

## Welcome to the B'nai Mitzvah Process at Temple Beth-El!

Bar or Bat Mitzvah is something that a young person *becomes*. It is *not* just a ceremony; it is a process, and that process is much more important than the ceremony at the end. At its best, this process can be an uplifting journey in the life of the young person and in the life of the entire family.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah process *should*:

- Help a young person gain more competence in Jewish life
- Foster enthusiasm for being Jewish
- Provide a chance for personal spiritual reflection and growth
- Help in the development of greater self-confidence
- Increase a young person's presence as part of our Jewish community
- Help the student recognize the temple as a safe place where they can always feel supported and loved

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah process *should not*:

- Be all about the Hebrew
- Feel like endless, useless drudgery
- Be an empty religious ritual that we do only for the sake of tradition

Bottom line: A Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony should be a joyous celebration of an important milestone in a young person's life, and the Bar or Bat Mitzvah process should be a meaningful time of growth and discovery for our young people. Temple Beth-El wants to make sure that your family gets to experience all of the positives that can come out of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah process.

The guidelines and requirements for Bar and Bat Mitzvah at Temple Beth-El are meant to ensure that Bar/Bat Mitzvah at our temple is what it is supposed to be: a transformative Jewish experience that helps shape the lives of our young people in positive ways.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Courtney Berman

## **B'nai Mitzvah Requirements**

- Hebrew
  - Fluency with basic prayers in the Shabbat worship service
  - Ability to chant Torah portion (usually 12-20 verses)
  - Ability to read or chant part of Haftarah portion (usually 2-4 verses)
  
- Jewish Literacy
  - Regular Attendance of Worship Services
  - Attendance of Hebrew and Religious School
  - Write a Dvar Torah to Deliver at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service
  
- Jewish Living
  - Commitment to Jewish Communal Life
  - “Trying On” Different Mitzvot
  - Participation in Community Service
  - Mitzvah Project

### **Hebrew**

#### **Fluency with basic prayers in the Shabbat worship service –**

An important part of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah process is helping students become comfortable with the prayers we use on Shabbat every week. By attaining some mastery with these prayers, students will be able to help lead Shabbat worship, and they will also be able to feel at home in many other synagogues. Such comfort will serve them well when they go to college or otherwise start living independent Jewish lives.

*Attached to this guide, you will find a checklist of prayers that are part of a complete Bar/Bat Mitzvah education. You will also find sample Bar/Bat Mitzvah service outlines that show how the service is usually organized, including which parts the student leads and which parts are good options for getting family and friends involved with the service.*

#### **Ability to chant Torah portion (12-20 verses) –**

Each student is assigned a Torah portion based on the annual cycle of Torah readings. Students will spend time with the rabbi learning about their portion, and together with the rabbi they will select which verses they will learn for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Then the rabbi will provide the student with audio files of the verses to aid in learning.

### **Ability to read or chant part of Haftarah portion (usually 2-4 verses) –**

Each Torah portion has an accompanying reading from the Prophets. Students will go over their Haftarah portion with the rabbi and choose a part to read or chant during their service.

### **Jewish Literacy**

#### **Regular Attendance of Worship Services –**

In the two years leading up to B'nai Mitzvah, students should attend ***at least 12*** worship services. These services should be a mix of Shabbat evening, Shabbat morning, and holiday services. It is important to experience different types of services so that students become acquainted with important parts of our worship, such as how the Torah service flows. Attending services gives students a more complete understanding of their Judaism, and it also aids in learning the Hebrew and the prayers.

Services at other synagogues can fulfill this requirement, but plan to attend some services at Temple Beth-El so that you are comfortable here.

*Keep track of the services you attend so that you can share your list with the rabbi before your Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. You should also sign in using the book in the office each time you come to services at Temple Beth-El.*

#### **Attendance of Hebrew and Religious School –**

We expect that families who expect that their children will become Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Temple Beth-El will enroll their children in Religious School as early as practicable.

Religious education is an integral part of the process of becoming B'nai Mitzvah. Formal Hebrew lessons begin in our school in the 4th level and prospective B'nai Mitzvah are expected to participate in Hebrew in addition to regular Religious School classes.

Absent very special circumstances, no student that expects to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be exempted from the Religious School and Hebrew requirement. Any decision regarding such an exemption will be in the sole discretion of Rabbi and the Religious School director together.

#### **Write a Dvar Torah to Deliver at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service –**

Dvar Torah means “word of Torah,” and that is the name of the speech that students deliver at their Bar/Bat Mitzvah services. To call it a Dvar Torah and not a speech helps to emphasize what is most important about the words they choose to share with the congregation the day of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Their words should teach the congregation something they may not have known before, both about their Torah or Haftarah portion and also about their unique worldview. Becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah means that they have a greater capacity to teach others now; their

Dvar Torah is their first official chance to do just that right after they have been called up to the Torah for the first time.

Students will work on their Dvar Torah with the rabbi, and the outline and content may change during this process. Generally, the Dvar Torah of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah will have the following four components:

- Something about what the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process has meant to you, or that you have gotten out of the process. How have you grown?
- Teach us something from your Torah or Haftarah portion. How does your portion apply to modern day life? Why is what you learned in your portion an important lesson?
- Tell us about your Mitzvah Project. Tell us about the organization you chose and why you chose them. Tell us why we should care, too.
- Thank you paragraph. This is your chance to publicly thank family, teachers, friends, and anyone else who has helped you through the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process.

### **Jewish Living**

#### **Commitment to Jewish Communal Life –**

Becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah is one way of expressing a commitment to Jewish Communal Life. Synagogues are an important part of what makes a Jewish community strong, and it is our duty to support the synagogue. To celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Temple Beth-El, one must be a member in good standing of our temple.

#### **“Trying On” Different Mitzvot –**

There are many different *mitzvot* (commandments) that are part of Jewish practice. In Reform Judaism, many *mitzvot* are not required, but they are still a part of our Jewish heritage. Jewish adults are responsible for choosing which *mitzvot* to make a part of their lives, which *mitzvot* do not have a place in their lives, and which *mitzvot* might be meaningful if practiced differently.

Since becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah means becoming an adult in terms of Jewish practice, this is the perfect time in a person’s life to start thinking more critically about various Jewish values and practices so that they can make decisions on what roles they play in their life for now. One’s relationship with Jewish practice may change as they keep growing and learning, and that is perfectly normal. The goal for now is to give our students the tools to make informed choices about Jewish practice.

The rabbi has a deck of “Mitzvah Cards” that the students will work their way through over the course of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah year. Each card has a different Jewish value on it and a suggested action or two to go with the value. Students will pick a new card every week or two

and experiment with the *mitzvah* on it until they are set to meet with the rabbi again to pick another. When they pick each card, they will spend a few moments exploring how they might try out that particular *mitzvah*, and then when their week with that *mitzvah* is ended they will spend a few minutes with the rabbi sharing about their experiences with that *mitzvah*. Was it something they found meaningful? Why or why not? Would they like to keep incorporating that *mitzvah* into their lives? In what way(s)?

This process is meant to arm students with the ability to start making their own Jewish choices. This activity should also help them with some of the other self-exploration that is part of the B'nai Mitzvah process. Families should feel free to be involved as well in whatever ways might resonate. If you have questions about any of the *mitzvot* your student brings home, the rabbi is always available to answer questions.

### **Participation in Community Service –**

Part of becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah is taking on additional responsibility in *tikkun olam*, repair of the world. In the two years leading up to Bar/Bat Mitzvah, students should participate in **at least 10 hours** of community service. This can include volunteering with your family, the temple, or your school. If interested, the B'nai Mitzvah Cohort can arrange to volunteer somewhere as a group. Volunteer hours can take place somewhere related to the student's Mitzvah Project, but not all of them have to be connected to the Mitzvah Project. In fact, it can be better to get a variety of experiences.

We are working on a list of some possibilities. The Jewish Federation of Volusia and Flagler Counties is a great option for getting some experience with *tikkun olam*. Federation works very hard to help as many people as they can, and they can always use more help. You can call them at 386-672-0294 or find them online at [here](#).

If you need any guidance, you can always talk to the rabbi.

### **Mitzvah Project –**

Each student should choose an organization where they can do something to make a difference. As part of their Mitzvah Project, students should learn about that organization and the organization's cause. They will tell the congregation some about their organization and its cause as part of their Dvar Torah the day of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

An important part of Mitzvah Projects is that they require something active from the student, exhibiting that the student is passionate about working toward a better world. Simply asking other people to donate goods or money is not enough. Each student and family will work together with the rabbi to craft a meaningful Mitzvah Project that exhibits the student's commitment to *tikkun olam*.