

בני מצוה

B'nei Mitzvah

Handbook



Congregation Beth Israel
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What It All Means

Mazal Tov!

Your family is embarking on one of Judaism's most exciting and important life-cycle events as your child transitions into Jewish adulthood by becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. A Jewish child reaches this new status at the age of thirteen. The term Bar/Bat Mitzvah means simply "one who is obligated to perform *mitzvot*." For example, after becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, these Jewish young adults are counted in a *minyan* (a quorum of ten Jewish adults required to conduct a service), they can now begin to fully fast on Yom Kippur and most importantly, they become responsible for their actions as members of the Jewish community and society at large.

During the Middle Ages, the custom arose to mark this occasion in a boy's life by calling him to the Torah and by arranging a festive meal in his honor. From this early life-cycle event emerged the familiar custom of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as a rite of passage for both boys and girls.

Children begin, at an early age, preparing for this service by attending Religious and Hebrew School. These years of formal Jewish learning focus on Jewish holidays, history, customs and the Hebrew language. Jewish learning occurs in the home as well. The more the whole family embraces this life-cycle event and engages in Jewish living, the more connected the student will be to his/her heritage. In the year leading up to this rite of passage, your child begins more intensive training focused specifically on Jewish liturgy (the prayers in the siddur, or prayer-book), Torah (chanting a portion from the Five Books of Moses and writing a speech based on the specific verses), and *haftarah* (chanting a portion from the Prophets that accompanies the Torah portion).

The Shabbat morning when your child becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be their first time receiving an *aliyah*—the honor of being called up to the Torah. This is

considered the highest honor given in a service. To chant the blessing over the Torah, one must be Bar/Bat Mitzvah age.

The experience of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a link the student shares with countless generations. It is our mission to continually reinforce how sacred, life-changing, memorable and beautiful this experience can and ought to be. Our goal at Congregation Beth Israel is—in partnership with the family—to provide your child with a deeper understanding and appreciation for the Jewish tradition. We look forward to creating a meaningful Jewish experience for you and your family. Thank you for giving us the privilege to share this special time in your life.

Warmly,

Rabbi Joshua Samuels
January 2013

Congregation Beth Israel B'nei Mitzvah Policies

To inform parents and care-givers about the requirements for Bar/Bat Mitzvah, we would like you to have the following information:

1. The family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate must be a member of Congregation Beth Israel, with all fees, dues and other financial obligations paid and in good standing.
2. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate must be enrolled in our Religious/Hebrew School program for a minimum of three years prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date, including the Bar/Bat Mitzvah year.
 - a. In those instances where a family is new to Congregation Beth Israel, attendance in Religious School in another community will be evaluated and accordingly recognized.
 - b. Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidates are required to complete the entire year of Religious School after the *simcha* has taken place and to continue in our Confirmation program. (Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah does not mark an end in one's Jewish education, but merely a transition from childhood to adulthood.)
 - c. Attendance at Shabbat services is strongly encouraged twice a month in the year leading up to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. There are weekly Friday evening services and two regular Saturday morning services a month. (This might be the best training.)
3. B'nei Mitzvah training comes under the supervision of the Rabbi. There might be, however, various community leaders working with your child.
4. Before a date can be put on the CBI master calendar, the Rabbi must confirm availability and determine readiness on behalf of the candidate.
5. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah service will begin at 10:00 AM as part of our regular Shabbat morning *tefillah*.
6. Any requests or exceptions to these policies must be discussed with the Rabbi.

Mitzvah Project

There is more to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in this community than leading a congregation in worship. As we all know, Judaism is a multi-faceted tradition with many entry points outside of prayer. Congregation Beth Israel prides itself as a community dedicated to social action and social justice. Judaism without acts of righteousness is empty. It is now your child's responsibility to engage in *Tikkun Olam*—repairing the world—as an affirmation of his/her commitment to Jewish adulthood. We encourage your child to choose a project that will not only bring more wholeness into the world, but will also instill in him/her this most important Jewish value. This project should inspire your child and cater to his/her interests. Below is a list of organizations that might be helpful in figuring out which area to focus on. Some might even have suggestions for teen involvement. You may also contact the Social Action committee of our synagogue for more ideas.

The following resources might also have some valuable information worth checking out: the Religious Action Center (www.rac.org), The Good People Fund (www.goodpeoplefund.org), www.jchoice.org, www.areyvut.org, www.emitz.com (Good Deeds section)

Mitzvah projects should be hands-on activities, not just raising money. It should also be more than a one-time event. Please discuss your child's mitzvah project with the Rabbi.

American Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.org>

Habitat for Humanity

<http://www.habitat.org>

Whatcom Hospice

<http://hospicehelp.org>

Planned Parenthood

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

Whatcom Human Rights Taskforce

301 W Holly St

Bellingham, WA

(360) 733-2233

<http://www.whrtf.org/>

Opportunity Council

1111 Cornwall Ave Ste. C

Bellingham, WA

(360) 734-5121

<http://oppco.org/>

Blue Skies for Children

13 Prospect St # 200

Bellingham, WA

(360) 756-6710

<http://www.blueskiesforchildren.org/>

Whatcom Peace & Justice Center

(360) 734-0217

<http://whatcompjc.org>

Alzheimer Society-Washington

(360) 671-3316

<http://alzsociety.org/>

Health Support Center

(360) 733-6714

<http://healthsupportcenter.org/>

American Red Cross

(360) 733-3290

<http://redcross.org/>

B'nei Mitzvah Timeline

TWO YEARS IN ADVANCE

1. A tentative date will be scheduled with the Rabbi and placed in the synagogue's master calendar. The date must be after his/her 13th birthday.

ONE YEAR IN ADVANCE

1. Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidates will be evaluated for readiness by the Rabbi.
2. Start attending two services per month—Friday evening and/or Saturday morning.
3. If you are planning a party/Kiddush luncheon away from the synagogue, book the venue as soon as possible. (The venue ought to be large enough to accommodate everyone who attends the service.)
4. Shop for a tallit (prayer shawl) that you will present to your child at the beginning of the service. If you have a tallit that has sentimental value, please inform the Rabbi of the significance and history so we may incorporate it into the service.

NINE MONTHS IN ADVANCE

1. Receive from Rabbi the recording and copy of all prayers that each Bar/Bat Mitzvah is required to lead. Begin practicing.
2. If the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is experiencing any difficulty in the learning process, please contact the Rabbi to explore private tutor options.

SIX MONTHS IN ADVANCE

1. Bar/Bat Mitzvah students join the Rabbi in group learning following Sunday Religious School for 45 minute sessions. These sessions will allow the students to practice chanting and working on the prayers together.
2. Students solidify their Mitzvah Project and begin (or continue) working on it.

3. Students receive their *haftarah* portion in recorded form from Cantor Sharona Feller and begin practicing. Miriam Zderic will set up personal meeting times to assist with this part of the service.

FOUR MONTHS IN ADVANCE

1. Immediate family meets with the Rabbi to discuss the flow of the service. The Rabbi will also give the student their first writing assignment (which is to be completed in 1 week) in preparation for their speech.
2. After the writing assignment is received by the Rabbi, each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student meets with the Rabbi for two or three consecutive sessions to discuss their Torah portion and choose their verses. (These verses will be chanted and commented on in their *d'var torah*.)
3. Once a student's Torah portion is chosen, Cantor Sharona Feller will send the student a recording. Miriam Zderic will assist each student with this component during their already scheduled meetings with her.
4. Students begin to meet with the Rabbi once each week (for 30 minutes) to craft their speech (*d'var torah*). Once the final draft is written, students will only meet with the Rabbi to practice chanting the prayers, if necessary.
5. Order your invitations. It is customary to include teachers, classmates, the Rabbi, Board members and the Religious School director. The whole community is encouraged to attend the service.

ONE MONTH IN ADVANCE

1. An honors list and extra Hebrew prayers/transliterations (see Appendix) will be provided in order to assign all honors such as *aliyot*, Torah lifter (*hagbah*), Torah dresser (*gelilah*), Ark openers, etc. to family and friends. Ask anyone coming to the bima for an *aliyah* to practice the blessings over the Torah.
2. Begin to write your blessing to your child. Each parent may write his/her own and the blessings should not exceed one page. The blessing is not a "roast" and should not list all of your child's accolades. The Rabbi will give

you guidance if needed. A copy of your blessing should be emailed to the Rabbi a week before the service (not to be edited, but simply for safe-keeping).

3. Contact the Oneg Queens to discuss the Friday evening oneg. (It might be helpful to enlist friends or your havurah to organize this oneg.)

ONE WEEK BEFORE

1. Email the Rabbi the parent's blessing.
2. Email the Rabbi the honors list.
3. Finalize your oneg plans with the Oneg Queens.

FRIDAY EVENING SERVICE

1. Please arrive 15 minutes before the service begins.
2. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah will help lead several prayers from the bima.
3. Stay afterwards to help clean up the oneg.

SATURDAY MORNING SERVICE

1. Bring kippot, speeches and the tallit that you will be presenting to your child.
2. Arrive by 9:30 AM if no professional photography session is scheduled. Plan to meet in the Rabbi's study at 9:45 AM.
3. Upon leaving the synagogue, remember to take with you all gifts, certificates and other personal items.

Beth Israel Protocol And Miscellaneous Items

1. Our policy at CBI is that Jewish family and friends given the honor of an *aliyah* must wear *kippot* (head covering) and *tallitot* (prayer shawl). These can be found in the sanctuary.
2. The honor of an *aliyah* is bestowed upon a Jewish male or female over the age of 13. Non-Jewish partners of family and friends may accompany their partners but will not chant the blessing. (The blessing over the Torah states that God chose the Jewish people from all other nations to be the recipients of the Torah.)
3. A non-Jewish family member or friend may not receive the honor of lifting and/or dressing the Torah. They are allowed to open and close the ark.
4. The use of electronics is never permitted during Shabbat services, except the stationary camera of a professional photographer/videographer. These cameras must be silent, not use flash and be stationed in the balcony. Family pictures may be taken prior to the Saturday morning service but must be completed by 9:30 AM. You must inform the Rabbi if a photographer is meeting you at the synagogue prior to the service. Pictures may also be taken any other day of the week so long as it is cleared with the Rabbi.
5. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is strongly encouraged to attend the Friday evening Shabbat service as the student will help lead some of the prayers. The family is also encouraged to provide the food for the after service oneg. For more information regarding the oneg, please contact CBI Oneg Queens, Joan Wayne and Miriam Zderic.
6. The Temple President will present a gift to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah on behalf of our congregation. If you have a special relationship with another current Board Member, please let us know.
7. Candle lighting begins the Friday evening service. Jewish female members of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family will light the candles and recite the blessings.
8. It is customary and most appropriate for the family to make a donation to one of the many synagogue funds in honor of their child. We thank you for your support.

One more thing...

A B'nei Mitzvah, like a baby naming, wedding and funeral, is a Jewish life-cycle event. While practicing the choreography of the service during a “dress rehearsal” might calm some nerves, it also might escalate them as well. Think of the Rabbi as your guide for the day, making sure you stand where you need to stand, speak when you need to speak and so on. All instructions will be given on the bima in real time. Your job as a parent is to simply be in the present (filled with *naches*, of course) with your child and family. The Rabbi will happily address any questions and/or concerns in the days and weeks leading up to the service.

Suggested Bibliography

Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005.

For Kids—Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Claim the PSpiritual Meaning of Your bar or Bat Mitzvah. Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin. Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

Appendix

Torah blessings for those receiving an aliyah

The person who is “called up” to the Torah is called an *oleh* (masculine) or an *olah* (feminine). This literally means, “one who is called up”. A couple or more than one individual who are called up together are called *olim*.

Each *oleh* or *olah* will be called up by his or her Hebrew name. Please be prepared with your Hebrew name before you are called up.

The *oleh* or *olah* will then take the corner fringes (*tzizit*) on his or her *tallit* and touch it to where the Torah reader is pointing to. Then, once the spot has been touched, the *oleh* or *olah* will kiss the *tzizit*.

The *oleh/olah* recites:

בְּרַכּוּ אֶת ה' הַמְּבָרֵךְ:

Praised is Adonai, source of blessing.

Bar'chu et Adonai ham'vorach.

The congregation responds:

בָּרוּךְ ה' הַמְּבָרֵךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Praised is Adonai, source of blessing, throughout all time.

Baruch Adonai ham'vorach layolam va'ed.

The *oleh/olah* repeats:

בָּרוּךְ ה' הַמְּבָרֵךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Praised is Adonai, source of blessing, throughout all time.

Baruch Adonai ham'vorach layolam va'ed.

The *oleh/olah* recites:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ:
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has chosen us from among all peoples by giving us the Torah. Praised are You, Adonai, giver of the Torah.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, elohaynu
melech ha'olam, asher bachar
banu mikol ha'amim v'natan
lanu et torato:
Baruch Ata Adonai, notain
hatorah.*

Following the reading of the Torah, the oleh/olah performs the same actions with his or her *talit*, and then recites:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת, וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ;
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

Praised are You, Adonai our
God, Ruler of the universe,
who has given us the Torah of
truth, planting within us life
eternal. Praised are You,
Adonai, giver of the Torah.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, elohaynu
melech ha'olam, Asher natan
lanu torat emet,
V'chayei olam nata b'tocheinu:
Baruch Ata Adonai, notain
hatorah*