

Dear B'nai Mitzvah Families-

Not so long ago, I stood under the chuppah with many of your students who started Temple school with me in Kindergarten, singing the Shema at Consecration. It is hard to believe that they are now preparing for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. We are here for you every step of the way and please feel free to reach out with an email, text, or call as you navigate this journey of planning a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. We are so proud of your child and excited for your families.

Blessings,

Sarah Clarkson

sclarkson@tbeptos.org

831-332-5491

Dear B'nai Mitzvah Families-

Oy! You are having your b'nai mitzvah during a pandemic. In spite of this, we believe that this will be one of the most meaningful days of your lives. We are here to support you and shower you with love. We wish that you could have all of your family and friends present, and regret that your in person guest list will be limited and your party can't be what we all expected before this happened. Hopefully, this will change as people are vaccinated. In any case, I look forward to forging the deep connection with your teens that I feel when I work with b'nai mitzvah, and I hope this will turn out to be one of the best days of your life.

Blessings,

Rabbi Shifra

swp@tbeptos.org

(831)479-3444 ext.208 (TBE phone)

(831)346-9426 (my personal cell phone for urgent calls and texts – please don't call on shabbat)

Dear B'nai Mitzvah Families-

I feel so blessed to be part of the process of preparing our students to become B'nai Mitzvah. Some of you I have been blessed to know for many years, and others I am very excited about getting to know. This has been such an unusual time, and I have great respect for your commitment to be engaged in this process. We know that the Jewish people have learned about resiliency and we are modeling this strength in pursuing this important rite of passage. I have so much gratitude to all of you for joining together in this journey and I want to be purposeful in thanking those of you who did not grow up as part of a Jewish community. I assure you that we are here to answer questions and encourage your curiosity. Temple Beth El is a big tent, you are welcome here.

Rabbi Paula

pmarcus@tbeptos.org

831-479-3444 ext 207

Who do I contact for...

- Logistics- Melissa Sunberg msunberg@tbeptos.org
- Content of the service and questions related to Jewish practices- Clergy
- Date changes- Sarah Clarkson
- Extra tutoring/learning issues- Rabbi Shifra

I. Its Not Just About One Day

By the age of 13, all Jews are “children of the commandments”, meaning that they have become responsible Jews, obligated by Jewish law to follow the commandments and take their turn serving in the role of leader in their Jewish community. In preparation for this life-cycle celebration, students are supported in the development of leadership skills and intellectual achievement. This is a time of dramatic growth and development, a rite of passage. We celebrate the transition from childhood to adulthood.

II. What’s It Mean?

Bar is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew word *ben* meaning “son.” **Bat** is both Hebrew and Aramaic for “daughter.” The plural is *b’nai*. That is why when we talk about twins or the class as a whole we call the occasion **b’nai mitzvah**. More recently, *B’nai Mitzvah* is sometimes used as a singular gender non-specific form, like “they,” and sometimes people say *B’mitzvah* as a gender non-specific form.

The word **mitzvah** means commandment, good deed, or responsibility. The plural of mitzvah is **mitzvot**. When a child becomes an adult, they are required by Jewish Law to fulfill the mitzvot. Leading the congregation in the blessing over the Torah is the specific *mitzvah*, which when fulfilled, marks the moment of leadership when teens become **b’nai mitzvah**.

When you make a compound word in Hebrew by putting two nouns together, the second one always remains singular. Thus, the plural of bar mitzvah is *b’nai mitzvah* (not b’nai mitzvot.)

Bar mitzvah, *bat mitzvah* and *b’nai mitzvah* all refer to people who are becoming responsible for performing mitzvot.

. The 6 Expected Accomplishments

Each student is expected to:

- Lead basic Shabbat **prayers and blessings** (checklist, text and audio are on our website www.tbeaptos.org go to the “Learn” scroll bar at the top of our website)
- Chant *Aliyot* from the **Torah** Scroll.
- Chant part or all of the **Haftarah** portion from the prophets.
- Perform **13 hours of community service** in a *Mitzvah* project. This can be described as a short-term volunteer commitment to any social service, such as cooking for the Mazon Project. Any project that enhances the lives of others or protects or preserves the environment is appropriate. In general, giving one’s self in community service is preferred. However, some students have chosen to fulfill their *mitzvah* project by raising *tzedekah* funds. For instance one student painted greeting cards and sold them, donating the proceeds to wildlife preservation.
- Deliver a **speech** interpreting the Torah portion from their personal point of view (known in Hebrew as a *D’var Torah*) that they will create with Rabbi Shifra’s help. You can get started in advance by reading a translation or summary of your Torah portion and writing a paragraph about what it is about.
- Participate in at least **13 Shabbat services**. You will receive a list of all of the dates for the b’nai mitzvah class at the retreat. Please note those dates on your calendar so that you will be able to watch classmate’s celebrations. You should also attend some Friday night services or services at other congregations. In addition to watching, you are expected to sing along and are encouraged to find opportunities to practice leading.

Timeline

18 Months Prior to Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*:

- By the spring of 5th grade, you will receive a date assignment form to return to us. (See “*Choosing a Date*”) Please sign and send back your “Date Assignment Form” to Melissa Sunberg.
- Begin learning Prayers and Blessings and reviewing Hebrew Reading. Every student needs to know all of the Prayers and Blessings 6 months prior to their B’nai mitzvah date. A Prayers and Blessings checklist and texts and recordings of these Prayers and Blessings are located on tbeaptos.org under LEARN. In addition, every student attends the Summer Prayers and Blessings class on Wednesday evenings from 7 to 8:15PM during the summer between 6th and 7th grade, unless they choose to become exempt by testing out of the class. Parents may be asked to hire an additional tutor for students who are unable to read Hebrew or do not know their prayers and blessings.

12 Months Prior to Your *Bar/Bat*

- Attend at least 3 *Shabbat* Services and arrange to lead a prayer or blessing for at least one of them.
- Create a guest list. Currently our policy is that you may invite a **maximum of 100 people, including the b’nai mitzvah class.**
- Book Hotel Rooms if you will be having out-of-town guests (summer dates may fill up early.)

6 Months Prior to Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*:

- Schedule weekly tutoring with clergy and begin practicing every day.
- Start the *Mitzvah* Project.
- Please remember that all *B’nai Mitzvah* tutoring fees must be paid in full 90 days prior to your event.

10 weeks Prior to Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*:

- Schedule Parents' and student's meeting with Rabbi Shifra to begin writing the *D'var Torah* (which means *Torah* teaching or speech.)
- Meet with the Rabbi who is leading your service to review/customize the service. (See "*Customizing the Service*") (If you have a preference of which Rabbi you would like to lead your service please let us know and we will try to accommodate you.)
- Call Melissa Sunberg at TBE to review plans (479-3444).** Submit photo and short statement of student's interests for publication in *Shofar* to Melissa Sunberg
THE SHOFAR: Bio Blurb

The Temple community looks forward to reading about your family's *simcha* (celebration) in *The Shofar*. Please send Melissa Sunberg a few lines about your child that will appear in the newsletter. We are now publishing the Shofar 4 times a year, at the end of the summer, late fall, late winter/early spring and late spring/early summer. We will include the information about your child in the next Shofar that comes out after we receive it. It may be after the event.

The blurb can include parents' or siblings' names, school and grade, interests, hobbies or his or her *Mitzvah* Project.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Text Examples:

KYRA KATE PHELAN, daughter of Shana and Peter Phelan, will be called to the Torah on November 4th. Kyra is an eighth grader at New Brighton Middle School. She enjoys racing sailboats, softball, running, skiing, swimming, traveling and reading. For her mitzvah project, she hopes to educate people on the effects of using plastics and how it ends up in our oceans. She is working with Sailors for the Sea and Save our Shores.

(74 words)

GABRIEL ORANGE will become a Bar Mitzvah on December 16. Bright, cheerful and engaging, Gabriel loves fishing, rock climbing, outdoor adventures, is an accomplished trumpeter, is learning the ukulele and is a member of the Junior Rock Shabbat Band. He loves role-playing games, board games, brain puzzles, and is the founder of his school's D&D Club. He loves computer programming, disassembling and rebuilding. Gabriel has a passion for learning and enjoys sharing his knowledge with others, especially science.

(78 words)

ARYEH KOONTZ is a seventh-grade honor roll student at New Brighton Middle School. He enjoys video games, biking, wrestling for the school team, and reading about history and politics. Aryeh will become a Bar Mitzvah on January 20th. His mitzvah project has been cooking and delivering Sunday meals to the Homeless Shelter downtown, a mitzvah

that's likely to become a family tradition. Aryeh has two brothers and a dog. (70 words)

- Begin thinking about Jewish family members and friends who would like to say an *Aliyah*. Collect their Hebrew names including their parent's Hebrew names (Aryeh ben Moshe v'Sarah). If they don't have Hebrew names, please include their first name and their parent's first names. Non-Jewish family members may come up for an *Aliyah* with other Jewish family members, or they may be given other honors. The bar/bat mitzvah will recite the Torah Blessings for their last *Aliyah*. It is our usual custom that parents recite the 2nd to last blessing. For each *aliyah* except the last two, you will choose individuals and friends to receive this honor. If, for example your child is reciting five *aliyot*, then you will choose three individuals or groups to come up for *aliyot*.
- Select a Hebrew or *Yiddish* name if the student or family member does not already have one.
- Order *tallit and kippah* for the student and/or guests (from gift shop).
- Send invitations. Don't forget to invite the b'nai mitzvah class.
- Confirm time of Friday night service. Parents practice the candle lighting blessing and student practices the Kiddush.**
- Schedule Student to lead one or two prayers at a *Shabbat* Service.

4 Weeks Prior to Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*:

- Make arrangements with rabbi for a final rehearsal, usually the Thursday before the big day. Parents and anyone involved in the service should be present. We suggest that the rehearsal be in the morning, rather than after school, when students are often tired.

2 Weeks Prior to Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*:

- Submit or email to your assigned Rabbi a typed list of Hebrew names of those doing *Aliyot* (**Please do not turn in Late!**)
- Call Melissa Sunberg to finalize set-up. Confirm number of attendants and zoom/live streaming link with Melissa.
- Send link to everyone invited to watch. You may invite them to Friday night as well.

Rehearsal, Friday night, and Day of Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*:

To Bring to the Rehearsal

- The student's copy of their Prayer Book
 - The student's *D'var Torah* speech printed in large font with page numbers on each page
 - Haftarah*
 - The student's *tallit* and *kippah*
 - If you haven't already provided the rabbi with a list of the properly spelled *Aliyot* blessers (include pronunciation if difficult) along with the Hebrew names of those who have Hebrew names, be sure to bring this to the rehearsal and also e-mail a copy to the rabbi.
- Meet briefly with Melissa Sunberg to discuss last-minute questions or changes. Confirm the time of the Friday night service and make sure you have the zoom link for Friday night.

To Bring on *Shabbat* morning:

- The student's copy of their Prayer Book
- Water bottle
- The student's *D'var Torah* speech
- The student's *Haftarah*
- Tallit and kippah

Starting about one year before their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, students should practice every day for 10 minutes. From 6 months prior, students should practice at least 20 minutes per day. For maximum benefit, students should study twice daily. If the study goals become a struggle, please talk to Rabbi Shifra, who has lots of ideas and experience, and will help you.

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook re Covid

Covid restrictions

TBE will strictly follow all guidelines outlined by the state of California. In general, the service and any celebration at TBE will be outdoors unless it is raining or a family requests an exception to have services inside. There will be very strict limits on the number of people can attend b'nai mitzvah in person. Currently, the limit for outdoor services is 125 guests. Everyone must wear a mask and remain 3 feet apart from anyone not in their pod.

In light of the anticipated availability of vaccinations for children being widely available this spring we are modifying our current practices so that if you choose to be inside or it is raining, we are requesting that:

- Attendance be limited to 100
- Everyone must be vaccinated
- Everyone will continue to wear masks inside and outside
- Meals will be served outside on the social hall patio
- Family should notify attendees at higher risk of the steps we are taking, which does not provide an absolute guarantee
- People who are not vaccinated may not attend indoor activities. Instead, they may sit outside if they have a negative covid test within 72 hours. We will provide seating and heating if needed.
- Proof of vaccination will be required.

As this situation is evolving with the availability of new vaccine guidelines as well as worrisome new variants, these restrictions are subject to change. Please check with Melissa about these guidelines when you meet with her before your event.

1. Dates

Although no one expects things to return to “normal” right away, with the vaccine rollout, things are changing quickly. Should you choose to postpone your date so that someone who is being vaccinated can attend in person or with the hope that some of the restrictions will be lifted, Sarah will work with you to accommodate your change of date.

2. Parents’ Blessing

Parents will be invited to bless their child after they complete reading from the *Torah* & *Haftarah* and giving their *D’var Torah*. This is an awesome moment, witnessed by your family & friends. It is a time to express prayers and wishes for them as they move into becoming a young adult in our community. We suggest the guideline of **about 3 minutes per parent**.

3. Wearing a Tallit

A Tallit is the fringed shawl that Jews wear during a Torah service. It is our tradition that at least one person for each *Aliyah* wear a *tallit*. There will be *tallitot* hanging on the rack near the entrance to the sanctuary. These are available to anyone who needs one. The bar/bat mitzvah child is usually presented with a gift of their very own Tallit at the beginning of the service by a family member. Many people choose to purchase theirs at the Sisterhood Gift Shop, which carries a wide variety of Tallitot.

4. Customizing the Service

We are happy to help you customize your service. We know that you may have unique ways to make it a meaningful and personal experience. To this end, there will be a special meeting with one of our Rabbis to customize the service and choose prayers and songs to be included in the ceremony. Both you and your student need to attend this important meeting.

Some of our members choose to hold their *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* at their homes. Families choosing this option are still required to observe all social distancing regulations. The Temple will provide the Torah and prayerbooks, and clergy will attend. Should you choose this option, you are responsible for any zoom technology.

5. CHAPERONES

We have found that having chaperons helps each family to have a joyful party, unmarred by inappropriate behavior. It is the chaperones' responsibility to be the eyes and ears of the community so that we can have continuity as we educate kids about what it means to be a good guest. Chaperones need to know where the kids are and what they are doing during the service, lunch, and party. No one is allowed on the Simcha playground or to wander around the building or grounds unsupervised. Students should not climb trees or pick plants. A general rule of thumb is to only use things for the purpose for which they were put there. Please gently remind kids of what is expected of them and what is appropriate in this social setting. Chaperones should exercise their authority in a kind but clear way. Please report all incidents large or small to Rabbi Shifra so that she can become aware of and address any ongoing issues. You may also call their parent/parents and ask them to pick up their student and take them home from the party if you feel that they are having a negative impact on the celebration. We also ask our parents not to drink alcohol at the parties for which they are chaperones.

AT THE SERVICE AND LUNCH

Chaperones should sit with or behind the 7th graders at the service and remind them of appropriate behavior when necessary. Chaperones should intervene if groups of kids attempt to leave together during the service. Although it is fine for a kid to use the bathroom, that should not be a group activity. Chaperones please ask any of the parents from the 7th grade class who are there if they would help place the books on the carts. For the duration of the lunch it is important that chaperones know where the kids are and what they are doing. Please eat lunch but please remember that you have to keep your eyes on the kids the whole time. Kids should not be climbing the fence to get into the playground or wandering the halls, entering classrooms or the Litvak wing, running through the waterfall area, or going upstairs. Please stay until the last kid has gone home.

Please include feeding your chaperones in your meal planning.

Please contact your Chaperone Coordinator(s) at least one month in advance to coordinate people, location, dates and times. Remember to call the chaperones a couple days in advance to confirm their attendance.

A minimum of two Chaperones is necessary.