
THE

B'nai Mitzvah HANDBOOK



Herzl-Ner Tamid Conservative Congregation B'nai Mitzvah Clergy and Staff

Briah Cahana - Rabbi
RabbiCahana@h-nt.org
206-232-8555 ext 211

Cantor Heather Batchelor - Cantor
cantorhb@h-nt.org
206-232-8555 ext. 207

Melanie Miller - Operations Director
melaniem@h-nt.org
206-232-8555 ext. 200

Irit Eliav Levin - Director of Education
irit@h-nt.org
206-232-8555 ext. 220

Sherri Shulman - B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator
bmcoordinator@h-nt.org





B'ruchim HaBa-im / Welcome!

Shalom parents and guardians,

We are so excited to partner with you on this sacred journey through the B'nai Mitzvah experience. The B'nai Mitzvah is a ceremony with many levels of meaning. For your child, it represents a coming of age, an opportunity to recognize potential, develop leadership skills, connect to the larger community, and shine in the presence of family and friends. For you, it is a time of reflection on twelve or thirteen years of parenthood, and an opportunity to anticipate new adventures in your child's future.

All of us at Herzl-Ner Tamid want to help you to make this occasion everything you want it to be. Please feel free to call upon our staff for advice, support and counsel.

Roles

The following section tells you more about the role of our clergy and staff in the B'nai Mitzvah process.

The Rabbi

The Rabbi will work with each student on the D'var Torah, or words of wisdom related to their specific Torah or Haftarah portion. The Rabbi is available to meet with parents and students throughout the process for counseling and special assistance.

The Cantor

The Cantor typically begins meeting with each student weekly in the six-eight months prior to the B'nai Mitzvah in order to learn their Haftarah, polish prayers and blessings, and practice on the bima.

The Administrative Assistant

The Administrative Assistant sends out important mailings and forms, schedules meetings with clergy and coordinates Hakol information.

Director of Education

The Director of Education will support your child throughout their time in the Frankel Religious School (FRS). The Director of Education will work with teachers to ensure students develop the educational foundation which will allow them to enter the B'nai Mitzvah process with confidence in their abilities to read Hebrew, chant their Haftarah, and lead portions of the service.

Operations Director

The Operations Director helps families organize the pre-neg, Kiddush luncheon, or other celebration arrangements at the synagogue. Please coordinate all building logistics and details with the person in this role.

B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator

The B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator is responsible for preparing the digital binder supporting student learning, overseeing the B'nai Mitzvah project, supporting family members who may want to read Torah at the B'nai Mitzvah ceremony, preparing the final slate of prayers the child will lead, and ensuring that all the members of the B'nai Mitzvah team (the Rabbi, the Cantor, FRS, any optional tutors) are working collaboratively with one another to support the student.

The B'nai Mitzvah Timeline

During the 5th Grade Year at FRS

- Group parent meeting with the Director of Education, Rabbi, Cantor, B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator, and the B'nai Mitzvah Schedulers to discuss the scheduling process.
- Parents complete the online B'nai Mitzvah ShulCloud form within 3-4 weeks after the group parent meeting to select their preferred date choices.
- Spring of 5th Grade Year: Distribution of B'nai Mitzvah list with assigned dates.
- Student attends FRS classes and synagogue for 5th grade, or is enrolled in a Jewish day school, or family makes alternate arrangements with the Director of Education.

8-10 Months Prior to B'nai Mitzvah (6th grade)

- Student's individual learning is assessed and B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator and FRS advise on tutoring timeline and strategy.
- Student maintains classroom attendance of at least 80% of FRS sessions.
- In addition to classroom attendance, family and student participate in Friday evening and Saturday morning services as often as possible.



6-8 Months Prior to B'nai Mitzvah (6th/7th grade)

Tutoring starts:

- Parents and students meet with the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator for a general orientation to discuss the B'nai Mitzvah process, begin to develop and discuss the mitzvah project, and answer questions.
- The B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator and the Cantor determine the schedule of prayers, prepare the Torah and Haftarah recordings, and prepare the student binders.
- The student prepares a Mitzvah Project proposal monitored by the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator.
- The Admin Assistant will contact the family to schedule the parent meeting with the Rabbi and Cantor.
- The student commences weekly Haftarah lessons with Cantor.

For the next six months the student will:

- Continue working with the Cantor.
- Continue working on the Mitzvah project, recording hours and accomplishments.
- Continue with family preparations, synagogue and classroom attendance.

5-6 Months Prior to B'nai Mitzvah (6th/7th grade)

Continue with family preparations, synagogue and classroom attendance:

- Family schedules meetings with the Rabbi to work on the student's D'var Torah (speech).
- Connect with the Operations Director to begin planning synagogue celebrations and options.

2-3 Months Prior to B'nai Mitzvah (7th grade)

- The student continues meeting with the Rabbi to prepare their D'var Torah.
- The family should begin assigning honors and Torah readers for B'nai Mitzvah service as desired.
- Parents begin preparing student bio for HaKol newsletter.
- Parents submit their family's Torah readers to the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator, who will provide materials and support for their preparation.
- Family's Torah readers schedule a time with the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator to review their Torah portion.
- Complete the ShulCloud form with the article and photo of the B'nai Mitzvah student by the first day of the month prior to the month of the B'nai Mitzvah. Example: for a March B'nai Mitzvah the profile and photo must be submitted by February 1.
- Finalize celebratory details and forms.
- Bring HNT account up to date.
- Family plans for Friday night prior to B'nai Mitzvah celebration, so as to accommodate student's co-leading of synagogue services.



1 Month Prior to B'nai Mitzvah (7th grade)

- Complete D'var Torah and email to the Rabbi and Admin Assistant.
- Optional: Email the insert for the brochure to the Rabbi and Admin Assistant for approval. Comments must be limited to a half-page (8.5x 5.5). You are responsible for printing and cutting it.
- Parents submit Family Participation Form to the Admin Assistant.
- Confirm Torah readers with B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator.
- Schedule family "dress rehearsal" with clergy. This will also be the opportunity for family photos.
- Finalize catering details with the Operations Director.
- Review brochure with the Admin Assistant.

2 Weeks Prior to B'nai Mitzvah (7th grade)

- Mitzvah Project complete.
- Parents submit their remarks/speech of blessing to the child (300 word limit) to the Rabbi and Admin Assistant by email.
- 5 to 10 days prior to the B'nai Mitzvah all Family's Torah readers must meet with or call the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator to review their Torah portion chanting.

For helpful links regarding items on this page please visit <https://mailchi.mp/b92305fd05c1/1om5zvi0lq>, or see the links on the last page of this handbook.

1 Week Prior to B'nai Mitzvah (7th grade)

- Family meets with clergy for the final “dress rehearsal” and photos.
- **Monday:** Prior to this day, all Torah readers must have met with the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator regarding their Torah portion.
- **Tuesday:** Deliver printed and cut copies of the approved brochure insert (optional) and family-ordered kippot (optional) and any candy (also optional) to the Admin Assistant.
- **Friday:** Family attends Friday night services in synagogue and student participates in co-leading prayers.
- B'nai Mitzvah will be announced in the months' HaKol and the eKol the week of the event.

Additional Notes: Any (optional) tutors must be approved by the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator to ensure consistency and on-going communication.

Family Membership

1. The family of the B'nai Mitzvah need to be members in good standing at Herzl-Ner Tamid.
2. All synagogue financial responsibilities must be current. This includes membership dues, building fund obligations, Frankel Religious School tuition, and B'nai Mitzvah fees.
3. It is mandatory that all students who have a B'nai Mitzvah scheduled at HNT be continuously enrolled in the Frankel Religious School, a Jewish Day School, or an equivalent program.
4. There is a one-time B'nai Mitzvah fee that is charged two years in advance.

Please contact the HNT office for an updated fee schedule and to arrange payments. **Accommodations will be made such that no family will be turned away due to financial limitations.**



Leadership Opportunities

When a B'nai Mitzvah leads the congregation in prayer, they are serving as "Shaliach Tzibbur", one who represents the community before God. This is an honor requiring respect, competence and commitment. The skills and values which our B'nai Mitzvah gains as each becomes a Shaliach Tzibbur stay with them long after the day of the B'nai Mitzvah celebration.

On Friday Night

- Selected prayers from Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma'ariv service for Friday Night: we encourage all our students to participate in some way in the Friday night service before their B'nai Mitzvah. If a B'nai Mitzvah service occurs on Saturday morning or afternoon, then the student is encouraged to lead the Friday before the service.
- If the B'nai Mitzvah service occurs on a weekday, we encourage Friday night participation following the Monday, Thursday, or Rosh Hodesh service instead of before to make it more convenient for out-of-town relatives to attend.

On Saturday Morning

- Blessings for the wearing of tallit
- Selected prayers during the Shabbat Morning Service
- Torah Brachot (blessings before & after the Torah reading)
- Torah portions: the maftir and optional additional readings
- Haftarah (portion from the Prophets)
- Haftarah Brachot (blessings before & after the Prophetic reading)
- D'var Torah (speech) – an opportunity for your child to share with the congregation something significant they have learned from the Biblical portion(s) and from the process of becoming a B'nai Mitzvah

Attendance at Shabbat Services

Attendance at Shabbat services prior to the B'nai Mitzvah celebration is an important part of your child's learning.

Please attend Shabbat services regularly beginning no later than nine months prior to your child's B'nai Mitzvah celebration. This will allow you to familiarize yourselves with the Shabbat service, forge bonds with fellow parents and congregants, and become comfortable in the synagogue setting.

Bimah Honors / Aliyot

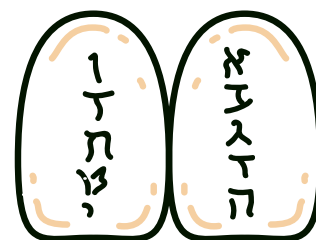
Being called to the Torah is a significant honor in Judaism. The profound spiritual importance of this honor is reflected in the name of the ritual, "aliyah," which means "ascending" or "going up."

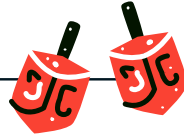
There are a number of Bimah and Torah honors in the service. Each B'nai Mitzvah family has the privilege of selecting people for some of these honors.

The Family Honors Participation Form will be distributed to you.

This form must be completed and returned to the HNT office one month prior to the B'nai Mitzvah.

Note: B'nai Mitzvah celebrations take place in the context of community and congregational worship. While family and friends have important roles in leading the service or may receive aliyot in honor of the B'nai Mitzvah, frequently the congregation will be acknowledging another occasion such as a baby naming, an upcoming wedding, an anniversary, or a yahrzeit. Therefore, not all bimah honors can be pre-assigned to family members or friends of the B'nai Mitzvah.





Guest and Family Torah Readers

Likewise, family members may have the opportunity to chant a portion from the Torah reading. If your family members intend to chant Torah, you must notify the B'nai Mitzvah coordinator at least **two months prior** to your event in order to reserve portions. These readers must demonstrate proficiency and competency to the B'nai Mitzvah coordinator in reading the Torah **two weeks prior to the event**.



Parents' Charge

On the day of the B'nai Mitzvah parents are invited to share words of blessing with their children. The words should be modest, brief (300 words per family). *The focus should be on Jewish values, ideally linked to the parasha.* The Rabbi, Cantor, the Director of Education, and the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator are available to offer guidance and ideas.

Please submit your remarks to the Rabbi by email two weeks before the B'nai Mitzvah for review.

Celebrate

Most B'nai Mitzvah celebrations include a festive meal, or seudat mitzvah. Some options are listed below. Please connect with the Operations Director to discuss the details. **Note:** All food served in the synagogue must come from an approved kosher caterer or have kosher certification.

“Pre-Neg” (Snack before services)

Although it is not required, families are encouraged to sponsor a “pre-neg” prior to the 6:00 PM Friday evening service on the weekend of the B'nai Mitzvah celebration.

Synagogue Kiddush

It is traditional to provide a light lunch for your guests and the members of the congregation after the service.

Other Meals

Because social events connected to B'nai Mitzvah are part of the religious experience, we urge you to observe Shabbat and kashrut in all aspects of your celebration and to include the appropriate blessings.

If you are interested in hosting a Shabbat dinner on Friday evening at the synagogue please contact the Operations Director.

Catering and Kitchen Use

Please note that we respect the halachic interpretation of Shabbat in that all food must be cooked before Shabbat.

ONLY A SYNAGOGUE APPROVED CATERER MAY BE

USED. Our list of synagogue approved caterers know our kitchen, our policies, and comply with Shabbat and Kashrut guidelines. Food prepared in any home or other outside source may not be brought into the synagogue.

It is the responsibility of each family and caterer to coordinate the disposal or removal of all leftover food after Shabbat.

Deliveries

All deliveries for weekend events at Herzl-Ner Tamid, must be within regular office hours: Monday –Thursday 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM, Friday 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM. This includes flowers, food, decorations, equipment, utensils, and supplies. No deliveries can come in or out while Shabbat is celebrated.

Enhancements

Tallit and kippot

Each B'nai Mitzvah student will need his/her own tallit (prayer shawl) and kippah. Tallit and kippot are available at the Herzl-Ner Tamid Gift Shop.

Optionally, many families order kippot embossed with their children's names and the date of their simcha. HNT also has a supply of generic kippot for your guests to use.

Invitations

- For invitations to B'nai Mitzvah parties: If you plan to invite at least half the FRS class to your child's party, please invite the entire class.
- Please note the correct spelling of our congregation's name: Herzl-Ner Tamid Conservative Congregation.

Use wording that reinforces the significance of the occasion, such as:

- "Please worship with us and share our joy when our child (name) is called to the Torah as a B'nai Mitzvah on (date)."

Decorations

Although decorations are optional, please consider the following as alternatives to floral arrangements:

- Mitzvah baskets (containing kosher food to be donated, toys for the needy, personal need items or books) are a nice alternative to fresh flowers.
- Table centerpieces or place cards can be printed with the name of the tzedakah agency receiving donations from your child.
- **Please note:** No photos or likeness of the B'nai Mitzvah are permitted at the Kiddush, on the brochure, or in the Sanctuary. The focus of the ritual of B'nai Mitzvah is on your child entering the community and not solely on the B'nai Mitzvah as an individual.

SUMMARY OF FEES (Subject to change)

B'nai Mitzvah Fee: (Not Tax Deductible)

Effective June 2026

This required fee helps to defray the costs of training and materials. This fee will be charged to your synagogue account when your child is in the sixth grade. This might be as little as nine months or as much as eighteen months prior to the B'nai Mitzvah date. This fee can be paid over time, but must be paid in full prior to the B'nai Mitzvah date.

All costs associated with invited guests or catering options are in addition to the B'nai Mitzvah fee.

Pre-Shabbat Oneg (Optional Sponsorship):

\$25 – A variety of sweets and fruit will be available for all Friday service attendees to enjoy.

Additional Fees:

-Kitchen use (includes mashgiach) \$40 per hour

This charge covers the cost of a mashgiach, as well as overhead costs and wear and tear on the kitchen. The hours are provided by the caterer and are billed after the event. This is prep, cooking, clean-up etc.

For questions about fee structure facility or kitchen use, including arrangements for Pre-Neg, Shabbat Dinner at HNT and Kiddush luncheon, please consult with the Operations Director.

-Table Setup - \$20 per table

This covers the setup of tables and chairs and a paper tablecloth.

Special Arrangements or Accommodations

Private Tutoring

In cases where children have special learning needs, or if there are gaps in their Hebrew skills that need additional support, the Director of Education, along with the child's teachers, may recommend private tutoring to supplement the child's ongoing educational program. Some families choose to engage a private tutor because they find the extra support helpful, even though tutoring would not necessarily be required. Any tutor must be approved by the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator so that consistency and on-going communication will be maintained throughout the course of the B'nai Mitzvah training period. Payment arrangements are made directly between the parents and the tutor.

Students with Disabilities or Learning Needs

Herzl-Ner Tamid (HNT) is committed to meeting the needs of all our students, both within the Frankel Religious School (FRS) and as part of the B'nai Mitzvah Process. HNT has established the Rachel Trager Fund to provide additional support for students who qualify for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan within their secular school. Students who need additional support, but who do not have one of these plans may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Herzl-Ner Tamid includes 20 lessons as part of the B'nai Mitzvah process. Students who qualify for additional support may receive up to 20 additional lessons to ensure that they are able to have a meaningful and rewarding B'nai Mitzvah experience.

For students who need an additional *madrich(a)* (teenage assistant) to support them in their FRS classroom, the Rachel Trager Fund can also help to support that process to ensure that they are set up for success at FRS.

We believe strongly in partnering with families to ensure that HNT and FRS are supportive and welcoming environments for all children. We want to ensure that your child's needs and wishes are fulfilled, with the highest possible *Kavod* (respect).

Saturday Afternoon Services (Mincha)

In a situation where participating in a Shabbat morning service poses specific learning challenges or obstacles for the student, families can request the option of a Mincha service or weekday morning service. Please discuss these options with the Director of Education before selecting a specific day or service, as prayers, melodies and Torah readings vary greatly between services.

The Shabbat Mincha service typically begins at 4:00 or 4:30 PM and lasts about an hour. It may or may not include the Havdalah ceremony, depending on the time of year. Arrangements may also be made for a post-Mincha meal (*seudah shlishit*).



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between the Torah reading and the Haftarah reading?

The Torah Readings on Shabbat and Festivals are followed by a selection from one of the books of the Prophets, (the second section of the Hebrew Bible.) The reading from the Prophets is the "Haftarah," which means "concluding portion." While the Torah reading is chanted from a scroll and must be partially memorized, the Haftarah can be chanted from any copy of the texts. In addition the melodies for chanting these texts are distinct from each other.

How will my child learn to chant their Torah and Haftarah portions?

Portions of text from the Torah and Haftarah are each chanted according to an ancient system of codes known as "trope." Once a child has mastered the systems of trope, he or she can chant any Torah or Haftarah portion, and therefore has a lifelong skill. Students are taught trope basics as part of their religious school curriculum in FRS and complete their preparation with the Cantor and optional private tutoring.

What is a *D'var Torah*?

Students are expected to prepare and deliver a speech or "D'var Torah" highlighting an important Jewish issue or concept from their Torah portion. This is an opportunity for each B'nai Mitzvah to share unique personal insights and learning.

Who helps my child with their *D'var Torah*?

Students will meet privately with the Rabbi or a specially assigned tutor for resources and guidance. Please contact the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator for guidance on this process and arrangements.

In addition, HNT congregant Richard Panick, is a professional speech coach, and is available to work with students on preparing the presentation part of their speeches. Please contact Mr. Panick at rgpanick@gmail.com to make arrangements.

The "Mitzvah" in B'nai Mitzvah: Mitzvah Projects

In addition to preparing for their service, students are expected to complete a mitzvah project. This is a way to connect with Jewish values and tradition by putting them into action through acts of kindness, community service, or social justice initiatives. The project should align with the individual's passions and values, and often involves volunteering or raising awareness about a cause. For ideas and information on mitzvah projects, consult your binder and the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator



Important Links

Schedule Time With the Rabbi and/or Cantor

Rabbi - <https://calendly.com/rabbicahana-h-nt>

Cantor - <https://calendly.com/cantorhb-h-nt>

Submit Your B'nai Mitzvah Photo and Write-Up for HaKol, Our Monthly Newsletter

(please sign-in to your Shulcloud account or the photo will not save)

<https://h-nt.shulcloud.com/form/B'nai-Mitzvah-Hakol-Write-up>

Download the Family Participation Form

<https://h-nt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Family-Participation-Form.pdf> (Standard)

<https://h-nt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Family-Participation-Form-Twins.pdf> (Twins)

<https://h-nt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Family-Participation-Form-Mincha.pdf> (Mincha)

<https://h-nt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Family-Participation-Form-2-Family.pdf> (Two family)

Choose Your B'nai Mitzvah Brochure Cover

(please add the cover number to your Family Participation Form)

<https://h-nt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/BM-Brochure-Covers-with-Number.pdf>

Questions? Contact us at info@h-nt.org

Notes
