



Family-Crafted B-Mitzvah

The Grandparent's Role in Creating a Unique Experience

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A Letter from the Jewish Grandparents Network

Mazal tov on reaching a milestone in your family! We hope you have the fortune to be celebrating your grandchild's coming-of-age in good health.

Here at the Jewish Grandparents Network (JGN), we are excited to be living through a Jewish ritual renaissance. We are witnessing a boom of ritual innovation fueled by a renewed sense of spiritual empowerment.

We invite you to be part of this innovation and to explore the possibility of creating rituals that will be meaningful for you, your B-Mitzvah grandchild, and the entire family. Just as a service on a Saturday morning at a synagogue is a wonderful way to recognize the B-Mitzvah, so is a small gathering of family and friends at a different venue. Just as reading from the Torah or teaching about the portion of the week can be deeply meaningful for the teen, so can creating a work of art or learning and chronicling family stories.

The *simchat bat* (Jewish baby naming) and bat mitzvah were immediately legitimate when they emerged in the 20th century, and new 21st century rituals are as valid and effective as any ancient rite. You do not need to be particularly qualified or important to create a ritual. You can just be *you*. As grandparents, we celebrate the unique roles we can play in our families' important life-cycle moments.

Every family has its own unique priorities, distinctions, and needs. The notion of B-Mitzvah and how to celebrate coming-of-age is worthy of your own adaptation. Our hope is that we launch you into a grandparent-led event or ritual marking the newest Jewish adult in your family. This guide is meant to spark conversation and activities that lead to an event that fits your own Jewish story.

We look forward to hearing what sort of B-Mitzvah adventures you design. May you find new blessings, meaning, and hope on the journey.



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Making Meaning: On Grandparenting and B-Mitzvah

Why You Matter

Some of the most riveting and emotional stories of our people are in the first book of the Torah. As Genesis comes to a close, we learn that Joseph brought his two sons forward to his own father, Jacob, who was ill and seemed near the end of life. Jacob preempts his blessings over his grandchildren with a powerful expression of gratitude and an acknowledgment of the tumultuous years he had spent apart from his sons. “I never knew if I’d see your face again... but now God has even let me see your children” (Bereishit 48:11). Jacob reminds us that grandparents are singularly positioned to see every generation as a gift and a fresh start.

Preparing Yourself

We encourage you to start this process of B-Mitzvah creativity by considering the following questions to help you identify what’s important to you in a B-Mitzvah celebration:

- 1) What is your own coming-of-age story? What memories do you cherish or wish had been different?
- 2) When you think of this grandchild, what commonalities and traits bond you?
- 3) What elements do you need present in order to feel this B-Mitzvah experience is authentic to you? For example, you might want to include reading from the Torah, some Hebrew, expansive family participation, blessings, and/or ownership or self-expression by your B-Mitzvah grandchild.

Connecting With Your Adult Children

Ideally, you will establish shared expectations with your children, the parents of the B-Mitzvah. We encourage you to ask your adult children some of the following questions:

- 1) What do you wish for your child’s Jewish identity?
- 2) What excites and/or concerns you about this Jewish experience?



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- 3) What 2–3 memorable moments or takeaways do you hope the B-Mitzvah teen will draw from this experience?
- 4) What role would you (the parent), expect to play in this journey or in the day of celebration? *How do you see my role as grandparent?*
- 5) If you will allow me to take the lead in planning this experience — in partnership with you — do you have any requests or cautions you'd like me to respect?

Connecting With Your Teen Grandchild

Adapt the questions above to seek input from your teen grandchild — your partner in this experience — about their interests, wishes, and hopes for the occasion. For example, you might ask, what does this experience (or rite of passage) mean to you? What are you most comfortable doing as part of the ceremony? In what ways would you like to stretch and challenge yourself? You can find other topics of conversation about B-Mitzvah [here](https://bmitzvahproject.org/how-to-talk-with-your-grandchild-about-becoming-b-mitzvah/). (<https://bmitzvahproject.org/how-to-talk-with-your-grandchild-about-becoming-b-mitzvah/>)



Photograph by Stephanie Fink

A Note About Clergy Facilitation

If you and/or your family are members of a synagogue or other religious institution, there is likely a process in place for the preteen or teen to prepare to become B-Mitzvah and for the day itself. You may still like to consider the suggestions in this guide to help add personal meaning to the occasion for your family.

If you intend to plan the event independently, you might turn to the Jewish canon — drawing, for example, from prayerbooks, other holy books, Jewish poems and stories — and aided by resources in your local community. Another option is to seek resources online on websites like [Sefaria](https://www.sefaria.org/) (<https://www.sefaria.org/>) that have compiled the breadth of biblical and rabbinic texts in an accessible format. For readymade ritual material, you can find texts and ritual examples at [RitualWell](https://ritualwell.org/) (<https://ritualwell.org/>) and [Recustom](https://www.recustom.com) (<https://www.recustom.com>).

You may still choose to involve a rabbi, cantor, prayer leader, or ritual facilitator with whom you have a relationship, or hire a tutor. Clergy can play many roles in this process, depending on your desires to incorporate pastoral care and extended Jewish learning. If you are in relationship with such leaders, talk to them early in the process about your

hopes for the place they may have in this B-Mitzvah experience. For example, they might serve as the advisor for a special service project or artistic undertaking. Clergy may also connect you with texts and rituals that especially suit the B-Mitzvah teen and/or your family.



Photograph by Sadie Braunstein

How This Guide Works

This guide is both a menu and a template. You might be inspired to use an entire sample ceremony or select discrete pieces to adopt and adapt. As you design the B-Mitzvah, we encourage you draw from the many repositories of Jewish ritual ideas and texts such as the sources we list above. You might also explore low-cost shops to design printable materials for custom ceremonies.

How We Designed the Sample Ceremonies

We have laid out each ceremony as follows:

1. **Value Concept:** What this ceremony strives to preserve, achieve, and draw upon
2. **Ritual Actions:** The elements of the ceremony or experience (for example, gathered family, Torah reading, hand washing, dance, and singing)
3. **Ritual Objects:** The items needed to execute such a ceremony (for example, Torah scroll, art supplies, and Kiddush cups)
4. **Blessings or Kavvanot:** Texts and Jewish sources to support various elements of the ceremony
5. **Steps:** Suggested way to go about combining these actions, objects, and texts to make a complete ceremony

This is neither an exhaustive sourcebook on facilitating B-Mitzvah, nor a recipe intended to be followed step-by-step. Rather, we hope that the following examples inspire you to design a B-Mitzvah ceremony that honors your grandchild, builds the connection with you, the grandparent, at this liminal moment, and suggests ways for you to be involved in a meaningful way in the B-Mitzvah experience.

B-Mitzvah is an innately flexible moment; you can't, and won't, mess this up! We encourage you to approach this ritual design with a sense of confidence and broad-mindedness. We hope this guide serves as a useful jumping-off point for the adventure of designing a B-Mitzvah experience.

Blessing for the Family

You may like to weave into your experience an Intergenerational Water-Pouring Ceremony, “Upon Becoming a B-Mitzvah,” (<https://bmitzvahproject.org/upon-becoming-a-b-mitzvah-an-intergenerational-water-pouring-ceremony/>) developed by Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and the Jewish Grandparents Network. This simple ceremony invites each generation to pour water from one cup to the next, celebrating and affirming the constant movement of life forward.

SAMPLE CEREMONY A

Traditional Approach: A Home-Based Ceremony

This ceremony brings core elements of the traditional synagogue B-Mitzvah service into the home setting or another private venue.

Value Concept: What this ceremony strives to preserve, achieve, and draw upon

1. Echoes of the familiar B-Mitzvah format (note that this could take place in addition to or instead of a synagogue-based ceremony)
2. Learning the sacred forms of chanting (trope) passed down through the generations. If you are not personally prepared to teach this skill, there are many trope teachers available in major Jewish areas and online. You can also use online trope trainer tools.
3. Honoring intergenerational Jewish learning

Ritual Actions: The elements of the ceremony or experience

1. Chanting from the Torah scroll
2. Leading core liturgy from the day (for example, Shabbat morning prayers such as Bar'chu, Sh'ma, Amidah, Torah Service)
3. Teen teaching about the Torah portion for that week (*d'var Torah*)

Ritual Objects: The objects you need to execute such a ceremony

1. Torah scroll
2. Prayer books and/or printouts of prayers
3. Family heirlooms associated with the respective ritual actions or new sacred objects like a *kippah* and tallit (prayer shawl) crafted by the grandchild and grandparent. For a creative and meaningful grandparent-grandchild tallit project, visit <https://bmitzvahproject.org/tallit-project/>

Items may also be original, such as a scarf/garment; a family cookbook; album (printed or digital), or other document; and music. Ideal projects combine the grandparent's skills with the teen's interests. (See below for more suggestions in "Building the Ceremony.")



Photographer Jessica Dickson

Blessings or Kavvanot: Texts and Jewish sources to support various elements

1. Liturgy appropriate to the day (for example, daily services, Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh [new month] services)
2. Shehecheyanu blessing
3. Priestly blessing

(See <https://bmitzvahproject.org/tallit-project/braiding-the-generations/> for examples of blessings)

4. An adaptation of the prayer Shepetarani in which parents or other cherished caregivers can take a role in releasing the parents from some responsibilities as the child takes on new ones at the age of maturity. Here is [one example](https://images.shulcloud.com/1164/uploads/resources/BM-parents-prayer-updated-Feb-2019.pdf) of the prayer: <https://images.shulcloud.com/1164/uploads/resources/BM-parents-prayer-updated-Feb-2019.pdf>



Alex Paul Photography

Steps: Below is one suggested way to go about combining these actions, objects, and texts to make a complete ceremony.

Building the Ceremony

1. **Open the conversation** with the parents of the B-Mitzvah teen and your grandchild using the prompts on pages 2–3 (“Connecting with Your Children” and “Connecting with your Teen Grandchild”). Consider which of the elements of this traditional approach work best for your family and what personal elements you want to add. For example, instead of a traditional *d’var Torah*, the teen might like to express the theme of the Torah portion in a poem, creative dance, or musical interpretation.
2. **Choose ritual objects and actions** to integrate into the ceremony. Consider the timing and the relevant elements to that date and day. For example, you might select a Sunday morning that coincides with Rosh Hodesh (the new month) when your grandchild will read or chant from a Torah scroll and lead a few selections of the psalms (Hallel). These choices may be guided by the child’s talents, learning style, and interests.

3. **Make a plan** for learning, and design the day. Hire an additional educator or B-Mitzvah tutor where appropriate (see suggestion about “trope” above), or set aside a dedicated, regular meeting time for grandparent and grandchild to learn together. Ask your grandchildren what interests them. For example, you might like to learn to read Hebrew together, interpret Torah stories, or learn about the Jewish holidays.

Be sure to include other family and friends where that would be meaningful. When considering a project, discuss your grandchild’s interests and your own talents and interests, and see where they intersect. Have you always wanted to teach them to knit? Are



Courtesy of Pexels

they excited to join you in the woodshop? The more time you have available for this aspect of the journey, the more elaborate a project you might choose.

4. **Select any blessings or intentions for the day.** Explore resources for songs, poems, and other content. You may choose instead to craft something new for the occasion.
5. **Celebrate!** You and your grandchild both have a lot to be proud of. B-Mitzvah is not only a milestone moment in your family; it is also a time for friends and community to honor the B-Mitzvah teen with joyful festivities that fit the occasion. Whether lavish or low-key, a party is a wonderful way to spotlight the B-Mitzvah and their hard work.

SAMPLE CEREMONY B

The Art of B-Mitzvah: A Sensory-Conscious Approach

This ceremony highlights your grandchild's personal creative expression and/or commitment to social justice in a ceremony that can take place in any venue, including the outdoors.

Value Concept: What this ceremony strives to preserve, achieve, and draw upon

1. Elevating a sacred moment of transition when a child has not been engaged in formal Jewish education.
2. Providing outlets for teen expression where sensory considerations would be helpful. This ceremony is particularly adaptable where the grandchild has learning differences and neurodivergence.
3. Promoting the importance of social action and communal service in young adulthood.

Ritual Actions: The elements of the ceremony or experience

1. Presentation by the teen of an art piece, in any medium, representative of studying the Torah portion or a Jewish value chosen for this occasion. This might be the outcome of an art-based learning project led by a grandparent. Examples include: a family quilt, a metal-forged tzedakah box, and a newly sculpted family ritual object like a seder plate. Think about your grandchild's interests and your own talents and interests and see where they intersect. Have you always wanted to teach them to knit? Are they excited to join you in the woodshop? The more time you have available for this aspect of the journey, the more elaborate a project you might choose.
2. Havdalah, a brief blessing-based ritual for the close of Shabbat. Learn more about Havdalah [here](https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/prayers-blessings/shabbat-conclusion-havdalah-blessings). (<https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/prayers-blessings/shabbat-conclusion-havdalah-blessings>)
3. A festive meal prepared for the occasion. This might be a culmination of learning with grandparents and preparing food together, perhaps sharing family recipes.
4. Presentation or mini-event featuring a project of communal service. Examples include: A bake sale with dog treats that raises funds for an animal rescue operation or an Israeli guide dog organization. For more ideas for mitzvah and service projects, visit <https://bmitzvahproject.org/mitzvah-project-partners-grandchildren-and-grandparents/>



Courtesy of Faith Kramer

Ritual Objects: The objects you need to execute such a ceremony

1. Art supplies
2. Havdalah set
3. Any items relevant to presenting a service project

Blessings or Kavvanot: Texts and Jewish sources to support various elements

1. Havdalah liturgy
2. Food blessings: the blessings of gratitude before and after eating
3. Poetry or literary arts that honor the teen and the moment, such as selections from a favorite author or compendium.

Steps: One suggested way to go about combining these actions, objects, and texts to make a complete ceremony

Building the Ceremony

1. **Open the conversation** with the parents of the B-Mitzvah teen and your grandchild using the prompts on pages 2–3 (“Connecting with Your Children” and “Connecting with your Teen Grandchild”). Consider whether the elements of this artistic approach work best for your family.
2. **Choose some ritual objects and actions** to integrate into the ceremony. Consider the timing and the relevant elements to that date and day. For example, you might choose to make and then present a family quilt on Thanksgiving Day and prepare the meal together with your grandchild.
3. **Make a plan for learning**, and design the day. Set aside a regular meeting time for grandparent and grandchild to learn and work on their craft together. Be sure to include other family and friends where that would be meaningful.
4. **Select any blessings or intentions for the day.** Together with your grandchild, choose songs, poems, or other content, or craft something new for the occasion.
5. **Celebrate!** Invite close family and friends to a festive event in which you share this unique illumination of your grandchild’s hard work and the investment you made in your relationship.



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APPENDIX

Examples of Other Types of Ceremonies and Projects

- Organize a neighborhood action in honor of the B-Mitzvah teen such as preparing and delivering meals or holding a park or beach cleanup.
- Host an intimate evening or tea party where close friends and family each bring a symbolic item as a keepsake, or a blessing for the B-Mitzvah that you collect in a scrapbook.
- Take a grandparent-grandchild trip that centers around a Jewish experience, like a trip to New York to see a Jewish-themed show and visit the Tenement Museum; a trip to Israel; or a trip to your childhood home to explore your family's roots.
- Complete a family tree together with your grandchild.



Photograph by Todd Gutnick

Honoring the B-Mitzvah at Holiday Gatherings

In many families, grandparents are the hosts of gatherings such as Rosh Hashanah dinner, Hanukkah parties, and Passover seders. *What role might your grandchild take on now that they are B-Mitzvah?* Consider adding an element to your family's gathering that honors your grandchild's new status as a Jewish adult. Examples include presenting your teen with a new item such as a Kiddush cup or a decorative matchbox for lighting the *hanukkiyah* on Hanukkah, seating them at the head of the seder table, or inviting them to lead a shofar blowing for the family on Rosh Hashanah.

Additional JGN Resources



Explore many more B-Mitzvah resources [HERE](https://bmitzvahproject.org/). (<https://bmitzvahproject.org/>) including a grandparent-grandchild [tallit-making experience](https://bmitzvahproject.org/tallit-project/). (<https://bmitzvahproject.org/tallit-project/>)

About the Author

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For several years, Hillary has co-produced the Sacred Sounds Unbound concert series with burgeoning Jewish music artists and the *Kol Tefilla* conference on prayer experiences with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Hillary is an instructor for first year students at the Ziegler School of Rabbinical Studies. She is an avid writer and is currently at work on her forthcoming book, *Minding the Ritual Gap*. Hillary and her husband, Rabbi Daniel Chorny, met in Israel and continue to enjoy learning together with their two children, Ella and Yossi.