

בני מצוה

B'nei Mitzvah Handbook



Congregation Beth Israel

Bellingham, WA

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What It All Means

Mazal Tov!

Your family is embarking on one of Judaism's most exciting and important life-cycle events as your child transitions into Jewish adulthood by becoming B'nei Mitzvah. A Jewish child reaches this new status at the age of thirteen. The term B'nei Mitzvah simply means, "one who is obligated to perform mitzvot." For example, after becoming B'nei Mitzvah, these Jewish young adults are counted in a minyan (a group of ten Jewish adults required to conduct a service), they can now begin to fully fast on Yom Kippur, and most importantly, they become responsible for their actions as members of the Jewish community and society at large.

During the Middle Ages, the custom arose to mark this occasion in a boy's life by calling him to the Torah and by arranging a festive meal in his honor. From this early life-cycle event emerged the familiar custom of the B'nei Mitzvah as a rite of passage for children of all genders.

Children begin, at an early age, preparing for this service by attending Keshet (Religious School and Hebrew School). These years of formal Jewish learning focus on Jewish holidays, history, customs, and the Hebrew language. Jewish learning occurs in the home as well. The more the whole family embraces this life-cycle event and engages in Jewish living, the more connected the student will be to their heritage and Jewish identity. In the year leading up to this rite of passage, your child begins more intensive training focused specifically on Jewish liturgy. This includes prayers from the siddur (prayer book), Torah - chanting a portion from the Five Books of Moses, writing a speech based on what they chant, and chanting Haftara - a portion from the Prophets that accompanies their Torah portion.

The Shabbat morning when your child becomes B'nei Mitzvah will be their first time receiving an Aliyah - the honor of being called to the Torah. This is considered the highest honor given in a service. To chant the blessing over the Torah, one must be B'nei Mitzvah age.

The experience of becoming B'nei Mitzvah is a link the student shares with countless generations. It is our mission to continually reinforce how sacred, life-changing, memorable, and beautiful this experience can and ought to be. Our goal at Congregation Beth Israel, in partnership with your family, is to provide your child with a deeper understanding and appreciation for Jewish tradition. We look forward to creating a meaningful Jewish experience for you and your family. Thank you for giving us the privilege to share in this special time in your child's life.

Warmly,

Rabbi Joshua Samuels

Leah Bordman
co-Kesher Director

2022-2023

Congregation Beth Israel's B'nei Mitzvah Policies

To inform parents and caregivers about the requirements for B'nei Mitzvah, we would like you to familiarize yourselves with the following information:

1. The family of the B'nei Mitzvah candidate must be a member of Congregation Beth Israel, with all fees, dues, and other financial obligations paid in good standing.
2. The B'nei Mitzvah candidate must be enrolled in Keshet (Religious School and Hebrew School) for a **minimum** of two years prior to the B'nei Mitzvah date, including the B'nei Mitzvah year.
 - a. In the instance where a family is new to Congregation Beth Israel, attendance in Religious School in another community will be evaluated and accordingly recognized.
 - b. B'nei Mitzvah candidates are expected to complete the entire year of Religious School after their ceremony has taken place, and to continue into our Confirmation program. **Becoming B'nei Mitzvah does not mark the end of Jewish education, but merely a transition from childhood to adulthood.**
3. Attendance at Shabbat services is expected twice a month in the year leading up to the B'nei Mitzvah date. There are weekly Friday evening services and multiple Saturday morning services each month. Students will sign in at services so we can keep track of attendance.
 - a. Students are also encouraged to attend Torah Study with a parent. This experience will help prepare the B'nei Mitzvah student for their personal Torah Study time with Rabbi Samuels. It will also introduce them to the adult community of learners within Beth Israel.
4. Attendance at all B'nei Mitzvah services during the year - it is important that each B'nei Mitzvah class support one another through this process/life event.
5. B'nei Mitzvah training comes under the supervision of Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman. There might be, however, various community members working with your child during this process.
6. Before a date can be put on the CBI master calendar, Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman must confirm availability and determine readiness on behalf of the candidate.
7. The B'nei Mitzvah service beginning at 10:00am is part of CBI's regular Shabbat morning T'fillah.

**Any requests or exceptions to these policies must be discussed
with Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman**

Mitzvah Project

There is more to becoming B'nei Mitzvah in this community than leading the congregation in worship. Judaism is multi-faceted, with many entry points outside of prayer. Congregation Beth Israel prides itself in being a community dedicated to social action and social justice. Judaism without acts of righteousness is empty. It is now your child's responsibility to engage in Tikkun Olam - repairing the world - as an affirmation of their commitment to Jewish adulthood. We encourage your child to choose a project that will not only bring more wholeness into the world but will also instill in them this important Jewish value. This project should inspire your child to cater to their interests. In Appendix D, you will find a list of organizations that might be helpful in choosing an area to focus on. Some organizations even have suggestions for teen involvement. You may also contact the CBI Social Action committee for more ideas or look at the URJ's Religious Action Center website for valuable information about today's relevant issues.

During Keshet, students will learn about the Jewish values of Tzedek (justice), Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), and the value of doing mitzvot. They will spend class time exploring possible project ideas. Please work with your child, listen to their ideas, and help them to come up with an appropriately challenging project. **You will need to fill out your "B'nei Mitzvah Social Action Project" form (Appendix C) and return it to Rabbi Samuels or Leah Bordman by the first Sunday in December.**

The scope of the Mitzvah Project might be different for each student depending on what issue they are interested in. One student might bake challah each week and deliver it to homebound congregants. Another student might volunteer for a local non-profit. These projects should be hands-on activities that are more than one-time events, and more than merely raising money.

Finally, we would like to highlight your child's project to the community in some way. First and foremost, they should mention the work they've been doing during the speech they give at their B'nei Mitzvah service. They could also create a visual display with pictures and information about their project and the people they are serving, a video, or something else to display for the congregation to enjoy. Please discuss your child's mitzvah project with Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman.

B'nei Mitzvah Timeline

TWO YEARS IN ADVANCE

A tentative date will be scheduled with Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman and placed in the synagogue's master calendar. The date must be after the student's 13th birthday.

- Before your child begins B'nei Mitzvah tutoring, they are expected to know how to decode and sound out Hebrew. They should also be familiar with and able to recite several Shabbat prayers. We understand that each child has different needs and abilities. Please let us know about any learning challenges your child experiences.

AT LEAST ONE YEAR IN ADVANCE

- Start attending two services per month - Friday evening and/or Saturday morning. The Family Service is on the first Friday of each month. Saturday morning services will most resemble the B'nei Mitzvah service.
- If you are planning a party/Kiddush luncheon away from the synagogue, book the venue as soon as possible. **(If you plan to have a kiddush luncheon at CBI, contact the main office for details.)**
- Shop for a tallit (prayer shawl) that you will present to your child at the beginning of their service. If you have a tallit that has sentimental value, please inform Rabbi Samuels of the significance and history so that we may incorporate it into the service.

AT LEAST NINE MONTHS IN ADVANCE

- Receive recordings and copies of all prayers from Leah Bordman that B'nei Mitzvah is required to lead.
- B'nei Mitzvah students join Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman in group learning following Keshet classes from 1:00-2:00pm. These sessions will allow the students to practice together and develop a cohort with their peers. In addition, Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman will discuss an array of relevant Jewish topics, such as: Tikkun Olam, God, Prayer, Social Action, and Jewish Ritual. These sessions will meet in the Beit Midrash (unless scheduled on Zoom for specific reasons).

SIX TO SEVEN MONTHS IN ADVANCE

- Begin meeting with Leah Bordman for private lessons. During these lessons, students will polish their prayers and learn any additional prayers still needed. They will also learn trope for chanting their Torah and haftarah portions.

FOUR MONTHS IN ADVANCE

- Students will meet with Rabbi Samuels and choose the section of their Torah portion they want to focus on. This will occur over two or three 30-minute sessions. Once this part is selected, they will begin learning to chant this part with Leah Bordman.

THREE MONTHS IN ADVANCE

- Students begin to meet with Rabbi Samuels once a week (for 30-minute sessions) to craft their D'var Torah. Once the final draft is written, one-on-one meetings with Rabbi Samuels will stop.
- Send a digital picture of your child with a bio to the Shul Shofar. Email this picture to editor@bethisraelbellingham.org. Along with the bio, include a family message to the community (thank you to... for..., etc.) which will be part of the B'nei Mitzvah program handout, and send this to Mary Somerville at office@bethisraelbellingham.org.

ONE MONTH IN ADVANCE

- An honors list and extra Hebrew prayers/transliterations (see Appendix A and B) will be provided in order to assign all honors such as Aliyot, Hagbah (Torah lifter), G'lila (Torah dresser), ark openers, etc. to family and friends. Ask anyone coming to the bima for an Aliyah to practice the blessings over the Torah. The Hagbah honor should go to someone who has done it before. Rabbi Samuels will need to have a brief tutorial with the person doing Hagbah sometime before the Saturday morning service.
- Begin to write your blessing to your child. Each parent may write their own and the blessings should not exceed one page. The blessing is not a roast and also should not list all of your child's accolades. Rabbi Samuels will give you guidance if needed. A copy of your blessing should be emailed to Rabbi Samuels one week before the service (not to be edited, but simply for safe keeping).
- Contact the "Oneg-Queens" (Joan Wayne and Miriam Davids) to discuss the Friday evening oneg which you are responsible for. It might be helpful to trade this responsibility among the other B'nei Mitzvah families. In recent years, the other B'nei Mitzvah families have organized the Friday evening oneg.

TWO WEEKS IN ADVANCE

- The last two lessons with Leah Bordman will be for one hour and will be full run-throughs of the service, including reading from the Torah. These will be held in the sanctuary (unless otherwise specified).

ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE

- Email Rabbi Samuels the parent blessings.
- Email Rabbi Samuels the honors list.
- Finalize your oneg plans.
- Students will have their final sessions with Leah Bordman and Rabbi Samuels in the sanctuary. They will practice carrying the Torah. In addition, the student will also practice delivering their D'var Torah from the bima.

FRIDAY EVENING SERVICE

- Please arrive at least 15-minutes before the service begins.
- The B'nei Mitzvah will help lead several prayers from the bima.
- Stay afterwards to help clean up the oneg in the social hall unless others are in charge of the oneg.

SATURDAY MORNING SERVICE

- Bring kippot, speeches, and the tallit that you will be presenting to your child.
- Arrive by 9:15am if no professional photography session is scheduled. Plan to meet in Rabbi Samuels' study at 9:45am to sign the B'nei Mitzvah Certificate.
- Upon leaving the synagogue, remember to take with you all gifts, certificates, and other personal items.

Beth Israel Protocol and Miscellaneous Items

1. Our policy at CBI is that Jewish family and friends given the honor of an Aliyah must wear kippot (head covering) and tallitot (prayer shawl). These can be found in the sanctuary.
2. The honor of an Aliyah is bestowed upon a Jewish person over the age of 13. Non-Jewish partners of family and friends may accompany their partners but will not chant the blessing. (The blessing over the Torah states that God chose the Jewish people from all other nations to be the recipients of the Torah.)
3. A non-Jewish family member or friend may not receive the honor of lifting and/or dressing the Torah. They are allowed to open and close the ark.
4. The use of electronics is never permitted during Shabbat services, except the stationary camera of a professional photographer/videographer. These cameras

must be silent, not use flash, and be stationed in the back of the sanctuary or around the sides. Family pictures may be taken prior to the Saturday morning service but must be completed by 9:30am. You must inform Rabbi Samuels if a photographer is meeting you at the synagogue prior to the service. Pictures may also be taken any other day of the week as long as it is cleared with Rabbi Samuels.

5. The B'nei Mitzvah family is required to attend the Friday evening Shabbat service as the student will help lead some of the prayers. The family is also encouraged to provide the food for the after-service oneg.
6. The Temple President will present gifts to the B'nei Mitzvah on behalf of CBI. If you have a special relationship with another current Board Member, please let us know.
7. Candle lighting begins the Friday evening service. Members of the B'nei Mitzvah family will light the candles and recite the blessings.
8. It is customary and appropriate for the family to donate to one of the many synagogue funds in honor of their child. We thank you for your support.

One more thing ...

A B'nei Mitzvah, like a baby naming, wedding, or funeral, is a Jewish life-cycle event. While practicing the choreography of the service during a “dress rehearsal” might calm some nerves, it might also escalate them as well. Think of Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman as your guides for the day, making sure you stand where you need to stand, speak when you need to speak and so on. All instructions will be given on the bima in real time. Your job as a parent is to simply be in the present moment with your child and family. Rabbi Samuels and Leah Bordman will happily address any questions and/or concerns in the days and weeks leading up to the service.

Suggested Reading:

Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005.

For Kids - Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Claim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin. Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

Appendix A

The following is a list of prayers B'nei Mitzvah students are expected to lead. Corresponding Mishkan T'filah page numbers are in parenthesis.

Tallit Blessing (190)

Ma Tovu [first two lines] (192)

Elohai N'Shamah [first two lines] (196)

Nisim B'chol Yom (198)

La'asok B'divrei Torah (204)

Chatzi Kaddish (224)

Barchu (226)

V'ha'eir Eineinu (230)

Shema (232)

V'ahavta (234)

Mi Chamocha (240)

Amidah (242-246)

Sim Shalom [first line] (258)

V'shamru (162)

Torah blessings (366)

Aliyah blessings (368)

Haftarah blessings (372)

Appendix B

Below is the list of honors your family can assign for the Saturday morning service.

Aliyot: These honors will recite the blessings before and after someone else chants Torah. You may choose 6 groups. The 7th and final Aliyah will go to the B'nei Mitzvah. The 6th will go to the parents. The 5th will go to the grandparents. Every other Aliyah may go to community members, friends, etc. The idea is that you start with the furthest relationships and end with the closest. (The list you give to Rabbi Samuels should have each person's relationship to your child and their Hebrew name if they have one.)

Hagbah: Lifting the Torah

G'lilah: Dressing the Torah

Ark Openers: This is suitable for young people and this honor may go to a non-Jewish person.

In addition, younger siblings are welcome to help lead a prayer from the bima as well as deliver their own public blessing to the B'nei Mitzvah.

Appendix C

B'NEI MITZVAH SOCIAL ACTION FORM

Please complete this form, and return to Rabbi Samuels or Leah Bordman by the first Keshet Sunday in December.

1. For my social action project, I am going to:
2. What organization, if any, will you be volunteering with?
3. How will you know when you've completed your project? (Will it be based on a certain amount of hours, a specific goal, or something else?)
4. What interests you or excites you about the project that you chose?
5. What challenges do you think might arise during your work?
6. What do you think you will need help with to be able to complete your project?

Appendix D

Below is a list of organizations (both local and national) which your child might be interested in volunteering for. This list is certainly not exhaustive.

Whatcom Humane Society

2172 Division St.
Bellingham, WA 98226
360-733-4746
www.whatcomhumane.org

Bellingham Parks and Rec Volunteer Program

360-778-7105
www.cob.org/gov/public/volunteer/parks-volunteer

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org/involved/volunteer.html

Habitat for Humanity in Whatcom County

1825 Cornwall Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98225
360-715-9170
www.hfhwhatcom.org

Whatcom Hospice

2800 Douglas Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98225
360-733-5877
www.whatcomhospice.org/volunteer

Planned Parenthood

1530 Ellis St.
Bellingham, WA 98225
360-734-9095
www.plannedparenthood.org

Whatcom Human Rights Task Force

360-389-3898
www.whrtf.org

Opportunity Council

1111 Cornwall Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98225
360-734-5121
www.oppco.org

Lydia Place

Gladstone Office:
1701 Gladstone St.
Bellingham, WA 98229
Bell Tower Office
1430 N Garden St.
Bellingham, WA 98225
360-671-7663
www.lydiaplace.org

Alzheimer Association WA State Chapter

www.alz.org/alzwa/volunteer

American Red Cross

1900 25th Ave. S
Seattle, WA 98144
206-323-2345
www.redcross.org/local/washington/volunteer.html