

Jewish Word Spelling Guide

Yid. = Yiddish

abbr. = abbreviated

esp. = especially

lit. = literally

n = noun

pl. = plural

pron. = pronounced

usu. = usually

v = verb

All foreign words are Hebrew unless otherwise indicated. The letters "ch" in transliterated Hebrew and Yiddish is a guttural sound as in the Scottish loch or the German *Ach!*

Adapted from: http://www.juf.org/jewish_learning/glossary_entry.aspx?id=7862

A

Achashverosh Persian king in Book of Esther

Adar 6th Jewish month (Feb-Mar), 14th is Purim

afikomen last bit of matzah, eaten at end of Seder, Greek for "dessert"

Ainikle (Yid.) grandchild

Aron (hakodesh) (the holy) Ark, cabinet for Torah scroll in a synagogue

Ashkenazi of Eastern European Jewish tradition

Av 11th Jewish month (Jul-Aug), 9th is Tisha B'Av

B

ba'alabusta (Yid.) hostess; friendly woman

bar mitzva 13-year-old boy now responsible for fulfilling mitzvot (commandments); the ceremony at which this rite of passage occurs

bat mitzvah 12 or 13-year-old girl now responsible for fulfilling mitzvot; the ceremony at which this rite of passage occurs

b'nai mitzvah more than one bar/bat mitzvah celebrant

B.C.E./C.E. Before the Common Era/Common Era. A different way to refer to dates before and after the Common Era ("common era" is used to represent the birth of Jesus) is B.C. (before Christ) / A.D. (year of our lord in Latin).

Licht bentch (Yid.) light and bless the Shabbat or holiday candles

biblical of the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, or the Writings

bikur cholim visiting the sick

bimah Stage or Torah-reading table in synagogue

Birkat HaMazon lit.=blessing of the food: Grace After Meals

boychik (Yid.) boy, term of endearment

brit or bris (brit mila) lit.=covenant: (circumcision)

bubbe (Yid.) grandmother

bubbe meiseh lit.=grandmother's story: old-wive's tale

bupkes (Yid.) nothing; something worthless

C

cacamamie half-baked, silly

chag holiday, esp. a religious one

chai (Heb.) life

challah braided egg bread for Shabbat and holidays

chametz leavened products forbidden on Pesach

Chanukah winter holiday commemorating the defeat of the Syrian Army in ancient times

chanukia candelabrum used to light Chanukah candles

charoset Seder condiment of chopped apples, walnuts, and wine; recalls mortar made by Hebrew slaves in Egypt

chas v'sholom lit.=mercy and peace: "G-d forbid!"

chatchke(s) knick-knack(s)

chazan cantor (liturgical singer in a Jewish religious service)

chazerai (Yid.) disgusting stuff, trash

Cheshvan 2nd Jewish month (Oct-Nov)

chevra kadisha lit.=holy association: burial society

Chol HaMo'ed middle 4 days of 8-day holidays, esp. Pesach and Sukkot. rules of the holiday apply, but work is permitted.

cholent 24-hour stew for Shabbat, holidays, etc.

Chumash lit.=five: The Five Books of Moses

chutzpah sass, moxy; nerve, gall

D

daven (Yid.) pray

Dayenu "It Would Have Sufficed," a Passover Seder song; **drash** sermon

dreidel toy top used on Chanukah

dvar Torah lit.=word of Torah: speech on enlightening biblical passage or any aspect of religious thought

E

Eicha Biblical Book of Lamentations; read on Tisha B'Av

Elul 12th Jewish month (Aug-Sept)

Eretz Yisrael (Heb.) The Land of Israel

Erev... lit.=evening: the night before, esp. for Shabbat or holiday; like New Year's Eve

Esther heroine of the Purim story from the Biblical Book of Esther, also "Queen Esther"

etrog citron fruit, used on Sukkot

F

far vus? (Yid.) for what?, why?

fermished (Yid.) mixed up, messed up

ferpitzed (Yid.) dressed up

fertoosed (Yid.) over-dressed, overdone

fleischig (Yid.) containing or relating to meat

fress (Yid.) gobble, eat heartily

fresser (Yid.) glutton

freylach (Yid.) festive

G

gabbai rabbi's synagogue assistant

ganef thief; clever person

gantze mishpocha (Yid.) the whole family

gefilte fish fish cakes

gelilah rolling and re-clothing of Torah scroll after it is read in the synagogue

gelt (Yid.) money, esp. as Chanukah gift

gemilut chasadim acts of kindness

geshmackt (Yid.) delicious, lip-smacking

geshrai (Yid.) cry, shout, yell [n]

gezunt (Yid.) healthy

gezuntheit (Yid.) good health (said after one sneezes)

glatt lit.=smooth: highest level of kashrut for meats

gornisht (Yid.) nothing, emptiness

grogger Purim noisemaker

H

Haftorah a reading from the Biblical books of the Prophets, read after the Torah reading in the synagogue. usu. related in content or theme to portion just read

hagbah raising and display of the Torah scroll after reading in the synagogue

Haggadah lit.= the Telling: Passover book, used as guide during the Passover Seder

hakafot dances or marches around the synagogue on Simchat Torah holiday[n]

halachah Jewish law

ha-levai (Yid.) "If only!"

halvah sesame candy

Hamen the villain of the Purim story from the Biblical Book of Esther

hamentash(en) three cornered Purim cookie(s), filled with fruit or poppyseeds. Said to represent Hamen's hat.

HaMotzi the blessing over bread

HaShem lit=The Name (used in place of God's actual Name)

Havdala prayer bidding farewell to Shabbat

haymish lit.=home-like: friendly, joyous

I

Iyar 8th Jewish month (May), 5th is Yom HaAtzma'ut, 18th is Lag BaOmer.

J

There is no J sound in Hebrew or in Yiddish

K

Kaddish mourner's prayer

karpas vegetables (usu. parsley, celery, potato) dipped in salt water and eaten at Passover Seder

kasha couscous-like dish made of buckwheat

kasher to make kosher, esp. meat or dishes

kashrut the laws of keeping kosher

kibbitz (Yid.) chitchat

kichel light air-filled cookies

kiddish celebratory snack after synagogue services

Kiddush prayer/blessing for wine

kinder(lach) (Yid.) (small) children

kipah (pl. kipot) (Heb.) skullcap

kishka seasoned mashed potatoes and vegetables in a casing

kishkas (Yid.) innards; "guts" ("She's got..."; "I feel it in my...")

Kislev 3rd Jewish month (Nov-Dec), 25th is Chanukah

klezmer (Yid.) lit. = musician. Lively instrumental music from Eastern Europe

klutz (Yid.) clumsy one

Knesset Israel's Parliament

k'neidlach dumplings made from ground matzah for soup

k'nish puff pastry filled with meat or potatoes

Kol Nidre lit. = "All Vows," key prayer sung by the Cantor or Rabbi on Yom Kippur eve. Also name of the Yom Kippur eve service.

kosher permissible under Jewish law

kreplach (Yid.) meat filled noodle pocket for soup

kugel pudding or casserole, usu. of potatoes or noodles

kvell derive deep pride or intense satisfaction, to brag about (one's grand children for instance).

kvetch whine(r), complain(er) v. or n.

L

Lag BaOmer the thirty-third day of the Omer, minor spring holiday

landsman fellow native (usu. of place in Old Country)

lashon harah lit.=bad language: slander, gossip

latke potato pancake, esp. for Chanukah

I'chaim "To Life!"

I'shanah tovah lit.=for a good year: Rosh HaShanah greeting

lulav palm frond. used on Succot

M

machatanim child's spouse's parents, co-in-laws

macher lit.=maker: mover-and-shaker, big shot

machzor holiday prayerbook, esp. for High Holidays

Mama Loshon (Yid.) lit.=mother tongue: i.e. Yiddish

mandel brot (or mandel bread) (Yid.) a nut cookie formed and cut from loaf

Ma Nishtanah "What is the Difference?" set of children's questions in Passover Haggadah, the "Four Questions"

maot chitim lit.=wheat money: charity given for poor to buy food for Passover or Rosh Hashanah

marror bitter herb eaten on Passover

matzah (pl. matzot) unleavened bread, esp. eaten on Passover

matzah brei fried dish made with eggs and matzah

mayven (Yid.) expert; know-it-all

mazel lit.=constellation, zodiac sign: luck

Mazel Tov lit.= (a) good star or sign: "Congratulations!"

mazik impish mischievous person, esp. a child

mechaya lit.= which makes live: a pleasure, great enjoyment, a relief; a real joy (said of a person, thing, or situation)

megillah (Heb.) lit.= scroll. Particularly the books of Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations of the Hebrew Bible. Additionally: (Yid.) *gansa megillah*, any long, drawn-out story

menorah a 7 branched candelabrum or lamp. Motif found in many synagogues. May also refer to the 9 branched Chanukah candelabrum

mensch (noun, pl. menschen) (Yid.) upstanding person, decent human being

menschlach (adjective) decent, morally upright, polite

meshuge, (Yid). crazy

meshugener (Yid.) crazy person

mezuzah biblical passage on a parchment scroll, placed in an ornamental case and affixed to the doorpost of a Jewish home

milchig (Yid.) dairy

minyan quorum of 10 required for certain prayers

misholach manot gifts of food given on Purim

misheberach blessing of healing given during the synagogue service

mishpacha (Heb.) family

mitzvah (pl. mitzvot) religious commandment, also sometimes translated as "a good deed"

Mogen David lit.=Shield of David: six pointed Jewish star

mohel one who performs circumcisions

Mordechai hero of the Purim story in the Biblical Book of Esther

N

na'areshkeit lit.=adolescent stuff: nonsense, silliness, worthless things or activities

nachas pride, esp. parental pride for children

nebach (Yid.) (Such) a pity!, the poor thing (referring to a person),

nebbish pitiful person

Nisan 7th Jewish month (Mar-Apr), 15th starts Pesach, 27th is Yom HaShoah

Nine Days days of mourning leading up to Tisha B'Av

nisht gerferalach lit.=not important: Don't worry, its not so bad

nosh snack [n,v]

nu (Yid.) "So?"

nudge

pest [n], to pester [v]

nudnick a pest, a nag, an annoyer, a bore

O

Omer period of 49 days between the second night of Pesach and the first night of Shavuot; first 33 are period of mourning

Oneg Shabbat lit.=joy of Shabbat, a small party celebrating the joy of Shabbat after usually after the Friday evening service

Oy, gevalt (Yid.) An expletive expressing urgency, astonishment, or surprise. Also a cry for help.

Oy, vey (Yid.) lit.=Oh, pain! Oh, no! (short for Oy, vey is mir – see next).

Oy, vey is mir (Yid.) "Oh, woe is me."

P

parve status of food containing neither dairy nor meat ingredients

Pesach Passover, holiday falling in spring

pikuach nefesh the tenet of preserving a life. Most Jewish laws can be broken to preserve a life.

pits'l (Yid.) tiny bit; very young or small child

plotz (Yid.) explode, esp. with intense emotion ("He was so upset, he was about to plotz).

potchkee (Yid.) to mess around inefficiently or inexpertly, to waste time, dawdle, when something too complicated or takes too long to do, ("That recipe takes too much potchkeeing").

pupik (Yid.) navel, belly button, tummy

Purim spring holiday commemorating events of the Biblical Book of Esther

punim (Yid.) face

pushka or pushkee (Yid.) box or canister for collecting tzedakah (charity)

Q

R

Rosh Chodesh first day (or days) of each Hebrew month

Rosh Hashanah lit.=head of the year: Jewish New Year, autumn holiday

rugelach croissant-like pastries, usu. w/ chocolate or cinnamon

S

same'ach happy

saychel (Yid.) common sense

s'chach loose thatch used for succah roof, must be from plants

schav cold soup of leafy vegetables

schluf (Yid.) sleep [v]

schlemazel (Yid.) luckless one

schlemiel (Yid.) bumbler, one who "can't do anything right"

schlep (Yid.) carry; drag, lug; drag one's feet; travel a great distance [v], lazy one; unkempt person [n]

schlump (Yid.) flop [v]; stoop-shouldered person [n]

schmaltz (Yid.) fat, grease, oil; maudlin sentimentality

schmateh (Yid.) rag; cheap piece of clothing

schmeichl (Yid.) smile; smooth-talk

schmooze (Yid.) friendly, gossipy, heart-to-heart talk, chit chat [n]; to have such a talk, to use talk to manipulate someone, as in "don't try to schmooze me!" [v]

schmutz (Yid.) dirt, filth, scum

schnook (Yid.) a meek person, a patsy, a passive ineffectual type, pathetic but likeable person

schpiel (Yid.) a long story or a play; sales pitch

schpilkes (Yid.) lit.=pins: jumpiness, anxiousness, not being able to sit still, impatience [n]

schtick (Yid.) a bit, a piece; comic act; a prank or trick, eccentricity, a device to steal attention.

schtiebl (Yid.) a small synagogue, often in a storefront or private home

seder Passover ceremonial meal

sha (Yid.) "Shh! Quiet!"

Shabbat the Sabbath, goes from approximately Friday sundown to Saturday sundown

shalom peace; also, hello and goodbye

shalom aleichem lit.=peace to you: "Greetings" (response is "aleichem, shalom")

shamash candle that kindles the other Chanukah candles

shanda (Yid.) a great disgrace, a big scandal

Shavuot holiday commemorating the receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, in late spring

shayna maideleh (Yid.) beautiful girl

shiva period of mourning observed for seven days after a family member's funeral. Takes place in the home of the mourner(s).

shloshim lit. = 30. period of mourning observed for thirty days after a family member's funeral

Sh'mini Atzeret eighth day of Succot, an autumn holiday

Shmot Exodus (2nd book of the Torah)

Shoah lit. = destruction: The Holocaust

shofar ram's horn, used as an instrument and blown on the holidays of Rosh Hashanah, the end of Yom Kippur and other occasions.

shul (Yid.) synagogue or school

shvach (Yid.) weak; tepid, unsubstantial

Shvat 5th Jewish month (Jan-Feb), 15th is Tu B'Shvat

shvitz sweat [v]; sauna [n]

simcha a special happy occasion, esp. bris, bar mitzvah, wedding, etc.

Simchat Torah holiday celebrating the Torah, in autumn

Sivan 9th Jewish month (May-Jun), 5th and 6th are Shavuot

succah (pl. succot) (may also be spelled: sukkah/sukkot) outdoor booth. Meals are eaten there on the holiday of Succot. Some people also sleep in the succah during Succot.

Succot harvest holiday, in autumn

T

tachlis (Yid.) essence, substance; worth; basics, "brass tacks"

talit (pl. taliot) (sometimes pronounced talis) prayer shawl with fringes (tzitzit)

Tamuz 10th Jewish month (Jun-Jul), 17th is Shiv-asor B'Tamuz

Tashlich Rosh Hashanah practice of throwing bread crumbs into a body of water, symbolically casting away our sins

tefillin biblical passages on parchment scrolls, placed in small boxes and affixed with leather straps to the head and one arm, worn (mostly) by men during morning prayer

Tevet 4th Jewish month (Jan), 10th is Asoroh B'Tevet

Tisha B'Av the 9th of Av, a major fast day commemorating the destruction of the Holy Temples, in summer

Tishrei 1st Jewish month (Sep-Oct), 1st and 2nd is Rosh HaShanah, 10th is Yom Kippur, 15th is Succot, 22nd is **Sh'mimi Atzeret**, 23rd is **Simchat Torah**

Torah the written Jewish law consisting of the first five books of the Hebrew Scripture. The Sefer Torah, the actual scroll read from in the synagogue, is always handwritten with special ink on parchment

trayf lit.=torn: not kosher

tsouris (Yid.) troubles, problems, distresses, suffering, worries

Tu B'Shvat the 15th of Shvat, Jewish Arbor Day

tuchus (Yid.) lit.=under: buttocks

tzedakah lit.=justice or righteousness. Charity, the obligation to help others.

tzimis carrot/pineapple compote, usu. with raisins or prunes; a hullabaloo [slang]

U

V

Vayikra The Book of Leviticus

vilde chaya (Yid.) wild animal; uncontrolled person or child

W

X

Y

yarmulke pron. "yamalka": (Yid.) skullcap, kippah

yahrtzeit (German/Yid.) anniversary of a death

yente (Yid.) gossipy one [n]

Yiddishkeit (Yid.) Jewishness

Yisrael Israel

Yizkor communal service of mourning all those who have died, takes place four times a year at services on certain holidays

Yom HaAtzma'ut Israel Independence Day, in spring

Yom HaShoah Holocaust Remembrance Day, in spring

Yom HaZikaron Israel Memorial Day, in spring, the day before Yom HaAtzmaut.

Yom Kippur Day of Atonement, in autumn

yom tov lit.=good day: holiday, Yiddish greeting for a Jewish holiday is "good yontif" from the Hebrew.

Yom Yerushalayim Jerusalem Reunification Day, in spring

Yomim Nora'im High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur

Z

zichrono livracha (abbr. z"l) "(May) his/her memory (be) for a blessing." Said of the deceased