

Monday was the 40th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing, so I thought this would be a great time to look back on Jews in space. No, not the Mel Brooks version. I'm talking about bona fide Jewish astronauts who have translated the ancient, nomadic ways of our people into a passion for exploration among the stars.

- Number one on this list can be none other than Judy Resnick, who was the first Jewish astronaut to go into space. She served as mission specialist on the maiden voyage of the Space Shuttle Discovery and also on the Challenger. She died tragically when the Challenger broke apart shortly after lift off for its 10th mission.
- Jeffrey Hoffman was the first Jewish man in space and the first person to ever bring a Torah into space. He did this during his 1996 mission on the Space Shuttle Columbia.
- Another Jewish astronaut, David Wolf, was in orbit during Hanukkah and though he couldn't light his hanukkiyah due to the hazards of fire in an oxygen-rich atmosphere, he did take advantage of zero gravity when spinning his dreidel. "I probably have the record dreidel spin," he later said, "it went for about an hour and a half until I lost it. It showed up a few weeks later in an air filter. I figure it went about 25,000 miles." Then of course there's Gregory Chamitoff, who About.com profiled back in 2008. He took mezuzot shaped like rockets on to the International Space Station and placed them on the door post near his bunk bed.
- Ilan Ramon was the first Israeli astronaut. He was the payload specialist on the Space Shuttle Columbia and died along with his crew mates when the Columbia disintegrated during re-entry over Southern Texas. But during his career as an astronaut Judaism was a prominent part of his life in space. He was the first astronaut to request kosher food in space and also the first one to consult a rabbi about how to observe shabbat while in orbit. In addition to a Torah scroll and microfiche copy of the bible, he also carried with him a picture of the Earth as seen from the moon that was drawn by a Jewish boy in a concentration camp during World War II.
- Last but not least on this list is Gary Reisman, who was the first Jewish astronaut to live on the International Space Station and brought a memento from Ilan Ramon's widow with him. He left right before Passover and asked if he could bring matzah with him, but alas, mission control thought the crumbs would be uncontainable. (Tangentially, I can't help but mention that Reisman is a self-proclaimed member of the Colbert Nation and had a cameo appearance on the series finale of Battlestar Galactica.)

So there you have it folks. Jews in space! This list is by no means comprehensive, but I do hope it has been interesting to read.