

Bar and Bat Mitzvah



The ceremony of bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah is not a performance or a graduation from religious education.

It is a metaphor for a door opening into the adult level of Jewish ritual life.

The Terms *Bar Mitzvah* and *Bat Mitzvah* mean “Liable to the Commandments”.

If you are reading this, your child is considering a commitment to the Jewish community. Welcome to this opportunity to learn and grow as a family.

Your child has a choice at this stage of his or her spiritual development. A student is automatically eligible to become a member of the Jewish religious community at age 12 ½ (for girls) or 13 (for boys). Whether they participate in a ceremony marking that transition is a decision the child and family must make together.

Preparing for the ceremony can be very meaningful for the child, the family and the entire congregation. It is a chance for your child to experiment with the sense of what it means to be a responsible Jewish adult. It's a chance for the family to deepen its understanding of Jewish identity and belonging. For the community, the ceremony itself marks our recognition of our newest member, as well as a celebration that the student has chosen to enter into a life of adult responsibilities and *mitzvot*.

In order to be called to the Torah as a bar/bat mitzvah in the midst of Congregation Shir Tikvah, the ability to chant Torah and Haftarah is not the central achievement. It is, rather, coming to understand what it means to be part of a Jewish community.

Reaching this goal takes very real effort. Families should carefully consider whether they are ready to support the child as he or she undertakes the required preparation: prayer, study, community service.

Timeline

Rabbi Ariel and staff will be your family's guides through the process of preparing for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. This celebration at Shir Tikvah is not necessarily what you may be familiar with at other congregations. Please don't assume anything based on your prior experience elsewhere!

Here is an approximate timeline of that process. **It is up to you** to keep track of the deadlines and make your own appointments.

1½ - 2 years prior: Initial Meeting *with Rabbi and Rivkah Coburn*

Discuss the process of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Shir Tikvah. If students choose to move forward, this meeting will include setting a date and picking a tutor. Rivkah Coburn will coordinate with any outside tutor to ensure that person has the appropriate orientation to Shir Tikvah expectations.

Texts required for study include a Shir Tikvah Siddur and a Torah commentary. (Rabbi recommends a version of *Etz Hayim*).

Your family must be members in good financial standing to proceed.

1 year prior: Check-in *with Rabbi*

6 months prior: Check-in *with Rabbi*

3 months prior:

Check-in *with Rabbi and Rivkah Coburn*

Check-in *with Katie regarding Mitzvah Project*

Check in *with Office Manager Amelia*

Schroth/Education Coordinator Rachael

Walkinshaw. Discuss logistics surrounding the ceremony and Kiddush luncheon, if any. Give us your child's Hebrew name.

*PAYMENT IS DUE AT THIS TIME.**

\$400 – covers the cost of hallah, candy, wine and staff time

\$225 – covers additional staff time if an on-site luncheon planned

1 month prior:

Check in *with Rabbi*. Discuss various honors you might choose to offer to family and friends, such as an *aliyah* (being called to the Torah), *bagba'ah* (lifting the Torah for the

*If this fee or tutoring expenses are a hardship for your family, please contact Rabbi directly. Fees may be subject to change

congregation to see) and *gelilah* (dressing the Torah in its vestments).

Check in *with Rachael*. She can find a place for a visual display or communicate appeals to the congregation.

The week prior: Rehearsal *with Rabbi*

Walk through the service and practice reading from the actual scroll. Bring mitzvah project display. Send electronic copy of d'var Torah to the office.

1 day before: Rest and Relax

Enjoy Shabbat dinner with your friends and family. It will be a wonderful event.

Preparation

Tutoring

Students are expected to meet with their tutor regularly in the year (or more) leading up to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Tutors are independent contractors and are to be paid by the Bat/Bar Mitzvah family. When feasible, two students may prepare together. The amount of time a student will need to adequately prepare depends on the individual.

One of the benefits of working with a tutor is that each student can work at his or her own pace and prepare the amount of material determined appropriate by Rabbi, the tutor and the family. This may include the Torah *maf'ir*, the Torah blessings, regular congregation prayers, as well as the *Haftarah* and *d'var Torah*. Some students also opt to learn some conversational Hebrew; others prefer to deepen their understanding of the prayer Hebrew and their expertise in singing the different chanted melodies.

Shabbat Services

Families are expected to attend Junior Minyan – the second Saturday of every month. Both you and your child will need to be quite comfortable with the structure, choreography, and tunes of the regular Saturday morning service.

Rivkah Coburn will meet with students in the library for the first half of the Shabbat service for learning and orientation.

Monthly Shabbat morning learning will include discussions and exposure to prayer language and the siddur. Students will join the rest of the congregation for the Torah service.

Three months prior to the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, families should plan to attend services regularly.

We understand that 100% attendance will not be possible. However, consistent absences will leave students unprepared for full participation in the community and may require postponement of the ritual.

Families should also plan to attend when other students in their cohort are being called to the Torah as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Not only does this help your student to become familiar with the ritual and the community, the tangible show of support for nervous peers is a *mitzvah*.

Nashira Project Mini-Session

Students are expected to attend a 3-week Sunday series at Tucker Maxon during Nashira hours for direct instruction in Torah Study (Rabbi) and the Mitzvah Project (Katie).

The Mitzvah Project

Jewish tradition teaches that one gives thanks by giving; for that reason, many Jews mark happy occasions by giving *tzedakah*. This project introduces your child to this important concept, and the project should reflect some

aspect of the child's personality as well as Jewish ethics.

One example: a child worked at the dog shelter and taught the congregation the Jewish ethic of *tzaar baalei hayim*, sensitivity to “the pain of animals”, in his *d'var Torah*.

Students are expected to create a visual display to share information about their Mitzvah Project with the congregation as a whole.

The Ritual Weekend

Erev Shabbat

You are certainly warmly invited to have the honor of lighting the candles and leading the Kiddush during Erev Shabbat *Tefilah* the evening before. But you are not required to attend, and many of our families choose to celebrate Shabbat at home with their visiting family and guests. If you choose to come to services and you expect to bring more than 20 guests with you, expect to provide an additional loaf of hallah.

Greeters

We schedule trained staff to greet at the door.

Programs

A program is **not** required. Each family should judge whether it will be helpful for guests who are not familiar with what a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is, or what occurs during Shabbat services. If you do choose to make a program, remember two things: first, you will be taking 90% of them back to be recycled as congregants will not keep them, and second, there is no standard Program.

If you are creating a program, we recommend including the Torah and Haftarah portions in and English.

If you are interested in seeing examples created by other families, let the Shir Tikvah office know, we have many copies available.

Photography/Videotape

This is not a performance. Having a photographer or someone openly videotaping the service is not appropriate. Any photos or videotaping must be done before the service begins (posed pictures with family and friends) or after it ends (candids during the socializing after we say the blessings over wine and hallah).

The honor of an Aliyah

The "*aliyah*" is defined as the honor of chanting the blessings before and after the Torah is read. Your child will have the final *aliyah*- "last is best", as they say in Hebrew, no matter how much or little Torah s/he reads. Usually the parent/s do the blessing for the next-to-last *aliyah*, regardless of who actually reads that part of the Torah. Sometimes the person who is given the honor of the blessing will also be able to read, but it is not necessary.

Because of the text of the blessing, it's not appropriate to offer this honor to a non-Jew. However, we do invite non-Jewish family members to be part of a larger group that includes Jews in an *aliyah* when and if it seems appropriate - like a non-Jewish parent, who was likely at least as instrumental as the Jewish parent in bringing the child to that moment, through support, carpooling and other kinds of parental help. We don't expect the non-Jewish parent or other relative to recite the blessing, but they are welcome to come up and stand with those who will recite it.

There are seven *aliyot* and the *maftir*. As a courtesy, one aliyah is give to the child's Nashira Project cohort and one for the community.

Reading from the Torah

If you have family members who would like to read from the Torah, they are welcome to participate, as are friends. Other members of our community may also participate in reading the Torah that morning, and, almost certainly, the Rabbi will be involved.

If you have Jewish family or friends reading Torah, please get a firm confirmation that they are indeed committed to reading/chanting. When you have that list as fail-safe as you can get it, the Rabbi will assign readings. They will each be at least 3 verses long. Also, even though your child has learned to chant the Torah and will do so, it is not required at Shir Tikvah for the Torah to be chanted by the other readers.

Other honors for family members

Other honors you can consider offering to people, in consultation with Rabbi:

- Holding the Torah aloft for all to see (two strong people).
- Helping to dress the Torah (one person).
- Opening the Ark doors

If you have a non-Jewish family member whom you wish to honor and don't see how you can do that, given the above, talk to the Rabbi. She will work it out in the best possible way for your family and your family dynamic. Remember that sometimes it's best to honor family and friends at a private family gathering.

Community Representatives

Three people from the Shir Tikvah community are selected to represent the entire Jewish community, and welcome the Bar/Bat Mitzvah into that community. It is not your job to arrange for them during the service. Rabbi does that. If you have people in mind you would like to be considered for this, just ask Rabbi.

Celebrating Afterwards

There is no applause at the service. In order to satisfy the impulse to applaud, we follow the custom of inviting congregants and guests to throw candy at the end of the *Haftarah* recitation.

Our *minhag* at Shir Tikvah is for the Nashira peers to pass out the candy. You may suggest cousins or siblings to help as well.

At the end of the service, everyone will be asked to come to the front of the sanctuary for Kiddush. After the blessings, parents will have a chance to express their gratitude. (It is **not** customary at Shir Tikvah to speak on the accomplishments of your child during this part of the service. You may do so at your private party.)

After the Ceremony

There are several options if families would like to offer refreshments for their guests and the rest of the congregation after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. There have been many different kinds of events after the ceremony. A luncheon is often a nice option, since it gives the entire congregation a chance to celebrate together, but it is not required and will not always be the right choice. Our downstairs area can seat about 100 comfortably, but is not ADA accessible.

Luncheon Policy

Our luncheon policies are as follows:

- Your additional luncheon fee covers 2 staff members to provide set up/clean up and food service. We will also provide linens, dishware, glasses, etc.

- Luncheon: provide the food through a restaurant and arrange for delivery by 11:30 on the day of the event. **There will be no exceptions to this rule.** Shir Tikvah has worked with YaHala, Baby Doll Pizza, Nicholas', Elephants Delicatessen and Beetroot in the past. *Please confirm your vendors with the office.*
- Dessert: can be homemade. *Please confirm delivery arrangements with the office.*

The Shir Tikvah kitchen is not kosher according to Jewish law, but we follow kosher practice. **We don't mix meat and dairy and there is no pork or shellfish.** Vegetarian is usually the best option. About 30 people attend Saturday morning services so count on including them if you provide lunch after services.

Special Kiddush

Families may opt for a Kiddush upstairs in the back of the shul rather than a luncheon. This usually includes cookies, juice or fruit. (Food must not require refrigeration.) Paper goods may be provided by the family. Families will be asked to help clean up after the event. There is no additional charge for this option, unless extra staff is required.