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Welcome to the B’nei Mitzvah Program

We are delighted you have chosen to celebrate your child becoming a bar/bat mitzvah with us here at Congregation Beth Israel. This booklet has been written to provide you with streamlined, easily accessible, and up-to-date information regarding this significant life cycle event in your child’s Jewish journey.

It is our hope that every family who participates in our b’nei mitzvah program feels confident about the process. If you have any questions or concerns, we have not addressed in the following pages, please contact us.

A Brief History

The phrases “bar mitzvah” and “bat mitzvah” are titles (such as Doctor or Rabbi) bestowed upon any Jew on their 13th birthday. The meaning of the title is "One Who Is Subject to the Commandments." Bar and bat mitzvah does not refer to a service or other event. In other words, turning 13 in Judaism is similar to turning 18 in the American legal system. It is the time one becomes responsible for all the sacred duties and privileges of Jewish life. Thus, a person does not "get bar mitzvahed" or "have a bar mitzvah." Rather, a person becomes a bat or bar mitzvah, similar to "she became a Doctor." or "he became a Hall of Famer."

Since the title ‘bar mitzvah’ or ‘bat mitzvah’ belongs to you for the rest of your life, our hope is you will return often to participate in the prayer life of the community and to help lead the service. At Congregation Beth Israel, we empower recent b’nei mitzvah students to contribute to the community in several ways; by inviting them to read/chant Torah on the anniversary of their Torah portion, during the summertime, and during the High Holy Day Season.

Program Philosophy

Here at Congregation Beth Israel we look forward to fostering young Jewish adults who feel confident in their studies, at home in their synagogue, and have pride in their achievements. We see all our students as the individuals they are and do our very best to accommodate their unique learning styles.

Our staff intensive program provides the opportunity for our students to form strong, lasting, personal relationships with their teachers and members of the Clergy Team. These personal connections reinforce our students desire to continue their Jewish education with us. This continuation, including Confirmation and Post-Confirmation, is an expectation of our b’nei mitzvah program.

An important part of becoming a Jewish adult is embracing community through prayer. We look forward to greeting our students at Shabbat services, both evening and morning, especially in the year leading up to their celebration.
Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), is also an integral part of our program. We work with our students to help them find mitzvah projects they find meaningful and to help them complete these projects.

**Date Selection Process: Guidelines and Considerations**

**Date Selection**
- Dates are chosen using an online survey tool. Parents will receive an email with the link to the survey. Parents are invited to take the survey three years prior to their child’s eligibility. Parents will be asked to choose three possible dates and rank those dates in order of preference.
- We do not offer bar/bat mitzvah dates on Thanksgiving weekend, during the month of July or from Selichot through Simchat Torah.
- More information regarding date selection is given during the fall of 5th grade.

**Partners**

You may request someone to be your child’s partner or you may allow a partner to be assigned to you. If you have selected a partner, you want to make sure you and the partner request the same dates, in the same order of preference, when taking the survey.

If another family becomes interested in a date after you have received the date assignment confirmation email, Sarah Avner will reach out to you to begin the conversation regarding sharing. No partners will be randomly assigned to any dates.

**Friday Night Participation**

We highly recommend participating at Friday night services. Participation on Friday helps work out some of the nervousness and gives students a taste of being on the bimah with a full sanctuary. If your family plans to attend the Friday evening service, regardless of student participation, the parents are invited to lead the blessings over the candles and wine during services.
Timeline of Preparation Process

**Grades 3 & 4** – Enroll in both Sunday School and Midrasha (Wednesday program). If Midrasha is not a possibility, please work with Carly Cera to formulate an alternative.

**Grades 5 & 6** – Enroll in Sunday School and Midrasha. If Midrasha is not possible, please work with Carly Cera to formulate an alternative.

**Grades 7 through 10** – Enroll in Sunday School. It is an **expectation of our community** that your child register and maintain regular attendance in our Sunday Religious School program throughout the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process and through Confirmation in 10th Grade. We see the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony as a significant marker in our student’s life-long journey of Jewish experience and community, but not as the end point. We expect that all of our students will continue with their involvement in our Religious School, so that they can continue to develop and nurture their Jewish identity and their connection to the synagogue community and Jewish tradition. We believe that incredible gifts await them as they continue to bring their developing questions, doubts, and insights to their rabbis and teachers here at CBI following their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. If you have any questions about your family’s ability to fulfill this expectation, please see Cantorial Soloist Sarah Avner or Rabbi Folberg as soon as possible.

**Eighteen to Twelve Months Out: Service Attendance.** All students are expected to attend Shabbat worship services 18 times (14 Shabbat mornings and 4 evenings) during the months leading up to their celebration. There is a binder at the reception desk where students record their attendance. Attending services enables students and families to connect more deeply with our community and provides a familiarity with the expectations of the day.

**Eighteen to Twelve Months Out: Mitzvah Hours.** Rabbi Tarfon said, “You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it.” This quote expresses the Jewish value of working to help those who are in need. We expect b’nei mitzvah students to have completed at least 18 hours of volunteer work before their bar/bat mitzvah date. We encourage students to choose “hands-on” projects involving meaningful and personal service. Please refer to the appendix for some ideas or reach out to Carly Cera for suggestions.

**Twelve Months Out: Hebrew Assessment.** Approximately twelve months out, Sarah Avner will meet with students to assess their Hebrew and prayer skills. After the assessment, she will make a recommendation regarding the start date for prayer class and tutoring. If necessary, she will suggest individual tutoring (at the family’s expense) to bring up the Hebrew reading skills to the necessary level for prayer class and Hebrew tutoring. A parent (s) must be present at this meeting as timelines and expectations will also be discussed.

**Eight to Twelve Months Out: Individual Tutoring for Torah/Haftarah.** Approximately eight to twelve months before the bar/bat mitzvah date (depending on the results of the Hebrew assessment), all students will attend individual, weekly, 30-minute study sessions with our tutor, Ellen Sable. The purpose of the tutoring will be to learn the Torah and Haftarah portions. Ellen
is a wonderful teacher who is experienced in teaching all styles of learning. After the Hebrew Assessment with Sarah Avner, please contact Ellen Sable to schedule a mutually workable meeting time. Tutoring with Ellen is included in the bar/bat mitzvah fee. Lessons with Ellen do not follow the Religious School calendar and continue over the summer and through holiday breaks. *Please note, there is a 24-hour cancellation policy with Ellen. If a cancellation is made less than 24 hours in advance, an $18 fee will be assessed. For sudden illness or emergency, please contact Ellen via text, phone or email, as soon as you know your child will not be able to attend the session.*

**Eight Months Out: Prayer Class.** Approximately eight months before the bar/bat mitzvah date, students will begin to attend our prayer class, which meets on Sundays from 10:00-11:00 am. Prayer class is led by Jacob Jew, a gifted teacher who grew up in our community, and Ellen Sable, our talented b’nei mitzvah tutor. Prayer class is a wonderful way for our students to master the main prayers of the worship service, it builds community, and enables students to support and encourage each another. Prayer class tuition is included in the bar/bat mitzvah fee. Generally, prayer class follows the Religious School calendar with the exception that it may meet a few times throughout the summer. Please plan on consistent attendance.

**Seven to Four Months Out: Meetings with our Senior and Associate Rabbis.** Our Senior Rabbi will meet with students two times before the ceremony in order to get to know the students better and to discuss the meaning of the day. Our Executive Assistant to the Clergy will reach out to your family to schedule 4 meetings with your student and one of the Rabbis before the ceremony in order to study the Torah portion and help prepare their d’var Torah (speech about the Torah portion). At least one parent is required to attend the first d’var Torah meeting with their child and the Rabbi.

**Two to Three Months Out: Invitations.** It is our policy that you invite your child’s entire Religious School Grade to the service and luncheon (or kiddush refreshments, whichever your family chooses to provide) following the service. By supporting this policy, your family will ensure every child feels included and help us to create Kehila Kedosha, sacred community. You may either mail a paper invitation or send an invitation to each of your child’s classmates. Before sending out the invitations, please reach out to Sarah Jew (sjew@bethisrael.org) to get an updated class list.

**Three Months Out: Proneg.** Every family is responsible for sponsoring the Proneg on the Friday before their child’s bat/bar mitzvah date. Please coordinate with Pam Hanna, Director of Membership Services, to pay for the Proneg. (phanna@bethisrael.org)

**Six Weeks Out: Mentor Rehearsals.** Students will be paired with an adult mentor from our community. They will meet 3-4 times in the Sanctuary for 1 hour, during the six weeks leading up to the ceremony. Students practice reading from the Torah, reciting their d’var Torah, and
becoming familiar with the flow of the service. Our mentors are caring volunteers who devote significant time to this process. Ellen Sable, with Sarah Avner’s assistance, will match each student to a mentor and will send out a note of introduction at the appropriate time.

**Three Weeks Out: Forms.** Please email your Honors Form, to our Executive Assistant to the Clergy and email our Associate Rabbi a copy of your Parent’s Blessing for review. Both documents are available on our website [here](#).

**One Week Out: Final Rehearsal.** The Thursday before the service, the student and their parent(s) will meet with Sarah Avner in the Sanctuary to go over the key points of the service. This rehearsal allows students to ask any last-minute questions and work out any nervousness they may have. Our Executive Assistant to the Clergy will be in touch to solidify the date and time of the rehearsal.

**The Big Day.** Please have all family members arrive by 9:50 am on the morning of the ceremony to meet the Rabbi in the Sanctuary for a final practice. Have a great day! You have earned it!

**Supporting your Child in Preparation**

Here are some helpful things you can do to be supportive:

- Regular participation in our education programs on both Sundays and Wednesdays. The most successful b’nei mitzvah students participate at least 80% of the time from 3rd grade.
- Bring your child to Shabbat services. *The more your child hears and sings along with the prayers, the easier it will be for him or her to prepare for the big day. We cannot emphasize enough how important this is to your child’s success!*
- Practice with your child at home. Even the best teacher cannot prepare a child well unless the student puts in time outside of his/her lessons at the Synagogue. Check your student's study folder for the weekly assignment. You don’t need to be able read Hebrew to listen to your child practice.
- Encourage your child along the way letting her/him know their hard work has not gone unnoticed.
- Stay on top of the timelines and schedules.
- Consider lightening your child’s extracurricular activities, at least for the six months prior to your child’s celebration.
- Be members in good standing of Congregation Beth Israel. All Temple financial obligations must be current, or with appropriate arrangements made, at least three months prior to the service.

**Parent and Family Roles During the Service**
Service Participation

Each family completes an Honors Form detailing the honors during the service you may give to family and friends. This form may be found on the Temple’s website here. Please consult the Honors Form for more specific information, and do not hesitate to reach out to Sarah Avner if you have specific questions.

Passing of the Torah Through the Generations

At the beginning of the Torah Service, a member of the Clergy Team will invite family members up to pass the Torah from the ark to the bar/bat mitzvah. This honor is typically reserved for grandparents and parents; however, aunts and uncles are also welcome.

Parent’s Blessing

Parents are invited to give their child a blessing before they hand the Torah to their child. Feel free to speak to your child from the heart in a way that is prayerful, reverent, and gives members of the congregation an opportunity to say “amen” at the end. For the sake of time and the flow of the service we ask that this blessing be brief. If you would like to see some examples of Parent blessings, please go to our website here.

Please send a copy of your blessing to Rabbi Levy no later than two weeks prior to the service. Your private celebration is your opportunity to speak at greater length about your child’s personal history and accomplishments.

Non-Jewish Family Participation

Congregation Beth Israel provides appropriate avenues of participation for any non-Jewish family members of our b’nei mitzvah. We ask you consult directly with Rabbi Folberg, Rabbi Levy or Sarah Avner if you have questions about these honors. They will be happy to work with you.

Event and Facility Information

Bimah Decorations

Some options:

- Based on your child’s mitzvah project, you may create baskets highlighting what they have done or put donations in a basket.
- CBI has silk plants and flower arrangements that may be used at no charge.
- Purchased cut, unscented, flowers from a florist to create a bouquet

Please contact the administrative staff for more details or assistance.
Photography and Videography (including cell phones)

Hand-held camera devices are NOT permitted during services. However, you may set up a video recording device on a tripod in the balcony of the Sanctuary if you wish to record your child’s service. If you choose to record your child’s service, the video camera must be ready to go no later than 10:15 am.

You may schedule still photography at the following times:

- The Friday morning or afternoon prior to your family’s celebration,
- The morning of the service (finished by 9:50 am when service participants will meet with a member of the Clergy team) when there is NOT something else scheduled to be in the sanctuary at the same time,
- After the service

There may be other times during the week when the sanctuary is available. If you would like members of our Clergy to be a part of your pictures, please contact our Executive Assistant in the Clergy to help with scheduling. (clergyoffice@bethisrael.org) Once the Clergy are reserved, please contact the Director of Community Engagement to reserve time in the sanctuary for photography.

Proneg Shabbat

A Proneg is held before services on Friday evenings at 6:30 pm in Smith Auditorium. Challah and wine will be provided for Kiddush on Friday evening.

All families are expected to sponsor the Proneg on the Friday of their bat/bar mitzvah, even if the family is not planning on attending. Please coordinate with Pam Hanna (phanna@bethisrael.org) to pay your $100 sponsorship three months before your date. If you would like to do more than coffee, water, snacks & sweets, please ask Pam about the different options.

Luncheon

We ask all our families to sponsor the Kiddush on Saturday morning following the service. Minimally, this consists of wine, challah and some cookies or sweets. You may bring them yourself, or the staff can provide it for a fee based on the number of attendees.

If you choose to sponsor a luncheon, in addition to the Kiddush, please remember it is our custom for anyone who attends services Saturday morning to come and have lunch. Regular attendees are about 20-25 people.

- For all luncheons following a simcha, a $72 kitchen use fee will be charged.
  - Additional set up or assistance from the CBI staff is available for an additional fee.
The kitchen use fee includes coffee, lemonade, Kiddush wine and challah. It also covers general wear and tear of the kitchen.

- We will use a standard buffet set up for all luncheons, unless requested otherwise. The caterers will set up the tables and chairs and dress them with linens, unless you request otherwise.
- If the luncheon is a party following the simcha, and lasts longer than 2:30 pm, there will be an additional charge of $72 per hour to cover staffing. We request an afternoon party conclude no later than 4:30 pm.

Caterers

You may use any caterer you would like. However, there are a couple local caterers our we’ve received good feedback about from our members. Please contact Harold Wilensky (hwilensky@bethisrael.org) for a list of caterers familiar with CBI kitchens and policies. If you happen to choose a caterer who has not served a luncheon at CBI before, they must meet with Harold Wilensky at least 4 weeks prior to the luncheon.

Food and Alcohol Policies

- Wine and beer may be served. It may not be sold. If other alcohol is served, a TABC Certified Bartender must serve it and an additional security officer is required at a cost of $360.
- Although we do not have a strictly kosher kitchen, we do observe certain Jewish dietary guidelines. Biblically prohibited foods, mostly pork and shellfish, are not served at the Synagogue. Additionally, as a courtesy to our members and guests who do observe some level of kashrut, we recommend you do not mix meat and dairy products in the same dish; although they may be served at the same occasion.
- Since your meal is open to the entire community, we ask you to please design your menu so someone who does not eat meat or has food allergies (especially to gluten or nuts) is able to eat a reasonably balanced meal.
- If you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Smith Rental/Party

- For CBI members in good standing, it is $1200 to rent Smith for 4 hours.
  - This cost includes use of all tables and chairs, the kitchen, security and a staff person at CBI in case of emergencies or questions.
  - There is no additional fee for set up/clean up time; unless you require CBI staff to do so.
• Security for events is provided by the Travis County Sheriff Department. If there will be more than 200 people at your event, there must be two officers on site. An additional $360 fee will be charged to cover the additional officer.
• The party is limited to Smith Auditorium. If there is evidence guests were outside Smith Auditorium, a minimum fee of $300 will be charged to your account, in addition to any cleaning or repair costs.
• Please ensure there will be enough adults to chaperone the party. If you would like help finding additional chaperones, please contact the administrative staff.

Decorations
• No confetti or confetti type table decorations may be used.
• Candles may only be used if tea lights are within a glass container as decoration.
• Only painters’ tape (blue tape) may be used to put anything on the walls.
• For tablecloths, please contact your caterer or other outside source. CBI does not have tablecloths for rent.

Clean up
• All rented space, including the kitchen, must be cleaned and all people must vacate the building by midnight.
• Nothing may be left behind, including garbage. If additional clean-up in the kitchen or Smith Auditorium is required after your party, you will be charged $250 to cover the additional costs.
• Please notify Harold Wilensky or Pam Hanna in advance if extra custodial help is needed. The hourly rate for custodial staff is $50.
Staff: We are here to help!

Administrative Staff
Pam Hanna, Director of Membership Services: phanna@bethisrael.org; (512) 454-6806 x203
- Your contact for Temple membership and finances. All b’nei mitzvah associated fees will be handled through her office.

Clergy Suite
Trish Ivey, Executive Assistant to the Clergy: clergyoffice@bethisrael.org; (512) 454-6806 x214
- Handles the appointment scheduling for bar/bat mitzvah tutorial lessons with members of the Clergy Team. Gathers information about honors and prepares the Shabbat morning program.

Rabbi Steven Folberg, Senior Rabbi: sfolberg@bethisrael.org
- Meets in a small group setting with all our students to explore the meaning of the bat mitzvah and bar mitzvah rite of passage. You will receive an email from the Executive Assistant to the Clergy with dates and times for your child to attend.

Rabbi Kelly Levy, Associate Rabbi: klevy@bethisrael.org
- Through group meetings with study partners and private meetings, Rabbi Levy helps students’ study and understand their Torah portions. While looking at various commentaries, Rabbi Levy helps the students craft a d’var Torah based on what they have learned.

Sarah Avner, Cantorial Soloist: savner@bethisrael.org
- Beginning with date selection, to the twelve-month Hebrew check-in, to the dress rehearsal, to the Shabbat service, Sarah is involved every step of the way.

Ellen Sable, B’nei Mitzvah Tutor: ellenrose.sable@gmail.com; (512) 913-8245
- Ellen meets with all students on a one-on-one basis teaching the Torah and Haftarah portions as well as refining and reviewing the prayers. She is also one of the teachers of our b’nei mitzvah prayer class. Ellen and Sarah Avner communicate regularly regarding student progress and Ellen is an integral part of the b’nei mitzvah process. She will also be your contact person when it is time for your student to begin working with a volunteer mentor to practice their d’var Torah.
Education Office

Carly Cera, Director of Youth Education and Engagement: ccera@bethisrael.org; (512) 454-1589
- Carly guides the educational journey leading up to and after your child becomes bar/bat mitzvah. She oversees the completion of mitzvah hours and will check in with you throughout the year. If needed, she will help your student create a passion project or explore organizations who benefit from volunteers.

Sarah Jew, Education Coordinator: sjew@bethisrael.org; 512-454-1589
- Sarah is your point person for all questions regarding: registration for religious school, Midrasha and Hebrew side-by-side learning. She is also your direct contact for the most up-to-date class list when it comes time to prepare invitations.
Appendix 1: Mitzvah Hours

Rabbi Tarfon said, “You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it.” This quote expresses the Jewish value of working to help those who are in need. We expect b’nei mitzvah students to have completed at least 18 hours of volunteer work before the date of his/her bar/bat mitzvah service. We encourage students to choose “hands-on” projects that involve personal service. Many of these organizations require parents to accompany youth volunteers.

Community Service Ideas:

**Austin Animal Center** is the largest municipal animal shelter in Central Texas, provides shelter to 23,000 animals annually and services to Austin/Travis County. [http://www.austintexas.gov/page/individual-aac-volunteer](http://www.austintexas.gov/page/individual-aac-volunteer)

**Austin Yellow Bike Project** is an all-volunteer non-profit initiative to put bicycles on the streets of Austin and Central Texas by operating community bike shops, teaching bike mechanics and maintenance, and acting as a local bike advocacy group. [http://austinyellowbike.org](http://austinyellowbike.org)

**Austin Habitat for Humanity** offers many ways for youth to volunteer - landscaping, planting trees, raising awareness or providing lunch for volunteers who are building. [www.austinhabitat.org/youth](http://www.austinhabitat.org/youth)

**Austin Parks Foundation** connects people to resources and partners to develop and improve parks. Volunteers participate in activities including erosion control, mulching, tree-planting, eradicating invasive species and trash pick-up. [www.austinparks.org](http://www.austinparks.org)

**Austin Pets Alive!** is a volunteer run non-profit animal rescue group committed to promoting and providing the resources, education and programs needed to eliminate the killing of homeless companion animals. Must be 12 to volunteer. [www.austinpetsalive.org](http://www.austinpetsalive.org)

**Bake A Wish** is a volunteer run non-profit organization who provide free, homemade birthday cakes to neglected, abused and/or abandoned children and the elderly and disables who would not otherwise receive a birthday cake. Volunteers bake and deliver cakes. [www.bakeawishAustin.org](http://www.bakeawishAustin.org)

**Central Texas Food Bank** is the largest hunger-relief charity in Central Texas, serving more than 46,000 people each week. There are family volunteer times when youth can participate. [www.centraltexasfoodbank.org](http://www.centraltexasfoodbank.org)

**Circle of Friends** is an Alzheimer’s respite group that meets at CBI every Thursday morning from 9am-2pm. This is a great summertime, or school break idea. For information, contact Theresa Lyons at tlyons@mac.com.
Jewish Family Services is the division of the JCAA that provides mental health and social services to the Austin Jewish and general community. JFS offers meaningful service projects that fit your schedule. Food pantry drives, shabbat and holiday programs, tech helper, education talks, games or musical entertainment, phone-pal or friendly visits are just a few examples of how you could be a mensch in our Jewish community. For more information, contact JFS Outreach & Volunteer Coordinator at jfs@shalomaustin.org or call 512-250-1043.

Keep Austin Beautiful provides resources and education to engage citizens in building a more beautiful community. Volunteers work on service projects, including creek and road cleanups. http://keepaustinbeautiful.org/volunteer

Little Helping Hands facilitates family volunteering by organizing and leading volunteer activities with various organizations. Opportunities are suitable for ages 3-17. For older kids and teens, they offer educational and leadership programs to enhance the learning that comes out of service experiences. www.littlehelpinghands.org

Meals on Wheels Central Texas-Greater Austin Area makes and delivers meals to homebound members of the community, including those age 60 and older. Volunteers deliver meals by car. www.mealsonwheelscentraltexas.org

Mobile Loaves & Fishes is a social outreach ministry for the homeless and working poor. Volunteers can help prepare and deliver meals through the St. John Neumann Commissary or work on the Community First Village homes and gardens. www.mlf.org/volunteer

Refugee Services of Texas a social service agency dedicated to providing resettlement services to refugees and other displaced persons. Youth appropriate opportunities include donation collection, apartment set-up, helping families explore Austin and child-care. Volunteers must attend an hour-long training session offered the first Tuesday of each month. http://www.rstx.org/volunteer

Sustainable Food Center oversees the SFC Farmers Market and creates opportunities for individuals to make healthy food choices and participate in a local food system. Youth participation in volunteer opportunities will depend on the job. Volunteers must attend an hour-long orientation session. www.sustainablefoodcenter.org