

MAY 3 12017 English Loan Words of Yiddish Origin

This list of English words of Yiddish origin can be found in the current online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, or the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary.

1. **Boychik**- a young boy or young man.
2. **Bupkes**- may be related to the Polish word for “beans”, but it really means “goat droppings” or “horse droppings.” It’s often used by American Jews for “trivial, worthless, useless, a ridiculously small amount” – less than nothing.
3. **Chutzpah**-nerve, extreme arrogance, brazen presumption. In English, *chutzpah* often connotes courage or confidence, but among Yiddish speakers, it is not a compliment.
4. **Dybbuk**- ghost; the malevolent spirit of a dead person which enters and controls a living body until exorcised. The play “The Dybbuk” by Shloyme Ansky portrays a young woman haunted by her dead lover.
5. **Dreck**- low worth or lacking in quality; used especially of merchandise.
6. **Eppes** and a **Bissel**-a little something, not much.
7. **Feh!**-an expression of disgust or disapproval, representative of the sound of spitting.
8. **Gevalt**-good grief, from German *Gewalt*, meaning “violence.”
9. **Glitch**- slip, nosedive, a minor problem or error.
10. **Gornisht**- implies a strong sense of nothing; used in phrases such as “gornisht helfn” -beyond help.
11. **Goy**-a non-Jew, a Gentile from the Hebrew **goyim** is plural and **goyish** is the adjective form.
12. **Kibbitz**-verbal joking.
13. **Klutz**-a dense, clumsy or awkward person.
14. **Kosher**-Something that’s acceptable to Orthodox Jews, especially food. Unacceptable food is called **traif**. In English, when you hear something that seems suspicious or shady, one might say, “That doesn’t sound kosher.”
15. **Kvell**-beam , be proud.
16. **Kvetsh**-complain, whine or fret.
17. **Macher**- a doer, big shot, important person.
18. **Mamzer**: bastard, literally or figuratively. As a term of endearment, it means “little devil.”
19. **Maven**-often used sarcastically to define an “expert”.
20. **Mazel Tov**- “good luck,” literally, “good constellation.”

21. **Mechaye**: a source of intense pleasure, from the Hebrew *chayim*, meaning "life."
22. **Mentsh**-an honorable, decent man, woman or child, an authentic person, a person who helps you when you need help.
23. **Mishegas**-insanity or craziness. A *meshugener* is a crazy man.
24. **Naches**-pleasure, satisfaction, delight, proud enjoyment.
25. **Narishkeit**-foolishness, from German *närrisch* meaning "foolish."
26. **Nebbish**-a hapless, unfortunate person, much to be pitied.
27. **Nosh**-a nibble; a light snack.
28. **Nu**-general word that calls for a reply. It can mean, "So?" "Huh?" "Well?" "What's up?"
29. **Nudnik**-pest, pain in the neck, the one who makes a dopy comment after the schlemiel's accidents, originally from Polish *nuda* meaning "boredom."
30. **Oy vey**-exclamation of dismay, grief, or exasperation. **Oy gevalt!** is like oy vey, but expresses fear, shock or amazement.
31. **Plotz**-to burst, from the German *platzen*.
32. **Putz**-, stupid, jerk, literally "unclean penis."
33. **Rachmones**-mercy, pity.
34. **Schande**-a disgrace; one who brings embarrassment through mere association.
35. **Schlep**-to drag, carry unwillingly. A **shlepper** slouchingly drags himself around.
36. **Schlemiel**-a clumsy, inept person. The kind of person who always spills the soup on a dinner guest or himself.
37. **Schlock**-cheap, shoddy, or inferior.
38. **Schlimazel**-someone with constant bad luck. When the shlemiel spills his soup, he probably spills it on the shlimazel.
39. **Schlub**-clumsy, stupid, or unattractive person.
40. **Schmendrik**-a jerk, contemptible stupid person.
41. **Schmaltz**- means chicken fat or grease and is utilized for excessively sentimentality, gushing, flattering, over-the-top, corny.
42. **Schmatta**, rag junk or low-quality merchandise.
43. **Schmooze**-chat, make small talk, converse about nothing in particular.
44. **Schmuck**- an insulting word for a self-made fool, but not used it in polite company at all, since it refers to male anatomy as do **putz**, **schmeckle**, **schlong**.
45. **Schnorrer**-beggar or person always asking others for hand-outs, from German *Schnorrer*.
46. **Schnook**- a meek, gullible, easily imposed-upon or cheated person.

47. **Spiel**-an excessive long, involved pitch or communication. From the German word for “play.”
48. **Shikse**-a non-Jewish woman, often used derogatorily. It has the connotation of “young and beautiful.” Referring to a man’s Gentile wife or girlfriend as a *shiksa* implies that his primary attraction was her good looks, often the equivalent of “dumb blond.” A *shagetz* means a non-Jewish boy, and has the connotation of a someone who is unruly, even violent.
49. **Schmegeggy**- a dope or idiot.
50. **Schmutz**-dirt – a little dirt, not serious grime.
51. **Shtick**- an entertainer’s routine, bit, stage or gimmick.
52. **Tchatchke**-knick-knack, little toy, collectible or giftware, plaything as in “My brother divorced his wife for some little tchatchke.”
53. **Tsaddik**-pious, righteous person, one of the 36 legendary saints for whose sake God does not destroy the world featured in *The Last of the Just* by Andre Schwarz-Bart.
54. **Tsimmis**- fuss, a disturbance, also, a kind of prune or carrot stew.
55. **Tsuris**: troubles.
56. **Tsuris**-serious troubles, not minor annoyances.
57. **Tuches**-rear end, bottom, backside, buttocks, the origin of the American slang word *tush*.
58. **Tummler**-entertainer or master of ceremonies, especially one who encourages audience interaction.
59. **Verbissen**-bitter, sullen.
60. **Verklemp**-choked up, speechless; unable to express one's feelings or emotions, from the German *verklemmt*, meaning “uptight.”
61. **Vigorish**, (contraction *vig*), usurious interest, that portion of the gambling winnings held by the bookmaker as payment for services.
62. **Yenta**-female busybody or gossip.
63. **Zaftig**-plump, chubby, full-figured child or an attractive woman, from German *saftig*, meaning “juicy.”

As in Hebrew, the *ch* or *kh* in Yiddish is a “voiceless fricative,” with a pronunciation between *h* and *k*. If you don’t know how to make that sound, pronounce it like an *h*. Pronouncing it like a *k* is goyish.

“Do not make a stingy sandwich; pile the cold cuts high! Customers should see salami comin’ thru the rye.” Allan Sherman’s album, “Hello Mudda, Hello Fadda,” contained these humorous lines in his song about food—Jewish food. While absurdity seems to lie at the heart of a startlingly sizeable number of jokes about Jews, restaurants, and food, I have often wondered what is it about Jews that makes cuisine so frequently the subject of laughter, puns, and jokes. Are we so obsessed with eating and food that it constantly permeates our thoughts and actions?

Steve Allen once commented that even the very sound of Jewish foods themselves evokes laughter. “Words like lox, herring, chopped liver, chicken soup, and matza are inherently more amusing than trout, bass, lamb stew, vegetable soup and whole wheat bread.” Evidence of this can be found in the report that F. Scott Fitzgerald used to walk into delicatessens just to hear the word *knish* being bandied about.

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Those Winter Sundays

by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

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098 My Father's Hats

Mark Irwin

Sunday mornings I would reach
high into his dark closet while standing
on a chair and tiptoeing reach
higher, touching, sometimes fumbling
the soft crowns and imagine
I was in a forest, wind hymning
through pines, where the musky scent
of rain clinging to damp earth was
his scent I loved, lingering on
bands, leather, and on the inner silk
crowns where I would smell his
hair and almost think I was being
held, or climbing a tree, touching
the yellow fruit, leaves whose scent
was that of clove in the godsome
air, as now, thinking of his fabulous
sleep, I stand on this canyon floor
and watch light slowly close
on water I can't be sure is there.

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For Those Whose Work is Invisible—Mary Gordon

For those who paint the undersides of boats, makers of ornamental drains on roofs too high to be seen; for cobblers who labor over inner soles; for seamstresses who stitch the wrong sides of linings; for scholars whose research leads to no obvious discovery.

For dentists who polish each gold surface of the fillings of upper molars; for sewer engineers and those who repair water mains; for electricians; for artists who suppress what does injustice to their visions; for surgeons whose sutures are things of beauty.

For all those whose work is for Your eye only, who labor for Your entertainment or their own, who sleep in peace or do not sleep in peace, knowing their efforts are unknown.

Protect them from downheartedness and from diseases [of the eye]. Grant them perseverance, for the sake of Your love, which is humble, invisible, and heedless of reward.

[A prayer by Mary Gordon (2007) called "For Those Whose Work is Invisible" in "Six Prayers." Doyle, Bryan (ed.) *God Is Love: Essays from Portland Magazine*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Books. Originally appeared in Portland Magazine in 2003.]

MY FATHER'S ASHES— Cherie Burns

I buried my father's ashes, and put his house up for sale. I allowed myself no time for grief; I worked quickly and neatly to put my losses behind me. I did not know then how they would creep up and gain on me. . . He still intrudes on my happiness, haunting my marriage. . . But I try to rig my childhood memories so I can put them to rest, I can no more change them than I could force our father-daughter relationship into closeness. . . Sometimes I don't think of my dad for days. But then I'll find myself feeling guilty when I shop, hearing my father whisper that a fool and her money soon part. I can't bear to sit for long at bars, where my father perched for too much of his life, and where I waited impatient for him to finish his drink so that we could go on to the ball game, the circus, my mother's funeral . . . I am learning the hard way that we are never done with our parents, even when they are done with us.

MOMMY'S SONG—Anonymous

When I was young I heard a song.
One song I heard, no others.
I learned the words and sang along;
The song it was my mother's.
She never told me how to sing.
She never told my why.
She simply sang the song she'd heard
When she was young as I.
Some lines were repeated.
Some lines were repeated.
Some lines were repeated.
And some of them were wise.
They were mommy's bible
They were mommy's blueprint
They were mommy's comfort.
But some of them were lies.
I often write my own songs now.
But more than now and then,
I find a voice inside me
Singing mommy's song again.

Slow Dance—David L. Weatherford

Have you ever watched kids
On a merry-go-round
or listened to the rain
Slapping on the ground?
Ever followed a butterfly's erratic flight?
Or gazed at the sun into the fading night?
You better slow down
Don't dance so fast.
Time is short.
The music won't last.
Do you run through each day
On the fly?

When you ask "How are you?"
Do you hear the reply?
When the day is done
Do you lie in your bed
With the next hundred chores
Running through your head?
You'd better slow down
Don't dance so fast.
Time is short.
The music won't last.
Ever told your child,
We'll do it tomorrow?
And in your haste,
Not see his sorrow?
Ever lost touch,
Let a good friendship die
Cause you never had time
To call and say "Hi?"
You'd better slow down.
Don't dance so fast.
Time is short.
The music won't last.
When you run so fast to get somewhere
You miss half the fun of getting there.
When you worry and hurry through your day,
It is like an unopened gift. . .
Thrown away. Life is not a race.
Do take it slower.
Hear the music
Before the song is over.

All I Got Was Words—William S. Bernstein

When I was young and fancy free
My folks had no fine clothes for me--
All I got was words:

Got tzu danken (Thank God)
Got vet geben (God will give)
Zal mir nor leben un zein gezondt (You should live and be healthy)

When I was wont to travel far,
They didn't provide for me a car--
All I got was words:

Gay gezondt (Go in health)
Faar Pameelech (Take it easy)
Hob a glickleche ryzeh (Have a successful journey)

I wanted to increase my knowledge.
But they couldn't send me to college--
All I got was words:

Hob saichel (Have good sense)
Zei nisht kein nahr (Don't be a fool)
Tayreh iz de besteh scharre (Torah is the best commodity)

The years have flown, the world has turned.
Things I have forgotten, things I've learned--
Yet I remember:

Zog dem emes (Speak the truth)
Gib t'sdokah (Give charity)
Hob rachmones (Have pity)
Zei a mentch (Be a mensch)

All I got was words.