

The Mechinah Year: Seventh Grade at TBA



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WHY MOVES YOUR SPIRIT?
Hebrew Community Program
of Temple Beth Shalom
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A Note from Your Clergy

June 2020

Dear Incoming Seventh Grade Families,

We're thrilled to accompany you on this exciting and meaningful year together where our young people enter the world of Jewish adulthood.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah marks the entry point into your young person's exploring what it means to get to design his or her own Jewish journey. Up until this point, you've been guiding them, ensuring that they receive the best tools possible to be able to accomplish the Jewish basics: praying, reading and understanding Torah, and mitzvot to benefit the community.

Now, starting with seventh grade and continuing in our high school program, TBA is providing our young people with the opportunities and choices to navigate their Jewish lives: a higher level of Jewish learning with meaningful conversations that can help them in their everyday life, space for asking difficult questions in a safe and nurturing environment, and opportunities for making more of an impact on their community through mitzvah projects and volunteer hours. Not only will our students be personally developing in our program, they'll grow in community with their Jewish peers through these highly formative years.

In order to do this, we require the support of the community and the [full attendance](#) of the community. [Seventh grade Mechinah is required for all TBA students becoming Bar and Bat Mitzvah for the entire year.](#) It is an essential part of Bar and Bat Mitzvah training, and participation in the [entire year](#) is necessary to ensure that all our young people benefit from learning with their full peer community. [In having your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah at TBA, you are committing to keeping your child enrolled and attending for the entire seventh grade Mechinah program, and we encourage you to consider continuing their attendance in high school.](#)

Additionally, there are no better way of helping our young people lead a meaningful and fulfilling Jewish and adult life than by showing them through our own example. We encourage you to take advantage of the many services and programs TBA offers for family and adults, and we on the clergy team would be most happy to meet with you to help you chart your own path of meaning.

This has been a highly unusual and difficult year. In this period we have learned however, about what is truly important: relationships, community, ritual, and meaningful contributions to the world around us. These are exactly what we are about at TBA, and in taking part in our Mechinah and high school programs, are young people will foster meaningful Jewish relationships, be part of community, be supported by ritual, and find opportunities to make a difference in the world. We look forward to another year with you and yours on this incredible journey.

B'shalom,

Rabbi David Z. Vaisberg

Cantor Jessica Epstein

Max Edwards, Rabbinical Assistant

Welcome to Seventh Grade



June 2020

Dear Incoming Seventh Grade Families,

Mechinah is the Hebrew word for preparation. The seventh grade year is really about a preparation and a new beginning. Students are preparing to become Bar or Bat Mitzvah. But, really students are preparing to become Jewish adults, and with that comes the responsibility of thinking and feeling like a Jewish adult. The Mechinah Year is designed to help our young teens understand that Bar and Bat Mitzvah is not a culmination, but rather a launching pad for their Jewish life. Enrollment and completion in the seventh grade year is a required to have your B'nai Mitzvah at Temple B'nai Abraham. Our courses are designed not only to instruct, but also to encourage wrestling with great Jewish ideas. Students are given the opportunity to participate in both core content classes, mitzvah opportunities and community building. Occasionally, we offer "choice days" where they choose elective opportunities based on interest. In this packet you will see a sampling of courses that are offered. Choice day electives are chosen by students during dinner. In seventh grade, students are not placed in designated classes, but each week we do a combination of large group work and also different random groupings to strengthen our dialogue and encourage students to mix and mingle. Additionally, this is the year when we ask the students to explore their role in the larger Jewish community. What are their obligations to their synagogue, local community and country? Through a choice based mitzvah track, students are encouraged to find their passion and pursue helping to make the world a more whole place. This is done by choosing either Mitzvah Service Hours or a Mitzvah Service Project coupled with a few obligations to our synagogue. Detailed information about the Mechinah year can be found here in this booklet. Our goal is to launch your children into the next part of their Jewish journey. Through their dedication to this year, we know they will find a wonderful beginning to this next phase of Jewish living and learning.

B'Shalom,

Morah Melissa Weiner
Director of Jewish Education
Jewish Learning Program
Temple B'nai Abraham



A Five Part Year of Study

Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust & Human Behavior

Facing History believes that the lifeblood of democracy is the ability of every rising generation to be active, responsible decision-makers. Facing History helps students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. Through discussion, character exploration, primary source material, and group exercises, students see the tragic events from every perspective.

1

In the process, they come to understand that history is the collective result of every individual's thoughts and actions. They learned not only history, but also the critical thinking skills required to make good choices. Through rigorous investigation of the events that led to the Holocaust and other recent examples of genocide and mass violence, students in a Facing History class learn to choose knowledge over misinformation, compassion over prejudice or bullying, and participation over indifference or resignation. It's active—rather than passive—learning. In this course, students move from thought to judgment to participation as they confront the moral questions inherent in a study of violence, racism, antisemitism and bigotry. The readings and activities explore the consequences of discrimination, racism, and antisemitism by holding up "the tarnished mirror of history" to one of the most violent times

in world history -- the 1930s and 1940s. As students read and reflect, they investigate the forces that undermined democracy in Germany, betrayed a generation of young people, and ultimately led to the Holocaust. In doing so, students discover that many of those forces threaten our own society today. Through readings, films, discussion, and activities, the class helps students discover how their decisions can make a positive difference in their community, nation and the world.

Out of the Ashes: The Birth of a Nation

Students will love Israel from the first "SHALOM. Lead by our Rishon, our youth emissary who spends the year teaching and working with our teens, the program seeks to instill love and partnership between our youth and our homeland. Rising from the ashes of WWII, the Zionist dream and the establishment of a modern Israel, the course will look at the connection of our people to the land, to the covenant of Abraham, and to the promise of a people. Geography, history, culture and modern Hebrew will be integrated components in this class. The class does not shy away from some of the more difficult contemporary complexities of Israel, but rather asks the students to consider our role in the protection of, but also the reflection on a very complex country. Taught in an informal, yet meaningful way, the class combines fun with learning!

2

Tefillah: Students participate in an interactive weekly prayer services designed to give them the opportunity practice the skills needed to lead the congregation.

3

Preparation for the Bar and Bat Mitzvah

At the request of the parents, students in the thick of preparing for the Bar and Bat Mitzvah will have the opportunity to learn with one of our trained teachers. The staff will offer help on only prayers necessary for a successful B'nai Mitzvah experience. This is not required, but students will be placed based upon parent request. Haftarah and Torah preparation will be lead by the clergy.

4

Electives: Students join in everything from Torah Yoga, Jewish cooking, Modern Hebrew, Jewish comic book heroes and other activities designed to explore Jewish culture, history and the arts.

5

7th Grade Mitzvah Requirements

What is it that calls you to stretch beyond what is comfortable into places that are uncomfortable, and realize you are more powerful and magical than your mind could have believed?"

Julia Butterfly Hill-Environmental Activist.

Mechinah curriculum includes visits throughout the year from those whose own passionate journeys are shared to help inspire our teens. Speakers have included:

The Seeing Eye, Yoni Stadler (tree sitter and founder of Eden Village Camp), Holocaust survivors from Metrowest, Bridges Executive Director, representatives from the Soup Kitchen, Philanthropy experts, Metrowest Able and Advocates for Special Needs Children, American Cancer Society, Thank Israel Soldiers, Israel Program Center, Pedals for Progress, JNF and more!

Choose your Mitzvah Path Inspiration!

Each student should choose one path!
Some very determined students have done both!

Option 1:

**15
Service
Hours**

Option 2:

**Approved
Mitzvah
Project**

Option I: 15 Service Hours Requirements

There are many mitzvot in Judaism, one of which is tzedakah. Tzedakah involves the giving of money, food and clothes. There is also Gemilut Chasadim, giving of one's time and energy. The Mechinah class students will be performing both of these mitzvot throughout the year. Volunteers are needed to perform Tikkun Olam, repairing the world in the Jewish community (including our Synagogue) and the community at large. Each time you volunteer in the Synagogue or Community please fill out a Volunteer Voucher Form (a sample is included in this booklet. Extra forms may also be found on the Synagogue's website, www.tbanj.org. Please go to the Hebrew School site and then hit Mechinah year.

Fifteen (15) total volunteer hours are required for each Mechinah Class student as follows:

- ★ 5 synagogue volunteer hours
- ★ 5 community volunteer hours
- ★ 5 additional hours of student's choice either synagogue or community
- ★ 2 hours working at the Purim Carnival and 1 hour at Mitzvah Morning

Synagogue Service Opportunities

Volunteers are always needed in the synagogue to help the congregation run smoothly and efficiently. Mechinah class students are very helpful in this effort. To volunteer in our office or for list of opportunities, please call Arleen 973-994-3950.

- ★ Religious School Assistant - Assisting in the office Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 4:00-6:00 p.m. in various office tasks when needed. Please call Brenda to ask if volunteers are needed for the day.
- ★ Hebrew Tutor - Assist students in Hebrew 4:00-6:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday. The Mechinah class student's Hebrew skills need to be evaluated before a student may tutor. Please contact Brenda.
- ★ Classroom Assistant - Assist students and teachers on Monday, Tuesday and Thursdays from 4:00-5:30 or 6 p.m. For the continuity of our classes we do ask for a one month commitment. The beginning and end of the day are the busiest times and all volunteers must be here the entire time.
- ★ Sell Snacks - Monday, Tuesday or Thursday, 3:30 p.m. - 4:15 p.m. You will receive 1/2 hour of Synagogue service. Please contact Arleen at alichtenstein@tbanj.org

Community Service Opportunities

Please let us know if you are involved in an organization that could use volunteers. The opportunity can be publicized. Babysitting, volunteering at school fairs or helping out with chores at home does not constitute community service. If you have a question as to whether something you are interested in doing would count as community service, please contact the office at alichtenstein@tbanj.org.

Mitzvah Hours Completion Form

Date: _____

Student: _____

Please circle either:

TBA Synagogue or Community

_____ Print organization name

Adult Supervisor signature: _____

of Volunteer Hours: _____

Describe your duties/experience:

Make a copy of this completed Voucher Form for your records, then hand in this original to the Religious School office. It may also be emailed to alichtenstein@tbanj.org. Additional forms are available at: www.tbanj.org.

Option 2: An Approved Mitzvah Project

In recent years, many synagogues and families have begun asking Bar or Bat Mitzvah candidates to do tzedakah/social action projects as part of their preparations. This requirement emphasizes the ideas that the mitzvot (commandments) to which they will be obligated involve not only Jewish ritual, but also social action. If your child is looking for a meaningful mitzvah project to celebrate becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, encourage them to think about what they feel passionate about and what they love. They may work individually or in small groups. A simple collection of items will not suffice as an entire mitzvah project, but is welcome as part of the overall goal.

Simply follow these simple steps:

- Make an individual appointment with Morah Melissa or Morah Arleen to discuss or develop an idea. Parents are welcome, but we are happy to work with your child to develop an idea and a passion for a cause. If working in a small group, all participants must attend.
- Complete a mitzvah project proposal form (one for each participant-included in this booklet). Parents must sign the form. Seek approval of the idea through Morah Melissa or Morah Arleen.
- At the midway mark of your project, please pick up a mid-project evaluation form from Brenda and complete it to provide an update to Morah Melissa or Morah Arleen.
- Mitzvah Project must be completed by the end of the seventh grade Mechinah year, although our hope is that each child will continue to follow their passionate commitment to their mitzvah. At the completion, please draft a summary for inclusion in the materials distributed at your Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Morah Melissa and Morah Arleen are always available for individual meetings throughout the process. We will provide ideas, encouragement and support.
- Complete 2 hours working at the Purim Carnival and 1 hour at Mitzvah Morning. Looking for ideas, we suggest: http://www.areyvut.org/project_ideas/ or visit us to review our resource materials .

Mitzvah Project Completion Form

Name: _____

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date: _____

Every Mitzvah Project should include at least three of these key elements:

- ★ Hands-on work (time spent working) with the organization
- ★ Advocacy for the cause
- ★ Educating others about the issue
- ★ Collecting items

Please describe your Mitzvah Project here:

- ★ What is the goal of your project?

- ★ How will you accomplish your goal? (Be sure to include who/what/where/when & how you will advocate and/or educate others about your cause.)

- ★ How will you track your progress (number of hours, pounds collected, etc.)

- ★ If you have a name for your project, what is it?

- ★ When do you think you will begin and end your project?

Give this completed form to Brenda & set up a 30-minute meeting with Morah Melissa or Morah Arleen to get approval & do a short text study together.

Approved by: _____

Student's Name/Signature _____

Parent's Name/Signature _____

Date: _____

Mechinah Program COMMITMENT 2020-2021

It is very important for a student to fulfill the educational requirements of Mechinah Program and step up to High School with their peers in April. Not to complete the Mechinah Program year sends a message that the Bar or Bat Mitzvah is itself the end goal, which is not the correct message we want conveyed. Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a wonderful lifecycle event, but it is not the end of the journey. The completion of the Mechinah Program year is a critical element to one's Jewish education. This commitment paper states that all parents and students understand the commitment to finish the Mechinah Program year and graduate regardless of when becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. If a student does not continue to attend Mechinah Program before becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, there can be no ceremony at the Synagogue.

Every time a student drops out during the Mechinah Program year it creates conflicts for those parents who insist their kids finish the year. Knowledge of another student who no longer "has to go" only causes other kids to question why they have to go. This is an unneeded aggravation for many families. The class requirements are extremely manageable and should not impact a busy seventh grader's weekly schedule. We need your help in keeping this commitment for the year. You will be notified of your attendance in January. Those who fail to meet the minimum requirement will not be eligible to step up with the class.

Date: _____

Print Student's Name: _____

I _____ commit to having my son/daughter complete the Mechinah Program requirements and "step up" with his/her class on April 30, 2021.

Parent's Signature: _____ Date: _____

I _____ commit to completing the Mechinah Program requirements and "step up" with my classmates on April 30, 2021.

Student's Signature: _____ Date: _____