

TO: Parents of Children Becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the year **2018**
RE: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Dates -- From Mady Koenig and Cantor Joel Caplan

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* **PLEASE TAKE TIME TO READ THIS LETTER. IT WILL AFFECT** *
* **YOUR CHILD'S BAR/BAT MITZVAH DATE.** *
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* *We'll need a response from you to set your child's date,* *
* *and by reading this letter through, you'll know all your options. THANKS!* *
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Hi! We're trying to assign a Bar/Bat Mitzvah date for your child in the year 2018! Thanks for reading all of this and responding to us. We've sent this to you on paper as well, by US mail.

We assign dates about three years in advance.

THE GOAL is to have only one Bar/Bat Mitzvah family honored at each service; that is, no "doubling up".

THE PROBLEM is that we have over **60** children in our congregation who need Bar/Bat Mitzvah service times in the year 2018. While this is a lovely problem to have, we can't just assign one child to each Shabbat -- there just aren't enough usable Shabbat dates during the year.

THE SOLUTION is to let all of you know about all the possible choices you have with types of services, and to find out what kind of service you'd prefer. Then we can assign a date based on what you want.

"Are some of these choices 'better' than others?" It depends very much on your point of view. All of the following choices have been used already by members of our congregation, who wanted them for various reasons. For example, one year there were 28 Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations on Saturday morning, 25 at Saturday dinnertime, 10 on Saturday mid-afternoon, 8 on Sundays/weekdays, 2 in the summer, 1 on Friday night, and 1 on Saturday night after sundown. It doesn't seem to matter whether a child is in our Religious School or in Day School - - the percentages of "who-goes-to-which-kind-of-school" are equal in all categories.

"Can I somehow get my date before everyone else?" No, sorry. We want to collect everyone's response, and then figure out all the dates together. Please respond to us by **Monday, February 2**, and then we'll start the assignment process.

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"Assignment process? How does that work?"

1) First, after we find out what everybody wants, we make an initial assignment. This will be as close as possible to what you request, given the following limitations: We'll assign you a service as close as we can to your child's Hebrew birthday. There will generally be at least two children assigned to each Shabbat, but all will be at different services -- remember, we don't "double up". We don't have kids from the same school district and grade celebrate on the same Shabbat, and we don't initially assign out vacation weekends or Passover unless you ask for it. For a fuller explanation, see page 8, "Appendix: How Bar/Bat Mitzvah Dates Are Assigned".

2) Second, we then make changes where we can, and send you the final result. For example, if you want a Shabbat morning or Shabbat dinnertime date that's not near your child's Hebrew birthday, we'll see if there's one available after all the kids have been assigned near their own birthday. Obviously, it helps if you can tell us a second and third choice!

"Okay. What do I have to do?" First, read this admittedly long letter all the way through to know your options. Then, please let us know by Monday, February 2 which kind of service you'd like for your child, *no matter which kind*. **To respond online, please click here: [LINK](#)**
And for questions, please contact Mady Koenig at 973-228-8933 or MEK902@aol.com.

- The rest of this letter consists of:
- a) Differences between services
 - b) Alternative Dates -- "More Easily Scheduled"
 - c) The Hardest Time to Schedule
 - d) Other questions and answers
 - e) Appendix: How Dates are Scheduled
 - f) Response Form

* * * * * **Differences between services** * * * * *

Now, why pick one kind of service over another?

The differences are outlined on the table on the next page. Highlights include:

1. **Length and difficulty:** The Saturday morning service is quite traditional, over three hours long, almost all in Hebrew, and is sometimes somewhat harder for children to learn. The others are about one hour long, and more "flexible" -- we can make them more challenging or easier, depending on the student's ability and motivation.
2. **Spotlight time:** Your child usually has the "main spotlight" for about 45 minutes in any of the services.
3. **Shabbat restrictions:** If you want to hold a reception in the synagogue immediately following the service, remember that there is no live or recorded music allowed on Shabbat, and no photography/video. Conversely, we may take photographs/video and use instrumental music, during the service or after, when the ceremony is not held on Shabbat.
4. **Shul regulars:** On Friday night and Saturday morning, other members of our Congregation will be present along with your guests. At other times, only your guests will be present.

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Types of Bar/Bat Mitzvah Services Comparative Chart

	Friday night	Saturday morning	Saturday sunset, or Saturday afternoon	Sunday when Torah is <u>not</u> read, or Saturday night (Nov.-Dec.)	Su/M/Th, when Torah <u>is</u> read
How long is the service?	1 hour	3 hours plus	1 hour (45 minutes if afternoon only)	45 minutes	Between 45 and 70 minutes, depending on specific date
How much time is my child "spotlighted"?	SAME FOR ALL SERVICES-- usually 45 minutes				
How much Hebrew/English in the service?	Some English	Almost all Hebrew	Some English	Some English	Some English
How difficult is it to learn?	Flexible	Flexible, but generally somewhat harder	Flexible	Flexible	Flexible
Which part of the Bible will my child chant?	Torah Reading from Torah at another minyan, then at your service as part of Speech	Haftarah (Prophets), and possibly part of Torah Reading	Torah Reading	Torah Reading from Torah at another minyan, then at your service as part of Speech	Torah Reading
Who will be there?	Your guests and maybe Cong. of 25+	Your guests and Cong. of 250+	Your guests	Your guests	Your guests
Can there be band/photos in the synagogue after the service?	No, it's still Shabbat	No, it's still Shabbat	Yes	Yes, and <u>during</u> the service as well	Yes, and <u>during</u> the service as well

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Alternative Dates -- "More Easily Scheduled"

Why are these more "easily scheduled"? Because in the past, we've seen about 80% of our families request service times that are either on Shabbat morning, Shabbat dinnertime, or Sunday-with-Torah-Reading. Since these times are in higher demand, and since we want all of our members to be treated fairly and equally, we go through the Assignment Process for those service times: We first (1) assign all kids to a weekend by the order of their Hebrew birthdays, and then (2) try to accommodate requests for changes based on what's left.

But if you're looking for a different kind of service, such as one of the following, we can usually bypass those two assignment rounds, and usually give you what you've asked for more easily. If you pick one of these, you tell us what dates you like; we're not as tied to the Hebrew birthday.

The following services last 45 minutes to an hour. Your child will lead most or all of the service, and the people in the pews will generally be your guests only. (As compared to Shabbat morning, when you will see your guests plus at least 270 congregation members.) Exceptions are noted below.

- a) **Friday night service.** Commonly done, especially for girls, over the last sixty years. We've had both girls and boys do this. Many dates available. One hour, your guests only (or plus possibly 25 cong. members if you want), Torah passages read as part of Speech, Shabbat restrictions apply in synagogue.
- b) **Shabbat afternoon service, not at dinnertime.** We have held many Shabbat *mincha* Bar/Bat Mitzvah services, as early as 2:30 p.m. and as late as 7:45 p.m., depending on the time of year. If your best time is not 5:00-7:30, this could work well for you! Many dates available. 45 minutes, your guests only, Torah is read, Shabbat restrictions apply in synagogue. Assumes reception will be out of the synagogue.
- c) **Saturday night, after Shabbat ends.** This works well for some families, particularly in November and December, when sunset time makes the Mincha/Maariv/Havdala Service last from 4:15-5:15 p.m. In such cases, we can hold a Maariv/Havdala Service around dinnertime (say 5:45-6:30). Many dates available. 45 minutes, your guests only, Torah passages read as part of Speech, no Shabbat restrictions.
- d) **Sunday morning when the Torah is not read.** The advantage is that there are lots of possible dates. 45 minutes, your guests only, Torah passages read as part of Speech, no Shabbat restrictions. The service runs from 10:30-11:15 a.m.

(more alternatives on next page)

Q. How can you do a Bar/Bat Mitzvah when the Torah isn't read?

A. The logic is the same as for a Friday night Bat Mitzvah, which girls have been doing for decades. A child reaches the Jewish legal status of *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, of age to do more mitzvahs, at their birthday, *even if they never set foot in a synagogue*. So why the ceremony? We're celebrating that our child is of age to do more mitzvahs, because we think doing mitzvahs is great! And our children are showing that they are worthy of this privilege and responsibility by leading part of a worship service. That "celebration-of-mitzvah-worthiness" is at the core of any service your child might help lead -- whether Friday night, Saturday, Sunday or weekday.

Q. If the Torah isn't read, would my child have an aliya at some other time?

A. Yes. Usually near the ceremony, and usually with immediate family (no, people don't invite scores of guests a second time!...)

e) **"Unusual" Shabbat dates.** These are dates which may be bad for some families, but good for others. If you're interested in one of these, we may be able to schedule it more easily for you. (Note: Morning services on these dates, as on all Shabbat mornings, take about 3 hours, of which your child would lead about 45 minutes.)

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| January 27, a.m. | The morning's Torah portion, <i>Beshallah</i> , has an extremely long Haftara. Only <u>fluent</u> Hebrew readers should consider doing this Haftara. |
| February 17 and February 24, a.m./p.m. | These are February vacation weekends in the Caldwell/West Caldwell school district, the West Essex Regional Schools, and at the Golda Och Academy, but <u>not</u> necessarily in other places. Montville, JKHA, private schools and others may well have different vacation schedules. |
| March 31 and April 7, a.m./p.m. | These Shabbat dates are during Passover. If you have family coming in from very far away, and want to link your child's celebration with having the family together for Seder, this might work well for you. Yes, members of our Congregation <u>have</u> used this date! (Passover food has gotten better!) |
| June 23, a.m./p.m. | The Shabbat after the last day of school (in most districts). |
| June 30 -August 25, a.m./p.m. | Summertime. Yes, a number of families in the past have chosen dates during the summer. The one difference is that we can't promise that <u>both</u> Rabbi Silverstein and Cantor Caplan will be there. <u>One</u> of them will definitely be there, but they have to be on vacation sometime, so we can't guarantee both. |
| Sept. 1, a.m./p.m. | The Shabbat of Labor Day weekend. |

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The Hardest Time to Schedule: Sundays and Weekdays when the Torah Is Read

Remember, you can have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony on any Sunday or weekday morning, even if you don't read from the Torah (see bottom of page 4). But when do we read from the Torah, besides Shabbat? The Torah is read every Monday and Thursday morning, and on a few Sundays during the year.

Hardest to Schedule: In a recent year, we had nine families request the same Sunday date! These Sunday-or-weekday-with-Torah-Reading services have become more and more popular over the last several years, particularly with Day School families. Therefore, we now assign these dates to whomever has the closest Hebrew birthday. (And by Jewish law, boys cannot use a date that is before their 13th Hebrew birthday, but girls can.) Also, we may hold **TWO** morning services on each of these days -- one at 9:00 a.m. and one at 10:30 a.m. (In general, the family with the closer Hebrew birthday chooses their service time first, but if you can commit now to using the synagogue building for your reception, you get preference in determining the time of the service.) And, as with all dates, we don't assign two children from the same school district to the same date.

That's a lot to process, we know... Again, it's worth repeating that you can celebrate Bar/Bat Mitzvah on any Sunday or weekday morning, even if you don't read from the Torah (see page 4). Having said all that, here are Sunday dates and weekday vacation dates when the Torah is read in the year 2018 -- if this is what you want, tell us what you'd like and we'll do our best!

Feb. 19 ----- President's Day Monday.

Mar. 1 ----- Thursday, Purim morning.
Traditionally, the service
is over two hours.

April 15 ----- Sunday, Rosh Chodesh Iyar.

May 28 ----- Memorial Day Monday.

Sept. 3 ----- Labor Day Monday.

Sept. 30 ----- Sunday, last day of Sukkot
(Hoshana Rabba).

Nov. 22 ----- Thanksgiving Day Thursday.

Dec. 9 ----- Sunday, 7th day of Chanuka.

Other Questions

Q. What about doing a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in Israel? Would you still help us?

A. Absolutely! We train your child no matter where your ceremony is held. Some families have done a ceremony in Israel only, and some have done one there and one here. There are a number of ways to do this in Israel -- speak to Cantor Caplan.

Q. Does every family make a "big" celebration?

A. Not at all. Families in our congregation celebrate a child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah in all kinds of ways. We personally have seen all the following (in no particular order):

- ** Coffee, cake and shmoozing after the service -- nothing more.
- ** Disk Jockey and desserts, in synagogue.
- ** Party in catering hall.
- ** Family celebrates with trip to Israel, instead of reception here.
- ** Everyone comes to house after services for food and shmoozing.
- ** Gathering in back yard.
- ** Kiddush in synagogue; pool party for kids next day.
- ** Simple buffet Saturday night.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. The point is that you don't HAVE to celebrate in any one prescribed way. There are many options, and members of our community have done them. Need suggestions? Contact Mady Koenig at 973-228-8933 or MEK902@aol.com .

Q. If we know now that we want to hold a reception in the synagogue building, might that affect the time of our child's service?

A. Maybe. If two families (with the nearest birthdays) request the same Sunday-or-Monday morning, and one family can commit now to holding their reception at Agudath Israel, then that family's service will take place later, closer to the time of that reception.

Thanks for reading all this -- you're now an "informed consumer". By **Monday, February 2**, please let us know what you'd like by filling out the form "**Response Form: Year 2018 Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service**" on the previous web page, and we'll be able to start making assignments. That process takes several weeks, so thanks for your patience. Let us know of any questions!

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Cantor Joel Caplan

Appendix: How Bar/Bat Mitzvah Dates Are Assigned

You don't have to read this – but if you want it, here is a fuller explanation of how Bar/Bat Mitzvah dates are assigned.

We try to have your child's date be as close as possible to what you request, given the following limitations:

We assign you a service as close as we can to your child's Hebrew birthday, unless you request otherwise (see below about such requests). By Jewish law, boys can use dates from their 13th Hebrew birthday and on, but girls can use dates from their twelfth Hebrew birthday and on, so sometimes girls may get a date that is before their 13th birthday.

There are generally at least two children assigned to each Shabbat, but all are at different services -- we don't "double up". We could have one child celebrate Saturday morning and another one Saturday evening, but we don't have more than one child celebrating Bar/Bat Mitzvah at any one service, unless all the parents involved request it. On the other hand, we have done two services at two different times on a Shabbat afternoon (one for Rachel, and another one for Jacob) or two services at two different times on a Sunday morning (one for Aaron, and another one for Miriam).

Whenever possible, we try not to have kids from the same school district and grade celebrate on the same Shabbat, to avoid "popularity contest" issues. And we don't initially assign out vacation weekends or Passover unless you ask for it.

If you request a date that is not near your child's Hebrew birthday, we make changes where we can. For example, if you want a Shabbat morning or Shabbat dinnertime date that's not near your child's Hebrew birthday, we are often able to do it -- but only if there's one available after all the year's kids have been assigned near their own birthdays. (Obviously, it helps if you can tell us a second and third choice!)

If multiple families request the same service, we generally assign it to the child with the closest Hebrew birthday. Two exceptions: If two families (with the nearest birthdays) request the same Sunday-or-Monday morning, and one family can commit now to holding their reception at Agudath Israel, then that family's service will take place closer to the time of that reception. The second exception is the Virtual Tie, which occurs when families request the same service, and their children's Hebrew birthdays fall in the same week. In this case, if one of the families already had to arrange for an older sibling's Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration to be outside the synagogue building due to our recent construction, then we give the requested service to that family.

In summary, we do our best to fulfill your requests, or at least one of your first three choices, given limitations of Hebrew birthdays, vacation times, not doubling up, and requests of other member families. Thankfully, we have been quite successful over the years in helping our members find dates, and we're glad we can help prepare for your simcha. Mazal tov!