

B'nei Mitzvah Handbook

2024-2025



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Letter from Clergy

Dear Families,

Mazel Tov on your children soon becoming b'nei mitzvah!

The day when your child comes of age as a Jew is a day they will likely remember forever. We want that day, and the preparation leading up to it, to be filled with meaning, excitement, joy, and pride.

A B'nei Mitzvah ceremony celebrates a child's passage into adulthood in the eyes of the Jewish community. Our tradition teaches that until 13, families bear the responsibility for teaching Jewish children how to live according to our values. When they turn 13, your child becomes responsible for carrying out the commitments of Jewish life. Beyond spiritual maturity, it reflects emerging moral responsibility.

To mark this transition in your child's ongoing Jewish education, it is customary for them to demonstrate their 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.

At CBE, our b'nei mitzvah process is carefully designed so that students have ample time to prepare. Our hope is that the preparation and participation in the ritual will engender feelings of accomplishment and sacred obligation.

This handbook offers information on the b'nei mitzvah ritual and ceremony, the path of study at Congregation Beth Elohim, and the logistics and procedures for planning your event. We hope that it will serve to answer many of your questions.

Please reach out to our B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator, Rana Bickel, with any additional questions: rbickel@cbebk.org.

Mazel Tov,

Rabbi Rachel Timoner

Cantor Josh Breitzer

Rabbi Stephanie Kolin

Rabbi Matt Green

Evan Traylor, Rabbinic Intern

Leslie Goldberg, Cantorial Intern

Rabbi Molly Kane, Director of Youth and Family Programs

Timeline of Preparation



3 YEARS PRIOR

- Commit to being in Yachad through 8th grade
- Date selection process
- Read and sign the brit (agreement) after receiving your child's assigned date



1-2 YEARS PRIOR

- Attend Shabbat morning services as a regular worshiper
- Attend all b'nei mitzvah family programs



12 MONTHS PRIOR

- Orientation meeting with Cantor Breitzer to discuss mutual goals and expectations
- Student begins weekly 1:1 tutoring sessions
- Decide how and where you want to celebrate after the ceremony
- B'nei mitzvah preparation fee is assessed to membership statement



6 MONTHS PRIOR

- Notify Cantor Breitzer if anybody else in the family would like to chant verses of Torah
- Parents sign up to usher three Shabbat morning services



4 MONTHS PRIOR

- Student starts working on their d'var Torah with their writing tutor



1 MONTH PRIOR

- B'nei Mitzvah student has a runthrough of the service with Cantor Breitzer
- Assign honors to family and friends using [honors form](#)
- If you'd like to sponsor kiddush for the morning of your child's service, fill out [this form](#)



WEEK OF THE CEREMONY

- Family meeting with officiating rabbi
- Final dress rehearsal with Cantor Breitzer
- Arrive by 8:45AM on the morning of the ceremony

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Staff Directory

Whom Do I Reach Out to Regarding...



B'nei Mitzvah Ritual and Preparation? Torah Reading and Tutoring?

Cantor Josh Breitzer

Cantor and Music Director

e: jbreitzer@cbebk.org

p: (718) 768-3814 x270



B'nei Mitzvah Planning and Logistics? Sponsoring Kiddush?

Rana Bickel

B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator

e: rbickel@cbebk.org

p: (718) 768-3814 x227



Finances (dues, tuition, fees)? Membership? Accessibility?

Maribeth Batcha

Director of Member Services/Engagement

e: mbatcha@cbebk.org

p: (718) 768-3814 x214



Yachad?

Zach Rolf

Yachad Director

e: zrolf@cbebk.org

p: (718) 768-3814 x112



Renting Space at CBE?

Kimberly Lisi

Executive Administrative Assistant

e: klisi@cbebk.org

p: (718) 768-3814 x235



Learning Differences and Inclusion?

Shayna Goodman

Learning Specialist, Yachad

e: sgoodman@cbebk.org

Setting the Date

All b'nei mitzvah ceremonies at CBE are held during Shabbat morning services. Dates before but reasonably close to the child's 13th birthday are appropriate. Any date after the 13th birthday is also possible.

In the fall of 5th grade, families are given a b'nei mitzvah date request form that allows them to select five possible Saturday morning dates for their child's ceremony. The b'nei mitzvah coordinator will match each family with one of their choices, and you will be notified (in February) when your child's date is assigned.

The majority of CBE b'nei mitzvah ceremonies are shared by two families. You should expect to share your date and we will connect you with the other family. Each child will fully participate in the ceremony. Date changes are unusual and requests for date changes must be made through the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator.

CBE Clergy reserve the right to postpone the date of the ceremony for any student who is not progressing adequately in their studies, for failing to maintain regular attendance at Yachad, or for failing to meet the Shabbat service requirements. We also reserve the right to postpone in the event of a community health or weather emergency.

B'nei Mitzvah Preparation Fee

The B'nei Mitzvah Preparation Fee will be automatically assessed to your membership statement at the beginning of the tutoring process, one year from the date of the ceremony.

The \$1,800 B'nei Mitzvah Preparation Fee covers:

- Weekly sessions with one of our CBE tutors
- A check-in with Cantor Breitzer every 6-8 weeks
- Check-in sessions, meetings, and rehearsals with clergy
- D'var Torah sessions with a writing tutor
- Your child's binder with necessary learning materials and a workbook specific to their parashah
- Family programs and meetings

Any outstanding balances including this fee, Yachad tuition, and membership dues are expected to be paid in full no later than three months out from the date of the ceremony. Please reach out to Maribeth Batcha, Director of Member Services, with any questions regarding your membership statement or payments: mbatcha@cbebk.org.

Inclusive B'nei Mitzvah Practices

*CBE has a history of working with families to create customized b'nei mitzvah for children who are neurodiverse or need accommodations for learning differences. **Here are some examples of b'nei mitzvah modifications:***

- Making sure your child meets with a tutor in person (as opposed to Zoom) if their learning needs would be best met that way. We have tutors who are experienced specifically working with kids who have ADHD and dyslexia.
- Deciding if the Sanctuary or Chapel is a more appropriate setting
 - Sanctuary is large, has bright lights, seats 1,300, and the sound is amplified with speakers
 - Chapel is small, has dimmer lights, seats 200, and the sound is not amplified (we offer the Chapel in special cases)
- Looking at the list of prayers and deciding how many, in English and/or Hebrew, your child can learn in the given time frame (also consider if the prayers in visual, audio, video or ASL format would be more appropriate)
- Reading only Torah or only Haftarah
- Learning prayers through pictures, videos, and ASL for b'nei mitzvah who are Deaf or nonspeaking
- Pre-recording videos of the b'nei mitzvah doing their parts of the ceremony to play in place of b'nei mitzvah getting up on bimah or as a backup, if they struggle with public speaking
- Choosing the prayers the b'nei mitzvah is comfortable with and focusing on practicing those
- Creating a custom service pamphlet, including b'nei mitzvah's drawings and/or visual aids

In your initial meeting with Cantor Breitzer, please discuss your child's developmental levels and learning needs. Yachad's Learning Specialist Shayna Goodman is happy to be part of these meetings as well to help make appropriate suggestions.

The Parent's Role in Preparation

YACHAD

All b'nei mitzvah students must register for and attend three consecutive years of the Yachad Program before becoming a b'nei mitzvah at Congregation Beth Elohim.

SIGNED BRIT

We send a *brit* (agreement) for families to sign when students are assigned their b'nei mitzvah ceremony date. This agreement outlines mutual expectations between the student, parents, and CBE throughout the process.

COMMITMENTS TO CBE

Families must be CBE members during their b'nei mitzvah process. Families must remain current in their financial obligations to CBE during the b'nei mitzvah process. Families are expected to communicate clearly with CBE staff throughout this process.

ATTEND RETREAT AND FAMILY MEETINGS

In 6th grade, families take part in a Shabbat retreat with the clergy team, followed up with three more meetings later in the year. These meetings help all our b'nei mitzvah families build bonds, establish community goals, and begin the process of studying Torah together.

ATTEND SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES

During this time of intense preparation 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.

USHER THREE B'NEI MITZVAH SERVICES

It is a CBE custom that parents usher at least three Shabbat morning services leading up to your child's date. 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 life.

The Student's Role in Preparation

YACHAD

Students will learn the prayers of our worship service and develop facility with leading these prayers. During their three years in Yachad, Yachad teachers track each student's interests, learning styles, and needs in preparation for the b'nei mitzvah tutoring process.

ORIENTATION MEETING

One year prior to the ceremony, we will reach out to schedule an initial intake meeting with Cantor Breitzer for an introduction of materials and a discussion of mutual goals and expectations. At least one parent should join their child for this meeting.

TUTORING

After the orientation meeting, Cantor Breitzer will assign a tutor to work with your child as they learn pertinent prayers along with Torah and Haftarah verses. Most students learn between 10-15 verses of Torah and 3-5 verses of Haftarah. Tutoring sessions take place weekly and are 30 minutes long. If a student misses three sessions you will be notified. Should your child surpass five missed sessions, you will be charged a fee of \$75 for each additional absence. Cantor Breitzer will meet with your child every 6-8 weeks to check in, assess their progress, and update you.

PRACTICE

We expect all students to practice for 25 minutes every day. Daily practice is crucial to ensure that students will not fall behind in their preparation and tutoring time.

D'VAR TORAH

Four months before the b'nei mitzvah date, students begin meeting with a writing tutor who works with CBE's clergy to support b'nei mitzvah with their divrei Torah. Students create and develop the d'var Torah on their own with guidance from their writing tutor.

FINAL MEETING AND REHEARSAL

On the Thursday evening before the b'nei mitzvah date, the student and their parents meet with the CBE rabbi officiating the ceremony to discuss any final questions or concerns. A dress rehearsal follows this meeting, with Cantor Breitzer and the other family sharing the service.

Customs of the Congregation

- **Dress code:** We encourage children to wear what will feel comfortable, which may or may not be gendered clothing. It is important that children have a say in how they present themselves on this special day.
- **Ritual clothing:** It is the custom of this congregation to leave the choice of wearing a *kippah* (head covering) or *tallit* (prayer shawl) to each individual. The b'nei mitzvah student, guests, and participants may choose to wear kippot and/or tallitot. There is a supply of kippot and tallitot available to those who may want to borrow one during the service.
- **Prayer book:** Our *siddur* (prayer book) is fully transliterated to enable everyone to participate.
- **Torah scroll:** 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 tallit or siddur and to kiss the talit or siddur as a sign of love and reverence for the Torah. This is not an obligation.
- **Gift:** A custom at CBE is for 7th grade families to organize a collection among all 7th grade families so that people do not feel pressured to give gifts for each b'nei mitzvah. The funds are used to purchase an engraved Kiddush cup for every 7th grader and to make charitable donations on behalf of the class to nonprofit organizations that the students choose.
- **The Role of Non-Jewish Family Members in the Ceremony:** CBE is proud to celebrate b'nei mitzvah with families of all different backgrounds, including those of multiple faiths. Non-Jewish family members are welcome to participate fully in the service.
- **Guests:** You may consider sharing the information above in a personalized manner with your invitations. This is a friendly way to tell your guests about our congregation's customs.
- **Kiddush Sponsorship:** Many families choose to mark this special day by sponsoring Kiddush after the ceremony. Kiddush sponsorship supports CBE's ability to provide Kiddush for all members. [Visit this page](#) to learn more and sign up.

The B'nei Mitzvah Honors

Each family's composition is unique, and we know it is important for everyone to feel welcome and included. You are invited to assign honors to friends and family friends as well; our suggestions are not in any way requirements. You may assign anyone you wish to each honor and assign multiple honors to the same person.

Tallit Presentation: Present a tallit (prayer shawl) to the b'nei mitzvah, who then recites the tallit blessing. Often assigned to grandparents or parents. *Non-Jewish family may participate fully.*

Opening the Ark: Open the ark doors for clergy to remove the Torah. Often assigned to siblings and cousins. *No Jewish knowledge or experience is necessary for this role, and non-Jewish family may participate fully.*

Torah Processional: Accompany the b'nei mitzvah as they walk around the Sanctuary holding the Torah. Often assigned to siblings, cousins, and friends. *No Jewish knowledge or experience is necessary for this role, and non-Jewish family members may participate fully.*

Aliyot: Chant blessings before and after the b'nei mitzvah reads verses of Torah. Each family is given three aliyot total; most b'nei mitzvah students chant all three aliyot themselves (usually 10-15 verses total). The aliyot are typically assigned as follows:

- The first to grandparents, aunts, and uncles
- The second to parents and siblings
- The third is always reserved for the b'nei mitzvah child

Jewish and non-Jewish family members can participate fully in the honor of receiving an aliyah. We ask that one member of each aliyah grouping be Jewish and above the age of 13. Non-Jewish family members (and Jewish family members who are less comfortable chanting in Hebrew) are welcome to:

- *Join their Jewish family members in chanting the blessing in Hebrew*
- *Read the English blessing in the 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.*
- *Stand with their Jewish family members and participate with their presence but not the words of the blessings*

G'lilah: "Dressing" or preparing the Torah to be returned to the ark. Typically assigned to siblings, aunts, and uncles. *While Jewish knowledge or experience is not necessary, Jewish loved ones tend to be more comfortable with this role.*

Day-Of Schedule and Logistics

All b'nei mitzvah ceremonies take place during Shabbat morning services officiated by members of our clergy team.

SHABBAT MORNING SCHEDULE

8:30-9:15 AM: Space available for photographs

9:30 AM: Services begin

Approximately 11:45 AM-12:00 PM: Services conclude. Small community kiddush takes place immediately following services.

Please be sure to let your guests know that we start on time at 9:30 AM. Many families encourage guests to arrive by 9:15 AM to allow ample time for street parking. The sanctuary address is 271 Garfield Place, the domed building on the NE corner of 8th Ave.

PARKING

- Public parking on Union Street between 8th Avenue and Prospect Park West
- Garfield Garage on Garfield Place between 6th Avenue and 7th Avenue
- SPT Parking on 5th Street between 7th Avenue and 8th Avenue
- For more information about directions to CBE via driving or public transportation, check out the [Contact & Directions](#) page of our website

ACCESSIBILITY

- If there is someone who cannot climb stairs, there is a lift to get into the sanctuary. To access it, enter from the Garfield side entrance.
- Large print prayer books are available.
- Please be in touch with Maribeth Batcha with further questions about accessibility, mbatcha@cbebk.org and 718-768-3814 ext. 214.

LIVESTREAM

All CBE services are livestreamed at these links for out-of-town guests:

- The livestream page on our website: cbebk.org/live
- Our Facebook page: facebook.com/cbebk
- Our YouTube channel: youtube.com/user/cbebk

Photography

- **No photography is allowed from the floor during the service.**
- Please be sure that your guests understand that they may take photos before or after the service, but only professional photography or videography is allowed during the service.
- During the service, your professional photographer or videographer must be stationed in the balcony, using only available light.
- Flash and loud shutter sounds are prohibited during the service.
- The sanctuary will be open by 8:30 AM for photography setup.
- The clergy will be glad to take pictures with you and your child either between 9:00 - 9:15 AM, or after services have concluded.
- **Marc Goldberg**
Photographer
(917) 746-5348
marcgoldbergphotography.com
- **Julie Markes**
Photographer
(917) 224-2859
juliemarkesphotography.com

Flowers

- You are welcome to order floral displays for the bimah for the morning of your child's service, but are by no means expected or required to do so.
- **All arrangements on the bimah MUST BE low-pollen and low-scent.**
- You can either order one arrangement to be placed on the floor in front of the lectern or two on either side of the central bimah stairs.
- Because most ceremonies are shared by two families, many choose to order two arrangements of bimah flowers and split the cost.
- If your floral arrangements are being delivered directly to CBE, please schedule delivery for the Friday afternoon before the ceremony and notify us so we can be prepared to receive and store them.
- **Zuzu's Petals**
Florist
(718) 638-0918
zuzusbrooklyn@gmail.com
- **The Rose Garden (Miguel Gomez)**
Florist
(646) 270-7587
therosegarden346@gmail.com

Talitot & Judaica

General Judaica

- [Eichler's](#): Judaica store in Brooklyn and online
- [Judaica WebStore](#): Online Judaica webstore selling kippot and tallitot
- [West Side Judaica](#): Judaica store on the Upper West Side

Tallitot

- [Handfinger](#)
- [Advah Designs](#)
- [Yussel's Place](#)
- [Etsy](#)

Kippot

- [Klipped](#)
- [Skullcap.com](#)
- [Mitzvaland](#)
- [Etsy](#)

CBE Rental Information 2024-25

To rent space at CBE, contact Kimberly Lisi: klisi@cbebk.org, (718) 768-3814 x235

RATES AND CAPACITY

Ballroom

- Seated Capacity: 250 at rounds or 300 in rows • Square Footage: 4,415 sq ft
- Rental Rate: \$4,800 (Member) / \$8,000 (Non-member)

Social Hall

- Seated capacity: 100 at rounds or 175 in rows • Square Footage: 1,632 usable sq ft
- Rental rate: \$2,000 (Member) / \$3,600 (Non-member)

Lobby

- Capacity: 50 at tables or 125 standing • Square Footage: 1,203 sq ft
- Rental rate: \$1,800 (Member) / \$3,600 (Non-member)

Board Room

- Capacity: 40 at tables or 50 standing • Square Footage: 742 sq ft
- Rental rate: \$1,000 (Member) / \$1,900 (Non-member)

ADDITIONAL FEES

- \$500 additional fee for Friday and Saturday evenings
- \$500 fee per half-hour for rentals that go beyond contracted time

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- Setup and breakdown of tables and chairs
- 60-inch round tables (22 available)
- 8-foot rectangular tables (12 available)
- 6-foot rectangular tables (12 available)
- 24-inch (27-36 inch adjustable height) Low Boys (5 available)
- 24-inch (40-inch height) High Boys (3 available)
- Blonde wooden folding chairs (180, only available in Ballroom)
- Black plastic folding chairs (200 available)
- Coat Racks
- CBE's kitchen allows for prepping, warming, and plating of food, but does not have an operating oven or stove.

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED?

The following services are not provided by CBE:

- Event planning and same-day management
- Catering
- Flowers and decorations
- Table linens, dining ware, utensils
- Audio/visual equipment, music, tech support

NOTE: Because CBE operates a preschool, we have limited time windows available for delivery and pickup of rental items on weekdays (10:00-11:30 AM; 4:00-6:00 PM, Mon-Fri). Rental companies will often charge an additional delivery fee. We recommend that you include this in your budget and we apologize for any inconvenience.

Suggested Vendors

Highly recommended vendors who are familiar with CBE and our spaces:

Kerry Muldoon

Party Planning and Staffing
(732) 257-8580
kerryanmuldoon@gmail.com

Andrea Adelstein, NYLux Events

Full Service Event Planning and Production
(201) 370-6506
andrea@nyluxevents.com

Simply Divine (Judy Marlow)

Kosher Catering and Event Planning
(917) 553-7510
jmarlow@simplydivine.com

Esprit Events

Kosher Catering and Event Planning
(212) 207-3888
info@espritevents.com

Miriam

Catering (Israeli Cuisine)
(718) 622-2250
miriamrestaurant@gmail.com

Fusion Productions

Lighting and Audio/Visual Presentation
(516) 626-2255
marcus@fusionproductions.biz

Dave Overcamp

Lighting Design
(917) 279-8736
dave@overcamp.com

Florie Huppert Design

Event Planning and Production
(646) 256-7555
florie@floriehuppertdesign.com

Alexandra Partow Events

Event Planning and Production
(646) 436-1729
alexandra@partowevents.com

Shelsky's

Catering and Event Support
(201) 961-5448 or (718) 855-8817
catering@shelskys.com

Sahadi's

Catering (Middle Eastern Cuisine)
(718) 788-7500
catering.ic@sahadis.com

La Bagel Delight

Bagels, lox and more
(718) 768-6107
labageldelight284@gmail.com

Soundhouse NYC

Lighting and Audio/Visual Presentation
(888) 826-1299
rentals@soundhousenyc.com

SuperSounds DJs (Anthony Caldiero)

Full Service Event DJ
(908) 581-2599
supersoundsdj@yahoo.com

Celebrating Elsewhere

Below is a list of some of local venues our families have used in the past. Please feel free to reach out to previous CBE b'nei mitzvah families for additional suggestions.

Stone Park Cafe: stoneparkcafe.com

Deity: deitynyc.com

Slate NYC: slate-ny.com

Baku Palace: bakupalace.com

Da Nonna Rosa: danonnarosas.com

R&D Foods: rdfoodsbklyn.com

Prospect Park Picnic House: prospectpark.org

The Invisible Dog: theinvisibledog.org

Nitehawk Prospect Park: nitehawkcinema.com

Brooklyn Bowl: brooklynbowl.com

Ascent Lounge: ascentlounge.com

Dumbo Loft: thedumboloft.com

Glossary

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

Brit: "Sacred covenant." For our purposes, the brit is an agreement setting expectations for both parties out of mutual respect.

D’var Torah (pl. divrei Torah): “Word of Torah.” A 5-7 minute teaching that b’nei mitzvah present to the community which includes 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. The b’nei mitzvah chants blessings and about 3-5 verses of Haftarah.

Kiddush: Celebratory spread of food and drink served at the conclusion of Saturday morning Shabbat services

Kippah (pl. Kippot; Yarmulke in Yiddish): Skullcap/head covering

Mitzvah: A Jewish commandment; colloquially, a good deed

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

Tallit (Tallis in Yiddish, pl. Talitot/Talleisim): a prayer shawl with fringes, worn for morning prayers by someone over the age of B’nei Mitzvah