



Webinar Discussion Guide

The Art of Becoming: Finding Creativity, Meaning, and Identity as Grandparents

By Ben Freeman and Naomi Less

February 2025

Purpose

This guide provides prompts for discussion of the JGN webinar "*The Art of Becoming: Finding Creativity, Meaning, and Identity as Grandparents*," led by Naomi Less and Ben Freeman of Lab/Shul on February 26, 2025. The webinar explores a) how our identities shift as we age and, especially, when we become grandparents, and b) how we can find meaning and mark the ongoing process of grandparenthood with creativity and intention.

If you were not able to attend the session, you can view the recording at <https://jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org/video-library/>. The guide is intended for groups of grandparents and program facilitators to share their own experiences and thoughts on the prompts below.

Key Takeaways

- **Start where you are.** Consider the ways in which your own grandparents modeled Jewish values and actions for you. Take an inventory of the ways in which you are already passing down Jewish traditions and modeling Jewish values and identify areas where you want to be more intentional. Both of these practices create space for you to deepen your internal sense of self and your connection to generations before and after you.
- **Jewish tradition can guide you.** By creatively exploring texts like the Talmudic story of Honi and the tree, and the prayer/Torah text V'ahavta, we have access to Jewish wisdom as a framework for understanding, strengthening, and treasuring our unique role as family elders transmitting a legacy.

- **What's in a name?** Much of what we're already doing and how we are as grandparents can offer our grandchildren a concrete model of what a Jewish life looks like. There is creative power in explicitly naming the Jewish underpinning of your actions or your way of being together, for example, taking grandchildren with you to a volunteer activity you're already engaged in and connecting it to the core Jewish value from the book of Deuteronomy in the Torah: *tzedek, tzedek tirdof* — pursuing justice.
- **Identify small and concrete next steps.** As you seek to deepen connection with your grandchildren and to find greater meaning in your role in cultivating their Jewish sense of self, concentrate on identifying small and hyper-specific “tweaks” to what you're already doing, rather than committing wholesale to a new course of action or something vaguely defined. For example, perhaps you call your grandchildren on Fridays before Shabbat. Might you explicitly name that it is Shabbat and try offering them a weekly blessing, in your own words? Or perhaps you do art projects with your grandchildren. Might you try creating a Jewish ritual item that they can keep with them or doing coloring pages together specifically focused on Jewish themes?

Tips for Jewish Connection with Grandchildren

- **Make it tangible and interactive.** Engage your grandchildren with hands-on activities that connect to Jewish traditions, coloring or doing Jewish-themed art together, such as baking challah together, lighting Shabbat candles, or creating a family recipe book with stories behind the dishes.
- **Tell your stories.** Share personal stories about your grandparents, childhood traditions, or moments when Jewish values shaped your life. Consider how the context of telling your stories matters — for instance, when putting grandchildren to bed, or while baking together — as well as how objects can become prisms for sharing about Jewishness in a profound and tangible way, for example, telling the story of a particular piece of jewelry or a special Kiddush cup. Storytelling makes traditions feel alive and personal, helping your grandchildren see themselves as part of a larger legacy.
- **Live your values out loud.** Model the values you want to pass down through your actions. Whether it's showing kindness (*chesed*), giving tzedakah, or volunteering, let your grandchildren see and participate in these values with you — and name them as specifically Jewish values.
- **Incorporate Jewish rituals into everyday life.** You don't need a formal setting to pass on traditions. Sing Jewish songs in the car, kiss a mezuzah, sing a Jewish or

Yiddish song at bedtime, say a short blessing before a meal, or share a Hebrew word of the day—small, consistent touches make a lasting impact.

- **Meet grandchildren where they are.** Find ways to connect Jewish values to grandchildren's interests. If they love nature, explore Jewish teachings on environmental stewardship. If they enjoy music, introduce them to Jewish melodies. Making traditions relevant ensures they resonate across generations.

Discussion Questions

1. What is one Jewish value or tradition that was passed down to you that has deeply influenced your life? How have you (or how might you) pass it on to future generations?
2. Reflecting on the actions you model for your grandchildren, the words you say, the way they experience Jewishness in your home space, and the activities you engage in together, which area(s) feels the strongest in your life right now? Which area(s) do you feel called to strengthen?
3. Think about a moment when you saw a grandparent or elder live out their values in a way that inspired you. What did they do, and how did it shape your understanding of what it means to carry on tradition?
4. What challenges or barriers do you face when trying to pass down traditions and values? How might you creatively adapt your approach to make them more engaging for your grandchildren?
5. How do you see your role as an elder in your family? What legacy do you hope to leave behind, and what small steps can you take to ensure it takes root?
6. In what ways can Jewish texts, songs, and rituals support you in making tradition relevant and meaningful for your grandchildren? How might you introduce these elements into your shared experiences?