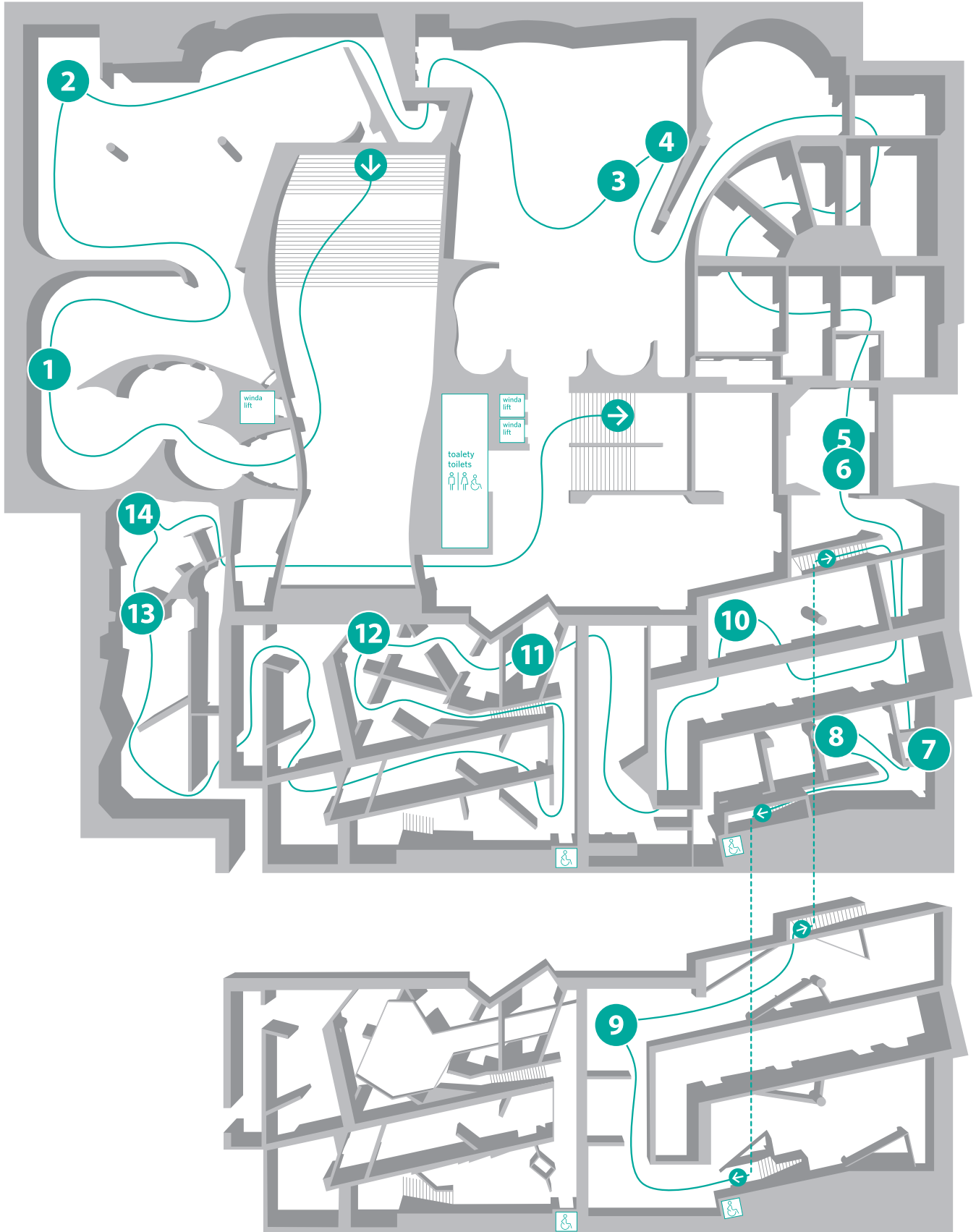


THEMATIC TOUR:

# Yiddish in 14 highlights



## 1. Maḥzor Worms – Festival prayer book

Gallery 2:  
First Encounters, 965-1500



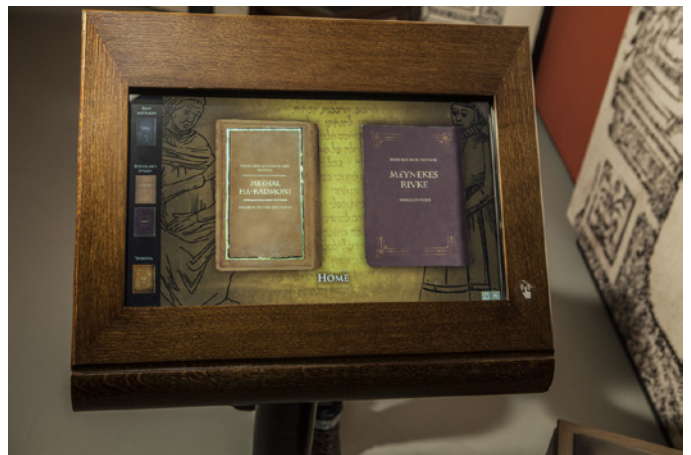
The earliest known complete **Yiddish** sentence appears in an illuminated **Hebrew** manuscript dated 1272 – “Let a good day shine for him, who will carry this **maḥzor**, festival prayer book, to the synagogue.” These words are written inside large calligraphic Hebrew letters. This maḥzor was created for an elderly **cantor** in Worms. It is enormous and was too heavy for him to carry. Pages from this manuscript are featured in an interactive presentation of the culture and languages that **Ashkenazi** Jews brought to Poland from German lands. Also presented here is page from an illuminated festival prayer book in Yiddish that was made by a scribe from Kraków in the mid-16th century.

Walk towards the wooden stronghold, past the round bracteate table with its two round interactive screens. Continue to Town Wall on your left. Beneath the first town, Magdeburg, is an interactive screen.

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

## 2. Meynekes Rivke – Advice for women

Gallery 3:  
Paradisus Iudaeorum, 1565-1648



“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 published a book. *Meynekes Rivke*, which she wrote in **Yiddish**, offers moral instruction and advises Jewish women on housekeeping, good family relations, and raising Jewish children. The book was first printed in 1609 in Prague, where she had died a few years earlier. Not only her name – Tiktiner refers to Tykocin, a town near Białystok – but also some features of her Yiddish point to her possible Polish origins.

On entering the gallery, make a hard left and approach the printing presses beneath a large map of Europe. Just past the printing presses is the library. Touch the interactive screen at one of the lecterns.

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

### 3. *Tkhines* – Women's prayers

Gallery 4:  
The Jewish Town, 1648-1772



*Tkhine Imohos* (Supplication of the Matriarchs) is a prayer written in Aramaic and **Yiddish** by a woman for women. Leah Horowitz, daughter of a **rabbi** and learned herself, wrote the prayer during the late 18th century. Women were to recite this prayer on the **Shabbat** before Rosh Hodesh, the day of the month when the new moon appears, an occasion of special importance to Jewish women. Women also recited *tkhines* when lighting the Shabbat candles or in relation to childbirth, illness, finding marriage partners for children, success in business, or safety when traveling. Some *tkhines* were recited at the cemetery in the hope that the dead would intervene on behalf of the living.

On entering the gallery, turn right into the Marketplace. Behind the second façade on your left is the Jewish Home. On the table are excerpts from *tkhines*.

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

### 4. *Tsene-rene* – Women's Bible

Gallery 4:  
The Jewish Town, 1648-1772



The most popular book in **Yiddish** was the *Tsene-rene* by Yankev ben Yitskhok **Ashkenazi** from Janów – the title comes from *Song of Songs* 3:11, “Go forth and see, daughters of Zion.” This book, which was intended for women, provided a summary of the weekly **Torah** portion, abridged and paraphrased commentaries, and edifying stories. Later editions might also be illustrated. Mothers would read from this book on the **Shabbat** and holidays and tell the stories to their children. The earliest edition to survive is dated 1622.

The *Tsene-rene* is inside the green cupboard in the Jewish Home.

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



5. Y. L. Peretz and modern Yiddish culture



“Without **Hebrew**, the folk has no past. Without **Yiddish** we have no folk.” Y. L. Peretz wrote these words in 1908, when the question of a Jewish national language was hotly debated. Peretz was the leading Yiddish writer of his generation and a charismatic figure. For “Jewish writers, publishers, actors, sculptors, and painters ... being in Warsaw and not visiting Peretz was equivalent to being in Rome and not seeing the pope,” recalled Gershon Lewin. Enter Peretz’s literary salon, an interactive presentation of his life and influence. Nearby, explore the beginnings of Yiddish theatre and the Yiddish mass press.

On the wall to your left as you enter the last section of this gallery is a large portrait of Y. L. Peretz. On the desk below the portrait is an interactive screen.

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

6. Yiddish theater



One of the earliest films of a **Yiddish** theater performance is the 1916 silent movie of *Shulamis*, an operetta by Abraham Goldfaden, father of Yiddish theater. Gimpel’s theater performed many Goldfaden works, many of them directed by Goldfaden himself. The silent film is accompanied here by one of the earliest sound recordings of songs from the Yiddish theater. The performers are from Gimpel’s Yiddish theatre in Lemberg, today Lviv, the first permanent Yiddish theater. These artists made about 600 recordings between about 1904 and 1911. Aiming for a higher artistic standard, Esther Rokhl Kaminska, mother of Yiddish theater, starred in the permanent Yiddish art theater established in Warsaw in 1909.

On the wall, below and to the right of the large portrait of Y. L. Peretz, is a screen.

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

## 7. Yiddishland - Vilna and YIVO

Gallery 6:  
Yiddish street, 1918-1939



"**Yiddish** itself has been recognized as a territory, an anarchic republic with its capital in Vilna," and "YIVO is the scholarly academy of the territory of Yiddish." So declared Noyekh Prilutski in 1935. The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research enlisted the Jewish public in its efforts to document Yiddish language and culture: "Help us collect treasures of Jewish folklore! In towns and cities around the world, where the Yiddish language is still alive, where Yiddish songs resound and Jewish stories and customs still persist - it is there that the treasures of our folklore are scattered. Let's not lose them!" Become a YIVO zamler, a collector, at the interactive station dedicated to collecting Yiddish folklore.

Go left from the film about the First World War and then right to an archway leading to the Street. On the left, upon entering the street, enter the first section, which is about Vilna.

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

## 8. Yiddish press and literature

Gallery 6:  
Yiddish street, 1918-1939



*Literarishe bleter*, which appeared weekly from May 1924 to June 1939, brought modern **Yiddish** culture to Jews across the globe. The magazine also included features on the newest cultural developments in Poland and abroad. Articles on Albert Einstein, Esperanto, Julian Tuwim, the filming of *The Dybbuk*, the latest book on motherhood, and visual and graphic art are featured in an interactive presentation of this magazine. On the wall, to the right, is an interactive presentation of modern Yiddish literature inspired by micrography, the art of composing the portrait of an author from the words of his text. On the opposite wall are the front pages of many Yiddish newspapers.

Pass from the Vilna area to the space with the dance floor. Below the portrait of Y. L. Peretz, are the *Literarishe bleter* interactive screen (left) and micrographic interactive screen (right).

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



## 9. Yiddish schools

Gallery 6:  
Yiddish street, 1918-1939



Supporters of Jewish national culture in the **diaspora** made education in the **Yiddish** language a priority. In 1921 the Central Jewish School Organization CYSHO was created in Warsaw. Its schools, which were run mainly by members of the Bund, the Jewish labor movement, and Poalei Zion Left, a Zionist labor organization, promoted Yiddish secular culture and socialist ideas. By the late 1920s, there were 219 CYSHO branches, including primary schools as well as preschools, night schools, six middle schools, and a teachers' seminary in Vilna. Open the desk to explore the curriculum and activities of the Yiddish school system – a Yiddish textbook, an anatomy exercise book, and postcards from an exhibition of student work.

From the dance floor turn to stairs to the mezzanine. Pass through the Family Album and Courtyard areas to reach the classroom. Open the second desk on the left.

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



## 10. Bund, the Jewish labor movement

Gallery 6:  
Yiddish street, 1918-1939



A rousing rendition of *Di shvue* (The Oath), recorded in the 1940s, is the earliest known sound recording of the Bund anthem. Sh. An-ski, author of *The Dybbuk*, wrote the words in 1902. *Di shvue* was sung at meetings and demonstrations. The Bund, founded in 1897, defended workers' rights and **Yiddish** language and culture. In a showcase on the far wall is the original commemorative cigarette case given to Vladimir Medem, a leader of the Bund, in 1917. Engraved on one side is a miniature of the Yiddish front page of the first issue of *Lebnsfragn* (Life Questions), the labor weekly that he founded during the First World War.

On the right, upon entering the Street, enter into the Politics section. At the far end, is the area dedicated to the Bund. On the far wall is the showcase with Medem's cigarette case.

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



## 11. Oyneg Shabes

Gallery 7:  
Holocaust, 1939-1944



On 22 November 1940, Emanuel Ringelblum, a historian and social activist, established an underground archive, *Oyneg Shabes* (Joy of Sabbath), in the Warsaw ghetto. Risking their lives, the team collected every shred of evidence, from official German notices to ration tickets and diaries, in an effort to “provide an all-encompassing picture ... of what the Jewish population experienced, thought, and suffered.” Ringelblum wrote these words in his diary at the end of January 1943. Excerpts from his diary, in **Yiddish**, appear vis-à-vis quotations from Adam Czerniaków diary, in Polish. Czerniaków was head of the Judenrat.

Pass through the first three sections of the Holocaust gallery – outbreak of war, occupation, and separation and isolation of Jews – to the entrance to the Warsaw ghetto area, which is defined by its sloping grey walls.

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

## 12. Coolies – Song performed in the Warsaw ghetto

Gallery 7:  
Holocaust, 1939-1944



Jews resisted the dehumanizing conditions of the Warsaw ghetto in many ways, among them in poetry and song. *Coolies* describes the plight of Jewish rickshaw drivers in the ghetto: “A Jew can be a coolie, too ... He’s been tested by good and bad ... [He] stands tall despite his troubles. He pulls it all around.” Sh. Sheynkinder wrote the **Yiddish** words, which were sung to a prewar “Chinese” tune. Diana Blumenfeld, who performed this song in the ghetto theaters, sang this song on Polish radio right after the war. Her performance can be heard here, accompanied by German film footage of bicycle rickshaws in the Warsaw ghetto.

Pass through the first four sections of the Warsaw Ghetto area to the Culture section. *Coolies* is included in the film projected on the wall.

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



### 13. Sara Hurwic questionnaire

Gallery 8:  
Postwar Years, 1944 to the present



“In which language are you most comfortable when thinking and speaking?” Sociologist Sara Hurwic (Irena Nowakowska) included this question in her 1948 survey of Jews registered in Łódź, Dzierżoniów, and Warsaw. She concluded from the 817 responses that 84% of the respondents knew **Yiddish**, but that Polish was gaining ground. Read what the respondents had to say about Yiddish at the interactive presentation on Sara’s desk.

Walk straight through the first two sections of the gallery to Sara Hurwic’s desk. It is on the right and opposite the red table.

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

### 14. Yiddish Book Publishing House

Gallery 8:  
Postwar Years, 1944 to the present



Thanks to communist cultural policy – “national in form, socialist in content” – Poland became one of the largest publishers of Yiddish books, second only to Buenos Aires, during the postwar period. **Yiddish** Book Publishing House (Farlag Yidish Bukh) published everything from a Yiddish translation of Julian Tuwim’s poetry for children and illustrated classics of Yiddish literature to propaganda volumes and Yiddish textbooks. Yidish Bukh and the books it published are presented in an interactive bookcase in the 1950s club, the setting for exploring Jewish life under communism. With the onset of Stalinism, pluralism had ended and the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ) became the official Jewish organization, with the TSKŻ club a center of Jewish life.

The bookcase is on your left in the 1950s club, just past Sara Hurwic’s desk.

**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.

**Karaite** – 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.