



InterfaithFamily.com

Encouraging Jewish Choices & A Welcoming Jewish Community

“This is really a wonderful document. You all should be commended for producing it.”
-Rabbi Arthur Nemitoff, The Temple, Congregation B'nai Jehudah, Overland Park, Kansas

GUIDE TO BIRTH CEREMONIES FOR INTERFAITH FAMILIES

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Introduction

We at InterfaithFamily.com compiled the **Guide to Birth Ceremonies for Interfaith Families** as a way to help interfaith families navigate the process of planning a birth ceremony. It includes detailed information about what takes place at a brit milah, simchat bat or naming ceremony, as well as information on ways a child's interfaith family can participate in the ceremony.

The booklet opens with background information on birth ceremonies in the Jewish tradition, including information on special concerns for interfaith families. It continues with sample sequences for birth ceremonies and concludes with a wide array of sample readings, prayers and rituals to include in your child's birth ceremony.

We could not have created this resource without the help of our devoted readers and contributors, who responded to our call in August 2006 for suggestions for birth ceremonies.

We would like to thank the following contributors (authors whose work originally appeared in another source include the name of the original publication):

Rabbi Lev Baesh
Cantor Ronald Broden
Anita Diamant
Rabbi Brian Field
Rick Fowler
Morissa Fregeau
Dr. Samuel A. Kunin
Mary Litman
Kathy Lowy
Keren McGinity
Rina Mello

Michelle Missner
MyJewishLearning.com
Barbara Niles
Brenda Platt
Mark Reiss, M.D.
George Robinson (JTA)
Judith Seid
Julia Slotnick Sturm
Rabbi Kenneth S. Weiss
Lesley Williams

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Debra Nussbaum Cohen
Louis Jacobs ([The Jewish Religion: A Companion](#), Oxford University Press)
Daniel Margolis ([Second Jewish Catalog](#), Jewish Publication Society)

Patty Margolis (same as previous)
Michael Strassfield (same as previous)
Sharon Strassfield (same as previous)

We owe a particular debt to Rabbi Arthur Nemitoff, who volunteered his expertise to review this document to ensure that it is Jewishly "sound."

Introduction to The Bris (Brit Milah)

According to traditional Jewish practice, on the eighth day after a boy is born, he is circumcised, that is, the foreskin is removed from the tip of his penis, and several blessings are recited. This ritual, called brit milah (commonly known as a bris), was first mentioned in the Torah (the Hebrew Bible), when God says, “Every male among you shall be circumcised... it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you” (Genesis 17:11). The brit milah may be postponed, however, if the child is not healthy enough to undergo the procedure.

According to traditional Judaism, there is a difference between circumcision and a brit milah. A brit milah must be performed by an observant Jew who follows a prescribed procedure. A brit milah is typically performed by a mohel, who is a Jew trained in religious law and surgical techniques. For many years there were only Orthodox mohels, but now there are a growing number of progressive mohels who are receptive to the needs of interfaith families. The Reform movement maintains a database of mohels at <http://www.beritmila.org>. Often, parents will ask their rabbi, if they have one, to co-officiate at the brit milah.

The brit milah may occur in any location that will allow it, and usually occurs in the parents’ home or a synagogue, although it is certainly permissible to perform the ceremony in the hospital.

The basic order of the ceremony is as follows:

1. An honored woman (the kvatterin) brings the infant forward and hands him to an honored man (the kvatter).
2. The kvatter places the infant on the knees of the already-seated sandek (another honored person, usually the grandfather).
3. The sandek holds the infant while the mohel performs the circumcision.
4. As the circumcision is performed, the mohel recites a blessing declaring that his act fulfills a holy commandment. (See Mohel’s Blessing, page 16.)
5. The parents recite a blessing acknowledging that their son has entered into a covenant, or contract, between God and the Jewish people. (See Parents’ Blessing, page 16)
6. The boy’s Hebrew name is formally bestowed over a cup of wine (See Kiddush (Blessing over wine), page 36).

Many parents and mohels add additional readings, songs and rituals to the basic ceremony.

Mohels are typically very accommodating to a family’s needs and will use anesthetic if desired and will help the parents find ways to add additional elements to ceremony. It is customary for mohels to charge a fee of several hundred dollars for their services, and if you need to bring in a mohel from out-of-town, you are expected to pay for their transportation and lodging. The mohel will provide precise

instructions on what you need if you are hosting a brit milah as well as instructions on how to care for the baby in the days following the circumcision.

It is also typical to have a festival meal following the brit milah.

Portions excerpted and adapted from “Ceremonies for Newborns: The Brit Milah Ceremony.” Reprinted with permission from MyJewishLearning.com.

Circumcision, Pros and Cons

While most American Jewish boys are circumcised, there is some debate over the safety, necessity and importance of circumcision.

Those who advocate for Jewish boys to have a bris point to the long pull of tradition, the religious requirement, the fact that the ceremony officially welcomes the child into the Jewish community and the fact that most American boys are circumcised. Modern mohels use special clamps to prevent bleeding and typically use an anesthetic to reduce the pain in the child. In addition, studies have shown that circumcision may reduce the risk of urinary tract infections and AIDS. For many Jews, a brit milah is an essential way to welcome and mark a boy as a member of the Jewish community.

Circumcision opponents point to studies that show circumcision can lead to complications such as infection, hemorrhage and even death. They also feel that circumcision causes unnecessary pain in infants and that the foreskin also serves a useful role in protecting the head of the penis in the infant and in sexual function in adulthood.

The brit milah is a widely endorsed practice in all American Jewish communities. At the same time, circumcision is not nearly as common in other developed countries, especially in Europe, and in some countries, such as Sweden, less than half of Jewish males are circumcised.

For more on the circumcision debate, see these articles on InterfaithFamily.com:

Aaron, Rabbi Donni C. ["How I Counsel Interfaith Families Considering a Ritual Circumcision."](#)

Friedman, Dawn. ["Why I Am Not Having My Son Circumcised."](#)

Levenson, Rabbi Shaul. ["Handling Hesitations over Circumcision: One Couple's Story."](#)

Moss, Lisa Braver. ["Circumcision: A Jewish Inquiry."](#)

Reiss, Mark, M.D. ["Circumcision: My Position."](#)

Weiss, Rabbi Kenneth S. ["A Connection with Our People."](#)

Introduction to Birth Ceremonies for Girls

There is no commandment in the Hebrew bible to welcome Jewish girls in a particular ceremony, so over the centuries a wide variety of ceremonies have been developed. In India, parents decorate their home with flower blossoms floating in water. In Turkey, and originally in Medieval Spain, guests at the Las Fadas ceremony would pass around the baby girl and say a blessing and speak of their hope for the new child.

Until the '70s, the only widespread ritual for welcoming girls in the U.S. was a brief ceremony where fathers, or both parents, would go to synagogue and have a blessing recited expressing hope that the girl grows up in good health, learns Torah, marries under a wedding canopy and does good deeds. (See Blessing for Entering Baby into the Covenant, page 16.)

In 1973, the first welcoming ceremony for girls was created by an innovative Jewish couple, Michael and Sharon Strassfield. Since then, countless variations and adaptations of the ritual (sometimes known as simchat bat or kabbalat bat) have sprung up, and it is now common among both liberal and Orthodox Jews to hold welcoming ceremonies for their baby daughters. There is no equivalent to a mohel for girls.

While there is no fixed form or required content for a simchat bat, a common structure has emerged, often in this sequence:

1. A song, sometimes a wordless Jewish one known as a niggun.
2. An introduction welcoming guests to the ceremony. (See page 12.)
3. A Hebrew welcome: (See Welcome in the Name of the Creator, page 14.)
4. Blessings of thanksgiving by the baby's parents (See Blessing of Thanksgiving by Parents ("Birkat HaGomel"), page 16.)
5. Prayers and readings related to parenting and raising a child. (See page 16.)
6. A ritual welcoming the new daughter into the Jewish community. This often involves wrapping the child in a ritual shawl (tallis), lighting candles or washing her feet.
7. Explanation of the baby's name, and a recitation of formal naming blessings. (See page 33.)
8. Presentation of a Jewish ritual item as a gift.
9. Recitation of prayers, poems and other readings by honored guests. (See page 16.)
10. Blessing over wine. (See Kiddush (Blessing over wine), page 36.)
11. Blessings of gratitude from the girl's parents. (See Shehecheyanu, page 35.)
12. Another song or two.
13. Recitation of the blessing over bread (hamotzi). (See page 36.)
14. A festive meal.

Sources include “Traditional Ways of Welcoming Jewish Daughters,” “The Modern Evolution of Ceremonies for Girls” and “The Elements of a Brit Bat,” all by Debra Nussbaum Cohen, MyJewishLearning.com.

Baby Naming

There are no rules in the Jewish tradition for how to name a child. Jews from different parts of the world follow different, sometimes contrary practices.

Jews of Central or Eastern European descent (Ashkenazi Jews) compose the majority of the Jewish population of the U.S. Ashkenazi tradition strongly discourages naming children after close living relatives, especially the parents, but encourages the naming of children to honor dead relatives, often grandparents. Often the child will be given a name that starts with the same letter as an honored late relative.

Jews who trace their ancestry to Spain, Portugal and North Africa (Sephardic Jews), however, may name children for living relatives.

It is also customary--and an essential part of the brit milah ceremony--to give a Jewish child a Hebrew name in addition to an English name. Sometimes the Hebrew name is the same as a relative's Hebrew name, sometimes it is simply related to a relative's name, sometimes it is the Hebrew form of the English name (e.g., Yosef for Joseph, Dovid for David). Many parents choose their children's name from the Bible, from rabbinic literature or from the pool of modern Israeli names.

Source: "Ceremonies for Newborns: Overview: Liturgy, Ritual and Custom for Babies," by Simcha Kling, MyJewishLearning.com.

Unique Considerations for Interfaith Parents

According to the traditional Jewish movements (Orthodox and Conservative), a child is not Jewish unless he or she has a Jewish mother.

According to the progressive Jewish movements (Reform and Reconstructionist), a child with only one Jewish parent--either mother or father--is Jewish as long as the child is raised to identify as Jewish. Holding a bris or simchat bat for your infant can be the first step to raising the child Jewish.

Most mohels are Orthodox and therefore abide by the traditional definition of a Jewish child. In many cases they will agree to perform a circumcision for a non-Jewish mother with the understanding that the child will later be immersed in a ritual bath (mikvah) to be converted to Judaism. If the father is not Jewish but the mother is, the mohel will skip the Hebrew line from the traditional brit ceremony where the father delegates his responsibility to circumcise the child to the mohel.

Mohels trained in the Reform tradition will perform a brit milah for children of interfaith parents without the expectation of further steps to conversion.

Generally speaking, mohels are quite accommodating to the needs of parents, so if you would like to have a non-Jewish grandmother or relative to be involved in the ceremony, don't be afraid to include them. In rare cases a very traditional Orthodox mohel may insist that the sandek, the man who holds the baby, be Jewish.

For the simchat bat, there are fewer concerns because there is no standardized procedure or officially recognized officiant. For any kind of birth ceremony, it is valuable to create a program that provides a guide to the rituals for both non-Jews and Jews. If you don't have time to create a program, it's helpful to explain the ceremony in advance to non-Jewish relatives.

Also be aware that if you plan on having the brit milah or simchat bat at a synagogue, there may be restrictions on what non-Jewish people can or cannot do. Some Conservative congregations, for example, may not allow the non-Jewish parent on the bima, or dais. Discuss the congregation's policies with the rabbi of the congregation before holding a brit milah or simchat bat. Since you only have a few days to plan these ceremonies, it might be worthwhile to speak to the rabbi before the child is born.

If you plan on affiliating with a Conservative or Orthodox congregation and the mother is not Jewish, the child must be officially converted before the congregation recognizes him or her as a Jew. For boys, the brit milah is part of the conversion process. For both boys and girls, a Conservative or Orthodox rabbi will also typically require the child to be briefly immersed in a ritual bath known as a mikvah. Conservative and Orthodox rabbis will also require an official conversion of adopted children whose mothers aren't Jewish or whose heritage cannot be verified.

Sample Sequences of Birth Ceremony

From Rabbi Brian Field:

1. Welcome in the Name of the Creator (See page 14.)
 2. Welcome/Gathering (See page 14.)
 3. Reading of your choice (See page 16.)
 4. Discussion of the meaning of the covenant (See page 30.)
 5. Covenant of the Five Senses (See page 31.)
 6. Naming (See page 33.)
 7. Parents speak about the baby's name
 8. Shehecheyanu (See page 35.)
 9. Kiddish and Hamotzi (See page 36.)
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From Lesley Williams:

1. Welcoming the guests (See page 12.)
 2. Welcoming in the Name of the Creator (See page 14.)
 3. A Baby is Not Only a Unique New Life (See page 14.)
 4. Awakening of the Five Senses (See page 32.)
 5. Song: L'chi Lach by Debbie Friedman (See page 19.)
 6. Entering the Covenant/Discussion of the meaning of the covenant (See page 30.)
 7. Responsive reading on God's love and trust for children (See page 19.)
 8. Blessing for child (See page 16.)
 9. Naming (See page 33.)
 10. Song: Simantov Umazel Tov
 11. A Blessing by Danny Siegel (See page 20.)
 12. Priestly blessing (See page 17.)
 13. Shehecheyanu (See page 35.)
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From Michelle Missner:

1. Welcoming the child (See page 14.)
 2. Blessing of gratitude for health of mother and child
 3. Explanation of baby's name
 4. Presentation of certificate containing name
 5. Expression of hope for the future
 6. Final statements by parents (See page 20.)
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From Anita Diamant:

1. Lighting of three candles

2. Grandparents carry the baby into the room to his/her parents
 3. Explanation of baby's name
 4. Baby is passed from guest to guest, with each person blessing the child
 5. Blessing from a friend
 6. Reading from grandparents (For ideas, see page 18.)
-

From Rena Mello:

1. Grandparents pass child to parents
 2. Blessings over the child (See page 16.)
 3. Responsive reading
 4. Parents speak about gifts they'd like to give child
 5. Explanation of baby's name
 6. Readings/statements from grandparents (For ideas, see page 18.)
 7. Traditional Jewish song/prayer
-

From Kathy Lowy (for a child whose naming takes place on the Jewish Sabbath, Friday night, but adaptable for other situations by omitting the first step)

1. Sabbath candle lighting by mother
2. Set aside chair for Elijah
3. Welcoming by father: "Know before whom we stand" (See page 13.)
4. Welcoming by grandparents: Grandparent's Blessing (See page 26.)
5. Shehecheyanu (See page 35.)
6. Reading: Bring Me Good Guarantors (See page 19.)
7. Reading: Children of Happiness (See page 26.)
8. Explanation of baby's name
9. Reading from Biblical passage explaining child's Hebrew name
10. Bestowing of Hebrew name (including Traditional Eastern European Naming, see page 34.)
11. Mi Shebeirach (See page 27.)
12. Immersion prayer (See page 27.)
13. Candle lighting by father (See page 28.)
14. Parental blessing by father (See page 28.)
15. Song
16. Kiddish (See page 36.)
17. Hamotzi (See page 36.)

Sample Introductions to Ceremony

Sample Introduction following Havdalah

(After Havdalah is completed, light a candle in addition to the set of candlesticks that we light on Shabbat and holidays.)

MOTHER: It is traditional that a candle be lit as a commemoration of the entrance of our newborn's soul into this world.

FRIEND: From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven. And when two souls that are destined for each other find one another, their streams of light flow together and a single brighter light comes forth... Every child is a new spark of life and the spark with a human being is his (soul).

Submitted by Morissa Fregeau

A name is more than a bland identifier

Welcome. We've gathered for what is perhaps the most joyous occasion a family and community can celebrate, the welcoming of a new baby. In many cultures throughout our beautiful and diverse world, a name is a special part of a person, part of the person's essence and being. Naming a child confers individuality upon the person. In our tradition, we give the child her/his own name but we also give her/him a Hebrew name. Thus we recognize the child's individuality but also her/his place in the Jewish community.

A name is far more than a bland identifier. It is rather a pointer, that directs our gaze in three directions. Its principal and unvarying function is to identify a particular man or woman. It bestows individuality; it ensouls. But names may also recall the past; often, they convert living persons into memorials to the dead. They may also predict the future, express a hope, augur a destiny. They carry, in sum, multiple messages. Through names, we eavesdrop as the old instruct the young, prepare them to carry the culture, and bless them on their way.

-by David Herlihy

Submitted by Judith Seid

Each new baby is special

We welcome you all to this naming ceremony as we welcome _____ to our lives.

Each new baby is special and each one teaches you something special. A first child teaches you how much you can love another person. The second child teaches you, against all your common sense and all your fears, that love grows when it's divided. The more people you have to love, the more love you have within you to give.

-by Lauren Adelman

Submitted by Judith Seid

To love children is to love our future

To love children is to love the future. To love a child is to love the creative. We are all joined as members of the family of humanity, yet every individual is unique. A name is a special part of a person, part of the person's essence and being. Naming a child confers a sense of independent identity upon the person.

Love is an expression of our strength. To nurture another human being with the gift of our time and our talents is to affirm our own power. True love is never self-sacrifice. It is the overflow of vitality that allows the force of life to pass from one to another.

To love a child is to love life. To nurture a child is to express hope. Children do not steal our strength. They allow us to go beyond ourselves and to discover the power of our own creative talents. To be a father or a mother is more than a profession. It is more than a social calling. It is the fulfillment of one of our deepest needs—our need to touch the future and make it live. Each of us speaks through our own behavior. Each of us in his or her own life becomes a personal message. If we are creative, then others can see how to be creative. If we are strong, then our strength becomes a vivid example to those around us. Good teachers teach by what they do, not by what they say. Good parents are good teachers. The lives of their children reflect the beauty and integrity of their own actions.

-by Miriam Jerris

Submitted by Judith Seid

“Know before whom we stand”

We are required to "know before whom we stand." This command becomes especially real at moments like this when we join together to celebrate a life cycle event. Today we all acknowledge that command. We gather together before our God as witnesses honoring the arrival of our daughter. Our sages have taught us that "Long before a soul incarnates she searches for just the right home." We are grateful that this gentle and beautiful soul has chosen us. We ask you all to rise to welcome the Guest of Honor.

Submitted by Kathy Lowy

Sample Readings to Welcome New Baby

Welcome in the Name of the Creator

Welcome little one!
Blessed may you be all your days, all your life;
Blessed may you be wherever you are,
In all of your comings and in all of your goings.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration (for a boy):
Baruch ha-ba b'shem Adonai
Baruch ata bair, uvaruch ata basedeh
Baruch ata b'voecha uvaruch ata b'tzaytecha

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration (for a girl):
Brucha ha-ba-ah b'shem Adonai
Brucha at bair uvrucha at basadeh
Brucha at b'voaykh uvrukha at b'tzaytaykh

Welcome/Gathering

We are gathered around this baby, the newborn child of _____, to welcome him/her to the world, to make a place for him/her in his/her family, in his/her communities, and to announce the name by which he/she will be known in the world and among the Jewish people.

Submitted by Rabbi Brian Field

A Baby is Not Only a Unique New Life

ALL: A baby is not only a unique new life, but the symbol of all life. Her existence touches all who see her.

How many are Your works, Adonai!
In wisdom You have made them all;
The earth is full of Your creation.
Each new life brings added beauty to the world;
Each new life is a witness to God's glory.

Submitted by Lesley Williams

Welcome into the World of Light and Shade

_____, we welcome you into the world of light and shade, of work and play, of laughter and tears. All our flowers and all our wine cannot express how happy we

are at your birth. All the caresses of our eyes and hands cannot measure the fullness of our love for you.

-Algernon Black

Submitted by Judith Seid

Welcome into the Human Community

_____, we welcome you into the human community, this nation, the family of humankind and the House of Israel. In you we have hope for a better life. In you, we all share a new life, your inborn gifts and new ways of seeing. In your life, our lives will be continued. We will love you and cherish you all the years of our lives. We hope that you will always be happy with us and proud of your name. We know that your name will be a joy to all who will know you.

-Algernon Black

Submitted by Judith Seid

Welcome for Adopted Child

We welcome you as one born of our love, our genes, our seed and our blood. We welcome you, who do not share our genes, but share our love.

Not flesh of my flesh,
bone of my bone,
still, miraculously, my own,
forget, even for a minute:
weren't born under my heart
in it.

Siblings may say: We rejoice in the birth of our sister/brother and the growth of our family.

Submitted by Judith Seid

Traditional Birth Ceremony Blessings

Mohel's Blessing

Blessed are You, O Lord Our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and has given us the command concerning circumcision.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al ha-milah.

Parents' Blessing

For boy:

Blessed are You, O Lord Our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and hast commanded us to make our sons enter the covenant of Abraham our father.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu lihach-neeso bivreito shel Avraham aveenu.

For girl:

Blessed are You, O Lord Our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and has commanded us to bring our daughter into the covenant of Israel.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:

Baruch atah adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'haknisa bivrito shel am yisrael.

Blessing for Entering Baby into the Covenant

ALL: Even as this child has entered into the covenant, so may he enter into the Torah, the nuptial canopy, and into good deeds.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:

K'sheim shenichnas brit, kein yikaneis l'Torah, l'chupah, ul'maasim tovim.

Blessing of Thanksgiving by Parents ("Birkat HaGomel")

Blessed are You, O Lord Our God, Ruler of the universe, who bestows good to sinners even as He has bestowed to me every good.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:

Baruch atah adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam hagomel l'chayavim tovt she-gemalani tov kol.

Three-Fold Benediction

May God bless you and guard you.

May God make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May God turn His face unto you and grant you peace.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:

Y'varekh'kha Adonai v'yishm'rekha;

Ya'ar Adonai Panav ay'lekha viy'hunekha;

Yisa Adonai Panav ay'lekha, v'yasaym l'kha shalom.

Sample Readings for Ceremonies for Boys and Girls

Mother's Blessing

MOTHER: We thank God for blessing us with a healthy, sweet and beautiful child. We pray that your life is filled with continued health and joyfulness. May you find strength in knowing how much you are loved, and by so many people. _____, we wish for you a life of family, community, education and mitzvot. And we promise, as you make your way in the world, we will always be there for you. We love and respect you, now and forever.

OFFICIANTS: We ask you their family and friends to give your support in thought, word and deed. You can be examples of lives well lived and commit to supporting _____ and _____ in their journey of parenthood. It takes a village to raise a child--and they want you to be part of _____'s life, offering him love and guidance throughout his life. Now we can all join hands as _____ and _____ offer final blessings to _____. After each please join us saying Amen.

PARENTS: May you have kindness and respect for both friends and strangers, for those that are similar to you and those that are different. Amen.
May you be generous--able to give and receive. Amen.
May you understand that the journey of life is as important as each step along the way. Amen.

Submitted by Julia Slotnick Sturm

Poem of Thanksgiving

FATHER: With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might
I thank you, God, for the gift of this wonderful child.

MOTHER: I thank you for a healthy pregnancy, a safe delivery and a speedy recovery.

FATHER: With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might
I pray for the continued health of _____.

MOTHER: I pray for her to be strong in mind and body,
To grow steadily and sturdily in a home filled with joy and love.

FATHER: I pray for her to become a person who greets the world
With passion
Courage
Humility
Wisdom
And Humor

MOTHER: With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might
I pray for God to watch over us, our family, and our community.

FATHER: I pray for the ability to love and nurture _____,
To provide for her and to educate her.

MOTHER: I pray for the ability to understand _____,
To allow her the freedom to grow.

TOGETHER: Dear God, help us to be good parents and to teach our daughter the
values of Judaism, so that she may improve the world through her thoughts and
deeds.

Amen.

-Adapted from Diamant, Anita. The New Jewish Baby Book. (277 pages, Jewish
Lights Publishing, 2005)

Submitted by Keren McGinity

L'chi Lach

L'chi lach to a land that I will show you
L'ch l'cha to a place you do not know
L'chi lach on your journey I will bless you
And you shall be a blessing, you shall be a blessing
You shall be a blessing lechi lach
L'chi lach and I shall make your name great
L'ch l'cha and all shall praise your name
L'chi lach to the place that I will show you
And you shall be a blessing, you shall be a blessing
You shall be a blessing l'chi lach.
-by Debbie Friedman

Submitted by Lesley Williams

God's Love and Trust of Children/Bring Me Good Guarantors

RABBI: When Israel stood to receive the Torah, the Holy One said to them: "I am
prepared to give you My Torah. Present to Me good guarantors that you will observe
and study the Torah and I shall give it to you."

GUESTS: They said: "Our ancestors are our guarantors."

RABBI: The Holy One said: "Your ancestors are not sufficient guarantors. Bring Me
good guarantors, and I shall give you the Torah."

GUESTS: They said: "Our prophets are our guarantors."

RABBI: The Holy One said: "The prophets are not sufficient guarantors. Bring Me Good guarantors and I shall give you the Torah."

GUESTS: They said: "Indeed, our children will be our guarantors."

RABBI: The Holy One said: "Your children are good guarantors. For their sake I give the Torah to you." (Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:24)

Submitted by Lesley Williams and Kathy Lowy

A Blessing

May your eyes sparkle with the light of Torah,
and your ears hear the music of its words.
May the space between each letter of the scrolls
bring warmth and comfort to your soul.
May the syllables draw holiness from your heart,
and may this holiness be gentle and soothing
to you and all God's creatures.
May your study be passionate,
and meanings bear more meanings
until life itself arrays itself to you
as a dazzling wedding feast.
And may your conversation
even of the commonplace,
be a blessing to all who listen to your words
and see Torah on your face.
-by Danny Siegel

Submitted by Lesley Williams

When God Wants An Important Thing Done

When God wants an important thing done in this world or a wrong righted, he goes about it in a very singular way. He doesn't release thunderbolts or stir up earthquakes. God simply has a tiny baby born, perhaps of a very humble home, perhaps of a very humble mother. And God puts the idea or purpose into the mother's heart. And she puts it in the baby's mind, and then--God waits. The great events of this world are not battles and elections and earthquakes and thunderbolts. The great events are babies, for each child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity, but is still expecting goodwill to become incarnate in each human life.

-Edmond McDonald, Presbyterian Outlook

(from Edelman, Marian Wright. Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditation on Loving and Working for Children. (240 pages, Beacon Press, 1995)

Submitted by Rev. J. Richard Fowler

A Parent's Pledge

I promise to...

Listen to my children

Communicate with my children

Teach my children right from wrong and be a good

Role model for them

Spend time with and pay attention to my children

Educate my children in mind, body and soul

Work to provide a stable family life for my children

Pray for and see God in my children and in all children

Vote for my children to ensure them fair opportunity

Speak out for my and other people's children's needs.

-Marian Wright Edelman (from Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditation on Loving and Working for Children)

Submitted by Rev. J. Richard Fowler

Final Statement to be Read by Parents Together

How are we to perform the countless acts of love that are involved in raising _____?

It is not such a mystery, really. Every lullaby, every diaper change, every smile, every sleepless night, every wordless prayer of thanks for this wonderful baby--in these and the unending ways we care for and teach and protect our children, we perform countless acts of love. And the world is made holier. And so are we.

Submitted by Michelle Missner

Children Learn what is lived.

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to be shy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith.

If children live with acceptance and friendship,

They learn to find love in the world.

-from the Christian traditions

-Submitted by Cantor Ronald Broden

Community Support and Responsibility

This ceremony brings together those who are part of _____'s ancestry and identity-- the parents (name those relatives who are here) and friends. This is the extended family of human beings who will be the answer to _____'s need for identity. You will be the stable, continuous members of the human community who will care about him/her and will be his/her support when s/he has need.

Each of us, parents, friends and family, have our particular responsibilities for this child. We hope for the wisdom to help guide him/her to reach his/her own fullest potential, to develop his/her own talents and to come to an understanding of his/her own place in the world and in the Jewish community (while honoring the heritages of both her/his parents).

We ask you, our friends and family, to help and support us in our great work of guiding the growth of our new baby as a responsible member and citizen of our community/of the House of Israel/of our shared world/our Earth. We recognize that each child belongs not only to his own family, but to all of us, and all of us are responsible to protect him/her and to nourish his/her growth.

ALL: We share in the joy of this ceremony and honor the power and tradition of this moment. We pledge ourselves to the care and well-being of this newborn child, (name), and welcome and accept her into our community (family).

-by Miriam Jerris

Submitted by Judith Seid

We wish you...

_____, we wish for you a life full of learning. May you learn from books, from the people around you and from the wonders of nature. We wish for you a life full of love and we wish for you the capacity both to give and receive love fully and wholeheartedly. We wish for you a life full of striving for justice, a life full of deeds of kindness, a life of concern for your community and for your fellow human beings.

_____, may you always stand firm and walk secure with the warmth of the earth in your body and fire of the sun in your spirit. We wish you the strength of the rock and mountains, the gentleness of grass and flowers with all their colors and fragrance. May you feel the joy of the wind as it moves through the fields of grain and tosses the branches of the trees in the forest.

-by Algernon Black

Submitted by Judith Seid

May you grow...

_____, may you grow in a happy family, a supportive community, and a safe world.
May you go forth into a life of learning, love and good deeds.
(This last sentence is the traditional Hebrew blessing. See Dedication to the Covenant, page 30.)

_____, may your name endure with honor as long as the rivers run to the sea, as long as the sun casts the shadow of the mountains over the slopes, and heaven shows the fire of the stars.

-by Len Cherlin

Submitted by Judith Seid

May your child...

May your child, (parents' names), learn from you what it means to be a loving human being. May the warmth and generosity of your own personalities touch his potential and enrich it by the force of your example. You have the power to share yourselves with your child. You have the power to give him the greatest and most intimate of all gifts--the gift of your loving behavior.

-by Len Cherlin

Submitted by Judith Seid

May you be fearless and tender

May you be fearless and tender. May you enjoy the warm sun on your face and the flow of wind and water on your body. May you love the beauty of the world, its flowers and trees, the mountains and flowing streams, the movement of all living things. And may you know the music and the rhythm of nature and the drama and poetry of human creation. Above all, may you know the comradeship of good friends and the meaning of generosity and compassion, the love of many and the love of one above all others.

-by Algernon Black

Submitted by Judith Seid

An ancient Irish pagan blessing

May the blessing of light be with you always,
Light without and light within.
May the sun shine upon you and warm your heart
Until it glows like a great fire
So that others may feel the warmth of it.

And may the light of your eyes
Shine like two candle lights
In a window at night bidding the wanderer
To come in out of the dark and the cold.

And may the blessings of the rain be upon you,
The sweet and tender rain,
May it fall upon your spirit
As when flowers spring up and fragrance fills the air.

And may the blessings of the great rain
Wash you clean and fair,
And may the storms always leave you stronger
And more beautiful.

And when the rains are over
may there be clear pools of water.

Submitted by Judith Seid

May your life be one of security and trust

May your life be one of security and trust. May your life shine with dignity and freedom. May your life know the creative harmony of peace.
-by Len Cherlin

Submitted by Judith Seid

Your life is a seed

Your life is a seed for the growths of tomorrow
This is the winter, the season for resting, that in the springtime
The earth may green with growing for a rich harvest.
May the good earth nourish you,
May you never lose touch with the living powers of the earth
Or the warm companionship of others.
May the arts nourish your spirit
And the challenges of life sharpen your powers of mind and heart.
May you never lose the sense of your own worth.
May you always have faith in your creativity
And may you grow in the power to love and be loved
And may the cup of your life be filled to overflowing.

Submitted by Judith Seid

May you live each day...

May you live each day with fullness of mind, generously and without hesitation. May you rise up in anticipation of each new day and lie down satisfied at night. May your life bring justice and peace and comfort to those who need it.

Submitted by Judith Seid

We are humbled

We are humbled by the awesome power of this moment.
From our lives, we have brought forth life.
Through our love, we have fashioned a child of love.
The mystery of beginnings is with us we acknowledge its presence.
May the life we have birthed be a blessing to all s/he meets.
And may s/he count us among her/his blessings as well.
-Adapted from Rami Shapiro

Submitted by Judith Seid

Sample Songs

"This Little Light of Mine"
"Heveynu Shalom Aleikhem"

Submitted by Judith Seid

Sample Poems

"The Pasture" by Robert Frost
"Putting in the Seed" by Robert Frost
"Children's Games" by Avrom Reisen
"Pippa's Song" by Robert Browning
"Woman of Valor" (excerpts)

Submitted by Judith Seid

The Crowning

in sleep you are a small queen
swaddled in the lace of shadows

a smile drifts on your lips
your palms upturned
in fearlessness

what have I come in here
to cover
to uncover

what do I know
of majesty
born as your head crowned
in me

so now it is my turn
to be amazed and small

for in sleep you are a small queen
swathed in the lace of shadows
-by Rachel Loden

Submitted by Judith Seid

Children of Happiness

Children of Happiness are not like ordinary children. You can tell one of the Children of Happiness by the way it is different. A Child of Happiness always seems like an old soul living in a new body, and her face is very serious until she smiles, and then the sun lights up the world. You look at the eyes of a Child of Happiness and you know the child knows everything that is truly important. Children of Happiness always look not quite the same as other children. They have strong, straight legs and walk with purpose. They laugh as do all children, and they play as do all children, they talk child talk as do all children, but they are different, they are blessed, they are special, they are sacred.

They are to be cherished and protected, even at the risk of your life. They will know sadness, but will overcome it. They will know alienation for they see past and through this reality. They will endure where others cannot. They will survive where others cannot. They know love even when it is not shown to them.

They spend their lives trying to communicate the love they know.
-by Anne Cameron

Submitted by Kathy Lowy

Grandparents' Blessing

We have been taught each child carries its own blessing into the world.

Grandchildren are the crown of their elders and the glory of their parents.

_____ comes from a wonderfully rich heritage of strong loving women who come from many different countries and many different faiths. Each of these women who will pass her through their chain of love, posses qualities we hope _____ will acquire. Clarity of purpose, wisdom, grace, confidence, generosity, strength, knowledge, a sense of humor, passion and a reverence for all manifestations of life.

Submitted by Kathy Lowy

Mi Shebairach

The one who blessed our mothers, Sarah and Rikvah, Rachel and Leah and the prophet Miriam and Abigayil and Queen Esther daughter of Abichayil. May he bless this beloved girl and let her name be _____ with Good Luck and a blessed hour; and may she grow up in good health, peace and tranquility. And may her Father and Mother see her joy and her wedding and sons, riches and honor and may they be healthy into old age; And may this be divine will. Amen.

Immersion Prayer

HONORED RELATIVE (Perhaps Aunt): Tradition is that Abraham entered into the covenant with God through the ritual of circumcision, Sarah his wife entered the covenant through ritual immersion in a mikveh, a ritual bath.

Our Mothers, Rebekkah and Rachel were betrothed and began new lives at the gentle flowing waters of the well.

HONORED RELATIVE (Perhaps uncle): Our Mother Tzipporah gave life to her child Moses in the ever-flowing waters of the Nile.

Our Sister Miriam danced for the saving of lives beside the overflowing waters of the Sea of Reeds.

HONORED RELATIVE: Water is God's gift to the living souls, to cleanse us to purify us to sustain us and renew us.

Moses and Aaron and the priests of Israel washed with cleansing waters before attending to God's Service at the Altar.

HONORED RELATIVE: As God separated the waters in the first creation, so do we ask that protecting waters surround this child.

And it is written: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean."
(Ezekiel 36)

(The honored relative symbolically cleanses child's feet as she enters into God's Covenant. Grandparent wraps _____ in tallis.)

GRANDPARENT: And it is written, "I am a well of living waters, a garden spring, A stream flowing from the heights of Lebanon." (Song of Songs 4:15)

You are blessed, O God Spirit of the world who has sanctified us with our commandments and commanded us concerning ritual immersion.

Submitted by Kathy Lowy

Lighting the Candle

There is a new light in our hearts and in our home.

As _____ has been brought into the covenant of the Jewish people, we would like to take this moment to dedicate her life to ma'asim tovim or good deeds of family and community.

Submitted by Kathy Lowy

Parental Blessing

Our God and the God of our Mothers and Fathers bring this Baby girl into a life of joy, a life of goodness, a life of wisdom. May it be your will that our daughter be a maker of peace and a pursuer of peace between one person and another, and let her light shine round her to illumine her companions. Strengthen our will and our strength to guide her in the ways of Torah and faithful devotion to you. Give us the ability to lead her in the path of the valiant women and men of Israel whose actions have shown brightly in all generations of our people's history.

Submitted by Kathy Lowy

Reading for Brit Milah

I present to you my son, intact in body and spirit to meet the world. You, his family and friends, are circled 'round today. (Godmother/sandeket brings child into circle and prayer continues.)

All the basic elements greet his spirit today: the greening earth, the gentle spring air, the single steady flame of your havdalah candle, and the water of (body of water).

With these basic elements, we bless all the parts that embody your spirit:

Your mind, may it be quick and clear;

your eyes and your ears, may they see and hear the soft spoken truth;

your mouth, may it speak with courage and timely gentleness;

your hands, may they shape your world with strength and care;
and finally, your heart, may it be full of the passion that is the best of humanity.
Tonight we pledge ourselves to your protection, your care, and your guidance.
Let the earth ground and strengthen you;
let the winds inspire you;
let the fire light your true path;
and let the water wash and refresh you.
May you always be guided by the love that surrounds you here and now and always.
Submitted by Morissa Fregeau

Readings for Discussing the Covenant

Dedication to the Covenant

We dedicate our child to Torah--to a never-ending fascination with study and learning, With a book, she will never be alone.

We dedicate our child to chuppah--to never-ending growth as a human being, capable of giving and receiving love. With loving family and friends, she will never be alone.

We dedicate our child to ma-asim tovim--to a never-ending concern for family and community, justice and charity. While she cares for others, she will never be alone.

Submitted by Mary Litman

Expansion of Blessing for Entering Baby into the Covenant. (See page 16.)

The Meaning of the Covenant

Brit or Covenant offers the blessing of belonging - to God, to community, to family, to the earth and is expressed through the living out of specific values

The covenant that we are bringing this baby into is a welcome to the Jewish people and its traditions and a welcome to _____'s family and their traditions. Just as when _____ and _____ were married, they formed a covenantal partnership between their family traditions, so too now the two of you are part of that inclusive covenant.

(Officiant lists values that have been named by parents.)

Submitted by Rabbi Brian Field

Adaptations of the Five Senses Ceremony

Covenant of the Five Senses

We do not know who we were before we were born, and we do not know where we go after our life is over, but we do know that in this life, we are gifted with a body. And now, it will be through your five bodily senses that we welcome you into the covenant:

The blessing of sight: Action: Light 2 candles
Light is the symbol of spirit, of knowledge, of hope, of warmth and of peace.
Let us bless the Source of Light, who creates light and mystery in the flames.

The blessing of taste: Action: Give baby sip of wine
Water is created directly by God. But to make wine involves a partnership between God and people. God provides the fruit that we transform into wine, which, when used wisely, can lift our spirits. May you take what God provides and make it holy.

Let us bless the Source of Life, who creates the fruit of the vine, symbol of holiness and joy.

The blessing of hearing: Action: Ring a chime, bell

The central prayer in Jewish spirituality is the Shema, which means “listen.” It is when we listen to each other, really listen, that we can transcend what seems to divide us, and discover the unity at the heart of reality.

May the Source of Sound caress your ears and fill your heart with words of blessing.

The blessing of smell: Action: Let baby smell fragrant flowers

The sense of smell unites us with our breath and connects us to our soul.

May the One Who Creates Fragrances gift you with awareness of and connection to the wisdom of your soul.

The blessing of touch: Action: Dip hands in water

When travelers came to the tent of Abraham and Sarah, they were welcomed with water to wash their face, their hands and their feet. As we dip your hands into this water, we pray that just as you have come in to a world of welcome, so may you offer the blessing of welcome to others who come into your lives.

Let us bless the Welcoming One who touches us with the knowledge that
wherever we are, it is home.
-adapted from "Awakening of the Five Senses" in Brit Shomrei HaMachzorim
Submitted by Rabbi Brian Field

Awakening of the Five Senses

Blessing over the Candles:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei m'orei ha-esh
Praised are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who creates the fire's light.

Blessing over the Wine:

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.
Praised are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the
vine.

Blessing over the Spicebox:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei minei b'samim
Praised are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who creates many kinds of
spices.

Submitted by Lesley Williams

Naming

Naming #1

May God who blessed our ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Leah and Rachel, bless _____ and let him/her be known among the Jewish people as _____ at this special time of blessing. May s/he be raised in health, peace, stability and love to long lives of learning, loving and covenanted relationships, and the doing of good deeds. May his/her parents get to see him/her happy, blessed with children of his/her own. May this be God's will, and let us say Amen.

Submitted by Rabbi Brian Field

Secular Humanist Naming

Brit Kedusha by Jody Bolz

Here is your first gift
(this blessing, this echo)
sound you'll answer to
turning, always, to see who spoke.

There is your name,
which people we don't know
will call you years from now,
when your infant face
with its astonished look
is just a picture

and our huge, parental love
a blur of hands.

Your father/mother and I name you _____. We have given you the name _____ because We have also given you a part of each of our family names, to bridge the generations of the past and those to come in the future.

Your father/mother and I name you _____. We give you your own name and ours, because you are both your own person and part of each of us.

Your father/mother and I name you _____. We have given you this name not because it is the name of a relative or ancestor; in fact, there are no _____ on either side of the family. We selected these names because they are beautiful names and the beautiful combination of (baby's names) will provide you with a sense of individuality. We selected this name because it is beautiful and unique, as you are a beautiful and unique human being.

We have given you the Hebrew name of _____. You are named for.....By giving you this name, we are bridging the generations of the past and present. Your (ancestors for whom baby is named) would have loved to have known you. In the years to come, we will be able to share many stories and memories about them with you.

We name you _____, sister of (brother/sister) and granddaughter of (grandparents). We accept the responsibility to care for you and nurture you. We pledge ourselves to honor and cherish your uniqueness. We commit ourselves to the integrity of life and recognize the power of our living example.

-by Miriam Jerris

Submitted by Judith Seid

Traditional Eastern European Naming

How shall the baby be called???

(Repeat the child's Hebrew name three times.)

Shehecheyanu

Blessed are You, O Lord Our God, Ruler of the universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this day.

Hebrew Phonetic transliteration:

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'aolam shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.

Blessings over Bread and Wine

Hamotzi (Blessing over bread)

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-alom ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

Kiddush (Blessing over wine)

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Phonetic Hebrew transliteration:

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-alom bor-ay peri ha-gafen.

Alternate Blessing over wine

We rejoice in our heritage which has given us the cup of wine as a symbol of our rejoicing.

(Put wine on baby's lips.) We (or baby's sibling) will pass around a cup of wine.

Please tell us your hopes for _____'s future as you sip from the cup.

This cup is the vessel of our hopes. It is filled with the new wine of a life just begun.

The sweetness of its taste is the joy _____ has brought.

-by Len Cherlin

Submitted by Judith Seid

Additional Ideas for Ceremony

It is customary to light candles in the room where the brit or simchat bat is to take place.

From Daniel Margolis, Patty Margolis, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld

It is custom to set aside a chair for the prophet Elijah (who is called the angel of covenant and is reputed to be the protector of little children).

From Daniel Margolis, Patty Margolis, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld

It is customary for everyone but the godfather (sandek) who is holding the baby to remain standing during the ceremony.

From Daniel Margolis, Patty Margolis, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld

Create a program for participants and spectators to follow along with. At the front of the program, include a brief list of the participants in the ceremony. The guide can also include information about, or pictures of, the child's namesake and/or a family tree.

Adapted from Debra Nussbaum Cohen

At the end of the ceremony, wrap the parents and children in a big tallis, and have all the grandparents hold the tallis around their kids and grandkids, and have them repeat the Threefold Benediction (see page 17) after the mohel, saying it to their kids: "May God bless you and keep you..."

Submitted by Rabbi Lev Baesh

Have the mother and father of the child write a letter to the child about the name they have chosen and who the name comes from. The letter includes stories, memories, and qualities of that person. I ask the parents to read the letter at the ceremony and to save it in their baby book to give to the child at Bat or Bar Mitzvah, or another important life cycle event.

Submitted by Rabbi Lev Baesh

I ask the parents to choose a person from both families to name the child after, giving the child a first and middle name. It is easy to find a Hebrew cognate to any English or other language based name. By naming after both families, they know that both families are respected and represented in their child.

Submitted by Rabbi Lev Baesh

At the end of the ceremony, thank the non-Jewish grandparents for their love and support as a way of recognizing their willingness to have their grandchild take part in a Jewish birth ceremony.

Sample Simchat Bat (Inspired by Dr. Seuss)

“With each child, the world begins anew.” (Midrash)

RABBI: To call someone or something by name is to touch its heart, its essence. It is to speak a word which lasts a lifetime. In the beginning, God began to create though names. When God said, “Yehi Or,” “Let there be light”--only then did light exist. Each name allowed day and night, earth and sky, sunlight and moonlight not only to be what they ought to be, but each name also created a separation. With a name, we become ourselves and no one else.

RABBI: B'ruchah ha-ba-ah b'sheim Adonai. May she who enters be blessed in the name of the Lord.

(Godparents enter with Godmother holding baby and Jewish Godparent lights candles.)

GODMOTHER: Joyfully do we present child's name to her parents to enter into the Covenant of Life. (Godmother gives baby to Godfather.)

GODFATHER: Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al kiddush ha-chayim.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, by whose Mitzvot we are hallowed, who commands us to sanctify life. (Godfather gives baby to father.)

RABBI says Kiddush (See Kiddush (Blessing over wine), page 36.)

FATHER: K'shem she-nich-n'sah la-brit, kein ti-ka-nes l'torah ul-chu-pah ul-ma-asim to-vim.

MOTHER: As she has entered the covenant, so may she enter a life devoted to Torah, chupah and the accomplishment of good deeds.

BOTH PARENTS (in unison) recite Dedication to the Covenant. (See page 30.)

ALL say Shehecheyanu. (See page 35.)

FRIEND: Congratulations, child's name!

Today is your day.

You're off to Great Places!

You're off and away!

You have brains in your head.

You'll have feet in your shoes.

You'll be able to steer yourself
any direction you choose.

You have a great family. And you know what you know.
And YOU are the girl who'll decide where to go.

GODFATHER: You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care.
About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there."
With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet,
you'll be too smart to go down any not-so-good street.

GODMOTHER: And you may not find any
you'll want to go down.
In that case, of course,
you'll head straight out of town.

AUNT 1: It's open there
in the wide open air.

Out there things can happen
and frequently do
to people as brainy
and footsy as you.

And when things start to happen,
don't worry. Don't stew.
Just go right along.
You'll start happening too.

OH!
THE PLACES YOU'LL GO!

AUNT 2: You won't lag behind, because you'll have the speed.
You'll pass the whole gang and you'll soon take the lead.
Wherever you fly, you'll be best of the best.
Wherever you go, you will top all the rest.

With banner flip-flapping,
you're on top of the world!
You're ready for anything.
Because you're that kind of girl!

GRANDPARENTS (Either set): Oh, the places you'll go! There is fun to be done!
There are points to be scored. There are games to be won.
And the magical things you can do with that ball
will make you the winning-est winner of all.

GRANDPARENTS (the other set): And will you succeed?
Yes! You will, indeed!

(100 percent guaranteed.)
KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!

ALL GRANDPARENTS: Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting.
So... get on your way!

RABBI: Now, in the presence of loved ones, we give to this child the name (child's Hebrew name). Let it become a name honored and respected for wisdom and good deeds. May God's blessing rest upon (child's Hebrew name) now and always. We pray that she will grow in heart and mind. May the story of our people inspire her. May the truths of Torah guide her. And, may the grandeur of the prophetic word of truth and righteousness enter her spirit and be for her a lasting benediction. Amen.

PARENTS: O God, we give thanks to You for the gift of (child's English name), who has entered into the Covenant of Life. Keep her from all harm, and grant that she may be a source of joy to us and our family and friends. Be with us, and give us health and length of days. Teach us to rear her with care and affection, with wisdom and understanding that she may be a faithful child, and a blessing to the world. We give thanks to You, O Lord, the Source of Life. Amen.

GRANDPARENTS TOGETHER: We are thankful for the blessing You have bestowed upon us in our lives. Now we have been granted a new grandchild to love, the opening of a new page in our family's chronicle. May she grow up in health and happiness. May we be granted the joy of seeing her develop all of her gifts, and the gratification of helping her to fulfill the best that is in her. Then our prayer shall have found its answer: the days and years to come shall be for us times of peace and fulfillment. Amen.

PARENTS: Y'si-mech Eh-lo-him k'Sa-rah, Riv-kah, Ra-chel v'Lei-ah. May God make you as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel & Leah.

RABBI: May God bless you and keep you; May God shine God's countenance upon you and be gracious unto you; May God lift up God's countenance to you and grant you peace.

RABBI says Hamotzi (Blessing over bread). (See page 36.)

Submitted by Mary Litman

Sample Non-Cutting Naming Ceremony #1

The Ceremony

Mother's mother carries child in. Father's mother, the sandeket (female grandparent who holds the baby during the ceremony), is seated and holds child throughout most of the ceremony. Everyone else stands.

Part I - Introductory Blessings and Prayers

MOTHER: Ba-ruch Ha-bah (blessed is the one who comes)

Blessings

In every birth, blessed is the wonder.
In every creation, blessed is the new beginning.
In every child, blessed is life.
In every hope, blessed is the potential.
In every transition, blessed is the beginning.
In every existence, blessed are the possibilities.
In every love, blessed are the tears.
In every life, blessed is the love.

FATHER: This Bris Shalom, Hebrew for Greeting or Welcoming Covenant, is our naming and welcoming ceremony for our child, _____. In following at least part of ancient Jewish custom, we mark the beginning of our commitment to raise him in the Jewish tradition culturally. We invite you--in a few minutes--to also share any blessings or well wishes for _____.

MOTHER: We are gathered here today, to welcome the first baby born in our families in this new millennium. Today we have a profound and unprecedented insight into our humanity, we now know that each of us is fully human from the moment we are born, able to feel and remember all the richness of each and every moment's experience.

FATHER: We wish to recognize some of the people who will be important in his life:
His grandparents.
His uncles, aunts, and cousins.
He also has two godparents who can't be here today...

Candle lighting

Honored relative lights candles.
Bubbe says the blessing over candles:
Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, bo-rei m'o-rei ha-eish.
Let us bless the Source of All, Who creates the illuminations of the flame.

MOTHER: There is a new light in our hearts and in our home. These candles celebrate the birth of our child. One candle for each of his parents. A third for his sibling, _____. And we kindle a fourth for _____, the new life in our family.

FATHER: Out of the creative darkness of the womb he has come.

MOTHER: These candles celebrate his emergence into light.

FATHER: Blessed is the woman who bears a child, for she knows how love covers pain.

MOTHER: Blessed is the man who fathers a child, for he makes a bridge between earth and heaven.

MOTHER and FATHER: Child of light, you know not yet the love and joy overflowing from our hearts.

ALL say Kiddush (Blessing over wine). (See page 36.)

MOTHER: Ba-ruk h kol khai ba-olam
Precious is every living thing in the world
B'ru-kheem ha-kha-yeem ba-adam
Precious is the life of humankind.

FATHER: In addition to symbolizing the fruit of our union, we drink wine to follow age-old traditions.

FATHER and MOTHER drink from cup and give child a taste. (FATHER dips a finger into the cup and wets child's lips with wine.)

Part II--Covenant

FATHER: With each child the world begins anew. By this ceremony your mother and I formally welcome you to our world and our family. As we name you today, our sweet son, we undertake our traditional responsibilities as your parents to take you forward into the world as we know it, to love you, to guide you, to educate you, and to cherish you. You are whole, complete, and perfect. We promise you, before our family gathered here today in your honor, to do our very best for you each and every day hereafter.

FATHER and MOTHER say Dedication to the Covenant. (See page 30.)

FATHER and MOTHER: _____, as you begin your journey through life, we pray that you will find sustenance in ma-yim cha-yim, the living waters which Judaism

offers to all who draw from the well of this tradition. May we learn and grow in these traditions together.

Part III--The Name, Readings, and Conclusion

MOTHER: As we prepare to give you your name, we wrap you in this tallis (prayer shawl).

FATHER explains background of name.

MOTHER: We invite guests and family to share thoughts, blessings, well wishes.

All family members: _____, all of us bless you and pray that you, together with us, share a life of wholeness and hopefulness and peace. Amen.

Part IV--S'udat Mitzvah, the Celebratory Meal

FRIEND says Hamotzi (Blessing over bread). (See page 36.)
Let us bless the Source of All, Who provides us with the staff of life.

MOTHER: Bread is the symbol of sustenance and honey the sign of sweetness. We dip the bread in honey in hope that our daily strivings will be sweetened by our love for each other. Please share bread and honey with us symbolically to wish _____ a sweet life.

Submitted by Brenda Platt

Sample Non-Cutting Naming Ceremony #2

Today we celebrate the blessing and naming of _____. His parents, _____ and _____ wish to share with him the ideals and experiences of their traditions. They will give him excellent values to live by throughout his life. We look at this ceremony as _____'s entrance into life as a member of his people. It is the hope of his parents that their traditions and values will give him a sense of self, of belonging, of hope, and of participation in the continuing evolution of humanity. _____ and _____ thank you for sharing the joy of this great occasion.

God and Creator, Source of all life. We thank You for the countless blessings you have given us. We thank You especially for the sacred joy and privilege of parenthood and family which adds profound meaning and purpose to our existence. This happy family has come into Your presence with grateful hearts. Give them the wisdom to teach this child to be faithful to You, O God, that he may grow up with the knowledge that You are always near to him, guiding and sustaining him. Keep open his eyes and spirit that he may be ever conscious of the beauty and goodness that is in man and woman, that he may ever nourish the goodness that has been implanted in him.

Though none can escape sorrow and pain, we humbly ask for him the courage to face evil, the faith to transcend it, and the strength to subdue it. Grant him health of mind and of body, that he may enjoy the fullness of years and live to do your will in faithfulness. Amen.

When asked about children, Kahlil Gibran wrote: "Your children are not your children, They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you yet they belong not to you. You may give them your love but not your thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls. For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them, but not to make them like you. For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday. You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth. The Archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite. And bends you with His might, that His arrows may go swift and far. Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness; For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable."

_____ and _____, give _____ unconditional love, a love that is not dependent on report cards, clean hands, or popularity. Give him acceptance of his human frailties as well as his abilities and virtues. Give him permission to make his own life independent of yours. Give him truth, make him aware of himself as a citizen of the universe where there are many obstacles as well as fulfillments. Bestow upon _____ the blessings of God. These are the laws of honoring your child. From these laws will be built the Declaration of Independence for the coming generation, a spiritual and emotional independence that, in turn, will make the world, free, tolerant, and safe.

PARENTS (Repeat): In conformity with hallowed observances, we present our child to be blessed and named. Blessed are You, O spirit of life, our God, who has sanctified us by your commandments, and commanded us to raise our son and bring him to be a blessing to all.

Our God, God of our Mothers and our Fathers! Sustain this child through his parents' loving care. Let him be known among the people of Israel by the name of : _____, in English,_____. May his name be a source of joy to him, and inspire him to serve all people and all humankind. May his parents and his family rejoice in his growth of body and soul. May they, with wisdom and patience, lead him to love of learning, a life of good deeds, and to a marriage worthy of God's blessing. And let us say, Amen.

May God who blessed our ancestors, bless this child. May his parents have the privilege of raising him, educating him, and encouraging him to attain wisdom. May his hands and his heart be faithful in serving God. And let us say, Amen.

Wine Ceremony:

Say Kiddush (Blessing over wine). (See page 36.) (Wine touched to child's lips, then parents and grandparents share from cup.)

(Blessing by Officiant in Hebrew, by guests in English):

Shehecheyanu, see page 35.

Officiant reads certificate.

(Benediction: in Hebrew and English)

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May God's countenance lift up unto you, and give you the greatest of all gifts:

Shalom! A life of peace in a world of peace.

Amen.

Submitted by Barbara Niles

Recommended Books

Cohen, Debra Nussbaum. [Celebrating Your New Jewish Daughter: Creating Jewish Ways to Welcome Baby Girls into the Covenant](#). (232 pages, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001)

Diamant, Anita. [The New Jewish Baby Book](#). (277 pages, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005)