

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 officiating. 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.

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

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).