

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@tbeaptos.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@tbeaptos.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

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831-479-3444 ext 207

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. 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 tbeptos.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.

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 15 people or 6 pods** and no food may be served at the temple. Hopefully this will change as people are vaccinated.
- 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 weekly meetings with Cantor Alisa or Rabbi Paula to begin Haftarah.
- 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.)
- 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
- 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.
- 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

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

From one year to 6 months before their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, students should practice every day for 20 minutes. From 3 months prior, students should practice at least half an hour per day. For maximum benefit, students should study twice daily with each session equaling 1/2 the prescribed daily study time.

1. Covid restrictions revised May 10, 2021

TBE will continue to hold all services or gatherings outdoors. We will continue to limit the number of people who can attend b'nai mitzvah in person. Currently, the guideline is 30 guests, plus the b'nai mitzvah class who will automatically be invited unless an exception is requested. For a small fee of \$35 an hour to ensure that everyone wears a mask and remains 6 feet apart from anyone not in their pod, you may invite an additional 20 guests. Unfortunately, children will not be allowed on the playgrounds or to roam the campus, so please consider potential problems related to supervision of small children when inviting guests. Since all b'nai mitzvah will be outside, the family will decide together with the temple what to do if bad weather is expected.

You may now have an outdoor celebration at TBE following b'nai mitzvah ceremonies. Please arrange and discuss all specifics with Melissa Sunberg. This includes the use of the kitchen and service of food by an approved caterer such as Benjamin F., with the following restrictions.

1. Social distancing is still required. This means that people who are not vaccinated must be seated at tables with their own "pods" because they will have to remove their masks to eat. You are not required to invite the b'nai mitzvah class to lunch. However, if they are invited, those who are not vaccinated must maintain social distancing.
2. Alcohol is not permitted.
3. DJ/dancing style parties are unfortunately still not permitted until further notice, however, background music is permitted.
4. We know how the ritual of dancing the horah at b'nai mitzvah has become an important tradition. Four pod members can lift the child up on a chair while people clap, but please don't plan circle dancing holding hands.
5. If you would like to discuss your ideas or request permission for something that is important to you but currently not permitted, please contact Rabbi Shifra.
6. You are not required to invite the b'nai mitzvah class to lunch. However, if they are invited, those who are not vaccinated must maintain social distancing.
(added as of 5/10/21)

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.

