



**BAR / BAT MITZVAH**  
**At Sha'arey Shalom**

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Dear Bar and Bat Mitzvah students and parents,

The tradition of Bar and Bat Mitzvah, by which we celebrate your passage into the Jewish religious and ethical responsibilities of adulthood, is one of the most enriching experiences you will ever have. The Bar and Bat Mitzvah service marks the occasion when you begin the process of becoming an adult. Along with your family, friends and extended family here at Temple Sha'arey Shalom, we celebrate your official entrance into the "adult" Jewish community.

We believe that Judaism is a way of life and a religious heritage worthy of serious adult understanding. Therefore, the learning, experiences, and identification that we ask of you are designed to lead you to mature linkages with our people and our faith. Participation as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is one important step along that road. It is, of course, not the only step.

Our Congregation firmly believes that Jewish education is a life-long journey. We encourage all our students to continue their Jewish education by participation in KeSheT (Hebrew High School), which includes Confirmation. Temple Sha'arey Shalom also offers adult education to inform, challenge and inspire you all the years of your life.

As you become an adult member of the Jewish community, we look forward to you joining with us in our people's journey. May this new chapter of your life be fulfilling, rewarding and enlightening.

Shalom,

Rabbi Renee Edelman and Cantor Jason Rosenman

## THE MEANING OF BAR/BAT MITZVAH

The term Bar or Bat Mitzvah (literally, "son or daughter of the commandments") is a title given to all Jews reaching their 13th birthday to signify that they are now prepared to take personal responsibility for their own religious actions and moral behavior through performing the *mitzvot* (commandments). It is equivalent to reaching the age of legal majority. No ritual is necessary to establish this status. Listing the stages in a Jew's life, the *Mishnah (Avot 5.21)* tells us "thirteen is for Mitzvah." That is to say, traditional Jewish law holds that it becomes incumbent upon a thirteen-year-old male to fulfill the 613 commandments. From this time unto the day of his death, the Jewish male is a Bar Mitzvah, a "son of the commandment." Additionally, in Reform tradition, a young woman becomes a Bat Mitzvah, a "daughter of the commandment," at 13 years of age. According to Jewish tradition, each Jewish adult is tied to the moral and ritual laws of Judaism as a child is tied to his parents.

Sometime during the 4th century, it became the custom to mark this stage of life by permitting the young man to be one of eight adult males privileged to make ascent (*aliyah*) to the reading desk on the *Bimah* on a given *Shabbat* soon after his thirteenth birthday. He would read some verses of the Torah scroll. Blessings thanking God for the Torah were recited before and after the reading of those verses.

By the 16th century, it became custom to follow this first public ritual appearance with a party sponsored by the Bar Mitzvah's family. This was held in the synagogue or at the family home on the *Shabbat* during which the young person ascended to the Torah. The very next morning, the Bar Mitzvah resumed his seat in his Talmud class in the community religious school, where he continued to study.

Over the past few centuries, the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Service has emerged as a wonderful way for a 13-year-old to demonstrate a commitment to Judaism. Before their congregation, family and friends, the young person accepts the privilege of reading from the Torah (Five Books of Moses) and Haftarah (Books of the Prophets), and leading worship. In this way, the congregation says to the 13-year-old: you are now a participating adult in our religious community. Thus the Bar or Bat Mitzvah service bears witness to the future and continuity of a Judaism embodied in a new generation of committed Jews. For these reasons, the beginning of a young person's transition from childhood to responsible Jewish adulthood is a time of celebration.

At Temple Sha'arey Shalom we continue this age-old tradition of marking a young Jew's passage into adult Jewish responsibility through the celebration of Bar and Bat Mitzvah. Such privilege is available only to students who have been enrolled in our Religious School for the equivalent of at least **five** full years.

Candidates must also be enrolled and attending our Religious School at the time during which they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah. For older students who transfer to our School, prior participation in an equivalent program of Jewish study is acceptable.

The Bar or Bat Mitzvah occurs as part of our Shabbat morning service. The student leads the congregation in Hebrew and English passages from the *siddur* (prayer book). Each Bar or Bat Mitzvah also reads or chants from the Torah, a hand-lettered parchment scroll which contains the Five Books of Moses. The student chooses a section of the weekly portion and explains it to the congregation, demonstrating his or her understanding of the text. The blessings before and after the reading are shared by family and friends.

After the Torah is read, the young person reads a passage taken from one of the prophetic books of the Bible. This selection is known as the *Haftarah* (completion) and contains either a thematic reference to the Torah reading or a reference to an event in the Jewish year. In addition, our Bar or Bat Mitzvah prepares and delivers a *D'var Torah*, literally a "word of Torah" or short sermon based on lessons from the Scriptural reading.

Other participants, including members of the congregational family, are honored with roles in the Torah service. Parents offer prayers of thanks and expressions of joy and pride. All gift presenters, whether through Brotherhood, Sisterhood and the board must be members of Temple Sha'arey Shalom.

We are very proud of our B'nai Mitzvah students and of the commitment to Jewish life and learning that they make on Shabbat through this wonderful Jewish tradition.

## EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Although religious responsibility is automatically assumed at age 13 for any Jew, the special ceremony marking this passage allows the child to demonstrate an ability to accomplish long term goals, to make a public statement of Jewish identity and to celebrate a growing independence. This communal commitment to each of our children comes with expectations from the children who become Bat/Bar Mitzvah in our congregation. Because we emphasize that Bar/Bat Mitzvah is part of a total religious educational experience, the following are required for those who become Bar/Bar Mitzvah here

- (a) All students are encouraged to start at Sha'arey Shalom in Pre-Kindergarten, which begins their familiarity with the Temple as their synagogue and with Reform Judaism. This helps them feel a part of our congregational community.
- (b) Students must attend the full program - Judaica program once per week, and Hebrew program once per week - beginning in *Kitah Gimel* (3<sup>rd</sup> Grade) through the end of *Kitah Zayin* (7<sup>th</sup> Grade). Thus, ***a minimum of five years of attendance is required.*** In situations where children have not had an

opportunity to begin the Hebrew program in *Kitah Gimel*, the Educator must be consulted.

- (c) For children of new members, consideration will be given to equivalent Reform Jewish education at another school.
- (e) Special consideration will be given for Special Needs students.

## CONGREGATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

### Criteria for Bar/Bat Mitzvah at TSS

1. Your family is a member-in-good standing of Temple Sha'arey Shalom.
2. The student is enrolled in Temple Sha'arey Shalom Religious School.
3. The student will have completed four years of religious education prior to the date of Bar and Bat Mitzvah.
4. The student will be at least 13 years old according to the Hebrew or secular calendar at the date of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah.

## PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE

It's important that these deeper meanings of Bar/Bat Mitzvah stand out clearly. The youngster's family can help by remembering that the ceremony is not a performance. Don't overemphasize that aspect. Great dramatic skills or *bima*-presence are not really important. Some bright young people have little poise in public and vice-versa (like adults).

A person's Bar/Bat Mitzvah accomplishment should stand on its own. Try not to make comparisons (much less worry about others making comparisons) between your youngster and others. Every youngster is unique and special to his loved ones and friends on his or her Bar/Bat Mitzvah day.

Remember that a Bar/Bat Mitzvah party, of any kind, celebrates the accomplishment of Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The party is not the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Parents who keep this in mind themselves can help youngsters see the difference.

Gifts are exciting (to adults as well). Gifts and thank-you notes are naturally a topic of much-spirited peer and carpool conversation. If possible, help your child appreciate that the friendship behind the gifts is what is most important, and that the personal accomplishment is the gift that keeps giving. (You can at least plant the idea!)

Bar/Bat Mitzvah can be a wonderful family experience, which gives a youngster new maturity and brings him/her closer to family and heritage. Parents can find much joy

in the youngster's accomplishments and in the new stage of life that the family enters, BUT problems often arise as a family thinks about and prepares for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It is not unusual for youngsters to be anxious or for family problems to surface. Parents can find scheduling and arranging the festivities of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah weekend overwhelming, threatening to squeeze the joy out of the occasion. In addition, difficult family situations might be exacerbated by the tension of planning the Bat/Bar Mitzvah.

Sometimes, just talking your concerns over with other parents who have "lived through" Bar/Bat Mitzvah can help. Often, their advice or friendship enables you to put things back in perspective.

Of course, the Rabbis and Cantor are available at any time for further discussion of any issue or concern.

## **THE PREPARATION FOR BAR/BAT MITZVAH**

Rabbi Renee Edelman meets with the parents and Bar/Bat Mitzvah student about six months before the ceremony. The rabbis also meet with candidates during their final preparation in the 2 to 3 months leading up to the Shabbat Service in which the family will participate.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will meet with Cantor Jason Rosenman on an ongoing basis, as well as an assigned tutor, to work on Hebrew, chanting and preparing for the service. The tutor and the Cantor work with the student until all of the prayers, Torah and Haftarah portions are understood with fluency.

The individual B'nai Mitzvah educational process is supplemental to Religious School studies. Each student must remain a student in good standing in our Religious School program. In addition, families are required to attend a series of weekly clergy-led Torah Study sessions prior to their celebration of Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

At the first individual meeting with Cantor Rosenman, students receive a folder which includes the following: a personalized schedule to monitor the student's progress on a weekly basis, the student's Torah and *Haftarah* portions (in Hebrew and English), information about other assignments, the Mitzvah project, and background information for the family. Regular practice on a daily basis is essential for the student to complete the weekly assignments and to attain fluency within the six-month period.

Parents can help by listening to the student practice out loud. Even if you do not know Hebrew, the very act of listening can be useful. In addition, it is important to listen to your child read his/her English passages, helping with pronunciation of

difficult words and suggesting slow and clear reading.

There will be two full rehearsals of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah - one with the Cantor on the Wednesday a week and a half prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and the final rehearsal will be with one of the Rabbis on the Monday prior (on Tuesdays when there is a Monday holiday). At that time the youngster will read from the *Sefer Torah* (Torah Scroll). Parents are welcome to attend these two rehearsals.

## **ADDITIONAL TUTORING**

Some students may require additional help in learning their Bar/Bat Mitzvah material. If a student becomes 1-2 weeks behind schedule in completing his or her weekly assignments additional tutoring may be recommended. Some students need tutoring because Hebrew has been difficult for them; others need it as a boost in confidence or a help in self-discipline and better study habits. Additional tutoring should be arranged only in consultation with the Cantor.

## **TROPE / CHANTING**

The chanting of parts of the prayers, Torah and/or *Haftarah* can be quite beautiful. The term used for chanting is *trope*.

While chanting does add to the aesthetic of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony, it does demand a certain skill. First, of course, the child must be willing to sing before others. It is nice to have someone be able to carry a tune, but we do not expect “opera stars.” The most important thing is for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah not to feel self-conscious about the singing. Second, the youngster must learn how to chant.

Since our program is designed to teach students skills they will use the rest of their lives, the emphasis is on teaching the method of chanting.

## **COSTS**

We try to keep the cost for Bar/Bat Mitzvah to a minimum, but there is an additional cost for books, supplies, etc. This includes the fee (currently \$700) covers books, supplies and the *oneg Shabbat* on the Shabbat of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Please note that you can also bake, ask friends and/or family to bake or arrange for a caterer to provide food. Please remember in planning for the *oneg Shabbat* to plan to have enough food for the congregation who attends (usually about 100 people in addition to your invited guests, but perhaps more on special *Shabbatot*).

**Most importantly, you must pay your dues in full at least three months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. If you are not paid up before your child’s Simcha, they will not**

be able to have their Simcha at TSS with our Rabbi and our Cantor. We have a financial secretary who is on the Executive Board who can help you navigate the costs. This year our financial secretary is Pam Bain. She can be reached by leaving a message at the Temple and she will return your class.

If you are concerned about the financial burden of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah costs, please speak to one of the clergy directly, who can offer assistance or Pam Bain, our Financial Secretary.

Please remember that the emphasis should not be on the most elaborate and/or extravagant party, but on the *mitzvah* (the commandment) of living as a Jew. In budgeting your funds keep in mind that costly meals and parties are not required and, in addition, may give the wrong message about what is really important on this special day.

## WHAT HAPPENS AT A BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

### **Erev Shabbat**

Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is asked to help at *Erev Shabbat* (Friday evening) services:

1. lighting the Shabbat candles - women, as well as men, may light the candles. This honor is most usually done by the mother of the B'nei Mitzvah, Grandmothers and sisters.
2. The Bar Mitzvah leads the congregation in *Kiddush* as part of the Shabbat evening service.
- 3.
4. ***Shabbat Morning***

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah will:

1. Lead the congregation in a number of prayers
2. Carry the Torah scroll through the congregation
3. Chant -
  - a. the Torah (in most cases some 12 to 15 verses will be said)
  - b. the *Haftarah* (usually 6 to 8 verses)
4. Teach the congregation in a *D'var Torah* (a short speech on how their Torah portion relates to their lives).

The family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will:

1. Hand the Torah to the child (our *minhag* or custom is for a father to give Torah to a son, a mother to a daughter).
2. Take other honors (as determined by the family, in consultation with the clergy)

## MITZVAH PROJECT

Bar/Bat Mitzvah should be a time for each youngster to take on added Jewish responsibility. Therefore, we ask that each Bar/Bat Mitzvah youngster do a MITZVAH PROJECT. The project has four parts:

- 1) Talmud Torah - studying, learning and understanding your Torah and *Haftarah*
- 2) Avodah - observing a new ceremonial or ritual mitzvah
- 3) Tz'dakah - the youngster chooses a cause to which to contribute, decides on the amount, and makes the contribution in honor of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- 4) G'milut Chasadim - doing a good deed for someone who really needs it (for example: delivering food to the elderly or infirm, visiting a nursing home, volunteering at a food pantry)

When the student begins Bar/Bat Mitzvah class s/he is given a booklet explaining the Mitzvah Project, plus a report sheet to be filled out when the project is selected.

Choosing the ways to fulfill this Mitzvah Project can make for a wonderful family conversation. The final choice should be a youngster's, but parental help and guidance may be necessary depending on what options are chosen.

## T'FILLOT

A full understanding and comfort with our congregation's *t'fillot* is important in two respects. First, it helps create a greater sense of community. Second, it gives the student confidence with and ease about the customs of *t'fillot* at Temple Sha'arey Shalom.

Thus, Bar/Bat Mitzvah students are required to attend Shabbat *t'fillot* (services) at Sha'arey Shalom at least 10 times before they become Bar/Bat mitzvah (not including Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur) - 6 times on Shabbat morning and 4 times on Erev Shabbat (Friday evening).

## Important Practical Information for Bar/Bat Mitzvah

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### **KIPPAH AND TALLIT**

Those who come onto the *bema* (men and women) are welcome to wear a *kippah* and *tallit* (someone who is not Jewish who reads is, however, asked to *not* wear a *tallit*). Those in the congregation may choose to wear a *kippah* and/or *tallit* or neither. *Kippot* and *tallitot* are supplied by the congregation for your guests. You may, of course, order special *kippot* if you would like. Should you order special *kippot* and have extras left over, we would hope that you would donate them to the Temple for use in the future.

### **KASHRUT**

The temple policy regarding *kashrut* (keeping kosher) is not to serve any food that is specifically prohibited in the Torah. In other words, no pork products and no shellfish may be served at any event (public or private) in our congregation. At Temple-sponsored, public events, we do not allow any blatant mixture of milk and meat. Once you choose a caterer, we ask that you please inform the office who you will be using.

### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an event of *k'dusha* (holiness). Thus, in keeping with the mood of this occasion, no still pictures are allowed during the service. You may, however, schedule a photo session during the week preceding or following the Bar/Bat Mitzvah or on that Shabbat morning before 10am. Please call the synagogue office to make these arrangements. Videotaping is permitted only by the temple-approved videographer.

### **ALCOHOL**

Temple policy allows for wine at Bar/Bat Mitzvah luncheons, but no hard liquor.

### **TEMPLE DUES AND FEES**

Our congregation has determined that a family's financial commitment to the congregation be current regarding temple dues and school fees. There is an additional fee for tutoring and set up of the *Oneg Shabbat* as well as for the use of any hall for a luncheon or dinner held at the Temple.

### **SERVICE TIMES**

*Erev Shabbat* services usually (though not always) begin at 8:00 pm. You can organize a private dinner for your family and/or out-of-town guests at the synagogue. Family services at the first Shabbat of every month are at 7:30 pm. Please call the office to make such arrangements. Shabbat morning services begin at 10:30 am, ending about 12:00 noon, though possibly as late as 12:15 pm.

### **CLERGY AT LUNCHESES**

The Rabbis and Cantor will be honored to join you at luncheons held at Sha'arey Shalom immediately following a Bat or Bar Mitzvah, but generally do not attend parties held elsewhere.

### **HONORS FOR NON-JEWS**

It is appropriate for someone who is not Jewish to read a selection at services with a universal theme or a suitable passage before the candle blessing. With the exception of a parent, Torah honors (including opening the Ark, lifting and wrapping the Torah) are *mitzvot* reserved for Jews. Please speak to the rabbi or cantor if you have questions.