

Bar / Bat Mitzvah

Everything you need to know before everything else you need to know!

New Rochelle, New York

Fall 2013/5774

The B/M Student

Everything you need to know specific to your child's training, recitation of prayers and chanting of Torah.

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The B/M Family

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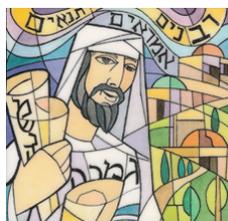


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Feel free to call the Temple if you have any more questions that need attention!

914-235-1800



Keeping Bar and Bat Mitzvah in Perspective

Bar/Bat Mitzvah is about the acceptance of responsibility. In the final analysis, this is the bottom line of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. It's not about acquiring the skill of K'riah,—“the reading of the Torah.” Rather, it's about acquiring the skill of responding to a challenge: a mitzvah. This is how Judaism defines maturity.

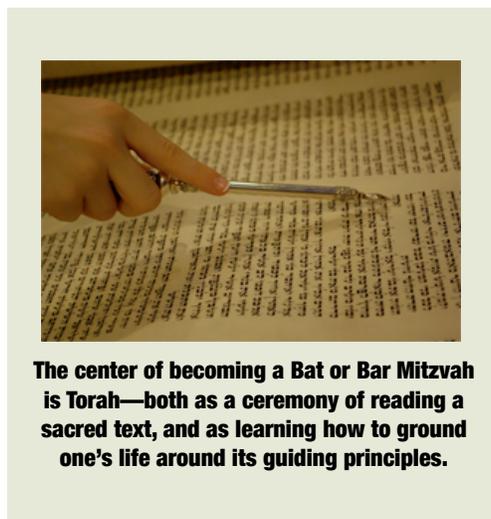
The Torah is the center of Judaism.

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 however you interpret those events in the wilderness of Sinai some three millennia ago, what cannot be dismissed is the sacredness with which our ancestors have embraced this legacy. This is why the first mitzvah we expect our children to fulfill is to stand before the Torah.

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—the communal home.



The center of becoming a Bat or Bar Mitzvah is Torah—both as a ceremony of reading a sacred text, and as learning how to ground one's life around its guiding principles.

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. More to the point, the only mistake one can make at a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is to lose sight of this truth. The audience is the Divine. Everyone in the sanctuary is joined together in this sacred dialogue.

Try to think of the reception that follows not as a separate event but as 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 is to say, however, that the spirit of the morning's celebration should be perpetuated through the performance of *mitzvot*. The recitation of the blessings and the setting aside of a portion of one's bounty for the poor demonstrate that the morning's celebration was not an isolated event but a standard to follow.

The meaning of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is enduring only if it takes place within a context of continued Jewish growth.

Being a Bar/Bat 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 Bar/Bat Mitzvah but in the days that follow. In other words, becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah should be thought of as 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 a commitment to continue religious education to confirmation and participation in our Temple Youth Group.



The Bar / Bat Mitzvah Student

What is the preparation process?

Formal preparation for becoming Bar / Bat Mitzvah at Temple Israel is fully integrated into Chavaya. This begins in the 6th grade with our "Trope Class," taught by Cantor Greenblatt, during which our students learn the basics of Torah and Haftarah chanting, along with prayers.

In 7th grade, each student will have an "intake" with members of the clergy and immediate family members to formally welcome him/her to this spiritual journey. Then they will participate in classes held on Thursday afternoons, beginning 5-6 months before their date of becoming Bar / Bat Mitzvah:

With Cantor Greenblatt, students meet at "Torah Corps," which is held in the sanctuary for one class period with several other students working in tandem. These sessions will allow students to prepare and execute parts of their service in front of a live congregation. It is a great way to get over nervousness and to share with each other all things Jewish. This is for 12 - 16 class sessions.

With Rabbi Nichols, students meet at "Mitzvah Corps," during which they will learn about performing *Mitzvot*, and understanding the value of a "Mitzvah Project." It is during these sessions that students will determine their individual projects (see below).

After Mitzvah Corps, students will meet with Rabbi Weiner in "Beit Midrash," a class preparing them for text study and writing a *D'var Torah* (see below). These are in-depth sessions held in Rabbi Weiner's office. There will be homework for each of the five sessions.

In this way, all of our students will have a great amount of time with each of our clergy members.

When their time on Thursdays is complete, one month prior to the Bar / Bat Mitzvah date, students have their "final four" appointments. These include three 20 minute private sessions with the Cantor at the pulpit in front of the open Torah, and one 1 hour

meeting with the entire family (the final rehearsal), in addition to meetings with Rabbi Weiner or Rabbi Nichols to complete the *D'var Torah*.

How much Hebrew will I have to prepare?

Each student is required to do the best that he/she can; no more, no less. The amount of Hebrew is standard between students (about 12-20 verses of Torah, about 10 verses of Haftarah, and several blessings during the service), but is then modified based on each student's ability. Students should not compare themselves to each other, but should ask themselves, "Am I doing the best job that I can?"

How is an afternoon (Havdalah) service different from the morning?

The Afternoon service has somewhat different liturgy (prayers) than the morning, the following week's Torah portion is read without an additional *Haftarah* reading, and there is a ceremony of separation marking the end of Shabbat (Havdalah) which concludes the service.

How much should I be studying at home?

When you begin your Bar / Bat Mitzvah studies, you should try to commit to **1/2 hour per day**. It might sound like a lot, but considering it's a foreign language, it needs to be studied daily. You don't have to study for 1/2 hour straight, but instead you can break it up into several study periods (5 minutes here, 10 minutes there, etc.). As you progress, your practice time will increase to 1 hour a day.

What is the Mitzvah Project?

The Mitzvah (commandment) part of becoming a Bar / Bat Mitzvah is not only centered around Jewish ritual, but also around doing acts of *G'milut Hasadim* (loving kindness). A Mitzvah project is a volunteer program done to underscore your understanding that being a Jewish adult is not only about study and prayer, but also about helping others. Rabbi Nichols will meet with you well in advance to help you select a suitable project based on your interests and the community's needs.

What about the Bar/Bat Mitzvah speech?

We call this a *D'var Torah*, a word of Torah. It is your opportunity to interpret your Torah portion in a

personal way. You will work on your *D'var Torah* with Rabbi Weiner, first in class, and then individually. The speech will be centered around your Torah portion and the meanings you find in it. The speech is a teaching piece, not a time for "thank-you's". We suggest that should you wish to thank those who have helped you reach this special day that you do it in writing privately or that you offer words publicly at your Bar / Bat Mitzvah party.

What if I need extra Hebrew help?

If either you or the Cantor feels that you need some extra help, you can study with the Cantor privately in addition to Torah Corps. If you need even more help, we have a list of tutors to suggest to you that you can engage privately.

What if I have special needs?

We are here not only to challenge you, but to accommodate you. Each such special situation will be addressed individually. Never be shy about asking anything of our clergy. Communication is the key! Furthermore, please bring any questions or concerns you have along the way to our clergy as soon as possible.

The Bar / Bat Mitzvah Family

When do we begin the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process as a family?

Your family, including the Bar / Bat Mitzvah child, parents, and any siblings (if possible) will have an initial meeting with the clergy sometime between five and six months before your service. You will begin to discuss the service, honors and any family situations or dynamics that are important for the clergy to know and understand.

How can I follow the service better?

The best way to follow our worship service is by coming to services! The more often you attend worship here at Temple Israel, the more comfortable you will feel singing the liturgy and participating in the readings. We especially encourage you to come to other Bar and Bat Mitzvah services on Shabbat. Remember, all services are open to everyone!

What time will the service begin?

Our worship service for Shabbat morning begins at 10:30 a.m. promptly. For the Havdalah service, the start time is 5:00 p.m. We ask you to word your invitations to say that the service begins 1/2 hour earlier than the actual times to ensure that the guests will all be in attendance (i.e. 10:00 a.m. or 4:30 p.m.).

How long is the service?

A service at which there is only one Bar/Bat Mitzvah runs about one hour and 30 minutes. Doubles tend to be one hour 45 minutes long, sometimes a little longer.

When I am asked to usher, what will I have to do?

You will receive a letter one month in advance asking you to usher. If you are not able to help on the assigned date, usually the week before your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah service, please call the Temple as soon as possible to exchange dates with someone else.

Your job as usher is threefold: 1) You will be asked to be greeters to guests and congregants, inviting people into the sanctuary, showing them the appropriate prayerbooks and helping people (especially latecomers) find the appropriate page; 2) You will be asked to watch out for attendees, primarily 12-13 year olds, who are not behaving with the proper decorum, and invite them to either participate in the service appropriately or to step out to the lobby; 3) You will want to carefully observe the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service so that you can become more familiar with the service when it is your turn.

When can our photographer take pictures?

For morning services, you can come in as early as 8:45 a.m., provided you make arrangements with Joyce Engel, our Executive Director. For afternoon services, it is common for families to take pictures starting at 3:30 p.m. Photography ends 30 minutes before the service. You may also choose to have photographs taken the week of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah as opposed to the actual day, again provided you make arrangements with Joyce Engel.

Your photographer may take pictures in many areas of the Temple, but your photographer may not open the ark until there is a clergy member present in the sanctuary. One of our clergy will help you with photographs with the Torah from 9:30-10 a.m., or from 4-4:30 p.m for afternoon services. Should you wish to take pictures of our clergy with your family, please let us know so we can make arrangements for that to take place as well.

Can we take pictures during the service?

In order to preserve the dignity of the prayer service, no photography or video is permitted to be

taken by guests during the service. Should you wish your service to be video-taped, you can engage the Brotherhood to do so through our synagogue's video system. And please turn off that cell phone!

Isn't the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service a private affair?

Worship services at TINR, including all Bar/Bat Mitzvah services, are public. As such, even though it is a big day for you and your family, the prayer service is open to the general public. Many congregants attend beyond your guest list. Similarly, you and your family are welcome at all Bar/Bat Mitzvah services. There is a balance between your family's participation during the service and parts which our clergy lead. You will be called to the pulpit for several honors (see below). Every congregation has its own *minhag* (customs). In our synagogue, parental speeches, Bar/Bat Mitzvah thank yous, etc., do not take place on the pulpit, but rather are encouraged to take place at your reception. For the same reason, we do not allow programs or personalized service leaflets.

Do you have direction cards to the Temple?

Yes—just ask and we can provide as many as you need.

What is the custom regarding Bima flowers?

You will be sent a letter about six weeks in advance informing you of the modest fee for flowers to decorate the Bima.

How is the Oneg Shabbat on Friday evening handled?

Bar/Bat Mitzvah families participate in the Friday night service by leading the candle lighting, Kiddush, or both. Please plan accordingly so your whole family can be at the Friday night service of your Shabbat. In the same letter as the Bima flowers, you will be informed of the hospitality fee for the Friday night Oneg in your child's honor and asked for your preference of Bar/Bat Mitzvah cake.

What is the kiddush after the service on Saturday morning?

Following the Saturday morning service, a modest kiddush is provided (white grape juice and challah). Your immediate family is called to the bimah at the conclusion of the service, and the appropriate blessings are recited. Juice and challah are shared afterward in the lobby.

What if we want to have our reception at the Temple?

If you speak to Joyce Engel, our Executive Director, she would be happy to help you plan your affair. What a great idea to follow the service by hosting your reception here!

Appropriate Dress

What is appropriate for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to wear?

On both Friday evening and Saturday, it is appropriate for the B'nei Mitzvah to dress modestly. If a girl chooses to wear a skirt or dress, it must be modest (at least covering the knees; shoulders and chest must be covered, as well.) Bar Mitzvah boys should wear a jacket and tie or a suit. Dress shoes are appropriate, while sneakers are not. For girls, flats or low heels are best. Students should bring their shoes with them to the final four rehearsals in order to practice carrying the Torah with them on. Students should scuff up the soles/bottoms of new leather-soled shoes so they don't slide around.

What is appropriate for family members and guests to wear?

Although we do not dictate a dress code to those in the sanctuary, any guests or family members who will be on the pulpit should also follow suit (no pun intended) with our Bar/Bat Mitzvah students. Ladies should have knees, shoulders and chest covered; Gentlemen should be in jacket and tie or a suit; shoes, not sneakers.

What about a kippah (yarmulke) or a tallit?

In our synagogue, people are invited, but not required to wear ritual garments. You and your guests may wish to bring and/or wear yarmulkes/kippot and tallitot. Some families choose to provide printed kippot for the day.. Should the Bar/Bat Mitzvah wish to wear either or both, he/she should feel comfortable doing so.

Honors / Aliyot

What is an "Aliyah" exactly?

An "Aliyah" literally means to go up in a physical and spiritual sense. It is the time at which people are invited up to the bimah before the Torah in order to bless the reading.

How many aliyot are there?

During our services there are four aliyot. Three of them are for family or guests. The last aliyah is for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Who may have an aliyah?

Any family member or guest who is at least 13 years old and Jewish. A non-Jewish parent of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah may be called up to accompany the Jewish parent for an aliyah. There are other honors (see below) in which non-Jewish family and guests may also partake.

What other honors are there to give out for Saturday?

Jewish or non-Jewish honorees may read the English translation of the Torah Portion. Jewish and non-Jewish honorees may undress and dress the Torah. Grandparents (and great-grandparents), and parents may go to the ark for a ceremony of passing the Torah from generation to generation.

Do you have to speak/read Hebrew to receive an honor?

No. We provide transliteration of Hebrew prayers. We encourage you to practice before the service, and our clergy are more than willing to help you.

Are there honors on Friday evening?

Your family will be asked either to bless the Shabbat candles, make Shabbat *kiddush* (blessing over the wine), or open and close the ark (only in the case of three Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies in one weekend). You should plan on being in the sanctuary the Friday evening prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony 15 minutes earlier than the service begins.

When do we decide who gets what honors?

Some months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah day, you will have a meeting with Rabbi Weiner to go over many details regarding the day, as well as to reflect on the importance of the whole experience. You will receive an honors sheet at that time, and return it to the office by two weeks before your service. Rabbi Weiner is always available to help with any questions you may have regarding honors.

We have a “different” family situation (divorce, medical problem, etc.) that requires some special attention. Can you accommodate us?

Of course! Please bring such situations as soon as possible to the attention of the Rabbis and the Cantor. We are here to help and to ensure that you have a rewarding and meaningful Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience.

Other Considerations

Is it appropriate to invite my child’s Chavaya class?

In a word: YES! We understand that if a child is close with only two or three other classmates that it may be awkward to invite the entire class; but please consider that if a child is planning on inviting at least half of the class (or at least half of the boys/girls), it is uncomfortable for those who are not invited.

We like to think of Temple Israel of New Rochelle as a large extended family and we do not want anyone to feel left out. Being 12 or 13 is already a challenge without issues like peer-pressure and fitting in.

How can we show our appreciation for the synagogue on this occasion?

There are several ways: first and foremost, please remember that the Temple is an extension of your home. Unfortunately, we have had incidents where children present at services or parties have caused damage to our facilities. Please encourage all your guests to treat the Temple like your home.

Second, it is appropriate to make a donation in honor of your son/daughter to the Temple. There are many funds here and any contribution, large or small, is most appreciated.

Last, but certainly not least: Bar/Bat Mitzvah is **not** the end of Jewish Education! We want your child to remain in Chavaya through Confirmation and then High School Graduation. This time of Bar/Bat Mitzvah is only the beginning of real Jewish learning as a young Jewish adult. Our High School is very creative and engaging and our students who have completed our program through 12th grade have been very grateful for the education they received here.

I received my Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony date but would like to change it. How?

We understand that there are a wide variety of reasons why a family needs to change a date for their ceremony. Here is what happens:

Contact Cantor Greenblatt (914-235-1800 x219) and let her know you are requesting a change of date. If you have a new date or dates in mind, you should communicate that, but be aware that the date can only be changed to a date that was already previously offered to the entire class. In other words, we will not change you to a date which has already been blocked out due to Temple programming. As well, we do not guarantee that anyone gets a “single” service. Every religious service at Temple Israel of New Rochelle is shared with the community, and often that means shared with another student. It only adds to the joy of the day.

Once you have communicated your request, phone calls and e-mails are made by Temple

Staff in order to accommodate your needs. This often takes a few days or weeks, since other families may need to be contacted and made aware that they will be sharing a date with your family. It is because of the work and correspondence necessary to facilitate such a change that we charge \$250 to confirm a date change.

When a date has been found that you and the Temple agree will best fit your family, we can hold your date change for two weeks. Once we have received your \$250 change fee payment, we will put it on our Temple’s “Master Calendar.”

You will receive, in writing, confirmation of the date change. It is only then that you should re-book caterers, photographers, etc. We will not guarantee any date change until we have your payment and you have a letter from the Temple that the date has changed.

We are happy to help you in any way we can, but please understand that calendaring at the Temple is often challenging due to the amount of programming we run for our Temple Community. Your understanding is greatly appreciated!

