

Frequently Asked Questions Of the Shir Ami B. Mitzvah Process

How can I help my child prepare?

As with any large endeavor your child takes on, you can be supportive partners, helping your child to manage their time, being interested listeners, and helping them to see through the preoccupations of the celebration to the essence of this milestone. We encourage families to attend Shabbat evening services and b. mitzvah services regularly prior to your own mitzvah.

Attending services as a family helps everyone feel more comfortable with the service and the prayers. It also shows you what Friday night services in general and your child's b. mitzvah service in particular will look like. Additionally, it is nice to support the other students in your child's class as they become b. mitzvah. We also consistently see that students who attend services regularly are our most prepared, confident, and comfortable b. mitzvah celebrants.

How will we participate Friday night?

- Your family will be called up to light the [Shabbat candles](#)
- Your child will lead the kiddush and v'ahavta during the service
- Your family will be invited to lead HaMotzi (the blessing over challah) at the end of the service

What happens on Saturday?

- The morning service begins at 10:15 am and usually concludes at 11:30-11:45 am.
- The Havdalah service begins at 4:30 pm and usually concludes at 5:30-5:45.
- You will gather with the Rabbi and Cantor in the Cantor's office for a brief ritual to prepare for this sacred moment.
- You will have the opportunity to present your child/ren with a tallit.
- The b. mitzvah will lead much of the service including reading from the Torah and offering a D'var Torah (a speech that teaches a lesson or two from the Torah portion).
- Parents will offer words of blessing to their child at the beginning of the Torah service (see Parent Blessing Guidelines on the [website](#))
- Parents do an aliyah (Torah blessings). This can be found with the recordings of the prayers on the b. mitzvah page on the [website](#).
- For a Havdalah b. Mitzvah, the family joins the b.mitzvah on the bimah to help lead this brief ritual.

I've never written a blessing before. How do I write one for my child on this special day?

This is a unique opportunity to add to this sacred moment by sharing a blessing with your child. Guidelines and examples can be found [here](#) and the clergy are available to help as well. It should be 2-3 minutes total, about 300-375 words. Please send to [Rabbi Briskin](#) for review one week before.

How can our family and friends participate in the service?

About three months before the service you will receive an email from [Jodi](#) with a link to fill out a Family Honors form. When filling out this form you will find guidelines with each honor on who should participate. Please don't hesitate to contact [Cantor Berlin](#) with questions.

How does someone who is not Jewish participate in the service?

We know that many of our families include a parent or other family member who is not Jewish. We strive to be as inclusive as possible. A parent who is not Jewish participates in all of the same rituals and blessings with the Jewish parent including Torah passing and the aliyah to the Torah. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, who aren't Jewish may participate by opening and closing the ark, helping dress the Torah, or offering an English reading during the service. If you have specific questions please ask Rabbi Briskin or Cantor Berlin directly.

How do we schedule family photos for the b. mitzvah?

Some people choose to take pictures on that Saturday, before the service. Others prefer to choose a time earlier in the week. Whatever you decide, be sure to schedule this with [Jodi Friedman](#) so that it is on the Temple calendar to ensure that the space is available and the appropriate people are notified. If you choose to take pictures on Saturday before the service, please plan to finish 30 minutes prior to the service. Please leave everything the way you found it. Anything that your photographer removes from the top of the readers table must be put back on the table after your photos are done.

Are we allowed to take photos or video during the service?

You may have a photographer or videographer during the service ONLY in one of the two designated areas at the rear of the sanctuary.

- The photographer must remain stationary and may not wander around.
- The sound of the shutter must not disturb people.
- NO Flash photography

Additionally, the services are [live streamed](#). If you would like a copy of the service, contact Phil Nordlinger pnordlinger@shiramipa.org the week after the b. mitzvah and he will send you a copy to download. Keep in mind that technology is not always reliable

and there is always a chance, for any service, that there may be a problem with the streaming. If you want to ensure professional video quality, you may choose to hire your own videographer.

Are there any other requirements or things we need to do for the service?

Greeter: We request that you serve as greeters for a b. mitzvah service before yours. This gives you the opportunity to see what happens at the service so that you will feel comfortable on your family's special day. And, since we want everyone to feel welcome at Shir Ami, you will fulfill the mitzvah of welcoming guests.

Tallit: At their b. mitzvah, as they are called to Torah for the first time, it is also the first time a child is permitted to wear a tallit. You may purchase one in the Temple gift shop, on a trip to Israel, or any place that sells Judaica items. You may also have an heirloom tallit that belonged to someone special in your family that your child can wear on this special day. However, it is still a nice opportunity for your child to have their own tallit that they will wear for their lifetime.

You or someone you choose will present the tallit to your child publicly at the beginning of the service (most common) or privately before the service when you gather in the Cantor's office. It is appropriate to say something about the tallit and this special occasion while presenting the tallit. (See Tallit Presentation on the Temple [Website](#))

Hebrew Name Explanation: Before chanting the Torah blessings for the final aliyah your child will give a brief explanation (2-3 sentences) of their Hebrew name.

For example: My Hebrew name is Tzvi Moshe. I was named after my grandmother Silvia who's Hebrew name was Tzviya and my great grandfather Moises or Moshe. Both of these people died before I was born and were very special to my father. I am told that Silvia was kind, generous, and a great cook. Moises was loving, caring, and did a lot to help people throughout their lives. I hope I can model their best traits now and in the future.

Thank You Speech: Following the presentation of the Board Representative, your child will receive several gifts from the Temple as well as their b. mitzvah certificate. Your child should write a brief speech thanking

- the Shir Ami Board of Directors, Women of Shir Ami, Men's Club, SHAFTY and NFTY for the gifts.
- those who directly helped with b. mitzvah preparation (tutor, Rabbis, Cantor)
- parents, grandparents, siblings, family and friends who came to celebrate with you

What is the appropriate attire for services?

This is a sacred occasion and you should dress appropriately. Depending on what your child chooses to wear, consider these guidelines: skirts or dresses should be no more than 2-3 inches above the knee; sportcoats/suits with a tie are appropriate; shoulders should be covered. Please communicate our guidelines to anyone who will be coming to the bimah for an honor. If you are having a Havdalah service, we encourage you to wear something more conservative for the service and should you prefer something more festive for the party, change after the service. Our Bride's Room is available to you to change and freshen up between the service and the party..

Should we make Tzedakah contributions?

It is appropriate to make contributions to at least one organization or fund in honor of this sacred occasion to:

- [Shir Ami clergy discretionary funds, Circle of Giving, or a specific fund](#) in honor of your child and/or appreciation of tutors and clergy
- [Shir Ami](#) for an engraved leaf on the Tree of Life wall or a brick outside.
- [Mazon](#): A Jewish Response to Hunger
- Any organization that is meaningful to you and your child.

Mitzvah Project

Becoming an adult in the Jewish community means that you are obligated to help take care of that community by giving back. Your child can begin to do this by participating in a mitzvah project. You and your child can decide what this project will be.

- If your child is involved in scouting you may use one or more of those projects as your mitzvah project.
- If you participate in one or more of the many tikkun olam projects going on at Temple you may use these as your mitzvah project.
- You may do several smaller projects or one that you do over a longer period of time (i.e. visiting a senior living facility monthly over a period of time).
- While donating money is an important mitzvah, doing a hands-on activity and interacting with people in our community can be a more meaningful way for a young adult to participate in taking care of the community.

Haftarah

Traditionally, Haftarah is read on Shabbat morning. It is an additional Hebrew portion that usually comes from the Prophets and is usually linked thematically to the weekly Torah portion. For some families this is a meaningful part of the Shabbat morning service and you and your child may choose to learn this extra Hebrew reading. For others, you may prefer to choose one of the [creative alternatives](#) suggested.