**JEWISH LIFE VOCABULARY**

Jewish Life Vocabulary (JLV) is a collection of Hebrew words or phrases that increases a student’s connections to Jewish people, traditions, culture and life. A JLV word might be a:

* Concept, for example: *tikkun olam[[1]](#footnote-1)* (repairing the world)
* Object, for example: *huppah[[2]](#footnote-2)* (wedding canopy), or
* Greeting, for example: *shavu-a tov[[3]](#footnote-3)* (have agood week)

***Jewish*** ***Life*** Vocabulary are words that enrich one’s ***Jewish*** ***life***, often deepening a person’s educational understandings and connections. Consider the word *delet[[4]](#footnote-4)* (door), which is rather general – not a concept or ritual object integral to Jewish life; thus, it is not defined as JLV. On the other hand, *Birkat Hamazon[[5]](#footnote-5)* (the blessing after meals) is the name of a ritual, and *maror[[6]](#footnote-6)* (bitter herb) 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.” In addition, learning to properly respond to a holiday or celebratory greeting in Hebrew creates stronger Jewish connections. This means that JLV words are at the core of being an educated Jew.

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 rich Hebrew environment. 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”[[7]](#footnote-7) – a group that bonds itself together through use of Hebrew in 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.”

How do we do this? By learning the vocabulary and finding natural ways to insert them into conversations. You might find yourself saying:

* “What is this week’s *parashah[[8]](#footnote-8)* (Torah portion)?” or
* “You’re going to Israel? *N’siyah tovah[[9]](#footnote-9)*, have a great trip!”

With consistent usage, you will open doors for your learners to a richer Jewish life journey. Students will feel that they are insiders, better understanding the code of Jewish life.

**IMPLEMENTING JEWISH LIFE VOCABULARY**

As teacher, you are a key facilitator of JLV. Your challenge will be to find opportunities to introduce or reinforce Hebrew vocabulary into your Judaics curriculum.

* Some insertions may be easy-enough because the words are already part of what you teach - “Has anyone been to a *b’rit milah*?*”* (translation: ritual circumcision).
* Other integrations could supplement your normal focus – “I hear that Sami is sick today; who’d like to text her with a *r’fu-ah shleimah*?” (translation: a complete healing).

Wait - are you unsure how to pronounce the words? Never fear! To be helpful, all JLV lists offer each word in Hebrew, transliteration and English translation. But there are other supports available to you including videos linked from the #OnwardHebrew JLV webpages that include pronunciation of words. You will be able to listen and repeat as much as needed.

There are so many ways to integrate JLV into your learning-specific time. Consider:

* Breaking 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 reinforcing the community-wide words chosen for each session, remembering to review/use them in the weeks beyond their introduction.
  + “Marci – will you hand out the books? *Todah*!” (translation: thanks!)
* Offering rewards for usage of words previously introduced.
  + These could be a high five, a “*Yofi*” (good for you!) sticker, an Alefbet pencil, etc.
* Posting labels for *objects*, places, and people learned as vocabulary.[[10]](#footnote-10)
  + Be clever about this! For instance you could post לַבְּרִיאוּת (*lab’ri-ut*, “bless you”) on a tissue box in your room the week that this word is introduced.
* Creating a bulletin board with a growing collection of current and past words. All the words are available in a large font with Hebrew and transliteration. These are an immediate and free download from links on this page: <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/jewish-life-vocabulary.html>.

1. תִּיקוּן עוֹלָם [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. חֻפָּה [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. שָׁבוּעַ טוֹב [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. דֶלֶת [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. בִּרְכַּת הַמָּזוֹן [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. מָרוֹר [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A phrase coined by Dr. Netta Avineri. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. פָּרָשָׁה [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. נְסִיעָה טוֹבָה [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)