

Mercy: The Power of Remembering, Restoring, and Reconciling
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Mercy:

The Power of Remembering, Restoring, & Reconciling

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"Poland is still a wounded country, with a wounded society." Stefan Meller said.

Meller, a Polish historian and former Foreign Minister of Poland, made this statement several years ago in a story concerning the manner in which Poland's votes within the European Union were weighted with regards to Germany's votes.

His statement uniquely reflects that Poland's past is painful and it impacts the present and influences Poland's future.

POLAND:

THE GRAVEYARD OF EUROPE

Poland is a country known by many as the “graveyard of Europe.” It has truly seen many wars and has suffered the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust.

- Think of these numbers: nine million.
- Nine million segmented into six million and three million.
- Nine million: six million and three million.

According to historical accounts,

- Nine million people died in Poland as a result of World War II.
 - Of this number three million Poles died directly due to the war or Nazi executions.
 - The remaining six million people who died were Jews from many European countries who were murdered systematically in six death camps established by the Nazis in Poland as a “final solution” to the Jewish question.
 - Of the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis in Poland.
 - Three and a half million of the six million Jews were Jews of Polish descent.

By not being Jewish many of us have great difficulty grasping completely in its fullest and most realistic sense the meaning of “*Shoah* | Destruction”. *Shoah*, the Destruction, is what we know as the Holocaust – the deliberate and systematic Nazi pogrom that burned or gassed to death six million Jews, 3.5 million Polish Jews.

We can never completely understand *why* the Holocaust occurred. But it did occur. And it must be faced.

It may help you to understand me to know that I am a photojournalist by trade. Gratefully, in my professional career I have had my photos published in my home country the USA, by *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, and internationally by the Associated Press, Reuters and other press agencies.

Thus, items of news, disaster, or human suffering definitely catch my attention. So when I lived and worked in Poland for twelve years, I naturally became curious about World War II and its impact on Poland, I investigated the history of Europe in more detail.

On a personal level, I became aware of the troubled history of the two largest communities of Poland: the Roman Catholic community and the Jewish community. And I realized that I was not part of either of these two communities – I was not part of either the Roman Catholic community or the Jewish community.

In fact the Polish government put me in a third category, a third community: the Baptist Christian community. If you yourself are not familiar with the difference between the

Roman Catholic Christian and the Baptist Christian, I will repeat for you what I told a Jewish woman one Tuesday evening in Warsaw.

She asked me, "I know that you are a Christian, but tell me who you are as a Baptist."

I told her that we gather to worship the One True God, we study Scripture, we pray and someone teaches.¹

In other words, Baptist Christians are not like Roman Catholics, who pray to the saints and have images, priests and ceremonies. Our practice is based on what we learned from the Jewish community. We follow the simple pattern of synagogue worship.

One Jewish man from the *Chevra Kaddisha* – the holy society said it this way. "You are Baptist? I like Baptists because they focus on what we share in common."

On a larger scale, several themes caught my attention:

- The anti-Semitism of Polish and Jewish relations prior to, during and following the War
- The social change in village Poland as people moved to the cities
- *Aktion Reinhard* (Operation Reinhard) – Hitler's plan for the extermination of European Jews.

In January 1933 Adolf Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany and began the radical transformation of Germany. His plan was simple: nullify the undesirables (concentration camps for political prisoners and mentally ill), multiply the desirables (*Lebensborn* and eugenics for biologically and racially pure Aryan traits) and liquidate the barriers (thus, discriminatory actions against Jews, considered the primary hindrances to pure Aryan racial development) in order to establish German supremacy in Europe.

In September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland and unleashed his attack not only upon a military enemy but innocent people

principally, who were Jews. He began by progressively reducing the rights and freedom of the Jewish population and then finally herded them into ghettos.

In the summer of 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and began the systemic extermination of Jews through the use of *Einsatzgruppen* or mobile killing units which in the end proved to be ineffective and costly. For this reason, Hitler ordered the development of a plan to answer the Jewish question or what is known as the Final Solution. *Aktion Reinhard* was the code name for the plan to eliminate European Jews.

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Hitler's *Aktion* plan called for the development of an efficient method to execute large numbers of Jews. The Chelmno extermination camp (originally called the Kulmhof concentration camp), near Łódź, Poland, was the first concentration camp that was used to perfect the method for the mass murder and disposal of Jews.

What developed out of this experimentation was the construction of three extermination camps in Nazi occupied Poland: Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec. These "death camps" were built not to profit from slave labor like German concentration camps but were designed to liquidate the lives of the Jewish people.

The ultimate purpose of these death camps was the mass extermination of Jews upon arrival. Between 1942 and 1943 nearly one and a half million Jews perished in these three death camps.

The Nazis advanced their methods from the lessons learned at Chelmno and the *Aktion* camps and applied them at the Majdanek and Auschwitz concentration camps. At Auschwitz the Nazi system was perfected culminating in the systematic and effective mass murder of innocent people. Estimates place the death toll at Auschwitz between 1.1 and 1.5 million people with the overwhelming majority of them being European Jews.

In the end Hitler's solution to the Jewish question resulted in what we know today as the Holocaust and the extermination of 6 million European Jews of which more than half were Jews from Poland.

As the magnitude of the Holocaust began to weigh on me, I tried to grasp the scope and the scale of the tragedy; nevertheless, I could not even begin to wrap my mind around what had happened and why.²

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY INTO REMEMBERING, RESTORING, AND RECONCILING

Gradually, I came to feel that I must deal with the aftermath of such a monumental tragedy and lead others to deal with it as well.

But the question was, "How?" How do we speak to such an injustice as the Holocaust?

On this question, let me speak personally. I will only now speak of my own individual journey.

Between 1999 and 2001, my own personal thinking was impacted deeply by the story in Moses' book *Genesis*. Moses records what some have called the first news release of murder: Cain, the younger brother of Able, beat Able to death. Then, he hid the evidence. He buried the body of Able and hid his crime.

The news archives records the conversation between the Almighty and Cain's conscience. It is one of the oldest records of moral and inner spiritual conflict in the literature of planet earth.

To me, that ancient news release became very moving from my experiences in Poland.

The ancient record is brief. It reads like this:

"While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then, the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?'

'I don't know,' Cain replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.' "

That is it. Rather short. But the question stayed with me, was the question that God asked Cain after he murdered his brother Abel, "Where is your brother? What have you done?"

For me, it became very personal. I am only explaining what happened to me.

I was living in Europe at the time of the Kosovo Conflict in which Serbian Christians were killing their Albanian Muslim neighbors. It was called genocide and led to one of the greatest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century, when hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees began to tumble across the border of Kosovo into neighboring countries. At one point there was an estimated 650,000 Albanian refugees residing in primarily Macedonia and Albania.

I saw this refugee crisis first hand when in May 1999 when I volunteer to assist a non-governmental organization in its distribution of humanitarian aid to the displaced people of Kosovo. This was the first time in my life that I had heard first-hand the testimony of people whose loved ones had been killed at the hand of their neighbor. It was overwhelming and tragic.

In 2001, I was preparing to move to Warsaw, Poland and was there in June making arrangements for my move. One afternoon, I accidentally stumbled upon the only surviving Jewish synagogue remaining in the city.

I began to contemplate my experience in Kosovo and I was disturbed, deeply disturbed. Innocent bloodshed – it troubled me.

- Could God be asking me this question regarding the Holocaust today?
- And for me, because I was a follower of Jesus, I asked:

How might I personally speak to such a heinous crime in which millions of innocent people died at the hands of their "brother?"

So then, as a result of that ancient story, and from asking those two questions, I began to deal with the question of the Holocaust. I sought a way to speak eloquently, but simply, to that focused issue as a follower of Jesus.

Then, one day I had a conversation in a restaurant in Otwock (a city just outside of Warsaw) with a waitress named Hannah. She was interested in me and what I was doing with a group of young college students in her city. She asked me a great many questions at every meal about what we are doing and why. Hannah was very pleased about our work and the good that we were doing for her city.

One day quite unexpectedly, she suggested that I take these young people to visit the Jewish cemetery in the city.

I asked her very politely this question, "*Czy ma pani pochodzenie Żydowskie?*" ("Madam, are you of Jewish descent?")

She replied simply, "Yes."

What was significant about that Jewish cemetery to Hannah? What was the meaning of a cemetery to a Jew or someone, who had Jewish heritage? I wanted to find out.

Sometime later, I went to visit this cemetery in the forest on the outskirts of Otwock, Poland. So there in this quiet, lonely and desolate place, I began to consider a thought that for me was new, even radical.

CARING FOR THE DEAD: RESTORING JEWISH GRAVEYARDS

I asked myself these questions:

"What if I began caring for and restoring this neglected and deserted cemetery as a means to serve the Jewish community?

And even maybe, could it be, maybe to bring even a tiny bit of healing to 6 million stab wounds inflicted upon Poland?"

What if? What if?

What if I myself began caring for and restoring just this one neglected and deserted cemetery? What good would it do? Would it do any good?

I did not know the answer that day in 2004. But I did know the question: *What if I myself began caring and restoring?*

When I approached the Jewish community about bringing friends of mine, friends who followed Jesus as volunteers, to clean and restore this Jewish cemetery, I was asked, "Why do you wish to do such a thing?"

In Polish, I responded, "*Pojednanie*." ("Reconciliation.")

Not a big explanation – just one word.

I simply said: "*Pojednanie*" – reconciliation.

But it was enough.

And with that single word, began an eight year journey that has led me to where I am today – working with the Jewish community of Poland through caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries.

Some may wonder, "Why would someone do something like this?" My answer to that question began many years ago.

Following World War II, politically and economically, the Polish nation recovered and has been reintegrated into Europe. However, it has not been the same for Jews in Poland. For the devastation for the Jewish people of Poland was not just or even primarily political or economic.

World War II in Europe *was* a political and economic trauma for the Jews. But it was more than that. It was a spiritual devastation, a destruction to which they refer today as the Shoah. For all intents and purposes, in the midst of WW II, Jewish culture was lost, destroyed, and nearly eliminated from Poland completely.

What was left behind were only dim shadows of the past in the memories of people – echoes of a former way of life – home, family, community and to some paradise. Now, these are gone and all erased.

And yet, despite this tragic loss, a remnant remains.

There is a small number of Jews remaining in Poland today. According to estimates, there are between 10,000 to 20,000 Jews living in Poland. Nonetheless and possibly even more significantly, there are silent witnesses that testify to the influence of the once vibrant Jewish culture.

Those silent witness lie scattered in 1,200 Jewish Cemeteries throughout Poland. These cemeteries are a visible reminder of the presence of the ones the Torah calls God's People – God's People among Gentiles in Poland.

Over the last several years I have heard a question many times from Jewish people with whom I had contact while working on a Jewish cemetery restoration project.

The first time I heard the question was in 2007, during a Jewish cemetery restoration. At that time, a Jewish woman asked me, "Why would you, a Christian, do this for us, a Jew?"

"Love," I answered.

"I love God. And I love my neighbor."

"I love the Jewish people and I honor them as the root of everything that I know about God as you have given us the Scriptures."

Since that first time, some Jews have responded to me by saying, "If I told people in Jerusalem what you are doing, they would not believe me."

In 2006, a young Jewish woman said, "I have no words to express about what you are doing. I am amazed."

One survivor of the Holocaust told me, "What you are doing on earth, the angels are proclaiming and rejoicing about in Heaven."

A survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto shared with me, because of what happened during the



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Conversations in Poland



war and Ghetto, he became an atheist.

During the darkest days of the Warsaw Ghetto, during the deportations of Polish Jews to the gas chambers of Treblinka he went to one of the Catholic churches in the Ghetto and stood before the statue of Jesus and cried out, "Where are you, Jesus?" There was no answer.

He said to me as he shared his story with me, "I have watched you and what your friends are doing in our cemetery." Then, he reached out his hand and touched my chest.

He said, "I don't believe in God. But I see God in you."

Many Polish Catholics see the importance of dealing with the past and honoring the Jewish heritage of Poland. One Polish Catholic shared with me that through what we were doing she caught a glimpse of the past and what was once a "normal part of Polish life" – Jews living among them.

Another atheist of Jewish descent shared with me, "These Jewish cemeteries which are presently restored will testify to the normal Jewish life in Poland before the Nazis."

"Whatever our sufferings in our individual lives – including those which are in these abandoned Jewish cemeteries today – these cemeteries testify that people were living there. They were living there with their trades, their loves, their aspirations. That's what I mean by the term of 'a normal life'."

One Polish Catholic woman asked me, "Why do you work with Jews?"

I carefully explained to her that as a heart-follower of Jesus Christ, not just a person born into a Christian family, that I must live as His disciple and put into practice His teaching. Jesus proclaimed that the two greatest commandments given in the Torah were to "love God" and to "love neighbor."

I went on to say, "Jews and Poles have lived as neighbors together for nearly a thousand years. If am a follower of Christ, then I must love my neighbor as myself. What greater way is there to show God's love, than by loving my neighbor? The Jews are my neighbor. I must love them."

This devout, elegant, and skeptical Polish woman then said to me most interesting. In Polish, it is, "*Stucham. Twoje słowa nie biegną po moim uchu.*"

She said, "I am listening. Your words are not rushing past my ears."

So, this is what I am doing. This is what I and a growing group of friends – Christian, Jewish, and others – are doing.

We are opening a conversation. We are seeking to open a dialogue with both Jews and Gentiles. We are beginning to dialogue about the true nature of God's love.

To me, love is not an abstract thought. Nor is love a fleeting emotion. Instead, love is action.

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And his commandment was best expressed by the deeper matters of the Torah "justice, mercy and faithfulness."³

MATZEVAH: MEMORIAL STONES IN THE HOUSE OF THE LIVING

Specifically, the name "*matzevah*" (מצבה) is derived from a Hebrew word meaning a memorial stone,¹ which is placed at the head of a grave facing toward the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The word *matzevah* reflects and captures the vision and purpose of the organization as it seeks to remember and honor the Jewish heritage of Poland by restoring Jewish cemeteries, and reconciling Jews and Christians through participating in a common "*mitzvah*."⁴

"The concept of *mitzvah* is singularly Jewish in that it refers not to deeds, but to behaviors that are explicitly set forth in the Torah by One God."⁵

One of the most important mitzvahs (*mitzvot*) that a Jew can perform is honoring the dead through the care of cemeteries – because the dead cannot care for themselves. This type of care is one of the highest expressions of true mercy or loving-kindness expressed in Hebrew as, *Chesed Shel Emet* (חסד של אמת) – literally meaning "*kindness of truth*."

The Matzevah Foundation is cooperating with the Rabbinic Council for Matters of Jewish Cemeteries (*Komisja Rabiniczna do Spraw Cmentarzy*), the Jewish Council of Warsaw and with Rabbi Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland, in Jewish cemetery restoration projects.

Working together with like-minded churches and Jewish organizations, we organize volunteer trips principally to Poland in order to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries.

These cemeteries are in places where there are no longer Jewish communities. Or, where the community is too small or has aged to the point that it can no longer care for these cemeteries.

In the future, *Matzevah* will explore and embrace projects in other Eastern European countries impacted by the Holocaust (*Shoah*). Accordingly, *The Matzevah Foundation* will organize Jewish cemetery projects in Poland beginning with the completion of the renovation of the wall surrounding the Jewish cemetery in Pruszków, Poland, a city of 80,000.

Matzevah is recruiting and training three types of volunteer groups for these projects:

- Groups that are exclusively Jewish
- Mixed Groups of both Jews and Christians
- Groups of volunteers entirely from churches.

Through Jewish cemetery restoration projects, we remember and make people aware of the plight of the Jews of Poland during the Holocaust (*Shoah*). By remembering the dead and restoring the graveyards, we have already seen seeds of reconciliation over what occurred to Polish neighbors at the hands of the Nazis during World War II.

THREE LESSONS LEARNED IN THE HOUSE OF THE LIVING

Upon reflection, I have learned at least three lasting lessons.

First, you must locate the cliffs of injustice.

Second, build bridges of mercy.

Third, travel the road of dialogue.

1. *Locate the Cliffs of Injustice.*

Find the cliffs of injustice where justice was cheated, clubbed, and killed. Where is the wound of the people? You locate the cliffs of injustice, by listening to the stories of wrongs. In Poland, Roman Catholic Poles and Jewish Poles still feel the currents of the river of rage.

On a cool summer afternoon, I took a group of friends to the place in Warsaw where the bridge that connected the two Ghettos was built. While explaining what happened here, an elderly Polish woman approached and asked me in Polish, "What are you doing?"

I replied in Polish, "I am telling them about the bridge that was once here on this corner."

She began to tell me how difficult the war was for Catholic Poles: How if they tried to help a Jew in any way, in any area, they and their entire families came under a sentence of death.

Then she said strongly to me, "You tell them that we had no choice."

Injustice kills choices. Injustice carves cliffs. And the cliffs of injustice stare out over the vast rivers of rage.

2. Build the Bridge of Mercy.

Deeds of loving kindness lay the bridge of mercy. The bridge of mercy allows us to connect with the people who have suffered the injustice. It allows us to be invited to that table I mentioned above, where five Holocaust survivors sat. It allows us to tell who we are.

And when you do the deeds of mercy, others will say to you what Anna said me: "*Stucham. Twoje słowa nie biegną po moim uchu* – I am listening. Your words are not rushing past my ears."

Your words will slow down and walk. Your words will sit at the table of memory. Others see. Others hear. And your deed-words will not rush past their ears.

3. Travel the Road of Dialogue.

Once you locate the gaping wounds of injustice, you get a sense of how to build the bridge of mercy. And when the bridge of mercy is constructed, you can begin to travel along the road of dialogue. It is a road always under construction.

Alek Wasowicz lived in Warsaw when we met. He was on the Rabbinical Commission for Matters of [Jewish] Cemeteries. I began this journey with him. When saying goodbye to Alek, he said, "In this global world, I do not see why you cannot continue your work from America. You must continue, because you have entered the most difficult dialogue in the world."

The way of dialogue may be difficult. But that road is paved with *matzevahs* – stones of memory. And along the neglected roads to Poland's House of the Living, my friends and I are sharing common times of deeply remembering, practically restoring, and wonderfully reconciling. ■

University Institute New Delhi is an Asia-based learning group in educational conversation throughout South & East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. University Institute provides for-credit education for USA universities and adult learning experiences for international and national students and participants.

Each academic year University Institute hosts in India approximately 70 students from 5 to 7 partner universities for seminars, adult learning experiences, and community involvements and immersions. Students professors, and campus | community leaders have included those from:

- University of Washington, Washington
- Seattle Pacific University, Washington
- University of California, California
- California State University LA, California
- California Baptist University, California
- Azusa Pacific University, California
- Arizona State University, Arizona
- Baylor University, Texas
- Texas A & M University, Texas
- University of Texas Austin, Texas
- California State University Fresno, California
- University of San Diego, California
- Charleston Southern University, S Carolina
- Palm Beach Atlantic University, Florida
- State University of New York, New York
- Syracuse University, New York
- Columbia University, New York
- Kabul University, Afghanistan
- Kateb University, Afghanistan
- Banyan Tree Network, Afghanistan

University Institute lecturers and presenters have included faculty of:

- St. Stephens College, Delhi University
- Jawaharlal Nehru University
- Jamia Millia Islamia University
- World Buddhist Centre Delhi
- **Dr Harisingh Gour Saugar University**
- University of Pune
- University of Lucknow
- Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture Technology & Sciences
- University of Kashmir
- University of Mumbai
- Indian Institute of Advanced Study

The **University Institute Global Conversation Lecture 2011** was delivered by Marc H. Ellis, Ph.D., Director, Center for Jewish Studies, & Professor of History, Baylor University.

Dr. Ellis lectured in the Spring at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, and in the Fall with University Institute at Jawaharlal Nehru University. The *Global Conversation Lecture* series revolves around the syllabus for all humanity: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before our Maker.

University Institute is focused around the crucial question of the 21st century:
what is the best way to live life on this planet?

In the first half of 2012

Thom Wolf, UI Professor, Global Studies, delivered the Swallen Lectures as Visiting Professor, School of Education, Andrews University; international consultant, *Encyclopaedia of South Asian Christianity* (Oxford University Press 2012). **Janaman Swalsing**, UI Lecturer, Leadership & Global Studies, and National Director, UI Community Academy, was International Scholar-in-Residence, Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.

Charles Ramsey, UI Professor, South Asian Communities Studies, with **Clinton Bennett**, Professor, Religious Studies, State University of New York, edited *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny* (Continuum UK 2012).

Kevin Brinkmann, UI International Research Associate, conducted the *Kashmir Progress Prone Seminar*, a University Institute partnership with the Department of Social Work, University of Kashmir.



ENDNOTES

¹ On the Jewish of Christianity, see Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of Christianity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990; Brad Young, *Jesus: The Jewish Theologian*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993; *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007; and Steven Hunt (Ed.), *Perspectives on Our Father Abraham*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

² From the vast literature, see Norman Davies, *God's playground: a History of Poland in Two Volumes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; and his *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Konstanty Gebert, "Foreword" in *Polish Heroes: Those Who Rescued Jews*, Krakow: Galicia Jewish Museum, 2006; Adam Michnik, "Poles and the Jews: How Deep the Guilt?" *New York Times*, 17 March 2001. Rpt. in *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* edited by Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004; Joshua Zimmerman, "Changing Perceptions in the Historiography of Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War" in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003; and Emmy Werner, *A Conspiracy of Decency: The Rescue of the Danish Jews During World War II*, Cambridge: Westview Press, 2002.

³ For a survey of the justice, mercy, faithfulness triad, see Joseph Telushkin, *A Code of Jewish Ethics: You Shall be Holy*, New York: Bell Tower, 2006; *A Code of Jewish Ethics: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*, New York: Bell Tower, 2009; Philip Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Catechism: A Study in the Epistles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940; and Thom Wolf, *Lifecode: An Examination of the Shape, the Nature, and the Usage of the Oikocode, A Replicative Nonformal Learning Pattern of Ethical Education for Leaders and Community Groups*, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2010.

⁴ See <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/369864/matzeva> In the *Torah* and *Tanakh*: Genesis (*Bereshith*) 28:18–22; 2 Samuel (*Sh'muel*) 18:18; Joshua (*Y'hoshua*) 4:20–23, the word **matzevah** "is used to designate a stone memorial, or monument, or, more specifically, as in the case of Rachel, a tombstone."

⁵ Interwoven with the tenets of *Torah*, Service-to-God and Deeds-of-Loving-kindness is the commandment to live a holy life, with elements of holiness expressed in the concept of *mitzvot* (singular—*mitzvah*). The concept of *mitzvot* is singularly Jewish in that it refers not (as often thought) to mere deeds, but to behaviors that are explicitly set forth in the *Torah* by the One God. Observing *Sabbath*, for example, is one central *mitzvah*.

Centering around *Shabbat* are additional *mitzvot* — lighting Friday night candles to mark the start of *Shabbat*, baking the special *Shabbat* bread called *Challah*, refraining from work-related activities, reciting special prayers, and numerous other *mitzvot* that developed from the inception of Judaism and throughout its history.