



Becoming B'Mitzvah AT TBZ BROOKLINE

*A comprehensive guide to an
easy and meaningful B'Mitzvah experience*



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Introduction

Congratulations! You and your family are about to begin a journey towards a very important Jewish rite of passage. As members of a spiritual community that values inclusivity, connection, and growth, we are always looking to grow in ways that reflect our core belief: that everyone should have a home at TBZ that represents their truest self. The words Bar or Bat Mitzvah literally mean “son” or “daughter” “of commandment” and B’nei Mitzvah is the plural, generally translated as “children of the commandment,” however Hebrew is a gendered language so it literally means “sons of the commandment.”

At TBZ, we use the term B’Mitzvah when we refer to the collective or when gender is not specified. B’Mitzvah is a gender-neutral word which means “of the commandment” and allows us to refer to all of our students, regardless of gender. We know that gender is fluid and it can feel limiting to only have the rigid options of Bar or Bat Mitzvah available. We hope that using the gender-neutral “B’Mitzvah” for the ritual will offer more flexibility of language for gender non-binary students such as, “I’m having my B’Mitzvah next Shabbat!” or “Becoming B’Mitzvah is important to me because...”

Much of today’s Jewish world defines becoming B’Mitzvah as the moment when a Jewish community welcomes a child into their congregation as a Jewish adult. What does it mean to be a “Jewish adult?” Traditionally, when a boy reached the age of Bar Mitzvah, 13, his father would recite a *bracha* (blessing) commemorating the time of freedom from certain parental obligations. The boy would then be responsible for his actions and would be allowed (and expected) to fully participate in Jewish ritual life.

Today, we acknowledge and emphasize the importance of parental participation in a child’s upbringing education, but we recognize that a Bar, Bat or B’Mitzvah does not really become a completely independent adult according to the benchmarks set by our secular world. At TBZ, we understand the moment of transformation to occur when the B’Mitzvah candidate proves that they are no longer merely a student of Judaism, but also a teacher. By leading the congregation in song, by chanting and interpreting texts, and by engaging in *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), the B’Mitzvah become teachers, leaders, and “adult” members of the TBZ community and the Jewish community.

It goes without saying that this transformation does not happen overnight. The B'Mitzvah experience is a process, which takes hard work and dedication. This handbook is meant to help relieve any anxieties you may have about reaching your special day. If you work well and are organized, your debut as a Bar/Bat/B'Mitzvah will be a great success!

Included in this booklet is some comprehensive information about preparing for your family's upcoming *simcha* (celebration) at TBZ.

B'Hatzlacha! (Good luck!) We look forward to sharing this *simcha* with you and offering our support in any way we can over the next years.

Be'sha-ah tovah (in good time - may it be an auspicious event!) and *Mazal Tov* (congratulations) – with wishes for a fulfilling *simcha*,

Rav Claudia, Rav Tiferet, and the whole TBZ community.



Services to celebrate becoming B'Mitzvah

Many families choose to celebrate their *simcha* (celebration) on Shabbat morning at TBZ. However, we are eager to fashion the right kind of service to fit your needs. We are fairly flexible, and with enough notice we have been able to accommodate most families.

B'Mitzvah celebrations are traditionally held when the Torah is read at one of the following services:

- *Monday and Thursday mornings*. Monday Torah readings permit B'nei Mitzvah scheduling on secular holidays that fall on Mondays, such as Labor Day or Memorial Day;
- *Shabbat Mornings*;
- *Shabbat Afternoons*. This is a *mincha/ma'ariv* (afternoon/evening) service and includes havdalah (marking the end of Shabbat). The first verses of the next week's *parsha* (Torah portion) is read, and there is no Haftarah (reading from the Book of Prophets);
- *Rosh Hodesh*, which is the beginning of a new lunar month. This is usually a weekday service and has a special Torah reading. Occasionally, *Rosh Hodesh* falls on a Sunday;
- Throughout *Hanukkah*, which includes weekday services and special Torah readings.

Requirements

To complete the B'Mitzvah program at TBZ and have your *simcha* **on Shabbat Morning** all students/families must:

- Be financially current members for at least three years before the *simcha*. (New-to-town members from other synagogue communities are exempt from this requirement).
- Attend weekly Beit Rabban sessions since at least 5th grade, unless enrolled in a Jewish Day School, or other program/arrangement to be discussed.
- Attend monthly family B'Mitzvah Group Sessions on Shabbat afternoons¹.

¹ Participation is expected to continue until the school year ends, even if the B'Mitzvah occurred earlier in the year.

We offer other opportunities listed in the previous section (*Mincha*, *Rosh Hodesh*, etc.) to current members who are not meeting the above listed requirements or those who prefer another service for their celebration.

In addition, B'Mitzvah candidates are expected to do the following:

- Start/continue a family Shabbat practice. We will help you partner with other families, if you wish, or support you to do it yourselves;
- Attend Shabbat Services and special programming for B'Mitzvah-age members (at least twice monthly);
- Complete *B'mitzvotav* - 13 Mitzvot Project² (Through Beit Rabban or as a family);
- Lead *Shema* and *Ve'ahavta* (central prayers in our services);
- Chant *brachot* (blessings) before and after *maftir* (final Torah reading);
- Chant *maftir* the last verses of the Torah portion)
- Write and deliver a *d'var Torah* (a word of Torah, like a sermonette). Students will meet individually with our Rabbinic Intern to discuss their writing process;³
 - If the B'Mitzvah candidate would like to offer a commensurate project in lieu of, or in addition to, a *d'var Torah*, such as a photography exhibit, a music or dance performance, or a family tree for the congregation, this can be discussed;
- Chant *brachot* before and after the *Haftarah* (the weekly reading from the Prophets);
- Attend 3 rehearsals with Rabbi and/or Rabbinic Intern

Some students may finish these requirements early, or may wish to increase their participation during the service. We encourage these students to:

- Chant additional *aliyot* (there are a total of 8, including the *maftir*);
- Chant *Haftarah* (if celebration is on Shabbat, 6-10 verse minimum);
- Lead *ashrei* (prayer recited during morning and afternoon services), we highly recommended for all students);
- Lead other parts of the Shabbat Morning Service
 - Selected Psalms from *Pesukei d'Zimra* (praiseful songs/prayers), which may include:
 - *Baruch She'amar*
 - *Esa Enai (Psalm 121)*

² See p. 10

³ See p. 21

- *Psalm 150 (Halleluyah)*
 - *Bar'chu (blessing over the Shema and before torah readings)*
 - The first 3 *brachot* of the *Amidah* (central prayer of services)

Our Hopes...

The years leading up to the B'Mitzvah celebration offer time to examine or reexamine your connection to Judaism, the Jewish People, and Jewish spiritual living. Many families treat this journey as a time for major changes in practice, opportunity for introspection, and/or to examine the meaning of their Jewish identity. At TBZ, we want to emphasize this on-going process of introspection, reflection, and potential for change. We do not want this event to be the last Jewish “thing” your family ever does! We do not want the B'Mitzvah's Jewish identity, understanding and meaning of Judaism to be frozen in a 13-year old perspective!

Timeline with Benchmarks for Preparation

The following timeline will guide your process:

5th Grade Year

- *Fall*: B'Mitzvah family introductory meeting with Rav Claudia, Rav Tiferet, and Cantor Maayan:
 - Determine which B'Mitzvah package⁴ is right for your family.
- *Spring*: Cantor Maayan meets individually with families to assess candidate's Hebrew to determine when to begin tutoring:
 - Candidate should know all consonants and vowels and should be able to read aloud comfortably.

Before 6th Grade Year Begins

- Set a date for your *simcha* (celebration) with Rav Claudia. Please contact Rochelle Kelman to schedule an appointment.

6th Grade Year

- Receive your Parasha resources;
- Start learning Torah trope (at Beit Rabban);
- Begin B'mitzvotav Project⁵ (at Beit Rabban).

⁴ See pages 27-28

⁵ See Page 10

7-12 Months prior . . .

- Begin 1:1 tutoring with Cantor Maayan or private tutor;
- Read your entire *parsha* in English to know the themes/topics;
- Read through your *maftir* in Hebrew;
- Learn to chant *brachot* before and after reading Torah (at Beit Rabban);
- Learn to chant *v'ahavta* (at Beit Rabban).

6 Months . . .

- Learn to chant the *ashrei*;
- Learn to lead the Torah Service;
- Learn to chant your *maftir* in with vowels and trope markings.

4 - 5 Months . . .

- Meet with Rav Claudia and other upcoming B'Mitzvah families to go over general service/ceremony details;
- Chant *maftir* fluently with vowels and trope markings;
- Begin to learn additional *aliyot*, if desired;
- Learn to chant *brachot* before and after *haftarah*;
- Begin to learn *haftarah*;
- Make or order invitations;
- Order *kippot* for your guests (*optional*);
- Find or make your *tallit* (prayer shawl);
- Coordinate *kiddush* plans with Executive Director.⁶

3-2 Months . . .

- Practice chanting *maftir* from the “unpunctuated side” of the *tikkun* (study guide for learning to chant Torah);
- Learn additional *aliyot*, if desired;
- Continue to learn *haftarah*;
- Meet with Rav Claudia to set up final details;
- Give out honors to family members and friends (a form will be sent to you in advance to complete);
- Meet with Rabbinic Intern to work on d'var Torah;⁷
- Schedule rehearsals with Rav Claudia and Rabbinic Intern;
- Send out invitations.

1 Month...

- Finish *d'var Torah*;
- Continue B'mitzvotav Project;
- Finalize party plans;
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

⁶ See p. 24

⁷ See p. 21

3...2...1 Week

- Rehearsals
 - *Helpful Hint:* Wear the shoes you plan to use during the ceremony to one or all of your rehearsals!
- If you are a parent, you may want to write down remarks to give to your child at the service (you will receive guidelines). You may also want to give the Priestly blessing for your child;
- Finalize party plans;
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

B'MITZVOTAV: Through God's Commandments

A thirteen-step Mitzvah program for TBZ B'Mitzvah Learners

B'MITZVOTAV is modeled upon a *mitzvah* (commandment; good deed) project by the same name as designed by Temple Ner Tamid in Bloomfield, New Jersey and inspired by the *B'Mitzvotav* project that TBZ tutor Jessica Slavin crafted for TBZ B'nei Mitzvah students, Wen-Wen Fisher, Dylan Frank & Rafi Michaels.

Family Guide

“Shimon the Righteous was among the survivors of the Great Assembly. He used to say: The world depends on three things—on learning Torah, on serving God (Avodah), and on doing deeds of loving-kindness (G'milut Chasadim)” - Pirke Avot 1:2

Becoming B'Mitzvah requires a great deal of hard work. It is true that a Jewish person becomes B'Mitzvah at the appropriate age with or without a ceremony. As a community, TBZ shares in the joyful celebration of your coming of age. We also want to make sure that the process is a meaningful one. It is a process that will help you to connect to your Jewish path in the world; to ask questions about your Jewish identity, and to embrace our traditions with love and understanding. Becoming B'Mitzvah marks the beginning of a person's Jewish accountability. But becoming responsible doesn't happen overnight, nor without practice! It is the process itself that is transformative. Through it we discover how we live our lives Jewishly.

Learning the Torah portion, the blessings, the *haftarah*, and the prayers necessary to lead the Shabbat morning service takes time and

commitment, and that part of the process is very important. But that is not all there is to becoming B'Mitzvah. Specifically, it means embracing *mitzvot*. *Mitzvot* are not just “commandments” or “obligations,” rather they are the ways in which we connect to our Jewish tradition; how we connect our present moments to all those who came before us, to all those who will come after us and to the whole Jewish community in the world today.

B'mitzvotav—through God’s commandments—is a learning-by-doing program, which all B'Mitzvah learners are expected to complete. This action-oriented project will give you the practice to continue living and doing Jewishly once you become B'Mitzvah and/or when you graduate from Beit Rabban. Doing *mitzvot* makes us partners with G'd in making the world a better place. We move beyond ourselves and connect with others. When we do a *mitzvah*, whether studying Torah, serving God, or doing acts of loving-kindness, we not only help to improve the world—we elevate ourselves as well.

All learners will complete thirteen *mitzvot* and record them in their B'Mitzvotav Journals. For Beit Rabban learners, they will work on this together on Wednesdays. Learners on other paths will work with Rav Tiferet and Cantor Maayan to ensure they are getting the most out of this practice.

Mitzvot may be divided in three categories: **Torah** (study), **Avodah** (worship), and **G'milut Hasadim** (acts of loving-kindness)

What Do You Need To Do?

We challenge you to complete **13 mitzvot** in three different categories (four in each category):

- **Talmud Torah:** Commitment to Jewish Learning: **4 mitzvot**
- **Avodah:** Jewish Living: **4 mitzvot**
- **G'milut Chasadim:** Acts of Love and Kindness: **4 mitzvot**

The 13th Mitzvah is: *Aliyah la-Torah*: being called to the Torah for the first time, on the Shabbat of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Below, you will find a list of *mitzvot* to choose from (4 *mitzvot* are expected for all B'nei Mitzvah students), you may choose from the other nine suggestions. This list is, of course, only a small fraction of the mitzvah connections we perform as Jews. If there is a mitzvah that you would like to perform and is not listed in this list, please let us know!

TALMUD TORAH/COMMITMENT TO JEWISH LEARNING

FOR ALL B'MITZVAH LEARNERS:

- D'VAR TORAH.** Study your Torah portion with your family, tutor and rabbis. Write a *D'var Torah* that exhibits your understanding of the portion and its meaning in your life. You will read it at your B'Mitzvah ceremony. 2-3 months prior to your B'Mitzvah you will begin the process of crafting your d'var Torah. But you don't need to wait until then to begin reading and learning about your Torah portion!

OPTIONS / CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:

- Read one Jewish Book** and write a review for your *Journal*. (Please check with the rabbis or the Beit Rabban teacher, if the book qualifies for the *mitzvah*.)
- Visit a Jewish museum, gallery, or special Jewish cultural event** (play, recital, movie). Write about your experience in your *Journal*.
- Interview your grandparent(s)** (or other elders in your family if your grandparents are no longer with us or not capable of participating in this project). Learn about their Jewish roots and their stories. Where did they come from? What kind of Jewish life have they lived? Write about the interview in your *Journal*.
- Identify something about Jewish belief or practice** you do not understand. Research the answer using books, the internet, the rabbis, teachers and other resources. Present the question, the answer, and your own experience of research in your *Journal*.
- Write your own midrash** (a creative story) about something in your *Torah* or *haftarah* portion. Try writing your portion from one character's perspective, creating an alternative version, or answering some unanswered question. You can illustrate this story (if you want to) and make it part of your *Journal*.
- Go to at least two Torah Study sessions** at TBZ (Saturday morning 9-10AM). Write in your *Journal* about your experience and one new thing you learned.
- Art or Music project:** You may create a ritual object such as a *mezuzah* (parchment encased and attached to a doorpost), *kiddush* cup (special, holy cup for ritual) or knit/crochet a *kippah* (headcovering). You

can paint, draw, or sculpt a scene from your portion or reflective of your portion. You may also choose to study and learn to perform some Israeli, Sephardic, or Yiddish songs.

Watch a Movie about a Jewish theme at home or at the Boston Jewish Film Festival (<http://www.bjff.org/>) and write a review for your *Journal*. (Please check with the rabbis or the Beit Rabban teacher to see if the movie qualifies for the *Mitzvah*).

Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.

AVODAH/JEWISH PRACTICE

FOR ALL B'MITZVAH STUDENTS:

SHAMOR V'ZACHOR SHABBAT. Fulfill all Shabbat attendance expectations prior to B'Mitzvah. This involves coming to Shabbat services twice-monthly during the year of your B'Mitzvah preparation. If you are not able to come on a Shabbat that there is WonderMinyan Services or/and B'nei Mitzvah group, come on a different Shabbat or to a Friday night Service.

OPTIONS: CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:

Attend a Jewish lifecycle event (wedding, funeral, baby-naming, *brit milah* (circumcision), *shivah minyan* (service at a house of mourning), etc.) other than B'Mitzvah and write down your impressions in your *Journal*.

Celebrating Shabbat at Home: Light Shabbat candles and/or sing the FULL Shabbat evening *Kiddush*, and say *ha-motzi* on the *challah* (the blessing over bread) every Friday evening for at least a month. Describe the experience in your *Journal*.

Attend one festival (*Sukkot/Pesach* (Passover)/*Shavuot*) morning service if possible. What was the meaning of the festival as it was conveyed through the service? What value is there in setting aside Jewish sacred days in a non-Jewish world? Comment in your *Journal*.

Blessing for food: Lead your family in *ha-motzi* before your main meal and every day for at least two weeks, and lead in the *birkat hamazon* (grace after meals) for four Shabbat dinners. Discuss the experience with your family. Write about how you and your family felt about this ritual in your *Journal*.

Kashrut: Keep one (1) aspect of *kashrut* (refraining from eating pork or shellfish products, or not mixing milk and meat) that you do not normally observe for one month. What did it feel like? What was it like to give up something you enjoyed? Are there positive aspects to keeping *kashrut*? Share your thoughts in your *Journal*.

Tie your own tzitzit (knotted strings) on a tallit (perhaps the one you will wear at your B'Mitzvah). Is there any meaning to the way the *tzitzit* are knotted? Comment in your *Journal* as to what purpose you think this ritual serves.

Likboah Mezuzah (affixing a mezuzah): If there is not one there already, affix a *mezuzah* to your bedroom door. What is the text of the handwritten parchment we put into the *mezuzah* case? How do you feel when you see it there? Think about what's inside. Write about this in your *Journal*.

Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.

GEMILUT CHASADIM/ACTS OF LOVING-KINDNESS

FOR ALL B'MITZVAH STUDENTS:

TIKKUN OLAM (REPAIRING THE WORLD) PROJECT.

Participate in a substantial, individual *mitzvah* project, which you will choose with the help of your teacher, tutor and/or rabbi. Write about why you chose this project, what you did, and how you felt about it in your *Journal*. **This is the heart of the B'Mitzvah experience. We recognize the unique qualities of each of you and encourage you to use your talent and creativity in choosing and performing this mitzvah.** We ask you to not only fundraise to support the charity you chose, but to make it a hands-on experience.

ADDITIONALLY, PLEASE CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:

Love your neighbor as Yourself: Help a classmate who is ill. Bring homework, library books and messages between home and school. Help them keep up with notes in class by relaying information to them. Write about this experience in your *Journal*.

Clothing those in need: Go through your house with your family and collect clothing and household for donation. Reflect on this experience in your *Journal*.

Honoring Elders. Visit a Jewish nursing home. Speak with residents about their lives. You can join TBZ in our visit to the elders at 1550 Beacon Street, bringing Holidays gifts (for Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah, Purim, and Passover). Write down their stories and your impressions in your *Journal*.

Be kind to Animals: Volunteer time at the local Animal Shelter or another organization that cares for animals. Write about what you did and how you felt doing it in your *Journal*.

Comforting the Mourners. Attend a *shivah minyan* at a house of mourning. Write down your impressions about your experience in your *Journal*.

Taking Care of the Environment: In honor of *Tu Bishvat*, plant a tree or some flowers in your yard and buy at least one tree from the JNF for Israel. Write about this experience in your *Journal*.

Participate in Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project offers an invitation to children preparing for B'Mitzvah to connect with the memory of children lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah. For more information go to <http://www.remember-us.org> or ask the rabbis.

Support the B'Mitzvah of a child with disabilities in Israel through ADRABA. For more information go to <https://masorti.org/adraba/> or ask the rabbis.

Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.

THE *B'MITZVOTAV* JOURNAL

Performing the *mitzvot* in the program is important, but “doing” alone is not enough. It is equally important that you reflect on what you did, how you did it, how it felt, and how it may or may not have changed your ideas about being Jewish. **That’s why the *Journal* is important.** In your *Journal*, you have a safe place to question, gain perspective, record your insights, and be creative.

There will be a Folder on Google Drive to share your writing.

We want you to write about your experiences and learn from them. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Be honest about what happened and how you felt.

This *journal* will become a very important gift that you will give to yourself for your B’Mitzvah.

You are also welcomed and encouraged to use some of your entries for the *d’var Torah* that you will share with the TBZ community on your B’Mitzvah day.

Here are a few guidelines to help you on your way. You can type out your reports and entries on the computer. You can write them by hand. Here are things to consider when asked to reflect on an experience:

- What did I think it was going to be like?
- What was it actually like to do a *mitzvah*?
- Did I feel comfortable performing the *mitzvah*?
- Who helped me do the *mitzvah*?
- How did my family react?
- What surprised me about the experience?
- Write a quick list of thoughts.
- Would I try this again?

These are just beginnings. Feel free to write from your own thoughts and to share your ideas honestly. Entries should be at least one page for each *mitzvah*.

Remember to make your *mitzvah* projects memorable and special. Make sure that your heart is into the project, and that it will be meaningful to both you and to those you help.

B’hatzlacha! Good luck!

Frequently asked questions (by B’Mitzvah Candidates)

Before my B’Mitzvah, do I really have to attend services on Shabbat? What if I have a weekly conflict on Saturday mornings?

YES! We know it’s difficult to get out of bed on a Shabbat morning, or to have to miss out on a soccer game or other event with your friends. But, trust us, you will feel MUCH more comfortable on the day of your

B'Mitzvah if you have heard and participated in the prayers on a regular basis and you recognize the faces of the community in the room, and you've attended other B'Mitzvah ceremonies at TBZ. Our Shabbat Morning program for older kids (during WonderMinyan) also provides great opportunities for practice!

I go to a Jewish Day School. Do I have to go to the Shabbat morning Services?

There are several reasons why it is a good idea for you to attend services. First of all, you will meet and get to know your TBZ peers, who are a FABULOUS group! Secondly, you can use these mornings to familiarize yourself with the TBZ melodies, some of which are different from the ones you might have learned in school. Finally, we don't just use these times to read, or sing through the Shabbat prayers and Torah portions. The Torah talks are really interesting. Leprosy, blood and guts, divination...the options are endless!

I can't sing. Can I just read my portion?

Unfortunately, no. The *mitzvah* of hearing Torah is not complete unless the reader chants. In the Talmud (B. Meg. 32a) we learn, *"Anyone who reads from the Torah without using trope, to them we apply the verse: 'So too I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live' (Ezekiel 20:25), since one who learns Torah with trope shows that they enjoy learning. Also, the tunes help them remember what they have learned."*

Did you know that everyone is born with the ability to sing? Some people have an easier time than others, but 90% of the battle is getting over your fear of singing in public. It may be hard for you, but no one will be judging you on your singing voice. No one needs to be—or should be—a rock-star in order to chant Torah!

What if I don't finish everything on time?

Breathe. No one is "grading" you on your performance or withholding your certificate from you if you don't finish everything you set out to do. You'll check in with your tutor along the way to make sure you have reasonable and attainable goals and adjust as necessary. However, we want you to work hard and do your best. If you practice every day and follow the suggested timeline in this guidebook, you should be able to complete a great amount of work.

Did you just say that I have to practice every day?

Well... you can be reasonable about the hours you spend on your practicing. Realistically, you are going to be very busy in the months leading up to your B'Mitzvah. You probably won't have time to practice

every day. But, you DO need to practice. Only you can really know how much work you need to put in to make yourself feel secure and accomplished. See the next section for tips on how to work smarter, not harder.

I’m still confused. What is my “Parsha” And, what is “Maftir”?

Good questions! The Torah is divided into 5 Books: Genesis (*Bereishit*_, Exodus (*Shemot*), Leviticus (*Vayikra*), Numbers (*Bamidbar*), and Deuteronomy (*D’varim*).

In each book, smaller divisions are found, called *parshiot*—singular: *parasha*. The word *parasha* (פרשה) means “portion.” There are 54 *parshiot*, one for each week of the year (and a few extras for the leap month!) .

Every *parsha* is divided into 8 smaller sections, called *aliyot*. The 8th *aliyah* is called the *maftir*. The *maftir* is the last *aliyah*, usually given to the person who will read the *haftarah* (*maftir* and *haftarah* share the same root, פטר which means “to conclude”). The *Haftarah* is the concluding text from the books of the prophets, which rounds out each week’s *parsha*. Often, the text of the *maftir* is the same as the seventh *aliyah*.

There is just one more thing you need to know. Remember how there are 54 *parshiot*, one for each week of the year? Well, each of these *parshiot* are quite long. So long that many congregations choose to only read 1/3 of the full *parasha* each year (Triennial reading). Therefore, it actually takes 3 years to get through the entire Torah. This is good news for you! It means that you only have to learn 1/3 of your *parasha*! To find your *parsha*, go to www.hebcal.com and look for the date of your B’Mitzvah.

What do you mean when you tell me to practice my Torah portion from the “unpunctuated side” of a *tikkun*?

The Torah only contains the consonants of the text. The reader is expected to learn the vowels and the melody. An example in English is:

MRY HD LTTL LMB WHS FLC WS WHT S SNW

A *tikkun* is a book that contains both the punctuated (vowels and trope) and unpunctuated (no vowels, no trope) versions of the text, side by side, to make it easier for you to learn. For example:

MRY HD LTTL LMB

versus

MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

I've noticed that there are people who stand around the Torah readers and correct them. Who are they? Will they be there when I have my B'Mitzvah?

These people are called the *gabba'im*, which literally means, "They've got your back!" Often one of them will be your tutor or a teacher that has helped you in your learning and they will help you if you get stuck, or gently correct you if you make a mistake.

What if I make mistakes?

You will probably make a few mistakes during your ceremony; don't let it bother you! Even the most experienced Torah readers, rabbis, and cantors make mistakes! Just take a breath and trust your *gabba'im* to support you.

Family Members who aren't Jewish may accompany a Jewish family member when they come up for an *aliyah*, without saying the *bracha* and wearing a *tallit*, although they still must have their head covered.

Tallitot and Kippot for all Jewish Members: Everyone coming up for an honor is encouraged to wear a *kippah* and a *tallit*. We acknowledge that some women do not have this practice and we hope they will try at least one of these practices in our community.

What if one of my parents is not Jewish? Can they participate in my B'Mitzvah? YES! We will find many ways for your non-Jewish parent to participate in your ceremony and in your celebration, including saying a special blessing, if they wish to do so. Please speak with Rav Claudia, who will help you determine what exactly that will look like.

Other VERY important information for parents:

- We would be delighted if parents, siblings, relatives, and friends want to read Torah at your *simcha*. Let us know well in advance, so that we can be sure they are well prepared.
- Please arrive at least 30 minutes before the start of the service on the day of.
- You are welcome to order *kippot* for your guests, however it is not a requirement.
- A program for your guests will be prepared by the office.

- Usually, *kiddush* is said upstairs after the service ends. It is easier to say *kiddush* before going downstairs when there is a large crowd. We hope you will lead *kiddush* & *ha-motzi*
- Your family is expected to sponsor a *kiddush* following Shabbat morning services for the congregation and your family and friends. If you decide to set different lunch plans for your family and guests, we hope your family will also attend the *kiddush*, so we have the opportunity to offer a *mazel tov*. At least two months in advance, let the synagogue office know of your *kiddush* plans (see timeline).
 - If the ceremony is scheduled for a time other than Shabbat morning, the family is expected to sponsor a congregational *kiddush* on a different Shabbat morning.

Writing Your D'var Torah

You will work on crafting a 7-10 minute d'var Torah with TBZ's rabbinic intern. This is an opportunity for you to teach about something that is meaningful to you. Here's a suggested structure:

1. Welcome
2. Summary/overview: What is your *parsha* about?
3. Formulate a question about the parsha, something that bothers you about it or that you wonder about. With the help of TBZ's rabbinic intern and the resources below, investigate what others have said in response to your question. Use those responses to spark your thoughts and work out an answer to your question. Remember to walk your listeners through this process! They won't know what's in your head unless you tell them!
4. How does this question relate to my experience of becoming B'Mitzvah? Speak about (and if possible connect to) your *mitzvah* project(s).
5. Thank yous...!

Although there are many different techniques for writing a *d'var Torah*, here are some suggestions to get you started:

DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE WEEK BEFORE YOUR B'MITZVAH!! You may not actually write your *d'var Torah* until the last minute, but give yourself a lot of time to think about your *parsha* and the ideas and to let the ideas take shape.

Read, Read, and Read. Read your *parsha*. Then, read it again. Make

sure you understand every word. If there is a word you don't know, you can look it up in a dictionary or ask someone. Use a good, clear translation from the 21st century.

Think. What about the text interests you? Disturbs or frustrates you? Confuses you? Write down your ideas and discuss them with someone else – a parent, your tutor, Beit Rabban teacher, or your rabbis.

Find other interpretations. You can get commentaries from your rabbis, teacher, or your library. People have studied these texts for centuries so use their wisdom! It will give you food for thought and different approaches to the text. Consider these sources:

- [*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*](#), by W. Gunther Plaut provides clear insights into Torah and *haftarah* and includes poetry and relevant quotes from throughout Jewish history.
- [*The Torah: A Women's Commentary*](#) follows the same format as the Plaut (above), but reads the text through a feminist lens.
- [*Text Messages: A Torah Commentary for Teens*](#) is a book organized by *parasha* that makes connections between the *parasha* and issues that young adults are concerned about.
- [*Torah Queeries*](#) is arranged by *parasha*. In it, queer Jews and straight allies explore queer approaches to traditional Jewish texts.
- [*The Commentator's Bible*](#) offers the interpretations of classic commentators such as Rashi, Ibn Ezra, or Ramban. There is a whole volume for each book of the Torah. This is an English version of *Mikra'ot Gedolot*.
- [*The JPS Torah Commentary*](#) has a volume for each book of the Torah, and for *Haftarah*. It is full of historical information and commentaries.
- [*The Five Books of Moses*](#) by Robert Alter is a beautiful translation with very good commentary

Using any of the ideas from the commentaries above is fair game, but remember to cite them!

Determine your approach. Consider these possibilities:

- **Analyze a small fragment of the text in great detail.** You will know that you have picked a good one if other commentators are as interested in it as you are.
- **Observe the whole text from a distance, taking note of some of its interesting details.** This approach is particularly suitable for *parshiyot* that deal with ritual details at great length. Discuss the role of finer points in the building of a religious life. For example, why did the screws that were used to build the Temple have to be a

certain material and a certain length, and why is this relevant to us today?

- **Begin with an idea from the text and apply it to another issue that is of great interest to you.** For example, if the text contains a long list of names, present a history of the origins of some typical Jewish names, perhaps including the names of those present.
- **Analyze the characters of biblical figures and the events of their lives in ways that will shed some light on our own.** For example, consider the sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau and the issue of preferred children.
- **Using the classic form for the *d'var Torah*, present several apparently discrepant facts** and then explain how they are not contradictions at all but instead point to a deeper meaning that is not obvious at first. If you take this approach, be sure to read *midrash* connected to your text.
- **Historical insights can illuminate a text in an exciting way.** Even if you don't draw any deep morals from this approach, it can still be enriching.

Write a first draft that grapples with the meaning. A *d'var Torah* does not merely summarize the *parsha*. If you are having a problem, try the indirect approach: After your initial reading of the *parsha* and some commentaries, write down any thoughts you have about it and then set what you have written aside. Keep it in the back of your mind. Read it right before you go to bed. Think about it. Once you begin writing your *d'var Torah*, jot down all your thoughts no matter how tangential they are: They may lead you somewhere.

Helpful Hint: Remember to make your *d'var Torah* personal. Relate the *parsha* to a relevant moment in your life, or to a cause or value that you believe in. Above all, we want to hear about YOU!

Edit, edit, edit. It is usually harder to be brief, but brevity is always appreciated. A few thoughts and examples are really all you need to present. A seven-minute *d'var Torah* is a great length. Anything longer than ten minutes may induce your guests to pay more attention to their grumbling tummies!

Guidelines for Writing the Parents' Blessing

At TBZ, it is important that the B'Mitzvah service be welcoming to all those in our congregation, not just the B'nei Mitzvah family and their

guests. Therefore, the speech given by parents should be three to four minutes long (including both parents!) and it should be framed as a blessing to your child on this special day (not an opportunity to thank people or give your own d'var Torah). In this way, your simcha becomes an enhancement of TBZ's services and does not overpower it. With these factors in mind, please submit your blessings to Rav Claudia before the final rehearsal. **Blessings need to be submitted before and rehearsed during the last rehearsal; no exceptions!**

TBZ appreciates your understanding and cooperation. Thank you for sharing these life events with us, your TBZ community.

Frequently Asked Questions (By parents!)

A *simcha* is a happy time and the staff of TBZ want to be as helpful to you as possible to make sure everything runs smoothly for your events. We hope this list will help.

The main contact for all *simchas* is the Executive Director, Benjamin Maron (617.566.8171 x 102 or benjamin@tbzbrookline.org). Please contact him with any questions not addressed below as well as any other concerns.

How many people can the community and meeting room hold for Kiddush? 275

How should we set up the Community room? We have sample plans for how best to arrange depending on your number of guests. Your decision is needed one month prior to the event.

How many tables are available? 15 - 60" round tables, 6 - high tops, 13 - 8' tables, 13 - 6' tables, 3 - 4' tables.

How many congregants should we figure will be at Shabbat services? 80-100 TBZ members

What's included with the B'Mitzvah Kiddush package?

1. Room setup before the event
2. Kitchen supervisor (Maira) available to help prepare and serve the Kiddush
3. Use of TBZ supplies as needed including wine for kiddush (ceremonial only) and two regular sized *challot* (challah breads)

4. Coffee and tea
5. Use of our tablecloths and all compostable utensils and compostable paper/plastic goods

When should deliveries be made? Deliveries of food and flowers must be made before 1:00 PM on the Friday of the event.

What about flowers? Artificial flowers in the sanctuary will be in place to enhance the space. If you desire, you may bring in fresh flowers for your event.

Who provides candies to be thrown? TBZ does.

What about pictures and video? Photos during the event are not allowed, however you can make arrangements with the office to take pictures before Shabbat, usually during the last rehearsal.

What about Kippot? TBZ has a supply of various kippot. If you decide to provide them, the number, color, etc., is up to you. Many people decide to make enough for everyone who attends the simcha so they can have them as a memento. There is no requirement to supply kippot.

How many people can fit into the sanctuary? The sanctuary can hold approximately 350 people (maximum).

Can we bring in additional food? No food can be brought in that is not kosher, this means that only food that is marked with kosher certification from a recognized kosher provider is allowed. This includes food prepared in your own home kosher kitchen.

Is drumming provided at B'Mitzvah services? Yes, drumming and music are part of our services on Shabbat.

Is there a model or a sample of the Service/Brochure? The office has a template and will create a program for you.

Who are the approved caterers? Caterers must be kosher with a hechsher approved by Rav Claudia. Food cannot be cooked on Shabbat and MUST be delivered before Shabbat. If your caterer is not listed here, please contact Benjamin Maron to get approval.

- Catering by Andrew | 402 Harvard Street Brookline, MA 02446 | (617) 731-6585
 - Status: Meat, Dairy (Cholov Stam- Cholov Yisrael available upon request) & Pareve
 - Letter of Certification - Va'ad KVH
- Catering by Meital | Longmeadow, MA | (413) 221-2078

- o Status: Request Dairy-Only
- Chai Catering@ The Butcherie | 402 Harvard Street Brookline, MA 02446 | (617) 731-6585
 - o Status: Meat & Pareve
 - o Letter of Certification - Va'ad KVH
- Dushez Catering | 150 Herrick Street, Newton, MA 02459 | (617) 340-2187
 - o Status: Meat, Dairy (Cholov Stam- Cholov Yisrael available upon request) & Pareve
 - o Letter of Certification - Va'ad KVH
- Inna's Kitchen | 547 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, MA, 02459 | (617) 795-2626
 - o Status: Meat & Pareve
 - o Shtiebel Eco-Kosher Certification
- Ora Catering | 450 Cambridge Avenue, Allston, MA 02134 | (617) 987-0270
 - o Status: Meat & Pareve
 - o Letter of Certification - Va'ad KVH
- Tova's Catering | 253 Mansfield Ave, Norton, MA 02766 | (508) 286-2242
 - o Status: Meat, Dairy (Cholov Stam- Cholov Yisrael available upon request) & Pareve
 - o Letter of Certification - Va'ad KVH

Can we have a private family dinner on Friday night? Families can rent space at TBZ (community room or meeting room) for Friday night dinner. Dinner must happen after services end (after 7:30pm). Same rules for catering apply. Rental is not available when there are TBZ events on Friday night (like Shabbat Nariya or community dinners). Check with the office about availability.

What about private parties on Saturday night? TBZ is also available to be rented for Saturday night or Sunday celebrations. Member rental fee applies. Same catering rules apply. Saturday night parties must start after Shabbat ends.

Note: Rental fees apply for celebration in the community room following B'mitzvah celebrations that do not happen on Shabbat mornings.

B'Mitzvah Packages

A B'Mitzvah is an important life event for the entire family and a great joy for TBZ! To ensure that all runs smoothly, it is important that you carefully read and understand the financial procedures associated with a TBZ B'Mitzvah.

B'Mitzvah cost (see below) will be broken into a monthly charge from the first month your child's B'Mitzvah date is reserved and entered onto the synagogue calendar through the month prior to the actual *simcha*.

The full B'Mitzvah package for our two-year program is \$4800 or \$200/month for 24 months.

Package includes all of the following:

- Tuition for 6th and 7th grade Beit Rabban;
- Up to 24 hours of private instruction in Hebrew and Torah trope provided by Cantor Maayan;
- All meetings with Rav Claudia including:
 - At the beginning of the process to set up a date and clarify expectations;
 - 3-4 months prior to the B'Mitzvah to review the last steps of preparations for the event and to check in on the progress of the learning;
- Individual meetings with rabbinic intern to work on *d'var Torah*, and service, etc.;
- Rehearsals in the Sanctuary beginning 3 weeks prior to B'Mitzvah;
- Monthly B'Mitzvah Family Group Sessions with Rav Claudia, over the two school years prior to B'Mitzvah (6th and 7th grade). The family is expected to continue attending these monthly meetings throughout the school year regardless if the *simcha* has been celebrated earlier in the year;
- B'Mitzvah Family Group Field Trips;
- Drumming during service;
- All facilities costs including cleaning, set-up, supplies (ex. candy) etc.

Abatements are available for those experiencing financial hardships. Please be in touch with our Executive Director, Benjamin Maron, for a confidential meeting.

Alternative Packages

If you do not need individual tutoring or if your child attends a Jewish Day school and does not need to attend Beit Rabban, we offer the following alternative packages:

- Alt. A – Families whose children attend Jewish day schools (no Beit Rabban tuition): \$3600;
- Alt. B – Families who provide their own tutor (not at TBZ) (no tutoring with Cantor Maayan): \$3100;
- Alt. C – Families whose children attend Jewish day schools and provide their own tutor (not at TBZ): \$1900.

Please speak to Benjamin Maron to discuss your package needs.

Packages do NOT include:

- Cost of catering the community *kiddush* following the service.
- Floral arrangements in the Sanctuary, if you wish to have.
- Rental of the community room for an evening event or private meals or any Kiddush not taking place immediately following Shabbat morning service.

The B'Mitzvah Agreement is found in the next page:

Please sign and return **ASAP**.
TBZ will sign and send you a copy.

You may pay by check, made out to Temple Beth Zion, or by Visa, MasterCard or ACH withdrawal.

A B'Mitzvah date reservation is ONLY guaranteed after TBZ receives the signed contract and the first installment toward the full B'Mitzvah agreement.

TBZ B'MITZVAH AGREEMENT

We have read, understood, and agree to the terms of TBZ Brookline's B'Mitzvah program and policies.

Name of Child: _____

B'Mitzvah Date: _____

Package Choice:

- Full Package Alt. A Alt. B Alt. C

B'Mitzvah Family

Temple Beth Zion

Name: _____

Please Print Clearly

Name: _____

Executive Director

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Please set up our payment plan as follows (check one):

- Pay by check monthly
- ACH bank withdrawal monthly
- Charge Credit Card monthly
- Pay full amount in advance

To set up a payment plan using a Visa or Mastercard or for ACH bank withdrawals:

- 1) Add your credit card or bank information to your ShulCloud account under "My Payment Methods"
- 2) Return the above form to the TBZ office and your payment plan will be set up.

TBZ will sign and send a copy for your records.



Summer, 2022