welcomed and treated as the family within our doors.

Finally, we'll examine the tallit, which comes in two styles the tallit katan (small tallit) and tallit gadol (big tallit). Tallit katan are generally thin shirts with Tzitzit (fringes) on four corners, but some elect to simply buy or make tzitzit with some means of attaching them to their own clothing on four sides. The tallit gadol is a prayer shawl with tzitzit on four corners used in morning prayers, and on fixed holidays (People are also buried in their tallit and in some customs, they are worn during weddings).

This commandment comes from many places in the Torah, my favorite is Numbers 15:38

"Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them that the spies who brought them disaster did so because they had gone after their own hearts, and after their own eyes. Therefore, tell

them to make Tzitzit—fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and that they shall put on the Tzitzit, the fringe, of each corner of the garment a thread of blue wool to remind them of the blue sky and of the miraculous acts of the Eternal Who is above the heavens.”

I find it very meaningful performing this mitzvah daily, as it is a constant reminder throughout the day and evening, of G-d, the miracles, and the 613 mitzvot. Wearing a tallit katan however, does not mean you do not need a tallit gadol, as morning prayers and holy days require the tallit gadol.

I found great meaning in learning to tie my own tzitzit as well, feeling a sincere connection to tradition and G-d as I literally tied the knots. I learned both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic methods of tying them and I plan on learning the Karaite and Yemenite methods in the future. The best part is that if at any time my tzitzit become unkosher, I can tie my own and don't have to sacrifice performing the mitzvah waiting for a new set.

Life cycle events and community

In a Jewish life, family and community are paramount and as such, events in one's life are celebrated among the community in as much as they are with family. Birthdays, anniversaries, wedding, births, deaths, conversions, graduations, B'nei Mitzvahs, and just about any other event is announced and shared within the community. These are called "Life cycle events," and are important moments in which the community can come together as one extended family for the event.

Within the community, we share with one another our joys and sorrows, we volunteer and do works for Hashem together, we pray together, and we care about one another's well-being. We study in classes in the synagogue together, we go to events together, we celebrate holidays together, it is truly an extended family and so life cycle events too are shared together.

As many diaspora Jews will tell you, it is increasingly difficult being without a community, and often leaves one feeling isolated. Community is a huge aspect of Jewish life, it is engrained into every aspect of Judaism, and you can even find references in the Torah to the importance of community. The life cycle events, and community are principal elements in the life of the Jewish people, and the two are shared amongst one another.

Our community in Philadelphia, when someone dies, the synagogue shares that information and fellow congregants donate and sit shiva voluntarily. When someone converts, they are brought before the community, at the bimah in the synagogue to announce their conversion, Hebrew names, and to receive blessings. Weddings are announced and the couple are given blessings before the community.

Babies are given their Hebrew names in sight of the community, and everything else is shared within the community, who come together to wish the individual(s) "Mazel Tov." Life within the Jewish community is a shared experience with the community that is as extended family.

Shabbat

Imagine if you will, that every week on sundown Friday until sundown Saturday, you had a sort of holiday whereas you don't work, you just relax, spend time with loved ones, and just enjoy living. That's exactly what Shabbat (Sabbath) is to the Jews, and it is a wonderful weekly ritual found practiced even amongst secular Jews. The commandment for Shabbat can be found in Genesis 2:2-3;

Genesis 2: 2 – On the seventh day God finished the work that had been undertaken: [God] ceased*ceased Or “rested.” on the seventh day from doing any of the work.

Genesis 2: 3 – And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy—having ceased on it from all the work of creation that God had done.

Those passages are only the first few mentioning Shabbat; however, you'll find many more passages talking about it throughout the Tanakh. There's no debating our weekly holiday is a special time, a holy time in which we free ourselves of the troubles of the past week and cleanse and empower ourselves for the week ahead. However, how Jews take this special time and celebrate it (aside from synagogue and Torah study) is different for each.

The Shabbat encompasses two synagogue services, one on Friday night and one on Saturday morning, as well as Torah study throughout. The Saturday service is often accompanied by young adults B'nei mitzvah services. My family often attends service on Friday night then rushes home and performs the Shabbat ritual, with each person taking a part and alternating that part each week.

This Shabbat ritual includes prayers, lighting the Shabbat candles, Challah bread, and the Kiddush cup filled with grape juice. Generally, a meal comes after all of that, and it's expected that the meal on Shabbat will be different from ones normal meals during the week. Our family likes to do some family bonding; arts and crafts, art, music, play board games, or something along those lines. One thing for us is that it is a special time for family, for us to honor G-d, and for a bit of R&R from the week, that is the mainstay of Shabbat for our family.

...but how we celebrate Shabbat, isn't the same as how every other Jew celebrates Shabbat. This is where our interpretation of Torah comes into play, let's take a deeper look.

Exodus 35: 3 – You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the sabbath day.

In Orthodoxy, this is seen as though we should not light a fire on Shabbat, however, the Torah is impeccable in its wording, and it says clearly “Settlements,” not houses. We interpret this under a lens that in the era this was written, where bonfires would be lit and people would be outside of their houses, staying warm, while talking amongst the community. A house, is in fact, NOT a settlement, a “settlement” as defined by the Oxford dictionary is;

“A place, typically one that has hitherto been uninhabited, where people establish a community.”

We interpret this to mean to stay in your own home and spend the time with family and friends, don't light a bonfire, and go out and have a good time. Rest with those you love, and don't spend it outside with others, while ignoring your family or forsaking your duties to rest, for fun. This is further settled for us in the following passage;

Deuteronomy 5:14 – but the seventh day is a sabbath of your God יהוה; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do.

Now, cooking may be seen as working, this is a fact that preparing and cooking a meal isn't labor free but turning on lights takes less work than holding a copy of the Torah and flipping through its pages. Karaite Jews will use battery-powered lights, which is confusing, because they say using electricity creates a spark, which is the same as starting a fire, but a battery-powered anything, is simply portable electricity. Electricity is a separate thing from fire, and while electricity can cause a fire, turning on a light does not burn your house down.

Exodus 35:3 – You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the sabbath day.

For one, it doesn't say dwelling or house, again it says settlements, but also what did it take to start a fire in ancient times? It took work to start a fire!

As anyone who was a boy scout or who learned how to camp properly; you had to dig a hole, find wood, make kindling, and put rocks around the hole to keep the fire contained, then after all of that, you had to strike a flint repeatedly or rub sticks together furiously. Making a fire happen wasn't as easy as striking a match or whipping out your zippo lighter, it took genuine work. While making a fire is easy today, it took work in ancient times, and it was considered something to make one's house and family warm and for cooking.

So, our lights stay on, we don't restrict electronics use (after prayer and Torah study), but we do abstain from work, even if it is work that we enjoy doing (such as writing or painting in my case). We lounge around, we have fun together, we pray together, we read Torah and or books that bring us closer to Hashem, we eat a nice meal, and we live. No labor, nothing strenuous, we don't go out, we honor the sacredness of the day and treat it as special, this is Shabbat to us.

Holidays

In Judaism holidays are a big deal, and for our family, they are huge (seeing as how there's two adults and four children). It's important to note that all holidays begin at sundown and end on sundown and will end at sundown on the appropriate day. Holidays do not move on the Jewish calendar but will seemingly move on the Gregorian calendar because the two are situated differently.

The Jewish year is full of celebrations, fasts, feasts, remembrances and so much more which fill the year up with events. Synagogues and Jewish organizations generally have events to attend and participate in on the holidays and they are always family inclusive.

Tu B'shevat – The proverbial new year of trees, is a celebration of nature marked with picnics, planting trees and eating various fruits. This is a one-day event.

Purim – The festival of lots which celebrates the Jews being saved in Ancient Persia, when the evil Haman tried to have them murdered. We read the Megillah of Esther, which talks about Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai, we eat Hamantaschen, we dress up, we generally hold a Purim Spiel, which is a play about what happened, we give money to the needy, and we give out gift bags (mishloach manot) among one another. This is a one-day event.

Pesach/Passover – This is a commemoration of the Jews Exodus from Egypt, when they had to leave so quickly that they didn't have time for their bread to rise (Hence where Matzoh bread comes from). During this eight-day holiday, we eat no leavened bread products, we also have a seder meal on the first and last nights. During the seders we tell the story of the Exodus and sometimes talk about freedom and what it means to be free.

Yom Hashoah – This is a day of remembrance for the victims of the holocaust, marked by memorials, dedications, and often education about what happened. This is a one-day event.

Yom Hazikaron – For those living in the holy land of Israel, this is a day of remembrance for those who lost their lives to terror attacks and for fallen soldiers. This is a one-day event.

Yom Ha'atzmaut – This is the Israeli Independence Day, commemorating Israel's declaration of independence back in 1948. This is a one-day event.

Yom Yerushalayim – Celebrates the Liberation of Jerusalem from Jordanian forces during the six-day war in 1967. This is a one-day event.

Shavuot – This holiday ends the counting of the Omer and when Moses of blessed memory received the Torah at Sinai. We read from the book of Ruth, we have tons of dairy (Cheesecake anyone?) and we read from and study the Torah all night. This is a one-day event.

Tisha B'av – This solemn day is set aside for the remembrance of the destruction of both the first and second temples in Jerusalem. The temples were both destroyed on this day and we pray, wail, and fast on this day. This is a one-day event.

Rosh Hashanah - Rosh Hashanah literally means “head of the year,” and is the Jewish new year per our calendar. This begins ten days of repentance, prayers and seeking teshuva, as well as eating apples dipped in honey for a sweet new year ahead. It’s sometimes seen as the time to reconcile your wrong doings, asking anyone you’ve harmed for forgiveness and asking G-d to forgive you, to seal your new year in the book of life. This and Yom Kippur are considered, “High holy days,” in the Jewish calendar.

Yom Kippur – At the end of the ten days of repentance from Rosh Hashanah, there is Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. This is the holiest day of the year in the Jewish calendar, spent mostly fasting and prayer fervently to Hashem in one final plea for a good year as it seals the book of life for the year. The end of Yom Kippur is marked by blasts from the Shofar, the ancient goat horn wind instrument of the Jewish people.

Sukkot – The festival of booths, or non-permanent dwellings called “Sukkot,” which we set up and adorn with fruits, leaves, vegetables, and the like, to recall the journey out of Egypt to the promised land. Lulav (Branches, myrtle, and willows) are shaken along with Etrag (Citron), meals are eaten under the Sukkot, and the community comes together to build them. This is generally one day outside of Israel, two days in Israel combined with Shemini Atzeret where a special prayer for rain is held.

Simchat Torah – Just two days after Sukkot, we celebrate Simchat Torah, which is the end of a complete cycle of reading the Torah and the start of a new cycle reading it again from the beginning. Singing, dancing, miniature Torah scrolls are held up, it’s a real party atmosphere. Jews around the globe read a specific portion of the Torah every week until the entire Torah has been read (it really promotes connection between all Jews), in case you didn’t know.

Channukkah – This is a time of remembrance, when in 167 BCE A Jewish band of warriors known as the Maccabees led a revolt against, the Syrian-Greek army who defiled the 2nd temple, under the leadership of Antiochus III. The Maccabees defeated them and restored the temple, but it took eight days to prepare the oil for the holy lamps and they only had one day worth of oil to reconsecrate the temple. The oil miraculously lasted eight days and we light the Hanukkiah (Channukkah Menorah) for eight nights to celebrate this. Kids play Dreidel and lucky adults do too, with chocolate coins, we eat lots of fried foods (Latkes with sour cream are my weakness), and in our house we give gifts to each other, one per night. The festival of lights is celebrated to honor the miracle of the oil, but a bigger miracle is that the light of the Jewish people is still burning today despite pogroms, exodus’, the holocaust, forced conversions, and much more throughout the nearly four-thousand-year history.

Prayer and prostration

Once the Jewish temple was destroyed, Jews couldn't offer their thrice daily sacrifices and so they were replaced with prayer per the portion in Hoshea 14:3;

***“Take words with you
And return to the LORD.
Say to Him:
“Forgive all guilt
And accept what is good;
Instead of bulls we will pay
[The offering of] our lips.”***

We pray in the morning, first with the Modeh Ani when we first awake, then we wake up a bit and perform the full morning prayers called “Shacharit.” Then we pray in the afternoon (Mincha) and at night (Ma’ariv), but to quote TV salesmen, that’s not all!

We pray before and after we eat, with a short prayer for each type of food (Vegetables, fruits, meat, bread) and if it is a full meal (which includes bread) we say the Birkat Hamazon prayer after we eat. Still with me here? There’s blessings and prayers for almost everything in Judaism, for gratitude, for mourning, for safe travels, to do well on a test, to bless our kids, literally everything in life has a Jewish prayer.

Inasmuch as Jews are the people of the book, they are the people of prayer, as it is a major part of our life. The importance of prayer cannot be overstated, and in fact Jewish people have prayer books called “Siddur,” filled with hundreds of prayers to the eternal. No one can memorize every prayer in Judaism and in fact there are copious amounts of Siddur out there, with each community and type of Jew (Reform, Orthodox, Karaite) having their own.

Now, here is where we adopt another Karaite tradition into our own practices, we believe in prostration as prescribed in the Tanakh. Prostration is mentioned over 33 times in Tanakh, as is the act of bowing (bowing at the knees then waist) and so we practice both in our daily prayers (Shacharit, Mincha, Ma’ariv). So, what is prostration?

This is the act of praying, while lying on one’s stomach, face down, legs outstretched and arms out to the sides. No, we don’t do this throughout the entire sequence of prayer, just in the beginning part, the rest is predominantly bowing (again, bending the knees and then the waist) at key sections of prayer. Prostration is a significant sign that we are under Hashem, that we are its servants and will uphold his Mitzvot and bring light to the world. Prostration is a sign of humility and subservience to Elohim alone.

Mitzvah and Tikkun Olam

I'm sure everyone reading this knows of the ten commandments, but I'd be willing to bet that very few know that Jews have 613 commandments, found throughout the Torah. The commandments or "Mitzvot (plural of Mitzvah, no not Matzah)," are the religious duties given to Jews by Hashem. If there was only one aspect of Judaism that someone chose to adhere too, the Mitzvot should be that, as they are the key, the very cornerstone of Jewish life. This number was first utilized by Rabbi Simlai in a sermon given in the third century CE, where he famously stated;

"613 commandments were communicated to Moses, 365 negative commands, corresponding to the number of solar days [in a year], and 248 positive commands, corresponding to the number of the members [bones covered with flesh] of a man's body."

The positive mitzvot are generally things Jews are expected to at least try to perform as much and as often as possible. The negative mitzvot are things we should avoid doing with every ounce of our being. The mitzvot are so important that the famous Rabbi Akiva (Born in 50 CE) believed they were all given on Mount Sinai, repeated in the Tent of Meeting, and declared a third time by Moses before his death and that no prophet could add or take away any of them.

The mitzvot can be broken down into three distinct categories mishpatim (laws); edot (Testimonies); and chukim (decrees). Mishpatim are seen as self-evident laws, such as not to murder or steal. Edot commemorate important aspects and events, such as honoring the Shabbat and how that reflects a belief in Hashem and his creating the world. Chukim are seen as having no rationale behind them and being purely a manifestation of the divine.

Some of the mitzvot religious Jews perform every day without trying, these are called "constant mitzvot," in the thirteenth century Sefer Hachinuch in Spain. These are;

1. To know God, and that God created all things.
2. Not to have any *god(s)* beside God
3. To know God's Oneness.
4. To fear God.
5. To love God.
6. Not to pursue the passions of your heart and stray after your eyes.

If you are a religious Jew like me, you perform at minimum 20 to 50 mitzvot a day without trying and many of the old Rabbinical sages and scholars declared that we should try to perform at least 100 mitzvot a day.

Tikkun Olam (Repair of the world) is a concept in which Jews take a moral obligation to the social welfare of the societies they inhabit. Some have said, "It is eternally Egypt," meaning that we have not found our promised land of peace, equality, health, and contentment for all,

and so we march on through the world and work to create it. It has been this way since the post Haskalah (enlightenment) movement, whereas social justice work, bridging gaps between communities (religious and secular), and altogether trying to make the world more like the promised land in the Torah.

Tikkun Olam was first mentioned in the Mishna, "mip'nei tikkun ha-olam," "for the sake of repairing the world," and was referenced in legal standings and proceedings to keep society functioning. At the end of the Aleinu prayer you will also find a mention;

"לראות מהרה בתפארת עוזך, להעביר גלולים מן הארץ והאלילים כרות יכרתון לתקן עולם במלכות ש-די"

"to speedily see Your mighty splendor, to cause detestable (idolatry) to be removed from the land, and the (false) gods will be utterly 'cut off', to take in olam – fix/repair/establish a world – under the Almighty's kingdom"

Tikkun Olam has at times been used in eschatological ways, such as with Aleinu, and at other times it was used in a more practical way, such as within the Mishna. No matter how it has been used, it was for the betterment of society/humanity at large. Regardless of whether it is seen through acts of kindness and justice, ritual observance, through self-work or deeds for humanity, Tikkun Olam stands as something important, though throughout the ages, scholars have disagreed on the exact meaning.

I for one take the stance of Maimonides who believed that Tikkun Olam encompassed all those things and that it was a noble and spiritually empowering endeavor to undertake. Maimonides wrote;

"Through wisdom, which is [represented by] Torah, and the elevation of character, which is [represented by] acts of kindness, and observing the Torah's commandments, which are [represented by] the sacrifices, one continuously brings tikkun olam improvement of the world, and the ordering of reality."

Maimonides also saw Tikkun Olam through the lens of justice, saying;

"Every judge who judges truth unto its [deepest] truth, even for one hour, it's as if he fixed the whole world entirely / tikein et kol ha'olam kulo and caused the Shekhinah to rest upon Israel."

You'll find Tikkun Olam a common mention in the Lurianic school of the Kabbalah, whereas it is believed that through prayer and ritual observance, this physical world will be rectified, as will the world above. They also believed that through ethical actions and life, what we do in the physical world here, will be done in the incorporeal world above. Even small acts of kindness and working towards social change for all, will help Tikkun Olam, and let's face it, we could all use a bit more kindness and equality in our lives.

In Reform Judaism's gate to prayer, we take Tikkun Olam to be more universal and to look after the social wellbeing of all humanity;

"You [Lord] have taught us to uphold the falling, to heal the sick, to free the captive, to comfort all who suffer pain"

This is called "gemilut chasadim," that is giving of your deeds to help others, and the first to see Tikkun Olam under the lens of social justice work, was the famous Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. So, why is Tikkun Olam here right beside the Mitzvot? Because the Mitzvot are directly connected to Tikkun Olam!

Maimonides said that the three pillars of tikkun olam are; Torah study, acts of kindness, and the ritual commandments. This is exemplified in the act of ethical behavior and Tzedakah, both of which are important Mitzvot and key elements toward Tikkun Olam.

Within the spectrum of ethical behavior, we strive toward kindness, perfecting ourselves, perfecting our communities, and perfecting Eretz-Yisrael. Through ethical behavior we attempt to be a light to the nations, a model to other people, communities, and nations to emulate. This is a universal concept found throughout the whole of Jewish thought and teachings.

Tzedakah means "charitable giving," and its root Tzedek means "Justice, or righteousness" and is a Mitzvah connected with Tikkun Olam. Philanthropy and charity, volunteering and donating are core elements in this work. Judaism isn't a religion of merely reading, believing, and praying, it is a religion of worshipful deeds, actions put forth to the betterment of the world.

In performing the mitzvot we work on making ourselves, our communities, society, and our nations, better for all. Through the Mitzvot we build a model society to be emulated, we build a peoplehood to be emulated. No, Jewish people do not see themselves as perfect, however they strive to be better versions of themselves through the application of the Mitzvot every day.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch broke down and explained the mitzvot as;

"(1) toroth (philosophical doctrines);

The ethical mitzvot fall under:

(2) mishpatim and

(3) chukim (commandments of justice towards (living) people and the natural world (including the human body itself respectively) and

(4) mitzvot (commandments of love);

The ritual mitzvot under:

(5) edoth (educational symbolic commandments) and

(6) avodah (commandments of direct service to God)."

Rabbi Hirsch's breakdown of the mitzvot further elucidates the mitzvot into something more tangible and easier to understand for the layman. Rabbi Jane Kanarek a conservative rabbi, believes that Tikkun Olam comes about through changing systemic laws to better serve humanity, while more conservative approaches believe it should be done through private efforts

and not government. In my opinion, all these things are right when combined into one conjoined effort which seeks to serve humanities betterment.

Jews the world over impart these concepts onto their youth, hoping they will take up the charge long after they are gone, continuing to make the world a better place for everyone. Thus, the Mitzvot and accordingly Tikkun Olam will ensure that for centuries to come, Jews will continue to be a light to the nations;

“Exodus 19:5-5 - ‘Now then, if you will indeed accept My command, and keep My covenant which I made with the Patriarchs, then you shall be My chosen treasure from among all the nations: for all the earth is Mine, but you alone have I chosen to be a light to the nations.’”

On one final note, if there is a mitzvah you cannot perform, but you think about it, it's considered as if you performed the mitzvah itself. This is because not all of the Mitzvot can be performed in modern day life and some only pertain to temple life, in which we no longer have a temple.

The 613 Mitzvot

Maimonides in the 12th century, compiled this listing in his classic compendium of Jewish law, the “Mishnah Torah,” which contains 14 primary “books” or sections. The Mitzvot are;

BOOK ONE: THE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE

| FUNDAMENTALS OF TORAH: | | |
|------------------------|---|-------------|
| 1 | To know there is a God | Ex. 20:2 |
| 2 | Not to entertain thoughts of other gods besides Him | |
| Ex. 20:3 | | |
| 3 | To know that He is one | Deut. 6:4 |
| 4 | To love Him | Deut. 6:5 |
| 5 | To fear Him | Deut. 10:20 |
| 6 | To sanctify His Name | Lev. 22:32 |
| 7 | Not to profane His Name | Lev. 22:32 |
| 8 | Not to destroy objects associated with His Name | Deut. 12:4 |
| 9 | To listen to the prophet speaking in His Name | Deut. 18:15 |
| 10 | Not to test the prophet unduly | Deut. 6:16 |

LAWS OF CHARACTER

| | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| 11 | To emulate His ways | Deut. 28:9 |
| 12 | To cleave to those who know Him | Deut. 10:20 |
| 13 | To love Jews | Lev. 19:18 |
| 14 | To love converts | Deut. 10:19 |
| 15 | Not to hate fellow Jews | Lev. 19:17 |
| 16 | To reprove | Lev. 19:17 |
| 17 | Not to embarrass others | Lev. 19:17 |
| 18 | Not to oppress the weak | Ex. 21:22 |
| 19 | Not to speak derogatorily of others | Lev. 19:16 |
| 20 | Not to take revenge | Lev. 19:18 |
| 21 | Not to bear a grudge | Lev. 19:18 |

LAWS OF TORAH STUDY

| | | |
|----|---|------------|
| 22 | To learn Torah | Deut. 6:7 |
| 23 | To honor those who teach and know Torah | Lev. 19:32 |

LAWS OF IDOLATRY AND PAGANISM

| | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| 24 | Not to inquire into idolatry | Lev. 19:4 |
| 25 | Not to follow the whims of your heart or what your eyes see | Num. 15:39 |
| 26 | Not to blaspheme | Ex. 22:27 |
| 27 | Not to worship idols in the manner they are worshiped | Ex. 20:5 |
| 28 | Not to worship idols in the four ways we worship God | Ex. 20:5 |
| 29 | Not to make an idol for yourself | Ex. 20:4 |
| 30 | Not to make an idol for others | Lev. 19:4 |
| 31 | Not to make human forms even for decorative purposes | Ex. 20:20 |
| 32 | Not to turn a city to idolatry | Ex. 23:13 |
| 33 | To burn a city that has turned to idol worship | Deut. 13:17 |
| 34 | Not to rebuild it as a city | Deut. 13:17 |
| 35 | Not to derive benefit from it | Deut. 13:18 |
| 36 | Not to missionize an individual to idol worship | Deut. 13:12 |
| 37 | Not to love the missionary | Deut. 13:9 |
| 38 | Not to cease hating the missionary | Deut. 13:9 |

LAWS OF IDOLATRY AND PAGANISM

| | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| 39 | Not to save the missionary | Deut. 13:9 |
| 40 | Not to say anything in his defense | Deut. 13:9 |
| 41 | Not to refrain from incriminating him | Deut. 13:9 |
| 42 | Not to prophesize in the name of idolatry | Deut. 13:14 |
| 43 | Not to listen to a false prophet | Deut. 13:4 |
| 44 | Not to prophesize falsely in the name of God | Deut. 18:20 |
| 45 | Not to be afraid of killing the false prophet | Deut. 18:22 |
| 46 | Not to swear in the name of an idol | Ex. 23:13 |
| 47 | Not to perform <i>ov</i> (medium) | Lev. 19:31 |
| 48 | Not to perform <i>yidoni</i> (magical seer) | Lev. 19:31 |
| 49 | Not to pass your children through the fire to <i>Molech</i> | Lev. 18:21 |
| 50 | Not to erect a column in a public place of worship | Deut. 16:22 |
| 51 | Not to bow down on smooth stone | Lev. 26:1 |
| 52 | Not to plant a tree in the Temple courtyard | Deut. 16:21 |
| 53 | To destroy idols and their accessories | Deut. 12:2 |

LAWS OF IDOLATRY AND PAGANISM

| | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| 54 | Not to derive benefit from idols and their accessories | Deut. 7:26 |
| 55 | Not to derive benefit from ornaments of idols | Deut. 7:25 |
| 56 | Not to make a covenant with idolaters | Deut. 7:2 |
| 57 | Not to show favor to them | Deut. 7:2 |
| 58 | Not to let them dwell in our land | Ex. 23:33 |
| 59 | Not to imitate them in customs and clothing | Lev. 20:23 |
| 60 | Not to be superstitious | Lev. 19:26 |
| 61 | Not to go into a trance to foresee events, etc. | Deut. 18:10 |
| 62 | Not to engage in astrology | Lev. 19:26 |
| 63 | Not to mutter incantations | Deut. 18:11 |
| 64 | Not to attempt to contact the dead | Deut. 18:11 |
| 65 | Not to consult the <i>ov</i> | Deut. 18:11 |
| 66 | Not to consult the <i>yidoni</i> | Deut. 18:11 |
| 67 | Not to perform acts of magic | Deut. 18:10 |
| 68 | Men must not shave the hair off the sides of their head | Lev. 19:27 |

LAWS OF IDOLATRY AND PAGANISM

| | | |
|----|--|------------|
| 69 | Men must not shave their beards with a razor | Lev. 19:27 |
| 70 | Men must not wear women's clothing | Deut. 22:5 |
| 71 | Women must not wear men's clothing | Deut. 22:5 |
| 72 | Not to tattoo the skin | Lev. 19:28 |
| 73 | Not to tear the skin in mourning | Deut. 14:1 |
| 74 | Not to make a bald spot in mourning | Deut. 14:1 |

LAWS OF REPENTANCE

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|----------|
| 75 | To repent and confess wrongdoings | Num. 5:7 |
|----|-----------------------------------|----------|

BOOK TWO: THE BOOK OF LOVE OF GOD

LAWS OF READING THE SHEMA

| | | |
|----|------------------------------|-----------|
| 76 | To say the Shema twice daily | Deut. 6:7 |
|----|------------------------------|-----------|

LAWS OF PRAYER AND KOHANIC BLESSINGS

| | | |
|----|--|-----------|
| 77 | To serve the Almighty with prayer daily | Ex. 23:25 |
| 78 | The Kohanim must bless the Jewish nation daily | Num. 6:23 |

LAWS OF TEFFILIN, MEZUZA AND SEFER TORAH

| | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| 79 | To wear tefillin on the head | Deut. 6:8 |
| 80 | To bind tefillin on the arm | Deut. 6:8 |
| 81 | To put a mezuzah on each door post | Deut. 6:9 |
| 82 | Each male must write a Sefer Torah | Deut. 31:19 |
| 83 | The king must have a separate Sefer Torah for himself | Deut. 17:18 |

LAWS OF TZITZIT

| | | |
|----|---|------------|
| 84 | To have tzitzit on four-cornered garments | Num. 15:38 |
|----|---|------------|

LAWS OF BLESSINGS

| | | |
|----|------------------------------------|------------|
| 85 | To bless the Almighty after eating | Deut. 8:10 |
|----|------------------------------------|------------|

LAWS OF CIRCUMCISION

| | | |
|----|---|-----------|
| 86 | To circumcise all males on the eighth day after their birth | Lev. 12:3 |
|----|---|-----------|

BOOK THREE: THE BOOK OF SEASONS

LAWS OF THE SABBATH

| | | |
|----|--|-----------|
| 87 | To rest on the seventh day | Ex. 23:12 |
| 88 | Not to do prohibited labor on the seventh day | Ex. 20:10 |
| 89 | The court must not inflict punishment on Shabbat | Ex. 35:3 |
| 90 | Not to walk outside the city boundary on Shabbat | Ex. 16:29 |
| 91 | To sanctify the day with <i>Kiddush</i> and <i>Havdallah</i> | Ex. 20:8 |

LAWS OF ERUVIN (RABBINICAL)

LAWS OF YOM KIPPUR REST

| | | |
|----|--|------------|
| 92 | To rest from prohibited labor | Lev. 23:32 |
| 93 | Not to do prohibited labor on Yom Kippur | Lev. 23:32 |
| 94 | To afflict yourself on Yom Kippur | Lev. 16:29 |
| 95 | Not to eat or drink on Yom Kippur | Lev. 23:29 |

LAWS OF FESTIVAL REST

| | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| 96 | To rest on the first day of Passover | Lev. 23:7 |
|----|--------------------------------------|-----------|

LAWS OF FESTIVAL REST

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 97 | Not to do prohibited labor on the first day of Passover | Lev. 23:8 |
| 98 | To rest on the seventh day of Passover | Lev. 23:8 |
| 99 | Not to do prohibited labor on the seventh day of Passover | Lev. 23:8 |
| 100 | To rest on Shavuot | Lev. 23:21 |
| 101 | Not to do prohibited labor on Shavuot | Lev. 23:21 |
| 102 | To rest on Rosh Hashana | Lev. 23:24 |
| 103 | Not to do prohibited labor on Rosh Hashana | Lev. 23:25 |
| 104 | To rest on Sukkot | Lev. 23:35 |
| 105 | Not to do prohibited labor on Sukkot | Lev. 23:35 |
| 106 | To rest on Shmini Atzeret | Lev. 23:36 |
| 107 | Not to do prohibited labor on Shmini Atzeret | Lev. 23:36 |

LAWS OF CHOMETZ AND MATZAH

| | | |
|-----|---|---------------|
| 108 | Not to eat chametz on the afternoon of the 14th day of Nissan | Deut. 16:3 |
| 109 | To destroy all chametz on 14th day of Nissan | Ex. 12:15 |

LAWS OF CHOMETZ AND MATZAH

| | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 110 | Not to eat chametz all seven days of Passover | Ex. 13:3 |
| 111 | Not to eat mixtures containing chametz all seven days of Passover | Ex. 12:20 |
| 112 | Not to see chametz in your domain seven days | Ex. 13:7 |
| 113 | Not to find chametz in your domain seven days | Ex. 12:19 |
| 114 | To eat matzah on the first night of Passover | Ex. 12:18 |
| 115 | To relate the exodus from Egypt on that night | Ex. 13:8 |

LAWS OF SHOFAR, SUKKAH, LULAV

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 116 | To hear the Shofar on the first day of Tishrei (Rosh Hashana) | Num. 29:1 |
| 117 | To dwell in a Sukkah for the seven days of Sukkot | Lev. 23:42 |
| 118 | To take up a Lulav and Etrog all seven days | Lev. 23:40 |

LAWS OF SHEKALIM

| | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 119 | Each man must give a half shekel annually | Ex. 30:13 |
|-----|---|-----------|

LAWS OF SANCTIFICATION OF MONTHS

| | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| 120 | Courts must calculate to determine when a new month begins | Ex. 12:2 |
|-----|--|----------|

LAWS OF FASTS

| | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 121 | To afflict and cry out before God in times of catastrophe | Num. 10:9 |
|-----|---|-----------|

LAWS OF MEGILLAH AND CHANUKAH (RABBINICAL)

BOOK FOUR: THE BOOK OF WOMEN

LAWS OF MARRIAGE

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 122 | To marry a wife by means of ketubah and kiddushin | Deut. 22:13 |
| 123 | Not to have relations with women not thus married | Deut. 23:18 |
| 124 | Not to withhold food, clothing, and relations from your wife | Ex. 21:10 |
| 125 | To have children with one's wife | Gen 1:28 |

LAWS OF DIVORCE

| | | |
|-----|---|---------------|
| 126 | To issue a divorce by means of a "get" document | Deut. 24:1 |
|-----|---|---------------|

LAWS OF DIVORCE

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 127 | A man must not remarry his wife after she has married someone else | Deut. 24:4 |
|-----|--|------------|

LAWS OF YIVUM AND CHALITZAH (LEVIRATE MARRIAGE)

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 128 | To do <i>yibum</i> (marry childless brother's widow) | Deut. 25:5 |
| 129 | To do <i>chalitzah</i> (freeing a widow from <i>yibum</i>) | Deut. 25:9 |
| 130 | The widow must not remarry until the ties with her brother-in-law are removed | Deut. 25:5 |

LAWS OF WOMEN

| | | |
|-----|---|--------------|
| 131 | The court must fine one who seduces a maiden | Ex. 22:15-16 |
| 132 | The rapist must marry the maiden (if she chooses) | Deut. 22:29 |
| 133 | He is not allowed to divorce her | Deut. 22:29 |
| 134 | The slanderer must remain married to his wife | Deut. 22:19 |
| 135 | He must not divorce her | Deut. 22:19 |

LAWS OF SOTAH (SUSPECT WIFE)

| | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 136 | To fulfill the laws of the Sotah | Num. 5:30 |
| 137 | Not to put oil on her meal offering | Num. 5:15 |
| 138 | Not to put frankincense on her meal offering | Num. 5:15 |

BOOK FIVE: THE BOOK OF HOLINESS**LAWS OF FORBIDDEN RELATIONS**

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 139 | Not to have relations with your mother | Lev. 18:7 |
| 140 | Not to have relations with your father's wife | Lev. 18:8 |
| 141 | Not to have relations with your sister | Lev. 18:9 |
| 142 | Not to have relations with your father's wife's daughter | Lev. 18:11 |
| 143 | Not to have relations with your son's daughter | Lev. 18:10 |
| 144 | Not to have relations with your daughter | Lev. 18:10 |
| 145 | Not to have relations with your daughter's daughter | Lev. 18:10 |
| 146 | Not to have relations with a woman and her daughter | Lev. 18:17 |
| 147 | Not to have relations with a woman and her son's daughter | Lev. 18:17 |

LAWS OF FORBIDDEN RELATIONS

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 148 | Not to have relations with a woman and her daughter's daughter | Lev. 18:17 |
| 149 | Not to have relations with your father's sister | Lev. 18:12 |
| 150 | Not to have relations with your mother's sister | Lev. 18:13 |
| 151 | Not to have relations with your father's brother's wife | Lev. 18:14 |
| 152 | Not to have relations with your son's wife | Lev. 18:15 |
| 153 | Not to have relations with your brother's wife | Lev. 18:16 |
| 154 | Not to have relations with your wife's sister | Lev. 18:18 |
| 155 | A man must not have relations with a beast | Lev. 18:23 |
| 156 | A woman must not have relations with a beast | Lev. 18:23 |
| 157 | Not to have homosexual relations | Lev. 18:22 |
| 158 | Not to have homosexual relations with your father | Lev. 18:7 |
| 159 | Not to have homosexual relations with your father's brother | Lev. 18:14 |
| 160 | Not to have relations with a married woman | Lev. 18:20 |
| 161 | Not to have relations with a menstrually impure woman | Lev. 18:19 |
| 162 | Not to marry non-Jews | Deut. 7:3 |

LAWS OF FORBIDDEN RELATIONS

| | | |
|-----|---|--------------|
| 163 | Not to let Moabite and Ammonite males marry into the Jewish people | Deut. 23:4 |
| 164 | Don't keep a third generation Egyptian convert from marrying into the Jewish people | Deut. 23:8-9 |
| 165 | Not to refrain from marrying a third generation Edomite convert | Deut. 23:8-9 |
| 166 | Not to let a <i>mamzer</i> marry into the Jewish people | Deut. 23:3 |
| 167 | Not to let a eunuch marry into the Jewish people | Deut. 23:2 |
| 168 | Not to castrate any male (including animals) | Lev. 22:24 |
| 169 | The High Priest must not marry a widow | Lev. 21:14 |
| 170 | The High Priest must not have relations with a widow even outside of marriage | Lev. 21:15 |
| 171 | The High Priest must marry a virgin maiden | Lev. 21:13 |
| 172 | A Kohen must not marry a divorcee | Lev. 21:7 |
| 173 | A Kohen must not marry a <i>zonah</i> (a woman who had forbidden relations) | Lev. 21:7 |
| 174 | A priest must not marry a <i>chalalah</i> (party to or product of 169-172) | Lev. 21:7 |
| 175 | Not to make pleasurable contact with any forbidden woman | Lev. 18:6 |

LAWS OF FORBIDDEN FOODS

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 176 | To examine the signs of animals to distinguish between kosher and non-kosher | Lev. 11:2 |
| 177 | To examine the signs of fowl to distinguish between kosher and non-kosher | Deut. 14:11 |
| 178 | To examine the signs of fish to distinguish between kosher and non-kosher | Lev. 11:9 |
| 179 | To examine the signs of locusts to distinguish between kosher and non-kosher | Lev. 11:21 |
| 180 | Not to eat non-kosher animals | Lev. 11:4 |
| 181 | Not to eat non-kosher fowl | Lev. 11:13 |
| 182 | Not to eat non-kosher fish | Lev. 11:11 |
| 183 | Not to eat non-kosher flying insects | Deut. 14:19 |
| 184 | Not to eat non-kosher creatures that crawl on land | Lev. 11:41 |
| 185 | Not to eat non-kosher maggots | Lev. 11:44 |
| 186 | Not to eat worms found in fruit on the ground | Lev. 11:42 |
| 187 | Not to eat creatures that live in water other than fish | Lev. 11:43 |

LAWS OF FORBIDDEN FOODS

| | | |
|-----|---|-------------|
| 188 | Not to eat the meat of an animal that died without ritual slaughter | Deut. 14:21 |
| 189 | Not to benefit from an ox condemned to be stoned | Ex. 21:28 |
| 190 | Not to eat meat of an animal that was mortally wounded | Ex. 22:30 |
| 191 | Not to eat a limb torn off a living creature | Deut 12:23 |
| 192 | Not to eat blood | Lev. 3:17 |
| 193 | Not to eat certain fats of clean animals | Lev. 3:17 |
| 194 | Not to eat the sinew of the thigh | Gen. 32:33 |
| 195 | Not to eat meat and milk cooked together | Ex. 23:19 |
| 196 | Not to cook meat and milk together | Ex. 34:26 |
| 197 | Not to eat bread from new grain before the Omer | Lev. 23:14 |
| 198 | Not to eat parched grains from new grain before the Omer | Lev. 23:14 |
| 199 | Not to eat ripened grains from new grain before the Omer | Lev. 23:14 |
| 200 | Not to eat fruit of a tree during its first three years | Lev. 19:23 |
| 201 | Not to eat diverse seeds planted in a vineyard | Deut. 22:9 |

LAWS OF FORBIDDEN FOODS

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 202 | Not to eat untithed fruits | Lev. 22:15 |
| 203 | Not to drink wine poured in service to idols | Deut. 32:38 |

LAWS OF SLAUGHTERING

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 204 | To ritually slaughter an animal before eating it | Deut. 12:21 |
| 205 | Not to slaughter an animal and its offspring on the same day | Lev. 22:28 |
| 206 | To cover the blood (of a slaughtered beast or fowl) with earth | Lev. 17:13 |
| 207 | Not to take the mother bird from her children | Deut. 22:6 |
| 208 | To release the mother bird if she was taken from the nest | Deut. 22:7 |

BOOK SIX: THE BOOK OF OATHS**LAWS OF OATHS**

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 209 | Not to swear falsely in God's Name | Lev. 19:12 |
| 210 | Not to take God's Name in vain | Ex. 20:7 |
| 211 | Not to deny possession of something entrusted to you | Lev. 19:11 |
| 212 | Not to swear in denial of a monetary claim | Lev. 19:11 |

LAWS OF OATHS

| | | |
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| 213 | To swear in God's Name to confirm the truth when deemed necessary by court | Deut. 10:20 |
|-----|--|-------------|

LAWS OF VOWS

| | | |
|-----|---|-------------|
| 214 | To fulfill what was uttered and to do what was avowed | Deut. 23:24 |
| 215 | Not to break oaths or vows | Num. 30:3 |
| 216 | For oaths and vows annulled, there are the laws of annulling vows explicit in the Torah | Num. 30:3 |

LAWS OF THE NAZIR

| | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| 217 | The <i>Nazir</i> must let his hair grow | Num. 6:5 |
| 218 | He must not cut his hair | Num. 6:5 |
| 219 | He must not drink wine, wine mixtures, or wine vinegar | Num. 6:3 |
| 220 | He must not eat fresh grapes | Num. 6:3 |
| 221 | He must not eat raisins | Num. 6:3 |
| 222 | He must not eat grape seeds | Num. 6:4 |
| 223 | He must not eat grape skins | Num. 6:4 |

LAWS OF THE NAZIR

| | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| 224 | He must not be under the same roof as a corpse | Num. 6:6 |
| 225 | He must not come into contact with the dead | Num. 6:7 |
| 226 | He must shave after bringing sacrifices upon completion of his Nazirite period | Num. 6:9 |

LAWS OF ESTIMATED VALUES AND VOWS

| | | |
|-----|--|---------------|
| 227 | To estimate the value of people as determined by the Torah | Lev. 27:2 |
| 228 | To estimate the value of consecrated animals | Lev. 27:12-13 |
| 229 | To estimate the value of consecrated houses | Lev. 27:14 |
| 230 | To estimate the value of consecrated fields | Lev. 27:16 |
| 231 | Carry out the laws of interdicting possessions (<i>cherem</i>) | Lev. 27:28 |
| 232 | Not to sell the cherem | Lev. 27:28 |
| 233 | Not to redeem the cherem | Lev. 27:28 |

BOOK SEVEN: THE BOOK OF SEEDS

LAWS OF MIXED SPECIES

| | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|------------|
| 234 | Not to plant diverse seeds together | Lev. 19:19 |
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LAWS OF MIXED SPECIES

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 235 | Not to plant grains or greens in a vineyard | Deut. 22:9 |
| 236 | Not to crossbreed animals | Lev. 19:19 |
| 237 | Not to work different animals together | Deut. 22:10 |
| 238 | Not to wear sha'atnez, a cloth woven of wool and linen | Deut. 22:11 |

LAWS OF GIFTS TO THE POOR

| | | |
|-----|---|-------------|
| 239 | To leave a corner of the field uncut for the poor | Lev. 19:10 |
| 240 | Not to reap that corner | Lev. 19:9 |
| 241 | To leave gleanings | Lev. 19:9 |
| 242 | Not to gather the gleanings | Lev. 19:9 |
| 243 | To leave the gleanings of a vineyard | Lev. 19:10 |
| 244 | Not to gather the gleanings of a vineyard | Lev. 19:10 |
| 245 | To leave the unformed clusters of grapes | Lev. 19:10 |
| 246 | Not to pick the unformed clusters of grapes | Lev. 19:10 |
| 247 | To leave the forgotten sheaves in the field | Deut. 24:19 |
| 248 | Not to retrieve them | Deut. 24:19 |

LAWS OF GIFTS TO THE POOR

| | | |
|-----|---|-------------|
| 249 | To separate the tithe for the poor | Deut. 14:28 |
| 250 | To give charity | Deut. 15:8 |
| 251 | Not to withhold charity from the poor | Deut. 15:7 |
| 252 | To set aside <i>Trumah Gedolah</i> (tithe for the Kohen) | Deut. 18:4 |
| 253 | The Levite must set aside a tenth of his tithe | Num. 18:26 |
| 254 | Not to preface one tithe to the next, but separate them in their proper order | Ex. 22:28 |
| 255 | A non-Kohen must not eat <i>Trumah</i> | Lev. 22:10 |
| 256 | A hired worker or a Jewish bondsman of a Kohen must not eat <i>Trumah</i> | Lev. 22:10 |
| 257 | An uncircumcised Kohen must not eat <i>Trumah</i> | Ex.12:48 |
| 258 | An impure Kohen must not eat <i>Trumah</i> | Lev. 22:4 |
| 259 | A <i>chalalah</i> must not eat <i>Trumah</i> | Lev. 22:12 |

LAWS OF MA'ASER

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 260 | To set aside <i>Ma'aser</i> each planting year and give it to a Levite | Num. 18:24 |
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LAWS OF THE SECOND TITHE AND FOURTH YEAR PRODUCE

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 261 | To set aside the second tithe (<i>Ma'aser Sheni</i>) | Deut. 14:22 |
| 262 | Not to spend its redemption money on anything but food, drink, or ointment | Deut. 26:14 |
| 263 | Not to eat <i>Ma'aser Sheni</i> while impure | Deut. 26:14 |
| 264 | A mourner on the first day after death must not eat <i>Ma'aser Sheni</i> | Deut. 26:14 |
| 265 | Not to eat <i>Ma'aser Sheni</i> grains outside Jerusalem | Deut. 12:17 |
| 266 | Not to eat <i>Ma'aser Sheni</i> wine products outside Jerusalem | Deut. 12:17 |
| 267 | Not to eat <i>Ma'aser Sheni</i> oil outside Jerusalem | Deut. 12:17 |
| 268 | The fourth year crops must be totally for holy purposes like <i>Ma'aser Sheni</i> | Lev. 19:24 |
| 269 | To read the confession of tithes every fourth and seventh year | Deut. 26:13 |

LAWS OF FIRST FRUITS AND OTHER KOHANIC GIFTS

| | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 270 | To set aside the first fruits and bring them to the Temple | Ex. 23:19 |
|-----|--|-----------|

LAWS OF FIRST FRUITS AND OTHER KOHANIC GIFTS

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 271 | The Kohanim must not eat the first fruits outside Jerusalem | Deut. 12:17 |
| 272 | To read the Torah portion pertaining to their presentation | Deut. 26:5 |
| 273 | To set aside a portion of dough for a Kohen | Num. 15:20 |
| 274 | To give the shoulder, two cheeks, and stomach of slaughtered animals to a Kohen | Deut. 18:3 |
| 275 | To give the first sheering of sheep to a Kohen | Deut. 18:4 |
| 276 | To redeem the firstborn sons and give the money to a Kohen | Num. 18:15 |
| 277 | To redeem the firstborn donkey by giving a lamb to a Kohen | Ex. 13:13 |
| 278 | To break the neck of the donkey if the owner does not intend to redeem it | Ex. 13:13 |

LAWS OF THE SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS

| | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 279 | To rest the land during the seventh year by not doing any work which enhances growth | Ex. 34:21 |
| 280 | Not to work the land during the seventh year | Lev. 25:4 |
| 281 | Not to work with trees to produce fruit during that year | Lev. 25:4 |

LAWS OF THE SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 282 | Not to reap crops that grow wild that year in the normal manner | Lev. 25:5 |
| 283 | Not to gather grapes which grow wild that year in the normal way | Lev. 25:5 |
| 284 | To leave free all produce which grew in that year | Ex. 23:11 |
| 285 | To release all loans during the seventh year | Deut. 15:2 |
| 286 | Not to pressure or claim from the borrower | Deut. 15:2 |
| 287 | Not to refrain from lending immediately before the release of the loans for fear of monetary loss | Deut. 15:9 |
| 288 | The Sanhedrin must count seven groups of seven years | Lev. 25:8 |
| 289 | The Sanhedrin must sanctify the fiftieth year | Lev. 25:10 |
| 290 | To blow the Shofar on the tenth of Tishrei to free the slaves | Lev. 25:9 |
| 291 | Not to work the soil during the fiftieth year | Lev. 25:11 |
| 292 | Not to reap in the normal manner that which grows wild in the fiftieth year | Lev. 25:11 |
| 293 | Not to pick grapes which grew wild in the normal manner in the fiftieth year | Lev. 25:11 |
| 294 | Carry out the laws of sold family properties | Lev. 25:24 |

LAWS OF THE SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS

| | | |
|-----|--|---------------|
| 295 | Not to sell the land in Israel indefinitely | Lev. 25:23 |
| 296 | Carry out the laws of houses in walled cities | Lev. 25:29 |
| 297 | The Tribe of Levi must not be given a portion of the land in Israel, rather they are given cities to dwell in | Deut. 18:1 |
| 298 | The Levites must not take a share in the spoils of war | Deut. 18:1 |
| 299 | To give the Levites cities to inhabit and their surrounding fields | Num. 35:2 |
| 300 | Not to sell the fields but they shall remain the Levites' before and after the Jubilee year | Lev. 25:34 |

BOOK EIGHT: THE BOOK OF SERVICE**LAWS OF THE TEMPLE**

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 301 | To build a Sanctuary | Ex. 25:8 |
| 302 | Not to build the altar with stones hewn by metal | Ex. 20:22 |
| 303 | Not to climb steps to the altar | Ex. 20:23 |
| 304 | To show reverence to the Temple | Lev. 19:30 |

LAWS OF THE TEMPLE

| | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| 305 | To guard the Temple area | Num. 18:2 |
| 306 | Not to leave the Temple unguarded | Num. 18:5 |

LAWS OF TEMPLE VESSELS AND EMPLOYEES

| | | |
|-----|--|--------------|
| 307 | To prepare the anointing oil | Ex. 30:31 |
| 308 | Not to reproduce the anointing oil | Ex. 30:32 |
| 309 | Not to anoint with anointing oil | Ex. 30:32 |
| 310 | Not to reproduce the incense formula | Ex. 30:37 |
| 311 | Not to burn anything on the Golden Altar besides incense | Ex. 30:9 |
| 312 | The Levites must transport the ark on their shoulders | Num. 7:9 |
| 313 | Not to remove the staves from the ark | Ex. 25:15 |
| 314 | The Levites must work in the Temple | Num. 18:23 |
| 315 | No Levite must do another's work of either a Kohen or a Levite | Num. 18:3 |
| 316 | To dedicate the Kohen for service | Lev. 21:8 |
| 317 | The kohanic work shifts must be equal during holidays | Deut. 18:6-8 |

LAWS OF TEMPLE VESSELS AND EMPLOYEES

| | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 318 | The Kohanim must wear their priestly garments during service | Ex. 28:2 |
| 319 | Not to tear the priestly garments | Ex. 28:32 |
| 320 | The breastplate must not be loosened from the <i>Efode</i> | Ex. 28:28 |

LAWS OF ENTERING THE TEMPLE

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 321 | A Kohen must not enter the Temple intoxicated | Lev. 10:9 |
| 322 | A Kohen must not enter the Temple with long hair | Lev. 10:6 |
| 323 | A Kohen must not enter the Temple with torn clothes | Lev. 10:6 |
| 324 | A Kohen must not enter the Temple indiscriminately | Lev. 16:2 |
| 325 | A Kohen must not leave the Temple during service | Lev. 10:7 |
| 326 | To send the impure from the Temple | Num. 5:2 |
| 327 | Impure people must not enter the Temple | Num. 5:3 |
| 328 | Impure people must not enter the Temple Mount area | Deut. 23:11 |
| 329 | Impure Kohanim must not do service in the temple | Lev. 22:2 |
| 330 | An impure Kohen, following immersion, must wait until after sundown before returning to service | Lev. 22:7 |

LAWS OF ENTERING THE TEMPLE

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 331 | A Kohen must wash his hands and feet before service | Ex. 30:19 |
| 332 | A Kohen with a physical blemish must not enter the sanctuary or approach the altar | Lev. 21:23 |
| 333 | A Kohen with a physical blemish must not serve | Lev.21:17 |
| 334 | A Kohen with a temporary blemish must not serve | Lev. 21:17 |
| 335 | One who is not a Kohen must not serve | Num. 18:4 |

LAWS OF RESTRICTIONS CONCERNING SACRIFICES

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 336 | To offer only unblemished animals | Lev. 22:21 |
| 337 | Not to dedicate a blemished animal for the altar | Lev. 22:20 |
| 338 | Not to slaughter it | Lev. 22:22 |
| 339 | Not to sprinkle its blood | Lev. 22:24 |
| 340 | Not to burn its fat | Lev. 22:22 |
| 341 | Not to offer a temporarily blemished animal | Deut. 17:1 |
| 342 | Not to sacrifice blemished animals even if offered by non-Jews | Lev. 22:25 |
| 343 | Not to inflict wounds upon dedicated animals | Lev. 22:21 |

LAWS OF RESTRICTIONS CONCERNING SACRIFICES

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 344 | To redeem dedicated animals which have become disqualified | Deut. 12:15 |
| 345 | To offer only animals which are at least eight days old | Lev. 22:27 |
| 346 | Not to offer animals bought with the wages of a harlot or the animal exchanged for a dog | Deut. 23:19 |
| 347 | Not to burn honey or yeast on the altar | Lev. 2:11 |
| 348 | To salt all sacrifices | Lev. 2:13 |
| 349 | Not to omit the salt from sacrifices | Lev. 2:13 |

LAWS OF SACRIFICIAL PROCEDURE

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 350 | Carry out the procedure of the burnt offering as prescribed in the Torah | Lev. 1:3 |
| 351 | Not to eat its meat | Deut. 12:17 |
| 352 | Carry out the procedure of the sin offering | Lev. 6:18 |
| 353 | Not to eat the meat of the inner sin offering | Lev. 6:23 |
| 354 | Not to decapitate a fowl brought as a sin offering | Lev. 5:8 |
| 355 | Carry out the procedure of the guilt offering | Lev. 7:1 |

LAWS OF SACRIFICIAL PROCEDURE

| | | |
|-----|---|--------------|
| 356 | The Kohanim must eat the sacrificial meat in the Temple | Ex. 29:33 |
| 357 | The Kohanim must not eat the meat outside the Temple courtyard | Deut. 12:17 |
| 358 | A non-Kohen must not eat sacrificial meat | Ex. 29:33 |
| 359 | To follow the procedure of the peace offering | Lev. 7:11 |
| 360 | Not to eat the meat of minor sacrifices before sprinkling the blood | Deut. 12:17 |
| 361 | To bring meal offerings as prescribed in the Torah | Lev. 2:1 |
| 362 | Not to put oil on the meal offerings of wrongdoers | Lev. 5:11 |
| 363 | Not to put frankincense on the meal offerings of wrongdoers | Lev. 5:11 |
| 364 | Not to eat the meal offering of the High Priest | Lev. 6:16 |
| 365 | Not to bake a meal offering as leavened bread | Lev. 6:10 |
| 366 | The Kohanim must eat the remains of the meal offerings | Lev. 6:9 |
| 367 | To bring all avowed and freewill offerings to the Temple on the first subsequent festival | Deut. 12:5-6 |
| 368 | Not to withhold payment incurred by any vow | Deut. 23:22 |

LAWS OF SACRIFICIAL PROCEDURE

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 369 | To offer all sacrifices in the Temple | Deut. 12:11 |
| 370 | To bring all sacrifices from outside Israel to the Temple | Deut. 12:26 |
| 371 | Not to slaughter sacrifices outside the courtyard | Lev. 17:4 |
| 372 | Not to offer any sacrifices outside the courtyard | Deut. 12:13 |

LAWS OF CONSTANT AND ADDITIONAL OFFERINGS

| | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 373 | To offer two lambs every day | Num. 28:3 |
| 374 | To light a fire on the altar every day | Lev. 6:6 |
| 375 | Not to extinguish this fire | Lev. 6:6 |
| 376 | To remove the ashes from the altar every day | Lev. 6:3 |
| 377 | To burn incense every day | Ex 30:7 |
| 378 | To light the Menorah every day | Ex. 27:21 |
| 379 | The Kohen Gadol must bring a meal offering every day | Lev. 6:13 |
| 380 | To bring two additional lambs as burnt offerings on Shabbat | Num 28:9 |

LAWS OF CONSTANT AND ADDITIONAL OFFERINGS

| | | |
|-----|--|---------------|
| 381 | To make the show bread | Ex. 25:30 |
| 382 | To bring additional offerings on the New Month | Num. 28:11 |
| 383 | To bring additional offerings on Passover | Num. 28:19 |
| 384 | To offer the wave offering from the meal of the new wheat | Lev. 23:10 |
| 385 | Each man must count the Omer – seven weeks from the day the new wheat offering was brought | Lev. 23:15 |
| 386 | To bring additional offerings on Shavuot | Num. 28:26 |
| 387 | To bring two leaves to accompany the above sacrifice | Lev. 23:17 |
| 388 | To bring additional offerings on Rosh Hashana | Num. 29:2 |
| 389 | To bring additional offerings on Yom Kippur | Num. 29:8 |
| 390 | To bring additional offerings on Sukkot | Num. 29:13 |
| 391 | To bring additional offerings on Shmini Atzeret | Num. 29:35 |

LAWS OF DISQUALIFIED OFFERINGS

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 392 | Not to eat sacrifices which have become unfit or blemished | Deut. 14:3 |
| 393 | Not to eat from sacrifices offered with improper intentions | Lev. 7:18 |
| 394 | Not to leave sacrifices past the time allowed for eating them | Lev. 22:30 |
| 395 | Not to eat from that which was left over | Lev. 19:8 |
| 396 | Not to eat from sacrifices which became impure | Lev. 7:19 |
| 397 | An impure person must not eat from sacrifices | Lev. 7:20 |
| 398 | To burn the leftover sacrifices | Lev. 7:17 |
| 399 | To burn all impure sacrifices | Lev. 7:19 |

LAWS OF YOM KIPPUR SERVICE

| | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 400 | To follow the procedure of Yom Kippur in the sequence prescribed in Parshat Acharei Mot | Lev. 16:3 |
|-----|---|-----------|

LAWS OF MISUSING SANCTIFIED PROPERTY

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 401 | One who profaned property must repay what he profaned plus a fifth and bring a sacrifice | Lev. 5:16 |
| 402 | Not to work consecrated animals | Deut. 15:19 |

LAWS OF MISUSING SANCTIFIED PROPERTY

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 403 | Not to shear the fleece of consecrated animals | Deut. 15:19 |
|-----|--|-------------|

BOOK NINE: THE BOOK OF SACRIFICES**LAWS OF PASCAL SACRIFICE**

| | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 404 | To slaughter the paschal sacrifice at the specified time | Ex. 12:6 |
| 405 | Not to slaughter it while in possession of leaven | Ex. 23:18 |
| 406 | Not to leave the fat overnight | Ex. 23:18 |
| 407 | To slaughter the second paschal lamb | Num. 9:11 |
| 408 | To eat the paschal lamb with matzah and Marror on the night of the 15th of Nissan | Ex. 12:8 |
| 409 | To eat the second paschal lamb on the night of the 15th of Iyar | Num.9:11 |
| 410 | Not to eat the paschal meat raw or boiled | Ex. 12:9 |
| 411 | Not to take the paschal meat from the confines of the group | Ex. 12:46 |
| 412 | An apostate must not eat from it | Ex.12:43 |
| 413 | A permanent or temporary hired worker must not eat from it | Ex. 12:45 |
| 414 | An uncircumcised male must not eat from it | Ex. 12:48 |

LAWS OF PASCAL SACRIFICE

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 415 | Not to break any bones from the paschal offering | Ex. 12:46 |
| 416 | Not to break any bones from the second paschal offering | Num. 9:12 |
| 417 | Not to leave any meat from the paschal offering over until morning | Ex. 12:10 |
| 418 | Not to leave the second paschal meat over until morning | Num. 9:12 |
| 419 | Not to leave the meat of the holiday offering of the 14th until the 16th | Deut. 16:4 |

LAWS OF PILGRIM OFFERINGS

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 420 | To be seen at the Temple on Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot | Deut. 16:16 |
| 421 | To celebrate on these three Festivals (bring a peace offering) | Ex. 23:14 |
| 422 | To rejoice on these three Festivals (bring a peace offering) | Deut. 16:14 |
| 423 | Not to appear at the Temple without offerings | Deut. 16:16 |
| 424 | Not to refrain from rejoicing with, and giving gifts to, the Levites | Deut. 12:19 |
| 425 | To assemble all the people on the Sukkot following the seventh year | Deut. 31:12 |

LAWS OF FIRST BORN ANIMALS

| | | |
|-----|--|-------------|
| 426 | To set aside the firstborn animals | Ex. 13:12 |
| 427 | The Kohanim must not eat unblemished firstborn animals outside Jerusalem | Deut. 12:17 |
| 428 | Not to redeem the firstborn | Num. 18:17 |
| 429 | Separate the tithe from animals | Lev. 27:32 |
| 430 | Not to redeem the tithe | Lev. 27:33 |

LAWS OF OFFERINGS FOR UNINTENTIONAL TRANSGRESSIONS

| | | |
|-----|---|--------------|
| 431 | Every person must bring a sin offering for his transgression | Lev. 4:27 |
| 432 | Bring an <i>asham talui</i> when uncertain of guilt | Lev. 5:17-18 |
| 433 | Bring an <i>asham vadai</i> when guilt is ascertained | Lev. 5:25 |
| 434 | Bring an <i>oleh v'yored</i> offering (if the person is wealthy, an animal; if poor, a bird or meal offering) | Lev. 5:7-11 |
| 435 | The Sanhedrin must bring an offering when it rules in error | Lev. 4:13 |

LAWS OF LACKING ATONEMENT

| | | |
|-----|---|---------------|
| 436 | A woman who had a running issue must bring an offering after she goes to the Mikveh | Lev. 15:28-29 |
| 437 | A woman who gave birth must bring an offering after she goes to the Mikveh | Lev. 12:6 |
| 438 | A man who had a running issue must bring an offering after he goes to the Mikveh | Lev. 15:13-14 |
| 439 | A <i>metzora</i> must bring an offering after going to the Mikveh | Lev. 14:10 |

LAWS OF SUBSTITUTION OF SACRIFICES

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 440 | Not to substitute another beast for one set apart for sacrifice | Lev. 27:10 |
| 441 | The new animal, in addition to the substituted one, retains consecration | Lev. 27:10 |
| 442 | Not to change consecrated animals from one type of offering to another | Lev. 27:26 |

BOOK TEN: THE BOOK OF PURITY

LAWS OF IMPURITY OF HUMAN DEAD

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 443 | Carry out the laws of impurity of the dead | Num. 19:14 |
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LAWS OF THE RED HEIFER

| | | |
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| 444 | Carry out the procedure of the Red Heifer | Num. 19:2 |
| 445 | Carry out the laws of the sprinkling water | Num. 19:21 |

LAWS OF IMPURITY THROUGH TZARA'AT

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 446 | Rule the laws of human <i>tzara'at</i> as prescribed in the Torah | Lev. 13:12 |
| 447 | The <i>metzora</i> must not remove his signs of impurity | Deut. 24:8 |
| 448 | The <i>metzora</i> must not shave signs of impurity in his hair | Lev. 13:33 |
| 449 | The <i>metzora</i> must publicize his condition by tearing his garments, allowing his hair to grow and covering his lips | Lev. 13:45 |
| 450 | Carry out the prescribed rules for purifying the <i>metzora</i> | Lev. 14:2 |
| 451 | The <i>metzora</i> must shave off all his hair prior to purification | Lev. 14:9 |
| 452 | Carry out the laws of <i>tzara'at</i> of clothing | Lev. 13:47 |
| 453 | Carry out the laws of <i>tzara'at</i> of houses | Lev. 13:34 |

LAWS OF IMPURITY OF RECLINING AND SITTING

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 454 | Observe the laws of menstrual impurity | Lev. 15:19 |
|-----|--|------------|

LAWS OF IMPURITY OF RECLINING AND SITTING

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 455 | Observe the laws of impurity caused by childbirth | Lev. 12:2 |
| 456 | Observe the laws of impurity caused by a woman's running issue | Lev. 15:25 |
| 457 | Observe the laws of impurity caused by a man's running issue | Lev. 15:3 |

LAWS OF OTHER SOURCES OF IMPURITY

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 458 | Observe the laws of impurity caused by a dead beast | Lev. 11:39 |
| 459 | Observe the laws of impurity caused by the eight <i>shratzim</i> | Lev. 11:29 |
| 460 | Observe the laws of impurity of a seminal emission | Lev. 15:16 |

LAWS OF IMPURITY OF FOOD

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 461 | Observe the laws of impurity concerning liquid and solid foods | Lev. 11:34 |
|-----|--|------------|

LAWS OF VESSELS (RABBINICAL)**LAWS OF MIKVEH**

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 462 | Every impure person must immerse himself in a Mikveh to become pure | Lev. 15:16 |
|-----|---|------------|

BOOK ELEVEN: THE BOOK OF DAMAGES

| LAWS OF PROPERTY DAMAGE | | |
|-------------------------|---|-----------|
| 463 | The court must judge the damages incurred by a goring ox | Ex. 21:28 |
| 464 | The court must judge the damages incurred by an animal eating | Ex. 22:4 |
| 465 | The court must judge the damages incurred by a pit | Ex. 21:33 |
| 466 | The court must judge the damages incurred by fire | Ex. 22:5 |

| LAWS OF THEFT | | |
|---------------|---|-------------|
| 467 | Not to steal money stealthily | Lev. 19:11 |
| 468 | The court must implement punitive measures against the thief | Ex. 21:37 |
| 469 | Each individual must ensure that his scales and weights are accurate | Lev. 19:36 |
| 470 | Not to commit injustice with scales and weights | Lev. 19:35 |
| 471 | Not to possess inaccurate scales and weights even if they are not for use | Deut. 25:13 |
| 472 | Not to move a boundary marker to steal someone's property | Deut. 19:14 |
| 473 | Not to kidnap | Ex. 20:13 |

LAWS OF ROBBERY AND LOST OBJECTS

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 474 | Not to rob openly | Lev. 19:13 |
| 475 | Not to withhold wages or fail to repay a debt | Lev. 19:13 |
| 476 | Not to covet and scheme to acquire another's possession | Ex. 20:14 |
| 477 | Not to desire another's possession | Deut. 5:18 |
| 478 | Return the robbed object or its value | Lev. 5:23 |
| 479 | Not to ignore a lost object | Deut. 22:3 |
| 480 | Return the lost object | Deut. 22:1 |
| 481 | The court must implement laws against the one who assaults another or damages another's property | Ex. 21:18 |

LAWS OF MURDER AND PRESERVATION OF LIFE

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 482 | Not to murder | Ex. 20:13 |
| 483 | Not to accept monetary restitution to atone for the murderer | Num. 35:31 |
| 484 | The court must send the accidental murderer to a city of refuge | Num. 35:25 |
| 485 | Not to accept monetary restitution instead of being sent to a city of refuge | Num. 35:32 |

LAWS OF MURDER AND PRESERVATION OF LIFE

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 486 | Not to kill the murderer before he stands trial | Num. 35:12 |
| 487 | Save someone being pursued even by taking the life of the pursuer | Deut. 25:12 |
| 488 | Not to pity the pursuer | Num. 35:12 |
| 489 | Not to stand idly by if someone's life is in danger | Lev. 19:16 |
| 490 | Designate cities of refuge and prepare routes of access | Deut. 19:3 |
| 491 | Break the neck of a calf by the river valley following an unsolved murder | Deut. 21:4 |
| 492 | Not to work nor plant that river valley | Deut. 21:4 |
| 493 | Not to allow pitfalls and obstacles to remain on your property | Deut. 22:8 |
| 494 | Make a guard rail around flat roofs | Deut. 22:8 |
| 495 | Not to put a stumbling block before a blind man (nor give harmful advice) | Lev. 19:14 |
| 496 | Help another remove the load from a beast which can no longer carry it | Ex. 23:5 |
| 497 | Help others load their beast | Deut. 22:4 |

LAWS OF MURDER AND PRESERVATION OF LIFE

| | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 498 | Not to leave others distraught with their burdens (but to help either load or unload) | Deut. 22:4 |
|-----|---|------------|

BOOK TWELVE: THE BOOK OF ACQUISITION

LAWS OF SALES

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 499 | Buy and sell according to Torah law | Lev. 25:14 |
| 500 | Not to overcharge or underpay for an article | Lev. 25:14 |
| 501 | Not to insult or harm anybody with words | Lev. 25:17 |
| 502 | Not to cheat a sincere convert monetarily | Ex. 22:20 |
| 503 | Not to insult or harm a sincere convert with words | Ex. 22:20 |

LAWS OF SLAVES

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 504 | Purchase a Hebrew slave in accordance with the prescribed laws | Ex. 21:2 |
| 505 | Not to sell him as a slave is sold | Lev. 25:42 |
| 506 | Not to work him oppressively | Lev. 25:43 |
| 507 | Not to allow a non-Jew to work him oppressively | Lev. 25:53 |

LAWS OF SLAVES

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 508 | Not to have him do menial slave labor | Lev. 25;39 |
| 509 | Give him gifts when he goes free | Deut. 15:14 |
| 510 | Not to send him away empty-handed | Deut. 15:13 |
| 511 | Redeem Jewish maidservants | Ex. 21:8 |
| 512 | Betroth the Jewish maidservant | Ex. 21:8 |
| 513 | The master must not sell his maidservant | Ex. 21:8 |
| 514 | Canaanite slaves must work forever unless injured in one of their limbs | Lev. 25:46 |
| 515 | Not to extradite a slave who fled to Israel | Deut. 23:16 |
| 516 | Not to wrong a slave who has come to Israel for refuge | Deut. 23:16 |

BOOK THIRTEEN: THE BOOK OF JUDGEMENTS**LAWS OF HIRING**

| | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| 517 | The courts must carry out the laws of a hired worker and hired guard | Ex. 22:9 |
|-----|--|----------|

LAWS OF HIRING

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 518 | Pay wages on the day they were earned | Deut. 24:15 |
| 519 | Not to delay payment of wages past the agreed time | Lev. 19:13 |
| 520 | The hired worker may eat from the unharvested crops where he works | Deut. 23:25 |
| 521 | The worker must not eat while on hired time | Deut. 23:26 |
| 522 | The worker must not take more than he can eat | Deut. 23:25 |
| 523 | Not to muzzle an ox while plowing | Deut. 25:4 |

LAWS OF BORROWING AND DEPOSITING

| | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 524 | The courts must carry out the laws of a borrower | Ex. 22:13 |
| 525 | The courts must carry out the laws of an unpaid guard | Ex. 22:6 |

LAWS OF CREDITOR AND DEBTOR

| | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 526 | Lend to the poor and destitute | Ex. 22:24 |
| 527 | Not to press them for payment if you know they don't have it | Ex. 22:24 |

LAWS OF CREDITOR AND DEBTOR

| | | |
|-----|---|-------------|
| 528 | Press the idolater for payment | Deut. 15:3 |
| 529 | The creditor must not forcibly take collateral | Deut. 24:10 |
| 530 | Return the collateral to the debtor when needed | Deut. 24:13 |
| 531 | Not to delay its return when needed | Deut. 24:12 |
| 532 | Not to demand collateral from a widow | Deut. 24:17 |
| 533 | Not to demand as collateral utensils needed for preparing food | Deut. 24:6 |
| 534 | Not to lend with interest | Lev.25:37 |
| 535 | Not to borrow with interest | Deut. 23:20 |
| 536 | Not to intermediate in an interest loan, guarantee, witness, or write the promissory note | Ex. 22:24 |
| 537 | Lend to and borrow from idolaters with interest | Deut. 23:21 |

LAWS OF PLAINTIFF AND DEFENDANT

| | | |
|-----|---|----------|
| 538 | The courts must carry out the laws of the plaintiff, admit, or deny | Ex. 22:8 |
|-----|---|----------|

LAWS OF INHERITANCE

| | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 539 | Carry out the laws of the order of inheritance | Num. 27:8 |
|-----|--|-----------|

BOOK FOURTEEN: THE BOOK OF JUDGES**LAWS OF SANHEDRIN AND PUNISHMENTS**

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 540 | Appoint judges | Deut. 16:18 |
| 541 | Not to appoint judges who are not familiar with judicial procedure | Deut. 1:17 |
| 542 | Decide by majority in case of disagreement | Ex. 23:2 |
| 543 | The court must not execute through a majority of one; at least a majority of two is required | Ex. 23:2 |
| 544 | A judge who presented an acquittal plea must not present an argument for conviction in capital cases | Deut. 23:2 |
| 545 | The courts must carry out the death penalty of stoning | Deut. 22:24 |
| 546 | The courts must carry out the death penalty of burning | Lev. 20:14 |
| 547 | The courts must carry out the death penalty of the sword | Ex. 21:20 |
| 548 | The courts must carry out the death penalty of strangulation | Lev. 20:10 |

LAWS OF SANHEDRIN AND PUNISHMENTS

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 549 | The courts must hang those stoned for blasphemy or idolatry | Deut. 21:22 |
| 550 | Bury the executed on the day they are killed | Deut.21:23 |
| 551 | Not to delay burial overnight | Deut. 21:23 |
| 552 | The court must not let the sorcerer live | Ex. 22:17 |
| 553 | The court must give lashes to the wrongdoer | Ex. 25:2 |
| 554 | The court must not exceed the prescribed number of lashes | Deut. 25:3 |
| 555 | The court must not kill anybody on circumstantial evidence | Ex. 23:7 |
| 556 | The court must not punish anybody who was forced to do a crime | Deut. 22:26 |
| 557 | A judge must not pity the murderer or assaulter at the trial | Deut. 19:13 |
| 558 | A judge must not have mercy on the poor man at the trial | Lev. 19:15 |
| 559 | A judge must not respect the great man at the trial | Lev. 19:15 |
| 560 | A judge must not decide unjustly the case of the habitual transgressor | Ex. 23;6 |
| 561 | A judge must not pervert justice | Lev. 19:15 |

LAWS OF SANHEDRIN AND PUNISHMENTS

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 562 | A judge must not pervert a case involving a convert or orphan | Deut. 24:17 |
| 563 | Judge righteously | Lev. 19:15 |
| 564 | The judge must not fear a violent man in judgment | Deut. 1:17 |
| 565 | Judges must not accept bribes | Ex. 23:8 |
| 566 | Judges must not accept testimony unless both parties are present | Ex. 23:1 |
| 567 | Not to curse judges | Ex. 22:27 |
| 568 | Not to curse the head of state or leader of the Sanhedrin | Ex. 22:27 |
| 569 | Not to curse any upstanding Jew | Lev. 19:14 |

LAWS OF EVIDENCE

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 570 | Anybody who knows evidence must testify in court | Lev. 5:1 |
| 571 | Carefully interrogate the witness | Deut. 13:15 |
| 572 | A witness must not serve as a judge in capital crimes | Deut. 19:17 |

LAWS OF EVIDENCE

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 573 | Not to accept testimony from a lone witness | Deut. 19:15 |
| 574 | Transgressors must not testify | Ex. 23:1 |
| 575 | Relatives of the litigants must not testify | Deut. 24:16 |
| 576 | Not to testify falsely | Ex. 20:13 |
| 577 | Punish the false witnesses as they tried to punish the defendant | Deut. 19:19 |

LAWS OF INSURGENTS

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 578 | Act according to the ruling of the Sanhedrin | Deut. 17:11 |
| 579 | Not to deviate from the word of the Sanhedrin | Deut. 17:11 |
| 580 | Not to add to the Torah commandments or their oral explanations | Deut. 13:1 |
| 581 | Not to diminish from the Torah any commandments, in whole or in part | Deut. 13:1 |
| 582 | Not to curse your father and mother | Ex. 21:17 |
| 583 | Not to strike your father and mother | Ex. 21:15 |

LAWS OF INSURGENTS

| | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 584 | Respect your father or mother | Ex. 20:12 |
| 585 | Fear your father or mother | Lev. 19:3 |
| 586 | Not to be a rebellious son | Deut. 21:18 |

LAWS OF MOURNING

| | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 587 | Mourn for relatives | Lev. 10:19 |
| 588 | The High Priest must not defile himself for any relative | Lev. 21:11 |
| 589 | The High Priest must not enter under the same roof as a corpse | Lev. 21:11 |
| 590 | A Kohen must not defile himself for anyone except relatives | Lev. 21:1 |

LAWS OF KINGS AND THEIR WARS

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 591 | Appoint a king from Israel | Deut. 17:15 |
| 592 | Not to appoint a convert | Deut. 17:15 |
| 593 | The king must not have too many wives | Deut. 17:17 |

LAWS OF KINGS AND THEIR WARS

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 594 | The king must not have too many horses | Deut. 17:16 |
| 595 | The king must not have too much silver and gold | Deut. 17:17 |
| 596 | Destroy the seven Canaanite nations | Deut. 20:17 |
| 597 | Not to let any of them remain alive | Deut. 20:16 |
| 598 | Wipe out the descendants of Amalek | Deut. 25:19 |
| 599 | Remember what Amalek did to the Jewish people | Deut. 25:17 |
| 600 | Not to forget Amalek's atrocities and ambush on our journey from Egypt in the desert | Deut. 25:19 |
| 601 | Not to dwell permanently in Egypt | Deut. 17:16 |
| 602 | Offer peace terms to the inhabitants of a city while holding siege, and treat them according to the Torah if they accept the terms | Deut. 20:10 |
| 603 | Not to offer peace to Ammon and Moab while besieging them | Deut. 23:7 |
| 604 | Not to destroy fruit trees even during the siege | Deut. 20:19 |

LAWS OF KINGS AND THEIR WARS

| | | |
|-----|--|----------------|
| 605 | Prepare latrines outside the camps | Deut. 23:13 |
| 606 | Prepare a shovel for each soldier to dig with | Deut. 23:14 |
| 607 | Appoint a priest to speak with the soldiers during the war | Deut. 20:2 |
| 608 | He who has taken a wife, built a new home, or planted a vineyard is given a year to rejoice with his possessions | Deut. 24:5 |
| 609 | Not to demand from the above any involvement, communal or military | Deut. 24:5 |
| 610 | Not to panic and retreat during battle | Deut. 20:3 |
| 611 | Keep the laws of the captive woman | Deut. 21:11 |
| 612 | Not to sell her into slavery | Deut. 21:14 |
| 613 | Not to retain her for servitude after having relations with her | Deut. 21:14 |

Teshuva

Teshuva roughly translates to “return,” and is the act of seeking repentance for transgressions you’ve committed. Unlike some paths which faith and just asking G-d to forgive you is enough, in Judaism there’s roughly three agreed upon steps;

1. Ask for forgiveness from the person(s) you’ve transgressed upon and try to make things right with them. If they cannot forgive you after asking three times, you are absolved for your attempts.
2. Ask G-d for forgiveness.
3. Forgive yourself for your transgressions (this is seemingly the hardest).

While everyone will sin from time to time, this action is undertaken to help ethically better oneself and move away from repeating past indiscretions. In his work, “The gates of repentance,” Rabbi Yonah of Gerona states that a sinner repents in the following way;

1. regretting/acknowledging the sin;
2. forsaking the sin
3. worrying about the future consequences of the sin;
4. acting and speaking with humility;
5. acting in a way opposite to that of the sin (for example, for the sin of lying, one should speak the truth);
6. understanding the magnitude of the sin;
7. refraining from lesser sins for the purpose of safeguarding oneself against committing greater sins;
8. confessing the sin;
9. praying for atonement;
10. correcting the sin however possible (for example, if one stole an object, the stolen item must be returned; or, if one slanders another, the slanderer must ask the injured party for forgiveness);
11. pursuing works of chesed and truth;
12. remembering the sin for the rest of one's life;
13. refraining from committing the same sin if the opportunity presents itself again;
14. teaching others not to sin.

Though during the temple periods sacrifice/burnt offerings were given to Hashem to cleanse sins, this was not always necessary;

"Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, 'Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.'" (Hosea 14:2)

These words from Hosea replace temple sacrifice, with words (aka prayer) so long as those prayers are delivered honestly and with proper intention. We also find that performing acts of kindness and charity are acceptable to seek repentance;

“Doing charity and justice is more desirable to the Lord than sacrifice” (Proverbs 21:3)

There are many means to return, to become free of one’s sins and transgressions, in my opinion, so long as the individual genuinely feels and knows what they did was wrong, and tries to atone, wholeheartedly, they are clean. Time and time again you’ll find throughout the whole of Rabbinic literature whereas doing acts of charity, reading the Torah, performing acts of loving kindness are more cherished means to Hashem of attaining Teshuva. It is important to note that teshuva cannot occur if the individual continues committing the sin, and it is considered even more repentant if the sinner is confronted by the ability to commit the same sin, but refrains.

Halakha

Halakha is Jewish law, and each branch of Judaism interprets their own Halakha standards of practice, with even modern Rabbis holding different standards, beliefs, and practices within the same branch. The religious Jewish laws of halakha are derived from both the Torah and the oral Torah (called the Talmud). Halakha outlines not just the religious life of Jews, but also gives and outline of the day-to-day life of an observant Jew.

In our modern era, halakha is sometimes seen as less binding than that of the Torah, because it was written by Rabbinate and not divinely handed down. Jews of all stripes however, derive many of their practices, wearing kippah/yarmulke, beliefs, and dietary laws directly from halakhic law. It should also be noted that the halakha varies between the branches, as well as the ethnic groups of Jews; Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Sephardi Jews, Yemenite, Ethiopian and other Jewish communities. Though different in their laws, halakha and the Muslim Sharia law are both similar in what they'd attempted to do and their application.

Halakha is one of the biggest differences between the branches of Judaic thought today, with orthodox and ultra-orthodox taking halakha verbatim, conservative believing that it's up to each Rabbi's interpretation still, and Reform encouraging its study, but saying take from it what's spiritually meaningful and to interpret it for themselves. For example, in the torah it states in Exodus 23:19-19;

“The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of your God יהוה. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.”

Within the framework of halakha, it is traditionally taken to mean keep meat and dairy separate, but we do not hold onto this interpretation. How often have you heard of boiling meat in its mothers' milk? Show of hands...anyone? Also, a kid is a goat or sheep, not a cow, not fish, not chicken (have you ever had fish or chicken milk?) and so we did a bit of studying. Boiling the flesh of a young animal in milk was an ancient pagan practice, that is what this is warning against.

Just as it states in the Torah and halakha, we do not eat blood from animals, we do not eat pork, we do not eat shellfish and only eat fish with scales and fins. We only eat meat that is ethically sourced and from places where workers are treated fairly and there are no animal rights complaints. We interpret halakha under the lens of traditional Jewish thought in the modern era, and we follow as much as possible unless we feel it conflicts with the original Torah intentions of where it was taken from.

We don't believe we're of equal footing with the sages and rabbis from Judaism's past, however, what we are is logical, modern, reason driven Jews, and very much so into following the Torah as it is written. We interpret halakha under the lens of who and what we are and do not deviate from that. I do not need a rabbinic degree to know that a kid isn't a cow, a fish, or a chicken, nor to research that it was a common pagan practice.

Halakha is where we receive the 613 mitzvot taken from the Torah, where we receive dietary laws from the Torah, where we learn how to act and treat each other in various circumstances, from the Torah. Halakha is the general guide through which an individual lives a Jewish life, however it is not uncommon and in fact in the Talmud it is common to see arguments between sages. My wife and I debated and argued over halakhic interpretations, we debated for the sake of heaven;

***Which is an argument for the sake of Heaven? The argument between Hillel and Shammai.
Which is an argument not for the sake of Heaven? The argument of Korach and his company.***

Mishnah Avot 5:17

Through this we have a working Jewish life, whereas we grow consistently in our understanding through study and debate with one another, in torah, in oral torah, in practices, and in halakha.

Talmud

The Talmud is a collection of rabbinical teachings by the rabbinical sages, that outline the practices, beliefs, holidays, halakha and more, passed down from the traditions of the ancient Jews. Due to the direct reflection of the teachings found in Torah, the Talmud is referred to as the “Oral Torah,” as before it was written down, it was an oral tradition. There are two versions of the Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud, and the Jerusalem Talmud, each slightly different from one another. The Babylonian Talmud is considered more complete, having the opinions of more of the rabbinical sages than its Jerusalem counterpart.

The Talmud is a massive collection of debates for the sake of holiness, often with numerous rabbis trying to figure out how things should be done. It is the principal document outlining the halakha, Jewish religious law, Jewish theology, folklore, and much more. The Talmud is such an important work, that for centuries it has stood as the guide to the everyday life of rabbinic Jews around the world.

The Talmud is comprised of the Mishna and the Gemara and was compiled by thousands of rabbis before the common era, to around the fifth century CE. The rabbis who are mentioned in their debates in the Talmud are referred to as tannaim (Teachers/repeaters), while the rabbis who compiled and produced the two Talmud are referred to as amoraim (Speakers). Throughout the Talmud you’ll find sometimes metaphorical debates between makshan (questioner) and tartzan (answerer) to drive a particular point or lesson.

Oftentimes throughout the Talmud you’ll find responsa and commentaries, further elucidating upon the tractate you’re reading. These responsa often contain codices and further information, while the commentaries help the reader to better understand the meaning of the sometimes-cryptic tractates. There are dozens of methodologies to study the Talmud, from its earliest incarnation right up into the twentieth century.

Orthodox Jews believe that the Oral Torah was given to Moses of blessed memory at Sinai when he was given the Torah itself. Modern academic scholars generally agree that the events mentioned in the Talmud are more or less true and can be studied for historical analysis. Religious and academic scholars study the Talmud for different reasons, both finding tremendous value and insight in its contents.

Karaite Jews reject the oral Torah entirely, (yet borrow some elements from it from time to time), as they believe it is not divinely inspired as the Torah was. The Talmud however, is based on Torah and it’s teachings directly reflect the passages of the Torah in its debates.

Death and the world to come

One element I genuinely love about Judaism is that, if you ask ten rabbis “*What happens when we die,*” you’ll receive nine conflicting answers and a wholehearted response of, “*I don’t know, I’ve never been dead.*” What most Jews believe is that we don’t fully know what happens when we die, and so we should focus on what we do know and can do while we’re alive. Judaism isn’t a death cult, nor are Jews promised a reward or punishment upon death, depending on if they’d done good or bad deeds.

Jews don’t believe in a hell, and heaven is reserved for Hashem and his angels, so what we mortals are left with is Earth. So, I know what you’re thinking, “Something has to happen when we die, right?”

We’ll here’s the scoop, not every Jew holds the same beliefs, but a consensus is that for twelve months after we die, the spirit undergoes cleansing. During that time, the family of the deceased says the mourner’s Kaddish, an Aramaic prayer to help cleanse the spirit. The mourner’s Kaddish doesn’t mention the dead and is solely aimed at praising Hashem, to let G-d know that our opinion hasn’t changed.

Okay, it also helps the grieving individuals get back on track and gives them something to focus on and to help their loved one’s soul. The mourner’s Kaddish is;

אבל :יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא . קהל :אמן]

**בְּעֶלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְּרֻעֻתָּהּ וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתָּהּ בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ וּבְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶלְמָא וּבְזִמְנָא קָרִיב ,וְאָמְרוּ :
אָמֵן] קהל :אמן]**

קהל ואבל :יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלְמָא וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא

**אבל :יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְּקֻדְשָׁא .בְּרִיךְ הוּא . קהל :ברוך
הוא:]**

**לְעֵלְמָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא בעשי"ת :לְעֵלְמָא לְעֵלְמָא מְכַל וְשִׁירְתָּא תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא וְנַחֲמַתָּא דְּאִמְרִין בְּעֶלְמָא .וְאָמְרוּ :אָמֵן
[קהל :אמן]**

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל .וְאָמְרוּ :אָמֵן] קהל:אמן]

עושה שְׁלום בעשי"ת :הַשְּׁלום בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלום עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ :אָמֵן] קהל :אמן]

...and the English translation is;

Glorified and sanctified be God’s great name throughout the world

which He has created according to His will.

May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days,

and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon;

and say, Amen.

May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.

Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored,

adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He,

beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that

are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us

and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

He who creates peace in His celestial heights,

may He create peace for us and for all Israel;

and say, Amen.

The Mourner's Kaddish is said for eleven months in honor of the deceased, and while it's supposed to take twelve, the statement is that they were so good and loved in life, that it only takes eleven. What happens after that is anyone's guess... oh yeah, the Messianic age!

Some believe that Moshiah, the messiah is going to come and usher in an age of peace and unity amongst all people and those who died and were good people, will return to life good as new to enjoy it. You'll notice one thing though, death in Judaism focuses more on the living, on the grieving process, and more on returning to life, than it does on the dead. Sure, we honor the dead... but there's a lot more involving life, **while** still honoring the dead in Judaism.

When someone dies, they are buried within 24 hours, covered in a white sheet (with their tallit), in a simple pinewood box. There is no viewing of the body, nor is the body disturbed by preservative measures, or makeup applied. We'd rather remember the person alive and as they were, then dead and dressed up as they were not!

Once a person passes, it is customary for friends and other family to sit shiva for seven days for the immediate family, that is to care for the grieving, such as; doing laundry, cleaning, cooking food, and more. On the first evening a seven-day shiva candle is lit to honor the deceased, mirrors are covered (to remind us that it's about the deceased not us) and people sit on low chairs, boxes, or cushions on the floor.

When everyone returns to the house from the cemetery, it's customary for non-immediate family to prepare Seudat Havra'ah, or more commonly, the meal of condolence. Friends of the deceased and non-immediate family will stay with the mourners during shiva (or return daily), taking care of needs such as laundry, cleaning, cooking, etc... to unburden them with these things, so they can mourn.

It's considered a mitzvah to call and offer condolences after the deceased is buried (not before) during the week of shiva. The mourner's do not leave their house during this period, those sitting shiva take care of anything to afford the week to grieve and work through things. It's forbidden for mourners to do several things during shiva;

Leaving the house, except to go to synagogue on Shabbat, or even during the week if there is no minyan at the shiva house

1. Leaving the house, except to go to synagogue on Shabbat, or even during the week if there is no minyan at the shiva house
2. Work or any business pursuits
3. Shaving or haircuts
4. Bathing, other than for basic hygiene
5. The use of cosmetics
6. Wearing leather shoes
7. Festivities of any kind
8. Wearing new clothing
9. Engaging in sexual relations
10. Study which gives pleasure, including reading the Bible aside from Job, Lamentations and some sections of Jeremiah

We abstain from cosmetics, shaving, haircuts, etc... for the same reasons we cover mirrors, it isn't about us, it's about the deceased. Leather shoes (unless on shabbat) are a luxury which show that we are content. We also abstain from all pleasurable activities during shiva, sex, reading books which bring pleasure, watching television and the like, though we are free to read Tanakh passages pertaining to grief. Morning and night ceremonies are performed, giving the grieving a chance to speak the mourner's kaddish without leaving home.

After the seven days of shiva, everyone takes a walk around the block symbolizing a return to life, but it doesn't end there. Sheloshim is the thirty days of mourning, in which the synagogue will mention the deceased's name, but the twenty-three days after shiva aren't as restrictive. During sheloshim the mourners don't just hop back into life, they ease into it, and they do not attend parties of any kind, go to the movies, attend concerts or purely social gatherings.

Sheloshim is still a mourning period and should be treated as such!

Upon the conclusion of sheloshim, the mourners still recite the mourner's kaddish three times a day, and after a year, a headstone is put on the deceased one's grave. Synagogues often announce the yearly anniversary (yahrzeit) of the death of loved ones, to keep them in our memories.

Questions

One thing I absolutely love about Judaism, is that questions and questioning are not just okay, they are expected and required. While many religions feel that if a person questions too much, or questions some aspect of their religion too much, it's a lack of faith, Judaism believes questions bring knowledge and strengthen Emuna/faith. Throughout the entirety of the conversion process, our rabbi would teach and tell us things, and always asked us if we had any questions, then answered the questions repeatedly.

What initially led me away from religion as a child, was that I had dozens of questions and after asking our priest several of them, I was simply told I lack faith and needed to pray. Blind faith is not something that breeds understanding, a genuine connection to G-d or anything other than zealotry and ignorance, and in fact, it pushed me away from the church. Imagine taking a math class and you don't understand a process to find a solution, so the teacher tells you, "Just believe it works."

The truth is, that if I have any questions whatsoever, I know that my Rabbi will be there and can answer them or help me to find the answer. In fact, the more questions a person has, shows that they have been studying and that they genuinely want to understand things better. You will not get told you lack faith, you will not get told to just go pray, you will get answers and even at times (as what happened several times with my Rabbi) bring a smile to their face, as your questions impress them.

If you have questions, if you're unsure about something, ask a rabbi, don't be shy, because it only serves to help you in your journey. No one has all the answers, ever, because no one is perfect, but that's why rabbis (meaning teachers) are there. The whole truth is that it's the "why's," and "How come's," that lead a person to understand just about anything in life, and Judaism is no different.

Who is a Jew?

This question comes up a lot in the Jewish world, because you can be an ethnic Jew and still not be Jewish, you can practice a religion other than Judaism and still be Jewish. It's a complicated question and one that is hotly debated, but for me, the debate is settled... If you're ethnically Jewish, or are a part of any branch of Judaism, you're Jewish, mazel tov!

I do often add this caveat however, if you're ethnically Jewish, you should learn about your people; the culture, the history, the food, the peoplehood which makes Jewish life, Jewish life. Enriching your understanding of all those aspects of being a Jew, will enrich your life as a whole and bring you closer in spirit with Jews of the past and present.

Some Jewish individuals are much more selective over who they consider a Jew, which becomes problematic at times. Some branches don't recognize other branches conversions, some go as far as to claim you're only a Jew if you practice Judaism, but many more are at least receptive to the way I see Jews. The question, "Who is a Jew," is rather rude honestly, knowing that Jews are historically the most persecuted people, and seeing how Nazi's and antisemites do not care how much Jewishness you have or what branch of Judaism you belong to.

"Who is a Jew," is a question which stares in the face of events such as the holocaust and asks its victims what branch they practice, how much and from which side father or mother are they Jewish. It is thoroughly distasteful and, in all honesty, is something that would cause me to not want to speak to that person. However (and sadly), it is a question that comes up all too frequently, within the Jewish community, whereas some will only accept you as a Jew if you meet their exacting specifications of one.

If someone is genuine, has converted, or has either parent is Jewish, has a connection to the people, to Israel, and knows about the Jewish people, their Jewishness shouldn't be in question. Jews come in all shapes, sizes, colors, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, cultures, etc... it is very encompassing. When antisemitism is on a constant uptick, the last thing we should be focusing on is gatekeeping who is and isn't a Jew!

There are dozens of stories of people who took years and converted, only to have some ignorant gatekeepers tell them they aren't really a Jew, which is against Torah/Talmud to do. The Jewish people being divided is the exact reason why both temples were destroyed... perhaps they need to read and study more?

If you are a Jew of any branch, no matter your race or superficial nonsense people use to divide each other, you are a part of the tribe and my relative by association.

How to convert to Judaism

So, I've mentioned conversion a lot in this book, probably because I'm ethnically Jewish, but also a convert because I wasn't raised Jewish. I had to go through the process of conversion step by step and inch by inch for over a year and a half (with my wife and 4 kids). I moved quickly (it normally takes a bit longer) because I was obsessive spending every dollar I could on books and things to enhance my family's Jewish life. I studied and still study for hours a day and jumped into Judaism and our Synagogue/Community headfirst and without reservation.

If you've thought about converting, my first step would be to find the differences between the branches of Judaism, find where you fit in, then find a synagogue of your chosen branch. Once you find a synagogue nearby, contact them, attend a few shabbat services (trust me, synagogues are welcoming places). When you find the right fit, ask the rabbi when their intro to Judaism or taste of Judaism classes are and go through them. The next step is to ask the rabbi if you could begin the conversion process, which entails meeting the rabbi regularly and talking to them about all things Judaism.

[Conversion note; Some rabbis practice rejecting the individual three times who asks to convert. This is to gauge the individual's nature and see if they are genuine.]

A big part of the conversion process is on you, in that it's up to you to read books on the history, the culture, Hebrew (though synagogues have classes), and peoplehood. The rabbi is there to answer questions and steer you in the right direction, make sure you are studying every night, attending shabbat services weekly, learning the rituals, studying the mitzvot and living a Jewish life as much as possible. Honor Shabbat, celebrate holidays and life cycle events, study the weekly Torah and Talmud portions, you must adopt a wholly Jewish life!

Your rabbi can set things into motion, answer questions, tell you what to read and help set you up studying various things, but it's up to you to genuinely put forth the effort to study. **NO ONE** can make you a Jew, you have to do that yourself but putting forth your best effort to learn and apply, to live as a Jew, and to become a part of the community.

Remember, you are not converting to a religion, you are converting to Judaism, to living and being a Jew; you are becoming a part of an ethnic group, a nearly 4,000-year-old culture. That is a highly important distinction made clear when the first convert, Ruth, the Moabite woman converted;

“wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God shall be my God.” (Ruth 1:16)

Once you undergo conversion, you are forever a Jew, there's no “backsies,” allowed, and even if you later decided to convert to another religion, you'll be a [insert other religion] Jew. This is not something anyone should enter lightly or without forethought, this is a life altering decision, so before jumping the gun, know that this is what you genuinely want in your heart of hearts.

“Feeling” Jewish

Okay, caveat time here; there is no timeframe for when one genuinely feels Jewish, nor is the experience the same for everyone. Until that time, many feel like they’re “trying,” to be Jewish, or just plain old “acting,” Jewish, some feel flat out like they aren’t “really,” Jewish, I have heard a lot of different things, from a lot of converts I know. Remember, conversion and one’s own Jewish life, is just that, your own and no one will share the exact same experience in the process.

Let me also start this off by saying that a convert is no more or less than a born Jewish person, a Jew is a Jew is a Jew. It’s a mitzvah to treat the convert as no different a Jew, than oneself or a born Jew, so relax and don’t schvitz about it. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen born Jews in an intro to Judaism class because after their Bar/Bat Mitzvah they just stopped learning, so if you’re converting and learning and don’t plan on stopping, you’re ahead of the curve!

Now, onto the good stuff...

I found out that I’m ethnically Jewish, both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi on my mother’s side, but I wasn’t raised in a Jewish household. When I learned about Judaism and decided to convert, so many told me there’s no need because of my matrilineal line, but I knew nothing about being a Jew. Once I studied obsessively and was about midway through the conversion process, it became more of a confirmation that conversion to me.

I knew all the prayers and songs in Hebrew, I obsessively studied Torah, Jewish history and culture and made tons of Jewish friends, but I honestly didn’t feel Jewish. I immersed in Jewish music, books, and media, studied the entire history of Israel, was living the life cycles and holidays and never missing a Shabbat, but didn’t feel like I was really a Jewish person yet. I was living as a part of the Jewish community in Philadelphia, I had a library of Jewish wisdom and was laser focused on performing the Mitzvot, and yet I didn’t feel Jewish.

It bothered me a bit at first, but then I realized that it would come, I would feel it the longer I was practicing and studying, in my own time. I was convinced that when I realized I felt truly Jewish, I would single-handedly dance the hora through our house while blasting the music from Fiddler on the roof or some cliché. The truth is, it was the opposite of a joyous experience when I realized it...

Most of my family were elated when I found Hashem and left the occult behind me, all but one person, who felt it his job to make me believe in Jesus. I kept trying to change the subject, repeatedly until I finally told him why Jews do not believe Jesus is the Messiah and based it solely from Torah. When he ran out of excuses he resorted to several antisemitic comments, and I abruptly ended our conversation there. I realized that I was fine debating him, though I’d really rather say, “you do you, I’ll do me,” and leave it at that, but his antisemitism struck me as a personal and racist attack.

That moment showed me that I wholly identified as and felt Jewish, and I took direct offense to his antisemitism. I realized that I wasn't just offended for others of the tribe, I was myself offended and that is when I truly felt my Jewish soul for the first time. I don't really have contact with that family member today, when they apologize, I'll forgive them, but until then no way, and it's been about a year now.

Now, not everyone will have that experience which gives them the "feeling," of being Jewish for the first time, sometimes, they are quite positive. I've had people tell me the first time they felt Jewish was up on the Bimah, holding a Torah scroll, and even one person who was told what a nice Jewish boy he was by someone's bubbe. It's unique for everybody, but I will say this, being a part of a community, doing things with the community, helps greatly.

Chosen people

You may have heard people and even the Torah saying that the Jews are Hashem's Chosen people and there's a good chance you are confused on what that means.

Exodus 19:5-5:

“Now then, if you will indeed accept My command, and keep My covenant which I made with the Patriarchs, then you shall be My chosen treasure from among all the nations: for all the earth is Mine, but you alone have I chosen to be a light to the nations.”

Several times throughout the Torah, Hashem calls the Jewish people his treasured people, and the children of the eternal covenant. So, what does all this mean, do Jews believe themselves somehow superior to others? Also, chosen for what?

The covenant between Hashem and the Jews is an eternal bond to uphold its Mitzvot, to be a light to the nations of the world and to be a shining example. This connects Hashem in a bond like marriage, with the Jewish people, whereas we are commanded to do Mitzvot, while others are not. This does not mean that Jews are better than anyone, nor do they think such, instead they view it as a job they must complete.

Think of a construction site, the foreman gives out jobs to everyone, but to one group they give out some seriously difficult jobs and the workers are paid accordingly... replace foreman with Hashem and you get the drift. The Jews are Hashem's chosen people to live by the mitzvot and his teachings, to bring light, kindness, and wisdom into the world. We are chosen because we are given a direct covenant with Hashem to live by his commandments/mitzvot and to be kind and do good works.

I often hear people with no knowledge of what it means to be Hashem's chosen people, say, “We're all chosen people now.” Okay, then we're all PhDs in podiatry now too, do you see how silly that sounds, or do you have a foot problem you'd let a random stranger take care of? The truth is that they honestly envy something that they don't understand (Highly irrational) and to feel better about themselves, they must believe an utter absurdity.

“Hashem's chosen people” does not mean they are special per se, just that they are in a covenant and must live by the Mitzvot given at Sinai and in doing so, are blessed. That's it, in a nutshell, it doesn't mean because they are Jewish, they are given the world, while everyone else gets their table scraps. Those who would think that have an inferiority complex, and thus overcompensate by claiming, we're all Hashem's chosen people.

Musar and Kabbalah

Two facets of Judaic wisdom which aren't required but assist in drawing the individual deeper into Judaism are Musar and Kabbalah. Musar develops the individual's character, and the kabbalah develops a deeper mystical aspect of Judaic thought and Hashem's world. The two can help one to grow closer to hashem and to gain a new outlook on Torah in the process, but not every Jew studies these aspects.

Developing a good moral character is pivotal in Judaism, and Musar is there to ensure that the Jewish lens is adamantly pointed to do just that. Some scholars have said without a good moral character the individual could not come to understand torah or hashem, and so through Musar, one develops good character and gets rid of character faults. Through Musar we learn how to ethically conduct ourselves through a Jewish moral scope, in accordance with Jewish law and Torah.

Musar teaches contemplation and numerous age-old techniques, passed down for nearly a thousand years, brought together in the 19th century, almost lost during the holocaust, and revived in the 21st century. These Musar techniques include; Chanting, meditation, contemplation, visualization, sitting in silence, writing in a diary, and tzedakah.

Kabbalah on the other hand, attempts to understand the interconnection between Hashem, Ein Soph (the infinite), and G-d's creations (Earth and humanity). Kabbalah is the foundation of all mystical beliefs and practices found within Judaism to better understand the hidden nature of the Torah, observances, and our relationships within a Jewish/spiritual context. Though many teachings of Kabbalah are much older, it began to be codified in the 12th-13th centuries in Spain and Southern France, and fully imagined in 16th-century Ottoman Palestine.

The most principal text of Kabbalah "Zohar," was written in the late 13th century by an unknown author, however it was widely popularized by Isaac Luria in the 16th century and later more so in Hasidic Judaism in the 18th century. As explained in the Zohar, Kabbalists study the Torah in four ways;

- Peshat (Hebrew: פשט lit. "simple"): the direct interpretations of meaning.
- Remez (Hebrew: רמז lit. "hint[s]"): the allegoric meanings (through allusion).
- Derash (Hebrew: דרש from the Hebrew darash: "inquire" or "seek"): Midrashic meanings, often with imaginative comparisons with similar words or verses.
- Sod (Hebrew: סוד lit. "secret" or "mystery"): the inner, esoteric (metaphysical) meanings, expressed in kabbalah.

Though older mystical traditions existed in Judaism, such as the Merkabah mystical concepts of 100 BCE, Kabbalah is the only form widely practiced by Jews throughout the world. Today, many individuals who aren't Jewish claim to practice Kabbalism (I'm looking at you Madonna), however, to fully understand Kabbalah, one would need to be a Jew, with full knowledge of the culture, traditions, history, holidays, language, religion, practices, laws,

etcetera to genuinely understand it. That was understood by the Christians and Hermetics's of the middle-ages, who in turn created their own forms of the Kabbalah, which deviate wildly from its original Judaic form.

Suggested reading

I am putting a suggested reading list here, for individuals who are interested in going into more depth with their studies in Judaism. I have personally read all of these books and consider them to be some of the best works in my personal library.

Tanakh: the holy scriptures by the Jewish publication society

On Judaism by Martin Buber

Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur

Choosing a Jewish life by Anita Diamant

Living Judaism by Rabbi Wayne Dosick

American Judaism by Glazer

Liberal Judaism at home by Morrison David Bial

A life of meaning; Embracing Reform Judaism's sacred path edited by Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan PhD.

Reform Judaism: A Jewish way of life by Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff

Night by Elie Wiesel

An Illustrated History of the Jewish People: The epic 4,000-year story of the Jews, from the ancient patriarchs and kings through centuries-long persecution to the growth of a worldwide culture by Lawrence Joffe

People love dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present by Dara Horn

Metsudah Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 2 vol. set by Avraham Davis

The Zohar in English by Tzvee Zahavy

Afterword

I have a more of my writings on my website <http://sonofsinai.com> where you'll find a plethora of content to read through, download, and watch. Yes, a shameless plug for my website, what about it, this is a free eBook after all, so enjoy the freeness and check out my website. Anyway, I hope you've enjoyed this brief romp through my Jewish life and world, and remember, this isn't some textbook on Judaism, it's how me and my family "do," Jewish life.

I'm sure there's going to be someone kvetching about how this is schmutz and I'm meshuggenah, but a lot of Judaism is about a personal relationship with Hashem, and this is how we have and understand that relationship. While we are liberal Reform Jews, which grants spiritual autonomy, we take a lot from the whole of Judaic practices and beliefs, not just what we're told on Shabbat. Reform, Orthodox, Hasidic, Karaite, we love it all and have adopted a bit from each of those branches of the Jewish tree.

No matter the reason you've sat here and read this book, I'd like to thank you, even if you just read it to complain, it served you some purpose. Also, if you didn't like what you've read here, I'll give you a 100% money back guarantee on every dime you've spent on it, no questions asked... how much is 100% of \$0.00?

So, listen to your Bubbe, and drop me a message on the contact form of my website listed above to let me know what you think of this work, to ask questions, or just to say shalom!

Shalom Aleichem,

Fred (Son of Sinai) Cook