

Similar Jewish Words You Don't Want to Mix Up

From kibbitz/kibbutz to mitzvah/mikveh, we round up some easily confused Hebrew and Yiddish terms.

By [My Jewish Learning](#)



It can be hard to pronounce and keep straight the myriad Jewish words and phrases in common parlance. Especially because for those of us who are not native Hebrew or Yiddish speakers (or who have the [auto-correct function](#) on our phones), many of these words and phrases sound similar to one another.

Below are some common Jewish words paired with their verbal doppelgangers — words that sound similar, yet have vastly different meanings. To spare you some potential embarrassment, we explain it all in alphabetical order below.

Did we miss some important ones? Comment below or email us at community@myjewishlearning.com.

1. Challah and Kallah

Challah (חלה), pronounced KHAH-luh, is the braided bread traditionally served on Shabbat. [Find some great challah recipes here.](#)

Kallah (כלה), pronounced KAH-luh, is Hebrew for “bride.”

2. Chesed (or Hesed) and Hasid (or Chasid)

Chesed (חסד), pronounced KHEH-sed, is usually translated as “lovingkindness,” and describes acts such as visiting the sick and helping the poor.

Hasid (חסיד), pronounced KHAH-sid, is a [Hasidic Jew](#), someone who is part of an ultra-Orthodox spiritual movement that began in late 18th-century Europe and comes from the same Hebrew root as chesed.

3. Chodesh and Kodesh

Chodesh (חודש), pronounced KHOH-desh, is Hebrew for “month,” and is most often used in the term [Rosh Chodesh](#), the celebration marking the beginning of each new [Jewish month](#).

Kodesh (קודש), pronounced KOH-desh, is Hebrew for “holy,” as in *sefer kodesh* (holy book), *am kodesh* (holy people) and *limmudei kodesh* (holy studies).

4. Chuppah and Chutzpah



Chuppah (חופה), pronounced KHOO-pah (oo as in book) or khu-PAH, is a Jewish wedding canopy.

Chutzpah (חוצפה), pronounced KHOOTZ-pah (oo as in book) or khootz-PAH, is Yiddish (and Hebrew) for “nerve” or “audacity.”

5. Eruv and Erev

Eruv (עירוב), pronounced AY-ruhv or ay-RUVE, is a boundary inside of which Shabbat-observant Jews are allowed to carry items or push strollers on Shabbat.

Erev (ערב), pronounced EH-rehv, means “evening,” and commonly refers to the first night of a Jewish holiday and sometimes the day before the holiday, as in [Erev Yom Kippur](#).

6. Hamsa, Hametz and Hummus

Hamsa (חמסה), pronounced HAHM-suh, is a hand-shaped amulet.

Hametz (חמץ), pronounced khah-METZ, is leavened food traditionally avoided during Passover. [Learn more about keeping kosher for Passover.](#)

Hummus (חומס), pronounced KHOOM-oos (oo as in book) or KHOOM-oos (oo as in food) is a chickpea puree popular in Israel and throughout the Middle East. [Find hummus recipes here.](#)

7. Kibbitz and Kibbutz



Kibbitz (קביץ), pronounced KIB-itiz, is Yiddish for chat or small talk, as in “I ran into my friend at the store and kibbitzed with her.”

Kibbutz (קיבוץ), pronounced kee-BOOTZ, is a collectively run residential and economic community in Israel.

8. Kiddush and Kaddish



Kiddush (קידוש), pronounced KID-dish or kee-DOOSH (oo as in boot), is the blessing that is said over wine to sanctify Shabbat. (It comes from the same root as kodesh, meaning “holy.”)

Kaddish (קדיש), pronounced KAH-dish, usually refers to the [Mourner’s Kaddish](#), an Aramaic prayer said during all Jewish worship services where a minyan is present. (It also shares a root with kodesh.)

9. Mashgiach and Moshiach

Mashgiach (משגיח), pronounced mahsh-GHEE-ahkh, is a person who supervises a commercial or institutional kosher kitchen and ensures that dietary laws are observed.

Moshiach (משיח), pronounced moe-SHEE-ahkh, is Hebrew for “messiah.”

10. Mikveh and Mitzvah

Mikveh (מקוה), pronounced MIK-vuh or meek-VAH, is a Jewish ritual bath.

Mitzvah (מצוה), pronounced MITZ-vuh or meetz-VAH, is Hebrew for commandment.

11. Seder and Siddur



Seder (סדר), pronounced SAY-der, is a ritual meal that follows a certain order, usually used to refer to the [Passover seder](#) (like the one above). However, many Sephardic Jews also have a [Rosh Hashanah seder](#), and the holiday of [Tu Bishvat](#) (the birthday of the trees) also has a seder.

Siddur (סידור), pronounced SIDD-er or see-DOHR, is a Jewish prayer book. Like seder, it derives from the Hebrew root *samech* (ס), *dalet* (ד), *reysh* (ר), which means “order.”

12. Sheitel, Shtetl, Shtiebel and Shtreimel



Sheitel (שייטל), pronounced SHAY-tull, is Yiddish for a wig that some [Orthodox women wear to cover their hair](#) after they marry.

Shtetl (שטעטל), pronounced SHTEH-tull, is the term for a historic Eastern European village with a significant Jewish community.

Shtiebel (שטיבל), pronounced SHTEE-bull, is a small synagogue, usually referring to a small [ultra-Orthodox](#) synagogue.

Shtreimel (שטריימל), pronounced SHTRY-mull, is a type of fur hat [worn by some Hasidic men](#).

13. Simcha and Smicha



Simcha (שמחה), pronounced SIM-khuh or seem-KHAH, is Hebrew for “joy” and is used to refer to a joyous Jewish occasion, such as a [wedding](#) or [bar/bat mitzvah](#).

Smicha (סמיכה), pronounced SMEE-khuh or smee-KHAH, is Hebrew for [rabbinic ordination](#).

14. Tisha B'Av, Tu Bishvat and Tu B'Av



Tisha B'Av (תשע באב), pronounced TISH-uh bahv, is the ninth of the [Jewish month](#) of Av, a day of mourning commemorating the destruction of the ancient temples in Jerusalem.

Tu Bishvat (ט"ו בשבט), pronounced too bish-VAHT (oo as in boot), is the 15th of the Jewish month of Shevat, a holiday celebrating trees.

Tu B'Av (ט"ו באב), pronounced too buh-AHV, is the 15th of the Jewish month of Av, a day celebrating romantic love that is often referred to as “the Jewish Valentine’s Day.”

15. Yizkor and Yahrzeit



Yizkor (יזכור), pronounced YIZ-kohr, is the memorial service that is part of four Jewish holidays: Yom Kippur, Passover, Sukkot and Shavuot.

Yahrzeit (יארצייט), pronounced Yahr-tzight or YOHR-tzight, is the Yiddish word for the anniversary of a death. Learn [how to mark a yahrzeit](#).