

# BNEI MITZVAH AT UNIVERSITY SYNAGOGUE

A FAMILY GUIDE TO BNEI MITZVAH



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# Bnei Mitzvah Timeline

## 4-7 Grade

- Attend Religious School, Retreat, Family Education Days and Bnei Mitzvah Meetings
  - As a part of our Religious School curriculum, our students become familiar with the structure of the Shabbat services, liturgy, and meaning of this important lifecycle ritual. Regular attendance at school, at-home practice, and attendance at Religious School tfillot are part of the Bnei Mitzvah preparation experience.

## 1 Year Prior

- Be Registered for Religious School
  - As your contract states, all students are required to remain in Religious School through the entire year during which they become *Bnei Mitzvah*
  - Religious School tuition and Membership dues must be paid in full prior to Bnei Mitzvah
- Check-in with Educator - Hebrew evaluation
  - If your child is struggling with Hebrew, please contact US. Your child may benefit from extra outside tutoring at parental expense. It is the parent's responsibility to coordinate any weekly session rescheduling that may be required
- Attend a minimum of 6 Friday evening services and 3 Shabbat morning or afternoon services
  - In order to be both familiar and comfortable with Shabbat services, students are required to **attend at least 6 Shabbat evening** and **3 Shabbat morning or afternoon services with at least one parent** during the year prior to becoming a *Bnei Mitzvah*. By attending services at our congregation you and your child will become familiar with our customs and connect with members of our synagogue community. We want our *Bnei mitzvah* to appreciate the meaning and structure of the Jewish prayer service before they are leading the service. More familiarity leads to a better ability to worship and to lead a community in prayer.

## 8-9 Months Prior

- Begin Meeting with Clergy
  - Meeting with Rabbi to work on D'var Torah
    - A clergy member will discuss the *Torah* and *Haftarah* portions with each student to help prepare a *d'var Torah* and *d'var haftarah* for the day of the *Bnei Mitzvah* ceremony. The introduction to the *Torah* reading is called a *d'var Torah* and for the *haftarah* reading, a *d'var haftarah*. Your child will meet with the rabbi to study and discuss important concepts in the *Torah* and *Haftarah* portions.
  - Meeting with Cantor/Music team to train on prayers
    - Cantor Shapiro prepares each child to chant verses of their designated *Torah* portion from the *Torah* scroll. It is the custom at University Synagogue to chant between 3 and 8 *aliyot* during the service. The child may chant all of the *aliyot* or a portion of the *aliyot*. If the child opts to chant less than 8 *aliyot*, others, including family members or the clergy may chant the other *aliyot*.
    - The Cantor prepares each student to chant a selection from *Haftarah* in Hebrew. The students learn to understand the relationship between the assigned *Haftarah* and *Torah* Portions.
    - All prayer and *Torah* portion mp3s can be found here:
      - <https://unisyn.org/content/bneimitzvah>

## 6 Months Prior

- Meet with Rabbi to work on personal prayer
  - This prayer will include one or more of the themes of the biblical selections. Composing a prayer in this way gives your child the opportunity to express thoughts about becoming a *Bnei Mitzvah*, to describe their feelings about the day, and to give thanks to God for this occasion.
- Meet with Educator to begin *Mitzvah* Project and Golden Kippah Progress Check-in
  - Each *Bnei Mitzvah* student will be expected, as a part of their training, to participate in a *Mitzvah* project to be approved by clergy and the student at the beginning of the training program. This program will give the student an opportunity to apply the concepts of *Tzedakah* and social responsibility.

Students should plan on spending at least 6 hours of active *mitzvah* work for their *mitzvah* project, plus extra hours towards earning the Golden Kippah.

- **Check out these resources for *mitzvah* project ideas:**
- Tablet article on doing *mitzvah* projects right: [www.https://Mitzvah Projects-Tablet Magazine](http://www.https://Mitzvah Projects-Tablet Magazine)
- *The Mitzvah Project Book*, Liz Suneby
- An online resource for choosing *mitzvah* projects: [www.jchoice.org](http://www.jchoice.org)

## 4-5 Months Prior

- Sign up to be a greeter at another student's Bnei Mitzvah service
- Sponsor Oneg
  - Parents **sponsor the Friday night Oneg Shabbat** preceding the child's *Bnei Mitzvah*. This is included in the Bnei Mitzvah fee. Contact Bonnie Kebre, Facilities Coordinator, for details.

## 2-3 Months Prior

- Continue meeting with clergy
- Parents work with Clergy/Clergy Assistant to assign bimah honors
- Parents begin crafting their blessing to the Bnei mitzvah
  - Your blessing should be no longer than two minutes (approximately one page, double-spaced). The blessing should relate to the child, the meaning of the religious and cultural experience, and the spirituality of the occasion. The key themes of the blessing are the parent's hopes, dreams, and aspirations based on the child's character. **Use this time to think forward and share your hopes and dreams for your child, not to look back and catalog his or her accomplishments.**

## 1-2 Weeks Prior

- Run through Service
  - a run-through will be held on the *Bimah* with a clergy member (usually Cantor Shapiro). During this session, the student will practice his/her part in leading the service and *Torah and haftarah* readings from the pulpit. It is the purpose of this session to make the child more comfortable with being on

the bimah and prepare the student for leading the service in the sanctuary. Attention will be paid to the choreography of the service and proper use of voice in the sanctuary. We require at least one parent or guardian to attend this rehearsal.

### **Day of Service**

- Breathe!
- Enjoy!

### **After the Service**

- Continue your Jewish education, involvement, and commitment to YOUR community.
  - Confirmation and Post Confirmation are the culmination of our formal religious education programming for youth at University Synagogue. Learning for people of all ages will foster positive Jewish identities, thereby building a foundation for lifelong Jewish learning.
- Express Gratitude
  - We encourage our children to contribute 10% of their monetary gifts to *tzedakah* and to help others in need through a *mitzvah* project. The celebrants should designate the recipients of their generosity and their time and notify our Clergy Assistant.
  - It is the custom at University Synagogue for the *Bnei Mitzvah* family to honor your child and **express appreciation by making a contribution** to the clergy discretionary funds in honor of this joyous occasion.

We are sensitive to children's differing learning needs and styles. We are committed to making this a positive learning experience for your child.

# Additional Resources and Insights

## Sample Parent Blessing

Dear (Child),

Judaism teaches that each person is born in the image of God, and within each person there is a spark of Holiness. Not only is this an enabling power that guides us in our relationships with others, but to me, it is also a connecting channel between a person and God. I have seen this connection through you on many nights after you recited Shema. At first your prayer was an assurance that tomorrow will be a good day, but as you grew, so did the length of the time you took to pray with your eyes closed and your lips moving.

I hope that you didn't let the attractions or distractions of growing up pull you away from this link. Remain a child at heart and continue to wonder at the many ordinary, yet amazing goings-on around you. Add to your Jewish knowledge to gain further wisdom and insight into the adult life. As I always say...feed your soul. Know that faith gives you the strength to overcome any challenge in life.

Let your deed, not words, tell you who you are and what you believe in. May you always be inspired to do good. And may we always see in your good health and happiness. We love you and *mazal tov!*

## Tzedakah

1. Those who wish to express their **appreciation to the Rabbis and Cantor** for their spiritual leadership and participation may contribute to their Discretionary Funds, which are utilized for support of Jewish and humanitarian causes and individual needs.

Every member of University Synagogue is eligible to receive all lifecycle services by virtue of his/her affiliation; your contribution will help our clergy fulfill essential Mitzvot.

2. University Synagogue's **Tree of Life** provides a way to acknowledge the happy events in the Temple family while supporting your Temple.
3. **Mazon:** Participate with your family in the MAZON program by contributing 3% of the cost of your Bnei Mitzvah to MAZON, an organization which advocates for the hungry; [www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)
4. Donate your flowers to a nursing home after the service is over.
5. In lieu of table flowers- food items can be wrapped in large baskets and then the funds donated to **SOVA's** food bank.
6. Donate left-over food from your reception to the people with food insecurity (St. Joseph Center or O.P.C.C.in Santa Monica).
7. Select agencies that you find significant, both Jewish and secular, to which an appropriate contribution may be given in honor or your son/daughter.
8. Place a Tzedakah box in your home to contribute to a select agency on a weekly basis.

## The Ten Commandments for Bnei Mitzvah students

JEFF BERNHARDT | **OCT 20, 2010** | **BAR & BAT MITZVAHS**

If you are 12 now, you've probably been hearing talk of your bar or bat mitzvah for years. Perhaps you've attended the bar and bat mitzvahs of friends or cousins. Perhaps you are the first of your friends to become a bar or bat mitzvah. Maybe you've attended a service and thought: How am I ever going to be able to learn all of that? Or perhaps you've already begun studying, and so far it's felt pretty effortless. (Or perhaps you are a parent of a soon-to-be bar or bat mitzvah.)

What follows are my Ten Commandments for bar and bat mitzvah students. Some I've learned during my years of teaching and preparing students for the "big day." Some come from former students who've recently gone through the process and for whom the experience is very recent. Remember, if you are having concerns, you're probably not alone. In any case, while there are no guarantees in life, following these commandments is likely to serve you well and help you to feel prepared, confident, proud and a little less anxious.

### **I thou shalt make a study schedule**

You're most likely in middle school and have a lot on your plate. You may be in a new school, have a lot more homework, have less free time than you used to, and you may be getting involved in lots of extracurricular activities. As with any long-term project, assignment or goal, it's best to set a time each day when you will work on it. Choose a time that works most days, and stick to it. The first week or so may be a challenge, but once it becomes part of your schedule and you get used to it, it will come naturally and you'll see that you are making great progress.

### **II Thou shalt save thy parents from nagging**

Most of us do not want to be nagged. And most parents would prefer not to nag. Once you've figured out when you're going to study, just do it. Becoming bar or bat mitzvah is about taking on more responsibility. What better way than to begin by studying without needing reminders (at least not too many reminders). You'll feel good about it, your parents will be proud of your self-discipline, and there will be a lot less arguing (which should make everybody happy).

### **III Thou shalt take ownership of thy studies**

Come to your lessons prepared but also with an agenda. Let your tutor know you need help with a particular prayer or that you are having trouble getting a certain melody, or that you just can't figure out how to get it all done. Ask questions about the Torah portion or about something that didn't make sense when you were working at home. If you're having trouble with some aspect of the preparations or you're feeling anxious, let your tutor (and/or a parent) know that you need help figuring this out. Taking an active role in this process is another way of taking responsibility and ownership and being an adult.

#### **IV Thou shalt limit thy extracurricular activities**

You may be thinking: No way am I giving up soccer, trying out for the musical, cheerleading, (fill in the blank). You don't have to give it all up, but if you want to reduce the stress in your life, it may make sense to plan for fewer obligations during the months prior to your bar or bat mitzvah. Trying to squeeze in play rehearsals and performances, baseball practices and games, schoolwork and bar or bat mitzvah preparation will only stress you out.

#### **V Thou shalt work hard**

This doesn't mean you have to get stressed out. But you want to feel that you worked your hardest and that you deserve to feel proud of yourself. If you can honestly say that you put your best effort and work into making this a special time, then you'll feel that much more proud of all you accomplished to get to that place.

#### **VI Thou shalt be patient with thyself**

It doesn't all come at once, but eventually it comes together. If you start to get stressed out or frustrated while studying, take a break, have a snack, watch some television or take a power nap. Then come back to it. Trying to learn something when you're stressed out will often cause you to feel more stressed out.

#### **VII Thou shalt stop and smell the roses**

Take time during the weeks and months of preparation to recognize how much you've learned and how your confidence has grown as the days go by. Recognize that what you're chanting today, you didn't know two weeks ago. Recognize that what you now chant effortlessly, you were stumbling through a month ago. Don't take all of your efforts and studying for granted. Recognize all that you have learned.

#### **VIII Thou shalt remember this is a prayer service**

This is not a performance. It may seem like that as you prepare — or even on the actual day — but you're leading parts of a service. It's a sacred time for you and your family and even for your community. Everyone who has stood before the congregation (rabbi and cantor included) have made mistakes. If you do, then you are in good company. And even if you do make a mistake, it doesn't take away from all the hard work you put into preparing.

#### **IX Thou shalt be anxious**

This doesn't sound like the kind of thing you would be commanded to do (or that you want to hear), but think of it as permission. I usually tell students they are not allowed to be anxious until a month before the bar or bat mitzvah day. And even then, the goal is that any nervousness should be about the fact that you will be in front of a lot of people and not because you are feeling unprepared. That having been said, it's normal to be at least a little nervous, so don't fight it. Talk with your parent, tutor, rabbi or cantor about how to calm your nerves a little. But, if you are nervous, then you're in the majority because most bar and bat mitzvah students are (whether they admit it or not).

### **X Thou shalt remember you have a lot more to learn**

Hopefully the preparation for the bar or bat mitzvah was a positive experience. Hopefully you will feel good about it in the end. Hopefully you will see how much more there is to learn and how much more you can grow through the learning offered at your synagogue and in the Jewish community. Perhaps you will seek out (or be offered) more opportunities to be a leader in your community — reading Torah, being an aide in the religious school, etc. Becoming bar/bat mitzvah is the beginning of a new stage in your life as a member of the Jewish community. Seek out opportunities, take up offers from the clergy or teachers. Finally, remember: You are taking your place as an adult in the Jewish community, and hundreds if not thousands of other young Jews around the world are as well. You are part of a community of young Jews becoming young Jewish adults. And, you are continuing the chain of all those who have come before you in your family and in your community. You are the next link — connected not only to those who came before you, but also to those who will come after you.

## Contact Information for Key People

<b>Rabbi Barry Lutz</b> FAMILY INVOLVEMENT, PERSONAL PRAYER D'VAR TORAH	<a href="mailto:rabbilutz@unisyn.org">rabbilutz@unisyn.org</a>	ext. 125
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<b>Ze'evi Berman,</b> Cantorial Intern TUTORING	<a href="mailto:clergyintern@unisyn.org">clergyintern@unisyn.org</a>	
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