



B'nei Mitzvah Handbook 2019

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Dear Parents,

Mazel Tov on your child soon becoming Bar or Bat (plural: B'nei) Mitzvah!

In the Jewish community, children become B'nei Mitzvah at the age of 13. Until this age, parents bear the responsibility for teaching Jewish children how to live according to our values. When they turn 13, your B'nei Mitzvah child becomes increasingly responsible for carrying out the commitments of Jewish life. To mark this occasion, it is customary for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to demonstrate his or her acceptance of these responsibilities and privileges by engaging with and teaching Torah, leading the community in prayer, and undertaking a mitzvah project as a symbol of commitment to Jewish values. This is an important moment to mark in the middle of your child's Jewish education, which stretches from birth through old age.

This handbook offers you in-depth information on the ritual and ceremony of B'nei Mitzvah, the path children at Congregation Beth Elohim take in their studies before and after their B'nei Mitzvah, and the logistics and procedures for preparing for and planning your event. We hope that it will serve to answer many of your questions, but our Clergy Administrator, Juliane McManus (jmcm Manus@cbebk.org), will also be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

We are very excited that in February we will host our annual post-B'nei Mitzvah trip to Israel with our 8th graders. This is a unique opportunity for your children to explore Israel with their peers, clergy and teachers! Highlights will include hiking and jeep tours in the Galilee and Negev, swimming in the Dead Sea, a Shabbat in Jerusalem, cultural highlights of Tel Aviv, and amazing food as we travel from North to South! The Israel trip is just the beginning of the amazing CBE Teen Program, which continues with trips, social activities and creative, hands-on Jewish learning through 12th grade.

Please be sure to read the schedule and mitzvah project sections of this handbook as many things have changed.

We look forward to working with and celebrating with your family.

Mazel Tov,
Rabbi Rachel Timoner
Cantor Josh Breitzer
Rabbi Rebecca Epstein

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Introduction

The Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony is an important event in the life of a Jewish child and family. It is a religious ceremony that celebrates a child's passage into adulthood in the eyes of the Jewish community. At this time, children are expected to accept the same responsibilities of the spiritual life of the community as other adult members. Beyond ritual maturity, it reflects emerging moral responsibility.

The Bar Mitzvah ceremony can be traced back to the twelfth century, when boys who reached age thirteen were considered ready to begin adult life. At Congregation Beth Elohim, both boys and girls celebrate their B'nei Mitzvah upon reaching their thirteenth birthday. Of course, in today's society we recognize that secular education is not complete when grade school is completed, and most adult responsibilities are postponed at least until the end of the teen years. Therefore, the B'nei Mitzvah is viewed not as an end, but as a significant milestone after which students engage even more fully and actively in their Jewish education.

We expect all of our students to make Jewish education a lifelong journey, which includes continuing their Jewish education through 12th grade. Our 8th grade students continue their Yachad education one evening a week and participate in an Israel trip in the late winter of their 8th grade year. Teens who visit Israel invariably return with a strengthened commitment to the Jewish people and a better understanding of the political, cultural, and religious issues that face us as Jews in the contemporary world.

Our 9th through 12th grade students attend our CBE High School program, which is held on weekday evenings, and participate in our informal youth programming and youth group. In high school, students have the opportunity to study in adult-level seminar-style learning, engage in community service and service-learning, build community through programs and projects, and share dinner together. Each year, our students participate in a trip together focused on social justice and Jewish life, while bonding and having fun.

Student Requirements to become B'nei Mitzvah at CBE

All candidates for B'nei Mitzvah must attend the Yachad Program at Congregation Beth Elohim. We require all students to attend at least three years of the Yachad program before becoming B'nei Mitzvah. The 6th, 7th, and 8th grade curricula include learning that is complementary to and essential for the B'nei Mitzvah experience. All B'nei Mitzvah candidates must be enrolled in Yachad in the year of their ceremony and we expect all students to participate at least through their 8th grade year.

A reading knowledge of Hebrew is essential for the standard B'nei Mitzvah ceremony. That said, we are committed to making the B'nei Mitzvah experience accessible to each student according to their developmental or learning abilities. Please do not hesitate to discuss any needs or concerns with our clergy.

All students are expected to attend Shabbat services at Congregation Beth Elohim Saturday mornings regularly during their 6th, 7th, and 8th grade years, and to attend the B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies of all their classmates that take place during the Yachad service on Shabbat morning. Of course, there will be dates in the year when conflicts arise and students are unable to attend, but we expect your children to be participating in the CBE Shabbat community most Shabbat mornings during the academic year. Service attendance will be monitored by our faculty. We strongly urge parents to attend with their children so that the whole family is familiar with the service and there to support other classmates in their *simchas* (joyous occasions).

The Student's Role in Preparation

B'nei Mitzvah dates are assigned during the 5th grade year. As our community continues to grow, two families will often be assigned the same date. Date changes are unusual and requests for date changes must be made through the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator, who will then consult with our clergy and event planning staff. Through Yachad curriculum and *tefillah* (worship) attendance from 3rd-7th grade, students will learn the prayers of our worship service and develop facility with leading these prayers.

In 6th grade, families take part in a Shabbat retreat with the clergy team away from CBE, followed up with two more meetings later in the year held at CBE. These meetings help all our B'nei Mitzvah families build bonds, establish community goals, and begin the process of studying Torah together. By the final meeting, families will have completed a close reading of their *parshiyot* and "presented" them to each other. We are especially eager to facilitate relationships between families celebrating b'nei mitzvah on the same date.

We expect all students to practice 25 minutes every day. It is very important that the children practice at home so they do not fall behind in their preparation and tutoring time. Some parents find that their children need additional tutoring to focus on their practice. Sometimes we suggest that your child needs a tutor for some Hebrew remediation. Should you need or wish to hire an additional private tutor, we can provide you with a list of qualified tutors. **We will allow each student to miss one session, but after that we will need to charge the family for a make-up session with their *melamed*. The cost of each make-up session with the *melamdim* is \$75.00 per hour.**

Ten months prior, students meet individually with Cantor Breitzer to review Torah blessings and cantillation. Cantor Breitzer provides a Dropbox link to recordings of pertinent prayers and blessings. This is the first of several individual meetings with Cantor Breitzer to be held every 4-6 weeks. In between meetings with Cantor Breitzer, students meet individually every week for 20 minutes with one of our *melamdim* (tutors) to learn and record their Torah and haftarah verses. Most students learn between 10-15 verses of Torah and 3-5 verses of Haftarah.

Three months before the B'nei Mitzvah date, students begin meeting regularly with one of the CBE clergy to research and write the d'var Torah. Each month, Rabbi Timoner meets for a sweet treat with all the b'nei mitzvah students who are celebrating in the following month.

On the Thursday evening before the B'nei Mitzvah date, parents meet with Rabbi Timoner in her study and then the whole family (both families in the case of a double) meet in the Sanctuary for a final rehearsal with Cantor Breitzer.

The Parents' Role in Preparation

During this time of intense preparation we strongly urge you to make a special effort to support your child and demonstrate awareness of this year as a rite of passage for the entire family. Therefore, we encourage your attendance at Shabbat Morning Services as a family, so that you will become thoroughly familiar with our worship practices. The more familiar you are with the service the more comfortable you will be at your child's ceremony. During the academic year, Shabbat Mornings begin at 9:15 AM with "Bagels and B'rachot" in the Rotunda, and then services in the Sanctuary begin at 9:30 AM.

Mandatory Parental Participation

As you guide your child toward demonstrating that he/she is a fully responsible member

of our community, we ask you to take responsibility in a few ways during the course of your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah year. These are requirements of the B'nei Mitzvah parents as a part of our B'nei Mitzvah Program.

1. Usher at three B'nei Mitzvah Services

Your child will already be attending Shabbat morning services regularly in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade years. Within the 2 years prior to your child's B'nei Mitzvah we ask that you usher at least three services (greet worshippers and distribute prayer books and pamphlets). This is an excellent way to meet other congregants, participate in the community, and to show your child the importance of your own regular participation in Jewish worship. When signing up to usher please note that you will need to be at the service 30-45 minutes prior to the start to help hand out books and pamphlets, and get everyone seated. The Clergy Administrator will share a link with you to the volunteer sign-up list, so you can select your 3+ dates to usher.

2. Attend the family education events during the 6th, 7th and 8th grade years:

We hold several family education events throughout the year, which parents attend with their children. The dates for these programs will be announced during the school year.

Mitzvah and Tzedakah Projects

Throughout their years at CBE, our young people will have many opportunities to engage in service projects through Yachad and with their families. As children get older our hope is that they will get more and more deeply involved in projects that enable them to encounter and relate to people across lines of neighborhood, race, and class, and through which they are confronting deep questions of social justice and sustainability in our society and world. In the teen years, students will learn community organizing and will engage their peers in a change campaign on an issue of their choosing. They will travel to the South to learn about the history of Jews in the Civil Rights movement and to Washington, DC, where they will learn about the legislative process and will lobby on Capitol Hill.

In their B'nei Mitzvah year, we will ask two things of our young people. First, we ask that our B'nei Mitzvah participate in a service opportunity that requires some significant effort on behalf of the child and their family. Our recommendation is that the Bar or Bat Mitzvah and one parent spend one night in the CBE Homeless Shelter. CBE hosts a homeless shelter for 12-14 men for five to six weeks each spring. The men are in a

strict, closely supervised, and rigorous program to prepare them for housing and jobs. They are respectful and deeply grateful for the ability to spend the night at CBE. They come in, eat dinner, talk with their hosts, and go to bed. CBE provides two or more volunteers each night who spend the night in the shelter. Anyone B'nei Mitzvah age or older is eligible.

We encourage you to consider this opportunity as an experience that your child will always remember in connection to their B'nei Mitzvah. If you or your child feel that this is too much of a stretch, we encourage you to cook dinner for the men and eat with them. If neither of these opportunities sounds possible for your family, we invite you to choose your own mitzvah project that is meaningful to you.

During the 7th Grade in Yachad, the students will be learning for one-third of the year about Tzedakah. They will learn the Jewish foundations of Tzedakah, they will learn about organizations and causes that are worthy recipients of their generosity. This will be a significant focus of the 7th grade year, and we will be guiding families to discuss this project together, especially as it relates to the gifts they will receive for their B'nei Mitzvah, and the opportunity to give back that is afforded at this moment in the young person's life.

Schedule and Logistics: What You and Your Guests Should Know

At CBE we are a community and it is a tradition that B'nei Mitzvah students are called to the Torah in front of the community. All B'nei Mitzvah Ceremonies take place on Saturday mornings during the scheduled Shabbat morning service.

Shabbat Morning Schedule for Yachad Service:

8:15 - 9:10 AM: Space available for photographs (optional)

9:15 - 9:30 AM - Community Bagels and B'rachot in the Rotunda

9:30 - 11:45 AM Shabbat Morning Service in the Sanctuary

11:45 AM (Approximately): Conclusion of service

Be sure to let your guests know that we do start on time. Accordingly, many congregants tell their guests to arrive at 9:15 AM. Driving instructions to Congregation Beth Elohim are available (on our website) for you to include in your invitations. Please make sure your guests understand that they will need ample time for finding on-street parking and walking to CBE. Also, let your guests know that your service will take place

in the Sanctuary (271 Garfield Place, the domed building on the NE corner of 8th Avenue).

The B'nei Mitzvah Ritual

On the Shabbat Evening, at Friday night services, all the members of the family are invited to bless the Shabbat candles. If you are not familiar with this blessing, please contact Cantor Breitzer who will be glad to help you prepare.

At Shabbat Morning Service, the following customs are followed:

Depending on the size of the Torah portion we will hand out *Aliyot* (the honor of being called for a Torah blessing). The B'nei Mitzvah will be given one of these *aliyot* and the parents of the B'nei Mitzvah may also have an *Aliyah* if they wish. When the student is called to the Torah, they will read the Torah blessings in Hebrew (the *Aliyah*). Students will generally chant 10-15 verses from the Torah. Other members of the family or of the CBE community often chant Torah before the B'nei mitzvah do.

The B'nei Mitzvah will chant the *Haftarah* blessings in Hebrew and chant a short excerpt of *Haftarah* (3-5 verses) followed by a *D'var Torah* (a teaching of Torah) either as an original address or interactive presentation on the Torah portion.

If there is a special *tallit* (prayer shawl) that you wish to present to the B'nei Mitzvah at the start of the ceremony, please speak with the Clergy Administrator. Please also note this on your honors sheet.

Silent honors may be conferred on other participants such as the opening of the Ark, walking with the Torah, and dressing the Torah. Please provide names of all participants in a timely fashion for inclusion in the pamphlet. Jewish and non-Jewish people are all welcome to have these honors in our services.

During the service, Yachad students are dismissed to their classes.

At a congregation like ours, every family's composition is unique, and it is important that every family feel welcome and included in the service. We invite you to come and talk with our Clergy about your family's needs and concerns

regarding participation in the B'nei Mitzvah ceremony.

Customs of the Congregation

It is the custom of this congregation to leave the choice of wearing a *kippah* (traditional head covering) or *tallit* to each individual. The B'nei Mitzvah may choose to wear a *kippah* and/or *tallit*. Guests and participants may also wear *kippot* or *talitot* as they choose. If you wish your guests to have *kippot* as mementos of the service, please bring them on the day of the ceremony. There is a supply of *kippot* and *talitot* available to those who may want to borrow one during the service.

Everyone who attends is encouraged to participate fully in the service. Our *siddur* (prayer book) is fully transliterated to enable everyone to do so. The Clergy will strive to explain many of the prayers and to give page numbers so that everyone can find their place and understand the meaning of the prayers.

The Torah will be carried down the aisle before it is read. It is the custom for many in this congregation to touch the Torah dressings with the prayer book or the plate with fingers and to kiss the book or fingers as a sign of love and reverence for the Torah. This is not an obligation. Guests to whom the Torah is a holy book are welcome to join in this custom at Congregation Beth Elohim.

We recommend that each B'nei Mitzvah student be presented by their parents or family with the gift of a Judaic ritual objects such as: a *Kiddush* cup, a pair of Shabbat candlesticks, a *Mezuzah* and/or a personal *tallit* and *kippah*. These ritual items will become a part of his/her personal ritual legacy.

You may consider writing a short personalized introduction and welcome for distribution with invitations. This is a friendly way to tell your guests about our congregation's customs.

Adding Meaning to the Ritual

CBE is proud to celebrate b'nei mitzvah with families of all different backgrounds, including those of multiple faiths. When considering who in your family will have an *aliyah* (the honor of chanting the Torah blessings), know that the CBE clergy have twin goals of maximum inclusion and maximum authenticity -- that no one should feel excluded, but that also no one should feel that they are saying words that make them

pretend to be something they're not. We offer families four options:

- 1) non-Jewish family remain seated, offering love and support from the pews;
- 2) non-Jewish family stand with their Jewish family members and participate with their presence but not the words of the blessing;
- 3) non-Jews read the English blessing in *Mishkan Tefilah* opposite the Hebrew blessings on that page. The language does not assume the reader is Jewish and it can be followed by the chanting of the Hebrew blessings by the Jews in the group;
- 4) non-Jews can join their Jewish family members in chanting the blessing in Hebrew.

Setting the Date

All B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies at Congregation Beth Elohim are held during regularly scheduled congregational services. Any date reasonably close to the child's 13th birthday is appropriate; dates any time after the 13th birthday are also possible. In 5th grade, families will be given a B'nei Mitzvah date request form that allows them to select 5 (five) Saturday morning dates for their child's ceremony. The B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator will work on the calendaring, and will let you know which of the 5 requested dates your child was given.

Scheduling will not proceed if there are outstanding financial obligations to CBE. You must remain current in your financial obligations during the B'nei Mitzvah process.

Postponement

The Clergy reserve the right to postpone the date of the ceremony for any student who is not progressing adequately in his or her studies, for failing to maintain regular attendance at Yachad, or for failing to meet the Shabbat service requirements.

Photography/Video Recording

The photographer should arrange to speak to the Events Manager prior to the event to discuss Temple procedures. **No flash photography** is allowed during the service. Please be sure that your guests understand that photos may only be taken before or after the service, not during the service itself. All professional photography and videography must take place from the balcony using only available light with a stationary camera. The Sanctuary will be open by 8:00 AM for photography set up.

The Clergy will be glad to take pictures with the family and student on the morning of the ceremony, between 9:00 - 9:10 AM.

Flowers

Families may choose to order and purchase floral displays for the bimah in consultation with the Events Manager.

Oneg Shabbat/Bagels and B'rachot

It is customary for the B'nei Mitzvah family to join in sponsoring the Oneg Shabbat enjoyed after Shabbat Evening Services on the eve of the B'nei Mitzvah, and the Bagels provided before the start of the Shabbat Morning Service. Please contact the Events Manager, Diane Schevelowitz (dschevelowitz@cbebk.org) to make this sponsorship.

The Friday night *Oneg* will feature platters of cookies and fruit, challah, wine, and grape juice. Before Shabbat morning services begin there is an assortment of bagels, cream cheese, butter, juice, milk, coffee, and tea. All families with *simchas* on Shabbat are invited to sponsor the community breakfast and invite their guests to join our community in public celebration of the simcha. This event is also referred to as a *Seudat Mitzvah* which means a celebration meal connected with a mitzvah. Many CBE families want to share the celebration of the event with other family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles etc. who wish to sponsor the *Oneg*, or "Bagels and B'rachot."

These suggested donations change in response to needs and costs, but as of May 2016, the suggested donations are:

Friday evening *Oneg*: \$250.00

Saturday morning "Bagels and B'rachot" breakfast: \$150.00

Should you wish to sponsor a community Kiddush following Saturday morning services, please speak with the events manager.

B'nei Mitzvah Fees

The B'nei Mitzvah Training Fee of \$1,550 will be added to your Congregational bill and is due six months before the B'nei Mitzvah date. The fee covers:

Extensive tutoring in preparation for the B'nei Mitzvah provided by the Clergy, clergy interns, and other melamdim.

The services of the Events Manager and B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator.

Family Education programs during the B'nei Mitzvah year.

Please know that the B'nei Mitzvah fees do not cover the rental of any rooms or spaces at CBE for your reception after the *Kiddush*. You are under no obligation to use CBE facilities for your celebration or reception, but the facilities are available to CBE members at a discount (see "Celebrating at CBE" below).

Tzedakah

There is a longstanding Jewish tradition of giving tzedakah in honor of a life-cycle event or simcha. Usually, families choose to make a donation in honor of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah to the officiating rabbi and/or cantor's discretionary fund. This discretionary fund is used for charitable giving at the discretion of the clergy member. There is no specific amount expected; our tradition understands that each gift from the heart matters.

Celebrating at CBE

CBE has several spaces that are available for celebrations following services. You may choose to have a luncheon at CBE immediately following the service or an evening event. You may use any caterer you choose, but please make sure they can present a Certificate of Liability and Worker's Compensation to our office. The charges for use of specific spaces are set by the Board of Trustees. Please speak with the Events Manager, Diane Schevelowitz (dschevelowitz@cbebk.org) for current charges and to reserve your space(s).

CBE's rental inventory includes the setup and breakdown of 6 foot, 8 foot and 60" round tables, blond wooden folding chairs with cream cushions, dinner and dessert plates, coffee cups, utensils as well as wine and water glassware. Caterers and third-party vendors, however, are expected to set-up and breakdown any items not owned by CBE. We expect the room and kitchen to be left free of garbage and swept with a broom. All details are outlined in the room rental forms.

If you are interested in using CBE facilities for your celebration, please speak to our Events Manager as soon as possible. The life cycle celebrations of our congregants are always given priority; however, demand for CBE space is strong and early reservations are often a good idea.

Due to our busy CBE calendar, there are usually other events scheduled during the same weekend as your child's B'nei Mitzvah. It is possible that you will not have access to the Ballroom, Social Hall, Lobby, or kitchen until the morning of the ceremony. Please make clear to your caterers that they too may not have access to the kitchen until Saturday morning. This can be critical information if you plan to use a kosher caterer.

Celebrating Elsewhere

Of course, you may choose to celebrate elsewhere: at a local restaurant, at home or at a catering hall. If you are thinking about these options and want to know how other people have done it, check with the Events Manager who can provide you with a vendor

and venue list --- we also encourage you to contact other B'nei Mitzvah families who have already experienced this wonderful life cycle moment.

Glossary

Aliyah (pl. *Aliyot*): The honor of being “called up” to recite the blessings for reading the Torah before and after an assigned passage from the Torah at Sabbath morning services. Also refers to passage of Torah chanted in between the blessings.

D'var Torah (pl. *divrei Torah*): “word of Torah.” A 5-7 minute teaching that B'nei mitzvah present to the community which should include verses of *Haftarah*, traditional Jewish sources, and ultimately their own thoughts on the *parashah*. The *d'var Torah* should be delivered in a way consistent with each student's skills and interests. Former b'nei mitzvah at CBE have used art, drama, music, poetry, and technology to give their *divrei Torah*.

Haftarah: “departure” Selection from the Biblical prophets thematically relating to the week's *parashah*. On some Shabbatot, the *haftarah* relates to a holiday or the particular time of year. B'nei mitzvah at CBE choose part of the *haftarah* to chant as part of their d'var Torah.

Kippah (pl. *Kippot*; Yiddish *yarmulke*): skullcap/head covering

Kiddush: Blessing over the wine

Maftir: “one who departs,” i.e. the Bar/Bat mitzvah who chants the *haftarah*.

Mitzvah: A commandment, a Jewish action, colloquially, a good deed

Motzi: also know as Hamozti, is the blessing over bread, on Shabbat said over challah.

Parashah (pl. *parshiyot*): Torah portion; one of 54 Jews read on an annual cycle every week. During holidays, we read special *parshiyot* relating to those holidays.

Seudat Mitzvah: a celebratory meal with the community as a part of the sanctification of a life-cycle event

Tallit (Tallis in Yiddish, *Talitot/Talleisim* for plural in Hebrew/Yiddish): a prayer shawl with fringes, worn for morning prayers by someone over the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Ceremony Checklist

2 years -1 year prior

- _____ Read this manual
- _____ Hand in date confirmation form
- _____ Learn about the ceremony
- _____ Attend all Family Education Workshops
- _____ Sign up to usher at least three Shabbat services

12-9 months prior

- _____ Check in with B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator about tutoring
- _____ Attend Shabbat services as a regular worshiper in the school year of the event
- _____ Decide how and where you want to celebrate after the ceremony and notify Events Manager
- _____ Order or create invitations, send copy to B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator
- _____ Begin various clergy meetings
- _____ Begin tutoring process

3 months Prior

- _____ Pay all fees at least four weeks before the ceremony
- _____ Speak with Events Manager about special concerns for *Oneg, Kiddush or Bagels and Brachot sponsorship*
- _____ Communicate with Rabbi Timoner regarding family honors
- _____ Bar/bat mitzvah "date" with Rabbi Timoner

2 months prior

- _____ Mail invitations at least eight weeks in advance of date, check with the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator if you're unsure of what time to put on the invitations

4 weeks prior

- _____ Provide correct Hebrew and English names of all the people who will participate in the ceremony to the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator
- _____ Send your honors list to the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator
- _____ Be sure everyone participating in the service knows their role and is prepared

Week of the B'nei Mitzvah

- _____ Parents meeting with Rabbi Timoner
- _____ Thursday evening final rehearsal in the sanctuary with Cantor Breitzer
- _____ Arrive by 9 AM on the morning of the ceremony

Celebration Checklist

Date Completed

- _____ Decide on type and time of party
- _____ Reserve location
- _____ Clear outside vendors with Temple office if using our facilities
- _____ Order or create invitations
- _____ Hire caterer
- _____ Hire musicians or other performers
- _____ Hire photographer
- _____ Arrange transportation and overnight accommodations for out-of-town guests
- _____ Decide on decor
- _____ Arrange for flowers or other decorations; receive confirmation
- _____ Arrange rental or purchase of china, flatware, glassware, serving pieces, linens, and furniture, as needed
- _____ Get confirmation of all rentals & hires, preferably in writing
- _____ Get your home in order and clean a week before the ceremony
- _____ Arrange your seating plan
- _____ *Mazal tov!* Enjoy your *simcha!*