



B'NEI MITZVAH
HANDBOOK
2021-2022

(Please read through this handbook and use it as a tool to familiarize yourself with the *b'nei mitzvah* experience that is in your near future.
The information is current as of November 4, 2021, and is subject to change.)

INTRODUCTION

It is important to take a moment to understand how we at East End Temple view the *b'nei mitzvah* in the greater context of one's Jewish life and Jewish education. Rather than approaching this as an ending point of learning, we view it as a significant marker in the education and Jewish life of our students. The emphasis of the experience is put on the learning process, on the weekly accomplishments of the students, on their pride in working diligently and thoughtfully on learning prayers, blessings, Torah and *Haftarah* portions as well as the *d'var Torah*. This process is made richer and more meaningful by family participation and involvement. Studying the portion together helps to emphasize the value of lifelong learning and models to our students the true lessons and values within the Torah. We emphasize the excitement and pride we feel in each student and that each student feels in themselves. Students should be congratulated for having engaged in significant studies, for being able to lead services confidently and competently, and for reading from the Torah. In this way, it is the quality and experience of learning that each student undertakes, not only the service itself, that we celebrate on the day of the *b'nei mitzvah*.

CONTACT INFORMATION

We encourage you to share with us any family issues or concerns you have.
Ongoing conversation is welcomed throughout the process.

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REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING B'NEI MITZVAH AT EAST END TEMPLE

- *B'nei mitzvah* is only open to members of East End Temple.
- It is understood that all students who are becoming *b'nei mitzvah* at East End Temple are raised solely in the Jewish tradition.
- Students are required to have three years of participation in the East End Temple religious school or its equivalent prior to becoming *b'nei mitzvah*. Students must fulfill all religious school requirements, including regular attendance, participation, and completion of work. Students who join the religious school later than the fourth grade may require additional tutoring in Hebrew beyond that offered by the religious school.
- **Mitzvah Project:** All students are required to complete a mitzvah project during the school year in which they will become *b'nei mitzvah*. The mitzvah project should involve a minimum of 13 hours of substantial work and should be discussed with the rabbi. It is also possible for the class to create a group project, which should also be discussed with the rabbi in advance.
- **Ushering:** It is a requirement of our congregation that parents usher at the Saturday *b'nei mitzvah* service immediately preceding their own *simchah*. [We will notify you of when that date is -- it may not be the week preceding your own *simchah*, depending on the *b'nei mitzvah* schedule for that year.] It is your responsibility to fulfill this sacred duty. If you cannot usher on that date, you must find a replacement within the congregation to perform your ushering honors for that date, and you are expected to usher on another date.
- Students are expected to attend at least three of their classmates' *b'nei mitzvah* services. We encourage parents to attend with their children. We also ask that parents invite all of your child's religious school class to your child's service. A contact list of all the students in your child's class will be provided at the beginning of the year.
- **Fees:** The \$2400 *b'nei mitzvah* fee, billed over two years (subject to change), includes weekly individual instruction with a tutor, meetings with the rabbi, and check-ins with the cantor. The fee also covers the day of your child's *b'nei mitzvah* service (*bimah* flowers, a simple Kiddush following the services on Saturday morning, security, etc. Our accompanist is also present to ensure a beautiful service experience). **This fee, as well as all other financial responsibilities to the temple, must be paid in full before the *b'nei mitzvah*.** You may also wish to co-sponsor the Friday night *oneg* (please check with the office for more details).
- **Setting the Date:** Children become *b'nei mitzvah* as part of our congregational Shabbat services on Saturday mornings, except during the months of July and August. Dates will be assigned on the closest available Saturday immediately following each student's 13th birthday.

A NOTE ABOUT COVID-19

At this time (Nov. 2021), we are celebrating *b'nei mitzvah* services in our sanctuary with up to 50 worshippers with the following guidelines: 1. All attendees over age 12 must show proof of vaccination; 2. All attendees must complete an EET Health Form; and 3. All attendees over age 2 must wear a mask at all times. At any time, we reserve the right to revert to an all-online service if necessary for public health.

HOW BEST TO HELP YOUR CHILD WITH THEIR PREPARATION:

1. First and foremost, talk to your child about your family history. Who in your family has had a bar or bat (or *b'nei*) mitzvah? Who has not and why? Share with them what this process of learning means to you as a family, and why it is important to you that your child embarks on this sacred rite of passage. Knowing what it means to you will help your child understand better what the process can mean to them.
2. **Help your child set aside 20-30 minutes every day to study.** This is perhaps the most important key to the success of our program. Each week your child will be assigned a small bit of homework. We build on the progress

each week, which is why we take a full year to complete the study. *B'nei mitzvah* practice is much like studying a foreign language, in that progress is aided by a little work each day, rather than two hours once or twice a week. The goal is to never overwhelm your child with too much work, and to have them experience the wonderful feeling of mastery all along the way. We tell students that they need to practice 20-30 minutes every day, but they do not have to study the day they have tutoring, and they get one additional day off. Helping your child get in the habit of sitting down and studying at the same time each day will ensure that they are well prepared, confident, and feeling great when they stand on the bimah to lead the day of their *b'nei mitzvah*.

3. Please let us know up front about any special learning needs or any other circumstances that may affect your child's studying. The beauty of being part of East End Temple is that as a small community we can personalize the *b'nei mitzvah* experience according to your child's needs.

PREPARATION TIMELINE

The following is an approximate timeline of preparation leading up to your child's *b'nei mitzvah*. Use this as a tool to review your child's progress with them. While the cantor will be in touch periodically to review your child's progress, please feel free to be in touch with the cantor or rabbi at any time.

24 months prior – Year One: Hebrew

The first year your child will have one-on-one Hebrew reading tutoring for 30 minutes per week, beginning approximately two years before your child's *b'nei mitzvah* date. This year of tutoring is focused on mastery of reading Hebrew that is so crucial to their success. Year One tutoring will give your child the necessary solid foundation upon which to begin *b'nei mitzvah* preparation, ultimately giving your child greater confidence, reducing stress and making the *b'nei mitzvah* process as meaningful and enjoyable as possible for your entire family.

12 months Prior – Year Two: *T'filah*/Torah/Haftarah

Your child will meet on a weekly basis with the tutor and begin the intensive process of learning morning prayers, chanting the Torah portion, and the haftarah. Sessions are 20 minutes long.

We divide the process into three parts beginning with:

1. *T'filah*, Prayer

Your child will receive their own *siddur*, prayer book. They will also receive sound files via email with which they will practice at home. They will need access to an mp3/mp4 player of some kind -- an iPhone, Android or other smart phone works well. Some of these prayers your child will be familiar with from religious school *t'filah*, others will be new to them.

2. Torah Portion

Once your child has mastered the prayers, we move on to the chanting of the Torah portion. The Torah portion is learned from a special booklet but is chanted from the actual Torah scroll. Your child will receive their own Torah portion booklet which includes the text with vowels, trope markings and punctuation, as well as the text without vowels, trope markings and punctuation (which most closely resembles the Torah scroll). Each student prepares 10-16 verses of Torah depending on the individual needs of the student. Torah has its own trope, or musical system, which does take time learn – for your reference, the *V'ahavta* is sung in Torah trope, so you may indeed already be familiar with it.

3. Haftarah

Each Torah portion has an accompanying Haftarah which serves to highlight or complement the Torah text in some way. Haftarah text is only read on Shabbat and comes from either the Books of the Prophets or the Writings, each of which makes up a volume of the biblical canon. Each child prepares approximately three verses of Haftarah. Haftarah has its own unique trope which differs from that of Torah.

Meetings with clergy

Students will meet with both the rabbi and the cantor at various times during their preparations.

12+ Weeks Prior – D’var Torah Preparation*

At this point, your child will start working on their *d’var Torah* (lesson from the Torah portion) with the rabbi, which the student will deliver at the service. Your child will study the portion with the rabbi and delve into its meanings and significance. The student will ultimately write a teaching that they will share in the form of a *d’var Torah*.

* These sessions are 30 minutes long, with just the student.

9, 6, and 3 Months Prior – Student Check-In with Cantor (will be scheduled through the office)

2 Months Prior – Student Check-In with Cantor (will be scheduled through the office)

4-5 Weeks Prior - Family Meeting with Rabbi

The rabbi will meet with the entire family to review what will be happening during the service. This is to help identify who should be honored and/or remembered during the ceremony.

2 Weeks Prior – Full Rehearsal

Parents and the student should attend this one-hour rehearsal, where the student will run through the entire service in order and practice chanting from the actual Torah scroll.

1 Week Prior – Final Check-In Rehearsal

This is an opportunity for the student to do a last check in with the cantor to review prayers, Torah and Haftarah. Parents do not need to attend this 30-minute meeting.

RITUAL INFORMATION

Friday evening preceding the *b’nei mitzvah*

On the Friday night preceding your special day, the congregation invites you to worship with us at services. You will be given the honor of lighting candles, and your child will help us lead *Kiddush*.

Shabbat morning and *b’nei mitzvah* services

- At the Shabbat morning service, your child will be seated on the bimah, and we ask the immediate family to occupy the front rows.
- During the Torah service, parents and grandparents (and great-grandparents) may be called to the bimah to participate in the Torah passing ceremony.*
- During the ritual of reading the Torah, there is the opportunity for three or four *aliyot* (the blessings before and after the Torah reading). The parents and older siblings have the *aliyah* immediately preceding the *b’nei mitzvah* child. Please make arrangements for other *aliyot* with the rabbi at least one month before the service. Please provide the rabbi with the Hebrew names of the participants and their parents.
- If you wish your child to wear a *kippah* and/or tallit, it is your responsibility to provide them. The congregation encourages but does not require these. There is an assortment of both *kippot* and tallitot for those who wish to wear them. However, if you desire a special type or color, you need to provide them.
- A service program booklet is optional. The temple has a Ritual Object handout that families are welcome to use.
- The service will start promptly at 10:00am for a single date, or at 9:00am and 11:15am for double date services.
- At the *b’nei mitzvah* service, your child will lead some or all of the following:
 - Chant from the Torah and the corresponding Haftarah in Hebrew
 - Chant the associated blessings for the Torah and Haftarah in Hebrew
 - Deliver a brief *d’var Torah* (teaching) about the Torah portion
 - Assist in leading the service (includes: *Nissim b’chol yom*, *Sh’ma*, *V’ahavta*, and *Amidah*)

***Torah Passing Ceremony:** Family members and the *b’nei mitzvah* will participate in the “chain of tradition,” where the rabbi symbolically passes the Torah down from one generation to the next by holding the *Sefer Torah* (Torah scroll) in front of each member of the family as they stand on the bimah. Great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and the *b’nei mitzvah* child will form a line along which the Torah scroll is passed from generation to generation.

Honors for Non-Jewish Family Members

We encourage family members to participate in Shabbat services as an important way for the student becoming a *b'nei mitzvah* to honor those whose love has brought them to this milestone. We recognize that some of these family members may not be Jewish, and that their support has been equally instrumental in guiding the bar/bat mitzvah child toward this day. Therefore, we seek to include non-Jewish parents and relatives in the celebration in equally meaningful ways. The rabbi will discuss this matter with you.

LOGISTICAL MATTERS

Kiddush (after the service) [CURRENTLY ON HOLD DUE TO COVID-19]

Should you want to enhance the simple challah, wine and grape juice already provided, you may do so at your own cost and with your own hired staff. EET does not have available staff to work your enhanced *Kiddush*. We ask that an enhanced *Kiddush* end approximately one hour after the service ends. Please email the office or call us if you have questions.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Kiddush: [CURRENTLY ON HOLD DUE TO COVID-19]

Q: When does the service start and end?

10:00am-11:30am for a date with a single service. If there are multiple services on the same day, the first service will be from 9:00am-10:30am and the second service will be from 11:15am-12:45pm.

Q: Where does the Kiddush take place?

Kiddush is held in the social hall downstairs, and the maximum capacity is 90 people (70 seated, with space for a buffet).

Q: Do we need to bring in a caterer for an enhanced Kiddush? Does the caterer set up while the service is happening?

Yes and yes, unless you only get few platters, in which case Mohammed can receive them and put those out on the buffet.

Q: Do you have caterers to recommend?

We don't work with anyone exclusively, but we like to work with local establishments (i.e. Tal Bagels, Ess-a-Bagel, Bagel Boss if you need kosher).

Q: How many people will attend?

Most likely the people at the service will be only the people you have invited. It is rare that anyone else joins the Saturday service, since we only have Saturday services when there is a *b'nei mitzvah*.

Q: How long does the Kiddush typically last?

The temple provides a quick, 15-minute challah/grape juice/sweet wine *Kiddush*. For those families who decide to enhance it, add another hour. Families also have the option to rent the social hall for a longer luncheon, and cost and further information can be provided closer to the date if interested.

Q: When should we reserve the social hall?

Let the office know as soon as you decide, but no later than a month prior to your child's *b'nei mitzvah* date.

Q: Does the temple charge a fee? Do you need a deposit?

There is no fee or deposit, unless you are renting the social hall for a longer luncheon (a 5-hour rental period from 12:00-5:00pm). Call or email the office for cost and more information about renting the social hall.

Catering [CURRENTLY ON HOLD DUE TO COVID-19]

If you are catering a full luncheon or dinner on-site at East End Temple, no shellfish or pork products are to be served, and we require a "kosher style" separation of milk and meat. Your caterer must provide staff, be bonded, and provide the temple with a certificate of insurance for using our facility **two full weeks** prior to the event. Contact the temple office to arrange.

Directions and Parking

East End Temple is located in a brownstone at 245 East 17th Street on Stuyvesant Square Park, just west of Second Avenue. It is a few blocks drive from the FDR Drive. For driving directions, visit www.googlemaps.com or www.mapquest.com.

There is street parking all around the neighborhood but be sure to read the signs; some spots require paying at a Muni Meter, even on a Saturday. Please visit: <http://www.parkinglotfinder.com/nyc.html> for best locations and prices.

- **By subway:** Q, N, W, R, 4, 5 or 6 train to 14th Street/Union Square. L train to 3rd Ave.
- **By Bus:** M15 to 17th Street or M14 to Second Avenue.

Electronic Devices

All cell phones, iPads, tablets, and other electronic devices are to be **turned off** while in the sanctuary. Please see **Photography** restrictions below.

Hidur Mitzvah

Our tradition teaches that one should try to wear fine clothes on the Shabbat, for it is written (Isaiah 58:13) “and you shall honor,” which is interpreted by the Rabbis to mean that the garments worn on Shabbat shall not be the same as those worn on weekdays.

We recognize that standards for dress have become somewhat less formal. Still, it is our expectation that worshippers of all ages will come to services dressed in a manner reflecting “*hidur mitzvah*.” For further guidelines please contact the synagogue office.

Invitation Etiquette

Good etiquette and laying the foundation for good relations between your child and their classmates is to include each child in your child’s religious school class in the *b’nei mitzvah* festivities. This includes, but is not limited to, inviting each child to attend the *b’nei mitzvah* and the celebration. A class list will be provided at the beginning of the year.

[Due to current capacity limits, you may choose to invite your child’s class to join the service online.]

Livestream & Facebook

All services will be streamed via the EET Livestream link (<https://livestream.com/eetservices>) and Facebook Live.

Photography

Still pictures: Professional photographs should be taken at the full rehearsal, two weeks prior to the *b’nei mitzvah* service. The entire family may attend, with all appropriate clothing, and pictures including the Torah and clergy may be taken. (Torahs may only be taken out when clergy is present.) Families should reach out to the office and clergy in advance to coordinate specific timing. No pictures may be taken during the service.

Service recording: All *b’nei mitzvah* services are video recorded, and a copy will be provided to the family.

Videography: Professional video recording is permitted during and after the service provided:

- All recording is done from the balcony.
- A tripod must be used.
- Only natural lighting is used (no recording lights).
- The camera should not be touched, nor should a remote be used during the service.
- The synagogue office must be contacted at least two weeks in advance if you will be using a videographer.

Sanctuary Seating [CURRENT CAPACITY AS OF FALL 2021 IS 50 PEOPLE.]

The seating capacity of the main sanctuary is 149 people, and the seating capacity of the balcony is 48 people, for a total of 197. We cannot allow more than that number, due to fire code restrictions. No unaccompanied children are allowed in the balcony. And no candy throwing is allowed at any point during the service.

Space Rental [CURRENTLY ON HOLD DUE TO COVID-19]

Our social hall is available for a full catered luncheon/party space for up to 70 seated people for a 5-hour period (this is different from an hour-long enhanced *Kiddush*). We provide the room, tables, chairs and a warming kitchen. Any other items are expected from the caterer. The synagogue office has various brochures and information re: DJs, caterers, engravers, photo/video, etc. EET does not endorse any service provider. Please contact the temple office for more information.

Tree of Life

Honor this auspicious occasion in your child’s life by purchasing a *Simchah* Leaf for the East End Temple Tree of Life. Your leaf will be engraved with your congratulatory message. The cost is \$234 per leaf (subject to change). Please contact the temple office for arrangements.

Tzedakah

Tzedakah, according to the Torah, is “equal to all other commandments combined.” Giving of charitable gifts is a fundamental pillar in our tradition and a meaningful, intentional way for us to express our gratitude. *Tzedakah*, which literally means “justice,” is a sacred commandment helping us to make the world better by helping others.

The *b'nei mitzvah* is a wonderful occasion on which to engage in this mitzvah of *tzedakah*. Please contact the synagogue office for suggestions of charitable organizations.

GLOSSARY

Aliyah: literally “going up;” the blessings before and after the Torah readings; it is an honor to be invited to recite these blessings

B'nei mitzvah: literally translated as “children of the commandments,” more accurately understood as “the Commanded One.” Figuratively, it means the age of responsibility

Bimah: the pulpit or raised area at the front of the sanctuary/chapel

Haftarah: the portion from the Prophets or Writings that is read after the reading of the Torah

Hebrew name: a Hebrew name is used for ritual purposes. It is composed of your Hebrew name and the Hebrew name of both your parents. The word “ben” or “bat” is inserted to mean “son of” or “daughter of,” and the letter vav is used to mean “and,” e.g. *Yoseif Tzvi ben Mordechai v'Esther; Sara Rivka bat Hannah v'Shalom*

Kippah: *yarmulke* or head covering

Parshat ha'Shavuah: the Torah portion of the week

Seder K'riat ha'Torah: the portion of the service when the Torah and *Haftarah* are read

Shacharit: the morning service

Tallit: a Jewish prayer shawl once only worn by men and boys from the age of bar mitzvah. Today, girls and women wear them also. A tallit must have tzitzit on the corners.

Torah: also known as the Five Books of Moses. The Torah is the first section of the Hebrew Bible.

Tzitzit: specially tied fringes on the corners of the tallit that are meant to be symbolic of the 613 mitzvot

Yad: “hand.” The pointer used when reading from the Torah

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Books:

The How To Handbook for Jewish Living, by Kerry Olitzky and Ronald Isaacs. (KTAV Publishing House, 1994) This book is a clear and succinct guide to common Jewish religious and social practice. Each entry gives the source of the custom or practice, basic steps, key words and phrases.

The Jewish Book of Why; The Second Jewish Book of Why, by Alfred J. Kolatch. (Jonathan David Publisher, 1995) Both books explain the reasons for Jewish customs concerning marriage, mourning, diet, prayer, worship, the celebration of religious holidays and more.

Jewish Literacy, by Joseph Telushkin. (William Morrow Publishers, 2001) This resource provides brief explanations of the most important concepts and topics concerning Judaism and Jewish history and culture. Basic religious terms, ethics, historical events, religious texts, Jewish personalities and more.

Putting God on the Guest List, by Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996) A wonderful book for parents of *b'nei mitzvah*. It provides practical and spiritual suggestions for bringing God and significance back to each stage of the bar/bat mitzvah.

Torah Commentary for Our Times: Three-Volume Boxed Edition, Harvey J. Fields. (URJ Press, 1993) This is a provocative approach to the weekly Torah portion, juxtaposing the insights of ancient, medieval and modern commentators. It is perfect for both beginning Torah students of all ages and scholars seeking new angles on the text.

Websites:

Behrman House: www.behrmanhouse.com/family/

This site provides online Hebrew resources.

My Jewish Learning: www.MyJewishLearning.com

This website is designed to be a resource for adult audiences of diverse backgrounds and learning objectives. It is representative of the wide and valid range of trans-denominational perspectives within Judaism.

Union for Reform Judaism (URJ): www.reformjudaism.org

This is the home page for the URJ, the central body of the Reform movement in North America. This site contains a variety of resources, programs and publications about Judaism and Jewish life.