

# Some Important Jewish Definitions

**Chumash:** This is the Torah when it's bound as a book instead of a scroll. It also comes with commentary.

**Gemara:** Commentary on the Mishnah. Part of the Oral Law, forbidden to be written down until after the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE. After the Mishnah was written in 200 CE, it was studied by many rabbis and their discussions were written down.

**Halakhic:** Collective body of Jewish religious laws. Comes from the Written and Oral Torah. Based on biblical commandments, Talmudic and rabbinic laws, and customs compiled from many books.

**Midrash:** Ancient commentary and interpretations on part of the Hebrew scriptures. Attached to biblical text. Most of the Midrash was composed between 400 and 1200 CE.

**Mishnah:** First major written collection of Jewish oral traditions known as the Oral Torah or Oral Law from about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. First major work of rabbinic literature. Traditional belief is that this was passed down from God to Moses. Written after destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple in 70 CE. Written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Has 6 orders dealing with everything from prayers to Sabbath to civil and criminal law, dietary laws, marriage, divorce, and more.

**Pirkeh Avot:** Compilation of ethical teachings from Rabbinic Jewish tradition from about 200 BCE to 200 CE. Consists of part of the Mishnah dealing with ethics plus one additional chapter. Some of the more famous quotes from Pirkeh Avot are: "The world stands on three things: On Torah, on works, and on kindness to others", "Say little and do much." "If not now, when?" "Do not be quick to anger."

**Rabbinic Judaism:** Mainstream form of Judaism since the 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE. Roots in Pharisaic Judaism, based on the belief that at Mount Sinai Moses received both Written Torah and Oral Torah from God.

**Shulchan Aruch:** Most widely consulted and accepted Code of Jewish Law. Written in 1563 by Joseph Karo and published in Venice two year later.

**Siddur:** Jewish prayer book containing a set order of daily prayers.

**Torah:** Compilation of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Written Torah, the Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses.

**Talmud:** Central text of Rabbinic Judaism and main source of Jewish religious law. There are two – one called Jerusalem (written in Gallilee about 300 CE) and the other, more complete Babylonian (written about 450 CE). Two components – Mishnah (Oral Torah) and Gemara (commentary) and related writings (450 - 500 CE). Here's where it gets confusing.

Tanakh: This is the whole meat and potatoes. It includes the first five Books of Moses (the Torah) plus all 24 books of the Hebrew Bible. Acronym for 3 divisions of Hebrew Bible = Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (writings).