

Islam

adhan

The call to prayer performed by the muezzin before each of the five daily times of prayer ([salat](#)). See [Practices: Salat](#).

A.H.

(anno hegirae, "After Hijira"). Islamic dating of years, beginning with Muhammad's flight to Medina in 622 AD.

Allah

("God"). The one true God. See [Beliefs: God](#).

basmla

The Bismi'llah saying, "in the Name of Allah," that invokes a blessing upon an action or undertaking of a Muslim. The full form is bismillahi (ar-)rahmani (ar-)rahim, "in the Name of Allah the merciful the compassionate."

caliph

See [khalif](#), below.

Five Pillars

(Arabic Arkan al-Islam, "pillars of Islam" or Arkan ud-Din, "pillars of the faith"). The five primary duties of every Muslim: profession of faith ([shahada](#)), ritual prayer ([salat](#)), fasting during Ramadan ([sawm](#)), pilgrimage to Mecca ([hajj](#)) and charity ([zakat](#)). Fulfillment of these duties brings rewards on earth and in the afterlife. See [Practices: Five Pillars](#).

hajj

("pilgrimage"). Pilgrimage to Mecca required of every able Muslim at least once during his or her life. One of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Hijira

The Prophet's flight to Medina in 622 AD, marking the beginning of the Muslim calendar. See [A.H.](#)

'id(from Aramaic/Syriac, "festival"). [Holiday](#) or festival, of which there are two major ones: 'Id al-Adha and 'Id al-Fitr.

'Id al-Adha

("Feast of the Sacrifice"). [Holiday](#) marking the end of the [hajj](#).

'Id al-Fitr

("Feast of the Breaking of the Fast"). [Holiday](#) celebrated at the end of the month of Ramadan.

ihram

White cloth wound around the body during the [hajj](#).

Ishmael

Son of Jewish patriarch Abraham and the maidservant Hagar (Genesis 16). According to both Jewish and Islamic tradition, he is the ancestor of the Arabs.

islam

("to surrender"). To surrender to the will of God; the name of the religion founded by Muhammad.

jihad

("striving"). Holy war; the defense of Islam against its enemies. Sufism focuses on the "greater" **jihad** against sin in oneself.

jinn

(from *junna*, "to be mad, furious, possessed"; singular *jinni* or *genie*). Shape-shifting fiery spirits, especially associated with the desert. Belief in **jinn** predates Islam, where they were widely believed to be the inspiration of poets and seers. In Islam, they are spiritual beings inferior to angels and devils who will face salvation or damnation along with humans.

jizya

Tax imposed on "[People of the Book](#)" living under Muslim rule.

Ka'ba

Cube-shaped monument in Mecca containing a sacred black stone. All Muslim prayer faces the direction (*qibla*) of the Ka'ba.

kafir

(*kafara*, "conceal; be ungrateful") One who does not believe in Allah, or in the content of the Qur'an, or in the prophetic status of Muhammad. Unbelief (**kufir**) is fundamental opposition to God and Islam, and is punished eternally in hell.

khalif

("deputy, successor"). A political leader of the Muslim community. The most important of these were the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs who ruled after the death of Muhammad. See [History: The Rightly-Guided Caliphs](#).

khatib

One who gives the **khutbah**. The position is appointed by the government in most countries.

khutbah

Sermon delivered on Fridays and special occasions.

kiswa

Cloth that covers the Ka'ba shrine in Mecca.

Muharram

First month in the [Islamic calendar](#). Also the name for al-Hijra, the [Islamic New Year](#).

People of the Book

Muhammad's designation for Jews and Christians, and sometimes Zoroastrians and Hindus. Because their religions featured scriptures and some aspect of divine revelation, they were not required to convert. However, they were required to pay a special tax (the [jizya](#)) for the privilege.

qibla

("direction"). Direction of the Ka'ba in Mecca, towards which all prayer must face.

Qur'an

("recitation"). The sacred text of Islam, revealed to Muhammad over a 20-year period by the Angel Gabriel. See [Texts: Qur'an](#).

qurra'

("reciters"). Professional reciters of the Qur'an, who usually have memorized the text. In early Islamic history, qurra' were called upon to elucidate unclear passages in the written text, often resulting in various schools of interpretation among qurra'.

Ramadan

The ninth month in the Islamic calendar, for the duration of which Muslims fast during the daylight hours to commemorate the giving of the Qur'an. See [Holidays: Ramadan](#) and [Practices: Sawm](#).

salat

("prayer") Ritual prayer performed five times per day facing the direction ([qibla](#)) of Mecca. One of the [Five Pillars of Islam](#).

sawm

("fasting," also spelled siyam). Religious fasting, especially during the month of Ramadan, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

sa'y

Ritual of running seven times between two low hills in [Mecca](#) during the [hajj](#), representing Hagar's search for water.

shahada

("testimony" or "witness"). The profession of faith that "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the prophet of God," which is the only requirement for joining the Muslim community. As one of the [Five Pillars of Islam](#), it must be spoken aloud with full understanding and faith at least once in one's lifetime. It is also included in the call to prayer, most ritual prayers, and is recited at death. See [Practices: Shahada](#).

Shari'a

Islamic law, both political and religious.

Sunnah

("Tradition"). Record of the words and deeds of the Prophet. While not the Word of God on a level with the Qur'an, the Sunnah is regarded as inspired and authoritative. See [Texts: Hadith](#).

Sunnis

("Traditionalists")

surah

A chapter of the Qur'an.

tafsir

Branch of Islamic learning devoted to Qur'anic exegesis (interpretation).

talbiya

Ritual formula recited repeatedly during the Hajj. They are the words attributed to Ibrahim (Abraham) when he summoned all people to the pilgrimage to Mecca.

zakat

Almsgiving (one of the Five Pillars of Islam).

Buddhism

Amida

(Japanese; Sanskrit *Amitabha*; "infinite light"). Celestial buddha who, while a bodhisattva, vowed to lead all beings to the Pure Land. Amida is the focus of devotion in [Pure Land Buddhism](#) and one of several revered [buddhas](#) of the [Mahayana](#) tradition.

Ananda

The Buddha's cousin and one of his primary disciples. He memorized and recited the Buddha's teachings, and so was known as the *Dhammabhandagarika*, "treasurer of the teachings."

anicca

Impermanence.

arhat

(Sanskrit, "foe-destroyer"). One who has attained nirvana; the goal of [Theravada Buddhism](#).

asuras

In Mahayana Buddhism, anti-gods or demi-gods, who populate the lower heavens, the second highest realm of existence. They enjoy a similar existence to the gods of the highest realm, but are plagued by jealousy of the latter and wage fruitless wars against them.

avidya

(Sanskrit, "ignorance"). Ignorance, which is the root of all suffering.

Avalokiteshvara

Compassionate [bodhisattva](#) who is described in the *Land of Bliss* sutras as standing by the side of Amida to welcome the deceased to the afterlife. In China, Avalokiteshvara became a feminine deity, [Kuan-yin](#).

Blue Cliff Records

A collection of 100 koans first collected by Hsueh-tou Ch'ung-hsien (980-1052) from previous Ch'an records.

bodhi

Wisdom or enlightenment.

Bodhi

(Sanskrit, Pali, "awakened"). Buddhahood; state of full enlightenment, in which things are seen as they really are.

bodhicitta

(Sanskrit, "thought of enlightenment"). An important concept in [Mahayana Buddhism](#). In a personal sense, it signifies the spontaneous resolve to strive for enlightenment. In a cosmic sense, it is reality itself, which makes enlightenment possible. In Tantric Buddhism, it is the fusion of wisdom with compassion in the bliss of perfect enlightenment.

bodhisattva

(Sanskrit, "one whose essence is wisdom"). In Mahayana Buddhism, future buddhas who postpone nirvana in order to help free others from suffering. The goal of Mahayana Buddhism is to become a bodhisattva. See [Bodhisattvas](#).

bonpu

(Japanese, "ordinary man"). In Zen, an expression used for the ordinary person as opposed to one who is enlightened or on the religious path.

buddha

(Sanskrit, Pali, "Awakened One") A fully enlightened being.

buddha-dharma

Teaching of the Buddha; another name for Buddhism.

buddha-nature

(Sanskrit **buddhata**; Japanese **busho**). In Mahayana Buddhism, the true nature of all appearances and all beings. To truly realize one's participation in the buddha-nature is to attain enlightenment.

buddha-sasana

Buddha-discipline; another name for Buddhism.

Buddhas of the three times

The **buddhas** of the past (whose numbers are incalculable, but the best-known is Dipamkara), present (Gautama), and future (Maitreya).

buddhata

(Sanskrit) See **buddha-nature**.

chado

(Japanese, "tea-way"). Tea ceremony in [Zen Buddhism](#), intended to overcome ordinary consciousness and subject-object distinctions.

Denne

In Zen Buddhism, the handing on of the robe as a symbol of the transmission of buddha-dharma in the lineage of patriarchs to a successor.

dependent arising

Also "dependent origination," "conditioned genesis," etc. Key Buddhist doctrine that all appearances are interdependent and cause one another.

dharma

(Sanskrit; Pali **dhamma**). Truth, teaching, or religion.

dhyana

(Sanskrit; Pali **jhana**, Chinese **ch'an**, Japanese **zen**). Meditative concentration. See [Meditation](#).

Dipamkara

First and most popular of the many Buddhas who preceded Gautama. See **Buddhas of the three times**.

duhkha

(Sanskrit; Pali **dukkha**). Suffering - the first of the Four Noble Truths.

Five aggregates

(Sanskrit **skandha**; Pali **khandha**, "group"). The five aspects that make up human appearance: material composition; sensations; perceptions; mental formations; and consciousness. These are impermanent, constantly changing, and do not constitute a "self." See [Buddhist Doctrine of Human Nature](#).

Five deadly sins

Five offenses that cause rebirth in hell (**naraka**): patricide, matricide, killing an arhat, injuring a buddha, and creating schism in the sangha.

Five Dhyani Buddhas

(Meditation Buddhas or Buddhas of Wisdom). Term coined by B.H. Hodgson in the 19th century to describe the figures who appear in the Mandala of the Five Jinas ("eminent ones"). It is not a term used in any Buddhist literature, but has become a common term in the West. See chart: [Five Dhyani Buddhas](#).

Five hindrances (nivaranas)

Mental and emotional obstacles that must be removed in order to attain knowledge and enlightenment: desire; anger; sloth; worry; and doubt.

Five Periods and Eight Schools

[Tendai](#) classification of the Buddha's teaching to explain the divergent systems that had developed since his death.

Five Precepts (sila)

Obligations that both monks and laypersons undertake. They are to abstain from: harming any living being; taking anything not given; sensual misconduct; false speech; and losing control through intoxication.

Gautama

The given name of the historical Buddha.

guru

(Sanskrit) Spiritual teacher.

hell-beings

Beings in the lowest of the six realms of existence, who have accumulated massive amounts of bad karma due to extremely harmful actions such as murder. Hell-beings experience the most suffering of any of the realms.

hungry ghosts

See **pretas**.

karma

(Sanskrit, "action"). Moral law of cause and effect in which good actions have good effects and bad actions have bad effects. A Hindu concept that was absorbed, largely unchanged, into Buddhism.

karuna

(Sanskrit, Pali, "compassion"). An important virtue in all Buddhism, but especially emphasized in Mahayana.

khanda

Component or aggregate. The Buddha taught that a human person is not an eternal soul or self, but the composite of five **khandas**.

Kuan Yin

(Chinese; Japanese **Kwannon**). Female bodhisattva of mercy and compassion who is called upon to assist her devotees in times of trouble. She is a popular object of devotion who plays a role similar to that of the Virgin Mary in Catholic Christianity.

lama

Tibetan spiritual leader.

lo-han

Chinese term for arhat.

lotus

Central symbol in Buddhism. Because the lotus grows in the mud but blooms untainted above the surface, it symbolizes those who overcome ignorance and attain enlightenment.

Lotus Sutra

Shortened title for "The Sutra on the True Dharma [which resembles a] White Lotus." An early and important Mahayana Sutra. Composed between the 1st century BCE and 2nd century CE, it presents itself as teachings of the historical Buddha but provides new interpretations of traditional beliefs. For instance, the Buddha is represented not as a mere mortal but a celestial being who teaches myriads of followers in a mythological paradise.

magga

Fourth of the Four Noble Truths: The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to end suffering.

Mahinda Festival

Sri Lankan Buddhist festival, also known as Poson, celebrating the monk Mahinda who brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

Mahayana

(Sanskrit, "greater vehicle"). School of Buddhism emphasizing a path to enlightenment that does not require monasticism and so is open to all. The Mahayana ideal is the bodhisattva, who helps others out of compassion, instead of the arhat of Theravada Buddhism. The Mahayana school incorporates a variety of traditions, lifestyles, and rituals, including the meditation-focused Zen and the devotional Pure Land Buddhism.

mandala

In Tibetan Buddhism, a symbolic and sacred representation of the universe. It most commonly features the five jinas or Dhyani Buddhas.

mantra

(Sanskrit, "mind protection"). Syllables recited during meditation.

metta

(Pali) Buddhist virtue of kindness and goodwill.

Middle Way

Monastic lifestyle advocated by the Buddha, which is midway between asceticism and the pursuit of pleasure.

nembutsu

(Japanese; Chinese *nien-fo*; "mindfulness of the Buddha"). Central practice of Pure Land Buddhism. It originally consisted of contemplation on the merits of the Buddha, but in China and Japan it was modified to simple chanting of the name of the Amida Buddha in the form *Namu Amida Butsu*, "I take refuge in the Buddha Amida." This practice is believed to grant entry into the Pure Land after death.

nirodha

Cessation of suffering upon attainment of nirvana (third of Four Noble Truths).

nirvana

(Sanskrit, "to snuff out "). Liberation from suffering and samsara, in which all desire is extinguished.

pansil

Abbreviation of *panca-sila*, the five precepts of Buddhism.

paritta

Buddhist healing and blessing rite.

paticca-samuppada

See dependent arising.

Poson

Sri Lankan Buddhist festival, also known as the Mahinda Festival, celebrating the monk Mahinda who brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

pretas

Hungry ghosts, who populate the second to the lowest of the six realms of existence in Mahayana Buddhism. Usually depicted as having small mouths or necks and giant stomachs, hungry ghosts experience continual frustration and unsatisfied craving.

Pure Land Buddhism

Devotional form of Mahayana Buddhism holding that by faith in the grace of Amida, one will be reborn in the Pure Land realm. The Pure Land is a paradise that is so conducive to enlightenment that one can easily gain nirvana from there. Practice centers on devotion to Amida Buddha and the chanting of his name (*nembutsu*). The movement began in India, then spread to China and Japan. It is now the most popular form of Buddhism in Japan.

rainbow body

The penultimate transitional state of meditation in which matter begins to be transformed into pure light. It is said to be the highest state attainable in the realm of samsara before the "clear light" of Nirvana. See [Buddhist Color Symbolism](#).

rakan

Japanese word for arhat.

ranto

(Japanese, "egg-shaped tower"). Tower on the tomb of a Zen monk.

Ratnakuta

(Sanskrit, "jewel" + "mountain"). Collection of Mahayana scriptures. Only four works survive in the original Sanskrit, but there were probably once 49 short sections.

Ratnasambhava

(Sanskrit, "jewel-born one"). One of the five Dhyani Buddhas.

roshi

(Japanese). Zen spiritual teacher.

Sakyamuni

"Sage of the Sakya tribe." Another name for the [historical Buddha](#).

samadhi

(Sanskrit) State of deep [meditation](#).

samsara

(Sanskrit, Pali "wandering"). The cycle of death and rebirth.

samu

(Japanese, "work service"). Physical work performed at set times in [Zen](#) monasteries.

samudaya

Second of Four Noble Truths: Suffering is caused by desire.

skandha

(Sanskrit; Pali, *khandha*, "group"). The five aggregates that make up human appearance: material composition; sensations; perceptions; mental formations; and consciousness. These are impermanent, constantly changing, and do not constitute a "self." See [Buddhist Beliefs About Human Nature](#).

sila

(Sanskrit, Pali, "precepts"). Basic obligations that Buddhists undertake. Monks and nuns adhere to all ten; laypersons to the first five sila. The ten precepts are to abstain from: harming a living being; taking anything not given; sensual misconduct; false speech; intoxication; solid food after midday; frivolous entertainments; perfumes and jewelry; raised beds; and involvement with money.

stupa

(Sanskrit) Monument containing relics, usually of the Buddha.

sutra

(Sanskrit) Discourse or section of teachings

Tantric Buddhism

In Indian thought, Tantrism is generally characterized by an emphasis on male-female polarity. Vajrayana is the Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism.

tea ceremony

(Japanese *chado*). Zen ritual to overcome ordinary consciousness.

Theravada

(S "tradition of the elders") Southern or Lesser Vehicle Buddhism

Tripitaka

(Sanskrit; Pali *Tipitaka*, "three baskets"). The collection of Buddha's teachings, in three sections: sutra, vinaya, and Abhidharma.

vajra

(Sanskrit; Tibetan *rdo-rje*, "diamond" or "thunderbolt"). Double-headed ritual instrument in Tibetan Buddhism used along with a ritual bell. The vajra is held in the right hand and represents skillful means, compassion, samsara, and the masculine principle.

Vajrayana

(Sanskrit "diamond vehicle"). Esoteric form of Buddhism focused on attaining enlightenment more quickly (in one lifetime). Also known as Tantric Buddhism. Closely related to, but not synonymous with, Tibetan Buddhism.

vinaya

(Sanskrit, Pali) The Buddha's teachings about monastic rules, ethics and karma.

yoga

(Sanskrit, "yoke").

zazen

(Japanese, "sitting" + "absorption"). Sitting meditation, which is the basic meditation practice of Zen Buddhism.

zemban

(Japanese, "Zen board"). Board used in long sessions of **zazen** to prop up the chin, thereby keeping from falling forward if sleepiness occurs.

Zen

(Japanese, "meditation"). Branch of Mahayana Buddhism that focuses on meditation instead of doctrines or scriptures; developed in China as Ch'an Buddhism before spreading to Japan.

zendo

Large hall in Zen monasteries, in which zazen is practiced.

Christianity

acolyte

(Greek, "follower"). A lay person, usually a child or young adult, who assist ministers in worship services.

adoptionism

Generally, the teaching that Jesus was only a human who was "adopted" by God as his Son. Specifically, the heresy that arose in 8th-century Spain under Elipandus, Archbishop of Toledo, and Felix, Bishop of Urgel. Both men taught that Christ was the divine Son of God, but the human Jesus (the "son of David") was only the adopted Son of God. Felix was condemned by Pope Leo III in 798. Felix recanted, but Elipandus remained firm until his death shortly afterwards. The heresy died with Elipandus until it was revived in a modified form in the 12th century.

Alexandrian School

School of thought associated with Alexandria, Egypt. It was influenced by Platonic philosophy and tended to emphasize the divinity of Christ over his humanity and interpret scripture allegorically. Compare with the [Antiochene School](#). Notable Alexandrians include [Clement](#) and [Origen](#).

Alexandrian rite

System of liturgical practices found in the Egyptian and Ethiopian Christian churches. It is historically associated with St. Mark the Evangelist, who is believed to have traveled to Alexandria.

Amish (also Amish Mennonites)

Conservative group in the USA and Canada arising from a division within the Swiss Brethren in Alsace under the leadership of Jakob Ammann (c.1656-1730). Further divisions occurred after the Amish migrated to North America, but most are members of the Old Order Amish Mennonite Church. Amish are similar to other Mennonites in doctrine and practice, but the former worship in private homes instead of a church, wear "plain" dress and retain the use of German in their services. There were about 35,000 baptized members in 1984.

anathema

(Greek, "suspended"). Condemned; cut off from the church. The word is used in Galatians 1:8 and I Corinthians 16:22 to denote separation from the Christian community, and it was often used in the conclusion of creeds to condemn those who held incorrect beliefs; e.g., "If anyone should say that ... let him be anathema." The earliest recorded instance of formally anathemizing was at the Council of Elvira, c. 306 AD. Anathema is generally considered more serious than excommunication, which excludes a person from sacraments and worship but not the Christian community.

Ante-Nicene

Predating the Council of Nicea (325 AD).

antiminsion (also antimension)

In Eastern Orthodoxy, the portable altar that consists of a silk or linen cloth decorated with scenes from the Passion and containing relics. Its use began around the beginning of the 9th century.

Antiochene School (also Antiochene theology)

Modern designation for the school of thought associated with the city of Antioch in Syria, as contrasted with the [Alexandrian School](#). Antiochene theology was influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, emphasized the humanity of Christ, and interpreted scripture in light of its historical context. Its most famous teachers are Diodore of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus.

apocatastasis

(Greek *apokath'istemi*, "to restore"). Doctrine that every creature, including the devil, will be reconciled with God in the end. Most notably taught by [Origen of Alexandria](#). Also known as universalism.

Apocrypha

(Lit. Greek "out of the writings"). Books not included in the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament, but included in the Greek Septuagint. Catholic and Orthodox Christians include the Apocrypha in the canon of scripture; Protestant Christians do not. Apocryphal books are Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Song of the Three Children, Susanna, Bel and the Drago, The Prayer of Manasseh, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and additions to Esther.

apologetics

(Latin *apologia*, "defense"). Branch of Christian scholarship focused on defending the faith against its critics and demonstrating its reasonableness. Examples of apologetic works include Justin Martyr's **Apology**, Augustine's *City of God*, Calvin's *Institutes*, and, in modern times, C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*.

Apologists

(Latin *apologia*, "defense"). Early church fathers writing from about 120 to 220 AD who sought to defend Christianity against its critics, usually by explaining misunderstood Christian practice and showing the harmony of Christianity with Greek philosophy. Among this group are Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tatian and Tertullian.

apostle

(Greek *apostolos*, "one sent out"). Missionaries sent out by Jesus, including the disciples and Paul.

Apostolic Fathers

Group of Christian leaders and writers from the late first and early second centuries A.D. These authors were not apostles themselves, but had close proximity to the apostles, either by personal relationship or close connection with apostolic teaching. Examples include Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Papias, Pseudo-Barnabas, the *Didache*, the *Second Epistle of Clement*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and *The Apostle's Creed*.

apostolic succession

Doctrine that the authority of ordained clergy (to perform valid sacraments and teach right doctrine) derives from an unbroken succession of valid ordinations beginning with the apostles.

Arianism

Belief, taught by Arius in the 4th century, that Christ was created by the Father, and although greater than man he is inferior to the Father. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, wrote and campaigned against Arianism. It was declared a heresy at the Council of Nicea in 325.

archbishop

In Catholicism and Anglicanism, a bishop who oversees the other bishops in the province. In the Episcopal Church, the archbishop is called the Presiding Bishop. (See [Who's Who in Anglicanism](#).)

baptism

The rite of admission to membership in Christian churches that involves immersing, sprinkling or anointing with water. Regarded as a sacrament by Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians. Most denominations practice infant baptism; some only baptize adult believers.

Baptists

One of the largest Protestant denominations, with 40 million members (and many more non-member adherents) worldwide and 26.7 million in the United States. The Baptist tradition has its roots in the Anabaptist movement of the Reformation and English Puritan John Smyth (1554-1612). Its most notable distinction is its rejection of infant baptism. Today, most Baptists in America belong either to the Southern Baptist Convention or the American Baptist Convention. See [Comparison Charts of Christian Denominations](#) for more information.

bishop

The priest and spiritual leader of a [diocese](#).

Breviary

Book containing the Divine Office (liturgy) of the Roman Catholic Church.

BVM

Blessed Virgin Mary.

canon

(Greek *kanon*, "rule" or "reference point"). A fixed group of writings considered inspired and authoritative. The New Testament canon consists of 37 books. Roman Catholics also consider the books of the Apocrypha to be canonical.

canonical

Belonging to the accepted body of scriptures. For example, the Gospel of John is canonical but the Gospel of Thomas is not.

canonization

Process of determining the New Testament [canon](#) and declaring a person to be a saint.

canonize

To officially declare a deceased Christian to be a "saint." In the Catholic church, saints are canonized by the pope (since the 13th cent.) and must have performed at least two miracles. In the Orthodox church, saints are canonized by synods of regional bishops. Protestants do not canonize.

canon

(Greek *kanon*, "rule" or "reference point"). (1) The body of scriptures accepted as authoritative. (2) A priest who serves on the staff of a cathedral.

canon law

Body of law related to the organization, discipline, and belief of the church and enforced by church authority.

Cappadocian Fathers

Three theologians from the region of Cappadocia in modern-day Turkey - Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379), Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389) and Gregory of Nyssa (330-395) - whose development of Trinitarian doctrine remains highly influential in Orthodox Christianity.

cassock

Ankle-length garment worn by clergy.

catechism

(Greek *katecheo*, "instruct"). A class or manual on the basics of Christian doctrine and practice, usually as a precursor to confirmation or baptism. Catechisms normally include lessons on the creeds, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, as well as the Hail Mary in Roman Catholicism.

catechumen

(Greek *katachesis*, "instruction"). One who is being instructed in the basics of Christian doctrine, usually in preparation for confirmation or baptism.

Cathari (or Cathars)

(Greek *katharoi*, "pure ones"). Heretical sect influential in southern France and northern Italy in the 13 and 14th centuries. It was characterized by a dualistic worldview and strict asceticism.

catholic

Universal. A term used by the early Christians to designate the universal Christian faith. When the eastern church split from the western in 1054 AD, the West retained this term and became known as Roman Catholic.

Churches in the East are known as Greek, Eastern or Russian Orthodox.

celebrant

Priest or minister who presides over a service including the Eucharist. Compare with "officiant."

chasuble

Outermost garment worn by bishops and priests in celebrating the Eucharist. In Eastern Orthodoxy, it is often also worn at solemn celebrations of the morning and evening offices and on other occasions. The Lutheran Church retained the chasuble for some time after the Reformation and the Scandinavian Churches still use it.

Christ

(Greek *christos*, "messiah" or "anointed one"). Title applied to Jesus identifying him as the figure predicted by the Hebrew prophets.

Christmas

(Old English *Christes masse*, "Christ's mass"). Holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25.

See [Christmas](#).

Christology

Area of theology dealing with the person of Christ. Treats such topics as the relation between Christ's human and divine natures, and the meaning of his sacrificial death (atonement). The vast majority of Christological doctrine was developed in the period leading up to the Council of Nicea in 325. For an overview of this doctrine, see [Beliefs: Christ](#).

church

(Greek *kuriakon*, "belonging to the Lord"). The worldwide body of Christian believers, a particular denomination or congregation, or the building in which they meet. The study of the nature of the church is [ecclesiology](#).

class meeting

A meeting of a small part of a Methodist congregation, usually held weekly, in which collections are taken and inquiries are made into the conduct and spiritual progress of the group's members. The class leader is appointed by the minister of the congregation. The institution dates from 1742.

confession

1. A profession of faith (e.g. by the martyrs) or statement of doctrine (e.g. Augsburg Confession). 2. Admission of sin, either directly to God in prayer, generally to the congregation, or privately to a priest.

confirmation

One of the seven Catholic sacraments, and a practice in some Protestant churches, in which a baptized young adult (usually aged 13) confirms his or her continuing commitment to the Christian faith. Confirmation is usually preceded by a period of education called [catechism](#).

consubstantiation

A doctrine of the Eucharist associated especially with Martin Luther, according to which the bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ coexist in the elements. Consubstantiation was formulated in opposition to the medieval Catholic doctrine of [transubstantiation](#).

Coptic Catholic Church

Catholic church in Egypt, in communion with the Roman Catholic Church since 1741.

Coptic Orthodox Church

The principal Christian church in Egypt.

Coptic language

Language spoken in Egypt from about the second century AD until the middle ages. Regarded as the last stage of the ancient Egyptian language, it replaced hieroglyphics with the Greek alphabet and included religious terms borrowed from Greek.

Council of Trent

The 19th ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, which took place over the period 1545-63. A very important council in that it reformed numerous aspects of church practice (e.g., abolished the sale of indulgences) and clarified Catholic doctrine in response to the challenges by Reformers.

crucifer

("cross-bearer"). Acolyte who carries the cross in a church procession before the service. The crucifer is followed by the choir, the acolytes, the lay ministers, and then the clergy in order of rank (highest last).

Crusades

(Lat. *cruciata*, "cross-marked") Wars fought against enemies of the Christian faith, primarily the Muslim Turks in the period 1095 to 1291, but later against other infidels and heretics.

cult of the saints

The body of religious beliefs and practices pertaining to the veneration of saints and their relics. Prayers are addressed to the saints in the hope that they will intercede with God on the behalf of believers. Saints are believed to have accumulated a "treasury of merit" which can be used for the benefit of believers.

curate

In Anglicanism, assistant pastor whose duties commonly include visiting the sick and shut-ins.

Deus volt!

(Latin "God wills it"). The battle cry of the Crusaders.

diocese

A geographical region headed by a bishop, which usually includes several congregations. In Orthodoxy, a diocese is called an eparchy.

docetism

(Greek "to seem"). The belief that Christ only appeared to have a human body. Associated with Gnosticism and based on the dualistic belief that matter is evil and only spirit is good.

Domine quo vadis?

(Latin, "Lord, where are you going?"). According to a legend found in the Acts of St. Peter, Peter was fleeing persecution in Rome when he met Christ on the Appian Way and asked him this question. Christ replied, "I am coming to be crucified again." Peter took this to mean that Christ would suffer again in him, so Peter turned back to Rome, where he was crucified. The small church of Santa Maria delle Piante on the Appian Way, commonly called Domine Quo Vadis, commemorates this event.

Donatists

Fourth century North African Christian faction, named for Bishop Donatus. The Donatists believed the church should be pure, and therefore church leaders who had handed over scripture during persecution (**traditores**) should not retain their positions. They were opposed most notably by Augustine, the prominent North African bishop. Augustine's influential doctrine of the church developed primarily in response to the Donatist controversy.

doxology

(Greek *doxa*, "glory"). A short hymn glorifying God.

Dynamic Monarchianism

Form of Monarchianism in which Jesus was a man who was adopted as the Son of God, or given the "power" (Gk. *dynamis*) of God, at his baptism or after his resurrection. Essentially synonymous with [Adoptionism](#).

Ebionites

(Hebrew *ebionim*, "poor men"). An ascetic sect of Jewish Christians that taught Jesus was only a human prophet who had received the Holy Spirit at his baptism. Rejected Paul, and held that the law of Moses must be obeyed by Christians.

ecclesiology

(Greek *ekklesia*, "church"). Branch of theology dealing with the doctrine of the church.

ecumenical council

A council of the Christian church at which representatives from several regions are present. To be distinguished from a "synod," which is a meeting of the local church.

ELCA

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The largest Lutheran church body in the U.S. and more liberal than the LCMS.

eschatology

Branch of theology dealing with end times or last things. Includes such subjects as the afterlife, the Day of Judgment, the Second Coming, and the end of the world.

Eucharist

A [sacrament](#) recognized by all branches of Christianity. Commemorates the Last Supper of Christ with the sharing of bread and wine. See also [transubstantiation](#) and [Real Presence](#).

excommunication

A penalty imposed by the Catholic Church prohibiting a person from receiving or administering sacraments or holding church office.

ex cathedra

(Latin "from the throne.") Authoritative statements made by the Pope in Roman Catholicism.

Fall, the

Disobedience of Adam and Eve (chronicled in Genesis 3) that resulted in ill effects for the remainder of humanity. See [Christian Beliefs: Human Nature](#).

Franciscans

Monastic order founded by [Francis of Assisi](#) in 1210 AD.

Gnosticism

Not a unified belief system, but a complex of religious movements that predate Christianity and have roots in both paganism and Judaism. By about the second century AD, Gnostic Christianity had developed and was labeled a heresy by the established church. Distinctive Gnostic beliefs include: two separate divine beings (the unknowable supreme deity and an inferior, evil creator god); the inherent goodness of spirit and evil of matter; the importance of *gnosis*, or special knowledge, for salvation; and a view of Christ as a messenger of the supreme deity who only appeared to take on a body. Major Gnostic teachers include Valentinus, Basilides, and Marcion.

gospel

(Greek *evangelion*; Old English *godspel*, "good news"). The content of Christian preaching; that is, that Christ died to save humans from the penalty of sin and reunite them with God. When capitalized, the word usually refers to one of the first four books of the New Testament, which relate the life of Christ.

grace

The undeserved gift of divine favor in the justification and then sanctification of sinners. The Greek term *charis*, usually translated in English as "grace," is about 150 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Pauline epistles.

Greyfriars

Name given to the Franciscans in England because of their grey robes.

hagiography

A biography of a saint, usually written from an admiring and idealized perspective.

halo

In Christian art and symbolism, a circle or disc of light around the head. It was used in the Hellenistic period for gods and demi-gods and later for Roman emperors, and was not adopted by Christians until the 3rd or 4th centuries. In modern Catholicism, a halo is permitted only for saints.

hell

The word used in English translations of the Bible for both the Hebrew *Sheol* (the place of the departed) and the Greek *Gehenna* (the place of punishment for the wicked after death). In Christian theology, hell is generally believed to be the place or state into which unrepentant sinners pass after this life. The popular idea of Hell as a place of punishment and fire derives from such NT passages as Matthew 13:42 and 25:30, Revelation 2:11, 20:14, 21:8 and others. See [Christian Beliefs on the Afterlife](#).

homily

A message delivered to lay Christians for their edification; sermon.

homoousios

(Greek, "one substance" or "one in being"). The Christological doctrine introduced by Athanasius and accepted as orthodox at the Council of Nicea in 325. The doctrine arose in the context of the heresy of Arius, who contended that Christ was created by the Father and was thus not fully divine.

Immaculate Conception

Roman Catholic doctrine that the Virgin Mary was born without original sin.

impassibility of God

Philosophical idea, influenced by Platonism, that God cannot suffer.

imprimatur

(Latin, "let it be printed"). Official authorization to print a book or other work, usually granted by a bishop for Catholic publications.

Incarnation

In general, to take on a bodily form. In Christianity, the historical event in which God became a man in Jesus of Nazareth. According to the gospel of John: "The Word became flesh (Lat. *carne*) and dwelt among us."

indulgences

In Roman Catholicism, a partial remission of temporal (non-eternal) punishment for sin after the guilt of sin has been forgiven through penance. The concept of indulgences grew out of the beliefs that (1) divine justice demanded the sinner pay for his or her misdeeds even though they have been forgiven, either in this life or in Purgatory; (2) giving alms to the church is a penitential work; and (3) the church possessed a treasury of merit earned by the saints that could be applied to sinners. By the late Middle Ages, the system of indulgences was rampantly abused, and greedy ecclesiastics and hired salesmen sold tickets to heaven in order to fund expensive building projects and line their own pockets. The abuses were stopped at the reforming Council of Trent in 1562, and today one must do good works, not pay money, to earn indulgences.

Johannine

Pertaining to the apostle John.

justification

The act by which God moves a sinner from a state of sin to a state of grace or, especially in Protestantism, the act by which God declares a sinner righteous.

kerygma

(Gk.) Term coined by Rudolf Bultmann to indicate the essential message (or gospel) of the New Testament church.

Lollards

Originally, followers of [John Wycliffe](#) (14th cent.), who emphasized personal faith, predestination and the Bible. The word was later applied to anyone seriously critical of the Church.

Luther, Martin

(1483-1546) German monk and professor whose questioning of church practices led to the Protestant Reformation. See [Martin Luther](#).

mitre

(Greek *mitra*, "turban"). Liturgical headdress of a bishop. In the Eastern Church it resembles a crown similar in form to that worn by Byzantine Emperors. In the Western Church it is shield-shaped and made of embroidered satin, which is often jewelled. Two fringed pieces hang down in the back.

modalism

Heretical belief system in which God consists of a single person who reveals himself in different modes. Thus the Son is divine, but the same person the Father. Closely related to patripassianism and Sabellianism.

monarchianism

General term for those heretical systems that focused on safeguarding the oneness of God by denying the Trinity. In dynamic monarchianism, Jesus was a man who was given the power of God. In modalist monarchianism, Jesus was the Father incarnate.

N

Nantes, Edict of

Edict signed by Henry IV at Nantes on April 13, 1598, after the end of the French wars of religion. It granted extensive rights to the Huguenots (French Calvinists). The edict was revoked by Louis XIV in the Edict of Fontainebleau on October 18, 1685.

neophyte

In the early church, a recently baptized Christian.

nepotism

The practice of bestowing an office or patronage on one's relatives. It was especially rampant among 16th-century popes, and was condemned by Pope Pius V in the bull "Admonet Nos" (1567).

Nestorianism

The doctrine, named for Nestorius (d. c. 451), Patriarch of Constantinople, that there were two separate persons in the incarnate Christ, one divine and the other human. Nestorius preached against Apollinarianism and objected to the term Theotokos ("God-Bearer") as a title for the Virgin Mary, and was opposed by St. Cyril of Alexandria.

New Rome

A name for the city of Constantinople, which may have been coined by Constantine himself. The Council of Constantinople (381) declared that "the Bishop of Constantinople is to have honorary pre-eminence after the Bishop of Rome, because Constantinople is the new Rome."

nimbus

Another word for [halo](#).

Ninevah, Fast of

Pre-Lenten fast of three or four days kept in the Church of the East, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the Armenian Orthodox Church.

officiant

Minister who presides over a worship service that does not include the Eucharist.

orthodox

(Greek *orthos*, "correct"). The correct or majority view.

Orthodox

The branch of Christianity prevalent in Greece, Russia and Eastern Europe. Originates as a separate body when the Eastern (Orthodox) church split from the Western (Catholic) church in 1054 AD. Orthodox Christians do not recognize the authority of the Pope, but rather the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Seven Ecumenical Councils are also of special authoritative importance. Orthodox Christianity is characterized by emphasis on icons.

Pantocrator, Christ

Christ depicted as "Ruler of the Universe," a common image in Orthodox iconography.

Passion

(Latin *passio*, "suffering"). The crucifixion of Jesus and the events leading up to it.

patriarch

(Gk. "father ruler") Generally, an early biblical figure such as Abraham or one of the "church fathers" of the early Christian church. Specifically, the spiritual leader of a major city in Eastern Orthodoxy (the Patriarch of Constantinople is the Pope's Eastern counterpart).

Patristics

(Lat. *pater*, "father") Branch of Christian theology and history concerned with the church "fathers" (*patres*), usually understood to refer to the period from the later first century to the mid-fifth century.

patripassianism

The heretical view, associated with Praxeas, Noetus and Sabbellius, that God the Father can suffer. A consequence of modalist monarchianism, in which the Son is the same person as the Father.

Pelagianism

Belief system, attacked by Augustine and declared a heresy in , which denies original sin and asserts the ability of humans to choose good over evil with only external assistance from God.

pope

(Lat. **papa**, "father") The bishop of Rome, who became the recognized leader of the entire Western church. See History: Development of the Papacy.

"Q"

The hypothetical source that many biblical critics suggest was used by the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. It consists of all passages Matthew and Luke have in common that are not found in Mark.

Quartodecimanism

("14-ism"). The early Christian custom, especially common in Asia Minor, of observing Easter on the 14th of the Jewish month of Nisan, whether or not it fell on a Sunday. Towards the end of the second century, Pope Victor suppressed Quartodecimanism and excommunicated the Bishop of Ephesus, who refused to comply. This action was rebuked by St. Irenaeus and most churches in Asia Minor retained the practice. It died out by the fifth century. See [Easter](#).

Quietism

17th-century movement emphasizing complete passivity and the "prayer of quiet" before God. The ideal is to abandon all desires, even for virtue, love of Christ, or salvation, as well as all outward acts of devotion, and simply rest in the presence of God. Notable Quietist writers include de Molinos, Guyon, and Archbishop Fenelon. Pope Innocent XI condemned Quietism and Molinos on November 19, 1687.

Quinque Viae

The "five ways" or arguments by which St. Thomas Aquinas sought to prove the existence of God.

Quinquagesima

The Sunday before Ash Wednesday. The word gets its name from its previous usage, which was for the 50-day period between that Sunday and Easter.

Quo Vadis?

See Domine Quo Vadis.

R

Real Presence

In Catholic and some Protestant churches, the physical and spiritual presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the [Eucharist](#).

rector

In Anglicanism, the elected pastor of a financially self-supported congregation. If there are several clergy in the congregation, the rector has primary responsibility for directing worship.

rosary

Catholic devotional practice in which 15 sets of ten Hail Marys are recited, each set preceded by the Lord's Prayer and followed by the Gloria Patri. A string of beads is used to count the prayers. The number of sets represents the 15 "mysteries" (five joyful, five sorrowful, five glorious), which are events in the lives of Jesus and Mary.

S

Sabellianism

Modalist belief system attributed to Sabellius, in which God consists of a single person who reveals himself in different modes. Thus the Son is divine and the same as the Father. Essentially synonymous with patripassianism and modalist monarchianism.

sacrament

A solemn Christian ritual believed to be a means of grace, a sign of faith, or obedience to Christ's commands. The Anglican catechism defines a sacrament as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace...ordained by Christ himself." In the Catholic and Orthodox churches, there are seven sacraments: baptism,

confirmation, the eucharist (communion), penance, extreme unction, ordination and marriage. In Protestant churches, only baptism and the eucharist are regarded as sacraments.

saint

In Protestant terminology, any Christian believer. In Catholicism, an especially holy Christian who has met certain requirements and been canonized by the Pope. See also cult of the saints.

Scholasticism

(Latin *scholastici*, "schoolmen"). "The medieval movement, flourishing in the period 1200-1500, which placed emphasis upon the rational justification of religious belief and the systematic presentation of those beliefs." (McGrath, 34)

see

(from Latin for "seat"). City in which a bishop's cathedral is located.

sola fide

(Latin, "faith alone"). Martin Luther's doctrine that faith is all that is necessary for salvation.

sola scriptura

(Latin, "scripture alone"). Martin Luther's doctrine that Scripture is the only authority for Christians (i.e., church tradition and papal doctrine are unnecessary and inferior to direct reading of the Scripture).

Son of Man

Title used 81 times by Jesus to refer to himself in the Gospels, but never by anyone else. The term may derive from the eschatological figure of Daniel 7 or may have been used by Jesus to refer to his humanity.

soteriology

Branch of Christian theology dealing with salvation.

Stations of the Cross

Series of fourteen events in the passion of Christ, beginning with Jesus' condemnation and ending with his body being laid in the tomb (for list, see [Christianity by the Numbers](#)). The stations are a subject of public and private devotion in Catholicism, especially during Lent.

subordinationism

Heretical belief in which the Son is lesser than the Father in divinity, rank or honor.

Synoptic Gospels

(Greek *synopsis*, "single view"). The NT books of Matthew, Mark and Luke, which offer similar views of the life of Christ (compared with the unique perspective of the Gospel of John).

T

thaumaturgus

(Greek, "wonder-working"). Title given to saints who have worked many miracles.

Theotokos

(Greek, "God-bearer"). Title of the Virgin Mary in the Orthodox tradition, used from the time of Origen (early 3rd century) onwards as an affirmation of Christ's divinity.

thurible

Container in which incense is burned.

transubstantiation

The doctrine that the bread and wine of the Eucharist actually becomes the body and blood of Christ, although it continues to have the appearance of bread and wine. Transubstantiation was rejected in different degrees by the Reformers. See also [Real Presence](#).

Transfiguration

Event described in Mark 9:2-8, Matthew 17:1-8, and Luke 9:28-36, in which Peter, James and John saw Jesus transformed into a glowing heavenly figure and talking with Elijah and Moses.

treasury of merit

Doctrinal basis for the sale of indulgences, in which certain saints performed more good works than was necessary to save them, and that this surplus can be applied to other believers in order to shorten purgatory.

Trinity

The Christian doctrine of the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead.

See [The Doctrine of the Trinity](#).

U

Unitarianism

Religious movement connected to Christianity but that rejects the Trinitarian understanding of God. In 1961, Unitarians jointed with the Univeralists to form the Unitarian Universalist Association.

universalism

The belief that all souls will be saved by God in the end. Hell either does not exist or is temporary.

V

vestments

Distinctive clothing worn by clergy when performing liturgical and other services of the church.

vestry

In Anglicanism, the board of directors of a church. The vestry elects the rector and oversees the church's secular affairs.

Vicar of Christ

Title for the Pope since the 8th century, which replaced the older title "Vicar of St. Peter." It expresses the Pope's claim to be the appointed representative of Christ on earth (based on, e.g., "Feed my sheep" in John 21:15).

Virgin Birth

Belief that Jesus Christ had no human father, but was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is based on Matthew 1 and Luke 1 in the New Testament and is implied in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

W

Wolsey, Thomas

(c.1472-1530) English cardinal. More a statesman than a churchman, Wolsey was active in foreign policy in a bold attempt to make England preeminent in Europe and was involved in King Henry VIII's attempts to secure a papal dispensation for divorce.

World Council of Churches

The "fellowship of Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior" that was formally founded at Amsterdam on August 23, 1948.

Wounds, Five Sacred

The five wounds of Christ suffered during the Passion: the piercing of his hands, feet and side. Devotion to the Five Wounds developed in the Middle Ages.

Wycliffe, John

(c.1328-84) English philosopher, theologian and reformer. He is known for his English translation of the Bible and has been called the "Morning Star of the Reformation." See [John Wycliffe](#).

X

Xmas

Abbreviation for [Christmas](#), replacing "Christ" with the first letter in the Greek for Christ, chi ("X").

Y

YMCA

("Young Men's Christian Association"). Association founded in London in 1844 by George Williams (1821-1905) out of his prayer and Bible-reading meetings. Its goals are to develop young people in mind, body and spirit and foster a world-wide fellowship based on mutual tolerance and respect. Non-Christians are admitted to membership, but in some local associations they have less say in policymaking than Christian members. The YMCA is active in over 100 countries.

Z

Zwingli, Ulrich

(1484-1531) Swiss reformer and humanist. He taught a purely symbolic interpretation of the Eucharist (as opposed to both transubstantiation and consubstantiation), accepted state action in religious matters, and died on the battlefield at Cappel, Switzerland (near Zurich).

Judaeism

Adonai

(Hebrew, "Lord"). One of the most common Jewish names for God, used especially during prayer.

aggadah

(Hebrew, "discourse" or "telling"). Non-legal material in the Talmud and Midrash, including stories, legends, theology, and sermons.

Alef-Bet

(Hebrew, "A-B"). The Hebrew alphabet.

Aleinu

Closing prayer of every synagogue service, proclaiming God's sovereignty.

aliyah

(Hebrew, "going up"). To "make an aliyah" is to be called up to recite the blessing before the Torah reading.

amudah

Small desk in a synagogue from which the Torah is read.

Aramaic

Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. Was once the common language of the Jewish world - the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds were both written in Aramaic - but it is no longer spoken.

ark

(Acronym for Hebrew aron hakodesh, "holy chest"). Cabinet in a synagogue that holds the Torah scrolls, usually located at the front of the sanctuary.

Ashkenazi

Jews from eastern and northern Europe and their descendents, to be distinguished from Sephardic Jews.

bar mitzvah

(Hebrew, "son of the commandment"). A boy who has reached the age of 13 and is thereafter expected to obey the commandments. Term also used for the ceremony marking this occasion. See Jewish Life Cycle: Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

bat mitzvah

(Hebrew, "daughter of the commandment"). A girl who has reached the age of 12 and is thereafter expected to obey the commandments. Term also used for the ceremony marking this occasion. See Jewish Life Cycle: Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

beit kneset

(Hebrew, "house of assembly"). The synagogue.

beit tefilah

(Hebrew, "house of prayer"). The synagogue.

beit midrash

(Hebrew, "house of study"). A place designated for the study of sacred texts, usually a part of the synagogue.

ben

(Hebrew, "son of"; Aramaic "bar" or "ibn"). Son of. Used in traditional Hebrew names; e.g., Rabbi Moses ben Maimon is Moses, the son of Maimon.

bet din

(Hebrew, "house of judgment"). A rabbinical court convened to resolve business disputes, grant divorces, determine whether a prospective convert is ready for conversion, etc.

bris

(Hebrew brit, "covenant"). Colloquial name for the ritual of circumcision, from the Ashkenazi pronunciation of brit.

brit

(Hebrew, "covenant"). The special covenant between God and the Jewish people.

brit milah

(Hebrew, "covenant of circumcision"). The ritual of circumcision performed on the eighth day of a boy's life. More commonly known as brit. See Jewish Life Events: Circumcision.

CE

"Common Era" or "Christian Era." Designation of years used by Jews and others who wish to avoid the affirmation of faith embedded in AD (Latin anno domini, "in the year of our Lord").

chanukiah

Nine-branch candlestick used on Hanukkah. More commonly, though not accurately, called a menorah. See Jewish Holidays: Hanukkah.

chutzpah

Arrogance, guts, presumption. Generally meant positively.

circumcision

See brit milah.

chukkim

Commandments that have no known reason behind them.

chuppah

(Hebrew, "canopy"). Also spelled huppah. Canopy under which the Jewish marriage ceremony takes place, representing the marriage chamber or the couple's new home. The term is also used colloquially for the marriage ceremony as a whole. See Jewish Life Cycle: Marriage.

Counting of the Omer

(Hebrew Sefirat ha-Omer). The counting of days between Passover and Shavuot.

Daf Yomi

(Hebrew, "the daily page"). Program of studying one page of Talmud per day. See Texts: Talmud.

Diaspora

Jews living outside of Israel.

Documentary Hypothesis

The modern scholarly hypothesis that the Torah was written by four distinct authors, identified as J (for "Jehovah"), E (for "Elohim"), P (for "Priestly"), and D (for "Deuteronomist"). A fifth, believed to be the editor of the other authors' works, is known as the "Redactor."

Gaon

(Hebrew, "eminence, excellence"). Title given to the head of the Babylonian academy and later to distinguished Talmud scholars in the 6th to 12th centuries.

Gemara

(Hebrew, "completion"). Commentary on the Mishnah. The Gemara and the Mishnah constitute the Talmud. See Jewish Texts: Talmud.

get

Divorce decree granted by a bet din. See Jewish Life Events: Divorce.

gezeirah

Rabbinic law designed to prevent accidental violation of a mitzvah. See Jewish Practices: Rabbinic Law.

gilgul

(Hebrew, "transmigration"). The Jewish doctrine of the transmigration (reincarnation) of souls, taught by the founder of Karaism and found also in kabbalistic writings.

goy

(Hebrew, "nation"; Yiddish, "Gentile"). Non-Jew. Sometimes used pejoratively, but the word itself is not negative.

haftarah

Portion of the Prophets read in synagogue services.

halakhah

(Hebrew, "the walk"). Jewish Law. Consists of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah plus rabbinic law and custom. See Jewish Practices.

Hallel

Psalms 113-118, recited at the end of morning service on festival days.

Hanukkah

(Hebrew, "Dedication"). Also spelled Chanukah. An eight-day holiday beginning on 25 Kislev (mid-December) that commemorates the revolt of the Maccabees in 164 BCE and the miraculous oil that burned for eight days. See Jewish Holidays: Hanukkah.

Hashem

(Hebrew, "The Name"). God. Used especially by Orthodox Jews to avoid saying a name of God.

Hashkiveinu

Evening prayer for God's protection while sleeping.

hechsher

(Hebrew) The "seal of approval" on kosher foods.

Kaddish

Prayer proclaiming the greatness of God. Used as the mourners' prayer (see Jewish Practices: Mourning) but also at other points in the liturgy.

kasher

(Hebrew, "fit"). Fit for ritual use. Also a verb meaning "to make a food or object fit for ritual use." See Jewish Practices: Dietary Laws.

kashrut

(Hebrew, "fitness"). Jewish dietary laws. See Jewish Practices: Dietary Laws.

kedusha

(Hebrew, "holiness"). Holiness.

kippah

(Hebrew; Yiddish yarmulke) Disc-like head covering.

Kol Nidre

(Hebrew, "All Vows"). Famous hymn sung during Yom Kippur releasing Jews of all religious vows made in the previous year. See Jewish Holidays: Yom Kippur.

kosher

Anglicized form of kasher.

lashon kodesh

(Hebrew, "the holy tongue"). Hebrew. See Bookstore: Hebrew Dictionaries.

l'chaim

(Hebrew, "To life"). A Jewish toast.

lulav

Interwoven branches of palm, willow, and myrtle used in the Sukkot celebration. See Jewish Holidays: Sukkot.

mashgiach

(Hebrew) Rabbi trained to certify foods as kosher.

matzah

(Hebrew, "unleavened bread"). Also spelled matzo or mazzah. Unleavened (non-yeast) bread used during Passover based on Exodus 12:39, in which the Israelites fled Egypt with only unleavened bread because they could not wait for the dough to rise. Called the "bread of affliction" based on Deuteronomy 16:3. See Jewish Holidays: Passover.

mazel tov

(Hebrew, "good planetary influences"). "Good luck." Usually said at the end of a wedding or upon hearing good news.

menorah

(Hebrew, "candelabrum"). A seven-branch candlestick. Part of the furnishings of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem. In 1948 it became the official symbol of the State of Israel. Often used to refer to the chanukkiyah.

mezuzah

(Hebrew, "doorpost"). Small parchment of Torah verses placed on the doorpost of Jewish homes in obedience to Deut. 6:9.

Midrash

(from Hebrew derash, "sermon"). Stories, sermons, parables, and other material explaining the Talmud. See Jewish Texts: Midrash.

mikva

body of natural water used for ritual cleansing

minyan

Quota of ten adult Jews required for certain prayers and observances.

Mishnah

(Hebrew, "a teaching that is repeated"). Rabbinic commentary on the Torah and part of the Talmud. Codified c. 200 CE by Judah Ha-Nasi. See Texts: Mishnah.

Mishneh Torah

(Hebrew, "repetition of Torah"). The book of Deuteronomy or, more commonly, the code of Maimonides.

mitzvot

(Hebrew "commandments"). Commandments; religious actions (singular mitzvah). Sometimes used more generally to refer to any good deed. See Practices: Mitzvot.

mohel

(MOY-el) The person who performs the ritual of circumcision. Must be an observant Jew trained in the applicable Jewish law and surgical technique.

Nevi'im

("neh-vee-EEM") (Hebrew, "Prophets"). Second section of the Tanakh, containing the writings of the prophets and history covering roughly 700 years after Moses.

Olam Ha-Ba

The "World to Come" - the Jewish afterlife. See [Beliefs: Afterlife](#).

Oral Torah

The Mishnah. According to traditional Jews, part of the Torah received by Moses at Sinai but not written down until c. 200 CE as the Mishnah.

pareve

(Yiddish, "neutral"). Kosher foods that contain no meat or dairy and therefore may be eaten with either. See [Jewish Practices: Dietary Laws](#).

Purim

(Hebrew, "lots"). Festive holiday in the early Spring celebrating the story of Esther and Mordecai with costume parties and plays. See [Jewish Holidays: Purim](#).

rabbi

(Hebrew, "teacher"). Jewish spiritual leader.

Rambam

(acrostic for Rabbi Moses ben Maimon) [Maimonides](#).

sandek

The "Jewish godfather" - the man who holds the baby boy during the rite of circumcision. See [Life Cycle: Circumcision](#).

Second Temple

The Temple in Jerusalem that was rebuilt in 516 BCE after the Babylonian Exile and destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

Separdic

Jews from the Middle East and Spain and their descendents.

se'udat mitzvot

A festive meal following the fulfillment of a mitzvot, such as circumcision.

shalom

Hello, goodbye, or peace.

shekhinah

The presence of God; the Holy Spirit. In Kabbalistic thought, the feminine aspect of God.

Shemot

(Hebrew "names"). The Hebrew name for Exodus, the second book of the Torah.

Sheol

Grave; world of the dead.

shochet

Kosher butcher.

siddur

(Hebrew, "order"). Prayer book used in Jewish liturgy. See [Jewish Practices: Worship and Bookstore: Prayerbooks](#).

simcha

(Hebrew, "rejoicing"). Any Jewish celebration.

Sukkot

(Hebrew, "Booths"). Eight-day autumn festival commemorating the Exodus and celebrating the harvest. See [Jewish Holidays: Sukkot](#).

Talmud

(Hebrew "teaching") The Oral Torah, made up of the Mishnah and the Gemara. See [Jewish Texts: Talmud](#).

Tanakh

(Hebrew TNK, acronym for "Torah," "Nevi'im" and "Ketuvim"). The Jewish Bible. See [Jewish Texts: Tanakh](#).

taryag mitzvot

(Hebrew, "613 commandments"). The 613 commandments given in the Torah and enumerated by Maimonides. See [Jewish Practices: Mitzvot](#).

terayfa

(Hebrew, "torn"). Food that is not kosher and may not be eaten. Also spelled treyf or treif. See [Jewish Practices: Dietary Laws](#).

teshuvah

(Hebrew, "turning"). Repentance; self-evaluation.

Tikkun olan

The healing of the world; world peace; social justice.

Torah

(Hebrew, "Law"). The first five books of the Jewish Bible. Also known as the Five Books of Moses or the Pentateuch. See Jewish Texts: Torah.

treyf

(Hebrew, "torn"). Food that is not kosher; prohibited. Also spelled "terayfa" or "treif." See Jewish Practices: Dietary Laws.

yad

(Hebrew, "hand"). Pointer used to read the Torah, usually in the shape of a hand with a pointed finger.

yahrzeit

(Yiddish, "anniversary"). Anniversary of a loved one's death. See Life Events: Death and Mourning.

yarmulke

(Yiddish; Hebrew kippah). Male head covering. See Symbols and Objects.

yetzer hara

The human inclination towards evil. See Beliefs: Human Nature.

yetzer hatov

The human inclination towards good. See Beliefs: Human Nature.

YHWH

(Hebrew, "I am" or "I will be"). Sacred name of God as revealed to Moses. Also known as the Tetragrammaton. It is considered too holy to be pronounced, and is usually replaced by Adonai in Torah readings.

Yiddish

The language of East European Jews and their descendents; a combination of Middle High German, Hebrew and Polish.

Zealots

Members of a historical Jewish movement characterized by armed rebellion against Roman rulers.

Zionism

A modern political movement with the aim of creating a Jewish state.

Zohar

The major text of the Kabbalah movement. See [Texts: Zohar](#).

Abrahamic

Believing without belonging

Belonging without believing

Coherence & social coherence

Common good

Competence

Conviction

Culture

Dialogue

Experience

Forgotten religion

Identity

Imam

Interconfessionalité

Interdisciplinary approach

Liturgy

Multiconfessionalité

Multiculturalism
Myth
Non-confessional theology.
Priest
Rabbi
Religion
Religious facts
Religious Identity
Rigour
Ritual
Scripture(s)