

Jewish Baby Naming Guide

Welcoming Your Child into the Covenant

"Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward."

— Psalm 127:3

Welcome to one of life's most joyous occasions! The arrival of your baby is a miracle worthy of celebration, gratitude, and blessing. At The Neshamah Institute, Rabbi Amy is honored to help you create a meaningful baby naming ceremony that welcomes your little one into the Jewish community with love, tradition, and joy.

Whether this is your first child or you're already veteran parents, whether you're deeply connected to Jewish practice or just beginning your journey, this guide will help you understand and plan a beautiful ceremony that reflects your family's values and celebrates this precious new life.

What Is a Baby Naming Ceremony?

A Jewish baby naming ceremony, called a *Simchat Bat* (celebration of a daughter) or *Brit Shalom* (covenant of peace) for a son not having a traditional circumcision, is a sacred ritual that formally gives your child their Hebrew name and welcomes them into the Jewish people.

These ceremonies serve several beautiful purposes. They publicly announce your child's Hebrew name, connect your baby to Jewish ancestors and tradition, ask for God's blessing on your child's life, celebrate with family and community, and establish your child's place in the chain of Jewish generations stretching back thousands of years.

When Should We Have the Ceremony?

For Girls: There is beautiful flexibility in timing. Traditional practice suggests within the first month, often on a Shabbat morning during Torah reading. However, many families today choose a time that works best for them—when you're ready physically and emotionally, when family can gather, and when you feel prepared to celebrate. This might be a few weeks after birth, several months, or even later. The important thing is that the ceremony feels meaningful

to your family.

For Boys: If your son had a traditional *brit milah* (circumcision) on the eighth day, his Hebrew name was given then. If you're having a *Brit Shalom* (covenant ceremony without circumcision), timing is flexible, similar to a girl's naming. Some families choose the eighth day to honor tradition, while others wait until they're ready.

Practical Considerations: Consider your recovery time after birth, family travel schedules, venue availability, and when you'll feel emotionally ready to host and fully enjoy the celebration. There's no "wrong" time—only the right time for your family.

Choosing Your Baby's Hebrew Name

Selecting a Hebrew name is one of the most meaningful decisions you'll make as Jewish parents. This name will connect your child to their heritage, honor family members, and carry deep significance throughout their life.

Traditional Naming Practices

Ashkenazi Tradition: Jews of Eastern European descent traditionally name children after deceased relatives, keeping their memory alive. This beautiful practice says that a person truly dies only when their name is forgotten. Many families choose their baby's English name to begin with the same letter as the honored ancestor's name.

Sephardic Tradition: Jews from Mediterranean and Middle Eastern backgrounds often name children after living relatives, especially grandparents, as a sign of respect and blessing. This practice celebrates continuity and brings honor to the living namesake.

Creative Approaches

Today's families often blend traditional and contemporary approaches. You might choose a nature name (like Tamar, meaning palm tree, or Ari, meaning lion), select a name with a meaningful quality (Nava means beautiful, Baruch means blessed), find a biblical character whose story resonates with you, use a Hebrew version of an English name (Michael/Michal, Samuel/Shmu'el, Sarah/Sara), or create a unique name with personal significance.

Hebrew Name Format

Your child's Hebrew name follows a traditional format: [Name] son/daughter of [Parent(s)].

Traditional format: "Sarah bat (daughter of) David v'Rachel" or "Eli ben (son of) David v'Rachel"

Inclusive formats for modern families: Two mothers: "Sarah bat Rachel v'Miriam"

Two fathers: "Eli ben David v'Jonathan"

Single parent: "Sarah bat Rachel" or "Eli ben David"

Honoring special relationships: Some families include additional names like godparents or those who helped bring the child into your life.

Rabbi Amy will work with you to find the perfect Hebrew name and format that honors your family structure and values. She has experience helping families navigate all naming situations with sensitivity and creativity.

Planning Your Baby Naming Ceremony

Your baby naming can be as intimate or elaborate as you wish. Rabbi Amy will work closely with you to create a ceremony that feels authentic to your family.

Where Can We Have the Ceremony?

Common venues include: Your home (intimate and comfortable), a synagogue sanctuary (traditional and sacred), an outdoor garden or park (beautiful and natural), a community center or event space (accommodates larger gatherings), or a restaurant or banquet hall (combines ceremony and celebration).

The Neshamah Institute's flexible approach means you can celebrate anywhere that's meaningful to your family. We're not bound by synagogue schedules or membership requirements.

How Long Is the Ceremony?

Most baby naming ceremonies last 20-30 minutes. This includes welcoming guests, blessings and prayers, sharing the story of the name you've chosen, the formal naming itself, and closing blessings. The ceremony is designed to be meaningful but not so long that guests (or your baby!) become restless.

Guest List Considerations

Baby namings range from intimate gatherings of 10-15 close family members to larger celebrations of 50-100 people. Consider inviting grandparents and close family, dear friends who share in your joy, your Jewish community members, colleagues who are important in your life, and interfaith family members and friends—everyone is welcome to celebrate with you.

Interfaith families are warmly welcomed at Neshamah. We honor all the traditions and people who are part of your child's life while maintaining the Jewish authenticity of the ceremony.

Elements of the Baby Naming Ceremony

Each ceremony Rabbi Amy creates is unique, but most include these beautiful traditional elements:

1. Opening Blessings and Welcome

The ceremony begins with a warm welcome to all gathered and traditional blessings, including the *Shehecheyanu* (thanking God for bringing us to this moment) and an acknowledgment of the miracle of new life.

2. Readings and Reflections

Rabbi Amy will include meaningful readings—from Torah, poetry, or other sources—that speak to the hopes and dreams for your child. Family members or friends may be invited to share readings or blessings.

3. The Story Behind the Name

This is a deeply personal moment where you share why you chose your child's name. You might tell the story of the ancestor being honored, explain the meaning of the name and why it speaks to you, share your hopes for who your child will become, or describe the journey that brought you to this moment.

4. The Formal Naming

Rabbi Amy will officially name your child using the traditional formula, incorporating the Hebrew name and the names of the parents. This is often accompanied by wrapping the baby in a tallit (prayer shawl), symbolizing being embraced by the Jewish community.

5. The Seven Blessings for a Daughter

For baby girls, we often include seven blessings based on the traditional seven wedding blessings, adapted for a new life. These blessings speak to wisdom, strength, peace, joy, and connection to Torah and community. Different family members or friends can each read one blessing.

6. Blessing Over Wine (Kiddush)

The blessing over wine sanctifies the moment and is followed by the baby's lips being touched with a drop of wine—their first taste of sweetness and joy in Jewish life. (Parents, you get to drink the rest!)

7. The Priestly Blessing

The ancient *Birkat Kohanim* is chanted over your baby: "May God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God's face turn toward you and grant you peace." These words have blessed Jewish children for thousands of years.

8. Blessings for Parents and Family

Rabbi Amy will offer blessings for you as parents as you begin this sacred journey, for grandparents and extended family who support you, and for siblings who are becoming big brothers or sisters.

9. Special Rituals (Optional)

Many families add personal touches such as planting a tree in Israel in your baby's name, creating a tzedakah box for your child's future charitable giving, having grandparents pass down a family tallit, lighting candles representing different generations, or inviting godparents or special adults to offer blessings or take on mentoring roles.

10. Closing and Celebration

The ceremony concludes with a final blessing and often the singing of *Siman Tov u'Mazel Tov* (good luck and congratulations). Then it's time to celebrate with food, drink, and joy!

Working with Rabbi Amy

Rabbi Amy brings warmth, wisdom, and over 20 years of experience to each baby naming ceremony. Her approach is personal, inclusive, and deeply meaningful.

The Planning Process

Initial Consultation (Free): You'll meet with Rabbi Amy to discuss your vision, ask questions, and get to know each other. This is your chance to share your family's story and what's important to you.

Name Selection Guidance: Rabbi Amy will help you choose the perfect Hebrew name, explore family history and meanings, and ensure correct Hebrew pronunciation and spelling.

Ceremony Customization: Together, you'll select readings and blessings, decide which rituals to include, determine how to involve family and friends, and plan the flow of the ceremony.

Certificate and Keepsakes: You'll receive a beautiful Hebrew name certificate suitable for framing and a personalized ceremony booklet for guests (if desired).

Day-of Coordination: Rabbi Amy arrives early to set up, guide participants on their roles, lead the ceremony with warmth and grace, and ensure everything flows smoothly so you can simply be present and enjoy.

What Makes Neshamah Different?

No Membership Required: You don't need to belong to a synagogue or pay annual dues. Baby naming ceremonies are open to all families.

Inclusive Welcome: Interfaith families, LGBTQ+ families, single parents, adoptive parents, families with children through surrogacy—all are embraced with equal warmth and respect.

Flexible Approach: Whether you're deeply observant or new to Jewish practice, Rabbi Amy meets you where you are and creates a ceremony that feels authentic to your family.

Personal Attention: You're not just another name on a schedule. Rabbi Amy invests time in getting to know your family and crafting a ceremony that's uniquely yours.

Beautiful Memories: Every ceremony is designed to create a moment of genuine spiritual significance and lasting beauty that your family will treasure forever.

After the Ceremony: The Celebration

A baby naming is a joyous occasion that calls for celebration! The festive meal or reception after the ceremony is called a *seudat mitzvah*—a meal in honor of performing a commandment.

Food and Hospitality

Your celebration can be as simple or elaborate as you wish: a casual brunch at your home, lunch at a favorite restaurant, an elegant catered affair, appetizers and desserts, or coffee and cake. Traditional foods include challah and wine for motzi and Kiddush, bagels and lox for a breakfast/brunch, Middle Eastern or Israeli foods, or family favorites and cultural dishes.

Decorations and Ambiance

Many families enjoy decorating with Jewish themes and symbols: Stars of David and Hebrew letters, blue and white or pastels, photos of the baby and family tree images, children's book themes with Jewish stories, or flowers and natural elements. Keep it simple or go all out—whatever brings you joy!

Gifts and Giving

Guests often ask what to bring to a baby naming. Traditional and meaningful gifts include:

Jewish gifts: Children's Judaica (Shabbat candlesticks, kiddush cup, tzedakah box), Jewish children's books, a tree planted in Israel in the baby's name, or a charity donation in the baby's honor.

Practical gifts: Baby essentials are always appreciated! There's no prohibition against practical gifts alongside the spiritual celebration.

Your own tradition: Some families request charity donations instead of gifts, establishing a college fund for the baby, or asking guests to write blessings or advice for the child to read when older.

Special Situations and Questions

Interfaith Families

The Neshamah Institute welcomes interfaith families warmly. Rabbi Amy has extensive experience helping families navigate different traditions respectfully. A baby naming is a Jewish ceremony, but non-Jewish family members are honored guests who can participate in meaningful ways such as reading non-religious poems or blessings, sharing reflections about the baby, lighting candles, or offering their own cultural traditions during the celebration (not during the Jewish ceremony itself). Rabbi Amy will work with you to create a ceremony that feels inclusive while maintaining Jewish authenticity.

Adoption and Non-Biological Parents

Children who join Jewish families through adoption receive Hebrew names and are welcomed into the covenant just as biological children are. The ceremony might include a *mikveh* (ritual immersion) for conversion if the child wasn't born Jewish, or acknowledgment of an older child's journey into the family. For LGBTQ+ families, surrogate situations, or other paths to parenthood, Hebrew names honor all parents equally. Rabbi Amy has experience with all family structures and will ensure your ceremony celebrates your unique family with dignity and joy.

Older Children and Adult Naming

Not all children receive Hebrew names as babies. It's never too late! Older children (or even adults) can have naming ceremonies appropriate to their age. This might happen when a family becomes more Jewishly engaged, after conversion to Judaism, or when someone wants to reclaim or change their Hebrew name. Rabbi Amy creates age-appropriate ceremonies that honor the person's journey.

Multiple Births

Twins, triplets, and other multiples can be named in a single ceremony or separate ones—your choice! A combined ceremony celebrates both children while honoring each child's unique identity and name. Rabbi Amy will help ensure each child feels equally blessed and celebrated.

Choosing Not to Circumcise

Some families choose not to have a traditional *brit milah* (circumcision) for their sons, instead opting for a *Brit Shalom* (covenant of peace) or *Brit B'li Milah* (covenant without cutting). These ceremonies welcome boys into the covenant through naming, blessings, and

ritual—without the surgical procedure. This is an increasingly accepted practice in progressive Jewish communities, and Rabbi Amy fully supports families making this choice.

Financial Considerations

The Neshamah Institute operates on a generous spirit and fair exchange model. Baby naming ceremonies have a suggested honorarium, but we never turn away families due to financial constraints. Rabbi Amy also offers guidance on keeping celebration costs manageable through home ceremonies (save on venue rental), potluck or simple refreshments, digital invitations, and DIY decorations. The ceremony itself costs nothing—your baby's blessing and welcome into the community is priceless.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do we need to be synagogue members?

No! The Neshamah Institute welcomes all families, regardless of membership or affiliation. You don't need to belong to any synagogue to have your baby named by Rabbi Amy.

What if we're not sure about the Hebrew name yet?

That's completely normal! Rabbi Amy will help you explore options, discuss family history, and find a name that feels right. Many families finalize the name just days before the ceremony.

Can we have the ceremony on Shabbat?

Absolutely! Many families love the added sanctity of a Shabbat morning naming, often followed by a kiddush lunch. We can also schedule for weekdays or Sunday if that works better for your family and guests.

How involved can family members be?

As much as you'd like! Family and friends can read blessings or poems, share reflections about the baby, hold the baby during certain moments, or recite the seven blessings for daughters. Rabbi Amy will help you decide who does what.

What if some family members aren't Jewish?

They're warmly welcomed! Non-Jewish grandparents, relatives, and friends attend and celebrate. They can participate in non-religious readings and blessings. Everyone who loves your baby has a place in the celebration.

Should siblings attend the ceremony?

Yes! Older siblings can participate by holding the baby, reading a simple blessing, or presenting the baby with a gift. Even toddlers can be included in age-appropriate ways. It helps them feel connected to their new sibling.

What should guests wear?

This depends on your venue and celebration style. For synagogue settings, suggest modest, respectful dress. For home or outdoor ceremonies, smart casual is usually perfect. Give guests guidance in your invitation.

What if our baby cries during the ceremony?

Babies cry—it's what they do! Rabbi Amy is experienced with little ones and keeps ceremonies short and flexible. If baby needs feeding or comforting, we simply pause. The ceremony is designed around your baby's needs, not the other way around.

Do we need a minyan (10 Jewish adults)?

Not for a baby naming. Unlike some religious ceremonies, a baby naming doesn't require a minyan. You can have as many or as few guests as feels right for your family.

Can we take photos and videos?

Absolutely! Many families hire photographers or videographers to capture the ceremony. Designating someone to handle media means you can be fully present. Rabbi Amy is comfortable with cameras and will pause for important shots.

What about our older child who wasn't named?

It's never too late! Rabbi Amy can help you plan an appropriate ceremony for children of any age. This might be especially meaningful if your family has become more Jewishly engaged since your older child was born.

Can we have the ceremony outdoors?

Yes, as long as weather permits and you have a backup plan. Gardens, parks, and backyards can be beautiful settings. Just ensure there's shade, seating for older guests, and a microphone if it's a larger gathering.

Baby Naming Planning Checklist

Use this timeline to help you plan your baby's naming ceremony:

2-3 Months Before (or earlier)

- Contact Rabbi Amy for initial consultation
- Discuss possible dates
- Begin thinking about Hebrew names
- Decide on ceremony location
- Estimate guest count

1-2 Months Before

- Finalize date and venue
- Confirm Hebrew name with Rabbi Amy
- Send save-the-dates to out-of-town guests
- Begin planning the celebration (food, decor)
- Decide who will participate in the ceremony
- Order or design invitations

3-4 Weeks Before

- Send formal invitations
- Meet with Rabbi Amy to finalize ceremony details
- Book caterer or plan menu
- Order decorations and supplies
- Arrange for photographer/videographer
- Purchase or borrow ceremonial items (kiddush cup, wine, tallit)
- Ask family/friends to prepare readings or blessings

1 Week Before

- Confirm final guest count
- Share ceremony program or participant roles
- Prepare any handouts for guests
- Confirm all vendor deliveries
- Plan baby's outfit
- Get plenty of rest!

Day Before

- Set up venue (if at home)
- Prepare any food you're making
- Lay out ceremony items
- Charge camera batteries
- Print any last-minute materials
- Breathe and get excited!

Day Of

- Feed baby before ceremony (happy baby = smooth ceremony!)
- Have backup outfit ready for baby
- Greet Rabbi Amy and coordinate final details
- Designate someone to help guests find seats
- Trust the process and enjoy every moment
- Celebrate!

What You'll Need for the Ceremony

Rabbi Amy will guide you on ceremonial items. Here's a typical list:

Essential Items

- **Kiddush cup** for wine blessing (can be family heirloom or newly purchased)
- **Wine or grape juice** (kosher wine traditional but not required)
- **Tallit** (prayer shawl) to wrap baby
- **Certificate or paper** for Hebrew name (Rabbi Amy can provide)
- **Candles** (if lighting is part of your ceremony)

Optional but Lovely

- **Ceremony booklets** for guests to follow along
- **Special pillow or blanket** for holding baby during ceremony
- **Flowers** or decorations for ceremony table
- **Guest book** for attendees to sign
- **Charity box** (*tzedakah*) for guests to contribute
- **Special outfit** for baby (many families choose white or traditional garments)

Rabbi Amy will bring any religious texts needed for the ceremony and help you arrange all items beautifully.

Sample Readings and Blessings

Here are some beautiful texts families often include in baby naming ceremonies:

Traditional Jewish Blessings

Shehecheyanu (Blessing for Special Occasions):

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

The Priestly Blessing:

Y'varech'cha Adonai v'yishm'recha. Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka. Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem l'cha shalom.

May God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God's face turn toward you and grant you peace.

Poems and Contemporary Readings

"A Child is Born" by Rabbi Rami Shapiro:

A child is born. A new story begins. May this child grow strong in body, wise in mind, compassionate in heart. May this child be a blessing to family, community, and world. May this child know love, give love, and be love.

From Kahlil Gibran's "The Prophet":

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, for they have their own thoughts.

Blessings from Parents

Many parents choose to offer their own blessings or hopes for their child. You might speak about the meaning of the name, your dreams for who your child will become, the values you hope to instill, or the legacy you hope to pass on. This is a beautiful, unrehearsed moment straight from your heart.

Additional Resources

Books and Websites

For Name Research:

- "The Complete Dictionary of English and Hebrew First Names" by Alfred J. Kolatch
- "The New Name Dictionary" by Alfred J. Kolatch
- kveller.com/baby-names (searchable Hebrew name database)
- behindthename.com (includes Hebrew name origins and meanings)

For Jewish Parenting:

- "The Jewish Pregnancy Book" by Sandy Falk and Rabbi Daniel Judson
- "Raising a Mensch" by Rabbi Neil Kurshan
- kveller.com (contemporary Jewish parenting wisdom)
- reformjudaism.org (lifecycle resources)

For Children's Jewish Education:

- PJ Library (free Jewish children's books: pjlibrary.org)
- Jewish children's music by Rick Recht, Debbie Friedman, Shira Kline
- Local Jewish preschools and Hebrew schools

Ready to Begin?

Planning your baby's naming ceremony should be joyful, not stressful. Rabbi Amy is here to guide you every step of the way, answering questions, offering suggestions, and creating a ceremony that perfectly celebrates your child and your family.

The first step is simple: reach out for a free consultation. We'll talk about your vision, your family, your baby's name, and how to create a ceremony that's meaningful, memorable, and uniquely yours.

May this guide help you plan a beautiful celebration. May your child grow in wisdom, strength, and compassion. And may your journey as Jewish parents be filled with joy, meaning, and countless blessings.

Contact The Neshamah Institute

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"Every child is a new beginning, a new possibility, a new hope for the world."

— May your child be blessed.