



CONGREGATION SHAA'RIE TORAH

A Guidebook to Becoming a *B' Mitzvah*

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Dear B' Mitzvah parents/guardians,

Each one of us embarks on a unique path, striving to comprehend the intricate roles of being both a Jewish person and a human being in this ever-evolving world. And as parents/guardians and educators, we understand that our children are also on this profound journey. Judaism provides incredible wisdom for these moments of transition, such as emerging from childhood.

B' Mitzvah is a more inclusive term for moving from a Jewish child to becoming responsible in the Jewish community. It is more and more common for those who identify as female to become a Bat Mitzvah, those who identify as male to become a Bar Mitzvah, and those who identify differently to become a B' Mitzvah. Learn more from [Keshet](#), an amazing organization advocating for LGBTQ Jews. At Congregation Shaarie Torah, we use B' Mitzvah when we refer to this life cycle in general.

In our educational approach to B' Mitzvah, we are committed to unearthing the wisdom within our traditions and applying it to the challenges of today. We encourage our B' Mitzvah students to question, engage in debates, develop a deep affection for Torah, and discover their distinctive voices within the harmonious tapestry of our heritage. We provide them with tangible tools to become exemplary individuals—a true mensch.

Our students don't merely undergo a B' Mitzvah ceremony; instead, they actively transform into B' Mitzvah – you can't have a B' Mitzvah because it is something our kids become. In doing so, they assume the responsibilities of adulthood within the Jewish community and the wider world. As part of this preparation, our children are privileged to delve into the realm of Torah study, exploring the enigmatic texts and ideas that have sustained our people for generations. They become collaborators in the mission of tikkun, striving to do their part to mend the world. They learn about how to become A+ people who use their time and talents to effect positive change.

The B' Mitzvah is not an endpoint; it is a commencement. Our students publicly affirm that they are part of an ongoing dialogue, and our community resoundingly responds with a resolute "YES!" We wholeheartedly believe that each of them has something meaningful to contribute, and we are eager to listen and support their journey.

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At Congregation Shaarie Torah, we believe that reaching this milestone is a family affair. As such, we do not provide a one size fits all model. We believe setting learning goals is really about exploring Jewish identity, which is intrinsically a student-centered approach. Each student has their unique family and life experience, which leads to their own deep questions and opportunities for growth as they become a responsible Jewish person. In addition to honoring the individual student and family's background as we prioritize learning goals, we also use our educational values to help guide our collaboration. These values include Fun, Character, Community, and Confidence.

- **Fun:** We believe in supporting positive Jewish identity through developmentally appropriate learning that is joyful at its core – and therefore fun!
- **Character:** We believe in cultivating kindness and practicing being our best selves in a world full of division and isolation. Jewish wisdom offers tools and practices to cultivate these traits, called middot, or soul-traits.
- **Community:** We believe in creating authentic relationships and a sense of belonging for our youth and their families, building connections with the greater Shaarie Torah community as well as the greater Portland metro community.
- **Confidence:** We believe in providing access to Judaism's wisdom through exposure and customizing learning goals based on specific skills/areas of content important to each family. This value helps bring to life our student- and family-centered approach.

We look forward to collaborating with you as a team to support your B' Mitzvah,

Congregation Shaarie Torah team



B' MITZVAH PREREQUISITES

- **Open minds/hearts** – explore what becoming a B' Mitzvah means to your unique family in partnership with the Rabbi.
- **Secure a B' Mitzvah ceremony date** – Jewish boys must be 13 years and one day old according to the Hebrew calendar. Jewish girls must be 12 years and one day old according to the Hebrew calendar. A celebration of marking this lifecycle can happen at any point. The Rabbi can help families clarify the factors for deciding upon a date to request.
- **Community connection** – A B' Mitzvah family must be members in good standing of Congregation Shaarie Torah, supporters of Congregation Shaarie Torah and currently enrolled in our Mensch Community, or have made special arrangements with the Rabbi.
- **Private tutor** – Families hire a tutor approx. 12 months prior to the ceremony date. The Rabbi can provide a list of tutors used by recent families. Students should expect to meet with tutor bi-weekly 12–9 months out and weekly 8 months before the ceremony date. *Tutor is paid directly by the family and not included in the B'Mitzvah fee.

B' MITZVAH RECOMMENDATIONS

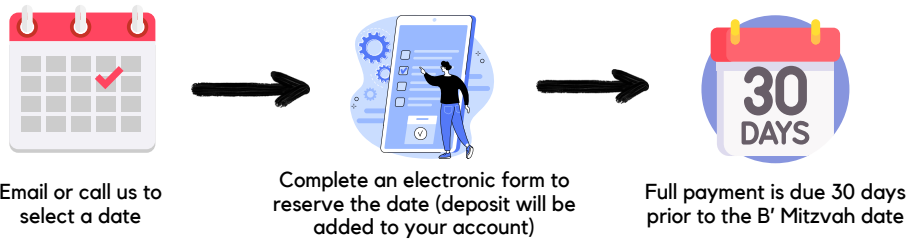
- **Two years of formal Jewish education** prior to the B' Mitzvah date. This may be at Congregation Shaarie Torah, another synagogue school, or a Jewish day school.
- **Proficiency in reading Hebrew** can be helpful to support some students feeling confident in their learning.
- **Attendance at services** is helpful so that students and parents/guardians forge a relationship to Jewish prayer, to develop a relationship to the broader community, and to help families become more comfortable in the prayer space itself. Parents/guardians are expected to accompany their children to services. Many families have found it beneficial to attend once or twice a month leading up to the ceremony.
- **A Mitzvah Project** is a way in which students understand that it is not enough to learn Torah or Jewish prayers – that learning must be used to help the world around them. Students are encouraged to dedicate 20–30 hours giving back to the community through hands-on volunteering and also by allocating part of their gifts to a worthy cause.

COSTS - MEMBERS & NON-MEMBERS

The B' Mitzvah fee is \$750 for CST Members/\$1,000 for Supporters enrolled in the Mensch Community/\$1,250 for non-members with special arrangements. Once a date has been selected by the family, a parent/guardian must complete an electronic form to reserve the date and set the B' Mitzvah preparations in process. When reserving a date a deposit of \$500 will be charged to your account. The remainder of the fee is due 30 days prior to the B' Mitzvah date.

Some families choose to use our facility for other events connected with the celebration of our young person becoming a B' Mitzvah, such as a Kiddush lunch or an evening celebration. If interested, contact our Congregational Affairs & Clergy Assistant Coordinator to learn more about possible options and fees. Our goal is to support your family as you gather in community to celebrate this joyful moment.

SECURE YOUR DATE & COMPLETE PAYMENT



SYNAGOGUE SUPPORT & RABBINIC GUIDANCE

The following guidance and support is offered to your family:

- The Rabbi meets with the family to guide them to choose which type of ceremony feels right, identify goals, and decide on options for dates.
- The parents/guardians complete an electronic form to secure a ceremony date.
- After identifying learning goals, the Rabbi writes a Tefillah Study Plan (TSP). Tefillah is Hebrew for prayer though it has many nuanced meanings.
- Examples of possible Tefillah Study Plan (TSP) include:
 - Shabbat Morning
 - Shabbat Mincha & Ma'ariv
 - Weekday
 - Havdalah
 - Creative Option – for example, Art Gallery
- The Rabbi shares and explains the TSP with the student, parents/guardians, tutor, and synagogue staff.
- The synagogue staff coordinate with parents/guardians to schedule two meetings with the Rabbi to work on Dvar Torah preparations.
- The Rabbi meets with the student in-person twice to work on Dvar Torah. Additional edits and help usually happen by phone and email.
- The Rabbi coordinates with the tutor as needed through the months of study.
- The synagogue staff coordinate with parents/guardians to schedule practice sessions {if the ceremony will be held in the prayer space}.
- The Rabbi facilitates the first practice session in the prayer space {if the ceremony will be held in the prayer space} to make sure everyone has the same expectations for the ceremony.
- The tutor, parents/guardians, and synagogue staff can coordinate additional practice sessions in the prayer space, including using the space to bring in a photographer as photography is not permitted on Shabbat.
- The Rabbi is available to help families with filling out honors sheet.
- The Rabbi facilitates the ceremony itself.



"The B' Mitzvah process at Shaarie Torah helped us slow down and think about what cultural and spiritual aspects are important to us. It clarified our belief that B' Mitzvah is one of the most important events for a Jewish child as it allows us, their parents and community, to support their autonomy and confidence. Most importantly, it reminded us of our key role in supporting her to be a member of her community who supports others and shares her talents with pride. It was a lot of work - and the Shaarie Torah team were all incredible to work with." - Ashley and Ouri, parents of recent B' Mitzvah

TIMELINE

Below is a timeline that roughly outlines a B' Mitzvah student's learning and preparations:

12-14 months

- Initial meeting with Rabbi and parents/guardians only.
- Complete electronic form to request reserving a specific date. The B' Mitzvah deposit fee of \$500 is due at time of submission of this form.

12 months

- Initial meeting with student, parents/guardians, and Rabbi.
- Identify the type of ceremony that best suits your family.
- Rabbi will create a Tefillah Study Plan (TSP) based on the type of ceremony chosen. The TSP will be shared with office administration, the tutor, and the parents/guardians and will be used to follow the student's progress.
- Family should interview and decide on a tutor who is a good match for your child and the type of ceremony requested.
- Students should work with the tutor (ideally 30 minutes per week) to first brush up on their Hebrew identification and pronunciation skills and then begin to work through their TSP.

6 months

- Contact Congregational Affairs & Clergy Assistant Coordinator about any requests for catering needs, extra room usage, and/or other logistics.
- Contact Congregational Affairs & Clergy Assistant Coordinator for scheduling meetings with Rabbi, Torah rehearsals, and honors list.

3 months

- First meeting with Rabbi to discuss preparing a Dvar Torah – a presentation of learning that focuses on the Torah portion.

2 months

- 2nd Meeting with Rabbi to work on Dvar Torah.
- Submit photograph and a brief biography of the student.
- Schedule meeting with Congregational Affairs & Clergy Assistant Coordinator to go over catering needs, costs and logistics.
- Submit completed list of honors.
- Submit draft of printed program to Congregational Affairs & Clergy Assistant Coordinator for review.

1 month

- All outstanding payments are due.
- Schedule practice sessions with the tutor in the location of the ceremony (Rabbi will do his best to attend the first practice session).

1-2 weeks

- Hold a final practice session (photography permitted).