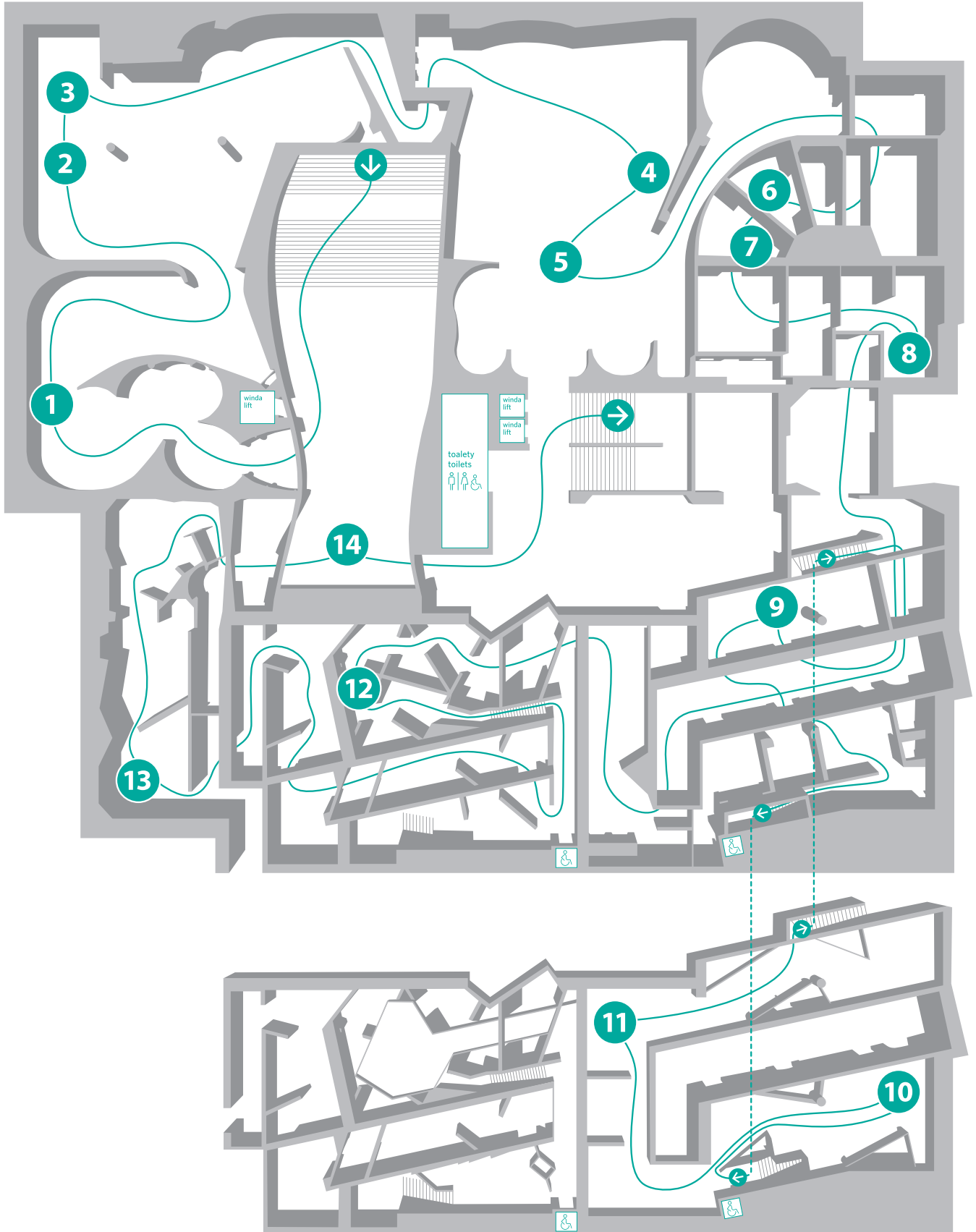


THEMATIC TOUR:

# Jewish Religious Life



## 1. Judaism and Christianity

### Gallery 2: First Encounters, 965-1500



Jesus is debating with the **rabbis** in the Temple in this scene from the 15th-century altar by Veit Stoss in St. Mary's Church in Kraków. Their exchange symbolizes the debate between Judaism and Christianity. Both faiths are based on the Bible, but Jews and Christians interpret this book differently. For Christians, the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament, which Jews do not accept. Accordingly, Jews were to be tolerated because they witnessed the life and martyrdom of Christ, but subordinated because they did not accept Christianity.

Walk towards the wooden stronghold, past the round bracteate table with its two round interactive screens. On the opposite wall are the Gniezno Doors. To their right is the scene showing Jesus debating with the rabbis in the Temple.

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

## 2. Shulhan arukh

### Gallery 3: Paradisus Iudaeorum, 1565-1648



Explore the *Shulhan arukh*, a concise code of Jewish law related to the **Shabbat**, holidays, **kashrut**, and many aspects of daily life. The original text, by Joseph Caro, reflected **Sephardi** custom. The notes by the Remu, as **Rabbi** Moses Isserles was known, reflected the **Ashkenazi** customs of Polish Jews. The Remu called his notes a *mapa*, tablecloth, for Caro's *Shulhan arukh*, which means "set table" in **Hebrew**. This book, with the Remu's notes, was first printed in Kraków in 1578-1580 and continues to guide Jewish religious life to this day.

On entering the gallery, make a hard left and approach the printing presses beneath a large map of Europe. On a bench opposite the printing presses is a standing interactive screen where you can explore the *Shulhan arukh*.

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

### 3. Tora and Talmud

### Gallery 3: Paradisus Iudaeorum, 1565-1648



The **Talmud** is the most important compilation of Jewish legal literature. The trunk represents the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. The branches represent the commentaries and other texts “growing” from the **Torah**. Together they form the Talmud. A life devoted to studying Talmud continues to be an ideal for many Orthodox Jewish men.

Just past the printing presses is the library. Touch the tree trunk and branches on the central interactive table to explore the evolution of the Talmud.

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

### 4. Women's Piety

### Gallery 4: The Jewish Town, 1648-1772



The *Tsene-rene* is one of the most popular Yiddish books ever printed. The author translated and adapted the Hebrew Bible as well as commentaries on it. Women would read the *Tsene-rene*, often called a woman’s Bible, on the **Shabbat** and holidays. This original illustrated edition from the 18th century is in a sideboard together with original ritual objects: candlesticks for lighting candles on the eve of the Shabbat and holidays, a silver goblet for blessing wine, and an oil lamp for the holiday of Hanukkah.

On entering the gallery, turn right into the Marketplace. Enter the Jewish Home, behind the second façade on your left. Inside the green cupboard is the *Tsene-rene*.

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



5. Gwoździec synagogue



The **synagogue** is at the center of Jewish communal life. The original Gwoździec synagogue was built around 1650. Its interior, which was covered with hand-painted prayer texts, zodiac signs, animals, and flowers, was renovated in 1729. The central **bimah**, the platform for the public reading from the **Torah** scroll, is typical of Polish synagogues. The Gwoździec synagogue was destroyed around 1914, but in 2011 and 2012, a team of 300 volunteers and experts, led by Handhouse Studio, reconstructed the roof and magnificent painted ceiling using traditional materials and tools. There were once more than 150 wooden synagogues in the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. None of them have survived.

On entering the gallery, turn right and walk straight through the Marketplace to the synagogue.

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

6. Modern Yeshiva



Why are the hands of the clock moving so quickly? Twenty-four hours pass in less than five minutes in this film about a day in the modern **yeshiva** in Volozhin, which was established in 1803. Hundreds of young men in this private religious academy studied the **Talmud** and other religious texts day and night. In the modern yeshiva, the study of **Torah** was an end in itself, rather than preparation for earning a living as a **rabbi**. The earliest yeshivas in Poland date from the 16th century.

Proceed through the first few sections of the gallery until you come to the Wedding. From there, pass through the Haskalah to the modern yeshiva, where you will see a film is projected on the entire wall.

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

**7. Hasidism**



Explore the petitions, *kvitlekh*, that **Hasidim** send or hand to their **tsadik**, their religious leader, during an audience. The *tsadik* might offer advice, a blessing, or an amulet. *Kvitlekh* are an expression of faith in the *tsadik* to intercede with God. Here are some of the 6000 *kvitlekh* from 707 locations that were sent to one *tsadik*, Eliyahu Guttmacher, in a single year, 1873-1874. Hasidism is a mystical movement of religious renewal that emerged in the 18th century in Podolia and spread rapidly thereafter.

From the yeshiva, enter the space devoted to Hasidim.

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

**8. Great Synagogue**



The Great **Synagogue** on Tłomackie Street in Warsaw, which opened in 1878, was the pride of progressive Jews. These “Poles of the Mosaic faith” identified with Polish language and culture and believed in the possibility of integration. While services in the Great Synagogue were in **Hebrew**, the sermons were in Polish, and women sat in a separate gallery. Listen to the voice of Gershon Sirota, one of the Great Synagogue’s **cantors**, who was the first cantor to make a sound recording.

Go straight from the Train Station, through two spaces devoted to industrialization, to the far wall of the gallery and area dedicated to integration.

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



## 9. Agudas Yisroel



The platform and achievements of Agudas Yisroel, the religious party, are featured in a film and supported by two original objects: a pocket edition of the **Talmud** for study anywhere at anytime, and a *pushke*, money box, for donations for the prestigious **Yeshivas** Chachmey Lublin (Yeshiva of the Sages of Lublin), which opened in 1930. As perhaps the largest and most modern Jewish talmudic academy of its day, Yeshivas Chachmey Lublin was a symbol of the strength of Orthodoxy. Agudas Yisroel defended religious tradition and opposed the secularism of other Jewish parties.

Upon entering the street, go to the right and into the area dedicated to Politics. At the center of the far wall is a presentation of Agudas Yisroel.

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

## 10. Hasidic wedding



The wedding of the daughter of the Bobover **tsadik** in March 1931 was such a spectacular event that Światowid, the Polish photographic agency, sent Ze'ev Aleksandrowicz to photograph it. Thousands of Hasidim from far and wide flocked to Bobowa to attend the wedding. They were welcomed by Hasidim on horseback in costume. "It is our custom to dress up as Cossacks, Cracovians, uhlands, and hus-sars to bring joy to the wedding, just like on Purim," they told a reporter from *Nowy Dziennik*. Joyful processions, accompanied by music, made their way to the *hupah*, the wedding canopy, where the marriage ceremony took place. Photoreportage of this event appeared in the Polish and **Yiddish** press in Poland and New York.

Upon entering the street, go through the cinema room and the space with the dance floor to a corridor and stairs to the mezzanine. At the top of the stairs, turn right into the area covered with maps and head for the far left corner, where there is a sign "Bobowa."

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

## 11. Religious schools

Gallery 6:  
On the Jewish Street, 1918-1939



"I was sent to a **heder** at the age of 3," a young man recalled. Open the last school desk to see films from the 1930s about the religious school system, from **heder**, a primary school for boys, to **yeshiva**, an academy for young men. Under pressure from the Polish state, the religious schools agreed to introduce a few secular subjects. The Beys Yankev schools, founded by Sara Schenirer, provided girls with a modern religious and secular education. There were also Jewish secular schools, but most Jewish children attended Polish public schools.

Return to the top of the stairs and head for the second part of the mezzanine. Pass through the Family Album area and Courtyard to reach the classroom.

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

## 12. Religious life in the Warsaw ghetto

Gallery 7:  
Holocaust, 1939-1944



"All . . . Jews who perished at the hands of the evil ones . . . are martyrs, even those who had not been forced to deny their Jewish faith," wrote **Rabbi** Szymon Huberband, a member of *Oyneg Shabes*, the secret Warsaw ghetto archive. Diaries written by Jews trapped in the Warsaw ghetto reveal their struggle to follow their religion. The Germans demolished **synagogues**, desecrated cemeteries, and forbade **kosher** slaughter. Religious life moved underground. The Germans also ordered Jewish converts to Christianity to move to the ghetto. They attended the two Catholic churches in the ghetto.

Pass through the first five sections of the Warsaw ghetto area to the one with illuminated panels on the wall. The central one is an interactive screen.

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



### 13. Restoring dignity

Gallery 8:  
Postwar Years, 1944 to the present



**Torah** scrolls profaned by the Germans during the Holocaust were discovered just after the war in the Łódź ghetto area. The burial of the scrolls at the Jewish cemetery in Łódź was captured on film. Torah scrolls, the most sacred object in Judaism, must be treated with the same respect as a human body, and if damaged, given a proper burial – or stored in a safe place. Bodies in mass graves were exhumed and also given proper burial. Listen to a **cantor** chanting *El male rakhamim* (God full of compassion), a prayer for the dead.

On your left, as you enter the gallery, is a wall of “registration forms.” Straight ahead, projected at high level is a film showing the ritual burial of Torah scrolls.

**CHECK MAP:**  
from highlight 12 to highlight 13

### 14. After 1989

Gallery 8:  
Postwar Years, 1944 to the present



Although one does not have to be religious in order to be Jewish, “Each one of us has had religious ancestors,” remarked one woman. In a series of video interviews, Jews in Poland answer the question: “What does it mean to be a Jew in Poland?” Religious life, which had been marginalized during the communist period, showed small signs of renewal during the late 1980s. Today, Jews in Poland can join Orthodox and progressive congregations. Even those who do not consider religion important may celebrate Jewish holidays with family and friends.

Final section of the exhibition.

**CHECK MAP:**  
from highlight 13 to highlight 14



# 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**.

**Heder** (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 kehillah, 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.