



Kol Hadash

HUMANISTIC  CONGREGATION

B Mitzvah Guide *A Resource for Families*

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Shalom!

If you are reading this Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation B Mitzvah Guide, you are likely:

- Curious about our B Mitzvah Program
- The parent of a student approaching B Mitzvah age
- Finding out more about Kol Hadash or...
- All of the above!

We are very glad that you have opened this booklet, whatever your reasons. We hope you find it useful.

Rabbi Adam Chalom Leah Sosewitz, B Mitzvah Coordinator

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What is a B Mitzvah?

Consistent with our Humanistic values of gender equality, B Mitzvah is our gender-neutral, non-binary terminology for what is conventionally called Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. At our celebrations, families and students can choose the terminology they prefer; our informational materials strive to be as inclusive as possible.

History of the Bar Mitzvah Ceremony

The Bar Mitzvah is a coming-of-age ceremony. At one time, the ceremony for males probably included circumcision at age thirteen, a rite that was later moved to the eighth day after birth. In ancient times, adulthood arrived with the onset of puberty.

In rabbinic Judaism, Bar Mitzvah marked the time when a boy assumed individual responsibility for the commandments of Jewish law. Before the age of thirteen, a child was presumed to be a parent's responsibility; after his thirteenth birthday (or twelfth for girls), the obligation to obey the positive commandments of the Torah and of the Rabbis was his own. He was considered a part of the adult community, a "son (bar) of commandment (mitzvah)."

Once responsible for his own behavior, the Bar Mitzvah could now read from the Torah during the Saturday morning religious service. However, the practice of calling a thirteen-year-old boy to read from the Torah on the occasion of becoming Bar Mitzvah is not specifically prescribed in Jewish law and was not practiced widely until the fifteenth century. It was around this time that the tradition of the boy creating a commentary on a Jewish text also became popular.

Thirteen-year-old girls did not obtain the privilege of celebrating a Bat Mitzvah until the 1920s, since in rabbinic Judaism historically (and in Orthodox Judaism today), women are not eligible to lead the public Shabbat Torah reading. From the first Bat Mitzvah in 1922, the ceremony has grown in popularity and today is practically universal throughout the non-Orthodox Jewish denominations.

In contemporary Reform and Conservative Judaism, it is customary for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to read from the Torah portion or Haftarah for a particular Shabbat on or after his/her thirteenth birthday, as well as to present a commentary on the text and on the Mitzvah experience and to lead a portion of the Shabbat service.

The Humanistic B Mitzvah

In modern American society, thirteen no longer represents the beginning of adulthood, but rather the onset of adolescence - a period of searching for one's identity and life path. Thirteen-year-olds can respond to more challenges than were expected of them as children; they can demonstrate greater independence and depth of thought, competence, and commitment.

A Humanistic B Mitzvah provides public encouragement and recognition of the development of these capacities on the road to maturity. It signifies a young person's desire to become more responsible for their own decisions and actions, and to identify with previous generations of the Jewish people who have done so. The Hebrew word mitzvah today is used in two ways. The original meaning was "commandment," but a second meaning of mitzvah is "good deed." Thus for Humanistic Jews, a B Mitzvah also signifies a "child of good deeds."

Humanistic Jews mark this life passage by encouraging B Mitzvah students to select a Jewish text or project with which they feel a personal affinity as the basis for their study. In their Jewish education at Kol Hadash, the students receive a thorough grounding in Jewish history, Hebrew, Jewish culture, and Humanistic Judaism. The Humanistic B Mitzvah presentation declares membership in the Jewish people and in the human community of ethical citizens.

Requirements of the Kol Hadash B Mitzvah

To celebrate a B Mitzvah at Kol Hadash, a child is expected to:

- Regularly attend Sunday School beginning in third grade (see note below)
- Complete 6th Grade Hebrew and 7th Grade B Mitzvah Classes, in addition to Sunday School
- Meet periodically with Rabbi Chalom in the year leading up to the B Mitzvah Celebration
- Study and prepare to read a Jewish language text (Torah, Bible or other Hebrew literature, or a text in Yiddish or Aramaic) and deliver a speech in English (commentary on text or results of an in-depth, relevant project—research, artistic expression, or documented activity)

Note: Families of older students who wish to prepare for a B Mitzvah should contact Rabbi Chalom to discuss options. It is never too late!

B Mitzvah students are also encouraged to complete a mitzvah (service) project that demonstrates a willingness to think of others and contribute to their community.

It is expected that each B Mitzvah family (students and parents) will usher and help with a simple oneg (reception) at two B Mitzvah Ceremonies during the year of or prior to their own B Mitzvah.

Because a B Mitzvah Ceremony also welcomes a student into the Kol Hadash community, all congregants are invited to attend the service. You are not required to invite all congregants to your party or extended oneg.

The student's parent or guardian must be a member of Kol Hadash and meet all financial obligations for the B Mitzvah Celebration, including membership dues, tuition and fees, facility rental, Oneg Shabbat, etc. See Appendix I, page 16, for more detail.

B Mitzvah Classes

Sixth Grade

In sixth grade Hebrew, students acquire the basic Hebrew reading ability they will need for their B Mitzvah Presentations. The sixth grade class meets on Sundays, 11:10 a.m - Noon, following Sunday School class at Deerfield High School.

Seventh Grade

Rabbi Chalom teaches the second year of the program. Because Hebrew is a central component of the class, the sixth grade year (or equivalent) is a prerequisite for the seventh grade B Mitzvah class. A student is not required to celebrate a B Mitzvah in order to take the Kol Hadash Hebrew program, Hebrew program or B Mitzvah Class. The seventh grade class meets on Sundays, 11:10 a.m. - Noon, after Sunday School at Deerfield High School.

Note: Enrollment in both years of the program, in addition to regular Sunday School attendance, is required for all B Mitzvah Students who do not already have Hebrew language skills.

In the seventh grade B Mitzvah Class, there are four major learning objectives:

1) Practice reading and understanding the students' B Mitzvah Hebrew readings

By the time of their B Mitzvah services, students will be very familiar with both the pronunciation and the meaning of their Hebrew readings. Students will read and interpret their own and other students' Hebrew portions, with special focus on the closest B Mitzvah Celebration.

2) Understand Hebrew as a living language

Students will master simple Hebrew conversations, grammar, and vocabulary, as well as songs sung in Israel and at Kol Hadash. This language study will be complementary to their B Mitzvah Hebrew reading skills.

- 3) **Understand the B Mitzvah Concept and Celebration**
Students will reflect on the history and significance of their own ceremonies, as well as review the basic elements of other B Mitzvah Ceremonies they will likely attend over the course of the seventh grade year. This will make them more familiar with what they see in other congregations and prepare them to explain the distinctive approach of Kol Hadash and Humanistic Judaism.
- 4) **Understand Humanistic Judaism**
Students will have a good understanding of the basics of Humanistic Judaism: its values, its approach to Jewish life and personal ethics, its roots and history, and its celebrations.

Choosing a Date

The first formal step to celebrating a B Mitzvah at Kol Hadash is to set a date for the event. Most families try to find a date close to their child's thirteenth birthday, but others choose dates for convenience.

The B Mitzvah date is selected in consultation with the B Mitzvah Coordinator and Rabbi 18-24 months before the celebration. If you want to schedule a B Mitzvah over 2 years out, feel free to contact us to do so.

B Mitzvah Families can choose a Friday night, Saturday morning, or Saturday evening service. Fall ceremonies cannot be scheduled before or during the High Holidays.

If you are considering a fall ceremony, this would require that Hebrew tutoring or project work would take place during the previous summer and might preclude overnight camp or a lengthy family vacation. Keep this in mind when selecting a B Mitzvah date.

The service must be held at our congregational home, the North Shore Unitarian Church, 2100 Half Day Road, Deerfield. Kol Hadash will reserve the space and bill the family the rental fee. The B Mitzvah Coordinator will make arrangements to reserve the facility for rehearsals during the two weeks prior to the ceremony; this rehearsal time is included in the facility rental fee.

The family is expected to host an oneg following the ceremony; this may be as simple as challah, cookies, and juice. The family is responsible for providing the food,

drinks, and paper goods. Please note that use of the Hearth Room foyer is included in the rental fee for the Unitarian Church; there is an additional charge to use the adjacent Fellowship Hall for an extended oneg.

Some families choose to host a simple oneg following the service and then a separate party at another location. Kol Hadash is not involved in the planning of or assistance with parties - we do offer parents a list of vendor recommendations made by other Kol Hadash families who have already celebrated a B Mitzvah with us. This list will also provide past B Mitzvah Presentation Topics and Mitzvah Projects. See the section titled "The Ethics of Celebration" for more discussion about parties.

A \$250 deposit is to be paid to Kol Hadash upon confirmation of a B Mitzvah Date. All other fees associated with the B Mitzvah are due in full one month prior to your event. Detailing of fees are listed in Appendix 1 on page 16.

Starting the B Mitzvah Journey

The next step is to choose the subject of the student's B Mitzvah presentation. Students may choose one of the following, with the Rabbi's guidance:

- 1) A Hebrew selection from the Torah, which is read in Hebrew from the Torah scroll and in English translation.
- 2) A Hebrew selection from another part of the Bible or from medieval or modern Hebrew literature. The selection is read in Hebrew and in English translation.
- 3) A project based on research, activity, or artistic expression. In this case, the Hebrew reading would be shorter and chosen to relate to the theme of the project. The project should be a vehicle for the student's demonstration of knowledge about an aspect of Jewish history or culture, how the topic relates to the Jewish community, and how the student can contribute to his/her community.

For each of the above, Rabbi Chalom meets with students approximately one year prior to the ceremony to help them choose a text and/or a project. Once a text or topic is chosen, it is time to begin the B Mitzvah Presentation, the student's commentary on the selected text or project; traditionally, the B Mitzvah's Commentary on a Torah portion is called a D'var Torah (translation: a word of Torah). Rabbi Chalom meets with the student periodically as the presentation is developed. For project-based presentations, the timing of the paper will depend on the nature of the project. The paper should be finished before Hebrew tutoring begins, although changes may be made up to six weeks before the service.

The goal of the Hebrew reading is to demonstrate a connection with Jewish culture.

For presentations based on Hebrew texts, regular Hebrew tutoring with a Kol Hadash tutor begins at least 14 weeks before the event; the tutoring schedule should be finalized five months before the event. For project-based presentations, the length of the tutoring schedule will be based on the selected shorter Hebrew reading.

It is very important that the tutoring schedule be consistent and without interruption, so that the student can make adequate progress. If you are considering a fall ceremony, summer tutoring or project work might preclude overnight camp or a lengthy family vacation. Keep this in mind when selecting a B Mitzvah Date.

The Project may be:

- A written research project that will be presented at the B Mitzvah Ceremony
- A project involving artistic expression, such as music, visual art, creative writing (prose, poetry), or a performance that is presented at the B Mitzvah Ceremony.
- An in-depth service-oriented project with a clear learning component, a summary of which is presented at the B mitzvah Ceremony. This should involve a significantly greater scope and time commitment than the community service activity outlined in the next section (Community Service).

All projects must have Jewish content and involve a learning experience. Some examples are:

- A researched and written report on a Jewish figure or historical event or an aspect of Jewish culture
- Artwork created in the style of a Jewish artist and displayed at the B Mitzvah Ceremony, accompanied by an oral presentation about the work.
- Weekly volunteer work at a center for Jewish elderly and the compilation of an oral history of American Jewish life in the early-mid 20th century
- Past projects have included:
 Being a Jewish Vegetarian
 Synagogue Architecture—including designing one
 The Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem (the student was herself ¼ Armenian)
 The Purim Shpiel (the student created his own and performed it)
 Jewish Humor
 Stephen Sondheim
 Jews in Science

Community Service/B Mitzvah Project

Kol Hadash's requirements for B Mitzvah Services include Sunday School for Jewish cultural education and Hebrew for familiarity with Jewish language. We also feel that community service enables students to live out the ideals of Humanistic Judaism, improving the world through human effort. By performing community service, students can learn valuable lessons about good citizenship, personal responsibility, and the importance of community mutual assistance.

The choice of how and where to volunteer lies with the B Mitzvah Child and Family; guidance can be provided by the B Mitzvah Coordinator, Youth Education Director or the Rabbi. Many public and private schools require community service, and that experience can count as the B Mitzvah Community Service. The B mitzvah Project can be as simple as doing small activities during the year prior to the B Mitzvah, or more substantial participation in a charitable activity, or any project or activity that serves the child's family or community. Students should actively participate in their service projects, beyond merely collecting donations from others. The B mitzvah Project should involve at least thirteen hours of work during the year before the B Mitzvah Celebration.

There are opportunities at Kol Hadash to assist our educational programs, including family services and special events like the Hanukkah service or the Purim celebration. There are also many kinds of service agencies in the Jewish and general community looking for assistance; animal shelters, food banks, and local libraries are just a few examples. The Jewish United Fund's website lists local volunteer opportunities: www.juf.org/TOV. Many students choose to include their community service experience in their B Mitzvah Paper as part of their presentation.

If you would like further suggestions of community service opportunities, contact the B Mitzvah Coordinator or peruse the B Mitzvah Resource List.

The Ethics of Celebration

One of the most challenging aspects of the B Mitzvah process for the family and the student is finding an appropriate way to celebrate the B Mitzvah Student. Their achievements should not pass by without celebration, but the excesses of extravagant B Mitzvah Parties are infamous. B Mitzvah Parties have the potential either to reinforce or to undermine the values of the ceremony and our congregation, so families are encouraged to find fitting ways to celebrate their child's achievement.

Children invited to the B Mitzvah Service should be accompanied by their parents (who should therefore also be invited to the service)—this helps both to demonstrate the importance of the event and to maintain decorum during the B Mitzvah Presentation. It is also expected that friends of the B Mitzvah Student who are invited to the B Mitzvah Party will also be invited to the B Mitzvah Service, which, after all, is the reason for the celebration.

For those families who choose a B Mitzvah Party, you have the option of celebrating at the Unitarian Church, using the adjacent Fellowship Hall; the church charges an additional fee for using this room. In the past, families have hosted dessert receptions after Friday evening services or lunch buffets after Saturday morning services. Our B Mitzvah Coordinator is available to provide examples of what families have done in the past and provide referrals.

Alternatives to large formal parties may include:

- A family trip to a special destination (such as Washington, DC, New York City, Israel)
- An event for friends at a special destination (amusement park, bowling, sporting event)
- A fun community service activity
- A smaller event for family and close friends

The B Mitzvah Coordinator and/or Rabbi can discuss this further with the family if desired.

Invitations

Families are responsible for selecting and printing invitations to the service. Text should include the following:

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation
at
2100 Half Day Road Deerfield, Illinois

It is important for families to include this text as stated to clearly announce the service as a Kol Hadash event and to identify the church merely as the location.

For invitations and service covers, families can decide for themselves whether they wish to use the terms *Bar Mitzvah*, *Bat Mitzvah*, or *B Mitzvah*.

Sample invitation text:

Please join our family as we celebrate
the B Mitzvah of
Aaron Friedman

Saturday, October 7, 2016
10:30 AM

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation
at
North Shore Unitarian Church
2100 Half Day Road, Deerfield, Illinois

A luncheon follows the service until 1:00 PM

Please send your invitation text to the B Mitzvah Coordinator for review before printing your invitations.

The B Mitzvah Service

The B Mitzvah Service is designed to celebrate the growing maturity and independence of the student. Families work with the Rabbi to create a ceremony that is meaningful to them and consistent with the values and traditions of Humanistic Judaism and Kol Hadash. The B

Mitzvah Service is a special opportunity to honor family and friends by having them participate in the celebration.

Liturgy and Music

Families may use Kol Hadash's standard B Mitzvah Service or may customize the service with an array of liturgy and music with the Rabbi's approval. Friday evening and Saturday morning B Mitzvah Celebrations are Shabbat services with candle lighting, a blessing over the wine followed by the blessing over the challah. If the B Mitzvah Celebration is a Havdallah service on a Saturday evening, there are special rituals and symbols to include: wine, a spice box, and a Havdallah (braided) candle.

The standard cover for a B Mitzvah Service includes the B Mitzvah Student's name (in Hebrew and English), the date of the event in the Jewish and general calendars, the Rabbi's or other officiant's name, and the name and logo of Kol Hadash. Families may create a customized cover with the approval of the Rabbi and Youth Education Director.

The service must be finalized at least 6 weeks before the B Mitzvah Event. The Rabbi sends the family an electronic PDF file of the service. The family is responsible for printing the service.

Kol Hadash's pianist and soloists provide music during the service. Their services are arranged with coordination by the B Mitzvah Coordinator. Other guest musicians may be included with the Rabbi's approval.

The Leader

The ceremony may be led by the Rabbi or a congregational lay-leader (dependent on availability).

The B Mitzvah Student

During the ceremony, the B Mitzvah is expected to:

- Lead one or more portions of the service.

AND EITHER

- Read from the Torah or an alternative Jewish language text (Hebrew, Yiddish, Aramaic, etc.), and then give a short speech including a summary and explanation of the Torah portion or other reading, including why the student chose it and its relevance to their life, their community service project, and the significance of the B Mitzvah to the child.

OR

- Give a speech on a topic relevant to the Jewish experience, including a Hebrew reading, why the student chose this topic and its relevance to their life, their community service project, and the significance of the B Mitzvah to the child.
- Deliver a short thank-you speech to the people who helped with the B Mitzvah, family, etc.

Other elements of the ceremony may include:

- Parents' address to the child
- Inter-generational passing of the Torah
- Rabbi's response to the Mitzvah Presentation
- Presentation of certificates/congregational gift
- Candlelighting

The B Mitzvah Family chooses readers for the service, as well as family and friends to honor with the candlelighting ceremony. A sample candlelighting order is below:

The B Mitzvah Tutor
Friends of the B Mitzvah Student
Aunts, Uncles, Cousins
Grandparents
Siblings
Parents
The B Mitzvah Student

Humanistic Decorum

The B Mitzvah Event and its participants should exemplify the values of Humanistic Judaism; therefore, theistic texts and practices, such as wearing a tallit (prayer shawl) or kippah (yarmulke/skullcap), are not included in the service.

Rehearsals

In the two weeks before the ceremony, the student rehearses at the Unitarian Church up to three times, as needed: once with the Hebrew tutor and B Mitzvah Coordinator the first week, and twice with the B Mitzvah Coordinator, Rabbi and Hebrew tutor (if available) the week of the service. At least one parent is required to attend each of the three rehearsals.

We recommend that families supply readers with their texts at least a week before the service and encourage them to practice reading their texts aloud. These rehearsals allow students to feel comfortable speaking in the space for the service and allow the tutor and Rabbi to offer last-minute tips on presentation and to walk through the ceremony as it will take place.

Photographs

If the B Mitzvah Family plans to take family photographs before the event, they should arrive at the Unitarian Church at least 1½ hours before the ceremony. The family can also contact the B Mitzvah Coordinator who will arrange a time to take photographs with the church **if it's before the date of the ceremony.**

The B Mitzvah Celebration

In addition to arranging for the rental of the Unitarian Church and hosting the oneg, the family is responsible for the printing of their service. On the day of the ceremony, service booklets can be left in the foyer for ushers to distribute. The family may reserve seats for their close family in the first two rows of the audience by placing services on those chairs.

Each B Mitzvah Family (parents and student) agrees to serve as ushers and to help with a simple oneg at two services before, or in the year of, their own service. This will be coordinated by the B Mitzvah Coordinator. Ushers distribute services, maintain order and decorum among the invited guests during the service, and help those guests who require assistance. Ushers also help set up the oneg and clean up afterward. Families planning a more elaborate oneg or luncheon should hire staff or arrange for family and friends to help.

To maintain decorum and assure good guest behavior, we require that private security/chaperone services be hired for services with fifty or more children attending. Families should contact the B Mitzvah Coordinator for a referral and must provide Kol Hadash with confirmation of hiring.

We encourage families to invite friends of the B Mitzvah with their parents, to discourage large numbers of young guests who may become unruly without adult supervision. Families should also designate adult friends or family members to sit among younger guests in the sanctuary to maintain decorum.

Approximately ten minutes before the ceremony begins, the Rabbi and the immediate B Mitzvah Family (parents, siblings and B Mitzvah Student) will meet away from the sanctuary and foyer to reflect on the moment at hand and to relax before the exciting event.

Final Thoughts

The B Mitzvah Celebration should not be considered the end of Jewish education - it is only the beginning.

Just as we do not finish learning about life in middle school, participating in Jewish culture continues through high school into college and adulthood. The B Mitzvah should be a peak on a continual relationship with the Jewish people and with Humanistic Judaism. It is expected that B Mitzvah Students will complete the 7th grade of Sunday School and continue on to Confirmation. Students who have been confirmed are eligible to become paid classroom aides for Sunday School.

It is our hope that the Kol Hadash B Mitzvah Experience is an opportunity to grow intellectually, emotionally, and personally; to develop skills and self-confidence; and to experience a meaningful connection to the Jewish people and to humanity. The B Mitzvah Celebration should provide family and community the opportunity to celebrate and applaud these achievements and to reaffirm their own commitments.

It takes a congregation to create a B Mitzvah.

It takes a lifetime to explore what it means to be a Humanistic Jew and a good human being.

Appendix I - Fees & Financial Obligations

The B Mitzvah Family must be dues-paying members of Kol Hadash. Student must be enrolled in Kol Hadash Sunday School, Hebrew, and Mitzvah classes with consequent financial obligations. The separate B Mitzvah Fee is charged to cover Kol Hadash's expenses for tutoring and musicians' services at the B Mitzvah Ceremony, as well as administrative costs. Payment of the fee is due **when formal preparations begin**. Fees are subject to change at the discretion of the Youth Education and Finance Committees but **not after deposits have been made** after the B Mitzvah Date has been chosen.

This fee does not include the costs of printing of the B Mitzvah Service Booklet to be used during the ceremony, renting the Unitarian Church for the ceremony, and a Custodial Fee. The Unitarian Church offers Kol Hadash families special rates to rent the sanctuary and hearth rooms, including rehearsals. There is an additional charge for use of the Fellowship Hall for an extended oneg, as well as a Facilitators Fee.

Current costs for Church room rentals as of 1/2019 are:

Sanctuary and Hearth Rooms only: \$505

Sanctuary, Hearth Room and Fellowship Hall: \$1175

Custodial Fees are billed @ \$30.00 per hour for both above options and a Facilitator Fee, also billed @\$30 per hour, is incurred when renting the Fellowship Hall. The Custodial fee covers chair and table set up and break down, cleaning of floors. Typical custodial service for setup and cleanup requires two hours.

Kol Hadash will arrange the rental and bill the family for facility, custodial and facilitator fees as required. Payment of the balance of the facility rental fee (less the earlier deposit) is due at least one month before the B Mitzvah Event. Custodial and Facilitator Fees will be billed after the B Mitzvah Event.

The family and their caterers are responsible for leaving the Church kitchen clean (as it was found) at the end of the event. The church facilitator can help you with letting your caterers and food delivery into the church, storage of drinks, availability and use of kitchen items and tablecloths and other details. Each family can work out these details directly with the facilitator once they have made their arrangements.

The B Mitzvah Coordinator is available to answer questions and will provide you with a link to the KH B Mitzvah Resource list of event service provider recommendations based on past KH family experiences.

Appendix II – Sample B Mitzvah Service Cover

The Bar Mitzvah of Grayson Landsman

הבר מצוה של
גרשון לנדסמן

April 16, 2016
8 Nisan, 5776



Kol Hadash

HUMANISTIC  CONGREGATION

Rabbi Adam Chalom

