

Temple Beth El

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B' Mitzvah Handbook of Policies and Procedures

2021 edition

*There are two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children.
One of these is roots; the other, wings. - Anonymous*

A Note From Rabbi Cassi Kail

Mazal tov! Congratulations! You are about to embark on one of the most significant Jewish milestones in your family's life. It is a spiritual, emotional, and meaningful process that we hope you will look back on with fondness, pride, and joy. You have passed the Jewish traditions down *l'dor vador*, from generation to generation. In becoming *B'mitzvah*, your child will have the opportunity to lead us in worship and Torah, demonstrating how much your child has grown as a person and as a Jew.

In preparation, *B'mitzvah* students study prayers, learn to read Torah, and work with me to create a teaching of their own. The cantor and I are thrilled to prepare your child for this sacred occasion. Please note that your involvement and cooperation will also be integral in making this a wonderful and positive experience.

We understand that the *B'mitzvah* process can feel a little overwhelming at first. We hope this handbook will answer many of your questions and give you a better idea of the work involved, and what to expect. Temple staff and clergy are here for you every step of the way. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Rabbi Cassi Kail

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Your Temple Beth El family is thrilled to celebrate this important moment with you.

I thought my child was becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Why is this called the B'mitzvah handbook?

Hebrew is a gendered language, which means that the words for coming of age vary depending on how one identifies. A person who identifies as a male becomes a *Bar Mitzvah*, while a person who identifies as female becomes *Bat Mitzvah*. If someone does not identify as male or female, they become *Brit Mitzvah* (a non-gendered term meaning “covenant of the mitzvah/commandments). In order to be concise and inclusive, we will use *B'mitzvah* as shorthand throughout this handbook.

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Preparation for Becoming B'Mitzvah

In the year leading up to your B'mitzvah date, we ask you to take part in a Family Enrichment class, regularly attend Shabbat services, and participate in a mitzvah project. We believe that doing so will greatly enhance the B'Mitzvah experience for your child, and your entire family.

Family Enrichment:

Temple Beth El offers a *B' Mitzvah Family* Enrichment Program each year. This year, there will be two 60-minute sessions. The first is on Sunday, January 24th at 1 pm. The second is on Sunday, March 21st at 1 pm.

On January 24th, families will meet with Rabbi Cassi, Cantor Ilan, and Director of Education Randi Sher. We will discuss the historical, religious, spiritual and developmental dimensions of becoming B' Mitzvah including the notion of covenants and commandments, the psychological and spiritual development of adolescents importance of this moment. We will also go over this handbook, expectations, date selection, in addition to answering any questions that arise.

On March 21st, you will meet with Rabbi Cassi, Cantor Ilan, and Carrie Hernandez. We will discuss many aspects of the B'Mitzvah experience, including facility matters, honors, blessings, technology, and future opportunities for your child. We will leave time to address any questions that come up.

Shabbat Service Attendance:

We strongly encourage you to regularly attend Shabbat services in the year leading up to the B'mitzvah, especially Torah services (which take place on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month) and other B'mitzvah services. This will enable you to feel more comfortable, confident, and prepared.

Mitzvah Project:

Becoming a *B' Mitzvah* means becoming a child of the Commandments (*mitzvot*). These commandments include acts of *G'milut Chasidim*—loving kindness.

As we are all part of a community of people who help each other and care for one another, it is important for you to give of your time and energy to others who need help. In the year before you become *B'mitzvah*, you are expected to spend at least 10 hours volunteering to do community service that you find meaningful.

Consider the following when choosing your *mitzvah* project:

- 1) What do others need?
Think about the people in your community. Are they in need of food or clothing? Do elderly neighbors in the community need their lawns mowed in the summer, leaves raked in the fall, walkways shoveled in the winter, and garages swept in the spring?
- 2) What am I good at?
Do you have a talent or subject in school at which you excel? There are younger children who might be able to learn from you. Do you have good people skills? You could volunteer at a nursing home, keeping residents company.
- 3) What do I like to do?
Do you like working with children? You can create a virtual class to entertain kids while their parents are working. Do you like pets? Perhaps you can walk the dog for someone who is sick. Do you like to sing or play an instrument? You may be able to entertain residents at a hospital or nursing home. Do you enjoy nature? You could remove litter from a park.
- 4) What bothers me in the world so much that I want to change it?
Are you concerned that people can't afford to pay for food and clothing? That certain animals are becoming extinct? That we're using up resources such as water, gas, and electricity? That there is no cure for certain diseases? You could raise money, and awareness for any of these causes.

As long as COVID-19 remains a real threat, Mitzvah projects might require extra creativity, or partnership with Rabbi Cassi. The temple has opportunities to create sandwiches which are handed out to people in need. You might be able to help organize clothing for people who are homeless, or to sort other supplies. You might choose to create meals for people who are quarantined, or to see how they need help. Whether you can offer assistance virtually or in person, there are opportunities to make life a little bit easier for fellow community members.

Six months before you become B'mitzvah, you will have a meeting with Rabbi Cassi and Cantor Ilan. Please be prepared to talk about your chosen Mitzvah project at that

meeting. If you are unsure of what to do, feel free to reach out to Rabbi Cassi beforehand.

Glossary of Terms

Aliyah – The B’mitzvah service includes a Torah reading, which is broken into 3-7 sections. Someone needs to bless the Torah before and after each of these readings. This honor is called an aliyah, and it is usually reserved for close family members, and friends. Since an aliyah can only be given to someone who is Jewish and over the age of 13, one of the highlights of the service is when the B’mitzvah is called to the Torah for an aliyah the very first time.

Bar Mitzvah – Someone who identifies as male becomes a “Bar Mitzvah” or “Son of the commandment”

Bat Mitzvah – Someone who identifies as female becomes a “Bat Mitzvah” or “Daughter of the commandment”

Brit Mitzvah – This term, meaning “Covenant of the Commandment” is used for someone who does not identify as male or female.

B’nai Mitzvah – This term is plural. Multiple people become B’nai mitzvah.

B’not Mitzvah - This is the plural of Bat Mitzvah. When two girls each become Bat Mitzvah, together they become B’not Mitzvah.

B’Mitzvah – This is the shorthand term used throughout this booklet to include all Bar/Bat/Brit/B’nai/B’not mitzvah students.

Bimah – This is the stage, or raised area in the synagogue from which we lead prayers.

Confirmation – After becoming B’mitzvah, students continue their education on Sundays in “NAOR” classes. At the end of 10th grade, they take part in a group ceremony in which students affirm their connection to Judaism and the Jewish people.

D’var Torah – Literally “Word of Torah,” this refers to the speech or teaching that each B’mitzvah student offers to the community. It will be created with the help, support and guidance of the Rabbi.

G’lilah- we read and lift to the Torah, this honor allows friends and family members to dress the Torah in its many coverings.

Haftarah – After reading Torah, B’Mitzvah students read a selection from the prophets. The Torah and Haftarah portions often share a similar theme or literary style.

Hagbah- After we read the Torah, we lift it for all to see. This honor is called Hagbah.

Havdalah – Shabbat ends on Saturday evening. After a day of rest, reflection and sanctity, we mark the end of this holy day and the start of a new week with a ceremony called Havdalah. It incorporates the sweetness of wine, the fragrant aroma of spices, and the beauty of light.

Kabbalat Torah – Before we read from the Torah, we traditionally pass it from generation to generation, down to the B'mitzvah. This ceremony is called Kabbalat Torah, or “the receiving of Torah.”

Kiddush – Coming from the same root as the word *kadosh* “holiness,” the Kiddush sanctifies the space that we are in—whether virtual or physical. In the context of Shabbat services, Kiddush refers to the blessing over the grape juice or wine. We include this in Friday and Saturday services, as long as it is safe to do so.

Kippah – Also known as a yalmulke, this head covering can be worn by males or females. It is a sign of reverence for God. While no one is required to wear a kippah, B'Mitzvah students typically do wear them.

L'Dor Vador – This Hebrew phrase means “From one generation to another.”

Mitzvah – Often thought of as a “good deed,” a more accurate translation is “commandment.” Our tradition obligates us to do many mitzvot, from taking care of people who are sick, to observing Shabbat. There are 613 commandments in the Torah.

Oneg Shabbat – Literally “Shabbat delight,” this refers to an after service snack break. Typically sweets and challah are available for service participants to enjoy.

Parashah – Also called the *Sidra*, *parashah* refers to the week’s Torah portion. There is a specific Torah portion assigned to each week of the Jewish year.

Siddur – This is another name for Prayer Book. At temple Beth El, we use the prayerbook Mishkan Tefilah.

Simcha – A *Simcha* is a joyous celebration. There are few things more joyous than a child becoming a B'Mitzvah.

Tallit – A Tallit is a prayer shawl worn by Jews over the age of 13. It contains four corners, each of which contains knotted tassels. The knots represent all 613 *mitzvot*, or commandments that appear in the Torah.

Torah – *Torah* has more than one meaning. At times Torah refers to the body of Jewish wisdom contained in all of our holy books and oral tradition. In a narrower definition, it refers to the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). A reading from the five books is assigned to each Shabbat. We read it from a Torah scroll.

Troupe – There is a special melody that we use to read Torah. When students study Torah, they learn the cantillation, or troupe marks, which shows them how to sing the verses.

Tzedukah – Coming from the same root as *tzedek* – “justice,” *tzedukah* is the generosity we offer to create a more just or fair world. Traditionally, one makes a gift of *tzedukah* in honor of *simchas*, such as becoming a *B’Mitzvah*.

B’Mitzvah Timeline

18-24 Months in advance

- Think about the ideal date of your child’s B’Mitzvah. Please note that it must take place after your child turns 13 years old. We encourage you to pick a date that is close to your child’s Hebrew birthdate. We are happy to help you figure this out.
- Submit your date request form.
- Keep your ears open for information about our Family Enrichment classes for B’Mitzvah Preparation, and mark them in your calendar.

12 months in advance

- Make sure to start attending services regularly
- Take time to think about your Mitzvah project
- If you believe your child needs additional preparation time because of learning styles, vacation plans (especially for summer B’ Mitzvah) or other reasons, please contact the Cantor directly to discuss starting private tutoring a bit earlier than usual.
- Finalize all paper work with Carrie Hernandez, in the temple office.
- Secure a venue for the reception, whether it is at Temple Beth El, or elsewhere.

7 months in advance

- Have a family meeting with Rabbi Cassi and Cantor Ilan. Here, we will answer your questions, discuss your mitzvah project, and assess the student’s Hebrew reading and liturgy skills so that we can set your child up for success.
- Order your invitations.

6 months in advance

- Begin weekly meetings with Cantor Ilan. During these 20-30 minute meetings, Cantor Ilan will evaluate the previous week’s assignments and assign further liturgy to learn for the following week. Students are expected to study 20-30 minutes per day until their B’Mitzvah date.
- If you wish to order personalized Kippot for the service, this is a good time to do so.

4 months in advance

- Meet with Rabbi Cassi for a family meeting, at which we will discuss your Mitzvah project, honors, and any questions that you might have.
- Following our conversation, Rabbi Cassi will meet with the B’mitzvah student to pick out verses from their Torah portion.
- At this point, Cantor Ilan will begin working with the student on their Torah and Haftarah portions.
- Purchase, or make the B’mitzvah’s tallit and kippah that they will wear on the big day.

2 months in advance

- B'mitzvah student begins meeting with Rabbi Cassi each week, for 30 minutes. We will focus first on studying the Torah portion and writing a d'var Torah. When that is complete, the student will also create a thank you speech for the gifts they will receive from various groups in the congregation.

1 month in advance

- At this time the B'mitzvah student should have completed ALL learning, and enter into review and mastery mode, including reading/chanting Torah from the scroll.
- The student's D'var Torah should be nearly complete, as well.
- Schedule permitting, we may invite the B'mitzvah to help lead part of the Friday night service, for practice and comfort.

Two weeks in advance

- Schedule final rehearsals for the week before the B'mitzvah.
- Begin practicing in the sanctuary
- Submit your list of honors
- Work with the Cantor to select English readings and write in choreography and page announcements into your *siddur*. Begin practicing the English as well as the Hebrew.

1 week in advance

- Provide Rabbi with a Final copy of the B'mitzvah's D'var Torah and thank you speech
- Provide Rabbi with a copy of the parent's blessing (no more than one page, double-spaced, please).
- Have at least one final dress rehearsal with Rabbi Cassi and Cantor Ilan.

Friday night before the service

- Attend Shabbat services.
- Lead the blessing over the Shabbat candles, and receive at least one gift from the congregation.

B'mitzvah Day

- You are ready! Enjoy this sacred milestone in your life.

Honoring Friends and Family

The Rabbi will provide you with the honor form when you meet with her seven months before your B'mitzvah date. It outlines many possible honors. They are:

- 1) 2-6 *Aliyot*, honoring individual people or groups of people who are important in your child's life.
- 2) *Gabbai*- Torah dresser
- 3) *Hagba'ah* – Torah lifter
- 4) People to open/close the ark
- 5) English reader to lead the congregation in an appropriate reading
- 6) Where it is possible to do so, grandparents, and parents (whether they are Jewish or not) are invited to take part in the *kabbalat Torah* ceremony, passing the Torah down from generation to generation.

Newsletter Announcement

Your child becoming *B'Mitzvah* is not only a special occasion for your family, but for the entire Jewish community. We encourage you create a B'mitzvah announcement to go into *Kol Beit El* (our temple newsletter) so that the entire community is aware of this special occasion. Please submit your text and a picture to Carrie Hernandez in the temple office by the 1st of the month prior to the B'Mitzvah date. Please contact Carrie for more information by calling the temple office or emailing her at tbeoffice@bethelsp.org.

Attire

The sanctuary is a holy place, requiring respectful modesty. We encourage everyone to wear blouses, button down shirts, slacks, skirts or suits. Please refrain from wearing jeans, shorts, sweatpants, tube-tops or spaghetti-straps.

Tzedukkah

On the occasion of a *simcha* in Jewish life, it is particularly meritorious to share that joy with others through the act of *tzedukkah*. You may consider offering a donation to the synagogue or another worthy organization in honor of the occasion. Many families donate 3% of the value of your child's *B'Mitzvah* gifts to "*Mazon: The Jewish response to Hunger,*" and/or give leftover food and flowers to an organization that can use them. It is also appropriate to show a gesture of appreciation to the rabbi and/or cantor by making a donation to their Discretionary Funds.

What to expect on the big day:

- 1) The service traditionally takes place on Saturday morning at 10 am.
- 2) If you would like to take pictures beforehand you are welcome to bring in a photographer. We ask that the photoshoot concludes by 9:30 so that we can greet guests and welcome them into the sanctuary. Limited photography is permitted during the service with certain conditions that the Rabbi will explain to you and your photographer. You are welcome to take posed pictures in the sanctuary before or after the service. Video recording is available with your own videographer; however, certain guidelines apply. Please ask the Rabbi for more information.
- 3) The B' Mitzvah student will conduct the majority of the prayer service from *Mishkan T'filah*, chant selected verses from the Torah and *Haftarah* portions assigned for that Shabbat and share a *d'var Torah*, a lesson gleaned from the student's interpretation of the Torah portion. Family participation is variable; planning and consultation with the Rabbi may determine the extent of it.
- 4) A designated representative of the Board of Directors will present gifts to the student towards the end of the service. A Sisterhood representative will have done so at the previous evening's Shabbat Service. If there is someone among your guests who might be an appropriate representative, please speak to the respective president.
- 5) It is considered an appropriate courtesy to invite the student's teachers, and all of your child's Torah School classmates (in his/her specific grade).
- 6) You will need to provide a list of other members of your family and guests who will be invited for an *aliyah* to the Torah, or the honor to open the ark or share an English language reading. This may require some advance planning on your part, especially in terms of out of town guests. The Rabbi will be happy to assist you with your questions.
- 7) In our congregation, we encourage parents of a B' Mitzvah to host the Friday evening Oneg Shabbat on the weekend of the service (see Administrative and Financial Notes). At this service someone from your family will be invited to light the Shabbat candles and all of you will be on the *Bimah* for *Kiddush*.

A WORD ABOUT YOUR RECEPTION

There has been a great deal of public concern about the inappropriate ostentation of B'Mitzvah celebrations. The happy celebration of a sacred event is a *mitzvah* (sacred obligation) in Jewish life and we do wish you all the joy in the world and a wonderful time at your celebration. But we hope that your celebration will honor the sanctity of the occasion and the true meaning of this moment. We also hope that there will be a suitable expression of *Tzedakah* (charitable consideration of others) as a party of your joy. Have a good time, but please remember what it is that is good about becoming B'Mitzvah.

Adjustments for COVID-19

During the COVID pandemic, we cannot currently offer in-person services in the sanctuary, though we hope that will change, as more people receive the COVID vaccine.

For the time being, there are two options

- 1) We can hold a virtual service, with Torah reading, pre-recorded and live honors, and thoughtful interpretations of Kabbalat Torah (passing the Torah from generation to generation), and other important B'Mitzvah customs.
 - a. The upside to this option is that you can honor many people all over world, and everyone can be an active participant.
 - b. This may be the safest option, especially if family members have pre-existing conditions or have not yet received their vaccine.
- 2) Pending approval by our Reopening task force, you can have an in-person service with Cantor Ilan, Rabbi Cassi, and up to 18 additional attendees who are spaced apart in families.
 - a. This in-person service will take place in the temple courtyard.
 - b. We can stream services, so that people who are not present can join from anywhere.
 - c. We can prerecord some honors, which can be displayed on screens during the service. You will need to sign a form agreeing to the rules put forth by the Reopening Task force. You can get this form through Carrie in the Temple Office. Pending thoughtful changes by the Reopening committee, it includes the following:
 - Each person will have their temperatures checked by a Reopening Task Force member, or Temple designee and will not be allowed onto the courtyard if they have a fever greater than 100 degrees F.
 - We will ask each attendee questions about their health. If they have symptoms consistent with COVID, they will not be allowed onto the courtyard.
 - There can be a maximum of 20 people present, including the rabbi, cantor, and B' Mitzvah.
 - Each household unit will be separated with specific seating on the patio, six feet apart from other household units.
 - We ask for people in different families to refrain from close physical contact
 - Everyone must wear masks the entire time.
 - There will be no food/drinks allowed.
 - People can go inside only to use the restroom when necessary.
 - Hand sanitizer and disposable masks will be available to all attendees.
 - Each person will provide contact info for tracing purposes.

**THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TEMPLE BETH EL
HAS ESTABLISHED THESE PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS,
AND THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AS AFFIRMED THEM
RELATIVE TO THE COMPLETION OF
B' MITZVAH TRAINING:**

- I. The family of the student to become B'Mitzvah must be members of the congregation and in good standing. This means that your annual commitment, school fees and other fees must be paid in full by the date of the service.
- II. Students are expected to continue their religious education following B' Mitzvah through Heh Class and Confirmation.
 - a. A B' Mitzvah pledge to continue one's Jewish education and experience is an integral part of the ceremony.
 - b. Students making the pledge will be honored in the life of the congregation.
- III. Candidates must have satisfactorily completed a minimum of five years of Religious School immediately prior to the anticipated service of becoming B' Mitzvah. Exceptional cases shall be referred to the Rabbi and the Educator for resolution.
- IV. The Rabbi, in consultation with the Educator and the Vice President of Education, shall retain the right to refuse B' Mitzvah status to any student failing to meet educational and attitudinal standards.
- V. In exceptional cases when attendance at Hebrew School is impossible because of ill health, or other reasons, which may have prevented the student from fulfilling educational requirements, the matter will be referred to the Rabbi and the Educator for study and disposition.
- VI. Credits from other Hebrew and Religious Schools are transferable in meeting our requirements, pending testing and interviewing with the Rabbi and the Educator.
- VII. The date of the B' Mitzvah ceremony will be set with the understanding that all requirements will indeed be fulfilled before that date. The ceremony will take place on a Shabbat, after the child turns 13 and at least 4 months into the "Heh" class year

We will work with families to ensure that a preferred date can be secured. However, dates will be assigned in order of the birth date of the student once all requests have been received.
- VIII. Regular attendance for students and their parents at Friday Night Shabbat Services, and any Shabbat Morning Service during which a person is becoming B' Mitzvah is expected throughout the period of B' Mitzvah tutoring.
- IX. **Administrative and Financial Notes**
 - I. Families planning a B' Mitzvah must be members in good standing of the congregation. Please be certain that your annual commitment and school fees to the congregation are current or that necessary arrangements have been made if appropriate.

- II. There is a \$600.00 B' Mitzvah fee which must be paid in order to secure your date. The fee covers books, supplies, musical accompaniment for the service and security guards.
- III. We encourage you to host the Oneg Shabbat on the preceding Friday evening to a Saturday service. Hosting the Oneg Shabbat means providing the refreshments either yourself or making arrangements to have others help you. The Temple Administrator will provide guidance on the preparation of your Oneg Shabbat.
- IV. Should you choose to use Al Manuel Hall (the social hall) for a reception on Saturday, rental fees will apply. Talk to the Temple Administrator to schedule your rental as soon as possible. If you are interested in using Al Manuel Hall, please note the following:
 1. The capacity of Al Manuel Hall is 144 - 216 depending on layout.
 2. The serving of pork and/or shellfish is strictly prohibited. Meat and dairy products may not be served on the same plate, or in the same course.
 3. Any music you provide either through your own mix or through the use of a DJ should be appropriate for a synagogue and Shabbat setting. Please no music with overt Christian themes and no music with profanity or lyrics unsuitable for young children. Please consult with your DJ to provide an appropriate play list.
- V. The Temple Administrator will send you a "check list" of all administrative fees and procedures.

A Final Note:

This handbook attempts to answer many questions you may have about the process of becoming B' Mitzvah. However, you may have other questions that are not addressed in this document. Please know that the Rabbi is available to consult with you to review any specific questions you may have. Our goal is to make the journey towards becoming B' Mitzvah enriching and enjoyable. Let us know how we can help.