

Everything You've Wanted
to Know about
B'nei Mitzvah

.... and beyond!

Updated July 2023

Introduction

Mazal Tov! We are looking forward to sharing this happy and exciting event in your family. This Handbook will help you prepare for your child to become a b'nei mitzvah (child of the commandment) at Temple Beth Shalom. We are extremely proud of our b'nei mitzvah program and its emphasis on the spiritual meaning of this experience for the child, family and community. We know that your child's b'nei mitzvah will be an important and meaningful rite of passage for your entire family, and we are here to respond to your needs and concerns.

Through their B'nei Mitzvah year your child will better identify with their Jewish heritage and community, gain recognition of personal achievement through study, and develop a sense of self-confidence. Judaism is not only a religion, but a way of life. By learning Judaism's customs, literature and prayers, a young person can share more fully in our rich tradition. Equally important is the ritual passage that celebrates the transition from childhood to adult membership in the congregation. We recognize, as did our ancestors, the importance of ceremony in our lives. The b'nei mitzvah ritual is a link in an unbroken chain made up of thousands of years of Jewish tradition. Each ceremony can be understood as a symbolic renewal of Abraham and Sarah's covenant with God and the start of a young adult's life of Jewish decision-making.

As each teen affirms their commitment to lead a responsible Jewish life, the Jewish people as a whole are renewed and strengthened. Your membership in the Temple Beth Shalom family reinforces your child's sense of belonging in our community. **TBS membership is a requirement for celebrating a b'nei mitzvah, as is at least two years of registration and participation in the Religious School.**

At Temple Beth Shalom, preparation for the b'nei mitzvah is a time for individual instruction and experience. Our children have the opportunity to expand their understanding of Judaism above and beyond their current awareness. It does not signal the end of their education, but rather the beginning of adult Jewish learning. Please contact Ellen Zieselman for more information about the Hochberg Academy, our innovative 8th-12th grade program.

Let us know how we can be of assistance as you begin this journey.

Shalom,

Neil Amswych
Lianna Mendelson
Wendy Steinberg

Rabbi
Cantor-Educator
Executive Director

GENERAL POLICIES

- **In order to celebrate b'nei mitzvah at TBS, the family must be members in good standing of Temple Beth Shalom.** Please check with the Executive Director when your ceremony is scheduled.
- All b'nei mitzvah services will take place during regular Saturday morning services and will be scheduled a minimum of a year in advance.
- Following attendance and participation in the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service on Friday night, the student customarily helps conduct the Shabbat morning service in addition to reading from the *Torah* and *Haftarah* (Prophets). They then deliver a short *D'var Torah* (sermon). We will work with your child to make sure that the work they do in the service is meaningful to them, and we acknowledge that looks different for different people.
- **NO photography is allowed during Shabbat services.** Photography is allowed and encouraged during the final rehearsal at 10:30 am on the Friday morning before the ceremony. The service will be recorded from our live stream and a download link of the service will be available for the family at no charge. **Cell phones should be on silent and put away.**
- The participation of any outside (non-TBS) clergy in the ceremony must be approved by Rabbi Neil well in advance. **Outside Jewish professionals may only participate in a service if previously approved and invited by the clergy of Temple Beth Shalom 3 MONTHS in advance.** You will be entirely responsible for any additional costs accrued.
- A *tallit* (prayer shawl), and *kipah* (yarmulke – head covering) may be worn by people of any gender. There are *tallitot* and *kippot* for sale in the TBS office; please inquire with the office staff.
- **TBS Office Hours: M-Th 9:30am – 4:30pm ; F 9:30am – 3:00pm**

EXPECTATIONS: 2 years prior

- The student will be registered in Religious School and attend regularly on both Wednesdays and Sundays for a minimum of two years before celebrating bar/bat mitzvah at TBS.
- By the end of 6th Grade, the student should be able to:
 - correctly identify Hebrew letters by name and sound;
 - correctly read vowel sounds;
 - decode (accurately read) liturgical Hebrew;
 - translate selected Hebrew roots.
- If these benchmarks are not met, a private Hebrew tutor may need to be hired at the parent(s) expense, in consultation with the Director of Education.
- The student will have attended a minimum of one Shabbat service per month, mixing between Friday evenings and Saturday mornings.
- The student and at least one adult will participate in all scheduled B'nei Mitzvah Family Learning workshops
- It is recommended that a parent who is unfamiliar with Hebrew register to take an Adult Hebrew class in order to be able to more fully support the child's preparation.

EXPECTATIONS: Year Leading Up to Ceremony

- The student will be registered in Religious School and regularly attend both Wednesdays and Sundays for the entire 7th Grade year.
- The student will attend a minimum of two Shabbat Services per month, mainly Saturday morning services. The student will be expected to participate in a leadership role at services as frequently as possible.
- The student and at least one adult will attend all scheduled Torah Study sessions on Sunday mornings.
- The family will meet with Rabbi Neil one year before the ceremony to discuss the journey ahead, as well as one month after the ceremony to discuss life after the ceremony. There will be other meetings in between as scheduled.

TIMELINE for STUDENTS

This timeline is aspirational. We work together to stick as closely to this timeline as possible, aware that the needs of students require some flexibility.

- Cantor Lianna will schedule all b'nei mitzvah dates in consultation with the parents and the student. The date will be confirmed once the parents meet with Wendy, the Executive Director. **After this, date changes will be made only in writing.**

- Approximately **EIGHT months** before the scheduled date, the student will begin to work with Cantor Lianna in weekly 30 minute meetings to learn how to chant their Torah and to review prayers.
- By **FOUR months** before the date, the student will be working with Rabbi Neil to complete their *D'var Torah* and their introduction to the Haftarah.
 - Pre-BM prep sessions with Rabbi Neil usually follow the format described below. Sometimes a student will need one or two more sessions based on the complexity of the material and how much work they've put in between sessions. When starting on your BM journey, please ensure that 5 or 6 sessions are booked with Rabbi Neil.
 - Session 1: Introduction, expectations, looking at possible study passages, starting to explore the Torah portion.
 - Session 2: Narrowing down study passages, more in-depth Torah.
 - Session 3: Looking at traditional Torah commentaries.
 - Session 4: Looking at modern Torah commentaries, introduction to Haftarah.
 - Session 5: Reviewing speech and Haftarah introduction.
- By **THREE months** before the date, the student will have become proficient in their *Torah* portion.
- By **TWO months** before the date, the student will have completed and started practicing delivery of the *d'rash* and their introduction to the Haftarah.
- **ONE DAY BEFORE:** On Friday morning, from 10:30am-12:00 (appx.) all participating family members will meet with the clergy for a rehearsal. Please let us know if there is any difficulty with this time for you.
- The **Friday night** before the ceremony, during the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service, the family will be given the honor of lighting the Shabbat candles and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will lead certain prayers. After the ceremony, there is a special circle where the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's classmates as well as older students gather to share some time and thoughts together – **it is essential that every student come to the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service on the Friday Night before all the Saturday services with B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies** to make this unique ceremony as full and meaningful as possible.
- **The Bat/Bar Mitzvah service begins at 10:30 a.m.** All participants will meet with the Rabbi at 10 a.m. in the Children's Library.

TIMELINE for PARENTS

1 YEAR BEFORE – AS SOON AS DATE IS SCHEDULED WITH CANTOR LIANNA

- Schedule initial meeting with Wendy, our Executive Director, to begin discussing logistics. The subsequent stages of the process for either the student or the parents cannot happen until this meeting has occurred.

10 MONTHS BEFORE THE DATE

- Meet with Faith to schedule all the necessary meetings with Rabbi Neil to be held throughout the process.

9 MONTHS BEFORE THE DATE

- Submit the necessary form to Wendy to reserve the Social Hall for your event. After this time, the availability of the space can no longer be guaranteed.

3 MONTHS BEFORE THE DATE

- If you wish, discuss with Rabbi Neil the participation of outside Jewish professionals.
- Meet with Faith to discuss your personalized pamphlet.
- Submit your student's photo and statement for the bulletin.
- Meet with Rabbi Neil to start working on the Parent's Prayer.

1 MONTH BEFORE THE DATE

- Submit the Service Honors form with all the names of participants. Make sure that you include the full Hebrew names for those being called up for Aliyot.
- Meet with Cantor Lianna to discuss music preferences for the service.
- Notify Wendy if the Oneg setup needs to be different from usual.

FRIDAY, DAY BEFORE (N.B. THE TEMPLE OFFICE CLOSSES AT 3 P.M.)

- **10:30 A.M. – 12:00 (appx.)** Rehearsal with clergy and all participating family members and friends (and photographer, if desired).
- **BEFORE 3 P.M.** All flowers for the Bimah and the Oneg tables must be delivered.
- **BEFORE 3 P.M.** All Oneg supplies must be delivered

- **6:15 P.M or 5:15** Arrive for Kabbalat Shabbat Service
- **6:30 P.M or 5:30.** Kabbalat Shabbat Service Begins. Family lights candles, student leads certain prayers, class will provide Oneg after.
 - Please note - We have family services at 5:30 PM once a month (typically, but not always on the second Tuesday of the month.) Cantor Lianna will let you know if it's a family service on the weekend of your child's b'nei mitzvah, and they are on the temple calendar.

SATURDAY, DAY OF CEREMONY

- **10:00 A.M.** Family meets in Children's library with clergy
- **10:30 A.M.** Service begins

LOGISTICS and FEES

- The **b'nei mitzvah fee** (\$900) will be assessed in 6th grade (in addition to Religious School tuition). ***The b'nei mitzvah fee must be paid in full before a date will be confirmed.*** The child is then entitled to eight months of private lessons with one of our tutors. In addition, they will receive digital files with recordings of the prayers and Torah verses and a *Mishkan T'filah* Journal Edition. **In special circumstances**, a child needing extra hours of Hebrew training may require a private tutor (to be paid separately by the parent), in consultation with the Director of Education.
- The Sanctuary pews seat approximately 120, and an additional 40 chairs may be placed in the back.
- There is no charge for the use of the Sanctuary and Social Hall for the ceremony or a *kiddush* **immediately** following services. Rental fees will be charged for additional events. **If such events are planned, contact the Executive Director at least NINE MONTHS before the service date.** After this time, we cannot guarantee the availability of the facilities due to the large number of events and groups renting our facility.
- Custodial services (setting up, opening the building, locking up, and cleaning) will be billed to the family. Please check with the executive director regarding rates. Two hours of custodial time are generally sufficient.
- Security charges: Security is provided by TBS on Friday nights and until 12 pm on Saturdays. If your celebration will be using the building after 12, you will be billed hourly for a security guard. **These hours must be scheduled in advance with Wendy.**

PARENT'S PRAYER

Parents will be invited to compose a personal and heartfelt prayer, to be delivered on the *bima* during the service, expressing praise for the child and parental hopes for the future. Rabbi Neil will assist in this process. The length of the prayer should be no more than five minutes.

FAMILY LEARNING WORKSHOPS and TORAH STUDY

In preparation for the b'nei mitzvah year, families will have the opportunity to learn with the clergy on Sunday mornings during Sunday School. Depending on the size of the class, there may be a few workshops during 6th grade, as well as 2-3 Sunday mornings through 7th grade. Families will share a potluck breakfast before the study session. **At least one adult must attend each family workshop with the student.**

MITZVAH PROJECT

*The world stands upon three things: on Torah, on prayer,
and on acts of loving-kindness. (Pirke Avot 1:2)*

At times of rejoicing, Jews always remember those less fortunate. *Tzedakah* (literally “righteousness”) is the sharing of our resources with others who are in need. The b’nei mitzvah year is a marvelous opportunity for the entire family to choose and get actively involved in the child’s Mitzvah Project. The chosen organization or project might be local, national, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the USA, Israel or elsewhere in the world. There are generally three parts included in the Mitzvah Project.

1. A donation is made by the family to an organization that focuses on issues around hunger, such as Mazon. This is often a percentage of the amount spent on the party or the catering, reminding us that while we celebrate, we should always remember those who are unable to even feed themselves a regular meal.
2. The student makes a pledge to donate a portion of their monetary gifts to a cause that they feel passionate about, usually but not always a cause related to the third part.
3. The student finds a cause that sparks their passion, often one that ties into a personal interest or a theme of their Torah portion. They then create a project through which they give of their time and energy to benefit that cause. This, in some ways, is the most important part because it ends up being the most meaningful to the student.

If you need ideas, speak with Ellen Zieselman or Rabbi Neil

HONORS AND ALIYOT

The b’nei mitzvah child is given the first *aliyah* to the Torah. Honors for family / guests include blessings during the Torah reading (*aliyot*), lifting the Torah (*hagbahah* - which takes practice and physical strength), dressing the Torah (*g’lilah* - easy for most people), opening and closing the ark, English translation of the Torah, or leading the congregation in English prayers.

If one parent is not Jewish, they may come up for an Aliyah together with the Jewish parent. We have an English translation of the blessings that is appropriate, or you may choose to recite the Hebrew together, or to just stand together while one person recites the blessing. This is for immediate family, such as for a non-Jewish parent of the BM and is not for extended family or friends. A non-Jewish partner of a Jew with an Aliyah may come up and stand with their partner while the Jewish individual recites the

blessing. Only Jewish extended family and friends may receive the honor of *aliyot*, *hagbahah* and *g'lilah*. There are, however, many ways to include and honor non-Jewish friends and family members. Non-Jewish participants may be invited to open and close the Ark, offer an extra poem, reading, prayer or translation, or be ushers before the ceremony.

Please invite all honorees well in advance, in consultation with clergy. If honorees need help with Hebrew, Cantor Lianna will be glad to assist (in advance).

Each *aliyah* is called to the Torah using Hebrew names. **Please provide all needed information to Cantor Lianna Rabbi Neil and Faith at least ONE MONTH in advance.** (*Full Hebrew names include the parent or parents, e.g. Yosef ben Avraham v'Miriam, Sarah bat Moshe*).

Younger brothers and sisters who are old enough and willing may be given a reading part in the service, or other honors that can be discussed.

A representative from the Board will make presentations to the child on behalf of the congregation. If you would like to request a particular Board member make this presentation, please let the office know at least one month in advance.

TBS BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT

We would be delighted to include a photo of your child and a brief statement in our bi-monthly bulletin. The deadline for bulletin submissions is approximately three months before the ceremony. Faith or Devin will reach out to you about this.

AT THE TEMPLE

ATTIRE: The synagogue is a sacred space. Please remind your guests to dress respectfully and appropriately for the occasion.

FLOWERS: It is customary for the b'nei mitzvah family to provide flowers for the bima at Shabbat services. The arrangement should be around 2 feet tall in order to fill the space (gladiolas are often suggested). You may also wish to provide flowers or centerpieces for the tables on Friday night and Saturday. Flower deliveries must be made before 3 pm on Friday. **(NOTE: Please be sure that the arrangement is completely unscented!)**

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY: You must make prior arrangements for the exact times that photographs may be taken. The rehearsal on Friday morning is an excellent opportunity. **No photographs will be permitted during the service. Cell phones must be silenced and put away.** TBS can provide you with a recording of the Saturday morning service.

FRIDAY NIGHT: The class oneg captain hosts the *oneg* on the Friday night before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony (*oneg shabbat* means "joy of the sabbath" and refers to refreshments following services). The parents of the student's Religious School class traditionally take turns as *oneg* captains to ensure that each celebration is joyous and stress-free for the family. Depending on other scheduled events, the oneg can be set up Friday afternoon or immediately before the evening service. **All deliveries must be made before 3 pm on Friday, at which time the office is closed, and the Sanctuary/Social Hall is locked.**

- Tables and chairs, coffee and tea will be set up by the office. If you require a setup different from the usual, you will need to alert the office **at least ONE MONTH** in advance.
- We usually have 50-75 people in attendance on Friday evenings, but check with the office to learn of any special events that evening. Please add your guests to this number to provide an appropriate amount of food.
- TBS can provide reusable, heavy plastic tablecloths for up to 10 tables as well as generic paper goods. Cloth tablecloths or paper goods of specific colors need to be arranged by the family. **Temple policy prohibits the use of styrofoam cups or plates.**

SATURDAY MORNING: The Shabbat morning *Kiddush* following the service can be simple or elaborate. The Temple will set out grape juice and *challah* in the kitchen.

SATURDAY GREETING: Every family is required to sign up to greet at two b'nei mitzvah ceremonies of their classmates. That way, we will have two families greeting at each ceremony. Greeters arrive by 10:00 and their responsibility is to welcome people with a smile, hand out programs, and answer questions.

CONNECTING WITH THE TBS COMMUNITY

The 7th grade is a time for bonding. We hope that our Religious School students and their families will gain a lifelong connection to one another and to Temple Beth Shalom. **All of the children in the child's Religious School class MUST be included on the guest list. The roster is available from the Director of Education.**

LET'S PARTY!

Whether to have a party, and how elaborate the party will be, is up to you. You may use the Social Hall for a buffet lunch, a sit-down lunch, a dinner party or an evening celebration, or you may choose another location for your event.

- If you plan to use the Temple for any part of your reception, you must arrange it with the Executive Director. A deposit and completed contract will be required, including insurance that the Temple will be held harmless in the event of accident.
- If you plan to serve liquor at the party, you must have a bar with a licensed server.

CATERERS

Temple Beth Shalom observes a Kosher Style policy: **No pork or shellfish products are allowed on the premises.** It is also customary not to mix milk and meat products in the same meal. Vegetarian options are always much appreciated. Please remind anyone providing food of these guidelines.

THIRTEEN THOUGHTS ABOUT B'NEI MITZVAH

1. B'nei mitzvah means "children of the commandment." It is interpreted to mean a young adult who is subject to the commandments and takes responsibility for their enactment.
2. Students do not *have* b'nei mitzvah. They are not bestowed upon youngsters; rather, students *become* b'nei mitzvah. It is a life cycle event that occurs automatically when a child reaches the age of thirteen.
3. Your child, although in the process of growing up, still needs your love, help, and guidance.
4. B'nei mitzvah refers to the ceremonies that publicly honor the children who have reached the "age of commandment."
5. The b'nei mitzvah ceremonies mark the "rite of passage" that is the beginning of a child's road to maturity.
6. The b'nei mitzvah ceremonies acknowledge a young person's commitment to their religious responsibilities within our community.
7. The b'nei mitzvah ceremonies recognize that a young person has attained a certain degree of knowledge about Judaism.
8. The b'nei mitzvah ceremonies do not signify the end of Jewish education but rather an occasion for renewed commitment to further Jewish learning.
9. The b'nei mitzvah ceremonies are most meaningful when the parents play an active role in the child's Jewish education and b'nei mitzvah preparation.
10. The b'nei mitzvah ceremonies help to instill a sense of poise, self-worth, and accomplishment in a young person.
11. The b'nei mitzvah ceremonies should be the focal point of the celebration. The religious nature of the occasion must be paramount, not a party.
12. The b'nei mitzvah ceremonies are not only focused on the child or the family. It is an important day for the whole TBS community and the entire Jewish people, who are welcoming the student into our community as a responsible, maturing Jewish young adult.
13. B'nei mitzvah is a special way of preserving our Jewish heritage.

B'NEI MITZVAH GLOSSARY

- Aliyah** Literally "going up" or "ascent." It is the term used when one is "called" to the Torah to say the blessings before and after a section is read or chanted. The plural form is **aliyot**.
- Amidah** The essential core set of prayers in the Jewish prayer service. Literally means "standing" because these prayers are recited while standing. The first three prayers are known as *Avot* (ancestors) *G'vurot* (God's power), and *Kedushah* (sanctification of God's Name). This part of the service is also known as *Tefillah* (the prayer).
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah** Literally "son/daughter of the commandment." The age (13) at which a Jew begins to become responsible for ethical and ritual decisions. At this age, the child is considered a full member of the Jewish community. The plural form is **B'nei Mitzvah** (for boys and girls) or **B'not Mitzvah** (for girls only).
- Bar'chu** The call to prayer, recited while standing. The Barchu marks the formal beginning of communal prayer. Traditionally, it is chanted as a call and response. The literal meaning is the command form of the verb "to bless."
- Bima** The elevated platform holding the ark.
- B'rachah** Literally "blessing." This is a generic term since blessings may be recited before any act, ritual or otherwise. The plural form is **B'rachot**.
- Chumash** From the Hebrew *chameish*, or five. A book which contains the Five Books of Moses, often with commentary and Haftarah portions as well. It is not a Bible, which contains many more readings.
- Etz Chayim** Literally a "tree of life." A term used for the Torah, as well as the wooden spools upon which the Torah scroll is wound. This is also the title of the *chumash* that the students receive in their religious school class.
- G'lilah** The act of dressing the Torah scroll after it has been read.
- Haftarah** A reading taken from the Writings or the Prophets. The Haftarah often shares a theme with the Torah portion.

- Hagbahah** The physically challenging act of lifting the Torah scroll, holding it open, and showing it to the congregation after the reading. No blessing is recited.
- Hakafah** Carrying the Torah around the congregation during the Torah service.
- Havdalah** Ceremony which ritually brings the Sabbath to a close, involving a braided candle, cup of wine, and spices. One of the rabbis would be happy to lead havdalah at the start of a Saturday night party.
- Kippah** Skull cap (also known as a *yarmulke* in Yiddish). Traditionally worn by men at all times, in the liberal community it is now worn by both men and women. A kippah is optional in Reform congregations.
- Kiddush** Blessing over wine on Shabbat and holidays.
- Parashah** The portion of Torah that is read or chanted each Shabbat.
- Motzi** The blessing over bread.
- Sh'ma** This prayer is often seen as a declaration of Jewish faith, and is a key prayer recited in the morning and evening ritual.
- Siddur** Jewish prayer book. The word *siddur* has the same Hebrew root as *seder* (order).
- Tanach** The Hebrew term applied to the Jewish Scriptures (Bible). It is an acronym for Torah (Five Books of Moses), **N**evi'im (Prophets), and **K**'tuvim (Writings).
- Tallit** Prayer Shawl, traditionally worn at morning prayers. May be worn by men or women in liberal congregations. The fringes at the corners are the essential elements, reminding us of the *mitzvot* (commandments).
- Yad** Literally "hand." The pointer that is used when reading from the Torah scroll, so that the parchment is not damaged by touching. Often a yad is shaped like a hand, with a pointing finger.