

## Hebrew Glossary

Following is a "glossary" of frequently used terms which you will find throughout the site, we hope they will be of some help.

If you come across some words not mentioned here, please feel free to write us and ask for the meaning. We will try to add the word to the glossary for everyone's benefit.

### **ACHRONIM:**

Halachic authorities of the period since the publication of the Shulchan Aruch in the sixteenth century.

### **ACHARON SHEL PESSACH:**

The Last Day of Pesach.

### **AGUNAH:**

A woman whose husband has not given her the divorce (GET) papers because he was unwilling for his own reasons, or unable to because he disappeared through war or other action. She cannot remarry until she is legally divorced according to Yisraelite law.

### **AHAVAT YHWH:**

Loving YHWH.

### **AHAVAT HATORAH:**

Loving the Torah.

### **AHAVAT YISRAEL:**

Loving a fellow Yisraelite.

### **AMIDAH:**

The 18 prayers (Shmona Esrei) that are part of every service. Also called silent devotion or Tefilah.

### **ARON KODESH:**

The enclosure where the Torahs are kept, usually tastefully decorated with sacred symbols.

### **ALIYAH:**

'Going up' to the Bimah to read from the Torah. Since the Torah is read at services on Monday, Thursday and Shabbat as well as all Yom Tovim the honor of reading is given to various members of the congregation.

### **AMORAIM:**

Post-Mishnaic authorities cited in the Gemara.

### **ARAMAIC:**

The language in which the talmud is written, also used in many other Yisraelite texts.

### **ASHKENAZI:**

A Yisraelite who originated from Europe (Ashkenaz=Germany). By and large they spoke Yiddish and had similar customs and practises.

### **AUFRUF:**

A Yiddish word meaning 'calling up', referring to being called up to read from the Torah on the Shabbat before his wedding.

### **BAR/BAT MITZVAH:**

Coming of age (13/12) for boys and girls, and are considered as adults in their obligation in Torah and the commandments.

### **BEIT DIN:**

Rabbinical court.

### **BEIT HAMIKDASH:**

The (first, second or third) Temple in Jerusalem.

### **BEIT MIDRASH:**

Communal House of Study.

### **BIMAH:**

The raised dais at the front of the synagogue (in the center in Sephardic synagogues) usually facing the east to Jerusalem, where the officiants stand and lead the service.

### **BIRKAT HAMAZON:**

Grace after meals.

**BRACHAH/BLESSING:**

A blessing that is said before eating various foods (wine, bread, fruits, vegetables), on experiencing some natural or human wonder or significant event and before many religious rituals. All blessings begin with Blessed art thou O YHWH our Elohim, King of the universe who etc.

**BRIT MILAH/BRIS:**

Ritual circumcision on the 8th day of life. It signifies the covenant between YHWH and Yisrael.

**CHALAH:**

A braided loaf baked in honor of Shabbos and other festive meals.

**CHANUKAH:**

It is a holiday that commemorates the event that took place during the Greek control over the Yisraelite homeland and were forcing their religious beliefs on the Yisraelites. Judah Maccabee led the fight against Hellenization and liberated the country and the Temple. After it was cleansed, only enough oil was found to last one day but miraculously it burned for eight days. Hence we light candles for eight days of Chanukah in a special candle holder called a Chanukyah in memory of the heroic deeds of the Maccabees.

**CHAYIM/Le'CHAYIM:**

Life. Le'Chayim: To life. A toast to one another.

**CHAZAN:**

The cantor, that leads the congregation in prayer and who is recognized as having good musical knowledge and abilities.

**CHUPPAH:**

The marriage canopy under which all Hebrew weddings take place. It symbolizes the bridal chamber and the Hebrew home.

**CHUTZPAH:**

Insolence.

**DAVEN,**

Davenen; (Yiddish):Pray, praying.

**DIASPORA:**

Refers to the Yisraelites who live outside of Israel all over the world, since the dispersion from the homeland after the destruction of the second Temple.

**ERETZ YISROEL:**

The Land of Yisrael.

**ETROG:**

A citron (a citrus fruit) used on Sukkot along with the Lulav.

**GALUT:**

Exile; Diaspora.

**GEMATRIA:**

The system of numerology where each letter represents a number. The total value of the letters of a word if equal to the total of another word then the two are related in some way. Certain numbers are good like 18 (chai which means life) or multiples of it.

**GET:**

A Yisraelite divorce document.

**GEULAH:**

Redemption.

**HAFTORAH:**

The passage from the Prophets read in the synagogue after the reading from the Five Books of Moses.

**HAKKAFOT:**

The sevenfold procession made with the Torah scrolls in the synagogue on Simchat Torah, accompanied by singing & dancing.

**HALACHA:**

This is the term for the Yisraelite way of life as taught by the Torah and the Talmud and interpreted by the Rabbis through the centuries.

**HAVDALAH:**

Ritual ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath and the separation between the sacred and the profane. All the senses are used in blessing the wine, the light of a special candle and smelling spices.

**IKVETAH DIMESHICHA (Aramaic):**

the [generation that can hear the approaching] 'footsteps' of Mashiach.

**KADDISH:**

Traditional prayer said in every service in memory of the dead and at funerals by close relatives.

**KASHRUT/KOSHER:**

**a:**The dietary laws as prescribed by the Torah and amplified by Halacha. Only certain animals may be used for food. Milk and meat cannot be mixed requiring separate sets of dishes and utensils, one for dairy (milchig) and one set for meat (fleishig). It is a powerful reinforcement of Yisraelite identity.

**b:**Ritually fit for use or valid. e.g. This Mezuzah is Kosher.

**KETUBAH:**

The marriage contract written in a prescribed form with decorative borders outlining the obligations mainly of the husband to the wife. It is signed by two witnesses. It is the main way of three ways that a man takes a wife -- by contract, by giving a gift (a ring) or by consummation of the marriage the latter witnessed only by inference.

**KIDDUSH:**

Sanctification of a Shabbat or Yom Tov by blessing over the wine and recalling history.

**KOHAIN:**

Any man who can trace his family roots to the Temple priesthood - Descendants of Aharon, most people called Cohen or any variant of that name but can have other names.

**KOHEN GADOL:**

High priest.

**LULAV:**

A palm branch intertwined with myrtle and willow that along with the Etrog make up the four species required for ritual on Sukkot.

**MATZAH:**

Unleavened bread eaten on Pesach.

**MEGILLA:**

here are five Megillot each coming in its own scroll. These are Megillas Esther, Megilla Ruth, Lamentations (Echah), Ecclesiastes (Kohellet) and Song of Songs (Shir Hashirim). They are each studied in conjunction with a holiday - Esther on Purim, Ruth on Shavuot, Echah on Tisha b' Av, Kohellet on Sukkot but only by Ashkenazim, and Song of Songs on Pesach.

**MELAVEH MALKAH:**

Festive meal held after the close of Shabbos to escort the departing Shabbat Queen.

**MEZUZAH/MEZUZOT:**

A parchment scroll written by a Sofer (scribe) and affixed to the doorpost, containing the first two paragraphs of Shema (Deuteronomy 6:-9 & 11:13-21). It is affixed to the right door post as you enter the house and is usually kissed on entering. It signifies that the home is Yisraelite and is a reminder of the holiness of the home.

**MIDRASH:**

A deeper more fanciful interpretation of passages from the Torah like reading between the lines. A Midrash does not have quite the force of Torah or Talmud but are frequently considered in explaining or interpreting Torah. MIDRASH means to seek or interpret. A DROSH is a commentary on some part of the Torah.

**MINYAN:**

A quorum. The minimal number is ten Yisraelites over Bar Mitzvah required for any communal religious service.

**MISHKAN:**

The Tabernacle, the temporary Sanctuary in the wilderness; see Exodus chapter 25.

**MITZVAH:**

Commandment from the Torah and also any good deed. There are 613 mitzvot in the Torah and we are commanded to fulfill as many as possible to lead an observant life.

**MOHEL:**

A trained observant Yisraelite who is authorized to perform Brit Milah (ritual circumcision).

**MOSHIACH/MESSIAH:**

Literally Anointed One. The descendant of King David, Yahshua , Who will bring universal justice,

peace and brotherhood.

**MUSSAF:**

The additional prayer of Shabbat and other festive days.

**NASI:**

- a. In Biblical times, the head of any one of the Twelve Tribes;
- b. In later generations, the civil and/or spiritual head of the Yisraelite community at large.

**NAZIR:**

One who sets himself apart for divine service by undertaking certain ascetic restrictions; Numbers 6:1-21.

**NER TAMID:**

The eternal light that is kept in the synagogue above the Holy Ark (Aron Kodesh).

**ONEG SHABBAT:**

Welcoming the Sabbath joyfully and lovingly.

**PARSHAH/PARSHIYOT:**

Portion of the Torah read publicly each week.

**PASSOVER/PESACH:**

An eight day observance according to Biblical command, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. It is observed in the synagogue with special readings, and at home by the SEDER on the first and second nights. Food is to exclude all leavened bread and is focused on the use of MATZAH which is unleavened bread. It occurs in the springtime between Purim and Shavuot.

**PIDYON HABEN:**

Redemption of the first born son from the Temple priests, the Kohanim to whom all first fruits are dedicated. He is redeemed for five shekels on the 30th day of his life at a home ceremony.

**PIRKEY AVOT:**

(chapters of the fathers) Tractate in the Mishnah reprinted in most Siddurim, commonly known as 'Ethics of the Fathers'.

**POSEK:**

Rabbis whose legal decisions are authoritative.

**PURIM:**

A merry holiday in late winter, based on the MEGILLAH of Esther which tells of the rescue of the Yisraelites of Persia from the wicked Haman by Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai. The megillah is read in the synagogue. Whenever the name of Haman comes up it is drowned out by noisemakers called GROGGERS. There is general merrymaking with costumes and plays called Purimshpiels. Charity, here called Mishloach Manot, is in order.

**ROSH HASHANA:**

The beginning of the High Holidays, a time of solemn self examination and judgment. It comes in the fall and lasts two days. It is the beginning of the religious year so everyone wishes a Happy New Year (Leshana Tova).

**SEDER:**

A ritual family feast prescribed by custom and the Haggadah the story of Passover. Its focus is on freedom through open discussion. The legendary four questions are asked by the youngest and the answer is the explanation of the Exodus, its history and significance. The Afikomen is the last matzoh to be eaten after being hidden and then found by the children who thereby earn a prize. The prophet Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah the ultimate redeemer, is an honored guest at every seder.

**SELICHOT:**

Midnight prayers said on the Saturday before Rosh Hashana to get into the mood of the High Holy Days.

**SEPHARDIM:**

Yisraelites who came from Spain (Sepharad), North Africa and the Mediterranean. They spoke Ladino and had local customs and practices. Religiously there are only minor differences from the western Ashkenazic practice.

**SHABBAT:**

Sanctified day of rest in which no work is to be done. A whole day of spiritual reflection.

**SHAVUOT:**

The Festival of Weeks comes seven weeks after Passover. It commemorates the giving of the Torah and is also the festival of the First Fruits - an agricultural holiday - therefore the synagogue is decorated with flowers and plants. The Book of Ruth is studied in this Pilgrimage Festival (the other two being Passover and Shavuot). Ruth was the first recorded convert to Judaism, a

Yisraelite by choice. It occurs at the end of spring so Confirmation usually takes place then.

**SHECHINA:**

The spirit of Elohim as it dwells among the people. It is considered to be the feminine side of the Deity.

**SHEMA:**

The declaration of faith in the unity of Elohim, said at every service. It is a quote from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Numbers 15:40-41.

**SHOCHET:**

A trained observant Yisraelite who is authorized to perform ritual slaughter of animals for kosher food. The important thing is to avoid making the animal suffer.

**SHTETL:**

Yiddish word for small town where most Yisraelites lived in eastern Europe within the Pale of Settlement where they were allowed to live. SHIVA: The seven day period of mourning after the burial of a close family member.

**SHOFAR:**

Ram's horn blown on Rosh Hashana and at the end of Yom Kippur.

**SIMCHAT TORAH:**

A Yom Tov at the end of Sukkot dedicated to the joy of having been given the Torah. There is much dancing and singing with the Torah scrolls being carried even into the streets.

**SUKKOT:**

An eight day festival (the festival of Booths) coming five days after Yom Kippur and culminating in Shemini Atzeret and then Simchas Torah. It is marked by the building of a temporary structure called a SUKKAH which is roofed over by branches and in which meals are to be taken and one may sleep therein. This is to recall the dwellings in the Exodus.

**TALIT/TALLIS:**

The prayer shawl with its prescribed fringes used in daily prayer. The fringes are a reminder of the Mitzvot.

**TALMUD:**

A compilation of 63 tractates recording the intellectual, social, national and religious activities pursued by Yisraelites during the approximately 1000 years of its formation. It covers commentary by many sages on the Torah using their Elohim-given faculties of reasoning and judgment to interpret the meanings and implications of Scripture. It is a fine example of logic and deduction to bring the written word to the every day life of the people in a meaningful way. The Talmud is known as the Oral Law (Aggadah) because it came through oral discussion and argumentation. The Tanach is the written law (Ketuvim). Together they form the basis of the Halacha. The Talmud was written down in the 2nd C. of the Common Era (CE) by Rabbi Judah the Prince as the Mishnah from memories of many Rabbis. It included Rabbinical enactments which became law. Further updating and extension was added over the next few hundred years and this was called Gemara. Together they embody religious truths, moral lessons, laws, history and inspiration regarding Torah and the eternal questions. (From the 'World of Talmud' by Morris Adler, Schocken Books)

**TANACH:**

An acronym for Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim (Five Books of Moses, Prophets and The Sacred Writings) that make up the entire Elohim-given Holy Scriptures.

**T'FILLIN/PHILACTERIES:**

Small boxes, containing the Shema, and attached to leather thongs for affixing to the forehead and the left arm as commanded in the Shema. These are worn daily except for Shabbat and Holy Days for morning prayer.

**TORAH:**

The five books of Moses. The word means teaching and so also means all learning. The Torah is central to Yisraelite life. It is considered to be the word of Elohim, whether actually written by Him or inspired by Him, so it is treated with all due reverence and love. It is Holy Writ about 3000 years old. It is called the Old Testament by Christians but not by Yisraelites who do not recognize any new testament. The Torah scrolls (Sefer Torah) used in the synagogue are written on parchment and stitched together to form one long roll containing every word as it has been written for three thousand years by faithful meticulous scribes. In book form it is still treated with reverence. Here it contains the tropes and commentaries and translations to various degrees.

**TRUPES/TRUPE:**

The markings called cantillation above or below each word in the Torah indicating the musical chant and emphasis assigned to that word. These indicate the proper way to chant the Torah, the Haftara and the Megilla each of which have their own Trope. They do not appear in the Torah scroll. They go back to Temple times.

**TZEDAKAH:**

Literal meaning is justice but it has come to mean charity because charity is not by choice but is a mitzvah, an obligatory moral duty.

**Yahrzeit:**

Yiddish for anniversary of the death of a family member. It calls for the recitation of the Kaddish in a minyan.

**YARMULKE/KIPPAH:**

Skull cap worn by men during worship, eating or study. Many wear a head covering all the time as a sign of respect and a reminder of Elohim above.

**YIZKOR:**

Hebrew for remembrance. A synagogue service for all the community to remember their dead. It is said on the pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot.

**YOM HA'ATSMAUT:**

Israel's independence day.

**YOM HASHOAH:**

A day set aside for community remembrance of the six million martyrs of the Holocaust.

**YOM KIPPUR:**

The most holy day of the year. It ends the ten days of awe begun by Rosh Hashanah. It is the day of judgment, repentance and forgiveness. Gmar Tov is used as a greeting on that day.

**ZION:**

Another name for Israel or Eretz Yisroel.