

Bnai Mitzvah Parents' Guide

Temple Emanu-El



2022

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Greeting

Mazel tov! This is such an exciting time in the life of your family. As a congregation, we are thrilled to celebrate with you and share in your joy. We take such pride in our children and how they lead the services. We welcome them into our community as young adults.

We present this guide to you and your family as a resource to assist you in the process. The creation of this document was a collaboration of the rabbis, the Director of Education, and the Ritual Committee. We hope that it will be helpful to you.

Congratulations, and we look forward to your special day!

Glossary

bnai mitzvah: the plural of bar mitzvah (boy) and bat mitzvah (girl)

bnot mitzvah: the plural of bat mitzvah (girl)

Torah: the scroll containing the first five books of the Bible

Haftarah: the weekly reading from the Prophets of the Bible

bimah: the stage in the sanctuary

aliyah: the honor of reciting the blessings for the Torah reading

kiddush: the blessing over the wine

motzi: the blessing over challah bread

havdalah: the ritual blessings marking the end of Shabbat

tallis or tallit: a ceremonial fringed shawl

kipah: small head covering, also called a yarmulke

oneg: the reception following a service

The Significance of the Ceremony

To become a bar or bat mitzvah in Jewish tradition means to reach the age of majority. The Mishnah declares that at age 13 a boy becomes responsible for the commandments. The Talmud would later state that girls become responsible at age 12. Today, we regard girls and boys equally and set the age of majority for both at 13. The Hebrew phrase bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah refers to the child who comes of age; it means literally “a person of the commandments.” However, in colloquial terms, the phrase has come to refer to the ceremony.

Since the time that the Temple stood in Jerusalem, the occasion of becoming bar mitzvah has included special ceremony and blessing. In recent centuries, the occasion was marked by the child reciting the blessings over the Torah or reading the Haftarah portion in the regular worship ceremony in the synagogue. The purpose of these rituals was to announce formally the status of the new adult. Since children were forbidden to

perform these synagogue rites, the fact that the bar mitzvah was doing it was a signal that he had now attained the age of 13.

Today, the ceremony is more extensive as the ritual takes on a second significance – the ceremony marks the culmination of the study of Hebrew letters and prayers. Our bnai mitzvah lead the entire service, read the Hebrew prayers, chant the Torah portion, recite the Haftarah portion, and deliver a sermon based on the message of the Torah portion. The ceremony is a formal demonstration of their learning and their competence of basic Jewish liturgical skills. It is a chance for the community to take pride in the child for not only attaining a certain age, but achieving a certain goal.

Choosing a Date

It is customary to select the Shabbat nearest to the date of the 13th birthday, though it is common to choose a date within a few months of that birthday. Families are invited to request dates midway through the fifth grade, but not sooner. This gives everyone an equal chance to get one of their top choices. If a family is late to the process, there are always lots of good dates available.

The bnai mitzvah ceremony usually includes participation in both a Friday night and Saturday service. On Friday night, the family will have the privilege of lighting the Shabbat candles, and the student will lead some parts of the service. The bnai mitzvah will then lead most of the service on Saturday. The family may choose the time of the Saturday service, whether it will be a traditional morning service at 10:30 or an evening service at 5:00.

To request a date, the family must fill out the formal Date Request Form and make a deposit of \$850 to sponsor the bimah flowers and the Friday night oneg, and cover the costs of Saturday's musician, sound tech, and facility staff person. Families may apply for financial assistance for this as with their dues.

The Family's Role in the Service

There are many opportunities for family members and close friends to participate. Such honors include the blessings over the candles on Friday night, and on Saturday opening the ark doors, dressing the Torah, blessing the Torah, and passing the Torah. At the end of this guide you will find a form with a complete list of parts. About three weeks prior to the event, we ask that you provide us the names of the participants so we can list them in the program and call them up to the bimah by name.

You may invite people to sit on the bimah, but most families do not. A person must be age 13 or older to sit on the bimah. We welcome non-Jewish relatives and friends to participate in the service by opening the ark doors or standing with other Jewish relatives during the blessings.

The role of the parents is especially important, and there are many points in the service in which you will participate. You take part in passing the Torah to the bar or bat mitzvah. You are invited to share personal words to your child at the conclusion of the ceremony on Saturday. In addition, you may assign to yourself any of the other parts of the service, such as blessing the candles or presenting the tallis.

Preparation

Hebrew: Students should enroll at a young age in our Religious School and Hebrew School to become grounded in Jewish traditions and Hebrew reading. At a minimum, we require students to be enrolled for at least two years in religious school prior to the ceremony. Our students participate in our monthly Family Service to become accustomed to leading prayers in front of the congregation. A year prior to the ceremony, students enroll in an additional bnai mitzvah lab on Wednesday evenings. Our Director of Education, Snait Ben Herut, oversees all aspects of Hebrew preparation. In the months prior to the ceremony, please check with her regularly on your child's Hebrew progress. Morah Snait conducts three formal assessments of each student's Hebrew proficiency: one year, three months, and six weeks prior to the ceremony.

Tutors: Students need a private tutor to learn their Torah portion and Haftarah portion, as well as perfect the prayers learned in school. Families commission a tutor about six months prior to the service and make financial arrangements directly with the tutor. You may choose your own tutor, and we recommend Rabbi Jennifer Singer (941-544-4189), Rinat Heiman (941-549-0744), and, when she gets back into town, Sabrina Silverberg (941-228-3281).

Students must participate in a minimum of seven lessons prior to the three-month evaluation date. Snait Ben Herut determines then whether a student will require further tutoring.

Torah portion: Families meet privately with Rabbi Glickman 6-12 months before the date to discuss the Torah portion. The rabbi will explain the entire portion and determine, with the family, the exact verses that the student will be chanting. At this time, the students will receive a photocopy of their Torah and Haftarah portions and, soon thereafter, music files of their chanting. All students will chant their Torah and Haftarah portions unless specific permission is granted.

Mitzvah project: It is required that all students perform 13 hours of community service in observance of a mitzvah of the Torah. Bnai mitzvah students may volunteer in any number of community agencies, including food banks, nursing homes, and animal shelters. Some students may choose an independent project such a food or clothing drive in their neighborhood. Rabbi Glickman can help.

Service attendance: Our students regularly attend our monthly Family Service, which affords them an opportunity to practice leading individual prayers before a congregation. Also, the Ritual Committee expects that all bnai mitzvah students attend at least three Friday night services that are not Family Services in the year prior to the ceremony. This will give our students a chance to strengthen their bond with the greater congregation, and to learn the custom of the regular service.

Speech: Rabbi Shefrin and our speech coaches work with each student on the speech. The speech includes a sermon on the meaning of the Torah portion, a personal prayer to God, and a message of gratitude. Rabbi Shefrin meets with each student and parents 2-3 months prior to the ceremony to establish an outline and direction for the speech. The volunteer coaches helps the students through each draft. Please see the addendum at the back of this guide for an outline of the speech.

Rehearsals: Each student has two formal rehearsals, one with Rabbi Shefrin two weeks prior to the service, and one with Mora Snait the Thursday before the service. You may wish to arrange additional rehearsals with your private tutor.

Administrative Details

Finances: Six months prior to the ceremony, the bnai mitzvah family must be in full compliance with all financial obligations to the temple, including dues, Maintenance Fee, and religious school fees. The leadership of the congregation is willing to work with any family to resolve financial concerns, provided the family approaches the leadership prior to this six-month deadline. The family must again be in full compliance with all subsequent financial obligations up to the day of the ceremony. Please direct questions to our comptroller at 371-2788.

Bulletin: We hope you will submit a picture and description of your child to publicize the ceremony in our bulletin. Send in a picture and blurb to bulletin@sarasotateemple.org by the 1st day of the previous month. The text must be written in a Word document and sent as an attachment.

Friday Night Oneg Reception: The bnai mitzvah family sponsors the oneg and bimah flowers on Friday nights, and the cost is covered by the deposit collected upon requesting a date. The oneg includes many wonderful desserts, healthy options, coffee, tea, and challah. If you would like to make special oneg arrangements, please contact Fatima Soriano at 941-580-2169.

Choir: As Friday night is a congregational service, the choir is present and their salary is paid by the temple. The Saturday service features a single musician/singer to lead music that is covered in the initial bnai mitzvah service fee. If you would like to commission an additional singer or singers to enhance the service, please call our music director Cynthia Roberts Greene at 921-1985 at least two months prior to the event.

Social Hall Private Events: We hope that you will consider using our beautiful Benderson Family Hall for your social events on Saturday or for a Shabbat dinner on Friday. Please speak with our special event coordinator, Fatima Soriano, for an explanation of fees, forms, and procedures (941-580-2169). If you are having a luncheon following a Saturday service, it is customary to invite everyone present at the service to eat. However, you will find that the attendees will be only your invited guests. Fatima should be contacted at least 3 months prior to the event, and all paperwork must be completed 60 days before the event.

Invitations to Classmates: As we are such an intimate Religious School, we strongly encourage you to invite all temple classmates to your celebrations. The school office can provide you with a list of names and addresses of the others students in their grade.

Photography and Videography: Due to the sanctity of the worship service, guests may not take pictures and photographers and videographers may not be visible to the congregation. A stationary camera may film or take stills of the service from the back of the room. You may arrange photo sessions on the bimah prior to the service.

Live Streaming: Friday night services are streamed live on our temple website www.sarasotateple.org, and access to your Saturday service is available at no additional charge. The temple will provide you with a password-protected video recording of the Saturday service.

Donations to Temple: Many families express their appreciation to the temple with a donation.

Dress: Dress is formal for bnai mitzvah and all bimah participants. This includes modest clothing that covers the shoulders, and coat and tie. You may choose to wear a kippah or tallis, but you do not need to. Please advise your guests that will be participating in the service of the dress code.

Gift Shop: The Sisterhood gift shop is a great place to order a tallis or yad. Bnai mitzvah kids can register for jewelry and other items. The shop offers gift certificates that you can give as gifts to the other students.

Some Tips for Hebrew Readiness

Preparation for the ceremony is intense, particularly in the final six months. The students must perfect their prayer recitation, learn their Torah and Haftarah portions, and write a speech. Here are a few tips to help your child progress on pace, minimize anxiety, and accomplish a goal that they can be proud of for the rest of their lives.

Starting immediately, please encourage your children to:

- make Religious School attendance a priority
- do their Hebrew homework consistently
- practice their prayers with the aid of the school website
- attend services regularly

In the final six months:

- cut back on all other extra-curricular activities
- engage a tutor
- encourage regular practice in small chunks. Daily studying is necessary.

A Final Note – After

A bar or bat mitzvah ceremony marks a beginning, not an end. Religious studies continue through Confirmation at the end of 10th grade. The Confirmation Class meets monthly on Sunday mornings with the rabbis, and the teens love it. We strongly urge that you enroll your teens in this program following the bar/bat mitzvah year.

Mazel tov!

Timeline

This timeline is here to help you arrange your schedule and remember the details. Please count backward from your date and mark these tasks on your calendar.

- 1-2 years prior: Request a date for the ceremony using the date request form.
- 1 year prior: Begin Bnai Mitzvah Lab on Wednesday evenings from 6:30-7:30 in addition to regular Religious School classes. Meet with Snait Ben Herut to assess student's Hebrew proficiency.
- 7 months prior: Make sure that your temple financial obligations are square, including dues and Maintenance Fee. For more information, contact our comptroller at temple.
- 6 months prior: Meet with Rabbi Glickman to select Torah portion and mitzvah project. Arrange for private tutoring in Hebrew. All financial obligations to the temple must be paid in full.
- 3 months prior: Submit picture and information to bulletin for publication. Contact Fatima Soriano at 941-580-2169 if you wish to rent the social hall. Set up speech appointment with Rabbi Shefrin. Morah Snait completes the second formal Hebrew assessment.
- 2-3 months prior: Meet with Rabbi Shefrin to prepare speech. Paperwork is now due for social hall rental.
- 6 weeks prior: Third Hebrew assessment with Morah Snait.
- 2-3 weeks prior: First rehearsal with Rabbi Shefrin.
- 2 weeks prior: Turn in Bimah Honors form to office.
- 1-3 days prior: Final rehearsal with Morah Snait.

Outline for Bar/Bat Mitzvah Speech

- I. Summarize your Torah portion. Emphasize the part of the Torah portion that includes the theme of your speech. (1 paragraph of 8-10 sentences)
- II. State the lesson or theme that you get from your Torah portion. Explain how the Torah portion teaches this message. (1 paragraph of 8-10 sentences)
- III. Share a teaching or quote from our Sages that addresses your theme. Explain how this quote is meaningful to you, or why you agree or disagree with it. (1 paragraph of 8-10 sentences)
- IV. Write two paragraphs that illustrate your lesson. Each paragraph should be 10 sentences that tell a story in detail. Choose any two of these topics:
 - tell us of a time when you did not follow your lesson. What resulted?
 - tell us of a time when you came to realize the importance of your lesson. What did you used to do? What changed? How do you act differently now?
 - tell us of a time when someone went out of their way to follow this lesson to help you.
 - tell us of a time when someone let you down by not following this lesson.
 - describe a role model of this value. It could be a famous person or a family member.
 - relate an experience in your mitzvah project that taught you about your lesson.
- V. In a short concluding paragraph, restate your lesson, why it is important, and how it is taught in Judaism. You may wish to show how your lesson means more to you now as you become a bar/bat mitzvah. (5-10 sentences)
- VI. If you wish, you may offer thanks to special people in your life. Every aspect of this paragraph must be dignified and positive. This paragraph must be no longer than 25% of your total speech. More lengthy tributes may be done at a family dinner or party.
- VII. Conclude with a personal prayer to God. This is a time to offer thanks to God and share your hopes for the future. The prayer should begin: "On this special day, I offer a prayer to God" or something similar. It is good to begin by thanking God for the blessings in your life. You may wish to ask God for good things for you, your family, America, Israel, and the world. You may wish to make a promise to God about how you will act or be in the future. Conclude by saying to the congregation, "Shabbat Shalom."

One of our speech coordinators below will work with you through every draft of the speech. Each draft that you send should be typed and carefully proofread.

Monica Caldwell: monicajcaldwell@gmail.com 747-0852

Amy Meese: salmanah@aol.com 809-7489

Please also send drafts to Rabbi Shefrin, mshefrin@sarasotatemple.org.

Bimah Honors for Friday and Saturday Ceremony

Below is the list of honors that you may give out to close friends and family. The passing of the Torah is only for parents and grandparents. There is one opportunity for blessing the Torah on Saturday, but it may be shared among several people. We have the bar/bat mitzvah student chant Torah and recite the blessing on Friday night, or recite a prayer or two if there is no Torah reading that night. Honors are reserved for Jewish adults, with these exceptions: non-Jews may open and close the ark doors or be part of a group that includes a Jew during the blessings. Children under 13 may lead the blessings over wine, challah, or havdalah on Saturday but may not sit on the bimah.

Please inform the temple office of the people assigned to each part two weeks prior to the ceremony so we can prepare a program.

Friday

Candles

Saturday

Ushers (hand out programs)

Tallis Presentation

Ark Doors (2 people)

Passing the Torah (parents and grandparents):

Undressing/Dressing Torah (1-2 people)

Aliyah – Torah Blessings (1-6 people)

Kiddush and Motzi (morning) or Havdalah (evening)

Please list the names of departed family members for us to honor before the reading of the Kaddish on Saturday: