



Hebrew Congregation of Somers

B Mitzvah Manual

2025-2026

5785-5786

3 Cypress Lane
Shenorock, NY 10587
(914) 248-9532

www.hebrewcongregationofsomers.org

Turning thirteen is a pivotal moment in a lifelong process of becoming-becoming compassionate, becoming courageous, becoming who we are.

B Mitzvah, or Be Mitzvah, is *being and becoming the mitzvah*.

B Mitzvah is the portal between childhood and the beginning of young adulthood. From the beginning, we begin a shift, moment by moment from *self*-centered to *mitzvah*-centered living, growing to meet the mitzvah of *this* moment, each of them a gem in the life path on which we are blessed to walk in this lifetime.

A B Mitzvah is a moment in the human journey when a person becomes both counted and accountable – in one's family, community, and society at large. This is a time for you and your family to share who you are, to learn more about who you are as a family, and who your child is and is becoming. To discover and connect with prayers and rituals that resonate with your family. We are here to guide you towards connecting deeply with the traditions, rituals and this sacred process.

At HCS, from our youngest students to our *madrichim* (teaching assistants), we model living a *mitzvah*-centered life. The B Mitzvah moment affirms a readiness to take additional responsibility through demonstrating what we have been cultivating all along:

- Learning how to live our lives through constructing meaning and purpose - reconstructing our Judaism, just as our ancestors did - to meet the needs of our times.
- Seeking joyful Jewish living while we hold the broken tablets in the ark alongside the whole.

It is a springboard for a life-long endeavor of further study, continued religious, moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth, as well as for the continued participation in the life of community.

We ask that you purchase Reclaiming Bar/Bat Mitzvah as a Spiritual Rite of Passage by Rabbi Goldie Milgram. This is an excellent book that describes the meaning and importance of the Bar/Bat/B mitzvah.

Your child will be part of a cohort of students and families who provide mutual support and are encouraged to be in community throughout the journey. Please be sure to invite all the students from the Hebrew School class to any celebration for your child.

PREPARATION FOR BECOMING A BAR/BAT/B MITZVAH

Scheduling the date

In the summer between fifth and sixth grade, and possibly into seventh grade, the first step in the Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah process begins! Please provide Rabbi Jonathan with your child's birthday and preferred B Mitzvah month. He'll then check to see when they turn 13 according to the Hebrew calendar. Students must attend a minimum of two years of Hebrew School at HCS before their B Mitzvah. Rabbi Jonathan will confirm a possible date with you. It is the synagogue's policy to schedule B Mitzvah only on Saturday mornings.

HCS member Jen Lieberman is a volunteer liaison to all HCS families who engage in the B Mitzvah journey. Please be in touch with Jen after familiarizing yourself with this manual so that she can help you throughout the journey! Jen can be reached at (347) 610-7771 or at jennifer.ann.lieberman@gmail.com.

Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah preparation

Preparation for becoming a Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah falls into six categories listed below:

1. Remote tutoring with Ann **or** a different HCS approved in-person tutor.
2. D'var Torah work with Rabbi Jonathan
3. Hebrew school attendance and emergent leadership within the Hebrew School community
4. Service attendance
5. Tikkun olam ("mitzvah") project
6. Family workshops - TBD

Tutoring

Tutoring sessions take place outside of Hebrew School hours. ***Ann's tutoring sessions are paid to her directly, in advance, at \$500 per 10 lessons. If a different HCS approved in-person tutor is used, payment should be arranged directly in advance with the tutor.***

Typically, twenty half-hour one-on-one tutoring sessions are needed. Occasionally, additional sessions are needed. If more than 20 sessions are needed, they can be added.

Preparing to become Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah takes a lot of time and commitment. Plan to study for at least fifteen-twenty minutes per day, six times each week.

Students should begin tutoring between seven to nine months before they are scheduled to become Bar/Bat/B mitzvah, minus summer months if applicable. Our experience has demonstrated that the summer months (especially when students are at sleep-away camp, even when Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah tutoring is available) are often less effective learning periods. Students scheduled to become Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah in the autumn should begin working with a tutor in the preceding winter months.

Parents are strongly encouraged to speak or email with their tutor on a regular basis so that you know how things are going.

The student is expected to chant from the Torah and to assist in leading prayers. We also encourage adult family members (and older siblings who already celebrated becoming a B Mitzvah) to chant readings from the Torah in honor of this special day. Please let the Rabbi know if you are interested in doing this.

Special accommodations for children with learning differences

Our community welcomes learners of all kinds. We are committed to creating a meaningful experience for you and your family, and will work with you to find the best way to work with your child. We are blessed to have a small, dynamic and individualized approach to working with our students.

Please contact us so that we can develop a plan together. Please also send us information about any support that your child receives during the school day so that we can do our best to meet their needs.

Hebrew School (Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah preparation)

In grades 5-7, the students will study the structure of the Saturday morning (Shacharit) service. The goal is that they not only learn how to read and sing these prayers, but learn what they mean and how they are relevant to them as modern Jews. They will be given recordings of the

prayers for home practice. Hebrew reading skills will also be emphasized. Additionally, they will learn about the Torah and Prophets.

We will provide a prayer mastery chart and each student will have the opportunity to be tested on each of the prayers on the chart demonstrating their knowledge of the prayer's meaning as well as being able to read and lead it when appropriate. This core knowledge acquisition begins earlier on in the educational journey (starting in earnest in grade 3) so if you have joined the school later on, please consider outside tutoring in order to catch up. This can be discussed with the Education Director.

We expect that the student will attend at least 80% of each month's Hebrew school classes, both Tuesday and Sunday.

Attendance through the end of the 7th grade year is also expected, even if the Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah service occurs before the completion of classes.

Working with the Rabbi

Rabbi Jonathan will meet with the student to work on the speech/D'var Torah (analysis of the subset of the portion they have chosen to focus on). These meetings will start about 3 months before the Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah date at times arranged by the parents and the rabbi.

Communal grappling with the meaning of the Torah portion is a long-standing Jewish practice and you have Torah wisdom to impart to your children. We welcome your involvement in the study and preparation of the D'var Torah.

Six weeks before the B Mitzvah, the Rabbi meets with the family to discuss details of the service, including honors, and other related items.

There is a (three minute max) parent blessing as part of the service. Material is included at the end of this manual to help guide you. A sibling blessing is also an optional addition to the service.

There is a 60-90 minute rehearsal 4:30-6:00 pm ***the week before the ceremony*** with the Rabbi, parents and student. Bring all materials to the rehearsal. At least one parent should attend this rehearsal - better if both can join.

Service attendance

Attending worship at HCS will help you become more familiar with our style of worship and standard melodies. The student will also feel more comfortable when it is their turn to lead worship. Service attendance also strengthens our community and will help your family to feel more connected to our congregation.

The schedule of upcoming services is in our weekly Happenings and on www.hebrewcongregationofsomers.org. The monthly community-led Friday night service starts at 6:30 pm, and is about 45-60 minutes long. Saturday morning services (without a B Mitzvah) start at 10 am and are about two hours long.

In order to be prepared for a Bar/Bat/B mitzvah, we expect our families to attend 10 services at HCS in the year leading up to the date of the B Mitzvah. At least 7 of these should be Saturday morning services.

Tikkun Olam (“mitzvah”) project

Tikkun Olam means “repair of the world” and it is a critical Jewish value. Each student should participate in a mitzvah project of personal meaning to them. Arrangements are to be made by the family. Please keep us posted about your child’s project. Other parents are great mentors for families to discover the mitzvah project options best for their child. The decision as to what the project will be should be made a minimum of 6 months in advance of the Bar/Bat/B mitzvah and the Rabbi will work with the student on integrating their mitzvah project into their D’var Torah. Here are some websites for you to explore:

<https://mitzvahquest.org/mitzvah-project-ideas/>

<https://www.areyvut.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Bnai-Mitzvah-Project-Road-Map-6.18.pdf>

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/how-to-choose-a-mitzvah-project-for-a-barbat-mitzvah/>

The Service

- The service will start promptly at 9:30 am (earlier than our usual start time) and last approximately two and a half hours.
- The Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah and their immediate family will sit in the front of the sanctuary.
- We strongly recommend that you ask one or two members of our HCS community to serve as ushers. They will direct guests to seating and make sure that they have *siddurim* (prayer books) and *chumashim* (Torah texts).
- We ask that you let your guests know in advance that photography, videography, and use of electronics (cell phones, etc.) is not permitted in the synagogue during Shabbat. All electronics need to be turned off prior to entering the building. We can record the zoom service. Please request this in advance of the Rabbi and follow up right after the service for a video recording.
- All guests are encouraged to wear *kippot* or other head coverings. *Tallitot* (prayer shawls) are encouraged at the bima for an *aliyah*. Clapping for a "job well done" is not done during a service.
- Throwing candy at the "newly-adult Jew" is a tradition that many families continue. Candy must be soft (no gelatin) and wrapped. You will want to designate one or two people to hand out the candy. Best to use candy with quiet wrappers!
- Candy is handed out while Torah is being wrapped or at the end of the service and thrown when the Rabbi indicates it is time to sing "*Mazal Tov*" and dance around the *bima* (if desired.)
- A family member is invited to present their child with a *tallit** at the start of the service.

Jewish family and friends of the family are encouraged to chant from the Torah. English readings can be assigned to any honored guest. This is a wonderful tribute to your child, and shows them the family's commitment to hard work. You should contact Rabbi Jonathan six months before the service so that he can choose the readings with you.

There is a custom of passing the Torah from generation to generation. This involves grandparents, parents and the Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah.

Honors include:

- Aliyot (blessings before and after each Torah reading). Family members doing aliyot should be familiar with and practice the Torah Blessings.

Non-Jews and children are welcome to come up with the Jewish adult. The final aliyah is reserved for the B Mitzvah.

Honors more generally available include:

- Hagbah (Torah lifter, needs some training/previous experience)
- G'lila (Dressing the Torah)
- Opening and closing the Ark
- English readings from the Siddur or elsewhere (determined in consultation with Rabbi Jonathan)
- Parent and sibling blessings.

Hosting a Kiddush following the Saturday morning service

We expect that the family of the Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah will host the Kiddush in the social hall or outside following the Saturday morning service. Cookies, challah etc. are the minimum requirements. Some families provide a dairy luncheon. To discuss delivery, kiddish set-up and clean-up as well as extra sanctuary chairs if needed, please contact our chair of the HCS Ritual committee Jesse Weiner at (914) 804-8313 or email at weiner.jesse@hotmail.com.

You will need to provide at a minimum: paper goods and utensils; plastic and hot cups and plastic short (Kiddush) cups; table covers; Kosher wine and grape juice; challah and cake and cookies; coffee and tea; non-dairy creamer and sugar; and cold refreshments.

Base your purchases on the number of your guests plus about 5-10 congregants. All deliveries to the synagogue must be made on Friday prior to sundown.

Please do not use the food from the refrigerator or freezer in the synagogue's kitchen.

Seating in the sanctuary

Depending upon the number of guests at your child's Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah service, additional folding chairs may need to be set up. Please note that the Sanctuary capacity is 120 people (84 in benches with 36 additional folding chairs).

Financial obligations to the synagogue

The synagogue Board expects that all synagogue dues and Hebrew School tuition be paid prior to the child's Bar/Bat/B mitzvah. Additionally, there is a \$600 fee to be paid three months prior to the date.

Many families, also, make a donation to one of the synagogue's funds in honor of their child's Bar/Bat/B mitzvah.

Kippot

While not a requirement, many families purchase special kippot (yarmulkes) for their guests. These serve as a commemoration of your family's and the community's special day. Please ensure there are also clips for the kippot.

***Tallit for the Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah**

As part of the service, the parents or other family member(s) will be asked to present their child with a tallit (prayer shawl.) You need to allow ample time to shop and purchase one. You may decide, instead, to present your child with a tallit that belonged to a close relative.

Flowers

You are welcome to provide flowers and/or plants for the sanctuary, lobby, restrooms and/or social hall. You may want to consider flowers or plants that the synagogue can use afterward to beautify the grounds after the day of the Bar/Bat/B mitzvah.

We have a number of members of the community who can offer advice about the myriad of details that you will want to consider and many suggestions about how you may address them.

B Mitzvah PARENT BLESSING

Speaking to your child publicly on the day of their B Mitzvah is a precious moment. Blessing your child at this moment is an opportunity to lift up the uniqueness of your child's character, share your hopes and dreams for your child and emphasize the importance of continuing on their paths of wisdom, community and spirituality in the years to come.

You might want to ask yourself:

- When you think about your child, what thoughts come to mind? What are you most thankful for? What are you most proud of?
- When you think about your child becoming B Mitzvah, what do you feel? What are your thoughts about your child leading services and reading Torah? About your child being "counted" as a Jewish adult?
- When you think about your child's future in general; what hopes, dreams or wishes do you have for him/her?
- When you think about your child's future as a Jewish adult, what do you hope for?

Some helpful hints:

- The verbs in blessings are usually done in "may ____ be" construction
 - Don't be afraid to put your hands on the person you are blessing. Physical contact is not only appropriate, but it is also historically proper and very moving
 - Don't be afraid of repeating a phrase (e.g. May God grant you X, May God grant you Y, May God grant you Z...)
 - End your blessing with a phrase so that it is known that the blessing is over (e.g. May this be your blessing, And let us say: Amen).
 - The most successful parent blessings are written out ahead of time and typically no more than one page per parent
- **Rabbi Dianne Cohler-Essesy**

SAMPLE PARENT BLESSINGS

Sample Parental Blessing 1

May you embrace life to the fullest

May you move through your fears and and pursue what you love

May you view this world as a safe place in which to dwell

May you appreciate the extraordinary gifts that you have been given of empathy, kindness, intelligence and beauty

May your sense of humor always be close to you and comfort you through difficult times

May you always remember this extraordinary day - and your Jewish mothers and fathers who came before you and made it possible for you to stand here today as a Jew

May God smile upon you, bathe you in sunlight and embrace you with love

Sample Parental Blessing 2

_____, surrounded by our family, friends and community,

This is the blessing I have for you:

May you have the ability to make your hopes and dreams come true.

May you be blessed with patience and understanding,

With wisdom and compassion, in your mind and heart.

May your deeds support righteousness,

And your goodness serve as an example to others.

May your enthusiasm for learning continue throughout your life,

And bring you great personal joy and fulfillment.

May your eyes shine with the light of the Torah,

And your voice be filled with song.

May your Judaism not be just something inherited, but something to be discovered and explored.

Mazel Tov

Sample Parental Blessing 3

With tremendous joy and pride;

In the presence of God, friends, family, clergy and congregation;

We offer you this blessing, _____;

On this day of your B Mitzvah:

May your sensitivity to others less fortunate compel you to act on their behalf in the spirit of Tikkun Olam, repair of the world.

May your love of learning inspire you to seek knowledge and engage in the exploration of Torah.

May your passion and enthusiasm propel you to spread joy and hope and possibility to those whose lives you touch.

May your spirit of adventure lead you to fully experience all that life has to offer.

May your self-confidence and determination fortify you in times of uncertainty.

May you take the gifts and talents that you have been given and make the world a better place for all.

May you always remember this special day and cherish the memory of your Jewish ancestors who came before you and made it possible for you to stand here today with pride in being a B Mitzvah.

Together: We love you, _____.

Sample Parental Blessing 4

Together: *Baruch ata Adonai shepetarani me'onsho shel zeh.*

(Praised be Adonai who has freed me from responsibility for this child.)

Mother: _____, a few months ago you asked me what I expect of you in life. Then you said "And don't quote Plato!" Well, I won't quote Plato. But I will paraphrase Hillel. I expect one thing of you, and that one thing is to treat all people the way you wish to be treated.

Father: But a blessing isn't just what we expect of you. It's also what we wish for you. So here it is.

Mother: _____, May you continue to be the wonderful person you already are.

Father: Intelligent and inquisitive, healthy and humorous, creative and confident, honest and loyal, and responsible. You have an acutely tuned sense of fairness.

Mother: You also have the wonderful ability to say "I love you." Hang onto that one especially!

Father: _____, May you have companions throughout your life who love and appreciate you for who you are, who honor your values, and who are there for you when you need them.

Mother: May you help create home and community wherever you go.

Father: May you help to make the world a more just and peaceful place. May you do all the things you want to do, not all at once, but with enough time and space around them to fully experience and appreciate each one.

Mother: May you find spirituality on your own terms.

Father: May you be successful, as you define success.

Mother: And most of all, may you have joy, not all of the time, but enough of the time to feel that life is a wonderful gift.

Together: _____, thank you for being one of the brightest lights in our lives. We're proud of you, and we love you. Mazel tov.

Sample Parental Blessing 5

My blessing for you.

Be interested in everything. Be curious, explore, adventurous, drink in everything, have fun but also be serious. Make a difference. Don't sit back and watch, go for it, take risks, be involved, help other people, help this planet. Honor your Jewish heritage and traditions. Have a purpose in life. Let me say that again: have a purpose in life. Your purpose gives meaning to your life. May you pursue justice and be a blessing to others. May you feel passionate about the social injustice in this world and may you do your part in helping to repair the world. May you continue to study Torah to help shape you into a better human being. May you love reading and read many books. May you be not just smart, but become wise. May you look beyond the surface of things. Life is about making choices. May you have the courage and good judgment to make good choices in your life.

I love you.

Sample Parental Blessing 6

Here is the blessing Bob Dylan wrote for his son, recorded in 1974. If you'd like to listen to it you can go to this link:

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xs13ou_bob-dylan-forever-young_music.

Forever Young

Bob Dylan

May God bless and keep you always
May your wishes all come true
May you always do for others
And let others do for you
May you build a ladder to the stars
And climb on every rung
May you stay forever young
Forever young, forever young
May you stay forever young.
May you grow up to be righteous
May you grow up to be true
May you always know the truth
And see the lights surrounding you
May you always be courageous
Stand upright and be strong
May you stay forever young
Forever young, forever young
May you stay forever young.
May your hands always be busy
May your feet always be swift
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift
May your heart always be joyful
And may your song always be sung
May you stay forever young
Forever young, forever young
May you stay forever young