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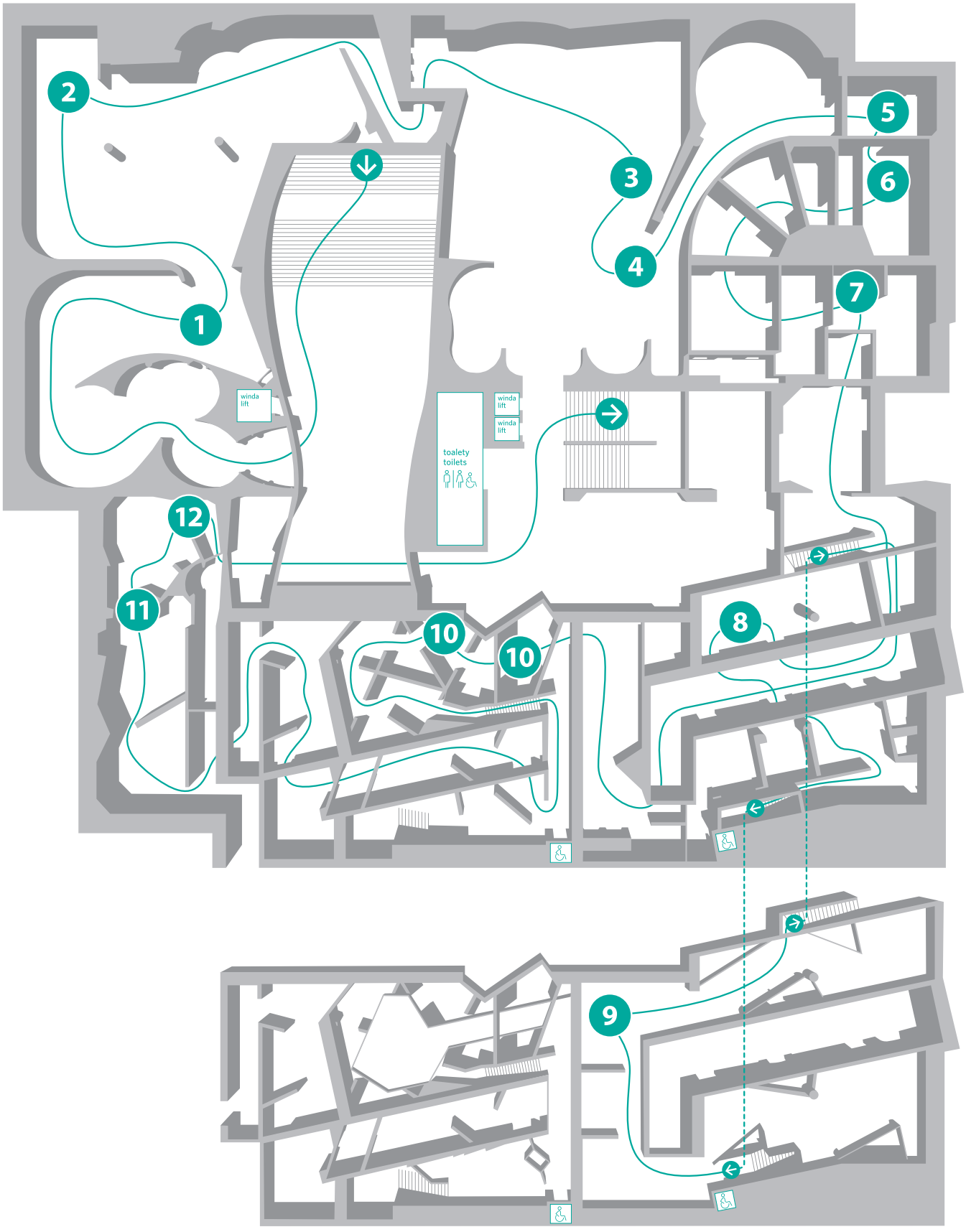
THEMATIC TOUR:

# Jewish women



## 1. Rachel Fiszel

**Gallery 2:**
First Encounters, 965–1500

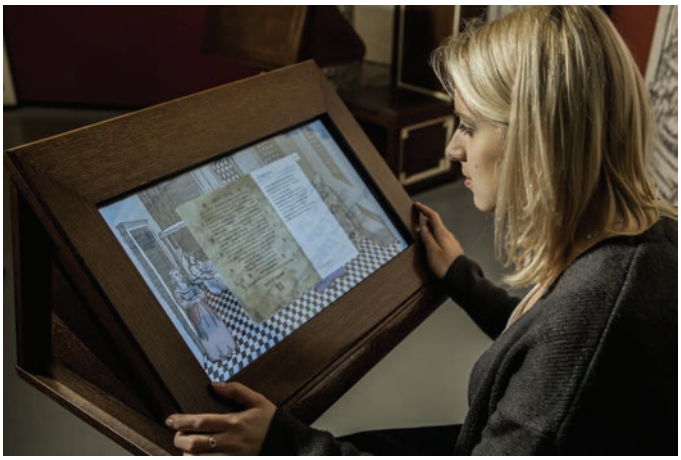
Rachel Fiszel was the matriarch of the leading Jewish family in Kraków and then Kazimierz from the 1470s until the mid-16th century. After her husband died, she took over the family's banking business and loaned money to King Kazimierz Jagiellończyk, who allowed her to mint coins from his own metal, and his sons Jan Olbracht and Aleksander Jagiellończyk. Even before she was widowed in 1489, Rachel was in business on her own. In 1483, she bought a tenement house on Szpiglarska Street. Enraged that the transaction was judged illegal, she wrecked havoc on the building and was taken to court. Rachel added to the family's prestige by marrying one of her daughters to Jacob Polak, the first illustrious Jewish scholar in Poland.

Walk past the wooden stronghold and turn right. Walk to the end of the Wall of Kings to the Fiszel family tree.

**CHECK MAP:**
from START to highlight 1

## 2. Rivke bas Meir Tiktiner

**Gallery 3:**
Paradisus Iudaeorum, 1569–1648



"Who has ever heard of or seen such a novelty? Has it ever happened in countless years that a woman has written something of her own accord?" This is how the printer of *Meynekes Rivke* (Rebecca's Nurse) referred to Rivke bas Meir Tiktiner, the first Jewish woman known to have authored a book. Written in **Yiddish**, the book offers ethical instruction and advice on housekeeping, good family relations, and raising Jewish children. Rivke was likely tutored by her father, a **rabbi**, which would account for her knowledge of **Hebrew** and rabbinic literature. The memorial book of Prague's Altneuschul refers to her as a teacher and preacher. *Meynekes Rivke* was printed in 1609 in Prague, where Rivke lived during the last years of her life.

Upon entering the gallery, turn left and walk past the large map of Europe and printing presses to the Library. Sit at one of the interactive lecterns and explore *Meynekes Rivke*, which appears in the section featuring books read in the home.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 1 to highlight 2

## 3. Women's piety

**Gallery 4:**
The Jewish Town, 1648–1772

Explore the spiritual lives of Jewish women as reflected in manuals written for them – and sometimes by them – in **Yiddish**. On the table are excerpts from two books. One book, Benjamin Slonik's *Seyder mitsves noshim* (Book of Commandments for Women), deals with the three commandments specific to women: lighting the **Sabbath** candles, family purity, and **halakhah**. The other book, *Tkhine Imohos* (Supplication of the Matriarchs), is a prayer written in Aramaic and Yiddish for women by a woman, Leah Horowitz, daughter of a **rabbi**. In the green cabinet is an original 18th-century illustrated *Tsene rene*, often called the "Women's Bible."

On entering the gallery, pass through the Marketplace. On your left, between the Tavern and the Synagogue, is the Jewish Home.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 2 to highlight 3

## 4. Prayer books for women

**Gallery 4:**
The Jewish Town, 1648–1772

This beautifully bound prayer book might well have been an engagement or wedding gift. Bound into one volume are two prayer books (1734 and 1763) and a *tkhine*, a supplicatory prayer. Women would use such fancy prayer books on holidays and for special occasions, such as the first visit to the **synagogue** after giving birth. From the 16th century, as women began attending synagogue services more often, a women's section was added to existing synagogues or included in the architectural plan for new ones. A learned woman might lead the prayers for those in the women's section who had difficulty following the **Hebrew**.

The prayer book is in a showcase on the outside of the synagogue wall closest to the home.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 3 to highlight 4

## 5. Judyta Zbytkower

**Gallery 5:**
Encounters with Modernity, 1772–1914

Judyta Jakubowicz (1749–1829) was the third wife of Shmul Zbytkower, one of Warsaw's wealthiest Jews at the turn of the 18th century and a protegé of King Stanisław August Poniatowski. Together with her husband, she was active in business and banking. After he died in 1801, she took over and became one of the largest military purveyors in the Duchy of Warsaw. An exceptionally talented entrepreneur, she was the owner of a banking and trading house and maintained business contacts with banks in St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna. Her story is shown in a film, set within a gold frame, on the wall of a salon inspired by the one that she hosted in Warsaw.

Exit from the Synagogue, turn left and follow the corridor to the area with the large royal portraits. From there, enter the yellow room. The film is on your left and the silhouette on your right.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 4 to highlight 5

## 6. Pauline Wengeroff

**Gallery 5:**
Encounters with Modernity, 1772–1914


"In these yellowed pages I have gathered and preserved the more important events and the enormous cultural changes that affected me and all of Jewish society." This is how Pauline Wengeroff begins her memoir, which she published in 1910 at the age of 77. Born Pessele Epstein, Wengeroff was raised in a wealthy religious family in Brest Litovsk. Her husband, a **Hasid** when they married, gradually abandoned traditional dress and **kosher** food, and some of her children converted to Christianity when faced with quotas on Jews entering educational institutions. Wengeroff bemoaned the loss of tradition, which she considered a high price for modernity. Excerpts from her memoir comment on changes in the Jewish wedding.

On the inner surface of the door frame between the Salon and Wedding room are a photograph and biography of Pauline Wengeroff. Continue into the wedding room: on your left is the wedding showcase and to your right a film with her commentary.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 5 to highlight 6

## 7. Rosa Luxemburg

**Gallery 5:**
Encounters with Modernity, 1772–1914

"Jewish sorrows? I cannot find a special corner in my heart for the ghetto . . . I feel at home in the entire world wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears," wrote Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), an important Marxist theorist. She was born into a middle-class family in Zamość and spent her childhood and early youth in Warsaw. As a result of her involvement in the Proletariat, a socialist organization, she was forced to leave Warsaw. She earned her doctorate in Zurich with a dissertation on the industrial development of Poland, focusing on the Łódź cotton workers. She was a co-founder of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) party.

Pass through the Train Station and Factory to the area with busts of key figures in the story of industrialization. Rosa Luxemburg is one of them. She also appears in the interactive.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 6 to highlight 7

## 8. Paulina Appenszlak

**Gallery 6:**
Yiddish street, 1918–1939


"A Jewish woman demands her representation, which she should be rightfully granted ... Moreover, we are not concerned only with purely women's issues: we want a decisive voice in all the issues," wrote Paulina Appenszlak in 1928. Paulina, a prominent feminist and journalist, founded *Ewa*, a widely read magazine in Polish for Jewish women. In its pages, she urged women to exercise their voting rights and to run for parliament and public office. She also ran a campaign for conscious motherhood.

From the Street, enter the third doorway on the right to the Politics area. Across the Street, in the Culture area, is a wall of newspapers – in the Polish section you will find *Ewa*.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 7 to highlight 8

## 9. Sara Schenirer

**Gallery 6:**
Yiddish street, 1918–1939

"A woman named Sara Schenirer came to Grójec . . . I had heard amazing stories about an extraordinary woman," recalled a girl eager to attenda Schenirer school. It offered religious girls a modern education. Raised in a **Hasidic** family, Schenirer had completed Polish public school and, with her father's help, studied religious texts in **Yiddish** translation. A seamstress by trade, she set up her first school in her apartment in 1917 and called it Beys Yankev. Two years later, the Agudas Yisroel, the religious party, endorsed the Beys Yankev schools, and by 1938, about 40,000 girls were attending as many as 250 branches. In this way, Schenirer revolutionized the place of Jewish women within Orthodox Judaism.

From the Street, enter the first doorway on your left. Walk through Vilna and take the stairs leading to the mezzanine. Go straight ahead and to your right until you come to the schoolroom. The last desk on the right is dedicated to religious schools.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 8 to highlight 9

## 10. Rachel Auerbach

**Gallery 7:**
Holocaust, 1939–1944

"So many times I have tried to write but somehow, my hands could never find the strength. . . And who knows whether there will be a single witness left of this disaster," wrote Rachel Auerbach in the journal she kept in the Warsaw ghetto. A writer and social activist, Auerbach was a member of *Oyneg Shabes*, the clandestine archive organized by Emanuel Ringelblum to record everything that took place in the Warsaw ghetto. Excerpts from her journal, which appear often in the Warsaw ghetto section of the Holocaust gallery, accompany the film about social welfare in the ghetto and in the *Oyneg Shabes* part.

From the entrance to the Holocaust gallery, pass through the corridor with German notices on the left wall and enter the Warsaw ghetto section. On your left is a presentation of *Oyneg Shabes* and further along the section on social welfare.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 9 to highlight 10

## 11. Sara Hurwic

**Gallery 8:**
Postwar Years, 1944 to the present

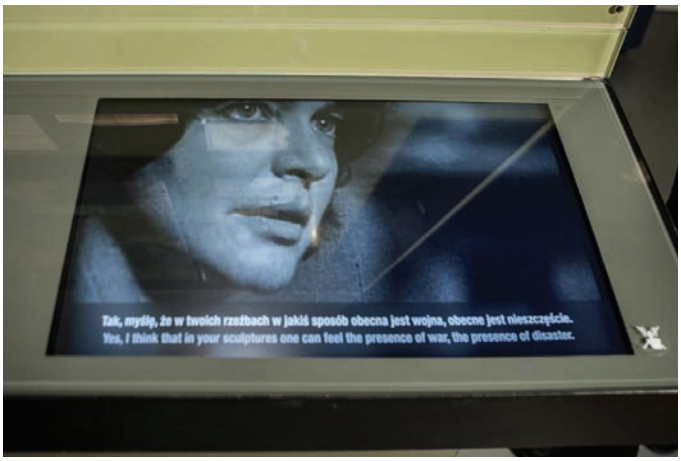

"In my opinion, the only solution to the Jewish issue is this: either our own state, Palestine, or, complete assimilation." This is one of hundreds of answers to questions that Sara Hurwic, a sociologist, sent to Jews in Poland in 1948. This survey, which was the basis for her doctoral dissertation, explored their attitudes to religion, language, change of name, assimilation, antisemitism, emigration, and the creation of the State of Israel. Hurwic published her dissertation first in English in Israel in 1986 and in Polish only in 1996, after the fall of communism. This unique document captures the thoughts and feelings of Holocaust survivors in Poland just after the war.

Pass through the first two sections of the gallery. Head for the table and chair just past the film of the unveiling of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. Take a seat and explore Hurwic's story and survey.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 10 to highlight 11

## 12. Alina Szapocznikow

**Gallery 8:**
Postwar Years, 1944 to the present




"The calamities of the war don't count for me," declared the artist Alina Szapocznikow. She had survived the Pabianice and Łódź ghettos and the Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Theresienstadt camps, but rarely referred to her wartime experience in her work. She did however enter the competition for an International Monument to the Victims of Fascism in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Raised in an assimilated family, Szapocznikow considered Jewishness – and her wartime experiences – a private matter. After the war she studied in Prague and Paris and, in 1951, returned to Poland, where she was active in artistic life. She died in France in 1973 at the age of 47.

Walk past the Club to the original paintings in showcases. On your left is Szapocznikow's proposal for the monument. On the ledge opposite and to your right is a film about her life and work.

**CHECK MAP:**
from highlight 11 to highlight 12

# Glossary

**Aron ha-kodesh** (Holy Ark) – cabinet in which → **Torah** scrolls, the most sacred object in Judaism, are kept. The ark is located at the eastern wall of the → **synagogue**, the direction of Jerusalem and prayer.

**Ashkenazim** – descendants of Jews who, from the Middle Ages, resided initially in German lands, and later also in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. Today they also live in Israel and in many other countries. Some still speak → **Yiddish**. They have their own customs, which differ somewhat from those of → **Sephardim**.

**Bet midrash** (Yiddish: *besmedresh*, study house) – a public place, supported by the → **kehillah**, Jewish community, where men gather to study → **Torah** and also for prayer.

**Bimah** – raised platform from which the public reading from the → **Torah** scroll takes place. The bimah in Polish → **synagogues** is traditionally located at the center of the main prayer hall and faces the eastern wall.

**Cantor** (Hebrew: *hazan*, Yiddish: *khazn*) – a professional prayer leader with musical ability who conducts the synagogue service. A → **rabbi** or layperson may also conduct the service.

**Diaspora** – the collective of Jews living outside the Land of Israel.

**Galitsianer** – Jew from Galicia, a province of the Austrian Empire created from the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the late 18th century. According to the stereotype, Galitsianers were the opposite of → **Litvaks**.

**Ḥeder** (Yiddish: *kheyder*, lit.: room) – traditional school where young boys learn to read Hebrew and study the → **Torah**. Their teacher is called a melamed.

**Halakhah** – Jewish religious law, which governs all aspects of Jewish life, is based on the commandments (*mitzvot*) in the → **Torah**.

**Hasidism** – a movement of spiritual renewal that began in the 18th century in Podolia. Israel ben Eliezer, known as Ba'al Shem Tov (Besht), is considered the founder. The movement is organized around charismatic leaders → **tsadikim** and is based on a religious ethos rooted in mystical experience, with an emphasis on ecstatic worship, song, and dance.

**Haskalah** – Jewish Enlightenment, a movement that emerged at the end of the 18th century. Its proponents, maskilim, promoted the renewal of Jewish life by reforming it and adopting a modern sensibility. They encouraged the teaching of modern Hebrew as well as foreign languages and other secular subjects.

**Hebrew** – both the Jewish sacred language of prayer and study (Yiddish: *loshn-koydesh*) and modern Hebrew (Hebrew: *ivrit*), which developed in the 19th century and became the official language of the State of Israel.

**Kabbalah** – the Jewish mystical tradition, both philosophical and practical. Kabbalah is believed to hold the secrets to the universe and to contact with God. *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Radiance), a medieval collection of mystical commentaries on the → **Torah**, is the key text of kabbalah.

**Kahal** – Jewish executive council responsible for governing a kehilla, the organized Jewish community in a particular location. The kahal recorded its decisions in a pinkas, a communal record book.

**Karaites** – Adhering only to the → **Torah** itself, Karaites reject the rabbinic interpretations of its laws, in contrast with Rabbinite Jews. Originating in medieval Babylonia, Karaites eventually settled in Crimea, Lithuania, and other parts of Eastern Europe.

**Kashrut** – laws of ritual purity relating to food, which prohibit eating certain animals and the mixing of milk and meat, and that prescribe how meat is to be slaughtered and prepared. These laws are based on the biblical book of Leviticus. Food that is fit to eat, according to these laws, is kosher.

**Klezmer** – a musician who traditionally performed at weddings and on other occasions, traditionally in a band that included a violinist, bassist, cymbalist, and drummer, and later also a clarinetist and trumpeter.

**Litvak** – a Jew from the northeastern part of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This region (Yiddish: *Lite*, Hebrew: *Lita*) includes Lithuania and parts of Belarus, Latvia, and nearby areas. According to a stereotype that arose in the 19th century, Litvaks are the opposite of → **Galitsianers**.

**Maḥzor** – festival prayer book, in contrast with the siddur, a daily and → **Shabbat** prayer book.

**Matzevah** – Jewish tombstone. In the historic territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Jewish tombstones were often elaborately carved and might be painted in bright colors.

**Mikveh** – pool for ritual immersion.

**Minhag** – Jewish custom, which often has the force of binding religious law → **Halakhah**.

**Minyan** – prayer quorum. Traditionally, a minimum of ten Jewish men (at least 13 years old) is required for public worship in the synagogue, for the → **Torah** reading, and at weddings, funerals, and other religious ceremonies.

**Rabbi** – religious leader of a Jewish congregation who is qualified to resolve issues on the basis of → **Halakhah**. A rabbi heads the Jewish court (Hebrew: *bet din*, Yiddish: *bezdin*), teaches → **Torah**, performs marriages, and certifies that foods conform to the requirements of → **kashrut**.

**Sephardim** – descendants of Jews who lived on the Iberian Peninsula. Following expulsion from Spain and Portugal during the 15th century, Sephardim settled in Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire, including the Balkans and North Africa. Some still speak Ladino and many observe their own customs, which contrast with some of those of → **Ashkenazim**.

**Shabbat** (Yiddish: *shabes*) – day of rest, from sunset Friday until shortly after sunset Saturday, during which work is prohibited.

**Shtetl** (lit: town) – The Yiddish word shtetl, when used in English, refers to towns in Eastern Europe where Jews formed a large percentage of the population and developed a distinctive way of life.

**Shtibl** – a room or small building where → **Hasidic** men, followers of a particular → **tsadik**, gather to pray, study, and socialize.

**Synagogue** (Yiddish: *shul*) – house of prayer. Traditionally, men and women sit in separate sections.

**Talmud** – compilation of Jewish legal literature. The Talmud consists of the Mishna, a legal code that specifies how the commandments of the → **Torah** should be carried out, and the Gemara, rabbinical interpretations of the Mishna. The material in the Talmud was created between the 3rd and 5th century CE in Palestine and Babylonia. The Babylonian Talmud is more comprehensive and became more popular than the one created in Palestine, which is known as the Jerusalem Talmud.

**Torah** – In the narrow sense, Torah refers to the first five books of the Bible. In the broad sense, Torah refers to all Jewish sacred teachings stemming in one way or another from the written Torah. The handwritten Torah scroll is the most sacred object in Judaism.

**Tsadik** (Yiddish: *rebe*) – literally "righteous person," refers to a charismatic leader associated with → **Hasidism**. *Tsadikim* are considered by their followers to be intermediaries between God and His people.

**Yeshiva** – religious academy where young Jewish men study the → **Talmud** and other religious texts.

**Yiddish** – the historic Jewish vernacular of → **Ashkenazi** Jews, a fusion of German dialects, Hebrew and Aramaic, and Judeo-Romance and Slavic languages. The beginnings of Yiddish are in the Rhineland in the Middle Ages. About 13 million people spoke Yiddish before the Second World War.