

**Congregation B'nai Brith**  
**201 Central Street, Somerville, MA 02145**  
**617-625-0333 [tbb@templebnaibrith.org](mailto:tbb@templebnaibrith.org)**

Dear Parents,

As amazing as it may seem, it's time to start thinking about, and planning for, the celebration of your child's becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah. To help you on your journey, we have put together this handout. We hope it will alleviate at least some of the potential (but not inevitable) stress that may accompany your planning for this joyful event.

The material in this handout includes important practical information. Please keep it handy for future reference.

We hope you see this experience as a process that will enrich your entire family, and will be an important milestone in your child's life. It can also be an opportunity for your entire family to learn and deepen your relationship to Judaism and to each other. We hope you have an enjoyable journey.

Please don't hesitate to call us, or the other contact people listed in the packet, if you have any questions.

With best wishes—and joyful anticipation,

Phil Weiss  
Darshan  
617-623-7561  
[pweiss@wheelock.edu](mailto:pweiss@wheelock.edu)

Eliana Jacobowitz  
Rabbi  
617-780-2253  
[rabbieliana@gmail.com](mailto:rabbieliana@gmail.com)

Lisa Gregerman  
Executive Director  
617-625-0333  
[lisag@templebnaibrith.org](mailto:lisag@templebnaibrith.org)

## WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not something that you do or is done to you (you don't *get* Bar Mitzvahed or *go* to a Bar Mitzvah). A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a person or a status. No matter what you do – or don't do -- you *become* a Bat or Bar Mitzvah when you turn 13 and one day according to the Jewish calendar. The ceremony and celebration that has become known as “the Bar/Bat Mitzvah” is the way Jews have come to mark the status of having new responsibilities and new privileges by joyfully engaging them. Consequently, our approach to Bar/Bat Mitzvah training is not limited to practical preparation for the “event,” but encompasses a process of learning about what it means to be part of the Jewish community.

*Bat Mitzvah* is Hebrew for “Daughter of the Commandments.” *Bar Mitzvah* means “Son of the Commandments.” Under Jewish law, children are not obligated to observe the *mitzvot* (commandments), although they are encouraged to do as much as possible to learn the obligations they will have as adults. At the age of 13, a child becomes obligated to observe *mitzvot*. Celebrating becoming a Bat/Bar mitzvah formally marks the assumption of that obligation, along with the corresponding right to take part in leading services, to be counted in a *minyan* (the number of adult Jews needed to constitute public prayer), to form binding contracts, to testify before religious courts, and to marry.

A tradition developed during the Middle Ages in Europe of marking a boy's rite of passage by calling him to the pulpit to read a section of the morning's Torah portion, along with the appropriate blessings. The ceremony marking a girl becoming a Bat Mitzvah developed in the last century, as Reconstructionist, Reform and Conservative congregations stressed the egalitarian nature of Judaism by calling women to the Torah.

The Bat/Bar mitzvah celebration ceremony is not a separate service, but an integral part of the regular service for Saturday morning, the morning of the Jewish Sabbath.

## CHOOSING A DATE

In keeping with our egalitarian practice, we require both boys and girls to be at least 13 years old, by the Jewish calendar, when they celebrate becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Temple B'nai Brith.

To choose a date for your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration, please contact the synagogue's executive director at 617-625-0333 to confirm/calculate your child's Hebrew birthday and choose an available date that will be convenient for your family and works with the synagogue's schedule of holidays and programming. Scheduling can be done 36 months (3 years) in advance. There is no obligation to reserve dates three years in advance, and families that prefer to wait may do so. Dates are assigned on a first come first served basis.

## MEETINGS WITH THE RABBI

Once you have chosen a Bar/Bat mitzvah date with our executive director, we ask that you schedule an appointment with Rabbi Eliana (in some cases with Phil), at which several topics will be discussed, including choosing a Bar/Bat mitzvah tutor, setting up tutoring plan, and setting up a schedule of future meetings.

We ask that you schedule at least two other meetings with the rabbi, one the month prior to the Bar/Bat mitzvah date, and one a week prior to the date. It is, of course, possible to schedule additional meetings and set up a system for check-ins and consultations.

Bar/Bat mitzvah tutoring at B'nai Brith is currently done by Phil Weiss and other tutors.

## WORKING WITH A BAR/BAT MITZVAH TUTOR

While your child will learn all the *basic* skills s/he needs at the Congregation B'nai Brith Children's School, preparation of specific material like Torah and Haftarah portions requires additional tutoring. Deciding how much tutoring your child will need, and when to begin tutoring, is done in consultation with the darshan or rabbi.

Bar and Bat mitzvah students work with a tutor weekly, for approximately one year, in order to develop skills which can include chanting the blessings on being called up to the Torah for an aliyah, chanting the Haftarah and its accompanying blessings, chanting from the Torah, leading parts of the Shabbat morning service, and preparing a teaching to deliver to the congregation (*d'var Torah*) about the weekly reading.

Choosing a Bar/Bat mitzvah tutor is discussed in the paragraph above "meeting with the rabbi"

## PRAYERBOOKS

A prayer book is called a *siddur* (Hebrew for "ordered") because it contains the order of our fixed prayers. We use the prayer book titled Siddur Sim Shalom, during our weekly Shabbat morning services. (Please note that we use a different *siddur* for our monthly Kehillat Shabbat service.) During the Torah Service we use the *chumash* Etz Hayim. It contains the *Torah* readings and *Haftarot* (readings from the prophets) for each week.

Please consider purchasing a copy of each book for your child (and other family members) to study from. They can be purchased at either of the Judaica shops on Harvard Street in Brookline, The Israel Bookshop or Kolbo. They can also be purchased on line.

## SYNAGOGUE CUSTOMS

We ask that everyone wear a *kippah* or other head covering as a sign of respect and humility. We also encourage Jewish men and women to wear a *tallit*, or prayer shawl.

In observance of *Shabbat*, we ask that people refrain from taking pictures, smoking, writing, and using cell phones in the synagogue.

## **ATTENDANCE AT SHABBAT SERVICES**

We strongly recommend that the child and parent(s) attend services at least twice a month during the year prior to the Bar/Bat mitzvah celebration. (Of course we would love to see you more often.)

While you may choose to try any of our services, please keep in mind that your child's Bar/Bat mitzvah celebration will take place during our weekly Shabbat morning service.

## **REHEARSAL**

On the Friday morning prior to the Bar/Bat mitzvah celebration, a rehearsal will be scheduled at the synagogue to do a dry run of the portions of the service your child will be involved in leading. This is also a time when, if he or she will be reading Torah, the student will be able to read his/her portion from the scroll that will be used in the service. This is very important because different scribes have different handwriting, and it is useful to see the distinctive style of a particular scroll. The rehearsal is also an opportunity to practice delivering the d'var Torah (teaching) from the lectern on the bimah (podium).

The rehearsal should be attended by the child, the tutor, and the religious leader(s). Parents and siblings are also invited to participate in the rehearsal.

## **FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN THE SERVICE**

### **ALİYOT, HONORS, ADDITIONAL READINGS, PARENTS' ADDRESS**

In consultation with the rabbi or darshan you will decide who can and will participate in the service.

The weekly Torah reading is divided into seven parts. At the beginning of each section, family members and friends go up to the *Torah*. They say the blessings before and after the portion. This honor is called an *aliyah*, literally, "going up." It is helpful for those who will be reciting these blessing to be familiar with them prior to the service. The printed text will be on the Torah reading stand, both in Hebrew and in English transliteration.

The last few verses of the seventh section are read twice and are called the *maftir*. *Maftir* is the aliyah which is given to the person who will recite the Haftarah (or the one who will recite the blessings for the Haftarah). The Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be called to the Torah to recite the *maftir* blessings. *Haftarah* portions come from the books of the Prophets and are thematically related to the weekly Torah portions.

Other honors during the Torah Service include: Opening/Closing the Ark, taking out the Torah, *Hagbah* (lifting the Torah), *G'ililah* (rolling the Torah), replacing the Torah in the Ark, and leading the responsive reading of the Prayer for Peace.

The parent(s) of the Bar/Bat mitzvah may wish to say a few words to their child from the *bimah*. Please keep these remarks to 5 minutes.

We ask all Jewish people called up for an aliyah to wear a *tallit* (prayer shawl) and everyone who goes up on the bimah to wear a *kippah* or other head covering. Please remind your friends and family who will be receiving honors of these practices.

## **PURCHASING A TALLIT and KIPPOT**

Usually, the parents or grandparents or a close relative or friend will purchase a tallit (prayer shawl) with/for the student. These can be purchased at a store that carries Judaica such as The Israel Bookshop or Kolbo on Harvard Street in Brookline or over the Internet. They can also be purchased at some crafts fairs or brought back from Israel by someone you know who may be visiting there. Some people even choose to make their own. (Please consult with the rabbi before embarking on this project, as there are some very specific requirements for a proper tallit.)

Some families decide to provide special Kippot to all in attendance, oftentimes with the name of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student and the date of the celebration printed inside. These can be ordered online or can be ordered from many stores that carry Judaica, (The synagogue always makes kippot available.)

## **INVITING CLASSMATES**

Each Bar/Bat mitzvah celebration is a meaningful moment in the life of the community. We hope you will consider formally inviting your child's religious school classmates to the service.

## **KIDDUSH**

### **Am I expected to serve food and/or drink after my child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah?**

Yes, it is customary for the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to provide a kiddush for the congregation and guests directly following the Shabbat service in the Temple's Social Hall. A kiddush includes, but is not limited to, a taste of kosher wine for each person and a light snack. Many families choose to host a luncheon meal at the Temple. All food provided must conform to the Temple's kashrut (kosher) policy.

### **How do I find a kosher caterer?**

Some caterers congregants have used include:

- **Edna of Ora Catering 617-987-0270 [oracatering@comcast.net](mailto:oracatering@comcast.net) (has keys to our building, caters Kehilat Shabbat and many other events at our shul.)**
- Dushez Catering 781-933-5853
- Catering by Andrew 617-731-6585
- Chai Catering (The Butcherie) 617-731-9888
- Milk Street Cafe 617-889-2016
- [A Perfect Taste/NRM Catering \(Glatt\): 781-297-7995](#)
- Catering by Andrew (Glatt): 617-731-6585
- Catering by Motti (Glatt): 508-315-3707

Kosher caterers advertise in local Jewish press, eg. [The Jewish Advocate](#), [The North Shore Journal](#), and are listed on-line.

**Cont'd**

### **What if I do not want to hire a caterer?**

You may shop for, prepare and serve a kiddush yourself in accordance with the Temple's (level 1) kashrut policy. The synagogue's Executive Director is available for advice on how to do this. All cooking and preparation must be done in the Temple's kitchen prior to Shabbat. No home prepared food may be brought in to the Temple kitchen (even from a kosher home).

### **What if I cannot afford to provide a kiddush?**

The Temple office staff will be happy to help you make arrangements for an affordable kiddush. The Mitzvah to Mitzvah Program provides families with agency support for kiddush luncheons.

### **What if I want to serve alcoholic beverages other than wine for kiddush?**

There are very specific guidelines for serving alcohol at TBB. See item F. Alcohol, in the Building Use Policy document. These rules are for everyone's protection. Please read them carefully.

## **FEES**

Private tutors set their own fees. Please discuss this with your tutor directly. There is a building use contract and usage fee which you will receive in a separate document when you reserve your child's Bar/Bat mitzvah date.

## **PROGRAM / HANDOUT**

Oftentimes families will prepare a brochure to hand out to those who attend the service. This is by no means mandatory and is at the discretion of each individual family. Each supplement should follow the template available through the synagogue office. The executive director can provide you with an electronic version of the brochure. You do not need to type it yourself from scratch. Your brochure should be submitted to the synagogue office for review, before multiple copies are made. Please leave enough time (at least one week) for this review. This means your brochure should be done a few weeks prior to the event date.

## **CANDY**

During the Torah Service, helpers (often children who are family friends or cousins) will hand out candy. You will need a designated adult to let the kids know when to make their way up the aisle. An usher can help you with this on the morning of the celebration. When the Bar/Bat mitzvah has finished reading the blessings following the *Haftarah*, instead of applause, we will congratulate him or her with a "shower" of candy, representing the sweetness of Jewish life and of the *Torah*.

Only kosher candy should be used. For reasons of safety and cleanliness please purchase individually wrapped jelly candies only. Sunkist Fruit Gems or Pizazz Fruit Slices are the most popular. You can buy Fruit Gems at the Butcherie in Brookline or online. One popular online vendor is CandyFavorites.com. Please purchase your candy several weeks in advance (so you won't find yourselves running around looking for candy on the Friday before the celebration, when you need to be attending to many other important things, like picking up relatives at the airport or making Shabbat dinner).

## PHOTOGRAPHY

The policy at Temple B'nai Brith is to not allow photography or videotaping on Shabbat. If you wish to have a photographer take pictures during a part of the rehearsal, please speak with your tutor and the darshan or the rabbi, in advance. If you wish to have a photographer meet with you on a different day, please consult with the executive director to make sure that the building will be open.

## PLANTS ON THE BIMAH

Some families like to have flowers or plants on the bimah for the service. If you choose to have them, please make sure that they are in containers that will not leak. Flowers/plants must be delivered before noon on Friday. They may be removed on Shabbat.

## PARKING

The City of Somerville has graciously agreed to **suspend resident only parking restrictions** on streets around the synagogue on Friday evenings and Saturdays, during our Sabbath Services (including those with Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations). **Tickets will be forgiven, if issued in error.** You may contact the synagogue office at [tbb@templebnaibrith.org](mailto:tbb@templebnaibrith.org) if you need to have a ticket abated. **Important:** Please note that all major parking violations such as obstructing a posted fire lane, parking within 10 ft. of a hydrant, parking within 20 ft. of an intersection will be enforced and are subject to the associated fines. These tickets cannot be abated.