

**TEMPLE AVODAH
RELIGIOUS SCHOOL
B'NAI MITZVAH
HANDBOOK**

(Revised 10/10/2021)

The B'nai Mitzvah ceremony is available to students who have been continuously enrolled in religious school. It is a privilege to celebrate a B'nai Mitzvah, not a right to which one is entitled. To earn this privilege, students must attend Religious School regularly, demonstrate mastery of all prayers, *Aliyot* and *D'var Torah*, and families must meet all the financial obligations as set forth in the Temple By-laws. Each of these obligations is further outlined in this handbook. Continuous monitoring of the child's progress and communication with the family will help to ensure a successful experience. A signed contract between the family and the temple will reaffirm the obligations of both parties.

I. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1. Our school has always taken pride in preparing our students for their B'nai Mitzvah. For children who attend Hebrew School regularly, learning Hebrew is generally straightforward. Formal instruction in Hebrew begins in the third grade. If at the beginning of B'nai Mitzvah preparation, it is determined (by the Cantor) that the student has not regularly attended Religious School and does not read Hebrew with acceptable fluency, a tutor will be required at the expense of the B'nai Mitzvah candidate's family. Names of tutors will be provided. Students who attend Religious School regularly will be tutored in house (see *Section X EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES*).
2. A B'nai Mitzvah is not an end to one's Jewish education. What a child has learned up to the age of 13 cannot begin to touch on the thousands of years of Jewish history, culture, language, and ethics that have been passed down by our people and taught by one generation to the next. We hope that each B'nai Mitzvah candidate will continue in our Keshet Kef program after their B'nai Mitzvah ceremony.
3. Religious School Attendance Requirements
 - a. Regular Religious School attendance is expected throughout your child's Jewish education.
 - b. Attendance in 7th grade Religious School is a vital component of B'nai Mitzvah preparation.
 - c. The Religious School will call the family if absences are deemed excessive. In addition, a referral will be made to the Rabbi and to the Religious School Committee. Additional tutoring at your expense may be required.

Community Service

Students in our Religious School are encouraged to do community service. Participation in Temple Avodah's Mitzvah Day is one way to fulfill this requirement. 4th grade is a wonderful time to begin taking an interest in charitable deeds.

Religious Service Attendance in the 7th Grade

Students are encouraged to attend at least ten (10) services at Temple Avodah within the twelve (12) months prior to their B'nai Mitzvah. This will give the student a better understanding of the service and its flow and help to ensure the student's comfort level when leading the service.

II. SERVICE ATTENDANCE

1. We expect all students to attend no fewer than twenty (20) religious services at Temple Avodah so that they can feel comfortable and at home in our Sanctuary and with our Shabbat rituals. **Ten (10)** of these should be in the 12 months leading up to the B'nai Mitzvah.
2. It is beneficial for a parent, guardian, or caregiver, to attend Shabbat services with each candidate. We, at Temple Avodah, feel that Shabbat worship should be a family activity and that an important message is conveyed to our children when we attend services with them.
3. The Cantor will maintain records of service attendance, either by paper form or electronically. It is the responsibility of the B'nai Mitzvah student to make sure their attendance is recorded.

III. INDIVIDUAL B'NAI MITZVAH LESSONS

1. Individual B'nai Mitzvah preparation will commence approximately 12 months prior to the B'nai Mitzvah date. Parents of students with identified special needs must contact the Cantor 14 months in advance of the student's B'nai Mitzvah date.
2. Lessons will not commence, nor will the B'nai Mitzvah be held if the family of the B'nai Mitzvah candidate is not in good standing as outlined in the Fees and Payments section of this Handbook.
3. At least one parent/guardian should accompany the B'nai Mitzvah student to the initial meeting with the Cantor and each B'nai Mitzvah lesson. Lessons are held weekly until the B'nai Mitzvah date. Lessons are scheduled via a sign-up website that will be sent out via e-mail. Students cannot be taken out of Religious School classes for B'nai Mitzvah lessons.
4. In the event lessons need to be canceled, you must notify the Cantor as soon as possible. Cantor will inform parents/guardians if a student has missed too many sessions and will need private tutoring at the expense of the family.
5. Students will meet with Cantor weekly. Students are required to bring their prayer books, Torah packets, and homework charts to each meeting. In addition, the Cantor has requested they bring their phone or an alternative recording device to each meeting.

IV. THE D'VAR TORAH

The term *D'var Torah* means "a word about Torah," and is the term we use for the B'nai Mitzvah speech. The D'var Torah will be a presentation of a thought or lesson that the B'nai Mitzvah shares with the congregation. Each candidate will work with their parent(s)/guardian and the Rabbi on the D'var Torah, which must be completed and given to the Rabbi by the date he assigns.

V. FINAL REHEARSAL

The week of the B'nai Mitzvah, the candidate and their parent(s)/guardian will meet with the Rabbi in the sanctuary for a final rehearsal. The student will have an opportunity to read directly from the Torah scrolls. There are no lessons that week. All National and Jewish holidays will be observed and if they fall on rehearsal days, it is your responsibility to contact Rabbi to reschedule. The B'nai Mitzvah candidate should bring their prayer book, Torah, and Haftorah portions and a typed copy of their D'var Torah.

VI. THE B'NAI MITZVAH SERVICE

1. Shabbat Morning services begin promptly at 10:00 AM. Please remember that services are held to observe Shabbat and that the B'nai Mitzvah is a part of that service.
2. During the service, the B'nai Mitzvah candidate(s) will sit on the Bima. The parents/guardians and immediate family will sit in the front rows of the sanctuary.
3. Parents/Guardians are encouraged to address their child in a personal statement of their own.
4. The Rabbi is the sole arbiter of the nature and content of our religious services.

VII. ALIYOT AND HONORS

1. An *Aliyah* is the honor of being called to the bima to recite the blessings before and after the Torah reading. Each family may assign *Aliyot* to members of their family, usually consisting of; a) parents/guardians, b) grandparents, c) aunts and uncles, d) siblings who are over age thirteen (*younger siblings may be called to dress and undress the Torah*). As a Reform congregation that believes in equal religious status for women, we encourage both men and women to take *Aliyot*.
2. The family of the B'nai Mitzvah will receive the number of *Aliyot* commensurate with the number of *Aliyot* the candidate is able to recite (there is a maximum of seven). The minimum expected is four including the B'nai Mitzvah's *Aliyah*.
3. We expect all the individuals called to the bima to be dressed in a respectful manner.
4. The Torah blessings may be recited in either Hebrew or English.
5. Your family will be contacted in advance of the B'nai Mitzvah service by a member of Temple Avodah's Board or clergy to discuss any honors for the day of the B'nai Mitzvah, participation in the Friday Night Service on the Shabbat preceding the B'nai Mitzvah, Oneg Sponsorships, and to answer any other inquiries (i.e., photography during the service, bios, and photos for Temple Topics) that you might have.

VIII. TZEDAKAH and MITZVAH PROJECTS

It is traditional to give a gift of tzedakah (charity, literally translated to mean righteousness) after celebrating a *simcha* such as a B'nai Mitzvah. It is the Jewish way of giving thanks for all that we have and the gifts we enjoy. It is suggested that the B'nai Mitzvah child's name be inscribed on our Tree of Life in the Temple Lobby. Another program of particular interest is *MAZON*, A Jewish Response to Hunger. The Rabbi will be happy to furnish you with more information on this program and others. Our B'nai Mitzvah are encouraged to pick a project that will make their B'nai Mitzvah experience a more meaningful one.

IX. FEES AND PAYMENTS

1. You must be in good financial standing, and all outstanding financial obligations must be satisfied for the B'nai Mitzvah to be conducted. Unless a financial arrangement has been made by your family with the Financial Secretary, all past year balances, including but not limited to all past dues, school fees, B'nai Mitzvah fees, assessments, and other Temple financial obligations must be paid. In addition, you must be in compliance with the following: (*Unless a full payment arrangement is made*)
 - a. 75 Days prior to the B'nai Mitzvah date you should have paid your dues in full or at least half (1/2) of your total dues and all school and B'nai Mitzvah fees. There is an understanding that the remaining balance will be paid in one of the Temple automatic payment plans. (ACH or Auto Credit Card). A Financial Secretary agreement to this plan is **required**.
 - b. As an alternative, provided you are in good financial standing and have paid all of your past years' obligations, as well as having fully paid your obligations for Hebrew School, you may pay 50% of the regular dues by the second week of August in the year of your child's B'nai Mitzvah and you must provide Temple with written credit card authorization to pay the balance on a monthly basis over nine (9) months.
 - c. Please refer to the B'nai Mitzvah Agreement (Contract) for all fees associated with the B'nai Mitzvah including the non-refundable preparation fee. Execution of this agreement (Contract) will ensure that your date is reserved for you. **This Agreement must be returned to the Temple within sixty (60) days of its receipt. Note: Additional fees will be required if the B'nai Mitzvah will be held at a time other than Saturday morning.**

X. EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Any evidence of extenuating circumstances, other than financial circumstances, that prohibits the fulfillment of the requirements in this Handbook must be submitted in writing to the B'nai Mitzvah Committee for consideration. Decisions will be made by the B'nai Mitzvah Committee, the Temple President, and the Rabbi. Extenuating circumstances regarding finances must be submitted to the Financial Secretary and/or to the President of the Temple.

XI. ALTERNATIVE B'NAI MITZVAH TIMES

Friday evening or Saturday evening B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies must be approved by the Rabbi and Cantor. Additional fees are assessed as per the Agreement (Contract). We only designate one Friday night a month for a B'nai Mitzvah. For either Friday night or Saturday night, the celebration must be held at Temple with Kombert Caterers following the service.

**Take an interest. Look at the materials your child has been given. Review portions with your child.
Your interest can serve as a stimulus and motivate your child to exert a greater effort.
Attend services regularly as a family. Just as in sports, practice is essential to success.**

**Please support our efforts, we take your child's Religious Education seriously,
we appreciate that you do as well.**

B'nai Mitzvah Preparation Schedule

Your children are your most precious possessions, and we, as educators, are aware of our keen responsibility to them and to you. To heighten and strengthen your child's Jewish identity and to fulfill the importance of the day, we need your help. Approximately twelve (12) months prior to the B'nai Mitzvah date, depending on the calendar: You will be contacted by the Cantor to set up an appointment to meet your child and schedule individual lessons/study sessions. Additionally, candidates will meet with the Rabbi to discuss their Torah portion. Students will begin D'var Torah (B'nai Mitzvah speech) preparation. Students are required to bring their folder, prayer book, phone/iPad or reading device weekly. Students are expected to complete weekly homework assignments by studying 3-4 times throughout the week. If the student does not complete 2 homework assignments, they will be given a practice log to be signed 4 times a week by the parent/guardian. The Rabbi will be made aware weekly of homework completions.

- * Two (2) months into individualized studies/lessons:
All prayers should be completed. Upon their satisfactory completion, candidate will begin studying the Maftir.

- * Four (4) months into individualized studies/lessons:
The Maftir and first Aliyah should be completed. When these have both been successfully mastered, candidate will begin second Aliyah.

- * Six (6) months into individualized studies/lessons:
The second and third Aliyot should be completed. When these have been mastered, the candidate will begin the Haftorah portion.

- * Two (2) months prior to B'nai Mitzvah date:
Torah reading, without vowels should be completed. Candidate will begin Haftorah preparation. The Haftorah will consist of Hebrew reading with vowels.

- * Two (2) weeks prior to B'nai Mitzvah date:
Students are expected to complete all prayers and blessings, Torah and Haftorah portion. Candidate will also be expected to deliver their speech to the Rabbi for review. Candidate will be notified by the Rabbi as to the date.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our office. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide your child with the beginning of an excellent Jewish education.

