

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 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.

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 never requires absolute adherence as the price of admission. In fact, we encourage 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).

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.

The program provides four 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're 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 six-month-to-a-year course of study as fits the student's schedule. Twenty 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.

13 STEPS TO CULTURAL B MITZVAH **Twenty Class Sessions**

Session 1	Learning about my family and their values and identifying my values (Step 1)
Session 2	Learning about my family and their values and identifying my values (Step 1)
Session 3	Exploring what it means to be Jewish and a humanist/cultural/secular Jew (Step 2)
Session 4	Learning about Jewish history (Step 3)
Session 5	Learning about Jewish history (Step 3)
Session 6	Learning about Jewish holidays (Step 4)
Session 7	Learning about Jewish holidays (Step 4)
Session 8	Learning about life cycle celebrations (Step 5)
Session 9	Examining the history of bar and bat mitzvah (Step 6)
Session 10	Experiencing our Jewish heritage (Step 7)
Session 11	Experiencing our Jewish heritage (Step 7)
Session 12	Reading Jewish literature (Step 8)
Session 13	Reading Jewish literature (Step 8)
Session 14	Learning about Jewish languages (Step 9)
Own Time*	Mitzvah project (community service) (Step 10)
Session 15	Developing my Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 11)
Session 16	Developing my Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 11)
Session 17	Developing my Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 11)
Own Time*	Completing "My Cultural B Mitzvah Journey" journal (Step 12)
Session 18	Preparing the Cultural B Mitzvah Ceremony/Celebration (Step 13)
Session 19	Practicing my Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 13)
Session 20	Practicing my Cultural B Mitzvah presentation (Step 13)

* Practicing my values by performing good deeds (Step 10) will be fulfilled outside of the class sessions. Completing "My Cultural B Mitzvah Journey" journal (Step 12) will be homework as the student is completing each of the first nine steps.

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.

Possible 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.

After those steps are followed, SHJ will also provide a signed certificate recognizing the student's completion of the program and a small gift.

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 twenty. 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.

The 13 STEPS to Becoming a Cultural B Mitzvah Summary

- STEP 1:** Learning about my family and their 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 the 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 our Jewish heritage
- STEP 8:** Reading Jewish literature
- STEP 9:** Learning about Jewish languages
- STEP 10:** Practicing my values by performing good deeds
- STEP 11:** Developing my Cultural B Mitzvah presentation
- STEP 12:** Completing “My Cultural B Mitzvah Journey” journal
- STEP 13:** Celebrating my Cultural B Mitzvah