



# Kol Hadash

HUMANISTIC  CONGREGATION

## **B Mitzvah Guide** *A Resource for Families*

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## ***Shalom!***

If you are reading this Kol Hadash B Mitzvah Guide, you are likely:

- Curious about our B Mitzvah Program
- The parent of a student approaching B Mitzvah age
- Finding out more about Kol Hadash or...
- All of the above!

We are very glad that you have opened this booklet, whatever your reasons. We hope that you will find it useful for your purposes.

*Rabbi Adam Chalom*

*Leah Sosewitz, B Mitzvah Coordinator*

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## ***What Is a B Mitzvah?***

*Consistent with our Humanistic values of gender equality, B Mitzvah is our gender-neutral, non-binary terminology for what is conventionally called Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. At our celebrations, families and students can choose the terminology they prefer; our informational materials strive to be as inclusive as possible.*

### **The History of the Bar Mitzvah**

The Bar Mitzvah is a coming-of-age ceremony. At one time, the ceremony for males probably included circumcision at age thirteen, a rite that was later moved to the eighth day after birth. In ancient times, adulthood arrived with the onset of puberty.

In rabbinic Judaism, the Bar Mitzvah marked the time when a boy assumed individual responsibility for the commandments of Jewish law. Before the age of thirteen, a child was presumed to be a parent's responsibility; after his thirteenth birthday (or twelfth for girls), the obligation to obey the positive commandments of the Torah and of the Rabbis was his own. He was considered a part of the adult community, a "son (bar) of commandment (mitzvah)."

Once responsible for his own behavior, the Bar Mitzvah could now read from the Torah during the Saturday morning religious service. However, the practice of calling a thirteen-year-old boy to read from the Torah on the occasion of becoming Bar Mitzvah is not specifically prescribed in Jewish law and was not practiced widely until the fifteenth century. It was around this time that the tradition of the boy creating a commentary on a Jewish text also became popular.

Thirteen-year-old girls did not obtain the privilege of celebrating a Bat Mitzvah until the 1920s, since in rabbinic Judaism historically (and in Orthodox Judaism today), women are not eligible to lead the public Shabbat Torah reading. From the first Bat Mitzvah in 1922, the ceremony has grown in popularity and today is practically universal throughout the non-Orthodox Jewish denominations.

In contemporary Reform and Conservative Judaism, it is customary for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to read from the Torah portion or Haftarah for a particular Shabbat on or after his/her thirteenth birthday, as well as to present a commentary on the text and on the Mitzvah experience and to lead a portion of the Shabbat service.

### ***The Humanistic B Mitzvah***

In modern American society, thirteen no longer represents the beginning of adulthood, but rather the onset of adolescence - a period of searching for one's identity and life path. Thirteen-year-olds can respond to more challenges than were expected of them as children; they can demonstrate greater independence and depth of thought, competence, and commitment.

A Humanistic B Mitzvah provides public encouragement and recognition of the development of these capacities on the road to maturity. It signifies a young person's desire to become more responsible for their own decisions and actions, and to identify with previous generations of the Jewish people who have done so. The Hebrew word mitzvah today is used in two ways. The original meaning was "commandment," but a second meaning of mitzvah is "good deed." Thus for Humanistic Jews, a B Mitzvah also signifies a "child of good deeds."

Humanistic Jews mark this life passage by encouraging Mitzvah students to select a Jewish text or project with which they feel a personal affinity as the basis for their study. In their Jewish education at Kol Hadash, the students receive a thorough grounding in Jewish history, Hebrew, Jewish culture, and Humanistic Judaism. The Humanistic Mitzvah presentation declares membership in the Jewish people and in the human community of ethical citizens.

### ***Requirements of the Kol Hadash B Mitzvah***

To celebrate a B Mitzvah at Kol Hadash, a child is expected to:

- Regularly attend Sunday School beginning in third grade (see note below)
- Complete 6th Grade Hebrew and 7th Grade B Mitzvah classes, in addition to Sunday School
- Meet periodically with Rabbi Chalom in the year leading up to the Mitzvah celebration
- Study and prepare to read a Jewish language text (Torah, Bible or other Hebrew literature, or a text in Yiddish or Aramaic) and deliver a paper in English (commentary on text or results of an in-depth, relevant project—research, artistic expression, or documented activity)

**Note:** Families of older students who wish to prepare for a B Mitzvah should contact Rabbi Chalom to discuss options. It is never too late!

B Mitzvah students are also encouraged to complete a mitzvah (service) project that demonstrates a willingness to think of others and contribute to their community.

It is expected that each B Mitzvah family (students and parents) will usher and help with a simple oneg (reception) at two B Mitzvah ceremonies during the year of or prior to their own B Mitzvah.

Because a B Mitzvah ceremony also welcomes a student into the Kol Hadash community, all congregants are invited to attend the service.

The student's parent or guardian must be a member of Kol Hadash and meet all financial obligations for the Mitzvah celebration, including membership dues, tuition and fees, facility rental, Oneg Shabbat, etc. See Appendix II for more detail.

### ***Choosing a Date***

The first formal step to celebrating a B Mitzvah at Kol Hadash is to set a date for the event. Most families try to find a date close to their child's thirteenth birthday, but others choose dates for convenience.

**The Mitzvah date is selected in consultation with the B Mitzvah Coordinator and Rabbi 18-24 months before the celebration.**

Mitzvah families can choose a Friday night, Saturday morning, or Saturday evening service. Fall ceremonies generally cannot be scheduled before the High Holidays.

If you are considering a fall ceremony, this would require that Hebrew tutoring or project work would take place during the previous summer and might preclude overnight camp or a lengthy family vacation. Keep this in mind when selecting a Mitzvah date.

The service must be held at our congregational home, the North Shore Unitarian Church, 2100 Half Day Road, Deerfield. Kol Hadash will reserve the space and bill the family the rental fee. The B Mitzvah Coordinator will make arrangements to reserve the facility for rehearsals during the two weeks prior to the ceremony; this rehearsal time is included in the facility rental fee.

The family is expected to host an oneg following the ceremony; this may be as simple as challah, cookies, and juice. The family is responsible for providing the food, drinks, and paper goods. Please note that use of the Hearth Room foyer is included in the rental fee for the Unitarian Church; there is an additional charge to use the adjacent Fellowship Hall for an extended oneg.

Some families choose to host a simple oneg following the service and then a separate party at another location. Kol Hadash is not involved in the planning of or assistance with parties. See the section titled “The Ethics of Celebration” for more discussion about parties.

## ***B Mitzvah Classes***

### **Sixth Grade**

In sixth grade Hebrew, students acquire the basic Hebrew reading ability they will need for their B Mitzvah presentations. The sixth grade class meets on Sundays, 11:10- 12:00, following Sunday School class at Deerfield High School.

### **Seventh Grade**

Rabbi Chalom teaches the second year of the program. Because Hebrew is a central component of the class, the sixth grade year (or equivalent) is a prerequisite for the seventh grade Mitzvah class. A student is not required to celebrate a B Mitzvah in order to take the Kol Hadash Hebrew program. The seventh grade class meets on Sundays, 11:10- 12:00, after Sunday School at Deerfield High School.

**Note:** Enrollment in both years of the program, in addition to regular Sunday School attendance, is required for all B Mitzvah students.

In the seventh grade B Mitzvah class, there are four major learning objectives:

**1) Practice reading and understanding the students’ B Mitzvah Hebrew readings**

By the time of their Mitzvah services, students will be very familiar with both the pronunciation and the meaning of their Hebrew readings. Students will read and interpret their own and other students’ Hebrew portions, with special focus on the closest Mitzvah celebration.

**2) Understand Hebrew as a living language**

Students will master simple Hebrew conversations, grammar, and vocabulary, as well as songs sung in Israel and at Kol Hadash. This language study will be complementary to their B Mitzvah Hebrew reading skills.

**3) Understand the B Mitzvah concept and celebration**

Students will reflect on the history and significance of their own ceremonies, as well as review the basic elements of other B Mitzvah ceremonies they will likely attend over the course of the seventh grade year. This will make them more familiar with what they see in other congregations and prepare them to explain the distinctive approach of Kol Hadash and Humanistic Judaism.

**4) Understand Humanistic Judaism**

Students will have a good understanding of the basics of Humanistic Judaism: its values, its approach to Jewish life and personal ethics, its roots and history, and its celebrations.

### ***Creating the Mitzvah Presentation***

For their Mitzvah presentations, students may choose one of the following, with the Rabbi's guidance:

- 1) A Hebrew selection from the Torah, which is read in Hebrew from the Torah scroll and in English translation.
- 2) A Hebrew selection from another part of the Bible or from medieval or modern Hebrew literature. The selection is read in Hebrew and in English translation.
- 3) A project based on research, activity, or artistic expression. In this case, the Hebrew reading would be shorter and chosen to relate to the theme of the project. The project should be a vehicle for the student's demonstration of knowledge about an aspect of Jewish history or culture, how the topic relates to the Jewish community, and how the student can contribute to his/her community.

For each of the above, Rabbi Chalom meets with students approximately one year prior to the ceremony to help them choose a text and/or a project. Once a text or topic is chosen, it is time to begin the Mitzvah paper, the student's commentary on the selected text or project; traditionally, the B Mitzvah's commentary on a Torah portion is called a d'var Torah (translation: a word of Torah). Rabbi Chalom meets with the student periodically as the paper is developed. For project-based presentations, the timing of the paper will depend on the nature of the project. The paper should be finished before Hebrew tutoring begins, although changes may be made up to six weeks before the service.

The goal of the Hebrew reading is to demonstrate a connection with Jewish culture.

**For presentations based on Hebrew texts, regular Hebrew tutoring with a Kol Hadash tutor begins at least 14 weeks before the event; the tutoring schedule should be finalized five months before the event. For project-based presentations, the length of the tutoring schedule will be based on the selected shorter Hebrew reading.**

It is very important that the tutoring schedule be consistent and without interruption, so that the student can make adequate progress. If you are considering a fall ceremony, summer tutoring or project work might preclude overnight camp or a lengthy family vacation. Keep this in mind when selecting a Mitzvah date.

The Project may be:

- A written research project that will be presented at the Mitzvah ceremony
- A project involving artistic expression, such as music, visual art, creative writing (prose, poetry), or a performance that is presented at the Mitzvah ceremony.
- An in-depth service-oriented project with a clear learning component, a summary of which is presented at the B mitzvah ceremony. This should involve a significantly greater scope and time commitment than the community service activity outlined in the next section (Community Service).

All projects must have Jewish content and involve a learning experience. Some examples are:

- A researched and written report on a Jewish figure or historical event or an aspect of Jewish culture
- Artwork created in the style of a Jewish artist and displayed at the B Mitzvah ceremony, accompanied by an oral presentation about the work.
- Weekly volunteer work at a center for Jewish elderly and the compilation of an oral history of American Jewish life in the early-mid 20th century
- Past projects have included:
  - Being a Jewish Vegetarian
  - Synagogue Architecture—including designing one for Kol Hadash
  - The Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem (the student was herself ¼ Armenian)
  - The Purim Shpiel (the student created his own and performed it)
  - Jewish Humor
  - Stephen Sondheim
  - Jews in Science

### ***Community Service***

Kol Hadash's requirements for B Mitzvah services include Sunday School for Jewish cultural education and Hebrew for familiarity with Jewish language. We also feel that community service enables students to live out the ideals of Humanistic Judaism, improving the world through human effort. By performing community service, students can learn valuable lessons about good citizenship, personal responsibility, and the importance of community mutual assistance.

The choice of how and where to volunteer lies with the B Mitzvah child and family; guidance can be provided by the B Mitzvah Coordinator, Youth Education Director or the Rabbi. Many public and private schools require community service, and that experience can count as the Mitzvah community service. The mitzvah project can be as simple as doing small activities during the year prior to the B Mitzvah, or more substantial participation in a charitable activity, or any project or activity that serves the child's family or community. Students should actively participate in their service projects, beyond merely collecting donations from others. The mitzvah project should involve at least thirteen hours of work during the year before the Mitzvah celebration.

There are opportunities at Kol Hadash to assist our educational programs, including family services and special events like the Hanukkah service or the Purim celebration. There are also many kinds of service agencies in the Jewish and general community looking for assistance; animal shelters, food banks, and local libraries are just a few examples. The Jewish United

Fund's website lists local volunteer opportunities: [www.juf.org/TOV](http://www.juf.org/TOV). Many students choose to include their community service experience in their Mitzvah paper as part of their presentation.

If you would like further suggestions of community service opportunities, please contact the B Mitzvah Coordinator.

### ***The Ethics of Celebration***

One of the most challenging aspects of the B Mitzvah process for the family and the student is finding an appropriate way to celebrate the Mitzvah student. Their achievements should not pass by without celebration, but the excesses of extravagant Mitzvah parties are infamous. Mitzvah parties have the potential either to reinforce or to undermine the values of the ceremony and our congregation, so families are encouraged to find fitting ways to celebrate their child's achievement.

Children invited to the Mitzvah service should be accompanied by their parents (who should therefore also be invited to the service)—this helps both to demonstrate the importance of the event and to maintain decorum during the Mitzvah presentation. It is also expected that friends of the Mitzvah student who are invited to the Mitzvah party will also be invited to the Mitzvah service, which, after all, is the reason for the celebration.

For those families who choose a Mitzvah party, you have the option of celebrating at the Unitarian Church, using the adjacent Fellowship Hall; the church charges an additional fee for using this room. In the past, families have hosted dessert receptions after Friday evening services or lunch buffets after Saturday morning services. Our B Mitzvah Coordinator is available to provide examples of what families have done in the past and provide referrals.

Alternatives to large formal parties may include:

- A family trip to a special destination (such as Washington, DC, New York City, Israel)
- An event for friends at a special destination (amusement park, bowling, sporting event)
- A fun community service activity
- A smaller event for family and close friends

## ***Invitations***

Families are responsible for selecting and printing invitations to the service. Text should include the following:

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation  
at  
North Shore Unitarian Church  
2100 Half Day Road Deerfield, Illinois

**It is important for families to include this text as stated to clearly announce the service as a Kol Hadash event and to identify the church merely as the location.**

For invitations and service covers, families can decide for themselves whether they wish to use the terms *Bar Mitzvah*, *Bat Mitzvah*, or *B Mitzvah*.

Sample invitation text:

Please join our family as we celebrate  
the B Mitzvah of  
Aaron Friedman

Saturday, October 7, 2016  
10:30 AM

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation  
at  
North Shore Unitarian Church  
2100 Half Day Road, Deerfield, Illinois

A luncheon follows the service until 1:00 PM

**Please send your invitation text to the Rabbi and B Mitzvah Coordinator for review before printing your invitations.**

## ***The Mitzvah Service***

The B Mitzvah service is designed to celebrate the growing maturity and independence of the student. Families work with the Rabbi to create a ceremony that is meaningful to them and consistent with the values and traditions of Humanistic Judaism and Kol Hadash. The Mitzvah service is a special opportunity to honor family and friends by having them participate in the celebration.

### **The Liturgy and Music**

Families may use Kol Hadash's standard B Mitzvah service or may customize the service with an array of liturgy and music with the Rabbi's approval. If the Mitzvah celebration is a Havdallah service on a Saturday evening, there are special rituals and symbols to include: wine, a spice box, and a Havdallah (braided) candle.

The standard cover for a B Mitzvah service includes the Mitzvah student's name (in Hebrew and English), the date of the event in the Jewish and general calendars, the Rabbi's or other officiant's name, and the name and logo of Kol Hadash. Families may create a customized cover with the approval of the Rabbi and Youth Education Director.

**The service must be finalized at least 6 weeks before the Mitzvah event.** The Rabbi will send the family an electronic file of the service in PDF format. The family is responsible for printing the service.

Kol Hadash's pianist and soloists provide music during the service. Their services are arranged by the Youth Education Director. Other guest musicians may be included with the Rabbi's approval.

### **The Leader**

The ceremony may be led by the Rabbi or a lay-leader of the congregation (dependent on availability).

### **The B Mitzvah Student**

As part of the ceremony, the B Mitzvah is expected to:

- Read from the Torah or an alternative Jewish language text (Hebrew, Yiddish, Aramaic, etc.)
- Give a short speech that includes a summary and explanation of the Torah portion or other reading, or the Mitzvah Project, including the reason the student chose it and its relevance to their life.
- Lead several portions of the service, in English and Hebrew.

Optional:

- A speech on a topic relevant to the B Mitzvah experience, e.g. the significance of the B Mitzvah to the child, a topic relating to the Torah portion or Hebrew selection, an explanation of the child's community service project, thank-you to the people who helped with the B Mitzvah, etc.

Other elements of the ceremony may include:

- An opening explanation of Humanistic Judaism
- Parents' address to the child
- Inter-generational passing of the Torah
- Rabbi's response to the Mitzvah presentation
- Presentation of certificates and gift from the congregation
- Candlelighting

The Mitzvah family chooses readers for the service, as well as family and friends to honor with the candlelighting ceremony. A sample candlelighting order is below:

*The Mitzvah Tutor*

*Friends of the Mitzvah Student*

*Aunts, Uncles, Cousins*

*Grandparents*

*Siblings*

*Parents*

*The Mitzvah Student*

#### **Humanistic Decorum**

The Mitzvah event and its participants should exemplify the values of Humanistic Judaism; therefore, theistic texts and practices, such as wearing a tallit (prayer shawl) or kippah (yarmulke/skullcap), are not included in the service.

#### ***Rehearsals***

In the two weeks before the ceremony, the student rehearses at the Unitarian Church up to three times, as needed: once with the tutor and B Mitzvah Coordinator the first week, and twice with the B Mitzvah Coordinator, Rabbi and tutor (if available) the week of the service.

We recommend that families supply readers with their texts at least a week before the service and encourage them to practice reading their texts aloud.

These rehearsals allow students to feel comfortable speaking in the space for the service and allow the tutor and Rabbi to offer last-minute tips on presentation and to walk through the ceremony as it will take place. If the Mitzvah family plans to take family photographs before the event, they should arrive at the Unitarian Church **at least one hour before the ceremony.** The family can also contact the Unitarian Church to arrange a time to take photographs before the date of the ceremony.

## ***The Mitzvah Celebration***

In addition to arranging for the rental of the Unitarian Church and hosting the oneg, the family is responsible for the printing of their service. On the day of the ceremony, service booklets can be left in the foyer for ushers to distribute. The family may reserve seats for their close family in the first two rows of the audience by placing services on those chairs.

Each Mitzvah family (parents and student) agrees to serve as ushers and to help with a simple oneg at two services before, or in the year of, their own service. This will be coordinated by the Youth Education Director. Ushers distribute services, maintain order and decorum among the invited guests during the service, and help those guests who require assistance. Ushers also help set up the oneg and clean up afterward. Families planning a more elaborate oneg or luncheon should hire staff or arrange for family and friends to help.

To maintain decorum and assure good guest behavior, we require that private security/chaperone services be hired for services with fifty or more children attending. Families should contact the B Mitzvah Coordinator for a referral and must provide Kol Hadash with confirmation of hiring.

We encourage families to invite friends of the B Mitzvah with their parents, to discourage large numbers of young guests who may become unruly without adult supervision. Families should also designate adult friends or family members to sit among younger guests in the sanctuary to maintain decorum.

Approximately fifteen minutes before the ceremony begins, the Rabbi and the immediate Mitzvah family (parents, siblings and Mitzvah student) will meet away from the sanctuary and foyer to reflect on the moment at hand and to relax before the exciting event.

## ***Final Thoughts***

The Mitzvah celebration should not be considered the end of Jewish education - it is only the beginning.

Just as we do not finish learning about life in middle school, participating in Jewish culture continues through high school into college and adulthood. The B Mitzvah should be a peak on a continual relationship with the Jewish people and with Humanistic Judaism. It is expected that B Mitzvah students will complete the 7th and 8th grades of Sunday School and continue on to Confirmation. Students who have been confirmed are eligible to become paid classroom aides. It is our hope that the Kol Hadash Mitzvah experience is an opportunity to grow intellectually, emotionally, and personally; to develop skills and self-confidence; and to experience a meaningful connection to the Jewish people and to humanity. The Mitzvah celebration should provide family and community the opportunity to celebrate and applaud these achievements and to reaffirm their own commitments.

*It takes a congregation to create a B Mitzvah.*

*It takes a lifetime to explore what it means to be a Humanistic Jew and a good human being.*

## ***Appendix I - The Countdown***

<b>6th Grade</b>	Student attends Hebrew class in addition to Sunday School.
<b>7th Grade</b>	Student attends B Mitzvah class with Rabbi Chalom, in addition to Sunday School.
<b>Month 24-18</b>	Select Mitzvah date with B Mitzvah Coordinator.
<b>Month 12</b>	Family meets with the Rabbi. Student meets with the Rabbi to discuss Hebrew reading or other project. Student begins to plan community service project.
<b>Month 11</b>	Student finalizes Hebrew reading selection and project and meets with the Rabbi to discuss their commentary.
<b>Month 10-9</b>	Student writes rough draft, in consultation with Rabbi.
<b>Month 8</b>	Student edits/refines paper, in consultation with Rabbi.
<b>Month 7-6</b>	Student completes paper. Hebrew tutoring schedule is finalized.
<b>Month 4</b>	Hebrew tutoring begins about 14 weeks before ceremony. Family meets with Rabbi to discuss service. Text for invitations is submitted to B Mitzvah Coordinator for approval.
<b>Month 3</b>	Hebrew tutoring continues. Mail invitations.
<b>Month 2</b>	Hebrew tutoring continues. Student begins presentation practice. Service is finalized.
<b>Month 1</b>	Family gives list of readers/candle-lighters to Rabbi. Hebrew tutoring and presentation practice continue.
<b>One Week Prior</b>	Student rehearses one day at the Unitarian Church with the B Mitzvah Coordinator and/or tutor.
<b>The Week of the Service</b>	Student rehearses two days at the Unitarian Church with the B Mitzvah Coordinator, Rabbi and/or tutor.
<b>The Day of the Service</b>	Final rehearsal, to begin no later than one hour before the service, is held with the Rabbi; all readers must attend.

**Note:** The timetable will vary for students undertaking project-based presentations, but the project should begin no later than eight months before the ceremony.

## ***Appendix II - Fees and Financial Obligations***

The Mitzvah family must be dues-paying members of Kol Hadash. Student must be enrolled in Kol Hadash Sunday School, Hebrew, and Mitzvah classes with consequent financial obligations. Fees are subject to change at the discretion of the Youth Education and Finance Committees. The B Mitzvah fee is charged to cover administrative costs, including fees for tutoring and musicians' services at the ceremony. Payment of the fee is due when formal preparations begin.

This fee does not include the costs of renting the Unitarian Church for the ceremony or printing the B Mitzvah service booklet to be used during the ceremony. The Unitarian Church offers Kol Hadash families a special rate to rent the sanctuary and Hearth Room, including rehearsals. There is an additional charge for custodial fees and the use of the Fellowship Hall for an extended oneg. Kol Hadash arranges the rental and bills the family. All balances must be paid at least 30 days prior to the mitzvah service.

## ***Appendix III – Sample B Mitzvah Service Cover***

