

Yiddish Mini-Dictionary

A note on spelling Yiddish words: There are a variety of Yiddish transliteration spellings and we have tried to use those that are most common. We hope our kit will inspire further interest in the Yiddish language and welcome your feedback on our kit.

abi – as long as
aleichem – to you
alter kocker – an old codger
bagel – hard roll
balebusta – female boss, capable home-maker
balegula – person of low standing, sloppy
bissel – a little, a bit
blintz – filled pancake
brech – to gag, vomit
bris – circumcision ceremony
brokh – misfortune
bruder – brother
bubbe – grandmother

mitzvah – a good deed
naches – pride and joy, delight
nebbish – a sad sack
neyn – no
nik – suffix denoting kind of person or thing (neatnik, etc.)
nosh – a snack, to snack
nu – question: what? what do you mean?
oy – exclamation meaning pain, disgust, astonishment or pleasure
oy vey – exclamation, “how terrible”
pisher – a young squirt
plotz – to fall down, to burst
potshke – dabble, experiment, fiddle around
punim – face
pupik – navel, belly button
schmuck – detestable person, very strong
put-down (literally: penis)
seykhl – common sense, street smarts
shabbas – sabbath
shalom – peace, hello/goodbye
shand – a shame, embarrassment
shayna – pretty, precious

bubelah – darling, sweetheart, usually for a young person
bubkes – nothing, zilch, not a thing
chai – life, the number 18
chaim yankel – a country bumpkin
challish – faint from hunger
chutzpa – nerve, daring, gall
deli – prepared food or where it is sold
dertzeyl – to tell
dreck – garbage, something of poor quality
esn – to eat
far vus – for what? why?
farblondget – lost, gone astray, confused
farbrent – burning, zealous
farmisht – confused, mixed up
fartutst – befuddled
feh – exclamation of disgust
ferklempst – clenched, emotionaly overwhelmed
fonfer – to stutter, bluff, cheat
fraynd – friend
froy – woman

sheygets – a non-Jewish boy, devilish boy, charmer
shikse – a non-Jewish woman, seductress
shlekht – bad
shlemazl – a fool, bungler, unlucky
shlep – a bore, jerk, carry or drag around
shmaltz – wealth, corny, overly decorated (literally: chicken fat used in cooking)
shmatte – dress or garment (literally: rag) can be used as compliment or insult
shmaychl – to smile
shmeer – flattery, to bribe (literally: to spread)
shmooze – to idle around and talk shop
shmutz – dirt
shnoz – nose
shpatzir – a walk, a stroll, to stroll
shpil – to play
shpilkes – jitters, nerves, impatient (literally: pins)
shtetl – a small town
shtik – a routine, behavior, especially an actor’s
shul – synagogue

fumfer – to mumble
geb – to give
gedenk – remember
gelt – money
geshmak – extremely tasty
gevalt – exclamation of help or fear
gey – to go
glick – luck, good fortune
glitch – slip
goniff – thief, rascal
gornisht – nothing
goy – a non Jew, gentile
grosse – big
gutt – good
hamish – cozy, homey, familiar
kaddish – mourner’s prayer
ken – to know
khaver – friend
kibitz – chitchat, discuss informally
kibosh – nonsense, to put an end to
kishkes – guts, intestines
klezmer – East European Jewish folk music
klug – smart or clever
klutz – a clumsy person

shvester – sister
shvitz – to sweat
simca – happy occasion
tallis – prayer shawl
tata – father
tchotchke – insignificant item, toy, ornament
toches – buttocks
tokhter – daughter
tomid – always
treyf – not Kosher, unclean
tsimmes – vegetable stew, big deal, fuss
tsurris – calamity, trouble
tummler – funmaker
tzuzamen – together
un – and
vakakta – screwed up
vance – pest (literally: bed bug), usually used regarding a child
velt – world
ver – to become
veyn – cry
vider – again
vu – where

knaker – bigshot, someone who thinks they’re important
kosher – in accordance with Jewish dietary law
kugel – noodle or potato dumpling
kvell – to be delighted, beam
kvetch – complain, a complainer
lakh – to laugh
latke – potato pancake
liebe – love
lox – smoked salmon
luft – air
madela – a young girl
makher – big shot, wheeler/dealer
matzo – unleavened bread
maven – expert, connoisseur
mazel – luck, “mazel tov” means good luck
mensch – a decent fellow
meshugge – crazy person, nuts
mikvah – ritual bath taken by Jewish woman
mir – me
mishpocha – family
mit – with

vuss – what
yarmulka – skullcap
yenta – a busybody, gossip or meddler
yeshiva – school
yichis – pedigree, lineage
Yiddish – language of central and eastern European Jewry
yo – yes
yold – fool
yuntov – holiday (literally: a good day)
zaftig – juicy, plump, buxom
zayda – grandfather
zer – very
zhlub – disheveled, pathetic person
zis – sweet
zudik – buttocks, rear-end