



TEMPLE BETH TZEDEK

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# Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parents' Handbook

2011

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## Letter to Parents

Dear Parents:

Mazal tov! The day on which your child reaches the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah is now fast approaching. We understand that the celebration of that day is truly one of the most important events in a person's life. At Temple Beth Tzedek our goal is to work with you during the coming months to insure that your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be:

- As stress-free and joyous as possible
- Religiously fulfilling and meaningful
- An occasion that will fill your family with pride
- A foundation that enables your child to continue religious education and to make informed decisions concerning his or her future religious life.

This booklet is designed to assist and guide you in your plans and arrangements for this special day. It contains the necessary steps to help make this event a truly memorable and significant one in the life of your entire family and in the life of the synagogue.

The Temple Beth Tzedek Board of Trustees and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism subscribe to established criteria in connection with the religious, educational, and spiritual preparation for B'nai Mitzvah candidates. One purpose of this booklet is to review these requirements with you. We share your desire to have your child participate at his or her highest level and have every confidence that your child will succeed at everything he or she does on the bimah.

The clergy, administrators, educators, officers and committees of Temple Beth Tzedek are here to serve you and will be happy to consult with you at any time concerning the contents of this booklet or about any questions or concerns that might develop.

Office phone: 716-838-3232  
E-mail: [office@btzbuffalo.org](mailto:office@btzbuffalo.org)

We pray that this simha will be a huge part of a lifetime of nachas that you receive from your child. We take this opportunity to extend to you our very best wishes and to offer you and your child a heartfelt Mazal Tov!

The Board & Clergy of Temple Beth Tzedek

## Introduction

The Hebrew phrase Bar/Bat Mitzvah denotes an individual who has reached the age of majority in Jewish tradition. For a girl, that age is 12 years and 1 day; for a boy, that age is 13 years and 1 day according to the Hebrew calendar. At this age a child is old enough to understand his or her place in Jewish life and, therefore, is obligated to know and observe its customs, ritual, and laws. The coming-of-age ceremony has traditionally consisted of a child being called to the bimah for the first time to recite the blessings preceding and following the reading of a section from the Torah. Other privileges that a Bar/Bat Mitzvah may exercise for the first time include being counted in a minyan (prayer quorum) and publicly leading certain prayers.

It is important to note that Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not something that someone does, but something that someone is. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a stage of development. It is a state of being which occurs automatically with the passage of time. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony is not a graduation ceremony celebrating the completion of religious school; Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a stage of development. Completion of Gesher or Kadimah and the Bar/Bat mitzvah ceremony are connected by the goal of preparing your child for a lifetime of learning and adult participation in Jewish life. We want to make sure that by this stage of life your child has acquired the skills to participate fully in synagogue life, including the skills to read Torah, Haftarah, lead the Torah service and Musaf and prepare and deliver a Dvar Torah.

We recognize that we ask a lot of our B'nai Mitzvah students. We do so with much pride. It is a primary component of the synagogue's mission that our children understand their place of importance in Jewish life and the life of Temple Beth Tzedek. The higher the level of their synagogue skills, the more they will feel at home in the synagogue. With all the studying and planning that such an occasion demands, the year preceding a Bar/Bat Mitzvah can be quite stressful.

Our pledge to you is that we will work together to make your experience as stress free as possible. Towards that end, what follows is a check list for preparations along with a timeline for completion of tasks.

## Preparations

- 1) Establishing the Date
  - a. Generally the 1<sup>st</sup> Shabbat following the child's 13<sup>th</sup> Hebrew birthday. Our clergy can assist you in determining this date.
- 2) When Are B'nai Mitzvah Allowed/Not Allowed?
  - a. Shabbat morning is the usual time to call a student to the Torah for his or her first aliyah
    - i. Services start at 9:00 a.m.

- ii. Parents and immediate family should be seated in the right side front row by 8:50 a.m.
- b. Special circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis, at the discretion of the clergy.
- c. The scheduling of B'nai Mitzvah on major festivals or holidays is an issue to be worked out with the Temple and clergy. It is strongly discouraged.

### 3) Religious Training

- a. For Gesher Students:
  - i. The student will continue in the Temple's religious school program, maintaining regular class attendance until the end of the school year regardless of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.
  - ii. We expect students to continue through Confirmation.
  - iii. Students must attend no less than 80% of regularly scheduled classes. Excessive absence may result in a postponement of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony.
- b. For Kadimah Students
  - i. The student will continue to attend Kadimah, maintaining regular class attendance until the end of the school year regardless of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.
  - ii. We encourage the student to graduate with his or her class at Kadimah at the end of the eighth grade.
  - iii. We expect students to continue through Confirmation.
- c. For students receiving religious education in other venues
  - i. Each case will be reviewed by Temple clergy.
  - ii. Any extra tutoring required will be the responsibility of the parents
  - iii. We expect students to continue through Confirmation
- d. For all Students: Attendance at religious services
  - i. During the year leading up to Bar/Bat Mitzvah, students must attend no less than 80% of regularly scheduled Shabbat services. Excessive absence may result in postponement of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony.
  - ii. During the week before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, students must attend one morning minyan, preferably the preceding Thursday morning. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah student should bring his/her tefillin to this service.
  - iii. Parents should attend services with their children.
- e. Synagogue Skills to be Reviewed as part of Bar/Bat Mitzvah training (listed according to priority):
  - i. The Torah blessings
  - ii. The blessing before the Haftarah
  - iii. The blessing after the Haftarah
  - iv. the Haftarah
  - v. Kiddush
  - vi. the Maftir Torah reading
  - vii. the Torah Service
  - viii. the Musaf Service
  - ix. Additional Torah readings or the Shacharit service

- x. Friday evening services.
- f. Use of tallit and tefillin: These ritual articles may be purchased from our Sarah Brooks Judaica shop if you can't find them elsewhere.

#### 4) Student Participation

- a. All divrei Torah (presentations on the Torah portion), new tunes, etc, are subject to clergy approval.
- b. D'var Torah (Presentation on the Torah portion)
  - i. Required of all students
  - ii. Preparation of the D'var Torah will be guided by the rabbi.
  - iii. While parents are encouraged to participate in the process of writing the d'var Torah by acting as resources to review the Torah portion with the student and make constructive suggestions as the child drafts his or her presentation, the d'var Torah itself should be written by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and reflect his/her knowledge, ideas, and feelings.
- c. A child will be permitted to lead as much of the Friday evening and Saturday morning services as they wish and are able to learn.
- d. All participants on the bimah are expected to dress in a manner that is appropriate for a religious service. All Jewish prayer leaders on the bimah, of both genders, should wear a head covering and a tallit.

#### 5) Students with Special Needs

- a. Clergy, with support from relevant committees (e.g. Education, Ritual, Keshet, Inclusion), the Board and congregation, will work to ensure that every student shall have the opportunity for:
  - i. Ongoing and meaningful religious education.
  - ii. Community service within the synagogue community.
  - iii. Meaningful and appropriate participation in religious services to the fullest extent possible during the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony.

#### 6) Community Service

- a. In preparation for becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, students are encouraged to participate in community service (mitzvot) opportunities. Special recognition of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will be provided during the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony for those students who actively participate in Keshet programs during at least one year prior to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

#### 7) Further reading

- a. The following is a short list of reading material of benefit to both student and parent.
  - i. Bar Mitzvah sections of Jewish Catalogs, particularly The Second Jewish Catalog, p. 61-67.
  - ii. Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin, Putting God on the Guest List, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, c1993.

- iii. Seymour Rossel (and an Editorial Committee of Many!), A Spiritual Journey, Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah Handbook, Behrman House, Inc., W. Orange, NJ, c 1993.
- iv. The Complete Artscroll Siddur
- v. Rabbi Reuven Hammer, Or Hadash: A Commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals

## **General Information**

- 1) We run three sessions for parents and students designed to assist families in preparing for the simha. In addition, the family will have opportunities to meet privately with the clergy as they prepare together for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- 2) Students should begin studying with the Cantor approximately one year before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- 3) A meeting with the Executive Director should be held as soon as possible to discuss the facilities you desire for your weekend as well as to review current costs and fees. Reserving the facilities early will avoid the possibility that the room you desire may be booked for another event.
- 4) All dues, fees, and other obligations owed to Temple must be paid in full two months prior to the date of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. If a payment plan is in place with the Temple the balance can remain.
- 5) The Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration is a community event. Your family is an important part of a larger synagogue family. That is why we ask each Bar/Bat Mitzvah family to sponsor a congregational Kiddush after services. If the family plans a private Kiddush lunch for invited guests at the synagogue, we ask that it not begin until one half hour after services have ended. A list of acceptable caterers is available in the office.
- 6) We strongly urge that any social affair planned to celebrate the Bar/Bat Mitzvah be held in the Temple. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah of your child is a religious occasion and any celebration of it should be in a religious atmosphere. The Temple has suitable facilities for a gathering of any size.
- 7) No photography of any kind is permitted on Shabbat or on Holidays. A weekday photography session in the Sanctuary can be arranged through the Temple Office.
- 8) Please inform your guests that smoking and the use of cell phones are not permitted on Shabbat anywhere on the Temple premises or grounds.
- 9) We do not permit the playing of instrumental or recorded music at any time on Shabbat. Applause during services is not appropriate.

- 10) Serving of alcoholic beverages is allowed only under strict supervision in accordance with the legislated statutes of the State of New York.
- 11) The observance of the laws of kashrut is a core value at Temple Beth Tzedek. Therefore only rabbinically certified kosher food, wine and caterers are permitted on the premises of Temple Beth Tzedek. The Rabbi is the final arbiter of questions concerning kashrut.
- 12) No deliveries are permitted on Shabbat. Therefore, all deliveries to the Temple must have arrived no later than 3:00 p.m. on Friday. Please coordinate all deliveries from vendors with the office well in advance of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. Our staff will be happy to help with the receipt of the deliveries, but you will understand that we cannot accept full responsibility for the correctness of deliveries. We would be grateful if you arranged for someone to be at the synagogue to accept any items being delivered for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah weekend.

If there is anything you need to discuss regarding your upcoming simcha, please do not hesitate to call the Rabbi, the Cantor, or the Executive Director. The Temple's phone number is 838-3232.

## **Beth Tzedek Kashrut Overview**

- 1) There are many national agencies that supervise the production of kosher products, each with its own copyrighted symbol of rabbinic supervision. Please check with the rabbi for approved symbols. A "K" may or may not be an indication of acceptable rabbinic supervision.
- 2) Temple Beth Tzedek observes the strict separation of dairy and meat, including all food products and utensils.
- 3) In those cases where there is no visible hekhsher or proof of rabbinic supervision, the Rabbi may research manufacturing mechanisms to see if a particular item is nevertheless acceptable. The results of this research will be written and dated; copies will be kept in the synagogue office.
- 4) All cheeses and wines must have a hekhsher.

## **Temple Beth Tzedek Dress Standards**

We recognize that community standards involving appropriate dress evolve and change. We follow the guidelines established by United Synagogue Youth. Please inform your guests of the dress standards in place at Temple Beth Tzedek, as dress standards vary among congregations.

- Clothing on which any profanity, inappropriate language, pictures, or symbols are written, printed, or depicted, is inappropriate.
- Any visible underwear is inappropriate.



- Tank tops, bare midriff styles, halter-tops, see through styles, or cut away styles (holes, etc.) are inappropriate.
- Dress shoes are strongly encouraged.
- It is expected that all participants in the service will wear an appropriate head covering.

Males should wear long pants with a dress shirt and tie, or dress sweater

Females should wear a skirt or dress. Keep in mind that you will be standing/sitting above the congregation's eye level, short skirts are more revealing than you might realize. Shoulders must be covered.

## **Candy Tossing**

The custom of tossing candy at B'nai Mitzvah probably developed from similar customs practiced at an Aufruf. In synagogues where women were confined to the balcony, candy was dropped on the celebrant as he passed under the balcony with the Torah during the Torah recessional to wish him a sweet life. Times have changed. In our day, it seems this custom serves as a moment of revelry designed to give the Bar/Bat Mitzvah a concussion. It is our hope that families will not choose to have the congregation throw candy at all. However, if you wish to throw candy, these are our concerns:

- 1) Candy is food. Any candy brought into the Temple must be in the original packaging and marked with a hekhsher.
- 2) Please make sure the candy is soft; Sunkist kosher gels are a good choice. Candy should be tossed gently, not thrown hard. A stampede of children will immediately overwhelm the bimah to make sure every piece of candy is picked up off the carpet.
- 3) If you would like, the synagogue can obtain this candy. Please advise the Executive Director if you wish to be supplied with the appropriate amount of candy so that we can assure it will be available for you.

## **Honors and Aliyot**

In principle one could celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at any time the Torah is read in public. The Torah is read during Shaharit and Mincha services of Shabbat, during Shaharit of Rosh Hodesh, Mondays and Thursdays. At Minhah on Shabbat and Shaharit on Mondays and Thursdays, three people are called to the Torah; on Rosh Hodesh, four; on Festivals, five; on Shabbat Shacharit, seven. Here at Temple Beth Tzedek we add an Aharon aliyah, bringing our Shabbat total to eight. Thus, Shabbat morning provides the greatest number of honors that may be handed out to family and friends. In general:

- 1) The first aliyah will be assigned to a Kohen and the second to a Levi. If no Kohen is present a Levi should be called first, and a Yisrael is called for the second aliyah. If there is no Levi present, the Kohen who has just completed the Kohen aliyah should be called for the Levi aliyah. If neither a Kohen nor a Levi is present, then the aliyot are distributed to any Yisrael present.
- 2) Some families are concerned that a parent, child, or sibling of one who has been called to the Torah should not be given the very next honor. Other families are not concerned about this issue. Please let the clergy or members of the Ritual Committee know your feelings on this issue so that the names you give us can be organized appropriately.
- 3) The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family may assign a total of 4 aliyot in addition to the Maftir Aliyah which is given to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- 4) The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is not obligated to fill each of the slots reserved for them. Optimally the ratio is one honor per person honored. Other honors which will be reserved for distribution to the family/families celebrating a simcha include:

- Opening the Ark
- Closing the Ark
- Removing Torah(s)
- Replacing Torah(s)
- Lifting Torah(s)
- Binding Torah(s)
- Carrying Torah(s)
- Prayer for our Country
- Prayer for Israel
- Prayer for Peace
- Prayer for the Armed Forces

In cases where there is more than one simcha, the parties will split these additional honors (if necessary/desired).

## **Participation of non-Jews**

A significant number of Jewish families, including families in our community, include people who are not halakhically Jewish. We appreciate what it means for someone not Jewish to marry into a Jewish family and we applaud their decision to participate in the raising of a Jewish child within the Jewish community. Our goal is not to exclude non-Jewish family members from the joyful celebration of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah; we desire to be as inclusive as possible. Having said that, however, we are mindful that many of the rituals of Shabbat are covenantal ceremonies, and there are parts of the service that can be performed only by someone who is Jewish.

Non-Jews may be on the bimah at any time. Non-Jews are invited to participate in services by

leading the prayers for peace, country, or servicemen. Only Jewish persons may accept an Aliyah. The tallit is a covenantal symbol and therefore is not appropriate for a non-Jew to wear.

The non-Jewish parent of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah may stand next to the Jewish parent while the Aliyah blessings are being recited and may speak to the child, should the parents choose to speak to their child at the end of the service on the bimah. The preference of the Board is that parents speak to their child during the Kiddush following services in the Lippa Auditorium.

## **Instructions for Completing Honors List**

- 1) Please be mindful of the considerations above.
- 2) Please try to obtain Hebrew names well in advance of the bar/bat mitzvah date.
- 3) A copy of the prayers in Hebrew and in English transliteration is provided elsewhere in this booklet. Please feel free to make copies and distribute.
- 4) Please double-check with the people you would like to assign to an honor to be sure they are capable of performing the honor. Training with our clergy is available.
- 5) Please return this form to the clergy as soon as possible and at least 2 weeks before the bar/bat mitzvah.

## B'nai Mitzvah Honors List

Opening/Closing the Ark at start of Torah Service (up to 2 people)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Removing the Torah \_\_\_\_\_

Carrying the Torah (processional) \_\_\_\_\_

**Aliyot** – not including the Bar/Bat Mitzvah [if the person is a Kohen or a Levi, please state so clearly]:

1. English \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrew \_\_\_\_\_

2. English \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrew \_\_\_\_\_

3. English \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrew \_\_\_\_\_

4. English \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrew \_\_\_\_\_

Lifting the Torah English \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrew \_\_\_\_\_

Binding the Torah English \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrew \_\_\_\_\_

**English readings:**

Prayer for the Country \_\_\_\_\_

Prayer for Israel \_\_\_\_\_

Prayer for Peace \_\_\_\_\_

Prayer for the Armed Forces \_\_\_\_\_

Carrying the Torah (recessional) \_\_\_\_\_

Replacing the Torah \_\_\_\_\_

Opening/Closing the Ark at end of Torah service (up to 2 people)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Addressing the Congregation**

The Rabbi is available as an aid in the writing of any speech, pamphlet or handout; all should be approved by the Rabbi before they are produced. Parents and relatives are free to express themselves and to create brochures explaining the service. Parents may speak to their child either on the bimah at the end of the service, or at the Kiddush after services. It is the desire of the Board of Trustees that parental speeches be delivered in the auditorium after the service for two very good reasons: one, parents may (and will) speak for as long as they like at the Kiddush, a liberty which cannot be taken on the bimah; and two, the words and blessings of the parents elevate the Kiddush from being an eating frenzy to including the Kiddush as part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony itself.

## **Party Decorum**

We discourage overly elaborate and ostentatious B'nai Mitzvah parties as a distraction from the religious significance of the occasion. A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a life cycle event infused with great meaning. The joy of this event should be reflected in the celebration. A kosher affair done after the Sabbath at our Temple is especially appropriate.

In addition, it is expected that you will invite all the students in your child's B'nai Mitzvah class, including both Gesher and Kadimah students. From time to time it has happened that some of the students in the B'nai Mitzvah class have not been invited to the various social affairs surrounding the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration. Inadvertently neglecting to invite one of the children will result in hurt feelings. Compiling the guest list is a teachable moment for your children in what it means to be a part of a community.

## **Check List for Bar/Bat Mitzvah**

- Arrange with the Executive Director to reserve Temple facilities as soon as possible.
- Engage an approved caterer and arrange for serving Kiddush as soon as possible.
- At least one year before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, student and parents should begin attending Shabbat services; if the child will be leading a service other than Shabbat morning, they should also be attending that service.
- Make sure you are a member in good standing before beginning lessons with the Cantor.
- Lessons should begin no earlier than 1 year and no later than 8 months prior to the date.
- Contact the Rabbi about four months ahead of the date to make the appointment to have your child begin writing their D'var Torah.
- All Temple dues and obligations are to be paid at least two months prior to the date of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah unless other arrangements have been made.
- Purchase Tallit from the Judaica Shop at least four weeks prior to date. It is recommended that Tefillin be purchased for each Bar Mitzvah student and each Bat Mitzvah student who chooses to don them.
- Order kippot from the Judaica Shop four to six weeks prior to date. The Judaica Shop also has a Bar/Bat Mitzvah gift registry.
- Submit picture and, if you wish, a small biography for the Temple Beth Tzedek Shofar two months in advance of the date.
- Submit picture and, if you wish, a small biography for the Jewish Review one month in advance.
- Schedule practices, final dress rehearsals, and photography sessions with the clergy one to two months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.
- Submit floor diagram for Kiddush, luncheon, etc., at least two weeks prior to date.
- Submit completed honors list two weeks prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

## B'nai Mitzvah Information

Kindly complete the following form so that we may have the correct information for the Temple Beth Tzedek Shofar, the *Buffalo Jewish Review*, the announcements and the BAR/BAT MITZVAH Certificate.

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Complete English Name

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English Date of BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Hebrew Date of BAR/BAT MITZVAH

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Complete Hebrew Name (e.g. Avraham ben David v'Ruth; Sarah bat Avraham v'Esther)

BAR/BAT MITZVAH Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

BAR/BAT MITZVAH Jewish: \_\_\_ By Birth \_\_\_ By Conversion (Date: \_\_\_\_\_)

Parent(s) names: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother Jewish: \_\_\_\_\_ By Birth: \_\_\_ By Conversion (Date: \_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_ Not Jewish

Mother's Complete Hebrew Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle: Kohen Levi Israel

Father Jewish: \_\_\_\_\_ By Birth: \_\_\_ By Conversion (Date: \_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_ Not Jewish

Father's Complete Hebrew Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle: Kohen Levi Israel

Siblings: \_\_\_\_\_

Grandparent(s) names: \_\_\_\_\_