

Society for Humanistic Judaism

Cultural B Mitzvah

13 STEPS to Becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah Through Humanistic Judaism

INTRODUCTION

What is so innovative about Secular Humanistic Judaism's Cultural B Mitzvah program?

Cultural B Mitzvah™ is designed for families who want a cultural rather than religious coming-of-age ceremony. Humanistic Judaism has been offering personalized, flexible, and creative educational experiences for youth in our North American communities for more than fifty years. We now offer this program remotely through on-line communication, making it ideal for those who do not live near a secular or humanistic Jewish community, and will provide long-distance support for those seeking a meaningful and cultural bar/bat/b'nai mitzvah experience for their child.

We have found that this process and ceremony carefully guides middle-school aged children through conquering a challenge in which they are the central actor. In addition to learning about Judaism in a personal way, students build confidence and pride; they are able to speak with confidence on a topic of their own choosing. We offer a distance learning approach which gives a clear structure and personal coaching as needed to reach the milestone of an inspiring experience for the children and the entire family.

The on-line Cultural B Mitzvah program offers multiple options to provide optimum flexibility. It is based on the *13 STEPS to Cultural B Mitzvah* curriculum designed by the Society for

Humanistic Judaism (SHJ). The options for participating in the program range from purchasing and completing the program on your own with some SHJ support, to a fully supported option of tutoring, presentation coaching, ceremony preparation, and in-person officiation. You can complete the program fully in English – Hebrew or another Jewish language (Yiddish, Ladino, etc.) is optional. You can choose a program with or without a Torah reading. For more information, please contact SHJ. After you begin to work with one option, you may find that you want more support, and this too is possible. Read more to learn about the options offered to meet many of the needs of secular Jews today.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah: Why am I doing this?

This program is designed to help you explore yourself and your values in the process of planning a coming-of-age ceremony that is meaningful to you and your family.

Since this process is designed to help you make the ceremony a form of your self-expression, consider what you'd like to include. Would you like to tell a story from family history, play an instrument, perform a speech of a historical figure, or something else that shows who you are? What family members do you wish to be a part of your service? This is a chance to incorporate the values (above) that are important to you, and to make the process meaningful to you.

COURSE AND STUDENT OBJECTIVES

The program objective of SHJ and its communities for the Cultural B Mitzvah program is to provide meaningful, empowering and educational coaching for young people anywhere in the US and Canada who commit to preparing for and presenting a Cultural B Mitzvah presentation, expanding the opportunity for remote learning to those who do not have a community nearby.

With all program options listed below, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of Jewish holidays, major events in Jewish history, and terms such as Judaism and humanism.
2. Identify a topic/role model from Jewish and/or humanist studies that interests them for in-depth study.
3. Research a variety of perspectives on that topic/role model, identifying reliable sources of information.
4. Use critical thinking tools to make effective arguments from the information they have gathered.
5. Frame the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation, outlining purpose and main points.
6. Write a presentation from that outline, using language to express their perspectives and to present clear evidence from reliable sources.
7. Build speaking skills that demonstrate vocal clarity, appropriate volume, and personal connection to the subject matter and to the audience.
8. Practice to present at the Cultural B Mitzvah ceremony an articulate talk about their topic as well as their perspectives on Jewish identity.
9. Contribute time and effort to a community service project identified as meaningful to the students' studies.

Our Cultural B Mitzvah students emerge from the process with strong critical-thinking skills, laying the groundwork for intellectual inquiry for the rest of their lives. It can provide these young adults with a deep connection to their heritage, and their families with a deeply moving, original, unforgettable coming-of-age ceremony.

Through this preparation no one will tell the student what to believe, only “this is what many modern Jews now believe.” Humanistic Judaism encourages people to think rationally about Jewish beliefs and practices, to gather new facts, to question, and to be open to developing their own perspectives over the course of their lives.

To find out more about how SHJ’s Cultural B Mitzvah program offers a meaningful, individualized, and relevant experience, please contact the SHJ Rabbi Miriam Jerris (rabbi@shj.org).

(This concept was originally conceived by Harriet Maza, Education Associate of the SHJ and revised for distance learning use by SHJ Rabbi Miriam Jerris & the B Mitzvah Committee, Victoria Ratnaswamy Marlene Cohen & BJ Saul) May 2020

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This program is for families seeking a Cultural B Mitzvah (bar/bat mitzvah) for their child(ren) who are not currently members of, or easily serviced by, an SHJ-affiliated (in-person) Community or Congregation. It consists of *13 Steps to Becoming a Cultural B Mitzvah*.

The 13 STEPS to Becoming a Cultural B Mitzvah Summary

- STEP 1:** Learning about family values and identifying my values
- STEP 2:** Exploring what it means to be Jewish and a humanist, cultural, or secular Jew
- STEP 3:** Learning about Jewish history
- STEP 4:** Learning about Jewish holidays
- STEP 5:** Learning about life cycle celebrations
- STEP 6:** Examining the history of bar and bat mitzvah and its forms of celebration
- STEP 7:** Experiencing Jewish heritage
- STEP 8:** Reading Jewish literature
- STEP 9:** Learning about Jewish languages
- STEP 10:** Doing Community service
- STEP 11:** Developing the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation & Completing the Cultural B Mitzvah portfolio/journal
- STEP 12:** Planning the Cultural B Mitzvah Service/Program
- STEP 13:** Celebrating the Cultural B Mitzvah

As you examine this document, each of these STEPS will become clearer to you. Please read the entire document and all the instructions before you start working and create a timeline for completing the steps. Over the course of this program you will create a portfolio, either digital or hand-written with your work for each step, the responses to the questions in each step, and additional thoughts you may have.

In each step, there are many options for learning and activities connected to them. Work with your parent or tutor to decide which activities you will choose. When you participate in an activity, please record your thoughts in your portfolio/journal.

At least **nine to twelve months** prior to the Cultural B Mitzvah celebration read the first part of **Step 11** regarding choice of Mitzvah hero or topic and make that choice early enough in your program to ensure that you will have the time you need to do the work that will lead to this very meaningful experience for the student and the entire family.

STEP 1 (Learning about family values and identifying my values) should be done first. If you can't get all the information for your family tree when you'd like to, gather what you can and return to it later in the year after you've visited with a relative, for example, and have more information to add.

STEP 2 (Exploring what it means to be Jewish and a humanistic, cultural, or secular Jew) builds on what you learned about your family's values. You can begin to figure out what your values are and how your Jewish identity fits into the person who is you. You will learn that there

are different ways that you can choose to be Jewish. Your understanding of this topic will develop and change through this Cultural B Mitzvah process. Please go back regularly to review your thoughts and add your current thinking. Record your ideas in your Cultural B Mitzvah portfolio and date your entries so that you can track how your ideas have changed and developed over time.

STEP 3 (Learning about Jewish history) is the longest of all the steps to complete because it involves learning the history of the Jewish people. Set aside a few hours each week for discussing and writing.

STEPS 4,5,6,7,8,9,10, can be done throughout your program as you come across information for each step.

STEPS 11,12,&13 have to do with your finished product to be presented at your mitzvah celebration. Look these steps over but leave the writing of your presentation and the preparation of the Cultural B Mitzvah service/program to do during the last **nine to twelve months** of your process because your other learning will contribute to your final product. Just remember it cannot all be done in a day or even in a month and maybe not even in a year. Choose a system to plan your progress with your parents and your mentor (if you have one). This is a process; if you do one part at a time it can be interesting, meaningful, and exciting. Do not let it overwhelm you. Ask an adult to help you break your work down into separate parts, then celebrate as you complete each part.

OPTIONS

The program provides options:

- ✓ Option 1 is General Guidance.
- ✓ Option 2 is Family Guided, Do-It-Yourself.
- ✓ Option 3 is Family Guided with In-Person Officiating
- ✓ Option 4 is Professional Tutoring with In-Person Officiating.

For Options 3 or 4, the SHJ will pair you with a Secular Humanistic rabbi or certified leader.

All Humanistic rabbis or leaders can assist students in interpreting Torah portions if that is a desired part of the student's Cultural B Mitzvah process. Because most Humanistic Judaism bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies do not require or incorporate a Torah portion, however, tutoring for chanting or reading a Torah portion in Hebrew is not included in any of the 4 options and requires a separate arrangement, which can be made with someone within the Humanistic Judaism movement or beyond it; we are happy to provide guidance.

Secular Humanistic Jews emphasize the importance of consistency between belief and behavior, so a community service project as part of Cultural B Mitzvah preparation is strongly recommended and SHJ can provide guidance for that as well.

While the timeline is flexible, this process works best as a nine-month-to-a-year course of study as fits the student's schedule. Twelve class sessions, each lasting sixty minutes, should allow the student to fully complete the **13 STEPS to Cultural B Mitzvah**. Additional time will be needed

for class preparation, research, and writing. Lessons should be paced to give students time to absorb them.

Twelve Class Sessions

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| Session 1 | Learning about family values and identifying my values (Step 1) |
| Session 2 | Exploring what it means to be Jewish and a humanist/cultural/secular Jew (Step 2) |
| Session 3 | Learning about Jewish history (Step 3) |
| Session 4 | Learning about Jewish history (Step 3) |
| Session 5 | Learning about Jewish holidays (Step 4) |
| Session 6 | Learning about life cycle celebrations (Step 5) |
| Session 7 | Examining the history of bar and bat mitzvah (Step 6) |
| Session 8 | Reading Jewish literature (Step 8) |
| Session 9 | Learning about Jewish languages (Step 9) |
| Session 10 | Developing my Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 11) |
| Session 11 | Preparing the Cultural B Mitzvah Service/Program (Step 12) |
| Session 12 | Practicing the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 12) |

Additionally, experiencing Jewish heritage (Step 7) will be accomplished under the guidance of parents. Community Service (Step 10) will be fulfilled outside of the class sessions. Developing the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 11), Preparing the Cultural B Mitzvah Service/Program and Practicing the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 12) will include time outside of tutoring sessions. Completing a Cultural B Mitzvah portfolio/journal (Step 12) will be homework as the student is completing each of the first nine steps. Celebrating the Cultural B Mitzvah (Step 13) is the event!

Option 1: General Guidance

Either for a fee of \$100, or free as an SHJ member (which is \$95 per year per household), the family will receive up to two one-hour phone or video conference consultations about Cultural B Mitzvah with the SHJ Rabbi. Additionally, an **overview** of the program and an outline of the **13 STEPS to Cultural B Mitzvah** is included.

Areas of consultation include:

- a. Choosing a topic or role model for the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation.
- b. Identifying a Community Service Project.
- c. Reviewing the student's presentation.
- d. Reviewing of the Cultural B Mitzvah ceremony program (the service).
- e. Identifying a Jewish language reading or reading from the Torah.
- f. Guiding the student in presenting an interpretation if a Torah reading is chosen.

The SHJ rabbi will review the student's presentation and the Cultural B Mitzvah service at least three weeks prior to the B Mitzvah Celebration. Then, SHJ will provide a signed certificate that can be presented during the ceremony and a small gift recognizing the student's completion of the program.

Option 2: Family Guided, Do-It-Yourself

The family-guided, do-it-yourself option uses the *13 STEPS to Cultural B Mitzvah* curriculum that we will provide to you. The 13 STEPS curriculum gives resources, including suggestions for the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation topic, an outline of questions to write a role model paper, examples of completed projects, options for creating a Cultural B Mitzvah service or program, and examples of a completed ceremony program. Sheet music is available upon request. There are also links to presentation examples in multimedia formats.

A family member will work through the *13 STEPS to Cultural B Mitzvah* curriculum with the student. The curriculum is outlined at the end of this document.

Family Responsibilities

Families are responsible for guiding their children through the steps, finding a Hebrew tutor if desired, booking the facility, hiring or choosing a ceremonial leader and a musician/s to play, sing, and lead the music, and working with the mentor to plan the program.

Costs

The cost for the Family Guided Program, which included the *13 STEPS to Cultural B Mitzvah curriculum* and the General Guidance described in Option 1 is \$500 for SHJ members and \$1,000 for non-members.

Option 3: Family Guided with In-Person Officiating

The Society for Humanistic Judaism will match a Secular Humanistic rabbi or certified leader who can officiate in person (lead the ceremony), without tutoring beforehand but with the expectation that the student will complete the Family-Guided course of study. For this option, you must purchase the Family Guided option.

In-Person Officiating

Retaining an officiant is best scheduled twelve months or more prior to the Cultural B Mitzvah ceremony, and ideally no later than nine months (due to demand and travel arrangements). While the family and student are preparing the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation, the officiant will typically:

1. Get to know the student and their family (up to one hour).
2. Help the student choose and frame the topic of their Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (up to two hours).
3. Provide comments on the presentation and give final approval (up to 90 minutes).
4. Assist the family in creating the ceremony program and give final approval (up to one hour).

Family Responsibilities

Families are responsible for guiding their children through the 13 STEPS Program, finding a Hebrew tutor if reading/chanting a Torah portion is desired, booking the facility, hiring or choosing a musician/s to play, sing, and lead the music, if desired, and preparing the ceremony and printing the ceremony program.

Costs

This Family Guided, In-Person Officiation option, which includes the *13 STEPS to Cultural B Mitzvah* curriculum and in-person officiating, is \$1,500 for SHJ members and \$2,000 for non-members, plus travel expenses as determined between the officiant and the family.

Option 4: Tutoring and In-Person Officiating

One-on-one instruction will be provided on two levels: 1) tutoring in Humanistic Jewish literacy and 2) preparation for the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation.

SHJ will match a rabbi or certified leader who can provide Cultural B Mitzvah tutoring and in-person officiating. This option will provide a teacher for Jewish literacy education in addition to mentorship for the Cultural B Mitzvah program presentation.

Tutoring and In-Person Officiating

This option is most effective when begun one year prior to the Cultural B Mitzvah. **The officiant will be involved in preparation and approval of the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation and ceremony program.** The number of tutoring sessions is twelve. Regularly scheduled online meetings will last up to 60 minutes. The tutor will prepare each session and the student will likely have some homework between sessions.

Family Responsibilities

Families are responsible for supporting their children, as needed, to prepare for their tutoring sessions, finding a Hebrew tutor if reading/chanting a Torah portion is desired, booking the facility, hiring or choosing musician/s to play, sing, and lead the music, if desired, preparing the ceremony and printing the ceremony program.

Costs

This option, including Jewish literacy tutoring, Cultural B Mitzvah preparation tutoring, and support and resources to prepare the Cultural B Mitzvah presentation and ceremony program, is \$2,450 for SHJ members and \$2,950 for non-members, plus travel expenses as determined between the officiant and the family.

Additional Social Components Available

Learning Cohorts

Some of our tutors may be willing to work with two to four students simultaneously, which will enable the student to meet other Cultural B Mitzvah students in their distance-learning community and develop connections with them. It will also allow opportunities for families to “meet” and support each other. New cohorts would begin two to three times a year. Please let us know if you are interested in exploring the idea of a cohort.

Mentors: Pairing Students with Cultural B Mitzvah Graduates

Some of our Cultural B Mitzvah graduates have volunteered to connect with new students who have not yet completed their Cultural B Mitzvah program. This will enable new students to meet

someone who has shared a similar experience. The Cultural B Mitzvah graduate will also introduce the student to HuJews, SHJ's Youth Group, which sponsors an annual conclave.

HuJews Youth Conclave

Graduates from any of the four Cultural B Mitzvah options described above are eligible to attend the annual youth gathering, as well as regular virtual gatherings of the Humanistic Judaism Youth movement. **HuJews Youth Conclave** is a powerful weekend of growth and learning that has formed life-long friendships over the past quarter-century.

ADDITIONAL SHJ RESOURCES INCLUDED WITH THE SHJ CULTURAL B MITZVAH PROGRAM

SHJ Topical Curriculum

Guide to Humanistic Judaism

Education for Humanistic Jews

In Memorium: Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, 1928-2007

Holiday Kits:

High Holidays

Hanukkah

Tu Bi-Shevat

Purim

Passover

Holiday Manuals or Humanistic Judaism journal issue:

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "The High Holidays," *Humanistic Judaism*, (Spring 1986)

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "Sukkot," *Humanistic Judaism*, (Summer 1990)

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "A Hanukka Manual," *Humanistic Judaism*.

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "Tu Bi-Shevat: The Jewish Earth Day," *Humanistic Judaism*, (Winter 1993)

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "Purim," *Humanistic Judaism*, (Winter 1992)

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "A Passover Manual," *Humanistic Judaism*.

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "Shavuot: Discovering Our Literature," *Humanistic Judaism*, (Spring 1995)

Life Cycle Manuals or Humanistic Judaism journal issues:

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "Celebrating Life's Passages," *Humanistic Judaism*, (Winter/Spring 1999)

Coming of Age: The Bar and Bat Mitzvah

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "Intermarriage," *Humanistic Judaism*, (Spring/Summer 2003)

Society for Humanistic Judaism, "A Parenting Primer for Humanistic Jews," *Humanistic Judaism*, (Autumn 2012/Winter-Spring 2013)

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