

# 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 a B'nei Mitzvah. A Jewish child reaches this new status at the age of thirteen. The term B'nei Mitzvah means simply "one who is obligated to perform mitzvot." For example, after becoming a B'nei Mitzvah, these Jewish young adults are counted in a minyan (a quorum 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 both boys and girls.

Children begin, at an early age, preparing for this service by attending Keshet (Religious 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. In the year leading up to this rite of passage, your child begins more intensive training focused specifically on Jewish liturgy (the prayers in the siddur, or prayer-book), Torah (chanting a portion from the Five Books of Moses and writing a speech based on the specific verses), and haftarah (chanting a portion from the Prophets that accompanies the Torah portion).

The Shabbat morning when your child becomes a B'nei Mitzvah will be their first time receiving an aliyah—the honor of being called up 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 a 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 is—in partnership with the family—to provide your child with a deeper understanding and appreciation for the 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 this special time in your life.

Warmly,

Rabbi Joshua Samuels

Andrea Shupack - Cantorial Soloist & Curriculum Education Director

November, 2020

## Congregation Beth Israel B'nei Mitzvah Policies

To inform parents and care-givers 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 and in good standing.
2. The B'nei Mitzvah candidate must be enrolled in our Keshet (Judaic/Hebrew School) program for a minimum of two years prior to the B'nei Mitzvah date, including the B'nei Mitzvah year.
  - a. In those instances 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 the *simcha* has taken place and to continue in our Confirmation program. (Becoming a B'nei Mitzvah does not mark an end in one's 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 a month. (This might be the best training.) While there is no official sign-in at services, the Rabbi and Cantorial Soloist trust that you will make the effort to participate as a family.
  - 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 the Rabbi. It will also introduce them to the adult community of learners at our shul.
4. B'nei Mitzvah training comes under the supervision of the Rabbi and Cantorial Soloist. There might be, however, various community members working with your child during this process.

5. Before a date can be put on the CBI master calendar, the Rabbi must confirm availability and determine readiness on behalf of the candidate.
6. The B'nei Mitzvah service will begin at 10:00 AM as part of our regular Shabbat morning *tefillah*.
7. Any requests or exceptions to these policies must be discussed with the Rabbi.
8. Attend all B'nei Mitzvah services during the year.

## **Mitzvah Project**

There is more to becoming a B'nei Mitzvah in this community than leading a congregation in worship. As we all know, Judaism is a multi-faceted tradition with many entry points outside of prayer. Congregation Beth Israel prides itself as 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 his/her 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 him/her this most important Jewish value. This project should inspire your child and cater to his/her interests. In appendix D, you will find a list of organizations that might be helpful in figuring out which area to focus on. Some might even have suggestions for teen involvement. You may also contact the Social Action committee of our synagogue for more ideas.

During class, 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 student, listen to their ideas, and help them come up with an appropriately challenging project. You will need to fill out your “B'nei Mitzvah Social Action Project” form and return it to Rabbi Samuels or Andrea Shupack by the time we return to Keshet after Spring and Passover break.

You might want to surf the website of the URJ's Religious Action Center for some valuable information about many relevant issues today ([www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org)).

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 them to homebound congregants. Another might volunteer for a local non-profit. Regardless, these projects should be hands-on activities, not just raising money. It should also be more than a one-time event.

Finally, we would like to highlight your child's project to the community in some way. This could be in the form of a visual display with pictures and information about their project and the people they are serving, video, part of their drash at their service, etc. Please discuss your child's mitzvah project with the Rabbi and Cantorial Soloist.

## **B'nei Mitzvah Timeline**

### **TWO YEARS IN ADVANCE**

1. A tentative date will be scheduled with the Rabbi and placed in the synagogue's master calendar. The date must be after his/her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday
  - a. Before your child begins B'nei Mitzvah tutoring, they are expected to know how to decode and sound out Hebrew. They are also familiar with and able to recite several shabbat prayers. We understand there are different needs and abilities. Please let us know about any learning challenges your child has.

### **AT LEAST ONE YEAR IN ADVANCE**

1. Start attending two services per month—Friday evening and/or Saturday morning. The Family Service is on the first Friday of the month. Saturday morning services will resemble the B'nei Mitzvah service the most.

2. If you are planning a party/Kiddush luncheon away from the synagogue, book the venue as soon as possible.
3. Shop for a *tallit* (prayer shawl) that you will present to your child at the beginning of the service. If you have a *tallit* that has sentimental value, please inform the Rabbi of the significance and history so we may incorporate it into the service.

### **AT LEAST NINE MONTHS IN ADVANCE**

1. Receive from Andrea recordings and a copy of all the prayers that each B'nei Mitzvah is required to lead.
2. B'nei Mitzvah students join the Rabbi and Cantorial Soloist in group learning following Keshet classes for from 12:30-1:30pm. These sessions will allow the students to practice together and develop camaraderie with each other. In addition, the Rabbi and Cantorial Soloist will discuss an array of relevant Jewish topics, such as: tikkun olam, God and Prayer, Social Action, and Jewish Ritual. These sessions will meet in the Beit Midrash when we are in person, and on Zoom while we remain virtual. They function as a round robin where the students learn part of the time with the Rabbi and part of the time with the Cantorial Soloist.

### **SIX TO SEVEN MONTHS IN ADVANCE**

1. Begin meeting with Andrea Shupack for private lessons. During these lessons students will polish their prayers, learning any additional ones still needed. And will learn how to chant their haftarah and Torah portions.

### **FOUR MONTHS IN ADVANCE**

1. Students will meet with the Rabbi and choose the section of their Torah portion they want to focus on. This will occur over two or three 30 minute sessions in the Rabbi's study. Once this is selected, they will begin learning to chant it with Andrea.

## THREE MONTHS IN ADVANCE

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

## ONE MONTH IN ADVANCE

1. An honors list and extra Hebrew prayers/transliterations (see Appendix for both) will be provided in order to assign all honors such as *aliyot*, Torah lifter (*hagbah*), Torah dresser (*gelilah*), Ark openers, etc. to family and friends. Ask anyone coming to the bima for an *aliyah* to practice the blessings over the Torah. And most importantly, the *hagbah* honor should go to someone who has done this before. Whether or not they have, Rabbi Samuels will want to have a brief tutorial with them sometime before the Saturday morning service.
2. 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 should not list all of your child's accolades. The Rabbi will give you guidance if needed. A copy of your blessing should be emailed to the Rabbi a week before the service (not to be edited, but simply for safe-keeping).
3. 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 with other B'nei Mitzvah families. In recent years, the other B'nei Mitzvah families have organized the Friday evening oneg.



## TWO WEEKS BEFORE

1. The last two lessons with Andrea 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 we are meeting virtually).

## ONE WEEK BEFORE

1. Email the Rabbi the parent's blessings.
2. Email the Rabbi the honors list.
3. Finalize your oneg plans.
4. Students will have their final sessions with Andrea and the Rabbi 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

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

## SATURDAY MORNING SERVICE

1. Bring *kippot*, speeches and the *tallit* that you will be presenting to your child.
2. Arrive by 9:15 AM if no professional photography session is scheduled. Plan to meet in the Rabbi's study at 9:45AM to sign the certificate.
3. 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/video-grapher. These cameras must be silent, not use flash, and be stationed in 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 the Rabbi if a photographer is meeting you at the synagogue prior to the service. Pictures may also be taken any other day of the week so long as it is cleared with the Rabbi.
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. For more information regarding the oneg, please contact CBI Oneg Queens, Joan Wayne and Miriam Zderic.
6. The Temple President will present gifts to the B'nei Mitzvah on behalf of our congregation. If you have a special relationship with another current Board Member, please let us know. In addition, classmates will either present a gift they created in Keshet or they will bestow a blessing on their friend.
7. Candle lighting begins the Friday evening service. Any members of the B'nei Mitzvah family will light the candles and recite the blessings.

8. It is customary and most appropriate for the family to make a donation 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 and funeral, is a Jewish life-cycle event. While practicing the choreography of the service during a “dress rehearsal” might calm some nerves, it also might escalate them as well. Think of the Rabbi and Cantorial Soloist 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 (filled with naches, of course) with your child and family. The Rabbi and Cantorial Soloist will happily address any questions and/or concerns in the days and weeks leading up to the service.

### **Kesher Involvement**

The Kesher Center for Jewish Learning is committed to having an active role in the B'nei Mitzvah process. The 7th grade year focuses on the B'nei Mitzvah life-cycle journey, exploring what it means to become a Jewish adult. Classmates will work on art projects and writing blessings which they will present to their friends on the bima. We want to help foster a community of supportive friends and teachers while your child enters Jewish adulthood. The B'nei Mitzvah family evening events are also sponsored and run by Kesher.

## Suggested Bibliography

*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 B

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

Tallit blessing (190)  
Ma Tovu: first two lines (192)  
Elohai N'shamah: first two lines (196)  
Nisim B'chol Yom (198)  
L'assok 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 C

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

**Aliyot:** These honors will recite the blessings before and after someone else chants the Torah. You may choose 7 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 and onward until the first aliyah which 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 the Rabbi should have each person's relationship to your child and their Hebrew name if they have one.)

**Hagbah:** Lifting the Torah

**Gelilah:** 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 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  
<http://whatcomhuman.org>

### **Bellingham Parks & Rec Volunteer Program**

360-778-7105  
[redwards@cob.org](mailto:redwards@cob.org)

### **American Cancer Society**

<http://www.cancer.org>

### **Habitat for Humanity**

<http://www.habitat.org>

### **Whatcom Hospice**

2800 Douglas Ave  
Bellingham, WA  
<http://hospicehelp.org>  
733-5877 (360)

### **Planned Parenthood**

[plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org)  
734-9095 (360)  
301 W Holly St  
Bellingham, WA  
733-2233 (360)  
<http://www.whrtf.org/>

### **Opportunity Council**

Cornwall Ave Ste. C 1111  
Bellingham, WA  
734-5121 (360)  
<http://oppco.org/>

### **Lydia Place**

C St 1911  
Bellingham, WA  
671-7663 (360)  
<http://www.lydiaplace.org>.

### **Alzheimer Society-Washington**

671-3316 (360)  
<http://alzsociety.org/>

### **Health Support Center**

733-6714 (360)  
<http://healthsupport-center.org/>

### **American Red Cross**

733-3290 (360)  
[/http://redcross.org](http://redcross.org)

