

**BROOKLYN
HEIGHTS
SYNAGOGUE
B'MITZVAH
FAMILY GUIDE
2023/5784**

The study of Torah is equal to all the other mitzvot, because it leads to doing them.

MISHNAH PEAH 1:1

OCTOBER 27, 2023

HELLO B'NAI MITZVAH FAMILIES!

Welcome to the B'nai Mitzvah Program at Brooklyn Heights Synagogue!

Our program – from start to finish – is truly a student-driven experience.

THE BASICS: At the Friday evening service of your Shabbat, your family will be invited to light the Shabbat candles. The B'Mitzvah will be invited to lead the congregation in the *V'Ahavtah* and will also lead the blessings during the *Kiddush* following the service. At the Saturday morning service, the B'Mitzvah will be leading the congregation in prayer, teaching and chanting the Torah and Haftarah portions.

This is a huge responsibility and accomplishment, but we promise – your B'Mitzvah will have plenty of time to prepare before they step up to the *bimah*.

SOME QUICK DEFINITIONS:

BAR MITZVAH: Son of the commandment

BAT MITZVAH: Daughter of the commandment

B'MITZVAH: This serves as an inclusive abbreviation that alludes to the gender-specific terms above, but reflects our respect for the need to continually refine our language, so that all people feel seen and embraced by their Jewish community.

B'NAI MITZVAH: The Hebrew plural of Bar/Bat or B'Mitzvah.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME A B'MITZVAH?

Jewish law does not require young children to follow the commandments, though they are certainly encouraged to do so. But, at the age of 13, children become obligated to fulfill the *mitzvot*.

As you will hear Rabbi Lippe say *many* times, the B'Mitzvah is not an *event*. You don't *have* a B'Mitzvah. It is a change in *status*. You *become* a B'Mitzvah.

A young person automatically becomes B'Mitzvah on their 13th birthday; no ceremony is needed for this change of status.

In the secular world, one is not considered to be an adult until 18 or 21, but Jewish law is different. In Jewish life, B'nai Mitzvah can count in a *minyan* (the minimum number needed for some religious practices), form binding contracts, and can serve as a witness in religious courts. They have reached their Jewish legal “majority.” (Marriage still awaits at 18, and career at 20.)

The formal celebration of Bar Mitzvah is fairly recent in Jewish history, dating back only five centuries. (The first Bat Mitzvah did not happen until 1922.) To show a community that a young man was now legally of age, he would be called to recite the blessing before and after the reading of the Torah, a mitzvah and privilege reserved for those 13 and older. Over time, the ceremony was expanded to include the reading of the Torah and the Haftarah, which is an additional reading from the Prophets, chosen by the rabbis to amplify a theme found in the Torah reading or related to the time of year. Leading the worship prior to the Torah service also became a tradition. Because certain Hebrew and liturgical skills were required for all of this, the connection between Bar Mitzvah and Jewish education arose.

Today it is the *Jewish education*, rather than simply *reaching the age of majority*, which we value.

At the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, our B'nai Mitzvah capably demonstrate their ability to lead services, chant Torah, participate in Tikkun Olam and social action projects, as well as teach our community.

B'NAI MITZVAH REQUIREMENTS AT BHS*

- Be at least 13 years old.
- Complete at least four full years of Jewish study in the BHS Religious School, including the studies described in this booklet.
- Attend at least six Friday night and two Saturday morning services with a parent at BHS in the year prior to the ceremony.
- Finish their 7th Grade year of studies with good attendance.
- Eight or more absences – excused or otherwise – may be considered suffice grounds for delaying a Bar/Bat Mitzvah

**Please note that the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue reserves the right to postpone the ceremony if the requirements are not met.*

B'MITZVAH SHABBAT OVERVIEW

FRIDAY NIGHT SHABBAT SERVICE

| | |
|---------|----------------|
| 6:15 PM | Family arrival |
| 6:30 PM | Services begin |

FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES

- The B'Mitzvah and their family are invited to light the Shabbat candles in front of the congregation at the beginning of the service.
- The B'Mitzvah is invited to the bimah in the middle of the service to chant the V'Ahavta (immediately following the Sh'ma Yisrael).
- Following the service, the B'Mitzvah is invited to join the Rabbi and Cantor in leading the congregation in the Kiddush and Motzi.

SATURDAY MORNING SHABBAT SERVICE

| | |
|----------|---|
| 9:00 AM | Synagogue opens. Family may arrive for photos. |
| 9:30 AM | Rabbi and Cantor arrive for photos (if scheduled) |
| 9:45 AM | Ushers and Greeters arrive |
| 10:15 AM | Rabbi and Cantor meet with the B'Mitzvah (aka "The Pep Talk") |
| 10:30 AM | Shabbat Morning services begin! |
| 12:30 PM | Kiddush in the Oneg Reception Room |

STUDENT'S CEREMONY PREPARATION: 3 STEPS

NOTE: *Presumption of Hebrew decoding proficiency (see below)*

STEP 1: 6th Grade - Learning Trope

Beginning in their 6th grade year, the class begins studying trope, the system of cantillation used for chanting the Torah and Haftarah. These musical notation systems are mastered through practice with sheets and MP3 files accessible online through our website. Our trope curriculum is built on the textbook *The Art of Torah Cantillation: A Step-by-Step Guide to Chanting Torah* (Paperback) by Marshall Portnoy and Josee Wolff, published by the URJ Press.

PRACTICE AND PREPARATION ARE ESSENTIAL: If your child spends 10-12 minutes a night on the trope systems, they will learn their Torah and Haftarah portions with much greater efficiency, ease, and less stress.

STEP 2: 7th Grade – Torah Study

Hebrew proficiency is expected and necessary for all students by this time in their studies at BHS. If your child cannot comfortably decode and read aloud all of the Hebrew (both letters and vowel signs by this point), we ask that you seek additional tutoring. Perhaps a parent, older sibling, or neighbor who can read modern Israeli style Hebrew is available. There are also a number of good computer programs available from Davka.com. The Rabbi, Cantor, or our BHS Religious School Director can also recommend Hebrew tutors-for-hire.

Students with special learning styles are capable of achieving the same quality and quantity of material as their peers, given adequate time and learning help. If your child has a special learning style, please communicate this to the Cantor and the Rabbi as soon as you are aware (especially when you have applied for a B'Mitzvah date in the fall of 8th grade.)

STEP 3: One-on-one tutoring with the Cantor and Rabbi

Eight to ten months before the ceremony, your child will begin weekly, one-on-one, in-person tutoring sessions at BHS with a B'Mitzvah tutor, then the Cantor, and then finally with Rabbi Lippe, four to six weeks prior to your date. Your child will receive a printed packet and MP3 files with all the required prayers, blessings, Torah portion and Haftarah selection.

NOTE: Parents may request a phone or in-person conference with any instructor on their child's individual progress at any time.

Suggested Practice Routine:

Your child should be listening to the recording, pausing, repeating and then “rewinding” and repeating again after a few words or phrases. This is the most effective way to learn, unless your child can place the melodies into the text without hearing the Cantor. If this is the case, the child should check themselves against the recording after doing their own work. Students who work 20 to 25 minutes every evening will progress at least one verse or two each week.

We also urge students and parents to attend both Friday evening and Saturday morning B'Mitzvah services, where you can follow the prayers and become accustomed to our practice.

Rabbi Meetings:

Rabbi Lippe will meet with each student and their parents approximately six weeks before the ceremony to help review the plans for the ceremony. The Rabbi will also meet with your child *weekly* during the month prior to the ceremony. Prioritizing rehearsals during this period over other extracurricular commitments is absolutely essential, and will help your child feel secure for their day on the *bimah*.

The Binder:

This is your child's own personal prayer book and guide, which they will use to lead Shabbat services on the morning of their B'Mitzvah. It is created specifically for your child and given to them at the first meeting with Rabbi Lippe. Your child will bring this book to every meeting with the Rabbi.

NOTE: Please, ask to see the binder, and pay special attention to the places highlighted in orange!

YELLOW = B'Mitzvah leads

PINK = Cantor and B'Mitzvah lead

ORANGE = Honors to be assigned to family and friends (see below).

FAMILY ROLE IN CEREMONY PREPARATION

Bimah Honors:

We offer three *Aliyot* (the honor of being called for a Torah blessing) during the Torah chanting. The Aliyot should be given to Jewish individuals over the age of 13 who will be able to chant the Hebrew blessings. The first two *Aliyot* may be given to family or friends, and the final is dedicated to the B'Mitzvah. Non-Jewish family members are welcome to read the English translation of the Torah passage and, of course, accompany those who offer the aliyah blessings.

Tallit/Prayer Shawl:

(Optional) Some families present their B'Mitzvah with a *tallit* (prayer shawl) to wear during the service. This presentation requires the reading of several paragraphs in English. Please write the names of the presenters on the appropriate page in your child's binder.

Kavods/Honors:

The following honors are listed in your child's binder. The page numbers are noted below. Please fill in orange blanks in your child's binder with names of your honorees, in pencil!

1. TALLIT PRESENTATION (optional): (p.1) Several paragraphs in English
2. ENGLISH READINGS: (p.14) 4 paragraphs which can be divided in numerous ways
3. ARK OPENING/CLOSING #1: (p. 15-16) 2 or more people
4. TORAH PASSING (optional): Parental reading and physical ceremony for grandparents, parents, child
5. UNDRESSING TORAH: (p.17) Often done by younger sibling, cousins or besties
6. ALIYOT: Prayers before and after each section of Torah. The reader must be Jewish and at least 13 years old. We'll need their Hebrew/Jewish names. 2 individuals, couples or groups.
7. TORAH TRANSLATION READERS: 1 person per aliyah, 3 total
8. HAGBA: (p. 18) Raising the Torah (1 person)
9. G'LILA: (p. 18) Wrapping the Torah (1-2 people)
10. PARENTS' PRAYERS/SPEECHES: 3 minutes each maximum
11. ARK OPENING/CLOSING: (p. 19) 2 or more people

Kiddush Cup Presentation:

It is customary for a representative of the Board of Trustees of the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue to present the B'Mitzvah with a Kiddush cup. If you are friendly with a Trustee, you may ask them to make the presentation.

Parent Speech:

(Optional) The speech *must* be scripted and should last no more than three minutes per parent (five minutes if only one parent is speaking), no matter how hard it is to fit in all the things you wish to share with family and friends.

Kaddish:

The Rabbi will read aloud the names of your loved ones who have died in the years past (not only yahrzeits). Please write these names on the appropriate page in your child's binder and review the names with Rabbi Lippe no later than Friday at the "dress" rehearsal. (If you have not yet seen your child's binder, ask to see it right away!)

THE MITZVAH PROJECT

Another part of the B'nai Mitzvah requirement at BHS is your child's committing to and fulfilling a Mitzvah Project.

The Mitzvah Project is extremely flexible but should involve a volunteer commitment of at least one hour on at least eight separate occasions (including preparation time). If possible, the project should be completed prior to the ceremony and will be shared aloud as part of your child's D'var Torah (B'Mitzvah speech). If your child already has a community service requirement at their secular school, that service project will usually count toward their Mitzvah Project requirement.

Rabbi Romano will discuss potential projects and distribute a list of inspiration, ideas and resources

at the Family Meeting in spring of the 6th grade year. Students are asked to write up and submit a Mitzvah Project Proposal, signed by a parent.

B'Mitzvahs may consider making a commitment to the BHS Homeless Shelter by cooking and serving dinner or sleeping over on several occasions throughout the winter. 13-year-olds are welcome to stay over with a parent; this can be an especially rewarding way to celebrate a child's moral coming-of-age.

We encourage you to consider this an opportunity your child will always remember in connection to their B'nai Mitzvah.

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS AT BHS

Financial Obligation:

Your family's financial commitments to BHS must be up to date two months in advance of your child's bar or bat mitzvah service. In addition to your membership obligations and Religious School tuition, there is a B'nai Mitzvah fee that covers the cost of dedicated B'Mitzvah tutoring and preparation. This fee is currently \$2400 for the calendar year 2024; with a small increase for the 2025 B'nai Mitzvah. If meeting these commitments presents an issue for your family, please speak with Linda Harvey, our Executive Director, as soon as possible.

Music:

We always arrange for the accompaniment of our wonderful pianist, Miriam Daly, unless you instruct us otherwise. We welcome additional musical accompaniment at your service! If there is a special instrument you would like included (such as a clarinet, flute or other), or if there is a musician in your family who would like to participate in services, please speak with Rabbi Lippe and Cantor Porzecanski about this as early as possible.

Photography:

(Optional) Photography is not permitted in the Sanctuary during services, since it is highly distracting for clergy as well as for the B'Mitzvah; part of the beauty of our service is to be fully present. You can also schedule photos to be taken in the Sanctuary on Saturday morning *before* the service, between 9:00 and 10:00 AM.

If you would like photographs with the Rabbi, Cantor and/or with the Torah, please confirm with the clergy *in advance*. This will be done around 9:45 AM on Saturday morning.

A digital video copy of the service will be created through our streaming services and saved on the synagogue server for ONE YEAR. Please reach out the Office if you would like a copy before the year expires. [However, you may wish to record the ceremony on your own.]

Flowers:

(Optional) Many families decorate the synagogue with flowers, usually two large bouquets on the *bimah* and sometimes a smaller arrangement in the reception room or in the entry hall. We do have silk floral arrangements on the *bimah* if you choose not to order flowers.

Kindly choose flowers that are low-odor and low-pollen for the comfort of those on the *bimah*. Lilies are especially to be avoided. Please be sure your flowers are delivered to BHS by *Friday at 3:00 PM*.

See the vendor list for suggestions on where to order flowers locally.

NOTE: If you'd like to make arrangements for your flower arrangements following your simcha, you might want to contact Bloom Again Bklyn [917-533-3183; bloomagainbklyn.org]. They will repurpose your "pre-loved" arrangements for those whose day can be brightened by receiving a bouquet (hospitals, nursing homes, etc.).

Kippot (Yarmulkes):

(Optional) Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, like most Reform synagogues, comprises a wide array of ritual practices and traditions. Some of our members wear tallit (prayer shawls), some wear kippot (yarmulkes), some wear both, some neither. Please be sure that your guests know we are comfortable with all levels of observance. Kippot and tallit are available at the entrance to the Sanctuary.

Some families like to provide personalized, imprinted kippot, commemorating the day of the B'Mitzvah Shabbat service. For samples of various kinds of kippot, please contact the Office.

See vendor list for options.

Program:

(Optional) Some families choose to distribute their own programs for the Shabbat morning service. The program content often includes an outline of the service, a list of names for the various assigned honors, descriptions of the customs and traditions, etc. The Office can provide examples of programs from other ceremonies. Please let the Office know if you are creating one; the Rabbi will need to review a draft one week prior to the B'Mitzvah service.

Marshmallows:

(Optional) There is a longstanding Jewish tradition which connects learning with sweetness, and from this comes the custom of gently tossing candy at the B'Mitzvah as they finish chanting the Haftarah. If you wish to observe this custom, please provide your guests with marshmallows (no mini-marshmallows please), individually-wrapped in 2x3" organza jewelry bags (available on Amazon) or tissue to protect our Sanctuary against sticky residue. (Plastic can also cause distracting crinkling sounds!) Deliver them in a large, airtight plastic bag (so they remain soft) when you come for your final rehearsal on Friday.

We will transfer them to baskets, which your ushers can use to pass them out.

NOTE: This is also a nice way to honor or include younger family members, such as cousins, who can be called upon to hand out the sweets.

Oneg:

(Optional) Following Friday evening and Saturday morning services, we gather as a community in the reception room just outside our Sanctuary to say *Kiddush* (the blessing over the fruit of the vine) and *Motzi* (the blessing over bread) and to share some light bites.

The B'nai Mitzvah fee covers red Kiddush wine, white grape juice, and challah for both the Friday evening and the Saturday morning Kiddush. We also recommend that families consider providing trays of cookies, fruit, cheese, or vegetables if they wish to extend the celebration for our community.

Alternatively, if you prefer the Office to arrange for Oneg refreshments, you may provide a contribution of \$180 for this Oneg Sponsorship. Please confirm with the Office at least four weeks prior to your Shabbat.

If you would like to host a pre-Shabbat dinner for your family and guests, please contact Lisa Kopel, our Director of Membership.

If there is a congregational Shabbat dinner on the evening of your child's simcha, you and your guests are welcome to participate. You may also want to consider sponsoring the dessert. Please contact the Office for more details.

Celebrating Jewishly:

(Optional) The Rabbi and Cantor do not accept fees for the performance of lifecycle events, pastoral care, or personal services for members of the congregation. Throughout the ages, however, Jews have expressed thanksgiving for happy events by appropriate gifts in support of the Synagogue. The Discretionary Funds of the Rabbis and Cantor help those in need and support causes that Reform Judaism has always valued. It is customary, therefore, to make a contribution to these funds. Through your *simcha*, and by virtue of your tzedakah, others may be blessed by your blessings.

Other possibilities for combining mitzvah, tzedakah and celebration include:

- A commitment to our BHS Homeless Shelter
- The Jewish National Fund
- Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger
- Heights + Hills

Lasting Commemorations:

(Optional) Some families also choose to contribute to Brooklyn Heights Synagogue in the form of a Simcha Leaf, commemorating the event for the Tree of Life in our reception room. Others choose to add a memorial plaque for a loved one to our Sanctuary wall at the time of their child's B'Mitzvah. Either can be purchased through the Office. If you would like your leaf or plaque in place at the time of the B'Mitzvah, please order it at least 12 weeks in advance.

BHS Social Space:

With our newly renovated building, we are now able to hold events in our second floor social space, which can accommodate large parties. Most families choose to host a luncheon following the B'Mitzvah services on Saturday, but if you're interested in an evening party, please let us know. If you are interested in finding out rates and for more, please contact Lisa Kopel, our Director of Membership at 718-522-2070 x124 or email lisa@bhsbrooklyn.org.

THIS IS NOT A GRADUATION!

Becoming B'Mitzvah should not be the end of anyone's Jewish education. The Torah is "wider than the sea" and can provide a lifetime of deepening, enriching, spiritual and intellectual sustenance. What one learns as a child is wonderful and powerful but needs to be enriched and sustained through an entire lifetime.

Every child must complete the 7th grade year, no matter their B'Mitzvah date.

We also expect that all our students will continue their education. Students continuing on through 8th and 9th grades participate at the end of 9th grade in a one-week trip to Israel over Memorial Day weekend. Confirmation is held at the end of 10th grade. Our post-confirmands are welcome to attend adult education events and classes, and the 11th and 12th grade class, which meets at Rabbi Lippe's house on Wednesday evenings, usually twice each month through the school year. It is offered at a nominal fee.

BHGSY (Brooklyn Heights Group of Synagogue Youth): High School students are also encouraged to participate in our self-governing youth group. Members create their own programming as well as participating in synagogue life and in the many initiatives of the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). BHGSY is a great way for your teenager to stay involved and gain valuable leadership and organizational experiences which can carry them through high school, college and beyond.

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

Most families have many questions as they navigate this passage together. We are here to help and to assure you that your simcha will be beautiful, appropriate, and full of meaning!.

To schedule an appointment with Rabbi Lippe or Cantor Porzecanski, please write to Isabel Benebgui at clergyassistant@bhsbrooklyn.org.

For logistical questions, billing and financial matters, please speak with our Director of Membership Engagement and Programming, Lisa Kopel, at 718-522-2070 x124, or email lisa@bhsbrooklyn.org.

We look forward to celebrating with you!

B'NAI MITZVAH TIMELINE

5TH GRADE YEAR

Date is scheduled with Clergy Administrator

6TH GRADE YEAR

Fall: Rabbi Romano introduction to the history, customs, and the development of the ceremony and it's celebration

Class begins learning cantillation trope (chanting)

January: Rabbi Romano's class: Embarking on the B'Mitzvah Journey—a mini class for Parents (& Grandparents)

Spring: Rabbi Romano's B'Mitzvah Program for students & parents

7TH GRADE YEAR

Fall: B'Mitzvah Shabbaton –“Mock” Ceremony on a Saturday morning with Rabbi Lippe

10-8 Months Prior: Tutorial arrangements are made and student begins meeting weekly with B'Mitzvah tutor

8-6 Months Prior: Student begins meeting with Cantor

6-4 Weeks Prior: Parents meet with Rabbi Lippe and Executive Director

Student begins meeting with Rabbi and writing D'Var Torah

4 Weeks Prior: Student meets with Rabbi weekly for 1-hour rehearsals

B'MITZVAH DAY!

Friday 3:30-5 PM: Dress rehearsal with Rabbi

Friday 6:30 PM: Friday night services begin

Saturday 9:00 AM: Building opens & family arrives for photography

Saturday 9:30 AM: Rabbi arrives (9:45 pictures with Rabbi if scheduled)

Saturday 9:45 AM: Guest Greeters arrive

Saturday 10:15 AM: Rabbi Cantor meeting with B'Mitzvah

Saturday 10:25 AM: Parents enter Sanctuary and sit down

Saturday 10:30 AM: Shabbat morning services begin!

Saturday 12:30 PM: Kiddush in Reception Room

B'MITZVAH CHECKLIST

Requirements for all families:

- ☐ Attend services with a least one parent during 12 months prior to ceremony
 - ☐ 6 - Friday evening services at BHS
 - ☐ 2 - B'Mitzvah morning services at BHS
- ☐ Complete all financial obligations to BHS (dues, tuition, and B'Mitzvah fee) at least two months prior to ceremony
- ☐ Make arrangements for celebration: as early as possible!
- ☐ Invitations / Directions / Parking info: Three months before ceremony
- ☐ Choose Greeters: At least 2-3 adults, preferably members of BHS, to arrive by 9:45 AM
- ☐ Musical Requests: Please speak with the Cantor several weeks ahead of time
- ☐ Bring Kippot & Tallit if you are wearing them
- ☐ Friday Evening (arrive no later than 6:15 PM)
- ☐ B'Mitzvah responsibilities: Candlelighting, chant V'ahavta, Kiddush after services
- ☐ Saturday Morning: Arrive no later than 9:45 AM, services begin at 10:30 AM
- ☐ Finish 7th Grade. Check out 8th Grade, 9th Grade Israel trip, 10th Grade Confirmation!

Optional:

- ☐ Oneg Sponsorship (DIY or arrange for Office to help)
- ☐ Arrange flowers to be delivered by 3:00 PM on Friday. Low odor, low pollen, no lilies!
- ☐ Wrap marshmallows and bring them on Friday, well wrapped to stay soft
- ☐ Order commemorative kippot: At least 3 weeks in advance
- ☐ Create program to hand out at Shabbat morning services
- ☐ Arrange for photos prior to service in Sanctuary 9:00 - 10:00 AM
- ☐ Live streaming of service: The default setting is to broadcast. There is NO COST to livestream the service. Please let the Office know if you wish to NOT broadcast the Saturday morning service, otherwise it will be streamed and accessible through our website at www.bhsbrooklyn.org. A digital copy of the service is available. You must let us know no later than 2 weeks after your service if you would like a copy. Advance notice is much appreciated!
- ☐ Order Simcha Leaves for our Tree of Life: At least 8 weeks prior to ceremony
- ☐ Order Memorial Plaques for Sanctuary: At least 12 weeks prior to ceremony
- ☐ Pre-services buffet for family & guests i.e. coffee, juice, pastries, bagels, etc.