



B-Mitzvah: An Introduction

B-Mitzvah: What's in a name? A Bit of History, and This Moment

From its inception, Reform Judaism has centered on the idea that Judaism needs to adapt and change to embody our highest values and to meet each new moment in a way that reflects our history and our present with an eye to the future. Only through such development has Judaism (not just Reform Judaism but in fact all of Judaism) remained relevant and timely while accessing the timeless wisdom of our tradition. This enables us, as it has enabled the Jewish community in each generation, to engage in a Jewish practice that is meaningful and relevant while striving to make the world a better place, living out the mandate of *tikkun olam* (healing the world).

This effort includes the language we use to talk about ourselves and our Jewish practice. Historically, the commonly used terms in the Jewish world for those who come of age is *B'nai Mitzvah* (plural), *Bar Mitzvah* (masculine singular), and *Bat Mitzvah* (feminine singular). The essence of these terms refers to those who accept responsibility for the sacred obligations (*mitzvot*) of being Jewish and part of Jewish community.

In recent years, understanding of gender in society and in Jewish community has developed significantly. We now know that gender is not a binary “either/or” between only male or female options but that gender is a complex landscape, with an array of genders that individuals identify with (e.g., nonbinary, genderfluid). In many cases, our young people are teaching us and leading the way in our understanding of gender and we are grateful to them.

Therefore **at Temple Chai, we are adopting the non-gendered term B-Mitzvah to refer to this lifecycle event** and to our program of learning and preparation for the milestone in order to have an inclusive term for all of our young adults.

Questions you may have

I. Why this specific name, B-Mitzvah?

At Temple Chai we have chosen B-Mitzvah as it is one of the most common terms now used in Jewish communities for this lifecycle event, and **we find the notion of “Be” powerful**. *Bar/Bat/B'nai/B* Mitzvah is not an event you have, but one **becomes** *Bar/Bat/B'nai/B*-Mitzvah. It is something you are. This is a process of being and becoming: becoming a teenager, being present in community, becoming fully aware of what is right and wrong, of who you are, and of what our sacred obligations are as Jews. B-Mitzvah encompasses all of these ideas and we are excited to continue to be present with each young person and each family in our community as we explore what it means to “B/Be” in this moment together.

As societal and communal norms and conventions develop, language adapts as well. Furthermore, the words we use do not merely reflect our lives but they also shape the way we understand the world. B-Mitzvah reflects our broader understanding of gender and invites us to celebrate, embrace, and honor all of our young people as they come of age in Jewish community.

2. Are all Jewish communities making this change?

At this moment, numerous communities throughout the Jewish world are developing in similar ways, choosing updated names for this lifecycle event and for temple programs that lead to the milestone. This is not yet universal but it is a growing trend. So far, there is not one singular name being used unanimously by Jewish communities or within the Reform Movement. It could be that over time, consistency will develop in the Jewish or Reform world and we will shift to using what becomes the commonly accepted name. This is a moment when we are continuing to learn and grow in understanding and we remain committed to the conversation and to this ongoing development.

3. Is this the same program as before or does the name mean an entirely different experience?

Our cherished way of engaging with the children of our congregation and joining with their families in helping them gain the skills and insight necessary to celebrate this coming of age *is not changing*. What is developing is the language used in discussing both the lifecycle event and the program of study.

At Temple Chai, we emphasize and value each child's process of learning as well as their continued involvement in Jewish and congregational life as much as the very meaningful experience on the day of their service. As a team of clergy and educators, it brings us such joy to work directly with our young congregants to prepare for this rite of passage marking the time when a child assumes the Jewish responsibilities of adulthood, typically celebrated right at the moment when they are stepping into "teenagerhood."

4. Can I still call my service *Bat Mitzvah*, *Bar Mitzvah*, *B'nai Mitzvah*, or another name that fits me and my identity, or do we have to call it my "B-Mitzvah?"

Absolutely! When you meet with your officiating rabbi, you will be able to chat about what term you would like to use to make sure the name we use for the service celebrating this milestone is fitting to you and your identity. "B-Mitzvah" will be used as our name for our program and for the lifecycle event generally within temple communications, including for each B-Mitzvah service on our temple calendar. This will ensure consistency while making sure the language we use is honoring of each of our young people.