



**18Doors** mission is to empower people in interfaith relationships— individuals, couples, families and their children— to make Jewish choices, and to encourage Jewish communities to welcome them.

**18Doors** offers consultation and resources for synagogues, agencies and schools of all affiliations to assist them in their welcome and engagement of interfaith families and all those who are interested in exploring Judaism.

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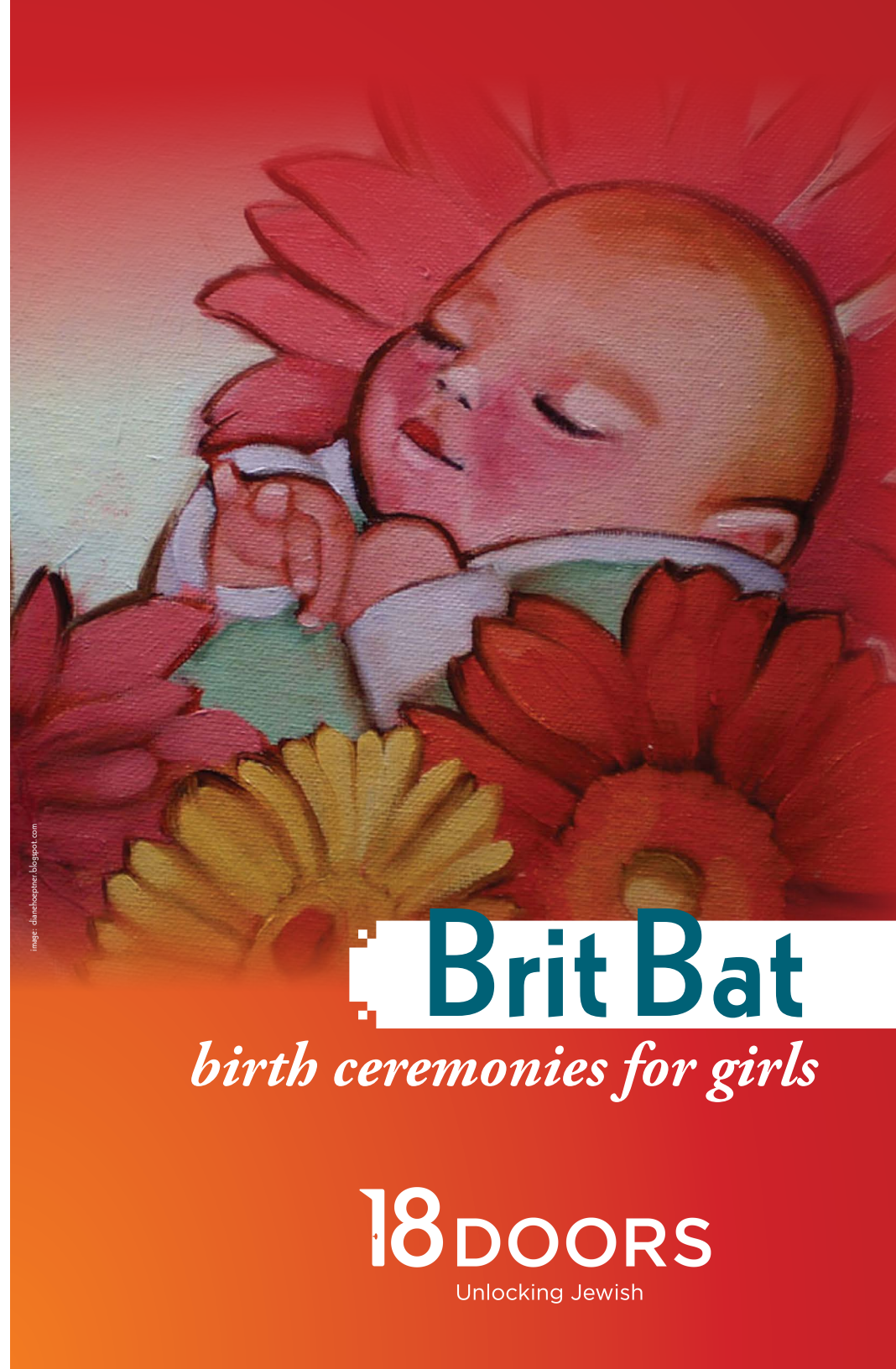


image: danabachner.blogspot.com

# Brit Bat

*birth ceremonies for girls*





blessed  
is she who comes!

בְּרוּכָה הַבָּאָה!  
b'ruchah haba'ah!

These ancient words express the emotion of parents who are holding their child for the first time, whether they are in the delivery room or holding an adopted child.

The arrival of a child is one of the most exciting, terrifying and holy moments in life. Jewish birth ceremonies give parents a way to name this unspeakable wonder, to share the joy with family and friends, and to make promises to our baby and ourselves. This is why the arrival of a child is often a Jewish turning point - the time when parents, for the first time, feel a strong connection to Jewish tradition and to the Jewish community.

*Brit* (often pronounced according to Ashkenazi custom and Yiddish as “*bris*”) is Hebrew for covenant. It is the way that Jews define their relationship to God. It is a commitment to living a certain way and doing certain things.

The Torah, or Five Books of Moses, is a record of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Jewish babies enter into the covenant through a ceremony called a *brit*. For male Jews, this is personalized through the covenant of circumcision (*brit milah*) which was first commanded of Abraham in Genesis 17:10.

Prayers and poems can be added at this point as well. Some parents write a letter to their new daughter expressing their wishes and hopes for her, and then put it away to be read at her bat mitzvah when she is twelve or thirteen.

Some end this section by reciting the *Shebekhianu* prayer, which is customarily said at the point of any new or first time experience, including the birth of a child. When you have shared your daughter's new name with your community for the first time? Say *Shebekhianu!* When you welcome her to the community for the first time? Say *Shebekhianu!* Some may choose to say the traditional prayer for daughters, said before the Friday evening Shabbat meal, which shares hopes that our daughters gain wisdom and share the best attributes of the four matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ  
וְהִגַּעְנוּ לְזִמְן הַזֶּה.

BA-RUKH A-TA A-DON-AI  
EL-O-HEY-NU MEL-EKH HA-O-LAM  
SH-HEKH-I-YA-NU V'KI'MA-NU  
V'HI-GI-A-NU LAZ'MAN HA-ZE.

Blessed are You, Lord our God,  
Ruler of the Universe,  
who has kept us alive and sustained us  
and permitted us to reach this moment.

[A traditional translation  
from The Jewish Catalogue.]

Blessed be the Eternal One,  
Source of Life,  
Who has given us life, helped us to grow,  
and enabled us to reach this moment.

[An alternative translation  
from How to Raise a Jewish Child.]

## IV. Celebrating with Food!

According to Jewish law, all major life cycle events are celebrated with a meal! In Hebrew, this is known as *seudat mitzvah*, which literally translates to “a commanded meal.”

You may start with the blessing over the bread, *ha'motzi*, and end with the blessing after the meal, *birkat ha'mazon*. In between, serve your favorites from your childhood, family specialties, bagels and lox, humus and pita, spaghetti and meatballs.... Whatever you choose, it will be a celebration!

### III. Naming

Names are the beginning of identity formation. Choosing your baby's name helps to shape the kind of person you are hoping the baby will become.

By selecting a Hebrew name, you connect your daughter to the generations that precede her, a community and a system of values.

The Ashkenazi (Jews descended from Eastern Europe) have a tradition of naming a baby after a parent or grandparent who has died. This custom dates back to the 6th century B.C.E and naming children after their families' ancestors remains the custom today.

Sephardic (descendants of Spain and Portugal) Jews name their children only after relatives that are alive. In some communities there is a strict pattern; the first son is named after the father's father, the first daughter is named after the father's mother; the second son is named after the mother's father, the second daughter after the mother's mother.

Because most American Jews are descendants of Ashkenazi Jews, parents often name their daughter after a family member who has died. Stories about the remembered relative bring a powerful emotional connection to the past and link to your hope for the future. You may also choose to explain your choice of Hebrew name by sharing an associated story from the Bible.



Traditionally, a child's full Hebrew name includes her parents' names as well, following the format: [baby's Hebrew name], [*bat* (daughter of)] [father's and mother's Hebrew names]. Then your daughter carries a family history with her whenever her full name is given.



### Planning A Brit Bat

Since the 1960s, more and more Jewish parents have extended the ritual imagery of a covenant to include daughters with a *brit bat* ("daughter's covenant"). In the Sephardic (descendants of Spain and Portugal) Jewish tradition, there was an old custom of welcoming daughters to the community. Parents carried their new baby girl around a room on a pillow and invited each guest to give her a blessing. The rabbi then recited a blessing for the baby's health and happiness and a lavish meal was served.

There is no set liturgy for a brit bat and, unlike the brit milah for a boy which happens on the eighth day, there are no rules about when or where it should happen. Generally the date is set according to when the mother feels well enough to enjoy the festivities. Some parents like to schedule the ceremony on the first day of the new moon (*Rosh Hodesh*), a semi-holiday of new beginnings when the Talmud exempted women from chores. In recent decades many Jewish women's groups have chosen to meet and celebrate at the new moon. A semi-holiday of new beginnings, on Rosh Hodesh, women were, according to the Talmud, exempted from chores; in recent decades, many women's groups have formed to meet and celebrate the monthly occurrence.

A brit bat on Shabbat can take place during worship services either on Friday night or Saturday morning. The baby is brought in front of the congregation, often up on the *bima* (raised platform), where the rabbi blesses the baby and the parents speak about her namesake(s). The *oneg Shabbat* or *kiddush* (sweets or light lunch following Friday evening Shabbat services and Saturday morning services, respectively) may be sponsored by the parents, grandparents or friends in the baby's honor.

Home ceremonies are also common and can be held on Saturday afternoon so that *Havdalah*, the closing ritual for Shabbat can be included.

## Liturgy & Ritual

As mentioned, there is no set liturgy for a brit bat. However, many such celebratory ceremonies include similar parts. What follows is a basic four-part structure: welcome, covenant blessings and ritual, naming and a celebratory meal (*seudat mitzvah*).

### I. Welcome

Most brit bat ceremonies begin with the greeting “*b'ruchah haba'ah*” (blessed is she who comes), followed by prayers or readings selected by the parents and/or rabbi. Some families adapt the custom of the brit milah of bringing the baby to a special chair called Elijah's chair (*kisei Eliyahu*). Jewish tradition holds that the prophet Elijah is present at every brit milah. Elijah is considered a protector of little children, in effect the “guardian angel.” Jews therefore set aside a special chair for Elijah at the bris, and the baby is placed in the chair briefly before the circumcision, or, in this case, the naming.

### II. Covenant Blessings & Ritual

Many parents wish to add a symbolic action or ritual to their words. Some parents choose to light a candle, marking the time as separate and holy, as is done to bring in a holiday or



artist: susan vida jadaiv image: www.gallery78.com

Shabbat. You can use the Havdalah candle, a pair of white Shabbat candles, heirloom candlesticks or a new set purchased as a gift for the baby.

Some parents touch the baby's hand to a Torah scroll, wrap the baby in a prayer shawl that might have been used as the parents' wedding chuppah or wash her hands or feet in remembrance of all the connections between women and water in the Torah.

Here is a sample blessing; create one that resonates with your family, wishes and hopes:

God creates each baby in God's own image  
with her own unique qualities  
extending God's holy covenant  
through each new generation.  
May our devotion to the covenant  
continue to sustain our daughter and us as a people.  
Blessed are you, God,  
Who continues to covenant with us,  
whose holiness is offered to us everyday.

