



# B-Mitzvah Family Text Discussion Cards



Young people of B-Mitzvah age often question the purpose of their life, how they should engage with their immediate world and the larger world, and the kind of impact they want to have on their family, their community, and the planet itself.

These 18 text-based activities — two on each downloadable card — prompt B-Mitzvah teens to consider these questions by examining them through a Jewish lens, using thought-provoking texts from the Jewish tradition as activators. In addition, the cards may serve as a tool for rabbis, other spiritual leaders, and Jewish educators to involve families in B-Mitzvah preparation.

Each card includes a Jewish text, a prompt for discussion, a chance to share something personal, and an activity.

The prompts and activities on each card can also promote intergenerational engagement and discussion — between grandparent and grandchild, parent and child, all three generations, or anyone else who would like to participate. Families can explore core Jewish values, share experiences, and connect their own insights to the wisdom of Jewish tradition.

The text-based discussion cards also give grandparents something meaningful to talk about with their B-Mitzvah-age grandchild. Grandparents can be a guide, helping the grandchild conceptualize and make meaning of challenging texts.

*Cover photograph by Sadie Braunstein*

## How to Use the Jewish Grandparents Network-DOROT Text Cards

***Be sure participants understand the literal meaning of the text at the top of each card before they start on the discussion prompts.***

### Materials for Using Text Cards

- Pens or pencils, sheets of paper
- Card #2: Video recording device (phone, iPad)
- Card #4: Playing cards
- Card #5: Small strips of paper (about 2 x 4 in.) or Post-it Notes
- Card #10: Origami paper, devices to view online directions, or printed directions

### A. Individual Family Use

You can use the cards to stimulate meaningful discussion about Jewish texts and values with your family. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Table Talk:** Keep the cards near the dinner table or anywhere that your family might gather to talk. At an appropriate time, pull out a card and ask the teen to read the text aloud. Once everyone understands the literal meaning (*p'shat*, in Hebrew), use the prompts to discuss the text (*d'rash*, or interpretation). Decide if you want to complete the activity too. Do this regularly and include whoever is at the table, young and old. Adapt questions for younger kids. Distant grandparents can join via FaceTime or Zoom.
- **Grandparent and Grandchild *Chevruta* (study partners):** Set up a regular weekly time for the two to meet — in person or on FaceTime or Zoom. Grandparent(s) and grandchild take turns choosing a text card to complete together.
- **Group Gathering:** Invite another Jewish family interested in creating meaning around the B-Mitzvah experience to join you once a month. At each gathering, each family shares a card of their choosing for the group to discuss. Give participants the option to share personal reflections only as they feel comfortable.

## B. Clergy, Spiritual Leader, and Educator Use

You can use the cards to encourage meaningful discussion about Jewish texts and values with your B-Mitzvah students and their families. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Ask the student to choose a card (leader might preselect a few cards) that relates to their Torah portion. Ask the student to use the card with a parent and/or grandparents and report back on the discussion at your next meeting. The student might also like to use the cards to help construct their *d'var Torah*.
- In a small group or class of students, pair up to discuss a card and do the activity. Rejoin the bigger group to report on the discussion and share the activity. Keep in mind that teens may not always be comfortable sharing personal reflections in a group setting.
- Anytime there is a meeting of the B-Mitzvah families or just the parents, use one of the cards as the text study to open the meeting and set the tone for the gathering.
- Arrange a session for students in class with grandparents at a distance. Each student will need a device to connect to their grandparent and a quiet part of the room in which to do so. During this skip-gen class (just grandparent and grandchild), each student dives into a text card with their own grandparent. Be sensitive to students who do not have grandparents or for whom it would not be appropriate to connect. Consider opening the session to “grandparents and cherished (or significant) elders,” for example.

## C. Intergenerational Program

You can use the text cards for a full 45-minute program, with an optional 15-minute extension activity.

The program can be intergenerational (grandparent or significant elder, parent, and teen) or skip-gen (grandparent and grandchild).

The instructions below are a suggested guide for how to lead such a group program.

### Family Members at a Distance

In advance, invite participants to include grandparents and other family members who are at a distance. Ask participants to plan the best way for those family members to join (FaceTime, Zoom, other platform). Have families test the chosen mode of connection

before the session and bring devices, such as a tablet or smartphone. The devices should be fully charged. (Have spare chargers on hand.) Participants with family members on devices should arrive 15 minutes early. Be sure you have a strong wi-fi connection and wi-fi network name and password available.

### Setup and Materials

- Name tags and markers
- Tables for small groups, or something firm to press on when writing, such as clipboards
- Pens or pencils, sheets of paper
- Card # 2: Video recording device (phone, iPad)
- Card #4: Playing cards
- Card #5: Small strips of paper (about 2 x 4 in.)
- Card #10: Origami paper, devices to view online directions, or printed directions
- Copies of the sample text card you will show — one per participant if possible, otherwise one per family. **SUGGESTED CARD: #1**
- *Optional extension activity:* Choose 4–6 different cards and provide a few copies of each card so each group has at least one copy

### Duration

45 minutes (add 15 minutes for optional extension activity)

### Method

We recommend the following structure for your intergenerational workshop, using a card you, the leader, have chosen.

### Welcome (15 minutes)

As guests enter the space, ask them to put on a name tag.

Greet participants and thank them for coming. Remember to welcome grandparents and other family members who are joining you from a distance.

**Say:**

Today we will learn together and connect through a Jewish text. Our ancient Jewish texts resonate through the ages with wisdom, provide ideas to contemplate and discuss, and can guide us in how we lead our lives.

In a moment I will ask you to turn to the family sitting closest to you. [Make sure each family has another family to partner with.] Introduce yourselves and share one word or short phrase that comes to mind when you think about the word LEARNING.

Model this by going up to a participant and saying, "Hi, I am X. My phrase is 'through books.'"

After the groups have finished, ask a few participants to share some words or phrases they heard in their group.

**Say:**

Just as rabbis did in ancient days, Jewish people have continued to study our ancient texts. We do this study through discussions that sometimes lead to arguments and finally to our own deeper understanding of the meaning. Rabbi Ben Bag Bag (yes, that was his name!), in Pirkei Avot 5:22, said: "Turn it, and turn it, for everything is in it. Reflect on it and grow old and gray with it." Let's look at one text together to get us started.

Read aloud the text you chose.

**Small-Group Discussion and Activity (15-20 minutes)**

***Facilitator's Tip: Adjust group sizes as needed. Families should stay together, and smaller family groups might partner with one or two other smaller family groups. It is important that everyone has a chance to share their thoughts. Remind groups to give family members at a distance a chance to contribute too.***

**Say:**

Now let's discuss this text in your small group. With the family you just partnered with, find an area where you will be able to hear each other.

Give the group a minute or two to partner up and to find a good location.

**Say:**

You will each receive a card with the text we just heard. Please start with the first question and make sure everyone has a chance to respond. You might like to have different people in your group read each prompt aloud. Try to make this a free-flowing conversation, building on each other's thoughts. The last prompt on the card has an activity for your group to do together. Remember: The goal is to connect, so it's okay if you don't always stick to the question.

Give each participant a copy of the card, a sheet of paper, and a pen or pencil.

**Optional extension activity if time allows (15 minutes)**

As you see the discussions starting to wind down, give groups who need it a new card and any materials they require.

**Closing Circle (15 minutes)**

Invite participants back to the large group.

**Say:**

Each of you had a chance to be like the ancient rabbis, turning a Jewish text over and over. What stands out for you in the discussions you had in your small group? Perhaps you thought of something in a new and different way, or liked something you heard, or heard something that challenged you.

Invite participants to share what stood out for them in their group conversation. Allow 3–4 minutes for group sharing.

**Say:**

While we explored these Jewish texts you also had the opportunity to connect and learn with your own family members and another family. At the beginning of our session, I asked each person to share a word or phrase related to the word LEARNING. Our other goal today was to connect to each other and to our community. Think of a word or phrase that describes how you felt about CONNECTING over Jewish text today.

Let's share words or phrases. It can be positive, negative, or neutral. For example, I might say, "inspiring" or "a bit anxiety-provoking" or "learned something new from my grandmother" or anything else you felt.

Invite participants to share.

**SAY:**

*Todah rabah* (thank you very much) for joining us — and a special thank you to those of you who made the effort to join us on FaceTime or Zoom.

**Follow-up and Assessment**

After the program, consider sending out a short survey asking families their reaction to the program and what they suggest you do differently next time. Or consider presenting the survey at the end of the session for immediate feedback.

You might also send out more text cards for their continued use at home.

**About the Authors**

**Text Cards:**

Shai Rosenfeld is lead educator and manager of Intergenerational Program Engagement for DOROT, a nonprofit social services agency in New York City, whose mission is to bring generations together for mutually beneficial learning and connection. Shai facilitates meaningful interaction between volunteers under 18 and over 65. He creates spaces of play and possibility for teens and older adults to build community and long-lasting connections.

**Leader's Guide:**

Diane Zimmerman recently retired after 30 years as a Jewish educational leader. Diane was the Associate Education Director at Temple Sinai in Washington for thirteen years. She is an experienced curriculum writer, led numerous teacher training workshops in the DC area and at conferences, provided expert editorial review to Behrman House Publishers, and served in leadership roles in the DC area and for the Association of Reform Jewish Educators. Diane has a BS in Elementary Education from the University of Illinois and a MEd in Jewish Education from George Washington University.

**Facilitator's Tip:**

***For each card, first discuss what the quote means in your own words so that you start with a baseline understanding of the literal meaning before diving more deeply.***

*With thanks to teen reviewers Adin Eisenstadt-Feil and Annelia Ritter.*

TEXT CARD

1

*Teach the child according to their way; even when they are old they will not deviate from it.*

—Proverbs 22:6

- What does “learning according to their (your) way” mean to you?
- Who is someone you learn from who teaches you according to your way?
- Share a time when you were asked to learn that was *not* according to your way.
- Everyone can be a teacher. Growing up means sharing the responsibility to teach others and help them grow. Based on your thoughts on the passage from Proverbs above, create a list of 3–5 tips for how to be a better teacher.



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TEXT CARD

2

*I found this world planted with carob trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, so too do I plant for my descendants.*

—Talmud, Ta’anit 23a

- It can be humbling to acknowledge the wisdom and generosity of those who came before us. What do you enjoy today that was here before you were born?
- What would you like to leave behind for the next generations?
- One of the traditional 613 mitzvot in Judaism is caring for the Earth. What’s one thing you and others could do every day to care for the Earth? Create a video (use a phone or other device) presenting, in any way you want, how you might take care of the Earth and spread environmental awareness. In developing your video, you might think about disposing of trash and doing recycling, keeping your space clean, donating to an environmental cause you believe in, or anything else to generate awareness about how to care for the Earth and prompt others to take action as well. Post your video online as as your family considers appropriate.



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TEXT CARD

3

*You do not need to complete the task, but neither are you excused from working on it.*  
—Pirkei Avot 2:16

- What is something you love or don't love doing that is never done or complete? It could be a hobby, something you are learning, or something that requires attention over time.
- Some projects can only be accomplished together with others. You might ask for help and rely on the community if you are not able to complete everything yourself. For example, in planning a bake sale to raise funds for a good cause, what are your tasks? Who helps you complete your tasks, responsibilities, or duties?
- Write a note of appreciation to someone or an organization who has helped you. Your thank-you note can be addressed to a specific person or to a service organization or business. For example, you might mail your note to firefighters at the firehouse, a nurse or doctor, or an institution in your community.



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TEXT CARD

4

*There is divine beauty in learning, just as there is human beauty in tolerance. To learn means to accept the postulate [the idea] that life did not begin at my birth. Others have been here before me, and I walk in their footsteps. The books I have read were composed by generations of fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, teachers and disciples. I am the sum total of their experiences, their quests. And so are you.*

—Elie Wiesel

- Learning something new can be hard. Think of something you struggled with at first that you are glad you learned. What was or is difficult about it?
- Why does it matter what the experience of past generations was like? How are you impacted by what came before you?
- One of the rewarding ways we learn is by playing games. We all know simple games like Tic-Tac-Toe, Dots and Boxes, Checkers, and Go Fish because someone taught them to us. Take time to teach each other a short game you know and play it together.



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TEXT CARD

5

Everyone must have two pockets, with a note in each pocket, so that he or she can reach into the one or the other, depending on the need. When you're feeling lowly and depressed, discouraged or disconsolate [without comfort], one should reach into the right pocket and there find the words: "For my sake was the world created." But when you're feeling high and mighty, you should reach into the left pocket, and find the words: "I am but dust and ashes."

—Rabbi Simcha Bunim Bonhart

- What lifts you up when you feel discouraged?
- When might someone need to remember to feel humble?
- Take some time to share meaningful words that inspire you and remind you of what's important to you. They could be from a song you listen to often, a story or poem, a saying, or a video. Write these words on a small slip of paper. Put this paper in a convenient place (a pocket, a shelf, on the bathroom mirror) so you can pull the paper out and look at it when you need to be reminded of these words.



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TEXT CARD

6

Do not say something that should never be heard, because ultimately it will be heard.

—Pirkei Avot 2:4

- What do you think this statement by Hillel the Elder means?
- When have you overheard something that you weren't supposed to hear? (No need to mention names.)
- What is the difference between gossip and rumors (in Hebrew, *lashon hara*) and criticism?
- How can rumors impact someone's life? Write a short script together in which one character repeats something they overheard, even though they know they shouldn't. Name your characters and write dialogue for them. How can something a person overhears have a big impact on their own life?



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TEXT CARD

7

*A test of a people is how they behave toward the old. It is easy to love children. Even tyrants and dictators make a point of being fond of children. But the affection and care for the old, the incurable, the helpless are the true gold mines of a culture.*

—Abraham Joshua Heschel

- Who are or were your own “gold mines”?
- Elders can be mentors, reliable family members, or cultural icons, and every community draws on their experience. Do you think the elderly should be treated differently than anyone else? Explain your answer.
- There are many negative (and some positive) stereotypes about getting older, yet it’s something we all do. Take three minutes to each create a list of stereotypes about getting older. Think of the ways old age is depicted in movies, online, and in advertising.
- Share your lists. Is there truth to these stereotypes? How should aging be represented?



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TEXT CARD

8

*In every generation a person must regard themselves as though they personally had gone out of Egypt.*

—Mishnah Pesachim 10:5

- This expression is but one part of the Passover tradition. Give an example of any family holiday tradition you love.
- The Israelites were immigrants in Egypt long before they were enslaved. If you were to see yourself as if you were freed from Egypt, how would that change your view of your own community?
- What would you want to know if you were coming to this country as an immigrant? What should they know about your community or area if they had just moved in?



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TEXT CARD

9

*Even though the mitzvot [commandments] are placed upon each individual, all Jews have areyvut [a responsibility] for one another, and they are all a single entity. It is like a guarantor who repays the debt of a friend.*

—Rabbi Yom Tov ben Avraham Isbili (aka Ritva), Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 29a

- How do you feel about focusing on Jews as having responsibility for one another?
- When has someone taken care of you by stepping in to help beyond being a good friend — taking on your “debt” as if it were their own?
- What does it mean to have *areyvut* for someone, to be a guarantor? What is the difference between *caring* for someone or something and *being responsible* for it?
- After you become B-Mitzvah, in our tradition you become responsible for yourself, and you also help carry the responsibilities of your family, your community, and your people.
- Let’s do something right now for our community. Whether you are at home, outdoors, in a community center, or at a synagogue, the building or environment always has to be maintained. Scan the room or area and see what you can do or ask someone what you can do to help, such as wiping down tables, taking out the trash, or helping in another way. Either do this now, or make a plan to do so at an appropriate time.



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TEXT CARD

10

*Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught a parable [a simple story that illustrates a moral or lesson]: There were people on a ship. One of them took a drill and started drilling underneath himself. The others said to him: What are you sitting and doing? He replied: What do you care? Is this not underneath only my own area that I am drilling? They said to him: But the water will rise and flood all of us who are on this ship.*

—Vayikra Rabbah 4:6

- What are some ways you’ve encountered in which others drill under their own seat and threaten to sink the boat you are on?
- How do your choices impact the world around you? Are there things you do for yourself that have a negative impact on others?
- In origami traditions (origami is the Japanese art of paper folding), boats symbolize life. Let’s make some origami together. First, each person should take a piece of origami paper and fill it with drawings, words, and phrases that represent the things in our lives that we share with others and must preserve to keep the boat afloat. Then fold each origami page into an origami boat. You can find simple instructions on how to do this online. We recommend <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/> — search Easy Origami Boats.



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*As iron sharpens iron, so too does one sharpen the wisdom of their friend.*

—Proverbs 27:17

- Tell us about a friendship you have that fits this description.
- Sharpening iron seems like an image of conflict and disagreement. How do you feel about this image? Are there other ways in which we can sharpen each other?
- Let's sharpen each other's wits with a game. One person will be the mastermind and the other the guesser. The mastermind will secretly come up with a sequence of four numbers made up of only the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. Two examples may be 2, 3, 1, 1 and 4, 3, 3, 4.
  - Now the guesser will write down a guess.
  - The mastermind will only tell them *how many of the numbers are in the right place* in the sequence and *how many of them are the right numbers but in the wrong place* in the sequence. Don't tell which are which!
  - Now repeat the process. If the guesser succeeds in six guesses, they win.
  - Trade roles and play again.



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*Rabbi Yehoshua taught, "Acquire for yourself a friend." He said it in terms of acquisition; he didn't say, "Make for yourself a friend," or "Befriend others." Could this be because of the work that you must do to acquire a friend, so that all of your deeds are refined through that friend? . . . A friend for virtue is when the desire of both of you and your intentions are for one thing, and that is to be good. And each of you wants to be helped by the other in reaching this good for both of you together. And the good is reached by disagreeing and when one of you questions the other. This is the friend Rabbi Yehoshua commanded us to acquire.*

—Maimonides, on the Sayings of our Ancestors (Pirkei Avot)

- Without mentioning names, when have you questioned or disagreed with a friend and something negative resulted?
- A "friend for virtue" is the kind of friend who pushes you to be good, to be a better person. What other kinds of friends do you have? Should all friends be friends for virtue?
- What values are important for you to refine in yourself and your friends? Take five minutes for each of you to make a list of five guiding values or principles that are important to you.
- Share your lists with one another. Then together create a combined list and rank the values or principles in order of importance.



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*Death and life are in the power of the tongue...*

—Proverbs 18:21

- Using your voice can make a real difference in the world, for good or bad. Think of a time when speaking up made a difference in your world.
- Besides speaking up for your beliefs, expressing yourself can inspire change in others. Who are some of your favorite artists — people whose words inspire you in surprising ways? On your phone, share with your partner(s) a piece of music, a famous speech, a quote from a book, or a song that moves you.
- Let's use the power of the tongue. Create a short speech you can read together that needs to be heard. Start with a topic that is important to you, do some writing together, and finally record something, including everyone in your group. It should be 1–2 minutes long.



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*For six years you are to sow your land and to gather in its produce, but in the seventh, you are to let it go and to let it be, that the needy of your people may eat, and what remains, the wildlife of the field shall eat. Do thus with your vineyard, with your olive grove.*

—Exodus 23:10-11

- This quote describes the Jewish tradition of *shmitah*, the Sabbatical year. Once every seven years, there is a year to take only what you need, share your wealth, and let the Earth rest. It can often feel as if there is so much to do and no time to complete all your tasks. Why is it so important to allow yourself time to relax or rest?
- How do you like to relax?
- Shabbat is the weekly time of rest on the Jewish calendar. What is one way you might let go this coming Shabbat?
- Let's make a relaxing activity for others to enjoy. It can be a puzzle, a coloring book, a trivia game, or anything you can imagine. Use the materials you have on hand. Remember: It should be something that can take a while for others to complete and that can help them slow down. Create materials and instructions together that can be easily understood by someone else.



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TEXT CARD

15

*On Yom Kippur, we do not atone for sins between us and another person until we make amends with that person. Even if we angered that person only in words, we are required to make amends with them. And if, at first, the person is not pacified, we [must] return and make a second and third try, each time taking three additional people with us. And if, on the third try, the person does not become reconciled with us, we [no longer] are obligated....*

—Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 606:1

- What is your reaction to the quote that you need to ask for forgiveness three times and only then may you stop asking?
- Let's do a little role-playing. First, find a story you all know. It might be a folktale, a fairy tale, a story from the Bible, or a movie. *Examples:* Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, Batman movies.
  - Identify who you think the villain is in the story.
  - One of you should take on the role of the villain and the others interview that person (the villain) about what happened from their point of view. See if you can find out how the villain might perceive their actions. Do they feel justified in acting as they did?
- Discuss how changing the point of view may or may not make a difference in how you think about the actions of someone else. Can you think of any real-world examples to share?



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TEXT CARD

16

*It is related that when Rabbi Zeira had a complaint against a person who had insulted him, he would pace back and forth before that person and present himself, so that the person could come and ask forgiveness of him. Rabbi Zeira made himself available so that it would be easy for the other person to apologize to him.*

—Talmud, Yoma 87a:15-16

- Sometimes moving forward requires us to show compassion to those who have wronged us. What might make that difficult? How might you overcome your own resistance to showing compassion?
- Are there ways to make amends without saying "I'm sorry"? Share some examples.
- Think about a situation in which you made an effort to make amends to someone, even when you thought you were right. Share with your group. Share strategies for reaching a peaceful resolution, especially when feelings have been hurt.



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TEXT CARD

17

*[Hillel] used to say: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"*

Pirkei Avot 1:14

- When might it be important to think about yourself first? Do you sometimes forget to consider yourself? Share examples.
- Many world leaders, including Presidents John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama, have used versions of Hillel's words to emphasize the importance of working toward solving global problems. Which of Hillel's words do you think apply most to solving global problems? Explain your answer.
- Choose a world problem of particular interest to you. Share one small thing you could do, tomorrow or soon, to make a difference. Be realistic, and practical. Make a promise to yourself to follow through.



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TEXT CARD

18

*Maimonides (Rambam), the 12<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher and thinker, said there are eight levels of giving tzedakah, each a bit more desirable than the level below. The lowest level on Maimonides' ladder of tzedakah is giving begrudgingly. The highest level is helping the recipient become self-sufficient. The second highest level is giving anonymously, in which neither the giver nor the receiver knows the other's identity.*

- What is the benefit to a) the giver and b) the receiver if the giving or doing is done anonymously? Are there any drawbacks?
- Share a few examples of when you helped someone less fortunate. Did you and the receiver know each other? How did it feel to be the giver? How do you imagine the receiver might have felt?
- Consider a mitzvah project you have underway or are planning. Plan if, and how, you might incorporate the giver (you) and receiver not knowing each other's identities.



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