



Living Judaism through discovery,  
dynamic spirituality, and righteous impact.

# Temple Israel of Boston

## B'Mitzvah Handbook

**Guide to your B/Bar/Bat Mitzvah  
at Temple Israel**

*“And you shall teach them steadfastly to your children.”*



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Need additional information about anything in this handbook? Please contact Cantor Alicia Stillman ([astillman@tisrael.org](mailto:astillman@tisrael.org)).

# Introduction and General Information

We are so excited to help guide each student and their family toward a meaningful B'Mitzvah experience. Your child may attend Religious School or a local day school and/or has spent time in private tutoring or other programs. Regardless of your education track, each student will find their individual path through the B'Mitzvah program - one size does not fit all! On the following pages you will find essential information, but please feel free to reach out to a member of the clergy if you have questions.

If you need immediate support, please email the Executive Assistant to Cantor Stillman, Miriam Spectre ([mspectre@tisrael.org](mailto:mspectre@tisrael.org)).

## **Ensuring Success**

We ensure that every student will feel successful and celebrate their important day in a way that feels meaningful and attainable. No two ceremonies or students are precisely alike, and we do our best to work with each individual to highlight their strengths and guide them towards a meaningful celebration.

## **Choosing a Rabbi**

Families are invited to request two choices for which rabbi will officiate their ceremony; you will receive an email requesting this information approximately 8 months before their date. We do our best to honor requests.

## **Social Justice Practice**

Throughout our program students will engage in conversations around creating an individual social justice practice. Guided by our Developer of Youth Justice Programs, Ari Zimmet, and Director of Teen and Youth Programming, Fallon Rubin, your child will choose an area or topic to work with, thereby creating their own justice practice and growing through their specific justice project.

# Glossary of B'Mitzvah Terminology

## B'Mitzvah 101

By the time your child steps up to the bima one Shabbat morning to recite his or her Haftarah, they will understand perfectly well what the first half of this sentence meant. But will you? And will you be able to explain it all to your guests? Here is a short glossary of important Hebrew phrases to know before you go:

**aliyah:** In Hebrew, the word aliyah means to go up, or, as a noun, an ascent. During the Torah reading portion of the service, some members of the community are offered an aliyah, meaning they are called up to the bima to perform a certain role. This can include reciting the blessing over the Torah, reading from the Torah, dressing the Torah and returning it to the ark, or some other function. It is considered an honor to be called up, and as such it is often given to family members and close friends of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

**aron ha-kodesh:** Literally meaning “the holy ark,” the aron ha-kodesh is an ark where the sacred texts used during a prayer service are held. Mostly, this includes one or more scrolls of the Torah and perhaps a similar looking scroll that will hold the Haftarah portions. The ark itself is meant to symbolize the mishkan (tabernacle) in which the ancient Israelites stored the sacred tables Moses received on Mount Sinai.

**B’nei Mitzvah:** B’nei Mitzvah is the plural of Bar Mitzvah and is the term used to describe the coming of age according to Jewish tradition. Literally meaning “master of commandments,” becoming a B/Bar/Bat Mitzvah means the person is obliged to observe the Jewish commandments, and a ceremony, along with a celebration, takes place to mark this moment. The event is a formal and spiritual declaration of a child’s accession to adulthood.

**bima:** Hebrew for stage, the bima is the raised location in the sanctuary where the Torah is read. At B'Mitzvahs, family members and close friends are often called onto the bima for an aliyah, or to assist with the service.

**d’var Torah:** Literally “a thing of Torah,” a d’var Torah is a speech that tries to convey a life lesson or message supported by the story in the weekly parasha or Haftarah (scripture readings). After the Torah portion is read, the Rabbi will give a d’var Torah, typically as part of a sermon; when a child becomes a B/Bar/Bat Mitzvah, he or she delivers a d’var Torah as well, often tying it into personal experiences.

**Haftarah:** Often mispronounced as “half-torah,” the Haftarah is a selected reading from one of the other sections of the Jewish Bible (Old Testament). Traditionally, the Haftarah is recited after the Torah reading on Shabbat or another holy Jewish day, and is usually thematically related to the parasha. It is customary for the student to read this portion of the scriptures in addition to any part of the parasha they have read. The prophetic texts found in the Haftarah are oftentimes an opportunity to reference

students' justice projects, as the texts can be outgrowths of the justice work of the prophets themselves.

**justice project:** Under the guidance of Ari Zimmet and Fallon Rubin, students will choose an area of social justice that they would like to learn more about, and create a practice and project reflective of their learning.

**Qiddush:** This is the blessing recited over wine on Shabbat and other Jewish holy days. Qiddush derives from the Hebrew word qadosh, which means holy. By saying Qiddush, one is proclaiming the holiness of the day.

**kippah:** The Hebrew name for the traditional head covering worn by Jews in synagogue as well as, for some, in daily life. Often called a yarmulke, its Yiddish name, the kippah is meant to signify a Jew's recognition of the presence of God. Some Jews often choose to wear kippot only during religious pursuits, such as when in a synagogue or while studying sacred texts, and some Jews do not wear a kippah at any time.

**minyan:** The number of people required to be present for certain prayers to be recited. A minyan consists of 10 Jewish adults. When a child becomes a B'Mitzvah, they are eligible to be counted in the minyan.

**Motzi:** The blessing recited over bread, which ordains the start of the meal. On Shabbat and other holy days, a festive, braided challah bread is used.

**parasha:** The weekly Torah portion read in synagogue. On Shabbat, a cantor, rabbi, or members of the congregation read the parasha. The Torah portion is divided into seven sections. At Temple Israel, we generally assign three aliyot. Once children receive their B'Mitzvah date, the parasha they will read from is known.

**Shabbat:** The Jewish day of rest, where everyone is commanded to stop all work before sundown on Friday and enjoy the company of friends and family until sundown on Saturday. This is also typically the day on which B'Mitzvahs are held (by custom though not by requirement). It is customary to indulge in an extensive meal on Friday night with guests, and the following morning a longer prayer service is usually held. Shabbat is meant to be a moment of peace in an otherwise hectic world and, depending upon one's level of observance, some choose to refrain from many activities on Shabbat, such as driving, writing, or watching TV.

**simcha:** The literal definition of simcha is joy. Simcha refers to a special happy occasion in a Jewish life, such as a B'Mitzvah, a bris, or a wedding.

**tallit (tallis):** A tallit is a traditional prayer shawl worn by Jewish adults while praying in synagogue. At each of the four corners of the garment are fringes of string, or tzitzit in Hebrew, that are braided and knotted as a way to remind Jews of the commandments issued in the Torah. Anyone of B'Mitzvah age or older is invited to wear a tallit, but it is not required.

**Torah:** Torah has multiple definitions, but in this context it refers to the first five books of the Bible, often called the Five Books of Moses. The Torah recounts the creation of the world and the establishment of the Jewish faith, while also offering a set of laws on which Jewish life is based. The Torah is divided into 54 portions, with one read each week (some weeks have double portions). The reading of each week's portion (or part of the portion in some traditions) serves as the focal point of the Shabbat prayer services.

**trope:** In Jewish tradition, sacred text is chanted rather than simply read, whether for public reading or for study. Trope is the Yiddish word for the 1,400-year-old system of distinctive marks that function as musical notation and punctuation for the biblical text. The trope determines the actual tune used by readers for the parasha and Haftarah. As part of their preparation, some B'Mitzvah learn the names and tunes for each trope marking so they can figure out the cantillation for themselves.

# Preparing for the B'Mitzvah: the 4-Year Plan

## 4th Grade

### The Process for Receiving a B'Mitzvah Date:

Families of children in fourth grade will receive an application in the fall to request a B'Mitzvah date. Here is some important information:

- Parents are asked to submit six date requests in priority listing. You may request a date up to six weeks before or after your child's **13th birthday**. Those who have summer birthdates can request the month before or after the summer vacation.
- In early winter, Temple Israel will send you confirmation of your B'Mitzvah date.
- Please be aware that we assign dates in the 7th grade of your child's Hebrew education.
- All B'Mitzvah ceremonies are celebrated in the morning and begin at 10:15am. Occasionally a family will choose a Monday or Thursday morning, which are Torah reading days as well, though Saturday morning is our most common time for a B'Mitzvah celebration.
- Ceremonies at Temple Israel will either be a single or a double. Temple Israel's policy is that no one can be guaranteed a single ceremony at the time of date assignments. If you are scheduled to have a single ceremony, and it is less than a year before your date, you will then have the right to graciously deny a request for another family to share your date. When pairing two children, Cantor Stillman and Rabbi Jacobson, in consultation with the rest of the clergy, will be guided by learning styles and capacities, not pairing two children from the same secular school, and being aware of inter-family compatibility.

**Justice League:** Spring of 4th grade is the first Justice League Program.

## 5th Grade

### Learning Continues:

At the winter **5th Grade B'Mitzvah Torah Portion Celebration**, families will meet, greet, and learn more about the B'Mitzvah process, the morning service, and the Justice League program. This is a great time to ask questions and begin to plan for your ceremony. Each student will receive their Torah portion booklet, which includes all the verses in their Torah portion and Haftarah. They will also receive their B'Mitzvah Handbook.



## 6th Grade

### Getting Closer; Tutoring Begins:

1. **Pick Your Portion:** Every student with their parent(s) meets with a member of the clergy to pick 10-12 consecutive Torah verses that they will prepare for their ceremony. This is another opportunity to bring your questions and find connection with a member of the clergy team. The clergy you meet with is not necessarily the clergy who will be on the bima with you during your ceremony.
2. Parents will meet with the cantor for the session, “**B'Mitzvah 101: Nuts and Bolts**” to go over all of the details of the B'Mitzvah process, the Saturday Shabbat morning service, and what it means to be a parent of a child growing into a B'Mitzvah.
3. **6th Grade Justice League Fair:** Students can familiarize themselves with and choose an organization to work with for their justice project. Their justice project, whether an individual or group project, is an expression of their growing justice “practice.”
4. **6th/7th Grade Kallah** at Camp Burgess & Hayward. Religious school and day school students join clergy and education staff for a weekend of fun, meaning making, and community building.
5. Each student will begin their tutoring process approximately 10-12 months before their B'Mitzvah date. Tutoring sessions are one-on-one for approximately 26 sessions throughout the Religious School year. (You will be contacted by the cantor's office to familiarize yourself with the different options for tutoring.)

### Note for Parents:

We encourage you to create a family Shabbat practice by:

1. Attending **Qabbalat Shabbat services**, Friday evening, 6:00 p.m. In this service students will see and hear the prayers they are learning in the context of a lively, musical service, as well as feel that they are part of a larger community.
2. We also encourage you to attend **Saturday morning Torah study** (9:00-10:45 a.m.) a year in advance of your portion. The clergy may teach texts that do not include your child's assigned verses; however, it is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about your portion and to help your child engage with a critical exploration of their Torah text a year in advance.

## 7th Grade

1. Help your friends celebrate their B'Mitzvah! Ceremonies begin and continue all year; you and your family are invited and encouraged to attend, support your classmates, and familiarize yourself with the service!
2. 6th/7th grade Kallah at Camp Burgess & Hayward. Religious school and day school students join clergy and education staff for a weekend of fun, meaning making, and community building.
3. Justice League activities continue all year. Students work with Temple Israel staff to assess their experiences and create a record of their justice practice to leave behind.

## 8th Grade and Beyond

We hope that all our students continue with our Teen program:

1. **The Tent**, our Monday night community-wide teen program
2. **Madrichim Program**: Assistant teachers on Sunday mornings.

## Guide to B'Mitzvah Tutoring Process

For some, becoming a B/Bar/Bat Mitzvah will require learning and practicing important prayers that are part of the Shabbat morning service, as well as the Torah and Haftarah portions for that Shabbat. The individual's learning process begins approximately twelve months prior to the date of the ceremony. Cantor Stillman, who begins this process and supervises it throughout, will meet with the student and provide them with Dropbox links to the audio and text files of the materials from which the student will learn.

### Individual Tutoring

As part of the B'Mitzvah process, each student is expected to spend thirty minutes a week working one-on-one with their tutor. During these sessions, the tutor and student will prepare the blessings and prayers for their Shabbat service, as well as learn verses from Torah and Haftarah. These personal sessions enable the student to receive individualized attention throughout their learning. There are three vehicles available to you for this preparation:

(1) **Temple Israel Tutor**: Students will begin their B'Mitzvah preparation twelve months prior to their ceremony. B'Mitzvah tutoring that takes place in the building will follow the Religious School calendar. Your child will work with a tutor on a one-to-one basis for 1/2 hour each week when Religious School is in session (i.e. there is no tutoring on holidays, during vacation weeks or during the months of July and August). Tutoring sessions are scheduled at a mutually convenient time. The cost of the program is \$1200. You will be billed for tutoring approximately 11 months before the ceremony and the fee is due 4 months before your child's ceremony.

(2) **Private Tutor**: You may arrange to have a private tutor work with your child at a mutually agreeable time and place. In this situation, the family becomes responsible for all scheduling and paying the tutor directly. Cantor Stillman can help you in the selection process of a private tutor. If you do seek a private tutor, please speak first with Cantor Stillman before going ahead with arrangements.

(3) **Online Jewish Learning**: A third option for B'nei Mitzvah training is with the Jewish Online tutoring program. In close consultation with Cantor Stillman a tutor

through this service can be chosen and will work with you child online at a mutually agreeable time. You will pay Online Jewish learning directly for their services. Cantor Stillman will provide your child and the tutor with all the necessary materials throughout the process.

*Of your three choices, #1 will be the least expensive of these options.*

## **Overview of the Service**

### **Rehearsal**

In the week prior to your ceremony you will have a rehearsal run by Cantor Stillman. This rehearsal is usually held on Monday or Tuesday afternoon, with the exception of holidays and school vacations. At this rehearsal your child will use the microphone, hold the Torah scroll, read from the Torah, and get a feel for moving around the bima. Parents will also use this time to recite their prayers and become familiar with the flow of the morning service.

### **Friday Evening**

On the Friday evening prior to your ceremony, your child will chant Qiddush at the beginning of our 6:00 p.m. Qabbalat Shabbat service.

### **Saturday Morning**

On Saturday morning, you will arrive at 9:45 a.m. for your ceremony. We will begin the morning at 10:15 a.m. with a ritual in the atrium. After clergy welcoming remarks, there will be an opportunity for family members to read an English blessing (one of four English blessings from which to choose) to your child. Once inside the sanctuary, we will proceed with the Shabbat morning liturgy. Your child will lead many of the prayers outlined on the previous page with clergy support.

## **Family Participation**

The B'Mitzvah service is a great way to honor and include members of your extended family and community. There are several ways to include loved ones in the rituals and special day.

### **In the Atrium**

The first opportunity for family participation occurs at the beginning of our ritual in the atrium at 10:15 a.m. A parent or parents will receive 4 optional readings for this moment. After you have chosen the reading that feels most appropriate to your family, you can distribute the text to your selected readers. Some families choose to have grandparents, aunts, and uncles or special family friends read in unison. Others choose to divide the text so that there are individual readers.

## **During the Service**

Once inside the sanctuary, you may choose ark openers (often siblings or cousins) for two moments during the service.

During the passing of the Torah scroll from one generation to the next, we invite grandparents and great-grandparents to participate in this moment whether they are Jewish or not. Sometimes a family will invite uncles, aunts, or other relatives to stand in place of loved ones who are deceased or unable to attend.

Finally, we ask you to select a Torah holder (someone older than the age of B'Mitzvah) to receive the Torah scroll and sit with it for approximately ten minutes while the B'Mitzvah reads the Haftarah text.

## **The Celebration**

Families are encouraged to celebrate their big day in any way that is meaningful to their child and family, and appropriate for the occasion.

We suggest that an effort is made by each family to include your child's Religious School or day school classmates on your invitation list, in order to build community and rapport in the cohort.

It is also important that your child and you attend as many B'Mitzvah ceremonies at Temple Israel as you can prior to your own ceremony. This will help orient you to the experience of B'Mitzvah as celebrated in this community, and prepare you for your big day.

All families are invited to use the beautiful spaces we have at Temple Israel for your post service celebration. You can learn more about space rental at Temple Israel on our website: <https://www.tisrael.org/facility-rentals/>

## **Day School Students**

At Temple Israel, day school students have the opportunity to fully engage in our B'Mitzvah program. Our social justice educators will work with your child individually or with their cohort to identify and coordinate their Justice League encounters and projects. As with all students, day school students begin tutorial 12 months in advance of their date and will be guided individually with the assistance of a tutor and guidance of Cantor Stillman and a rabbi.

Day school students are encouraged to join us for post-B'Mitzvah teen education and engagement.

If you have any questions about day school engagement at Temple Israel, please contact Roberta Axeloons ([raxeloons@tisrael.org](mailto:raxeloons@tisrael.org)).

## Planning a Green B'Mitzvah

Mazel Tov as you plan this powerful day of tradition and transition!  
As Torah reminds us that we are guardians of the earth, this is one additional way to consider what is important to you as you plan your ceremony and celebration.

None of us have to be reminded of the earth's fragility and the need to take active steps to protect it. It's a Jewish commandment! Although behavior change is difficult for all of us, children and teens are at ideal ages for establishing climate-friendly behaviors. Therefore, on one of the most important days of your child's and family's life, consider adding another dimension of pride and purpose to this meaning-filled occasion by thinking of creative ways to plan for a "green celebration."

## Justice League

**Wake Up. Champion. Unite**  
<https://www.tisrael.org/justice-league/>

The Justice League is an interdisciplinary community designed to incorporate religious education, social justice experiences, and youth group style fun to prepare our 5th-7th graders for B'Mitzvah and beyond. The Justice League is designed for all Temple Israel 5th-7th graders who will become B'Mitzvah at Temple Israel, whether they are students in our religious school or a local day school.

The Justice League provides room for personal exploration of issues of injustice that are important to students and families while also working within and toward community. We are supporting our students to take a proactive role in civic life and realize their capacity for making change. A key component of the Justice League is our **Social Justice in Action** program. This program offers the opportunity for families to build community – both within and beyond Temple Israel – through confronting injustice.

We recognize that both the B'Mitzvah experience and the development of an identity as a justice changemaker are bigger than any one event or encounter. Pedagogically, we seek to guide our students on a journey of **Learning and Discovery (5<sup>th</sup> grade)**, **Action and Reaction (6<sup>th</sup> grade)**, and **Reflection and Integration (7<sup>th</sup> grade)**.



# Temple Israel Post-B'Mitzvah Teen Program

Temple Israel's Teen Education Program engages teens as participants in Jewish educational experiences that are relevant to their day-to-day lives. Students learn to advocate for themselves and their needs and to develop as leaders who have ownership and agency over their education and what their Judaism means to them.

For more information visit : <http://www.tisrael.org/teen-ed/>

## **THE TENT:**

A Jewish Learning Community for Greater Boston Teens at Temple Israel

The Tent, modeled after a tent, which is open on all sides, connects teens with a diversity of voices to strengthen them as learners, as thinkers, and as young American Jews. Our program is open to all interested teens, grades 8 through 12.

The TENT meets Mondays, October - May:

5:45 – 6:30 p.m.: dinner

6:40 – 7:30 p.m.: 1st class

7:40 – 8:30 p.m.: 2nd class

For more information, including courses, FAQ, and registration, visit:

<http://www.tisrael.org/the-tent/>

## **MADRICHIM PROGRAM**

Every year, a cohort of teens serve as student teachers. The goal of the Madrichim Program is to help our teens develop as leaders and teachers, and to provide our Religious School students with excellent role models. Teens apply to the program in the spring and are offered positions over the summer. Each student receives a small volunteer stipend each semester.

Throughout the year, Madrichim focus on developing skills in small group facilitation, classroom management, and experiential lesson-planning. In addition to hands-on learning in the classroom, Madrichim will also receive targeted support and training on differentiated instruction in a series of six development meetings led by experts in the field.

## **RYFTI - REFORM YOUTH FEDERATION AT TEMPLE ISRAEL**

RYFTI teens join together for fun, informal, Jewish experiences. RYFTI holds monthly activities that range from scavenger hunts in Harvard Square to apple picking. Along with the monthly activities, there are two weekend Kallah held each year: Fall Kallah (November) and Clergy Weekend (May). These weekend getaways are a time for the teens to bond, have fun, and engage in excellent peer-led learning. RYFTI is led by a teen board, elected by their peers each Spring. RYFTI is an affiliate of [NFTY- North East](#).

### **CONFIRMATION**

#### **A Yearlong Experience for 10th Graders at Temple Israel of Boston**

Temple Israel of Boston 10th graders spend a year together building community and grappling with the questions that help them define their personal relationship to Judaism. The confirmation year includes:

Spending wonderful learning time with Rabbi Elaine Zecher, Rabbi Dan Slipakoff, and Rabbi Suzie Jacobson, exploring questions of great meaning to you. You will also have the special opportunity to work with Cantor Stillman on creating your confirmation service. For your other class block on Monday nights, you'll be able to make a choice from The Tent's excellent slate of elective classes.

#### **CONFIRMATION SERVICE**

As confirmands, you will lead our Qabbalat Shabbat service in the spring in culmination of your confirmation year. As a class, you will lead our congregation in a service you help create, inspiring our community with what you have taken from your confirmation experience.

### **L'TAKEN SOCIAL JUSTICE SEMINAR**

Join hundreds of other Reform Movement teens in a weekend of civic engagement. Share Shabbat, tour D.C., experience havdalah at the Jefferson Memorial, and more. On Monday morning, you'll have meetings in the offices of your own federal Senators and Representatives, where you will advocate on a Reform Movement campaign of your choosing.



## **Economic Justice & B'Mitzvah: Black-Owned Businesses**

Temple Israel is known for incorporating justice work into Jewish practice. Why not make this a central tenet of your B'Mitzvah experience as well?

Leaders within Tikkun Central pinpointed an easy, effective, actionable step each family can take to use their money for good. This economic justice project, which we call “Purchasing Power,” helps us think about where we put our money - large and small.

This project is anchored on the importance of investing in local, Black-owned businesses, with our awareness of the racial disparities in Boston between generational wealth and in the evidence that Black-owned businesses are likely to hire more people of color, and foster economic improvement for families and communities of color along with myriad other benefits.

Like all small businesses (only much more so), Black-owned businesses often fail, or fail to start, due to lack of access to capital or the challenge of reaching their desired markets and customers. When we make a meaningful effort to spend dollars in line with our hopes for the world around us, we are participating in the drive for economic justice.

We encourage you to think about the way our life events can seamlessly be spaces of economic and racial justice action. Imagine the impact if each B'Mitzvah family at Temple Israel chose one of the below caterers, bakers, florists, etc. for their B'Mitzvah celebration.

We are on the forefront of igniting our Jewish ritual and life cycle events with tangible economic justice. Will you join us?

These business owners are friends of Temple Israel; please treat them as such. Your purchases are building relationships and strengthening our community in the process. If you have feedback, contact Tali Puterman ([tputerman@tisrael.org](mailto:tputerman@tisrael.org)).

### [List of Black-Owned Businesses](#)