

## JEWISH LIFE VOCABULARY

Jewish Life Vocabulary (JLV) is a collection of Hebrew words or phrases that increases one's connections to Jewish people, traditions, culture and life. A JLV list includes:

- Concepts, for example: תִּיקּוּן עוֹלָם *tikkun olam*; repairing the world
- Objects, for example: חֻפָּה *huppah*; wedding canopy, and
- Greetings, for example: שָׁבוּעַ טוֹב *shavu-a tov*; (have) a good week

Jewish Life Vocabulary is easily infused into English sentences, for instance:

- “What is this week’s פָּרָשָׁה (*parashah*; Torah portion)?” or
- “You’re going to Israel? נְסִיעָה טוֹבָה (*n’siyah tovah*; have a great trip)!”

When children and adults have a nuanced understanding of JLV, doors are opened to insider participation and a richer Jewish life journey.

Words on a **Jewish Life** Vocabulary list enrich one’s **Jewish life** and can deepen a person’s Jewish educational understandings and connections. For example, the word דֶּלֶת (*delet*; door) is rather general – not a concept or ritual object integral to Jewish life; thus, it is not defined as JLV. On the other hand, בְּרִכַּת הַמְּזוֹן (*Birkat Hamazon*; the blessing after meals) is the name of a ritual and מְרוֹר (*maror*; bitter herbs) is a food central to the telling of the *Pesah* story. The use of Hebrew puts both of these in a Jewish context – the first holds more power than referring to a “blessing after eating” and the latter proclaims a deeper historical connection than “a bad tasting vegetable.”

Rabbi Nicki Greninger of Temple Isaiah (JQuest) in Lafayette, California was an early adopter of Jewish Life Vocabulary in her educational program. She explains that JLV enables Jewish educators to create a richer Hebrew environment by expanding Hebrew knowledge and use, beyond decoding practice or *B’nai Mitzvah* preparation. Temple Isaiah bases its JLV program on the work of Dr. Sarah Bunin Benor who notes that Jews often speak “Jewish English,” naturally inserting or infusing various vocabulary and terminology from Hebrew (and even Yiddish) into their everyday speech. When a group of people use Hebrew words this way, they create a “Hebrew metalinguistic community”<sup>1</sup> – a group that bonds itself together through use of Hebrew songs, prayers, vocabulary and culture – without the pressure of needing to become fluent in Hebrew. Instead, words are sprinkled into normative conversation. Quoting Rabbi Greninger, “It’s about creating culture through shared language.”

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<sup>1</sup> A phrase coined by Dr. Netta Avineri.

## THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JLV AND #ONWARDHEBREW

#OnwardHebrew,<sup>2</sup> a now-established approach to the teaching of Hebrew in part-time/congregational settings, is based on a sound-to-print learning model.<sup>3</sup> Students hear the sounds of Hebrew before being taught to decode. With multiple brain paths created for Hebrew learning (especially kinesthetic and auditory), students more quickly become confident, competent, and joyful Hebrew learners.

Jewish Life Vocabulary is one of four pillars supporting #OnwardHebrew's sound-to-print (S2P) learning principles. JLV may stand alone or be combined with two other elements: Hebrew Through Movement<sup>4</sup> and increased attention to regular *t'fillot* (Hebrew prayers).<sup>5</sup> Together, these approaches provide increased comfort and familiarity with Hebrew, building to a time when Hebrew decoding is introduced – for All In #OnwardHebrew programs, this is in fifth grade or later.<sup>6</sup> The overall goal is for a community's Hebrew learning to be streamlined and intentional, integrating each educational opportunity and creating a cohesive trajectory of learning.

Jewish Life Vocabulary may be used alone as an educational strategy, or in parallel to any other Hebrew learning program from any publisher (e.g., Behrman House, Torah Aura) or curriculum designer (e.g., Jewish Education Center of Cleveland). JLV may be formally taught and/or the words may naturally be integrated into speech.

## THE CRITERIA FOR WORDS PLACED ON THE JLV LIST

Jewish Life Vocabulary terms are at the core of what it means to be an educated Jew. JLV involves a pattern of talking that easily and comfortably combines Hebrew terms into English sentences and may be:

1. Words used in and around the Jewish community (synagogue, school, home, etc.).
2. Relevant to the Jewish lifecycle, calendar or daily life.
3. Concepts or greetings in everyday use.

As noted above, the Hebrew words for “door” (or colors or furniture or numbers) do not shape our Jewish understandings or knowledge and thus are excluded from the JLV list.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/> and the “Onward Hebrew!” Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/144174356227118/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/sound-to-print.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://HebrewThroughMovement.org> and the “Hebrew Moves Me” Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/194398270732234/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/hebrew-tfillah.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://youtu.be/UmlFO2CAFwY>

<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, these words might certainly be taught in via Hebrew Through Movement or a Hebrew class that focuses on communication.

The JLV list created as part of the #OnwardHebrew initiative is not complete – other words fit the criteria above and could be added. The list is also not prescriptive – there are words that will not fit every educational program’s culture and goals. Nor is the list a set of prescribed words that build specific cultural literacy.<sup>8</sup>

Rather, educators and clergy choose the vocabulary most appropriate for their educational aspirations. For example, the JLV list includes Hebrew names for the books of the Torah. Some educational programs will adopt these five words because their clergy and staff consistently refer to books of the Torah in Hebrew (e.g., *B’reishit*, rather than Genesis). Other programs will ignore this section of the JLV list because they consistently use the terms more common in English usage (e.g, Exodus, Leviticus). In addition, the provided JLV list does not include the Hebrew names of books in the rest of the *Tanach*, Bible (e.g., *Shoftim* for Judges and *Sh’muel Alef* for Samuel I). However, an educational program may expand on the given list since the JLV document just offers the starting point of possibilities.

### PERSONALIZING JEWISH LIFE VOCABULARY

The JLV list is rather large, thus, each educational program chooses desired vocabulary for:

- the entire community (e.g, the greetings and concepts) or
- classes and learning programs with a specific focus (e.g., a Torah class).

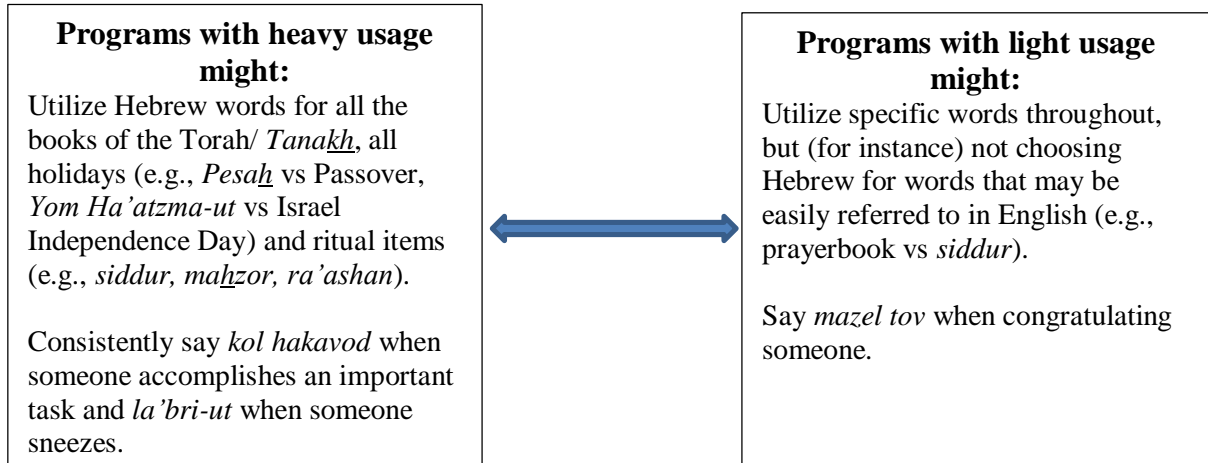
These decisions may be made by an education director and/or clergy alone, a committee, or a more wide-spread process with parents and/or students.

In choosing vocabulary, it is important to consider:

***Current comfort with Hebrew usage:*** There are some communities in which Hebrew is a strong priority and already heavily incorporated, whereas others scatter Hebrew sparingly.

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<sup>8</sup> In other words, JLV is not reminiscent of E. D. Hirsch’s focus on creating foundational cultural literacy. See, “E. D. Hirsch on Cultural Literacy,” <http://newlearningonline.com/new-learning/chapter-7/>

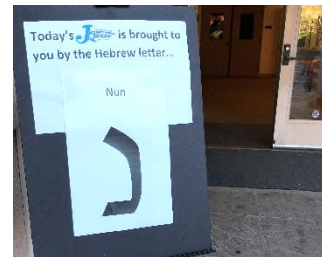


An educational program or host organization's "placement" on this continuum is simply a starting point. Usage will shift over time, but an honest assessment provides an initial sense of how deeply a program may wish to dip into the Jewish Life Vocabulary list.

**Available time:** Realistically, students will remember one to three words introduced simultaneously. Less is more!

**Vocabulary choices:** The JLV list is divided into two segments: the first includes a wide variety of categories (e.g., greetings, values/ethics, Jewish texts, life cycle), whereas the second is holiday-based. These broad divisions and their subsets make it easier for a program to:

- Decide which vocabulary could be **introduced to the entire community**, for example, תודה (*todah*, thank you) or לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה *l'shanah tovah*, happy new year).<sup>9</sup>
  - One category could be chosen as the focus for a semester or year, with one to three words introduced each session and reinforced in the weeks following.
  - A Hebrew "letter of the week" could serve as the organizing factor, with one to three words from different categories introduced.<sup>10</sup>
  - The Jewish holiday cycle could be the foundation of the lists, with a focus on holiday greetings, ritual objects and concepts.<sup>11</sup>



<sup>9</sup> In addition to the JLV word lists, consider which additional vocabulary would be important to the community - for example names of internal programs (*Bonim*, *Ma'ayan*, *Shoresh*) or a community-wide core value or focus (*tikkun olam* or Israel-related vocabulary).

<sup>10</sup> Temple Isaiah, Lafayette, CA, organizes its lists by letter-of-the-week. In addition to the JLV introduced, all teachers spend two minutes engaging learners with the letter in a quick, fun way.

<sup>11</sup> Programs that are a couple of years into Hebrew Through Movement will find that their students have already learned a number of holiday-related words, though reinforcement from a variety of angles is always helpful.

These organizing principles may vary by year – for example, one year using holidays and the next using the Hebrew *Alefbet*.

On a more informal level, decisions need to be made regarding the specific vocabulary that staff will integrate into their normative in-English conversations. For example:

- “In your *siddur*, turn to page 14.”
  - “*Mazal tov* to you and your family!”
  - “Let’s do the correct *b’rakhah* before eating snack.”
- Decide which vocabulary could be **assigned to those working with specific curriculum**.
    - These could be integrated into specific subject learning (for example, the Hebrew words related to birth introduced when students are exploring this element of the life cycle).
    - Clergy and B’nai Mitzvah tutors could consciously teach/use the terminology associated with the Torah service when involved in preparations.
    - Hebrew Through Movement teachers should already be integrating some specific JLV vocabulary into their lessons, especially concrete ones related to holidays, rituals, prayers and blessings.<sup>12</sup>

The lists have been provided in a Word document, rather than a PDF, to make it easier for a program to develop its own organizational charts by copying and pasting the desired vocabulary.

Examples of organizational charts are linked from the Jewish Life Vocabulary section of the OnwardHebrew.org website: <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/jewish-life-vocabulary.html>.

The sample, below integrates the introduction of Hebrew letters with relevant holiday vocabulary:

Date	Upcoming Holiday	Hebrew Letter of the Week	Jewish Life Vocabulary (mostly but not entirely based on Letter of the Week)	Suggestions for introduction	Words to review
10-Sep		(First day)		Introduce concept of JLV to the community!	
17-Sep	Rosh Hashanah	Shin ש	<i>Shanah tovah, shofar</i>	When someone says <i>shanah tovah</i> , another person responds “happy new year!” and yet another person says <i>shofar</i> and blows the <i>shofar</i> [i.e., a “random” unexpected chain of events that gets set off.]	
24-Sep	Yom Kippur	Mem מ	<i>Mahzor, shanah tovah u’metukah</i>	Candies handed out (tossed?) on the <i>m’tukah</i> part of the greeting. Something about grabbing a <i>prayerbook</i> , but “no, it’s a <i>mahzor</i> .”	<i>Shanah tovah</i> (add <i>m’tukah</i> ), <i>shofar</i>
8-Oct	Sukkot	Samech ס	<i>Sukkah, s’khakh (siddur)</i>	“What’s that on top of your <i>sukkah</i> ?” “ <i>S’khakh!</i> ” “Bless you! No, but what’s on top?” ...	<i>mahzor</i> (as opposed to <i>siddur</i> )

<sup>12</sup> Note that on all lists, vocabulary already part of Hebrew Through Movement is indicated by an asterisk; the HTM teachers will need to know which words to prioritize over time.

## IMPLEMENTING JEWISH LIFE VOCABULARY

**Introducing the JLV initiative to the community:** Depending on the community’s potential reaction to increased Hebrew usage, a Jewish Life Vocabulary initiative could fly under the radar screen and simply start, OR be intentionally introduced. If the latter, this added Hebrew approach may be introduced via any combination of these ideas:

- An article in the community’s bulletin
- A video, blog, vlog or podcast posted to the program’s website<sup>13</sup>
- Social media splashes (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok)
- A sermon from the pulpit or more generalized speech/presentation
- A prominent bulletin board or display



And what are the potential messages an educational program might share with its stakeholders? These, below, are all taken from pages of this document; they are offered freely for use and adaptation:

- Jewish Life Vocabulary are Hebrew words or phrases that increase one’s connections to Jewish people, traditions, culture and life. JLV includes concepts (*tikkun olam*), objects (*huppah*) and greetings (*shavu-a tov*), woven quite naturally into English sentences.
- Words on a **Jewish Life** Vocabulary list are chosen because they enrich one’s **Jewish life** and often deepen a person’s Jewish educational understandings and connections.
- When a group of people use Hebrew words this way, they create a “Hebrew metalinguistic community” – a community that bonds itself together through use of Hebrew in songs, prayers, vocabulary and culture – without the pressure of needing to become fluent in Hebrew.
- Integrating JLV into an educational program moves Hebrew learning beyond the walls of a classroom, thus creating a richer Hebrew environment for all. Hebrew is not relegated to formal instruction but becomes a natural part of one’s Jewish being.

**Introducing vocabulary to staff:** Creating a Hebrew-rich environment is a challenge that will take several years to fully implement. Teachers who already have much on their plate, will now be asked to look for opportunities to either introduce or reinforce Hebrew vocabulary into their other learning priorities. Some insertions may be easy-enough because the words are already part of the curriculum (“Has anyone been to a *b’rit milah* or *simhat bat*?”), but other

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<sup>13</sup> See a rabbi’s blog for an example of a simple, fun explanation of some common JLV terms here: *Yasher Ko-ah* <https://tinyurl.com/y7l6ctz6>, *Humash* <https://tinyurl.com/ybcl8cmt> and *Shavu-a Tov* <https://tinyurl.com/y962ster>

integrations could be more difficult (“I hear that Ellie is sick today. Who would like to text her with a *r’fu-ah shleimah*?).

In addition to finding the space for this in their heads, hearts and curriculum, non-Hebrew speaking teachers and *madrichim* face the added challenge of learning to pronounce, remember and comfortably use vocabulary. To be helpful to this challenge, the JLV lists provide each word in Hebrew, transliteration and English translation. In addition, videos linked from the #OnwardHebrew JLV webpages include pronunciation of words so that teachers, *madrichim* and other staff may hear and practice as many times as needed.<sup>14</sup>

But staff (teachers, *madrichim* and others) need additional supports: emotional ones to bolster those for whom this feels like a Herculean task and cognitive ones to ensure that everyone teaches/utilizes/reinforces the vocabulary correctly. An educational program might:

- Introduce and discuss new JLV in a staff meeting.
- Create short videos introducing/explaining new JLV, with links sent weekly with the staff newsletter. [The screenshot to the right is from a video series here: <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/jlv-visual-resources.html>]
- Encourage one-on-one conversations between teachers and members of the leadership team.
- Provide specific ideas and materials for use with learners (activity ideas, pictures, videos, etc.).
- Label itself as a “metalinguistic community” (of course, not using that scholarly phrase), celebrating and enjoying its use of Hebrew, finding intentional ways of drawing its members together through the use of this very special language to Jews worldwide.
- Offer incentives for reinforcing or using the new vocabulary.<sup>15</sup>



**Introducing vocabulary to students:** As noted above, some of the vocabulary will be introduced/reinforced in a community setting and others in smaller groups.

- During *t’filah/k’hillah*/assembly time a program might:
  - Offer a skit using the JLV terms, developed and/or presented by a teacher committee, *madrichim*, or a group of students.

<sup>14</sup> Linked from here: <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/jewish-life-vocabulary.html>

<sup>15</sup> The #OnwardHebrew team asks that if programs develop other ways of introducing and reinforcing vocabulary, that these be shared. Send a note through Contact page of the website to learn how to share this information: <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/contact.html>

- Use music, either an existing song that reinforces the term(s), or a newly composed one.
- Illustrate the term with a poster or digitally projected slide with the term and perhaps an illustration.
- During learning-specific time a teacher might:
  - Take a “field trip” around the synagogue to find ritual objects or other items.
  - Break students into small groups using JLV (“Check the photo you pulled from the box and make three groups: *kippah*, *t’fillin* and *m’zuzzah*.”)
  - Intentionally reinforce the community-wide words chosen for each session.

**Creating reinforcements for the Hebrew vocabulary introduced:** Jewish Life Vocabulary, as well as other #OnwardHebrew initiatives, moves Hebrew learning beyond a specific block of time (e.g., direct teacher instruction 9:30-10:30 on a Sunday morning). It is one thing to introduce new vocabulary, but it’s another to deeply embed its usage. A program should consider:

- Being intentional in reinforcing previously taught words by:
  - Reviewing the previous week’s words prior to introducing new ones (a planned-in-advance calendar<sup>16</sup> will support this effort).
  - Encouraging teachers to use words in that week’s learning, as well as two to three weeks after.
  - Offering rewards for usage of words previously introduced. These could be small (a high five, a “Yofi” sticker placed on a user’s clothing that day, an Alefbet pencil,<sup>17</sup> etc.) or a bit larger (coupon to an ice cream or coffee shop).
- Posting labels for *objects*, places, and people learned as vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> Be clever about this – perhaps on a given Shabbat, the rabbi, cantor and a *shali-ah tzibur* wear a nametag giving their JLV-introduced term.
- Sharing the upcoming (or past) Hebrew vocabulary to students, parents, congregants, volunteer leadership or others interested in JLV:
  - On a bulletin board with a growing collection of current and past words<sup>19</sup>
  - In a bulletin article
  - In a blog/vlog/podcast
  - On social media (Twitter, Instagram)
  - On a bulletin board
  - From the pulpit

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<sup>16</sup> Sample calendars and organizational charts are linked from the JLV webpage:  
<https://www.onwardhebrew.org/jewish-life-vocabulary.html>

<sup>17</sup> An internet search will uncover a wide variety of these.

<sup>18</sup> Premade labels may be ordered from the JECCMarketplace.com. Check especially for the augmented reality classroom labels that “speak” the words when scanned with the HP Reveal app. In addition, the JLV webpage includes links to large font word cards for each of the vocabulary offered in this guide; these are a free download.

<sup>19</sup> Premade word cards are available for free and immediate download from a link on the webpage:  
<https://www.onwardhebrew.org/jewish-life-vocabulary.html>



## CONCLUSION

Jewish Life Vocabulary is an easy-enough avenue for creating a richer Hebrew environment in any educational setting. It's an example of "the more, the more," whereby learners and staff naturally increase the sounds of Hebrew in their heads and hearts.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check the JLV webpage for links: <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/jewish-life-vocabulary.html>

**JEWISH LIFE VOCABULARY LISTS:** As noted above, the lists are divided into categories and include the Hebrew, transliteration, and a definition of words. These are provided in a Word document so that vocabulary may easily be copied and pasted into a new document or organizational chart. However, to see the Hebrew correctly and access it, one's computer needs a keyboard set to Hebrew.<sup>20</sup>

**JEWISH LIFE VOCABULARY WORD CARDS:** These may be printed and posted on a bulletin board or other location as a reminder of the vocabulary learned.

**VIDEOS THAT ASSIST IN PRONUNCIATION:** Subdivided by category, these include the words printed in Hebrew, transliteration, translation, and yes, orally pronounced.

**SAMPLE ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTS:** These offer a structure for laying out a scope and sequence. A number are offered for use and/or adaptation.<sup>21</sup>

**TEACHER INTRODUCTION:** This document introduces the concept of Jewish Life Vocabulary to teachers, *madrichim* and other staff. It is offered in Word so that a program may adapt it as needed.

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<sup>20</sup> In Windows, in the "Control Panel" go to the Regional/Languages settings and add Hebrew. Watch an explanation here for Windows 10 <https://youtu.be/xJoZ1ITvK8c> or 11 <https://youtu.be/hgH3fVZyngc>. In Mac OS go to "System Preferences", then the Keyboard preference pane. Choose 'Input Sources' and check off Hebrew. Then, you can check 'show input menu in menu bar' which will allow for easier switching between languages. Watch an explanation here: <https://easyosx.net/2021/08/02/how-to-type-in-multiple-languages-on-your-mac/>. An easy way to add the keyboard on a tablet or smartphone is to add the Gboard app with its "international settings."

<sup>21</sup> Variations will be added as new ones are submitted by programs experimenting with JLV. Use the Contact form here <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/contact.html> to inform the OnwardHebrew team of your interest in sharing.