

4

CHAPTER

Creating a Meaningful Jewish Study Plan

This chapter will help you to assess where you are with your Judaism and provide a basic tutorial in some of the most interesting and significant religious practices of Bar/Bat Mitzvah (B-Mitzvah). Your study plan will serve you best when you incorporate those aspects of Judaism that you need and want to experience and understand better. And because private instruction is customary, B-Mitzvah offers an opportunity for you to set your own learning pace and agenda.

Imagine you are invited to decide the criteria for B-Mitzvah for a colony being founded on the moon. Some good teachers have been sent along on the expedition, but now they've asked for your guidance. Their question for you is this: "Do you think someone can be ready for B-Mitzvah if she or he

has never been to a Passover seder, sat in a sukkah, met the prime minister of Israel, or memorized the entire Sabbath prayer service?”

What might it take, in your opinion, for a person to qualify as a basically prepared Jew, someone you'd be ready to have come up to the Torah for B-Mitzvah and, after Shabbat, for whom you would sign on his or her certificate as a witness?

Not such an easy question, is it? There is no correct answer because this is both a personal and a local matter. Norms for B-Mitzvah readiness differ from community to community and have intensified quite a bit since Talmudic times. To decide what is right for you, it may help to understand how Judaism fits together as a coherent system of practices.

Quite a substantial program is listed in the completed table on the next page. Judaism offers a rich model for living. Why?

Try this: imagine living in a world that allows no ceremonies for welcoming a new baby, making the transition from youth to adulthood, or burying a loved one. This world tolerates only one form of civilization, and this one doesn't savor or celebrate the change of seasons, is intolerant of those who take time off from work, and ignores those who cannot take care of themselves. It also forbids prayer, freedom, literature, and challenges to authority. Imagine a world with only national holidays: days off for war memorials and slain presidents or heroes. In that world no Passover seder, Hanukkah menorah, nor call of the shofar is allowed. Imagine a culture 100 percent determined by corporate marketing, where time is organized only for productivity.

Every B-Mitzvah student is a culture holder—someone who holds the memory of an amazing way to fully celebrate life. Part of becoming an adult Jew is completing basic training for cultural leadership through knowledge of your people's history, prayers, chants, dances, stories, festivals, and other sacred practices that contribute to the art of living and caring for each other and the world.

MAJOR CATEGORIES OF JUDAISM AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Add the six missing major categories of Jewish practice to this list. The answer appears on the next page.

God	
	Shabbat
Hebrew	
	Peoplehood

In a page or two, we'll get specific about what you'll need to know for the B-Mitzvah ceremony itself. Before that, based on your own assessment of what is appropriate for a person to know and have experienced as a Jew in order to attain B-Mitzvah, we'll take a look at where you stand.

Remember Ben and Sara from Chapter Two? Their mom and dad asked them to give thought to what they want to learn about Judaism during their B-Mitzvah preparation. They made their reflections on this a first entry in their B-Mitzvah journal with a chart for each of the categories of Judaism and an important question they each hoped to resolve during their B-Mitzvah. After reviewing Ben's chart, you can make one of your own. It is fine to have more than one question for each category.

Judaism contains more of value and fascination than any one person could learn in a given lifetime. The goal at B-Mitzvah is not to try to know it all but rather to arrive at your

MAJOR CATEGORIES OF JUDAISM AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE (ANSWER KEY)

God	Holy days
Torah	Shabbat
Prayer	Mitzvot
Hebrew	Israel
Life-cycle events	Peoplehood

B-Mitzvah prepared for full membership in “the tribe.” On the day of your B-Mitzvah, we hope you’ll feel strengthened by all you’ve learned and accomplished, excited about what you have developed for those who will be present on your special day; most of all, we hope you will already be imagining what you want to explore next.

PREPARING FOR YOUR CEREMONY



Religion is a significant part of any enduring civilization. And ceremonies such as B-Mitzvah, when conducted with meaning, spirituality, and integrity, can be hugely helpful to the human spirit. Just as Hindus, Native Americans, and others hold remarkable sacred ceremonies, we Jews do, too.

Religious ceremonies have many ritualized roles, symbols, and prayers. The service at which you will attain B-Mitzvah contains such a ceremony: the Torah service. If you are to experience the most powerful effects of this ceremony, you first

BEN'S OPENING STUDY QUESTIONS FOR B-MITZVAH PRESENTATION

God	What if someone is angry with God for bad things that happen in life? Can we talk about that?
Torah	Why are there two different Garden of Eden stories?
Prayer	Why are there so many kinds of Kaddish in services?
Hebrew	Where did Hebrew come from? Why do we keep it?
Life-cycle events	Why did it take so long for girls to be allowed to become Bat Mitzvah?
Holy Days	Do I always have to forgive? Also, I'd like to receive a shofar as a B-Mitzvah present and learn to blow it.
Shabbat	Why is Shabbat called a queen and God a king?
Mitzvot	If there are 613 mitzvot, there must be a lot I've never heard of. I'd like to learn about some of those.
Israel	There are many place names in my Torah portion. I'd like to see them on a map of the Middle East, learn if they still exist today, and either visit or see pictures of them.
Peoplehood	Our new neighbor is a Jewish teacher from Argentina. She says our Jewish Federation has been a big help to her family. How did Jews get to South America originally? Why are they having problems, and how does the Federation know to help?

SACRED SYMBOLISM IN SERVICES

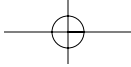
Fill in the right-hand column with what you think the symbol in the left-hand column means or represents.

Symbol	What This Means or Represents
Crown on the Torah	
Bells on the crown	
Embroidered Torah cover	
Wooden staves that hold and roll the Torah scroll	
Breastplate that hangs over the Torah	
<i>Bimah</i> , raised platform for the Torah table and leader's stand	
Ark, cabinet for the Torah, the <i>aron kodesh</i>	
<i>Yad</i> , hand-shaped pointer for reading Torah (so the ink won't wear off)	

need to be able to recognize the drama that is unfolding and the meaning behind each symbol.

Note: from here on in this chapter, you may find material both new and familiar. Start your study process out now by highlighting new material so that you can easily return to it for deeper study.

You'll be able to fill in the meaning of the symbols in the worksheet after reading the next section. Try filling it in now; it might be fun to test yourself and your B-Mitzvah planning team in advance.



WHAT IS THE MEANING OF SHABBAT SYMBOLS AND PRACTICES?



Imagine it is your B-Mitzvah day and time for you to go up to the Torah. You are about to become an adult witness and participant in the reading and interpretation of Torah. Go ahead, approach the ark; it represents the ark of the covenant, in which the Israelites carried the carved tablets with the Ten Commandments in the wilderness. The doors of the ark are opened. You will cross a threshold in your life as an elder or leader of the community places the Torah in your arms. The sacred mantle of leadership is upon you.

Experience the weight, feel, and appearance of the Torah. Most likely it will be dressed in an embroidered cover. (Sephardic communities encase their Torahs in beautifully painted cases.) The Torah is dressed according to the garments of Aaron, the high priest, who wore a blue robe embroidered with pomegranates alternating with real golden bells along the bottom (Exodus 28:34). Folklore says this fruit has 613 seeds, which is the total number of mitzvot in the Torah.

The forehead of the high priest was crowned by a piece of hammered gold with the words *kodesh l'Adonai*, “holy to God,” engraved upon it. When they can afford to do so, communities commission crowns of precious metal to place atop the Torah scroll. The crown is also said to symbolize the metaphor for God as *melech*, “king,” which can be understood as a metaphor for the governing principles of creation.

Gold bells dangled from the hem of the high priest's robe. The crown of your Torah likely has tiny bells that tinkle when it is lifted. The community would be alerted by the bells to the presence of the high priest in their midst. Commentators also imagined the high priest's experience in the section of the temple known as the holy of holies as so wonderfully intense that his soul might leave his body in order to cling

to this experience of God. So they wondered if the bells might be a signal system, alerting temple workers to run into the holy of holies to save the high priest's life if the bells ceased ringing.

The Torah in your arms may be wearing a silver breastplate. The high priest wore one for ritual occasions. It was embedded with twelve stones, representing each of the tribes, and it had a secret compartment used as a tool for decision making.

The Torah scroll is mounted on two wooden rollers that are its handles. These are called the *eitz chayyim*, the Tree of Life. You may remember the trees that stood in the Garden of Eden: the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. That Tree of Life has traveled through time and become the words of Torah. You are holding the Tree of Life in your arms.

The *yad*, a pointer, often made of precious metal and shaped like a hand with one finger pointing, will likely be hanging over one of the *eitz chayyim* poles. The pointer's shape recalls what the Torah says (Exodus 32:18), that the Ten Commandments were written in stone with the "finger of God."

You see, all of your life you have been traveling toward Mount Sinai, which is symbolized by the *bimah*, the stage or reader's platform. At your B-Mitzvah, you will make *aliyah*,

TIP

Jewish Vision Quest

To step away from the crowd, pour your heart out to God, and listen for guidance is a basic right and essential practice with which to become comfortable. It doesn't even matter if you believe there is a God listening to you for this to be a valuable experience.

Take a trip into nature and do this, whatever your age. Here's how it works:

1. Find a safe place in nature where no one can hear you and you cannot get lost. Bring water and tissues.
2. Begin to talk out loud to God. Share whatever you are feeling, longing for, wondering about, frustrated with, working through, astonished by, delighted and grateful for. Keep speaking; don't stop.
3. If you run out of words, say "lah-lah-lah," "oi, yoi, yoi," or various nonsense syllables until another round of material comes up for expression.
4. Keep doing this until you are truly empty. For some people a physical act such as breaking sticks helps, too.
5. When you are empty of material, sit or wander a short distance and experience a warm silence. An answer will come to you in some way, either now or over the next days. It may come in the form of a symbol—an animal, plant, or a soft voice inside of you—or it may be carried on the wind or in many other ways.

Depending on your issue, you might want to have a mentor help you make sense of your experience afterward. If you do this as a group or class experience, create a debriefing time for those who wish to share.

This practice is called *hitbodedut*, "making yourself alone" with God. Hannah goes into the sanctuary to do this when she is sad over being childless (I Samuel 1:10–20), and Moses is always heading up a mountain filled with the stresses of his duties.

Find bibliography for viewing Judaism spiritually at ReclaimingJudaism.org and learn more about this specific practice in works such as *Jewish Meditation* by Aryeh Kaplan and the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, some of which can be found on-line at azamra.org/Earth/guide. With practice you can do this silently inside of yourself, anywhere, to receive relief, comfort, and insight.

“ascend,” as Moses did, in order to bring down Torah for your people.

Receiving Torah can change your life; it has for our people. What a wonder that the Israelites did not replicate the system of pharaoh, taskmasters, and slaves out there in the wilderness! Instead, they entered the promised land after a journey from slavery to freedom based on what was then a radical new system for living that today we know as Torah.

You will carry that radical document, Torah, the record of our people’s journey from slavery to freedom, through the community on your B-Mitzvah. It contains the first known guidelines for how to create a society based on respect, freedom, and love within healthy social structures and guidelines.

Faces from the story of your life—family, community, teachers, and friends—will be looking at you as you turn to face them with the sacred scroll in your arms. They will see and hear you in a new light on your B-Mitzvah day, the light of Torah.

RECEIVING THE LIGHT



Most of the good things in life involve a process of preparation. For example, a tennis player doesn’t leap up from bed to take the first stroke of a game; she begins with a series of warm-up exercises that stretch each muscle group. Each stage of a service is designed to warm you up for prayer within yourself and on behalf of others. Following is a map of the intent of the stages of the Shabbat morning service, the time when most B-Mitzvah ceremonies take place. In addition to needing at least one edition of the full Jewish scriptures for your studies, you will also need a well-designed *siddur*, prayer book; every denomination publishes at least one; their websites can be found in the Resources section at the end of this book.

Preparing Your Service Booklet

Congregational B-Mitzvah families often prepare a booklet of creative readings and explanations of the service and Torah reading. Those designing a B-Mitzvah that will be held independently of a congregation generally include all the major prayers, along with their translations and transliterations in this booklet, so that it can serve as the prayer book. These also serve as a gift for those who attend to take home for further contemplation.

1. Begin by creating a file or shirt box labeled for each major part of the service. As you come across possible interpretive readings and graphics, save them in the appropriate file.
2. Seek out a Hebrew-English word-processing program such as Davka Writer or Dagesh Pro for a PC or Nisus Writer for a Mac. Often such programs have a traditional Hebrew *siddur* and Torah already in their databases; you can easily format a booklet using them, as well as insert color graphics and photos.
3. Customize your effort as much as possible. Are you a doodler? Create borders. A cartoonist? Reveal something about the prayers or the story in your Torah portion. Do you have friends who are poets? Ask them to address a theme or prayer as their gift to you, and include their work in the booklet.
4. Many who attend will be in the dark about Jewish practices. To prevent awkward moments, include in your booklet explanations and guides to practice.
5. Create a *Yizkor* or memorial page dedicated to those who have died before your special day.
6. Create an appreciation page for your B-Mitzvah planning and preparation team. Remember family, friends, tutors, clergy, artists—everyone who helped you reach your goals.

7. Remember that Hebrew reads from left to right, so booklets for Jewish prayer, even when there are transliterations and translations, are meant to be printed and read from back to front. To bind your booklet you'll need extra margin off-set space; create that with your formatting, and remember about the back-to-front when setting up page number locations. That's important to tell your printer as well.

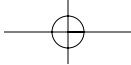
It's great to involve capable guests in taking roles or parts in the service. Some communities welcome this approach. Because not all guests will be Jewish, learn which parts of a service are covenantal and only appropriately led by a Jew and which parts are universal or lend themselves to supplementary material such as poems, singing, or dance. Norms for this vary widely among communities; check them out before giving assignments.

Once you have the printed service booklets, be sure to create annotated copies with highlighted sections that bear each reader's name. Add colored notes that stick out from the pages that each reader needs to know about. Note any stage directions that are important, such as, "rise from your seat and read," or "come up to the front with the three readers prior to you; you each have a paragraph to read; yours is first."

Write participants' names clearly on the cover, and have their booklets on a special reception table outside the room where your service will take place. Have someone at that table note who has arrived, and make sure the participant receives his or her booklet.

Prepare several copies of a comprehensively annotated service booklet, with the full names of readers, so that you can honor them. Add pronunciation guides if you need them; mark who is saying and doing what very clearly. Have a comprehensive copy ready for the B-Mitzvah student, any clergy who will be on the *bimah*, tutors, mentors, and other key players.

Plan ushers who will ask arriving guests if they are familiar with a Jewish service and who will offer to seat them with someone who can help softly interpret the goings on.



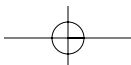
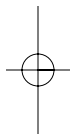
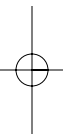
Finding Personal Meaning in the Prayer Service

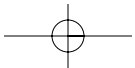
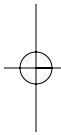
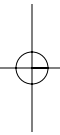
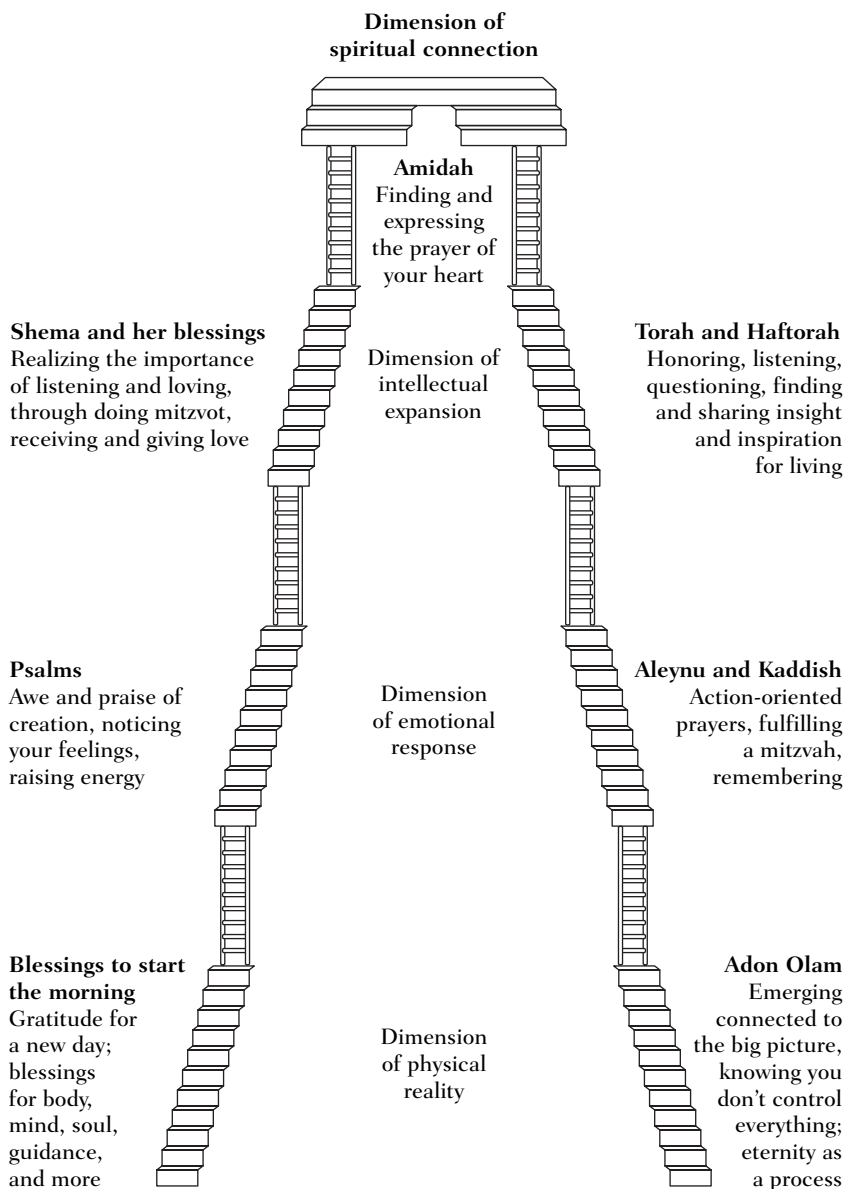
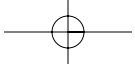
To transform services from lots of words into personal meaning, go over the map of the Shabbat morning prayer service, which will be helpful as you page through your *siddur*. Note how the early service integrates body, mind, and spirit as an early stage of prayer. Only after warming up with the energy of the Psalms is there a collective experience of prayer in which the community responds together in the Borchu. Review each important stage. At Bmitzvah.org you will find a user-friendly guide to how to experience at home—how to understand and lead each major prayer in the service so that they can become more meaningful for you and your guests.

Because Hebrew is a highly poetic, nuanced language, many shades of interpretation are possible for any verse. That is one reason the prayers never get old for those who understand them. You might take on learning a few more prayers in depth as part of your preparation plan; ask your teacher(s) to work with you, to show you how to find the many shades of meaning.

Beyond the individual prayers is your innermost personal prayer. Notice how on the map, at the apex of the service, is the *amidah*, a time of rising in silent contemplation of your life in order to find and express the prayer of your heart. This means listening within yourself for what you feel, notice, hope, and need. The prophet Ezekiel taught the importance of not assuming that the loudest voice you hear is the most important.

A service leader needs internal preparation in order to be most effective at receiving Torah and offering it in a meaningful way to the community. Each prayer in the traditional *amidah* is a springboard to helping you focus your personal prayers. (Rabbi Marcia Prager has a beautiful set of *amidah* cards that reveal this process; there's a link to her work and other spiritually innovative rabbis and cantors at Ohalah.org.) Even before finding meaning in each part of the *amidah* comes the prayer skill of how to use the silence of the *amidah*.







TIP

Finding the Prayer of Your Heart

When seeking the prayer of your heart, it can help to first clear a space by noticing your breath and following it. Sit comfortably with eyes softly focused, asking, “How am I?” Anything that comes up, honor it by gently imagining putting it out on a table, and then see if there’s more that wants to come. Don’t investigate each thing; just let a full inner inventory happen.

Happy or challenging items may come up. If the feeling is about something difficult, beware of senses or voices within that carry guilt, shame, or say “should” and “if only.” Without giving these voices extra weight, let them take their place on the shelf along with the stiller, softer voices. Ezekiel says the voice of God is not in the whirlwind, the fire, or an earthquake; it is in the stillness, where you can hear a small, soft voice.

When you feel empty of life matters to be placed on the counter of your life during this exercise, sit quietly; be with yourself. Your body will speak to you, perhaps via a glow of happiness. Or you could feel like dancing or purring, or sense a tugging, hurt, or turmoil somewhere inside. Pick one sense; it might be murky, unclear right now, and rather than thinking about it, feel its effect on your body and spirit. Gently sit with the sensation and where it is within you. Now gradually become curious about it.

Is there one word, sense, or image that comes up about this matter? What quality helps this place to be better described? Go back and forth between it and the word or sense you have about it until you have a way to describe it.

Now ask this feeling what it needs? Perhaps it’s a good feeling that will come out as a prayer of gratitude for life. Or perhaps it’s a trouble; ask it what should happen. Ask it what it wants from you. Ask what if it became OK and what’s in the way of that happening. Welcome with patience this prayer your body is helping you formulate.

(Continued)

Now you might imagine whispering your prayer of what is needed and wanted to happen into the ear of the Cosmos, or you might take out your B-Mitzvah journal and write a memo to God explaining what you've noticed and what you hope will happen. For example, Sara, from Chapter One, shared with us a piece that she wrote at summer camp: "Dear God, I wish I could go home today." "Dear God, please help the other kids to like me." "Dear God, please give me the courage to sit next to Karen. I think she'd be a cool friend." And Ben, at the same camp wrote, "Thank you God for the fun I had today. I feel so happy and full of life!"

When doing this at home or synagogue, you might want to put on a tallit, a prayer shawl. Sometimes you'll see a person place her tallit over her head at services or when praying at home; this is to create private, sacred space. (We will discuss the tallit at more length later in this chapter.)

This guide is based on a method the author was privileged to learn from Kye Nelson and from Dr. Gene Gendlin, author of *Focusing* and founder of Focusing.org, where you can receive guidance in deepening the applications of this method to living.

SHARING THE LIGHT



Becoming B-Mitzvah means listening beyond what you want for yourself. It is a time to remember what is on the plate of the lives of those immediately around you and those in the world as a whole. Then you can fully pray for what is needed, hoped for, and appreciated.

What prayers do you have for those in your life, in this world? How do you go about forming such prayers? This starts with focusing on who really is important to you in the minyan of your life. Complete *Who Is in the Minyan of Your Life* to help you decide.

WHO IS IN THE MINYAN OF YOUR LIFE?	
<p>Who is in the minyan of your life? And what is going on in their lives that you might pray for on their behalf during your <i>amidah</i> prayer on your B-Mitzvah day? Look at the two examples and add your minyan and your prayers.</p>	
Name	Your Prayer for This Person
Aunt Annie	She's been so sad since Uncle Jack died three years ago. Please help her see how much I and the other cousins love her and miss going out on the town with her. Help her heart heal; give her the strength to come to my B-Mitzvah and see the whole family. Please!
Dan, my brother	Dan is so excited about his new job. What a great gift to find a job that uses so many of his talents. May he get along great with everyone there, and may it turn out to be just right for him!

Who do you show up for in life, and who shows up for you? The spiritual meaning of a *minyan* is more than the traditional ten people needed as a quorum to hold a service. Your minyan is also the inner circle of your life, those who not only care about you but who also help when needed and those for whom you care. These are the first members of your guest list and the faces you will most eagerly seek on the day of your B-Mitzvah.

Now you, like the high priest of old and the rabbi and cantor of today, can face your community as one who is *kodesh l'YHVH*, filled with the holiness of becoming. A person's mind clears and heart opens after such a prayer sequence. When you

step up to the ark to take on the mantle of leadership, even your voice will sound different because of all the feelings about family and friends that will enrich the sound of who you are. You are going to give them a present, your self, your participation in the “tribe,” your reading of the sacred text with care after great preparation, and your vision of what they need to hear to help them connect to meaning for living through the text.

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR NAME



You will be called to the Torah by your sacred name. Having a Jewish name that rings true for you is very important whether you are the B-Mitzvah student, parent of the student, or a guest being given the honor of an *aliyah*. Names hold power and meaning. If you have a Hebrew name, now is the time to connect deeply with its meaning. If you don't, we'll show how you can get one.

Names can add energy to your sense of self, fall flat, or be draining. If you have a Jewish name that you don't appreciate, you can change it easily by being called to the Torah with your new name and having your final blessing including mention of the taking of this name. Or if there's a family story behind that name and changing it would be super “sensitive,” you might decide to make it a middle Hebrew name and put your preferred one in front of it. And if you don't have a Jewish name yet, you need to find one now.

For a while rabbis and cantors were stopping people from using Yiddish names up at the Torah, even though in Europe before the war this was common. Although Hebrew became extremely important with the rebirth of Israel as a sovereign state with its own language, as the Yiddish-speaking generations are passing away, many realize that Yiddish names are also holy

and need to be preserved. Today most communities accept that you can be called to Torah with a Hebrew or Yiddish name.

A person is called up to the Torah with a personal Jewish name as well as the Jewish names of his or her parents, or in the case of converts, in the name of Sarah and Abraham, the first Jewish family. For example:

Sara's name is already a Hebrew name, so she will be called to the Torah as Sara *bat* (daughter of) Ari (her dad's Hebrew name) *v'* (and) Malka (her mom's Hebrew name). She will hear herself called by the command: "*Ta'amode* [arise] *Sara bat Ari v'Malka!*"

Ben is short for Benjamin, which in Hebrew is Benyamin (Hebrew has no *J* sound), so he will be called to the Torah as Benyamin *ben* (son of) Ari (his dad's Hebrew name) *v'* (and) Malka (his mom's Hebrew name). He will hear himself called up by the command: "*Ya'amode* [arise] *Benyamin ben Ari v'Malka!*"

In intermarried families the Jewish parent's name will usually be used after the student's, although sometimes both parents' names are used because, in fairness, they are the parents! In the latter case, one parent won't have a Jewish name, so his or her English first name can be used. What about a Jewish parent who hasn't had a B-Mitzvah and doesn't have a Jewish name? What a great project it will be to select one and adopt it in preparation for this special day. A forgotten or lost Jewish name can sometimes be found by interviewing family, looking at grave stones or checking stored religious documents or inside the cover of books remaining Hebrew school.

Most important, once you have a Jewish name, B-Mitzvah is an important time to get close to its meaning, so that when you are called to Torah, everything about your self comes up with you.

TIP**Choosing Your Jewish Sacred Name**

Jewish name choices are most often of these types:

- Characters from the Bible and Jewish history
Moshe = Moses; Rivka = Rebecca; Shimon = Simon
- Names from nature
Ari = lion; Hadassah = myrtle; Shoshana = lily
- Desired qualities of character or feeling
Bahira = clarity; Tikva = hope; Simcha = happiness

It's also helpful to know that although Sephardic Jews have the tradition of honoring a living member of the family by taking on that person's name, Ashkenazi Jews carefully reserve this as an act of memorial.

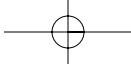
If you are contemplating a new Hebrew name, try it on!

- Write yourself a letter addressed to the possible name.
- Imagine your friends calling you by this name.
- Ask a few people in your life to call you by the name for a few hours so that you can see how it feels.

When the name is right, your whole body will resonate "Yes, that's me!"

Find out in what verses of Torah and prayer the name you are drawn to appears. A keyword search on-line or on a Torah CD can prove fascinating and sometimes sobering. There may be an important message embedded in that verse for you. The name might have connections you do not want.

In the back of *The Complete Art Scroll Siddur* (Artscroll.com), you will find an alphabetical listing of selected



verses from the Torah. One custom is to take the first letter of your name and look up the verse that begins with it to see if in that verse is a message for you. It is particularly traditional to do this at the end of the *amidah* during services.

Drop by a synagogue library, or resource room at a Jewish community center or Board or Bureau of Jewish Education. The staff can offer dictionaries and resources that explain the meaning of many Jewish names, and likely they can offer you the use of a keyword Torah and liturgy search on their computers.

When you find the right name, wear it! Think how happy it will make someone for you to suggest their B-Mitzvah gift to you might be your Jewish name on a necklace or ring, or a donation to a good cause in your honor and in your Hebrew name.

THE COSMIC DRAMA



An important part of B-Mitzvah readiness is learning that on Shabbat an even bigger drama is going on than your B-Mitzvah and the Torah reading. Did you know that giving a *d'var Torah* on Shabbat is considered to be a wedding present for God? Let's take one more giant step back into the sacred drama of Judaism. Take the quick test in this section for the fun of it.

Shabbat has the model and meaning of a wedding. So who's getting married? In a way, you are. To our ancestors the idea of "bride" meant awaiting a very special change in your life, feeling fully alive, excited, fresh, clear, pure, and receptive. Renewing this kind of feeling, bringing the "bride" inside was their favorite metaphor for Shabbat. The Jewish idea is that as the week wears on, a person gets tired from ceaseless activities; mistakes start to happen more often, relationships can get strained. We may start cutting corners in order to get things done. The glow of your best self can become dim when you need rest and reenergizing.

FINDING MEANING IN SHABBAT PRACTICES

Symbol	Meaning or Origin in Torah
Shabbat as a bride	
Two candles	
White candles and tablecloths	
Dressing up for Shabbat	
Six psalms before L'cha Dodi at Friday night services	
Blessing wine, saying Kiddush	
Giving a <i>d'var Torah</i>	
Having an oneg after services	
A braided Havdalah candle	

So the Friday night service begins with six psalms, one to help remove the “veil” of stress from each of the six days of the week before Shabbat. Then comes the seventh psalm, *L'cha Dodi*, which welcomes the feeling of Shabbat coming toward you using the metaphor of the bride: *boe-ee kallah, boe-ee kallah*, “Welcome, bride!” we sing as we turn to invite the glow of Shabbat inside the community, the synagogue, inside ourselves.

So if the reenergizing, intimate feeling of Shabbat happening is the bride, then what is the groom? The groom happens when we remember there is structure to the universe that we can trust, an amazing unity of design that our ancestors intuited and that scientists are uncovering every day. In Judaism the governing principles, *melekh*, the kinglike aspects of creation are one face of God; they are in part revealed in the

structure we turn to for inspiration, the Torah, which is symbolically wearing a crown.

And so another face of God is the flow and energy of creation called *Malkah*, “queen,” which when united with *Melekh*, “king” brings the structure of creation fully alive. This allows for intimacy and a sense of God as presence, a quality of God experience our people also know by the name Shechinah and Shabbat. Shabbat is a cosmic wedding, a weekly recommitment ceremony to re-soul a person with practices that dissolve the illusion a hard week can give of the world being fragmented. On Shabbat we reclaim the core meaning of the Shema, *YHVH Echad*, all is One.

Now that you know that Shabbat is modeled on a wedding, can you guess why Shabbat candles, tablecloths, and even clothes are, by tradition, white? Indeed, because white is the color of the eggshell, of a new fresh sheet in the Torah of your life; this is a white wedding. To give visual pleasure to the bride and groom, people dress up at a wedding. On Shabbat one tries to feel comfortable and look one’s best.

So who are the wedding guests? That’s a paradox: each person is both the bride and a guest. In synagogue the guests are the congregation and the reception afterward of usually cakes and drinks is called an *oneg*, meaning pleasure, and represents the royal wedding reception. The ritual is repeated at home, too; Shabbat dinner is the wedding reception, and surely you have invited guests. Many expand this mitzvah with the pleasure of fresh flowers for their Shabbat table decorations.

When are the wedding vows? The potential to bring new life into the world is a core mitzvah of both Shabbat and a Jewish wedding. Wine symbolizes the life-force in Judaism. Just as at every Jewish wedding there is a blessing over the wine, which symbolizes the life-force, every Shabbat we say a prayer called Kiddush, which blesses the holiness of life, the love and desire we have for it, and the life-giving power of new beginnings. A

Jewish wedding finishes with seven blessings, and in the Talmud the Kiddush originally had seventy words, so Kiddush symbolizes seven to the power of ten blessings for this reconnection of your soul with the meaning and experience of being fully alive.

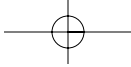
Lighting Shabbat candles, leading Kiddush, and the blessing over the gift of the rather amazing transformation of what was once star dust into bread, called Hamotizi, are practices that the B-Mitzvah student often undertakes; you will find them in most every prayer book. And remember, no week-day bread will do; Shabbat is a challah-day!

A slave would have to work every day, but Judaism is designed as an antidote to slavery. Shabbat is a celebration of life, a cosmic wedding—and on this occasion, also of your B-Mitzvah. It is also a honeymoon from homework and other weekly efforts. So, of course, your B-Mitzvah and Shabbat offer lots of time for partying, getting filled with great food, socializing, and dancing joyfully.

You've likely heard of chaos theory, where a butterfly that flutters its wings in China sets in motion a chain of changes that one day affect something in your part of the world. Our ancestors have always believed that about the practice of Shabbat—that Shabbat is a cosmic wedding, with benefits inside of you and far beyond you. Just think of many things that might have been that may possibly change because your family comes to share the special Shabbat of your B-Mitzvah with you.

Something is missing from this wedding. What about presents? Are there wedding presents for the king, and Shabbat, the queen? Your *d'var Torah* is the wedding present. Tradition holds that whenever a new interpretation of Torah is given, inside the scroll the crowns on the letters that are shaped like flames begin to twinkle in appreciation.

Learning to use, care for, and benefit from the major personal Jewish ritual objects is an important part of B-Mitzvah preparation. The major items involved are tallitot, *kippot*, and tephillin.



TRADITION

And God told Moses, “Speak to the children of Israel, and guide them throughout their generations to make fringes on the corners of their garments.”

—Numbers 15:37–40

You will see them [the fringes] and remember all God’s mitzvot and do them.

—Numbers 15:39

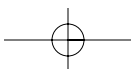
TALLIT



The *tallit* is a four-cornered prayer shawl with specially knotted fringes, called *tzitzit*, worn as a reminder to live a mitzvah-centered life. A tallit is a portable spiritual home in which you can wrap yourself at home, in synagogue, or when you are away on adventures and desire time for prayer, reflection, or healing from a sore spot in your life.

A person generally selects or receives his or her first full tallit during the process of preparation for B-Mitzvah. Some Jews, from early childhood on, wear a lightweight tallit called a *tallit kattan*, “little tallit,” under their clothes; and others prefer the full shawl-style tallit for prayer and special occasions in life.

- A Jewish wedding canopy is often a large tallit, a canopy of spirit, held over the couple on four poles.



- A Jewish person is buried wearing a tallit. One corner is symbolically cut off; in some communities only males are buried this way.

- An old tallit that is unsightly, torn, or unusable gets donated to the synagogue or a Judaic library and will be used to wrap worn-out or superfluous documents like photocopies with the sacred YHVH name of God, Adonai, on them in Hebrew script so that they can be buried with dignity in a *geniza*, a Jewish cemetery section set aside for this purpose.

- Sometimes when a child becomes sick, the parents wrap her or him in a tallit and pace the floors as they pray for healing.

- The Yemenite Jews have a practice of wearing an all-black tallit at prayer during a period of mourning. Some Jews have an all-white tallit to wear on Yom Kippur, symbolizing rebirth. Recently, tallitot (plural) have appeared in many-colored varieties throughout the world.



TRADITION

Women wearing tzitzit is a revival of the Torah's guidance for all to put fringes on their garments. This practice had lapsed by the time of the Maimonides' twelfth-century compilation of Jewish practice known as the *Mishneh Torah*. The Talmud, the authoritative, fourth-century compilation of rabbinic discussions on Jewish laws, ethics, customs, legends, and stories in Tractate *Menahot* 43a, reports that Reb Yehudah attached fringes to the aprons of women in his household: "All must observe the law of tzitzit, Cohanim, Levites and Israelites, converts, women and slaves." This section also records one scholar, Reb Simeon, as declaring women not to be obligated to wear tzitzit.

- A full tallit is never worn in a bathroom; it is a sacred item. (Nor are tephillin; a *kippah* can be worn everywhere.)
- People who are leading services usually wear a full tallit; all others wear a full tallit only at morning services, and some orthodox Jewish men wear only a tallit kattan until they are married and then receive a full tallit, often as a wedding present. (See Bmitzvah.org for a guide to traditions about the meaning of the knots and windings.)

Finding a Tallit Just Right for You

Local Judaica stores, many websites, synagogue gift shops, and custom-tallit makers await your visit. You can buy a tallit ready-made, or order one, or make one yourself by choosing a favorite color, fabric, style, decoration, and texture. Links to tallit makers and a guide to making your own tallit are available at Bmitzvah.org. Some tallit makers will offer the option of shipping yours with the fringes not yet attached so that you can do the knotting as a family or personal ritual.

Putting Your Tallit On and Away

Hold the tallit so that the decorative collar, called the *atarah*, is facing you. Often these have the blessing for wearing a tallit on them, a verse from Torah, a prayer of deep meaning, or a decoration. Let yourself feel what it means to enter this fabric sukkah, a shelter of peace.

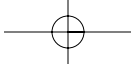
Some people kiss the tallit at this point, the way you might put a kiss on a mezuzah, realizing you are crossing a threshold (the root word of Adonai, *ehden*, means windowsill or threshold) with the intention of creating sacred space.

Recite the blessing: *Barukh ata adonai eloheynu melekh ha olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hitateyf ba-tzitzit.* ("Blessed is our God, Governing Principle of the universe that makes us holy through guiding us to do the mitzvah of wrapping in a tallit.")

TIP**Creating a Tzitzit-Tying Ritual**

Sara Harwin, a Judaica fabric artist (Harwinstudios.com), introduced the author to the idea of a blessing ritual for the tying of the fringes onto your tallit.

1. Take the tallit, either a new one without fringes yet applied or an older one onto which you want to put new fringes, and drape it over the B-Mitzvah student.
2. Have someone or several special persons in your life on hand to help tie the knots. (Although not difficult, this is detail-intensive. You can find a full guide to tying tzitzit and the meaning of the number of knots at Bmitzvah.org.)
3. Ask those coming to bring a blessing they wish to give the B-Mitzvah student; this will become part of their memory of preparing this tallit. These blessings can be prepared in advance and also provided on paper to the student for inclusion in a B-Mitzvah memory book. A blessing might sound like this: "May you be blessed to find wonderful Jewish communities that you enjoy greatly throughout your lifetime!"
4. For each of the four corners of the tallit, assign the blessing individual or blessing team. Decide which is preferable, to receive the blessings before the winding and knotting for that corner or after, and begin. As an option you might reserve one corner for the student to ask for his or her own most desired blessings, to which all present can respond: Amen!



Holding your tallit like a cape by the *atarah* (collar section), fling it up and around and over your shoulders. Some wear it like a cape; others fold it into a neat column of fabric; some wear it like a shawl. If a tallit is very large, it is customary to flip the corners up onto your shoulders. It is very helpful to have a tallit clip, which is two alligator clips and a tiny chain that will keep your tallit from slipping all the way off during the movements of prayer and Torah reading.

When it is time to take your tallit off, fold it gently and return it to a protective pouch. Caution: Tzitzit don't wash well, so dry cleaning is a must. The fringes need to be covered with foil when going through the process, or they will fray. Should you have a tallit with worn fringes, just clip them off and tie new ones on. They can be purchased at most Judaica shops.

WHAT COLOR IS YOUR KIPPAH?



The little round beanie Jews often wear to pray is called a *kippah* in Hebrew, *yarmulke* in Greek, and skullcap in English. For most contemporary Jews, the decision to wear a *kippah* all day is a religious choice. So if you are wearing a *kippah* and get attracted to doing something that would not be good for you or others, you might remember you have a *kippah* on; just that Godly “tug” of what you really believe in may stop you from getting into trouble. Others prefer to wear a *kippah* only for ritual situations, such as Shabbat blessings, during prayer, or while at services.

The Israelites of biblical times and Jews even as recently as medieval times did not wear a *kippah*. This practice has evolved relatively recently. Covering the head is first spoken about in connection with the official garments of the high priest in Exodus 28:4, 37, 40. He wore a type of head ornament called

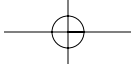
a *mitznefet*; the ordinary priests had a kind of hat, *migba'at*. In the books of Samuel, Jeremiah, and Esther, we learn that people in mourning would cover their heads and veil their faces, a custom that continued into Greek and Roman times. The Talmud reports that some who felt great awe for the experience of a Divine Presence in the world would also veil their faces and cover their heads, especially while praying or studying.

It gradually became an optional custom for Torah scholars to cover their heads. For those who would lead services and give the priestly blessing, a head covering became normal among the Jews in Babylonia. The great medieval commentator known as the Maharsha ruled that wearing a head covering during prayer was optional, although Maimonides equated an uncovered head with a person who does not take living seriously enough. Not until the seventeenth century did writers describe a difference between Christians and Jews as that of Jewish men covering their heads during prayer.

Kippot are available in endless shapes, sizes, designs, and colors. A person's choice of *kippah* communicates something: a big plain black one usually means the person lives a very observant, traditional life; a tiny colorful handmade one often signifies an active, spiritual, liberal Jew. Or maybe someone was just attracted to a particular *kippah* and chose it or made it by hand. Some people have bowls of *kippot* at home for guests to borrow and to match with outfits. What color would you like your B-Mitzvah *kippah* to be?

There are many ways to express being Jewish. If it's not your family's usual practice, wearing a *kippah* for a while—in public, during study, prayer, or meals—is a nice religious experiment to try during your B-Mitzvah preparation year(s). You might write in your journal about how wearing a *kippah* changes how you experience the world and how the world reacts to you.

It takes courage to wear a *kippah* in some parts of the world; in a few neighborhoods in Israel, some Jews will become



TRADITION

Rabbi Honah ben Joshua never walked four cubits [about six feet] with an uncovered head, for he used to say, “The Shechinah, [God’s] presence, resides above my head.”

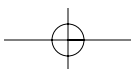
—Talmud *Kiddushin* 31a

angry and aggressive at seeing a woman wearing one. Remember, Judaism does not want you to follow a practice that could put your life at risk. Putting your *kippah* in your pocket if it could result in any danger to you, or wearing a hat instead, is fine. The Torah says we are to live by our traditions, not die by them.

MUST EVERYONE WEAR A KIPPAH AND TALLIT AT SERVICES?



There are many regional and denominational variations about the wearing of a tallit and *kippah*. You’ll see non-Jews being asked to wear *kippot* in certain synagogues, and in others someone will try to prevent them from doing so. Politicians of all stripes usually pop a *kippah* on when they come through the door of a synagogue. For a non-Jew it is neither necessary to wear one nor some kind of offense or sin to do so. Customarily, a married Orthodox Jewish woman will cover her hair with a scarf, hat, or a wig and wear clothing that covers as much of her body as possible, because being fully physically seen by an adult male is restricted to her husband.



On occasion well-intentioned congregants will try to enforce local customs about tallit and *kippah* because they mistakenly think such local practices are part of Jewish law. Most communities no longer create barriers to women participating in the mitzvah of tallit or wearing a *kippah* if they so choose. Well-instructed ushers at your service can softly tell arriving guests whatever custom your community prefers. Where local custom allows for the mitzvah of hospitality to prevail, it's most welcoming to guests to allow them to choose for themselves.

A nice B-Mitzvah memory and gift for your guests is created by ordering or crocheting custom *kippot* so that everyone who desires to will have one to wear and take home. Be sure to put a bowl of hairpins out to help hold the *kippah* on; contrary to what some people think, Jews don't have Velcro on the tops of our heads! Larger crocheted *kippot* work better for bald folks. Taking on the mitzvah of wearing a tallit for morning prayer is also a very personal decision. Again, it's a gesture of hospitality to have some extra tallitot for those who forgot theirs or who feel inspired to try.

EXPLORING MEZUZAH AND TEPHILLIN



The prayers inside of a mezuzah are about the importance of listening, loving, and doing so better by following the mitzvot. Traditionally, Jews place a mezuzah on every doorway in a home except for the bathroom. Transitioning from one space to another means noticing your mood, thinking about how you will affect others, and making a choice about how you will be in the next space you enter. Keep in mind that a doorway is a threshold, an Adonai space. Crossing a threshold that has a mezuzah is a reminder to bring holiness into the room.

B-Mitzvah is an important time to engage in the mitzvah of mezuzah, particularly on the one space you control the most, your own room. If there is a mezuzah on your room and the casing now seems too immature for you, you can save the scroll inside, pick out or make a new cover, and create a mezuzah-hanging ritual for your personal sacred space. (Visit ReclaimingJudaism.org; under life-cycle rituals, you will find a full guide to holding a mezuzah-hanging ritual and party.)

Meditation is an important part of Judaism, the wearing of tephillin is a morning meditation practice for every day except Shabbat. This practice is usually first introduced into a person's life during B-Mitzvah studies. Although to those unfamiliar with them, tephillin can look pretty strange, the practice is actually quite wonderful.

The boxes on the tephillin are also called houses, which, like the mezuzah, contain tiny handwritten scrolls with verses of the Shema and other blessings from the Torah. The boxes are then attached to leather straps, each knotted differently so that you can encircle the crown of your head and wind the other around your weaker or nondominant arm.



TRADITION

In the paragraph after the Shema comes the section that most clearly describes the basis for tephillin: “you shall bind them for a sign upon your arm and they will be for frontlets between your eyes” (Deuteronomy 6:8).

Tephillin also contain the verses Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21; Exodus 13:1–10 and 13:11–16.

The same verses are in each box, but the ones on the arm tephillin, known as the *shel yad*, are on one parchment, and those for the head, the *shel rosh*, are written by a scribe on four individual parchments, each of which gets its own room in the *bayit*, the houselike box.

How to Put on Tephillin

Each step of tephillin practice has meaning. For example, by putting the *shel yad* on your weaker arm, the message is for this mitzvah to strengthen you. The root of tephillin (the Hebrew word *tephillin*) is *tefillah*, “prayer.”

1. While standing, unwrap the *shel yad*'s coiled straps, leaving in place any knots or straps that have been slipped through a knot. Take off the decorative metal or cardboard box that protects the *bayit*.
2. Pull up your sleeve (or wear short sleeves), and open the leather loop wide so that you can slide your arm in and tighten the loop over your biceps.
3. Say the first blessing: *barukh atah adonai eloheynu melekh ha olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hane-akh tephillin* (“Blessed be . . . who guides us

FINDING BURIED TREASURE

A little child of maybe seven, while exploring the basement of her suburban home, found a curious item, a velvet bag containing little boxes with long black leather straps attached to them. Hauling them upstairs, she asked her father if she could use the straps for a craft project.

Her father took the package from her hands and drew the objects out tenderly. "I have not used these since the beginning of the World War II! These are called tephillin," he explained. "They contain handwritten scrolls with verses from the Torah about love and the importance of keeping the mitzvot as a way of showing love.

"During my term of service in World War II, the horrors I saw and experienced left me angry with God, people, and myself. Because of my army experiences, I stopped using these." He took them from her hands, saying, "These need to be put away in a more appropriate place."

When the young girl began to prepare for Bat Mitzvah, she saw tephillin on the list of items to bring to class. Showing the list to her father, she wondered how he would react.

"Just a minute, I'll be right back," he said. He returned carrying the worn velvet bag holding his tephillin. "I'll show you how to do this, just as my father showed me.

"Roll up the sleeve on your left arm. A Jew wears these straps on the head and on the weaker arm, as a reminder to grow stronger as a person. See how the box sits near your heart? To use your head in life is very important, but unless you balance the concerns of your heart and the logic in your head, your decisions can lack compassion.

"Slide the box on your head further down on your forehead. There. Hindus call that spot the third eye. It is very holy to have words of Torah there, between your eyes. Tephillin is a meditation; its purpose is to bring more love into the world."

"Daddy, why are you crying?"

"Because I never thought I'd ever do this again. Because I love you. And because teaching you, I remember my own father's love. And looking back, maybe some of the most important decisions I made as a leader during the war turned out to be good ones because of the good fortune of having grown up with Torah between my own eyes."

to holiness through doing mitzvahs, by commanding the putting on of tephillin”).

4. If you don't have a large bicep, it will help to wind above and below the *bayit* on the flat edge beneath its box to hold it in place; otherwise you can end up with a bunch of coils around your wrist. Don't despair; it's normal for this to take lots of practice.
5. Now wrap seven times around your lower arm. Some communities have the custom of wrapping toward the body, others away. Each of the seven turns has a meaning; there are many interpretations. A powerful approach is to do each turn very slowly while focusing on one of the seven qualities the Jewish mystics teach are like a hologram of the Tree of Life happening inside of you and the Big Picture of the Universe as you do this. (If need be, you can focus on understanding these qualities and developing them in yourself with imaginary tephillin.) These seven qualities are the following:

Khessed: Unconditional loving-kindness

Gevurah: Strength and discipline

Tiferet: Compassion

Netzakh: Endurance, ambition, drive

Hod: Extra attention to making something unique and beautiful

Yesod: Transmitting, sending something on that is ready

Malchut: Relaxing control of events; the joy of seeing what happens after you've given all you can

6. Now you can wind the rest of the leather strap around your palm. This is only temporary; you'll get back to this and do it again more elaborately in a minute.
7. Uncover the *shel rosh*, and put it over your head so that the box sits centered just below your hairline and then

the knot will be behind your head above your neck. Let the two straps hang loosely on either side of your head and over your shoulders.

8. Recite the second blessing *barukh atah adonai eloheynu melekh ha olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al mitzvat tephillin* ("Blessed Be . . . guiding us to become holy through the mitzvah of tephillin." Many prayer books contain meditations to follow this point; one such asks God to "fill you with wisdom and to satisfy the desires of all living things.")
9. With the seven windings in place on your arm, unwrap the length of strap around your palm and bring it over the top of your hand between your thumb and index finger down to the middle finger.
10. Wrap three times around the middle finger and then go back around your palm until you've used up the slack and can tuck the end in. Turn your hand over—surprise!—the configuration of the windings spells out one of the sacred names of God, *Shaddai* "Nurturing One,"—*Shin, Daled, Yud*.
11. The blessing that is said now is the same one from the prophet Hosea that is said at a Jewish wedding, because tephillin is a commitment between a Jew and the Source of Life. Each of the seven windings is a weekday journey to prepare yourself for this moment. Over the years you can discover many possible interpretations for these Hebrew words.

V'eirastikh li l'olam

I will be engaged with You forever

V'eirastikh li b'tzedek

I will be engaged with You in justice

Uv'mishpat

and deciding what's right

Uv'khesed

with loving-kindness

Uv'rachamim

and with compassion

v'eirastikh li b'emunah

I will be engaged faithfully with You

v'yahdaht et YHVH.

So that you will know God.

What does the last verse mean? Who is “you”? Some say, because there are no capital letters in Hebrew, that by emphasizing these qualities of living, we bring the experience of Godliness into the world. What do you think?

12. You can complete your tephillin meditation by sitting down and resting your head against the crook of the elbow of your wrapped arm. This will bring the *bayit* of the head tephillin near that of the arm, which will naturally be leaning up against your heart. Connecting head and heart through a mitzvah-centered life—that’s the message!

A helpful photographic guide to laying tephillin can be accessed on the web at tephillin.co.il, and an on-line video guide by Rabbi Jay Spero is at jbuff.com/Tefvidrm.htm.

Tephillin are generally worn during morning prayers; afterward you can take your tephillin off or keep them on for a time of meditation or Torah study. When you take them off, first remove the strap around your fingers, then wind it around your palm; take off the *shel rosh*; wrap it up with its covering box back in place; wind its straps on it; put it away in the tephillin bag; then take off the rest of the *shel yad*, and wrap it up meditatively in its place in the bag too.

By the way, never wear tephillin to the bathroom—they have real sections of handwritten Torah inside. They’re not only



TRADITION

The Holy One, Blessed Be, surrounded Israel with the commandment of tephillin for their heads, tephillin for their arms, tzitzit for their clothing and mezuzot for their doors.

—Talmud *Menachot* 43a-b

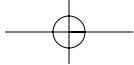
Mikhal the daughter of King Saul wore tephillin and the sages did not protest.

—Talmud *Eruvin* 96a

expensive; they can be damaged by moisture, extreme temperature, and misuse. If you're using an inherited set, check with a Judaica shop or a scribe to see if your tephillin need maintenance.

Tephillin take practice and support to become part of your life. Is there a morning service nearby where you will be comfortable and welcome? Or someone at home or in a B-Mitzvah class who can do this with you? If you are an adult B-Mitzvah, this is a wonderful practice to do simultaneously with a life partner or best friend.

You are not trapped into continuing these practices by sampling them. Many Jews are inconsistent in their practices, no matter how committed their intentions. We're people after all! If you begin some of the practices in this chapter and put them down at some point in your life, like the father of the young girl in the tephillin story, you will always have the effects of the practice deep within you. And it is always kosher to begin again.



We've covered a lot of ground in this chapter, from an overview of the structure of Jewish practice to the Torah ceremony, your role as a leader, your sacred name, and finally choosing and using personal ritual items. This is material for your season of preparation. If you've perused it in one reading, we've intentionally made sure that there's a lot to return to for study, day by day.

Now it's time to move on to the biggest step—becoming a witness, reader, and teacher of Torah on your B-Mitzvah day.

