

Beth Israel of San Diego  
Lee and Frank Goldberg Family Religious School

# *B'nei Mitzvah Handbook*



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## INTRODUCTION

*At five years the age is reached for the study of the Scripture, at ten for the study of the Mishnah, **at thirteen for the fulfillment of the commandments**, at fifteen for the study of the Talmud, at eighteen for marriage, at twenty for seeking a livelihood, at thirty for entering into one's full strength, at forty for understanding... (Pirkei Avot 5:21)*

Becoming a *B'nei Mitzvah* marks the beginning of a young person's transition from childhood to adulthood. It offers a family and their community the chance to leave behind the everyday, and focus on the miracle of life and human maturation. As a young person makes their way into adulthood, the ritual celebration of *B'nei Mitzvah* allows them to demonstrate readiness to begin taking on adult Jewish responsibility. It indicates that they recognize that the wisdom of our Jewish heritage is a tool to building a life partnership with God.

## THE HISTORY OF B'NEI MITZVAH

Traditionally, *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* literally means "Son/Daughter of Commandments." In modern application, we have evolved this language to incorporate those students who may not associate with binary "male/female" identification. Hence, the use of *B'nei Mitzvah* (Children of the Commandments).

In earlier times, the term had legal weight in the community, signifying that an individual would be held legally responsible for their actions. Traditionally, a male child was considered a *Bar Mitzvah* upon reaching the age of thirteen. His father would be called to the *bimah* (pulpit) at the service closest to his son's thirteenth birthday. The Torah would be read, and the father would recite a blessing thanking God that he was no longer legally responsible for his son's actions. In later years, a thirteen-year-old boy, having progressed in his Jewish education and understanding the basics of Jewish knowledge, was expected to participate in a prayer service, reading from the *Torah* and *Haftarah* (prophetic writings), and most importantly, giving a lesson or explanation of the weekly Torah portion, called a *D'var Torah*. Following the celebration, it was customary to celebrate at a "*seudat mitzvah*" or a celebratory meal that was in keeping with the spirit of the occasion.

The service of *Bat Mitzvah* was a relatively newer tradition (circa 1922). It was introduced to emphasize the concept of equality of boys and girls in Jewish religious ritual and education. In Reform congregations, the ceremony of *Bat Mitzvah* and the educational requirements are identical with those of *B'nei Mitzvah*.

## PREPARATION FOR YOUR *B'NEI MITZVAH*

*Simon the Righteous was one of the last of the Great Assembly. His motto was: "The world stands on three things—the Torah, the [Temple] service, and loving acts of kindness." (Pirkei Avot, 1:2)*

### BY THE TIME OF YOUR SERVICE

Our *B'nei Mitzvah* services are joyous occasions welcoming our young people into the age of Jewish responsibility. By the time of their service, our students will have:

- Achieved a basic factual knowledge of Judaism and an understanding of the values of Judaism, and will have learned Hebrew through prayers and reading of the *Torah* and *Haftarah* (Prophetic portions)
- Made a commitment to continue their religious education through high school and beyond. An adult Jew is obligated to continue to study their Jewish heritage and tradition throughout life.

### PREREQUISITE RELIGIOUS SCHOOL EDUCATION

- A minimum of three years of religious school education, or the equivalent, as determined by the rabbi in conjunction with Direction of Education, prior to and including the year of the *B'nei Mitzvah* service.
- Satisfactory completion of all academic work and 75% attendance at Sunday morning and mid-week religious school and Hebrew classes.
- Students who come to Beth Israel from another community will be accepted as candidates for *B'nei Mitzvah*, provided they meet Beth Israel's educational requirements.
- If remedial tutoring is required for any student due to missed classes, it shall be at the parent's expense.

## HOW ARE THE CANDIDATES FOR B'NEI MITZVAH PREPARED?

Our *B'nei Mitzvah* candidates are very well prepared and rehearsed by the time of their ceremony.

Time Before Service	With Whom	Topic
10 Months	Rabbi Nevarez	Introduction to Program Receive Introductory Packet <i>Torah, Haftarah</i> verses <b>Parents and student attend.</b>
2 -3 Weeks after initial Visit	Rabbi Bernstein, Cantor	Introduction to <i>Ma'asei Mitzvah</i> program, supervised tutoring, chanting, service preparation <b>Parents and student attend.</b>
7 Months 20 - Half hour sessions	Tutor	Learning how to read and chant Torah and haftarah
6 Months Check-up meetings every 4-6 weeks	Rabbi Bernstein, Cantor	Review progress
4 Months and Follow Up meetings	Rabbis Nevarez or Gimbel	Begin work on <i>D'var Torah</i> (speech) Discuss service participation Receive Service Planner and Forms
3 Weeks prior	Rabbi Bernstein, Cantor	Prayer book setup (1 hr)
2 Weeks prior	Rabbi Bernstein, Cantor	1 <sup>st</sup> rehearsal (1 hr)
The Week of	Rabbi Bernstein, Cantor	<b>Final rehearsal on bimah (1 hr)</b> <b>Parents and student attend</b>

## MA'ASEI MITZVAH– PERFORMING MITZVOT

*Ma'asei Mitzvah* means "doing/performing *mitzvot*" in Hebrew. During the preparation process students will participate in our *Ma'asei Mitzvah* program, which will help them learn three elements of Jewish commitment: *Torah, Avodah* (worship) and *Gemilut Chasadim* (deeds of loving kindness). Students complete a total of at least 18 *mitzvot*. Of the 18 *mitzvot*, twelve are required and six are elective. By completing these *mitzvot* at least one month prior to their *B'nei Mitzvah* celebration, students will have a greater sense of God's presence in their life, of the importance of *mitzvot*, and what it means to be a responsible member of the community.

### **Mitzvot Related to Torah**

#### **Required:**

- Make a commitment to continuing your Jewish education.
- Learn *Torah trope* (cantillation).
- Chant *Torah* and *Haftarah*.
- Write a *D'var Torah*.
- Attend 1 *Torah Study* class on Shabbat morning with parents

#### **Electives (minimum 2):**

- Write an autobiography, including your Jewish history.
- Write a book report related to a Jewish topic (approved by clergy).
- Create a family tree that goes as far back as possible.
- Write a report about a favorite Jewish personality.
- Attend a Beth Israel educational lecture or class.
- Study the *Torah* portion of the week with your family every Shabbat for one month.
- Learn *Haftarah trope*.
- Your own ideas. (Get permission from clergy.)

### **Mitzvot Related to Avodah (Worship)**

#### **Required:**

- Attend 12 Beth Israel services with your family the year prior to your *B'nei Mitzvah*. These should be: 6 Erev Shabbat services and 6 Shabbat morning or afternoon services when a *B'nei Mitzvah* is celebrated. Some of the Shabbat morning service attendance may be at the Shabbat Lay Led (Minyan) service in the Foster Family Chapel
- Attend two teen Erev Shabbat services.

#### **Electives (minimum 2):**

- Celebrate Shabbat at home each week, for a minimum of three months.
- Attend a *B'nei Mitzvah* celebration at another congregation.
- Attend a *shiva minyan*.
- Recite *Sh'ma* and *V'ahavta* for one month every evening before bedtime.
- Attend 2 Shabbat Lay Led morning services (*Minyan*) in the Foster Family Chapel.
- Recite the morning blessings including *Sh'ma* each day for a month.
- Your own ideas (Get permission from clergy).

### **Mitzvot Related to G'milut Chasadim**

#### **Required:**

- Participate in Beth Israel's Hunger Project on two Sunday mornings with your parent(s).
- Give *tzedakah* in the Religious School every week.
- Deliver a "mish bag" through Beth Israel's Caring Community, visit a senior citizen home, and/or participate in another volunteer program on at least two separate occasions.
- Participate in a Beth Israel Caring Community or Social Action project, or other approved project.

#### **Electives (minimum 2):**

- Donate 3% of the gift money you receive to the Beth Israel Hunger Project.
- Commit to doing the Hunger Project on 2 additional Sundays.
- Volunteer for our Caring Community, Social Action committee, or other organization doing *g'milut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness).
- Visit someone in the hospital.
- Usher at two Erev Shabbat services.
- Your own ideas. (Get permission from clergy).

### **B'nei Mitzvah Boot Camp**

In addition to *Ma'asei Mitzvah*, students are strongly encouraged to attend the one-week *B'nei Mitzvah* Boot Camp held during the summer before they become a *B'nei Mitzvah*. It is a wonderful way to fulfill many of the *Ma'asei Mitzvah* requirements, build their confidence, practice prayers, and bond with the clergy and their classmates, all while having a fun time. The religious school office will contact you with details, but feel free to reach out to them.

### **Mitzvah Projects for Your B'nei Mitzvah:**

Each child is expected to perform a *g'milut chasadim* (acts of righteousness) in preparation for their *B'nei Mitzvah*. Families are encouraged to individualize their *mitzvah* projects. Examples of past projects include students collecting non-perishable food, clothes, and furniture for worthy causes, toys and sports equipment for abused and underprivileged children, and money for people with AIDS and others in need. Other families have planted a tree in honor of each guest or have asked guests to bring toys or non-perishable foods to the service. Many families have used the centerpieces at their receptions as a call to action to help those less fortunate.

We also encourage *B'nei Mitzvah* students to participate in one or more of Beth Israel's many Caring Community activities. These may include visiting elderly or shut-in members; delivering "mish bags" to ill, recently hospitalized, or bereaved individuals; making challah for mish bags or caring casseroles; interviewing an older member (or "sage") about his or her life and values; and more. Contact Katey Lindley, the Director of Caring Community, for ideas at 858-535-1111 ext. 2525 or [klindley@cbisd.org](mailto:klindley@cbisd.org).

We are happy to help you choose a *mitzvah* project for your family.



## THE WEEKEND OF YOUR *B'NEI MITZVAH* SERVICE:

### EREV SHABBAT AND CANDLE LIGHTING

Your family will participate in the Erev Shabbat, Friday evening, congregational service on the weekend of the *B'nei Mitzvah*. Your family (parents/siblings of the *B'nei Mitzvah*) will participate in the candle lighting. In addition, the *B'nei Mitzvah* will participate in the service as assigned by the clergy.

### ONEG SHABBAT

Your family will be a host of the Friday Oneg Shabbat by virtue of your (tax deductible) contribution to our *Oneg Shabbat and Kiddush Fund*..

### *B'NEI MITZVAH* SERVICE TIMES

Beth Israel's Shabbat morning (Shacharit) services begin at 10:00 a.m. and Shabbat afternoon (Minchah-Havdalah) services begin at 4:00 p.m. Each service normally lasts 1.5 hours. \*Please note: ALL SERVICES, REGARDLESS OF MORNING/AFTERNOON TIME, ARE CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES. Families are more than welcome to invite guests and loved ones to celebrate this incredible milestone in the life of their child and family.

### GIFT PRESENTATIONS MADE BY CLERGY

One of our Board members will present each *B'nei Mitzvah* student with gifts on behalf of the Women of Beth Israel, the Men's Club of Beth Israel and the congregation during the service. The Women of Beth Israel gives each student a pair of Shabbat candlesticks and a Kiddush cup. The Men's Club of Beth Israel provides every student with a copy of *On the Doorposts of Your House*, a book of prayers and ceremonies for the Jewish home. The congregation plants a tree in Israel in honor of each student. Finally, a gift certificate is given to the *B'nei Mitzvah* from NFTY (North American Federation of Temple Youth) for travel to Israel.

### USHERING AND HANDOUTS

Please designate at least two people to act as ushers for the Saturday morning/afternoon Shabbat service. Anyone may serve in this capacity. Ushers will distribute *Chumashim* (books that contain the Torah and Haftarah readings) to your guests and all others who will be worshipping with us. Friday evening Erev Shabbat ushers are provided by the Men's Club of Beth Israel. Please contact the Men's Club if you wish to have someone from your family help usher on Friday evening.

**Please do not prepare your own individual worship booklet or family pamphlet for the service unless you have received permission from someone in the clergy suite.**

### **B'NEI MITZVAH SERVICE**

We encourage members of your family, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to participate in the service. Family and friends receive *aliyot*, lift the *Torah (hagbah)*, dress the *Torah (g'lilah)* and open/close the ark. Parents and grandparents (Jewish and non-Jewish) participate in the Torah passing ceremony.

### **PARENTS' ADDRESS TO THEIR CHILD**

Parents are invited to present their *B'nei Mitzvah* student with their tallit and address their child with brief (two minutes total) personal words at the beginning of the service. Alternatively, you may choose to do this more intimately in the rabbi's study prior to the service. In either case, your words should be prepared in consultation with the rabbi. This is not meant to be an opportunity to praise your child's academic or extra-curricular accomplishments. Parents are encouraged to focus on the religious significance of becoming *B'nei Mitzvah*, the moment as a rite-of-passage into Jewish adulthood, the passing down of the Jewish tradition and the Jewish values and ideals which parents hope their child has learned and will exhibit in later life. Parents are also encouraged to base their comments on a Jewish source or quotation, especially their child's Torah portion.

### **MUSIC FOR THE B'NEI MITZVAH SERVICE**

Our clergy will be pleased to speak with you concerning any requests you may have for music to be used during the service. Please do not make any arrangements for music or instrumentals without permission.

### **ALIYOT (TORAH BLESSINGS)**

The act of going up to bless the Torah is called an *aliyah*, which means "ascending" in both the physical and spiritual sense. The traditional Torah blessings will be recited/chanted by Jewish family and friends of your choosing, before each reading from the Torah. Non-Jewish family and friends are welcome to accompany those reciting the blessings up to the bimah, **but do not recite** the blessing. All those receiving an *aliyah* must be at least 13 years of age. Those reciting the blessings must be capable of reading Hebrew or be proficient with transliteration. The clergy will be happy to review these blessings with you or to provide you with a digital version of the proper Hebrew pronunciation. These can also be found on our website: [cbisd.org](http://cbisd.org). The final *aliyah* (called *maftir*) will be done by the *B'nei Mitzvah*. The total number of *aliyot* and participants in the Torah service will be determined in consultation with the clergy.

## **MORNING B'NEI MITZVAH KIDDUSH**

Each *B'nei Mitzvah* family will host a challah and wine Kiddush reception in the foyer of the Social Hall immediately following a *Shacharit/morning B'nei Mitzvah* service. The clergy will join you and help to lead the brachot (prayers) with your *B'nei Mitzvah* student. Wine, grape juice, and challah will be provided for the entire congregation through your *Oneg Shabbat/Kiddush Fund* contribution. Families wishing to provide additional food to supplement the *Kiddush* refreshments should coordinate these arrangements with our Even Operations Manager at 858 535- 1111, ext. 2572, or at [mstrebe@cbisd.org](mailto:mstrebe@cbisd.org).

## **HAVDALAH SERVICE**

At the conclusion of all *Minchah/afternoon B'nei Mitzvah* services in the Glickman-Galinson Sanctuary, your family will participate in a Havdalah service, signifying the conclusion of Shabbat.

## **HOLDING A RECEPTION IN THE SOCIAL HALL**

The David & Dorothea Garfield Social Hall adjacent to the sanctuary is an excellent, convenient, and versatile venue for those wishing to hold a reception. Please make arrangements directly with our Event Operations Manager at 858 535-1111, ext. 2572, or at [mstrebe@cbisd.org](mailto:mstrebe@cbisd.org).

## **B'NEI MITZVAH PARTY**

Your *B'nei Mitzvah* is a time for celebration! Jewish tradition teaches that a joyous gathering of family and friends should mark it, but the joy of the occasion does not depend upon lavish gifts or expensive parties that may overshadow - even defile - the sanctity of an occasion that marks religious attainment in the growth of an individual. A good rule is to *keep the emphasis on the "mitzvah."*

## POST B'NEI MITZVAH EDUCATION

### B'NEI MITZVAH EDUCATION

At the age of thirteen, the student is just beginning to grasp the true importance and significance of Jewish teaching. Therefore, as a prerequisite for the celebration of the *B'nei Mitzvah*, an agreement by child and parent to continue formal Jewish studies through high school is made. By continuing religious education, the *B'nei Mitzvah* students prepare themselves for the significant ceremony of Confirmation.

The emphasis of Jewish education is to obtain knowledge that will enable each individual to live a full Jewish life as they move to university and/or the working world. It is in this spirit that the process of acquiring the knowledge of Judaism leads from enrollment in the religious school, through *B'nei Mitzvah* and Confirmation, to participation in high school and youth group activities to adult learning and Jewish living within a congregation and community and in every area of human activity. We believe this commitment ensures the integrity of the *B'nei Mitzvah* service as a celebration of the student's entry into responsible Jewish life and not as an end to their Jewish religious education, like a graduation.

## Follow the road through Beth Israel's Lee and Frank Goldberg Family Religious School



## ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

### POSTPONING A B'NEI MITZVAH DATE

Occasionally it becomes necessary to postpone a *B'nei Mitzvah* service due to inadequate progress or lack of attendance on the student's part. We will always make parents aware if the student needs additional help. If a postponement seems likely or even possible, the rabbi or Director of Education will inform you at least three months in advance.

### BETH ISRAEL DIETARY RULES

In keeping with the spirit of Biblical dietary laws (*kashrut*) and Jewish tradition, everyone at Beth Israel shall adhere to the following rules:

1. No *treife* (forbidden) foods shall be served: e.g. pork, shrimp, shellfish, catfish, and all other fish that do not have both scales and fins.
2. Dairy products and meat, including poultry, shall not be mixed in the same food. However, they can be served alone if separated on the buffet table. If you are in doubt, please contact the rabbi.

### THE OPTIONAL CUSTOM OF THROWING CANDY & OUR POLICY

For some families, it is customary to throw candy at the *B'nei Mitzvah* when they have completed their D'var Torah, to wish them "sweetness." Children will be invited to come up to the bimah to retrieve the candy once it has been thrown. Please only use soft, individually wrapped candies such as Sunkist Fruit Gems. Hard, unwrapped, or chocolate candies are not allowed to be thrown.

### THE TRADITION OF TZEDAKAH

#### **Giving Tzedakah in Honor of B'nei Mitzvah:**

The word *tzedakah* is often translated as "charitable giving," but literally means "justice" in Hebrew. For Jews, giving to those less fortunate is a sacred obligation and a way of life. Part of our *Ma'asei Mitzvah* program is devoted to encouraging the practice of *tzedakah* and to having our students begin this life-long tradition. At joyous occasions, it is a Jewish tradition and a wonderful example to your child to make a contribution to a worthy cause. We encourage supporting Jewish causes as well as local, nature-oriented causes and those supporting Israel. Many *B'nei Mitzvah* families have given donations to the Rabbis' Discretionary Funds and the Hunger Project, which members of Beth Israel have supported for over thirty years.

## **DRESS AT B'NEI MITZVAH**

We strive to educate our students and families that the sanctuary is a special place for us. One way we show respect is with our dress. Therefore, Beth Israel has established guidelines for our Shabbat and *B'nei Mitzvah* services. Coats and ties, dresses or suits are most appropriate. Sleeveless attire is not permitted on the bimah. If you will be celebrating at a party immediately following the ceremony, please bear in mind that party clothes may not be appropriate for a worship service; modesty and good taste should underlie your decisions.

## **FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS**

It is the policy of Congregation Beth Israel that every member be current in their financial obligations to the congregation and remain so throughout the *B'nei Mitzvah* process, from the granting of the *B'nei Mitzvah* date, through Religious School tutoring, culminating in the simcha of the *B'nei Mitzvah*. Please contact Bethany Ratner Eisenberg, Director of Membership and Engagement, at 858-535-1111, ext. 2554 or the office of Executive Director Lesley Mills at 858 535--111, ext. 2511 if you have any questions regarding your financial obligations.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY**

Please inform your photographer and/or videographer as well as family members of the following policies: No still photography may be taken by anyone inside the sanctuary during the service itself. However, still photographs WITHOUT FLASH may be taken from the foyer at any time. Photographs may be taken in the sanctuary any time up to 45-minutes before the start of the service or a service has concluded. A Torah may be taken out of the Ark and opened or held only by appointment and with the supervision of a trained Beth Israel employee or volunteer. These photos may be taken 45-minutes before the service or during the week. The service may be videotaped from the back of the sanctuary. Video cameras may only use available lighting during the service. Please make sure that your photographer and/or videographer understands this policy.

## GLOSSARY

**ALIYAH (plural ALIYOT):** *Aliyah* literally means “going up.” During the Torah service certain congregants will be called up to the pulpit (*bimah* in Hebrew) to bless the Torah before and after its reading. It is a special honor to receive an *Aliyah*, usually reserved for those especially close to the *B’nei Mitzvah*.

**BIMAH:** The raised platform area in the front of the sanctuary. The pulpit.

**CHAZZANUT:** The ancient art of Hebrew chanting. The cantor (*chazzan* or *chazzanit* in Hebrew) is skilled at *chazzanut*, and knows both traditional and modern ways to chant the prayers, Torah and Haftarah.

**CONFIRMATION OR KABBALAT TORAH:** A ceremony created by the Reform movement, in which young Jewish adults in tenth grade confirm their allegiance to Judaism and the Jewish people. *Kabbalat Torah* means “receiving the Torah” in Hebrew.

**D’VAR TORAH or D’RASH:** *D’var Torah* means “a word of Torah” in Hebrew. A *D’var Torah* or *D’rash* is a short sermon based on the week’s Torah portion, delivered by the child during the *B’nei Mitzvah* service. The *D’rash* wrestles with the text and presents one understanding of one of its many messages.

**HAFTARAH:** An excerpt from the Prophets (*Nevi’im* in Hebrew) portion of the Hebrew Bible that is read following the reading from the Torah. There is a literary or thematic connection between the Torah portion and the *Haftarah*.

**KIDDUSH:** *Kiddush* is both a prayer and an act. As an act it is the sanctification of Shabbat usually done with wine. *Kiddush* is also the prayer over wine in which Shabbat is hallowed. In an extended sense of the word it includes the Shabbat morning reception, which begins with the *Kiddush* prayer over wine.

**KIPPAH:** This head covering (also known in Yiddish as *yarmulke*) is a sign of modest reverence for God. In a Reform synagogue the wearing of the *kippah* and the *tallit* is optional and extends to men and women.

**MITZVAH:** Literally means “commandment,” though in Yiddish and modern English it is also used for any good deed.

**PARASHAH:** Another term for the weekly Torah portion that is read and studied during the service. Also called the *sidra*.

**SIDDUR:** means “order” in Hebrew and refers to the weekday and Shabbat prayer book, which contains the order of prayers. Our congregation uses the Reform Movement’s siddur, the *Mishkan T’filah*.

**SE’UDAT MITZVAH:** Sharing a meal with the community as a way to celebrate is rooted in Jewish tradition. The *B’nei Mitzvah* feast was declared a *se’udat mitzvah*, a meal celebrating a commandment, in the sixteenth century.

**TALLIT:** The prayer shawl worn by Jewish adults in fulfillment of the commandment in the Torah, “You shall attach *tzitzit* (fringes) to the four corners of your garments.” (Deut. 22:12) The fringes are knotted in such a way that they remind the Jew of all the commandments in the Bible. Both *kippot* and *tallitot* are available in the rack as you enter the sanctuary and are optional in Reform Judaism. *Tallitot* are traditionally be worn during morning services, but not in the afternoon, except on Yom Kippur.

**TORAH:** The word “*Torah*” really has two meanings. In its broadest sense it refers to the entire body of Jewish laws, lore, and teachings. In its narrowest sense, it refers to the scroll on which is written the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Every Shabbat a consecutive portion of the Torah is read and studied.

**TZEDAKAH:** The word *tzedakah* is often translated as “charitable giving,” but literally means “justice” in Hebrew. For Jews, giving to those less fortunate is a sacred obligation and a way of life.



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