

# Glossary of Basic Jewish and Hebrew Terms by Category



## LIFE CYCLE EVENTS

**Brit Milah** (*BRIT MEE-lah*) Literally, covenant of Circumcision. The ritual is performed on male babies at eight days old (if they are sick or it could be detrimental to their health, it is postponed). Also when a male converts to Judaism if he has not already had one.

**Bar Mitzvah** (*BAHR MITS-vuh*) Literally, son of the commandment. A boy who has reached the age of 13 and is consequently obligated to observe the commandments. Also, a ceremony marking the fact that a boy has reached this age.

**Bat Mitzvah** (*BAHT MITS-vuh*) Literally, daughter of the commandment. A girl who has reached the age of 12 and is consequently obligated to observe the commandments. Also, a ceremony marking the fact that a girl has reached this age.

**Chassanah** (*Hassanah*) The Wedding Ceremony Chuppah (*Huppah*) The wedding canopy that the bride and groom get married under.

**Sheva Brachot** Seven Blessings recited over the bride and groom. Seven Days of feasting in honor of the bride and groom.

**Chattan** (*Hattan*) The Groom

**Kallah** The Bride

**Shiva** (*Shivaah*) The seven days of mourning proceeding the death and burial of an immediate family member. Friends and relatives visit the house of mourning to pay respects.

**Shloshim** (*shlohsh-EEM*) Literally, thirty. The thirty-day period of mourning after the burial of a close relative.

**Kaddish** (*KAH-dish*) Aramaic:holy. A prayer in Aramaic praising God, commonly associated with mourning practices

**Yahrzeit** (*Yahr-tsayht*) The anniversary of the death of a close relative.



## SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

**Shabbat** Literally, end, cease, rest. The Jewish Sabbath, a day of rest & spiritual enrichment.

**Kiddush** Literally, sanctification. A prayer recited over wine sanctifying the Sabbath and the Biblical festival holidays.

**Challah** (*KHAH-luh*) A sweet, egg bread, usually braided, which is served on Sabbaths and holidays.

**Havdalah** (*Hahv-DAH-luh*) Literally, separation, division. A ritual marking the end of the Sabbath or a holiday.



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## SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS CONT.

**Rosh Hashanah** (*The first and second days of the Jewish month of Tishrai*) Literally, head/first of the year. The new year for the purpose of counting years.

**Yom Kippur** (*Falls on the 10th of Tishrai*) Literally, Day of Atonement. A day set aside for introspection, prayer, fasting and repenting from the sins of the previous year.

**Sukkot** (*soo-KOHT; SUK-uhs*) Literally, booths. A festival commemorating the wandering in the desert and the final harvest.

**Simchat Torah** (*SIM-khat TOH-ruh*) Literally, rejoicing in the law. A holiday celebrating the end and beginning of the cycle of reading the weekly Torah portion in the Synagogue. Coincides with the 7th or 8th day of Sukkot.

**Chanukkah** (*KHAH-noo-kah*) Literally, dedication. An eight day holiday celebrating the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem after it was defiled by the Selucid Greeks.

**Tu B'Shevat** (*TOO bish-VAHT*) Literally, 15th of Shevat. The new year for the purpose of counting the age of trees for purposes of tithing.

**Purim** (*Puur-im*) Literally, lots (as in "lottery"). A holiday celebrating the rescue of the Jews from extermination at the hands of the chief minister to the King of Persia.

**Mishloach Manot** (*mish-LOahkh mah-NOHT*) Sending gifts of food to friends during Purim.

**Pesach** *Passover* Holiday commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. The holiday also marks the beginning of the harvest season.

**Seder** (*SAY-d'r*) Literally, order. The family home ritual conducted as part of the Passover observance.

**Omer** A unit of measure. The 49-day period between Passover and Shavu'ot is known as the Omer period, because we count the days from the time that the first omer of barley is to be brought to the Temple.

**Shavu'ot** (*shah-VOO-uhs*) Literally, weeks. The 50th day of counting the Omer. A festival commemorating the giving of the Torah and the harvest of the first fruits.

**Tisha B'Av** (*TISH-uh BAHV*) Literally, The Ninth of Av. A fast day commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Holy Temples in Jerusalem, as well as other tragedies.



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## RITUALS AND CUSTOMS

**Daven** (*DAH-ven*) Yiddish word to Pray.

**Tefillah** (*t'-FEE-luh*) Hebrew word to Pray\*

**Etrog** (*ET-rohg*) A citrus fruit native to Israel, used to fulfill the commandment to “rejoice before the LORD” during the holiday of Sukkot.

**Fleishig** (*FLAHYSH-ig*) Yiddish word for: meat. Used to describe foods that contain meat and therefore cannot be eaten with dairy. Bassar Hebrew word for meat. Grace After Meals Recited after eating a meal with bread. Hebrew word: Birkat Hamozon (BeerKat Hamazone). Yiddish word: Bentsch .

**Halakhah** (*ha-Lukhuh*) Literally, the path that one walks. Jewish law. The complete body of rules and practices that Jews are bound to follow, including biblical commandments, commandments instituted by the rabbis, and binding customs.

**Kashrut** (*Kahsh-ROOT*) From the Hebrew root meaning fit, proper, or correct. It is mostly used in reference to Jewish dietary laws.

**Kippah** (*KEY-puh*) The skullcap worn by Jews, commonly known as a yarmulka in English.

**Lulav** (*LOO-lahv*) -Literally, palm branch. A collection of palm, myrtle, and willow branches, used to fulfill the commandment to “rejoice before God” during the holiday of Sukkot .

**Matzah** (*MAHTZ-uh*) Unleavened bread eaten during Passover .

**Menorah** (*meh-NO-rah*) A candelabrum. Usually refers to the nine-branched candelabrum used to hold the Chanukkah candles. Can also refer to the seven-branched candelabrum used in the Temple.

**Mezuzah** (*m'-ZOO-zuh; m'-ZU-zuh*) Literally, doorpost. A case attached to the doorposts of houses, containing a scroll with passages of scripture written in it (The “ Shema ” from Deuteronomy 6:4).

**Minyan** (*MHEN-yin*) The quorum necessary to recite certain prayers, consisting of ten adult Jewish men.

**Mitzvah** *Literally*, commandment. There are 613 commandments, many of which can only be observed in Israel, or in conjunction with the Holy Temple and its service. It is also used to refer to any Jewish religious obligation, or more generally to a “good deed”.

**Mikveh** (*MIK-vuh*) The ritual bath used for spiritual purification at the time of conversion to Judaism, and for “Family Purity” laws after a woman finishes her monthly period and can resume sexual relations with her husband.

**Milchig** (*MIL-khig*) Yiddish: dairy. Used to describe kosher foods that contain dairy products and therefore cannot be eaten with meat. Hebrew word: Chalav.



# Glossary of Basic Jewish and Hebrew Terms by Category



## RITUALS AND CUSTOMS CONT.

**Pareve** (*PAHR-ev*) Literally, neutral. Used to describe kosher foods that contain neither meat nor dairy and therefore can be eaten with either.

**Treyf** (*TRAYF*) The term used to refer to “unkosher” food.

**Tallit** (*TAH-lit*; TAH-lis) A shawl-like garment worn during morning services, with tzitzit (long fringes) attached to the corners as a reminder of the commandments.

**Tefillin** (*t'-FIL-lin*) Phylacteries. Leather boxes containing scrolls with passages of scripture, used to fulfill the commandment to “bind the commandments to our hands and between our eyes.”

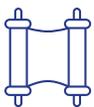
**Tzedakah** (*tsi-DUH-kuh*) Literally, righteousness. Generally refers to the giving of charity.

**Tzitzit** (*TZIT-sit*) -Fringes attached to the corners of a garment worn under a shirt. The fringes may be worn out/exposed to remind the wearer of the commandments.

### \*Jews Pray Three times a day:

- (1) Shacharet = morning service
- (2) Minchah = afternoon services
- (3) Ma'ariv = evening service.

**Yeshiva** Advanced school of Biblical study and Rabbinic ordination.



## BIBLICAL TEXTS AND SCRIPTURE

**HASHEM** Literally, “the Name” used in reference to God’s name in conversation (not in prayer).

**Navi** (*nah-VEE*) A Prophet . A spokesman for God, chosen to convey a message or teaching.

**Megillah** (*m'-GILL-uh*) Literally, scroll. One of five books of the Bible (Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther).

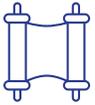
**Mishnah** (*MISH-nuh*) An early written compilation of Jewish oral tradition, the basis of the Talmud.

**Talmud** (*TAHL-mud*) The most significant collection of the Jewish oral tradition interpreting the Torah.

**Tanakh** (*TahNakh*) Acronym of Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings) the 24 Books of the Hebrew Scriptures.



# Glossary of Basic Jewish and Hebrew Terms by Category



## BIBLICAL TEXTS AND SCRIPTURE CONT

**Torah** (*TOH-ruh*) Literally means The Law. In its narrowest sense, Torah is the books of

**Genesis**, *Exodus*, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In its broadest sense, Torah is the entire body of Jewish teachings.

**Torah Scroll** The Torah (Bible) that is read in synagogue is written on a leather scroll.

**Zohar** (*ZOH-hahr*) The primary written work on Jewish mysticism.



## THE MANY FACES OF JUDAISM

**Ashkenazic Jews** Jews from eastern France, Germany, and Eastern Europe, & their descendants.

**Sephardic Jews** Jews from Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East, & their descendants.

**Yemenite Jews** The Jews of the Middle Eastern country of Yemen, whose customs and practices are somewhat different from those of Ashkenazic or Sephardic Jews.



## THE MAIN DENOMINATIONS OF JUDAISM

**Conservative** Accepts the binding nature of Jewish law but believes that the law can change.

**HARADI** Ultra Orthodox Jews who are the most religiously observant of the Laws and Rituals.

**Orthodox** Believes that God is present in our daily lives and the Torah/Law comes from Him and cannot be changed.

**Reform** Believes that Jewish law was inspired by God and one can choose which laws to follow.

**Reconstructionism** Does not believe in a personified God and believes that Jewish law was created by men.

