B’nei Mitzvah Handbook

A comprehensive guide to an easy and meaningful B’nei Mitzvah experience

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Introduction

Congratulations! You and your family are about to begin a journey towards a very important Jewish rite of passage. The words Bar or Bat Mitzvah literally mean “son or daughter of commandment.” Much of today’s Jewish world defines the event as the moment when a Jewish community welcomes a boy or a girl into their congreagtion as a Jewish adult.

What does it mean to be a “Jewish adult?” Traditionally, when a boy reached the age of Bar Mitzvah, 13, his father would recite a bracha commemorating the time of freedom from certain parental obligations. The boy would then be responsible for his actions and would be allowed (and expected) to fully participate in Jewish ritual life. Today, we acknowledge and emphasize the importance of parental participation in a child’s upbringing education, but we recognize that a Bar or Bat Mitzvah does not really become a completely independent adult according to the benchmarks set by our secular world. At TBZ, we understand the moment of transformation to occur when the Bar/Bat Mitzvah proves that he/she is no longer merely a student of Judaism, but also a teacher. By leading the congregation in song, by chanting and interpreting texts, and by engaging in tikkun olam, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah becomes a teacher, a leader, and an “adult” member of the TBZ community and the Jewish community.

It goes without saying that this transformation does not happen overnight. The B’nei Mitzvah experience is a process, which takes hard work and dedication. This handbook is meant to help relieve any anxieties you may have about reaching your special day. If you work well and are organized, your debut as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be a great success!

Included in this booklet is some comprehensive information about preparing for your family’s upcoming simcha at TBZ.

Please return the enclosed B’nei Mitzvah agreement (pages 28 & 29), signed, as soon as possible to our Executive Director, Carol Nathan.

B’Hatzlacha! We look forward to sharing this simcha with you and offering our support in any way we can over the next years.

Be’sha-ah tovah um’tzulachat, in a mazaldike sho – with wishes for a fulfilling simcha,

Reb Moshe Waldoks and Rav Claudia Kreiman
B’nei Mitzvah Opportunities

Many families choose to celebrate their simcha on Shabbat morning at TBZ. However, we are eager to fashion the right kind of service to fit your needs. We are fairly flexible, and with enough notice we have been able to accommodate most families.

B’nei Mitzvah celebrations are traditionally held when the Torah is read at one of the following services:

- **Shabbat Mornings**
- **Shabbat Afternoons.** This is a mincha-ma’ariv service and includes havdalah. The first aliyah of the next week’s parsha is read, and there is no haftarah.
- **Monday and Thursday mornings.** Monday Torah readings permit B’nei Mitzvah scheduling on secular holidays that fall on Mondays, such as Labor Day or Memorial Day.
- **Rosh Hodesh,** which is the beginning of a new lunar month. This is usually a weekday service and has a special Torah reading. Occasionally, Rosh Hodesh falls on a Sunday.
- Throughout **Hannukah,** which includes weekday services and special Torah readings.
- Special considerations can be discussed for **Pesach,** **Shavuot,** and **Sukkot simchas.**

Requirements

To complete the B’nei Mitzvah program at TBZ, all students must:

- Attend Beit Rabban classes (weekly), unless enrolled in a Jewish Day School, or other arrangement
- Attend T’fillot Mishpachot (bi-monthly)
- Attend B’nei Mitzvah parent-student sessions with Rabbis (monthly)
  - N.B.: In the programs above, participation is expected to continue until the school year ends, even if the Bar/Bat Mitzvah has occurred earlier in the year. Please inquire also about our post Bar/Bat Mitzvah program.
- Complete B’mitzvotav - 13 Mitzvot Project
- Lead shema and v’ahavta
- Chant brachot before and after maftir reading
- Chant maftir

* We can make accommodations for students with special needs. Please speak with the rabbis.
☐ Write and deliver a *D’var Torah.* Students will meet individually with Reb Moshe and Rav Claudia to discuss their writing process. If the Bar/Bat Mitzvah would like to offer an appropriate project in lieu of a *D’var Torah,* such as a photography exhibit, a music or dance performance, or a family tree for the congregation, this can be discussed.

☐ Chant *brachot* before and after the *haftarah*
☐ Chant *haftarah* (10 verse minimum)
☐ Attend 3 rehearsals with Rabbis
☐ Start/continue a family Shabbat practice. We will help you partner up with other families, if you wish, or help you do it yourselves.

*Some students may finish these requirements early, or may wish to increase their participation during the service. We encourage these students to:*

☐ Chant additional *aliyot* (there are a total of 8, including the *maftir*)
☐ Lead *ashrei* (*highly recommended for all students*)
☐ Lead other parts of the Shabbat Morning Service
  - Selected Psalms from *pesukei de zimra,* which may include:
    - *baruch sheamar*
    - *esa enai*
    - *psalm 150*
  - *bar’chu*
  - *amidah*

*Helpful Hint: Create a folder for all of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah materials. Put a few pieces of blank paper in that folder. Every time you have a question or an idea about your parsha, write it on the paper. Use those questions and ideas while writing your *D’var Torah.*
Our Hopes...

The years leading up to the celebration of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah offer a time to examine or re-examine your connection to Judaism, the Jewish people, and Jewish spiritual life. Many families treat this experience as a time for a major life-style change, an opportunity for introspection, or an examination of their core Jewish identity. At TBZ we want to emphasize this on-going process of introspection, reflection, and potential for change. We do not want this event to be the last Jewish “thing” your family ever does. We do not want a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to forever remain 13 years old when it comes to Jewish identity and tradition.

Bibliography

All families should purchase:

- **Tough Questions Jews Ask: A Young Adult’s Guide to Building a Jewish Life** by Rabbi Edward Feinstein. This book will be used in our monthly meeting on Shabbat.

The following books may be useful:

- **Bar Mitzvah: A Guide to Spiritual Growth** by Marc-Alain Ouaknin. This book applies to the Bat Mitzvah as well.

- **Make Your Own Bar/Bat Mitzvah: A Personal Approach to Creating a Meaningful Rite of Passage** by Rabbi Goldie Milgram.

- **Jewish Family and Life: Traditions, Holidays, and Values for Today’s Parents and Children** by Yosef I. Abramowitz, Susan Silverman.

- **Danny Siegel Bar and Bat Mitzvah Mitzvah Book: A Practical Guide for Changing the World Through Your Simcha** by Danny Siegel.

- **Putting God On The Guest List: How To Reclaim The Spiritual Meaning Of Your Child’s Bar Or Bat Mitzvah** by Jeffrey K. Salkin.

- **For Kids - Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Claim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah** by Jeffrey K. Salkin.

- **It’s a Mitzvah!: Step-By-Step to Jewish Living** by Bradley Shavit Artson.
Other books we encourage you to read... (Great summer reads!) Please choose at least one from each section:

SECTION 1

- American Judaism: A History by Jonathan D. Sarna
- Let Freedom Ring: A History of the Jews in the United States by Seymour Rossel (Author), Ruby G. Sraus (Editor)
- The Book of Jewish Practice / The Book of Jewish Belief by Rabbi Louis Jacobs
- History of the Jewish People Vol. 1: Ancient Israel to 1880’s America by Jonathan D. Sarna, Jonathan B. Krasner, Editor: Gila Gevirtz
- The History of the Jewish People Vol. 2: A Story of Tradition and Change by Jonathan B. Krasner, Jonathan D. Sarna
- Moe Berg: The Spy behind Home Plate (JPS Young Biography) by Vivian Grey
- Great Jewish Thinkers: Their Lives and Works by Naomi Pasachoff
- The Story of the Jews: a 4000-Year Adventure by Stan Mack – Comic book form
- The Jewish 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Jews of All Time by Michael Shapiro
- Holocaust: A Q&A Guide to Help Young Adults Really Understand the Holocaust by M. Guyle Crispin
- His Name Was Raoul Wallenberg by Louise W. Borden
- Smoke and Ashes: The Story of the Holocaust by Barbara Rogasky
- Hidden on the Mountain: Stories of Children Sheltered from the Nazis in Le Chambon by Karen Gray Ruelle, Deborah Durland Desaix
- Jerusalem: The Biography by Simon Sebag Montefiore
- Loading... Wanderings by Chaim Potok
- A Promise Fulfilled: Theodor Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, and the Creation of the State of Israel by Howard Greenfeld

SECTION 2

- Next Year in Jerusalem: 3000 Years of Jewish Stories by Howard Schwartz
- The Chosen / My Name is Asher Lev by Chaim Potok
- The Dovekeepers by Alice Hoffman
- By Fire, By Water by Mitchell James Kaplan
- The King of Mulberry Street by Donna Jo Napol
- Life, After by Sarah Darer Littman
- My Guardian Angel by Sylvie Weil; Gillian Rosner, trans.
- The Things a Brother Knows by Dana Reinhardt
- Plots and Players by Pamela Melnikoff
Suggested Timeline with Benchmarks for Preparation

The following timeline is suggested, but students may, of course, set their own goals individually, with their tutor and their family.

1 ½ - 2 Years prior . . .
- Schedule a date with TBZ
- Assess Hebrew reading level
  - Student should know all consonants and vowels and should be able to read aloud comfortably

7-12 Months prior . . .
- Connect with your tutor (TBZ will match students with tutors\(^1\))
- Read entire *parsha* in English
- Read *maftir* in Hebrew
- Learn to chant *brachot* before and after reading Torah
- Learn to chant *v’ahavta*
- Begin B’mitzvotav Project

6 Months . . .
- Learn to chant the *ashrei*
- Learn to lead the Torah Service
- Begin learning the Torah cantillation system
- Learn to chant *maftir*, with vowels and trope markings

4 - 5 Months . . .
- Chant *maftir* fluently with vowels and trope markings
- Begin to learn additional *aliyot*, if desired
- Learn to chant *brachot* before and after *haftarah*
- Begin to learn *haftarah*
- Make or order invitations
- Will you order *kippot* for your guests? Look into getting them now
- Find or make your *tallit*
- Coordinate *kiddush* plans with TBZ office

3-2 Months . . .
- Practice chanting *maftir* from the “unpunctuated side” of the *tikkun*
- Learn additional *aliyot*, if desired
- Continue to learn *haftarah*
- Begin to write *D’var Torah* – first draft
- Meet with Rav Claudia or Reb Moshe about *D’var Torah*

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\(^1\) If your family prefers to work with someone outside of the TBZ community, you must have this person get in touch with the rabbis **BEFORE** tutoring sessions begin.
Schedule rehearsals with Rabbis
Send out invitations

1 Month...
- Write D’var Torah
- Continue B’mitzvotav Project
- Finalize party plans
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

3...2...1 Week
- Meet with rabbis for rehearsals
- If you are a parent, you may want to write down remarks to give to your child at the service (together it should be no more than one page double/triple space 14 ft. – 3 to 4 minutes). You may also want to give the Priestly blessing for your child
- Give out honors to family members and friends (A chart for the honors is found on page 24 of this handbook)
  - Aliyot 4-5-6-7: normally 7th for parents and 6th for grandparents
  - Maftir: Bar-Bat Mitzvah child
  - Opening the ark
  - Carrying the Torah
  - Lifting the Torah
  - Dressing the Torah
  - Closing the ark
  - Readings for Non-Jewish family members
  - Candies
  - Ushers
- Finalize party plans
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

*Helpful Hint: Wear the shoes you plan to use during the ceremony to one or all of your rehearsals
B’MITZVOTAV: THROUGH GOD’S COMMANDMENTS:
A thirteen---step Mitzvah program for TBZ B’nei Mitzvah children

B’MITZVOTAV is modeled upon a Mitzvah project by the same name as designed by Temple Ner David in Bloomfield, New Jersey and inspired by the B’Mitzvotav project that TBZ tutor Jessica Slavin crafted for TBZ B’nei Mitzvah students, Wen-Wen Fisher, Dylan Frank & Rafi Michaels.

Family Guide

“Shimon the Righteous was among the survivors of the Great Assembly. He used to say: The world depends on three things—on Torah, on the service of God (Avodah), and on deeds of loving-kindness (G’milut Chasadim)” Pirke Avot 1:2

Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah requires a great deal of hard work. It is true that a Jew becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at the appropriate age with or without the ceremony. As a community, the TBZ congregation shares in the joyful celebration of your child’s coming of age. At TBZ, we also want to make sure that the process that leads to the joyful celebration is a meaningful one. It is a process that will help you to connect to our Jewish path in the world; to ask questions about your Jewish identity, and to embrace our tradition with love. Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah marks the beginning of a person’s Jewish accountability. But becoming responsible doesn’t happen overnight; reading from the Torah or giving a D’var Torah are not the only paths towards this transformation. It is the process that is transformative. Through this process we try to see how our being Jewish impacts on our everyday life.

Learning the Torah portion, the blessings, the haftarah, and the prayers necessary to lead the Shabbat morning service takes time and commitment, and that part of the process is very important. But that is not all there is to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. To be a Bar/Bat Mitzvah means embracing mitzvot. Mitzvot are not just commandments or obligations, rather they are the ways in which we connect to our Jewish tradition; how we connect to all those who came before us, to all those who will come after us and to the whole Jewish community in the world today.

B’mitzvotav—through God’s commandments—is a learning-by-doing Bar/Bat Mitzvah program, which all B’nei Mitzvah students are expected to complete on their journey towards becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at TBZ. This action-oriented project will enable you to begin your own program for Jewish doing through the performance of various mitzvot or actions in the world. Performance of mitzvot helps us to become partners with God in making the world a better place. We are able to move beyond
self and connect with others. When we perform a *mitzvah*, whether by studying the Torah, worshipping God, or performing acts of loving-kindness we not only help to improve the world—we elevate ourselves as well.

All students will complete thirteen *mitzvot* and record them in their B’Mitvotov Journal. Families will be guided through this process during our monthly Saturday afternoon meetings. Students at the Beit Rabban programs will have a continued guidance by their teacher. Other students will arrange their own completion of this program in meetings with their rabbis and private tutors. Reb Moshe, Rav Claudia, your Beit Rabban teacher and/or your private tutor will assist you along the way, meet with you, discuss the *mitzvot* with students and parents and help you to find the answers to the many questions which will arise along the way.

Mitzvot may be divided in three categories: **Torah** (study), **Avodah** (worship), and **G’milut Hasadim** (acts of loving-kindness)

**WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?**

We challenge you to complete 13 *mitzvot* in three different categories (four in each category):

- **Talmud Torah**: Commitment to Jewish Learning: 4 *mitzvot*
- **Avodah**: Jewish Living: 4 *mitzvot*
- **G’milut Chasadim**: Acts of Love and Kindness: 4 *mitzvot*

The 13th Mitzvah is: Aliyah la-Torah: being called to the Torah for the first time, on the Shabbat of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Below, you will find a list of *mitzvot* to choose from (4 *mitzvot* are expected for all B’nei Mitzvah students), you may choose from the other nine suggestions. This list is, of course, only a small fraction of the mitzvah connections we perform as Jews. If there is a mitzvah that you would like to perform and is not listed in this list, please let us know!

**TALMUD TORAH/COMMITMENT TO JEWISH LEARNING**

**FOR ALL BAR/BAT MITZVAH STUDENTS:**

- **D’VAR TORAH.** Study your Torah portion with your family, tutor and rabbis. Write a *D’var Torah* that exhibits your understanding of the portion and its meaning in your life. You will read it at your Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Four months prior to you Bar/Bat Mitzvah you and your parents will join Reb Moshe and Rav Claudia on a meeting to discuss
the process of writing your D’var Torah. But you don’t need to wait for that meeting to begin reading and learning about your Torah portion!

OPTIONS / CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:

☐  Read one Jewish Book and write a review for your Journal. (Please check with the Rabbis or the Beit Rabban teacher, if the book qualifies for the mitzvah)

☐  Visit a Jewish museum, gallery or special Jewish cultural event (play, recital, movie). Write about your experience in your Journal.

☐  Interview your grandparent(s) (or other elders in your family if your grandparents are no longer with us or not capable of participating in this project). Learn about their Jewish roots and their stories. Where did they come from? What kind of Jewish life have they lived? Write about the interview in your Journal.

☐  Identify something about Jewish belief or practice you do not understand. Research the answer using books, the Internet, the rabbis, teachers and other resources. Present the question, the answer, and your own experience of research in your Journal.

☐  Write your own midrash (a creative story) about something in your Torah or haftarah portion. Try writing your portion from one character’s perspective, creating an alternative version, or answering some unanswered question. You can illustrate this story (if you want to) and make it part of your Journal.

☐  Go to at least two Torah Study sessions at TBZ (Saturday morning 9-10AM). Write in your Journal about your experience and one new thing you learned.

☐  Art or Music project: You may create a ritual object such as a mezuzah, Kiddush cup or knit/crochet a kippah. You can paint, draw, or sculpt a scene from your portion or reflective of your portion. You may also choose to study and learn to perform some Israeli, Sephardic, or Yiddish songs.

☐  Watch a Movie about a Jewish theme at home or at The Boston Jewish Film Festival (http://www.bjff.org/) and write a review for your Journal. (Please check with the Rabbis or the Beit Rabban teacher to see if the movie qualifies for the Mitzvah).

   Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.
AVODAH/JEWISH PRACTICE

FOR ALL BAR/BAT MITZVAH STUDENTS:

✅ **SHAMOR V’ZACHOR SHABBAT.** Fulfill all Shabbat attendance expectations prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This involves coming to Shabbat services twice-monthly during the year of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. If you are not able to come on a Shabbat that there is Mishpachot Services or/and B’nei Mitzvah group, come on a different Shabbat or to a Friday night Service.

**OPTIONS: CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:**

- **Attend a Jewish lifecycle event** (wedding, funeral, baby-naming, brit milah, shivah minyan, etc.) other than a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and write down your impressions in your Journal.

- **Celebrating Shabbat at Home:** Light Shabbat candles and/or sing the FULL Shabbat evening Kiddush, and say ha-motzi on the challah every Friday evening for at least a month. Describe the experience in your Journal.

- **Attend one festival** (Sukkot/Pesach/Shavuot) morning service if possible. What was the meaning of the festival as it was conveyed through the service? What value is there to setting aside Jewish sacred days in a non-Jewish world? Comment in your Journal.

- **Blessing for food:** Lead your family in ha-motzi before your main meal and every day for at least two weeks, and lead in the birkat hamazon (Grace After Meals) for four Shabbat dinners. Discuss the experience with your family. Write about how you and your family felt about this ritual in your Journal.

- **Kashrut:** Keep one (1) aspect of kashrut (refraining from eating pork products, or shellfish products, or not mixing milk and meat) that you do not normally observe for one month. What did it feel like? What was it like to give up something you enjoyed? Are there positive aspects to keeping kashrut? Share your thought in your Journal.

- **Tie your own tzitzit on a tallit** (perhaps the one you will wear at your Bar/Bat Mitzvah). Is there any meaning to the way the tzitzit are knotted? Comment in your Journal as to what purpose you think this ritual serves.
Likboah Mezuzah: If there is not one there already, affix a mezuzah to your bedroom door. What is the text of the handwritten parchment we put into the mezuzah case? How do you feel when you see it there? Think about what’s inside. Write about this in your Journal.

Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.

GEMILUT CHASADIM/ACTS OF LOVING-KINDNESS

FOR ALL BAR/BAT MITZVAH STUDENTS:

☐ TIKKUN OLAM (REPAIRING THE WORLD) PROJECT.
Participate in a substantial, individual mitzvah project, which you will choose with the help of your teacher, tutor and/or rabbi. Write about why you chose this project, what you did, and how you felt about it in your Journal. This is the heart of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience. We recognize the unique qualities of each of you and encourage you to use your talent and creativity in choosing and performing this mitzvah. We ask you to not only fundraise to support the charity you chose, but to make it a hands on experience.

ADDITIONALLY, PLEASE CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:

☐ Love your neighbor as Yourself: Help a classmate who is ill. Bring homework, library books and message between home and school. Help them keep up with notes in class by relaying information to them. Write about this experience in your Journal.

☐ Clothing those in need: Go through your house with your family and collect clothing and household for donation. Reflect on this experience in your Journal.

☐ Honoring the Elderly: Visit a Jewish nursing home. Speak with residents about their lives. You can join TBZ in our visit to the elderly at 1550 Beacon Street, bringing Holidays gifts (for Rosh Hashanah, Hanukah and Purim and Pesach). Write down their stories and your impressions in your Journal.

☐ Be kind to Animals: Volunteer time at the local Animal Shelter or another organization that cares for animals. Write about what you did and how you felt doing it in your Journal.
Comforting the Mourners. Attend a *shivah minyan* at a house of mourning. Write down your impressions about your experience in your *Journal*.

Taking Care of the Environment: In honor of *Tu B’Shevat*, plant a tree or some flowers in your yard and buy at least one tree from the JNF for Israel. Write about this experience in your *Journal*.

Participate in Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project offers an invitation to children preparing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah to connect with the memory of children lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah. For more information go to [http://www.remember-us.org](http://www.remember-us.org) or ask the rabbis.

Support the Bar/Bat Mitzvah of a Special Needs child in Israel. For more information go to [http://www.masorti.org/masorti-programs/masorti-youth/bbmitzvah-special.html](http://www.masorti.org/masorti-programs/masorti-youth/bbmitzvah-special.html) ask the rabbis.

Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.

**THE B’MITZVOTAV JOURNAL**

Performing the *mitzvot* in the program is important, but *doing* alone is not enough. It is equally important that you reflect on what you did, how you did it, how it felt, and how it may or may not have changed your ideas about being Jewish. **That’s why the *Journal* is important.** In your *Journal*, you have a safe place to question, gain perspective, record your insights, and be creative. **Please, purchase a *journal* for this purpose.**

We want you to write about your experiences and learn from them. There are no “right” or “wrong “answers. Be honest about what happened and how you felt.

This *journal* will become a very important gift that you will give to yourself for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

You are also welcomed and encouraged to use some of your entries for the *D’var Torah* that you will share with the TBZ community on your Bar/Bat Mitzvah day.
Here are a few guidelines to help you on your way. You can type out your reports and entries on the computer. You can write them by hand. Here are things to consider when asked to reflect on an experience:

- What did I think it was going to be like?
- What was it actually like to do a mitzvah?
- Did I feel comfortable performing the mitzvah?
- Who helped me do the mitzvah?
- How did my family react?
- What surprised me about the experience?
- Write a quick list of thoughts.
- Would I try this again?

These are just beginnings. Feel free to write from your own thoughts and to share your ideas honestly. Entries should be at least one page for each mitzvah.

Remember to make your mitzvah projects memorable and special. Make sure that your heart is into the project, and that it will be meaningful to both you and to those you help.

B’hatzlacha!

Helpful Hint: Don’t worry about making mistakes. EVERYONE makes mistakes. Even the most experienced Torah readers and rabbis and cantors make mistakes. You will probably make one mistake during your ceremony; don’t let it bother you!


**FAQ’S**

**Before my Bar/Bat Mitzvah, do I really have to attend services on Shabbat? What if I have a weekly conflict on Saturday mornings?**

YES. We know that it is difficult to get out of bed on a Saturday morning, or to have to miss out on a soccer game or other event with your friends. But, trust us, you will feel MUCH more comfortable on the day of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah if you have heard and sung the prayers on a regular basis, if you recognize the faces of those around you, and if you have attended other B’nei Mitzvah ceremonies at TBZ. Our T’fillot Mishpachot services also provide great opportunities for batting practice. During the weeks leading up to your ceremony, you will get the change to practice your portion in front of your friends.

**I go to a Jewish Day School. Do I have to go to Mishpachot Services?**

There are several reasons why it is a good idea for you to attend these bi-monthly services. First of all, you will meet and get to know your TBZ peers, who are a FABULOUS group. Secondly, you can use these mornings to familiarize yourself with the TBZ melodies, some of which are different from the ones you might have learned in school. Finally, we don’t just use these times to read, or sing through the Shabbat prayers and Torah portions. We’ve developed the content of the mornings to be of interest to all students. And, we have really interesting discussions. Leprosy, blood and guts, divination…the options are endless!

**I can’t sing. Can I just read my portion?**

Nope. The *mitzvah* of hearing Torah is not complete unless the reader chants. In the Talmud (B. Meg. 32a), Rabbi Yohanan stated, “Anyone who reads the Scripture without a melody... of him the Scripture says [Ezek. 20:25], “Moreover I gave them laws that were not good, etc.” Did you know that everyone is born with the ability to sing? Some people have an easier time than others, but 90% of the battle is getting over your fear of singing in public. It may be hard for you, but no one will be judging you on your singing voice. No one needs to be—or should be—a rock-star in order to chant Torah.

**What if I don’t finish everything on time?**

Breathe. No one is “grading” you on your performance or withholding your certificate from you if you don’t finish everything you set out to do. However, we want you to work hard and do your best. If you practice every day and follow the suggested timeline in this guidebook, you should be able to complete a great amount of work.
**Did you just say that I have to practice every day?**

Well... you can be reasonable about the hours you spend on your practicing. Realistically, you are going to be very busy in the months leading up to your Bar/Bat Mitzvah. You probably won’t have time to practice every day. **But, you DO need to practice.** Only you can really know how much work you need to put in to make yourself feel secure and accomplished. See the next section for tips on how to work smarter, not harder.

**I’m still confused. What is my “Parsha” And, what is “Maftir”?**

Good questions! The Torah, as you hopefully know, is already divided into 5 Books (Genesis—Bereishit—Exodus—Shemot—Leviticus—Vayikra—Numbers—Bamidbar—Deuteronomy—D’varim).

In each book, smaller divisions are found, called parshiot—singular: parsha. The word parsha (פרשה) means “portion.” There are 54 parshiot, one for each week of the year.

Every parsha is divided into 8 smaller sections, called aliyot. The 8th aliyah is called the maftir. Maftir comes from the Hebrew root פתר which means “to conclude.” (Often, the text of the maftir is the seventh aliyah).

The word haftarah comes from this root. Haftarah is the concluding text from the books of the prophets, which rounds out each week’s parsha.

There is just one more thing you need to know. Remember how there are 54 parshiot, one for each week of the year? Well, each of these parshiot are quite lengthy. So lengthy, that many congregations choose to only read 1/3 of the text each week (Triennial reading). Therefore, it actually takes 3 years to get through the entire Torah. This is good news for you. It means that your workload is actually cut drastically, and that you and your family and friends can get to lunch earlier! To find your parsha, go to www.hebcal.com and look for the date of your Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

**What do you mean when you tell me to practice my Torah portion from the “unpunctuated side” of a tikkun?**

The Torah only contains the consonants of the text. The reader is expected to memorize the vowels and the melody. An example in English is:

   MRY HD LTTL LMB WHS FLC WS WHT S SNW

A tikkun is a book that contains both the punctuated and unpunctuated versions of the text, side by side, to make it easier for you to learn. For example:

   MRY HD LTTL LMB versus MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB
I’ve noticed that there are people who stand around the Torah readers and correct them. Who are they? Will they be there when I have my Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

These people are called the *Gabba’im*, which literally means, “They’ve got your back”! One of them—at TBZ she is affectionately called “the page lady”—calls out page numbers to the congregation and shows you your place in the Torah. The other one is usually your tutor, and they will help you if you get stuck, or gently correct you if you make a mistake.

**Non-Jewish Family Members** may accompany a Jewish family member when they come up for an *aliyah*, without actively participating (saying the *bracha* and wearing a *tallit*), although they still need to have their head covered. Another way to participate is to do readings in English from a piece of liturgy they feel comfortable with or another poem.

**Tallitot and Kippot for all Jewish Members:** All men and women who are coming up for an honor, are encouraged to wear a *kippah* and a *tallit*. We acknowledge that many women do not have this practice and we hope that they will try at least one of these practices, hopefully both.

**What if one of my parents is not Jewish? Can they participate in my Bar/Bat Mitzvah?** YES! We will find many ways for your non-Jewish parent to participate in your ceremony and in your celebration, including saying a special blessing, if they wish to do so. Please speak to the rabbis, who will help you determine what exactly that will look like.

**Becky’s Tips for How to Practice Your Parsha**

Secret Confession: I HATE practicing. Growing up, I used every excuse I could imagine to get out of practicing the piano or the clarinet. Sometimes (okay often), I still find reasons to avoid working, even when I know that there is a deadline looming in the distance. I am all for embracing the need to relax at the end of a long day, but I also know that practicing is the only way to avoid massive headaches when it comes down to the wire. So, I offer you a few ideas about how to work smarter, not harder. If they don’t work for you, try and come up with your own techniques.

**Set aside one or two sessions for getting comfortable with the Hebrew text.** If you can read fluently, you will be able to chant fluently. If you actually understand the words that you are reading, then you will be able to chant from the unpunctuated side of the Torah with greater ease. You don’t need to be able to translate word for word, just look for a few key words that you recognize and use a translation to help you remember the gist of your passage.
If you make a mistake, go back and repeat it correctly, 5 times. This is the rule of 5. It always works. Sometimes, if I’m feeling particularly ambitious, each time I make a mistake, I go back to the very beginning and repeat the whole passage again.

Just practice the hard bits. When most people sit down to practice, they usually start from the beginning of their parsha. DON’T DO IT! The beginning is likely the section that you’ll know the best. Instead, start from a spot that scares you. Are you having trouble with the words? Is there a tricky trope combination? Focus on these bits, and then review the rest. You’ll save time and energy this way. Trust me, it works.

Still getting stuck in the same place? Try to move in a specific way each time you get a hard part right. So, you’re chanting along from the unpunctuated side, and everything is going great, until you get to a certain spot. What was that word? What was that melody? Look back at the right-hand column, the one with vowels, and each time you the part correctly, clench your fist, tap your foot, or make some other movement. They physical motion will help you to remember the next time you encounter that same sentence, without vowels.

Even when you master chanting your portion without vowels, occasionally practice with the vowels. This way, you’ll catch yourself if you have been making a mistake, and you’ll really get the correct words and melodies ingrained in your brain.

If you have a recording, DO listen to it every night. Osmosis, osmosis, osmosis...plus, this activity eats up zero extra day-time hours.

Ask your tutor if you and she/he can make a recording during your lesson. Rather than practicing from a recording your tutor gives you, record yourself each time you are able to learn something. That way, the recording will reinforce work you have already done.

Chant with your recording. Instead of just listening, try singing along with your tape.

Practice your D’var Torah in front of a mirror. Can you see yourself? No? You’re not making enough eye contact!

Practice your D’var Torah for your parents and your tutor. You’ll get a chance to practice in front of the rabbis at the rehearsal, but it’s always helpful to get feedback earlier.

Breathe.
The D’var Torah

Your D’var Torah should be 7-10 minutes, with the following structure:

1. Welcome
2. Summary: What is my parsha about?
3. Go into depth about one thing in the parsha that interests me. Research this thing. Read the commentators, and formulate your own ideas.
4. What does this parsha mean to ME and to my experience of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah? Speak about (and if possible) connect to your mitzvah project(s).
5. Thank you…!

Although there are many different techniques for writing a D’var Torah, you should take into account the following suggestions.

DON’T WAIT UNTIL THE WEEK BEFORE YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH!
You may not actually write your D’var Torah until the last minute, but give yourself time to think about your parsha to let your mind visit and revisit the text.

Read, Read, and Read. Read your text. Read it again. Make sure you understand every word. If there is a word you don’t know, you can look it up in a dictionary or ask someone.

Think. Is there something about the text that interests you? Disturbs or frustrates you? Confuses you? Write down your ideas and discuss them with someone else – a parent, your tutor, Beit Rabban teacher, or your rabbi.

Helpful Hint: Don’t forget to practice the ha-motzi. Seriously, after all of that hard work, it’s the one easy bracha that we all should know, but that we all forget about until it comes time to recite it.
**Find other interpretations.** You can obtain commentaries from your rabbi, your teacher, or your library. There is no need to reinvent the wheel; people have studied these texts for centuries. Avail yourself of their wisdom. It will give you food for thought and different approaches to the text. Consider these sources:

- *Plaut's Commentary* provides clear insights into Torah and haftarah.
- Field's *A Torah Commentary for Our Times* is a user-friendly reference that includes traditional as well as contemporary insights.
- Nehama Leibowitz's *Studies* provides authoritative modern perspectives.
- The Soncino *Chumash* and *Rashi* in particular are the classic rabbinic commentaries.
- *The Five Books of Moses* by Everett Fox is a word-for-word translation of the Hebrew text.
- *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* is a classic resource.
- The URJ Website: [www.urj.org](http://www.urj.org), where the skeleton of this D'var Torah guide also appears!

**Using any of the ideas from the commentaries above is fair game, but remember to cite them!**

**Determine your approach.** Consider these possibilities:

- **Analyze a small fragment of the text in great detail.** You will know that you have picked a good one if other commentators are as interested in it as you are.

- **Observe the whole text from a distance, taking note of some of its interesting details.** This approach is particularly suitable for *parshiyot* that deal with ritual details at great length. Discuss the role of finer points in the building of a religious life. For example, why did the screws that were used to build the Temple have to be a certain material and a certain length, and why is this relevant to us today?

- **Begin with an idea from the text and apply it to another issue that is of great interest to you.** For example, if the text contains a long list of names, present a history of the origins of some typical Jewish names, perhaps including the names of those present.

- **Analyze the characters of biblical figures and the events of their lives in ways that will shed some light on our own.** For example, consider the sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau and the issue of preferred children.

- **Using the classic form for the D'var Torah, present several apparently discrepant facts** and then explain how they are not contradictions at all but instead point to a deeper meaning that is
not obvious at first. If you take this approach, be sure to read *midrash* connected to your text.

- **Historical insights can illuminate a text in an exciting way.** Even if you don't draw any deep morals from this approach, it can still be enriching.

**Write a first draft that grapples with the meaning.** A *D'var Torah* does not merely summarize the *parsha*. If you are having a problem, try the indirect approach: After your initial reading of the parsha and some commentaries, write down any thoughts you have about it and then set what you have written aside. Keep it in the back of your mind. Read it right before you go to bed. Think about it. Once you begin writing your *D'var Torah*, jot down all your thoughts no matter how tangential they are: They may lead you somewhere.

*Helpful Hint:* Remember to make your *D'var Torah* personal. Relate the *parsha* to a relevant moment in your life, or to a cause or ethic that you believe in. Above all, we want to hear about YOU!

**Show your work to someone else.** It can be really helpful to get a second opinion. Someone else can also tell you if something you are saying is confusing.

**Edit, edit, edit.** It is usually harder to be brief, but brevity is always appreciated. A few thoughts and examples are really all you need to present. A seven minutes *D’var Torah* is a great length. Anything longer than ten minutes may induce your guests to pay more attention to their grumbling tummies.
### Torah Service Honors

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honor</th>
<th>English name</th>
<th>Hebrew name</th>
<th>Connection</th>
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<td>Carrying Torah</td>
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Other VERY important information:

- We would be delighted if parents, siblings, relatives, and friends want to read Torah at your simcha. Let us know well in advance, so that we can be sure they are well prepared.

- Please arrive at least 30 minutes before the start of the service.

- For the candy, we strongly recommend Sunkist fruit drops. (We do not allow chocolate or hard candy.)

- You are welcome to order kippot for your guests, however it is not a requirement.

- Some families like preparing a program for their guests. If you would like to do so, please speak to the rabbis.

- Usually during a simcha the Kiddush prayer will be said upstairs. It is easier to say Kiddush before going downstairs when there is a large crowd.

- There is a fee of $100 for drumming during the service. If you would like to have drums played, please write a check to Ronald White and mail it to TBZ, two weeks prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

- Your family is expected to sponsor or provide a kiddush following Shabbat morning services for the congregation and your family and friends. If you are expecting more than fifteen guests in addition to the usual TBZ Shabbat morning crowd, we encourage you to cater kiddush. We expect that your family will attend this kiddush, regardless of other lunch plans, so we have the opportunity to offer a mazel tov. At least two months in advance, let the synagogue office know of your Kiddush plans.

- If the Bar or Bat Mitzvah is scheduled for a Sunday Rosh Hodesh or for a Shabbat mincha - maariv service or another day which is not Shabbat, the family is expected to sponsor a congregational Kiddush on Shabbat morning. A custodial charge will also be assessed in connection with the additional opening of the synagogue on Shabbat afternoon or Sunday morning.

- TBZ’s Community Room is available for private celebrations in addition to Shabbat kiddush. Please notify the office as far in advance as possible of your plans for your private celebrations. A separate rental agreement will be required.
**B’nei Mitzvah Fee and Agreement**

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an important life event for the entire family and a great joy for the congregation. To assure that all runs smoothly, it is important that you carefully read and understand the financial procedures associated with a TBZ Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

The date for your child’s Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be reserved and entered onto the synagogue calendar after you have returned the signed B’nei Mitzvah agreement along with a minimum 10% deposit ($150) of the B’nei Mitzvah program fee.

The B’nei Mitzvah program fee is $1500 payable over two years. The fee must be paid in full at least sixty (60) days prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. In addition, the family must be current with all other financial obligations owed to TBZ sixty (60) days prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

Abatements are available for those experiencing financial hardships. Please be in touch with our Executive Director, Carol Nathan, for a confidential meeting.

**The Fee includes:**

- A first meeting at the beginning of the process to set up a date and clarify expectations with one of our rabbis.

- Monthly (during school year) meetings on Shabbat: On Shabbat after services parents and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child will participate in a learning program with rabbis, over two years prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah (during 6th and 7th grade). The family is expected to continue attending the monthly meetings until the school year ends even though the Bar/Bat Mitzvah may have taken place earlier in the year.

- Experiential learning sessions planned especially for the B’nei Mitzvah group.

- Help finding a private tutor to teach the student and continued communication between rabbis and tutor.

- A meeting (by family or together with other families having their simcha around the same time). This meeting will be scheduled to be 3-4 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The goal of this
meeting will be to talk about the last steps of preparations for the event and to check in the progress of the learning.

- Following this meeting, individual meetings with rabbis to help working on the D’var Torah, service, etc.
- Supervised rehearsals in the sanctuary during the 3 weeks prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

**The Fee of the B’nei Mitzvah program does not include:**

- Individualized tutoring in Hebrew and Torah trope.
- Cost of sponsoring or catering the kiddush following the service.
- Custodial charges if the celebration is not on Shabbat.
- The fee for drumming during the service.
- Floral arrangements in the Sanctuary.
- Rental of function hall for evening event or private meals or any Kiddush not taking place immediately following Shabbat morning service.

The B’nei Mitzvah Agreement is found in the next two pages:

**Please sign both copies of the B’nei Mitzvah Agreement** and return both signed copy with full payment or a minimum 10% deposit ($150) within two weeks of receipt.

We will add our signature and return one copy to you. You may pay by check, made out to Temple Beth Zion, or by Visa or MasterCard.

**A Bar/Bat Mitzvah date reservation is ONLY guaranteed after TBZ receives the signed agreement and $150 deposit.**
BAR/BAT MITZVAH AGREEMENT – FAMILY COPY
PLEASE DETACH AND RETURN WITH PAYMENT.
We will add our signature to this copy and return to you.

I have read, understood and agree to the terms of Temple Beth Zion’s Bar/Bat Mitzvah program.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Family

Name:__________________________

Please Print Clearly

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date: ________m

Signature:______________________

Date: ________________________

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Temple Beth Zion

Name:__________________________

President

Signature:______________________

Date: ________________________

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If you wish to pay by Visa or MasterCard, please complete the following information:

Credit Card Number:

_____________________________

Exp. Date: ________________________

Amount Charged: ________________________

Credit Card Holder:

_____________________________

Signature:______________________
BAR/BAT MITZVAH AGREEMENT – OFFICE COPY
PLEASE DETACH AND RETURN WITH PAYMENT.

I have read, understood and agree to the terms of Temple Beth Zion’s Bar/Bat Mitzvah program.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Family

Name: _____________________________

Please Print Clearly

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date: ____________

Signature: _________________________

Date: ______________________________

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Temple Beth Zion

Name: _____________________________

President

Signature: _________________________

Date: ______________________________

If you wish to pay by Visa or MasterCard, please complete the following information:

Credit Card Number: ____________________________________________

Exp. Date: ____________________________

Amount Charged: ____________________________

Credit Card Holder: ____________________________________________

Signature: ____________________________________________
My Notes....