

IN YOUR HOME

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Jewish Life Cycle Events

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Shalom Parents

You and your family can have many years of fun together, celebrating Jewish life cycle events creatively, while making those events meaningful to all family members.

Birth ceremonies for Jewish children are memorable. In addition to being given an English name, Jewish babies usually receive a Hebrew one, announced at the *Brit Milah* (ritual circumcision) or *Simchat Bat* (birth ceremony for a girl), meaning “Rejoicing in a daughter”. Ashkenazic families usually name children in memory of deceased relatives, while Sephardic families often honor living relatives by naming children for them.

The *Brit Milah* is performed on a healthy baby boy’s eighth day of life by a *mohel* (a person ritually trained in this procedure). The *Simchat Bat* occurs in the synagogue on a day when the *Torah* is read: *Shabbat* morning or afternoon, Monday or Thursday morning, or a holiday, or at home on any day desired.

The *Pidyon Ha-Ben*, occurring on the 30th day after the birth of a first-born son, is based on the biblical understanding that first-born sons were dedicated to serving God in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Coming of age ceremonies offer many opportunities to celebrate. Consecration marks the initiation of a child’s formal Jewish education. Often children are given small *Torahs* or special books and sweets at this time.



Bar Mitzvah and *Bat Mitzvah* ceremonies, (at age 13 for a boy, and 12 or 13 for a girl), are public declarations of the child’s acceptance of obligations to fully observe commandments required of adults and participate actively in the Jewish community. The child usually recites *Torah* blessings and reads a *Torah* portion in the synagogue. Although most celebrations occur on Saturday, they can also take place on Monday, Thursday or Jewish holidays—the other days of public *Torah* readings.

Confirmation, typically occurring after completion of several years of religious school education, recognizes young adults/teenagers for their accomplishments.

Life choices ceremonies can include personalized Judaic rituals. Conversion to Judaism, marriage, *Chanukat Habayit* (dedicating a home) and divorce usually include Judaic rituals and are often creatively developed.

Jewish Death and mourning customs relate to showing respect for the deceased and concern for mourners. Sitting *shiva* (a seven-day period of mourning immediately following a funeral), saying *Kaddish* (prayer for the dead), and *yahrzeit* (anniversary of a death) guide Jews through difficult periods. Each year, on the Hebrew date of the anniversary of the death, as well as on *Yom Kippur* Eve, a *yahrzeit* candle is lit and burns all day in the mourner’s home. Each of these customs can be personally adapted to make them meaningful.

WHAT CAN WE DO AT HOME?

There are many opportunities to create your own ritual items and ceremonies marking Jewish life cycle events.

PREPARING FOR A NEW BABY

Your older child's help in preparing for the new baby helps him feel important.



With your child:

- Discuss the older sibling's names, why they were chosen and the names chosen for the new baby.
- Make a sign with the new baby's name. Encourage the older sibling to choose colors and designs, writing the name in English and/or Hebrew. Hang it on the door of the baby's room.
- Honor the older sibling by having a "big sister (or brother)" party.

MOVING INTO A NEW HOUSE (OR ROOM)

The *mezuzah* is the only required symbol of a Jewish home. It is placed on the upper third section of every doorway, except the bathroom, on the right side as one enters the room. Inside the small container is a handwritten scroll of parchment with a portion from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 written on the front and the word *Shaddai* (Almighty) on the back. One blessing suffices for putting up more than one *mezuzah* at once. Just before affixing the *mezuzah*, say the blessing:



Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, Asher Kidshanu Bemitzvotav Vetzivanu Likbo'a Mezuzah.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has made us holy with commandments and bids us to affix the *mezuzah*.

With your child:

- Make your own *mezuzah* case with bake-at-home materials (available from craft stores) or purchase a completed one.
- Buy a new *klaf* (parchment inside the *mezuzah* case). Examine it, handling it gently to avoid rubbing the writing. Try reading the Hebrew. Gently roll it up and place it inside the *mezuzah* case.
- She can help affix the *mezuzah* on the doorway to the house or to her room.

MAKING FRIENDS WITH OLDER PEOPLE

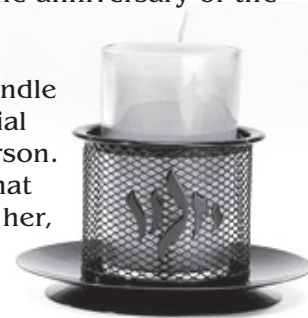
Often, in our society, young children have no opportunities to visit elderly people. Long-term studies show lasting benefits to young and old who spend time together. Children who meet regularly with seniors show improved vocabulary and advanced social skills. Seniors who spend time with children are less bored, lonely, or helpless.

With your child: Visit an elderly relative or friend for a short period of time. Prior to the visit, discuss the possibility with the host and your child. Suggest a topic of conversation with your child. Occasionally bring a gift; perhaps a plant or your child's drawing. Be sure to limit visiting time appropriately.

REMEMBERING A LOVED ONE

Light a *yahrzeit* candle on the anniversary of the death of a loved one.

With your child: Light the candle together, and recall the special qualities of the deceased person. Discuss ways to remember that person (displaying photos of her, cooking her favorite foods, talking about her good deeds, etc.)



EXPRESSING THANKFULNESS

For nearly 2000 years of Jewish life, as we learn from the *Talmud*, the *Shehecheyanu* blessing has been recited in gratitude for any new and exciting moment. We continue to greet every Jewish festival with it as well as in recognition of special moments.

With your child: Say the *Shehecheyanu* blessing (in English or Hebrew) when something new and very special happens, (when she's learned to ride a bike, is about to start kindergarten, tastes a new food, attempts a new task).

SHEHECHEYANU 3

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Shehecheyanu V'kiyimanu V'higiyanu Lazman Ha'zeh

Blessed are You Lord our God,
King of the universe, who has granted us life,
sustaining us and enabling us to reach this day.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS (all for 3-7 year olds except *)

BIRTH

My Baby Brother: What A Miracle, by S. Rouss, Jonathan David, 2002, At first Sarah doesn't know why everyone says her new baby brother is a miracle, but by the day of his *brit milah*, she thinks differently.

Baby's Bris, by S. Wilkowsky, Kar-Ben, 1999. Sophie is not sure how she feels about having a baby brother, but each day, leading up to the day of the *bris*, she learns more and more. Finally, on the eighth day, she's ready.

Baby Babka, the Gorgeous Genius, by J.B.Zalben, Clarion Books, 2004. Beryl is disappointed to have another brother, but, with a little magic and assistance from wise Uncle Morty, she changes her mind.

ADOPTION

Katie-Bo: An Adoption Story, by I. L. Fisher, Adama Books, 1987. Jim and his brother don't understand why their mother is adopting a baby from Korea, but they soon learn some nice things about their special new sister.

Rebecca's Journey Home, by B.O. Sugarman, Kar-Ben, 2006. The Stein family looks forward to enlarging their Jewish household by adopting a Vietnamese little girl. There are so many things to do to prepare!

NAMING

***The First Gift**, by A.S. Gadot, Kar-Ben, 2006. As a boy considers the first gift his parents gave him, his name, he recounts how names came to be and the many names a person may be called.

Sophie's Name, by P. Grode, Kar-Ben, 1990. Sophie Davida Finkle-Cohen thinks her name is too long - until she learns about her namesakes.

CONVERSION

Mommy Never Went to Hebrew School, by M.A. Portnoy, Kar-Ben, 1989. A young boy tells why and how his mother converted to Judaism.

MOVING

A Mezuzah on The Door, by A. Meltzer, Kar Ben 2007. When a little boy moves from a city apartment to his new suburban home his adjustment is hard. The Jewish tradition of celebrating while putting up a *mezuzah* on the door helps his transition.

MARRIAGE

Beni's First Wedding, by J. Breskin Zalben, Henry Holt & Co, 1998. In preparation

for Uncle Izzy's wedding, Beni and his family select special clothing, make yummy goodies and have fun in the processional.

***The Wedding That Saved A Town** by Y. Strom, 2008, for 7 to 10 year olds. When Ziske's klezmer band arrives to play at a wedding in Pinsk, they discover many sick townspeople. But tradition says that if two orphans get married in a cemetery a miracle may happen, so Ziske looks for the perfect couple.

DIVORCE

Who Will Lead The Kiddush? by B. Pomerantz, UAHC, 1985. A young girl, troubled by her parents' divorce, is comforted by *Shabbat* traditions.

BAR MITZVAH

My Brother's Bar Mitzvah, by J. Gallanti, Kar-Ben, 1990. Sarah is worried that her brother Ben won't be ready for his upcoming *Bar Mitzvah*. What do you think?

A Belfer Bar Mitzvah, by G. Teles Pushker, Pelican Publishing, 1995. Toby Belfer describes the weekend of family fun and ritual as her cousin celebrates becoming a *Bar Mitzvah*.



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS continued from page 3

OLD AGE

A Grandma Like Yours/A Grandpa Like Yours, by A. Warmflash Rosenbaum, Kar-Ben, 2008. A wonderful assortment of grandmas, grandpas, *bubbes*, *zaydes*, *saftas* and *sabas* are portrayed through whimsical animal illustrations and rhymes.

Say Hello, Lily, by D. Lakritz, Kar-Ben, 2010. Lily wants to go with her mother to visit the residents at Shalom Home, an assisted living facility, but when they arrive she suddenly feels very shy. What should she do?

DEATH

Where Do People Go When They Die?, by M. A. Portnoy, Kar-Ben, 2004. This exquisitely illustrated book presents a child's ideas and questions concerning death.

Pearl's Marigolds For Grandpa, by J.B. Zalben, Simon & Schuster, 1997. A young girl copes with the death of her grandfather by remembering all the things she loved about him and planting marigolds in his memory.

***A Candle For Grandpa**, by D. Techner and J. Hirt-Manheimer. UAHC, 1993. An explanation of Jewish customs helps parents answer 4 to 8 year old's challenging questions about God, life and death.

***Daddy's Chair**, by S.O. Haas, Kar-Ben, 1991, appropriate for 4 to 8 year olds. A young boy sits *shiva* with his family after his father's death, becoming familiar with Jewish mourning customs and his loss.

A FEW RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR ADULTS

To Be a Jew: A Guide To Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life by Rabbi H.H. Donin, Basic Books, 1972. This extensive discussion of Judaism's underlying beliefs and ethical structure includes information on *Shabbat*, family life, holidays, marriage, divorce, death and mourning and other important aspects of Orthodox Jewish practice.

The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children, by W. Mogel, Penguin Books, 2001. Blending Jewish teachings and parenting concerns, Mogel, a clinical psychologist and educator, applies essential Judaic values to thought provoking and pragmatic parenting suggestions.

How to Be a Jewish Parent: A Practical Handbook for Family Life, by A. Diamant & K. Kushner, Schocken Books, 2000. This accessible, non-judgmental, affirming book suggests ways to create Jewish space, community, and time with children, from a liberal Jewish orientation. Many topics are addressed and useful resources presented.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Check these websites: <http://www.Judaism.about.com>
Then click on "Jewish Living"

<http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/cycle.htm>

<http://www.jewfaq.org/tocevents.htm>

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

...A Jewish boy automatically becomes *Bar Mitzvah* at age 13 and a girl at age 12, whether or not a ceremony takes place.

...Many communities have study programs for adults who missed the opportunity to have *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* ceremonies and wish to prepare for them as adults.

...Although there is no time limit for naming a baby girl in the synagogue, it is customary to do it as soon as possible.

...Gifts in multiples of \$18, (a number considered lucky in Jewish tradition) are frequently given in honor of a life cycle event.

