

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook



Temple Shir Tikvah

34 Vine Street

Winchester, MA 01890

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

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B'nai (Bar/Bat) Mitzvah at Temple Shir Tikvah

Introduction

B'nai Mitzvah translates as “children of the commandment,” which means that a child is old enough to be responsible for the *mitzvot*, the commandments that a Jew performs in order to live a Jewish life. The celebration of *B'nai Mitzvah* marks the beginning of a young person's transition from childhood to adulthood.

At Temple Shir Tikvah, this celebration occurs when a child is 13 years of age. The ceremony results in the child becoming a full-fledged member of our Jewish community and sharing in the responsibilities that come with that, including full voting privileges. At the completion of this coming-of-age ritual, each child is considered an adult and morally responsible for their own actions. From a religious perspective, the child is considered old enough to begin to understand the Torah and may lead prayer and other religious services in the family and the community.

At Temple Shir Tikvah, participation in the service by family, whether interfaith or not, is encouraged. Non-Jewish parents and grandparents may fully participate in the service, e.g., by passing the Torah, saying blessings in Hebrew or English, presenting the tallit, or lighting candles.

Scheduling

Approximately 1½ to 2 years before a child's 13th birthday, families are sent information for scheduling the date of the B'nai Mitzvah. This information includes a calendar of available dates. Each family completes a Date Request Form, picking a first and second date choice. Once the forms are received from all the families, each child is assigned a date, with priority given to children whose birthdays fall closest to their requested date.

Confirmed dates and their associated Torah portions are assigned shortly after all families' forms are received. Billing information is also sent out at this time (see *Fees, Forms, and Payment* below).

Here is some information to remember when choosing a date:

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- Your B'nai Mitzvah ceremony should be scheduled **after** your child's 13th birthday. "Birthday" is defined as the English birthday. Certain exceptions are possible. Please check with the Rabbi and/or Cantor regarding exceptions.
- Priority is given to the child whose birthday is immediately preceding or on a given Shabbat. You have your choice of the morning (10 AM) service or the afternoon Havdalah (4 PM) service. If you do not want to use that date, you may choose a later Shabbat. Every effort will be made to accommodate your request.
- You may change your date at a later time, if necessary. However, at that time, you will be limited to a choice of remaining available dates.

This process has been established to provide families much needed flexibility. It is recognized that it is not possible for all families to schedule a B'nai Mitzvah at the time of their child's 13th birthday. However, these rules are for **your** benefit and flexibility.

Fees, Payment, and Forms

All B'nai Mitzvah families are asked to pay the **B'nai Mitzvah Package Fee**, which covers:

- Tutoring and family meetings with Beth
- Participation in Mitzvah Makers on a Saturday in January, where you will receive your Torah portion text and an engraved *siddur* (prayer book), have lunch with your fellow B'nai Mitzvah families, and learn more about this important lifecycle milestone from Temple clergy and staff
- Family education brunch with Rabbi Cari on a Sunday morning
- The B'nai Mitzvah ceremony in the sanctuary
- Use of the Oneg Room for a 1-hour kiddush following the ceremony
- The joy of being with family, friends, and community at Temple Shir Tikvah

A \$200 deposit is due by the date of Mitzvah Makers. The remaining fee is due 30 days before the B'nai Mitzvah, with the option of paying in full or in installments at any point along the way.

The **Building Use Form** tells us which rooms of the temple you intend to use, and for how long. It is due in the spring before the child's B'nai Mitzvah year. Use of the Oneg Room for a 1-hour

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kiddush is included in the basic package. Families can opt for **an extended (2-hour) Kiddush or a 4-hour reception at the Temple** for an additional fee, which covers building use and custodial services for one hour prior and one hour after the event. If more building access or custodial time is needed, an additional hourly fee applies (see the *Event Planning Handbook* for a list of all fees).

Worship Requirements

At Shir Tikvah, the B'nai Mitzvah child co-leads the entire service with the Rabbi and Cantor. Each child is required to learn their specific Torah portion (*Parasha*) and its trope (song). Torah portions range from 9 to 18 verses in Hebrew (from 3 to 6 *Aliyot*). The child chooses the section of their Torah portion that he or she will read. In addition, a short selection from the Prophets is chosen by the child and chanted after their Torah portion. This *Haftorah* ranges from 3 to 10 verses. In addition, the B'nai Mitzvah child is required to prepare and present a sermon, a *D'var Torah*, based on their Torah or Haftorah reading.

Educational Requirements

Religious School

Children who are studying toward their B'nai Mitzvah are expected to attend religious school at Shir Tikvah for a few years prior to scheduling their B'nai Mitzvah. For new members who have attended religious school elsewhere, a meeting with the Rabbi and/or Cantor will be necessary to determine when the child would be ready for their B'nai Mitzvah at Shir Tikvah. In religious school at Shir Tikvah, children learn to read Hebrew and understand prayers, and are introduced to interpreting and drawing meaning from the Torah. By the time a child begins the B'nai Mitzvah process, he/she should know the basic fundamentals of Hebrew, i.e. knowing the Hebrew alphabet and reading in Hebrew phonetically. The child should also be familiar with the most common songs and prayers used during services.

Tutoring and Rehearsals

All children are expected to be tutored for their B'nai Mitzvah. Children must work with a tutor to learn their specific Torah portion and its trope (song) and to write their *D'var Torah* (sermon). At Shir Tikvah, our Cantor is the primary tutor for children becoming B'nai Mitzvah.

At the beginning of the process, our Cantor has a discussion with each child's parent(s) to determine the child's learning style and the appropriate time for tutoring to begin. Tutoring usually starts 6 to 9 months before the B'nai Mitzvah. As part of the tutoring process, the Cantor provides rehearsal time. In addition, the Rabbi holds a full walk-through of the service the week before the actual date.

Mitzvah Makers

"Mitzvah Makers" is a mandatory sixth grade *Shabbaton*, a day-long event for children and their parents hosted by the Rabbi and Cantor. At the Shabbaton, the child receives his/her Torah portion, the Mishkan T'filah prayer book, and their *Haftarah* portion. There are follow-up parent meetings where sixth grade parents meet with seventh grade parents who have been through the B'nai Mitzvah process and who can lend advice and knowledge.

Social Action Requirements

The importance of Tikkun Olam (Repair the World) is promoted in the early grades of our religious school. In 4th grade the students participate in the Caring Corps. As students enter the 6th grade, the social action component is incorporated through the B'nei Telem curriculum. The Tikkun Olam focus expands in the 6th and 7th grades with the Tikkun Olam Corps. Students learn to contribute to social justice causes as part of a larger community effort through volunteering monthly at a local soup kitchen and other volunteer experiences.

A mitzvah project is community service or social action work spearheaded by an individual student and undertaken in the months leading up to their B'nai Mitzvah. It is encouraged but not mandatory. Through integration of resources from the Tikkun Olam Committee, the religious

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school, and the Caring Committee, it is our hope that we can make a range of resources available to those wishing to take on a formal mitzvah project.

The Service

The Saturday morning (*Shacharit*) service includes the *Sh'ma* and its Blessings, a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning service. The morning service starts at 10:00 AM and typically runs until around 11:45 AM.

The Saturday afternoon (*Mincha/Ma'ariv*) *Havdalah* service marks the symbolic end of Shabbat and ushers in the new week. This service does not include the *Sh'ma* and its Blessings and therefore is slightly shorter than the morning service. The *Havdalah* is recited over kosher wine, a special braided Havdalah candle, and a besamim (spice box). The afternoon service starts at 4:00 PM and usually ends about 5:30 PM.

All Shir Tikvah community members are welcome to attend the service. B'nai Mitzvah families are encouraged to personally invite their child's religious school classmates to the service.

7th Grade Class Invitations

As part of the Shir Tikvah culture of inclusion, it is encouraged that the B'nai Mitzvah family extend invitations to all 7th grade classmates to attend the service and, for morning services, the one-hour kiddush following the service. In so doing, classmates can share in this special experience. Here is a template for that invitation:

Dear 7th Grade Classmate,

Please join us next Saturday, date, at time as we celebrate the occasion of child's name Bar/Bat/B'nai Mitzvah. Child's name will be chanting Parasha Name, a parasha that relates the short description of Torah reading subject. The family name's hope you can share this joyful event with them. Child's name is looking forward to having their Shir Tikvah classmates join them at the bimha to sing L'Chi Lach at the end of the service. You are also welcome to join us for an oneg immediately following the service. If you attend, please have your parents pick you up around time.

Hebrew Names, Tallit and Kippah

At the B'nai Mitzvah Shabbat service, only the Hebrew names of the B'nai Mitzvah child and the child's parents are used. If the child does not have a Hebrew name, he or she can choose one

prior to the ceremony. If a child's parent does not have a Hebrew name, his or her English name is used.

Generally, families purchase a *tallit* (prayer shawl) for the B'nai Mitzvah child. The Temple also has some available if a family chooses not to buy one. Boys wear a kippah (yarmulke) during the service. Some girls wear one, some do not — it is entirely up to the child and family. See [Ceremony Resources](#) on where to buy a tallit or kippot.

Prayers, Blessings, Readings and Aliyot

A transliterated version of the reform siddur 'Mishkan T'filah: Shabbat' is used for services at Temple Shir Tikvah. Each student conducts the service by 1) leading many of the prayers and readings, 2) chanting portions of the Torah and the Haftarah and 3) chanting the Blessings before and after the Torah and Haftarah portions.

The primary parts of the service include:

- **Opening Prayers:** at which time the Tallit is presented
- **The Sh'ma and its Blessings** (morning service only): Prayers for creation, revelation and redemption
- **Amidah:** Standing before God
- **Torah Service:** includes the Torah procession, blessings before and after the Torah reading, Aliyot, Haftarah Blessings, Haftarah reading, D'Var Torah, Parents' Address, and Temple presentation
- **Concluding Prayers:** includes the Mourner's Kaddish, Havdalah (afternoon service only), and Ha-Motzi.

Honors

During the service, there are several opportunities for special family members and friends to participate. These *honors* are:

1. *Tallit presentation* (any family member or family friend)
2. *Two ark openings* (1 to 4 people, of any age or religion)

3. The *Torah blessings* (anyone over the age of 13, any number of people on the *bimah*; usually done by Jewish relatives, but there is also a non-Hebrew option)
4. *Lifting and dressing the Torah* (2 people over the age of 13 — at least one should be strong; preferably should be people who have done this before)
5. Shir Tikvah *presentation* (anyone from the community and is chosen by the family).
6. Leading *Motzi* at the end of the service
7. For afternoon services, *Havdalah* helpers to hold the candle, wine cup, and spice box (any age).

Parent Speeches

The goal of the parent speech is for you to have a chance to tell your child and the people assembled what this day means to your family. You might talk about your child's Torah portion and how it relates to your child or your family, your child's growth during this process, your hopes for your child, positive characteristics that you've seen in your child's life so far, and your child's membership in the adult Jewish community.

Some parents give a joint speech, and others choose to speak separately. Regardless of how you split it up, parent speeches should take no longer than 5 minutes in total.

Presentation

During the service, a present from the Shir Tikvah community is given to the child by a temple member. This presentation includes the following:

- A certificate commemorating participation in the 7th Grade Tikkun Olam Corps
- A NFTY gift certificate for travel to Israel during high school
- Their B'nai Mitzvah certificate
- A copy of the Torah

This presentation is typically made by a friend of the family or by one of your children's religious school teachers. The parents of the child choose the person to give the presentation. The presenter is welcome to make a short speech (under 2 minutes) indicating how proud they are of the child and how much the child is appreciated.

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Here is an example of what might be said during the gift presentation:

On behalf of Temple Shir Tikvah, it's my pleasure to present you with some gifts:

- *Tikkun Olam Fund Certificate. The 7th grade class participated in the Tikkun Olam Corps this year where they learned about the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam—repairing the world. TST 7th grade students and their families each contributed to a fund in lieu of Bar Bat Mitzvah gifts for each other. At the end of the year students decide where to donate the money. This certificate is in recognition of your work in making the world a better place.*
- *NFTY \$250 gift Certificate: This certificate gives you \$250 toward a NFTY (National Federation of Temple Youth) trip to Israel. Even if you don't use this gift certificate, our hope is that you will travel to Israel at some point.*
- *B'nai Mitzvah Certificate: This certificate gives you full rights as an adult member of Temple Shir Tikvah. You can vote, join committees, sing in the choir, work as an aide in the religious school, or find many other ways of continuing your involvement in our community post B'nai Mitzvah.*
- *Torah: Here is your own copy of the Torah. This book contains the stories, lessons and wisdom of the Jewish people. It is also called the Tree of Life because it will grow with you and show you the unique lens through which our people view their world. For the Jewish people, the study of Torah never ends and each reading offers the possibility of new meaning as you've shown us so beautifully today.*

Mazel Tov and I look forward to watching all you have yet to accomplish!

Program Booklet

Most families distribute a program booklet at the B'nai Mitzvah ceremony which gives the order of the service, lists the child's Torah and *Haftarah* portions, and provides additional readings, and lyrics to songs. It is particularly helpful to non-Jewish attendees. The program lists the names of those who are participating in the service, and is also a nice remembrance for people who attend the ceremony. The program typically includes:

- A description of what the service is
- The structure of the service, with names called out for any honors or readings.
- Lyrics to any songs not in the prayer book
- Transliterations of any prayers that are not included in the prayer book
- Translation of the Torah and *Haftarah* readings
- Hebrew of the Torah and *Haftarah* readings.

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At Temple Shir Tikvah the *Mishkan T'Filah*, transliterated prayer book, a Reform Siddur, is used for the B'nai Mitzvah service. The morning and afternoon services differ slightly from each other. Templates (Word files) for creating a program for the morning or afternoon service are available on the temple website. Each template can be edited and printed into a booklet or trifold handout, depending on which template you choose.

There is an extensive collection of programs from prior B'nai Mitzvah services in the Temple library for families to view when creating their own program.

Photography and Video Policy

In order to maintain the sanctity of the B'nai Mitzvah services, the Rabbi and our Cantor have agreed on the following policies regarding photography and video.

1. The names of all photographers and videographers must be supplied to the Office Manager no less than 1 week prior to the service in order to provide these names to the Rabbi and Cantor
2. Videographers must remain stationary in the rear of the sanctuary and must not move around the room.
3. Photographers must remain in the rear of the sanctuary and may use a telephoto lens to take close ups of activities at the bimah. Photographers may move back and forth across the rear of the sanctuary but may not come down any of the aisles at any time.
4. Photographers must not take pictures of people praying, meaning that no photographs may be taken of the congregation as a whole. If you or your photographer has any questions regarding these policies, please contact the Rabbi or Temple office.

There are two exceptions to #3

- 1) When the torah is being passed from grandparents to parents to child, the photographer may come down on either side of the sanctuary (on the window sides) to the front row to photograph only this portion of the service. Immediately after the torah passing, the photographer must move back to the rear of the sanctuary.

2) At the end of the afternoon service during Havdalah, the photographer may come down on either side of the sanctuary to take pictures during this portion of the service only.

Celebration

Refer to the *Event Planning Handbook* for room capacities, rules and regulations, and fees associated with having a celebration at Temple Shir Tikvah.

Light Kiddush

For a morning service, if you are not having your reception at the Temple, it is appropriate (but not required) to set up a light Kiddush (wine and challah and/or cake) in the Oneg Room, both for your guests and for any community members who might attend the service. A light Kiddush should last no more than 30 minutes. If your Kiddush lasts any longer, the family must provide additional helpers for clean-up after guests leave. The family must provide all tableware and refreshments. There are no additional costs associated with using the oneg room for a light Kiddush.

Kiddush Luncheon

Some families choose to have an extended Kiddush which includes the use of kitchen and Oneg Room for a maximum of 2 hours. After a morning service, an extended Kiddush may end no later than 2:00 pm, with an additional hour for clean-up. The extended Kiddush can be scheduled even if there is also an afternoon event scheduled at the Temple at 4:00 pm or later. The family must make arrangements for cleaning up after guests leave. The family must provide all refreshments and tableware. See the *Event Planning Handbook* for the cost of renting the Oneg room for an extended Kiddush.

Reception

Full receptions may be as long as 4 hours in length and include the use of the kitchen, oneg room and/or sanctuary. Additional time is allotted for set-up and clean-up. Due to time constraints, a

full reception following a morning service is not allowed if there is another Temple event scheduled in the afternoon or early evening. The family must provide all refreshments and tableware. See the *Event Planning Handbook* for the cost of renting the sanctuary and/or Oneg room for a reception and catered events.

Shabbat Family Dinner

Families may want to have a private dinner in the oneg room prior to Shabbat services on Friday night. Approval is based on the availability of the space, depending on what is happening at the Temple that evening. See the *Event Planning Handbook* for the cost of renting the Oneg room and planning details for a Shabbat family dinner. If you wish to have a Friday night dinner, please contact the Temple office six weeks prior to the requested date.

Shabbat Oneg

The Friday night service on the eve of the B'nai Mitzvah can be a special time for you and your guests to worship with the community, outside of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah excitement. Families are encouraged to attend Friday night services and to sponsor the Oneg. Please see the *Event Planning Handbook* for details on sponsoring the oneg. If you wish to sponsor an oneg, please contact the Temple office one month prior to the requested date.

Family Responsibilities

Family Helpers

Each B'Nai Mitzvah family (parents and child) is asked to volunteer as Family Helpers to assist three other families with their B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies. A Family Helper Coordinator will contact families to request and assign volunteers. Typically, there are three helpers for each B'Nai Mitzvah service.

Family Helpers should show up at least 30 minutes before the service and plan to stay no more than 30 minutes after the service. General responsibilities entail:

- parking assistance

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- greeting
- ushering
- **minor** set-up and clean-up.

It is generally recommended that one helper become the point person or "captain" to help organize and navigate tasks with the parent contact. It's a good idea for Family Helpers to touch base with one another a week or so before the ceremony to know what their assigned tasks are. One helper should be assigned "the parking lot attendant", another helper should be "the greeter" in the main lobby, and the third helper should be "the usher" in the sanctuary.

Greeting and Ushering

Before the service, one greeter should stand in the front lobby; greet the guests, direct people to the coat room, rest rooms, gift table, and sanctuary (via elevator or stairs) as needed. The greeter should also be available to help answer any questions or concerns the caterer/photographer may have while the ceremony is being conducted, and more importantly, make sure that children entering the sanctuary are quiet and respectful.

The usher assigned to the sanctuary should assist guests with seating. The parent contact should provide details on where the children and close family members should to be seated. During the service, an usher should sit in the back of the sanctuary to help late-comers and to keep children quiet as necessary. The usher should provide general assistance during the ceremony; i.e. direct guests to restrooms and seat late arrivals quietly and quickly so that the service is not interrupted in any way.

Parking

One Family Helper is needed for parking. Parking assistance involves letting specific guests into the Temple lot, and then directing others to the nearby church lot (if it is available), street parking, or other town parking lots. The parent contact should provide a list of guests that will be using the Temple parking lot (the family can use up to 10 regular spaces and one accessible space).

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The parent contact will also tell the parking attendant whether the nearby church lot is available. See the *Event Planning Handbook* for a parking map of Winchester Center. Families can copy and use this map for distribution to guests to help them find other available parking.

Setup of Sanctuary

One Family Helper typically places a prayer book on each chair in the sanctuary before the service. This helper can distribute the programs to guests by placing one on each chair before the service. This helper may be asked to place the flowers in the sanctuary if the family is bringing the flowers with them that day.

Cleanup of the Sanctuary

At least one Family Helper should return prayer books to the shelves in the sanctuary after the service. This helper should also pick up programs, kippot and miscellaneous items and give them to the custodian. Flowers should be removed from the sanctuary unless arrangements have been made to share the arrangements with another event that day.

Setup for a Light Kiddush

If a family is having a light Kiddush (not catered) after a morning service, one of the Family Helpers should set up the tableware, pour the wine and juice, and put out the challah on the tables in the Oneg room so that the room is set up before the service ends. There is a challah cover in the kitchen if needed; just ask the custodian where it is kept. If the family is planning a larger Kiddush, they will need to make their own arrangements for setup and cleanup with their caterer or food supplier.

Cleanup after a Light Kiddush

A Family Helper should help clean up after a "light" Kiddush, such that the Oneg room and kitchen are left with no food or paper products. (If the family plans a larger Kiddush then it is their responsibility to make their own arrangements to set up and clean up in the Oneg Room.)

Ceremony Resources

Mitzvah Makers Tutorial

A Mitzvah Makers audio tutorial is accessible through the temple website.

Prayers and Song Lyrics

Instead of the traditional *Barchu* prayer, we use the following prayer in our congregation. You may want to include this prayer in your program booklet, so that guests who are not familiar with it can follow along.

Barchu, Dear One

Barchu, Dear One,
Shechina, Holy Name,
When I call on the light of my soul
I come home.

– Lev Friedman

This next section lists some B'nai Mitzvah songs. If you choose to include any of these songs in your service, you may want to include these lyrics in your booklet, so that people at the service can sing along.

And the Youth Shall See Visions

This is a good song for after the Rabbi's blessing, or to conclude the service.

Chorus:

And the old shall dream dreams
And the youth shall see visions,
And our hopes shall rise up to the sky.
We must live for today, we must build for tomorrow.
Give us time, give us strength, give us life.

Childhood was for fantasies, for nursery rhymes and toys,
The world was much too busy to understand small girls and boys.
As I grew up I came to learn that life was not a game,
That heroes were just people that we called another name.

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Now I'm grown, the years have passed, I've come to understand
There are choices to be made and my life's at my command.
I cannot have a future, 'til I embrace my past,
I promise to pursue the challenge, time is going fast.

Today's the day we take our stand, the future's ours to hold.
Commitments that we make today are dreams from days of old.
We have to make the way for generations come and go.
We have to teach them what we've learned so they will come to know.

– Debbie Friedman (based on the prophet Joel 3:1)

The following songs are in the Mishkan T'filah prayer book. You can find a complete index of songs on page 317.

Eili, Eili

This is a good song to use after silent prayers. (page 349)

L'chi Lach

This is a good song for after the Rabbi's blessing or to conclude the service. (page 341)

Not by Might

This is a good song for after the Rabbi's blessing or to conclude the service. (page 365)

Open up our Eyes

This song is well suited to singing before the Shema. (page 373)

Romemu

In addition to being part of the Torah processional, this version of the song is a good opener for the service. (page 249)

Salaam (Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu)

This is a good song for after the Amidah. (page 253)

Shavua Tov

This is a song for the end of a Havdalah service. (page 337)

T'filat Haderech

This is a song for concluding the service. (page 345)

Yerushalayim Shel Zahav

This is a good song for after the Rabbi's blessing or to conclude the service (page 356)

Alternative Readings and Blessings

If you want to include an additional or more personal reading at your service, here are some available options that have been used in other services. Alternatively, you may also want to explore some poetry works by Mary Oliver, Yuhuda Amichai, and Kahlil Gibran, which often fit nicely with the service.

When Torah Entered the World

This reading is on page 257 of the Mishkan T'filah prayer book.

Alternative Parents' Blessing before the Torah Reading

*May your eyes sparkle with the light of Torah,
and your ears hear the music of its words.
May the space between each letter of the scrolls
bring warmth and comfort to your soul.
May the syllables draw holiness from your heart,
and may this holiness be gentle and soothing
to you and all God's creatures.
May your study be passionate,
and meanings bear more meanings
until life arrays itself to you
as a dazzling wedding feast.
And may your conversation,
even of the commonplace,
be a blessing to all who listen to your words
and see the Torah glowing on your face.*

– Danny Siegel

A Prayer for our Dearly Departed

In the rising of the sun and in its going down,
We remember them.
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of the winter,
We remember them.
In the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring,
We remember them.
In the beginning of the year and when it ends,
We remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength,
We remember them.
When we are lost and sick at heart,
We remember them.
When we have joys we yearn to share,
We remember them.
So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now part of us,
As we remember them.

– Rabbi Jack Riemer

Prayer for Peace

*We cannot merely pray to You to end war;
For we know that You made the world in a way
That we must find our own paths to peace
within ourselves and with our neighbors.*

*We cannot merely pray to You to root our prejudice;
For You have already given us eyes
With which to see the good in all persons,
if we could only use them.*

*We cannot merely pray to You to end despair,
For You have already given us the power
To clear away slums and to give hope,
if we would only use our power justly.*

*We cannot merely pray to You to end disease,
For You have already given us great minds
With which to search out cures and healings,
if we would only use them constructively.*

*Therefore, we pray to You instead
For strength, determination, and willpower,
To do instead of just pray,
To become instead of merely to wish,
For Your sake and ours, speedily and soon,
That our land may be safe,
And that our lives may be blessed.*

– Rabbi Jack Riemer

Parents' Prayer

*What do I wish for you?
I wish for you to be a person of character,
Strong but not tough, gentle but not weak,
I wish for you to be righteous, but not self-righteous.
Honest but not unforgiving.*

*Wherever you journey, may your steps be firm
And may you walk in just paths and not be afraid.
Whenever you speak, may your words
be words of wisdom and friendship.*

*May your hands build and your heart preserve
What is good and beautiful in our world.
May the voices of the generations move through you
And the God of our ancestors be your God as well.*

*May you know that there is a people,
A rich heritage to which you belong
And from that sacred place,
You are connected to all who dwell on the earth.*

*May the stories of our people be upon your heart.
And the Grace of the Torah rhythm dance in your soul.*

– Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

A Blessing for a Parent to Say to a Child

*May all the gifts hidden inside you find their way into the world,
May all the kindness of your thoughts be expressed in your deeds,
May all your learning lead to wisdom,
May all your efforts lead to success,
May all the love in your heart be returned to you,
May God bless your body with health and your soul with joy,
May God watch over you night and day and protect you from harm,
May all your prayers be answered.
Amen.*

– Naomi Levy

Tallit and Kippot Resources

Tallit and kippot can be purchased at the Israel Bookstore and Kolbo Fine Judaica on Harvard Street in Brookline.

URJ Resources

The following books and music are available through urjbooksandmusic.com:

- [*The Art of Torah Cantillation - A Step-by-Step Guide to Chanting Torah* by Cantor Marshall Portnoy and Cantor Josee Wolff](#)

This unique, step-by-step book and compact disc package will lead the novice through each step of learning how to chant Torah. Divided into 13 lessons and additional useful appendices and bibliography, the book allows the reader to “self-teach” the important principles of Torah cantillation. The only pre-requisite for this course of learning is a basic ability to read Hebrew and a willingness to learn! This guide includes a CD of the corresponding recordings.

- [*Making it Count: Guidelines for Becoming a B'nai Mitzvah*](#)

This guide is designed to help you make the most of your Jewish journey. Focusing on the values that are most important in our tradition, you will explore together what commitments you can make to bring these principles to life. Judaism has a lot of special wisdom to offer, but only you can make it real.

- [*Torah and Haftarah MP3s*](#)

Use your phone or laptop for your Bar and Bat Mitzvah preparation: Torah and Haftarah portions are available for download as MP3 files.

Celebration Planning Resources

Event Planning Handbook

The *Event Planning Handbook* describes the facilities at Temple Shir Tikvah that may be used for private functions, including the B'nai Mitzvah kiddush and party. It also explains what resources (tables, chairs, A/V equipment, etc.) the Temple has available, as well as logistical and procedural information when using the building.

Vendor Notebooks

The Temple office has a compilation of vendor recommendations provided by families who previously had their child's service and/or celebration at Temple Shir Tikvah. Check out how satisfied other congregants were with their florists, DJs, caterers, party venues, photographers, videographers, and other entertainment services. There are also notebooks of vendor brochures and advertising.

Planning Timetable

Use this timetable as a to-do-list to help you guide you on your the B'nai Mitzvah journey.

Early Activities (18 - 24 months before)

- **Reserve a date for the service.** In the month of August, the Temple office will send you a Date Request Form and with a calendar of available dates. Complete the form, specifying a first and second choice of dates. You may also indicate if the Temple will be your party venue. See the *Event Planning Handbook* to read *Having your Party at the Temple*. Return the form to the Temple office by the deadline (usually in early October). The office will process your request, assign the Torah reading for that date, send you the date assigned for your child's B'nai Mitzvah.
- **Submit a deposit to reserve your date.** Once your date is assigned, the Temple office will send you billing information for the B'nai Mitzvah Package. Submit the required \$200 deposit by the date of Mitzvah Makers (usually in late January).

January of 6th Grade

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- **Attend Mitzvah Makers** – This is a mandatory informational meeting with the Rabbi and Cantor, held in late January, for all sixth graders (signed up for their B'nai Mitzvahs) and their parents.
- **Set up a payment plan** for the remaining balance of the B'nai Mitzvah Package Fee. Full payment is due 30 days before your child's B'nai Mitzvah date.

9 - 12 months before

- **Prepare the guest list and establish a budget for the party.** Review the *Event Planning Handbook* to learn about room capacities, kitchen use, and rules for using Temple space.
- **Check the Vendor Notebooks** available in the Temple office for suggestions for party vendors. The notebooks contain locations, caterers, photographers, florists, invitations, videographers, entertainment, and DJ information.
- **Choose a party venue.** If you are not having your party at the Temple, your venue will require a deposit to reserve your date and time. Otherwise, if you are having your party at the Temple, choose a caterer. Check out the Vendor Surveys in the library to see which caterers have worked well at the Temple. Review the *Caterer's Agreement* in the *Event Planning Handbook* with your caterer so that both of you are aware of their responsibilities while working in the Temple.
- **Reserve entertainment for the party** such as band, DJ, or other activity for teens and adults.

6 - 9 months before

- **Arrange tutoring with the Cantor.** Our cantor is the primary tutor used by Temple members. Contact the Rabbi or Cantor if you want to have a different tutor.

3 - 6 months before

- **Volunteer to be a Family Helper.** Sign-up to assist another family during their ceremony when contacted (by email) by the Family Helper Coordinator. Review Family Helper responsibilities.
- **Arrange hotel accommodations for out-of-town guests, if applicable:**
 - Reserve block of rooms or just choose a hotel you like.
 - Contact your out-of-town guests with hotel choice and any discount associated with your block of rooms.

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

- o **Enlist a photographer** and/or videographer (professional or family member). Provide a copy of the Photography and Video Policy to the applicable person.
- o **Order or create invitations.** Invitations should include:
 - RSVP card / return stamped envelope (RSVP date is typically two weeks before the event).
 - Directions to the Temple and party venue.
 - Hotel information (check-in time for out-of-town guests).
 - Party information for kids (transportation to party venue and/or pick-up time at party completion).
 - Any special information about what your family is planning.
- o See the *Event Planning Handbook* for information about Winchester and Temple Parking and the Winchester Parking Map in case you want to provide specific information to your guests in their invitation.
- o **Purchase thank you notes and envelopes.**

2 months before

- o **Purchase tallit (optional).** At Israel Bookstore or Kolbo Fine Judaica in Brookline.
- o **Order kippot (optional).** At Israel Bookstore.
- o **Send out invitations.** (Typically 6–8 weeks before the event). Create a spreadsheet to keep track of RSVPs.
- o **Determine family members and friends who will take part in the service.** Provide them with their written part, especially if they need to practice:
 - Think about roles (e.g., Aliyah) for family members and friends.
 - Think about any special roles for classmates (sing a song together).
 - Note: younger kids may say *Motzi* or open the ark.
- o **Select wardrobes** for family members. Dress clothes are appropriate.
- o **Review all party details** (including menu, table settings, rentals, staffing) with your party venue or caterer.

1 month before

- o **Submit Building Use Form to the Temple office**

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

Create the program booklet for the service (optional). Examples of programs from previous services are archived in the Temple Library. The Rabbi or Cantor can review your program for accuracy.

- o **Apply for One-Day Liquor License** at the Winchester Town Hall if your party is at the Temple and you are planning to serve alcoholic beverages.
- o **Decide on flowers (optional)** for the Temple sanctuary. You can share the cost with another family who may be having their service the same day.
- o **Provide picture/video policies** to photographer/videographer.
- o **Contact the Temple office** if you are interested in sponsoring the Oneg the Friday night before the service. See the *Event Planning Handbook* for Sponsoring the Oneg.
- o **Reserve transportation** to party venue for children or special guests.
- o **Return the Caterer's Agreement** signed by the caterer with the **Security Deposit** to the office if you are having a catered party at the Temple. Make sure your caterer provides the Temple office with their **Certificate of Liability Insurance**.
- o **Write parent speech(es)** and type it up double-spaced in large print.
- o **Receive names of your Family Helpers** - the Family Helper Coordinator emails you with the names of your three helpers
- o **Make the final payment of the B'nai Mitzvah Package Fee**

No later than 10 days before

- o **Receive Hebrew Certificate Request Form** via email from the Temple office. Specify your family Hebrew names (in English or Hebrew) and the Torah reading information for the B'Nai Mitzvah certificate.
- o **Provide final payments and paperwork** to the Temple office:
 - Balance of Event Rental fee
 - Completed Hebrew Certificate Request Form
 - Final guest count
 - Liquor License
 - Set-up diagrams/information for sanctuary and/or oneg rooms if anything other than traditional seating is required or if the Temple is your party venue
 - Flower delivery information – name of florist (or yourself) and time of arrival
 - Video and/or photographer information – name and time of arrival.

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

- o **Decide usage of Temple parking lot** – decide which guests with special needs will park in the Temple lot.
- o **Provide instructions to your Family Helpers** – email each of them with a specific task list for what you would like them to do before, during, and after the service. See Responsibilities of Family Helpers.
- o **Order challah** for Kiddush (not required for Havdalah service).
- o **Purchase Kiddush Tableware** - paper plates, napkins, tablecloths, plastic utensils, and plastic cups for Kiddush (not required for Havdalah service).

1-7 days before

- o **Participate in a final rehearsal** with the Rabbi.
- o **Receive church parking availability** from the Temple office by email on Thursday (two days before the event).
- o **Buy Challah and any fresh food for Kiddush** (not required for Havdalah service).
- o **Purchase Friday night Oneg** refreshments (optional) - If sponsoring the Friday night Oneg, plan what to bring and pick up anything you can before that Friday. Bring the food to the Temple on Friday morning or before the service.
- o **Touch base with your party venue or caterer** on last-minute details.

B'nai Mitzvah Day

- o **Bring printed materials for the service:**
 - Program booklets (optional)
 - Torah portion, Haftarah portion, D'var Torah
 - Parent speeches
 - Extra prayers, poems, songs, etc. (optional)
 - Maps of Winchester for parking
- o **Bring Special Family Judaica for service: (**can also use Temple's)**
 - Tallit and kippot (optional)**
 - Kiddush cup and Challah Cover**
 - Havdalah candles (for afternoon service)**
- o **Bring Food for Kiddush:** (not required for Havdalah service)
 - Wine, grape/apple juice, Challah, other refreshments

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

- Tableware (including small cups) and tablecloths for 2 rectangular (6-foot) tables

Relax and enjoy this special experience with your family and friends!

Celebration Planning Tips

Here are some suggestions on how to simplify your child's B'nai Mitzvah celebration and reduce expenses.

Focus on the child, the ritual and the meaning of the day. This is what your child (and your guests) will remember years for now. It's okay to forgo some theme that has nothing to do with the meaning of the day. Emphasize the uniqueness of your child and the love your family has for the child, to create a rich experience for everyone attending. Make sure your guests know how meaningful it is to your family that they attended.

Talk with your child. You may find that your child doesn't want a blow-out but something more casual and low key. Also, your child is old enough to understand there may be significant financial constraints.

Make a budget. Start with a total amount you feel comfortable spending. Create a spreadsheet of projected expenses based on the number of guests. Divide your expenses into categories like invitations, flowers, food, beverages, entertainment, photo/video, gifts, rentals, etc. Without a detailed budget, costs can soon be out of control. As you go through the process of planning, eliminate extras that are unimportant to you. There is no requirement for tropical floral arrangements or champagne toasts when something far simpler will still suffice. Remember – it's not a wedding!

Make your own invitations and programs. There is beautiful stationery available these days, and many companies (Cranes) enclose directions for printing using your home computer and printer. Today's online paper businesses and PC applications make this easier and more beautiful than you could have imagined five years ago. Many scrapbooking supplies can be used to make unique invitations at a much lower cost than professionally printed invitations. Make this a craft project with your child – it is total fun.

Trim your guest list and stay on top of your RSVPs. If budget is an issue, remember each person represents a cost of \$50-\$150 or more. Trim your guest list if you expect to exceed your budget if everyone attends. People tend to forget that every time they add a table of 6-10 guests, they also add table linens, a centerpiece, food, extra rentals, and labor and so on. When the final bill arrives, you'll experience "sticker shock" and disbelief that the initial budget was exceeded.

Preparing the Food. This is not necessarily a practical idea, but if you love to cook, and are well organized, you can certainly cut costs by preparing the food yourself with family and friends. Maybe you only prepare some of the food, maybe a special cake, and order the rest. The number of guests will determine if this is possible. Go online and look at menus to get ideas. Don't prepare overly complicated food.

Extended Kiddush or Buffet Costs. Don't order more food than you need. If you are serving a buffet, always order food for fewer guests than are actually attending. Otherwise, there will probably be a lot of food left over. At the last minute there will always be guests who can't attend. Also, people don't eat as much as you think they will. Not every guest will eat each buffet item, especially expensive items such as fish. Order food for 15% fewer guests than the number of attendees. You will still have food left over, but you will have spent less. Food platters for 20 can really serve 25-30.

Cut catering costs. Do not hire a catering company at the last hour. Plan ahead and hire early. Keep the menu simple with less number of different types of food. Vegetarian options are always less expensive than ones with meat and fish. Use expensive foods in hors d'oeuvres rather than in entrees. Typically, a plated lunch or dinner is less expensive than a buffet because there are fewer options and waste.

Venue determines cost. Really shop around to compare costs between hotel functions, restaurants, and catered events. You would be surprised to know that your family's favorite restaurant may be the least expensive option. There are many price points.

Beware of hidden costs. Ask your vendors if all prices are inclusive. The line "plus labor, rentals, sales tax" etc., can quickly push your budget over the limit. Make sure you know how much waitstaff your caterer is providing and what their hourly rate is. Check the gratuity rate that will be charged for the party. Gratuity should be based on food costs only, exclusive of MA food tax (6.25%).

Use what the venue has available. Get a list from your venue of what they have on hand; tables, chairs, linens and colors, staging, lighting, sound equipment and more. (See the *Event Planning Handbook* for Temple resources.) Using what is available could cut your budget dramatically. Remember to consider all of these things when making your final location choice.

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

Host a luncheon instead of a dinner. It's usually less expensive. There are usually more facilities available at lunch time (and your bar bill will be considerably less). Alternately, forgo one really huge celebration and have two little ones -- a casual oneg luncheon and then a kids-only party in the evening.

Entertaining out-of-town guests. Compare prices at local hotels – if you reserve a block of rooms, the rooms are usually priced at a lower rate. (Usually guests pay for their own rooms.) If you are having a dinner for out-of-towners, have it at a Chinese or Italian restaurant that serves family-style platters -- this cuts way down on the cost of individual meals. A casual brunch or barbecue (weather permitting) at home is an easy, inexpensive way to entertain out-of-town guests. Have it the next day rather than the day before. If you love to cook, have a dinner at home, and hire teenagers to help serve and do cleanup.

Feed the kids something different that costs less than the adult menu. Kids are active, rarely sit, and are satisfied with less fanfare than the adults. They will also be finished with eating much faster than the adults. If your child's favorite meal is fettuccine Alfredo or spaghetti and meatballs, pick that as the kid's meal. With a Caesar salad and garlic bread, it's a full meal for the kids. Pasta is usually not an expensive menu option.

Alcoholic beverages are not necessary. You can always serve sparkling cider rather than wine. If you decide to purchase wine, beer, etc., you can buy the alcohol yourself. If alcohol is purchased by your caterer, it will be more expensive. Very good wine can be bought for less than \$15.00 per bottle. Many liquor stores give a discount if wine is bought by the case. See if your liquor store will allow you to return unopened bottles (this is very common).

Close the bar during dinner. Some hosts choose to close the bar during dinner and pass wine instead. The bar can remain closed or, if you choose, reopened the bar after the candle lighting/memory video and/or speeches. For a luncheon, you could serve wine, beer, and a novelty non-alcoholic drink. For a dinner, you could add one specialty cocktail, rather than a full bar. It is better to have limited alcohol than have a guest pay for his drinks.

Party décor – start with your child's favorite color and go from there. A specialty theme will cost you extra money. Color can especially set the mood. Make the party focus be on your child by making a picture board with pictures of your child at all ages. Or place a favorite or humorous framed photo (clear plexi-glass is inexpensive) of your child on each table. It could generate a lot of conversation.

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Create centerpieces that double as favors. If you want favors for the children's table, use candy bought in bulk. Fill baskets with candy bars or small clear bags of candy, tied with pretty ribbon. Or fill large martini glasses with jelly beans or M&Ms for a cute children's table centerpiece.

Centerpieces don't have to cost a lot. Centerpieces are not a necessity. But if you choose to have them, you can buy flowers at a local farm stand or discount warehouse and glass vases online or at a crafts center. Or use potted plants. Or maybe you have floral centerpieces only on the adults' tables. Votives are lovely for an evening party and are very reasonably priced (no candles in our Temple). Centerpieces can be meaningful: provide each table with a basket or decorative box and ask each family or friend to bring a children's book, crayons, markers, or a small stuffed animal that can be donated to a children's charity. Or ask them to bring canned goods for donation to a food bank.

Share Flowers for the Sanctuary. There are two floral stands on each side of the bimha. If there is another family having a B'nai Mitzvah the same day as you are, ask if they want to split the cost of the two floral arrangements in the sanctuary. Have the flowers delivered Saturday before the morning service. The flowers will still be very fresh for the afternoon service. Arrange to have each family take their flowers at the end of the day.

Professional photographers/videographers are not necessary. Use one or more favorite uncles, aunts, cousins or family friends to take pictures during the party or before the service. You can set up a video camera for the service at the back of the Temple. If you use a professional photographer, interview and hire a photographer who will give you digital files of your photos. You can make the album yourself online. It's a very easy process once you learn how. Making the album yourself costs about one-half to one-third of the traditional proofs-and-album route.

DJs serve more than one purpose. Music and games are important aspects of the child's party, and a DJ helps entertain your child and his/her friends while the adults enjoy each other. But there is a wide range of prices and activities. Always use a DJ that is recommended by someone you know (use the Vendor Book in the Temple library), and definitely compare prices. DJs will try to sell you expensive prizes/favors, but prizes and favors are not really necessary.

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Older teenagers are a great resource. Older siblings and/or their friends can be hired at reasonable rates to do all sorts of tasks, e.g. serving and cleanup at a Friday night dinner at home, entertaining the children at the party, and/or running errands. In lieu of a DJ, an older teenager may agree to create a playlist of your child's favorite music and play it through speakers at the party.