

Congregation Ohev Shalom/Marlboro Jewish Center

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Manual

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A Message From The Rabbi

Mazal Tov on the upcoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah of your child! This will be a great event for you, your family, and the community! At Marlboro Jewish Center all of our staff and many volunteers will join together to ensure that this special moment will be both positive and meaningful.

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is both a religious ceremony and a celebration. The ceremony marks the occasion of a young person reaching the age of accountability in Jewish law. Although we know that our children remain children in many ways, we also see the seeds of maturity begin to blossom in them. Judaism takes those blossoms seriously and nurtures their unfolding by treating them with adult respect. When we honor that respect and communicate to our children that we truly value our heritage and its traditions and laws, and that therefore becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah *is* a great responsibility and a great honor, then we, too, are nurturing their continued Jewish growth and commitment.

We honor your children, as you do, when we ask them to step forward and accept the responsibility that becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah requires. As they prepare for their date, they will learn life-long skills that will make them feel at ease in any synagogue in the world, and as their Jewish knowledge grows, so will their Jewish self-identification. While there is a large amount of material to be learned, new material will only be assigned after the preceding material is mastered so it won't overwhelm the children, and we always tailor our goals to the abilities of the individual child, never pushing children farther than they are capable. Whatever their level, we help the students live up to their potential so that, like the hundreds of B'nai Mitzvah we have worked with, they too will beam with pride both during and after their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, having earned the good feelings that real accomplishment brings.

Your child's journey to Bar/Bat Mitzvah is soon to begin. We hope this booklet will help you to understand what lies ahead so that we can work together to make both the journey and the destination as wonderful as possible.

With warmest regard,

Rabbi Michael Pont

Bar/Bat Mitzvah At-A-Glance

<p>1Yr-18Mo Prior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational meeting led by Rabbi for all Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parents • Bar/Bat Mitzvah Lessons begin (Approx. 1Yr Prior) • Cantor or Mrs. D will contact parents to begin process.
<p>One Year-6Mo Prior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D'Var Torah Meeting at Religious School for Parents and Child • Child receives their Chumash and begins work on D'Var Torah • D'Var Torah Mentoring info and Materials are sent • Parents' Blessing/Speech Guidelines are sent
<p>3 Months Prior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D'Var Torah writing should be well underway • Bar/Bat Mitzvah student begins to read portions of service
<p>Two Months Prior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Honors information is sent • Social Action Committee information is sent • Parents' Blessing/Speech writing should be well underway • Send digital picture to Bonnie Komito (bkomito@mjcj.com) for Temple Topics
<p>One Month Prior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family meeting with Rabbi on 3 is scheduled • D'Var Torah and Parent's Blessing/Speech are due • Schedule sanctuary picture taking appointment
<p>One or two Weeks Prior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All paperwork is due to the Ritual Office (i.e. Honors) • Kippot basket is due to Ritual Office • Food donations are due to Ritual Office

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Meaning

The term “Bar/Bat Mitzvah” literally translates as “Son/Daughter of the Commandments,” but the meaning of the term is that once your child becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah, he or she is accountable under the law. No longer a child who doesn’t know right from wrong, Judaism holds that at Bar/Bat Mitzvah the young person knows that stealing is wrong, that giving Tzedakah (charity) is right and so on. Able to understand the mitzvot, the commandments, Judaism now asks the child to behave well on his or her own accord. (You can see that raising a child is a group effort, for Judaism assumes the family and the community have been and will continue to work together to teach the child Jewish values and Jewish law and provide a supportive community for living a Jewish life.) Once a child becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah, he or she may read from the Torah in services, have any honor in the worship service open to other adult worshippers, and may be called upon to sustain the community when comforting the bereaved by being counted in a minyan (a prayer quorum), or when doing any of the many deeds that fulfill Jewish hearts. It is because a transformative change in status takes place in the Jewish life of a child at Bar/Bat Mitzvah that we say Bar Mitzvah means a boy becomes a man or Bat Mitzvah means a girl becomes a woman. In fact, in many respects under Jewish law, they do.

Bring the Meaning Home

Our children sense that as Bar or Bat Mitzvah approaches, something momentous is happening in their lives. They pick up many cues from their parents, extended family and friends that their Bar/Bat Mitzvah is truly important. Over the course of their preparations, the children come to understand the meaning of their Bar or Bat Mitzvah and the new responsibilities and privileges that it affords them religiously. In my talks with the children, they often refer to this new status in very respectful tones, and their expectation is, almost invariably, that because they are being seen religiously as having more responsibility, their parents will expect them to be more responsible in other areas of their lives as well. Since the Bar/Bat Mitzvah means so much to their parents, as is clear from the amount of time they are spending on bringing them in for lessons, preparing for the party, and the emotional investment in the child’s doing well, the children naturally expect that parents in like manner take seriously the transformative aspect of their change in status *in synagogue and at home*.

Children often expect that their duties will change at home after Bar or Bat Mitzvah, or that they will be expected to come to synagogue on a more regular basis. Their expectation depends, of course, on the individual circumstance, but the children work out in their minds what it would look like for them to “be (more

of) a man” or “be (more of) a woman,” that is, what appropriate change in responsibilities and privileges would correspond to the change that is conferred upon them by the religion.

The Bar or Bat Mitzvah *is* an appropriate time and place to have such talks with your child and to create synagogue and/or home responsibilities and privileges that will change after Bar or Bat Mitzvah. It is a way to show your child that you recognize this as a serious step in his or her development as a Jew which you would like to honor. If you choose to create such changes, and I encourage you to do so, be reasonable in the changes you make - nothing beyond your child’s grasp. You want to build in success so that you won’t have to take these privileges away and so undo the message! So choose appropriate changes and plan them well in advance of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and make sure your child is completely on board. If you do, it is a way to add a level of meaning that your child can anticipate before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and enjoy long after.

Speaking From Experience: Ways To Help Your Child

Hebrew Reading Skills

Every child has a finite amount of time working with Cantor Krieger and Mrs. Ohrwashel. If your child comes to them with poor or nonexistent Hebrew reading skills, their time to teach your child the skills required for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be seriously compromised. If your child is having difficulty with Hebrew reading, you must address this problem **AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE**. Do not wait until the 7th grade to alert us to this problem! The greater your child’s ability to read Hebrew, the easier he or she will be able to master the skills taught for Bar and Bat Mitzvah. Please speak with the Director of the Religious School if your child is having a problem reading Hebrew as soon as you are aware of it.

Synagogue Attendance: Familiarity Breeds Comfort and Confidence

One of the best ways to help a child is to bring him or her often to services. When students come week after week over a sustained period, their jitters over “what’s going to happen” disappear as they internalize the prayers and the flow of the services. They don’t have to wait for the “cue” from the Rabbi or the Cantor about what they are to do next; they can anticipate what happens next. Give your child an advantage at his or her Bar/Bat Mitzvah, by making synagogue attendance a habit long before the Bar or Bat Mitzvah is on the horizon.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation Program

“The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation Program” is an inclusive title for those things that your child will be doing in preparation for his or her Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Our goal is to allow you to know in advance what to expect to help you with your planning. Please note, however, that since our goal is an excellent experience for your child, if we find that something does not work well and should be eliminated, or if we discover something that should be added to enhance some portion of the program, then changes will be made.

When your child becomes a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, they will demonstrate their competence as a leader in the synagogue by leading prayers, chanting Haftorah (Shabbat morning) and/or reading from the Torah. They will also give us a D'Var Torah, a word of Torah, by teaching us about their Torah portion and how it relates to them and his or her life.

The knowledge, skill and appreciation to do this comes from several important sources:

1. The Religious School Experience
 2. The Synagogue Experience
 3. Individual Bar/Bat Mitzvah Training
1. **The Religious School Experience** provides a student with knowledge of Jewish history, Israel, customs and ceremonies, Hebrew and prayers in order for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony to be a meaningful experience. In the 7th grade students will participate in a Chesed Project, where they donate their time in the spirit of Jewish tradition of Gemilut Chasadeem (showing kindness to others).
 2. **The Synagogue Experience** is essential so your child can experience the prayers ‘in action’. Attendance at both Junior Congregation and regular services provides an opportunity for your child to practice prayers they know as well as understand the rhythm of the service. Whether your child’s Bar or Bat Mitzvah is on Shabbat morning, Shabbat Mincha or on a Monday, Thursday or Rosh Chodesh, there are ample chances for them to attend ‘their’ service.
 3. **Individual Bar/Bat Mitzvah Training** is one part of the responsibility of Jewish adulthood, taking on the challenge of learning what is necessary for a meaningful ceremony. Group lessons begin in Kita Vav/6th Grade with Cantor Krieger. Individual Bar and Bat Mitzvah lessons start approximately 9 months to 1 year prior with either Cantor Krieger or Mrs. Ohrwashel.

All Bar/Bat Mitzvah Students

Cantor Krieger's Initial Lessons For All Students

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Training begins with students being exposed to Haftarah blessings and trope (cantillation) (for students with a Shabbat morning Bar/Bat Mitzvah); or Torah blessings and trope (for students with a Shabbat Mincha, Rosh Chodesh or weekday Bar/Bat Mitzvah). Cantor Krieger will work with students during regular Religious School hours. When this training begins for your child will depend on their Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

D'var Torah

All Bar/Bat Mitzvah students are required to write a d'var Torah and to present it in a speech to the congregation on the occasion of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. A *d'var Torah* is a teaching of Torah. It is the act of interpreting the Torah's teachings for oneself and then teaching it to one's community which begins the transition into acceptance of religious responsibility that is at the heart of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Students will receive their own copy of the *Etz Hayim chumash* (Five Books of Moses) in Vav/6th Grade. This way you and your child can explore the Torah together in the months leading up to the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and beyond. We hope this will enrich your family's Jewish learning!

We ask that our students read the Torah portion they are assigned (Note: they can base their talk on any part of the weekly Parashah, not just the part read in our triennial reading), and then write their d'var Torah based on something that sparked their interest. It is often helpful for the student to read the Torah reading and then come up with a list of questions that interest him/her.

Finally, they should try to see if they can relate this lesson to everyday life. More details will be forthcoming at the appropriate time (such as length, aids to understanding the Parashah, etc.), but we do have a mentor available to the Bar/Bat mitzvah to offer assistance to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the preparation of the d'var Torah and to schedule. If you would like a mentor for your child, please let Reba Schneiderman, the Ritual Administrator know.

Note: All students are required to turn in a completed draft of their d'var Torah to the Cantor or Mrs. Orwashel and Reba Schneiderman, the Ritual Administrator, at least four weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date, whether or not they have elected to use a mentor. The draft is forwarded to the Rabbi to afford the opportunity to make suggestions and tweak the d'var Torah to find its best possible expression. A final, approved copy is due before the Reinforcement

Phase of instruction begins, so that the student can begin rehearsing the final version of his/her d'var Torah.

Parents Blessing/Speech

We at Congregation Ohev Shalom/Marlboro Jewish Center would like to offer you the opportunity to bless your child with a personal prayer, speech or d'var Torah after their Aliyah to the Torah. The purpose of time is to briefly communicate to your child your Jewish hopes and dreams for them and the significance of this day in their life. This prayer, speech or d'var Torah can be words of Torah or from our tradition that are especially meaningful to you in the context of your child. You can also offer a blessing that is pre-written but which you can customize. The Rabbi must see and approve your prayer, speech or d'var Torah. **See Appendix A for examples.**

Family Meeting With Rabbi Pont

The family of every Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will meet with the Rabbi prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This gives the parents, the student and the Rabbi a chance to get to know each other better; it gives the parents a chance to ask any remaining questions, and it is a chance for the Rabbi to gain additional insight into their child. The Ritual Administrator (Reba Schneiderman) will be scheduling your meeting at the appropriate time.

Zayin/7th Grade

Individual Student Chesed Projects

To begin to incorporate into their personal lives the Jewish tradition of Gemilut Chasadeem (showing kindness to others), each 7th grader will choose a charitable act to perform over a minimum of 7 hours beginning the summer before 7th grade.

The purpose of this project for the 7th grade is to introduce how Gemilut Chasadeem can easily be incorporated into one's life, utilizing one's own skills and talent.

Giving of one's time is a charitable act, a component of Gemilut Chasadeem. Though giving tzedakah, or charity money, is also an important component of living Jewishly, the 7th Grade Chesed Projects will be solely comprised of doing acts which require the giving of time.

The Chesed Project will reflect an interest of each individual student, such as: helping the elderly by spending time playing Bingo or cards at a Senior Center, listening to and recording a Holocaust Survivor's story and promising to tell it 50 years from now, befriending and spending time with special needs children through Friendship Circle, feeding the indigent and hungry at a soup kitchen, caring for abandoned cats and dogs at an animal shelter, etc.

Chesed Project Presentations

All the 7th grade students will present their Chesed project at the school Chesed Fair during the spring of 7th grade. Each 7th grade student will design a tri-fold poster board with photos, printed or hand-made materials, depicting how the time was spent.

Special Programs and Trips will continue as appropriate reflecting the 6th grade and 7th grade curricula. The students will have the opportunity to teach about these experiences to each other, and as invited guest speakers to the younger grades at times during the year.

7th graders will be asked on the first day of school for information regarding the Chesed project they are pursuing, including the name, address, and nature of the volunteer work.

Any questions, please call the Education Director (732) 536-2303 x113.

Special Note: Students With A Shabbat Morning Bar/Bat Mitzvah

1. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Training continues in Zayin/7th Grade as students are assigned 1-1 lessons according to the date of their Bar/or Bat Mitzvah. Cantor Krieger and Mrs. Sylvia Ohrwashel will be teaching the students. The lessons run one half hour in length. All students who have a Shabbat Morning Bar/Bat Mitzvah will review the blessings before and after the Haftarah and the Haftarah trope (cantillation), and then learn their Haftarah.
2. As soon as the student is accomplished in the Haftarah chanting, he or she will proceed to review the blessings before and after the Torah reading and the Torah trope (cantillation). Then the student will learn the appropriate Torah readings.
3. When the student is sufficiently accomplished in the Torah reading, the student is taught to lead parts of the service in the amount of time that remains before the Reinforcement Phase of instruction begins.

4. The Reinforcement Phase of instruction begins three weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. During this time the student will practice his/her speech, polish his/her delivery and get used to speaking with the microphones. The procedure for laying Tefillin will be reviewed, as well as the procedure for putting on a Tallit. The student will also have opportunities to practice reading his/her Torah portion from the Torah, which is subtly different from reading from a *tikkun* (a book with a picture of the Hebrew script from a Torah). Most importantly, the student will develop the confidence in his or her skills in this period so that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be a day of pride and delight!

5. Finally, Cantor Krieger will conduct a Rehearsal which will be scheduled for each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student. Parents are requested to attend the Rehearsal if possible.

Special Note: Students With A Shabbat Mincha (Afternoon), Rosh Hodesh, Or Weekday (Includes Sunday) Bar/Bat Mitzvah

1. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Training continues in Zayin/7th Grade as students are assigned 1-1 lessons according to the date of their Bar/or Bat Mitzvah. The lessons run one half hour in length. Cantor Krieger and Mrs. Sylvia Ohrwashel will be teaching the students. All students who have a Shabbat Mincha (afternoon), Rosh Hodesh, or Weekday (includes Sunday) Bar/Bat Mitzvah will review the blessings before and after the Torah reading and the Torah trope, and then the student will learn the appropriate Torah readings.

2. When the student is sufficiently accomplished in the Torah reading, the student is taught to lead parts of the service in the amount of time that remains before the Reinforcement Phase of instruction begins.

3. The Reinforcement Phase of instruction begins three weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. During this time the student will practice his/her speech, polish his/her delivery and get used to speaking with the microphones. The procedure for laying Tefillin will be reviewed, as well as the procedure for putting on a Tallit. The student will also have opportunities to practice reading his/her Torah portion from the Torah, which is subtly different from reading from a *tikkun* (a book with a picture of the Hebrew script from a Torah). Most importantly, the student will develop the confidence in his or her skills in this period, so that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah can be a day of pride and delight!

4. Finally, Cantor Krieger will conduct a Rehearsal which will be scheduled for each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student. Parents are requested to attend the Rehearsal, if possible.

Planning Your Simcha

The Essentials - Tallit, Tefillin, Kippah

The real markers of coming of age in Judaism are the ritual garments that your child will be entitled to wear! Don't miss this opportunity to allow your child's spirituality to blossom! In our society today, in Jewish camps and many Jewish settings, it is common for boys and girls alike to wear Kippot, Tefillin, and of course to have their own Tallit. Conservative Judaism respects this egalitarian trend and encourages it. Males and females are required to pray daily with Kippah, Tallit and Tefillin. In our school, we will be teaching both boys and girls about these ritual items – their importance, how to wear them and the blessings they require, so that every child will be knowledgeable.

Tallitot (plural of Tallit) and Kippot (plural of Kippah) are available for purchase in many Judaica stores or on line. Tefillin are also available in those locations, but you might want to check out The Federation of Jewish Men's Club web site (fjmc.org) for extremely reasonable rates. Please be aware, that even if girls choose not to wear a Kippah on the day of their Bat Mitzvah, they must wear an appropriate head covering.

While we ask that all male guests, Jewish and not, wear a Kippah (Yarmulke) as a sign of respect when in the Sanctuary, only Jewish men are required to wear Tallitot (plural of Tallit). It is requested that all women (married or single), Bat Mitzvah age and above, wear a head covering or Kippah in the Sanctuary. Women (married or single) who are Bat Mitzvah age and above are welcome to wear Tallitot as well.

Tallitot are worn for the Shabbat Morning Service as well as the morning service on any other day. During Shabbat Mincha (Afternoon) services, Tallitot are worn only by those people receiving an honor. No Tallit are worn for the Ma'ariv (Evening) Service.

Tefillin are not worn on Shabbat or holidays. They are worn during the daily Shacharit (morning) Service. Congregation Ohev Shalom can loan a pair of Tefillin to a guest upon request (supplies are limited). Advance notice is requested.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is expected to supply Kippot and head coverings for your guests. Congregation Ohev Shalom will supply Tallitot for congregants and guests.

Honors, Blessings, and Guest Torah Readers

Our Ritual Administrator will be sending you forms which explain the honors that are available to your family on this momentous occasion. We ask that you fill in the names of the people you have chosen to receive those honors and return the form to our Ritual Administrator, Reba Schneiderman, two weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. ***For a full list of honors, please see Appendix B.***

A Word about Honors for Individuals of other Faiths:

A significant number of Jewish families, including families in our community, include people who are not Jewish. Our goal is not to exclude non-Jewish family members from the joyful celebration of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah; we desire to be inclusive as possible. Having said that, however, we are mindful that many of the rituals of Shabbat are also covenantal ceremonies, representing the promises made between G-d and the Jewish people, and can be performed only by someone who is Jewish. For example, only Jewish persons may accept an Aliyah to, lift or dress the Torah. The tallit is a covenantal symbol and therefore is not necessary for a non-Jew to wear.

We invite non-Jewish members of your family to participate in our services by leading the prayers for peace or country. ***Talk to Rabbi Pont about specifics related to your family.***

If your Spouse isn't Jewish:

We appreciate what it means for someone not Jewish to marry into a Jewish family and we applaud their decision to participate in the raising of a Jewish child within the Jewish community.

The non-Jewish parent of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah may stand next to the Jewish parent while the Jewish parent has their Aliyah to the Torah. Both parents may speak to their child, should they decide to do so during the Torah service.

Torah and Shehechyanu Blessings

There are two special blessings that will be part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience for both you and your child. The first is the two-part Torah blessing which is said during your Aliyah to the Torah, and the second is the Shehechyanu blessing that is said towards the end of the Torah service.

The Origin of the Torah Blessings:

In ancient times, two blessings were said during the public Torah reading: one by the first person before he began to read and one by the last person after he finished. The first blessing emphasized that God chose Israel to receive his Torah and referred to the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The second blessing referred to the Oral Torah. The Borkhu prayer at the beginning, which is a call to prayer and an invitation to bless God, was added to precede the first blessing because it marked the beginning of a new section of the service.

During the Talmudic period, the rabbis established that everyone who read a section from the Torah would recite both blessings so all the members of the congregation could hear them. In the post-Talmudic period, when the number of people capable of reading the Torah declined, it became customary for one person to read on behalf of everyone. But the rabbis still wanted to include multiple people, so they invited people to say the blessings before and after reading a part of the Torah. There are seven Aliyot on Shabbat, three during Shabbat Mincha, three on Monday or Thursday mornings and four on Rosh Chodesh. This is the tradition we still follow today.

As parents of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, you will be honored with an aliyah to the Torah. You may also honor other family members such as grandparents or Aunts, Uncles or cousins. We ask that you and everyone else who is called up to the Torah learn these blessings ahead of time so that they are chanted fluently. Please make sure that all guests are prepared for their honor so that it adds to the spirit and holiness of the occasion. If you or someone else receiving this honor needs some assistance, please let the Ritual Administrator know.

Shehechyanu Blessing

The Shehechyanu blessing is recited at the end of the Torah service and the entire congregation will join you as you recite it. As Jews we say the Shehechyanu prayer to mark special occasions because it thanks G-d for allowing us to reach this special time in our lives.

Reading Torah at Your Child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah

A special way for family members to honor the Bar or Bat Mitzvah is by reading Torah on the day of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It is a tremendous statement about the importance of the ceremony and of Judaism to have a family member working hard to learn their Torah portion alongside the Bar or Bat Mitzvah! We encourage this practice and the Cantor or Mrs. Ohrwashel will be happy to work with you and help you, providing CD's and copies of the Torah reading. The Cantor will assign you a portion and listen to you read it prior to the Bar or Bat

Mitzvah. **In order that nothing detracts from your child's service, we ask that you complete your learning and demonstrate competency one month before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.** No exceptions!

Some Jewish Laws Your Guests Might Not Know (and we ask that they follow)

We are aware that in our modern Jewish world there are many Jews who practice Judaism differently, and that there are many who are not familiar with the laws of Conservative Judaism. We ask that anyone who uses our facilities abide by these laws while on the premises (in the buildings or in the parking lot). What does that entail?

- Shabbat and holidays are holy times and the Sanctuary is a 'makom kadosh', a holy space. Many things that are acceptable on weekdays are not allowed in this holy space during the Sabbath and holidays.
- Picture taking is prohibited on Shabbat and holidays.
- All outside vendors must be made aware that set up of electronics and equipment must be done when there aren't any services going on. Electronics cannot be turned on in the building until after Havdalah (the service that ends Shabbat).
- Writing (and drawing or coloring) is prohibited on Shabbat and holidays.
- Cell phones (texting, talking, emailing) and using phones of any kind are prohibited on Shabbat and holidays. Please make sure that your guests know to turn off all cell phones, beepers and other electronic devices before entering the premises.
- Carrying from the Synagogue to a Public Area (the street) or from a Public Area into the Synagogue is prohibited on Shabbat. While the exception of keys for driving is allowed, gifts are not excluded. So if guests have unwittingly brought gifts, please ask them not to bring them into the holy space of the Sanctuary. An usher will show you a discreet place where they can be placed until after Shabbat.
- In the holy space of the Sanctuary, we place coverings on our heads to signify that the Presence of God is among us. In this intimate setting with the Holy One, we ask that you request your guests keep necklines in modest proportions, have shoulders and backs covered and wear clothing that is appropriate for a religious service.

A Few More Things to Note...Candy Throwing, Gum Chewing, Transportation

- We do allow extended family only to throw candy (Sunkist fruit gems) up on the Bimah. Other types of candy must be approved by Rabbi.
- We ask that you and your guests refrain from chewing gum in the Sanctuary during services.
- If you will be transporting guests of your child to another facility after the service, the buses must pick up your guests at the side of the building and drop them off at a facility other than the Synagogue after the party.

Picture Taking Prior to Your Simcha

You are requested to call Reba (536-2300 Ext. 106) at least a month prior to your Simcha to arrange for picture taking time and date. If you wish to include the Rabbi or Cantor, please confirm with her.

Pictures for Temple Topics

A digital picture is requested for Temple Topics two months prior to your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Please email the picture to Bonnie Komito, MJC's Executive Director (bkomito@mjcny.com).

Direction Cards

Direction cards to be included with your invitations for out-of-town guests are available in the Temple Office.

Decorum Cards

Decorum cards for your guests (our rules to follow) can be included with your invitations. They are available in the Temple Office.

Financial Policy

There is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee per child. (Subject to change). This fee includes training, Shabbat Evening Oneg Shabbat, Shabbat Morning Kiddush and flowers for the Bimah. Hebrew School tuition and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee must be paid in full six months before your Simcha and prior to the beginning of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah training. All outstanding amounts due the congregation for Membership Dues, fees and Building Fund must be current within the quarter in which the Bar/Bat Mitzvah takes place. Failure to comply with this policy will cause an indefinite postponement of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. Please note: No child will be denied a Bar/Bat Mitzvah due to financial hardship. We encourage anyone who may need assistance to contact the Financial Secretary or our Executive Director. All contacts are kept strictly confidential.

Oneg Shabbat and Kiddush Policy; Ushering

Our congregation shares the joy of your child's entering the age of personal and communal Jewish responsibility. We know that you are especially proud as your child takes that step. As one tangible expression of that pride and connection with the community, we ask that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah families co-sponsor the Oneg Shabbat following the Shabbat Evening Service (Friday night) and the Kiddush following the Shabbat Shacharit (Morning) Service on the weekend of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This is included in your Bar/Bat Mitzvah fees.

As you know, many families in our congregation celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzvah each year. Through the presence and participation of B'nai Mitzvah families in each other's time of joy, awareness of the blessings of community are enhanced. As one tangible expression of your participation in each other's Simcha, we ask that you come to a Shabbat Evening Service several weeks before your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah to serve cake at the Oneg Shabbat. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah families who celebrate will appreciate your participation. The schedule for this honor will be sent to you.

Oneg Shabbat

For the Shabbat Evening Oneg Shabbat, the Synagogue will provide: Cake, Cookies, Coffee, Wine, Soda, Juice, Challah and Paper Goods.

Kiddush

The Congregation will gladly set up the Shabbat Morning Kiddush.
The Kiddush includes: Loaf Cakes, Cold Drinks, Challah, Wine and Paper Goods.

Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ushering

All synagogues rely on congregants helping congregants to function. In order to attain a high standard of decorum for our B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies, we have set a Synagogue policy that relies on our B'nai Mitzvah parents for help. On an assigned date we will ask you to usher, helping us to maintain an atmosphere conducive to prayer in our Shabbat services. You will receive notification of the date to which your family has been assigned. If you cannot make that date, we ask that you arrange coverage by switching with another family and notifying us of the change.

Enhancing Your Simcha

Many B'nai Mitzvah parents realize the great impact that becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah is having on their child, and so they wish to elevate their Simcha with meaningful acts and symbols. Here are some ideas that you and your child might like:

Invitations

- Purchase invitations from the Jewish National Fund: for each invitation, a tree will be planted in Israel.
- Create your own invitations on the computer and explain that a Tzedakah donation has been made with the money saved.

Donations/Centerpieces

- Make a project of choosing a Tzedakah recipient (charity organization or project) that resonates with your child and donate a portion of his/her gifts to it.
- Following Shabbat, bring your flower centerpieces to a local nursing home.
- Make centerpieces collecting items that can be donated, such as sports equipment, stuffed animals, food baskets, books, games/toys, CD's.
- Donate leftover food from your Simcha to a "feed the hungry" program.

Candle Lighting

- Give Tzedakah in honor of each person lighting a candle.
- Plant a tree in honor of each person lighting a candle.

For more ideas on enhancing your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience, please see Appendix C.

Services Schedule

Shabbat

Before you know it, your date will arrive! Services on Friday Evenings currently begin at 8:15 P.M. Approximately once a month we have a Shabbat Dinner on the calendar open to all congregants (and B'nai Mitzvah families and their guests) who would like to make reservations. We look forward to our B'nai Mitzvah leading the congregation in Kiddush the Friday night of their B'nai Mitzvah.

The Shabbat Morning Service begins *promptly* at 9:15 A.M. The first rows of the Sanctuary will be reserved for your immediate family. Bar/Bat Mitzvah families are urged to be present by 9:00 A.M. Shabbat morning services generally last from 9:15am until Noon. The duration may vary based on service components, the length of the Torah reading and Haftarah and other factors.

The time of the ***Shabbat Mincha Service*** varies with the time of year. The service generally lasts 1-1.5 hours. Reba Schneiderman, the Ritual Administrator, will be able to tell you what time the service will begin for your Simcha.

Other Services Schedule

While the duration of any service is an estimate, the following will give you some general guidelines:

Rosh Chodesh	10:00 A.M. – 11:45 A.M.
Monday Morning	10:00 A.M. – 11:30 A.M.
Chol HaMoed Sukkot	10:00 A.M. – 12:00 noon
Hannukah	10:00 A.M. – 11:45 A.M.

Appendix A – Parent’s Blessings/Speeches

1. A Blessing by Danny Siegel, inspired by Talmud Berachot 17a

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 the world.

May your study be passionate,
And meanings bear more meanings
Until life itself 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.

2. A Prayer for My Child on the Occasion of His/Her Bar/Bat Mitzvah

May your dedication and determination lead you to passions which are rewarding and fulfilling.

May your instincts, intuitiveness and Jewish studies guide you safely and happily through your life.

May your kindness and caring continue to help others and characterize you.

May your huge reservoir of energy and innate passion for learning be used for personal growth, love of family and betterment of community.

May your love for your family and friends bring you joy and happiness, strength and security, warmth and tradition.

May you one day enjoy your grandchildren's Bar and Bat Mitzvahs as your grandparents are today. [If not grandparents are alive, substitute: your children's Bar and Bat Mitzvahs as your father/mother and I are today.]

Most of all, may you always know, whatever doors you walk through and wherever life leads you, we are so very proud of you. You are one of the greatest and truest blessings of our lives. No matter what, you always have our love and support.

May the Holy One guard you and sustain you, helping you to be whole-hearted in your faith, studying Torah and fulfilling mitzvot. May you find favor before G-d and all people. And let us say: Amen.

3. Rav Ammi (Third Century, Tiberias) to his Students (in 79 words)

May you live to see your world fulfilled.

May your destiny be for worlds still to come, and may you trust in generations past and yet to be.

May your heart be filled with intuition and your words be filled with insight.

May songs of praise ever be upon your tongue and your vision be a straight path before you.

May your eyes shine with the light of holy words and your face reflect the brightness of the heavens.

May your cherished hopes be fulfilled in your lifetime;

May you be worthy of life eternal;

And may your ideas persist throughout the generations.

May your heart be filled with understanding;

May your mouth speak wisdom;

And may your tongue give expression to song.

May your eyes direct you straight forward;

May they shine with the light of Torah;

And may your countenance be as radiant as the bright firmament.

May your lips speak knowledge and righteousness;

And may your feet swiftly take you

To places where the words of G-d are heard.

4. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parent Prayer I

Gratefully we thank You, G-d, for the joyous privilege of seeing our son/daughter _____ attain this milestone. On this day, cherished dreams and hopes are fulfilled. On this day, new dreams and new hopes are born.

We give thanks for the wondrous privilege of seeing our son/daughter _____ grow day by day, week by week, year by year. For the health and strength You have given him/her, for the mind and spirit with which You endowed him/her, for his/her ability to elicit and return love, for these precious gifts, we thank You.

Watch over him/her, O G-d, on this special day and every day. Grant him/her a growing understanding of the true significance of this occasion and a deepening loyalty to everything it represents. May the teachings of our heritage guide him/her throughout life; and may he/she lead a life worthy of Your blessing.

Amen.

5. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parent Prayer II

May you see your world created in your lifetime,
May you see your visions come to be,
May your hope touch every generation to come.
These are the prayers we have for you.

May you be blessed with understanding,
With wisdom and compassion in your heart,
May your tongue be filled with song,
And your lips sing out for justice.

May your eyes shine with the light of the Torah,
And your face be radiant as the brightness of the sky,
May your lips speak words of wisdom,
And may the world you live in be the world of your dreams.

6. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parent Prayer III

(Insert your Child's Name), you have brought great joy to our lives. We give thanks for the privilege of seeing you grow day to day, year to year. You are growing up to be an incredible young man/young woman. You are intelligent and compassionate. You have a strong sense of right and wrong and the courage to stand up for your beliefs.

You are very creative and we hope you will continue to be an independent thinker. Remember that when someone comes up with an idea that others think is impossible, they may be on to something really important. We hope that you find something you are passionate about, follow your own path, and use your talents to do something remarkable that will make a difference.

Remember to live each day to the fullest. Get the most from each day of your life so you can look forward with confidence and look back without regrets. Time is a non-renewable resource. Take time to appreciate the moment, to find peace and faith within you.

Continue to use your great sense of humor to keep things in perspective. Look for something good in each day and each person. Remember to laugh and enjoy life.

May you grow to be strong in body and mind, to love what is good and true, and may you never forget how much we love you.

7. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parent Prayer IV

We are very proud of the person that you are becoming. On this, your Bar/Bat Mitzvah day, we have special hopes for you:

We hope that you always remember that you are part of a wonderful heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. You are connected to the Jewish people, to G-d and to Torah. You need the Jewish community and the Jewish community needs you.

We hope you will continue to learn and mature. You will find that the world is not always a fair place, but do what you can to make it better. Do not let others sway you from what you know to be right and just, and always believe in your own abilities. Remember you are a unique individual and the most important thing is to be the best you can be.

We hope that you always know that no matter what problems you face you will always have the help, support and love your parents. You have brought more joy and happiness to your mother and me (or your father and me) than you will ever know, just in being yourself and giving us the pleasure of watching you blossom into the beautiful young woman/man who stands before us today.

8. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parent Prayer V

[Note: if you have a daughter, you may want to add this at the beginning of this prayer. *There was a time when women were told what they could not be. Then there came a time when women were told what they needed to be, if they wanted success. But I/we want you to know – there is nothing as a woman you cannot be, and there are only two things you need to be – true to yourself and responsible to your community.*]

(Child's name here), 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 may journey, may your steps be firm, and may you walk on 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 of our people move through you and may the G-d of our ancestors be your G-d 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 this earth.

May the stories of our people be upon your heart and the grace of the Torah rhythm dance in your soul.

Gratefully we thank You G-d for the joyous privilege of seeing our son/daughter attain this milestone.

On this day cherished dreams and hopes are fulfilled.

On this day new dreams and new hopes are born.

We pray that you're protecting and loving care will accompany him/her.

Wherever he/she goes and in all that he/she does, help him/her to become all that he/she is capable of being.

Give him/her strength to do all the good things that are in his/her reach.

Keep her loyal to the best that he/she has been shown, and to the noblest Jewish teachings he/she has been taught.

May his/her deeds find favor in the eyes of her community and be worthy of Your blessings.

Amen.

9. Parent's Speech/D'Var Torah

Shabbat Shalom!

We want to thank everyone for coming here this morning and sharing in this great Simcha!

Matthew, you did an amazing job.

We are so proud of you!

You are a constant source of joy and nachas.
You are a wonderful son and an awesome big brother.

Matthew-When you were born, you came into this world with your eyes wide opened. You immediately began to take in all that was around you. While you may hesitate before going into things, once you do something your joy is so pure. Don't let life scare you. Remember we are always here for you .

In the Ashkenazi tradition, children are named after deceased relatives partly for respect and to memorialize our ancestors, and partly in the hopes of the child inheriting the virtues of those ancestors.

You were named Matthew/Moshe after your great grandfather Manny. He was a man who knew how to love fully. While he worked hard and provided well for his family, he never forgot to take time for them. He viewed everyone as a friend and would help anyone. You take after him in so many ways. Your love for family and for life is unparalleled.

Your middle name David/Dovid is after your great great uncle Dovid Leib Labkovski who was a talented Russian-Lithuanian-Israeli artist who concentrated on landscapes and people of the shtetl. Matthew, may you allow your artistic side to shine, and be well rounded in all you do. Although Dovid was not a religious man, his use of Shtetl as a main subject of his art showed his love for Judaic values and traditions. Matthew may your love of Judaic values and traditions always be a part of your life.

Dovid was a true Zionist. His love of Israel is apparent in his art. May you share this love this summer as we explore Israel.

Dovid's first published work was "Shalom Aleichem and his heroes" published in 1959. It was limited to 250 copies, and was numbered. In honor of your bar mitzvah, we have purchased one of these copies for you.

Matthew, your love of learning in both regular school, Hebrew school and in life is uncommon in someone your age. It always makes me laugh to think of how I

threatened you to not be allowed to go to school the next day if you did not get to sleep, and how this made you go to sleep.

May you continue your love of Jewish learning as you continue on with Hebrew High School.

Your torah portion Vayetze speaks of how G-d promises to Protect and take care of Jacob. May G-d always protect and take care of you.

You have truly become a MAN to be proud of!
Mazel Tov on your special day!
We love you very much.

10. Parent's Speech/D'Var Torah

Jonathan,

We are very proud of you. Not just for how awesome you were in leading us in services today in front of this large group of family, friends, and congregants; but for the young man you have become.

The parshah you just read is about making choices. Sometimes easy choices. Sometimes hard choices.

And as you said in your d'var Torah, sometimes it can be tempting to choose what appears to be the easy way out. Cutting corners. Following others who claim they can make life easier for you if you'll just "try" what it is they're doing. Peer pressure. But the Torah places a heavy price on such actions.

And while you probably won't be stoned to death for making a bad choice like they were in biblical times, there are still consequences of your actions. But when you "do the right thing", the blessings multiply. Good things happen. People like you. They seek you out. They want your help. In the Bible, your flock and crops grow larger; today that means you can make more money. But it's important to share that with those who may not be as fortunate. To be kind to others, regardless of their circumstances.

And we know that you do and you will. You have demonstrated already how polite, good-hearted and supportive you are. You've been a good friend to many, adaptive to the many places you've lived and schools you've attended and wanted to help others – as you did in the Chesed project you mentioned.

And so as you make your way into adulthood and through what certainly can be a tumultuous time, here's a couple of words of wisdom from an old man:

- Stick to your beliefs. When you take the "high road" you can always look yourself in the mirror and be proud of who is looking back at you.
- It's OK to be curious about the world. In fact, learn as much as you can about it and the people in it. But don't get so curious about what others do and be tempted to try them when you know they're not right.
- Choose to be optimistic about life. Look for the good in the people you meet, the places you visit and the opportunities in front of you.
- And finally, do what you're passionate about. That's true in school, college, work and whatever charities or groups you choose to be involved with. When you enjoy what you do and are motivated to do it, it's not really "work" and you can do amazing things. And we know that you will do amazing things.

With that, we leave you with the blessing of children traditionally said at Erev Shabbat:

יְשִׁימָה אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה. יְבָרְכֶךָ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ. יָאֵר יי פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי יִחְזֶה. יִשָּׂא יי פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי, וְיִשֶּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

"May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasheh. May the Lord bless you and protect you; may the Lord show you favor and be gracious to you; may the Lord show you kindness and grant you peace." And let us all say, Amen.

Appendix B - Bar/Bat Mitzvah Honors

Special Note: The Torah Service begins with the ceremony of taking out the Torah from the Aron Kodesh (Holy Ark). This commemorates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai and is a very special part of the service. You will have the opportunity to give members of your family the following honors during the Torah service:

Opening the Ark/Closing the Ark

You may ask up to four family members to open the curtain on the ark that contains our Torahs. They will both open and close the curtain (after the Torah is taken out).

If you are sharing this Shabbat with another family, you may be assigned this honor at the end of the Torah service, when we put the Torah away. You may still ask four family members and they will still open and close the curtain (after the Torah is put away).

Carrying the Torah

You may ask one Jewish family member to carry the Torah in the procession that will circle the sanctuary at the beginning of the Torah service. This person can be either a man or woman and must be of Bar/Bat Mitzvah age and above. This person must be able to carry about 50 pounds while walking, including walking up and down the stairs from the Bima. If you are sharing this Shabbat with another family, you may be assigned this honor when we are putting the Torah away, at the end of the Torah service.

Aliyah to the Torah

Shabbat morning: Your family will have four Aliyot to the Torah available to you. One is for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah child, one will be for you, the parents, and the others can be given to Jewish family members (siblings, grandparents, etc.). Up to four people may be called for an Aliyah at a time. You may choose to have your above Bar/Bat Mitzvah age children have their Aliyah with you.

Shabbat Mincha or Monday/Thursday morning: Your family will have three Aliyot to the Torah available to you. One is for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah child, one will be for you, the parents, and the other can be given to Jewish family members (siblings, grandparents, etc.). Up to four people may be called for an Aliyah at a time. You may choose to have your above Bar/Bat Mitzvah age children have their Aliyah with you.

Rosh Chodesh morning: Your family will have four Aliyot to the Torah available to you. One is for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah child, one will be for you, the parents, and the others can be given to Jewish family members (siblings, grandparents, etc.). Up to four people may be called for an Aliyah at a time. You may choose to have your above Bar/Bat Mitzvah age children have their Aliyah with you.

Readings: If you need additional honors, you may ask family members to read the prayer for peace, our country or Israel. The Prayer for Israel is for a Jewish family member only. Please let Reba know your requirements.

Appendix C – Bar/Bat Mitzvah Enhancement Experiences

1. Remember Us: The Holocaust B’Nai Mitzvah Project

Offers an invitation to children preparing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah to connect with the memory of children lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah.

Families report that participation adds depth and meaning to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience. Parents are often moved to experience their own children offering healing for this broken place in Jewish history. Congregants and unaffiliated Bar/Bat Mitzvah guests become witnesses to the child’s moment of spiritual leadership and redemptive action. All are given the opportunity for a deeper connection with their Jewish faith and history.

There is no charge for participating

Basic information will be sent about each child: name, parents, country where they lived, place of death, year (sometimes date) they died. Additional information can often be found on the Internet.

First, be assured that this program does not make additional work for you or your child. We recognize that the children (and parents) have already committed to extensive preparation.

Here’s how the program works:

1. Your child will receive the name of a lost child and a written invitation to participate.
- 2 . Your child is invited to keep the remembered child in mind however she/he chooses. Support this intention by encouraging web research, library visits, and family conversations. Creating a context helps develop meaning.
3. When your child does a mitzvah, it is an opportunity to do it *b’shem*— in the name of — the child whose memory he/she is carrying. You can help by reminding him or her about this connection.
4. We recommend that your child speaks the name and memory of the remembered child when standing on the bimah, in whatever way that he/she chooses. Help your child with preparation of his/her remarks. It is a significant moment when your child stands as a model for Jewish memory.

Benefits to your child

Through these simple acts, done in the normal course of bar/bat mitzvah preparation, your child will be helping to redeem the memory of a lost Jewish child.

He/she will benefit in deep ways.

· Participation in *Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project* provides an opportunity for each one to learn that he/she has a significant

role to play in the preservation and transmission of Jewish memory.

By this simple act children lost in the Shoah are being remembered, one child at a time. To date more than 18,000 children in over 750 congregations worldwide have accepted this invitation.

What Some Participants Have Said:

Linda, an educator and parent wrote:

“The kids really connected to it right away, and I think it gives them something personal in trying to grapple with the Holocaust. I think they will remember these children for a very long time.”

From a recent Bar Mitzvah:

“If these children are forgotten, some say that history is bound to repeat itself. This exact reason is why this program means so much to me. You might think that if you, just one person, doesn’t do anything to remember the Holocaust, it wouldn’t make a difference, but it does. Every bit of remembrance, has a big impact on the people all around you, and in turn they will, hopefully, do their part to remember.”

Hannah said this at her Bat Mitzvah:

“One of the special things that I’m doing for my Bat Mitzvah is to remember a child killed in the Holocaust....As with all the children remembered by the “Remember US” project, Rochel’s name and information has been given to only one Bar or Bat Mitzvah person. I am the only one who has been given and accepted the responsibility and honor of remembering her. I have chosen today’s date, May 13, as the date on which I will say Kaddish for Rochel every year for the rest of my life. Our Jewish tradition tells us that after we die we live on in the memories of other people; as long as I remember Rochel, there will always be a part of her that the Nazis couldn’t kill.

website www.remember-us.org

2. Celebrate Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah in a Meaningful Way with LOTEM

Becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a significant moment in the life of a Jewish boy or girl. Our "Mitzvah to Mitzvah" program offers Bnei Mitzvah youth the opportunity to add more meaning to this special occasion by sharing it with children in Israel with special needs. By choosing to give tzedakah towards LOTEM on behalf of their Bar or Bat Mitzvah, participants will learn about charitable giving as a social component of their celebration as well as make a difference in the lives of children who are less fortunate in Israel. Tzedakah raised will go towards sponsoring a nature outing for a group of children with special needs.

Participants in the "Mitzvah to Mitzvah" program can choose the specific LOTEM project for which they wish their funds to go towards. Upon completion of their Mitzvah project, they will receive a certificate. On their next visit to Israel, they will have the opportunity to lead a nature outing together with one of our soldier guides. We will then celebrate the simcha together on our farm.

To read a beautiful piece that one of the participants in our "Mitzvah to Mitzvah" project wrote, [click here](#).

Go to www.jnf.org/bnaimitzvah to set up your personal fundraising page and start raising tzedakah towards LOTEM. *When you are asked for which program you would like to raise money for, you must indicate "Accessibility and Therapeutic Services" and type LOTEM as the specific project in the line.

For additional information contact:
Alisa Bodner, JNF-LOTEM Liaison
lotem@jnf.org
US: (347) 236-3262
Israel: 972-502634332

A word about LOTEM – "Makes Nature Accessible"

This non-profit organization was established in 1993 by Amos Ziv following a moving encounter with a group of visually impaired teenagers hiking in the Israeli countryside. Amos realized that in order to provide these special-needs hikers with the maximum benefit of activities in a rural environment, suitable guidance and more defined trails were essential. It is now the leading organization in Israel offering outings, nature clubs and creative workshops in nature to people with special needs. With centers in Jerusalem and the north of Israel, LOTEM serves more than 30,000 participants every year. LOTEM's target population includes children and adults who are blind and visually impaired, deaf and hearing impaired, physically and intellectually challenged, emotionally disturbed, and at risk of physical and emotional abuse. Watch for more information as our relationship evolves. Their site www.lotem.net is definitely

worth visiting.

One Participant's Experience

Hallel Ner-David decided to celebrate her bat mitzvah in a unique way, together with her family. They chose to hike 12 trails together in Israel and the US. The last trail they hiked was LOTEM's accessible trail in Nahal HaShofet. Hallel shares her moving experience with us.

"Many of us take hiking in the outdoors for granted. However, LOTEM understands that this is not so and they are doing something to change the situation."

"Last Chanukah, my family and I decided to hike twelve climbing trails together in honor of my bat mitzvah. Now, one year later, I want to tell you about these hikes, known as "Hallel's Hikes" and about one trail in particular in Nahal HaShofet.

Our last hike was in Nahal HaShofet. This trail certainly was not a climbing one. We had spoken as a family about the fact that not everybody is able to hike but that this does not mean that one who cannot hike does not want to enjoy nature. We then heard about Nahal HaShofet and the nonprofit organization in Israel by the name of LOTEM.

Nahal HaShofet is a stream next to Yokneam Moshava whose waters flow throughout the whole year. It is named for an American Jewish judge. The thing that is most unique about this stream is that there is a hiking trail along it that is accessible to people with special needs. The trail is operated by "LOTEM". LOTEM is the leading organization in Israel that offers accessible hikes and activities in nature to children and adults with special needs.

LOTEM's headquarters are in Emek HaShalom, where it hosts groups of people with special needs and organizes hikes, workshops and nature activities. We were in Emek HaShalom when there was also a group of adults with a range of intellectual disorders. We watched them press grapes to prepare grape juice and we saw a watering system that was built for the height of somebody in a wheelchair so that he too can operate it.

Paula Friedland guided us in the site and showed us how everything is accessible to the disabled. She told us the story about a boy who grew up in Yokneam Moshava and hiked Nahal HaShofet with his friends. He would hike on a trail that led to a particular cave there, until he was in a car accident and became paralyzed. When LOTEM was planning to construct the accessible trail, they took this boy there and asked what they can do to bring back his experience of

hiking. He told them that they should build the trail in a way so that he can return to the cave. This is what they did. This was very emotional for me.

Paula also told us about her son who fell when he was in a tour guiding course before he went into the army. The fall caused him to be paralyzed over his whole body, except for his head. However, he is now a commander in the army and he still loves to hike. Due to her son's injury, Paula decided to volunteer with LOTEM and then to work there. She explained how she worked for the organization and how the inner strength of her son changed her life.

I feel blessed that I can hike in nature and climb but I also acknowledge the fact that not everybody has this privilege. I very much value the work of LOTEM that enables people with special needs to experience the nature.

Nature is so therapeutic and it is unfortunate that so much of it is not accessible to everybody. Many of us take hiking in the outdoors for granted. However, LOTEM understands that this is not so and they are doing something to change the situation."

Appendix D: A Few Final Words from Rabbi Pont

B'NAI MITZVAH INNOVATIONS

A Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a significant rite of passage not only for the child but for the entire family. Cantor Krieger, the lay leadership and I continually review the process and make changes in order to improve the overall experience. While it's possible that some of these practices were done in years past, they fell out of practice. Here are a few innovations we have incorporated in the past year, and why we moved away from the status quo.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON: This Bar Mitzvah consists of three separate services: *mincha* (afternoon), *ma'ariv* (evening), and *havdalah* (distinction between Shabbat and the rest of the week). During *mincha* the child is the main focus: he reads from the *Torah*, gives a speech, and leads most or all of the prayers. All of the honors to family and friends occur during *mincha* as well. *Havdalah* is short and sweet (about five minutes) and includes blessings over wine, a candle and spices. Family members join the child on the *bima*, facing their guests. We turn down the lights, allowing the glow of the candle to illuminate the sanctuary. Cantor Krieger plays guitar, leading us in an inspiring melody as we sing together, hand-in-hand swaying back-and-forth. It's fun, beautiful, and a great way to end the ceremony and send people off to a celebration on a Jewish high! In between is *ma'ariv*, which includes many of the same prayers as *mincha*. In my first year I sensed that both family and guests became restless during this service. A couple of times, I even heard collective groans when it was time to rise or sit! It is my desire to provide a fulfilling experience at our synagogue, and looking back I felt frustrated that *ma'ariv* seemed to be a black sheep of the Bar Mitzvah. I spoke to a few other rabbis who noticed the same thing. In response, one colleague substituted some of the prayers with an interactive discussion on a Jewish theme. This format fits with my style of teaching, so I've adopted it. I offer a question, ask people to debate with their neighbors, and then facilitate a group discussion. I think this has been a successful change, however should a family wish I would maintain a full *ma'ariv* service.

D'VAR TORAH (SPEECH): At the Bar Mitzvah the child displays mastery in two areas. First, he leads us in prayer, reads from the *Torah* and on Shabbat morning chants a *haftarah*. This is the culmination of years of Jewish education and months of intensive, one-on-one lessons. Second, through his *d'var torah* he proves that he is ready to engage Judaism in a thoughtful manner. In my opinion, both are significant. At MJC we have a fantastic mentor program – congregants who help kids with their speeches. About six months before your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah, we meet with you, your child and other MJC sixth graders and their parents for a meeting. Each child will learn the narrative and themes of his or her portion, guided by me, the cantor, and the mentors. We hope to engender a stronger connection for the kids to their portions, and

encourage families to study *Torah* for months leading up to the Bar Mitzvah service. This is an invaluable Jewish journey we wish for family members to take together!

WORDS FROM PARENT TO CHILD: A Bar or Bat Mitzvah reaches a plateau in their maturation and Jewish identity, engendering a sense of wonder. I think it's important to offer parents the chance to express their feelings of joy and thankfulness during the service. This creates not only stronger family bonds, but it also brings our community closer together. We too have seen the child grow up, feel proud of his or her accomplishments and share the joy of his or her parents. Each family chooses one of three options: a blessing or prayer (see the Appendix in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Handbook), a speech or D'var Torah, or no speech. Also, in order to maintain the flow of the service, I urge parents to speak for no more than 2-3 minutes.

CANDY: We have adopted the Sephardic custom of tossing candy and singing *siman tov u'mazel tov* in order to enhance the festive spirit of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. However, there is a fine line between levity and a breakdown of decorum. Families that choose to do this pass out the candy to their immediate and extended family **only** (20-30 pieces). I alert them when to distribute and toss during the service, and allow for young children come and 'clean up' the bima.

CERTIFICATE: The certificate is a reminder of a wonderful day. We've upgraded it, offering an artful design on cardstock that includes the child's name in Hebrew. Finally, we now put it in a frame, ready for display in your home!

POST-B.M. INTERVIEW: In order for the MJC staff and lay leadership to improve upon the process, we are eager to hear your feedback. The week after the event, we ask families to meet with a member of our Bar/Bat Mitzvah Subcommittee. We are grateful for these opportunities to hear your reflections on the whole Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience and thank the families for their compliments and for their candor. At these meetings families can also collect items left over from the service: gifts from the congregation, *kippot* and head coverings, etc.

Again, this evaluation is an ongoing one. We are reconsidering our policies on how honors are distributed, preparing a 'decorum card' for families to include in their invitations, looking into having a hard copy program that lists service honorees, and thinking about various aspects of the service itself. I am grateful to Cantor Krieger for his partnership, to Reba Schneiderman for her tireless efforts, and to Mrs. Sylvia Ohrwashel for her guidance on and off the bima. Also, I thank our volunteers such as the Ritual VP, the Ritual Chair, our mentors, and our Board of Trustees, who all work in various ways to make our B'nai Mitzvah special. If you have ideas about B'nai Mitzvah, please let me or Reba know!!

13 VERSES OR A BALANCED B'NAI MITZVAH DIET

A Bat or Bar Mitzvah (BBM) is a watershed moment in the life of a young Jew, and a significant milestone for the entire family. After studying in Religious School and after months of intensive lessons, it all comes together on one Shabbat. When students chant on the bimah we hope they will feel a sense of accomplishment. However, a BBM is not the completion of Jewish education. Rather we hope that this training will empower students to keep expressing themselves Jewishly in high school, in college, and throughout adulthood. Thus, years of study in Religious School and months of BBM tutoring are not just for one Saturday, but for a lifetime.

While the focuses of training for a Shabbat morning BBM is the Haftarah, and for the afternoon service the Torah reading, these are not all that a student should learn. Rather she or he should also be able to *lead* the various prayers. Yet learning biblical passages in a foreign language is a challenge. The staff of our Religious School is excellent, but nevertheless not all students acquire Hebrew reading as well as others. During school and when they begin BBM training, some excel and others struggle.

Cantor Krieger, the lay leadership and I want to be sure that every student not only shines on the day of their ceremony, but is prepared for their Jewish future. If the Cantor or Mrs. Ohrwashel (our second tutor) recognizes that a student's skills are such that she or he will spend almost the entire time of weekly lessons mastering the haftarah or Torah reading, thus neglecting the prayers, they will recommend that the student learn thirteen verses, or not the entire Haftarah or Torah reading. This will give the student ample time to learn to lead many if not most of the prayers. The number thirteen is of course symbolic – one verse for each year leading up to Jewish maturity.

Of course, preparing a young person for Jewish adult life is a partnership between the family and the synagogue. I believe that, under Rabbi Koas, our children are improving their Hebrew reading skills; initiatives such as the Jewish Prayer Club generate enthusiasm for liturgy. I am thrilled and grateful for his leadership, and perhaps the thirteen verses concept will not be necessary in the future.

If you are a parent or grandparent, I ask you to consider your role in this partnership. Will you nurture the Jewish identities of the children in your life? Will you speak with them about Jewish history? Will you celebrate Shabbat and holidays with them? Will you bring them to synagogue for Shabbat dinners, Junior Congregation, programs, and holiday celebrations? Students who attend Shabbat and holiday services with their families gain familiarity with the prayers and are more prepared for BBM training than those who do not attend. Please come to services as often as you can! Even if you arrive late or need to leave early, and even if your child is wearing a uniform, that's okay – just come!

Please let me know how MJC can help you to be a strong partner in this endeavor, and how the synagogue itself can be a good partner.