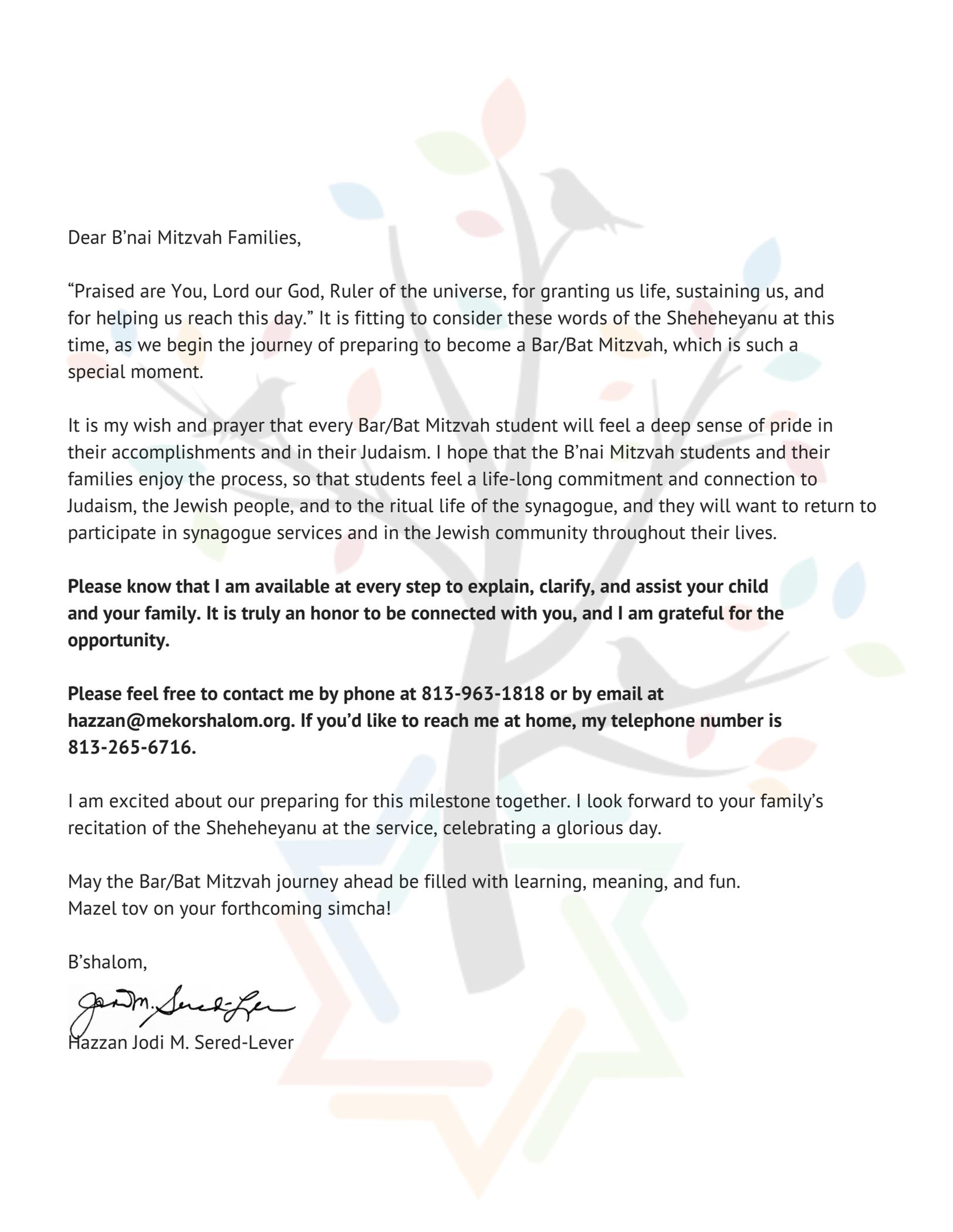


Congregation Mekor Shalom Celebrates!

**A Bar/Bat Mitzvah Guidebook
For a Journey of Meaning,
Learning, & Smiling...**



Dear B'nai Mitzvah Families,

“Praised are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, for granting us life, sustaining us, and for helping us reach this day.” It is fitting to consider these words of the Sheheheyenu at this time, as we begin the journey of preparing to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, which is such a special moment.

It is my wish and prayer that every Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will feel a deep sense of pride in their accomplishments and in their Judaism. I hope that the B'nai Mitzvah students and their families enjoy the process, so that students feel a life-long commitment and connection to Judaism, the Jewish people, and to the ritual life of the synagogue, and they will want to return to participate in synagogue services and in the Jewish community throughout their lives.

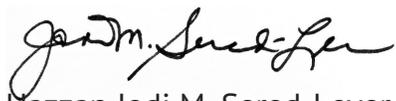
Please know that I am available at every step to explain, clarify, and assist your child and your family. It is truly an honor to be connected with you, and I am grateful for the opportunity.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 813-963-1818 or by email at hazzan@mekorshalom.org. If you'd like to reach me at home, my telephone number is 813-265-6716.

I am excited about our preparing for this milestone together. I look forward to your family's recitation of the Sheheheyenu at the service, celebrating a glorious day.

May the Bar/Bat Mitzvah journey ahead be filled with learning, meaning, and fun.
Mazel tov on your forthcoming simcha!

B'shalom,



Hazzan Jodi M. Sered-Lever

Having a Bar/Bat Mitzvah—It's A Date!

Two to three years in advance, families are asked to fill out a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Registration Form, confirming their intention of celebrating the simcha with Mekor Shalom.

There are a few factors that play into a bar/bat mitzvah date:

- At Mekor Shalom, boys must turn thirteen according to their Hebrew birthday either on or before the bar mitzvah date.
- Because according to Jewish law, girls need to have turned twelve, there is some more flexibility in scheduling a date.
- Some additional considerations include the Jewish holidays, the congregational calendar, and the length of the Haftarah for a particular Shabbat.

Families receive a letter from Hazzan Sered-Lever with the date that has been selected. If there are any concerns about the chosen date, please contact the Hazzan, and she will make every effort to address those concerns and/or accommodate a change in date that works well for your child and your family.

Alef-Bet-Vet, Let's Talk About Jewish Education...

To become a bar/bat mitzvah with Mekor Shalom, students must be enrolled in an organized, ongoing program of Jewish study. Mekor Shalom Religious School and Hillel Academy are the most predominant educational venues, but an alternative plan or program may work equally as well.

Regardless of the setting, the objective is the same: Children who engage in bar/bat mitzvah preparation must be able to read Hebrew proficiently. If your child is not quite at that point, not to worry! Hazzan Sered-Lever is committed to making sure each youngster has the necessary reading skills and is as comfortable as possible with his/her Hebrew.

When Is It Time to Start Studying for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

In general, **students begin studying approximately 10 months in advance** of the bar/bat mitzvah. These half hour lessons take place weekly at a mutually convenient time. The Hazzan teaches each child as an individual so an early starting date for lessons or additional appointments are available, if need be. Every child receives the Hazzan's home telephone number (813-265-6716) and is encouraged to call, if questions arise between lessons.

Please be advised that it is the policy of both Mekor Shalom and Hazzan Sered-Lever that students will receive instruction only when a responsible adult is in attendance at the lesson.

What's a Mother or Father to Do?

If you know Hebrew, that's great. If you don't yet know Hebrew, you don't need to be concerned at all. A supportive parent, who makes sure that a child comes to scheduled appointments with the Hazzan and also makes sure the child studies the bar/bat mitzvah material daily, is the most helpful—whether or not you know the language.

Spending Some Additional Time At Shul: Who's On First?

At Congregation Mekor Shalom, it is expected that bar/bat mitzvah students attend at least **12** Shabbat and/or Holiday morning services in the year leading up to the bar/bat mitzvah.

An added suggestion is to attend **6** Friday night services during this time period.

There are a few reasons for this recommendation:

- By an adult or two accompanying bar/bat mitzvah students to services, families are able to make sure there is a minyan (the presence of 10 Jewish adults necessary for all prayers and rituals to be included) that day. It is a priceless way to contribute to synagogue life.
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah students and their families have the opportunity to increase their familiarity with the Shabbat morning service. One has the chance to see with a renewed perspective the playing field, the batting order, and the line up.
- Attending services is really good for one's Hebrew because there is time to follow the prayers closely.

If a bar/bat mitzvah receives an assigned date less than a year before the simcha, please plan on attending Shabbat morning services on a "pro-rated basis." In other words, if the date went on the calendar 11 months in advance, the service requirement is reduced to 11.

Of course, attending more frequently is fine, too!

Smiles and Mekor Shalom friends will greet you, and there is an Oneg Shabbat on Friday evenings and lunch on Shabbat morning.

A Place Where People Care About People: Being Inclusive

Because valuing each person is a core belief at Mekor Shalom, the congregation strongly encourages, urges, and recommends that the bar/bat mitzvah invite every child with whom they engage in religious studies. This request is applicable with regard to any of the organized, ongoing Jewish study programs.

In the same vein, not too many adults want to go back to the social scene of junior high. Families may elect to sponsor a Kiddush luncheon or light repast following the service.

This custom is a lovely one, having a *seudat mitzvah*, a festive meal following a *simcha*. In this spirit of inclusiveness, please consider including Mekor Shalom friends who are attending services that day.

Including everyone, both children and adults, will help maintain the positive energy and good feelings from person to person that are mainstays of Mekor Shalom.

Location, Location, Location! Where Are Services Being Held?

On-Site at Mekor Shalom: What You Can Expect...

If you have been to Mekor Shalom, you may have noticed that the sanctuary presently is on the smaller side.

Because of the space limitation, families anticipating more than 50-60 attendees at the service have found alternative locations at which to hold the service.

If you do not expect more than 50-60 people (including Mekor Shalom friends) to be coming that day, services may certainly be held at the shul.

Services on Both Friday Night and Shabbat Morning

Friday night services at Mekor Shalom begin at 6:30 p.m. and last approximately an hour.

Shabbat morning services begin at 9:30 a.m. and are finished around noon.

Hosting a Kiddush Luncheon

If you elect to have a Kiddush luncheon immediately following services, **please consider opening your meal to Mekor Shalom friends who are attending services that day.**

For an onsite bar/bat mitzvah, it is necessary to follow the laws of kashrut according to synagogue practice.

Only food prepared in a kitchen under reliable and accepted supervision, as determined by Hazzan Sered-Lever and clearly marked as such, may be brought in to the Mekor Shalom kitchen. All potential caterers must be pre-approved.

This means that even if your great-aunt Tillie keeps kosher, she can't bake or cook at home and then bring the food in. She may, however, make arrangements to come in to the shul to prepare food. If family and friends would like to come together to prepare food in Mekor Shalom's tiny kitchen, they are most welcome.

With that in mind, every item that comes into the kitchen must have a reliable and accepted kosher symbol (also known as a hekhsher). Every item that comes into the kitchen must be checked in to verify that it is kosher.

If you are ready to make arrangements or if you have questions, please feel free to contact Hazzan Sered-Lever. Additional information may be found on the Mekor Shalom website: <https://mekorshalom.org/content/kashrut-mekor-shalom>.

Mekor Shalom does not employ any maintenance staff. It will, therefore, be necessary for the shul to have a custodian on duty to facilitate the set up and clean up for that day. As Mekor Shalom does not have funds to cover this expense, families are asked to make a contribution to take care of this cost.

Anticipated Additional Expenses for an On-Site Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Bar/bat mitzvah families are asked to cover customary expenses that are incurred in having a Mekor Shalom bar/bat mitzvah. For an on-site bar/bat mitzvah, they include (but may not be limited to):

Photocopies of the bar/bat mitzvah program and Torah reading sheets:	\$100
Custodial staff for set up, break down, and cleaning of the Atrium for the Kiddush Luncheon:	\$100

Off-Site at Your Choice of Venue: What You Can Expect...

Services on Both Friday Night and Shabbat Morning:

If you decide that an off-site venue would be a better fit, then Mekor Shalom will take the show on the road, so to speak.

Over the course of Shabbat, both Friday night services and Shabbat morning services will be held at your chosen location. Because everyone is always welcome, the congregation will be notified of this change of place, so that all Mekor Shalom friends may come to worship at either service.

With an off-site venue, bar/bat mitzvah families have the option of altering the Friday night service time to accommodate friends and family. If you wish, you may make arrangements with Hazzan Sered-Lever to have a start time of:

- 6:00 p.m.
- 6:30 p.m.
- 7:00 p.m.

Friday night services last approximately an hour.

Advanced planning for a time other than 6:30 p.m. is necessary to notify the entire community of a change in time.

Please note that Shabbat morning services must keep the 9:30 a.m. start time to avoid ending uncomfortably late. Shabbat morning services conclude around noon.

Hosting a Kiddush Luncheon:

If you elect to have a Kiddush luncheon immediately following services, **please consider opening your meal to Mekor Shalom friends who are attending services that day.**

Including everyone, both children and adults, will help maintain the positive energy and good feelings from person to person that are mainstays of Mekor Shalom.

It is understood that for an offsite bar/bat mitzvah, the ability to *kasher* (make completely kosher) the kitchen of an event site is quite impractical. With that in mind, if a bar/bat mitzvah is held offsite, **please make sure that any food that you serve immediately after services is completely dairy and/or vegetarian.**

Accommodations for Hazzan Sered-Lever and her family:

Because Hazzan Sered-Lever and her family are *Shomrei Shabbat* (their Shabbat observance includes not driving or riding in a vehicle or spending money), please plan on arranging comfortable accommodations at a nearby or on-site hotel for them.

Because they will not be able to check out until after Shabbat, a two night stay will be necessary.

The Hazzan and her family will also need to have their **meals provided** during Shabbat (either kosher or dairy/vegetarian). You are asked to do *one of the following*:

- Include them as your guests for Friday night dinner, Saturday morning breakfast, and Saturday lunch.
- Provide them provisions for these meals for them to have in the hotel room.
- Make a contribution to Mekor Shalom to cover the cost of **any or all** of the following meals Hazzan Sered-Lever arranges for herself and family:

Friday night dinner, Saturday morning breakfast, and Saturday lunch (*lunch only in the event you do not host or invite them to a Kiddush Luncheon*). \$50 total contribution for Friday night dinner, \$25 total contribution for breakfast, \$25 total contribution for lunch.

Anticipated Additional Expenses for an Off-Site Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Bar/Bat mitzvah families are asked to cover customary expenses that are incurred a in having a Mekor Shalom bar/bat mitzvah. For an off-site bar/bat mitzvah, they include (but may not be limited to):

Photocopies of the bar/bat mitzvah program and Torah reading sheets. *Printing arranged by Mekor Shalom.*

Price varies by number of copies needed. **\$150**

Cost to move ritual items (Ark, prayer books, etc.) from Mekor Shalom to your venue and back to Mekor Shalom (*varies based on the distance of the venue from Mekor Shalom*). Logistics arranged by Mekor Shalom. **\$80-\$150**

Two night stay in a hotel for Hazzan Sered-Lever and her family in walking distance of your venue: **Estimate (cost will vary based on hotel rate) \$200-\$500**

Cost Varies

Contribution to Mekor Shalom to cover the cost of **any or all** of the following meals Hazzan Sered-Lever arranges for herself and family: Friday night dinner, Saturday morning breakfast, and Saturday lunch (*lunch in the event you do not host or invite them to a Kiddush Luncheon*). \$50 total contribution for Friday night dinner, \$25 total contribution for breakfast, \$25 total contribution for lunch.

Ala Carte Per Meal Contribution Required Only If Hazzan Procures Own Meals: \$25-\$100

Unfortunately, Mekor Shalom is unable to subsidize the costs associated with holding Shabbat services in an alternate location.

What Will The Bar/Bat Mitzvah's Involvement Be In the Service?

It's is such an important question, and there is an individualized answer that will become clear for each bar/bat mitzvah student.

In most cases, the bar/bat mitzvah will have an aliyah by reciting the Torah blessings and chant a Torah reading and the *haftarah* (prophetic portion for the day). The children are encouraged and empowered to learn and then lead as much of the Friday night service and the Shabbat morning services as they are able.

Each bar/bat mitzvah will have the opportunity to study the Torah portion he/she has and compose a D'var Torah (Teaching about the Torah) with the guidance of Hazzan Sered-Lever. Each child will write a Thank You speech. Both the D'var Torah and the Thank You speech will be delivered at the service on Shabbat morning.

Please plan on being in attendance at the Friday night service and Shabbat morning over the Shabbat of your *simcha*.

What Shall I Wear? A Tallit Please...

Bar/bat mitzvah is a time when adult Jews take on the *mitzvah* of wearing a *tallit*. The fringes on the four corners (*tzitzit*) serve to remind the wearer to observe the *mitzvot* (commandments) of Judaism. Each bar/bat mitzvah is asked to take on this ritual observance. One has the option of purchasing a *tallit* via any number of online or local vendors.

With regard to the kippah, boys are required to wear a *kippah*, and girls are strongly encouraged to wear a head covering or *kippah*.

On weekdays, according to our Tradition, Jewish adults also wear *tefillin* or phylacteries along with the *tallit*. While originally a required *mitzvah* for boys, as a Conservative, egalitarian congregation, girls have the opportunity to learn how to put them on as well. Each bar/bat mitzvah is encouraged to acquire his/her own set because in the *Shema* we learn we are to "bind them [the *mitzvot*] as a sign upon your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead." It is through *tefillin* that we practice this *mitzvah*. For suggestions regarding the purchase of a tallit or *tefillin*, please ask Hazzan Sered-Lever.

Mitzvah Project

Every bar/bat mitzvah student is asked to engage in a mitzvah project. With so many ways for time to be donated to worthy causes, students are asked to go beyond putting out a box to collect items and then simply drop off at the designated location. Please make every effort to share gifts of time and talent.

Is This The Little Girl I Carried; Is This The Little Boy At Play: Personalizing the Ceremony

Mekor Shalom families are a part of a sacred community where everyone is appreciated, and everyone's presence matters. With that in mind, at a bar/bat mitzvah, there is room to personalize the service in any of the following ways, if you wish:

- *Tallit* Ceremony
This ceremony consists of the presentation of the *tallit* to the bar/bat mitzvah by loved ones (e.g. parents and/or grandparents).
- Torah Passing Ceremony
Grandparents, parents, siblings, and the bar/bat mitzvah stand in a row for a symbolic passing of the Torah from generation to generation.
- Candy Toss
A gentle tossing of soft, wrapped candies at the bar/bat mitzvah as a symbol of sweetness of the event.
- Parent's Charge or Prayer
Parents have the option of speaking to the bar/bat mitzvah or offering a prayer in English. Parents are urged to write out their remarks in advance. If a child is blessed to have two parents in attendance, they are both welcome to speak either separately or together.

All of these elements are optional, and may be selected in any combination.

Multi-faith Households: An Opportunity for Inclusivity

Mekor Shalom is sensitive to being inclusive of everyone. Parents, who are supportive of their child's upbringing in the Jewish faith, even if it is different from their own, deserve to have a meaningful role in the bar/bat mitzvah services. Hazzan Sered-Lever is committed to helping to facilitate what that looks like for your family, in the context of the requirements of Jewish law. She will be more than happy to speak with you to make the arrangements.

Honoring Family & Friends

Friends and family members of the Jewish faith are eligible to open/close the Ark, have an aliyah (i.e. chant the Torah blessings, if able) chant from the Torah scroll in Hebrew (if able), lift the Torah scroll (if able), or tie the Torah scroll, carry the Torah, lead the Prayer for the Country in English, the Prayer for Israel in Hebrew, and the Prayer for Israel in English.

If you have family and friends who are not Jewish, their participation may include leading the Prayer for Our Country, the Prayer for Israel in English, or the Prayer for Peace. If there are relatives that you would want to include in a Torah Passing Ceremony or a *Tallit* Ceremony, they are welcome to participate.

Enjoying Shabbat Unplugged

In keeping with Mekor Shalom's Shabbat observance, everyone is requested to refrain from using electronic devices during Shabbat services and during the Kiddush immediately following.

You Oughta Be In Pictures (If You Wish...)

If you wish to have a photographer come to Mekor Shalom to take pictures, you are most welcome to schedule that. Of course, as indicated above, this photo shoot would need to be at a time other than Shabbat. Please coordinate your arrangements with Hazzan Sered-Lever, so that someone will be able to have the shul open for you.

Where Might I Read More About Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Here are a couple of suggested book titles:

- *Surviving Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah: The Ultimate Insider's Guide* by Cantor Matt Axelrod
- *Putting God on the Guest List* by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin
- *Putting God on the Guest List for Kids* by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin

L'Chaim! To Life! Being Jewish for Life...

One of the goals of the bar/bat mitzvah is to create a positive Jewish experience for the children and their families so that they want to continue their connection to their Judaism for a lifetime. Fortunately, by being connected to Mekor Shalom, the journey continues after the bar/bat mitzvah date with ongoing opportunities for involvement. Your presence in the congregation is a blessing, and you make a difference.

Mazel tov on this special milestone!
The whole community is *kvelling* along with you!