
"Avinu Malkeinu"
"Our Father, Our King"

Please continue

Expressions and Greetings

What is the proper Jewish thing to say when someone tells you she's pregnant?

How do you wish someone a happy holiday in Hebrew?

Below are some common Jewish phrases and expressions to answer these questions and more.

Sabbath-Related Greetings:

Shabbat Shalom (shah-BAHT shah-LOHM) Hebrew. Literally, Sabbath peace or peaceful Sabbath. This is an appropriate greeting at any time on Shabbat, although it is most commonly used at the end of a Shabbat service.

Gut Shabbos (GUT SHAH-biss; gut rhymes with put) Yiddish. Literally, good Sabbath. Like Shabbat shalom, this is a general, all-purpose Shabbat greeting. Gut Shabbos is more likely to be used in general conversation or when greeting people, while Shabbat shalom is more commonly used at the conclusion of a service.

Shavua Tov (shah-VOO-ah TOHV) Hebrew. Literally, good week. This greeting is used after Havdalah (the ceremony marking the conclusion of Shabbat), to wish someone a good forthcoming week.

Holiday Greetings:

Chag Sameach (KHAHG sah-MEHY-ahkh) Hebrew. Literally, joyous festival. This is an appropriate greeting for just about any holiday, but it's especially appropriate for Sukkot, Shavu'ot and Pesach (Passover), which are technically the only festivals (the other holidays are holidays, not festivals).

Gut Yontiff (GUT YAHN-tiff; gut rhymes with put) Yiddish. Literally, good holiday. This greeting can be used for any holiday, not necessarily a festival.

L'Shanah Tovah (li-SHAH-nuh TOH-vuh; li-shah-NAH toh-VAH) Hebrew. Lit. for a good year. A common greeting during Rosh Hashanah and Days of Awe. It is an abbreviation of L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem (May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year).

Please, don't wish people a Happy Yom Kippur; it's not considered a happy holiday.

Other Expressions

Shalom (shah-LOHM) Hebrew. Literally, peace. A way of saying "hello" or "goodbye."

Mazel Tov (MAH-zl TAWV) Yiddish/Hebrew. Literally, good luck. This is the traditional way of expressing congratulations. "Mazel tov!" is the correct and traditional response upon hearing that a person has gotten engaged or married, has had a child, or has become a bar mitzvah. It can be used to congratulate someone for getting a new job, graduating from college, or any other happy event.

Note that this term is not used in the way that the expression "good luck" is used in English; that is, it should not be used to wish someone luck in the future. Rather, it is an expression of pleasure at the good luck someone has already had.

Yasher koach (YAH-shehyr KOH-ahkh) Hebrew. Literally, straight strength. Figuratively, may you have strength, or may your strength be increased. A way of congratulating someone for performing a mitzvah or other good deed. In essence, you are wishing this person the strength to continue doing this good thing, and you are also recognizing the effort that the person put into doing this good thing. It is most commonly used in synagogue, to congratulate someone after he or she has participated in some aspect of the service.

Strictly speaking, this is a masculine form. Some people use the feminine form when expressing the same sentiment for a woman, but that is unusual.

L'Chayim (li-KHAY-eem) Yiddish/Hebrew. Literally, to life. The toast you offer before drinking wine or other alcoholic beverages, used the way you



Glossary of Words & Terms for Jewish Living

*Beginnings ----- Birth ----- Chanukah ----- Conversion ----- Death ----- Jewish Education ----- Marriage & Home
Pesach ----- Purim ----- Rosh Hashanah ----- Shabbat ----- Shavuot ----- Simchat Torah ----- Sukkot ----- Yom
HaAtzma-ut ----- Yom HaShoah ----- Yom Kippur*

BEGINNINGS:

Berachah (pl. *Berachot*) - Blessing.

Shehecheyanu - Literally: "[God] who has kept us alive" - This is the blessing for beginnings, happy occasions. It is also said at candle lighting, Kiddush, and at certain other specific times during festival observance.

BIRTH:

B'rit Milah - Covenant of circumcision, traditionally performed on the eighth day of a boy's life.

Mohel - Highly skilled ritual circumciser.

Kvater/Kvaterin - Godfather/Godmother: those who carry the baby into the b'rit ceremony.

Sandak - Person who holds the baby during the ceremony.

Seudat Mitzvah - A festive meal which honors the observance of a mitzvah.

Mi Sheberach - Literally: "May the One who blessed" - A prayer usually, but not solely, recited after a person has been honored with a Torah blessing. There are various forms of this prayer, one of which is used to name a child.

B'rit HaChayim - Literally: "covenant of life" - A home ceremony for the naming of baby girls.

Pidyon Haben/Habat - Literally: "redemption of the (first-born) son/daughter." - Home ceremony, which takes place on the thirty-first day of a child's life.

Kiddush Pe'ter Rechem - Modern ceremony celebrating the birth of the first child.

Ken Ayin Hara (Kinna Hurra) - Literally: "against the evil eye."

CHANUKA:

Chanukah - Literally: dedication.

Chanukat HaBayit - Literally: dedication of the house. - Ceremonial hanging of the mezuzah.

Menorah - Seven- or eight-branched candelabra. Most commonly used to refer to the eight-branched Chanukah lamp.

Chanukiah - Eight-branched Chanukah menorah.

Gelt - Yiddish word for "money"; given as a Chanukah present, used for playing dreidel.

Dreidel - Yiddish for "top"; used in Chanukah game. Known in Hebrew as "sevivon".

Nes Gadol Hayah Sham - Literally: "A great miracle happened there." - First letters of these four words are found on the dreidel.

Latke - Yiddish word for "pancake". Potato latkes are traditionally eaten on Chanukah.

Sufganiyot - Jelly doughnuts served in Israel on Chanukah.

CONVERSION:

Ger/Gioret - "One who is invited to join the Hebrew tribe." The masculine and feminine forms of the Hebrew term for convert.

Gerut - Conversion.

Halachah - Jewish Law.

Kabbalat Ol Mitzvot - Literally: "acceptance of the yoke of the commandments."

Tevilah - Immersion in a ritual bath (mikveh) or any natural body of water, which can serve as a mikveh.

Milah - Ritual circumcision.

DEATH:

Gan Eden - Literally: Garden of Eden; paradise.

Gehinom - Literally: Valley of Hinom; place of punishment.

Kevod HaMet - Honor due to the dead.

Taharah - Ritual purification.

Tachrichim - Burial shrouds.

Chevrah Kadisha - Group of people entrusted with the mitzvah of preparing the body for burial.

El Malei Rachamim - Literally: "God, full of compassion"; memorial prayer.

Keriah - Tearing of a garment or a ribbon as an expression of grief. *Shivah* - Seven-day mourning period beginning with the burial. *Sheloshim* - Thirty-day mourning period.

Unveiling - Dedication of the grave marker.

Yahrzeit - Anniversary of the death.

Kaddish - Prayer praising God. There are several Kaddish prayers recited during the service, one of which is recited in memory of the departed.

Yizkor - Memorial services held on Yom Kippur and on the last day of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

Seudat Havra'ah - Literally: meal of condolence; prepared by the friends of the mourners.

Mitzvah - Commandment; obligatory responses to our Jewish traditions.

Minyan - Quorum of ten people necessary for public prayer.

Tzedakah - Literally: justice, righteousness; the Hebrew word we use for charity.

JEWISH EDUCATION:

Bar/Bat (Bas) Mitzvah - Ceremony marking youngster's reaching the age of religious majority.

Haftarah - Selection from the Prophets read or chanted after the weekly Torah portion.

Tallit (Talis) - Prayer shawl.

Hebrew School - After-school Hebrew classes.

Sunday School - Classes in history, customs, and ceremonies.

Religious School - Term that includes both Sunday school and Hebrew school, though in some synagogues it refers to only Sunday school. Sometimes Religious school is referred to as Torah school.

Cheder - Old-fashioned term for Hebrew school. In Eastern Europe, it was the primary school.

Shabbaton (pl. Shabbatonim) - A Sabbath program of study and celebration.

Kallah (pl. Kallot) - A conclave or retreat.

Chavurah (pl. Chavurot) - Informal group which meets together for study and celebration.

Ulpan (pl. Ulpanim) - Intensive Hebrew course.

MARRIAGE & HOME:

Kiddushin - Marriage. *Ketubah (pl. Ketubot)* - Marriage contract. *Chatan* - Groom. *Kalah* - Bride.

Chuppah - Canopy; it can be a tallit, velvet or silk canopy, or floral arrangement.

Ring - Traditionally it is solid, without stones.

"Harei at mekudeshet li betaba'at zo kedat Mosheh v'Yisrael" - Literally: "Behold you are consecrated unto me, with this ring, according to the Law of Moses and Israel." This is the Hebrew nuptial formula.

Sheva Berachot - Seven traditional blessings recited or chanted after the exchange of rings.

Kiddush Cup - For wine, which is drunk after the Sheva Berachot.

Glass to Break - There are various interpretations of the symbolism. The traditional explanation is that the glass is broken in memory of the destruction of the Temple.

Yichud - Time spent alone together by the bride and groom immediately after the wedding ceremony. Aufruf - Calling up of the bridegroom for Torah blessings on the Shabbat preceding the wedding. Mikveh - Ritual bath traditionally visited by the bride prior to the wedding.

Fasting - Bridal couple traditionally fasts on the wedding day prior to the ceremony.

Get - Religious divorce.

Chanukat HaBayit - Literally: dedication of the house.

Mezuzah - Ritual object consisting of a casing and a klaf (scroll) which is put on the doorpost(s) of the house.

Klaf - Handwritten mezuzah scroll containing Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21.

Pushke - Tzedakah box.

Kosher - Ritually fit.

Trefe - Literally: torn apart; food that is not ritually fit. It is the opposite of kosher.

Parve - Containing neither meat/meat derivatives nor milk/milk derivatives and which can be eaten with either milk or meat meals, e.g., fruits, vegetables, eggs.

Milchig - Foods derived from milk or milk products.

Fleishig - Foods derived from meat or meat products.

PESACH:

Pesach - Passover. *Seder* - Literally: order; refers to program of prayers and rituals for the home celebration.

Haggadah (pl. Haggadot) - Literally: *telling*. - It is our duty to tell the story of Passover, particularly to the children.

Matzah - The unleavened bread eaten in recollection of the hurried departure from Egypt. The eating of matzah is obligatory only at the Seder. During the rest of Pesach, one may abstain from matzah as long as all chamets is avoided.

Chamets - Leavened bread and anything made with wheat, rye, barley, oats, and spelt unless supervised to ensure that it has not leavened.

The Four Cups - Each has a specific place in the service. The first serves as the Kiddush; the second is taken at the conclusion of the first part of the Seder; the third is the cup marking the conclusion of the grace after the meal; the fourth cup comes at the conclusion of the Seder. The four cups are said to refer to the promises of redemption made by God to Israel.

The Four Questions - Questions asked at the Seder. The answers to the questions form the rest of the Haggadah.

The Cup of Elijah - Elijah is the herald of the Messianic Era when justice and peace will be realized.

Karpas - A green herb such as parsley or a green vegetable such as celery or watercress. It symbolizes spring.

Maror - The bitter herbs such as horseradish symbolizing the bitter plight of the enslaved Israelites.

Charoset - A mixture of fruits, nuts, and wine. Its color and consistency is a reminder of the bricks and mortar used by the Israelite slaves.

Shank Bone - Symbolic of the paschal sacrifice.

Egg - Represents the additional Passover festive offering, the "chagigah," in the Temple.

Afikoman - A Greek word meaning "dessert." - We make the matzah the official dessert of the Seder meal. To keep the children alert during the Seder, the afikoman is hidden. The children find it and the leader of the Seder must redeem it.

Opening the Door - We open the door to welcome symbolically the prophet Elijah.

Ma'ot Chitim - Literally: wheat money; money-collected prior to Passover to assist the needy to celebrate the holiday.

Shabbat HaGadol - **Literally: the Great Sabbath preceding Passover.**

PURIM:

Purim - Literally: lots.

Megillah (pl. Megillot) - **Literally: scroll.** - There are five megillot in the Bible. The one read on Purim is Megillat Esther.

Grogger - Noisemaker used to drown out Haman's name.

Purim Schpiel - Humorous play put on at Purim.

Shabbat Zachor - The Shabbat immediately preceding Purim. Its name is taken from the additional Torah portion read that day- Deuteronomy 25:17-19 - which begins with the word "zachor" (remember).

Mishlo'ach Manot - Sending portions of food to friends to celebrate the holiday; also referred to as "Shalach Monos".

Hamantashen - Filled three-cornered pastries supposed to represent Haman's hat.

ROSH HASHANAH:

Rosh Hashanah - Literally: the "head of the year"; the New Year.

High Holy Days - Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Also known as the "High Holidays" or "the Holidays".

Shofar - Ram's horn.

Chet - Literally: "missing the mark"; - a Hebrew term for sin.

Teshuvah - Literally: "returning"; a Hebrew term for repentance.

Selichot - Penitential prayers.

Tashlich - Traditional ceremony in which individuals symbolically cast their sins into a body of water.

L'Shanah Tovah Tikatevu - New Year greeting meaning "May you be inscribed (in the Book of Life) for a good year," sometimes shortened to "Shanah Tovah".

Yom Tov - Literally: "a good day". - The term has come to mean "holiday". It is often pronounced Yuntiff and the standard holiday greeting is "Good Yuntiff".

Gemar Chatimah Tovah - Literally: "May you finally be inscribed (in the Book of Life) for good" - After Rosh Hashanah and through Yom Kippur, this greeting is used.

Machzor - High Holy Day prayer book.

SHABBAT:

Shabbat - Sabbath. *Shabbos* - Yiddish and Ashkenazic Hebrew pronunciation for the Sabbath.

Kodesh - Holy. Kavanah - Intention. Mitzvah - Commandments.

Minyan - Quorum of ten necessary for public worship.

Challah - Braided egg bread, for Shabbat and festivals.

Kiddush - Blessing recited or chanted over wine, emphasizing the holiness of Shabbat and festivals.

Tzedakah Box (Pushke in Yiddish) - Container for collecting money for charitable purposes. It is customary to give tzedakah prior to candle lighting in the home.

Havdalah - Literally: separation - Ceremony on Saturday night, dividing the Sabbath from the beginning of the week.

SHAVUOT:

Shavuot - Literally: "weeks" - This festival occurs seven weeks after Pesach.

Confirmation - Ceremony marking completion of the religious school courses, often held on Shavuot.

Blintzes - Cheese- or fruit-filled crepes.

SIMCHAT TORAH:

Simchat Torah - Literally: "Joy of the Torah." - Holiday marking the conclusion of the yearly cycle of Torah readings and the beginning of the new cycle.

Torah - Literally: "teaching." - In a narrow sense it is the Five Books of Moses, hand-written on a parchment scroll. In a broad sense, it is everything, which flows from this (i.e. Judaism).

Tanach - Acronym for Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings)- the three sections of the Hebrew Bible.

Bimah - The raised platform in the synagogue where the Torah is read.

Aliyah -Literally: "going up"; - the honor of being called to recite the blessings over the Torah.

Parashah - The weekly Torah portion.

Shemini Atseret - Literally: "the eighth day of assembly"; conclusion of Sukkot.

Hakafah (pl. Hakafot) - Torah procession(s) around the sanctuary.

SUKKOT:

Sukkot - Feast of Booths. Name of one of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals.

Sukkah (pl. Sukkot) - Booths, hut, or tabernacle covered with branches and decorated with hanging fruit, vegetables, and other decorations.

Ushpizin - Mythic guests invited to the sukkah.

Lulav - Palm branch, with myrtle and willow sprigs attached.

Etrog - Citron.

Hakafah (pl. Hakafot) - Procession, circling the sanctuary with the Torah.

YOM HA ATZMA-UT:

Yom HaAtzma-ut - Literally: "Day of Independence"; Israeli Independence Day

Diaspora - Jewish communities outside of Israel.

Galut - Exile.

Zionism - The belief that there should be a Jewish homeland in Zion (Israel).

Hora - Israeli folk dance.

YOM HaSHOAH:

Yom HaShoah - Literally: "Holocaust Day." A day set aside to remember the Holocaust and to honor the memory of those who perished. Shtetl (pl. Shtetlach) - A small Jewish village in Eastern Europe.

Yiddish - Judeo-German; the everyday language of the Jews of Eastern Europe. Mamaloshen - Literally: "mother language"; affectionate term for Yiddish. Pogrom - Organized attack on the Jewish community.

Anti-Semitism - An irrational hatred of Jews.

YOM KIPPUR Yom Kippur - Day of Atonement:

Shabbat Shuvah - Sabbath of Return, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It gets its name from its haftarah, which begins "Shuvah Yis'rael, Return, O Israel" (Hosea 14:2).

Kol Nidrei - Literally: all vows. Opening prayer for Yom Kippur eve.

Yizkor - Memorial service recited on Yom Kippur, as well as the last days of Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot.

Yahrzeit Candle - Memorial candle lit on the anniversary of a loved one's death and also on those days when Yizkor is recited.