GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

by Torah.org

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A

Abba - father

Acharonim - Authorities on the subject of Jewish Law, of the period since the publication of the "Shulchan Aruch" in the sixteenth century till today.

Acharon Shel Pesach - The last day of Passover.

Afikoman - The last food eaten at the Passover Seder. A broken piece of Matzah.

Aharon - Older brother of Moshe, Moses.

Ahavas Yisrael - Loving a fellow Jew.

Aleph - First letter of the Hebrew alphabet

Aleph / Bais - The Hebrew alphabet consisting of twenty-two letters.

Aliyah - lit. Going up. 1. The part of the Torah Service performed in the synagogue when a person is called up to the Torah; 2. Moving to the land of Israel.

Am Yisroel - All Jews, the nation of Israel.

Amah - Measurement ranging from 21.7 inches or 55.11 cm to 23.5 inches or 59.7 cm. Pl. Amos.

Amen - lit. "Agreed." from the same root as Emunah, belief, and Ne'eman, trustworthy.

Amidah - lit. "standing". The prayer said while standing that is the central part of every prayer service.

Amoraim - Post-Mishnaic authorities cited in the Gemara, Talmud.

Ashkenazi - lit. "German". Generally used to refer to Jews who are of North, East, and West European descent (e.g. Germany, France, England, Russia, Hungary, etc.).

Avodah, Avodas Hashem - Service of G-d.

Avodah Zarah - Idolatry.
Avraham - Abraham, the first patriarch of the Jewish people.

Ayin Hara - The evil eye.

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B

Ba’al Teshuva, Ba’alas Teshuva - One who returns to Torah Judaism / Torah Observance.

Bais - Second letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Bar Mitzvah - When a young man reaches the age of thirteen he accepts the responsibility of fulfilling the Torah and its commandments. This is a much-celebrated event by family and friends, as it is his inauguration into Jewish adulthood.

Bas - Daughter, girl.

Bas/Bat Mitzvah - When a young woman reaches the age of twelve she accepts the responsibility of fulfilling the Torah. This is a much-celebrated event by family and friends, as it is her inauguration into Jewish adulthood.

Bayis - House;

Ben - Son, boy.

Beis Din - Rabbinical court.

Beis HaMikdash - The (First or Second) Temple in Jerusalem.

Beis Medrash - House of Study.

B”H - Baruch Hashem, Praise G-d

Bima - Pulpit.

Bracha - Blessing, a prayer.

Bris Mila - Jewish male circumcision on eighth day after birth.

Bubby - Yiddish for grandmother.

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C

Chag - Jewish holiday

Chaim - Life
Challah - (a) A tithe of dough for the Kohan; (b) A braided loaf baked in honor of Shabbos.

Chametz - The five grains of wheat, barley, spelt, rye, and oats or products produced from them, which Jews are prohibited to eat or own on Passover.

Charoses - A apple nut mixture resembling mortar used in the Pesach Seder.

Chasidism - lit. "pious ones". A Jewish movement that arose in 18th century Ukraine, teaching closeness to G-d through simple piety and ecstatic singing and dancing.

Chasan - Groom.

Ches - Eighth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Chessed - Loving kindness and grace towards others.

Chaya; pl. Chayos - lit. living; generally used to refer to animals that belong to species that are undomesticated.

Chol HaMoed - lit. The Intermediate Days; the "work days" of Passover and Sukkos. The Festivals of Passover and Sukkos both have holidays at the beginning and end (though technically the holiday at the end of Sukkos is a separate holiday), and "intermediate days" in the middle. During these days, much work is permitted, but many holiday laws remain in effect.

Cholov Yisroel - It generally denotes milk that was produced under constant supervision by an observant Jew. See here for a discussion on how this law should be applied in the context of the United States dairy industry.

Chumash - lit. "five". A book containing all of the five books of the Torah.

Chuppah - Marriage canopy for a Jewish wedding.

Chutzpah - Insolence

Chazzan - Cantor

D

Daled - The fourth letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

Daven, Davening - Pray, praying.

Drasha - A lecture or sermon on a topic in Judaism, often with a theme of ethics or spiritual growth.

Dvar Torah - An insight into the Torah. Literally, a "word of Torah."
E

Eisav - Esau, Yaakov's twin brother.

Eretz Yisrael - The Land of Israel

Erev... - lit. 'Evening', the eve of [a Sabbath or a festival]

F

Frum - Religious, devout, pious

G

G-d - Creator and Ruler of everything. The dash is used in place of the middle letter out of respect and caution not to destroy His Holy Name.

Gabbi - The person who assists in running the congregation services.

Gadol - Great, large.

Galus - Exile; diaspora.

Gan Eden - the Garden of Eden, aka the World to come.

Gefilte Fish - Ground fish, onions, and seasoning cooked in salt water. Traditional Jewish food, usually eaten on Shabbos.

Gehenom - Hell.

Gemara - see "Talmud".

Gematria - A system of numerical values and mystical significance for each letter, word, phrase, chapter, parsha of the Torah and Tanach.

Get - Jewish divorce.

Geulah - Redemption

Gezunterhait - Yiddish for, in good health, said after one sneezes.

Gilgul - The reincarnation of a soul.
Golem - A human-like creature created through mystical powers.
Goy - (a) Non-Jewish person. (b) A nation.

Haftorah - lit. 'Final passage'. The passage from the Prophets read in the synagogue after the reading from the Torah.
Haggadah - lit. 'Telling'. Book from which the Seder service is conducted on Passover.
Halachah - (a) The body of Torah law; (b) a particular law.
Hallel - a recitation from the prayer service for Jewish Holidays from Psalms 113-118, used for praise and thanksgiving.
Har Sinai - Mount Sinai.
Hashem - lit. 'The name'. Commonly used to refer to G-d, while avoiding casual use of His name in conversation.
Havdalah - lit. 'separation'. Commonly refers to the ritual that signals the end of the Sabbath (i.e. it separates between the holy Sabbath and the mundane weekday). The ritual involves making a benediction over a cup of wine, as well as making a blessing over spices and a multi-wicked candle.
Hey - Fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
Hoshana Rabbah - The seventh day of the festival of Sukkos

Ima - Mother.

Jew - A person who was born of a Jewish mother. A person who converted to Judaism.
Kabbalah - lit. 'received tradition'. The body of classical Jewish mystical teachings, the central text of which is the book of Zohar.

Kaddish - An Aramaic declaration of the holiness of G-d's name, said several times during services when praying with a quorum of ten men.

Kallah - Bride.

Karpas - One of the rituals of the Passover Seder. One eats a vegetable (e.g. parsley or celery) that is dipped in salt water.

Kashrus - State of being Kosher.

Kedusha - Declaration of the holiness of G-d's name, said during the chazzan's repetition of the Amidah, the standing prayer.

Kiddush - Blessing over wine and bread on Saturday and Jewish Holidays. Additionally, it can refer to a celebratory buffet held after morning services on Saturday or Jewish Holidays.

Kippah - Yarmulka, skull cap.

Kitniyos or Kitniyot - lit. "Legumes". Jews of Ashkenazi descent do not eat legumes during the Passover holiday. This category includes rice and corn.

Kittel - A white robe worn at festive occasions like at one's own wedding, Yom Kippur and Pesach. A pious person is usually buried in the kittel he wore during his lifetime at the festivities.

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch - Part of the Code of Jewish Law.

Kal Yisrael - All the people of Israel.

Kohen, Kohanim - 'Priests', i.e., Descendants of Aharon.

Kohen Gadol - High Priest.

Kosher - Food permitted to be eaten by Torah observant Jews.

L

Lashon Hara - speaking any form of evil about another Jew. It is forbidden to speak Lashon Hara about another person, EVEN IF IT'S TRUE.

Latke - (Potato) pancake.
Lulav - One of the "four species" taken on Sukkos, but often used colloquially to refer to all four. During the Sukkos holiday, there is a commandment to take four species - the Lulav, a palm frond; the Esrog, a species of citrus fruit; the Hadas, myrtle; and Aravah, willow - and wave them in a special ceremony with a blessing.

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M

Maaser - Tithe.

Malach - Messenger, angel sent to carry out a mission for Hashem.

Mamzer - Bastard.

Marror - Bitter herbs (e.g. horseradish), eaten at the Passover Seder.

Mashiach - lit. ‘The anointed one’. The Jewish Messiah.

Matzah - Unleavened bread. Unleavened bread is prepared in a Kosher-for-Pesach location with only kosher-for-Pesach utensils. Only eighteen minutes are permitted to mix, roll, perforate and bake Matzah from the time water and flour are mixed.

Mazal Tov - Good luck, congratulations.

Mechitzah - A physical barrier. Wall, curtain, that separates men and women in the Synagogue.

Megillas Esther - The book of Esther which is read on Purim.

Melaveh Malkah - Festive meal held after the close of Shabbos to escort the departing Sabbath Queen.

Mem - Thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Mezuzah: pl. Mezuzos - small parchment scroll written by a scribe and affixed to the door post, containing the first two paragraphs of Shema.

Midrash - Collections of the classical Sages’ homiletical teachings, commentary on the Torah.

Mikveh, Mikvah - ritual bath

Minchah - The afternoon prayer.


Minyan - Quorum of ten men required for communal prayer.

Mishkan - The Tabernacle.
Mishna - The germinal statements of law which are elucidated by the Talmud.

Mishpachah - Family, relatives.

Mitzvah; pl. Mitzvos - A religious obligation; one of the 613 Commandments that are written in the Torah.

Mohel - Individual who performs the circumcision of a Jewish male.

Moshe - Moses.

Motzei Shabbos - Saturday night after Shabbos concludes.

Mussaf - The additional prayer of Shabbos and other Jewish holidays.

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N

Nachas - Joy, happiness especially from our children.

Navi - Prophet.

Niddah - The time when a woman is in a state of separation from her husband.

Nissan - First month of the Jewish Year.

Nun - The fourteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

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P

Parsha - Portion of the Torah read each week, one of the fifty-four weekly divisions of Torah.

Parshas - The parsha of...

Pesach - Passover, an eight day festival celebrating G-d’s deliverance of the Jews when they were slaves in Egypt. The first two days and the last two days of Pesach are observed as holy days. The in between days are termed Chol Hamo’ed - intermediate days.

Pirkei Avos - lit., ‘chapters of the fathers’. Tractate in the Mishnah commonly known as ‘Ethics of the Fathers’.

Posek - lit. Decisor; Rabbi whose legal decisions are authoritative.

Pshat - The plain meaning of (e.g.) a Scriptural passage.

Purim - Even though Purim represents a very significant event it is considered a minor holy day
since it is not part of the Torah. It centers on the plot by the wicked Haman to murder all the Jews in King Ahasuerus 127 provinces and how Hashem used Queen Esther and her uncle Mordechai to bring relief and deliverance to the Jewish people.

R

Rabeinu - Our teacher.
Rasha - Evil person.
Rashi - A great sage and commentator on the Torah.
Rav - Rabbi.
Rebbe - Chasidic spiritual leader.
Rebbi - My teacher.
Rebetzin - Rabbi’s wife.
Rivkah - Rebecca, the wife of Yitzchak the second patriarch.
Rosh Chodesh - lit. ‘The Head of the Month.’ This semi-holiday occurs for one or two days of each month - on the first day of every month, and also on the thirtieth day of a Jewish month.
Rosh Hashanah - lit., ‘head of the year’. The Jewish new year, which falls on the first two days of Tishrei.

S

Sandek - Title of the person honored with holding the baby on his lap during circumcision.
S’chach - The covering of a Sukkah. This covering must consist of natural growth that does not provide a complete cover - such as bamboo or tree branches.
Seder - lit. ‘order’; pl., Sedarim. The order of service observed on the first night of Pesach (and outside of the land of Israel, on the first two nights).
Sefer - Book.
Sefer HaChinuch - A medieval work that organizes the 613 commandments by the weekly portion in
which they appear. The work analyzes the legal structure and philosophical implications of the commandments.

**Sefer Torah** - pl., Sifrei Torah. Torah scroll.

**Sefiras HaOmer** - Counting of the 49 days of the Omer between Pesach and Shavuos.

**Seudah Shlishis** - The obligatory third meal that is eaten on the Sabbath.

**Shabbos** - The Jewish Sabbath, celebrated weekly from Friday at sundown till Saturday at nightfall.

**Shabbos Goy** - A non-Jew who does work on Sabbath that a Jew cannot do.

**Shadchan** - Matchmaker or marriage broker.

**Shalom** - Peace, also used as a greeting as "hello" or "goodbye".

**Shavuos** - lit. 'weeks'. A Festival commemorating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Shavuos falls on the 6th of Sivan, and outside of the land of Israel, also on the 7th of Sivan.

**Shechinah** - The Divine Presence

**Shechitah** - Ritual slaughtering.

**Shehecheyanu** - lit. 'Who has granted us life'). Blessing pronounced on seasonal and other occasions for thanksgiving.

**Shema** - A prayer which proclaims the Oneness of Hashem, and the Jewish dedication to Him. The Shema is prayed twice a day everyday.

**Shemoneh Esrei** - lit. '18'. Refers to the main "Amidah," the prayer said while standing that is the central part of every prayer service.

**Shtetl** - Small Jewish Village

**Shoah** - Holocaust.

**Shofar** - A ram's horn, blown during the Rosh Hashanah services.

**Shul** - Jewish synagogue.

**Shulchan Aruch** - lit. 'a set table'. The standard Code of Jewish Law compiled by R. Yosef Caro in the mid-sixteenth century.

**Shemitah** - The seven-yearly Sabbatical year.

**Shemoneh Esrei** - lit. '18'. Refers to the main "Amidah," the prayer said while standing that is the central part of every prayer service.

**Shivah** - Mourning period of seven days by immediate relatives upon the death of a spouse, mother,
father, brother, sister, son, or daughter.

**Siddur** - Prayer book.

**Simcha** - lit. Happiness. A Jewish family or community celebration, such as a wedding, bar/bas mitzvah, etc.

**Simchas Torah** - lit. 'the rejoicing of the Torah'. Festival immediately following Sukkos, on which the yearly Torah-reading cycle is concluded and recommenced.

**Siyyum** - lit., 'conclusion'. Celebration marking one's completion of the study of a portion of Torah or Talmud.

**Succos** - The festival of dwelling in booths. This is a seven-day holiday in which there is a commandment to live in booths.

**Sukkah** - The special booths used during the holiday of Succos.

**Taanis Esther** – A fast observed from sunrise to nightfall on the 13 of Adar, the day before Purim. On this day, the Jews were battling for their lives (see Esther chapter 9), and they prayed and fasted so as to entreat G-d to help them. This fast commemorates the fact that G-d responds to the prayers of those in distress, who fast and repent wholeheartedly.

**Taharas Hamishpachah** - Laws of family purity. In general, upon the onset of menstruation, a man and woman may not have any intimate contact until a "purification" process has been undergone. This process is completed by immersion in a mikvah (ritual bath). Please consult with a knowledgeable Rabbi for details of these laws.

**Tallis, Tallit** - Prayer shawl.

**Tallis Katan** - lit. 'small garment'. Refers to a small four-cornered garment, with Tzitzis attached, customarily worn throughout the day.

**Talmud** - The basic compendium of Jewish law, thought, and Biblical commentary. When unspecified refers to the Talmud Bavli, the edition developed in Babylonia, and edited at end of the fifth century C.E.; the Talmud Yerushalmi is the edition compiled in the land of Israel at end of the fourth century C.E.

**Tanach** - Acronym for Torah (the Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im (the Prophets), and Kesuvim (the Writings).

**Tashlich** - Ceremony of casting off ones sins at a live body of water on Rosh HaShanah.
Tefillin - Phylacteries. Small black leather cubes containing parchment scrolls inscribed with Shema Yisrael and other Biblical passages, bound to the arm and forehead and worn by men at weekday morning prayers.

Tefillin Shel Rosh - lit. Tefillin of the head. Of the two Tefillin, the one worn on the head.

Tefillin Shel Yad - lit. Tefillin of the hand. Of the two Tefillin, the one worn on the arm.

Tehillim - lit. 'praises'. The book of Psalms.

Tes - The ninth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Teshuvah - lit. 'return'. Repentance.

Tisha B'Av - lit. 'The Ninth of [the month of] Av') - A fast day commemorating the Destruction of both Temples.

Todah Rabah - Thank you!

Torah - the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, also known as the Five Books of Moses and the Pentateuch. In addition to the Torah (the Written Law), G-d gave Moses a more comprehensive explanation of the Written Law known as the Oral Law. Both the Written and Oral Law constitute the Torah.

Traif - Not Kosher.

Tzaddik - pl., Tzaddikim). A righteous individual.

Tzedakah - Charity, righteousness.

Tzitzis - Fringes worn on the corners of 4-cornered garments. See Numbers 15:37.

Yahrtzeit - The anniversary of the day of death for parents or other relatives.

Yeshiva - Religious Jewish school where Torah is studied.
**Yeshiva Bochur** - An unmarried young man attending a Yeshiva.

**Yetzer Harah** - The natural drive for misdoing.

**Yetzer Hatov** - The natural drive for virtue

**Yibum** - A marriage law in the Torah (Deut. 25:5-10), often called the "Levirate Marriage", obligating one of the male relatives, ideally a brother, of a man who died before having children to marry his widow.

**Yid** - Yiddish for Jew.

**Yiddishkeit** - Yiddish for Jewish.

**Yisroel, Yisrael** - (Nation of) Israel.

**Yizkor** - Prayer in memory of the dead.

**Yom Kippur** - The Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year. This is the Day that the fate of every living creature and all nations for the coming year, is sealed.

**Yom Tov** - Jewish holiday.

**Yud** - Tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

**Z**

**Zaidy** - Yiddish for grandfather.

**Zayin** - The seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

**Zero'a** - A shank bone from a Kosher animal, nowadays a chicken, used for the Pesach Seder Plate.

**Zohar** - Classic book of Jewish mysticism written by Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai