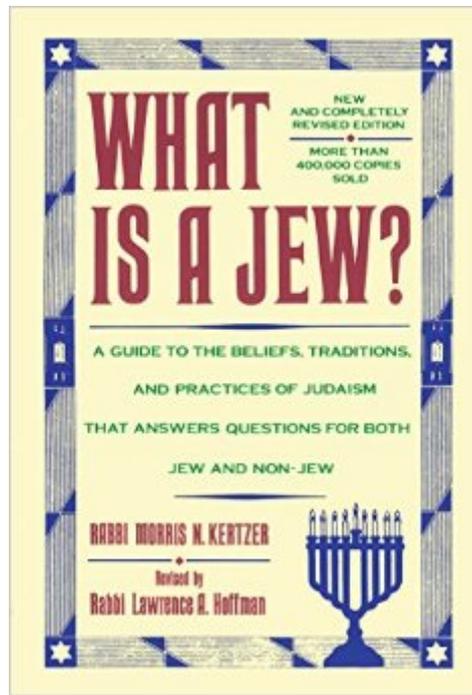


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# What Is A Jew?



## Synopsis

With over 400,000 copies sold, > is the classic guide that answers 100 of the most commonly asked questions about Jewish life and customs. Completely revised and reorganized, this guide to the traditions, beliefs, and practices of Judaism "for both Jews and non-Jews" tackles a wide range of subjects in a question-and-answer format. Ideal for conversion students, interfaith couples, and congregants seeking answers to essential day-to-day issues.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (40 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #162,798 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #56 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Theology](#) #64 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies > Judaism](#) #105 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Jewish Life](#)

## Customer Reviews

Some books on religion give a warm fuzzy feeling - others give a lot of detailed information. This work is definitely in category two! In a question-response format (114 of each), this volume manages to cover almost anything one would want to know about Judaism. Originally written by the late Rabbi Morris N. Kertner, his nephew Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman has updated it. ("What Is a Jew" was first published in 1953, and has gone through three revisions, and countless reprints.) A new feature I found very useful in this revised edition is its transliteration of Hebrew words -- abundant in this work -- as they occur, together with their meanings. The 148 Hebrew (and occasionally Yiddish or Aramaic) terms used throughout the text are brought together in a glossary at the end of the volume, too. ---- Though this book is written from a "middle of the road" Jewish perspective, it carefully points out the differences between the four contemporary major divisions of Judaism (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist schools). "What Is a Jew" also gives fair treatment to the Chasidim (Hassidim), and such historical schools as the Sadducees, Pharisees, Mitnagdim, and others. To give an idea of the range of questions covered in this

paperback, here is a brief sample: "Who Were `The Rabbis'?" ; "What is Halachah?" ; "Is There a Priesthood in Judaism?" ; "Do Jews Believe Literally in Satan?" ; "According to Judaism, Do Animals Have Rights?" ; "What is the Difference Between A Synagogue, a Shul, and A Temple?" ; Why Do Some Jews Keep Only One Day of a Holy Day, While Others Keep Two?" ; and "What Is the Jewish Attitude Toward Divorce?" ; "Does Judaism Accept Converts?" , and many other equally interesting topics.

I hesitate to write this review because it concerns an aspect of this book that will not be important to many readers, yet it may be very important to some. If you are a Humanistic, cultural or agnostic Jew you may be interested in what follows here. The unique and amazing aspect of the original edition of Rabbi Kertzer's book (first published in 1953 and revised by him in 1960) was that it was almost entirely non-theistic. It did not emphasize the role of God in being a Jew at all. It had little to no connection with "establishment Judaism." For those of us who do not believe in divine revelation, etc., the book was a wonder. It presented a Judaism we could all love and recognize and yet did not require adherence to established theistic and traditional rabbinic authority. To get a hint of what I can only call the violence of the re-write, compare the section headings of the original with the current re-write. The total sections of the original were, "What is a Jew?," "Jews and the Community," "Marriage and the Family," "Religious Law and Ritual," "Customs and Traditions," Feasts and Fasts," "Modern Israel," and "Jews and Christians." It's worth noting that in the original the section on "Religious Law and Ritual" starts with this quote from the Talmud, "It matters not whether you do much or little so long as your heart is directed toward Heaven." This quote is representative of the entire original version which values heart, custom and Jewish life more than Jewish authority. The opening quote of the whole text is a reconstructionist prayer that starts with the question, "God, where shall I find thee?" and follows with answers such as "Wherever words come out from the depth of truth.

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