

Temple Sha'arey Shalom B'nai Mitzvah Handbook



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Table of Contents

Welcome Letter	4
Explanation of Bar/Bat Mitzvah	5
Requirements of Bat/Bar Mitzvah	6
B'nai Mitzvah Timeline	7
Responsibilities of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah	8
Responsibilities of the Parents	9
Additional Important Information	10

Mazel Tov!

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

As a family, you are about to experience one of the most significant spiritual adventures of your lifetime. This is a highly emotional journey and will be filled with some anxiety but mostly joy.

This handbook is designed to relieve some of the anxiety and to increase the joy of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience. Although the synagogue will do everything possible to make sure that your child is ready for this momentous day, family cooperation is essential. Together, we can make this a beautiful memory for your child and your family.

Please use this handbook!!

May this be just one of many shared family Simchas (joyous events) we will share with you.

Rabbi Renee Edelman
Director of Education

Explanation of the B'nai Mitzvah Ceremony

The second century C.E. sage, Judah ben Tema, could be called the inventor of B'nai Mitzvah. It was he who envisioned the way one's life of Jewish study and responsibility should unfold, including that at age thirteen, one is ready to do mitzvot. (There are 613 mitzvot - commandments - enunciated in the Torah.) A child younger than thirteen performed mitzvot as options, but once the child turned thirteen, mitzvot were to be considered as obligations. After the second century C.E., thirteen became the age of spiritual and moral choices, religious achievements, and legal maturity. All religions and cultures have their moments of "becoming" – the time for entry into the requirements of adult behavior. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah accomplishes precisely what anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff once insisted such a ritual must: "It provides a great moment of spiritual transformation strong enough to carry an adolescent across the chasm of chaos and fear." Reform Judaism, which began in Germany in the early 1800's, pioneered the inclusion of women in an equal role in religious life. Yet it is only in the twentieth century that women began to celebrate coming of age religiously with a Bat Mitzvah ceremony. The first Bat Mitzvah ceremony occurred in 1922 in New York City. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan invited his daughter Judith to recite the blessings over the Torah and read her portion from a book. We have progressed so much since that day, as the young Jewish women of today take on full ritual responsibility. In modern interpretation, as boys and girls become B'nai Mitzvah, they accept the responsibilities and privileges that come with Jewish adulthood. According to Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin, "B'nai Mitzvah is about ritual maturity. It is about growing up as a Jew. It is about becoming a full-fledged member of the Jewish community." Most importantly, it is about connecting to Torah and to the covenantal traditions of the Jewish people. The Bar and Bat Mitzvah service is sacred and deserves celebration. Something uplifting and holy occurs when you read from the Torah scroll on the day when you become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. You may not even notice it at the time, but it is happening, and it is real. This occurs because the Torah is at the very center of our faith. It is our story, our vision, our sense of ourselves, the most basic record of what God wants of us.

Written by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin

Requirements for Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah

1. Eligibility: Families must be members of good standing of Temple Sha'arey Shalom. That means that you will have paid financial obligations in full **eight weeks prior to the date of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah**. If you have a monetary hardship, please reach out to our VP of Finance.
2. Education: a minimum of four consecutive years (grades 4-7 or their equivalent) of regular attendance in a Jewish religious education program as well as the satisfactory completion of each class. Special accommodations will be made for those with learning challenges.
3. The student will be at least 13 years old according to the Hebrew or Secular calendar at the date of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
4. Additional Education Requirements: With our help, students will chant Torah and Haftarah, lead prayers in Hebrew and English and present a Dvar Torah (words of Torah, i.e., speech).

B'nai Mitzvah Timeline

- 2 years before Receive date: Sandy will send out a date request. Please choose a date close to your child's birthday
- 1 year before You will meet with the Rabbi to go over any family concerns or any issues relating to your child.
- Cantor will call to set up student's first lessons. Each student will receive a book that includes the Torah portion with translation. The Hebrew of the portion will appear both with vowels and trope (the singing notes), as well as how it looks directly from the Torah. The booklet also contains the Haftarah. This will be your student's most important booklet for the year.
You will meet with the Cantor weekly to learn your Torah portion and Haftarah portion. Prayers will be taught in Hebrew school. We have free tutoring for every student so there is no need to hire an additional tutor. If you feel that your child needs additional help, reach out to the Director of the Religious school.
- 6 months before** Rabbi will call your student to set up dates to write Dvar Torah (sermon) And review the outline of the service in the prayerbook.
- 2-3 months before You will rehearse on the Bimah with both the Cantor and the Rabbi. The Rabbi will meet with the family to go over the honors and gather Hebrew names.

Responsibilities of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Student

1. Individualized lessons
 - a. Approximately 8 months to a year before your student's Bar/Bat Mitzvah, he/she/they will begin lessons with the Cantor. Private training lessons last for 30 minutes. It is important that your student arrive early to these meetings so that the lessons can begin on time. *Please make sure that your child practices daily. Just as they practice a sport to get better, each time your student practices for becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, they become more confident and excited.*
2. Sermon D'var Torah
 - a. D'var Torah means a "word of Torah" - that is a moment of teaching. Your child will be teaching the congregation about his/her/their Torah portion and sharing their insights. The student will meet with the Rabbi to read through the Torah portion together and prepare the D'var Torah.

Responsibilities of the Parents

Besides Kvelling parents are welcome to meet with the Rabbi to discuss strategies for parent involvement in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process.

- Women of the family are expected to light the Shabbat Candles on Friday night.
- Arrange for the student to have a special Tallit. Often parents or grandparents present the Tallit to their child.
- Give the Hebrew names of your child, both parents (if they have them) and grandparents to the Rabbi.
- Have an Aliyah(be called to the Torah with the blessings before and after Torah). Parents usually have the Aliyah directly before their Bar/Bat Mitzvah child. Words and tunes can be found on our website.
- Offer a blessing for your child. This should be a short speech about the values that you would like your children to hold on to for their future.
- Provide Kippot for your guests. **At Congregation B'nai Israel, all men are required to wear a kippah at services.**
- Families are asked to keep the process of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in perspective. **At Congregation B'nai Israel, all worshippers are required to dress modestly. Make sure that women's shoulders are covered. Dresses with thin straps, require a large scarf to cover the shoulders. Dresses much reach the knee. We are to follow these rules as we are renting space in their building this year.**
- All students are required to invite the other students in their Hebrew school class to their special day.
- Attend a Shabbat service prior to your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah so that you are familiar with the service.
- Send a picture of your child, with their school, interests, etc. to go into our Scroll and local papers. We need this by the first of the month before the month that your child becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Additional Important Material

- During this time of covid, we ask parents to let us know the number of attendees two weeks before the event.
- You are responsible for Kiddush on Friday Night. Please call the president of sisterhood to plan. Sisterhood provides the oneg for a cost, as all food stuffs need to be kosher.
- Make sure your guests know of the dress code.
- We will be able to set up a zoom for your service so that friends and congregants might attend.
- **You are required to wear a mask in the synagogue as are your guests. We will ask you a series of questions at the door. You and your guests will be seated in small pods and will be socially distanced.**
- **Photographs must be taken before Shabbat. There are no cameras allowed in or on the grounds of the synagogue during Shabbat (Friday night to Saturday late afternoon (when there are three stars in the sky)).**
- **Honors are limited during the pandemic.**

Breathe and get ready for a very special Shabbat!!!