

## Outline of B'nai Mitzvah Honors At Congregation Har HaShem *Updated June 14, 2016*

You are approaching an amazing moment in your family's Jewish journey. As you make all of your preparations, we just want to remind you that we are a source of support for you along the way. We map everything out as best as we can to make the planning as clear as possible.

One of those things that we begin to share when you are just a couple of months away is the "honors" for the service. As Rabbi Greene moves into his second year, he has tried to assess, with lots of feedback, some of the ways we move our worship service and b'nai mitzvah experiences into the next stage of Har HaShem's own journey. This memo is designed to explain some of the changes that will be introduced into our Shabbat morning services.

We know that you might have questions. Please don't hesitate to ask them. You will have an opportunity to ask Rabbi Greene directly in the second meeting that he has with each of our b'nai mitzvah families.

You can contact us at:

Rabbi Greene	<a href="mailto:f.greene@harhashem.org">f.greene@harhashem.org</a>	303-499-7077 x40
Holli Berman	<a href="mailto:h.berman@harhashem.org">h.berman@harhashem.org</a>	303-499-7077 x17

Some of these changes are to expand our commitments to inclusion, while still respecting the integrity of our Tradition. Others relate to the flow of the service. And lastly, we are trying to create a new balance so that these services reflect the needs of the whole community. In the end, things haven't changed that much... but we do want you to be aware of this new direction.

Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrant may honor members of their family or friends by extending them an *aliyah* (the word is related to the idea of "to ascend") or an honor during the Saturday morning service. We will need this form completed with the names of those people given honors at least two weeks prior to your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. You will be asked to give the Hebrew name and the parents' names of those people chosen for *aliyot* to the Torah. The form will be on a Google Doc. For more information or assistance, please contact Mikaylah, the Assistant to the Clergy ([m.levenson@harhashem.org](mailto:m.levenson@harhashem.org)).

Families that are sharing a B'nai Mitzvah date will receive forms for Bimah Honors that have been specifically designed for more than one student and family. Both families have the same number of honors and are also required to give Hebrew names and the parents' Hebrew names of those people chosen for *aliyot*.

We understand that some families are larger than others, but please keep in mind that every family must follow the honors set forth on the honor sheet. It is our experience that most people don't *expect* an honor. We will always do what we can to be accommodating, but we are balancing the needs of our community along with those of our b'nai mitzvah families.

Be sure to provide your honorees with copies of the blessings for an *aliyah* (the Hebrew blessings with English transliterations) so that they can rehearse them. The Torah blessings, with transliteration, and a

sound file, will be sent to you via email. We will also be sending an instruction video on how to “raise” the Torah scroll, the honor called *hagbah*. Please distribute this information to the appropriate people who are fulfilling these honors.

If you have further questions about Honors, please call Rabbi Greene or Holli Berman to discuss them.

PLEASE DO NOT FEEL THE NEED TO FILL ALL THE EMPTY LINES AVAILABLE. They are there as options, not as necessities. Again, Rabbi Greene will be glad to guide you to fill them in properly and meaningfully.

### **The giving of the Tallit**

The tallit (in the Ashkenazi Jewish tradition, it is called a *tallis*) is worn during morning services. The fringes of the four corners of the tallit serve as a reminder to observe God’s *mitzvot*. In our congregation, Jews who are thirteen years old or older wear a tallit. With our commitment to egalitarianism, this is true for men and women. This custom’s origins are from the Book of Numbers 15: 37-41.

We ask that you follow the below guidelines.

- The presentation can be anyone you choose, typically parents or one set of grandparents.
- There can be a message. The message should be less than one minute.
- The message should be about what it means to receive a tallit – the significance we hope it brings.
- A sample blessing that you can feel free to use:
  - As you wrap yourself in the tallit, may you have many more opportunities to create your own sacred space as a holy person. May the fringes always remind you to perform the mitzvot of our Creator. May God continue to bless you as YOU are a blessing to us.

### **Aliyah to the Torah**

The word “aliyah” means to “go up.” It refers specifically to being called to the Torah to recite two blessings, one before and one after the chanting of the Torah. Because this blessing includes the words “*asher bachar banu/who has chosen us*,” Congregation Har HaShem calls only Jews over the age of 13 to recite or chant blessings over the Torah. If a parent is not Jewish wants to participate at this sacred moment, we have an English reading that respects the integrity of Jewish tradition, as well as the parent’s relationship to the Jewish community. This is the sample:

O God of all humanity:

We lift our voices in gratitude that the Torah has come into the world through the Jewish people.

We lift our voices in gratitude for the ideals it teaches: justice; compassion; devotion; the partnership of mind, heart, and deed.

We lift our voices in gratitude that our son/daughter today takes his/her place among the people of Israel.

We pray that he/she will do so with pride and joy. As You called Israel to be a light to the nations, so, too, we pray that our son/daughter will be his/her own ray of light to the world.

You will need to know the Hebrew name of each person called for this honor. Remember, Hebrew names represent two (2) generations and that in Reform Judaism we choose to mention both father and mother if we can. The word “ben” means “son of” and “bat” means “daughter of.”

PEOPLE WHO ARE CALLED FOR THIS BLESSING SHOULD PRACTICE! Being called for an *aliyah* is a very high honor; it also presupposes an ability to recite or chant credibly and respectfully. For the honor of the Torah and for the dignity of the person, please support the person so that s/he is prepared.

There are seven *aliyot*. Our form will clearly illustrate who can be asked to participate in each *aliyah*. Our tradition is to have the first *aliyah* be reserved for someone from our congregation. We are very committed to creating an environment where the celebration of b'nai mitzvah are part and parcel of our regular Shabbat experience and to include someone from the congregation – whether it is a teacher, *ma'amein*/mentor, or another congregant.

In the past, we have said that the *aliyah* before the bar/bat mitzvah student always needed to be the parent(s). While we think that parents have earned this honor(!), we are now making it optional. We know that families have their own dynamics and want to be more flexible in terms of who you honor.

### **Taking the Torah out of the Ark**

At Har HaShem, we have had two customs emerge over the years. The first is to have a line of Jewish parents and grandparents stand together where each is symbolically given the Torah and passes it on to the next until one parent passes the Torah to the bar/bat mitzvah student. In the past, this has only been an opportunity for people who were Jewish.

The other custom has been to make a semi-circle surrounding the student. This was a custom to enable families with non-Jewish relatives to participate.

Here is how we are moving forward.

We are going to “let go” of both of these customs. You might ask, why? Both can be compelling, for sure. However, in an environment where we have more and more families who are making Jewish choices, but not everyone is Jewish; or blended families where relationships are complicated; or where there aren't grandparents who are present or well enough to participate – for these reasons among others, we are going to move away from these practices. On a personal level, I am not comfortable having two different families sharing a *simchah* on a Shabbat morning to be “forced” to have two different practices (one family using the “line” and the other to use the “circle”) because someone is not Jewish. That does not synch with our commitments to inclusion.

What will happen?

Rabbi Greene will pass the Torah directly to the student. The parent(s) can stand with the child, if they choose to. The *hakafah* (procession around the sanctuary) will be led by our b'nai mitzvah students and the parents will be able to follow. We would be glad to have those who have opened the ark join you.

Again, we know that changes are hard. We have had countless hours of conversations about these modifications. They are all rooted in the desire to provide meaningful honors to friends and family of b'nai mitzvah students, to engage our congregation in meaningful Shabbat worship, to enable families

to expand the circle to include more people, and to maintain the integrity of our Shabbat morning *tefilah* practices (worship practices).

*Hagbah* and *Gelilah* (the raising of the scroll and the redressing of the scroll) remain honors. We are adding a spot for someone to sit with the scroll during the reading of the Haftarah (this did not exist before).

We will have spaces for people to open and close the ark and curtain when we take the Torah out of the ark and when we return it to the ark (this is new). For the honor of opening/closing the ark, opening/closing the ark curtain, undressing/redressing the Torah scroll – these are all opportunities that would be appropriate for someone who is not Jewish and/or for someone who is under the age of 13.

### **Guidelines for the Parental Prayer**

*Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Shimon said: A man is responsible for his son until the age of thirteen; thereafter he must say, "Blessed are You who has now freed me from the responsibility of the boy."*

--Midrash Genesis Rabbah 63:10

The tradition of the parent reciting a blessing upon a child's coming of age is quite ancient. The above text indicates that it was ritualized and probably performed on the occasion of the child's first *Aliyah*. And although it might seem a bit inappropriate to recite a prayer freeing yourself of responsibility for your child, its underlying principle should be most instructive in preparing your remarks to your son or daughter. Indeed, in many ways, the bar/bat mitzvah experience marks the individuation of the child: It is the commencement of a young person's acceptance of adult responsibility – even though we, as parents, still have a role to play in supporting our children to make Jewish choices.

The intent of the parental prayer in our service is to afford the parent(s) the opportunity to publicly acknowledge – in a sacred setting – the joy and pride they feel at that moment. More important, however, they can also use that time to share their hopes and dreams for their child's Jewish journey. In other words, it's an opportunity to articulate the meaning of the moment. It is your opportunity to share "your Torah!"

This ritual is not to be confused with the addresses that take place at the *se'udat mitvah* or family celebration. This is a unique opportunity – in the presence of your community as well as friends and family – to ask for God's blessings for your daughter or son.

In your remarks, consider the following:

- Your message should be addressed to your child, not the congregation.
- It should be a message about his/her Jewish future. Consider: Where is it that you hope this moment will lead your child? What do you hope that s/he will take from it?
- Say what you would like to say, keeping your remarks brief. The message should be approximately 300-350 words.
- One parent can speak or two parents can speak; if two parents, you don't get twice as long!

- Say nothing embarrassing about or to your child.
- Please do not mention your child's grades in school. Jewish self-esteem, for your child or for children listening in the congregation, should be based on the kind of person you are, not what grades you get.
- In addition to saying what you would like to say about your child, make sure to include a Jewish message. That is why we are here!
- This is not a bragging moment. It is not about your child's résumé nor is it a historical overview of his/her childhood. Your message should focus on the character traits your child demonstrates and what are the values and character traits you wish to nurture in him/her.
- What does it mean to you to have your child add his/her link in the chain of tradition of the Jewish People?
- Your words need to be written out in advance. Even those who have tremendous experience with public speaking have a different experience sharing this message with their own children. Your blessing is due to Mikaylah, the Assistant to the Clergy, ten days before your child's bar/bat mitzvah.
- Hugging your child at the end is encouraged!
- Crying is permitted.