

# **A GUIDE TO BECOMING A BAR OR BAT MITZVAH AT BETH HAVERIM SHIR SHALOM**

*Produced by  
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the Education Committee, & the Ritual Committee  
Beth Haverim Shir Shalom, Mahwah, New Jersey*

*Dear Bar/Bat Mitzvah Families;*

*Please see below some quick & helpful information of what to expect in the coming months. More detail and forms may be found in the "Hosting" section of this guide.*

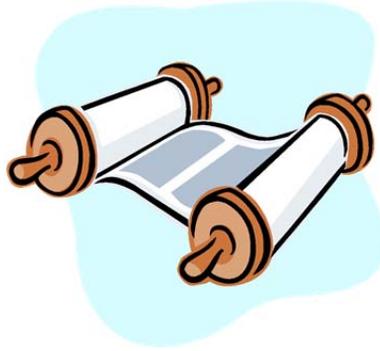
*Any questions, do not hesitate to call 201-512-1983.*

*Thank you.*

### **QUICK REFERENCE/KEY FACTS TO KNOW**

- YOU MUST BE A MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING OF BHSS
  
- Six to nine months before you will receive a bill in the amount of **\$1,000**. This bill is comprised of two amounts:
  - \$750.00 for a combination of prayer group classes, rabbi meetings, cantor sessions & bar/bat mitzvah rehearsals
  - \$250.00 Shabbat Oneg/Kiddush fee.This total fee must be paid in full no later than two weeks prior to your big day.
  
- You may choose to have either bima baskets or flowers for the sanctuary. You will need two of either one; one will be for the rabbi's lectern and the other for the cantor's lectern.
  
- As an option, we offer videotaping (DVD) and live streaming of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. This is the only service you may use in our sanctuary; no other videotaping is allowed as we are under contract with our own video company.
  
- If you would like to have a photo session in the sanctuary, please call the office to schedule a time.
  
- As part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process we ask that every family "usher" for the B'nai Mitzvah prior to your own. This may or may not be exactly the week before. Please refer to the synagogue calendar.
  
- If you would like to have a Shabbat dinner, extended Kiddush, luncheon or bar/bat mitzvah party, the social hall or the Ulam is available for rental. Reservations are held by deposit only and are on a first come, first served basis.

# *INTRODUCTION*



## **Mazel Tov!**

Soon your child will become a bar or bat mitzvah. This is a wonderful time for your entire family! At this moment, as the event becomes a reality, you may be feeling the beginnings of excitement and confusion. In this binder, you will find everything you wanted to know – and some things you never thought of asking – about the philosophy, requirements and procedures of the entire process. We hope to make this journey a smooth and meaningful one that you will remember all your lives.

## **The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony in a Ritual and Educational Perspective**

Jewish life includes a pattern of ritual ceremonies, each one marking a significant time in a person's life. With each event, every Jew relates in a more mature manner with our heritage and Jewish community. At birth, with the *brit milah* or naming ceremony, your child was welcomed into the covenant of the Jewish people. At an early age, your child was consecrated into Jewish learning in the religious school.

Soon, your child will be called to the Torah as a bar or bat mitzvah, indicating a change in their religious status. “*Bar*” literally means “son” and “*Bat*” literally means “daughter.” A “*mitzvah*” is a commandment. To become a bar or bat mitzvah is to become a son or daughter of the commandment. With this privilege comes the obligation to learn about and observe Jewish commandments and practices applicable as a modern Reform Jewish adult. The bar and bat mitzvah ceremony is a rite of sacred passage and not the culmination of a religious and education process. When your child receives their bar or bat mitzvah certificate, they affirm their lifelong commitment to active participation in Jewish life through study, celebration and good deeds.

## **Confirmation**

***We fully expect that all young people who become bar /bat mitzvah at Beth Haverim Shir Shalom will continue on to confirmation during their high school years.***

Once you and your child have experienced the beautiful ceremony of bar /bat mitzvah, your connection to Judaism is not over. From the beginning of your child's Jewish life, you made a commitment to share all of its aspects within the Jewish community. The next step from a statement of mature interaction with Judaism during the bar /bat mitzvah, is an affirmation of that interaction through the process of Confirmation.

The first confirmation ceremony took place in Berlin, Germany in 1817. It was there, at the birthplace of Reform Judaism, that a group of 16 and 17 year-olds stood before their congregation to affirm their Judaism. Originally, Confirmation was a substitute for bar mitzvah, since it was thought that a child's Jewish education should not end at the age of 13. Today, throughout the United States and many other countries, students who continue

their Jewish education after bar /bat mitzvah celebrate their confirmation on *Shavuot*, the Festival of the Giving of the Torah.

The *Kadimah* program at Beth Haverim Shir Shalom brings a more mature understanding of Judaism in order for each child to take a firm stance in the confirmation of their faith in God and their Jewish identity. Beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade (which is a required year of attendance) and continuing through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, this program emphasizes a wide variety of topics of interest to your child. Including various holiday celebrations, trips, discussions and guest speakers, this curriculum is geared toward helping bridge the gap in Jewish education between bar /bat mitzvah and adulthood.

## **REQUIREMENTS LEADING TO THE BAR /BAT MITZVAH CEREMONY**

1. The child must be at least age 13.
2. Beginning with the fourth grade year, there is a requirement of a minimum of four consecutive years of formal religious education in the Beth Haverim Shir Shalom program before there can be a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony as a part of our Saturday morning worship. New students to our school may fulfill this obligation with formal training at a previous religious institution. We **strongly recommend** that a student who will turn 10 years old during their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year, start religious school in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade as opposed to 4<sup>th</sup>. This will enable the fulfillment of the four year requirement.
3. Before the date of their bar/bat mitzvah, each student and his or her parent/guardian/other adult are required to attend a minimum of 10 Shabbat services at Beth Haverim Shir Shalom. At least 4 of the 10 services must be on Shabbat morning. Other Shabbat mornings, as well as evenings, may be included in the remaining 6 services. We encourage you and your child to attend at least one bar/bat mitzvah service at BHSS in 4th grade, and one in fifth grade as well. These will count toward the service attendance requirement (see below.) *Service attendance cards, which can be found outside the synagogue office, must be handed to the rabbi or the cantor at the end of the services your family attends.* The interest of the parent, with the child, in the worship experience greatly enhances the entire bar /bat mitzvah experience. **We strongly suggest this requirement be completed one year prior to your bar/bat mitzvah celebration.**
4. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate must perform at least 18 hours of community service based on an issue that they care about that they would like to affect change on in the world.

5. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate will prepare a *d'var Torah* explaining the Torah portion and the lessons it should teach us, why becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is important to them, what they are looking forward to learning Jewishly after their celebration, and highlighting the community service they have performed. There will be meetings with the rabbi beginning approximately seven months in advance to plan this presentation, as well as one meeting afterward to discuss the next steps in the student's Jewish development.
6. The family must be up-to-date with all financial commitments to the congregation, including dues, school, bar /bat mitzvah fees, and building fund.

## PREPARATION OF THE STUDENT

1. Approximately one year in advance, your child may attend a special b'nei mitzvah group prayer class. At this group class, your child will review the prayers of the service. The group class is a powerful first step towards your child's mastery of the liturgy. Whether or not your child is assigned to this class will be determined by the cantor and educator.
2. Beginning approximately seven months in advance, the rabbi begins to meet with b'nai mitzvah families to get to know them, as well as to work with students on their *d'var Torah*. At least one parent is required to attend each of these meetings. It's a great opportunity for families who are doubled with another family to get acquainted as well; if you are sharing the date with another family, these meetings will be with the two families together. The rabbi will meet with you approximately four times in advance and one time after the celebration. Each meeting will last approximately 45 minutes.
3. Six to nine months in advance, your child will also attend regular tutoring sessions conducted by the cantor or other synagogue professional. There they will learn their Torah and Haftarah portions. Lessons are weekly and last approximately 15 minutes. In consideration of the cantor/tutor's and other students' time, promptness is crucial. Students who arrive late may miss all or part of their lesson. If the rabbi or cantor deems it necessary, extra meetings may be needed to fulfill the requirements. If progress is still slow, the rabbi or cantor may recommend outside tutoring at the family's expense. If you are aware of any special difficulties or learning needs your child may be having, please share them with the rabbi, cantor or educator as early as possible. (Please note: If you have special scheduling needs, you must let the synagogue secretary, the cantor or the tutor know before lessons are scheduled to begin.)
4. The cantor recommends that your child study every day for 15-20 minutes. For the best results, he/she should practice reading out loud and use the prayer book and other materials provided. Parents should monitor their child's progress by listening to their practice sessions at home and through regular communication with the cantor or tutor. Even if you do not know how to read Hebrew, it is important to listen to your child for clarity, fluency and confidence. Your child should always review what he or she already knows as well as working on newly assigned work.

## PREPARATION FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

1. **Invitations and Announcements**  
Invitations should invite your guests to the ceremony in the synagogue. In wording the invitation, it is correct to use phrases like: X will be called to the Torah as a bar/bat mitzvah, Y will become a bar/bat mitzvah. This is a complete Shabbat morning service that begins promptly at 10:00 a.m. and ends at approximately noon.
2. *Kippot* (Yarmulkes), *Tallitot* (Prayer Shawls)  
The synagogue provides *kippot* and *tallitot* for all services. If you wish to provide personalized *kippot* and/or have a specific color, they must be ordered privately.
3. **Live Streaming, Video and Still Photography**  
In order to maintain the sacred nature of the service, no photographs may be taken during the service. It is recommended that photography sessions be arranged for a weekday during the week(s) preceding the service. If it is done on Saturday morning, all photographs must be taken before 9:15 am. An appointment must be made with the administrator in advance. The rabbi and the cantor would be honored to be part of your family pictures, if you choose, but you must make that appointment with them directly. For more information on videotaping, and live streaming options, please refer to the **Hosting** section of this handbook.
4. *Bima* Baskets or Flowers  
The family must provide *bima* baskets or flowers for the *bima*. The synagogue will create baskets to be distributed to the Center for Food Action in Mahwah, Ramapo Bergen Animal Rescue in Oakland, or Jewish Family Services of Rockland. Or as an alternative, flowers, ordered privately, not through the synagogue, should be delivered on Friday before 1 p.m. and will be left for the congregation to enjoy throughout the next week. For more information on *Bima* Baskets, please refer to the **Hosting** section of this handbook.
5. **Temple Topics Submission**  
Each B'nai Mitzvah student has the opportunity to submit a "biography" that will be published in *Temple Topics* corresponding with the month of their celebration. This form is available online in the B'nai Mitzvah information on the synagogue website or from the synagogue office.
6. *Oneg Shabbat*  
Each bar/bat mitzvah family hosts the *Oneg Shabbat* Friday night of their celebration. For more information on the *Oneg Shabbat*, please refer to the **Hosting** section of this handbook.

7. Use of Synagogue Building

Please refer to the **Hosting** section of this handbook for information on the use of synagogue facilities.

8. *Tzedakah*

It is considered one of the highest *mitzvot* (commandments) to give *tzedakah* (charity.) By giving *tzedakah*, we help others while thanking God for the many blessings in our lives. For suggestions of charities to which you can give *tzedakah*, please speak to the rabbi. If you would like to honor the rabbi, cantor or educator, it would be appropriate to make a donation to one of the Beth Haverim Shir Shalom funds or the rabbi's, cantor's, or educator's discretionary fund. Please contact the synagogue office for information.

9. Suggested Reading

There are many great ways for your family to make the whole b'nei mitzvah experience even more meaningful; there are some terrific books available with creative ideas for you to explore, and we'd like to recommend some of our favorites:

On the Doorposts of Your House: Prayers and Ceremonies for the Jewish Home  
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Gates of Mitzvah: A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle  
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat mitzvah  
Jewish Lights Publishing

Raising Your Child to be a Mensch  
Neil Kurshan

Teaching Your Child About God  
David Wolpe

The Mitzvah Project Book: Making Mitzvah Part of Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Your Life  
Skylights Path Publishing

## LEADING UP TO YOUR BAR /BAT MITZVAH CEREMONY

You will be assigned three rehearsals, to be led by the educator, cantor, and rabbi. They will occur during the month immediately preceding the ceremony and will each last one to one and a half hours. Both the child and at least one parent must attend these rehearsals, which are run-throughs of the service. The student should bring to all rehearsals the following: their *d'var Torah*, prayer book and all study materials. Completed *Aliyah* (honors) sheets and a draft of your parent blessing are due at the first rehearsal. For more information on *Aliyah* sheets and parent blessings, please refer to the **Honor Sheets** section and the **Prayers/Blessings** section of this handbook.

Ushering **is a requirement for the family**. You will generally be assigned to usher at the bar /bat mitzvah service immediately preceding your own. (This may or may not be the Saturday morning directly before your child's service. Please call the synagogue office to verify your ushering date.) Ushering helps guests feel warmly welcomed to our community; it also enables you to have a more complete understanding of the entire service. If you are unable to usher on the day of your assignment, it is your responsibility to arrange a switch with another family.

Please arrive to usher **no later than 9:20 a.m. for a 10:00 a.m. service**. Your job as ushers is very important in helping to maintain the decorum needed for a spiritual experience, and a family will return the favor the day of your child's celebration.

## SERVICE PROCEDURES

*The sacred form of Shabbat services, including readings, music and other ritual matters, is determined by the rabbi and the cantor to enhance the beauty of every Shabbat for the congregation. There are ample opportunities for you to honor family and friends with participation in the service.*

### Erev Shabbat/Friday Night

1. The family must attend the Friday evening *Shabbat* services immediately preceding the bar /bat mitzvah ceremony. The first Friday evening *Shabbat* service of the month begins at 6:30 p.m.. All other Friday night *Shabbat* services will begin at 7:30 p.m.. Your family must arrive no later than 6:15 p.m. for a 6:30 p.m. services, or no later than 7:15 p.m. for a 7:30 p.m. service.

**Please call the synagogue office to be sure of the *Shabbat* service time.**

2. Each bar/bat mitzvah family hosts the *Oneg Shabbat* on the Friday night before their celebration. Please see the **Hosting** section of this handbook for more information.

## ***Aliyot - Honors***

1. The mother or other adult Jewish female in the family helps to lead the candle blessing at the beginning of the service.
2. There are other honors available for the family on Friday night, including reciting the Torah blessings, dressing the Torah, opening the ark for the Torah service, and opening the ark for the *Aleinu* section of the service. You may utilize as many of these honors as you wish.
3. The bar/bat mitzvah child will lead the congregation in the *Kiddush* during the service.

*Please be sure to fill out the correct honors sheets depending on whether yours is a single or double celebration. Please note: families are given the same number of honors to distribute, whether it is a single or double celebration. If you are celebrating together with another family, please contact the synagogue office to determine whether you are "Family # 1" or "Family # 2".*

## ***Shacharit L'Shabbat/Saturday Morning***

### Prior to the Service

1. The Shabbat morning service begins at 10 a.m. sharp. Your family must arrive no later than 9:15 a.m.
2. If you are bringing your own *kippot*, please do so no later than the Wednesday preceding your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Otherwise, there are *kippot* and *tallitot* available for those worshippers who wish to use them.
3. If desired, a parking attendant or babysitter is the responsibility of the family. Arrangements must be made through the administrator.
4. Extended family and guests should be seated by 9:55 a.m. (at least five minutes before the start time.) Your immediate family (the bar/bat mitzvah child, parent(s), and siblings) will meet in the rabbi's office beginning at approximately 9:45 a.m.
5. There are no reserved or assigned seats, although it is customary for the parents and immediate family to sit in the front rows of the sanctuary.
6. Unless otherwise noted, services begin promptly at 10 a.m. and end at approximately noon.

## During the Bar /Bat Mitzvah Ceremony

1. Torah Transmission: Since a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony is the culmination of years of work by both the parents and the child, it is important to symbolically transmit the teachings of Torah from the parents to the child. This is done by a Torah passing ceremony. After an introduction by the rabbi, the rabbi will pass the Torah from the parents to the child.
2. After the child completes the *Haftarah* blessings, **parents are invited to offer their parent blessing (English.)** Please refer to the **Prayers/Blessings** section of this handbook for information on choosing or writing your own blessing.
3. *Aliyot*/Pulpit Honors  
There are several opportunities to honor your family and close friends during the Shabbat morning service. The forms listing the honors available can be found in the **Honor Sheets** section of this handbook. These forms must be completed and handed in at the first rehearsal. Please inform each participant of his or her honor well in advance to the service.

## *Tallit* Presentation – **OPTIONAL**

It is the bar and bat mitzvah student's personal choice as to whether he or she wears a *tallit* (prayer shawl) during the service. If your child IS planning to wear a *tallit*, then there are two options:

1. The *tallit* is "presented" to the child by a relative or family friend on the *bimah* as a part of the beginning of the service. This is a NON-SPEAKING part; the rabbi will help the child say the blessing for wearing a *tallit*, and he/she will put it on and continue with the service. If you are doing this, then you need to include the presenter's name in your honor sheets when you hand them in to the office.

2. The *tallit* is placed in the sanctuary before the service and when the cantor escorts the bar and/or bat mitzvah up onto the *bimah*, he will assist with the blessing and putting on the *tallit* before the service begins.

## B. Opening and Closing the Ark Curtains

There are three times during the service when you can choose one or two people to open/close the Ark curtains. They are: at the beginning of the Torah service, at the end of the Torah service, and during the *Aleinu* section of the service. As this honor can be given to people of any faith or age, it is good way to involve non-Jewish family members, younger siblings and close friends at this time. On your honor sheets, list one or two people for each of these three times.

C. *Aliyot* to the Torah

One of the greatest honors for a child who is becoming a bar /bat mitzvah is to be called to the Torah for the first time. In addition, the father, mother and eight other family members or friends who are Jewish and over the age of 13 can be honored by reciting the Torah blessings. There are a total of 8 *aliyot* during the Torah reading section of the service, of which you are responsible for four: one for the child, one for (typically) his/her parents, and two others you may offer to friends and family. If you or your family members need a recording of the blessings or other special assistance, please do not hesitate to ask. The Torah blessing can be found in the **Prayers/Blessings** section of this handbook and on the BHSS website.

D. *Hagbah*/Lifting the Torah and *G'lilah*/Dressing the Torah

After the Torah is chanted, the honor of lifting the Torah is given to a relative or friend. Since the Torah is lifted high and turned around so that the congregation can see it, someone strong enough should be asked to perform this honor. A second person then helps dress the Torah before it is returned to the ark. Both of these honors are given to a Jewish person who is over the age of 13.

E. *Kiddush*

There is an English prayer before the *Kiddush* (blessing over the wine) that can be given to anyone Jewish or non-Jewish, including a younger sibling, as another honor. Please see the **Prayers/Blessings** section of this handbook for a copy of this prayer.

F. Optional “In Remembrance” section

Our b'nai mitzvah families are permitted to include an “In Remembrance” to be published within the service guide. The “In Remembrance” form can be found in the **Honor Sheet** section of the handbook. For “In Remembrance” examples please refer to the **Prayers/Blessings** section of this handbook.

*Please note: You may assign a family member and/or friend to more than one honor during the service, as long as he/she fits the requirements as explained at the bottom of page 2 in the Honor Sheets section of this handbook.*

## GLOSSARY

*Aleinu* – The prayer of adoration chanted and read towards the end of the service in front of the open ark.

*Aliyah/Aliyot* (plural) – The word literally means “going up” it is used to refer to the honor of reciting the blessings over the Torah.

*Bar mitzvah* – The word literally means “son of a commandment.” A boy, having reached puberty, is now traditionally considered responsible for carrying out the laws of Judaism. The word refers specifically to the child and not to the ritual ceremony of being called up to the Torah. B’nai mitzvah is the plural for boys (or boys and girls.)

*Bat mitzvah* – The word literally means “daughter of a commandment.” A girl, having reached puberty, is now traditionally considered responsible for carrying out the laws of Judaism. The word refers specifically to the child and not to the ritual ceremony of being called up to the Torah. B’not mitzvah is the plural.

*Bima* – The raised portion in our sanctuary, which leads to the *Aron Kodesh* (the Ark) that holds our Torah scrolls.

*Haftarah* – The word literally means “conclusion.” It refers to the reading from the Prophets. It is usually thematically connected to the Torah portion for a particular Shabbat.

*Hakafah* – The procession which brings the Torah into the congregation.

*Kiddush/Motzi* – These are the blessings done at the end of the service over the wine and the bread.

*Kippah* (Yarmulke) – This is a skullcap worn according to custom by both men and women if they wish during prayer.

*Mitzvah/Mitzvot* (plural) – This word literally means “commandment” but has also come to be understood as “good deed” since all that God commands is for the good of the people. For Reform Jews, it denotes desirable acts, both ritual and ethical, which define us as Jews.

*Oneg Shabbat* – This phrase literally means, “delight of the Sabbath.” It refers to the time after the Friday evening service during which there is socializing, eating and drinking to celebrate Shabbat.

*Parashah* – This term refers to the section of the Torah read on any particular Shabbat.

*Siddur* – prayer book

*Tallit/Tallitot* (plural) – This is the prayer shawl traditionally worn during morning services, or anytime Torah is read. It is based on the commandment to wear fringes. According to the Talmud, a Jewish law book, both males and females may wear it once they reach the age of bar /bat mitzvah.

*Torah* – The handwritten parchment scroll kept in the ark and containing the Five Books of Moses.

*Tzedakah* – This term literally means “righteousness” or “act of justice” and is used to refer to the duty of the Jew to assist others through charity or volunteer work.

## **PEOPLE TO CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS**

Rabbi Barry Diamond – [rabbibdiamond@gmail.com](mailto:rabbibdiamond@gmail.com)

Cantor David Perper – [cantorperper@earthlink.net](mailto:cantorperper@earthlink.net)

Educator – Rebecca McVeigh – [schoolatbethhav@optonline.net](mailto:schoolatbethhav@optonline.net)

Education Chair – Lauren Einhorn – [laureneinhorn16@gmail.com](mailto:laureneinhorn16@gmail.com)

Co-Ritual Chair - Judy Teich – [judy.teich@gmail.com](mailto:judy.teich@gmail.com)

Co-Ritual Chair – Debbie Royal – [dsroyal@optonline.net](mailto:dsroyal@optonline.net)

Community Service - Whitney Speer – [whitneyspeer@msn.com](mailto:whitneyspeer@msn.com)

Oneg Shabbat Information – Synagogue Office (201) 512-1983