

Jewish Lingo You May Hear in the Office

The Jewish community is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-cultural group of people hailing from all four corners of the world. [Click here to learn more.](#)

There are many different languages that have historically been a part of Jewish community including Hebrew, English, Yiddish, Ladino, Farsi, Arabic and many more. These languages evolved in Jewish communities across the world. For example, historically, Ashkenazi Jews, or Jews from Europe, may speak Yiddish, while Sephardic Jews, or Jews from Spanish speaking nations, may speak Ladino.

All of these cultures, languages and people are a part of the Jewish communities that Federations serve and below are some of the most common words or phrases you might hear in your office. Keep in mind, you may hear some different pronunciations of these words, especially words ending in "t" or "s", depending on the cultural background of the speaker.

Aliyah

(n.) Jewish immigration to Israel

"My sister is making aliyah next month, so I'm going to go see her off at the airport."

Balagan

(n.) chaos, mess

"The construction near the office is making traffic a nightmare. What a balagan!"

Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah

(n.) a Jewish coming of age ceremony traditionally celebrated when a child is 12 (for girls) or 13 (for boys)

"Next weekend is my cousin's bat mitzvah. I'm so excited to celebrate with her family!"



Brit Milah / Bris

(n.) the ceremony of male circumcision that typically takes place eight days after birth
“I’m going to be in a bit late this morning because I am attending my nephew’s bris.”

Chutzpah

(n.) nerve, gumption

“It took real chutzpah for him to interrupt the CEO during the meeting.”

Kvell

(v.) to feel happy and proud

“My daughter just aced all her exams. I’m kvelling!”

Kvetch

(v. or n.) commonly refers to whining or complaining, or a person who complains

“He likes to kvetch when we have meetings in the morning, because he prefers the afternoon.”

Labriut

(exclamation) said in place of “bless you” when someone sneezes

“Achoo!” “Labriut!”

L’chaim

(exclamation) a toast meaning “to life”

“To a great team and a successful quarter! L’chaim!”

Mazel tov

(exclamation) congratulations, literally translates to “good luck”

“Mazel tov on your promotion!”

Mensch

(n.) a good person, a person with high moral integrity

“The new hire seems like a mensch. He volunteers at the hospital in his free time.”

Mitzvah

(n.) a good deed

“My son made soup for our sick neighbor. What a mitzvah!”

Nosh

(v. or n.) snack, bite to eat, or to eat

“I love to nosh on the pretzels in the break room.”



Oy vey/Oy gevalt

(exclamation) Yiddish phrase expressing dismay, woe or exasperation
“Oy Vey, the copier is broken again.”

Sababa

(exclamation) Arabic term used in Hebrew slang expressing that something is good
“We should hear back from the vendor next week, okay? Sababa.”

Schlep

(v. or n.) drag or lug something around, or a time-consuming, exhausting journey
“We schlepped all the food to the event on the train and got delayed. What a schlep!”

Schmooze

(v.) to chat, make small talk
“If you want to know what everyone thought of the meeting, ask me, I stayed after to schmooze with the committee.”

Schpiel

(n.) a speech; usually intended to persuade
“At the end of the conference, the development director will give her the fundraising schpiel.”

Shalom

(greeting) directly translated to “peace” but often used to say hello or goodbye
“Shalom! It is so good to see you, please come in.”

Shiva

(n.) seven-day period of mourning following a death when mourners receive guests at the family home and may not attend work
“My coworker is sitting shiva for her mother who passed away. I am going to visit and pay a shiva call.”

Shul

(n.) synagogue
“Our next event will be at the shul on Main Street.”

Simcha

(n.) a happy event
“My coworker just got married. What a simcha!”



Tachlis

(n.) practical details of a matter, "brass tacks"

"We've spent a lot of time talking about the vision of the project. Let's make sure we leave time to cover tachlis so we can execute on next steps."

Tchotchke

(n.) knick-knack, little toy, collectible

"I love stopping by your office and looking at all the photos and tchotchkes you decorated with."

Tikkun olam

(n.) repair the world, an important Jewish value that usually refers to community service or social justice activity

"At our organization, we value Tikkun Olam and will be volunteering with underserved populations as part of our day of service."

Torah

(n.) the central holy book for Jews made up of the first five books of the bible

"My daughter did such a great job reading from the Torah at her Bat Mitzvah this past weekend!"

Tov

(adj.) Hebrew word meaning "good"

"Did you get the package I sent in the mail? Tov."

Tzedakah

(n.) charity

"With part of my bonus this month, I'm going to give tzedakah to my local soup kitchen."

Yarmulke/kippah

(n.) skullcap/head covering traditionally worn by Jewish men

"Did you see how cool our volunteer's kippah is? It has such a beautiful pattern."

Come across a word not on this list or just interested in learning more Jewish lingo? [Click here.](#)