

What Does That Mean?

By Shira Nanus

All through the preparations for a child's *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, straight through the big day, lots of Hebrew words get tossed around as if, of course, everyone understands. For those who are not so sure what some of them mean, here's a glossary of common terms.

Simcha:

The literal definition of *simcha* is "joy." Simcha refers to a special happy occasion in a Jewish life, such as a *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, *bris*, or wedding.

B'nai Mitzvah:

B'nai mitzvah is the plural of *bar mitzvah* and is the term used to describe the coming of age according to Jewish law. Becoming a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* means the person is obliged to observe the Jewish commandments, and a ceremony, along with a celebration, takes place to mark this moment. Jewish tradition designates *bar* and *bat mitzvah* age as 13 for a boy and 12 for a girl. Outside the Orthodox community, *bar* and *bat mitzvah* is today celebrated at age 13 by both boys and girls.

Torah:

Torah has multiple definitions, but here it refers to the first five books of the Bible, also known as the Five Books of Moses. For public reading, the *Torah* is divided into portions (each portion is called a *parasha*) and read weekly in Jewish prayer services.

Parasha:

The weekly *Torah* portion read in synagogue. When children receive their *bar* or *bat mitzvah* date, they are assigned a specific *parasha*. A child often reads from that *parasha*, and delivers a *d'var Torah* to the congregation highlighting its major themes.

D'var Torah:

Literally "a word of *Torah*," *d'var Torah* is a speech usually delivered by the rabbi after the *Torah* service. Often the *d'var Torah* conveys a life lesson or message supported by the story in the weekly *parasha* or *haftarah*. When a child becomes a *b'nai mitzvah*, he or she delivers the *d'var Torah*, often tying it into personal experiences.

Haftarah:

A selected reading from one of the biblical prophetic books. Traditionally, the *haftarah* is recited after the *Torah* reading on the Sabbath or another holy Jewish day, and is usually thematically related to the *parasha*.

Trop:

In Jewish tradition, sacred text is customarily chanted rather than simply read, whether for public reading or for study. *Trop* is the Yiddish word for the 1,400-year-old system of distinctive marks that function as musical notation and punctuation for the biblical text. The *trop* determines the actual tune used by *b'nai mitzvah* and all other readers for their *parasha* and *haftarah*. As part of their preparation, some *b'nai mitzvah* learn the names and tunes for each *trop* marking so they can figure out the cantillation for themselves.

Bimah:

Hebrew for stage, the *bimah* is the raised location in the sanctuary where the *Torah* is read. At *bar* and *bat mitzvahs*, family members and close friends are often called onto the *bimah* to assist with the service.

Aliyah:

In Hebrew, the word *aliyah* means "to go up, or ascend." An *aliyah* is the act of going up to (or ascending to) the *bimah* to recite the blessing over the *Torah*. To receive an *aliyah* is to be asked to do this. It is considered an honor and is often bestowed upon family members and close friends of the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* child. The *Torah* portion is not read as a whole, but rather is divided into seven sections. Each section is called an *aliyah*.

Minyan:

The number of people required to be present for certain prayers to be recited. A *minyan* consists of 10 Jewish adults, or, for Orthodox Jews, 10 Jewish males. When a child becomes a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, he or she is eligible to be counted in the *minyan*.

Kiddush:

This is the blessing recited over wine on the Jewish Sabbath and other Jewish holy days. *Kiddush* derives from the Hebrew word "*kadosh*," which means "holy." By saying *kiddush*, one is proclaiming the holiness of the day.

Motzi:

The blessing recited over bread, which allows the subsequent eating of the meal. On the Sabbath and other holy days, the festive braided white bread called *challah* is used.

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