

# Beth Shalom B'nei Mitzvah Handbook



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# Mazel Tov!

Congratulations on reaching this milestone in your student's life. The ceremony to come will change the status of an individual from a student to an adult in the eyes of the Jewish community.

You, as a family, are about to experience one of the most significant spiritual adventures of your lifetime. This is a highly emotional journey and, as such, will be filled with some anxiety, but mostly joy.

This handbook is designed to relieve some of the anxiety and to increase the joy of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience. Although the congregation will do everything possible to prepare the student, family cooperation is essential. Together we can make this joyous occasion a cherished memory in the life of your family.

Please read through this handbook, and use it as a reference book often.

May this be only one of many family *simchas* (joyous moments) we will share with you!

*Rabbi Ederly  
Lynn Calnek*

## In the Beginning: A History of Bar/Bat Mitzvah

"Bar Mitzvah" literally means "son of the commandment." "Bar" being the Hebrew term for "son" and "Mitzvah" being the Hebrew term for "commandment". "Bat" is the Hebrew term for daughter. Under Jewish Law children are not obligated to observe the commandments until the age of 13 for boys and 12 for girls, however, they are encouraged to study and learn the obligations they will have as adults. The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony formally marks this obligation.

The earliest bar mitzvah ceremony consisted of blessing and reading the last section of the weekly portion of the Torah, the maftir (the extra reading). The most important part of the rite was a d'var Torah (a sermonette on the Torah or haftarah portion). Since the bar mitzvah was assuming adult religious responsibilities, he was expected to show his understanding of those responsibilities to his family and, more importantly, to the community.

The first Bat Mitzvah did not occur in North America until 1922. Dr. Judith Kaplan-Eisenstein, the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, blessed and read the Torah portion from a book "at a respectable distance" from the Torah scroll. The regular celebration of girls becoming a Bat Mitzvah came into prominence in Reform congregations in the second half of the 20th century and is now identical to the Bar Mitzvah service.

When children become B'nei Mitzvah (plural form of Bar/Bat Mitzvah), they accept the responsibilities and privileges that come with Jewish adulthood. B'nei Mitzvah is about ritual maturity, growing up as a Jew, becoming a full fledged member of the Jewish community and, most importantly, it is about connecting to Torah and to the traditions of the Jewish people.

*'The study of Torah is not simply a didactic act...It is a powerful experience soul to soul'. [Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchi](#)*

## **Requirements for Becoming A Bar/Bat Mitzvah**

### **1. Eligibility:**

Families must be members in good standing of Beth Shalom prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah taking place. This means that you have successfully renewed your membership for the current year and do not have a past due balance from the previous fiscal year.

### **2. Education:**

A minimum of four consecutive years (grades 4-7 or their equivalent) of regular attendance in a Jewish religious education program is expected as well as the satisfactory completion of its academic requirements. All students will be required to pass a Hebrew proficiency test in December of fifth grade. No student will be permitted to choose a Bar/Bat Mitzvah date until Hebrew proficiency standards have been met. Students joining Beth Shalom religious school in 5th-7th grades are expected to meet fifth grade Hebrew proficiency prior to obtaining a Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

### **3. Additional Education Requirements:**

All students are expected to chant from the Torah, lead prayers in Hebrew and English and chant Haftarah. Students are expected to study daily. The goal is daily reinforcement, not oppressive homework. (See Individualized lessons on page 9 of this handbook).

### **4. Hosting a Kiddush (Oneg) after B'nei Mitzvah Service:**

All families have their own idea of how to celebrate this milestone. Some have receptions immediately following services and others make different arrangements. We encourage all members of the Beth Shalom community to join in the recognition of your family's simcha. To this end, it is expected that a small Kiddush is offered directly after the Shabbat morning service. This can occur in the lobby or in the social hall depending on your family's need or desire. To reduce the onus on the B'nei Mitzvah family for the weekend of their own simcha we have

devised a system wherein seventh grade families help each other. At the beginning of your class' B'nei Mitzvah year, the Beth Shalom office will send out a signup genius for you to sign up to host the Kiddush of one of your student's classmates. We ask for the following:

- The host family contact the B'nei Mitzvah family to get an idea on the number of people to expect and some guidance as to what supplies are needed;
- The host family is responsible to provide a very light nosh such as cookies, fruit, vegetables, etc. with juice, coffee or other beverage
- The host family arranges set up and clean up. This includes setting out food before the end of the service, disposing of all trash after the Kiddush, and cleaning the temple kitchen, including any items used as part of the set up. Please remember to wash, dry and return items used back to where you found them.
- Our kitchen is 'kosher style'. This means
  - No pork, pork products or shellfish
  - Meat and dairy foods are not allowed at the same meal
  - Non-kosher raw meat cannot be prepared in the temple kitchen
  - Non-kosher cooked meat can be brought into the building.

A copy of the Beth Shalom Kashrut policy can be found at the bottom of the synagogue website under "Forms".

Beth Shalom will provide a challah and wine to be used on the bimah for blessing;

## **5. Financial obligations:**

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee of \$1,050.00 is required to cover bar/bat mitzvah costs (additional study materials, rabbinical time, training for chanting Torah and haftarah). The payment structure is as follows:

\$350.00 due when your student's date has been confirmed, generally in spring of student's 5th grade school year;

\$350.00 due by January 31st of student's 6th grade year in school;

\$350.00 due by December 1st of student's 7th grade year in school.

## **6. Setting the Date:**

Based upon evaluations in religious school, if it is determined that your student is reading Hebrew on grade level, you will be invited to participate in the date selection process at the B'nei Mitzvah Orientation in May of your student's 5th grade school year. At the orientation, dates are determined by way of a lottery system. Each family will draw a number, which determines the order of date selections. Prior to this meeting, families will be provided a list of available dates. The dates will begin in January of student's 7th grade school year and extend through that calendar year. Please be aware that some dates will not be available due to holidays and Rabbi's summer sabbatical. It is expected that children have reached their 13th birthday prior to the date you choose. Please plan to attend the meeting with a minimum of three possible dates in case your initial choice(s) are eliminated prior to your turn.

At this meeting, you will receive pertinent information about the Beth Shalom b'nei mitzvah process. Once your student's date is confirmed, you will be required to pay the first one-third of the b'nei mitzvah fee (\$350.00).

If your student is not reading Hebrew on grade level, you will receive written notification of such by January of your student's fifth grade school year. At this time, a detailed plan involving you, the Religious

School Director and the Rabbi will be developed. This plan will include a follow-up date for re-assessment. If your student is still not reading on grade level at the follow-up evaluation, your student will be deferred for a later date.



## **B'nei Mitzvah Timeline\*\***

**2 years before:**

Receive date.

**1 year before:**

Director of Religious School will contact you to set an appointment with the Rabbi to receive student's Torah booklet.

Director of Religious School will contact you to set up weekly Torah trope training with Lisa Sharp at her home in the Lochmere subdivision (near the intersection of Tryon Road and Cary Parkway).

**2 -3 months before date:**

Director of Religious School will contact you to set up weekly Haftarah training and prayer review. This training will be done via Facetime or Skype.

Rabbi will contact you to set up a meeting to discuss D'var Torah (sermon) and review the service outline. (See "The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony" on page 13 of this handbook for more information.)

**\*\* View indepth timeline on synagogue website:**

**<http://bethshalomnc.org/temple-services/education/bnei-mitzvah/bnei-mitzvah-timeline/>**

## Responsibilities of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student

### 1. Individualized lessons:

Approximately 8 months before your student's bar/bat mitzvah, he/she will begin Torah trope training with Lisa Sharp. Private training lessons last for 30 minutes. It is important that you arrive a few minutes early so that the lessons can begin on time. Due to the volume of students receiving training on any given day, lessons end at the notated time. Arriving late will shorten the amount of time for your student's lesson.

The training schedule will be set by family with Lisa Sharp. The training schedule varies, but is usually held on Sundays around the Sunday school schedule. Once set, the day and time will remain the same throughout the training process. It is very important to remember that the commitment to Torah training is no different than that required of a sports team or other extra-curricular activity. Please make sure that you select your training time accordingly.

In addition to Torah trope training, students will meet with the Director of Religious School weekly beginning approximately 8 weeks prior the B'nei Mitzvah date to begin Haftarah training and prayer review. These lessons will occur on either Facetime or Skype.

### 2. Sermon/D'var Torah:

D'var Torah literally means "A word of Torah" - that is, a moment of teaching and learning. Becoming a Jewish adult, each student is designated as our congregation's Torah teacher the day of their b'nei mitzvah. Students are expected to learn about their Torah reading, its content and its meaning, They will then present it to the congregation, emphasizing the lessons we can all learn from this section of Torah. Each b'nei mitzvah family will meet individually with the Rabbi approximately 2 months prior to bar/bat mitzvah, to study their Torah section, and begin to prepare their D'var Torah. You will be notified by the religious school director when it is time to make an appointment with the Rabbi for this meeting.

## Responsibilities of the Parents

Besides *kvelling* (beaming with pride and pleasure) parents are invited to meet with the rabbi to discuss strategies for parent involvement in the b'nei mitzvah process. Some ways parents can be involved include the following:

- a. Participate in the ceremony of handing down the Torah generationally (parents and grandparents).
- b. Arrange for the student to have a special tallit. Often, a grandparent or other relative likes to provide such an item thus imbuing it with more sentimental value. No other ritual items are needed unless the family wishes the congregation to use a special Kiddush cup or Yad.
- c. Have/be present for an *aliyah*.
- d. Offer a "prayer" for your student. This should be a short speech to your student. Please ask the Rabbi or Director of Religious School if you would like to see a sample prayer.
- e. Provide Kippot for guests, however, there are Kippot available for your use in the synagogue.
- f. Families are expected to provide a booklet to help guests follow the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. You can find sample booklets on the synagogue website:  
**<http://bethshalomnc.org/bnei-mitzvah-booklet-templates/>**
- g. Families are asked to keep the process of becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah in perspective. It is a sacred rite of passage that occurs within the context of a congregational Shabbat service. Please ask your guests to wear appropriate attire. "Business casual" is appropriate.
- h. In the spirit of community, you are encouraged to invite your student's Bar/Bat Mitzvah class to your celebration. However, we

realize that this is not always feasible. To avoid hurt feelings, please do not hand-deliver invitations at religious school. Please contact the office manager for an up-to-date class list and addresses.

- i. Attend Shabbat morning services prior to your student's service. This is not only a way for your student to be familiar with the order of the service, but it can be helpful for parents as well.
  
- j. Send notice to Beth Shalom Newsletter with a picture and biography of your student (interests, school, family, etc). **The deadline for this article is the first week of the month before your student's B'nei Mitzvah.**

## **Mitzvah Project**

Doing Mitzvot and performing acts of kindness are at the core of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. In addition to all the learning and leading of services, a Bar/Bat Mitzvah may be enriched by engaging in a personal project, devoting a few hours to doing a special Mitzvah. Below are some suggestions:

### 1. Give of Your Time:

- a. Volunteer to work in the temple and/or the religious school;
- b. Visit the elderly—family members, a neighbor, or a nursing home;
- c. Work on an ecology project;
- d. Work in a soup kitchen;
- e. Collect old but usable clothes, toys, tapes, videos, etc., and give them to the needy and the homeless;
- f. Work on projects during Good Deeds Day at synagogue;
- g. Participate in a walkathon for a cause that is meaningful to you;
- h. Work on a project for Habitat for Humanity.

### 2. Give of Your Money:

- i. Help the hungry, the poor, and the homeless;
- j. Help Jewish Causes;
- k. Help the Synagogue:
  - l. Give to any *tzedakah* funds;
  - m. Sponsor a scholar-in-residence;
  - n. Create an endowment fund.

## **7th Grade Class Mitzvah Project**

As part of the 7th grade class, Bnei Mitzvah students will work on Ledor Vador project - delving into their own family history.

They will research, work independently and with their families, and collectively present their work to all the congregation at a Shabbat service set during the year.

## **The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony**

### **Honoring your family and friends**

During the Shabbat morning service there are several opportunities for families to distribute honors to family members and friends. More information on ways to honor family and friends can be found on the synagogue website:

**[bethshalomnc.org/temple-services/education/bnei-mitzvah/bnei-mitzvah-service-outline/](http://bethshalomnc.org/temple-services/education/bnei-mitzvah/bnei-mitzvah-service-outline/)**

### **Chanting an aliyah**

During the Torah service numerous *aliyot* are given to the family. The Hebrew word *aliyah* translates as “elevation” or “going up”. An *aliyah* is the honor of going up to the Torah and reciting the blessings before and after the reading of the section of the Torah read by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. A copy of the Aliyah worksheet can be found on the synagogue homepage under “Forms”.

### **Dressing/Undressing the Torah**

This honor happens during the Torah service and should be given to a Jewish relative or friend.

### **Lifting the Torah**

This honor, referred to as *Hagbah* (lifting) is the ritual of lifting the Torah scroll and displaying it to the congregation after the Torah reading. This honor should be given to a Jewish family member who does not have limited physical abilities.

### **Readings**

Families are invited to include friends in family members in their service by extending an English reading.

### **Photography**

Video and still photography are permitted during the service. Please instruct your photographer/videographer to place their equipment in the

designated area in the sanctuary. We ask that flash photography not be used during the service.

### **Music**

Families may want to include music in the service. There is no instrumental accompanist scheduled to play at B'nei Mitzvah services. There are several Beth Shalom members who often participate musically when invited/contracted to do so by the B'nei Mitzvah family.

If you have any questions about this handbook or about the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process, please do not hesitate to contact the synagogue office.