

Basic Beliefs and Observances *(cont.)*

Mitzvot

Jewish observance is structured around doing *mitzvot* (commandments; singular, *mitzvah*). Mitzvot cover all areas of the life of a Jew, including religious obligations and other kinds of ethical behavior. Some examples of mitzvot follow.



Prayer: Jews are obligated to pray certain prayers three times a day—morning, afternoon, and evening. These prayers include the *Shema*, the most important statement of Jewish belief (see the section of Tallit and Tefillin for two excerpts from the Shema) and the *Amidah*, a silent prayer in which they might ask God for certain things like health, wisdom, protection from enemies, and the coming of the Messiah. Some kinds of prayers are included only when praying with a *minyan* (10 people over the age of Bar or Bat Mitzvah; 10 men in Orthodox Judaism), so Jews are encouraged to pray with a community.



Tzedakah (charity): Jews are obligated to give a certain percentage, generally at least 10–15% of their income, to tzedakah.



Kashrut (dietary laws): According to the laws of kashrut, only split-hooved animals that chew their cud, certain types of fowl (like chicken, turkey, and duck), and fish with fins and scales are kosher—that is, proper to eat. Jews are also forbidden to mix dairy and meat products together at the same meal. In addition, animals (not fish) must be killed in a special way called *shechitah*, kosher slaughter, so they die with as little pain as possible. One of the purposes of the Kashrut laws is to sensitize Jews to proper treatment of animals.



Shabbat (The Sabbath): On Shabbat, from sundown on Friday night until dark on Saturday night, Jews set aside time to rest. It is symbolic of God's seventh day of rest, after taking six days to create the world. On Friday nights and Saturday afternoons, Jews have special Shabbat meals, including blessings over wine and special braided egg breads called *challah*. In a traditional observance of Shabbat, Jews refrain from creative acts which change the state of the world, including cooking, shopping, lighting fires (including using electricity), sewing or knitting, writing or coloring.