

We're here to help you...

Crack the code

For newcomers or those who are returning after many years, the Jewish community seems to speak a language of its own! (*And not just Hebrew and Yiddish, but acronyms and organizational names too.*)

You are not alone! To help you crack the code and feel more comfortable in Jewish settings, we've created this pocket glossary and a companion webpage. The website contains additional terms you may hear.

Please visit: www.BigTentJudaism.org/code

The Big Tent Judaism Coalition

is coordinated by the Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI.org), an independent national organization providing programs and services to unaffiliated Jews and intermarried families.



Jewish Holidays

Shabbat: *Sabbath*, day of rest. Spend time with family, pray, read, rejuvenate.

Rosh Hashanah: *Jewish New Year*.

Blow the ram's horn (*shofar*) in synagogue. Eat apples dipped in honey for a sweet year.

Yom Kippur: *Day of Atonement*. Fast and pray for forgiveness for the prior year's sins. (Together with Rosh Hashanah considered the "High Holidays.")

Hanukkah: *Festival of Lights*. Light the *menorah*, a candle holder for nine candles. Play *dreidel* (spinning top game) and eat *latkes* (potato pancakes).

Purim: *Masquerade Festival*. Read the story of Esther (*megillah*), who rescued the Jews of Persia. Dress in costume and eat *hamantaschen*, triangular cookies.

Pesach: *Passover*. Attend a *seder* ("ordered") meal, retell the Exodus story and eat *matzah* (unleavened bread).

Jewish Practice

Bris/Brit Milah: Covenant of circumcision usually performed on the male child in his eighth day of life.

Bar Mitzvah/Bat Mitzvah: Rite of passage that signifies Jewish adulthood at the age of 13 for boys and 12 or 13 for girls.

Challah: Braided, egg bread used for ritual purposes and eaten on the Sabbath and many holidays.

Kabbalah: Jewish mysticism.

Kosher: *Kashrut* in Hebrew. Dietary laws.

Kippah/Yarmulke: Head covering or skullcap worn in reverence for God.

Mitzvah: A commandment given by God. Also, used to refer to a good deed.

Tzedakah: Charitable giving.

Cracking the Code:

A pocket glossary
of commonly used
Jewish Words



To engage, support and advocate for all those seeking a welcoming and inclusive Jewish community.

In the Synagogue

Synagogue/Shul/Temple:

Jewish House of Worship.

Bimah: Raised platform in the front of most synagogue sanctuaries.

Cantor/Chazzan: Chants the liturgy during worship services.

Daven: "To pray" in Yiddish.

Kiddish/Oneg: The sanctification prayer over wine for specific holidays and Shabbat (Kiddush), often followed by a reception with snacks and desserts (oneg).

Mourner's Kaddish: Prayer recited by mourners during the first year after internment and on every anniversary of the death.

Minyan: A quorum of 10 adults (men only in traditional settings) required for the reciting of certain community prayers; often refers to a prayer group.

Rabbi: Community religious leader, literally "master"/"teacher".

Siddur: Prayer book.

Torah/Chumash: *Five Books of Moses.* The first five books of the Bible.

Tallit/Tallis: Prayer shawl.

Common Synagogue Greetings:

- **Chag Sameach/Gut Yontiv:**
"Happy Holiday" in Hebrew and Yiddish.
- **Mazal tov:**
"Congratulations" or "Good Luck" in Hebrew.
- **Shabbat Shalom/Gut Shabbes:**
"A Peaceful Sabbath" in Hebrew;
"Good Sabbath" in Yiddish.
- **Yasher Koach:**
"May your strength be increased" in Hebrew. Said after an honor at the Torah or any success.

Religious Denominations

Conservative: Maintains a traditional view on Jewish law, but recognizes the need for accommodations to modern life.

Orthodox: Traditional Judaism that adheres strictly to Jewish law. Has the widest variety of sects, from "Modern Orthodox" to *Chassidism*.

Reconstructionist: Defines Judaism as an evolving civilization of which the Jewish people are a central component; socially progressive in outlook.

Reform: Liberal movement that offers personal autonomy on Jewish practice and interprets Jewish law in a modern context.

Secular Humanistic: Views Judaism through human-centered history, culture, ethical values, and shared experience of the Jewish people rather than a belief in God.

Other Jewish Organizations

ADL: *Anti-Defamation League*, fights anti-Semitism.

Birthright Israel: Free trip to Israel for Jewish young adults ages 18–26.

Chabad: Segment of Chassidic Orthodoxy known for its outreach to Jews of all backgrounds.

Federation: Local oversight and fund raising agency of the Jewish community.

Hillel: Jewish student organization on college campuses.

JCC: *Jewish Community Center.* Recreational, educational, social and cultural venue for the Jewish community.

JFS/JFCS: *Jewish Family (and Children's) Services.* A multi-service agency that provides social services to individual from all backgrounds.