

*“Study from love  
and honor will follow”  
-Bahya*

**CONGREGATION OR AMI**  
“Light of My People”

# **B’nai Mitzvah Handbook**

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## Mazel Tov!

*Dear Bar/Bat Mitzvah Family,*

You, as a family, are about to experience one of the most significant, Jewish, and highly spiritual adventures of your lifetime. This is a highly emotional journey and, as such, will be filled with some anxiety, but mostly joy.

This handbook is designed to relieve some of the anxiety and thereby increase joy of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* experience by answering many of the questions you may have. Although the congregation will do everything possible to prepare your child, family cooperation is essential. *Yad b'yad b'yachad* (together hand in hand) we can make this significant occasion a cherished memory in the life of your family.

We encourage you to read through this handbook, and to use it as a reference book often. Since **some synagogue policies may change between now and your child's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date**, you will want to be in touch with the Rabbi and the office as your date approaches.

May this be only one of many family *simchas* (joyous moments) we will share with you!

*With Excitement,*

*Rabbi Paul Kipnes, Cantor Doug Cotler, Rabbi Julia Weisz, and Diane Townsend*

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## Explanation of the B'nai Mitzvah Ceremony<sup>1</sup>

The second century C.E. sage, Judah ben Tema, could be called the inventor of *B'nai Mitzvah*. It was he who envisioned the way one's life of Jewish study and responsibility should unfold, including that at age thirteen, one is ready to do *mitzvot*. (There are 613 *mitzvot* - commandments - enunciated in the Torah.) A child younger than thirteen performed *mitzvot* as options, but once the child turned thirteen, *mitzvot* were to be considered as obligations. After the second century C.E., thirteen became the age of spiritual and moral choices, religious achievements and legal maturity.

All religions and cultures have their moments of “becoming” – the time for entry into the requirements of adult behavior. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* accomplishes precisely what anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff once insisted such a ritual must: “It provides a great moment of spiritual transformation strong enough to carry an adolescent across the chasm of chaos and fear.”

Reform Judaism, which began in Germany in the early 1800's, pioneered the inclusion of women in an equal role in religious life. Yet it is only in the twentieth century that women began to celebrate coming of age religiously with a *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony.

The first *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony occurred in 1922 in New York City. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan invited his daughter Judith to recite the blessings over the Torah and read her portion from a book. We have progressed so much since that day, as the young Jewish women of today take on full ritual responsibility.

In modern interpretation, as boys and girls become *B'nai Mitzvah*, they accept the responsibilities and privileges that come with Jewish adulthood. According to Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin, “*B'nai Mitzvah* is about ritual maturity. It is about growing up as a Jew. It is about becoming a full-fledged member of the Jewish community.” Most importantly, it is about connecting to Torah and to the covenantal traditions of the Jewish people. The *Bar and Bat Mitzvah* service is sacred and deserves celebration.

*Something uplifting and holy occurs when you read from the Torah scroll on the day when you become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. You may not even notice it at the time, but it is happening and it is real. This occurs because the Torah is at the very center of our faith. It is our story, our vision, our sense of ourselves, the most basic record of what God wants of us.*

- by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin

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<sup>1</sup> *B'nai Mitzvah* is the plural of Bar or Bat Mitzvah

## Greetings

### ***From Our Rabbis Paul Kipnes and Julia Weisz:***

Placing the sacred Torah in your child's hands creates something intensely spiritual for all in attendance. Before that can occur, your child will learn to chant and understand a section of the original Hebrew text. You will prepare for the sacred moment when he/she takes those first important steps on the road to Jewish adulthood. To hold, chant from and understand Torah is a privilege. We will help you and your child understand the meaning of this privilege. I look forward to getting to know your child and your extended family, and to working with him/her on a *D'var Torah* (speech). At the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony we will celebrate together, binding your family with our Jewish traditions.

If you have any questions about the service, ritual or preparation process, please contact Rabbi Paul (818-880-4880 or [Rabbipaul@orami.org](mailto:Rabbipaul@orami.org)). If Rabbi Julia is officiating at your service, you may contact her (818-880-4880 or [Rabbijulia@orami.org](mailto:Rabbijulia@orami.org)). We will have our first family meeting together three months before the *simcha* (joyous occasion).

### ***From Our Cantor Doug Cotler:***

Many months of preparation are about to unfold. With courage, patience, strength, and love, your child will grow. Savor each accomplishment. Surely the ceremony itself will prove to be an auspicious moment in the life of your child, family, and community as together we celebrate, and affirm our ancient heritage and tradition, in a vital and meaningful way.

Remember, though, that the real meaning of becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is one of beginning - not completion. Your child is taking first steps on the path to Jewish adulthood. Thinking of it as the end of Jewish education is antithetical to its original purpose.

About a month before your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date, the Cantor will contact you to schedule a rehearsal. The rehearsal will be for the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student and the parent(s). We look forward to sharing and participating in your *simcha*.

### ***From Our B'nai Mitzvah Teacher Diane Townsend:***

I am honored to work with the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* students. My mission is to create a learning ambience which is enjoyable and make it as easy as possible for each of my students. Even though the process may seem intimidating, each student will do a wonderful job as he/she becomes a *Bat/Bar Mitzvah*; I have not lost a student yet! My goal is to provide each of my students with an esteem-building and enriching experience as they work towards becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. I will help your child reach his/her full potential and assist you all in making everyone comfortable with all aspects of the process. I am here to answer questions, hold hands and soothe nerves. It is a joy for me to share this *simcha* with you. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (818-424-9995 or [bmteach1@aol.com](mailto:bmteach1@aol.com)).

## **COUNTDOWN TO *BAR/BAT MITZVAH***

### *A Check List*

**2 Years Prior -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Schedule date with Congregation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Select and reserve location for reception.

**12 Months Prior –**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Begin Mitzvah Projects

**9 to 12 Months Prior –**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Begin 12-week Pre-B'nai Mitzvah Prayer Class with Diane Townsend. Call Susie Stark in the synagogue office to find out when your student's class begins.

**8 Months Prior -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Order invitations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Call Susie Stark in the synagogue office to discuss the various fees and the Friday night service responsibilities.

**6 Months Prior -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrange tutoring schedule and begin individual preparation with Or Ami's *B'nai Mitzvah* teacher, Diane Townsend at (818) 424-9995 or [bmteach1@aol.com](mailto:bmteach1@aol.com).

**4 Months Prior -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Schedule appointment with the Rabbi for family meeting and to begin speech preparation. Call the office at (818) 880-4880 or email [rabbipaul@orami.org](mailto:rabbipaul@orami.org) or [rabbijulia@orami.org](mailto:rabbijulia@orami.org). Bring list of *Aliyot* with Hebrew names to the Rabbi meeting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Buy a *tallit* and *kippah* to wear at the service.

**Minimum One Month Prior -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Schedule meeting with the Cantor 1-2 weeks prior to the ceremony at (818) 888-8290.

**1-2 Weeks Prior -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Attend meeting with the Cantor.

**One Week Prior -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Provide Rabbi with copy of parent (1 page, double-spaced) speeches for approval.

**Friday Night Before a Saturday ceremony -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Attend *Shabbat* services: *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* leads a prayer, and the family lights *Shabbat* candles. Congregation presents gift.

**Day of *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Celebration -**

Don't worry - Be happy - Enjoy!!

*Please understand that these deadlines are for your benefit. Everything will go very smoothly if things are done in advance. We all need lead time to do the best job. We greatly appreciate your cooperation with the above schedule.*

## **GLOSSARY**

### **Many Words You Need to Know**

**ALIYAH:** During the *Torah* service, certain guests will be called up to the pulpit (*bimah* in Hebrew) to bless the *Torah* before and after each section is read. *Aliyah* literally means “going up.” It is a special honor to receive an *aliyah*, usually reserved for those particularly close to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

**BAR MITZVAH:** Son of the Commandment. Properly, this term applies to a person and not to a ceremony.

**B'NAI MITZVAH:** Children or sons of the commandment, or non-gender specific plural.

**BAT MITZVAH:** Daughter of the Commandment. Properly, this term applies to a person and not to a ceremony.

**B'NOT MITZVAH:** Daughters of the commandment, when referring specifically to females.

**BIMAH:** This refers to the raised platform area in the front of the sanctuary. Some people call it the *pulpit*.

**CONFIRMATION:** Confirmation is a ceremony created, in which a class of young Jewish adults confirms their allegiance to Judaism and the Jewish people. At Or Ami this ceremony usually occurs at the end of the eleventh grade.

**D'VAR TORAH:** A speech based on the *Torah* portion. In this interpretation of the weekly *Torah* reading, the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* demonstrates study of the text and an understanding of one of its many messages.

**G'LILAH:** The people who have the honor in the *Torah* service of dressing the *Torah* scroll after it has been lifted by the *Hagbah*.

**HAFTARAH:** Following the reading from the *Torah*, a passage is read from the portion of the Bible called the Prophets (*nevi'im* in Hebrew). The *Torah* portion and the *haftarah* are usually connected by a common theme or literary style.

**HAGBAH:** Person who has the honor in the *Torah* service of lifting the *Torah* scroll high for all to see.

**HAVDALAH:** The ceremony, on Saturday evening, which separates *Shabbat* from the rest of the week.

**HAZZANUT:** Cantorial chanting/singing. A cantor is called *Hazzan* in Hebrew.

**KIDDUSH:** *Kiddush* is both a prayer and an act. As an act, it is the sanctification of *Shabbat* usually done with wine or grape juice. *Kiddush* is also the prayer over wine on *Shabbat* and holidays. In an extended sense of the word, *Kiddush* includes the *Shabbat* morning reception following services which begins with the *kiddush* prayer over wine.

**KIPPAH:** (*Plural is Kippot*) This head covering (also known in Yiddish as *yarmulke*) is a sign of reverence for God. In a Reform synagogue, the wearing of the *Kippah* and the *Tallit* is optional, although the *B'nai Mitzvah* customarily wear them.

**MAFTIR:** The concluding section of the *Torah* reading which is chanted by the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

**MITZVAH:** (*Plural is Mitzvot*) Sometimes thought of as a “good deed,” in actuality, *mitzvah* is a commandment, an obligation stated in the *Torah*. The rabbis count 613 *Mitzvot* in the *Torah*.

**ONEG SHABBAT:** Literal translation is “Sabbath pleasure.” In practice, it refers to the sweets we savor after *Shabbat* services on Friday evening.

**PARASHAH:** Also called the *sidrah*, the *parashah* is the *Torah* portion which is assigned to be read each *Shabbat*.

**SE'UDAT MITZVAH:** Sharing a meal with the community as a way to celebrate is rooted in Jewish tradition. The *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* feast was declared a *se'udat mitzvah*, a meal celebrating a commandment, in the sixteenth century. The *se'udat mitzvah* is a traditional way to enhance a *mitzvah* by celebration to prevent it from being minimized. The feast is a joyous way of emphasizing the religious significance of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service. (Please read the article on page 19).

**SIDDUR:** (*Plural is Siddurim*) The Hebrew word *siddur* means “order,” and is applied to the weekday and *Shabbat* prayerbook, since the prayerbook contains a specific order of the prayers. The *siddur* used by the Reform Movement is called *Gates of Prayer*.

**SIMCHA:** A joyous occasion.

**TALLIT:** (*Plural is Tallitot*) This prayer shawl is worn by Jewish adults in fulfillment of the commandment in the *Torah*, “You shall attach *tzitzit* (fringes) to the four corners of your garments.” The fringes are knotted in such a way that they remind us of all the *Mitzvot* in Judaism.

**TALMUD:** Ancient Jewish text containing explanations and commentaries on the *Torah* law by early Rabbis, completed around the year 500 C. E. in Babylonia.



**TORAH:** (Literally, “teaching”) The *Torah* really has two meanings. In its broadest sense *Torah* refers to the entire body of Jewish law, lore, and teachings. In its narrowest sense, *Torah* refers to the scroll on which are written the five books of Moses (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy*). Every *Shabbat* a consecutive portion of the *Torah* is read and studied.

**TZEDAKAH:** The giving of money or goods to those in need. *Tzedakah* translates to justice or fairness. Traditionally one makes a gift of *Tzedakah* in honor of *simchas*, including the *simcha* of becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

**YAD B'YAD B'YACHAD:** Hebrew expression for “hand in hand together.”

## Eligibility and Preparation Requirements

### 1. JEWISH EDUCATION:

A minimum of four consecutive years (grades 4-7 or their equivalent) of regular attendance in a Jewish Religious Education program is expected as well as the satisfactory completion of its academic requirements and attendance requirements. Congregation Or Ami requires 80% attendance each school year to satisfy the attendance requirements for *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

Completion of the 7th grade year in HUB 7/8 (our teen program is required regardless of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date. Students are required to attend a twelve-week Pre-B'nai Mitzvah Prayer class held 9-12 months prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date.

We strongly encourage students to continue in our teen education programs through Confirmation and beyond. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is a milestone on the road of Jewish education. It is not an end, but the beginning of deeper learning and observance. As such, **each student must be enrolled in and attending our HUB 7/8 (upper grades Jewish learning classes) at the time of his/her tutoring and *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service. In the event that such classes have concluded for the summer or have not yet begun, students must be enrolled for the following year.**

### 2. TASTE OF BAR/BATMITZVAH PRAYER CLASS

Our *Taste of Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Prayer Class prepares the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students for their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* training. Often held on Tuesdays or Thursdays from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. Groups of ten to twelve students will meet for an hour a week for twelve (12) weeks with Diane Townsend, our *B'nai Mitzvah* teacher. Groups are organized so students begin at least nine months before their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date. Class times and dates will be assigned and announced approximately a year before your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service. Tuition for this required program is currently \$340.00 per student, *but is subject to change*. Please contact Susie Stark (818-880-4880 or [Susie@orami.org](mailto:Susie@orami.org) if you have questions.

### 3. TUTORING:

Diane Townsend is the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* teacher for Congregation Or Ami. She prepares all of our students for their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service. Individual study with Diane Townsend begins a minimum of six months prior to the Service date. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* preparation requires 22 weekly sessions of one-half hour each followed by 4 sessions of one hour each.

(Please note: This 26-week course of study assumes **basic proficiency in Hebrew reading and the chanting of appropriate prayers**. If your child has not completed three full years of Religious School in grades 4, 5, and 6 prior to beginning of *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* preparation, **special approval of the Congregation will be required**, and additional study at the family's expense may be necessary.)

Students must study (per individual instruction) for a minimum of 20 minutes per day. If study is missed for one day, then 40 minutes must be put in the following day. The goal is daily reinforcement, not oppressive homework. Even if parents do not know Hebrew, you can listen for fluency, as well as give encouragement, and boost confidence. If your child

is stumbling over the material, more practice time is required. If any “life” issues are affecting your child’s ability to study or concentrate, or if he/she becomes anxious about the work, please inform our *B’nai Mitzvah* Teacher, Diane Townsend as soon as possible.

*Bar/Bat Mitzvah* preparation fees are paid directly to the teacher. You will also pay an additional fee of 2 hours for Diane’s involvement on the day of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service.

#### 4. MITZVAH VOLUNTEER HOURS:

In recognition that becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* involves assuming responsibility, **each *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student is expected to complete a 10 hour mitzvah project PRIOR to your family meeting with the rabbi.** This means that you need to complete the mitzvah project at least 2 months before your service. The mitzvah provides the student with an experience of volunteerism, particularly targeted to helping those in need.

This ten hour project may not be fulfilled using time credited toward community service requirements for school or other groups. However, the mitzvah project may be comprised of additional hours in the same setting. **All mitzvah projects must be approved by our B’nai Mitzvah Project Coordinator.** Please read the enclosed letter about the Mitzvah Project planning process.

We strongly encourage students and parents to work together to plan and carry out the mitzvah project. In this way, the student recognizes the abiding value of helping others even as the parental involvement reinforces the significance of the endeavor. You can create your own Mitzvah project or consider volunteering at:

- Jewish Home for the Aging at (818) 774-3307
- SOVA Kosher Food Pantry at (818) 988-7682
- Heal the Bay Canyon Clean Up Projects at (310) 453-0395
- The Gentle Barn at (661) 252-2440
- For additional volunteer opportunities in the Jewish community, contact the Jewish Federation by logging onto Sulam: The Center for Jewish Service Learning ([www.sulamcenter.org](http://www.sulamcenter.org)) or <http://www.jewishla.org/page/s/volunteer>

**While fundraising provides significant funds for volunteer organizations, the mitzvah volunteer hours may be fulfilled only with hands-on volunteering.**

#### 5. SHABBAT SERVICE ATTENDANCE

To ensure that our pre-B’nai Mitzvah students and their families are comfortable and familiar with Or Ami’s service, **6th and 7th grade students are required to attend six Friday night Shabbat services at Congregation Or Ami during the year.** Students will receive credit for all Or Ami Friday night and holiday services (excluding High Holy Days). Students need to be accompanied by an adult, and must remain through the entire service. Students should “check in” with one of the Rabbis or the Cantor following each service. This service attendance requirement must be completed by the family meeting with the Rabbi three months prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service.

## Other Mitzvah Opportunities

There are many other ways that you can make this moment into a meaningful, value-laden celebration:

### **Table Centerpieces**

Instead of flowers (which die soon after the *simcha*), consider using baskets filled with items that can be donated to help others. Some families have made beautiful baskets of books, toys, and stuffed animals, and donated them to homeless shelters, inner city schools or shelters for battered women.

### **Twinning with an underprivileged Israeli/Russian Child**

For many disadvantaged Jews in Israel or the former Soviet Union, becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* may be just a dream. For a gift of \$100 you can give an underprivileged child the opportunity to become a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* as well. Link your child to a student in one of the Progressive Movement's congregations in Israel or the former Soviet Union and strengthen the chain of Jews who study and cherish Torah. (The program also provides opportunities for children with special physical or educational needs to become a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Many children with disabilities are not allowed to participate in Orthodox Bar Mitzvah ceremonies.)

Your child will receive: The name and address of a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student in Israel and/or the former Soviet Union (please understand that the quality of communication depends on the ability of each child to write in the other's native language); a letter of congratulations from World Union of Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) honoring this significant life cycle event; a beautiful certificate to be presented by your rabbi during the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony.

The student with whom your child is linked will receive: *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* training that includes study of Jewish symbols and ceremonies, moral and ethical values, prayer, and the weekly Torah portion. He/she will have the opportunity to take part in a meaningful *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony that integrates Progressive Judaism and Reform Jewish values within his/her own life; the name and address of the student with whom he/she is linked. For more information, contact the WUPJ directly by phone at (212) 650-4280.

### **Remembering a Child Lost in the Holocaust**

The goal of the Remember Us Project is to have each bar or bat mitzvah student remember one individual child lost in the Holocaust. Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project offers an invitation to children preparing for bar/bat mitzvah to connect with the memory of children lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah. The Remember Us Project provides the student with the name of a lost child, information about him/her, and suggestions for simple acts of remembrance: doing mitzvot b'shem (in the name of the child), mentioning the child in a d'var Torah, taking on the mitzvah of saying Kaddish, and/or lighting a yahrzeit candle yearly. Learn more at <http://www.remember-us.org>.

## Financial Responsibilities

- 1) **All Temple dues and fees must be current and fully paid in order to schedule your family's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service date. Please be aware that the congregation's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30 (not September to August).**
- 2) **All membership dues and religious school fees for the current fiscal year must be paid in full no later than two months prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date. Upper grades registration fees for the following year must be paid for students whose *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date falls after HUB 7/8 classes end in May.**
- 3) **B'nai Mitzvah Fee:** Each *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* family is responsible for paying a *B'nai Mitzvah* fee, currently \$945.00 per family **but subject to change**, which supports the *B'nai Mitzvah* process including providing each student with his/her own *siddur* (prayerbook), covering administrative costs associated with the program, supporting the security, maintenance and the regular *Oneg Shabbat* on the Friday evening service immediately prior to the *Bar/Bar Mitzvah*. The fee needs to be paid no less than six months prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service. As this *B'nai Mitzvah* fee covers more than just the *Oneg Shabbat*, the fee needs to be paid even if you choose to offer at your own cost a more extensive *Oneg Shabbat*.
- 4) **Gift to the Congregation:** Many *B'nai Mitzvah* families choose to honor their son or daughter by making a special gift to Congregation Or Ami at the time of the ceremony. Every synagogue is sustained by the donations of grateful members. Holy occasions are appropriate to express appreciation to the congregation, which makes these joyous celebrations possible. Please speak with the Rabbi or Development Committee Chairperson about opportunities for meaningful contributions to Congregation Or Ami.
- 5) **Supervision of Youth Fee:** Families inviting more than 30 pre-teen friends need to hire an additional person to supervise the youth. This will ensure that a boisterous group of friends will not negatively affect your simcha. Office staff will arrange for an approved youth supervisor. The cost is approximately \$50.00.
- 6) No extra fee is requested or expected for the participation of the Rabbi or Cantor in your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service. This ceremony is one of the ways in which your Rabbi and Cantor are available to you as members of the Congregation.

# Details of the Ceremony

## **TIME AND PLACE:**

*Bar/Bat Mitzvah* services may be scheduled on a Friday night, Saturday morning or Saturday afternoon. Services will last between 1½ and two hours. Please note that attendance at all synagogue services will be open to all members of the congregation without special invitation. Your family will need to select one of the following services:

### **A) Saturday morning – Shabbat Morning Services begin promptly at 10 AM**

All Saturday services are held in our own sanctuary. We read 3 to 4 aliyot plus a *maftir* from the Torah. As a synagogue service, attendance is open to all members of the congregation. However, your reception remains private. The synagogue is available for a *kiddush* luncheon. Call the office for details.

### **B) Saturday afternoon – Havdalah Services begin promptly at 4 PM**

All Saturday services are held in our own sanctuary. This is generally referred to as a *Havdalah* service because it concludes with the lovely ceremony that ends *Shabbat*. The service begins at 4PM. We read 3 to 4 aliyot plus a *maftir* from the Torah. As a synagogue service, attendance is open to all members of the congregation.

If you are participating in a Saturday morning or afternoon service, **your family is expected to attend services the Friday night before.** (In some instances, the family may need to attend a service earlier in the month. Please check with Rabbi Kipnes to confirm.) On that evening, the family will be honored and the ***Bar/Bat Mitzvah* will lead the Congregation in a prayer.** (The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* will also be presented with a congregational gift.) *For all services and all times – Friday and Saturday – we invite the community to join us for worship.*

## HONORS FOR FAMILY OR FRIENDS DURING THE SERVICE:

### 1. Aliyot

During Saturday services, we have three or four *aliyot* for family/friends, plus a *maftir*. During Friday night services, we are limited to 2 aliyot plus the *maftir*.) The final *Aliyah*, called the *maftir*, is for the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student. *Aliyot* may be apportioned in groups. Anyone who is called up for an *aliyah* must be 13 years of age or older. It is expected that people called to the *Torah* wear a *tallit*. Non-Jewish relatives are invited up to the bima with Jewish relatives. Please speak to Rabbi Kipnes to see how fully we welcome non-Jews.

A transliteration and translation of the *Torah* blessings (for before and after the *Torah* reading) are on page 18 and 19 in this Handbook. Please make copies of the blessing pages and have your honorees **practice the blessings** so that they can recite them with ease at the Service. In addition, downloadable copies of the blessings and .mp3 (music files) of the tunes for chanting are on our website's B'nai Mitzvah page ([www.arami.org](http://www.arami.org)). People coming up for an aliyah need to learn the blessings. We encourage your son/daughter to help you learn the blessings; it is not too often that our children have the opportunity to teach their parents. Upon request to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* teacher, we can make a CD with the blessing melody.

### 2. Opening the Ark

Two adults may be designated to open the doors. They must be adults (over age 18), and may be Jewish or not.

### 3. Undressing *Torah*/Dressing *Torah* - *G'lilah*

One to six people may dress the *Torah* after it is read. Often the younger siblings or cousins of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* are accorded this honor. They may be of any appropriate age, and may be Jewish or not.

### 4. Adult to Sit with and Supervise Teenage Guests

Often our teenage guests need to be reminded to be respectful during services. If you will be having more than 30 teenage guests, you will be expected to hire a synagogue-provided chaperone to ensure they behave appropriately. In general, this will cost \$50 for the service. If the teens feel the need to talk, the adult supervisor will need to ask them to step outside and will need to supervise them. Teens who do not sit with parents are expected to sit on the right hand side when facing the bimah. In addition, Diane Townsend (who is hired by the family to assist the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student during the *Torah* and *Haftarah* reading) will also help supervise the teens during the first half of the service. It is expected that someone supervise the teens during the second half of the service.

**BLESSING BY THE PARENT(S)**

Most parents choose to speak to their child during the ceremony. Parent(s) speeches take the form of a blessing to the child. **They are to be no more than 1 page, double-spaced in length. The blessing should focus on the special qualities or values of the child. A written copy of the parent's blessing must be given to and approved by the Rabbi one week prior to the ceremony.**

**CANDY**

The custom of throwing candy was meant to shower the young person with sweetness. Unfortunately, it has become a chance for “target practice” instead. As this could result in serious injury, **throwing candy is NOT permitted.**

**D'VAR TORAH (SPEECH) OF THE *BAT/BAR MITZVAH***

The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* will give a *D'var Torah* speech five to seven minutes long. Please call the office 4 months prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony to schedule an appointment with the Rabbi. Call 818-880-4880 or email [rabbipaul@orami.org](mailto:rabbipaul@orami.org) or [rabbijulia@orami.org](mailto:rabbijulia@orami.org). The outline for the speech includes: A summary of *Torah* portion; discussion of how it relates to the “real life” of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student; explanation of the meaning of becoming a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*; description of the *Mitzvah* project; acknowledgments and thank you's. The Rabbi will assist students with their speeches, beginning the process by explaining the *Torah* Portion. The Rabbi will review the speech, edit, make suggestions and approve the *D'var Torah*.

**DRESS CODE FOR THE BIMAH**

Clothing tells a story. It expresses how the wearer feels about him- or herself, and how the wearer wants to be perceived. That story may change depending upon the time and place. In the book of Exodus, Chapter 28, the Torah describes the special garments worn by the Israelite priests when they served God. These commandments recognize that different attire is appropriate for different contexts. Our clothing ought to be attuned to the occasion, suitable for the location, respectful of the other people participating, and reflective of our self-image. These factors are particularly important for service leaders to consider, so B'nei Mitzvah and their families especially should take them into account.

Judaism teaches that each of us is made in the image of God. That image is contained in many different shapes, sizes, and colors. Consequently, we do not want to prescribe or proscribe certain attire. For services, we expect that all of our attendees will choose clothing that, whatever its form, tells a story of being ready to enter a sacred space of prayer and community. We hope that clothing will enable participants to feel present in services, comfortably and without distraction. We will be happy you are here, no matter what you choose to wear.

Please dress respectfully for participation on the *Bimah*. Bare midriffs or shoulders, and low cut dresses, low cut blouses, and mini-skirts are not appropriate. Shirts must be tucked in and sports attire (i.e., sweats or jogging suits), jeans and tuxedos are not



appropriate. Comfortable shoes should be worn; very high heels are not appropriate for the Bat Mitzvah girl. The synagogue now owns some shawls and, when necessary, will request (and require) that people dressed inappropriately cover themselves.

### **FLOWERS/SOVA FOOD BASKETS**

Each B'nai Mitzvah family is required to provide at least two floral arrangements on Friday night (for the Bimah and the Oneg Shabbat table). During weekends when two or more families celebrate B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies, each family needs only provide one floral arrangement (in such cases, the rabbi, with input from each family, will determine which family will provide which arrangement). Each family may take the flowers home following the Shabbat service. The congregant is responsible for the cost of these arrangements. We encourage families to substitute SOVA food donation baskets for the flowers. Call SOVA at (818) 988-7682.

### ***KIPPOT/TALLITOT***

The wearing of a *kippah* (head covering) or a *tallit* (prayer shawl) is optional in our congregation, but highly encouraged, however, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah must wear a tallit. We encourage Jews receiving an *Aliyah* to wear a *kippah* and a *tallit*.

### **PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY**

- 1. Within certain guidelines, still photography is permitted during the service. Photographer must remain in the back of the sanctuary and may NOT use a flash.** Families should pose for still pictures before or after the Service. Some families may wish to take pictures in the sanctuary on a day prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Please call Susie Stark to check availability and make arrangements to reserve the sanctuary.
- 2. Congregation Or Ami may be moving toward having an in-house videographer for all B'nai Mitzvah. Please speak to Susie Stark for the current policy.**

### ***SIDDURIM***

We use our congregational prayer book – *Mishkan T'filah* - at all services.

## Standard Order of Prayers for *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Service

### SHABBAT MORNING SERVICE:

Tallit Presentation/Blessing  
 Shehecheyanu  
 Chatzi Kaddish  
 Bar'chu  
 Sh'ma/Listen  
 V'ahavta  
 Mi Chamocha  
 Avot v'Imahot  
 G'vurot  
 Kedusha  
 V'shamru  
 Sim Shalom  
 Passing Torah from generation to  
 generation  
 Torah Portion  
 Mi Shebeirach Healing Prayer  
 Parents' Blessing  
 Haftarah  
*Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Speech  
 Rabbi's Blessing  
 Aleinu  
 Kaddish  
 Oseh Shalom

### FRIDAY NIGHT & HAVDALAH SERVICE:

Tallit Presentation/Blessing  
 Shehecheyanu  
 Chatzi Kaddish  
 Bar'chu  
 Sh'ma/Listen  
 V'ahavta  
 Mi Chamocha  
 V'shamru  
 Avot v'Imahot  
 G'vurot  
 Kedushat Hashem  
 Shalom Rav  
 Passing Torah from generation to  
 generation  
 Torah Portion  
 Mi Shebeirach Healing Prayer  
 Parents' Blessing  
 Haftarah (*Havdala only*)  
*Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Speech  
 Rabbi's Blessing  
 Aleinu  
 Kaddish  
 Havdalah

**THE RABBI AND CANTOR MAY INSERT APPROPRIATE READINGS AND/OR SONGS IN THE SERVICES**

## Who Shall I Ask?

*There are no dumb questions!*

### **RABBI (RABBI KIPNES AND RABBI WEISZ)**

The Rabbi is available to address any issues regarding the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* process. A Rabbi's primary concern is that this be a special moment in "Jewish time" for everyone involved.

Please share any questions or concerns with Rabbi Kipnes regarding special family circumstances such as interfaith marriages, single parent or blended families, separation or divorce, participation of non-Jewish family members. Good counsel is available to help resolve any and all difficulties or dilemmas. Also, the Rabbi will help the student prepare the *D'var Torah* (speech) and parent(s) prepare their blessing of the child. While Rabbi Kipnes has overall responsibility for the B'nai Mitzvah process, Rabbi Weisz also works with students toward B'nai Mitzvah.

### **CANTOR**

1. Any questions regarding the liturgy (prayer service) or music. Of course, the Cantor is also available to help with any of the concerns mentioned above.

### **DIANE TOWNSEND, B'NAI MITZVAH TEACHER**

1. Individual student preparation
2. All pertinent and not-so-pertinent information, and a shoulder to lean on

### **DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION (RABBI WEISZ)**

1. Educational requirements and concerns

### **SUSIE STARK (RABBI KIPNES' ASSISTANT)**

1. Questions regarding logistics of ceremony or *Oneg Shabbat*
2. Financial issues: Dues requirements, *Oneg Shabbat*, other fees
3. Scheduling or changing *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* dates
4. Set up for the service
5. Rental of synagogue for receptions

## Recommended Reading

- Salkin, Jeffrey: *Putting God On The Guest List*, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994
- Leneman, Helen: *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics*, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996
- Kushner, Lawrence: *Book of Miracles - A Young Person's Guide to Jewish Spirituality*, UAHC, 1987

# The Seudat Mitzvah – The Party

## *Rites and Wrongs of Passage*

*adapted from Putting God On The Guest List*

*by Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin*

The *Bar and Bat Mitzvah* party has been much criticized over the years. **Yet most Jews do not know that the party is an integral part of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ritual.** The first mention of the *Bar Mitzvah* party is in the *Shulchan Aruch* (the classic sixteenth century code of Jewish law): “It is the religious obligation of the father to tender a festive meal in honor of his son’s becoming a *Bar Mitzvah*, just as he might do when the boy marries.”

From a *halachic* (Jewish legal) point of view, then, the party has a proud lineage. But references to *Bar Mitzvah* parties go back even further. Scholars have a field day in locating the genuine seed of the custom.

Some say it goes back to Isaac’s weaning. Genesis 21:8 says Abraham threw a feast to celebrate that event. One ancient source suggested that Isaac was weaned at the age of thirteen (*Midrash, Bereshit Rabbah 53:10*)!

## *A Choice: Celebration or Conspicuous Consumption*

Modern American Jews are not the first Jews to confront the ethical overtones of conspicuous consumption. Even in medieval times, there were excesses in celebration. But in the sixteenth century, Rabbi Solomon Luria didn’t like what he saw. In his commentary on the *Talmud*, he condemned *Bar Mitzvah* parties as “occasions for wild levity, just for the purpose of stuffing the gullet” (*Yam Shel Shelomo, Baba Kama, 7:37*).

The rabbis of the Middle Ages eventually enacted laws to limit spending on festivities. They did this to protect the dignity of the less wealthy. This was identical to the original reason for a plain wooden casket at a funeral---so no one would be humiliated by having a less-than-opulent coffin. It also parallels the original reason for communal wedding rings that all brides would wear so that none would have to do without.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, when Jews were first becoming comfortable in America, *Bar Mitzvah* parties became especially opulent. Soon, the *Bar Mitzvah*’s social component would eclipse its ritual function. In the 1920s and 1930s the catering industry grew, which encouraged the transformation of *Bar Mitzvah* from a ceremony to an “affair.” This era also saw the growth of gift giving in connection with *Bar Mitzvah*.

### *The Ethics of Jewish Celebration*

Soon, the materialism that had become attached to *Bar Mitzvah* was decried. In 1938, the noted Orthodox rabbi, H. Pereira Mendes, insisted that the *Bar Mitzvah* “not be allowed to deteriorate into merely a day for perfunctory observance or for merry-making or gifts.” Twenty-six years later, the Central Conference of American Rabbis condemned the “deterioration in the character of the *Bar Mitzvah* affair.” The extravagant consumption, the conspicuous waste, and the crudity of many of these affairs are rapidly becoming a public Jewish scandal. The lowering of standards, as reflected in many *Bar Mitzvah* celebrations, is in direct violation of the teaching of the *Torah*. The trend toward the abandonment of aesthetic standards can lead to the abandonment of ethical standards as well.”

Concerns about the taste and aesthetics of *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* are still with us today. But there is a larger issue of the Jewish ethics of celebration. Such ethics help us understand the way that Jews view the world.

Judaism’s great contribution to the moral vocabulary of the world was that it produced a middle way between extremes, the way of *mitzvah* and *kedushah* (holiness). God made us a little lower than the angels, but much higher than the animals. Judaism says that we neither **reject** nor hoard pleasure. We **sanctify** pleasure. We sanctify what we eat through *kashrut* (dietary laws), what we own through *tzedakah* (holy giving), what we drink by *kiddush* (blessing the wine).

#### *Toward The Middle Way: How to Sanctify Our Celebrations and Put God on the Guest List*

What do we do? “Putting God on the Guest List” means that God calls to us to conquer, in some small way, the polarities between the sacred and the profane. Early in the planning stages for a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, it is important for parents to ask, “**What Jewish values do we hope this *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* celebration will embody?**” Make a list of them. Your list may include compassion, dignity, justice, learning, social action, generosity, humility, moderation, a love for the Jewish people and the Jewish homeland. Plan your celebration around these values, and stick to them.

One family asked its *Bat Mitzvah* guests to give money to the Jewish Federation to help poor elderly Jews. Another family put emblems of the twelve tribes on the tables at their son’s *Bar Mitzvah*. It was their way of teaching about our roots in the land of Israel.

One family bought trees in Israel in honor of its *Bar Mitzvah* guests. Another family asked family members and friends to help light the candles on the *Bat Mitzvah* cake. Such a ritual is not unusual, but they chose to do it in a different way. As each guest came up to light a candle, he or she offered the *Bat Mitzvah* girl a blessing, or a word of encouragement, or a Jewish value that the young woman might embody.

Other families put photos and biographies of important Jewish leaders throughout history on each table at their party, or put information about certain charities on each table and asked guests to contribute or learn about the causes. Some families forego the entire culture of catering by having the party at their homes or at a summer camp.

Best yet, many families go to Israel in lieu of a party. They have correctly surmised that their child would soon forget the party, but a trip to Israel does not become a lost memory.

Ultimately, these are the answers: Jewish celebrations that celebrate Jewish values. The educational and spiritual part of *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* can extend beyond the final hymn at the service. It can permeate the lives of our young, and it can enrich what they take with them into the world.

When a caterer inevitably asked, “What’s the theme of your son’s *Bar Mitzvah* going to be? The mother responded, “How about Judaism?” It’s a good answer, simple yet elegant.

## Who will Guarantee the Jewish Future? *A Rabbinic Legend*

One of the most famous of all Rabbinic legends concerns the moment when God gave the *Torah* to the Jewish people at *Mount Sinai*.

According to the Rabbis, just before God presented the Commandments to the Israelites,

God said, "I want to give you a precious way of life, these *mitzvot* through which you will be able to make life itself. But first I want to know what you will give me as a guarantor of your willingness to keep this way of life alive!"

Our people said, "We will give you our prophets in exchange. They will be our guarantors of the Jewish future."

But God said, "No, the prophets weren't good enough."

So our people said, "We will give you our sages and rabbis. They will be our guarantors of the Jewish future."

But God said, "No, the sages and rabbis weren't good enough either."

Finally, our people's eyes were opened, and they realized what had to be done. "We will give you our children.

They will be our guarantors of the Jewish future."

"Yes," said God at last,

"Now I will certainly give you the *Torah*, the *mitzvot* and this precious Jewish way of life, for your children are the best guarantors of all."

And that is how it has been.

For four thousand years, our future has rested squarely upon the shoulders of our children.

Caring for them, nurturing them, lovingly teaching them all the ethics, values, rituals, customs and spiritual inheritance that Jewish life has to offer, has always been our greatest responsibility and our greatest challenge.

## TORAH BLESSING NUMBER 1

### HEBREW – Get from Diane Townsend

#### In English Transliteration:

Bar'CHU et A-do-NAI ham-vo-RACH.

(wait for the congregation to respond with the second line, and then repeat it.)

Ba-RUCH A-do-NAI ham-vo-RACH I'o-LAM va-ED

Ba-RUCH a-TA A-do-NAI E-lo-HEI-nu MEHlech ha-o-LAM

a SHER BA-char BA-nu mi-KOL ha-a-MIM,

v'NA-tan LA-nu et TOH-ra-TOH.

Ba-RUCH a-TA A-do-NAI, no-TEIN HA-to-RA

Praise the One to whom praise is due!

Praised be the One to whom praise is due, now and forever!

Praised be our Eternal God, Ruler of the universe, who has chosen us from all peoples by giving us the *Torah*. We praise You, Eternal One, Giver of the *Torah*

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(tips for pronunciation)

ai = as in eye

ch= as in Bach (a gutural sound)

ei = as in day

CAPS = accented syllable



**TORAH BLESSING NUMBER 2**  
*After a Section is Read from the Torah*

**HEBREW – Get from Diane Townsend**

**In English Transliteration:**

**Ba-RUCH a-TA A-do-NAI E-lo-HEI-nu ME-lech ha-o-LAM  
a-SHER NA-tan LA-nu toh-RAHT e-MET,  
v'cha-YEI o-LAM na-TA b'toh-CHEI-nu  
Ba-RUCH a-TA A-do-NAI, NO-tein ha-to-RAH.**

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe:

You have given us a *Torah* of truth, implanting within us eternal life.

We praise You, O God, Giver of the *Torah*.

---

Tips for pronouncing the transliteration:

ai= as in eye

ei - as in day

ch = as in Bach (a guttural sound)

CAPS = accented syllable

