

**JCP**

**downtown**

**B'nai Mitzvah**  
Resource Guide



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# INTRODUCTION

Dear Families,

Mazel tov and welcome!

It is with great joy and excitement that we extend our heartfelt congratulations to you and your family as your child embarks on the sacred journey of becoming a b'nai mitzvah. This is a momentous milestone in your child's life, marking their transition into the next phase of their Jewish journey. We at JCP are honored to walk alongside you in this profound and meaningful process.

This experience is not just a ceremony; it is a journey of learning, growth, and deepening connection to Jewish traditions, values, and community. As your child prepares to lead us in prayer, chant from the Torah, and share their personal reflections, they are not only embracing their heritage but also stepping into a new role of responsibility within our Jewish community.

At JCP, we strive to make this experience as enriching and supportive as possible. Our dedicated team of educators, clergy, and staff are here to guide your family through each step of the process. This includes helping your child learn important Jewish skills, like leading the main prayers of the service, chanting from the Torah, and crafting a meaningful D'var Torah (speech).

This is also a special time for you as parents as your child embarks on the path toward Jewish adulthood. You will witness your child's growth in knowledge, confidence, and Jewish identity as you enter this next chapter as a family. I encourage you to fully engage in this journey, to share in the learning, and to cherish the moments of preparation and celebration.

Once again, mazel tov! May this journey be filled with joy, discovery, and a deepened sense of connection to our Jewish community and tradition.

Warm regards,

Rabbi Deena Silverstone and Rabbi Josh Scharff  
Jewish Community Project Downtown

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

## Terminology

While "bar" or "bat" on its own means "son" or "daughter," the phrase *bar mitzvah* or *bat mitzvah* means "age of responsibility." *B'nai mitzvah*, the plural and gender neutral form of the word, will be used in this guide. As children become young adults, they take on an increased responsibility for their own actions, their relationship to Jewish tradition, and their connection with the larger community.



# PROCESS OVERVIEW

Please review this high-level overview of the b'nai mitzvah process at JCP.

## As early as 3rd grade and onward

- Family becomes members of JCP
- Family selects a b'nai mitzvah date (full membership is required, and must be maintained to hold date)
- Family pays first half of b'nai mitzvah fee (\$2,500)
- Learner attends weekly Hebrew School class

## Beginning at the start of 6th grade

- Learner begins to work weekly with tutor

## One year before ceremony

- Rabbi assigned
- Learner and family meet with rabbi to choose Torah verses from assigned Torah portion
- Learner, tutor, and family receive study materials specific to the verses selected
- Family decides if they'd like to sponsor the Friday Evening Services the night before their child's b'nai mitzvah ceremony

## 6 months before ceremony

- Learner meets with rabbi to start work on D'var Torah (speech)
- Learner makes a plan to attend at least three Friday evening services before their ceremony
- Family pays second half of b'nai mitzvah fee (\$2,500)

## 3 months before ceremony

- Rabbi will review learner's progress so far and will confirm their eligibility to become a b'nai mitzvah
  - Learners who have actively participated in this process (including attending tutoring and *D'var Torah* meetings) will be well prepared for the rabbi's confirmation and will be on track for their ceremony
  - Learners who have not participated in the preparation process may, at the rabbi's sole discretion, have their ceremony canceled or postponed (fees paid up to that point will not be refunded)

## 6 weeks before ceremony

- Family confirms ceremony logistics and honors via intake form

## 1 week before ceremony

- Rabbi, musician, learner, and at least one parent meet for ceremony rehearsal

## Day of ceremony

- JCP team (rabbi, musician, and events staff) travel to selected location in NYC to perform ceremony
- Learner becomes a b'nai mitzvah!

# PROCESS OVERVIEW

## Setting a Date

We are honored to offer b'nai mitzvah training and services to all eligible members of JCP. If you are not yet a member, you can become a member of JCP [here](#). Full membership is required in order to reserve and hold a date. Families may reserve a date as early as third grade.

B'nai mitzvah ceremonies can take place for students in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. Most of JCP's b'nai mitzvah ceremonies take place shortly after the child's thirteenth birthday. The date must be chosen at least one year in advance. It is up to your family to choose what works best for you. JCP b'nai mitzvah ceremonies take place either Shabbat morning (Saturday, 9:30-11:30am) or Shabbat afternoon (Saturday, 4:30-6:30pm).

Once you have become a full member of JCP, you can request access to the b'nai mitzvah date selection Calendly link and select any ceremony date that is open. Date selection happens on a rolling basis. Families can choose a date beginning when their child is in third grade, but no later than a year in advance. When selecting a date via the Calendly link, families must also select the timing of the service. Families can select only one date and time slot. The first part of the b'nai mitzvah fee will be due upon reserving the date.

### **When choosing a date, please keep the following dates (and the days around them) in mind:**

- Sports schedules
- High school application deadlines
- B'nai mitzvah dates of other kids at school
- B'nai mitzvah dates of family members
- B'nai mitzvah dates of camp friends
- School vacations
- Other family events
- Jewish holidays, including the High Holy Days, Hanukkah, and Passover

Please note that for ceremonies taking place in the few weeks following a break, learners will be expected to continue tutoring throughout the break. This is true for all school breaks, including winter break, spring break, and summer vacation.

**Ceremonies taking place in the fall semester (September-December) will require learners to have summer tutoring.** Generally, this is included in 7th grade tuition. Circumstances that necessitate additional tutoring may result in additional costs.

# PROCESS OVERVIEW

## JCP B'nai Mitzvah Policies

### Date Policies

**Full membership is required to reserve and hold a b'nai mitzvah date.**

**Dates should be reserved under the assumption that they may not be able to be changed.**

- **Based on availability**, dates can be changed **one time** prior to the verse selection meeting (~12 months in advance of the ceremony) at no charge.
  - Please keep in mind that "availability" includes everything on our rabbis' calendars, including other lifecycle events, school events, holidays, etc.
  - **We often have stretches of multiple months where our rabbis are booked every single weekend and during which we cannot accommodate date changes.**
- In extenuating circumstances, the ceremony can be rescheduled **one time** after verses have been selected. Since the Torah study process essentially starts over, we require a full 12 months to prepare. This means that new dates must be at least one year out and that it is not possible to move a ceremony to an earlier date. A fee of \$1,000 will be assessed to change the date.
- Any date change may necessitate a change of the assigned rabbi.

**Dates are requested on Calendly and should not be considered final until you receive a separate confirmation from the JCP team.**

### Venue Policies

- JCP rabbis officiate ceremonies within the five boroughs of New York City. If you have a specific venue in mind, **please confirm venue availability before selecting a date.** We recommend our preferred partner Hebrew Union College in Greenwich Village.
- It is also possible to hold a ceremony in Israel, either with JCP clergy or with our partner rabbi based in Israel. Please note that there are additional fees and scheduling restrictions.
- Except for ceremonies held in Israel, JCP does not allow ceremonies to be hosted with another rabbi.
- The JCP team typically does not do in-person venue walkthroughs or otherwise assist in securing a venue. If your venue does require a walkthrough, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate. We are always happy to coordinate with you or your event planner to answer questions about our ceremony requirements.

Learners, families, and the JCP team all maintain extremely busy schedules. For this reason, we try to schedule all b'nai mitzvah meetings far in advance. Please do everything you can to prioritize these appointments. In the event that you or your child cannot make an appointment, please let us know as soon as possible.

# PROCESS OVERVIEW

## Finances

Below is the three-year payment schedule for the b'nai mitzvah program.

Fees include sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classes\*, one-on-one tutoring, individual preparation with a JCP clergy member, JCP Full Membership, and the logistics and coordination of the ceremony with the officiating clergy member and musician.

Deposit when reserving a ceremony date	\$2,500**
Full Membership <i>\$2,200 for a one parent family and \$3,600 for a two parent family.</i>	\$2,200 or \$3,600
Sixth grade tuition (includes full school year of weekly class & tutoring sessions)	\$4,500*
Seventh grade tuition (includes full school year of weekly class & tutoring sessions)	\$4,500*
Balance of b'nai mitzvah fee, due 6 months prior to ceremony	\$2,500
Eighth grade tuition (includes monthly teen program)	\$1,000
Extra tutoring sessions as needed	\$120/session

JCP strives to address barriers from participation. Please join us in conversation about the particular type of support from which your child or family could benefit.



\*Full membership grants you special access to events, programs and perks including reduction in HSP tuition per child.  
\*\*Refundable until two years before the date of the ceremony

# PROCESS OVERVIEW

## JCP in Israel

Some JCP families choose to celebrate their child's b'nai mitzvah in Israel. Learners should still be enrolled in the sixth and seventh grade years of HSP, as well as any necessary additional tutoring, in order to ensure they are properly prepared for their ceremony. While participating in our B'nai Mitzvah in Israel program, families will work with both a JCP rabbi and JCP's Israel-based partner, Rabbi Galit Cohen-Kedem of Congregation Kodesh v'Chol, in Holon, Israel.

With two years of advance notice, JCP's clergy can plan to travel to Israel to officiate a b'nai mitzvah ceremony. If there are multiple ceremonies within the same year, it is likely we will coordinate dates so more than one ceremony happens in a single trip for the rabbi. Additional fees will apply, including reasonable travel and accommodation costs for the rabbi. In the past, when JCP's clergy have traveled to Israel to officiate a b'nai mitzvah, it has taken place at the egalitarian section of the Western Wall, a hotel, or the HUC campus in Jerusalem.

For more information about JCP in Israel, visit [www.jcpdowntown.org/hebrew-schoolproject/jcp-in-israel/](http://www.jcpdowntown.org/hebrew-schoolproject/jcp-in-israel/).



# COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE

## The Family Experience

We expect that all families will help keep their child on track with their studies between sessions with the b'nai mitzvah tutor and JCP clergy, and support their child as they write their D'var Torah (speech about their Torah portion).

Conversations with clergy will give participants in the program the opportunity to explore Jewish values and customs together with their family. Families can plan to be involved in the ceremony in a number of ways. They may choose to lead portions of the service or read from the Torah. Any such family involvement must be confirmed at least six months before the ceremony to allow time for parents/other family members to learn prayers and/or Torah.

There are opportunities to honor loved ones who will be present at the ceremony, as well.



# COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE

## Friday Evening Services

In the six months leading up to their b'nai mitzvah ceremony, we hope to see learners take a more active role in joining the broader JCP community. We expect to see learners join for services **at least 3 times**.

We also invite you to kick off your child's b'nai mitzvah weekend with a celebration at a Friday Evening Service! As a wonderful way to commence the festivities, your child will have the opportunity to lead services alongside JCP clergy. **This must be reserved by the time of your verse selection meeting.** Email [events@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:events@jcpdowntown.org) for more information about sponsoring a Friday Evening Service in honor of your child.



# COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE

## Mitzvah Project

As part of becoming a b'nai mitzvah at JCP, learners complete a mitzvah project to reflect their increasing responsibility in society and their power to make impactful change in the world. This project helps learners create a deep and lifelong habit of giving back and engaging in *tikkun olam* (acts of repairing our world).

There are two components of the mitzvah project experience at JCP:

**Within class:** Through the HSP curriculum, seventh graders are introduced to different types of tikkun olam, including philanthropy, volunteering, and community organizing, exploring these concepts through Jewish text and through exposure to Jewish organizations that engage in this work.

**At home:** b'nai mitzvah learners are asked to complete their own mitzvah project in honor of becoming a b'nai mitzvah. This individual mitzvah project is the responsibility of the learner and their family. Here are the steps that you will be asked to take:

- Identify an organization within New York City whose work is meaningful to the b'nai mitzvah learner, and with which they can volunteer their time.
- So as to maximize the impact of the project, and to encourage learners to develop a deep appreciation for and meaningful relationship with the organization of their choosing, we ask that each learner completes a minimum of 10 community service hours with a single organization.
- For some suggested organizations with whom to partner, please feel free to refer to [this guide](#).

Once the b'nai mitzvah learner has confirmed which organization they will be volunteering with, they should complete [this intake form](#). JCP must review and approve the project plan before a learner can begin volunteering.

Once they have completed at least 10 hours of service to the selected organization, the learner should complete [this reflection form](#).

# TIMELINE

## Preparation for the Ceremony

Officiated by one of JCP's clergy and a JCP musician, each b'nai mitzvah ceremony is personalized within the context of a Jewish traditional framework, ensuring that the ceremony suits your family's Jewish perspective and values.

### Study with Clergy

Our goal is to empower each learner as a lifelong student of Judaism through a personalized preparation process. Each learner will meet with a JCP clergy member six times in the months leading up to the ceremony, encouraging personal reflection on their Torah portion, introducing methods of Jewish textual interpretation, and exploring core values. **Clergy assignments are made a year in advance**, and JCP strives to ensure continuity by pairing each learner with the clergy member who will officiate their ceremony.



### Choosing a Torah Portion

The portion of the Torah that the learner will read is based on the date and time of the b'nai mitzvah. In Jewish tradition, the Torah is divided into weekly sections so that the entire Torah can be read and studied within a year. Approximately one year before the ceremony, the learner will meet with their assigned rabbi to choose a segment of that week's Torah portion to study and read aloud during their b'nai mitzvah ceremony. The JCP team will provide study materials for the learner to study on their own and with their assigned tutor.

# TIMELINE

## Preparation for the Ceremony

### Musical Direction

One accompanist on guitar is included in the b'nai mitzvah fee. If you would like to have additional musicians join that accompanist, we are able to hire additional musicians on your behalf for a fee of \$2,000 per musician. We have a roster of talented musicians who play piano, percussion, and guitar. **Their involvement in the ceremony is subject to approval by Musician-in-Residence Molly Rose Hoenig.** Please email [events@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:events@jcpdowntown.org) to coordinate additional musicians.

If you would like to have an instrument not listed above, we will work to source a musician who plays your preferred instrument. All musicians must be hired by JCP, display a professional level of musicianship (as assessed by the JCP team), and attend required rehearsals. We are unable to have musicians who are not hired by JCP join the ceremony.



# TIMELINE

## Educational Experiences

### One-on-One Tutoring

Learners will be matched with a tutor at the beginning of their sixth grade year. Learners will work with their tutor one-on-one during weekly 45-minute sessions until their ceremony date. While we strive for continuity, learners may work with more than one tutor throughout the preparation process if changes in the tutor's or learner's schedule arise.

Individual tutoring blocks are generally offered on Mondays and Wednesdays between 3:15pm and 7pm and are shaped around the HSP class schedule. Tutoring usually happens in person on the same day as the learner's HSP class. Additional tutoring blocks may be made available over Zoom.



# TIMELINE

## Educational Experiences

### Hebrew School Project Classes

The HSP experience balances tradition and creativity, encouraging learners to explore their Jewish identity and grow as individuals, friends, and community members, and fostering lifelong engagement with Jewish traditions and values. Learners will examine Jewish texts in deeper ways, feel ownership over rituals and traditions, and explore what it means to become a Jewish teenager.



### Core Curriculum

In sixth and seventh grade, learners tackle the big ideas of Jewish identity, culture, history, diversity of Jewish life, Israel, and interpretation of sacred texts in personal and meaningful ways. The curriculum also integrates the concepts of responsibility for oneself and one's community through service.

Students beginning their studies during or after sixth or seventh grade will be asked to confirm a b'nai mitzvah date before beginning the HSP program. This is so we can make sure their tutoring time will be well spent and that there is plenty of time to learn their Torah portion.

### Eighth Grade

Beginning in eighth grade, learners participate in a monthly teen group facilitated by JCP clergy and educators. We provide a Jewish space for teens to socialize, stay connected to the community, and discuss challenges that face Jewish teens as they transition into their high school years. We also provide continued opportunities for the teens to volunteer in the community, gather for Shabbat dinners, and celebrate Jewish holidays.



# EVENT PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

## Recommended Ceremony Venues

- **JCP Lobby**
  - Maximum capacity of 60 people
  - Email [events@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:events@jcpdowntown.org) to reserve
  - Rental is \$500 for a 3-hour window
  - Located at 146 Duane Street
  
- **Hebrew Union College (HUC)**
  - Maximum capacity of 220 people
  - Email Meredith Kelly [mkelly@huc.edu](mailto:mkelly@huc.edu)
  - Located at 1 West 4th Street



## Rehearsal

The week of the ceremony, there will be a full rehearsal of the ceremony. These rehearsals take place at JCP and include practicing the D'var Torah, music, and reading from the Torah. We cannot accommodate a rehearsal at the venue. At least one parent is required to accompany the learner to the rehearsal.



# EVENT PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

## Day-Of Ceremony Needs

The b'nai mitzvah fee covers the cost of coordinating and organizing the details and logistics of the ceremony. Our team will arrange for the transportation, setup, and breakdown of ritual objects, including our Torah scroll, prayer books, head coverings, prayer shawls, challah, wine, candy, and any other specific ritual item required for the ceremony. The fee also covers the presence of a clergy member as the main officiant, and the presence of one musical accompanist on voice and guitar.

### For the ceremony, JCP will provide:

- Torah, yad (pointer), and laminated blessing card
- JCP prayer books
- Extra prayer shawls to cover the Torah
- Kiddush cup
- Havdalah set (for afternoon ceremonies)
- Candies and baskets for distribution
- Kippot (if requested)

### What we ask the venue to provide:

#### *Physical setup*

- 2 chairs on bima (stage) for rabbi and musician
- One large table (8') on which to rest and read the Torah
- Tablecloth for the large table
- One small table (any shape) for other ritual objects (to the side/back of the bima)
- Tablecloth for the small table
- One podium, stage right of the large table
- A second podium OR music stand, stage left of the large table

#### *Sound setup*

- One (ideally wireless) handheld microphone
- Optional: one podium microphone at the stage-right podium
- One wireless headset microphone for the musician at stage left
- If a wireless headset microphone is not available, a microphone on a mic stand will suffice.
- A ¼" guitar plugin option (we will provide a 10' cord)
- Guitar stand

#### *Service setup*

- Wine and wine opener (kosher or non-kosher)
- Challah with challah board or plate

On the day of the ceremony, the JCP team will need 45 minutes to set up the space, do a sound check, unroll the Torah, and quickly meet with your family. Our b'nai mitzvah ceremonies run for approximately 90 minutes. Please ensure your venue reservation is for at least 2.5 hours.

# CONTACT

## Contact

**For questions about ceremony logistics, contact our Community Events Manager:**

**Jodi Isman**

Community Events Manager

[jisman@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:jisman@jcpdowntown.org)

**For questions about the Hebrew School Project, contact the Director of the Hebrew School Project:**

**Kai Segall**

HSP Director

[ksegall@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:ksegall@jcpdowntown.org)

**For questions about JCP membership, please contact our Development and Events Coordinator:**

**Jolene Hernandez**

Development and Events Coordinator

[jhernandez@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:jhernandez@jcpdowntown.org)

**For questions about the content of service, contact our rabbinic team Rabbi Deena Silverstone and Rabbi Josh Scharff**

Rabbinic Team and Jewish Life

[rabbi@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:rabbi@jcpdowntown.org)

**For questions about scheduling your child's D'var Torah tutoring, verse selection, and the final rehearsal, contact our Rabbi's Assistant**

**Jincell Baul**

Rabbi's Assistant

[jbaul@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:jbaul@jcpdowntown.org)



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