

Knesset Israel / Temple Israel

Bar / Bat Mitzvah Handbook



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You've Got a Date!

Since you are reading this handbook, you must have recently received a date for your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah so ... **Mazel Tov** on the upcoming simcha in your family! This handbook is designed to help you prepare for and celebrate your simcha in a way that is meaningful and in keeping with our Jewish tradition. Use this guide to:

- Know what to expect – both practically and emotionally
- Avoid surprises
- Answer questions
- Know what questions still need to be asked
- Get an idea of upcoming timelines
- Know what to do and when and where to do it

It is customary to mark this turning point in the life of a Jewish child with a religious ceremony. This provides the Bar/Bat Mitzvah with an opportunity to exercise their new rights as full members of the community by receiving an Aliyah, reading the Maftir and chanting the Haftarah and possibly other Torah portions. The celebrant will also lead the congregation in prayer.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony traditionally is the occasion at which boys and girls formally attain the status of religious and legal maturity and become obligated to fulfill all the commandments of the Torah. Wishing to preserve the special significance of this occasion, we view the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony not as an end, but rather as an affirmation of Jewish commitment.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration is not only a joyous experience for the young person, their family and friends; it is a rite of passage that is observed communally. It also serves as an incentive for learning, which, hopefully, will be an ongoing part of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah's life as an adult Jew. Therefore, we urge you to remember that your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration is, first and foremost, a religious event. Hence, there are two important principles underlying your celebration:

- The religious service is the central element of the day
- A Bar/Bat Mitzvah observance is a congregational event. The congregation is proud to witness our children become participating adult members of our community. Temple Israel is pleased to welcome your relatives and friends to our Shabbat service and to have them join us in prayer, song and celebration.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact the synagogue. The Rabbi, Cantor, Executive Director, Religious Activities Committee and Congregation are here to help you in any way.

Most importantly, relax and enjoy the journey of this life cycle event!

A History of the Bar & Bat Mitzvah Ceremonies

All societies determine a specific age that separates childhood from adulthood—the age when an individual assumes his or her religious and communal responsibilities to the society in which he or she lives. Like most traditions, the ceremonies connected with becoming a Bar or bat Mitzvah at age thirteen evolved over time. It has always been viewed as one moment in the process of spiritual growth and evolving commitment to the Jewish people.

The establishment of becoming a *Bar Mitzvah* at thirteen years plus one day for boys and a *Bat Mitzvah* at twelve years plus one day for girls has several origins. The Talmud records that during the time of the Second Temple (520 BCE–70 CE), it was traditional for Sages to bless a child who had completed his first fast day at the age of twelve or thirteen. In *Pirkei Avot* (“Ethics of the Fathers,” second century CE) it is written, “At thirteen one is ready to do *mitzvot*.” By the time the Talmud was completed in the sixth century CE, boys of thirteen years plus one day had assumed full responsibility for performing the *mitzvot*, hence the term *Bar Mitzvah*, “son of the commandment.” This also had legal ramifications: These boys were now counted in a *minyán* and could act as witnesses. There was no formal rite, only a public blessing by the father that he was no longer responsible for the sins of the son.

The earliest *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony consisted of blessing and reading the last section of the weekly portion of the Torah, the *maftir*, meaning the extra reading, since the boy was not a *Bar Mitzvah* until after the service, and reading the *haftarah* portion. The most important part of the rite was a *d’rashah* or *d’var Torah*, a sermonette on the Torah or *haftarah* portion. Since the *Bar Mitzvah* was assuming adult religious responsibilities, he was expected to show his understanding of those responsibilities to his family and, more importantly, to the community. Structurally, the *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony is essentially the same as it originally was. It wasn’t until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that we find records of a *Bar Mitzvah* being invited to lead part of the worship service.

A public ceremony in celebration of a girl becoming a *Bat Mitzvah*, “daughter of the commandment,” did not come into formal being in North America until 1922. Dr. Judith Kaplan-Eisenstein, the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, blessed and read the Torah portion from a book “at a respectable distance” from the Torah Scroll. The regular celebration of girls becoming *B’not Mitzvah* came into prominence in the Conservative congregations in the second half of the 20th century and varies from congregaton to congregation.

Historically, all joyous occasions were celebrated in some manner, and becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* was no exception. However, unlike weddings at which we are commanded to rejoice with bride and groom, the *Bar Mitzvah* has no such mandate. In early years, celebrations varied from a simple *Kiddush* of wine, brandy, and cake following the service to more elaborate meals for the family and friends. The Rabbis urged families not to have elaborate celebrations and to always provide for the poor in order to as an expression of the Mitzvah of inclusion.

The *d’rashah* was delivered by the *Bar Mitzvah* celebrant at an appropriate moment during the festive meal in order to emphasize its religious aspects. Gifts were generally limited to books, religious items, or “sermon gifts,” which were small amounts of money given as thanks for the sermonette. Among Moroccan Jews, this money was given to the boy’s teacher. Historically, *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* has been viewed as a first step in a young person’s acceptance of the obligations of our tradition to family and to community as a responsible Jew. It was, and should

continue to be, the beginning of a lifetime of the performance of *mitzvot*, study, prayer, and a commitment to share in the destiny of the Jewish people.

By guiding our nascent Jewish adults to the acquisition of a sophisticated understanding of Judaism, we empower them to become committed young Jews and set them on a path of lifelong involvement in the Jewish community and engagement with the values of Judaism. One of the earliest modes of recognizing the new status of our children was by articulating that we were no longer responsible for their actions and misdeeds. Implicit in this statement was that we had fulfilled our parental obligations and fostered within our children the necessary understanding and skill set to become intelligent, functional and participatory Jews.

KEEPING BAR/BAT MITZVAH IN PERSPECTIVE

- **Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is about the Acceptance of Responsibility.** Ultimately, this is the true import of *becoming a Bar and Bat Mitzvah*. It is not about acquiring a skill set which includes *K'riat HaTorah*, —“the reading of the Torah”, Haftarah and leading T'fillah (prayer). Rather, it is about acquiring the skill of responding to the challenge of being a committed Jew in the 21st century. This is how Judaism defines maturity.
- **The Torah Is the Center of Judaism.** Everything we do as Jews, everything we believe, everything we value revolves around the Torah. The Torah is the testimony of our people's encounter with God and it is very clear the sacredness with which our ancestors have embraced this legacy. Standing at the Torah our children become heirs to this legacy and affirm their acceptance of the Torah's expectations.
- **Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is a Community Observance.** It is not by coincidence that we choose to hold this initiation ceremony in public. To be a Jew means to live within a covenantal relationship—not only with God but with other Jews as well. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* marks the entry of the child as a full-fledged member of the community. The awarding of an *aliyah*, (“being called to the Torah”), is a gift of the Jewish people. For this reason, the marking of the child's coming of age takes place in the synagogue—our communal home.
- **The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony Is Not a Performance: It's a Celebration.** The synagogue is not a theater, and the *bimah* is not a stage, and the congregation is not an audience. The synagogue is the place of the community and it is gathered to welcome a new member to its ranks.
- **The Reception That Follows Is Not a Separate Event but a Continuation of the Celebration.** In fact, Judaism has a formal name for the meal after a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*: It is a *S'udat Mitzvah*. This meal is in honor of the performance of a Mitzvah. It, too, is a sacred gathering. This is not to say that it must be solemn; it should be a joyous moment reflective of the spirit of the morning's celebration and should perpetuate the concept of performing mitzvot. *Kashrut* is another *Mitzvah* that should be observed during the reception meal, no matter where the celebration takes place. *Kashrut*, the recitation of appropriate mealtime blessings and the setting aside of a portion of one's bounty for the poor demonstrate that the morning's celebration was internalized as a standard to be followed.
- **The Meaning of Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is Enduring Only If It Takes Place within a Context of Continued Jewish Growth.** Being a *Bat* or *Bar Mitzvah* is not the experience of a lifetime. It is a lifetime experience—a state of being that remains with us throughout our lives. Indeed, the true measure of *performance* comes not on the day one becomes a *Bat* or *Bar Mitzvah* but in the days that follow. Becoming a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* is a Jewish “commencement,” marking not an end point but a beginning—a beginning of a lifetime of mitzvot, a beginning of a lifetime of learning. As such, it is our firm belief that the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebration is validated and enhanced by demonstrating a commitment to continued religious education, in the Mifgash program for example, and participation in our synagogue's Kadima and USY groups.

MAKING IT COUNT

The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* process provides an opportunity for parents and children to talk about the Jewish values and observances that are meaningful to them. Studying *mitzvot* together and performing them together will help that conversation happen. Below are two resources that will help you:

- ***Putting God On The Guest List: How To Reclaim The Spiritual Meaning Of Your Child's Bar Or Bat Mitzvah* by Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin**

This book enjoys great popularity, for it addresses a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* in an exciting, contemporary style. The catchy title reflects the tone of the book. In illuminating the meaning of the *Bar Mitzvah* ritual, Salkin covers all bases: history, sociology, and religion. Recognizing that the *Bar Mitzvah* is an emotional event, particularly in families that are not observant, he explains its significance as a link in the unbroken chain of Jewish tradition as well as a rite of passage. Throughout, Salkin offers instant answers to the perplexing questions of faith and belief. In our age of instant gratification, this approach has great merit and appeal. Available at the Temple Israel Gift Shop.

- ***Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming of Age Together* by Cantor Helen Leneman**

A practical guide that gives parents and teens the "how-to" information they need to navigate the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* process and grow as a family through this experience. For the first time in one book, everyone directly involved offers practical insights into how the process can be made easier and more enjoyable for all. Rabbis, cantors and Jewish educators from the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements, parents, and even teens speak from their own experience.

There are several other excellent books available regarding Bar/Bat Mitzvah that can be of tremendous help to the entire family as it begins to think about and plan for the simcha. Here is a short list:

- *Mitzvah* by Jacob Neusner
- *Coming of Age – Your Bar / Bat Mitzvah* by B. Efron and A. D. Rubin
- *The Jewish Family Book* by Sharon Strassfeld and Kathy Green
- *The Narrowest Bar Mitzvah* by Steven Schnur
- *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survival Guide* by Randi Reissfeld
- *Danny Siegal's Mitzvah Book*

THE THIRTEEN MITZVOT PROGRAM

To help prepare *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* students to be fully integrated into the adult Jewish community with a measure of knowledge and pride, we present the Thirteen *Mitzvot* Program for the entire family to research and enjoy. Students who complete this program will be presented a special certificate at their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

Mitzvah One – Your Torah Portion and Haftarah

☞ Write an essay of 300 words on your *Parsha* or *Haftarah* that will subsequently be integrated into your *D'var Torah*.

Mitzvah Two – Home Rituals

☞ Participate in at least 4 of 10 home rituals with your family. Where possible, include a tape recording or photo to document the “event.” (not taken on Shabbat or Yom Tov):

Choices include:

Reciting HaMotzi before a meal	Havdalah
Singing Shalom Aleichem on Shabbat	Lighting Chanukah candles
Reciting Kiddush	Conducting the search for Chametz
Reciting Birkat HaMazon	Conducting part of the Passover Seder
Lighting Shabbat candles	Reciting the Shema at bedtime

Mitzvah Three – Synagogue Rituals

☞ Participate in at least 4 synagogue rituals. Choices include:

- Recite the blessing on Lulav and Etrog
- Attend Family Shabbat Services
- Hear the Reading of the Megillah
- Lead Yigdal on Friday night
- Attend a Simchat Torah celebration
- Learn to blow the Shofar
- Plant or purchase a tree for Tu B'Shevat (show us the certificate!)

Mitzvah Four – Life Cycle

☞ Attend and write a paragraph about three of the following life cycle rituals: Include your impressions and questions. Again, display photos wherever possible.

A Jewish wedding	A Brit Milah
A Pidyon HaBen	A baby naming
A funeral	Shiva

Mitzvah Five – Shabbat Dinner

☞ Attend at least 2 Family Shabbat dinners a year at the synagogue. Describe what impressed you the most. What can you take home and emulate?

Mitzvah Six – Shabbat Worship

- ☞ Participate in *Shabbat* morning or Friday evening services on 8 occasions. Don't count other *Bat* and *Bat Mitzvahs* you attend.

Mitzvah Seven – Remembering the Holocaust

- ☞ Read a book from a prepared Holocaust bibliography and write a brief essay recording your impressions of the book.
- ☞ Interview a Holocaust survivor and write a brief essay about the things you learned and the impressions you were left with.

Mitzvah Eight – Israel

- ☞ Write about three different organizations or people important to the history of Israel.

Among these are:

The Balfour Declaration	Histadrut
The Knesset	The Jewish Agency
Chaim Weizman	David Ben-Gurion
Golda Meir	Theodor Herzl
The IDF	The PLO and the Palestinian Authority
The Kotel	Masada
The Jewish National Fund	World Zionist Organization
Suggest your own	

Mitzvah Nine – Tikkun Olam

- ☞ Learn about various organizations in the community. Choose one or several and make a contribution to one of these. (A contribution of *chai* - \$18 – is a start!) Explain why you chose these organizations.
- ☞ Offer your services to a charity or service organization. Make at least 3 visits of 2 hours each. Describe your visits in words and document them with photos.

Mitzvah Ten – Jewish Knowledge

- ☞ Answer the following questions about various Jewish observances:

Why do we have two loaves of *challah* on Friday night?

Why do we say blessings over lights, spices, and wine at Havdalah?

Name the five services of Yom Kippur.

Why does the Jewish calendar day begin at sundown?

Mitzvah Eleven – Jewish Leaders

- ☞ Choose and describe 4 Jewish leaders from each of the following categories:

The Biblical Period

The Rabbinic Period

Late Medieval Personalities

Modern Jewish Personalities

Mitzvah Twelve – Synagogue

∞ Describe the significance of the following list of synagogue objects

- *Rimonim, Ner Tamid, Yad, Keter Torah, Machzor, Aron Kodesh*

∞ Give time to the synagogue by participating in one of the following:

- Repairing *chumashim* and *siddurim*
- Building and decorating the Sukkah
- Aiding in a classroom or the administrative office
- Suggest another way you can help the synagogue

Mitzvah Thirteen – Special Projects

∞ Choose two of the following:

- Research your family history and put it in essay form illustrated with photographs
- Write an essay on an interesting Jewish personality
- Read and write a paper on the Ten Commandments
- Create your own Jewish calendar
- Create your own Jewish heirloom
- Prepare a Shabbat and/or holiday meal

Essays and documentation should be featured attractively in this binder which will be displayed at the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebration and will then be taken home as, perhaps, the most meaningful memento of all.

The Rabbi will meet with *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* candidates periodically to review progress on this material and offer direction.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR S'UDAT MITZVAH/RECEPTION

The religious part of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony occurs in the sanctuary. Choosing to focus on Jewish values during your later celebration will continue to sanctify the day and make it special and memorable. Remember, everything we do with our children teaches them something.

Decide as a family what you are celebrating and what this moment in your life means. This decision will help guide you through the rest of the planning stages.

Consider Jewish Values in Your Decision Making

- *G'milut Chasadim*—Acts of Loving Kindness
- *Tzedakah*—Righteousness/Justice/Sacred Giving
- *Talmud Torah*—Study of the Torah
- *Hidur P'nei Zakein*—Honoring the Elderly
- *Zicharon*—Memory
- Shabbat—Honoring Shabbat
- *Tzar Ba'alei Chayim*—Non-Cruelty to Animals
- *Tikkun Hanefesh*—Repairing the Self
- *Tikkun Olam*—Repairing the World

Theme

Having a theme for your celebration might help you organize your vision for the day as well as serve as an educational tool for your family and friends. The challenge is to find an appropriate, relevant idea that reflects the Jewish values important to you. You might want to focus on a value or Mitzvah addressed in your Torah portion. For example:

- *B'reishit*, the first portion in Genesis, is about Creation. Use the theme of *tikkun olam*, “repairing the world,” and incorporate an environmental project into your celebration. Or consider creating or beginning something that will benefit the world in some way. One idea is to establish a food reclamation program in your school that calls upon kids to donate the uneaten, wrapped portions of their lunches (e.g., unopened juice boxes, packaged snacks), which you will take to the local food pantry on a weekly basis.
- The Torah portion *Noach* lends itself to the theme of showing kindness to animals. You can find out about species that are becoming extinct, get information about what we can do to help, and distribute it to your guests. You can ask guests to bring old towels, leashes, food, etc., for an animal shelter and then set a time when everyone can go there to help out. This theme is an easy one to feature throughout your entire celebration.
- There is a portion in Genesis called *Toldot*, which means “Generations.” You might use this occasion to learn about the generations in your family. Make a family tree and use it as table centerpieces. Contribute to organizations that focus on intergenerational activities.

- In the portion *Vayeishev*, Joseph interprets dreams. Use the theme of dreams throughout your celebration. Contribute to organizations that make dreams come true for those in need, such as the *Make a Wish Foundation* or *Myriam's Dream*. Purchase *kippot* made by the elderly in workshops supported by *Myriam's Dream*, a nonprofit organization that helps older people throughout the world.
- The first portion of the Book of Exodus is called *Sh'mot*, meaning "Names." Be creative. Consider the following: In what ways are names important? What does your name mean? What about other names? What is the meaning of your Jewish name? For whom are you named? Find out the *g'matria*, the numerical equivalent in Hebrew, of your name and its significance. Does it tell you anything about yourself? Contribute to an organization that helps newborn babies—those who are first being named. Contribute to one of the Holocaust museums or organizations—places that keep alive the names of those who were lost but are not forgotten.
- If Moses figures prominently in your portion, consider the theme of leadership. You can learn about other famous leaders. Consider the following: What are the essential characteristics of leadership? From a Jewish point of view, what makes a good leader? If you are having a candle-lighting ceremony, ask each person to think of a different leader and the qualities the leader had that he or she would like you to emulate.
- Your Torah portion might speak about blessings. You may decide to think about the blessings you have in your life and try to insure that others who are less fortunate are blessed in similar ways. For example, food is a blessing.
- Organize a collection of canned goods and spend some time at the food pantry, shelving supplies. Use canned food as the centerpiece for your tables and then donate the food to the hungry.

Check in Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's book, *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*.

Tzedakah

The “theme” of **every** Bar / Bat Mitzvah is responsibility. As a child matures, he/she is given an ever-increasing responsibility for their actions. Within the Jewish tradition, the concept that “kol yisrael arayvin zeh lazeh” that “each of us is responsible for the other” is fundamental. As the Bar / Bat Mitzvah approaches both child and family have various avenues for expressing and assuming responsibility.

- The invitation sets the tone for the celebration and can let your guests know what is important to you. In lieu of sending an expensive invitation, utilize your desktop publishing skills and make your own. Note on the back of the card that the simplicity of the invitation represents a donation to a *tzedakah* organization that you chose. The thank-you note can also be produced in this way.
- Donate 3% of the total cost of food to Mazon, an organization that helps feed hungry people nationwide. If you contact them ahead of time, they will send you cards to put on your tables, indicating that you have made a contribution.
- In honor of each of your guests, give donations that can make a difference in the lives of others, not party favors that will cost you the same amount and end up in the trash. Purchase a tree in Israel for each guest or each candlelighter. Purchase a “mootual fund,” a share of a cow on Reform Kibbutz Lotan, for each of your guests.
- Check to see if the leftover food can be donated to a soup kitchen. If you are somewhat insistent, many restaurants and caterers will help with this.
- Make either a financial donation to or purchase something specific for the synagogue, religious school, or synagogue library in honor of your becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.
- Flowers purchased to decorate the *bimah* can be donated to a local hospital or nursing home, not left in the synagogue to wither. Let someone else enjoy them.
- It is still possible to “twin” with either an Ethiopian Jewish child in Israel (through the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry).

Entertainment

- Include Israeli dancing, not just the hora. Perhaps think about hiring someone to teach Israeli dancing. Consider featuring klezmer music as part of the party entertainment.
- It is possible to do a Mitzvah project in place of or in addition to some form of entertainment. Why not rent a local school gym and sponsor a Mitzvah basketball game. Ask friends to support one of the teams and pledge any amount of money for each point scored. Cook for the soup kitchen with your friends.
- The party should reflect the initial values on which the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony is based. Don't be afraid to be different.

Candle-lighting

Make the candle-lighting ceremony meaningful and Jewish: use your own theme and be creative. If your theme is Jewish heroes/heroines, ask each candle-lighter to think of a specific characteristic of a great Jewish hero/heroine whom they would like you to aspire to as you grow up. Or if your theme is dreams, ask each candle-lighter to think of a dream that he or she hopes the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* child will fulfill. Requesting your family and friends to prepare for this honor ahead of time includes them in the celebration in a meaningful way. Their words for the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* may become one of the most treasured aspects of the celebration.

Centerpieces

Choose something simple. Cut flowers can be beautiful and elegant on any table and can be donated to a local nursing home after the party. If you want, choose something that goes with your theme if you have one. For example, if your theme is Famous Jewish Sports Figures and you decide to use sports equipment as part of your centerpiece, research which organizations can use that sports equipment and donate the centerpiece items to them after the party. Put a card on your table to let your guests know that even the sports equipment is going to be used in a Jewishly meaningful way. If your theme is Israel, you can purchase trees from the Jewish National Fund and make centerpieces that incorporate the certificates the JNF sends you. Make your own centerpieces. Do you dry flowers? Are you handy with woodworking? Incorporate something personal into your decorations. Can you make a centerpiece out of something that can be donated after the party to people in need?

Keep it Jewish

Begin the meal with *Kiddush* and *Motzi* and end it with the singing of *Birkat HaMazon*. Begin with *Havdalah* before a Saturday evening event.

Variations on a Celebration Theme

- Having a luncheon at home
- Providing a luncheon for adult guests immediately after services and then having a more informal party for the children later that evening or the next day
- Inviting everyone to a mystery location and then involving them in a Mitzvah project
- Taking a family trip to Israel
- Taking a family trip to the town in Europe (or any place in the world) from which your ancestors came and explore your Jewish roots together

Everything you do to make your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebration personal, filled with your values, and personally meaningful will enhance the experience for all. Every celebration need not look the same. Have your celebration reflect who you are and what you believe as an individual and as a family. Make Jewish choices, and don't be afraid to be different. The memories of how you worked together and your incredibly meaningful celebration will last a lifetime.

Eligibility, Requirements and Expectations

- All children, whose families are members in good standing of Temple Israel.
- The child has completed at least five years of religious school, two days a week at B'Yacahd, our joint religious school or is enrolled at the Hebrew Academy.
- Regular attendance at *Shabbat* services for at least one year prior to the scheduled individual *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* (Friday evening and/or Saturday morning). This will familiarize the child with the service and make him/her comfortable in this setting.
- The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is encouraged to attend Sunday morning *minyan* at 8:30 a.m. for at least 2 months before his/her *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* to learn to don *t'fillin* and participate in the weekday *shacharit* service
- Parents are expected to fulfill their roles in this program.
- Financial obligations – *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* fee/sponsored *kiddush*
- A Mitzvah project – a special certificate
- Meetings with the Rabbi and Cantor
- Must have reached the traditional age of *mitzvot*:
 - Boys – Age 13 as determined by his Hebrew birthday,
 - Girls – Age 12 as determined by her Hebrew birthday

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation and Private Instruction

Your child's preparation for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah started the day he/she was born. With your guidance, support from formal religious education, your child's Jewish identity and abilities have been developing. Once formal training sessions have been established, the preparation intensifies. In addition to this, your child is now in middle school, which also means more work and hormones. This might be a good time to try to lighten up on their extra-curricular activities.

We encourage each child to do as much as possible. Arrangements will be offered to accommodate special needs.

- **Basic Training** - About one year before the date of your simcha, you will be contacted by the Hazzan to set up weekly half-hour sessions. The Hazzan will teach your child trope, their assigned Haftarah and Maftir, required blessings and possibly Shacharit.

The following details the instruction your child will receive from the Hazzan:

- Private instruction with the Hazzan for 30 minutes per week, for one year.
- Each student will receive their individual material, CDs and booklets containing their Torah and Haftarah Portions and Cantillation, prayers and blessings, for home study.
- Each student is expected to study at least 30 minutes at home every day 6 times a week.

Individual Instruction will cover:

1. Blessings before and after Torah Reading
2. Blessings before and after the Haftarah
3. Haftarah Trope
4. Individual Haftarah
5. Torah Trope – Maftir
6. Kiddush for Friday evening and Shabbat morning
7. Blessings for *tallit* and *t'fillin* – for boys (optional for girls)
8. Blessing for Shabbat candles – for girls (optional for boys)

We encourage our young men and women to go beyond the basic expectations by learning:

1. Additional Torah Readings
 2. Kabbalat Shabbat and/or *Shir Hashirim for Friday evening*
 3. Shacharit service or other prayers from the Shabbat morning service (*Birkat Hachodesh*)
- **Attending Services** – Also one year before your simcha, the child and his/her family is expected to attend Saturday morning services regularly. This will give the student and their family an opportunity to become familiar with the customs and practices of our Shabbat morning service.
 - **D'var Torah** - About four months before your simcha, you will be contacted to set up a series of 1 hour meetings with the Rabbi at which you will study your child's Torah portion together. This process will provide the Bar/Bat Mitzvah with the tools and ideas which will enable them to write their D'var Torah.
 - * **Ashrei** - Chanting Ashrei at the Shabbat Service on the Saturday morning **immediately prior** to the Shabbat of their simcha
 - * **Minyan** - Attending the synagogue's minyan service (6:45 a.m.) with their family on the Monday or Thursday morning before the Shabbat of their simcha

Parents are asked to encourage and support their child by:

- Listening to them practice*
- Provide emotional support
- Maintain regular contact with the Hazzan
- Periodically, attend sessions with Hazzan

*Knowing Hebrew is **not** a requirement. Practice is essential to success and listening to your child shows him/her the importance you place in his/her accomplishments. It is important to your child that you take an active interest in his/her Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. Inquire as to your child's progress and make an effort to listen to him/her on a regular basis.

COUNTDOWN TO A SIMCHA: THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH TIMELINE

- **Two (2) years in advance of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date**
Family is invited to an orientation meeting to:
 - a. Set date with the rabbi - A child may become *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* on Shabbat, *Rosh Chodesh*, or Mondays and Thursdays when the Torah is read.
 - b. Discuss reception/room usage with the executive director
 - c. Discuss all fees and payment schedule with the executive director.
 - d. Discuss family responsibility as regards Bar/Bat Mitzvah requirements and expectations – synagogue attendance, Mitzvah project, lesson attendance
- **One (1) year in advance of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah***
 - a. Begin lessons with the Hazzan
 - b. First of the fees are due
 - c. Begin active synagogue attendance
 - d. Begin Mitzvah Project meeting periodically with the rabbi to review progress
- **Four (4) months in advance of *Bar/Bat Mitzvah***
 - a. Begin D'var Torah discussion with the Rabbi
 - b. Discuss honors to be distributed for Shabbat morning services
- **Three (3) months in advance of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah***
 - a. First draft of D'var Torah submitted
 - b. Begin wrap-up of Mitzvah Project, begin writing report
 - c. Create Bar/Bat Mitzvah program and submit initial draft
 - d. Review role of family members – Torah readers, service participants
- **One (1) month in advance of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah***
 - a. Schedule “dry runs”
 - b. Complete final draft of D'var Torah
 - c. Submit program draft for final review
 - d. Preparation of all service participants confirmed
- **Two (2) weeks in advance of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah***
 - a. Payment of all fees is confirmed by the synagogue office
 - b. Submit final draft of Bar/Bat Mitzvah program and receive Rabbi's approval; take to printer
 - c. Confirm schedule for photos in sanctuary
 - d. Full “rehearsal” with Bar/Bat Mitzvah student and family scheduled
 - e. Confirm all arrangements for the aliyot and other kibbudim/honors
 - f. Submit article to *The Jewish World* if you so choose
- **One (1) week in advance of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah***
 - a. Last dry runs with the Hazzan and the Rabbi
 - b. Review any last changes family requires
 - c. Full rehearsal

MAZEL TOV! RELAX! ENJOY!

BAR/BAT MITZVAH GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Besides *kvelling* (untranslatable), parental involvement in a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebration includes:

1. It is strongly recommended that the parents and family attend Shabbat services, both Friday evening and Saturday morning, regularly with their child, before their own *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service. This provides for a level of comfort for parent and child, and it familiarizes both with the service.
2. **INVITATIONS:** The proper form is for parents to invite their guests to “participate in the services of Sabbath worship” at which their son or daughter is to be “called to the *Torah* as a *Bar Mitzvah*” or “as a *Bat Mitzvah*”.
 - a. One should also extend an invitation to guests to join with the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* at the Friday evening - *Kabbalat Shabbat* service.
 - b. It is also recommended that the name of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* appear in Hebrew along with the name of the *Sidrah* and possibly the Hebrew date. The rabbi or cantor will assist in providing this information.
 - c. The parents might suggest to their non-Jewish guests who are unaccustomed to a long service that they delay their arrival on Saturday morning until 9:30 a.m. for the beginning of the *Shacharit* service. You might explain to your non-Jewish friends that the service consists of four parts:
 - ☞ A preliminary service (practically all Hebrew) from 9:00a.m. to 9:30 a.m.
 - ☞ The *Shacharit* (morning) service follows, often led by the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.
 - ☞ The *Torah* service, including Bible study and the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony, from 10:00a.m. to 11:30a.m. (approximately).
 - ☞ An additional concluding service (*Musaf*) from 11:30a.m. to 12 Noon.
 - d. Make every effort to include all your child’s classmates.
 - e. Please remind all your guests of appropriate synagogue attire and that cell phones, cameras, other electronic devices and equipment are not allowed on *Shabbat*.
3. **ALIYOT:** All arrangements for the four family *aliyot* and other *Torah* honors should be made with the Rabbi at least two weeks before the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Please inform those designated to receive *aliyot* to arrive by 9:30 a.m.; otherwise, the honors will be assigned to others.

Anyone called to the *Torah* during the service is expected to be able to recite the blessings in Hebrew or to have practiced reading the English transliteration of them. Please see the appendices for a page which includes both the blessings and instructions. Additional copies of the blessings recited during an *Aliyah* are available through the Rabbi’s office. It is suggested that you send the transliteration to those who will be reciting them far enough in advance so that they could familiarize themselves with the prayers. Please help the Rabbi and Hazzan by writing out the HEBREW names of individuals to be called to the *Torah*.

A card with the blessings in large print - in both Hebrew and the English transliteration -- is always on the *Torah* reading table.

The person who lifts the *Torah* Scroll (*Hagbah*) should be experienced in lifting the scroll properly, lest the Scroll be damaged or accidentally dropped.

4. **FLOWERS:** The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* family is invited to provide the flower on the *Bimah*. Flowers should be delivered to the Synagogue before 2:00 p.m. Friday, and must remain until *Shabbat* ends. Please coordinate the flowers with the executive director.
5. **PROGRAM:** Families are encouraged to personalize their program. This can be done through the Rabbi's office or individually. All programs must be reviewed and approved by the Rabbi.
6. **KIDDUSH:** The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* family is responsible for sponsoring the congregational Kiddush on the day of the Simcha. Details regarding Kiddush are on the reverse side of the building use form at the end of this packet.
7. A minimum of two weeks before the ceremony, the family should inform the congregation of the approximate number of guests expected at Friday night and Saturday morning service. Parents are asked to complete the Oneg Shabbat/Kiddush sheet including the number of guests expected.

Kibbudim/Honors and Aliyot

Parents must complete the Kibbudim/Honors Sheet and present it to the rabbi for review at least two weeks prior to the simcha. The family of the Bar / Bat Mitzvah is given the following honors for distribution to family and friends:

- Four Aliyot* plus the Maftir which is reserved for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- Hagbah – Lifting the Torah is an honor that can be assigned by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family, however, their choice needs to be approved
- G'lilah – Dressing the Torah (one person)
- Opening the Ark Doors/Curtains – Taking Out the Torah (two people)
- Opening/Closing the Ark Curtains – Returning the Torah (two people)
- Opening/Closing the Ark Curtains/Doors – Shir Hakavod (two people)

For those receiving aliyot, the list must include the honorees full Hebrew names (including father's name and mother's name) as well as their designation (Kohen, Levi, or Israelite). Keep in mind that a person most appreciates an honor that they are able to do comfortably. Anyone called to the Torah during the service is required to be able to recite the blessings in Hebrew or to have practiced reading the English transliteration of them. Copies of the English transliteration of the blessings recited during an Aliyah are available from the synagogue. It is suggested that you send the transliteration to those who will be reciting them far enough in advance so that they could familiarize themselves with the prayers.

Aliyot, other than the ones reserved for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family, are given to congregants furthering the sense that this is a community service. Aliyot are always reserved for any of the following reasons: Baby Naming, Aufruf, Recovery from Illness or Yartzheit observance.

Note: As a matter of policy, all honors belong to the synagogue. Whenever possible an effort will be made to include additional family members and friends in the service after the needs of the congregation are satisfied (i.e., aufruf, naming a baby girl, recovery from illness, Yahrzeit).

* This is complicated in families comprised of Kohanim and/or Levi'im.

Tallit Policy For All Individuals at the Torah

Knesset Israel/Temple Israel recently adopted a new minhag (practice) impacting those individuals who are directly engaged with the Torah. This new minhag was added as an expression of Kavod HaTorah, respect for the Torah and in fulfillment of the Halacha (requirements of Jewish law) regarding proper attire when approaching the Torah. Henceforth, anyone engaged with the Torah is expected to wear a tallit. This refers to Torah readers, those called to the Torah for an aliyah, hagbah and gelilah and those who hold or carry the Torah.

We recognize that this will impact most directly on women in our congregation who do not currently wear a tallit during worship, but I am hopeful that any discomfort this may create will be overcome by an appreciation that this addition is meant as a reflection of our congregation's commitment to traditional practice even as we expand the role of women and their participation. Tallitot will be available on the bimah for those who require them.

As an additional note, someone donning a tallit in this circumstance should not recite the b'racha for putting on a tallit, as the tallit is being put on only as a sign of respect for the Torah and not in fulfillment of the mitzvah of tsitsit.

If you have any questions about the new tallit policy, please feel free to ask the rabbi.

BAR/BAT MITZVAH FAMILY: THE WHAT, WHERE AND WHEN

1. **TIME:** The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* parents should arrive promptly at the synagogue. On Saturday, they should arrive before 9:00 a.m.; Friday, at least 10 minutes before the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service.
2. **KABBALAT SHABBAT:** Services for “Welcoming the Sabbath” are held Friday at sundown, or during the spring-summer sessions at 7:00p.m. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* chants selections from *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Arvit*. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* should attend *Kabbalat Shabbat* accompanied by parents and immediate family.
3. Siblings may chant or read parts of the service but this must be arranged in advance with the *Hazzan*. This applies to *Shabbat* morning as well.
4. **ATTIRE:** The *Bar Mitzvah* should wear a suit, tie, and *kippah* on both Friday evening and Saturday morning, and his *tallit* all morning on Saturday. Wearing a *tallit* and/or a *kippah* is optional for the *Bat Mitzvah*. The *Bat Mitzvah* should be dressed appropriately with dress/skirt at an appropriate length (not too short). Shoulders must be covered. Married women should wear a hat, lace cloth or *kippah*, especially when they go up to the *bimah*.
5. **SEATING:** The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and immediate family are seated in the front rows facing the Rabbi. The parents should occupy the aisle seats. Once the parents are seated, they should remain in their places; ushers will welcome their guests and see that they are seated. Families are requested to refrain from conversing with guests as they come in during the religious service or with those who have returned from an *Aliyah*.
6. **PRAYER OF GRATITUDE - SHEH-HEH-CHEH-YANU:** After the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* has concluded chanting the Haftarah, they will receive a charge from the rabbi as well as gifts from the congregation and the Jewish community. Following the child’s expression of thanks, the rabbi will accompany the young person to their parents. Parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters rise and recite *Shehecheyanu* (the prayer of gratitude)
7. **PARENTAL BLESSING:** Following the recitation of the prayer of gratitude parents will bless their child by reciting Birkat Kohanim. The words and procedure are included later in this informational packet. These should be learned in advance, if possible, or they may be read. Parents may say both the Hebrew words and the English translation in unison or divide them as they wish. While reciting the blessing parents should place their hands on the child’s head.

We would like to suggest that parents continue this lovely tradition of blessing their children every Friday night at the Shabbat dinner table before *Kiddush*. It is an intimate and joyful experience that Jewish children never forget.

SHABBAT DECORUM AND RULES

A member of the Religious Activities Committee is present at each Bar/Bat Mitzvah service to facilitate for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family and their guests. This person will let you and your honorees know when to go up for your honor.

Please help us maintain the dignity of the Sabbath by observing and informing your guests of the following rules:

- Smoking in the synagogue or anywhere on its grounds is prohibited.
- Packages, gifts (including envelopes), cameras, food, liquor are not to be brought into the building. If gifts for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah are inadvertently brought into the synagogue, they cannot be removed until **after** Shabbat is over.
- Photography and videography are **not** permitted in the synagogue or on synagogue grounds during the service. Arrangements can be made for a photo session during the week prior to or following the ceremony by contacting the synagogue office.
- The use of cell phones and other electronic devices is prohibited on the Sabbath. A telephone will be made available for emergency use.
- Food, centerpieces, decorations, etc. which are left after your simcha may **not** be removed from the synagogue building until **after** Shabbat. Please call the office during the preceding week to find out when somebody will be in the building and to make arrangements to pick up your belongings.
- For parties which are to take place on Saturday evening, nothing (flowers, music equipment, cameras, etc.) may be brought into the Synagogue until the conclusion of Shabbat or on Friday prior to 1:00 p.m.

PROPER ATTIRE

Bar/Bat Mitzvah families and their guests are expected to dress in a manner appropriate for synagogue services and to maintain decorum throughout the service. Strapless and/or backless dresses are considered inappropriate for services and should not be worn.

NOTE: All men are required to have a kippah when in the sanctuary.

OFFERING OF TZEDAKAH BY THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH (TERUMAH)

The “theme” of **every** Bar / Bat Mitzvah is responsibility. As a child matures, he/she is given an ever-increasing responsibility for their actions. Within Jewish tradition, the concept that “kol yisrael arayvin zeh lazeh” that “each of us is responsible for the other” is fundamental. As the Bar/Bat Mitzvah approaches both child and family have various avenues for expressing and assuming responsibility.

While it is not in any way obligatory, it has become customary for the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* to share his/her *simcha* by presenting a gift from the child’s own money to Temple Israel, the State of Israel, or some philanthropy, in gratitude for having arrived at this milestone in life, and in appreciation of the efforts of their teachers. There are many items, both large and small, which are appropriate for such a demonstration of appreciation.

Suggestions for a *Terumah* (an offering) include:

- A State of Israel Bond
- Library Books
- Camp Givah Scholarship Fund or other synagogue fund of your choice
- Scholarship Fund for Summer Study in Israel
- Art or religious objects for the synagogue (consult with the Rabbi)
- Equipment for the Early Childhood Center, the B’yachad Religious School or Camp Givah

MAZON

Mazon was created by members of the Jewish community in response to a tremendous need and inspired by Jewish values. Mazon is a Jewish response to hunger. It is a vehicle through which we can add public service to our private celebrations. In earlier days, when Jews held a simcha, the poor of the community shared in the celebration receiving both food and alms. Today, while we are intellectually aware of their needs, physically they remain invisible to us. Mazon suggests we voluntarily add three percent (though donations of any amount are welcome) to the cost of our celebrations as an offering to help defeat the scourge of hunger here at home and throughout the world. For more information contact the Rabbi.

Partnership 2000 - Eshkol Region in Israel

Partnership 2000 (P2K) was created 13 years ago by the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) with its partners in the United Jewish Communities and Keren Hayesod. The goal of the program is to build a special relationship between the Jewish communities in the Eshkol region of Israel and Northeastern NY through programs that promote personal links between the residents of the partnership communities. Programs include Israeli counselors for American summer camps, shlichim from Eshkol visiting our community during the academic year, and a pen pal program between schools. P2K offers an opportunity not only for support, but also for collaboration and real friendship based on personal relationships. P2K also funds and monitors programs to integrate disadvantaged “at risk” Ethiopian youths from all over Israel into the Eshkol community, an early childhood preventive intervention program, a plan for providing seniors with opportunities for personal development at the Regional council’s equivalent of a JCC, and other programs targeted to enhance residents’ lives within the region.

ISRAEL BONDS

This is a unique opportunity to perform the mitzvah of Ts'dakah in a manner described as "the highest degree" by our great teacher Maimonides. We encourage our young people, as they assume the responsibilities of Jewish adulthood, to act as builders of the Jewish State. By investing in a State of Israel Bond they show devotion to the ideals of Judaism, a partnership with our people Israel, and a connection to our land in its ceaseless effort for economic security and peace.

Options include:

- **Mazel Tov Bonds** (5-year): fixed rate, \$100 minimum investment and \$10 increments; interest paid upon maturity.
- **eMitzvah Bonds** (5-year): fixed rate, \$36 minimum investment and \$18 increments; interest paid upon maturity. May only be purchased online.

JEWISH NATIONAL FUND

- Purchase unique and exquisite JNF certificates which can be customized to use as invitations, favors, table signs or for candle-lighting ceremonies
- JNF and U Mitzvah Projects - JNF is the leading environmental agency in Israel
- Inscription in the JNF B'nai Mitzvah Honor Book
- JNF Party Favors

TREE OF LIFE

A beautiful way to capture the spirit of your *simcha* and to endorse it as a strong bond between your family and Knesset Israel/Temple Israel is to have a leaf dedicated on our Tree of Life. The Tree of Life is a life-size bronze wall décor which is on permanent display in the lobby leading to the Main Sanctuary. The Tree symbolizes life and love by commemorating special names and occasions.

If you would like to purchase a leaf in time for your *simcha*, we must receive your order one month prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date. The cost of each leaf is \$180.00. If you are interested in the Tree of Life, please contact the Temple Israel office.

Other Stuff You Need to Know ...

Decorating the Bima

Bima Flowers

Anyone wishing to can provide fresh flowers for the pulpit. Please be sure that the flowers are delivered before 1:00 p.m. on Friday and they may not be removed from the synagogue until one hour after sundown on Saturday night.

After Shabbat, the flowers can be donated to hospitals or nursing homes. It is the responsibility of the family, not the synagogue, to donate and deliver the flowers.

Food Baskets

In addition to, or instead of, flowers, you can display food baskets on the pulpit. Please be sure that the baskets are delivered before 1:00 p.m. on Friday and they may not be removed from the synagogue until one hour after sundown on Saturday night.

Remember that all items in the food basket **must** be kosher.

After Shabbat, these baskets can be donated to the needy. As with the flowers, it is the responsibility of the family, not the synagogue, to donate and deliver these baskets.

The following is a list of possible places to donate the food baskets:

Northeastern New York Regional Food Bank

Insert list

Kippot

Our synagogue requires that all men wear kippot in the sanctuary. The family may provide personalized head coverings for men and women, if desired. If this is done, they must be delivered to the synagogue before 1:00 P.M. on Friday; and they may not be removed from the synagogue until one hour after sundown on Saturday night. Kippot may be ordered through the Hadar Gift Shop. Baskets in which to put them out are available from the synagogue office.

Tallit and T'fillin

Every Bar Mitzvah boy is **required** to possess his own set of T'fillin. In many communities in the Conservative Movement women have begun to accept the obligation of wearing T'fillin. Bat Mitzvah girls are not required to acquire a Tallit or T'fillin but are encouraged to do so.

Our synagogue requires that all individuals who approach the Torah wear a tallit, which in this context means when a Bat Mitzvah is called to and/or reads from the Torah.

Tallitot and T'fillin are available for purchase through our Hadar Gift Shop.

Hadar Gift Shop

For your convenience, Tallitot, T'fillin, Bar / Bat Mitzvah albums, Kippot and various other items can be ordered through the Hadar Gift Shop. Details are available from the Gift Shop manager, Eve Cameron, Ext. 132.