



Temple Israel  
WESTPORT, CT

Dear Families,

Mazal tov on reaching this step of the b'nei mitzvah process! Our goals for b'nei mitzvah at Temple Israel are simple: we want each student to complete their b'nei mitzvah feeling, "proud to be you, and proud to be a Jew." We also love to build enduring relationships with your child so that they feel connected to our congregation and remain engaged in Jewish life through their teenage years and beyond.

Your main point of contact for scheduling appointments, rehearsals and general questions is our B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator Erin Simon: [esimon@tiwestport.org](mailto:esimon@tiwestport.org), or 203-227-1293 x302.

You may reach your clergy at the emails below:

Rabbi Michael S. Friedman: [mfriedman@tiwestport.org](mailto:mfriedman@tiwestport.org)

Cantor Julia Cadrain: [jcadrain@tiwestport.org](mailto:jcadrain@tiwestport.org)

Rabbi Elana Nemitoff-Bresler: [enemitoffbresler@tiwestport.org](mailto:enemitoffbresler@tiwestport.org)

Rabbi Zach Plesent: [zplesent@tiwestport.org](mailto:zplesent@tiwestport.org)

Cantor Becky Mann: [bmann@tiwestport.org](mailto:bmann@tiwestport.org)

We are here for you every step of the way, and look forward to sharing this journey with you.

Mazel Tov,





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## Our values

**SUPPORT:** We're with you every step of the way. We will support you throughout this process to ensure your experience is meaningful, positive, and empowering.

**INCLUSION:** We believe in welcoming all people across orientation, gender identity, background and ability. We accommodate various learning needs, and welcome interfaith families, and all types of family constellations to participate fully in the process.

**TRADITION & INNOVATION:** We treasure tradition and embrace innovation. Together, we will discover what meaning the ancient words of Torah have for us today in our own lives.

**PERSPECTIVE:** B'nei mitzvah is a milestone highlight, though it is but one highlight of many within your larger Jewish journey.



## **B'nei Mitzvah Timeline**

5th grade:

- Receive date assignment letter (Thanksgiving weekend)
- Torah Family program -- Connecting with our Torah portions (Winter)
- Tefilah (Prayer) Family Exploration program (Spring)

6th grade:

- Hopes, Fears, Memories Family program (Fall)
- Mitzvah Family program (Spring)

8-10 months before the service:

- 8-10 months before -- B'nei Mitzvah Family launch
- 5-6 months before -- Weekly tutoring begins
- 5-6 months before -- Haftarah Workshop
- 5 months before -- Individual Tikkun Olam project meeting
- 1-2 months before -- Officiating Clergy meetings begin (Dvar Torah meetings, Rabbi meetings, and Cantor meetings)
- 1 month before -- Sanctuary rehearsals begin ( 3 rehearsals total)
- Friday night before -- All becoming b'nei mitzvah are honored with lighting Shabbat candles, and helping to lead Kiddush and motzi.



## Expectations

Each student is expected to...

- Continue to regularly attend Keshet.
- Attend Shabbat services as often as possible (we love to see you there!)
- Practice daily for 15-20 minutes. Students may access all materials via their google drive folder, which we will share with you when tutoring begins.
- Chant approximately 12 verses of Torah and approximately 5 verses of Haftarah. Generally, each student should master about one verse (one sentence) of Torah or Haftarah per week.
- Craft and present a D'var Torah, presenting their own insights on the weekly Torah portion.
- Complete a Tikkun Olam Project. You may access a list of Tikkun Olam Project ideas and organizations [here](#). Once you have chosen a project, please complete your form [here](#).



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## **How can I make bar/bat mitzvah a meaningful experience?**

- Determine why this Jewish milestone is so significant to you. In other words, Why are you doing this? Then discuss your answers with your child. Encourage your child to come up with their own answers as well.
- Take a look at your child's Torah portion (in English). Discuss it as a family. What themes do you see in the text? How might the portion relate to your family's values? Are there parts of the portion that you strongly agree with? Parts that trouble you? There really are no wrong answers. Your rabbis will guide your child through the process of writing a D'var Torah, but conversation about the content of the portion can only deepen your family's experience.
- Attend Shabbat services at Temple Israel, or via our livestream. Our services are filled with joyous music and compelling messages about our world. Most importantly, Shabbat is a time to be together as a family without the distraction of screens or the burden of to-do lists. We think you'll love it. It's also the best way for your child (and you!) to become familiar with the service your child will be leading.



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## Family Honors

- Family and friends may be honored with an aliyah -- the blessing before and after reading the Torah. Generally you will have three aliyot, each which can be parceled out to a small group (ie, grandparents and aunts and uncles). The bar/bat mitzvah has the honor of the fourth aliyah.
- An aliyah form is provided in your google folder, and [here](#). Please return your completed aliyah form at least two weeks before your child's bar/bat mitzvah.
- Grandparents and parents are invited to participate in the passing of the Torah scroll from generation to generation.
- Younger siblings may have the honor of reading an English prayer for peace.
- Older siblings may have the honor of an aliyah, or of lifting the Torah scroll.
- You can find recordings and text for all blessings and prayers, including the Torah blessings recited by those honored with an aliyah here: <https://tiwestport.org/bneimitzvahmaterials>



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## Frequently Asked Questions about Aliyot

**Q:** *How many people can we have for each aliyah?*

**A:** Each family may invite anywhere from a single individual to a small group for each aliyah.

**Q:** *Can someone who is not Jewish have an aliyah?*

**A:** Yes, we welcome participation from people of all backgrounds. If a non-Jewish person has an aliyah, they may either join with Jewish relatives in reciting the Hebrew blessings, or they may recite the English translation of the closing Torah blessing:

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has given us a Torah of truth, implanting within us eternal life. Blessed are you Adonai, who gives Torah.

**Q:** *What if I don't know my/my child's Hebrew name?*

**A:** If you are not sure about your child's or your own Hebrew name(s), please discuss with your officiating clergy.

**Q:** *What if someone with an aliyah doesn't have, or doesn't know, their Hebrew name?*

**A:** You may simply leave this section blank in the form.

**Q:** *How can I practice the aliyah blessings?*

**A:** You can find recordings and text of the opening and closing Torah blessings [here](#).

**Q:** *How should I decide which of our loved ones should come up for each aliyah?*



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**A:** We suggest giving the third aliyah to the parents of the bar/bat/b'nei mitzvah child. The first and second aliyah may go to grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, dear friends, or anyone above the age of bar or bat mitzvah.

### **Photography & Videography**

All services will be professionally filmed, and the recording will be available to you afterwards. In addition, you may arrange a time to use our sanctuary for photographs immediately prior to or following the service. To reserve the sanctuary for photographs, please email Stephanie Schwartz [sschwartz@tiwestport.org](mailto:sschwartz@tiwestport.org). Temple Israel staff will be present to assist during the photo session. Photography is permitted during the service as long as the camera is stationary in the rear of the sanctuary.

### **Celebrations**

If you would like to hold your celebration on-site, please contact Stephanie Schwartz, our Director of Programming and Member Engagement: [sschwartz@tiwestport.org](mailto:sschwartz@tiwestport.org)

### **Live Streaming**

We livestream all b'nei mitzvah services [here](#).





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## Defining Key Terms

**B'nei Mitzvah:** “Child of the commandments.” A rite of passage in which a child takes their place as a fully participating adult member of the Jewish community.

Bar Mitzvah: for a male-identifying child

Bat Mitzvah: for a female-identifying child

B'not Mitzvah: for two female-identifying children

B'nei Mitzvah: for multiple children or a single non-binary child

**Parshah** (PAR-sha or pa-ra-SHA): “Portion.” Each week in the Jewish community, we read a different portion of the Torah. Generally each child who becomes b'nei mitzvah learns an assigned section from within the weekly Torah portion.

**Haftarah** (haf-ta-RAH): A reading from the book of Prophets. As part of our *b'nei mitzvah* process, we hold group “*haftarah workshops*” where each child learns about haftarah and selects the *haftarah* portion most meaningful to them.



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**D'var Torah:** “A word of Torah.” The speech each child gives at their service, explaining and bringing personal insight to their Torah portion. We provide five D'var Torah meetings for each child with their officiating rabbi, where the rabbi offers guidance and support in writing this speech.

**Aliyah** (ah-lee-YAH): “Coming up.” Loved ones may be honored with an aliyah, which means coming up to the *bima* to recite the blessings before and after reading Torah. We ask each family to fill out an Aliyah form with the names (in both English and Hebrew) of their honorees.

**Bima** (BEE-mah): “Stage.” The raised section in the front of our sanctuary where much of the service takes place.

**Tallit** (tah-LEET): A ritual prayer shawl that the child wears during the service.

**Tikkun Olam Project:** (tee-KOON oh-LAHM) “Repairing the world.” Each student completes a *tikkun olam* service project as a part of their b'nei mitzvah process.