



Congregation B'nai Israel

Preparing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah

This guide includes the traditions surrounding Bar and Bat Mitzvah at Congregation B'nai Israel. It will be of help to your family as you plan and share the process of participating in one of Judaism's greatest mitzvot, that of leading the Congregation in prayer and being called to read from Torah.

Children usually become Bar/Bat Mitzvah during the Saturday morning Shabbat Service at 11:00 a.m. Two B'nai Mitzvah may share the same service. The Saturday morning Service at 8:00 a.m. is also available. The Religious Practices Committee has reaffirmed a long-standing policy that Friday night and Havdalah services are not available for Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

It is a blessing to have a Congregation of almost 750 families and a school of over 300 students. Holidays and Congregational events, as well as summer vacations, are all considerations when assigning Bar/Bat Mitzvah dates. We appreciate your flexibility, as there are fewer than 40 Sabbaths available. In order for a child to be eligible for Bar and Bat Mitzvah, they must complete our Hebrew curriculum, **and** be enrolled in our Religious School at the time of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Regular attendance is expected, and if the Religious School indicates that attendance requirements have not been met, no Bar or Bat Mitzvah date will be assigned. Similarly an assigned date may be withdrawn.

Please keep in mind that the Rabbis and Cantor are available to meet with you at any time to discuss questions and concerns and you should feel free to call on them.

What will the Bar/Bat Mitzvah be expected to learn and do?

It is understood that every child has unique abilities. The Rabbis and Cantor will tailor each student's part in the worship service accordingly. Generally, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will:

1. Chant the blessings before and after Torah and Haftarah portions;
2. Chant from the Torah;
3. Chant from the Haftarah;
4. Chant selected prayers from Mishkan T'filah;
5. Read and comprehend the English translation of the Torah and Haftarah portions, and master the English readings in Mishkan T'filah;
6. Prepare and deliver a D'var Torah, a personal interpretation teaching the congregation a lesson from the Torah portion.

What are the Costs?

Following is a schedule of anticipated costs and donations in connection with your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. These costs, which are in effect at the time you receive this booklet, may change slightly.

BAR/BAT MITZVAH.....\$550.00

This fee, determined by the Board of Trustees, covers the expense of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Hebrew program. The fee does not go to any personnel on the staff. It also includes **Mishkan T'filah**, a digital training file, and the organist charge.

ONEG SHABBAT.....Contribution of \$125.00

PULPIT FLOWERS.....Contribution of \$125.00

The Oneg (light hors d'oeuvres and snacks) preceding the service and the pulpit flowers enhancing the bima are arranged by the synagogue, but are traditionally sponsored by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family.

These fees are due eight weeks before your child's individual preparation, described below, or six to eight months before your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. *Please also note the Policy on Financial Status at the end of this handbook.*

Cantor's Class

The season before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, your child will begin a special 13 week class taught by the Cantor. The class is offered during Kitah Zayin (7th grade) and meets on Monday evenings (during regular Religious School), and Thursday afternoons, 4:00 - 4:30 p.m. (When 7th graders are not in the Cantor's class they attend Religious School on Monday evenings, but do not attend on Thursday afternoons.) Children celebrating their Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the spring of 7th grade begin the class the previous fall. Children celebrating in the fall of 8th grade begin the previous spring. Special arrangements are made for those children whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah takes place in the fall of 7th grade.

In the Cantor's class, your child will learn to chant all blessings surrounding the Torah and Haftarah portions, as well as selected passages from the prayer book. Learning this material is aided by the use of an MP3 which your child will receive when she/he begins preparation with the Cantor. The MP3 will be used in conjunction with the prayer book your child will also receive.

During the class students will practice and recite these prayers with and in front of their peers. The material from the Cantor's class must be mastered before private instruction begins. If the Cantor determines that a student is having difficulty learning the prescribed materials, the student may be asked to supplement their preparation by studying in the Religious School's Tutoring Center.

Regular attendance in both the Cantor's class and Religious School classes are prerequisites for a student to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Individual Preparation

Individual preparation begins four to six months before your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Your child will spend a half-hour each week in one-on-one tutoring at B'nai Israel. During this time your child will learn to chant Torah and an additional portion of Haftarah.

The Torah has no vowels or cantillation signs (the ancient form of musical notation that indicates the tune for each word). During these sessions, the student will learn the traditional melodies associated with their Torah and Haftarah portions and will become comfortable chanting Torah directly from the ancient scroll.

D'var Torah

Individual preparation also includes discussion of the week's portion. A Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will meet with one of the Rabbis or the Director of Education for study and reflection on their torah portion. The student will prepare a D'var Torah (personal interpretation) which they will present at their Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

The Parents' Role

We feel strongly that the experience for the students becomes most positive when parents too, are involved and supportive. At points during the Cantor's Class, parents will be asked to join their children in order to learn about the history of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the Shabbat morning service and the student's specific Torah portion. In addition, families will be invited and encouraged to attend several additional family gatherings, and to participate in regular Sabbath Services. These programs are meant to provide enrichment and an opportunity for families to share experiences.

The parent also serves an important role in helping the child prepare at home. During the days in between visits with the Cantor/tutor, your child will be expected to study the portion at least thirty minutes each evening. The amount of time needed will vary with each child. We all know, however, that daily study is crucial. Learning cannot be achieved by "cramming" once or twice a week, or by studying furiously just prior to meeting with the Cantor/tutor.

Meaning of Mitzvot

Our Mitzvot program is a wonderful, optional opportunity offered at Congregation B'nai Israel. This program involves the Bar/Bat Mitzvah selecting mitzvot from the categories of Religious Observance, Community Service and Study. Working with their peers, creating mitzvot and building community ties, the candidate student dedicates him/herself to fulfilling these mitzvot before their Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

A Mitzvot Coordinator assists in developing an individualized program, and provides guidance throughout the program. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah receives a Certificate of Accomplishment at his/her Bar/Bat Mitzvah for the successful completion of the project. The Mitzvot Program is intended to serve as a meaningful extension of one's Bar/Bat Mitzvah process, to focus on the significance of the word **Mitzvah**, and to plant within a child seeds that flourish into a lifetime commitment toward living Jewishly.

Tallitot and Kippot

Tallit (prayer shawl) and Kippa (head covering) are garments long appropriate for Jews at prayer. Educated choice has been a hallmark of the Reform Jew, so while both are available at B'nai Israel, they are not required. Since gender equality is also a hallmark of the Reform Jew, we encourage both boys and girls to discuss the merits of wearing Kippot and Tallitot not only at the service in which they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah, but also at any subsequent morning service. Both are easily available for purchase or order at our Judaica shop or on-line.

A Couple of Weeks Before

A couple of weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the parents and child will meet with one of the Rabbis. You will discuss the order of the service, the family's participation (Aliyot), and the personal meaning of the occasion for all members of the family. The family should also ask 4 friends or family members to serve as ushers for the service.

Photography

No pictures may be taken during the service. It is permissible to take pictures in the sanctuary one hour before or after the service. Please provide the Temple with the name of your photographer. Photography times will be split and coordinated between families when it is a shared B'nai Mitzvah.

You may video the service only within the following guidelines: A single video camera must remain stationary at all times on a tripod (no monitor). The tripod is to be located in the back corner of the sanctuary on the Rabbi's side. The tripod may not be moved; only the camera on top of the tripod may be turned. No additional lighting may be used.

“Your” Shabbat has Arrived!

On the Friday morning preceding the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, your child will have a rehearsal in the Sanctuary to prepare for the service with the Cantor.

Encourage your family and friends to arrive early to enjoy the Oneg Shabbat that begins at 5:30 p.m. prior to the 6:00 p.m. Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday evening. One or more members of the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will recite the candle blessing that takes places immediately before the service begins. The blessing may be read alone or shared among members of the family. During the service, The Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be called forward to lead the kiddush.

On Saturday morning, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family and all those who will have a role in the service should be in the Sanctuary by 10:40 a.m., at which time the Rabbi will review roles and cues and answer any remaining questions.

The ushers should see that all guests are seated in the sanctuary by 10:55 a.m. The Service begins promptly at 11:00 a.m. While teenage guests are usually well behaved, it may be necessary for the ushers to control the behavior of the teenagers present to prevent them from disrupting the service.

There will be a Kiddush, with challah and wine supplied by the Temple, immediately following the service. The ushers will be asked to help distribute wine and grape juice and collect the empty cups.

Celebrating at B'nai Israel

B'nai Israel is a wonderful place to celebrate your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Our facility is able to accommodate both an afternoon and an evening celebration on the same day, and also has space appropriate for a small Kiddush luncheon. Detailed information about the use of the facility will be sent to you with your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. *Please be sure to note the requirements and deadlines for reserving space that will be included in the materials.*

Board of Trustees Policy on Financial Status

Congregation B'nai Israel encourages children of members to celebrate the life cycle event of Bar/Bat Mitzvah when they attain the age of 13. The congregation is committed to assisting the students and their parents in all aspects of a child's becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah must also commit to assisting in this preparation and fulfilling their financial commitments to the congregation. In this light, in order for a child to begin individual training (approximately four months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah), the member must be current in all financial obligations to the congregation (i.e. annual contribution, building fund pledges, Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee, Religious School tuition) or be in compliance with an agreed upon financial plan. Any member who has not complied with their financial obligations to B'nai Israel will risk the Bar/Bat Mitzvah not taking place as scheduled.

Beyond Bar/Bat Mitzvah

It is important that our students see themselves as life-long learners. It is our expectation that students will continue in our 8th grade religious school and then join Merkaz, the Community High School, in 9th grade. The 8th grade curriculum offers the students the opportunity to discuss important issues in a Jewish context, while Merkaz offers high school students the chance to learn with their peers from the entire greater Bridgeport Jewish community in classes they choose.

A celebration on the road to High School graduation is confirmation, a highlight of Reform Jewish education. The 10th grade year, which leads to confirmation, is part of the Merkaz curriculum and includes numerous learning opportunities and study with the Cantor and Rabbis. In addition there is a class trip to Washington, DC and the actual creation of the Confirmation service. Students experience a mature course of studies and cement social relationships through informal gatherings. It is our hope and expectation that all Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidates will remain in Religious School through Confirmation.