
B'NEI MITZVAH HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION & WELCOME

Congratulations on reaching this milestone in your child's life. The ceremony that will be held will reflect the change in the status of an individual, from a child to an adult, in the eyes of the Jewish community.

This handbook is intended to help make this joyous occasion in your family's life reflect the teachings of our tradition, and to teach our children the responsibilities associated with becoming a Jewish adult. We will work together to ensure that your family has a positive experience as we prepare together for this Simcha (joyous occasion).

WHAT IS A BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

Bar/Bat Mitzvah literally means "son/daughter" of the commandment and refers to the age when children became legally responsible for their own actions. Since only people who have attained the age of bar/bat mitzvah are allowed to lead the congregation in certain sections of the service, including reading of the Torah, congregations would honor young adults with an aliyah (literally being "called up" to read from the Torah) sometime after their thirteenth birthday.

Originally only celebrated by boys, the first Bat Mitzvah was held in 1922. While girls traditionally attain the age of Bat Mitzvah at age 12, the Reform Movement generally treats men and women equally for Bar/Bat Mitzvah, celebrating sometime after their 13th birthday.

THE MEANING OF BAR/BAT MITZVAH TODAY

For many, Bar and Bat Mitzvah is less about reaching legal adulthood and more about celebrating a milestone in the life of the child and the family. It celebrates the completion of the parents' commitment to raise their child as a Jew and an affirmation of Jewish community, learning and Jewish values.

WHEN DOES ONE BECOME BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony does not change the status of the child into an adult. That happens at age 13. Instead, the ceremony is simply the ceremony at which the congregation honors the young adult by inviting him or her to take a leadership role within the service. One does not get "bar/bat mitzvah-ed" on that date, rather, on that date one celebrates attaining the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH SERVICE

Setting A Date

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah may be scheduled any time after a girl's 12th birthday or boy's 13th birthday (Hebrew/Jewish calendar); it is recommended that it be scheduled after the 13th birthday for either a girl or a boy due to maturity and the ability to understand the commitment of becoming a Jewish adult. Religious school class work in preparation for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will aim for 7th grade.

Things to consider in setting a date:

- Availability of hotel rooms (e.g., football games, graduation, prom, etc.)
- Jewish holidays (some Jewish holidays may be more or less conducive to a Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration. Speak to the Ritual Committee about any questions.)
- Availability of a service leader (See "Involving the Rabbi or Religious Leader" below)
- The theme of the Torah portion (See "Torah Portion" below)

Torah Portion

Each week, a Parashah "section" of the Torah (The Five Books of Moses) is read at Shabbat services. The specific section to be read is determined by the date of the service on the Hebrew/Jewish calendar. Some Torah portions may be more interesting to your child than others. This could be important as the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be writing a D'var Torah (a homily on the weekly Torah reading – literally a "word of Torah").

You can see what Torah portion is to be read on each Shabbat using the interactive calendar at the www.bible.ort.org website. This website gives the name of the portion, the complete text in Hebrew and English, and the Haftarah that is read along with the portion. The Haftarah (literally "conclusion") is a section from a later section of the Jewish bible that is thematically connected to the weekly Torah reading or holiday.

Timing of Services

Friday night services can be scheduled at 7:30 pm or 8:00¹ pm depending on the family's preference and last approximately 1 hour. Saturday morning services are scheduled at 10:00 a.m. and last around 2 hours.

¹ Families often choose the later time to give out-of-town guests more time to travel.

INVOLVING THE RABBI OR RELIGIOUS LEADER

Families have a choice of whether they wish to have the Rabbi lead services and help the Bar/Bat Mitzvah prepare his/her D'var Torah. If the Rabbi is to be involved, then he needs to be consulted well in advance to coordinate all aspects of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

No Rabbinic Involvement

If the Rabbi will not be involved, a leader for the service must be found. Please consult the Ritual committee when making this decision. The leader may be the tutor, a family member, or a Congregation member. The Ritual Committee can help you to identify someone, if you would like. The leader does not need to be a member of the congregation, but if not, the Ritual Committee will need to approve the person.

Rabbinic Involvement

If you would like the Rabbi to be involved, **notify the Ritual Committee of the date as soon as possible; possibly discuss the date(s) you are considering prior to actually setting the date to find out the Rabbi's schedule.**

The Rabbi's schedule is typically developed during the summer preceding each academic/Jewish calendar year, but he often has some weekends pre-scheduled with other events. Consulting him a year ahead is not too early to begin the process.

You may certainly invite the Rabbi to any celebrations that you are planning. Understand that his ability to attend will depend on the other responsibilities he has toward the congregation during his weekend visit.

If the Bar/Bat Mitzvah occurs on one of his regularly scheduled weekends, the Rabbi does not need to be paid extra for being involved in a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The Ritual Committee is better able to accommodate your wishes if the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is scheduled far in advance.

If the Rabbi is asked to come in for an extra weekend for the event, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is responsible for the Rabbi's expenses. This needs to be arranged privately with the Rabbi.

PREPARATION

Start with Ritual Committee

Meet with the liaison to the Ritual Committee to discuss the date that you have chosen and whether the Rabbi or someone else will be officiating at leading the service.

Our guidelines prescribe a minimum level of participation for each child (see below). Inform the ritual committee of the parts of the service for which the bar/bat mitzvah will take responsibility. If your child would like to deviate from these guidelines, please discuss this with members of the ritual committee, as the ritual committee will need to approve these changes.

Have the child select a *Mitzvah Project* and let the Ritual Committee know what project he or she has chosen. All Mitzvah projects must be approved by the Ritual Committee.

Summary of minimum responsibilities for Bar or Bat Mitzvah:

- Mitzvah Project
 - 21 lines of Torah in Hebrew and Haftarah portion in English;
- or,**
- 3 lines of Torah in Hebrew and Haftarah portion in Hebrew (in this case, a different reader(s) must be responsible for the rest of the Torah portion).
- Blessings for the Torah and for the Haftarah
 - D'var Torah (talk/learning based on the Torah portion for that week)
 - Lead the congregation in the following prayers: Hatzi Kaddish, Shema, V'ahavta, Avot and the Gevurot.

Find a tutor

The Ritual Committee can help you to identify people who are willing to tutor Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidates. Discuss any possible tutoring fees directly with your tutor.

Some tutors are happy to help with all parts of the service. Alternatively, you may work with different people for different parts of the service. Discuss these options with the ritual committee and the tutors. The different parts of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service that need to be prepared include:

The Torah portion

The entire Torah portion for each Shabbat is not typically read. Discuss with the Rabbi, tutor and/or Ritual Committee how to choose the number of lines and

which lines are to be read (twenty-one lines is considered the minimum number of lines for a Torah reading at CBS).

While some children choose to chant (sing) the Torah portion this is not required. If your child would like to chant, there is a software program called Torah Trope that can help your child learn trope (notes for singing the Torah) as well as the specific trope for each Torah (and Haftarah) portion. Many of our children have found this helpful.

The Haftarah

The Haftarah portion, as with the Torah portion, is determined by the date of the Shabbat. It can also be found using www.bible.ort.org. Typically the Bar/Bat Mitzvah reads the entire Haftarah portion in Hebrew; however, if the child reads at least the minimum twenty-one lines of the Torah portion in Hebrew, the Haftarah portion may be read in English. The child may choose to chant or to read the Haftarah. Torah Trope can also help children to learn the Haftarah portion.

Writing the D'var Torah

When the Rabbi conducts a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, he will meet with the student several times to help in the writing of the D'var Torah. If the Rabbi is not participating, the tutor or another member of the congregation may work with the student to develop their D'var Torah. The Ritual Committee can you identify someone to help with this.

Leading Congregation in prayer

Discuss with whoever will be helping to lead the services specifically which prayers and songs the child will do and how the service will be structured.

The prayers that your child should be able to lead, minimally, include the Hatzi Kaddish, the Shema, the V'Ahavtah, the Avot and the Gevurot. The child must also read or chant the blessings before and after the reading of the Torah and Haftarah. Of course, he/she may certainly do more.

When to Begin Directed Study

If your child is already comfortable reading Hebrew, study should probably begin approximately six months before the service. If not, your child will likely need to begin at least a year before the event. This should be discussed with your tutor and your child.

SPECIAL HONORS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS DURING THE SERVICE

Presenting a Tallit

The tallit is the prayer shawl that may only be worn by Jewish adults. Bar/Bat Mitzvah students may begin wearing a tallit at their B/Mitzvah service. Family or friends sometimes purchase a tallit for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as a present. If desired, a friend or member of the family can “present” the tallit to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and say a few words. Some Bar/Bat Mitzvah students prefer to begin the service already wearing their tallit.

Parent Honors

Our prayer book contains several versions of a parents’ prayer, which one or both parents can read publicly during the Saturday morning service, should they wish. In addition, our Congregation often incorporates a tradition of passing of the Torah from one generation to the next. The people involved in the passing of the Torah are chosen at the discretion of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and his/her family. Non-Jewish family members are welcome to participate passing the Torah if they wish.

Some parent(s) speak publicly to their children during the Saturday morning service.

Ushers

Ushers greet guests, show people where to sit, hand out prayer books and, in general, create a more welcoming environment. Friends or relatives are often invited to act as ushers or you can ask the Ritual Committee to find a volunteer from the community.

Gabbai (the Torah service leader)

The Gabbai leads the Torah service by calling up the people for the prayers over the Torah and by helping the student should they lose their place while reading the Torah in Hebrew. If you choose to use a Gabbai, you and your service leader should choose someone who is familiar with the Torah portion. This could be the tutor, if he/she is familiar with the duties of serving as a Gabbai.

Bimah Honors

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is invited to light the Shabbat candles on Friday night. This can be done by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and/or a combination of people chosen by the family.

There can be **UP TO** seven Aliyot during the Torah service on Saturday morning, including the Maftir (final section), which is read by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Therefore, up to six people or small

groups of people can be honored during the Torah service. These individuals or groups can include family members, friends, teachers, etc.

Bimah honors also include opening the ark two separate times, Hagbah and Galilah (dressing and lifting the Torah), and Gabbai (*see above*).

SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT BIMAH HONORS: If your family includes non-Jewish members whom you would like to honor, they are very welcome as participants in our service. Please discuss possible honors and roles for non-Jewish family members with the Rabbi or the person leading your service if this is not the Rabbi, and/or members of the Ritual Committee.

FOOD RELATED TO THE SERVICE

Note! It is often helpful to have a friend coordinate the food for services.

Kiddush

Challah and wine should to be present on the piano by the Bimah for the conclusion of Friday night and Saturday morning services. A whole challah must be provided for each service, Friday night and Saturday morning.

Onegs

The community is very open and willing to help with your Simcha (joyous occasion). Don't hesitate to ask for help to bring food, to help set up and to do whatever you need done.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is asked to host the Friday night Oneg². It is often helpful to have a friend to coordinate food for the Oneg. You may hire a caterer or people to help serve, set-up and/or to clean up.

Following Saturday morning services, there should be, at a minimum, a Kiddush³ for the Congregation. This can be as simple as bread(s), cookies, etc. or can be more expansive. An extended Kiddish/luncheon may be held at a different location if the entire congregation (people who attended the morning service) is invited.

² Oneg literally means joy, but has come to mean a reception on Friday evening

³ Kiddush means "sanctify" and refers to the sanctifying of the day by saying a blessing over a cup of wine. Today is refers to a small food reception after the Saturday morning service."

INVITATIONS, FLOWERS AND OTHER AMENITIES

Invitations

Services on Friday night and Saturday morning are public services open to the congregation. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be announced through the bulletin and all members are invited.

At your discretion, you may send invitations to members and to people outside of the congregation to invite them to the services. It is at your discretion whom to invite to any additional celebration(s).

Flowers

Flowers for the Bimah are not required. If you wish to have flowers, you may use the florist of your choice. Donna Ness is in the building on Friday afternoons and will let people in for deliveries if necessary; please notify her in advance so that she will know when to expect them.

Service Program

A program explaining the Congregation and/or the service is not required. If you wish to do one, the Congregation Secretary, Donna Ness, has samples that can be used as guides.

Building Use

The family is responsible for ensuring the building is locked and secured after the Oneg on Friday night and after Shabbat morning services. You will need to arrange for someone who has a key to be willing to stay and lock the building or to ask Donna Ness for a key and instructions for locking the building.

There is a nominal building fee for use of the building for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Please ask the ritual committee or the Congregation Treasurer for more information.

It is also customary to make a donation to the Congregation, often in honor of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a family member, the Rabbi, or the occasion itself.

Helpful Tip

You and your child will find it helpful to attend several B'nei Mitzvah prior to your child's to learn about the role of the child and family in the service. It will also be helpful in planning for the Oneg on Friday night and extended Kiddush on Saturday to get ideas for what others serve as well as what tasks are involved and how they are managed.

The other benefit of our small size is that Congregation members truly want to help you and your child. Allow them this mitzvah!