

# Glossary of Words & Terms for Jewish Living

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## CHANUKAH

**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.

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## 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 if the commandments."

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

**Milah** - Ritual circumcision.

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## 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, Shavout, and Sukot.

**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.

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## 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.

**Talit (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.

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## MARRIAGE & HOME

**Kiddushin** - Marriage.

**Ketubah (pl. Ketubot)** - Marriage contract.

**Chatan** - Groom.

**Kalah** - Bride.

**Chuppah** - Canopy; it can be a talit, 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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 candlelighting in the home.

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

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## 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.

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## 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 Sukot.

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

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## SUKKOT

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

**Sukah (pl. Sukot)** - 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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 Yisrael*, 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 Sukot, 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.