

# Tamid: The Downtown Synagogue B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

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## 1. Overview and Welcome

*“On three things the world stands: On Torah, on Prayer, and on Acts of Love and Kindness”  
-Talmud, Pirkei Avot*

Dear Families,

Congratulations and Mazel Tov on your arrival at this moment in life and this exciting stage in your child's life. At Tamid, supporting children and families through this process is one of the most important aspects of our community!

Jewish wisdom teaches that “on three things the world stands: on Torah, on prayer, and on acts of love and kindness.” Tamid's B'nai Mitzvah curriculum is based on these three concepts and our hope is that by the time your child celebrates their simcha, they will have formed a fluid knowledge of these concepts to prepare the child for their life as an evolving Jewish adult.

The transition from child to adult is a very exciting time in the life of a young person and their family. We approach this transition in two ways. First, we expose and train the student in Torah, Prayer, and Acts of Love and Kindness (Mitzvot). Secondly, we draw upon a framework of stage development theory to help usher a young person into an independent, confident, and mature adult.

### **Group Classes or Private Instruction**

Tamid offers two tracks for b'nai mitzvah. Group classes meet once per week for two academic years. Our private training program lasts 1-2 years and students meet with a tutor once per week online. The curriculum is the same

for both pathways.

### **Liturgy and Prayer Curriculum**

Students will have a weekly session with our music specialist to learn the necessary prayers to lead a b'nai mitzvah ceremony. Students will learn the meaning and melodies of the major prayers of Shabbat morning, Shabbat Evening, Havdalah, and the Shabbat Table blessings.

### **“Acts of Love and Kindness” = Jewish Ethics and Values Curriculum**

How to draw upon Jewish thought to live as a Jew in the modern world is the focus of our Ethics curriculum. The ethics framework is based on the threefold relationship that a Jew has with self and society: *Ben Adam l'Atzmo*, *Ben Adam l'Chavero*, *Ben Adam l'Makom* – between person and self, between person and others, and between person and God.

### **Torah**

“Taking hold of Torah” by helping each student find a personal connection to Torah, Jewish wisdom, and Jewish thought is our goal. Individual and family experiences help the student to see themselves on the continuum of Jewish tradition both as a member of *K'lal Yisrael* (Jewish People) and their own family of origin.

### **Hebrew Curriculum**

All students will study Hebrew in levels appropriate to their individual level. Students are divided into Hebrew learning sections based on a combination of proficiency among 5th and 6th graders. The goals are for students to be able to identify Hebrew letters and vowels and to have some basic comprehension of prayer and conversational vocabulary.

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## **2. Curriculum: Liturgy and Prayer**

*“When you pray, don’t make your prayer only a fixed form, make it of the heart.”*

- Talmud, Pirke Avot 2:13

Students will be instructed in the major prayers of the Shabbat Evening and Morning service, Havdalah Ceremony, and the Shabbat table blessings. Each student will be given their own siddur to use at home and will learn prayer in class and via Tamid Online. By the end of the course, each student will demonstrate knowledge and comfort with the following prayers:

1. Aliyot blessings for Torah
2. Barchu
3. Shema
4. V'ahavta
5. Shabbat Candle Blessing and Kiddush
6. Aleinu
7. Hamotzi
8. Amida (Avot v'Imahot)
9. Mourners Kaddish
10. Talit blessing
11. Blessing before haftarah
12. Blessing after haftarah
13. V'shamru
14. Mah Tovu
15. HaTikvah
16. Havdalah Blessings
17. Four questions for Passover Seder
18. Hanukkah candle blessings

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### 3. Curriculum: Ethics and Values

*"If I am not for myself, who will be for me?  
If I am only for myself alone, what am I?  
And, if not now, when?"*

-Pirke Avot, 1:14

#### **Jewish Ethics and Values**

The ethics program is focused on personal and social responsibility through a Progressive Jewish framework with the assumption that students live in a diverse world. Students use the Talmudic "Pirke Avot" ancient wisdom text as the background for discussions that take place weekly and on field trips, social action and mitzvah projects and family sessions. The learning goal is to provide students with decision making tools about how to think about personal and social issues from a Jewish perspective – the perspective that they grow into during the year as they develop and discover their own Jewish voice.

The ethics framework is based on the threefold relationship that a Jew has with self and society: *Ben Adam l'Atzmo*, *Ben Adam l'Chavero*, *Ben Adam l'Makom* – between person and self, between person and others, and between person and God. (see curriculum by month below)

#### **Mitzvah Project - "Putting the Mitzvah in B'nai Mitzvah"**

All B'nai Mitzvah students participate in the Class Mitzvah Project which is decided upon by the 7th grade class each year. Students are encouraged to speak about their mitzvah project in their *D'var Torah* (speech) or to present their experiences during their ceremony.

#### **Tzedakah - Gifts of Time and Resources**

*Tzedakah*, according to the Torah, is "equal to all other commandments combined." Giving of charitable gifts is basic to Jewish tradition and is one way for Jews to express their gratitude. Tzedakah— which literally means "justice"— is one of the basic tenets of living Judaism: helping to make the world better by helping others.

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### 4. Torah and Haftarah Training

Three to four months prior to the child's ceremony, a private tutor will begin training students in their Torah and/or Haftarah portions, reviewing all prayers, and preparing the student for their individual celebration. While some B'nai Mitzvah students read their entire Torah portion, there are sometimes readings available for other family members who would like the opportunity to read from the Torah at the ceremony. If a member of your family is proficient at reading Torah, please encourage them to participate and we will tutor them and provide all the materials needed.

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## 5. Family Tree Project

### Taking hold of Torah: My Family Tree Project

*"In order to know where you are going,  
you must first know from where you came"*  
–Pirke Avot

#### Project overview

Each student is asked to learn about their personal history through the creation of a family tree and by recording two interviews with a family elder. This project is completed in the Spring with the support of Tamid's faculty.

#### Part I - Family Tree

Students are invited to identify, create, and design any family tree template they would like. Students can use computer generated family trees OR create and design theirs by hand.

Students are asked to place into their family tree the following information if appropriate:

- Siblings, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc degree. (great grandparents, great uncles, great-great grandparents, etc)
- Birth and (death) dates and
- location for as many possible people on your tree

*Example:* Albert Shanfield

B. Nov 6, 1912 Radam, Poland.

D. Dec 6, 1987 Portland, Maine

#### Part II – Recording Personal History with two family elders

Students are asked to choose one elder from each family line (parent A and parent B) and interview and record the conversation. The recording can be audio or video but it must be transcribed in written form when submitted on the due date. Examples of questions include:

- Where were you born?
- Where did you go to school?
- What was it like to grow up in your home?
- What did you do with your friends when you were 11 years old?
- Did you have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?
- What did your parents do to make a living?
- What do you remember about your parents?
- What do you remember about my parents?
- What is your biggest hope for me?
- Five more additional questions of your own

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## 6. Types of Ceremonies

You are invited to be as creative as you possibly know how to celebrate your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Your child is unique and the ceremony should reflect that uniqueness. Think BIG! Be BOLD! Be UNIQUE!

### **Shabbat Morning**

Many B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies are marked by participation in the Shabbat morning service. The Bar/Bat mitzvah stands before the entire community to mark his/her transition to maturity and responsibility under Jewish law.

### **Havdalah**

The Havdalah service marks the conclusion of Shabbat when the spices, wine, and havdalah candle are raised.

### **Alternative Ceremonies**

There are other sacred moments for a child to celebrate their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. You are invited to be as creative as possible in dreaming up a ceremony that speaks to your family. B'nai Mitzvah trips to Israel can also be very popular.

### **Make Your Ceremony Unique : Involve honored guests!**

### **Hakafah**

When the Torah Scroll is removed from the Ark, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's immediate family – parents and siblings – are invited to join in the procession around the sanctuary.

### **Torah Passing Ceremony**

Family members and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah can participate in the "chain of tradition," where the Torah is symbolically passed down from one generation to the next by holding the Sefer Torah (Torah Scroll) in front of each member of the family as they stand on the bimah. Grandparents, great grandparents, parents, and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will form a line along which the Torah Scroll is 'passed' from generation to generation.

### **Aliyot - Prayers for reading of the Torah**

There are three Torah honors called Aliyot. Each Aliyah involves honorees chanting the blessings before and after the Torah reading. Aliyot may go to anyone over the age of thirteen the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family seeks to honor. Honorees often include, but are not limited to: grandparents, parents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

### **Parents Blessing and speech**

Parents are encouraged to share words of wisdom, a prayer, and good wishes with their child during the service.

### **Music and Performance**

During the ceremony, some students may elect to perform a Jewish piece of music, display art which they created that relates to their Jewish identity, or sing a song that is appropriate to the B'nai Mitzvah experience. Each student is encouraged to bring their full selves to their ceremony.

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## 7. Inviting Tamid Classmates to your Ceremony (or party)

We hold a high value in letting your child's classmates be invited to each ceremony. If you have a party that follows and choose to invite the class, the kids will have a great time with each other. If you invite more than half of the classmates to the party, please invite all the classmates, even if your child feels today that Joe or Sally is not their friend so why invite them? Friendships grow over time through the path of shared experiences. If you invite less than half the class to your ceremony/party, we understand you may not invite the entire class.

We work very hard in class to cultivate an atmosphere that will build relationships among our students for a lifetime. As kids get older and enter adolescence, they need each other differently - they need a social network they can trust and where they feel safe and loved by everyone. Their synagogue needs to be a place where they are always accepted and never rejected and I need your help to make this happen for their lives.

If you choose to invite the classmates to your party and cost is a concern, Rabbi Levine has discretionary funds available and would be happy to cover the cost of the classmates to ensure that everyone is included in the party.

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## 8. Frequently Asked Questions?

### **How long is the ceremony?**

Approximately one hour.

### **Does my child need to know the Hebrew letters to join the B'nai Mitzvah Program?**

Yes. Students must be able to read the Hebrew letters and make letter and vowel combinations. Private tutoring can be arranged before the academic year begins to prepare any student to learn the letters in 2-3 weeks.

### **What about students with special learning needs?**

Tamid is committed to helping you find the best way to prepare for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Special arrangements can be made to allow students and/or other family members with disabilities to participate fully in the ceremony.

### **Who will officiate at my child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah?**

Rabbi Darren and Chesney Polis. The goal is to make the experience as personal as possible for your family.

### **Where can my child celebrate the Bar/Bat Mitzvah?**

Tamid brings the Torah to you. Think B Mitzvah in a box. The typical experience is to have the ceremony one hour before the party at the same venue. This can happen anywhere - event spaces, hotels, restaurants, common rooms, houses, back-yards, the beach, on boats. Get creative and be personal!

### **Can my child learn to Wrap/Lay Tefillin?**

Yes. Translated as "phylacteries," tefillin are special ritual boxes containing passages from the Torah which are worn on the arm and on the head during weekday morning prayer. Boys and girls will be shown the process during the 6th grade year.

### **Who provides Kippot and Talitot?**

You are invited to arrange for kippot which can be purchased easily from any Judaica website. Many parents like to give a Talis to their child on the day of the ceremony. Tamid will also bring a box of generic white kippot to the ceremony.

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## 9. Parent's Timeline and Checklist

### 2-5 years before your child's ceremony

- Enroll your child in Hebrew School. Students must read Hebrew before entering the two year B'nai Mitzvah program
- Date selection happens 3+ years prior to your child's 13th year and is done together, at a class meeting with parents, staff and rabbis.
- To keep your child's official date on the Tamid calendar, your family must maintain Tamid membership.

### 9-12 months before your ceremony

- Reserve your location/venue
- send a save the date to family

### 4-6 months before your ceremony

- Have a conversation with Rabbi to plan logistics and details
- Family Participation (aliyot, special readers) discussed

### 3-4 months before your ceremony

- Student begins 1-1 Torah training with tutor
- Student sets date with Rabbi to write student speech
- Make plans for a talis for your child

### 1 weeks before the ceremony

- Student submits final speech to rabbi
- Rehearsal: Parents, student, and rabbi meet for run thru. Mazel Tov!

### Check-list of what parents need to arrange at ceremony

#### On the Bema 30 minutes before the ceremony

- Torah (Tamid will provide)
- Prayer books (Tamid will provide)
- Kippot/Yarmulkes (Tamid will provide if needed)
- Kiddush Cup and wine/juice
- Talis for b'nai mitzvah student
- Challah (shabbat morning ceremony only)
- Havdalah Set: Kiddush Cup, Spice box, Havdalah Candle (Tamid will provide for evening ceremonies)

#### Logistics/Equipment

- 2-3 hand held microphones
- 4-6 foot table for Torah



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## 10. Glossary and Bibliography

**Aliyah:** literally “going up;” the blessings before and after the Torah readings; it is an honor to be invited to recite these blessings.

**Bar/Bat Mitzvah:** literally translated as “Son/Daughter of the Commandment,” more accurately understood as “the Commanded One.” Figuratively, it means the age of responsibility.

**B’nai Mitzvah:** more than one Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Used when referring to more than one child.

**Haftarah:** the portion from the Prophets or writings that is read after the reading of the Torah. Optional.

**Havdalah:** the evening ceremony on Shabbat.

**Kippah:** yarmulke or head covering.

**Parshat ha’Shvuah:** the Torah portion of the week.

**Seder K’riat ha’Torah:** the portion of the service when the Torah and Haftarah are read.

**Shacharit:** the morning service.

**Tallit:** a Jewish prayer shawl once only worn by men and boys from the age of Bar Mitzvah. Today, girls and women wear them also. A tallit must have tzitzit on the corners.

**Torah:** also known as the Five Books of Moses. The Torah is the first section of the Hebrew Bible.

**Tzitzit:** specially tied fringes on the corners of the tallit that are meant to be symbolic of the Mitzvot.

**Yad:** the pointer used when reading from the Torah.

**Hebrew name:** a Hebrew name is used for ritual purposes. It is composed of your Hebrew name and the Hebrew name of both your parents. The word “ben” or “bat” is inserted to mean “son of” or “daughter of,” and the letter vav is used to mean “and,” e.g. Yoseif Tzvi ben Mordechai v’Esther; Sara Rivka bat Hannah v’Shalom.