

TEMPLE BETH-EL



Commonly Used Hebrew Terms

aliyah: literally “going up,” as in going up to the front of the sanctuary. The honor of being called up to the bimah to participate in the service is called “an aliyah.”

bar/bat mitzvah: a son/daughter of the commandment.

bimah: the raised platform at the front of the sanctuary. The ark, the Torah scrolls, and the lectern are up on the bimah.

birkat kohanim: the blessing of the priests of Ancient Israel, the oldest known blessing.

birkat Torah: blessings recited before and after the reading of Torah in the synagogue.

cantor: the clergy person who is the musical leader of the congregation.

challah: the braided bread traditionally eaten on the Sabbath and on holidays.

d’var Torah: an explanation of the Torah portion based on the teachings of the Rabbis of generations past along with a modern application by the speaker.

g’lilah: the honor of dressing the Torah.

haftarah: the portion of scripture taken from the Prophets, read on Saturdays and holidays after the Torah reading.

hagbah: the honor of performing the ritual lifting of the Torah after the reading is completed.

kedusha: sanctity, holiness.

kiddush: the prayer recited over the wine; also the small meal following a service.

kippah: Hebrew for the round headpiece worn in synagogue by some congregants. (Also called yarmulke or skull cap.)

minyan: a group of ten Jews required for community prayer services according to tradition.

mitzvah (mitzvot, pl.): commandment. Loosely translated as good deed or a religious obligation.

parasha: one of 54 portions of the Torah, read on a weekly basis in synagogue beginning on Simchat Torah. Also called parashat haShavua (the portion of the week).

rabbi: teacher. The clergy person who leads the service and teaches Torah.

shabbat: the Hebrew word for the Sabbath. From sundown Friday until sundown Saturday.

shalom: Hebrew for “peace” or “hello” or “goodbye.” At services, people will greet each other with “Shabbat Shalom.”

shlichei tzibbur: the lay people who lead services. Literally, “messengers of the community.”

tallit: the traditional prayer shawl. (Also called tallis.)

tikkun olam: literally “world repair.” It is commonly used to refer to the pursuit of social action and social justice.

zedakah: the concept of tzedakah as a form of charity is an extension of the original concept of tzedek as justice and righteousness, so that tzedakah has been translated as “righteous giving.” (from Gates of Mitzvah)

Torah: the Hebrew name for the first five books of the Bible. Torah represents the original text given to the Hebrews at Mt. Sinai. It is the holiest Jewish text upon which Mishnah, Talmud and all commentaries and writings are based.

