

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Manual

Oheb Shalom Congregation



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Introduction

Introduction

The celebration of Bar or Bat Mitzvah is one of the most meaningful, memorable and joyful parts of being Jewish. It is a time to express hope and confidence in the future as a child marks a transition to a new stage of life. It is a time for family members and friends to gather in celebration. It is a time to take pride in a child's skills and achievements. Most important, becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a time to honor Jewish values, deepen our ties to the synagogue and the Jewish community, and strengthen Jewish identity.

We have prepared this manual in the hope that the information and advice it contains will enrich your family's Jewish experience and help to make the moments spent in the synagogue on the day of your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah meaningful, comfortable, and memorable.

What is Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

The term Bar or Bat Mitzvah refers to a Jewish person over the age of 13 who is considered responsible to observe mitzvot and follow a Jewish way of life. The ceremony of "becoming" a Bar or Bat Mitzvah involves active participation in a Shabbat service, through which the child accepts the responsibility of living Jewishly. The celebration after the service is called a Seudat Mitzvah, a meal shared in honor of having performed a sacred religious act.

While 13 years old was once considered the proper age to take on the responsibility of observing mitzvot, it was not until the medieval period that such privileges were conferred on a child at a public religious service. Today, Bar or Bat Mitzvah is not only the moment when a young teenager becomes eligible to be called to the Torah and count in a minyan, it also marks the time when a child begins to have a serious encounter with Jewish tradition. The teenage years are a time when a young person moves from a perspective of self-interest to considering how he or she can contribute to the community and the world at large. Bar or Bat Mitzvah thus celebrates not a single day in a child's life but the blessing of human growth and potential.

Logistics

Personalized Information Brochure

Many families wish to create a brochure for the congregation that contains words of welcome from the family, a list of honorees and a description of your child's mitzvah project as well as other information. You can find a sample brochure on the Oheb Shalom website.

Ruach Shabbat (The Spirit of Shabbat)

At Oheb Shalom, we endeavor to create an environment that honors Shabbat as a special day. We do this in part by putting aside cellphones and tablets and refraining from photography and videography while in the synagogue. In addition, we prepare in advance for Shabbat by ensuring that all supplies needed for a celebration have been delivered by Friday afternoon.

Display Table

Kippot, brochures and a description of your child's Mitzvah Project may be placed on a display table outside the sanctuary. Please do not place driving directions to offsite facilities, guest lists or materials pertaining to your reception on the display table. These can be included with your formal invitation.

Holding Your Simcha at Oheb Shalom

We would love for you to celebrate your simcha at Oheb Shalom! Holding your reception at the synagogue is a statement of Jewish values and a way to strengthen your ties to the congregation. Murnick Hall and Levy-Zucker are always available to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family for the morning of a simcha. To reserve our facilities for a private reception please contact us.

Which Sacred Space to Use

Most B'nai Mitzvah services take place in the main sanctuary, which seats several hundred people. If you are expecting a small group of guests, you may choose to hold the service in the Schechner Chapel, which can comfortably seat up to about 130 people.

Times of Services and When to Arrive

We look forward to seeing your family at Friday evening services which begin at 8:00 P.M., except for the first Friday of each month when the service begins at 6:30 P.M. and is followed by a congregational dinner. Shabbat morning services begin at 9:45 A.M. but please plan to arrive by 9:30 A.M.

Sponsoring the Kiddush

Traditionally the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family sponsors the Kiddush after Shabbat morning services, even if you are planning a private reception in the synagogue or at another facility. The congregation loves to congratulate the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family at the Shabbat kiddush so please join us! The details of these arrangements will be discussed at your meeting with the Executive Director.

Bima Flowers

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family provides bima flowers. The Chair of our Flower Fund, Norma Schechner (973-763-9232), ensures that a fresh and beautiful floral arrangement is in place for your simcha. Please call Norma to discuss the choice of flowers with her.

Photography and Videography

Many families take photographs and videos of their child on a weekday before the Shabbat of their simcha. Please contact the Executive Director to schedule a photography session so that we can ensure the building is open. Rabbi Cooper and Cantor Lippitz would be delighted to appear in your photographs. Please contact them directly to ensure they will be present.

The Oheb Shalom Review

We are proud to include photographs of our B'nai Mitzvah students in The Review! You will be asked to submit a one-paragraph statement about your child (school, hobbies, mitzvah project, etc.) and a high-resolution digital copy of a photo of your child should be submitted to the editor of the Review at least four months prior to the date of your simcha.

Unaccompanied Children

Unaccompanied children can find it difficult to sit through a long service. If necessary, our ushers will remind unaccompanied children throughout the service that their behavior must reflect the dignity of the occasion. You may wish to suggest to the parents of your child's guests that they arrive at the synagogue at 10:15 A.M. rather than 9:45 A.M.

Schedule

Lessons with Cantor Lippitz

Cantor Lippitz will contact you to begin individual lessons with your child approximately eight months before your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. She will meet weekly with your child for half an hour at a mutually convenient time (approximately 24 sessions). She will also meet personally with you to discuss who you would like to honor during the service; family and friends may chant a portion of Torah, take an Aliyah, or lead the congregation in English readings.

Preparing a D'var Torah with Rabbi Cooper

Every child prepares a D'var Torah that is offered to the congregation during the Shabbat service. Your child will receive a booklet that will be helpful in preparing for studying the Torah portion and writing the D'var Torah. Rabbi Cooper will contact you approximately six months prior to your celebration, and earlier if your child will become Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the fall and will be away at summer camp. The number of meetings required depends on the needs of the child. A parent must attend at least the first meeting.

Meeting with the Executive Director

Linda Griffler will contact you approximately 12 months prior to your simcha to discuss logistical and financial arrangements. Linda will help ensure that your use of the synagogue's facilities is a pleasant experience.

Service Participation

Your Family's participation in the Shabbat Service

Bar/Bat Mitzvah children participate in the Shabbat service to the extent of their ability and preparation. On Friday evening, our B'nai Mitzvah typically lead the reading of the Sh'ma/V'ahavta and recite the Kiddush. On Shabbat morning, our B'nai Mitzvah read one or more aliyot from the Torah, chant the Haftarah, offer a D'var Torah and may choose to lead Musaf.

Parents typically remain on the bima from the beginning of the Torah reading until the end of the service but are welcome to sit in the front rows of the sanctuary for Musaf, if preferred. Siblings should remain seated in the pews during the service and will be called up to the bima if they are participating in the service.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family's active participation in the service includes:

- a. **Assisting the child in putting on the tallit-** The celebration of Bar/Bat Mitzvah is exciting in part because we watch our children perform meaningful Jewish rituals, such as wearing a Tallit, for the first time. Your child will put on his/her Tallit at the beginning of the service, either privately or publicly before the congregation.
- b. **Aliyot to the Torah-** The honor of reciting an Aliyah involves chanting a blessing in Hebrew before and after the reading of Torah verses. In addition to aliyot to the Torah, you may also designate the person who lifts the Torah (Hagba) and up to two people to dress the Torah (Gelila).

Cantor Lippitz will assist you in assigning honors in her meeting with you. Please see the honors worksheet on the Oheb website.

- c. **Guest Torah Readers-** Relatives and friends may chant Torah if they are able. Please contact Cantor Lippitz well in advance of your simcha to arrange this. Torah readers must be Jewish and wear a tallit when reading.
- d. **Other Prayers -** Relatives or friends of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family are welcome to recite the Prayer for Our Country, the Prayer for the State of Israel, *Ashrei (Psalm 145)*, *Ein Keiloheinu* and *Adon Olam*. Many students invite their classmates as a group to lead one of the latter prayers.

- e. **Passing or Holding the Torah-** Many parents and grandparents choose to pass the Torah scroll to their child as a symbol of passing on the Jewish heritage from one generation to the next. After receiving the scroll, the child may then carry it for the processional.
- f. **Reciting “Shehecheyanu”-** Following the presentation of gifts the immediate family and grandparents recite Shehecheyanu, the blessing we offered when celebrating important milestones or doing something meaningful for the first time. If you and your child do not already know the Shehecheyanu, we will help you to learn it together for this special occasion.
- g. **Speeches by Parents-** Parents may offer a prayer immediately after their Aliyah. The Rabbi will offer suggested texts of the prayer. Speeches and personal reflections should be made during the Kiddush or at your reception.
- h. **Participation of Non-Jewish Parents and Guests-** Our congregation recognizes that both Jewish and non-Jewish parents play a role in raising their children and creating and sustaining a Jewish family. We see Bar/Bat Mitzvah as a time for families to remain together throughout the service. Non-Jewish parent may sit on the bima and participate in several aspects of the Shabbat service, including helping the child to put on his/her tallit, walking in the Torah processional and recessional, and standing near the Torah during the parents’ and child’s Aliyot.

Sexton

A member of the congregation volunteers each Shabbat to serve as sexton, who insures that those receiving honors know when to ascend the bima. The sexton will greet you during the first part of the service and will review the honorees with you.

Ushers

The congregation provides an usher who will greet people as they enter the sanctuary. Ushers will hand out announcement sheets, point out the location of the tallit rack, and answer questions about prayer books, decorum and the timing of the service. You will be asked to serve as usher for another Bar or Bat Mitzvah service before your own simcha.

Kiddush on the Bima

After the service, we recite blessings over wine (Kiddush), hand-washing (N'tilat Yadayim) and challah (Motsi) on the bima prior to adjourning to Murnick Hall for the Kiddush luncheon. Grandparents, parents, relatives and friends may be invited onto the bima for the recitation of these blessings.

Shabbat Guests

Out of town guests who do not ride on Shabbat often require home hospitality. Please contact Rabbi Cooper if you need assistance in arranging hospitality for your Shomer Shabbat guests.

Traditions

Tallit and Tefilin

The wearing of a tallit is a meaningful Jewish ritual that should be performed throughout Jewish life beginning at the time of Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Every Bar and Bat Mitzvah child should own his or her own tallit. We encourage you to purchase a tallit through the Miriam Sisterhood Judaica Shop.

Students learn how to wear tefilin in the sixth grade of the Zeman School. The Rabbi is happy to guide you in purchasing tefillin.

Providing Kippot for the Congregation

It is a custom for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family to provide kippot for the congregation inscribed with the child's name and date of the simcha. We encourage you to purchase personalized kippot through the Miriam Sisterhood Judaica Shop. Clips or bobby pins should also be provided if the family provides the kippot. The synagogue will provide basic kippot if the family chooses not to provide them.

Tossing Candy

To express our wish that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child have a life filled with sweetness and joy the congregation will gently toss candy towards him/her. This is done after the chanting of the Haftarah. The congregation will provide the candy.

Oheb Shalom Values & Requirements for Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Inviting Classmates

All the children in your child's Religious School class must be invited to your simcha. We've intentionally placed this issue in the section on values as the feelings of children who are not invited to a simcha are connected to the religious value of creating and sustaining community and the importance of every individual. We hear stories of children who are seldom invited to parties, and who are excluded from their social group at a critical time for developing social skills. We also hear about children who feel that they ought not attend services on a Shabbat morning because they were not invited to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah reception or child's party. Our youth community can be a safe and positive model for all our children when all the students in a class are invited to every simcha.

Jewish Education

Becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah requires a commitment to Jewish education, thus enrollment in, and regular attendance at, the Zeman School or a Jewish day school (such as Golda Och Academy) is required.

Regular Attendance at Shabbat Services

Regular attendance at Shabbat services, especially at Oheb Shalom, is key to making Bar or Bat Mitzvah meaningful. Consistent Shabbat attendance as a family will:

- a. help you to become more familiar with the content and structure of the Shabbat morning service, reducing anxiety and nervousness on the day of your celebration.
- b. reinforce the message that preparation for Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a family matter, in which everyone learns and grows.
- c. likely lead to you and your child discussing the spiritual aspects of becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah.
- d. connect you to other members of the congregation, including other families celebrating a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

For these reasons we strongly encourage your family to regularly attend services, and especially during the years leading up to becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Family Shabbat services, held several times per year, are especially meaningful and helpful in preparing children for becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

The Mitzvah Project

Bar/Bat Mitzvah students should undertake a Mitzvah Project during the year prior to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. In order to help you find a meaningful project you will be invited to a family program led by Gavin Hirsch.

Financial

All financial obligations to the synagogue must be current, or alternate arrangements made in advance, in order to celebrate becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah on Shabbat morning. If you are having difficulty satisfying your financial obligations, please contact the Linda Griffler.