

BAR/BAT MITZVAH POLICY

Adopted November 2014

A Mitzvot Understanding

“Son and Daughter of the Mitzvot.” This is the literal translation of “Bar and Bat Mitzvah.”

What does it mean to be a son or daughter of the Mitzvot?

A Mitzvah is often understood as a kind act. There are certainly mitzvot, which involve a kind act but the concept of Mitzvah is, in fact, much broader. A Mitzvah, at its core, refers to an action which is commanded. The belief that we are commanded to perform certain actions is central to Judaism. From an American perspective we are born with rights; from a Jewish perspective we are born with responsibilities. We are born with an innate sense of being commanded or called to live up to and meet these responsibilities. These actions, or Mitzvot, range from giving Tzedakah (charity) to celebrating and remembering the Jewish holidays.

Why does it only happen at the age of 13?

The idea of being responsible to the world around us is a heavy idea. A 5 year old doesn't really want to hear that they have some basic obligations to the world around them. In the Jewish tradition it is only once a young man or woman reaches the age of 13 (12 for girls in some communities) that they are fully capable of internalizing the notion of Mitzvah. Only at that age can one truly be called a son or daughter of the Mitzvot.

Why is it a cause for celebration?

As overwhelming as this idea may be - that we are born with a responsibility and obligation to the world around us - with the right perspective, it can also be a tremendous source of joy and inspiration. It means that we are all connected to each other. We are not disconnected individuals living in our self-created bubbles. Rather, we live in this world as part of a complex matrix of inter-connectedness and love. We, therefore, come together as a community on Shabbat to celebrate this joyous occasion.

Goal: We hope this day will be meaningful and transformative for you as you embark on the next stage of your Jewish journey.

Eligibility: The family must be members in good financial standing. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah must have attended CAA Hebrew School for at least one year prior to his or her ceremony. During that prior year they must have attended 18 Shabbat

Experiences and two additional Shabbat services with their family and attended one Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Date: The Rabbi will contact the families in the sixth grade class with available dates. A family will then contact the Rabbi to reserve a specific date from the dates available. Dates will be assigned on a first come, first served basis. Bar/Bat Mitzvahs take place on Shabbat mornings starting at 9AM. We do not have Mincha/afternoon Bar/Bat Mitzvahs. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah class will have a mandatory group meeting with the Rabbi and a representative from the Board of Directors in the fall. Parents should schedule an individual family meeting with the Rabbi two months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The Rabbi will review with you honors, parts of the service and distribution of Aliyot.

Non-Jewish parents are encouraged to fully participate in all aspects of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration with the exception of a few ritual aspects of the service. The Rabbi can discuss this with you in greater detail.

Primary responsibilities for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

1. Understand the significance of the day in regard to your connection to Jewish Life
2. Think about what this day means for you along with ideas expressed in the Torah portion and articulate that in a D'var Torah (5 minute speech) with help from the Rabbi/tutor.
3. Find a Mitzvah Project that speaks to your passions in life and in Judaism. The Rabbi will be a resource to assist with ideas
4. Sign up for the Remember Us Project at Remember-Us.org. The Remember Us Project keeps alive the memory of over 1.5 million Jewish children who died in the Holocaust before they could become a Bar or Bat mitzvah. By choosing to remember one child on this day, the b'nei mitzvah restores value and meaning to that family's life and enriches their own.
5. Learn the Aliyah Blessings (Bor'chu) and Tallit blessing
6. Chant the Haftorah and Blessings (from a printed Chumash with the vowels)

If you have mastered the above:

1. Read verses from the Torah Scroll
2. Chant the verses
3. Lead sections of the service

Tutor: Each Bar/BatMitzva student will work with a tutor in conjunction with the Rabbi to determine which parts of service the student will lead. The tutor will provide the additional help to insure that the student is fully prepared for the day. The parents are financially responsible for the tutoring.

Parent's Talk: In addition to the Dvar Torah/Speech delivered by the Bar/Bar Mitzvah, parents often choose to speak from the Bimah following the Dvar Torah. We offer these guidelines: Please keep your words brief and please do not exceed 5 minutes. Your words should be directed to the significance of the day. This is not an opportunity to take a walk down memory lane! The Rabbi would be happy to assist you in the preparation of your remarks.

Ushers: We recommend that the family ask 2 guests, perhaps friends of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, to serve as ushers at the service. The ushers are there to welcome guests and hand them kippot, siddurim and chumashim.

Kiddush: The family must sponsor the community Shabbat Kiddush immediately following services. This is an opportunity for family, friends and the wider community (those who attend services other than your invited guests- approximately 20 people) to share in the joy of the coming of age in Judaism of your son or daughter.

We strongly encourage you to use a caterer for the Kiddush. A list of approved caterers will be made available to you by the Rabbi. Your caterer is responsible for cleaning up after the Kiddush. **There is no additional lifecycle fee or social hall rental fee.**

If a caterer is not used, you may purchase and prepare Kiddush items yourself under the supervision of the Rabbi and the Kiddush Committee. You must have a minimum of two people on the day of the Kiddush responsible for setting up and cleaning up. Our superintendent will assist with the setup of the tables and chairs on Friday.

CAA's Kashrut Policy must be followed for the Kiddush. It is available on our web site. Also, there is no candle lighting permitted, and no recorded or electronic music, on Shabbat.

The minimum items needed for the Kiddush are (where to buy items, listed in parentheses, are for those not using a caterer):

2 Challahs (BJs, Stop & Shop, Zucker's in Peabody or Shaw's in Newburyport)

2 Kedem Grape Juice (Stop & Shop)

Kosher Bagels

Philadelphia Cream Cheese

Humus

Fruit Platter

Entemann's pastries or something similar

Herring

Lox (optional)

What to tell your guests:

The synagogue is a house of worship. The guidelines below are provided so that all guests may understand the holiness of a synagogue and Shabbat and act accordingly.

ATTIRE

It is traditional to dress modestly in a synagogue. Shoulders should be covered. Business casual dress is acceptable.

All males are expected to wear a kippah (or yarmulke). While many women wear head coverings, it is optional. Wearing a kippah is not a symbol of religious identification like the tallit, but is rather an act of respect to God and the sacredness of the worship space.

A prayer shawl (or tallis) is worn by Jewish men and women (optional). Because the braided fringes at the four corners of the tallit remind its wearer to observe the commandments of Judaism, wearing a tallit is reserved for Jews.

SHABBAT OBSERVANCE

Photography and recording are strictly forbidden in the synagogue building on Shabbat. Arrangements should be made for photos to be taken before or after the Sabbath.

Cell phones and any other electronic devices must be silenced or remain off anywhere in the synagogue building on Shabbat.

Smoking is prohibited in the sanctuary, inside the building, and on the synagogue grounds.

Donations: We strongly encourage you to make a donation to the synagogue in honor of your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This is a long standing tradition and is a way to express your appreciation to the synagogue. This can take many forms including a donation to the General Fund, engraving a leaf on the Tree of Life, donating High Holiday Machzors, or a donation to the Kosher Torah Fund. It is also customary to express your appreciation to the Rabbi by giving a gratuity.

How-To Guide:

A Tallit can be purchased on a family trip to Brookline, to visit Kolbo or the Israel Book Shop.

Kippot can be ordered from several online sources.

Candy: It is the custom of our congregation to shower (not bombard) the Bar/Bat Mitzvah with candy at a certain point in the service. The family is expected to provide candy. We highly recommend you use Sunkist Fruit Gems, which can be ordered online.

Party:

There is no religious obligation to "throw a party" beyond the Kiddush immediately following services. Many families in fact choose to focus the celebration around the Kiddush and perhaps a small family gathering later that

evening. You should not feel any pressure to *go all out* with a large catered dinner, DJ, etc...

If you do choose to have a party later that day or evening, please keep in mind the religious and spiritual nature of the day. We also understand that many in our community do not observe traditional kashrut but we would still ask, respectfully, that you avoid serving non-kosher items such as shellfish and non-kosher meat.

Recommended Reading for parents :

Putting G-d on the Guest List, by Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin

To Be a Jew and To Pray as a Jew, both by Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin

The Sabbath, by Abraham Joshua Heschel

To Heal a Fractured World, by Jonathan Sacks Page

You may also visit the Newburyport Library, which has a selection on Judaism

Questions: Please feel free to consult with the Rabbi or Ritual Committee chairperson should questions arise.