



# Manifestations of Zionism

IN JEWISH IDENTITY



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**The Jewish people are a diverse ethnic and religious group who emerged in the land of Israel over 3,000 years ago. Jewish identity and peoplehood include shared ancestry, history, language, culture, and religious beliefs. Israel is the ancestral home of the Jewish people, and the birthplace of their religion (Judaism) and their language (Hebrew). The terms “Jew” and “Judaism” are tied to a specific geographic location, Judea, which is part of the Land of Israel. Both ancient sources and modern scholarship confirm these facts.**

While a minority of Jews always remained in their ancestral home, most were scattered across Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond due to violence and oppression by the Roman Empire and others. This created the diaspora (Jews living outside of Israel) and contributed to the diverse tapestry that is the Jewish people today. At the same time, Israel remained a central pillar of Jewish identity for communities around the world. A major reason why the modern State of Israel exists is because Jews yearned to return for thousands of years. Today, that land is home to nearly half of the world’s Jewish population.

Scholars of comparative religion have compared Jews to other indigenous peoples who are also deeply tied to their ancestral lands. In traditional Jewish thought and practice, the Land of Israel is also a spiritual homeland. Synagogues across the world are constructed facing Jerusalem, and Jews recite daily prayers that long for return and restoration. Rituals throughout the Jewish calendar—such as concluding the Passover seder and Yom Kippur with “Next year in Jerusalem,” or breaking a glass at weddings to mourn the destruction of the Temple—express this enduring

connection. Jewish traditions, history, and identity are rooted in sacred geography and relationships with their ancestral home.

Zionism is an expression of this deep connection and desire to be free in the land of Israel. On a political level, Zionism is the movement supporting the Jewish people’s right to self-determination. The word “Zion” literally refers to the name of a hill in Jerusalem and is used when referring to Jerusalem or Israel. References to Zion and the Land of Israel are found throughout Jewish texts, in religious books thousands of years old, in poetry and Rabbinic texts from the Middle Ages, and in modern-day literature.

Multiple studies show that the vast majority of Jews see Israel as an [important part](#)<sup>1</sup> of their identity and [consider](#)<sup>2</sup> denying Israel’s right to exist to be [antisemitic](#).<sup>3</sup> Targeting, marginalizing, ostracizing, and otherwise discriminating against Jews because of their connection to Israel or their Zionism is no more acceptable than targeting any other aspect of one’s Jewish identity. Using “Zionists” as a code word for “Jews” is similarly unacceptable, even when such speech is framed as “political.”

**Below are just a few examples of the numerous ways Zionism is part of daily Jewish identity.**

1 [pewrsr.ch/414pGlp](https://www.pewresearch.org/414pGlp)  
2 [bit.ly/ajc-report-2024](https://bit.ly/ajc-report-2024)  
3 [bit.ly/drawing-the-line-2024](https://bit.ly/drawing-the-line-2024)

## ZIONISM IN JEWISH TRADITIONS AND CULTURE

### Breaking a Glass at Jewish Weddings

At the end of a Jewish wedding ceremony, a glass is stepped on and shattered to remember the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, which marked the end of Jewish self-rule in the land of Judea. This tradition emphasizes that even in moments of intense joy, Jews must not forget the struggles their people have endured.

### Challah

Jews traditionally eat this bread every Sabbath. The etymology of “challah” is derived from a Hebrew root word meaning “portion,” referencing the ancient Sabbath practice when Jews gave part of their bread to the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem as part of ritual observance.

### Shemittah

Shemittah is a biblical practice during which agricultural work pauses and landowners give up ownership of their fields. Any produce that grows naturally during this year is considered communal and may be taken by anyone. The practice is part of a seven-year cycle rooted in Jewish law and applies only to agricultural land in Israel.



## ZIONISM IN JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND PRAYERS

### “Next Year in Jerusalem!”

For centuries, Jews have ended both the Passover seder and the Yom Kippur service with the refrain “L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim,” or “Next Year in Jerusalem.” This declaration reflects the Jewish people’s yearning throughout time—and especially during eras of expulsion and persecution—to return to Jerusalem and Israel as a free people.

### Holiday of Chanukah

Chanukah is a Jewish holiday that lasts for eight days and is celebrated during the winter months. The word itself means “dedication” and refers to the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in the second century BCE. The holiday celebrates a revolt by a Jewish group called the Maccabees against the colonization of their land, the erasure of their identity, and the desecration of their Temple in Jerusalem by the invading Seleucid Greek Empire.

### Facing Toward Jerusalem When Praying

Traditional synagogues are built with the ark containing the Torah facing in the direction of Jerusalem so that the congregation prays towards Israel.

### Three Pilgrimage Festivals

The three pilgrimage festivals (Shalosh Regalim in Hebrew) of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot are the three Jewish holidays during which, in ancient times, all able-bodied Jews were commanded to travel to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple.



## The Mourner's Kaddish

This prayer, traditionally said by mourners, states, “May Your sovereignty be accepted in our own days, in our lives, and in the life of all the House of Israel. May G-d comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

## The Weekly Torah Service

When the Torah scroll is removed from the ark during the weekly prayer service so that it can be read from, worshippers proclaim, “Ki Mitzion: For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

## The Amidah

In Judaism's central prayer, traditionally recited three times a day, the return to Zion and the restoration of Jerusalem are mentioned repeatedly (“And to Jerusalem your city may you return;” “May our eyes behold your return to Zion ... Blessed are you, who restores his presence to Zion.”)

## Birkat HaMazon, Grace After Meals

During the blessing made after meals, Jerusalem and Zion are repeatedly mentioned as places of great holiness and places for which Jews yearn. (“Have mercy Lord ... on Jerusalem, Your city, on Zion the resting place of your glory” and “Blessed are you G-d who rebuilds Jerusalem in His mercy.”)

# MODERN MANIFESTATIONS OF ZIONISM

**Hebrew** is the ancient language of the Jewish people. It is a Canaanite dialect that is indigenous to the Land of Israel. Even after spoken Hebrew gradually declined in the Jewish diaspora, Jews continued using it in religious texts and rituals. This allowed it to be revived as a modern language in the late 19th century. Today, modern Hebrew is the national language of Israel, home to nearly half of the world's Jewish population. Modern Hebrew is also taught and used in Jewish schools, synagogues, camps, and community centers throughout the Jewish diaspora. Though many Jewish communities around the world developed their own regional languages (e.g., Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic) or used the local spoken language, Hebrew remained the shared language of Jews around the world.

**The Menorah: Israel's Official Emblem** is a seven-branched candelabrum symbolizing Jewish heritage. Jewish tradition, as reflected in the Chanukah story and the Roman Arch of Titus, recalls a golden menorah that once stood in the Temple of Jerusalem.

## HaTikvah (“The Hope”), Israeli National Anthem

Originally written as a poem in the 19th century, the Israeli national anthem references Zionism as core to Jewish identity. The lyrics state, “As long as the Jewish spirit is yearning deep in the heart, With eyes turned toward the East, looking toward Zion, Then our hope—the two-thousand-year-old hope—will not be lost: To be a free people in our land. The land of Zion and Jerusalem.”



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## SAMPLE STUDENT LETTER TO AN ADMINISTRATOR REVIEWING A BIAS COMPLAINT

My Zionism and my connection to Israel are central parts of my Jewish identity, ancestry, ethnicity, religion, and culture.

Jews are indigenous to Judea, the land now known as Israel. We have a shared ancestry tracing back to that land. Indeed, “Jew” is just the English word for Judean.

My people’s language, Hebrew, comes from Israel. Many of our holidays, like Passover and Chanukah, are deeply connected to that land. I regularly attend educational, religious, and social events that celebrate Israel and Israeli culture. Many of my Jewish peers travel to Israel to further explore our Jewish heritage.

Just as many indigenous communities maintain a sacred connection to their ancestral lands, many Jewish religious practices are rooted in the Land of Israel. Our daily prayers, holiday rituals, and even the design of our houses of worship reflect this deep bond.

Israel is not merely a place of historical or spiritual significance. It is also where almost half of my people live today. It would be impossible to separate my connection to Israel or my Zionism from the rest of my Jewish identity.

