



The B'nai Mitzvah Manual

Covid Edition

Dear Parents,

What is B'nai Mitzvah? For starters, it's not something you "get," or something that's done to you (as in "I was Bar-Mitzvahed"); nor is it simply a celebration, a milestone event, or a religious service. No, B'nai Mitzvah is really none of these things. Bar/Bat-Mitzvah is something you become. Strictly speaking, it happens automatically when you come of age (in traditional Jewish terms, that's 13 years old). Here at Temple Beth-El, a child marks this coming-of-age through a process of study, social action, self-reflection, and religious service. And we, the congregation and professional staff, together with the child's family, celebrate their entry into Jewish adulthood.

Bat, Bar and B'nai-Mitzvah is only a beginning. It represents a commitment to Jewish learning and living, and of dedication to the welfare of the Jewish community. Most of all, it represents a commitment to continued study and exploration. In the truest sense of the word, becoming Bat, Bar or B'nai Mitzvah is a "commencement" of an emerging Jewish adult's religious studies. We hope that this milestone is just one step of many as our students continue to study and live Jewish lives.

We have created this handbook to help you manage the details of the process and make it as smooth as possible. Please don't hesitate to contact us with your questions as you navigate this sacred moment.

We look forward to celebrating with your family!

L'shalom,

The Temple Beth-El Team

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BAR/BAT MITZVAH: MEANINGS AND MYTHS

Becoming Bar/Bat-Mitzvah is an ancient Jewish practice.

But it's not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. The practice seems to date back at least as far as the Second Century, when the Talmud notes that "at age thirteen a boy becomes subject to the commandments."² Further, traditional Judaism regarded the age of thirteen as the point at which a father is released from responsibility for his son's conduct. Though the practice of Bar Mitzvah has evolved throughout the ages, many believe that by the Middle Ages in Europe, a boy of thirteen would demonstrate his new status in the community by reading from the Torah scroll, leading the community in worship, and offering an original interpretation of the weekly Torah portion. These essential practices have been retained to the present day. In the 20th century, the demand for equality gave rise to the practice of Bat-Mitzvah for girls, which in Reform (and many Conservative) communities has become universal.

Becoming Bar/Bat-Mitzvah is, ultimately, about responsibility.

While the process of Bar/Bat-Mitzvah necessitates the acquisition of skills such as chanting Torah and Haftarah, studying Torah, and speaking in public, these do not comprise the essence of Bar/Bat-Mitzvah. The key is the word mitzvah: a sacred obligation. By becoming Bar/Bat-Mitzvah, a child learns his/her responsibilities to the community and acquires the motivation and experience to respond to a noble challenge. In so doing, s/he emerges as a "Jewish adult": one who has responded to the Jewish definition of maturity.

The Bar/Bat-Mitzvah ceremony is not a performance.

It's a celebration and a commemoration of a child's effort and personal growth throughout the entire process. The service is a religious ceremony, not a show. "The synagogue is not a theater and the bimah is not a stage and the congregation is not an audience. More to the point, the only mistake one can make at a Bar/Bat-Mitzvah is to lose sight of this truth."³

The Bar/Bat-Mitzvah ceremony emphasizes the centrality of Torah in Jewish life.

A child's primary honor at the service is to chant from the Torah scroll. Torah tells the story of our people as they emerged from tribes of nomads and slaves. It commemorates our people's early experience of God. It has served as the source of Jewish wisdom for millennia. And it unites the Jewish people, even today, as a common source of inspiration and hope.

2 - Avot 5:21.

3 - Kushner, *Bar & Bat Mitzvah Handbook*.

The reception which follows is a continuation of the celebration.

Please try not to think of it as a separate party or event. Traditionally called a Se'udat Mitzvah, or meal in honor of the performance of a mitzvah, it is a special and sacred occasion. "This is not to say that it must be solemn; it is to say, however, that the spirit of the... celebration should be perpetuated through the performance of mitzvot."⁴ Setting aside a portion of one's abundance to help the poor and needy can demonstrate that the morning's celebration represents "not an isolated event, but a standard from which to follow."⁵ MAZON, a Jewish Response to Hunger, recommends that the Bar/Bat-Mitzvah contribute a portion of gift money and 3% of the expense of the celebration toward this worthy charity. An enclosure from MAZON is included in your packet.

The meaning of becoming bar/bat mitzvah can lead to further Jewish growth.

Becoming Bar/Bat-Mitzvah "is not the experience of a lifetime, it is a lifetime experience"—a process that can remain with us throughout our lives. We state firmly that the Bar/Bat-Mitzvah ceremony is validated by a commitment to continue religious education at least through Confirmation (10th grade) and ideally through High School Graduation (12th grade), and is enhanced by participation in youth engagement programming.

3, 4 & 5 - Kushner, *Bar & Bat Mitzvah Handbook*.

PREPARING FOR B'NEI MITZVAH: A FAMILY JOURNEY

SCHEDULING THE CEREMONY

The process of Bar/Bat-Mitzvah at Temple Beth-El formally begins at the end of the 4th grade with the scheduling of a Bar/Bat-Mitzvah date. In the Spring of that year, parents receive a letter from our office, and a **B'nei Mitzvah Date Selection Form** for the given year. This form enables parents to state scheduling preferences.

The celebration will be scheduled as close as possible to the child's date of birth. In fairness to all, we cannot give May or June dates to children born in the winter months, much as we would like to promise everyone a warm Spring day. No July and August dates are scheduled. Therefore, children born in these months will probably be scheduled in June or September. Students get their own date except for twins and special circumstances approved by the clergy.

PRAYER BOOK GIFTS

Sometime during the child's first year of formal Hebrew studies (5th grade), students will be presented with their own siddur (prayer book) at the Kabbalat Siddur ceremony that commemorates the beginning of their Hebrew studies. This siddur will be used in the preparation and leading of the Bar/Bat-Mitzvah service. Parents of students who join our school after 5th grade will be provided a siddur when they begin learning.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

ELIGIBILITY

The celebration of Bar/Bat-Mitzvah at Temple Beth-El is a privilege afforded only to members in good standing. A member's account must be current, including annual support, Preservation Fund, B'nei Mitzvah fees, and all other miscellaneous charges. Each child must be within a year of his/her thirteenth birthday (or older—it's never too late!) and enrolled in the Religious School of Temple Beth-El at the time of Bar/Bat-Mitzvah, having successfully met all the requirements in Religious and Hebrew studies.

FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS

In addition to the obligations of membership to Temple Beth-El, there are various costs incurred by the Temple specifically pertaining to Bar/Bat-Mitzvah which require reimbursement.

The **B'nei Mitzvah fee of \$600/ year for students in Grades 5-7** covers:

- 3 years of curriculum designed to help students prepare not only for the day they become a b'nei mitzvah but the overall questions and ideas that relate to becoming an adult in the Jewish community.
- 3 years of Small Group Hebrew classes
- 20 sessions (30 minutes long) with our tutor
- supplies necessary for preparation
- security and maintenance staff

This fee will be automatically added to your Temple billing statement, and should be paid each year they are in middle school. **If your child requires additional one-on-one sessions with a tutor**, you will be responsible for scheduling those sessions and negotiating fees directly with the tutor, which will be paid directly to them.

MEETINGS WITH RABBIS, CANTOR, AND TUTOR

The period of preparation for Bar/Bat-Mitzvah, which is explained in detail below, begins approximately **12 MONTHS before the scheduled date**. (If your child will be away for an extended duration (like summer camp), do not count this time in your preparation timetable.)

Students will receive a binder with copies of the Torah portion, Haftarah portion, trope (cantillation melodies), and readings. Mp3s of the blessings, prayers, Torah and Haftarah portions can be found on the Temple website.

During the first 6 months of preparation, students will have a special Small Group Hebrew where they will clergy and tutors on Sunday mornings to establish expectations and practice essential skills necessary to lead the congregation in worship the day of their service. During the first 6 months of preparation, students will:

- review and polish the prayers and blessings they will lead during the service
- learn Torah trope (cantillation melodies)
- begin to study their Torah portion
- begin to write their D'var Torah

Approximately 6 months before the scheduled date, families will need to meet with Rabbi Mack to review logistics for the service. Judith Gilson, our Clergy Assistant will be in touch to schedule those meetings.

Approximately 6 months before the scheduled date Rabbi Mack will send a Google Doc to begin each student's D'var Torah (speech). Students should be able to access this document with their phone or via computer. Students will need to schedule time to meet with Rabbi Mack via Zoom to review their D'var Torah. Judith Gilson can schedule these meetings. Students who are writing a Prayer will also work on that writing during these sessions.

Approximately 4-5 weeks before the scheduled date, students will meet once a week with the Cantor in a one-on-one session to conduct final rehearsals.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Preparing for Bar/Bat-Mitzvah requires diligence, patience, organization, and consistency. The following five guidelines will greatly assist your preparation and our ability to facilitate your progress.

1. The Bar/Bat-Mitzvah candidate will practice a minimum of thirty (30) minutes each day. A single day off per week is appropriate, but not more. As the date draws near, 45 minutes to 1 hour will be necessary, or as determined by the Cantor, Tutor and/or Rabbi. **REGULAR PRACTICE IS CRUCIAL.** Working once or twice a week for several hours **will not achieve the same effect as daily practice for shorter periods of time.**
2. Assignments must be completed each week and be kept up to date.
3. **Please bring all materials to every tutoring session and meeting.** Always have a pen or pencil and paper on hand.
4. **PHOTOCOPY any materials and/or save documents to the cloud so you have access to them.** This will make it hard for you to lose something important. Remember, becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is all about responsibility. If you do lose any materials, please contact the Cantor **immediately** for a replacement.

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

We will strive to make Bar/Bat-Mitzvah an enriching, positive, and meaningful experience for you and your family. For students with learning differences, we can work with existing learning strategies towards the goal Bar/Bat-Mitzvah. If your family is experiencing particularly stressful circumstances, this too will be helpful to know so that we can assist. Any such information will be treated confidentially and sensitively. We are aware that the experience of Bar/Bat-Mitzvah can easily become overwhelming, especially given these concerns; we are available to guide you and your child throughout the journey.

WHAT DOES THE BAR/BAT-MITZVAH DO?

SHALIACH TZIBUR: A LEADER OF WORSHIP

At Temple Beth-El, the Bar/Bat-Mitzvah joins with the clergy in leading the congregation in worship. The Hebrew prayers for this responsibility have been learned in Hebrew school prior to Bar/Bat-Mitzvah; and will be practiced with the Cantor and tutor. Specific prayers and English readings will be coordinated with the Cantor and Tutor on an individual basis.

TORAH AND HAFTARAH READING

B'nei Mitzvah will learn a total of 10-20 verses from the weekly Torah portion, later to be divided into four sections, or aliyot. They will also learn a selection from the weekly Haftarah. Specific verses are coordinated by the Cantor on an individual basis.

The Torah is un-vocalized (without the diacritical vowels or accents) while the Haftarah is chanted with vowels. Moreover, each student will learn the tropes or cantillation melodies. These skills are taught by the Cantor in the tutoring sessions at the beginning of their preparation. They are honed through practice with recordings (provided by the Cantor) and with the Tutor.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah will chant the Torah blessings only over the fourth and final aliyah, or reading, known as the maftir (“conclusion”). Other aliyot are given to family members and friends.

D’VAR TORAH

Following the reading of Torah and Haftarah, the Bar/Bat-Mitzvah will deliver a brief (3-4 minute) teaching drawn from the Torah portion called a D’var Torah. This message will be prepared in monthly consultation with the Rabbi.

A D’var Torah (literally, a “word” of Torah) is not a sermon or a term paper. It is, simply, the identification of a question about or feature of the Torah portion followed by a thoughtful response. It is a single idea, based on the text of the Torah, and applied to the congregation and the speaker’s personal experience.

Students will compose a four or five paragraph D’var Torah based on the student’s Torah reading. Together with clergy, students will study the Torah and relevant commentaries, review the student’s writing for content, and practice delivering the D’var Torah from the bimah.

Parents form an essential part of this process, helping with initial reading and brainstorming, as well as writing and proofreading—we encourage you to get involved in this process!!

The D’var Torah is, however, most importantly, an opportunity for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to teach the congregation Torah and should reflect your own original thought and character!!

PERSONAL PRAYER & THANK YOU’S

Students will write a personal prayer to be read as we return the Torah to the ark. This is a great time for them to thank their tutor, teachers and the clergy as well as their family and friends. We encourage you to be as inclusive as possible.

IMPORTANT

Students should come to all tutoring sessions and meetings prepared. There will be work to do at home in between each session. Taking the time to do the work each week in between sessions will insure that their time during sessions is well spent and productive.

TZEDAKAH/CHARITY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Many families have chosen this joyous occasion to make a special donation to the Temple in honor of their child's celebration. Sharing your joy in the form of tzedakah is always appropriate.

We suggest, in the spirit of your child reaching a state of maturity and responsibility, that they be encouraged to make a personal contribution to a charity of their choice from the gift money they receive.

THE BAR/BAT-MITZVAH SERVICE

The following safety protocol has been determined by the Temple Beth-El COVID-19 Medical committee and will apply to Zoom B'nei Mitzvah Celebrations until the time when COVID-19 is no longer a public Health Issue:

- 1) The attendees in the sanctuary will be limited to the immediate family of the B'nei mitzvah up to a total of 15. That number includes the rabbi, 1 maintenance person and photographer.
- 2) The family will create a list for contact tracing.
- 3) All attendees not on the bima will commit to wearing a mask the entire duration of their time in the sanctuary.
- 4) Out of town guests agree to conform to the state regulations about quarantine and testing.
- 5) Attendees agree not to sing aloud due to the danger of spreading aerosolized particles. These rules will be contingent upon state guidelines and advice on best practices for the Reform Movement and are subject to sudden change as the progression of the virus expands and contracts.

WHEN AND WHERE SERVICES ARE HELD

- Bar/Bat-Mitzvah services are held during our congregational Shabbat morning service which begins at 10:30 am from September until June
- Rehearsal for those with parts in the service will take place at 9:45 am. This is also an excellent time to take photographs.

ON THE DAY OF YOUR CELEBRATION

The Bar/Bat-Mitzvah and all members of the family who are participating in the service are asked to meet with the Clergy in the sanctuary promptly at 9:45 AM. It is advisable to arrive no later than 9:30 AM. For services at other times, a run-through is coordinated with the family at a mutually agreeable time.

INCLUSION OF RELIGIOUS SCHOOL CLASSMATES

We encourage students to invite all Religious School classmates to B'nei Mitzvah celebrations to avoid hurt feelings. Email Rachel Mersky Woda, our Director of Youth & Family Engagement for a class list.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE SERVICE?

We ask that you use the **B'nei Mitzvah Information Sheet** (found on our website) to plan the details of the service with the Rabbis. It includes all service responsibilities and honors which can be designated to your family members and friends.

INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNGER SIBLINGS AND CHILDREN

Children may be given age-appropriate honors such as helping to dress the Torah or opening the Ark. Often younger siblings or children will join the family at the end of the service to recite Kiddush and Motzi. Any child having already completed Bar/Bat-Mitzvah is eligible for an aliyah to the Torah.

INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Temple Beth-El welcomes the participation of non-Jewish family and friends. While there are some limitations, we very much want your guests to feel welcome.

Non-Jews may participate in any of the honors listed below except for:

- the recitation of the Torah blessings (aliyot)
- the lifting of the Torah (hagbah)
- the Kiddush blessing.

In the instance of an interfaith marriage, both parents may come up to the Torah, but only the Jewish spouse may recite the blessings.

SPEAKING PARTS

1) Aliyot

An aliyah is the honor of being called to the Torah to recite the blessings before and after the reading of the scroll. A single aliyah may be recited alone or shared among no more than 3 people. Please make sure that your honorees are familiar with the blessings. They may be found on pg. 568 of Mishkan Tefila and there is a laminated copy in large print on the bimah as well. An Mp3 recording of this blessing is available on our website. Each Bar/Bat-Mitzvah student has a total of 4 aliyot, the last of which is recited by the Bar/Bat- Mitzvah him/herself.

2) Parents' Blessing

In our service, parents are afforded the opportunity to acknowledge in public, and in a sacred setting, the joy and pride they feel at this moment. As importantly, they can use that time to share their hopes and dreams for their child, particularly in relation to being called to the Torah. In other words, it's a chance to express the meaning of this moment.

- Speak to your child, not about your child.
- Please think of the Jewish message you want to give your child.
- Write out your message – then your child will have it for posterity.

You may wish to utilize a reading or poem, or you may write something entirely unique. Speak from your heart. Either way, we encourage you to prepare your remarks in advance. We also respectfully request that each parent's remarks not exceed two minutes. Our clergy are happy to discuss this practice with you.

3) Presentation of Gifts

Each child receives a TaNaCH (Jewish Bible) thanks to the generosity of the Brotherhood & Sisterhood, a certificate from the Temple, and a certificate from NFTY (North American Federation of Temple Youth), the last of which is redeemable toward travel to Israel.

A family member or friend is invited to present these gifts with brief congratulatory remarks. This is an opportunity for someone who can express the importance of continuing Jewish learning – a teacher, mentor, older family member - to say a few words to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

- This person does not need to be Jewish.
- The presenter will be called up by one of our rabbis at the end of the service
- The presenter is invited to share a few words, but these remarks should not exceed a minute or two.
- This person may want to speak about the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and the significance of this milestone occasion or about his or her relationship with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- It is not necessary to speak about the TaNaCH (Hebrew Bible) and its history or contents.

4) Kiddush and Motzi

The celebration ends with the prayers over the wine and bread, for which the celebrant may be joined by friends or family.

NON-SPEAKING PARTS

2) Torah Passing

When the ark is opened, the Torah is passed down through the generations: from parents to the Bar/Bat-Mitzvah.

3) Other Torah Service Honors

Other honors include an Opening and Closing of the Ark, and Lifting and Dressing the Torah scroll (hagbah and g'lilah).

GUIDELINES FOR PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY

The Bar/Bat-Mitzvah service is an occasion best captured with the lens of the heart. Photography—flash or other—is not permitted in the sanctuary during worship. Many families choose to have a professional photographer take pictures the week before Bar/Bat-Mitzvah or on the morning of the ceremony. Whatever your arrangements, please follow the following guidelines. Your cooperation is appreciated.

FOR THE FAMILY

- Inform the Temple office of your photography arrangements. We cannot guarantee that the sanctuary will be available at the time unless the space is reserved.
- Photos of the family can be taken until 9:45am when rehearsal begins. The photographer may continue to take photos during the rehearsal.
- Please conclude all photography promptly by 10:15 AM.

TBE LIVE STREAMING AND DVDS

- We have the capability to live stream and/or record the service from the sanctuary.
- A camera engineer records images and audio of the event that is instantly transmitted through our website over the internet. Only people with knowledge of our web address and password can have access to it from any point in the world, provided they have a computer with internet access.
- According to our experience this can be a great service to relatives and friends that cannot attend and who would enjoy watching it from the distance.
- The fee for this service is \$200. To request this service, contact Judy Moseley, Executive Director.

FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHER

- The Temple opens at 8:00 on Saturdays for early photographs. Formal shots may be taken until 9:45am. Informal shots may be taken during the rehearsal. All photographic equipment must be removed from the sanctuary by 10:15 AM for a 10:30 AM service.
- The Torah scrolls **may not** be opened for photography without the presence of the clergy.
- The Torah scrolls **may not** be removed from the Ark without the presence of the clergy.
- No chairs may be moved or rearranged by a photographer. If the photographer needs to move sanctuary furniture, s/he must ask a Temple maintenance staff member to do it.
- The lectern microphones **may not** be moved or removed for photography.
- Photography may resume immediately following the Shabbat service, after all worshippers have left the sanctuary.
- Photographers **may not** take photographs of the family at the brief ceremony behind the *bimah* five minutes prior to the service.
- **Non-flash** photos may be taken during the service from **outside** the sanctuary or chapel.