

## B'Mitzvah English Readings

Adding English readings to your B'Mitzvah service gives your family the opportunity to make the service your own. We can intersperse poetry, prose, prayers, and more between the Hebrew liturgy to add meaning throughout the service. You can have anywhere between zero and six of these readings – and feel free to add some in a language other than English as well, if that feels authentic to your family!

**Please make sure the readings are not directed towards the B'Mitzvah student themselves, but rather add meaning for all attendees.** For example – a poem that declares how much you love your grandchild who is becoming a Bat Mitzvah is probably not the move. A reading about peace, or tradition, or justice, or Shabbat, or family, or gratitude is just right. There will be time later on in the service for parents to address their child directly, and your party can include as much of that as you like, of course, but these English readings are meant to add to the Shabbat service as a whole, and not focus on the B'Mitzvah specifically.

You're welcome to choose your own readings and take a stab at placing them throughout the service as you like! Just make sure to submit them to Rabbi Hannah at least a month before your rehearsal; that will give her a chance to let you know if you need to go back to the drawing board at all, and it will also give her a chance to shift the placement around if appropriate.

**Also: when readers come to the bimah, please make sure that they have a copy of their reading printed out – not on their phone.**

### TEXT SAMPLES TO USE OR PERUSE

The Talmud tells the story of an old man who was seen planting a carob tree. As the king rode by he called out,

“Old man, how many years will it be before that tree bears fruit?”

The old man replied, “Perhaps seventy years.”

The king asked, “Do you really expect to be alive to eat the fruit of that tree?”

“No,” answered the old man, “but just as I found the world fruitful when I was born because my ancestors planted for me, so I plant trees for my children and my children’s children.”

*-Planting for the Future (From the Babylonian Talmud Taanit 23A)*

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There was once a man who stood before God, his heart breaking from the pain and injustice in the world. “Dear God,” he cried out, “look at all the suffering, the anguish and distress in your world. Why don’t you send help?” God responded, “I did, I sent you.”

*-Rabbi David J. Wolpe*

How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment, we can start now, start slowly changing the world! How lovely that everyone, great and small, can make their contribution toward introducing justice straightaway. And you can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness!

-Anne Frank

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God, help us now to make this new Shabbat.

After noise, we seek quiet;

After crowds of indifferent strangers,

We seek to touch those we love;

After concentration on work and responsibility,

We seek freedom to meditate, to listen to our inward selves.

We open our eyes to the hidden beauties

and the infinite possibilities in the world You are creating;

We break open the gates of the reservoirs

of goodness and kindness in ourselves and in others;

We reach toward one holy perfect moment of Shabbat.

-Ruth Brin

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Each of us enters this sanctuary with a different need.

Some hearts are full of gratitude and joy:

They are overflowing with the happiness of love and the joy of life; they are eager to confront the day, to make the world more firm; they are recovering from illness or have escaped misfortune.

And we rejoice with them.

Some hearts ache with sorrow:

Disappointments weigh heavily upon them, and they have tasted despair; families have been broken; loved ones lie on a bed of pain; death has taken those whom they cherished. May our presence and sympathy bring them comfort.

Some hearts are embittered:

They have sought answers in vain; ideals are mocked and betrayed; life has lost its meaning and value. May the knowledge that we too are searching, restore their hope and give them courage to believe that not all is emptiness.

Some spirits hunger:

They long for friendship; they crave understanding; they yearn for warmth. May we in our common need and striving, gain strength from one another, as we share our joys, lighten each other's burdens and pray for the welfare of our community.

-Gates of Prayer

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*An Old Irish Blessing*

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind always be at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face,

And rains fall soft upon your fields.

And until we meet again,

May God hold you in the palm of God's hand.

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Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come from the depths of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way in the arid desert sands of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by You into ever-widening thought and action—  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Maker, let my people awake.

*-Rabindranath Tagore*

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A thought has blown the market place away; there is a song in the wind and joy in the trees.  
The Sabbath arrives in the world, scattering a song in the silence of the night: eternity utters a day.

Where are the words that could compete with such might?  
Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space;  
On Shabbat we try to become attuned to the holiness in time.  
Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth;  
On Shabbat we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul.  
Six days a week we seek to dominate the world;  
On the seventh day we try to dominate the self.  
The world has our hands, but the soul belongs to Someone Else.  
To set apart a day a week, a day on which we would not use the instruments so easily turned into weapons of destruction.  
A day for being with ourselves,  
A day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization,  
A day on which we use no money,  
A day of armistice in the economic struggle with our neighbors and with the forces of nature.  
Is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for human progress than the Sabbath?

*—Abraham Joshua Heschel*

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*I thank You God for this most amazing day*  
i thank You God for most this amazing  
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any--lifted from the no

of all nothing--human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?  
(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)  
*-e.e. cummings*