

Congregation Tikkun v'Or

Ithaca Reform Temple
Spirit • Community • Justice

B-MITZVAH HANDBOOK

5781-5782 / 2021-2022

*“And these words which I command you this day
you shall take to your heart.
You shall diligently teach your children.
You shall recite them at home and away,
morning and night.”
Leviticus 6: 5-8*

WELCOME

Welcome to the journey of becoming b-mitzvah!

Reaching the age of b-mitzvah is a very special occasion, one that is celebrated in community with friends and family. Literally, to become a bat (daughter) or bar (son) or b-mitzvah means to become connected to the commandments. This age signifies a turning point in a young Jew's life, requiring them to assume more responsibility in the Jewish community. Celebrating b-mitzvah marks a new stage in a child's development as a Jew and as a human being. At the same time, it marks a new stage in your life as a parent. Take time to think about what this passage means to you in your life. What is it that you want to pass down to your child?*

*One of the key goals of Congregation Tikkun v'Or is to provide an environment in which our children can learn about many different ways to live a rich Jewish life infused with a deep connection to: **Spirit** (God, The Mystery, Meaning, Life Purpose);*

***Justice** / Tzedek/ Tzedakah (Acts of Caring) and Tikkun Olam (Repair of the World);*

***Community** and their expanding responsibilities (mitzvot) as community members and*

These three goals are part of the b-mitzvah preparation and celebration. The student deepens their connection to Spirit, through their learning of Jewish religious practices, by leading prayers and exploring their understanding of Torah (the teaching/truth). This includes wrestling with their own understanding of God, including the possibility of rejecting God or redefining what they mean by God.

Their deepening connection to community is reflected in their participation in events of our community including attendance at services and participation in tzedakah projects such as making food for the hungry. Their participation in the pursuit of justice will be reflected in their Tzedakah/Tikkun Olam project. We want to provide them with the tools and experiences that will allow them to participate as full members of our religious community. At Tikkun v'Or we emphasize the ethical tradition of Judaism. This requires the young person to learn about Jewish ethics, and more importantly, to experience how Jewish ethics are lived in our own congregation and to learn how to apply it to their own lives.

The process of developing these connections is an exciting opportunity for deep learning and spiritual growth, not only for the student but also for the entire family. We would like to invite you to participate actively in this process by helping your children as they prepare and by fully engaging yourself. This may entail setting your own learning goals and taking on some new moral, spiritual or communal commitment.

We invite all families to commit with their children to making the most of all these new opportunities and responsibilities. To this end, we have defined some objectives for both the family and the individual student. Our overall goal is that these responsibilities will bring you and your child joy and meaning.

Lastly, we are deeply committed to the full participation of both Jewish and non-Jewish parents and family in the b-mitzvah process. Our congregation is blessed by the participation of non-Jewish members, some of whom are parents, who so generously support our community fully. While there may be some small differences in the ways in which Jews and non-Jews participate in the service, we wholeheartedly welcome the full participation of parents and family members of other. Our children have much to learn from living in a community that embraces people of different faiths, while at the same time being deeply rooted and nurtured by the teachings of Judaism.

*Note: "Bnai mitzvah" is the plural for both bar and bat mitzvah, but technically, it is the plural masculine form, because in Hebrew, mixed-gender groups default to male language. It is still somewhat ambiguous, but in order to be inclusive of all genders and to avoid confusion over whether "bnai mitzvah" is plural or a singular terms for someone who used the pronouns they/them, the term **b-mitzvah** is often being used as a gender neutral way to refer to both the ceremony and the person involved. As with other languages, Hebrew is still evolving in best practices in this regard. We are happy to talk with students and families more about these terms and options for gender-neutral ceremonies and Hebrew words.*

B-MITZVAH AT TIKKUN V'OR: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE B'NAI MITZVAH YEAR?

During the 7th grade year, religious studies are intensified to enable students to be prepared for b-mitzvah ceremonies and for future adult Jewish life. Students prepare by:

- Attending Jewish Learning Experiences (JLE) on Sundays and Wednesdays;
- Having individual tutoring sessions and family meetings;
- Participating in an individual Tikkun Olam project;
- Attending Shabbat services regularly.

WHAT DO STUDENTS LEARN IN THE MIDWEEK CLASS?

B-mitzvah students meet for a 90-minute mid-week class throughout the school year, in addition to the Sunday morning classes. Students must attend both classes for the entire year even if they become bar or bat mitzvah before the year is over

Why do we pray? How do we pray?

Understanding the structure and meaning of the Shabbat prayers.

How do we live holy, ethical lives? How does Jewish learning and mitzvot connect to our lives?

Study of the *mitzvot* which facilitate good decision-making and *tikkun olam* /repair of the world.

How do we put learning into action?

The b-mitzvah class participates in one or more mitzvah projects to apply Jewish values learned in the class.

HOW DO STUDENTS LEARN THE TORAH PORTION?

In addition to Sunday and Wednesday JLE, students follow an individualized program of study. This program generally begins six months prior to the ceremony and includes the following components:

*In-depth study of the meaning of the student's Torah portion, culminating in the composition of a *d'var Torah*;

*Chanting of a section of the Torah and choosing either a section of the Haftarah (in Hebrew or English) or another meaningful reading;

*Chanting of the prayers that the student will lead.

HOW MUCH HEBREW DO STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW?

A reading knowledge of Hebrew sufficient to learn to lead prayers, and to learn one's Torah portion, should be attained by one year prior to the b-mitzvah. In some cases, this may require that the family provide individual tutoring at their own expense. Practicing Hebrew over the summer can make a big difference.

WHAT ELSE DO STUDENTS NEED TO LEARN TO BECOME B-MITZVAH?

Students can each improve their prayer skills. In addition to the work in the class, the student works individually with the tutor on the Shabbat prayers and their meanings. They are expected to learn and lead *at least* the list of prayers in the Readiness Checklist, in addition to some preferred prayers and some optional ones. The opportunity always remains open for the student to prepare more than assigned. Please speak with Naomi Wilensky about any learning challenges so we can plan this year of study together appropriately.

Students (and their families) also learn to balance their time and responsibilities. Many students are involved in theater, sports, and dance. We encourage these interests while expecting that especially during the b-mitzvah year, the commitment to Jewish learning is of high priority.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD FAMILIES AND STUDENTS ATTEND SERVICES?

As often as possible! Regular attendance and participation in Shabbat and holiday services is the best way to learn and be comfortable with the prayers and services. It's also a way to connect with other families and the rest of the Tikkun v'Or congregation.

Attending services is one of the most helpful ways to for the student to prepare for leading prayers. In addition, attending services is a mitzvah, since it builds community and supports classmates, as well as anyone wishing to say Mourner's Kaddish for a loved one.

Students are expected to attend:

Friday night services:

- All scheduled class participation services*
- At least 6 other Friday night services led by congregants
- B-mitzvah services of classmates

Saturday morning services:

- At least one b-mitzvah at TvO during the sixth grade year
- Scheduled class participation service*
- B-mitzvah services of classmates

Holiday services:

- At least one service each for Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur (out of town OK)
- At least one other TvO holiday celebration

** If a student cannot attend a class participation service, they must arrange to make up by participating in a different service. Plan to attend both Friday evening and Saturday morning services for each of your classmates' b-mitzvah.*

Additional participation: The religious life of Tikkun v'Or is based on active participation. In addition to attending services, we ask that each student take a role in leading services. Families may choose to lead a service together, or a student might lead a few prayers at a service led by a congregation member. Throughout the year students may also be asked to participate in other Shabbat evening or morning services.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF A TIKKUN OLAM PROJECT?

B-mitzvah students participate in one or more group activities that expresses Jewish values in a personally meaningful way. Teachers will supervise the students and help them understand the meaning of the project in a Jewish context. Each student is expected to design and carry out their own Tikkun Olam project outside class time. In addition, students are encouraged to think creatively about other ways that they can put Jewish values into action in the course of their everyday lives.

We hope that all children will take every opportunity to learn about and perform *mitzvot*, taking part in the opportunities provided in religious school, in the family, in the congregation, and in the larger community.

WHAT ARE THE FAMILY’S RESPONSIBILITIES?

The family’s main responsibility is to support the young person in their study of Torah. Parents can do this by making sure the student attends classes and services, listening as the student practices prayers, Torah and haftarah, and engaging with the student as they explore the Torah portion and create a meaningful d’var Torah. Some students want to work more independently, and families can still help by conferring regularly with the teachers about their progress. The b-mitzvah year is a time to deepen the entire family’s Jewish learning. Parents and siblings can help by listening as the bar/bat mitzvah practices. Be a supportive and encouraging “audience.” Ask plenty of questions. Answer what you can. Read together to find out more. Attend services as a family.

The family usually hosts oneg following services for the congregation and guests. This can be as simple as challah with wine and grape juice, or as elaborate as a sit-down luncheon.

Families are encouraged to help each other with the oneg; this can make it easier for everyone. Sign up through Each for All.

Most families also have a party after services for close friends and family.

HOW CAN THE REST OF OUR FAMILY PARTICIPATE?

Becoming b-mitzvah is a life passage that signals a deeper involvement in Judaism and thus requires the Jewish young adult to take-on more Jewish responsibility. As such, the work that the student does in preparation requires thoughtfulness and commitment.

Each student is unique and offers the Jewish community different gifts. In order to nurture these unique qualities, the student is trained in a tailored study schedule. In addition, we encourage family participation in the service itself. This usually takes the form of participating in creative or standard readings, blessings, or rituals associated with the b-mitzvah Shabbat service.

Suggestions for participation of family members and friends:

Shabbat Evening Service:

- Candle lighting (Hebrew & English) at beginning of the Shabbat Evening Service
- English readings (at the discretion of the service leader)

Shabbat Morning Service:

- Handing of the *tallit* to the bar/bat mitzvah
- English readings from the morning service in the prayerbook
- For the Reading of Torah
- Open & Close Ark
- Unwrapping Torah
- (2+) Torah blessings before and after the Torah Reading (aliyah)
- Torah Lifter (*hagbaha*) and Torah Wrapper (*gelilah*)

Other:

- Passing the Torah down the generations
- Additional Torah reading
- Leading a song
- Parental blessing of the bar/bat mitzvah
- English readings from prayer books or other sources

For interfaith families: Members of the congregation who are in interfaith families are invited to participate fully in services. Please discuss opportunities for participation by non-Jewish family & friends who are not members.

For special needs: TvO strives to include, accommodate and integrate people with special needs. Please discuss opportunities for participation by family & friends who have special needs, including mobility impairments.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE PRAYER BOOK

Families can create a supplement to the prayer book to personalize each ceremony. Tikkun v'Or has approximately 60 copies of *The Torah*, so this supplement also serves to provide copies of the Torah portion.

Ask for supplement samples if needed, and include these in your supplement:

- Hebrew and English of the Torah and haftarah readings
- Welcome and thank you (recommended)
- English readings or quotes that are not in the prayer book (optional)
- Explanations about the service, prayers, Jewish customs (optional)
- List of honors/honorees (optional)
- Additional songs that may not be in our prayer book (will be provided to you as needed)
- Include page numbers on each page of the supplement

TVO LOGISTICS & FEES

B-mitzvah services are usually held on Saturday mornings at Congregation Tikkun v'Or at 2550 Triphammer Road. Other options – such as Saturday afternoon/evening Havdalah services, or holidays may be possible. The synagogue can hold up to 150 people seated in the sanctuary. We have 120 chairs, and a sound system, which will all be set up for the service unless otherwise specified.

The b-mitzvah family usually hosts a kiddush or oneg at the temple right after the services on Friday night and Saturday morning (see “Responsibilities”).

A temple key and security code and instructions will be given to all b-mitzvah families in the week or two before the ceremony so that you may have access as needed.

Is the temple building available for celebrations?

The temple is available for celebrations; the b-mitzvah family has rental priority for their chosen weekend. Talk with Naomi to schedule a celebration at the temple; there is a rental contract and special regulations.

Celebrations have also been held at people's homes, at local hotels, on the college campuses, at state parks, and other area venues.

We do ask that the celebration be in keeping with Jewish customs. Please keep in mind that the students have spent considerable time learning the history and laws of Judaism. The celebration of this learning should be consistent with the spirit of Jewish traditions and practices. While it is up to you to decide what food to serve and what music to play, building policies, as well as Jewish custom, ask you to refrain from serving pork products and shellfish and having entertainment that is inappropriate for a religious celebration for a thirteen-year-old.

What about photography and videotaping?

Photography during the service is not permitted. Please ask if you would like to use a video camera to record the service. There is no restriction regarding photography or videotaping before or after the service, or at any reception or party held at the synagogue later in the day.

What ritual objects do we need to have?

There are a number of Jewish symbols that are associated with the preparation and ceremony of becoming b-mitzvah.

B-mitzvah services are the first occasion at which a Jewish child wears a *tallit*. After this age, Jewish adults traditionally wear a *tallit* during a morning service. The *tallit*, with its fringes, is worn as a reminder of our responsibility to act ethically, as well as being an aid to prayer. A special *kippah* is another way to encourage your children to foster a relationship to prayer.

The congregation presents each student with a special gift – a kiddush cup or candlesticks. Naomi will arrange for the b-mitzvah to make choices from our selection.

Other costs (At your discretion):

Luncheon for the whole congregation, flowers, entertainment, facility rental, donation to the Temple, including special funds such as the Yeladim Religious School Scholarship Fund.

What can we do with leftover food?

Clean food is welcome at St Johns Community Services
618 W. State St. - across from FedEx Office/Kinkos
See www.sjcs.org to check their current hours.

*Additional information on celebrations, catering, music, etc is available from Naomi.

What about Zoom?

We've now held b-mitzvah services by zoom, and as a hybrid zoom and in-person soon. We'll keep figuring this out as the year continues.

GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

- Aliyah Blessing** Hebrew blessing said before and after the reading of the Torah
- B-Mitzvah** A gender-neutral way to refer to both the ceremony and the person involved, as a singular or plural term. Bat Mitzvah (feminine) and bar mitzvah (masculine) can be used for specific people or ceremonies as appropriate.
- Challah** Braided bread eaten on Shabbat and holidays
- Chumash** 5 Books of the Hebrew Bible
- D'var Torah** An educational talk, which teaches about the meaning of a Torah portion
- Gelilah** The wrapping of the Torah. The person who wraps is the *Goleil* or *Golelet*
- Haftarah** Selected writings from the Jewish Prophets, linked to weekly Torah reading
- Hagbah** Ritual lifting and display of the Torah after it has been read during the service
- Kiddush** Refers to the blessing over the wine/grape juice as well as the small gathering after the Shabbat morning service
- Kipah** (Hebrew)/**Yarmulke** (Yiddish) Religious head-covering
- Kosher/Kashrut** Dietary laws forbidding the consumption of pork, shellfish, and the mixing of milk and meat.
- Maariv** Evening Service
- Maftir** The last 3 lines of every Torah portion that is read by the individual who will be chanting the Haftarah Portion
- Minchah** Afternoon Service
- Motzi** Prayer that expresses our gratitude for the food that God provides & which human beings cultivate
- Parasha, Parashah** Weekly section of Torah that is read in the synagogue.
- Shacharit** Morning Service
- Siddur** prayer book
- Tallit** The fringed prayer shawl worn during the Morning Service.
- Tanakh** Entire biblical canon of Jewish literature (the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings)
- Tefillah** literally means 'prayer.' Also refers to the Standing Prayer (*Amidah*)
- Torah** The 5 Books of Moses-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
- Trop, Trope, or Ta'amei HaMikra** Musical notation that instructs the reader how to sing the text. Often called cantillation marks.