

Becoming *B'nei Mitzvah* @ Temple Sinai

A Beginner's Guide

Introduction

Becoming *B'nei Mitzvah* is about a lot of things. It's about...

- a moment that happens in front of your community when you lead your friends and loved ones in prayer.
- a course of study to prepare you to lead the service, chant from the Torah, and present words of *Torah* with confidence.
- forming relationships with your clergy, your tutor and educators, and the entire Sinai staff.
- Creating Jewish memories with your family.
- deepening your connection to Temple Sinai.
- forming and enhancing friendships with peers.
- becoming a well-rounded young Jewish person who loves being Jewish and who will carry on Jewish traditions long past the age of 13.

At Temple Sinai, becoming *B'nei Mitzvah* means that you have questioned a lot, learned a lot, hopefully laughed a lot, and are ready to advance toward living a rich Jewish life.

Temple Sinai's *B'nei Mitzvah* program has two components, *Keva* and *Kavanah*. Everything related to your actual service, like the Hebrew prayers and chanting Torah, is the *Keva* (Hebrew word used when something is a bit more set in place or fixed) component. The *Kavanah* (intention) component is the process of relationship building and personal experiences that lead to that ceremony and inspires your continued involvement in Jewish life afterward.

The entire *B'nei Mitzvah* process focuses on these key relationships: the relationship between the student and their peers, the relationship between the student and their clergy, and the relationship between the student and Jewish living.

The relationship between the student and their peers

We know that a strength of being a part of the synagogue is the community that we build with our peers. That's why, in addition to youth and family programming that already exists at Temple Sinai, we have special *Shabbat* dinners that take place throughout the year just for those who are in our *B'nei Mitzvah* program. We are also working on other experiences for both peers and parents to build community with one another.

The relationship between the student and their clergy

The *B'nei Mitzvah* process provides a great opportunity to deepen relationships with the rabbis and the cantor. The process starts one year before the ceremony date with an introduction to the *B'nei Mitzvah* program and the values that will be highlighted throughout the year. As the process continues, you will meet with different rabbis to check in on your progress, study the meaning of your Torah portion and help craft your *Dvar Torah* (also known as your speech). Each member of our clergy team looks forward to spending some quality and, we hope, impactful time with you.

The relationship between the student and Jewish living

This *B'nei Mitzvah* year is an important time for you to better understand and appreciate your place within their Jewish community. As a Jewish young adult, you have the opportunity to take more ownership of your Jewish identity and to make choices that relate to Jewish observance.

TEAM YOU!

It takes a lot of effort to become *B'nei Mitzvah* at Sinai. During the year ahead (starting with today!), building off your years of learning where you were exposed to the Hebrew language and the prayers of our Jewish tradition, you will not only study the *Torah* and become more comfortable with the prayers, but you will also become well-versed in Judaism's ideas about life. We have assembled a team to support you through this process. We call this team **TEAM YOU**, because we are all here for YOU, to help YOU navigate the challenges and celebrate the (many) victories this year will bring. TEAM YOU is here to help YOU become the best YOU that you can be!

Your TEAM YOU is comprised of people who will help you through each stage of the *B'nei Mitzvah* process:

- Your PARENTS, who will help keep you on track, motivated, and inspired during this year ahead
- Your CLERGY, who will help you understand the Torah, help you prepare your speech, check-in throughout the process and be with you on the bima by your side at your service
- Your TUTOR, who will work with you on the Hebrew parts of the service
- Your SHARON, the person who will make sure you have what you need for appointments, schedule appointments, and coordinate between you, your tutor, and your clergy
- Your COACHES, our educators, clergy and staff, to help and guide as needed, through your Geshar projects (see more below)

Your TEAM YOU will help you navigate the *Keva* and *Kavanah* of becoming B'nei Mitzvah.

Overview of Keva

Keva, which is the Hebrew word used when something is a bit more set in place or fixed, is everything related to your actual *B'nei Mitzvah* service. Throughout this next year, you will focus on learning and enhancing the skills needed, not only to lead your *B'nei Mitzvah* service but also to be able to participate in a Jewish worship service for the rest of your life.

In order to help you develop your skills and confidence in this regard, all students work closely with a *B'nei Mitzvah* tutor. Our tutors will assist you with the selected list of prayers, the *Torah* portion and, when appropriate, the *Haftarah* portion. Your tutor will support you to ensure you feel comfortable and confident to lead your B'nei Mitzvah service.

Overview of Kavanah

We often think of the *B'nei Mitzvah* service as the most important part of the process. But really it is only the most visible. The most important part is the personal meaning piece, the *Kavanah* component. *Kavanah* is the process of relationship building and personal experiences that lead to that ceremony and inspires your continued involvement in Jewish life afterward.

Gesher Personal Interest Program

To help you with these important decisions on the bridge between childhood and Jewish adulthood, we have created the **Gesher** (bridge) Personal Interest Program. The *Gesher* (the Hebrew word for “bridge”) program presents students with various options of meaningful projects and/or experiences from which to choose according to their personal interests and passions. We want you to dream big and make choices as to which tracks you want to explore and that will be interesting and meaningful.

The Gesher personal interest program has three categories and students are asked to **choose at least one track from each.**

Category 1: Tzedek (Justice)

The *Tzedek* category will help students address something broken about our world to make it a better place:

1. *Gemilut Chasadim* (Acts of Loving Kindness) Track:

Students who complete this track are interested in engaging in something action-oriented, like holding a drive to collect sports equipment or pet supplies to donate to a specific organization or volunteering your time to help a specific organization of your choice.

- *If interested in this track, students should email Marisa Kaiser (mkaiser@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

2. *Tzedakah* (Philanthropy) Track:

Students who complete this track are interested in becoming teen philanthropists to raise money for a cause about which they care. They will receive coaching to be able to set goals and create a plan to put in place.

- *If interested in this track, students should email Rabbi Brad (blevenberg@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

3. Temple Sinai Social Action Track:

Students who complete this track will participate in the social action programs and volunteer opportunities at Temple Sinai such as Family Promise, Second Helpings, Refugee Relief, the High Holy Day food drive, Backpack Buddies and more.

- *If interested in this track, students should email Carrie Bohn (cbohn@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

Category 2: Dor l'Dor (Generation to Generation)

The *Dor l'Dor* category will help students create personal and meaningful family connections.

1. *Hiddur Mitzvah* (Enhancing the B'nei Mitzvah service) Track:

Students who complete this track will make their *B'nei Mitzvah* service even more meaningful by personalizing some of the ritual objects used in the ceremony. Examples could include making a *yad*, personalizing your *tallit*, baking challah and choosing other ritual objects to use in the service.

- *If interested in this track, students should email Marisa Kaiser (mkaiser@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

2. Family Stories Track:

Students who complete this track will tell the story of “me” and the story of “we” – their family – as they engage with parents and grandparents. We know that each family is unique, so this is a chance to figure out the best projects for you and your family. You might compile a cookbook of family recipes and record traditions observed at holidays, and you might also complete more creative ritual projects such as creating a scrapbook/project telling a family story modeled in the spirit of the *Haggadah* and you might even think about interviewing relatives to learn about their Jewish journeys and documenting those stories.

- *If interested in this track, students should email Rabbi Brad (blevenberg@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

3. *Shabbat* as a Family Track:

Students who complete this track will participate in Shabbat with their families. Students and their families will participate regularly in Friday night and/or Saturday morning *Shabbat* services at Sinai, hold regular Shabbat dinners with family members and friends, and engage in other Shabbat traditions such as regularly making *challah* or lighting Shabbat candles.

- *If interested in this track, students should email Rabbi Brad (blevenberg@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

Category 3: *Kehilah* (Community)

The *Kehilah* category will help students connect to the greater Jewish community.

1. Jewish Travel Track:

Students who complete this track will integrate Jewish learning into their family travel. Examples include visiting synagogues/Jewish sites when they go to another city, creating an Israel Pledge (a commitment to visit Israel and a plan to make it happen!), engaging around Israel, and making connections with Jewish people wherever you go.

- *If interested in this track, students should email Marisa Kaiser (mkaiser@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

2. Jewish Atlanta Track:

Students who complete this track will engage with Jewish opportunities throughout Atlanta, including: visiting MACoM (Atlanta's community *mikveh*) and immersing in a *mikveh*, watching an AJFF (Atlanta Jewish Film Festival) movie, attending a *Neranenah* (formerly Atlanta Jewish Music Festival) event, attending a MJCCA Book Festival program, going to the Kosher BBQ Cook off, or marching together with Jewish Atlanta in the Pride Parade or other social justice efforts.

- *If interested in this track, students **should email Rabbi Brad** (blevenberg@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

3. Temple Sinai Track:

Students who complete this track will attend youth group programs and Shabbat services, making each a priority this year. They will register with one of the clergy members for a Torah Tour to know the stories behind our Torah scrolls, and they will complete a scavenger hunt of the Sinai campus to better understand certain items in the building.

- *If interested in this track, students **should email Jennifer Quick** (jquick@templesinaiatlanta.org) prior to getting started.*

Planning Your Gesher Personal Interest Projects

Once you decide which track from each category you want to choose, you should begin planning using your *Gesher* Planning Chart. There will be *Gesher* check-ins with your tutors and clergy members and coaches from your tracks and Sharon will also periodically inquire about the progress you are making during the year.

Following the completion of the *Gesher* program, you will present a short essay to one of the rabbis that addresses what fills you with pride about your Jewish identity, how you demonstrate that pride, and what you learned throughout the *Gesher* process. This essay will be integrated into your speech as well.

One additional note about *Gesher*: While it is possible to complete these tracks all by yourself, we think this is a great opportunity to partner together as a family and make some – or even most - of these projects into family-centered activities. In this way, your *B'nei Mitzvah* experience will be even more of a family-based activity!

Conclusion

The collective hope of our Temple Sinai staff and lay leaders is that our families enjoy this *B'nei Mitzvah* experience and that our young people find it meaningful and moving and look back upon the process of becoming *B'nei Mitzvah* with pride as they move into the next phase and involvement along their Jewish journey.