

CONGREGATION BETH SHALOM

B'NEI MITZVAH INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES

Introduction

Mazal tov on your family's entry into the process of a bar/bat mitzvah preparation and celebration at Beth Shalom. This sheet is designed to give you all the information you will need to help you through the process.

It is our primary goal to make the experience meaningful for the bar/bat mitzvah and for the entire family. We believe that going through the motions without any real gain in Jewish learning and maturity does not promote Jewish identity and often alienates the kids who go through a rote process. So, meaning is the key, although the nature of the meaning will vary from family to family in accordance with each family's values and connections with our tradition.

Requirements for Beginning the Process

Children will be accepted for bar or bat mitzvah if they meet the following requirements:

- Must be Jewish, as determined by Rabbi, using the standards of the Reform tradition
- Must have attended religious school at Beth Shalom or another acceptable synagogue, or have received suitable private tutoring to the satisfaction of the Rabbi (generally for a minimum of three years)
- Family must be members of Beth Shalom

Selecting a Date

Dates are selected on a first come, first serve basis, in conjunction with the Rabbi, and should be scheduled at least 18 months before the bar/bat mitzvah. Many families choose a date near the student's thirteenth birthday, but that is not required. Also, a child (or an adult) who has not had a bar/bat mitzvah celebration, but wishes to do so, may do so at ANY age post 13.

Requirements of the Process

There are a number of requirements listed below. We try to be flexible in accommodating the needs of each family. Thus, if there is some requirement that is not attainable due to the student or your family's circumstances, we will try to be creative in finding an alternative means of achieving the same goals.

1. **Study with the Rabbi** for approximately one year. This study is in addition to Religious School and any tutoring that may be required to learn the prayers and Torah/haftarah reading(s). The work with the rabbi will center upon what it means to become a bar/bat mitzvah, basics of Judaism, more in depth study of a particular area in which the student feels passionate, and learning to research and prepare a d'var torah. Depending upon the timing, some of this study may be together with other students, but as the bar/bat mitzvah time approaches, the last several months will always be one on one.
2. **Tutoring.** Each student is responsible for leading some or all of the service and therefore, learning to chant or recite the necessary prayers, as well as his/her Torah and haftarah reading(s). While the Rabbi will oversee this process, the actual teaching of this will NOT be done by the Rabbi. Some families elect for a family member to teach the student the prayers. Others hire a tutor (usually Josh Burnim) to teach the prayers. It is possible to do it from tapes, but VERY difficult.
3. **Time commitments.** During the year of preparation, there is a lot to do. Many students enter the process already overbooked in other school and extra-curricular activities. If the student is already fully booked, adding on another major activity will only cause stress and unhappiness for both the student and the family. It is strongly recommended that the

student's entire schedule be evaluated and perhaps, if the student is already fully booked, that some other activity be eliminated during this year.

4. **Torah portion.** Every student capable of doing so will be expected to read from the Torah. The Rabbi will assign an appropriate portion that may vary in length from student to student, depending on that student's abilities. Before approaching the Torah portion, the student will normally *first* learn Torah trope generically, then learn to read the text with vowels, then to chant the text using the trope s/he has already learned, and finally learn to chant it from the Torah scroll (without vowels or trope marks). This system teaches the student trope so they are able to chant from the torah in the future, as opposed to learning to chant this one portion and never chant again.
5. **Other Torah readers.** If there are other family members that wish to chant Torah, it is possible to have up to 7 readers, although more than 3 make for a long service. Talk about this with the Rabbi.
6. **Haftarah portion.** Most students will also learn a haftarah portion, if s/he has the ability to do so. Only the most advanced students will be asked to learn the haftarah trope. The haftarah text that will be read will include vowels and cantillation marks, so learning this is generally far easier than learning to chant from the torah.
7. **Required prayers.** All students who are able will learn the following prayers, at a minimum: Blessing over the tallit, Shema (including V'ahavta), Borechu, Morning Blessings, first 3 blessings of the Amidah, Torah blessings, and kiddush. In addition, intermediate level students will learn Ashrei, the Reader's Kaddish, V'Shamru, Aleinu, and blessings before and after Haftarah. Advanced students will be assigned additional prayers as the Rabbi deems appropriate.
8. **D'var Torah.** Each student will prepare and deliver a d'var torah, his or her own commentary on the torah portion s/he has read. The Rabbi will work closely with the student to help him or her develop his/her d'var torah. It is preferable if the parents NOT be involved in this process to assure the student's own thoughts and words.
9. **Materials and required reading.** The student will be required to purchase *Crossing the River*, available from the Temple for \$25 (our cost). Depending on the student's interests and aptitudes, there will often be a second book, to be determined by the Rabbi. In addition, the parent(s) shall read either Putting G!d on the Guest List, by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (basic), or Make Your Own Bar/Bat Mitzvah: A Personal Approach to Creating a Meaningful Rite of Passage by Rabbi Goldie Milgram.
10. **Attendance at services.** Because the student will lead significant portions of the service, the student is expected to attend a minimum of ten (10) services (excluding High Holiday and children's services) in the year preceding the bar/bat mitzvah service, so the student becomes familiar with the service s/he will lead. Each student will be issued a card and at each service attended, the Rabbi will stamp the card to show the student was present.
11. **Projects.** Each student will do nine mitzvah projects of his/her choosing, as approved by the Rabbi. Each student will choose three projects from each of these three categories: a) becoming a more knowledgeable Jew; b) becoming a better person; c) becoming a more spiritual or religious person. Many examples of such projects are given in *Crossing the River*, but a student may choose to substitute his/her own projects, with Rabbi's approval.

12. **Tallit.** In most instances, a child will be presented with a tallit at the bar/bat mitzvah. The family is responsible for purchasing (or making) that tallit well ahead of time. The Beth Shalom gift shop is one source, but so are various websites.
13. **Siddurim (Prayer Books).** There are two options: you may use our congregation's prayer books, which work fine, or you may create personal prayer booklets that include photos, favorite readings, etc. The advantage of personal prayer books is that they are personal, they don't skip around, they offer a nice momento, you can include names of family members and yartzeit, etc. The disadvantage is they take a good deal of time to create, are costly to print, and some families consider this one of the most time consuming parts of the entire process. If you choose to create your own, first look at one of the many previous booklets created within the congregation (and you can then use that template), but you must have it complete at least one month before the bar/bat mitzvah.
14. **Honors.** You may give out as many honors as you wish to family members and others. You should prepare a list of all those you wish to honor, and the Rabbi will work with you to find appropriate ways to do so.
15. **Music.** There are many options for the music at the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony, but it is the responsibility of the family to arrange for the music desired. One option is that the Rabbi lead the music a capella. Another is a costly option of flying in any number of cantors or cantorial soloists that are available, although sometimes there is one in the family. A third option is to ask one or more of our Temple musicians to supply the music (e.g., Maddy Rassaby, Josh & Ethan, etc).
16. **Non-Jewish family members.** We encourage the participation of non-Jewish family members in appropriate ways. The rabbi will work with you on that.
17. **Venue.** Families are encouraged to hold their children's b'nei mitzvah at the Temple's premises. Families that wish to use other venues should consult with the Rabbi, and it will ordinarily be permitted if there is a good reason to do so and if all members of the Beth Shalom community are openly invited to attend the service. Otherwise, the Rabbi may officiate at an off-premises service, but his participation will not be treated as part of his Congregational responsibilities, and must be conducted in the Rabbi's private time and be subject to such fee as determined by the Rabbi.
18. **Cost.** For Beth Shalom members in good standing, there is no cost for use of the synagogue or for the Rabbi's time in preparing the student or officiating. However, a member who has joined the community in the year preceding the bar/bat mitzvah must commit to at least two additional years of membership post-bar/bat mitzvah.
19. **Reception/Kiddush luncheon.** Although there is no cost for the above, every bar/bat mitzvah family is expected to provide a reception of some kind immediately following the service. It can be a full-blown kiddush luncheon or some cookies and the like, or anywhere in between. All those attending must be invited and be made to feel welcome.
20. **Party.** Many families choose to make a party to celebrate the bar/bat mitzvah. Every family is free to pursue whatever course they wish in this regard and to invite whomever they wish.
21. **Rabbi's Discretionary Fund.** Although there are no direct fees (see paragraph 17) for the synagogue or rabbi, it is customary and usual to make an appropriate contribution in honor of the bar/bat mitzvah to the Rabbi's discretionary fund, which is used by the Rabbi to assist families in need and support other Temple projects. The amount of such contributions varies widely depending upon the means of the family. Some families also make a contribution to the Temple to honor the occasion.