Brit Mitzvah Guidelines

Updated 2/2021

Guidelines are subject to change, and you will be made aware of any changes.
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Philosophy

Our congregation welcomes and encourages Jewish members of any age (13 or over) to prepare for and to celebrate a brit mitzvah. It is our hope that through the process of preparing for the event and through their involvement in our community, participants will discover their Jewish voice and bring a fuller meaning to their practice of Judaism. Adults desiring to prepare for a brit mitzvah ceremony may arrange a course of study with the Rabbi.

We are grateful that you have chosen our community to guide you on this important journey. The following guidelines provide a framework to ensure that the brit mitzvah experience consistently adheres to the values of our community. In cases where the guidelines create a barrier rather than a challenge, we invite families to talk with the Rabbi about designing an experience that will be meaningful, challenging, and appropriate for the child and the circumstances.

It is important that the brit mitzvah process be respected and valued. In the unfortunate circumstance that our guidelines (Guidelines for Educational Foundation, Brit Mitzvah Year, and Family and Community) are not respected, the Rabbi can elect to delay the brit mitzvah service to provide the family with time to focus on the missing aspects of the preparation process. This is not meant to be punitive, but rather to uphold the value and meaning of the brit mitzvah process.
**A word about language:** You have probably heard bar, bat, and b’nai mitzvah before, but perhaps not brit mitzvah. Whereas bar/bat/b’nai mean son, daughter, and children respectively, *brit mitzvah* means *covenant of commandment*. That is, as we celebrate this lifecycle, your child is stepping farther into the covenant first celebrated as they received a Hebrew name. We use this term both to highlight this continuous sacred relationship and to offer a non-gendered name for this lifecycle.

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**Study and Preparation**

**School Attendance:** Children must attend the CBHCS for the two years prior to their brit mitzvah year. While a student is enrolled at CBHCS, consistent attendance is expected. Students continue at CBHCS through the completion of seventh grade, regardless of when their ceremony dates occur.

**Service Attendance:** In the two years leading up to the brit mitzvah, students and their families will receive a “bingo” card filled with different opportunities to participate in Jewish Life. (See Appendix for a copy.) Students must complete 3 lines of the bingo card. The top horizontal line must be completed by every student, which ensures that each child will attend at least 5 full Shabbat morning services. Then each participant can fill out any other 2 lines regardless if they are horizontal, diagonal, or vertical. Each line filled will enable your child to be entered into a drawing for prizes.

Regardless of the opportunities on the card that the student chooses, everyone must attend at least 5 Shabbat morning services at CBH. This is really quite critical to set the context of what
we are preparing for during these years of study. We advise attending Shabbat morning services particularly in the 6 months before the brit mitzvah.

**Brit Mitzvah Class:** For a few months sometime during the year preceding the brit mitzvah ceremony, students will attend a midweek class. In this class, they will concentrate on the meaning of the ceremony, the prayers of the Shabbat service, and becoming a Jewish adult.

**Trope Tutoring:** The child will require tutoring to learn trope, the musical notation which tells the reader how to chant the Torah portion. Many begin this process 9 months before the brit mitzvah date.

Please be in touch with Rabbi Gottfried or our office administrator admin@cbhatlanta.org so we can connect you with tutors familiar with our community and be in communication with your tutor. The cost of tutoring is the responsibility of the family.

Some of this preparation can be aided by trope tutoring software such as Pocket Torah http://www.pockettorah.com/ or Trope Trainer http://www.kinnor.com/, which are available for purchase online.

**D’var Torah:** Each brit mitzvah will prepare a d’var torah (literally, a word of Torah) which they will present at the service. The d’var torah can take many forms and should communicate key ideas in the parashah (Torah portion) for that Shabbat, as well as comment on the personal significance to the brit mitzvah. Rabbi Gottfried will work with each child individually on their d’var torah, beginning 6-8 weeks prior to their brit mitzvah, and students will be expected to submit a final draft at 1-2 weeks prior to the rehearsal. Note: The majority of the writing will take place at home, and usually requires parent support. If you think your child needs more time, please contact Rabbi G to arrange appointments as early as 12 weeks prior to the brit mitzvah.

**Tikkun Olam Project:** Each brit mitzvah student will engage in a tikkun olam (repairing the world) community service project related to the brit mitzvah’s developing sense of ethical/Jewish obligation. The project should occur over the course of the brit mitzvah year, and requires a 12–15 hour minimum time commitment.

_Families desiring an exception to the guidelines must submit a petition to the Education Director and Rabbi Gottfried. Steps for filing a petition may be found at the end of this document. Please contact the office for additional information._
The Role of Family and Community

While the student is certainly at the heart of the brit mitzvah preparation and celebration, at CBH we believe firmly that this process and celebration are most meaningful when they take place in the context of the student’s family and the CBH community every step of the way. Just as we are not a community with a “drop off” Sunday school, we are not a community where you can drop a child into the brit mitzvah process and meet them at the end. This is truly a lifecycle for the family - your child cannot do this without you!

Similarly, we believe that one of the most compelling aspects of Jewish identity is connection to Jewish community. Throughout the preparation process and beyond the simcha itself, we want our children and young adults to feel that they have a place at CBH -- to have relationships here, to understand the communal nature of Jewish life and ritual, and to have experience balancing personal interests with communal interests.

As an expression of our commitment to family and community involvement, the following guidelines were developed:

1. It is important that the family be members of CBH for a minimum of a full year prior to the brit mitzvah year so that they have an opportunity to form relationships and understand the customs and needs of our community -- and have an opportunity to feel at home with them -- prior to beginning the brit mitzvah course of study.

2. The family (not just the brit mitzvah student) should attend the required CBH Shabbat morning services. This will both help everyone to feel oriented in CBH traditions and liturgy, and help families to build upon their relationships in the community. It will also help ensure
that we have a minyan at smaller services; certain prayers and rituals require the presence of at least 10 Jewish adults.

Designing your service:

While some aspects of the service will reflect the personality and passions of brit mitzvah and their families, this must always be balanced with the needs of the community. The Shabbat morning service is our community’s Shabbat service, and we are honored to call upon our brit mitzvah to help lead our community’s Shabbat service as we honor their lifecycle. That said, there are many ways in which the morning can and should reflect and honor your family.

- The Rabbi’s assistant will send you a template for your service in the form of a GoogleDoc several months prior to your date. It is very important that you complete this template. The Rabbi will be using this as an outline for your special day. A 30 minute appointment will be scheduled with the Rabbi about 4-6 weeks out from your date to review the template and discuss the service.

- There will be several opportunities for the brit mitzvah family to offer honors to friends and family. Some ritual honors are reserved for Jewish people, while others are available to all: Any loved one can open the ark, stand on the bimah during an aliyah, present the tallit, or offer a reading. Reading the blessing during an aliyah, reading from the Torah, and lifting and dressing the Torah are honors reserved for Jews. Non-Jewish parents and relatives are invited and encouraged to participate in meaningful ways. CBH wishes to honor the entire family’s contribution to the growth and development of the child.

- For in-person services, the brit mitzvah family will choose two adult greeters for the beginning of the service. It is strongly recommended that these greeters be members of CBH. Greeters need to be familiar with the space where your brit mitzvah is taking place and able to answer questions. They need to be able to warmly welcome guests and hand out programs and siddurim. Non-member guests will come with questions, and for this reason we ask that your greeter be an adult. Greeters should stay in their position until 9:45, as guests may come late and need instruction.

- Though not required, it is customary at CBH to include readings or, particular settings of prayers, or songs that are meaningful to the brit mitzvah family and serve our community as a Shabbat offering. Prayers are the bulk of music in the service. When your child is not leading a prayer, there will be others to help lead the prayer (Rabbi, Gayanne Geurin the CBH Music Director, Will Robertson the CBH Chorus Director, a family member or friend, others from the Chorus or congregational life). The Rabbi will be the one who makes this decision. If a special piece of music is requested or suggested we will assess what music resources at CBH are available for live over zoom offering if
that is what is called for. There are also recordings from CBH albums [https://www.congregationbethaverim.org/downloads](https://www.congregationbethaverim.org/downloads) and a few CBH music videos. If you know for sure there is a family member that is wanting to offer a special song, please bring this to our attention and we will see if it can be included in the Shabbat morning service. Music preparation for your service should begin 2 months prior to the date.

- Each brit mitzvah family puts together a booklet/program with information regarding the service, the verses your child will be reading from the Torah, and our congregation’s practices, for distribution on the day of the event. A template will be emailed to you from the CBH Office Administrator. Please plan to have programs for ¾ of your expected headcount or on a pdf to send to your guests attending virtually.

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**Minhag HaMakom: CBH Traditions/Customs**

Here are some of the customs that make brit mitzvah at CBH different and special. These are not required, but are traditional at CBH.

- As a Reconstructionist shul, we use the **Reconstructionist Torah blessing** for an **aliyah**. (This version of the blessing takes out the idea of the Jews as the “chosen people.”) However, if you have friends or family doing an **aliyah** who are more comfortable with the traditional version of the blessing, they may use that version. We will have copies of both versions of the prayer up on the bima.

- **We shower our brit mitzvah with (soft, certified kosher) candy** after they read their d’var. CBH provides the candy for in person services.
As your child attends CBHCS and brit mitzvah class, we hope they will form a community with their peers at CBH. Please consider inviting all of your child’s CBH classmates to your simcha.

Financial Obligations

As you commit to the brit mitzvah process, be aware there are some fixed costs associated with each student’s preparation and each brit mitzvah service at CBH. For many of us, it is helpful to plan far ahead (and even set up a payment plan leading up to the big day).

If the family is unable to meet the financial obligations, a meeting should be scheduled with the CBH Office Administrator to discuss payment plan options. Contact admin@cbhatlanta.org

Preparation Costs

1. Education tuition for the child having their Brit Mitzvah and family membership dues must be up to date prior to the brit mitzvah date in order to have the ceremony.

2. Families are financially responsible for trope tutoring if needed. Families may hire an outside tutor. Please share your tutor's name and contact information with the Office Administrator. We will contact them as needed to confirm the Torah portion your child will be reading. Outside trope tutors typically charge $60–75 per hour; plan on 6-9 months of weekly lessons.

3. The mid-week brit mitzvah class fee is $250.

4. Families will need to purchase a Reconstructionist Siddur before the mid-week Brit Mitzvah class. They are available here: http://stores.jewishreconbooks.org/search.php?search_query=Reconstructionist+siddur&x=0&y=0
**Event Fees**

For your convenience, CBH processes the building rental, deposit, security and childcare fees on your family's behalf. These are all pass-through expenses. Three weeks before the service, all fees are due and your CBH account must be in good standing.

Total brit mitzvah fees are comprised of space rental (venue), security, custodial, childcare fees, and a small amount to help cover the cost of staff time at the event. Most venues require a down payment of 50% of the venue cost at the time of booking. (Please note that childcare is suggested but not required.)

For Zoom only, there will be no fees for venue, security, custodial, or childcare. Fees will include Torah rental, administrative fees and siddurim if needed.

For Zoom/in-person hybrid events, there will be a charge for venue, custodial and administrative support.

For all Zoom services, CBH will provide Zoom support.

CBH requires a $150 non-refundable location payment which will be applied towards your balance. This payment secures CBH for your date.

A $250 refundable damage deposit is required for all in person events.

In 2020, the total cost at our synagogue building is $1320 and the total cost at CCUCC is $3620. St. Bartholomew's Church is available for brit mitzvah rental at the cost of $2020. The $250 damage deposit is refundable, however a non-refundable location deposit is due at each location. Please contact the CBH administrator for specific payment information.

Please note that fees are subject to change based on vendor charges.

For in person events only (not to include hybrid) CBH families are responsible for hosting a catered, post-ceremony *oneg* (refreshment) or *kiddush* lunch for their guests and community members. This offering can range from a light snack to a full lunch, but must include challah and juice for *motzi*, must be vegetarian or kosher fish only, and kitchen help or servers that are not guests of your simcha must be hired. Once we have determined your venue for the service, the office staff would be happy to offer suggestions regarding the best food set-up for the space.

A rough estimate for numbers is the number of invited guests plus 30 community members.
These are some commonly used caterers:

Sweet Melissa’s, CBH members Glen & Liz Gurevitch: 404-370-1111
Alon’s Bakery: 678-397-1781

Post-Simcha Donations

The above mentioned fees do not generate operating funds for CBH; therefore it is customary to make a donation to CBH at the time of Brit Mitzvah. The suggested minimum for brit mitzvah donation is $360, which can be made out to CBH General Fund or to the Rabbi’s Discretionary Fund.

We ask that families who have requested special music make an additional gift of $180 to CBH in honor of the music program, in recognition of the additional planning and rehearsal time that special requests require.

Both brit mitzvah and their families are encouraged to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah, sharing their joy and good fortune with others by making a charitable contribution to an organization of their choosing.

Appendices

Who Has the Answers?

At critical points in this process, either the Administrator or the Rabbi’s Assistant will contact you directly about information concerning date selection and appointments with the Rabbi.

For all other inquiries, please reference the list.

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<tr>
<th>Office phone</th>
<th>404-315-6446</th>
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<tr>
<td>Office hours</td>
<td>Monday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailing address</td>
<td>P.O. Box 29548, Atlanta 30359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office location</td>
<td>2074 Lavista Rd, Atlanta, GA 30329</td>
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The **CBH Administrator**, admin@cbhatlanta.org, is your first line of communication concerning

- Any question where it is unclear who to ask
- Picking a date
- Questions about fees and payments
- Facility reservation
- Event policy questions
- Brit Mitzvah Guideline questions
- Registration for the Brit Mitzvah Class (occurs with school registration process)
- Finding a Trope or Hebrew tutor
- Creating a program for the service

The **Director of Education**, education@cbhatlanta.org, assists with

- Community school issues and attendance

The **Rabbi’s Assistant**, awalker@cbhatlanta.org, assists with questions or appointments concerning

- Brit Mitzvah Class Schedule
- Spiritual issues connected with the brit mitzvah
- Role of interfaith parents and family members
- Choosing and preparing a Gabbai Rishon (Torah Service Leader)
- Tikkun olam project
- Filling out the brit mitzvah template/outline
- Verses to be chanted in Torah reading at the brit mitzvah

**Rabbi Gottfried**, rabbig@cbhatlanta.org, is the primary staff person who guides students in preparing their d’var torah and can answer all questions about the writing process.

The **CBH Music Director**, ggeurin@cbhatlanta.org, can provide guidance with:

- Choral and instrumental music and musicians for the brit mitzvah ceremony

The **CBH Programs Coordinator**, programs@cbhatlanta.org, is your first line of communication concerning:

- Event questions
- Catering and logistics arrangements at the event
Resources and General Information

CBH Website

The Brit Mitzvah section of the CBH website – [www.congregationbethaverim.org](http://www.congregationbethaverim.org) – contains links to many important resources, including a copy of the most recent brit mitzvah guidelines, service templates, and checklists.

Brit Mitzvah Prayer MP3 Files

A link to an audio (mp3) set of Shabbat Morning Prayers from the Siddur will be emailed to you before your child begins the brit mitzvah class. Torah blessings are included here for those honorees who may need practice.

Trope Tutors

For options please contact the Office Administrator at admin@cbhatlanta.org

Specific Prayers and Blessings

The following list of Hebrew learning goals is recommended. (Note: For children and adults with special learning needs, modifications may be made)

1. Learn to chant Torah portion (3–7 aliyyot/sections)
2. Learn to chant the blessings before and after reading the Torah (CBH siddur 399)
3. Learn to lead the prayers taught in the brit mitzvah class. These typically include

- Birchat HaShachar (CBH siddur 153 – 161)
- P'sukei D'zimrah (selected verses, CBH siddur 177 – 241)
- Full Shabbat Kiddush (CBH siddur 119)
- Hatzi Kaddish (CBH siddur 245)
- Barechu (CBH siddur 247)
- Sh'ma and V'ahavta (CBH siddur 277)
- Amidah (selected sections CBH siddur 295 - 321)
- The beginning and the end of the Torah service
- Aleynu (CBH siddur 445)
- Adon Olam (CBH siddur 459)
Glossary of Hebrew Terms

- **Aliyah**: literally “going up.” The ascent to the bimah to say the blessings over the Torah.
- **Brit mitzvah**: “the covenant of commandment” - CBH’s term for this lifecycle event
- **Chumash**: the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy)
- **D’var Torah**: “a word of Torah”; an exposition of the Torah portion of the week, or sermonette.
- **Gabbai Rishon**: person who guides us through the Torah service and calls on family and friends to make a blessing over each reading.
- **Gabbai Sheni**: person who helps the Torah readers keep their place and ensures Hebrew is read correctly.
- **Haftarah**: literally “completion.” The weekly reading of a section from the Book of Prophets. At CBH, this is optional. It can also be done in English.
- **Kavannah**: sacred intention, directing the heart, the goal of Jewish prayer.
- **Midrash**: literally “searching out” A post-biblical, rabbinic interpretation of a biblical verse. (There is also a current trend to create contemporary Midrash today, using the arts to react to Torah.)
- **Mitzvah**: act of connection; commandment.
- **Parsha**: The Torah portion of the week. At CBH we chant one-third of the parsha each week, completing the full Torah readings in a three-year cycle.
- **Tanakh**: acronym for the three sections of the Hebrew Bible: Torah (the Five Books of Moses), Nevi’im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings)
- **Tefilah**: Prayer/worship.
- **Tikkun olam**: literally “repairing the world”; tikkun olam is social action work in the world that brings healing and justice. Its original kabbalistic meaning was more mystical/cosmological.
- **Torah**: literally “teaching”. Narrowly, the first part of the Hebrew Bible that is read from the scroll; broadly, all Jewish sacred literature and all Jewish learning.
- **Trope**: cantillation system for chanting Torah
• **Tzedekah**: justice; the mitzvah of sacred giving; similar in action to charity, but fundamentally different in principle

**CBHCS Petition Process Guidelines**

To petition to be involved in the CBH Brit Mitzvah process without fulfilling the requirement of attending **CBH Community School for at least two years**, please provide a 1-2 page essay, including the following:

1. Explain your extenuating circumstance and why it is keeping you/has kept you from the 2 year school enrollment requirement.
2. Explain how you are providing your child with a Jewish education through alternative means.
3. Explain how you are ensuring that your child/family maintains their connection to their CBH community (including attending CBH services, etc).
4. Submit your petition to the Education Director at education@cbhatlanta.org, with the subject line “Petitioning CBHCS.”

Your petition will then be reviewed by the Education Director, Rabbi, Executive Director, and the CBH Board. We will reach out to you once the Board has met and processed your petition. If there is any feedback from any of the parties involved in reviewing the petition, we will give that to you as well. (Feedback would mainly involve any stipulations regarding your child’s alternative Jewish education, that must be met in order for your petition to be accepted.)

If you have any questions or require any assistance with the petition process, please contact the Education Director at education@cbhatlanta.org.