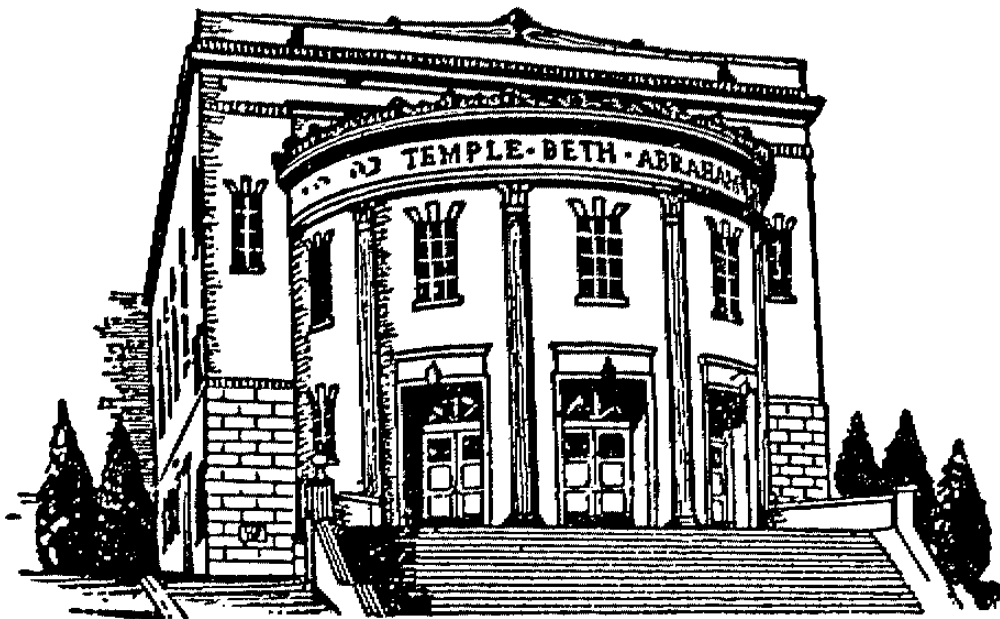


Temple Beth Abraham
B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

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Mark Bloom, Rabbi

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Coordinator

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

I. Requirements of our Students.

- A. Attend *Bet Sefer* (or equivalent program) for at least three years prior to the scheduled date;
- B. Complete *Kitah Zayin*, regardless of the date on which he or she becomes *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*;
- C. Attend, along with at least one parent, Rabbi Bloom's *Family Education* sessions on Torah, Worship and Deeds of Loving-Kindness.
- D. Continue with his or her Jewish studies as part of the community *Midrasha* program;
- E. Familiarize themselves with the order and the choreography of the service by attending not less than 20 *Shabbat* services at Temple Beth Abraham in the year leading up to the date, at least 12 of which must be on Saturday mornings.
- F. Participate in hands-on projects designed to bring home the meaning of the concepts of *tzedaka* and *g'milut chasadim*.
- G. Day school students are expected to participate in the *Kitah Zayin* program by attending *Bet Sefer* their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* year.

II. Expectations of our Students. *B'nai Mitzvah* candidates are expected to:

- A. Be familiar with the symbols of Jewish prayer: *kippah*, *tallit*, *t'fillin*;
- B. Demonstrate a basic knowledge and understanding of Jewish life and thought, include *Torah*, *T'filla* (Prayer), *Shabbat*, the *Chagim* (Holidays and Festivals), Hebrew, Jewish ethics and history;
- C. Conduct portions of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service on the Friday evening before their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*;
- D. Attend and participate in the morning *Minyan* service on the Thursday morning before the ceremony;
- E. At the *Shabbat* morning service, lead the *Torah* service, chant the *Maftir* (or final) portion from the *Torah*; chant the appropriate *Haftarah* ¹(the

¹ Note: Despite sounding similar, the words *Torah* and *Haftarah* actually have nothing in common etymologically. The word *Haftarah* derives from the word "petter," meaning "ending" and is therefore actually closely related to the word *Maftir*.

selection from the prophetic writings); and deliver a *D'var Torah* (literally, a “word of Torah”) interpreting the *Torah* and/or *Haftarah* selections; and

- F. Following the service, to lead the congregation in the *Kiddush* and the *Motzi*.
- G. Students are also encouraged to lead additional *t'fillot*, e.g. the *Musaf* (or additional) service and the *birkat ha-mazon* (blessings after the meal), to chant additional sections of the *Torah* reading

III. Role of the Tutor

The role of the tutor is to prepare the student for reading from the *Torah* and chanting the *Haftarah* portion for his or her *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Some assistance may also be needed to prepare the student for leading the *Torah* and *Musaf* services, but students should generally be familiar with the services through attendance at *Bet Sefer*, where this is part of the curriculum, and from attendance at services. The best thing you, as parents, can do to assist your child in preparing for his or her *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is to accompany them to *Shabbat* morning services so that you and they can become familiar with the order of the service and what will be expected of them.

- A. Tutoring is something that will have to be arranged by you, the parents. We do not have an official *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* tutor. Our B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator can provide you with list of approved tutors.
- B. 36 half-hour lessons over the 9 months preceding the date is fairly standard. Some students prefer to start earlier to accommodate schedules. Much depends on how motivated your student is and how much he or she takes on;
- C. Tutors generally works backward with the blocks of material the student is expect to master (e.g. *Haftarah*, *Maftir*, Additional *Aliyot*, and *T'fillot*.)
- D. Fees for tutoring are a private matter to be arranged by and between the parents and the tutor, as are arrangements for the location and hours of the tutoring.
- E. The fees charged by the synagogue for *Bet Sefer* cover only the in-class instruction (*Kitah Zayin*) and other expenses associated with the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, not the tutoring or luncheon expenses.

IV. Meetings and Other Deadlines

- A. **12-15 months before** the date for the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, contact the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator for a list of tutors. If you have someone whom you would like to use that is not on our list, you must get approval from the Coordinator.
- B. **9-15 months** before the date, start tutoring. Also, you should go over details of the tutoring process and other requirements with the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator.
- C. **4 months prior** to the date: Meeting with the Synagogue Administrator. Make sure all financial matters are settled, (i.e., that you are current in your dues and all required fees have been paid) and discuss use of the facilities and other such matters;
- D. **3 to 4 months prior** to the date: Speak with the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator to check on the student's progress, to discuss service honors and to answer any questions you may have about the ritual aspects of the ceremony. **One of the issues that will be raised during this conversation is the question of who will be reading Torah. You will need to let us know if you will need the Ritual Committee to find Torah readers or, if you will be having friends and family read. We will also want to make sure that everyone will be prepared. Persons who do not regularly read Torah at TBA will be required to chant for the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator not less than three weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Individuals who are not prepared at that time will not be allowed to read;**
- F. **6-12 months prior** to the date: Begin to work on the *D'var Torah*. Rabbi Bloom will work on this with the student, but this is also a wonderful thing for you, the parents, to work on with your children.
- G. **2-3 weeks prior to the date:** Final check-in with the Synagogue Administrator. Submit your draft text for the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* booklet to the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator (as the office staff will be duplicating it for you), as well as your final "honors" list. **The Rabbi must approve the booklet.** Booklets will be printed in black ink only (on any color paper you choose) and cannot include photos of the student or any other individuals. The B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator will format the booklet for you. **We will also need to know the Hebrew names of everyone who is being called to the Torah for an aliyah.** The Hebrew name consists of the honoree's name and his/her parents' Hebrew names. This will be placed on the bima so that people can be called up by their Hebrew names. Please provide this information to the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator about two weeks before the ceremony.

H. **The week prior to the date:** Rehearsal in the Sanctuary. This usually takes place the Wednesday before the Saturday service at 4 p.m. Inasmuch as photography is not permitted on Shabbat, you will likely want this to be a “dress rehearsal” and have your photographer there to take pictures. If you plan to take a series of “posed” shots, please ask your photographer to arrive at approximately 3 p.m. to take pictures with the family, so the 4 p.m. hour can be devoted primarily to running through the service. **All photographs involving holding or using the Torah must be taken when the Rabbi, Gabbai or B’nai Mitzvah Coordinator are present.**

I. **Thursday Minyan and Friday Evening.** The students are also expected to attend the 8 a.m. morning *minyan* service the Thursday before the Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony where they wear tefillin and recite an *aliyah* in the presence of some of our members of our community. The service lasts approximately an hour. On the Friday evening before the service, beginning at 6:15 p.m., the student will also lead some of the prayers, arranged in consultation with the Rabbi. Sometimes there are a variety of activities occurring on Friday night (such as a Rock and Roll Shabbat or a class led service), but the student and family will have some part in the leadership of the service.

J. **Other Matters.** Contact the B’nai Mitzvah Coordinator for questions about:

1. *Omer* photo and article;
2. Flowers for the *bimah*;
3. Childcare during and after the service;
4. Planning the *Kiddush* luncheon:
 - a. Catering and *Kashrut* policy; and
 - b. Music during *Kiddush* luncheon;
5. Transliterated *Siddur* available;
6. Greeters/Ushers during the service; and
7. Facility/custodial (Social Hall) use and fees (for an evening party).

V. The Big Day

A. Services begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. with the *Birchot Ha-Shahar* (the morning blessings) and the *P’sukei D’zimra* (selections from the Psalms). You are expected to be inside the sanctuary **no later than 9:15 a.m.** The congregation will provide someone to lead this portion of the service, but you may, after conferring with the B’nai Mitzvah Coordinator or Rabbi, want to ask someone else to do so;

B. The *Shaharit* (morning) service will follow, which the Cantor usually leads;

C. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* will lead the Torah service;

D. Parents' Role: The *Torah* service is generally preceded by the parents' presentation of the *tallit* to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, together with the parents' bestowing of a blessing and **short** remarks. The parents, if Jewish, generally also are called to the *Torah* for an *aliyah*. The seventh (or next to last) *aliyah* is especially appropriate because you will then remain on the *bima* for the final or *maftir aliyah*, which your son or daughter will chant;

E. *Aliyot* and Other Honors. Opening and closing of the Ark for the taking out and returning of the *Torah*; 7 *aliyot* (including Maftir – one *aliyah* is reserved for a congregant to be selected by the Gabbai); lifting and tying the *sefer Torah* (called *Hagbah* and *Gelilah*); prayers for country, Israel and peace. These last three prayers, found on pages 414-417, may be especially appropriate ways to honor non-Jewish family and friends. With approval from the Rabbi, you may also substitute readings on similar themes. On certain Shabbatot, there may be more than one *Torah* to take out, lift and dress. NOTE: several honors *may* be “held back” should it be appropriate to honor another member of our community (e.g. for an *aufruf*, the *aliyah* traditionally extended to a groom on the *Shabbat* before his wedding);

Everyone who has a Torah honor (*aliyah*, open/close the ark, lift/tie the Torah, carry Torah) must be Jewish and must be age 13 or above. While it is lovely to honor your classmates with these honors, you may not do so if the honoree has not already celebrated his/her own Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony.

F. Younger Siblings' Role: Younger siblings, often together with cousins, may also chant prayers such as *Ein K'Eloheinu*, (along with all the children of the congregation), and they may also lead prayers they are working on in religious or day school, with permission from the Rabbi.

G. Roles for Non-Jewish Family Members. Presentation of *Tallit* by a non-Jewish parent, blessing of your son or daughter, English prayers;

H. The D'var Torah is NOT a thank you speech. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* will be expected to deliver a talk that reflects the meaning of this rite of passage, and connects with the *Torah* and *Haftarah* portions. Thank yous and additional family remarks are more appropriate at the *Kiddush* luncheon;

I. All members of your family are expected to wear appropriate attire to the ceremony. **For female members of the family, this means no sleeveless dresses or tops, and no skirts or dresses that are very short. In addition, every Jewish person who goes up to the *bima* for any kind of honor is**

expected to wear a tallit and kippah, both of which are available in the foyer of the sanctuary. Finally, it is suggested that *Bat Mitzvahs* refrain from wearing very high heels during the ceremony as it makes it more difficult for them to walk the stairs to the bima while carrying the heavy Torah;

J. Passing out and/or throwing of candy is not permitted in our service. Throwing anything at people is not in the spirit of the service and, given the nature of 7th graders, can be quite dangerous. It was originally a wedding custom wishing the bride and groom a sweet life together along with as many children as there are candies, and is not appropriate at a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony;

VI. **Afterwards**

A. You are strongly encouraged to hold your “function” at the synagogue.

B. In all events, you are expected to provide at least a modest *Kiddush* luncheon. You must use a synagogue-approved caterer. Currently, that list includes Hennie Hecht, Edie Mills, Mary Odenheimer and Jing Piser. You may also use one of the East Bay Kosher caterers (Grand Bakery, Oakland Kosher, Holyland Restaurant on Lakeshore), but you will be required to pay a synagogue mashgiach so the caterer can be supervised in the Temple Beth Abraham kitchen. Other certified Kosher caterers from other areas may also be permitted, again, in consultation with the Rabbi. Nevertheless, it is strongly recommended that you use one of the in-house synagogue caterers. For additional information regarding Temple Beth Abraham’s policies regarding the catering of the Kiddush Luncheon, contact the B’nai Mitzvah Coordinator. There are strict rules relating to the use of the kitchen designed to preserve its kashrut;

C. If you do have a separate nighttime party, **all** members of the student’s class at Bet Sefer **must** be invited. This is something they experience together, and to exclude some of the students is hurtful to the feelings of the individual and the camaraderie of the class;

D. Respect the Shabbat and observe the laws of *Kashrut*. No photography is permitted anywhere on the synagogue campus on *Shabbat*; no telephone calls of any kind may be made by anyone on *Shabbat*; no smoking is permitted anywhere on the premises.

E. Try to keep the celebration in perspective;

F. Enjoy yourself!

VII. **How to put God on your guest list.**

A. Family Involvement:

- Attend services with your son or daughter;
- Work with her/him on the *D'var Torah*;
- Read *Torah* at the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony (we will help you!);
- Participate in family education programs;

B. Tzedakah: Consider using the occasion of this wonderful *simcha*, this joyous event, for the giving of *tzedakah*. For instance, Mazon, which bills itself as “a Jewish response to hunger,” encourages families to donate an amount equal to three percent (3%) of the cost of the “affair.” A few years back, the parents of the *B'nai Mitzvah* students came up with a plan for having each family donate \$300 to be used as follows: \$100 of the total amount so raised as a gift to the classmate becoming *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and with the rest of the money to be split between a project or projects selected by the students and some gift to the synagogue. As a class, you may want to consider a similar project;

C. Encourage your child to set aside some portion of his or her gifts to a worthy cause.

D. Remind your child to participate in the Remember Me project – your child will be given a very short bio of a child who died in the Holocaust. Encourage your child to donate tzedakah or other charitable acts in memory of this child and remind her/him to say *kaddish* for this child on the anniversary of the child's death or on the date of your son's/daughter's *simcha*.

Remember. Whatever you decide to do in this regard can serve as a powerful object lesson for your son or daughter. Lead by example.

Mazel Tov!