



**CONGREGATION BETH EMETH**  
**The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program**

We, at Beth Emeth, welcome you and your family to an experience that is designed to build the confidence of our students and to provide them with many wonderful Jewish memories. For parents, we have in place step-by-step procedures that will help reduce stress, and will allow you to be a positive factor in your child's success. Our clergy and teachers recognize the fact that each student is unique. The program unfolds in a manner that provides a challenge for every student, while avoiding becoming an overwhelming burden for anyone. You will be alerted to the various stages of the program by a series of emails, which will provide you with important information on how to proceed.

***APPROXIMATELY 9-12 MONTHS PRIOR TO YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH DATE:***

You will receive an e-mail from the Religious School letting you know that your child will be beginning his/her/their b'nai mitzvah preparation classes with the Cantor. These classes take place on Wednesday afternoons between 4:00 and 6:00 pm. Upcoming b'nai mitzvah candidates are divided into small groups of 7-10 students based on the date of their bar/bat mitzvah and study the service parts and blessings, their Torah portion and their Haftarah portion with the Cantor. Students will be provided with all written materials, as well as MP3 files, to help them prepare the service parts, as well as their Torah and Haftarah portions.

In the year prior to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, in addition to attending at least seventy (70) percent of religious school class sessions, students are expected to attend six (6) Saturday Shabbat morning services at Congregation Beth Emeth when there is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Students are also strongly encouraged to attend Erev Shabbat Services at Congregation Beth Emeth when there is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

If a student is not regularly attending their Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation classes and as a result, the Cantor determines additional support is needed for the student to meet requirements, the student's family must meet with the Cantor to determine how the student will satisfy the requirements. The student's family may be responsible for the cost of any additional classes or tutoring needed to meet Bar/Bat Mitzvah requirements.

***APPROXIMATELY 6-9 MONTHS PRIOR TO YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH DATE:***

Shara Siegfeld will contact you to arrange a meeting with you and your child to discuss MITZVAH PROJECT ideas (for a further explanation of a Mitzvah Project, see pages 12-13). This discussion is important and should be scheduled no matter where your child is in the process; whether he/she has already completed his/her/their project, or doesn't know how to get started! Once the Mitzvah Project has been completed and the Mitzvah Project form (see copy of form in pocket of this manual) is submitted to the Religious School, it will be included in our Mitzvah Project book that we keep as a resource for future Bar/Bat Mitzvah students.

***APPROXIMATELY 2-3 MONTHS PRIOR TO YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH DATE:***

Our bulletin editor, Debbie Schaffer, will contact you in the month preceding your Bar/Bat Mitzvah requesting information and **a copy of your child's photo** for publication in The Jewish World and Temple Bulletin (which will also be on our web site). This will be due no later than the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the month preceding the event. Along with family information, the information requested should contain a short blurb to be included in the Bulletin about your child, which can contain anything you might find informative; sports, hobbies, interests, or Mitzvah Project information. Digital photos are preferred, but not mandatory. Black and white or colored photos are both acceptable. Families have the option of not having their child's photo sent to these publications and should indicate this on the form. The requested information and digital image of the Bar/bat Mitzvah can be sent electronically to [debbieschaffer18@gmail.com](mailto:debbieschaffer18@gmail.com).

Finally, families will receive an invitation to attend a B'nai Mitzvah Orientation, which will be held once each fall. This workshop will focus on answering parents' and students' questions and concerns. Parents will be

meeting with Rabbi Shpeen and the Cantor will meet with the students to learn about the process of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, including how to help their child with their D'var Torah (interpretive message) as well as the challenges in preparing for this lifecycle event. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR ALL FAMILIES TO ATTEND THIS ORIENTATION! Each child has his/her/their own concerns/questions and the workshop offers children as well as parents the opportunity to have their questions answered and to be informed of up-to-date procedures related to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

***APPROXIMATELY 6-8 WEEKS PRIOR TO YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH DATE:***

Approximately **6-8 weeks before the event**, parents will receive a letter from Rabbi Shpeen requesting that an appointment be set up to meet with Rabbi Shpeen to go over the process of developing a D'var Torah, as well as go over details of the service. This is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the Torah portion and, as a family, to study with our Rabbi. It is important that all parents attend this meeting, along with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student, and that the student bring all of his/her/their materials.

***THE WEEK OF THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH...***

During the week of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the Cantor will schedule rehearsal(s) in the Sanctuary or Chapel (depending on where the service will be held) with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah so that everyone is prepared for the service on Saturday morning.

***THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW:***

- During the entire process we STRONGLY ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO ATTEND SERVICES REGULARLY (please see attached Attendance Policy); Saturday morning B'nai Mitzvah services as well as Friday night services. The schedule of services is published each month in the bulletin and is listed on the CBE website. We especially encourage those newer members of our congregation to attend, so that they may familiarize themselves with our liturgy and ritual practice.

- Please be aware that while Bar and Bat Mitzvah is a very important event in the life of your child and family, it is essentially an affirmation of the student's ability to participate in worship as an adult member of the community. However, it does not indicate in any way graduation from Religious School. We hold strong expectations that our students will continue their studies through Confirmation, so that they may begin to learn about our faith on a more mature level.
- **FRIDAY SHABBAT SERVICES:**  
Friday evening services are typically held at 5:30 pm. From time to time there are holidays or special events that might change the time services are held. Please check the website calendar, which posts the exact times for each Shabbat Service a year in advance. You may wish to sponsor an Oneg Shabbat (light refreshment after Friday evening service) in honor of your child, and may do so by contacting Kathy Golderman. Your sponsorship will be included in the service announcements.
- **LIVE STREAMING OF SERVICES ON OUR WEB-SITE:**  
Our Friday evening and Saturday morning services are live-streamed on our web-site. This is most beneficial for family and friends who are unable to attend services. Just go to [www.BethEmethAlbany.org](http://www.BethEmethAlbany.org) and click on "**Live Stream.**" Our services are also archived. Should you wish to underwrite the web-streaming of your child's service, please contact Kathy Golderman. Your sponsorship will be included in the service announcements as well as posted on the web site.
- **BIMA FLOWERS:**  
Each family is invited to contribute toward the floral arrangements on our Bima and in the Chapel for the Shabbat of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. You will be notified by the Temple several months prior to the occasion as how to make this contribution.

- **HAND OUTS:**

So as to maintain the proper decorum of our service, no programs, booklets or handouts are permitted to be distributed at services. Should you wish to provide your guests with any reading materials, we encourage you to include them with your invitation.

- **PHOTOS AND VIDEO:**

Still photos may be taken prior to services. During services photos are allowed only from a designated position outside of the Sanctuary through the glass windows of the rear doors.

If a family wishes to take photos in advance of the service, they may do so but won't have access to the Torah scrolls.

We provide a zip drive copy of the video from the Saturday morning Service. Your copy will be available on the Monday following the Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the Temple Office. No other videography or audio recording of the service are necessary as it is also archived on our web site.

- **KIPPOT:**

Kippot are not required at Beth Emeth. For those members and guests who choose to wear them, we provide standard black kippot as is our custom, or you may provide your own. Please note that non-Jewish ornaments may not decorate your kippot.

- **KIDDUSH: *not applicable during COVID restrictions***

There is always a Kiddush following Saturday services. After Shabbat Services, working in conjunction with our Executive Director, three options are available:

- 1) **Simple Kiddush** – Beth Emeth provides juice and cookies for up to 50 people. If you would like cookies for more than 50 people, please notify the Executive Director and there will be a small, additional per person charge.

- 2) **Extended Kiddush** – if you prefer a more elaborate Kiddush you can either have it catered or can arrange for Beth Emeth to provide this at an additional cost. Please arrange this with our Executive Director.

3) **Kiddush Luncheon** – This is a catered sit down luncheon arranged entirely by the family.

Please contact Beth Emeth's Executive Director, Kathy Golderman, at (518) 436-9761 ext. 225 for information about scheduling the Kiddush.

- **RECEPTIONS:**

Bar/Bat Mitzvah families have priority for use of Beth Emeth space as long as they make their reservation within 90 DAYS of receipt of this packet. Reservations are made by sending the Executive Director a deposit along with the completed Facility Reservation Form (see side pocket of this manual). After 90 days, the space will become available for other temple activities which may preclude Bar/Bat Mitzvah family use of Beth Emeth space. If you have any questions, please contact Kathy Golderman at (518) 436-9761 ext. 225.

- **PROPER ATTIRE:**

In order to recognize the sanctity of the worship space, and to show proper respect for our service, the Ritual Committee has issued guidelines for those congregants, adults and children, who participate in a Bar or Bat Mitzvah (and on the bima).

1. No jeans permitted.
2. Skirts or dress pants preferred.
3. Collared shirts preferred.
4. No bare shoulders regardless of the season and weather.

**In addition, as it is the minhag (custom) of Beth Emeth that those who lead our worship service wear a kippah and tallit, it will be expected that our Bar/Bat Mitzvah students will do the same when leading our Shabbat morning service.** We can provide these for you or you can use this opportunity to attain these for your child or to possibly use a kippah/tallit from a family member to honor this occasion. If you have any questions about this, please contact Rabbi Shpeen.

## **SUMMARY**

Our policies, rules and fee structure are necessary to provide a standardized and equitable structure for these very special life cycle events. Despite the need for such structure, we are always available to work with you when hardship or special circumstances arise.

### **HELPING NON-JEWISH GUESTS TO FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE AT YOUR FAMILY'S BAR/BAT MITZVAH**

- Talk to your guests in advance about the importance of the Bat/Bar Mitzvah as a Jewish Life Cycle event.
- Have the Bar/Bar Mitzvah child write the guests a letter about how much the Bar/Bat Mitzvah means to them and how much the presence of non-Jewish family members will mean to them.
- Invite the non-Jewish guests or family members to visit the synagogue for services with you at a time prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- Beth Emeth wants non-Jewish spouses to feel as comfortable as possible during the service. In discussions with the Rabbi and Cantor about the service, be sure to ask for ways the non-Jewish spouse can be involved.
- Provide explanations of the service to non-Jewish guests. Many families have found it most useful to mail these in advance of the service. For an example of this document, refer to Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah, by Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin, pages 165-167.
- The reception candle-lighting custom is another opportunity that families can use to involve non-Jewish family members in the experience.
- Be sure to give the non-Jewish guests special thanks for their support and for being part of this important milestone for your family!

**AS YOU PLAN, USE THE TIPS THAT WORK BEST FOR YOUR FAMILY.**

**MAZEL TOV – AND ENJOY!**

## **A HISTORY OF THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH CEREMONIES**

*Compiled by Bert Wagner*

All societies determine a specific age that separates childhood from adulthood - the age when an individual assumes his or her religious and communal responsibilities to the society in which he or she lives. Like most traditions, the ceremonies connected with becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at age thirteen evolved over time. It has always been viewed as one moment in the process of spiritual growth and commitment to the Jewish people.

The establishment of becoming a Bar Mitzvah at thirteen years plus one day for boys and a Bat Mitzvah at twelve years plus one day for girls has several origins. The Talmud records that during the time of the Second Temple (520 B.C.E. - 70 C.E.), it was traditional for Sages to bless a child who had completed his first fast day at the age of twelve or thirteen. In *Pirket Avot* ("Ethics of the Fathers," second century C.E.) it is written, "At thirteen one is ready to do mitzvot." By the time the Talmud was completed in the sixth century C.E., boys of thirteen years plus one day had assumed full responsibility for performing the mitzvot, hence the term Bar Mitzvah, "son of the commandment." This also had legal ramifications. These boys were now counted in a *minyan* and could act as witnesses. There was no formal rite, only a public blessing by the father that he was no longer responsible for the sins of his son.

The earliest Bar mitzvah ceremony consisted of blessing and reading the last section of the weekly portion of the Torah, the *maftir*, meaning the extra reading, since the boy was not a Bar Mitzvah until after the service. He also read the haftarah portion. 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 his responsibilities to his family and, more importantly, to the community. Structurally, the Bar Mitzvah ceremony is essentially the same as it originally was. It wasn't until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that we find records of a Bar Mitzvah being invited to lead part of the worship service.

A public ceremony in celebration of a girl becoming a Bat Mitzvah, "daughter of the commandment", did not come into formal being in North America



until 1922, when 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 *B'not Mitzvah* came into prominence in Reform congregations particularly in the second half of the 20th century. These ceremonies are generally identical in form to the celebration of a Bar Mitzvah.

It should be noted that the rite of Confirmation originated in the Reform Movement in Germany in 1810 and included girls in 1817. Since it was felt that a thirteen-year-old was too young to understand the precepts of Judaism, the celebration of a boy becoming a Bar Mitzvah was dropped in favor of Confirmation, which was held at age sixteen or seventeen because that was deemed a more mature age to assume the responsibilities of Judaism. Today, most congregations hold both ceremonies.

Historically, all joyous occasions were celebrated in some manner, and becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah was no exception. However, unlike weddings at which we are commanded to rejoice with bride and groom, the Bar Mitzvah has no such mandate. In early years the celebrations varied from a simple Kiddush of wine, brandy, and cake following the service to more elaborate meals for the family and friends. The rabbi urged families not to have elaborate celebrations and always to provide for the poor in order to fulfill the mitzvah. The *d'var Torah* was delivered by the Bar Mitzvah some time during the celebration in order to emphasize its religious aspects. Gifts were generally limited to books, religious items, or "sermon gifts," which were small amounts of money given as thanks for the sermonette. Among Moroccan Jews, this money was given to the boy's teacher.

Historically, Bar/Bat Mitzvah has been viewed as a first step in a young person's acceptance of the obligations to family and community as a responsible Jew. It was and should continue to be the beginning of a lifetime of the performance of mitzvot, study, prayer, and a commitment to share the destiny of the Jewish people.

## KEEPING BAR AND BAT MITZVAH IN PERSPECTIVE

(Adapted from the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Handbook: A Manual for Parent and Student, Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ)

- **Bar/Bat Mitzvah is about the Acceptance of Responsibility.** In the final analysis, this is the bottom line of becoming a Bar and Bat Mitzvah. It's not about acquiring the skill of k'riah, - "the reading of the Torah." Rather, it's about acquiring skill or responding to a challenge; a mitzvah. This is how Judaism defines maturity.
- **The Torah is the Center of Judaism.** Everything we do as Jews, everything we believe, everything we value revolves around the Torah. The Torah is the testimony of our people's encounter with God. And however you interpret these events in the wilderness of Sinai some three millennia ago, what cannot be dismissed is the sacredness with which our ancestors have embraced this legacy. This is why the first mitzvah we expect our children to fulfill is to stand before the Torah.
- **Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a Community Observance.** It is not by coincidence that we choose to hold this initiation ceremony in public. To be a Jew means to live within a covenantal relationship - not only with God but with other Jews as well. Bar/Bat Mitzvah marks the entry of the child as a full-fledged member of the community. For this reason, the marking of the child's coming of age takes place in the synagogue - the communal home.
- **The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony Is Not a Performance: It's Leading the Congregation in Worship.** The synagogue is not a theater, and the *bimah* is not a stage, and the congregation is not an audience.
- **Try to Think of the Reception That Follows Not As a Separate Event but As a Continuation of the Celebration.** In fact, Judaism has a formal name for the meal after a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It is a *s'udat mitzvah*. This meal is in honor of the performance of a mitzvah. It, too, is a sacred gathering. This is not to say that it must be solemn; it is to say, however, that the spirit of the morning's celebration should be perpetuated through the performance of mitzvot. The recitation of

the blessings and the setting aside of a portion of one's bounty for the poor demonstrate that the morning's celebration was not an isolated event but a standard from which to follow.

- **The Meaning of Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is Enhanced if it Takes Place within a Context of Continued Jewish Growth.** Being a Bat or Bar Mitzvah is not the experience of a lifetime. It is a lifetime experience - a state of being that remains with us throughout our lives. Indeed, the true measure of the experience comes not on the day one becomes a Bat or Bar Mitzvah but in the days that follow. In other words, becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah should be thought of as a Jewish "commencement", marking not an end point but a beginning - a beginning of a lifetime of mitzvot and a beginning of a lifetime of learning. As such, it is our firm belief that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration is enhanced by a commitment to continue religious education to Confirmation and participation in our Temple Youth Group.

## **THE MITZVAH PROJECT: WAYS TO ENRICH THE MITZVAH**

*Tzedakah* is an obligation in Judaism: It involves giving of our time and/or money to others. Here is a list of things to do and organizations that your family might consider. If you don't know about these organizations, check them out. It's good to learn about the ways in which people are doing *tikun olam*, "repairing the world".

Obviously, this is not a complete list. You can find your own favorite way or favorite organization to which you may contribute. The most important thing is that you work or give, not how much. Giving is one of the ways in which you can show that you are taking on adult Jewish responsibilities.

### **GIVE OF YOUR TIME:**

- Volunteer to work in the temple and/or the Religious School beyond that of being a teen aide in the Religious School.
- Become active in the Temple Youth Group's social action projects.
- Visit the elderly - a neighbor in need, or a nursing home.
- Work on an ecology project.
- Work in a soup kitchen.
- Collect old but usable clothes, toys, CDs, DVDs, etc., to give to the needy and the homeless.
- Work on projects during Mitzvah Day at the temple.
- Participate in a walk-a-thon for some cause.
- Work on a project for Habitat for Humanity.

### **GIVE OF YOUR MONEY:**

Help the hungry, the poor and the homeless.

- Mazon - The Jewish Response to Hunger (U.S. or Canada): Donate 3% of the cost of the celebration or a part of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah gifts. [www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)
- United Jewish Communities (formerly UJA and Federation): Supports many Jewish organizations in Israel, the U.S., Canada and around the world. [www.ujc.org](http://www.ujc.org)
- The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) [www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org)
- The American Jewish World Service [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)
- Habitat for Humanity [www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org)
- A local soup kitchen [www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)

- A local organization for the homeless and the poor
  - [www.iphny.org](http://www.iphny.org)
  - <https://caresny.org>
  - <http://hata.org/>
  - [www.shelterlist.com/city/ny-albany](http://www.shelterlist.com/city/ny-albany)

#### **HELP SUPPORT MEDICAL RESEARCH & MEDICAL SUPPORT GROUPS:**

- Local hospitals or nationally recognized specialty hospitals.
- Specific disease groups: Cancer Care, The Kidney Foundation, AIDS, MS, Heart, etc.
- Hadassah [www.hadassah.org](http://www.hadassah.org)
- Ronald McDonald House <https://rmhcofbany.org/>

#### **HELP OTHER SUPPORT GROUPS:**

- For abused children and adults [www.equinoxinc.org/page/youth-services-38.html](http://www.equinoxinc.org/page/youth-services-38.html)
- P-FLAG: Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)
- JACS, AA, and other organizations dealing with substance abuse
- The Jewish Guild for the Blind [www.jgb.org](http://www.jgb.org)
- Israel Guide Dog Center for the Blind <https://israelguidedog.org/your-mitzvah-project/>

#### **HELP JEWISH CAUSES:**

- The Fund for Reform Judaism [www.urj.org](http://www.urj.org)
- ARZA/WORLD UNION, North America [www.arza.org](http://www.arza.org)
- WUPJ: World Union for Progressive Judaism [www.wupj.org](http://www.wupj.org)
- Jewish National Fund (trees in Israel) [www.jnf.org](http://www.jnf.org)
- Israel Gives (donate online to 30,000 Israeli non-profit organizations) [www.israelgives.org](http://www.israelgives.org)

#### **HELP THE SYNAGOGUE:**

- Give to any of the *tzedakah* funds
- Volunteer in the Office
- Volunteer in the Garden
- Become one of our *Madrahcim* (teen aide) in the Beth Emeth Religious School

Please Note: We do not post ads or flyers for Mitzvah Projects in our Bulletin or on the Beth Emeth web site

## **SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH RECEPTION**

(From the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Handbook: A Manual for Parent and Student, Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ)

The religious part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony occurs in the sanctuary. Choosing to focus on Jewish values during your later celebration will continue to sanctify the day and make it special and memorable. Remember, everything we do with our children teaches them something.

Decide as a family what you are celebrating and what this moment in your life means. This decision will help guide you through the rest of the planning stages. You may find the book, Putting God on the Guest List, by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (Jewish Lights Publishing) to be quite helpful. You can order a copy through our Religious School or find one in our Religious School's library.

### **CONSIDER JEWISH VALUES IN YOUR DECISION MAKING:**

- G'milut Chasadim - Acts of Loving Kindness
- Tzedakah - Righteousness/Justice/Sacred Giving
- Talmud Torah - Study of the Torah
- Hidur P'nei Zakein - Honoring the Elderly
- Shabbat - Honoring Shabbat
- Tzar Ba'alei Chayim - Non-Cruelty to Animals
- Tikkun Hanefesh - Repairing the Soul
- Tikkun Olam - Repairing the World

### **THEME:**

Having a theme for your celebration might help you organize your vision for the day as well as serve as an educational tool for your family and friends. The challenge is to find an appropriate, relevant idea that reflects the Jewish values important to you. You might want to focus on a value or mitzvah addressed in your Torah portion. For example:

- ***B'reshit***, the first portion of Genesis is about Creation. Use the theme of tikkun olam, "repairing the world", and incorporate an environmental project into your celebration. Or consider creating or beginning something that will benefit the world in some way. One idea is to establish a food reclamation program in your school that calls

upon kids to donate the uneaten, wrapped portions of their lunches (eg., unopened juice boxes, packaged snacks), which you will take to the local food pantry on a weekly basis.

- The Torah portion, **Noach** lends itself to the theme of showing kindness to animals. You can find out about species that are becoming extinct, get information about what we can do to help, and distribute it to your guests. You can ask guests to bring old towels, leashes, food, etc., for an animal shelter and then set a time when everyone can go there to help out. This theme is an easy one to feature throughout your entire celebration.
- There is a portion in Genesis called **Toldot**, which means "Generations," You might use this occasion to learn about the generations in your family. Make a family tree and use it as table centerpieces. Contribute to organizations that focus on intergenerational activities.
- In the portion, **Vayeishev**, Joseph interprets dreams. Use the theme of dreams throughout your celebration. Contribute to organizations that make dreams come true for those in need, such as the Make a Wish Foundation or Myriam's Dream. Purchase kippot made by the elderly in workshops supported by Myriam's Dream, a nonprofit organization that helps older people throughout the world.
- The first portion of the Book of Exodus is called **Sh'mot**, meaning "Names." Be creative. Consider the following: In what ways are name important? What does your name mean? What about other names? What is the meaning of your Jewish name? For whom are you named? Contribute to an organization that helps newborn babies - those who are first being named. Contribute to one of the Holocaust museums or organizations - places that keep alive the names of those who were lost but are not forgotten.
- Your Torah portion might speak about blessings. You may decide to think about the blessings you have in your life and try to ensure that others who are less fortunate are blessed in similar ways. For example, food is a blessing.

**TZEDAKAH:**

- The invitation sets the tone for the celebration and can let your guests know what is important to you. In lieu of sending an expensive invitation, utilize your desktop publishing skills and make your own. Note on the back of the card that the simplicity of the invitation represents a donation to a tzedakah organization that you chose. The thank-you note can also be produced in this way.
- Donate 3% of the total cost of food to Mazon, an organization that helps feed hungry people nationwide. If you contact them ahead of time, they will send you cards to put on your tables, indicating that you have made a contribution.
- In honor of each of your guests, give donations that can make a difference in the lives of others, not party favors that will cost you the same amount and end up in the trash. For example, you can purchase a tree in Israel for each guest.
- Check to see if leftover food can be donated to a soup kitchen. If you are somewhat insistent, many restaurants and caterers will help with this.
- Make either a financial donation to purchase something specific for the temple, religious school, or temple library in honor of your becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

**ENTERTAINMENT:**

- Include Israeli dancing, not just the hora. Perhaps, think about hiring someone to lead and teach Israeli dancing. Consider featuring klezmer music as part of the party entertainment or have a Jewish storyteller perform.
- It is possible to do a mitzvah project in place of or in addition to some form of entertainment. Why not rent a local school gym and sponsor a mitzvah basketball game? Ask friends to support one of the teams and pledge any amount of money for each point scored. Cook for the soup kitchen with your friends.
- Don't be afraid to be different!



**CANDLELIGHTING:**

If you choose to include a candle lighting ceremony as part of your reception, try to make it meaningful and Jewish. If your theme is Jewish heroes/heroines, ask each candle lighter to think of a specific characteristic of a great Jewish hero/heroine who they would like you to aspire to as you grow up. Or if your theme is dreams, ask each candle lighter to think of a dream that he or she hopes the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child will fulfill. Requesting your family and friends to prepare for this honor ahead of time includes them in the celebration in a meaningful way. Their words for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah may become one of the most treasured aspects of the celebration.

**CENTERPIECES:**

Choose something simple. Cut flowers can be beautiful and elegant on any table and can be donated to a local nursing home after the party. If you want, choose something that goes with your theme, if you have one. For example, if your theme is Famous Jewish Sports Figures and you decide to use sports equipment as part of your centerpiece, research which organizations can use that sports equipment and donate the centerpiece items to them after the party. Put a card on the table to let your guests know that even the sports equipment is going to be used in a Jewishly meaningful way. Make your own centerpieces. Do you dry flowers? Are you handy with woodworking? Incorporate something personal into your decorations. Can you make a centerpiece out of something that can be donated after the party to people in need?

**KEEP IT JEWISH:**

Consider ending an afternoon celebration with *Havdalah* (ceremony that ends Shabbat; separating the special (Shabbat) from the ordinary), or begin your evening celebration with *Havdalah*. Ask any of the clergy for help with this if you are interested.

### **CELEBRATION VARIATIONS:**

It is most common to have a celebration of some kind at a catering hall or restaurant directly after services. Other models that you might consider:

- Using the temple social hall for a luncheon for guests.
- Having a luncheon at home.
- Providing a luncheon for adult guests immediately after services and then have a more informal party for the children later that evening or the next day.
- Inviting everyone to a mystery location and then involving them in a mitzvah project.
- Taking a family trip to Israel.
- Taking a family trip to the town in Europe (or any place in the world) from which your ancestors came and explore your Jewish roots together, OR
- Any combination of the above!

### **CLOSING THOUGHTS:**

Everything you do to make your Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration personal, filled with your values, will enhance the experience for all. Every celebration need not look as if it's been shaped by the same cookie cutter. Have your celebration reflect who you are and what you believe as an individual and as a family. Make Jewish choices, and don't be afraid to be different. It's worth it! The memories of how you worked together and your incredibly meaningful celebration will last a lifetime. **Put God on the guest list for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah!**

