

# ***B’nai Mitzvah Experience at Temple Beth Israel***

Mazel tov on making a commitment to become, b’nai mitzvah, in Hebrew meaning, a child of the commandments. A special chapter has begun in your family’s life. The time of study and preparation to become b’nai mitzvah is a challenging but rewarding journey. Your child is growing – transforming – into a young adult, and you are undoubtedly becoming aware of the joys, hopes, and worries that go with being the parent of a child in this stage of life.

The b’nai mitzvah experience is Judaism’s rite of passage for this remarkable time of life. The skills young people have traditionally mastered in order to establish themselves as young adults in the “tribe” include publicly blessing and chanting from the Torah, leading the community in prayer, and studying and sharing insights about what the Torah portion might have to teach us all.

Our goal for our young adults at TBI is that they will be able to stand up proudly, with a strong foundation of Jewish texts, values, and practices, and be ready to use their inherited skills and knowledge to celebrate their Jewish identity and enter a lifetime of Jewish living.

In a community as diverse as our own, we expect that process and celebration to look somewhat different for each child, but it is also understood to be a major endeavor shaped by tradition and community in whatever form it takes. As our community’s own “B’nai Mitzvah Bubbie” Joan Bayliss, discovered, “One of the greatest confidence-building aspects of b’nai mitzvah is for young people to discover that through practice and diligence, they can do something really big by breaking it down into small pieces and working on each piece one at a time.”

The b’nai mitzvah journey is a big undertaking that calls for a significant commitment of time in the family schedule. If your student tries to squeeze it in around the edges of multiple extracurricular activities, then it’s likely to be more stress and rush than satisfaction, and more rote performance than transformative process. This is not a time to be missing religious school or tutoring. If your kid tends to overbook on activities, consider cutting back during the year leading up to this big moment. It’s worth the investment in the process and will create more joy and sanity in your family.

It is completely normal for the entire family to become swept into the emotional roller coaster that can go along with any major life-cycle event. Weddings, births, and – yes – b’nai mitzvah preparation cause interpersonal dynamics with relatives and friends near and far to be stirred and mixed up. Expect the unexpected and call on your fellow parents for support and camaraderie.

In the midst of all this wonder are the many, many details. This binder is intended to provide as much information about the program and the experience as possible, so please read it through carefully, and refer to it as the first step towards answering your questions during the process. It is also particularly important to attend the b’nai mitzvah Parent Circle meetings throughout the year. If you can’t find what you need to know in here or on our website, please don’t hesitate to contact us with questions.

Kol tuv,

*Rabbi Alyson Solomon & Rabbi Rubi Sophia Motzkin Rubenstein*

## Contact Information

Because the b'nai mitzvah process involves many details, it can become confusing for parents to know who to contact about what. Here's how we can help:

<b>Staff Member</b>	<b>Contact Info</b>	<b>Area of Support</b>
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<b>Helena Clement</b> <i>Executive Director</i>	541-485-7218 x104 helena@tbieugene.org	facility rental; payment and billing questions
<b>John Hirsch</b> <i>Office Manager</i>	541-485-7218 x106 john@tbieugene.org	facility rental, logistics of service and building use, special requests about the service
<b>Jody Kirtner</b> <i>Programs and Communications Manager</i>	541-485-7218 x 103 jody@tbieugene.org	submissions to This Week @ TBI
Class Co-Parent Coordinator		Kiddush cup decisions, sign up for onegs and greetings, class dinners, activities, etc.
Class Co-Parent Coordinator		

## B'nai Mitzvah Mentors (Tutors)

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## **Section 1**

# **Historical Background of B'nai Mitzvah**



## **Historical Background of B'nai Mitzvah**

“Liberal Jews recognize that the process of becoming a bar/bat mitzvah is as crucial as the moment itself. B'nai mitzvah ceremonies are rites of passage that prepare children to lead engaging and thoughtful Jewish lives with a sense of commitment to their Jewish identity.”

© Deborah Waxman and Joshua Lesser, A Guide to Jewish Practice, Volume III edited by David Teutsch.

The meaning and definition of b'nai mitzvah has changed a lot over the years. The events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the distinct experience of American Jews living simultaneously in two civilizations, have both had a significant influence on the ritual and tradition. Young people consider this occasion to be their ceremonial identification with the Jewish People and Judaism. Emotionally, they now “belong.” Some even feel that without this ceremony they are “not Jewish.” Parents seem to feel that this is indeed the major meaning of the ceremony today: it builds and strengthens Jewish identity. From that day on, the youngster has a defined place in the universe. This is no small matter. In fact, it is a major accomplishment in this age of “options,” different life-styles, and changing values.

Historically, in Jewish tradition a boy is considered a “man” at the age of thirteen years and one day, a girl is a “woman” at age twelve years and one day. Obviously, in this respect, b'nai mitzvah ceremonies are clearly rites of passage. What did this coming of age mean, and how was it observed?

The institution celebrating b'nai mitzvah developed over centuries. The Talmud says, “At five years of age a male child is ready to study the Torah, at ten the Mishnah, and at thirteen the commandments (mitzvot).” The 13th birthday marked that one was biologically, intellectually and spiritually ready to begin assuming adult responsibilities and was prepared to participate in adult religious life by being counted in the minyan and wearing tallit and tefillin. Historically, responsibilities for one who has become bar mitzvah include praying three times daily, putting on tefillin, fasting on Yom Kippur and other fast days, observing Shabbat and holy days, keeping kosher, and continuing ones' study of Judaism.

Traditionally, the ceremony was simple, the bar mitzvah was called up (aliyah) to the Torah during a service to recite the Torah blessings. Often the individual would chant a section of the week's portion, followed by chanting the Haftarah and would address those gathered to demonstrate understanding of the texts learned for the occasion. It has also been tradition to follow the Shabbat service with a modest meal of celebration (seudah).

In order to accomplish this, a certain degree of knowledge, acquired during family religious practice and study was expected. Of course, in a pre-modern Jewish community most customs were learned through observance in the home or shul (synagogue). Becoming a bar mitzvah was never considered the end of Jewish education, but rather a milestone; circumstances permitting, many students went on to pursue years of in-depth study in yeshiva and in other settings.

Many of the practices and areas of study described above in the historical development of b'nai mitzvah pertained to boys alone for centuries. It's worth noting, as a Reconstructionist congregation, our movement's vital role in the development of the value of gender equality in the area of b'nai mitzvah. The following is an excerpt from an article called “The First American Bat Mitzvah” from a web site called “The Jewish Virtual Library”:

On Saturday morning, March 18, 1922, twelve-year old Judith Kaplan, the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, stepped to the bimah of her father's synagogue, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. She recited the preliminary blessing, read a portion of the Torah sidra in Hebrew and English and then intoned the closing blessing. "That was enough to shock a lot of people," she later recalled, "including my own grandparents and aunts and uncles."

The shocking event they had just witnessed, according to historian Paula Hyman, was the first bat mitzvah conducted in the United States. Reflecting on her historic moment, Kaplan observed, "No thunder sounded. No lightning struck." Rather, Judith Kaplan and her father, founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, set the model for what has now become a widespread American Jewish practice.

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Today, in a pluralistic, open society, we seek for b'nai mitzvah to initiate a lifelong exploration of Jewish practice and study. Will our students observe the festivals? Will they fast on Yom Kippur? Will their Jewish identity express itself in deepened interest in Jewish affairs, in charity (tzedakah)? Will they continue their Jewish education? Will they develop a connection to Israel? Will they go to Jewish camps in the summer? Will they take a more responsible role in the synagogue and in the larger Jewish community? Will they continue to perform mitzvot throughout their lives? In which ways will they manifest their Judaism?

All those opportunities are deeply encouraged by Temple Beth Israel. Parental guidance and encouragement are essential. Indeed, becoming b'nai mitzvah is a major process created by tradition as a structured way to build Jewish identity. (In other words, Jewish responsibility must be taught/learned in such a manner as to create a milestone in the student's personal as well as communal life.) It is a symbolic expression of willingness to assume increased Jewish responsibility, not the end of the road. This embrace of responsibility becomes a marker, which indicates the child's readiness to receive greater freedom and privileges in the family, in the synagogue, and in one's daily life.

Temple Beth Israel will do its part in preparing your child for this event. Your involvement, however, is the essential link that will ensure your child's spiritual growth.

Several articles are enclosed in the last section of this handbook that may further illuminate our modern interpretation of the b'nai mitzvah experience and give you ideas for making this a meaningful journey for your family.



## **Section 2**

### **TBI's Program Overview**

- The B'nai Mitzvah Experience at Temple Beth Israel
  - Declaring "Hineini"
  - The Traditional Approach
  - Alternative Approaches
  - Specific Requirements
- Expectations for Attendance and Participation
  - Tracking
- Making a Commitment
  - B'nai Mitzvah Studies Agreement
  - Selection of a B'nai Mitzvah Service Dates
  - The Role of Family in the Process
- Resources from TBI
- B'nai Mitzvah Mentors, Practicing, and Tutoring
- Meetings with the Rabbi
- Mitzvah Projects



# The B'nai Mitzvah Experience at Temple Beth Israel

## Declaring “Hineini!”

It is our goal at TBI that our b'nai mitzvah students will be able to confidently declare “Hineini!” (Here I am!) and understand and demonstrate what it means to them and to the community to be identified as a Jewish adult. We recognize that there are multiple ways people manifest Jewish identity and participate in community, and we want to have a program that honors the diversity of our students and families. As you think about how you and your family demonstrate your Jewishness, consider these different areas of development:



- **(Mind) Torah:** features Torah study and analysis, learning Hebrew, and a clear understanding of the core stories and themes of the Jewish people.

- **(Heart) Avodah:** features fluency and comfort with songs, blessings and Hebrew used in services and everyday life, enough that students are able to participate (and lead) parts of services with confidence and be actively Jewish in daily life.



- **(Hands) G'milut Chasadim:** features significant engagement with Jewish values and ethics, including tikkun olam efforts, tzedakah, social justice, and other mitzvah projects.



- **(Body) K'lal Israel:** features an appreciation and awareness for what makes Jews “a people” and a commitment to that community through actions as diverse as cooking and hosting a Jewish meal, crafting Judaica, researching about Jewish family history or Jewish history in general, or being involved with contemporary Jewish issues.



## The Traditional Approach

The traditional b'nai mitzvah process at TBI focuses primarily on cultivating the first two categories (Torah and Avodah). Most of our students demonstrate this by 1) becoming proficient enough in the liturgy that they can lead the congregation in certain prayers and blessings, 2) learning to chant Torah, and 3) giving a reflective d'var on the Torah portion. The information in this binder assumes a student working towards these goals.

## Alternative Approaches

In acknowledgement of the diversity of our Jewish community, and because we want to accommodate different learning styles and honor multiple manifestations of Jewish identity and what they offer, we are very willing to create alternative approaches to the traditional model. If your family thinks that there might be a more fitting way to recognize your child's entrance into Jewish adulthood, we are eager to work with you to design an alternative approach. Please talk to Rabbi Ruhi Sophia or Rabbi Solomon as early as possible to navigate an alternative path.

## Specific Requirements

However it's done, enabling students to reach this level of "hineini" requires a significant investment of time and energy, usually from the family with support from Talmud Torah. Students will be ready at different times and in different ways. Some of our students come from homes with a high level of Jewish engagement, others come from homes with minimal connection other than religious school participation. Some of our students start in our Talmud Torah program in kindergarten or first grade, others much later. Some students are reluctant, and others put in a tremendous amount of effort. All of these students can reach a level of hineini that merits identifying as a bar or bat mitzvah, but the pathway may be different for them.

So, to be specific, to become b'nai mitzvah at TBI, students should:

- **Be at least 13** (older is fine).
- **Full participation in Talmud Torah** classes, ideally starting in Zra'im through Kita Zayin. Beginning in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students come twice a week, Sundays and Wednesdays and each year take at least one JEWL if not two per week.
  - New students to Talmud Torah will not start in Kita Hey, Vav or Zayin, regardless of age (unless they have participated in religious school elsewhere).
  - If your child is new to Talmud Torah or unable to participate as above during these three years, please make an appointment with the Rabbi Educator.
- **B'nai Mitzvah Shabbatonim:** Students, and accompanying parents as requested, are expected to attend as much as possible of the b'nai mitzvah retreats (Shabbatonim) each year during the two years of the b'nai mitzvah program. There are two Shabbatonim each year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The dates are set by late summer each year. The Shabbaton are usually held on a Saturday after-evening and include: games, learning, havdallah and fun! We hope to have at least one-overnight Shabbaton held at TBI.
- **B'nai Mitzvah Family Limmud Programs:** There will be several b'nai mitzvah family programs throughout the year in lieu of (and at the same time as) regular Sunday morning cohort class. It is expected that at least one parent attends most of these family meetings with the student.
- **Worship Services:** Students ideally should attend a minimum of 16 services in the 18 months before their bar/bat mitzvah dates. This is divided as follows:
  - 6 - **Prayers Unpacked** w/ Rabbi Solomon on Shabbat mornings. As much as is possible, it is wise to accomplish this during the Kita Vav year (6<sup>th</sup> grade), so that students can focus more on regular Shabbat services as they get closer to becoming b'nai mitzvah.
  - 6 - **Regular Shabbat Morning Services** (without b'nai mitzvah celebrations). Six is the bare minimum. Most students won't achieve the level of comfort and confidence without many more services than this.

4 - **Services of your choice**, including Friday evening, shiva minyanim, special holiday services, Havdalah program, Saturday morning or afternoon service. This can be a day with a bar/bat mitzvah. (This does not include erev or morning Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur services.)

- **Other TBI Programs:** Students are expected to attend two non-worship service, community events/programs designed for the larger TBI community. This can include lectures, adult education programs, social events or group volunteer programs. It does not include Havdalah or Simchat Torah or religious services. It also does not include programs designed specifically for or with Talmud Torah or TBI youth. It does include things like Sisterhood lectures, community education programs, or the Saturday morning Torah study group.

Please consult the Talmud Torah webpage, the main TBI calendar, or the emails for more information regarding services and programs.

Attending Talmud Torah classes and TBI services and programs aims to prepare our students as b'nai mitzvah. This aims to achieve the following:

- Give students an opportunity to experience the various prayer and religious services in the TBI community and gain a greater level of comfort with participating in and leading prayer.
- Ensure their Jewish education and enable it to continue beyond b'nai mitzvah.
- Acquaint students with the diverse offerings at TBI and help them understand that people connect with Jewish life at TBI in many different ways.
- To build strong relationships both with their Talmud Torah class cohort as well as with the greater TBI community.

The requirements have been set up so students have some flexibility in the programs they attend, and it will hopefully be a rewarding and meaningful part of the b'nai mitzvah training process. These requirements assume a baseline level of proficiency and familiarity with Judaism and the experiences of worship services at the beginning of the b'nai mitzvah program. Students who don't yet have that may have additional requirements. *Please note: students that are working with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia and/or Rabbi Solomon on individualized pathways to b'nai mitzvah may draw up different attendance and participation expectations from what follows.*

## Helpful Tracking Tool

Students and families are encouraged to use both the **online tracker found at [tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah](http://tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah)** and the tracker sheet to track attendance and participation.

Record your attendance on your paper B'nai Mitzvah Service & Program Attendance Tracker (hard copy in the back of this binder and PDF at [tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah](http://tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah)).

*This is your reminder of what you've attended.*



# **Making a Commitment**

## **B’nai Mitzvah Studies Agreement**

TBI asks that b’nai mitzvah families agree to meet the requirements of b’nai mitzvah study by signing a brit (agreement). Becoming b’nai mitzvah is a sacred life-cycle process and ritual, and a brit signifies the weight and relevance and makes it clear the responsibilities we are all assuming. There is a standard brit in the back of this binder. Your family may use the one provided or may work with Rabbi Solomon and Rabbi Ruhi Sophia to create one that meets the goals stated in this section but is personalized for your student’s needs. A signed agreement is necessary for admittance into the b’nai mitzvah program. Please underscore to your child the solemnity of signing such a document.

## **Selection of B’nai Mitzvah Service Dates**

Students will be assigned dates for their b’nai mitzvah services after having completed all the following steps of the b’nai mitzvah program registration process:

1. Parent(s) attend introductory b’nai mitzvah parent meeting in the spring of 5<sup>th</sup> grade or arrange for a make-up meeting with Rabbi Solomon.
2. Students and families submit to Rabbi Solomon by **August 1<sup>st</sup>**:
  - a. the signed Program Entrance Form (including three dates for bar/bat mitzvah services (on or after the student’s 13<sup>th</sup> birthday by either the Hebrew or secular calendar).
  - b. the B’nai Mitzvah Agreement

Families that would like to have personal meetings with Rabbi Solomon or Rabbi Ruhi Sophia to assist with this step are welcome to do so.

3. Families register for the new school year (online), pay tuition online or to the main office (whether your family pays in full or monthly installments is fine), and pay the first payment of life cycle fee by **August 1<sup>st</sup>**.
4. Dates will be assigned all at one time in late summer/early fall for all the incoming students who have completed steps 1-4 above. **Families who haven’t completed steps 1-3 will have to wait to be assigned a date until they’ve done so.**

We do our best to give families their first choices. The dates must be cleared with the master calendar for TBI and the rabbi to ensure that there are no conflicts. Beyond conflicts in the TBI calendar, priority is given to dates that correspond to the child’s Hebrew or English birthday. For weeks with more than one birthday, we will have a drawing if all other things are equal. Please see the section on “Picking Your Parasha” on page 33 to help choose potential portions that would be a good fit. Also, keep in mind that students who have turned 13 are able to lead the Amidah in community, even if they have not yet had their b’nai mitzvah services. If your child might benefit from some additional practice in front of the congregation before the big day, you might want to choose a later date.

## **The Role of Family**

As a potentially transformative rite of passage for the student and the family, the experience takes on the most meaning when parents and student learn together, rather than moving through the process as if it were simply a huge independent assignment to complete.

Since our children learn more from what we do than what we say, it is important that our actions reflect a commitment to Judaism and Jewish education. **We encourage you to attend Shabbat**

services along with your children on a regular basis, so that you and your child will become both familiar and comfortable with the prayer service and TBI's customs. Parents who casually drop their children off at services and do not attend with them are communicating to their children an ambivalence that can be confusing and diminishing. It's understood that everyone's lives are pulled in many directions by different priorities and activities – we just want to impress upon parents that the more you can model and support participation in Jewish life with your child, the more powerful and transformative the b'nai mitzvah experience is likely to be for you, your child, and your relationship.

## **Resources from TBI**

TBI gives copies of the *Kol Haneshamah* siddur to all the b'nai mitzvah students at the Simchat Torah celebration in their Kita Vav (6<sup>th</sup> grade) year as part of the b'nai mitzvah preparation process. We hope the siddur will be a helpful tool in your child's journey to becoming bar/bat mitzvah as well as meaningful resource for years to come.

Also in the fall of 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Talmud Torah will provide students with a *Liturgy Practice Book* with the prayers and Torah trope related resources they'll need to learn. You can find sound files for the prayers on our google drive, accessible from this page: <https://www.tbieugene.org/education/the-sounds-of-prayer-at-tbi>.

Please pay close attention to this binder, the Talmud Torah updates, and other b'nai mitzvah-related emails during this process and reference them all as a first step in looking for answers. There are many other useful links and tips on the b'nai mitzvah page of the TBI website, including pdfs of this handbook, sample programs, caterer handouts, and so much more, so please bookmark the page: [www.tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah](http://www.tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah) as well as our google drive for b'nai mitzvah files: [tinyurl.com/TBIbmitz](http://tinyurl.com/TBIbmitz).

The more families use these resources for the simple questions, the more time staff has available to address other needs in helping families through this process.

## **B'nai Mitzvah Mentors, Practicing and Tutoring**

Our b'nai mitzvah mentors (tutors) are key people in the lives of our b'nai mitzvah students. Talmud Torah selects b'nai mitzvah mentors for their knowledge of the tefillah and minhag (prayer and customs) at TBI as well as their commitment to the TBI community. The mentors help the students cross the bridge between life as a child in the TBI community and life as a young adult member of the congregation. The mentors tutor students in Hebrew and trope for their parasha and assist them with the liturgy. They are familiar friendly faces welcoming students to services and encouraging them to try out what they've learned. They also often serve as guides for your family as you go through this process as they've walked this road with many other students.

**Mentor Assignments:** Parents are welcome to give input about which mentor(s) might be the best fit for their students, but **please DO NOT make a private arrangement with a mentor on your own. However, parents are** welcome/encouraged to contact the Talmud Torah office with questions about mentor assignments or getting started. Rabbi Ruhi Sophie will assign mentors to students based on that input, as well as observations from teachers, and mentors' availability and load. (Different mentors have different potential time slots. It's not uncommon for a student's preferred mentor to have a schedule that doesn't match the student's availability. If your mentor's



schedule doesn't work with your schedule and you can't change yours, talk to Rabbi Solomon about working with a different mentor.) Most mentors meet with students at TBI, but occasionally a mentor and a family agree on an alternative place that is mutually beneficial such as the mentor or family's home. In any event, mentors are not to transport students.

**Tutoring Sessions:** Most students begin working with their mentors about 6-9 months prior to the bar/bat mitzvah date, though some families will desire or be advised by the Talmud Torah office to begin earlier. (If your student needs pre-b'nai mitzvah tutoring, the Talmud Torah office can often provide you with names of people who may be able to help.) The student usually meets with the mentor once each week on a set schedule to practice the prayers, blessings, Torah readings, and sometimes Haftarah or other readings.

The mentoring fee includes 24 tutoring sessions. If the student uses fewer than 24 sessions, we do not generally prorate the tutoring sessions used. In most cases, if a student needs more than 24 sessions, the family will need to pay for additional sessions. The TT office will let you know if it seems like you may be going over the allotted 24 sessions, but you should also keep track and talk to Rabbi Solomon if you have concerns.

**Practice:** Some of our advanced Hebrew classes (level 4.5 and above) assume a certain amount of outside of class practice. By the time they are in Kita Vav (6<sup>th</sup> grade) students should be practicing Hebrew 5-15 minutes on days without Talmud Torah (or attending Shabbat services). Practice is best done out loud, while following the text, in front of a partner, sibling, tutor, or friend. The best material to practice before starting work with a mentor is the content from your Hebrew classes and/or liturgy that the student most enjoys from the siddur. There's no reason it can't happen on the go (in the car, in the ortho appointment waiting room, at a sibling's sports event, etc.)

In the 9 months leading up to becoming b'nai mitzvah, students should be practicing 15-30 minutes per day. This level of practice is a serious commitment and is the equivalent of being in another sport or taking on a musical instrument. You will need to make a very intentional plan for how to fit this in your family's schedule, in the same way sports and music practice has a schedule.

**Parasha:** Mentors also support students and family in exploring the Torah portion and selecting verses for aliyot. For students giving a traditional d'var Torah on the Torah portion, mentors will likely want to hear them practice the speech to assist with delivery.

**Payment:** Parents are responsible for paying all the mentor's fees through the main TBI office. Scholarships for mentoring fees are available through the Talmud Torah office for families who are in need of extra assistance. Please let Rabbi Solomon or Helena (the TBI executive director) know if you need financial aid, or if you can make a donation to help another family cover the costs.

**Canceled Appointments:** Make sure you have your b'nai mitzvah mentor's name and phone number in a readily accessible place to use whenever needed. Also, make sure both you and your child's mentor have the same session day, time, location and length in mind when you agree on a meeting schedule.

**Conflicts:** If you ever need to cancel or change an appointment for reasons other than illness, you must contact your child's b'nai mitzvah mentor directly (***NOT the Talmud Torah office***) no later than the evening before the meeting. In case of illness, please contact your mentor as early as possible before the meeting. If you cancel on the same day as the lesson or if you fail to show up for a lesson, this can count as one of the 24 allotted mentoring sessions. In turn, if your mentor ever cancels or changes an appointment without giving you at least one day's notice, fails to show up for a lesson, does not arrive at the appointed time, or you have other ongoing challenges that you can't resolve on your own, please call the Talmud Torah office at 541-485-1898.

## **Meetings with the Rabbi**

There is a minimum of five meetings with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia built into our program. **It is your responsibility to set up these meetings. Please contact Rachel Burstein at [rachel@tbieugene.org](mailto:rachel@tbieugene.org) or (541) 485-7218, ext. 108. Please don't let this slip!**

**Meetings with the rabbi are generally as follows:**

1. **First family meeting: 8-9 months prior** to bar/bat mitzvah to explore the spiritual meaning of the process, talk about the Torah and Haftarah portion for that specific Shabbat service, and discuss any questions or details about the process. It is very helpful to be familiar with the assigned Torah portion before this meeting, please see section 4 (d'var Torah) for more information. However, please DO NOT attempt to write a d'var before meeting with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia.
2. **Rabbi and student, d'var Torah meetings: 2 meetings**, starting about **6-7 months prior** to bar/bat mitzvah, and again a month after that. The student and rabbi will discuss the Torah portion and strategies for developing a d'var Torah. Do not begin work on the writing of the d'var Torah before the first of these meetings unless otherwise instructed by Rabbi Ruhi Sophia. There is the possibility that the student may need more meetings and the rabbi will do her best to make that happen.
3. **Second family meeting:** about **6 weeks prior** to bar/bat mitzvah to discuss any remaining questions, concerns, submit the "Honors" form (electronically please), clarify other details, and to continue to discuss the Torah portion as a family.
4. **Dress rehearsal and tzitzit tying:** This is typically scheduled on the Thursday before the Saturday ceremony from 3:30 -5:30 pm. It can take longer with photography and/or tzitzit tying with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia. (Please let her know if those will be included.) Anyone with a significant role in the service is encouraged to attend if possible.
5. **Challah baking:** Rabbi Ruhi Sophia invites b'nai mitzvah students and their families to bake challah with her at her home at 11am on the Friday before their Shabbat services. This is a special opportunity for immediate and/or extended family members to help surround the student with love and support before the big day. Plan on 45 minutes to an hour.

If more meetings with the rabbi are needed, please contact the main office, and we'll do our best to arrange additional times.

## **Mitzvah Projects**

Over the years, many TBI students have participated in mitzvah projects alongside their other b'nai mitzvah preparations. Even when students' b'nai mitzvah training is a more classic blend of Torah and Avodah than G'milut Chasadim, it can still be meaningful to take on a mitzvah project. Often, their efforts with a mitzvah project can tie in nicely with their exploration of their parasha and an eventual d'var Torah.

It's not always easy at first glance to find volunteer projects that are both meaningful for the students and truly helpful for the community, but there are many things they can do that are needed. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Regular visits to a senior
- Visiting the sick
- Packing boxes at Food for Lane County
- Helping with kids at First Place Family Shelter or the Relief Nursery
- Making kits for Days for Girls ([daysforgirls.org](http://daysforgirls.org))
- Yard work for families who are going through a difficult time
- Assisting with TBI related projects, events, activities



# **Section 3**

## **Event Planning**

- B'nai Mitzvah Costs
- Temple Beth Israel's B'nai Mitzvah Checklist for Parents
- Logistics for the B'nai Mitzvah Event
  - Use of TBI Facility
  - Numbers and Seating
  - This Week at TBI E-Bulletin
  - Erev Shabbat (Friday Night) Service and Oneg
  - Greeting
  - Seudat Mitzvah (Shabbat Luncheon)
  - Kashrut and the TBI Kitchen
  - Linens
  - Photographs
  - Flowers
  - Musicians
  - Left-over Food and Flowers
  - Children
  - Kiddush Cup Class Gift
  - Digital Streaming Service
  - Other Details
- TBI Event Resources Inventories
- Core Principles of Temple Beth Israel's Ethical Kashrut Commitment: Sustainability, Environmental Health and Justice
- B'nai Mitzvah Event Planning Community Resources and Contacts



## **B'nai Mitzvah Costs**

The b'nai mitzvah process definitely shouldn't bankrupt families, but it's easy to get overwhelmed by the costs. A clear sense of the expenses will help you budget what's best for your family. There are scholarships available for families in need and there are also creative ways to save money on the event. Here's an outline of what you can expect (the b'nai mitzvah fees are also on a handout in the back pocket of your binder):

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>Regular Talmud Torah Tuition</b> <i>Payments can be set up in your ShulCloud account.</i>	\$955/year
<b>B'nai Mitzvah Fees at TBI for the Class of 2025</b>  Total b'nai mitzvah fee is <b>\$1,585</b>  <b>B'nai Mitzvah Fee Includes:</b>  <b>Life Cycle Support</b> Support for the b'nai mitzvah experience provided by TBI including: logistical details, additional education-related communications, private sessions with the rabbi, a siddur, all the materials relevant to the course of study, b'nai mitzvah family limmud sessions with the rabbi, and the gift of a Tanakh.  <b>Mentoring</b> 24 hour-long sessions with a b'nai mitzvah mentor to practice prayers, trope, and the student's Torah portion in addition to general b'nai mitzvah mentoring. Students who need additional tutoring should arrange for payment directly with their mentors.  <b>B'nai Mitzvah Reception at TBI</b> A two-hour reception in TBI's social hall after the BM ceremony for your friends and family. Please begin arrangements with the front office 9 months in advance of your event for details regarding what is included.  <b>Set up payment plan (monthly, or in whatever increments you choose) in you ShulCloud account and begin payments by December 31<sup>st</sup> of your student's 6<sup>th</sup> grade Talmud Torah year.</b>  <b>All payments must be completed by June 1st of your student's 7<sup>th</sup> grade Talmud Torah year.</b>  <i>Any financial questions should be directed to the Executive Director, Helena Clement.</i>	\$1,585

<b>Tzedakah</b> TBI strongly encourages donating 3% of the cost of the food for your child's b'nai mitzvah celebration to <i>Mazon, the Jewish Response to Hunger</i> . <a href="https://mazon.org/">https://mazon.org/</a>	variable
<b>Friday night onegs for classmates</b> Each family will help provide an erev Shabbat oneg for two other b'nai mitzvah students. This relieves the pressure off families when it is their weekend.	variable
<b>Seudat Mitzvah</b> Meal after the service. Costs vary widely depending on the number of attendees and whether you organize a class potluck or have it catered.	variable
<b>Kiddush Cup Class Gift</b> It is a TBI tradition to have each b'nai mitzvah class choose a kiddush cup and give a matching one to each student as a gift in lieu of giving individual presents to every classmate. This saves a tremendous amount of money for families and gives the students a meaningful and appropriate reminder of their day.	\$20-\$50, depending on which cup the class chooses
<b>Class Group Gift</b> Many b'nai mitzvah classes have contributed towards a group gift, often to something for the synagogue, new prayer books, furniture, art, etc.	variable
<b>Additional Expenses Often Incurred</b> Although none of these are required costs, many families spend money on the following as well: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tallit</li> <li>• Invitations</li> <li>• Personalized kippot</li> <li>• programs</li> <li>• Party venue (rental for TBI's social hall from 6pm-12am is \$500)</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Photography/Video</li> <li>• Flowers/Decorations</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Clothes</li> </ul>	variable



## **TBI's 2-year B'nai Mitzvah Timeline & Checklist**

Please use the timetable on the following page to stay on top of the logistics of b'nai mitzvah planning. Not every item listed will necessarily apply to your family's celebration and the listed times may vary somewhat with each family's needs, but it will give you a good idea. TBI staff (the rabbi, Rabbi Educator, Talmud Torah Administrator, mentors, and the office staff) will do our best to support you in this process, but b'nai mitzvah students and families are ultimately responsible for making sure these things happen. (This timeline is also on a handout in the back pocket of your binder.)

Date	Student/Family	Staff
May/June of 5 <sup>th</sup> grade year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attend meeting for incoming 6<sup>th</sup> grade families w/Rabbi Solomon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prepare b'nai mitzvah family handbooks and student liturgy books for incoming 6<sup>th</sup> graders</li> <li>- Lead meeting for incoming 6<sup>th</sup> grade families &amp; distribute family handbooks</li> </ul>
August/September of 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Submit b'nai mitzvah date preferences and corresponding parasha</li> <li>- Complete and submit: <b>entrance form, b'nai mitzvah agreement, fee schedule, timeline</b></li> <li>- Express any preference for mentor (mentor choice is not guaranteed and will be assigned based on availability and other factors)</li> <li>- Pay TT tuition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rabbi Solomon/Rachel collect signed paperwork</li> <li>- TBI Office confirms that TT tuition is up to date</li> <li>- Rabbi Ruhi Sophia – approves chosen date</li> </ul>
Beginning of 6 <sup>th</sup> grade (Fall Term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confirm date/parasha with Rachel/Rabbi Ruhi Sophia</li> <li>- Receive mentor assignment</li> <li>- Receive student liturgy book and siddur</li> <li>- Attend Shabbat services as often as possible and all 6 Prayers Unpacked with Rabbi Solomon</li> <li>- Attend all B'nai Mitzvah Family Limmud with Rabbi Ruhi &amp; Parent Circle Meetings with Rabbi Solomon</li> <li>- Attend cohort meeting with Helena and John re: finances and building use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confirm dates with families</li> <li>- Continue to collect paperwork</li> <li>- Distribute student liturgy books and siddurim</li> <li>- Schedule learners' services, send out schedule and info to families</li> <li>- Talmud Torah office sends out volunteer sign ups and class kiddush cup information</li> </ul>

Date	Student/Family	Staff
By December 31 <sup>st</sup> of 6 <sup>th</sup> grade year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Families log into their ShulCloud accounts, make sure payment method is entered, and set up payment plan for \$1,585 (payments to be completed by June 1<sup>st</sup> of 7<sup>th</sup> grade year)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TBI Office confirms that a payment plan has been set up via ShulCloud</li> </ul>
12 months prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Try to attend Shabbat morning service of student's parasha</li> <li>- Meet with Rabbi Ruhi and obtain parasha materials if you haven't already</li> <li>- Contact Rachel to set up first family appointment w/Rabbi Ruhi</li> <li>- First family meeting w/Rabbi Ruhi or Rabbi Solomon and mentor assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make sure kids have received parasha materials</li> <li>- Rachel reaches out to family to schedule first family meeting w/RRS</li> <li>- Rabbi Ruhi matches student with mentor</li> <li>- Rabbi Ruhi or Rabbi Solomon first family meeting</li> </ul>
9 months prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attend first family meeting w/Rabbi Ruhi or Rabbi Solomon if you haven't already</li> <li>- Start working w/mentor</li> <li>- Review goals, specific needs, expectations about b'nai mitzvah w/Rabbi Ruhi</li> <li>- Meet with John re: plans to use social hall for luncheon/celebration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make sure families have attended first meeting w/Rabbi Ruhi or Rabbi Solomon</li> <li>- Make sure mentor assignments have been finalized and kids have connected with their mentors</li> <li>- Office begins to work with families on building use plans</li> </ul>
8 months prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student begins working w/mentor if they haven't already</li> <li>- Continue to attend Shabbat services and learners' services</li> <li>- Continue meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi re: d'var</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Check in with mentors and families to make sure students are meeting with mentors</li> <li>- Track service attendance</li> <li>- Rachel schedules meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi</li> </ul>
7 months prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi re: d'var</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rachel schedules meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi</li> </ul>
6 months prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi re: d'var</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rachel schedule meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi</li> </ul>

Date	Student/Family	Staff
4-5 months prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi re: d'var</li> <li>- Parents learn blessings for tallit, Torah readings, shehecheyanu (mentors can help)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rachel schedules meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi</li> </ul>
6 weeks prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi re: d'var</li> <li>- Finalize luncheon plans by submitting building use form to John</li> <li>- Family meets with John to discuss day of logistics and building use</li> <li>- Finalize honors for family members and friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rachel schedules meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi</li> <li>- TBI Office finalizes building use plans with families</li> </ul>
1 month prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Final meeting w/Rabbi Ruhi re: d'var</li> <li>- Practice on bimah with mentor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rachel schedules meetings w/Rabbi Ruhi</li> </ul>
1 week prior to b'nai mitzvah date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dress rehearsal (usually Thursday 3:30-5:30pm)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rachel confirms rehearsal</li> <li>- Kiddush cup (to be given by the prior b'nai mitzvah student) and Tankah are placed on the bima</li> </ul>

# **Logistics for the B'nai Mitzvah Event**

## **Use of TBI Facility**

John will provide you with a Building Use Form at your meeting with him 9 months prior to your b'nai mitzvah date. **Please finalize your building use plans by submitting this form to the John in the main office at least 6 weeks before your event.** Information about planning the reception and use of the TBI kitchen is below.

## **Numbers and Seating**

The sanctuary (as normally set up) fits approximately 175 people. If you anticipate more people at the service when your child becomes bar/bat mitzvah, you may want to talk to the main office about opening up the side to fit an additional 140. If fully set up with 21 (8 person) round tables, the social hall seats 168 people. If you anticipate more than that you'll want to consider other layouts and special planning and coordination with the office is recommended. See the tables inventory list on page 30.

## **This Week at TBI E-Bulletin**

Families are invited to put a short announcement and photo in "This Week at TBI," announcing their son or daughter's upcoming bar/bat mitzvah. It needs to be fewer than 60 words and submitted to Jody Kirtner (jody@tbieugene.org) no later than noon on the Tuesday prior to the service. By sending in an announcement you are allowing TBI to include it in "This Week at TBI" which is emailed to hundreds of TBI members and friends.

## **Erev Shabbat (Friday Night) Service and Oneg**

Each b'nai mitzvah family will volunteer for two onegs for fellow classmates and will in turn have two families hosting on their weekend.

Please use the handout in the back pocket of the binder for a take-with you reference for the evening.

Here's what the volunteering families need to know and do:

- Use TBI's ritual items in the kitchen cupboard labeled "Shabbat" or bring your own: kiddush cup, challah cover and tray, knife, saltshaker, and the hand washing pitcher and bowl.
- **Pick up four pre-paid loaves from Barry's before 6pm. (Two will be set out Friday night** and the other two will be saved for kiddush Saturday morning.) Put the two loaves of challah on a platter, covered and with a salt shaker.
- Set up the handwashing station at the oneg table. You need a pitcher of warm water, the two-handled handwashing cup, a basin to pour into, and a hand towel (in drawer labeled "towels" in the kitchen).
- TBI provides sweet kosher wine and grape juice for Friday night's Kiddush. Assess approximately how many people are in the service so you know what's needed and pour grape juice and wine in the small portion wine cups and put on labeled trays.
- You and the other family volunteering are responsible for the rest of the food and drink at the oneg. People often set out fruit and desserts. Hosts of a regular (non b'nai mitzvah event) plan on about 60 people in attendance. Talk with the b'nai mitzvah family of the

weekend to get a sense of how many additional guests they anticipate. Please see the section below on *Kashrut and the TBI Kitchen* for more details about food.

## Greeting

Each b'nai mitzvah family will serve as a greeter and set up the kiddush for two other b'nai mitzvah services.

Greeters are the face of TBI to the people who walk through our door, so it is of great importance that you convey a warm welcome and de-mystify the complexities of a Jewish service and house of worship for newcomers. Suggestions for effective greeting:

- Wear a name tag.
- Say “Welcome” in English and ask if they have been here before.
  - If they say they have, then wish them Shabbat Shalom, hand them a *siddur* (prayer book) and a *chumash* (Torah book) and offer head coverings.
  - If they say they have not been here before:
    - Say, “Shabbat shalom,” give them the books, explain the difference between them, and offer head coverings, say something like, “here’s a kippa/yarmulke if you’d like to wear one.” (They don’t have to wear one.)
    - The b’nai mitzvah family may ask you to hand out a copy of the Shabbat Morning Service Guide\* as well.
    - You might point out the coat closet, bathrooms and family room if they have young children.
    - They may sit anywhere, but ask them to wait to find their seats if the congregation is standing in prayer at the time.
- It is useful to prepare a stack of books - in pairs - on top of the book cabinet. This allows entry to flow smoothly.
- It is ideal to have 2 people doing the greeting, from about 9:15 until the beginning of the Amidah. Then, leave remaining books stacked in pairs on the cabinet for other arrivals.

### **Prepare kiddush for after the Saturday service (near the end of the morning service):**

- Assess how many people are in the service so you know what’s needed.
- Pour grape juice and wine in the small portion wine cups and put on labeled trays (TBI has a small amount of juice and wine, the b’nai mitzvah family provides the additional.)
- Put the challah on a platter, covered, with a salt shaker. There should be two challahs remaining from Friday night service. (The volunteers who provided the oneg on Friday night picked up four pre-paid challahs from Barry’s. Two are used on Friday night and two on Saturday morning.) If b’nai mitzvah families are anticipating a large crowd, they should provide more challah.
- Set up the hand-washing station with a basin/large bowl, the two-handled cup, a pitcher of additional warm water and a hand towel.

## Seudat Mitzvah (Shabbat Luncheon)

Customarily, the bar/bat mitzvah family hosts a kiddush luncheon at the synagogue following services. We strongly encourage you to do so. This offers the opportunity to build an inclusive community and to honor Shabbat and celebrate this important rite of passage with all those who attended the morning service. Should finances present difficulties with sponsoring the seudat

mitzvah, please speak with Helena.

It is up to your family to decide upon the type of kiddush and/or reception to create. Many families find that a well-organized potluck or a team of friends as DIY caterers can best bring the community together (and help hold costs down). Indeed, potlucks have been remembered as some of the best b'nai mitzvah gatherings; we encourage families to consider this option. ***Again, please remember that everyone attending the service is invited to the kiddush.***

Whatever you do, you need to make sure there is challah and wine/juice for the Kiddush. There will be **two loaves of challah** already there (the supporting oneg families will have picked them up from Barry's on Friday), and TBI provides enough **sweet kosher wine and grape juice** for the regular Shabbat attendees (a couple dozen people). You will also have the celebration challah made with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia on Friday morning. You will need to provide any additional challah, kosher wine, and grape juice for the extra people expected to be in attendance due to the bar/bat mitzvah.

***If you should choose to hold your luncheon elsewhere, please make sure to provide a simple Kiddush (wine, juice, and challah) is set up for those who remain behind. Please ask your greeters to assist with this.***

The "Building Use Form" details the requirements for using the TBI facility. It is in the back of this binder.

## **The TBI Kitchen: Keeping it Clean and Kashrut (Kosher)**

Many people use the TBI kitchen, and everyone is responsible for keeping it cleaner than it was found. Make sure your caterers and/or helping friends know that all dishes need to be cleaned, sterilized, and put away. Anything brought into the kitchen needs to follow the kashrut practices for TBI (see below) and also be removed from the kitchen when you are finished. Counters need to be wiped down, sinks left clean, etc. It's not uncommon for another event to be happening within 24 hours and the kitchen should be left ready for the new users. Please refer to the TBI Kitchen Practices and Policies (Caterer Handout) in the back of your handbook (and [tinyurl.com/TBIbmitz](http://tinyurl.com/TBIbmitz) and [www.tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah/](http://www.tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah/)) for detailed instructions for an easy reference sheet.

Kashrut, the set of laws relating to kosher food, is observed in the TBI kitchen. We ask that you exercise care in the preparation and purchase of foods to be brought into our kitchen or that is served at the synagogue.

**Cooking/Reheating:** Food may not be cooked at TBI during Shabbat (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) or Yamim Tovim (festival days), except as permitted by the rabbis or by the tefillah u'minhag committee. Food *may* be reheated (or of course served cold or at room temperature during this time). Use of electricity at these times may only be for turning on lights, warming (not cooking) foods, and boiling water for coffee or tea.

**Avoiding "treif" foods and keeping things separate:** Treif foods are those that are not kosher. Only parve (foods with neither dairy nor meat, such as grains, fruits, vegetables, kosher fish, eggs, etc.) or dairy foods may be brought into and used in the kitchen and synagogue premises. Individuals and caterers must check to make sure that shortening with animal fat (other than butter) is not used. Gelatins in Jell-O, marshmallows, sour cream, yogurt etc., must be vegetarian.

Fish can be brought into the synagogue only if it is of the type of fish that possesses both scales and fins -- shellfish is not kosher and is not permissible on our premises.

The rabbi is the final authority on all questions of kashrut and its observance at TBI.

## **Linens**

The synagogue does not have enough matching linens for a full luncheon/reception. Caterers will sometimes supply linens as part of their service; check if you need this. This is often an expensive element in the whole event. Many families have found that it is actually cheaper to purchase linens than to rent them, and you may also consider sharing with other families. See page 30 for info about sharing resources with other families.

## **Photographs**

Photographs may not be taken in or on the grounds of our synagogue during Shabbat and b'nai mitzvah ceremonies. Arrangements can be made to have photographs taken of family and friends during the dress rehearsal. Contact the main office to arrange a photography time with the rabbi.

## **Flowers**

Flowers can be delivered on the Friday before the bar/bat mitzvah. The office closes early on Fridays, so please make sure that they are delivered no later than 12:30 PM. Because many of our congregants have a strong reaction to fragrant lilies, we ask that these not be in your floral arrangements.

## **Musicians**

The regular TBI musicians (Vic Hansen, Emily Fox, and David Helfand) don't usually play music at Shabbat morning services. If you would like to have musicians as part of the service, you are encouraged to contact them. Though they often play as a group, you'll need to coordinate with each person independently, as you may want all of them or just one and they may or may not be available. Asking them a few months in advance is advisable. It's also appropriate to offer compensation for their time and talent (typically \$50-100/musician).

## **Left-over Food and Flowers**

Please make arrangements ahead of time to handle leftover food and flowers. DO NOT leave any leftovers in the kitchen without staff permission. Food is very welcome at the First Place Family Center (541-342-7728) at 1995 Amazon or at Food for Lane County (541-343-2822) at 770 Bailey Hill Rd or at WomenSpace (541-485-8232). Flowers may remain in the sanctuary for the community to enjoy (with prior arrangement with Helena), taken with you, or donated as you see fit.



## Children

Please note that the Family Room of the sanctuary is not intended as a free play room for roaming kids but rather a place for adults caring for kids to still feel connected to the service. If you anticipate a large number of young children attending the Friday night or Saturday services, it would be excellent to provide child care.

## Kiddush Cup Gifts

It is a TBI tradition, for each family of the b'nai mitzvah class to purchase a kiddush cup. This cup is then "presented" as a gift to a b'nai mitzvah student during his/her service. Sometime in the year leading up to the b'nai mitzvah year, the class parent (or co-parents) will contact the families with several kiddush cup options. The families agree on a price and choose a kiddush cup together. The cup is typically ordered through the gift shop for convenience. Each family is responsible for purchasing only one cup. Each student will present one cup to a b'nai mitzvah student at his/her service. Typically the most recent student to be bar/bat mitzvah is the one to present the cup to the new bar/bat mitzvah in the service. Even though your family is only purchasing one kiddush cup, this is considered in lieu of gift-giving for all of the students. With this cup, the students all receive a special ritual object to which they share as a class, and it relieves the pressure to compete or match with gift-giving.

## Live Streaming

TBI will stream your child's b'nai mitzvah service live on TBI's YouTube channel, and it will be kept on the YouTube channel for later viewing. A dedicated link will be created for your child's service and will be shared with you by the TBI office in time for you to include it in invitations. Please contact Jody in the TBI office with any questions.

## Other Details

- Remember that Shabbat lasts from sundown on Friday night until an hour past sundown on Saturday night.
- Smoking is not permitted in the synagogue or on the grounds at any time. We also refrain from lighting any matches, lighters, or candles on Shabbat (after Shabbat candles have been lit on Friday night).
- Cell phones and any other electronic devices need to be turned off inside the synagogue on Shabbat.
- We refrain from taking pictures on Shabbat at TBI.
- Please remind guests that the *siddurim* (prayer books) and *chumashim* (Torah books) are sacred texts and should not be placed on the floor.
- Guests should also be reminded to arrive promptly at the start of the service.
- Please remind those who will be called to the Torah that it is our custom at TBI for all Jews coming up for an *aliyah* to wear a tallit, and for all honorees to wear a head-covering.
- We do not open envelopes or gifts at TBI on Shabbat.
- We do not throw candy in our services.

## **TBI Event Resources Inventories**

<b>Kitchen Inventory</b>	<b>Table Inventory</b>																																																		
<p><b>PLATES:</b></p> <table> <tr><td>10 inch dinner</td><td>190</td></tr> <tr><td>8 inch salad</td><td>190</td></tr> <tr><td>6 ¾ inch dessert</td><td>186</td></tr> <tr><td>soup bowls</td><td>200</td></tr> <tr><td>sugar bowls</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr><td>creamers</td><td>20</td></tr> </table> <p><b>GLASSWARE:</b></p> <table> <tr><td>8 oz. glasses</td><td>174</td></tr> <tr><td>wine glasses/kitchen</td><td>56</td></tr> <tr><td>wine glasses/storage</td><td>48</td></tr> </table> <p><b>SILVER:</b></p> <table> <tr><td>teaspoons</td><td>219</td></tr> <tr><td>soup spoons</td><td>213</td></tr> <tr><td>knives</td><td>220</td></tr> <tr><td>forks</td><td>230</td></tr> </table> <table> <tr><td>punchbowl</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>lucite beverage container/storage</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>stainless water pitchers</td><td>20</td></tr> </table> <table> <tr><td>110 cup coffeemaker</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>60 cup coffeemaker</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>55 cup urn for hot water only</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>wicker bread baskets</td><td>14</td></tr> </table> <p>many assorted serving bowls and platters many assorted silver trays</p>	10 inch dinner	190	8 inch salad	190	6 ¾ inch dessert	186	soup bowls	200	sugar bowls	6	creamers	20	8 oz. glasses	174	wine glasses/kitchen	56	wine glasses/storage	48	teaspoons	219	soup spoons	213	knives	220	forks	230	punchbowl	1	lucite beverage container/storage	2	stainless water pitchers	20	110 cup coffeemaker	1	60 cup coffeemaker	1	55 cup urn for hot water only	1	wicker bread baskets	14	<table> <tr><td>8' banquet tables</td><td>22</td></tr> <tr><td>6' banquet tables</td><td>14</td></tr> <tr><td>60" round table</td><td>21</td></tr> <tr><td>folding card tables</td><td>8</td></tr> <tr><td>6' folding rectangular tables</td><td>23</td></tr> </table> <p><b>TBI's B'nai Mitzvah Supplies Cooperative</b></p> <p>We have a storage corner in the TBI basement for party decorations and supplies that may be useful to other families, such as table clothes, lights, lanterns, a chocolate fountain, etc. Talmud Torah parent Cindy Morris Anderson is in charge of managing donations and checking out supplies to families.</p>	8' banquet tables	22	6' banquet tables	14	60" round table	21	folding card tables	8	6' folding rectangular tables	23
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**CORE PRINCIPLES of TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL'S  
ETHICAL KASHRUT COMMITMENT:  
SUSTAINABILITY, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND JUSTICE**

Temple Beth Israel community's ethic for environmental stewardship and justice are derived from both traditional and contemporary Jewish principles:

***Tikkun Olam*** - Stewardship: The diversity of life is sacred and should be protected because of its intrinsic value and the inter-connectivity of nature and humans. Humankind's unique place in the natural order is to safeguard ecological systems so that the diversity of life can thrive. In this way we are working to repair the world.

***Tzedek S'vivati*** - Environmental Justice: All people have the right to live, work, study, and play in environments free of dangerous air, water, or land pollution.

***Bal Tashchit*** - Responsibility to Future Generations: Humankind has a solemn obligation to future generations to live within the ecological limits of the earth and not to waste our resources.

***Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayyim*** - Prevention of Harm: Our actions should cautiously and prudently err in favor of protecting the life and health of humans and animals.

***Tovat H'Klal*** - The Common Good: TBI has an obligation both to make decisions in the interest of the common good, and take the worth of the common good into account when doing economic analysis of policies and decisions.

***Mitzvot*** - Moral Leadership: As environmental issues are ethical matters of personal and community responsibility TBI should take a leadership role in protecting the local environment and all creation. "Justice, Justice you shall pursue."

"When the Holy One created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said; "Look at my works! See how beautiful they are, how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil or destroy My world – for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you."

Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13

In keeping with our principles of Ethical Kashrut, we make a commitment to environmental stewardship through our actions. As a congregation, we strive to achieve excellent maintenance of the TBI synagogue facility and promote everyone's right to a healthy, quality environment now and for future generations. TBI will adopt Ethical Kashrut guidelines for our community and encourage all individuals, households and organizations to adopt personal and community values that preserve and conserve the environment.

**Through our direct actions, TBI will:**

- Conserve Resources: Maximize our opportunities to reuse, recycle and compost.
- Sustainable Purchasing: Prioritize purchasing products that are repairable, reusable and long lasting.
- Reduce Toxicity Exposure: Purchase products with ingredients that are known or suspected carcinogens, neurological toxicants or endocrine disruptors.
- Achieve Energy Independence: Adopt policies which reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- Buy Local and Regional: When possible, support local and regional farmers, artists, businesses and manufacturing.
- Sustainable Landscaping: Promote sustainable landscaping practices.

**Special areas of attention for celebrations**

TBI is committed to our goal of conserving resources and reducing waste that goes into the landfill.

We seek to maximize our opportunities to reuse, recycle and compost.

- Compost:
  - When preparing food or cleaning up, compost all vegetables, fruit, napkins, and other non-dairy food products in the compost bin.
  - Use the green bio-degradable bags in a trash can to gather the compost.
  - Deposit the bagged compost into the Sanipac gray “yard waste” bin.
- Waste and Recycling:
  - Recycle PAPER, ALUM, GLASS, METAL in recycling receptacles
  - No STYROFOAM
- Food Purchasing: Whenever possible . . .
  - Buy Organic
  - Buy Fair Trade
  - Buy Local
- Dishes
  - It is the intention of the community to use TBI dishes and flatware. Please avoid the use of paper plates and plastic ware. Make sure you instruct your kitchen team how to use the dish washer - it is easy and fast!
  - If paper goods must be used, please purchase compostable, and/or post-consumer 100% recycled. Compostable plates, napkins and cups can be purchased - make sure you instruct your kitchen team to compost these items in the Sanipac gray “yard waste” bin and do not put them into the trash.

## **B'nai Mitzvah Event Planning**

### **Community Resources and Contacts**

These businesses and individuals that are starred (\*) contribute to Temple Beth Israel by advertising in our publications, making donations to the auction and other fundraisers, participating as members or supporting special events and programs. Please consider using one of these "friends of TBI" for your special event.

#### **Invitations**

- \*InstaPrint 541-343-2679
- Kinkos 541-344-3555
- Paper Plus 541-345-3223

#### **Photographers:**

- \*Peter Chapman 541-343-5273
- \*Northwest Exposure 541-654-1921 [northwestexposures.com](http://northwestexposures.com)
- Cliff Etzel 541-514-2763 [cliffetzel.com](http://cliffetzel.com)

#### **Accommodations**

(Tip: Check with the Chamber of Commerce for big city events that may be occurring on the same weekend as your bar/bat mitzvah. This may affect availability of hotel rooms and party venues. Remember the b'nai mitzvah "season" occurs during peak time for graduations, weddings and major sporting events.)

#### **Hotels/Motels**

- |                              |               |  |
|------------------------------|---------------|--|
| • The Inn at 5 <sup>th</sup> | 541- 743-4099 | 205 E 6th Ave, Eugene                  |
| • Hilton                     | 541-342-2000  | 66 East 6 <sup>th</sup> Avenue, Eugene |
| • Valley River Inn           | 541-687-0123  | 1000 Valley River Way, Eugene          |
| • La Quinta                  | 541-344-8335  | 155 Day Island Road, Eugene            |
| • Phoenix Inn                | 541-344-0001  | 850 Franklin Blvd., Eugene             |
| • Best Western GreenTree Inn | 541-485-2727  | 1759 Franklin Blvd., Eugene            |
| • Marriott Residence Inn     | 541-726-2121  | I5 Beltline, Springfield               |
| • Best Western New Oregon    | 541-683-3669  | 1655 Franklin Blvd., Eugene            |
| • Shilo Inn                  | 800-222-2244  | 3350 Gateway Blvd., Springfield        |

#### **Bed & Breakfast Inns**

- |                            |              |                                       |
|----------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| • The Oval Door            | 541-683-3160 | 988 Lawrence, Eugene                  |
| • The Campbell House       | 541-343-1119 | 252 Pearl St., Eugene                 |
| • Excelsior Inn Ristorante | 541-342-6963 | 754 East 13 <sup>th</sup> St., Eugene |

## Party Venues

- |                             |              |                                 |              |
|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| • Temple Beth Israel        | 541-485-7218 | • Hilyard Community Center      | 541-682-5311 |
| • Downtown Athletic Club    | 541-484-4011 | • Studio One at the Hult Center | 541-344-5777 |
| • Hilton Hotel              | 541-342-2000 | • Laurelwood Golf Course        | 541-687-5321 |
| • Valley River Inn          | 541-687-0123 | • Dorris Ranch                  | 541-736-4544 |
| • The Campbell House        | 541-343-1119 | • Petersen Barn Community Ctr.  | 541-682-5521 |
| • Campbell Community Center | 541-343-1119 | • Willamalane Activity Center   | 541-736-4444 |
| • Amazon Community Center   | 541-682-5373 |                                 |              |

## Caterers

- |                           |              |                              |              |
|---------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| • *Ann Schar              | 541-343-0553 | • Oakway Catering            | 541-343-7432 |
| • *Bagel Sphere           | 541-341-1335 | • University Catering        | 541-346-4303 |
| • Cravings                | 541-343-7933 | • Falling Sky                | 541-505-7096 |
| • Oregon Electric Station | 541-342-1932 | • Marche                     | 541-342-3612 |
| • Ambrosia Catering       | 541-342-4141 | • Brindiamo Catering         | 541-342-6963 |
| • Soup Nation             | 541-683-1999 | • South Fork Catering (SEHS) | 541-790-8060 |
| • Carte Blanche           | 541-554-9088 | (Gregory Dunkin)             |              |

## Flowers

- |                      |              |
|----------------------|--------------|
| • *Rhythm and Blooms | 541-485-0985 |
| • *Dandelions        | 541-485-1261 |
| • Passion Flower     | 541-344-3857 |
| • *Jewel Nelson      | 541-344-0913 |

## Linens

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| • Parties to Go | 541-485-5587 (You can get full-service party rental) |
|-----------------|--|

# **Section 4**

## **D'var Torah**

- Picking Your Parasha
- Selecting Aliyot
- Exploring the Parasha
- Responding to the Parasha
  - Organizing Your Ideas
  - Alternatives to the D'var Torah
- Torah Portions Highlights





## Picking Your Parasha

A big part of choosing dates for b'nai mitzvah is about connecting with the Torah portion. One can make a good argument that there's no such thing as a bad parasha; there's something to be explored in each of them, but some portions are inherently more or less appealing, especially to adolescent students. So, when you are requesting b'nai mitzvah dates, consider what parshiot correspond to the calendar.

For your convenience, there's also a listing of all the Torah portions likely to apply to your b'nai mitzvah cohort below. You may also find the website [hebc.com](http://hebc.com) very helpful. Click on "Torah Readings," and then click on the Hebrew year for the diaspora. The website shows you what Torah portions (with links to text) correspond with the common calendar. (Hint: Have trouble remembering the Hebrew year? The last digit corresponds nicely with the last digit in the common calendar from January 1<sup>st</sup> through Rosh Hashanah. For example, June 2024 and 5784. From Rosh Hashanah until secular New Year, the Jewish calendar is one digit higher: October 2024=5785.)

You can also work backwards, thinking about themes and then choosing dates that correspond to the parshiot. Use the Torah Portions Highlights at the back of this section to explore parshiot.

Please note: B'nai mitzvah at TBI typically happen as part of the regular Shacharit (Saturday morning) service. Occasionally a family decides to have one as part of a **special afternoon (minchah) service instead**, in which case the Torah portion is the one for **the following week, not** the one shown on the calendar for that Shabbat. TBI discourages minchah services for staffing and liturgical reasons.

Students will be assigned dates for b'nai mitzvah as part of the b'nai mitzvah track registration process as described on page 8 in the

### **Torah Portions for 2024-2025**

*Please remember, that just because the date is listed here, doesn't mean it will be an option, and if it's crossed off, it definitely isn't.*

#### September 2024

7 Shoftim  
14 Ki Teitzei  
21 Ki Tavo  
28 Nitzavim-Vayeilech

#### October 2024

~~5 Ha'Azinu~~  
~~26 Bereshit~~

#### November 2024

2 Noach\*  
9 Lech-Lecha  
16 Vayera  
23 Chayei Sarah  
30 Toldot

#### December 2024

7 Vayetzei  
14 Vayishlach  
21 Vayeshev  
28 Mitetz

#### January 2025

4 Vayigash  
11 Vayechi  
18 Shemot  
25 Vaera

#### February 2025

1 Bo  
8 Beshalach  
15 Yitro  
22 Mishpatim

#### March 2025

1 Terumah\*  
8 Tetzaveh  
15 Ki Tisa  
22 Vayakhel  
29 Pekudei

#### April 2025

5 Vayikra  
~~12 Tzav~~  
26 Shmini

#### May 2025

3 Tazria-Metzora  
10 Achrei Mot-Kedoshim  
17 Emor  
25 Behor-Bechukotai  
31 Bamidbar

#### June 2025

7 Nasso  
14 Beha'alotcha  
21 Sh'lach  
28 Korach

#### July 2025

5 Chukat  
12 Balak  
19 Pinchas  
26 Matot-Masei\*

#### August 2025

2 Devarim  
9 Vaetchanan  
16 Eikev  
23 Re'eh  
30 Shoftim

Hyphens indicate a double portion. You will have two parashiot to digest, but not more work in any other regard.

\*=Rosh Hodesh; service involves a little extra liturgy

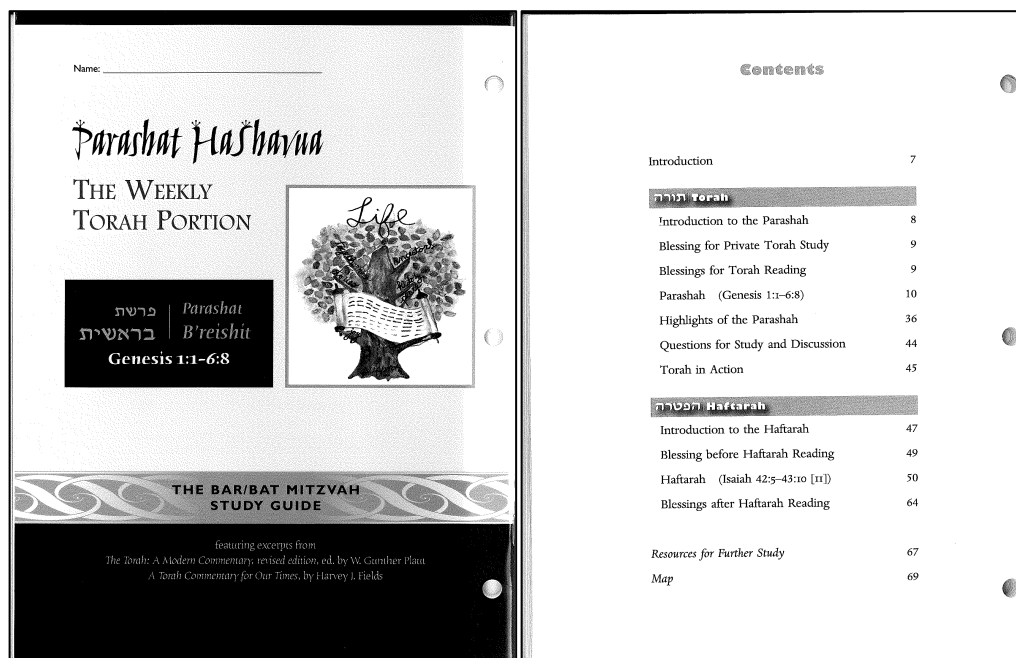
Program Expectations section. Priority will go by birthdays, and there are some dates (either not listed or crossed off in the chart at the right) that aren't feasible for anyone due to holidays and other reasons.

## Selecting Aliyot

Though many people are accustomed to the terms Cohen, Levi, Israel, and Maftir to distinguish the different aliyot of the parasha, that is not Reconstructionist or TBI practice. We encourage the student and family to work with the mentor and rabbi to find their connection to the text when identifying aliyot.

## Exploring the Parasha

Once you know your parasha, you'll want to get very familiar with it. Talmud Torah will provide you with a folder of resources for exploring your portion, including the Parashat HaShavua book pictured here. We encourage you to make an appointment to come in (parent(s) and child) and pick it up from Rabbi Solomon as soon as you are ready. It will be yours to keep. You are responsible for it. It's for learning, and so, you may write in it and personalize it, but we also ask that you also remember that it's a piece of Torah and so therefore a sacred object. It needs to be handled respectfully. Don't lose it, don't throw it in the sports practice bag, don't let it ride around on the bottom of the car, etc. It looks like this:



Expect that it will take you a significant amount of time to familiarize yourself with the parasha. You are encouraged to set aside several family study sessions to explore the portion together. If at all possible, finish the first two tasks before your first meeting with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia, but **do not begin writing your d'var** yet.

1. **Read over the parasha enough times with your parent(s) and/or other family members that you understand it at a basic comprehension level.** Can you retell the story in your own words without looking at the text? If your parasha doesn't feel like a story, try and see it as such in order to help think about the text as a whole. Tips:
  - If you don't already have a big picture of the Torah in which to place this parasha, consider looking at the very brief overview of all the parshiot at the back of this section or <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/a-summary-of-the-torah/> in order to understand where you are starting in the overall story.
  - As a family, sit down together and read **the entire portion** aloud in English. Allow yourself plenty of time for this activity. It can take at least a half-hour, if not longer. You may need to read it a few different times before you understand it at the comprehension level; that's ok. Keep the following in mind:
    - Don't worry about the commentary to the right of the translation during your first read, unless it's helpful for comprehension.
    - Be patient. If you don't understand something, give it a few reads. Have different family members try to put it in their own words. Or if you hit a list of "begats," just keep reading all the way through.
    - Keep an open mind if you hit a piece of text that contains something that seems disturbing to you at first glance. Be prepared for some very morally complex, and at times, adult topics of discussion. Remember, among the Torah's many stories, ideas, laws, and poems, are included references to violence, sex, bodily functions, and war. Rather than writing them off as something bad, wrong, or gross, try to consider what our ancestors were striving to understand. If you find you have a strong emotional response, just note it down and know that you can come back later to think analytically about context and intention. Right now, you are just trying to understand the what. If you don't have a clear understanding of what's happening, it will be hard to accurately glean meaning from it.
  - You might find it helpful to take outline notes or map the story of what happened in the parasha so that you can tell it in your own words.
  - Consider acting out the characters to fully understand what's happening. Often when we retell the story in contemporary language, it starts to make more sense.
2. **When you have a clear basic understanding of the who, what, where, and when of the story, you're ready to start responding more deeply to the text.**
  - What stuck out to you? What questions came up? What insights? Make notes in the text and keep an additional notebook with these annotations to bring to the first meeting with the rabbi.
  - Expect to discover something interesting, thought-provoking, or surprising. Give Torah the benefit of the doubt when faced with things that are uncomfortable and allow yourself to ask questions instead of shut down and dismiss it. For centuries, Jews have approached Torah with a sense of awe for the sacredness of this ancient and mysterious text. If you come to a part that is disturbing, turn it over and over again. Rabbi Ben Bag Bag who lived about 2,000 years ago said about Torah, "Turn it and turn it again, for all is in it; see through it; grow old and worn in it; do not budge from it, for there is nothing that works better than it." (Pirkei Avot 5). It's also been said that there are 70 faces (or ways of understanding any part) of Torah (Bemidbar Rabbah 13:15). Start wondering how those uncomfortable parts might be interpreted to teach us something rather than disregarded as irrelevant to us today.

- Don't be easily discouraged or overwhelmed. You will get to discuss the text with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia. You are not expected to be a Torah scholar. While there's certainly a wonderful depth of insight that comes with years of Torah study, there's also a freshness of perspective that comes with looking at the text from the place in which you stand in all your uniqueness.
3. **Bring your initial understanding and reactions to a meeting with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia** (about 8 months before your service date).
  4. **Continued exploration of the parasha.** Now that you have a good sense of what happens in the parasha and your own responses, open yourself up to others' responses. Consider looking at one supplementary piece a week between your initial family meeting with Rabbi Ruhi and your first d'var meeting. In addition to resources given to you by Rabbi Ruhi Sophia, you might consider the following resources in exploring your parasha further. As with any other kind of research, if you are inspired by the words and thoughts of others, credit needs to be given to the original sources.
    - Look again to the accompanying commentary in your parasha book right beside the text.
    - Use the "Questions for Study and Discussion" in your parasha book.
    - Consider the two other translations (Everett Fox's and the Interlinear ArtScroll one) provided to you. Does a different translation of a word make something seem different?
    - Read the accompanying Haftarah portion (it's in your parasha book) and consider how they are connected.
    - Watch a bimbam.com video about the parasha; they have fabulous thought-provoking videos on each Torah portion.
    - Go to My Jewish Learning for excellent summaries and commentary ([www.myjewishlearning.com/torah-portions](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/torah-portions)).
    - Explore the insightful resources on the Jewish Reconstructionist website ([jewishrecon.org/divrei-torah](http://jewishrecon.org/divrei-torah)).
    - Check out the Seventy Faces of Torah series at [blog.hebrewcollege.edu/seventy-faces](http://blog.hebrewcollege.edu/seventy-faces)
  5. **More meetings with Rabbi Ruhi Sophia** (about 6-7 months prior to service date). You (the student) and Rabbi Ruhi Sophia will talk about what you've explored and how to develop it into a d'var Torah. Do not begin writing your d'var before this meeting.

## **Responding to the Parasha**

Now that you have a lot of ideas about your parasha, you get to share your analysis with others. There are many possible ways that students could demonstrate their familiarity with and insight about their Torah portion. The most common approach is to give a d'var Torah during the service, but it is not the only approach. See some alternative ideas at the end of this section.

### **Organizing Your ideas**

The following concepts and organizational strategies were created by Rabbi Richard J. Israel, and found in his book, *The Kosher Pig and Other Curiosities of Modern Jewish Life* and modified for our use. You might use one of these approaches to structure your d'var.



**The Microscope:** You build a d’var Torah around one small detail within the Torah portion – a single verse, character, event or idea. This can be helpful if they have a portion that has many different laws or many different narrative bits that aren’t so easily connected. Rabbi Ruhi Sophia may be able to provide you with some midrash or commentary. You will typically formulate some questions and connect this one small item to a present-day situation or a personal experience.



**The Airplane:** This is the opposite of the microscope. Here, you focus on the broad overview of what goes on in the Torah portion, identifying a theme that is present in most or the entire Torah portion. A theme can be an idea, like “moral courage,” or a character trait, like “loss of faith.” A theme can also be an action, like “wandering” or “miscommunicating.” You may receive help identifying themes, but it’s important that you choose the theme they want to focus on. Rabbi Ruhi Sophia can help provide further questions and related resources to help you expand on the theme.



**The Diving Board:** The student begins with something in the Torah portion and bounces off it into a connected issue of deep interest to him or her. One bat mitzvah took a single verse from her Torah portion – commanding the Israelites to farm the land for 6 years but let it lie fallow every 7<sup>th</sup> year – and bounced off it like a diving board into a talk on environmental concerns. It’s important to tie the end of the talk back into the Torah portion.



**The Biblical Personality:** If the Torah portion has an interesting or famous character in it, you can build your d’var Torah around a discussion of what that person did in the Torah narrative in general, how ancient or modern commentators have understood this person’s impact, and what your own take is on the higher meaning we can learn from studying the life of this person. This can also work for less famous characters. Rabbi Ruhi Sophia can seek out midrash or other commentaries to provide you with support material. As with the other formats, we’ll want to hear your take on what we can learn from studying this character today.

Students should feel free to be creative in writing their d’var, both in substance and style. For example, while many people start with a summary, beginning with a story from the student’s own life can be a powerful way to get the listener’s attention. Bringing in poems, readings, or even asking questions of the congregation can also be options. Make the d’var yours! If you are needing more structure, **consider Rabbi Ruhi Sophia’s outline and tips for a successful d’var on the next page.**

## Alternatives to the D’var Torah

Not every student finds the traditional d’var to be the best way to express him or herself. While we believe that the bar/bat mitzvah experience is a rite of passage that by definition is supposed to challenge adolescents, we also want to give students an opportunity to shine in a way that is uniquely them. Instead of writing a d’var Torah, students may write a song or poetry related to the Torah portion, create and share a relevant work of art, facilitate a group experience that helps congregants explore the portion, or some other alternative idea. Please talk to Rabbi Ruhi Sophia if you would like to take an alternative approach. It doesn’t mean less work, just a better way to show how you personally connect to the parasha.

## Standard D'var Outline

1. Shabbat shalom!
2. Basic context of the Parasha. (Ex. In Parashat \_\_\_\_\_, the Israelites have just \_\_\_\_\_, and are now \_\_\_\_\_. You may have heard of \_\_\_\_\_, which also happens in this parasha **or** Moses describes many laws, including but not limited to \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.)
3. Get to the hook. (Ex. What particularly interested/troubled me in Parashat \_\_\_\_\_ is how \_\_\_\_\_/is the verse \_\_\_\_\_/is when Moses says \_\_\_\_\_.)
4. Describe what your initial reaction was to that hook.
5. Describe what various commentators and the people you've talked with have said about your issue, and how that does or does not affect your initial conception.
6. Relate it to an issue/question/reality of our own time/in our own lives. Specifically relate how the insight from Torah speaks to that issue.
7. Really drive home, "Here's what we learn from this \_\_\_\_\_."
8. Here's how I intend to apply it as a Jewish adult:

### **Reminders:**

Torah always has some insight to each us. If you approach it with that assumption, you will find it. Therefore. . . .

- We don't teach against the text. (I.e. We don't say, this is irrelevant/stupid/offensive for our own time. We might start by saying "this *seems* irrelevant/offensive/stupid, but here's what it's actually teaching us...")
- We don't insult people who understand Torah differently from us (whether Orthodox Jews, Christian fundamentalists, atheist fundamentalists, whatever. . . .)
- We do not thank everybody for everything. A simple, "thank you all for being here" is appropriate in a d'var Torah. Thanking everybody for everything is appropriate for the program, but not for the d'var Torah.

# Torah Portions Highlights

In addition to the useful summary below, check out [myjewishlearning.com/torah-portions](http://myjewishlearning.com/torah-portions) for a succinct overview of themes and events of the whole Torah.

**The following summaries are from Harvey J. Fields book, *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, and other sources**

\* This is one of the several designated Torah portions that, depending upon the numbers of Shabbats in the year, is either read as two separate portions or combined to assure the reading of the entire Torah.

## **Bereshit - Genesis**

The world is created. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are introduced. Jacob and his sons travel to Egypt where Jacob blesses his sons before his death.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Parashat Bereshit</b> (1:1-6:8): The world is created in six days.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ God's creation is a blessing</li> <li>○ Humanity is responsible for the world</li> <li>○ Adam's and Eve's expulsion from Eden</li> <li>○ Human beings are responsible for one another</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Noach</b> (6:9-11:32): A flood destroys the world but God's rainbow promises that the world will never again be destroyed in its entirety.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ One righteous person can save the world</li> <li>○ Ingredients for destroying a world</li> <li>○ Sources of human unhappiness and confusion</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Lekh-Lekha</b> (12:1-17:27): Abraham leaves Mesopotamia for the Promised Land.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Defining "leadership"</li> <li>○ The importance of honesty</li> <li>○ How to settle disagreements</li> <li>○ The mitzvah of rescuing captives</li> <li>○ Circumcision in Jewish tradition</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Vayera</b> (18:1-22:24): Abraham welcomes three angels into his tent and learns that his wife Sarah will give birth to a son.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The art of hospitality</li> <li>○ Consequences of injustice</li> <li>○ "Loyalty" to God</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Chayei Sarah</b> (23:1-25:18): Abraham's servant finds a suitable wife, Rebecca, for Abraham's son Isaac.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Jewish mourning practices</li> <li>○ Purchasing at the full price</li> <li>○ Defining "beauty"</li> <li>○ The meaning of "love"</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Toledot</b> (25:19-28:9): Esau and Jacob are born. Isaac blesses Jacob.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Jealousy between siblings</li> <li>○ Stereotypes and prejudices</li> <li>○ Favoritism by parents</li> <li>○ Inter-marriage</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Vayetze</b> (28:10-32:3): God appears to Jacob in a dream. Jacob works fourteen years and marries Leah and Rachel.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The role of angels in the Torah</li> <li>○ Proper and improper prayer</li> <li>○ Dealing with dishonest people</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Vayishlach</b> (32:4-36:43): Jacob and Esau reunite after twenty years. Rachel dies and is buried in Bethlehem.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Confronting "power"</li> <li>○ Wrestling with ourselves</li> <li>○ Responding to rape</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Vayeshev</b> (37:1-40:23): Joseph's brothers strip him of his coat of many colors and throw him into a pit.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hostility between siblings</li> <li>○ Delivering what is promised</li> <li>○ Embarrassing others</li> <li>○ Measuring loyalty and success</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Miketz</b> (41:1-44:17): Joseph successfully interprets Pharaoh's dreams and is appointed viceroy.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Interpreting dreams</li> <li>○ Choosing between revenge and caring</li> <li>○ Choosing between death and survival</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Vayigash</b> (44:18-47:27): Joseph reveals himself to his brothers who are dumbfounded.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Speaking out for justice</li> <li>○ Achieving reconciliation between enemies</li> <li>○ Fearing the stranger</li> <li>○ Economic planning and justice</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Parashat Vayechi</b> (47:28-50:26): Jacob blesses his sons and Joseph dies.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Jewish burial practices</li> <li>○ Making "honest" evaluations</li> <li>○ Defining "leadership"</li> <li>○ Lying in the cause of peace</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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<b>Shemot – Exodus</b> : The enslaved Israelites are freed from Egypt by Moses who receives the Ten Commandments. The Israelites build the tabernacle.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Parashat Shemot</b> (1:1-6:1): Moses is saved by Pharaoh's daughter. God appears to Moses at the burning bush. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pharaoh's war against the Jews</li> <li>○ When is civil disobedience justified?</li> <li>○ Moses: fear, courage, self-doubt, or humility?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Va'era</b> (6:2-9:35) God brings plagues upon the Egyptians but Pharaoh's heart hardens and he refuses to let the Israelites go. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why are there so many names for one God?</li> <li>○ The "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Bo</b> (10:1-13:16): Egyptian firstborn children are slain by God. The Israelites hastily leave Egypt and bake matzah from unleavened dough. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Were the Israelites justified in taking gold and silver from the Egyptians?</li> <li>○ Origins of Pesach celebration</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Beshalach</b> (13:17-17:16): The waters of the Red Sea divide to make a path for the Israelites. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Was Israel's escape from Egypt a "miracle"?</li> <li>○ Why are there so many complaints against Moses and God?</li> <li>○ Amalek's attack upon the Israelites</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Yitro</b> (18:1-20:23): Jethro, Moses' father-in law, advises him to appoint judges to ease his burden. Moses receives the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The burden of leadership</li> <li>○ What happened at Mount Sinai?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Parashat Mishpatim</b> (21:1-24:18): Moses instructs the Israelites in the Law. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ethical and ritual mitzvot</li> <li>○ Caring for the stranger</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Terumah</b> (25:1-27:19): The tabernacle is constructed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The sanctuary in the Jewish tradition</li> <li>○ "Exactly as I show you...so shall you make it?"</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Tetzaveh</b> (27:20-30:10): Aaron and his sons are put in charge of the menorah. The priestly garments are described in great detail. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is the ner tamid (eternal light)?</li> <li>○ Priestly clothing: fashionable style or significant symbol?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Ki Tissa</b> (30:11-34:35): The Israelites build a golden calf and when Moses sees it he shatters the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why did the Israelites build a golden calf?</li> <li>○ Moses protests on behalf of his people</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>* Parashat Vayakhel - Pekudei</b> (35:1-40:38): The people bring an array of gifts for the tabernacle until they are told to stop. The cloud of glory covers the completed tabernacle as the Israelites stand in the distance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Sabbath is for celebration and rest, not for work!</li> <li>○ The obligation of giving charity, tzedakkah</li> <li>○ Accountability of public officials</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>Vayikra - Leviticus</b> The priestly code; the rules pertaining to sacrifices, diet, and morality; the Land of Israel; and festivals are discussed.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Parashat Vayikra</b> (1:1-5:26): God reveals the sacrificial laws. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The meaning to sacrifice and prayer</li> <li>○ Defining "sin" in Jewish tradition</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Tzav</b> (6:1-8:36): Moses anoints Aaron and his sons as priests. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Finding meaning in obsolete traditions</li> <li>○ The holiness of blood</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Shemini</b> (9:1-11:47): Laws describing kosher and nonkosher animals are given. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What did Nadab and Abihu do wrong?</li> <li>○ Different views on kashrut</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>* Parashat Tazria - Metzora</b> (12:1-15:33): Cleanliness and uncleanness are defined in relation to childbirth and leprosy. The laws for the purification of the leper after he has healed are discussed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Biblical medicine, ritual, and ethics</li> <li>○ The sin of slandering others</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>* Parashat Aharei Mot - Kedoshim</b> (16:1-20:27): Aaron's sons die and he chooses a goat and a scapegoat. More laws are set forth, including, "Love your neighbor as yourself." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Seeking meaning for the strange ritual of scapegoat</li> <li>○ Defining "holiness" in Jewish tradition</li> <li>○ Can we love others as ourselves?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Parashat Emor</b> (21:1-24:23): Festival seasons are described in detail. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Jewish festivals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pesach</li> <li>▪ Shavuot</li> <li>▪ Sukkot</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth: about Lex Talionis</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>*Parashat B'har – B'hukotai</b> (25:1-27:34): The sabbatical and jubilee years are discussed as well as the punishment for rejecting God's covenant. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lessons from the sabbatical and Jubilee years</li> <li>○ The Mitzvah for caring for the poor</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



- Rewards and punishments: the consequences of our choices

### **Bamidbar - Numbers**

The census and more statutes and laws are discussed. The Hebrews continue their journey to Canaan through the desert.

- **Parashat B'midbar** (1:1-4:20): The Israelites' encampments during their journeys through the desert are described.
  - Jewish history and the desert
  - Counting the Israelites
- **Parashat Naso** (4:21-7:89): Regulations concerning Nazirites and the threefold priestly benediction.
  - The suspected adulterous
  - The Nazirite: abstention and holiness
- **Parashat Beha'alotcha** (8:1-12:16): The *menorah* is kindled and seventy elders are delegated to serve under Moses.
  - Murmuring and complaints
  - The protest against Moses by Miriam and Aaron
- **Parashat Shelach** (13:1-15:41): Twelve spies are dispatched to survey the land of Canaan and two of the spies return with a positive report.
  - The sin of the spies
  - The meaning of wearing tzitzit, "fringes"
- **Parashat Korah** (16:1-18:32): Korah refuses to accept the leadership of Moses and Aaron so he and his assembly are killed by an earthquake.
  - Korah's rebellion: a deadly dispute
  - Magic and miracles in Jewish tradition
- **Parashat Chukat** (19:1-22:1): The laws regarding the red heifer are enumerated. Moses strikes the rock and water gushes forth.
  - The parah adumah: the ritual and its meaning
  - The sin and the punishment of Moses and Aaron
- **Parashat Balak** (22:2-25:9): Balak, king of Moab, sends Bilaam to curse the Israelites, but Bilaam gives his blessing to them instead.
  - Bilaam's strange book
  - Decoding Bilaam's poetry and blessings
- **Parashat Pinhas** (25:10-30:1): the daughters of Zelophehad are given their father's inheritance and Moses chooses Joshua as his successor.
  - Pinhas: dangerous fanatic or hero of faith
  - Women's rights: what does the Torah say?
- **Parashat Matot - Mas'ey** (30:2-36:13): Moses informs the tribal heads regarding the laws of vowing. There is a detailed account of the various way stations on the Israelites' route to the Promised Land. References are made to the cities of refuge.
  - Understanding the request of the Reubenites and Gadites
  - Cities of refuge: justice for unintentional homicide

### **Devarim - Deuteronomy**

Moses addresses the children of Israel and presents them with a recapitulation of the laws and some warnings.

- **Parashat Devarim** (1:1-3:22): Moses explains and interprets the law to the people.
  - Decide justly in all cases
  - The spies: another view
- **Parashat Va'etchanan** (3:23-7:11): The Ten Commandments are repeated with slight variations. The cities of refuge are mentioned again. The first section of the Shema is begun with, "You shall love the Lord your God."
  - The meaning of the Shema
  - Is it possible to love God?
- **Parashat Eikev** (7:12-11:25): The Shema continues with the second paragraph, which deals with the theme of reward and punishment.
  - The dangers of arrogance
  - Cutting away thickness about her heart
- **Parashat Re'eh** (11:26-16:17): Moses continues his address, telling the people that obedience will bring them blessing, whereas disobedience will bring them curses.
  - Regulations for slaughtering animals and eating meat
  - Israel's role as a "treasured people"
- **Parashat Shoftim** (16:18-21:9): Moses warns the people against idolatry and reminds them of the importance of pursuing justice.
- **Parashat Ki Tetze** (21:10-25:19): Moses reviews a variety of laws intended to strengthen family life and human decency in Israel. Those laws refer to lost property, the educational responsibility of parents to their children, and kindness to animals, among other things.
  - You shall not remain indifferent
  - Marriage and divorce
- **Parashat Ki Tavo** (26:1-29:8): The laws of tithing and first fruits are discussed.
  - The drama and the meaning of reliving history
  - Blessings and curses
- **\*Parashat Nitzavim - Vayeilech** (29:9-31:30): Moses continues his farewell speech and God tells the people to choose life. Joshua is appointed successor to Moses who completes the writing of the Torah.
  - The meaning of teshuvah, "repentance"
  - Passing on leadership
- **Parashat Ha'azinu** (32:1-52): Moses' farewell song—a beautiful poem in which he calls upon heaven and earth to witness God's dependability.
  - If God's ways are just, what about evil?
  - The importance of history
- **Parashat Vezot Ha'berachah**
  - The significance of the Torah

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ "Justice, justice shall you pursue"</li><li>○ Caring for the environment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Moses: prophet and leader</li></ul>
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# **Section 5**

## **Tefillah & Minhag**

### **(Prayers and Customs)**

- Prayers and Blessings
- Honors and Customs
  - Jewish and Non-Jewish Honorees
  - Presentation of the Tallit
  - Passing Down the Torah (*blessing included*)
  - Aliyot/Being Called to the Torah (*blessings included*)
  - Parents' Blessing
  - Hagbah and Gelilah
  - Opening and Closing the Ark
  - Gabbayim
  - Candy
  - Special Readings and Prayers



## Prayers and Blessings

In the fall of their Kita Vav year (6<sup>th</sup> grade), b'nai mitzvah students will receive a student liturgy practice book. (You can also find it here for download if you lose yours: <https://www.tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah>.) Each family should also download the b'nai mitzvah sound files from the google drive link found here: [www.tbieugene.org/education/the-sounds-of-prayer-at-tbi](https://www.tbieugene.org/education/the-sounds-of-prayer-at-tbi). If it is a hardship for you to download the sound files, the TT office can put them on a thumb drive or burn a disk for you, just ask. For students who have phones or mp3 players of some sort, we recommend downloading the files in a way that allows access to them on the go.

Our Hebrew classes are designed to have students learning the Hebrew that will support their b'nai mitzvah preparation. Kita Vav students should be **at least** at level 4 in Hebrew in the fall. (Levels above 4 will be renamed as follows starting in Fall 2018): Students will focus on the following prayers and blessings as they progress:

Level 1: aleph-bet

Level 2: vowels and syllables

Level 3: foundational vocabulary and decoding words

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Level 4: basic blessings for Shabbat, other holidays and special times, and food; Shalom Aleichem

Level 5: *these liturgically focused classes can be taken in any order.*

a: Shema v'ahavta

b: Aleynu and Kiddush,

c: Yotzer Or and Ahava Raba

d: Birchat Hashachar (Morning Blessings), Havdalah blessings, parts of the Torah Service

Level 6: Amidah

Level 7: Biblical Hebrew for Torah readings

Level 8: Trope

Level 9: Modern Hebrew

In addition to the liturgy learned in their Hebrew classes (identified above), students also learn the following (in Sunday morning cohort classes and/or with the support of their mentors) in preparation for their b'nai mitzvah services:

- Tallis blessing
- Barechu (the call to prayer)
- Kaddish titkabal and hatzi kaddish
- Additional elements of the Torah service and blessings including returning the Torah to the ark
- Eyn Keyloheynu

Students becoming b'nai mitzvah on dates with special prayers (such as Rosh Hodesh) may learn additional liturgy.

## **Honors and Customs**

Shabbat morning services offer opportunities for participation in many ways, including presenting the tallit, opening the ark, passing the Torah, being called to the Torah, lifting (hagbah) and dressing (gelillah) and returning the Torah to the ark, as well as readings and blessings. Such participation is considered an honor, and the b'nai mitzvah family enjoys the privilege of selecting most of the honorees for these acts. There is a B'nai Mitzvah Honors form in the back of this binder to assist you in your planning. You can also talk to the rabbi or mentor with questions during your family meetings. Rabbi Ruhi Sophia prefers that you turn in an editable electronic version of the form; this is available from our b'nai mitzvah Google drive which you can find at [tinyurl.com/TBIbmitz](https://tinyurl.com/TBIbmitz).

### **Jewish and Non-Jewish Honorees**

TBI strives to create a balance between the tribal and the universal dimensions of Judaism in its ritual practices during religious services. Our intention is to honor and deeply appreciate the commitment of all members of our community, Jewish and non-Jewish, and to honor the unique gifts and blessings that all parents bring to the b'nai mitzvah process. We desire to have an inclusive community that welcomes and affirms differences within and among our member households, while at the same time honors and preserves certain ritual or theological commitments that distinguish the Jewish path from other faith traditions. Ritual distinctions sometimes create points of difference in the roles people take on in a religious service based on the religious identity each individual is affirming at the time of the service. (This is not unlike the way in which a non-Catholic might be asked to refrain from taking Communion at a Mass, even though s/he might play other deeply meaningful roles in a service being held in a Catholic church.) As a result, some ritual honors are open to Jews and non-Jews, and certain honors are only open to Jews. The following pages can help explain some of the distinctions, and please don't hesitate to ask the rabbi questions about TBI practices.

### **Presentation of the Tallit**

Near the beginning of the service, the tallit (prayer shawl) is presented to the bar/bat mitzvah. It is common to have a grandparent do this, although any family member or friend can have this honor. The presenter may offer a few words or a blessing at this time (**no more than a minute**). The bar/bat mitzvah will say the blessing for putting on the tallit.

### **Passing Down the Torah**

After the Torah is taken out of the ark, it is physically handed down through the generations to the bar/bat mitzvah. This ritual passing down of the Jewish tradition, is usually done with the student's family, beginning with the grandparents and then the parents and finally the bar/bat mitzvah, but could be done with other significant people who have "passed down" Judaism to the young person. The Torah is only held by the Jewish participants, although non-Jews can stand closely behind, and touching their family members, symbolically supporting the process. After the passing down of the Torah, the parents read a blessing to their child. The blessing is provided below, although parents may offer one of their own after consulting with the rabbi.

## **Blessing for Passing Down the Torah**

“AND ALL YOUR CHILDREN SHALL BE TAUGHT ABOUT GOD, AND GREAT SHALL BE THE PEACE OF YOUR CHILDREN.”

*Humbly do we give thanks for this day, and for the years of growth and learning that have preceded it. Now as our child steps forward to affirm her/his commitment to the ideals and mitzvot of Judaism our/my soul is joyful, our/my mind is at peace.*

**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחַיָּנוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לַזְמַן הַזֶּה.**

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha olam, shehecheyanu v'kimanu, v'higianu la z'man ha zeh.*

*Blessed is the Eternal One, our God, ruler of the Universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us and for enabling us to reach this great day.*

*We pray that this day's service and experience may long remain and resonate in our child's memory. May it engrave on the tablet of her/his heart the understanding that this day initiates an entrance into full adult participation in the Jewish community, and with it a life more committed to mitzvot, to deeds of justice and kindness, to faithful membership in the household of Israel and the greater human family.*

*O God, make each of us a worthy example to our children. Let nothing estrange us from them and from You, the Source of all goodness and compassion. Help us, again and again to renew our attachment to the Covenant of Israel, to walk hand in hand with our child in the ways of righteousness and truth. Amen.*

## **Aliyot/Being Called to the Torah**

“Aliyah” means “going up” and is the Hebrew word used to refer to the honor a person receives when s/he is called up to the Torah. Someone going “up for an aliyah” will recite the blessings in Hebrew before and after the Torah reader chants in Hebrew (see the next section). We have some specific practices regarding Jewish and non-Jewish participants with regards to aliyot (plural of aliyah). Briefly, this is our practice:

- All persons formally called to the Torah for an aliyah must be Jews who are familiar with the Torah blessings (see below). Non-Jewish family members may accompany a Jewish relative who is being honored with an aliyah. The rabbi will explain the logistics of how this works and is happy to answer questions about it.
- All Jewish recipients of an aliyah must wear a head covering and a tallit – please inform them of this expectation. Non-Jews who accompany Jewish honorees during an aliyah must wear a head covering, but not a tallit.
- Our custom at TBI is that both non-Jewish and Jewish parents stand next to the Torah scroll during one aliyah (one chanted reading from the Torah) but that only Jewish parents chant these Torah blessings for reasons of ritual practice that have to do with the specific covenantal relationship expressed by Jewish faith and identity.

The texts of the Torah blessings are included here as well as in the student liturgy handbook. There is also a copy on the Torah table at TBI (with both Hebrew and transliteration) that is held up for

everyone who is called up to the Torah. Every Jewish parent should be comfortable with the Torah blessings in order to bring honor to the Torah when participating in an aliyah.

You might take this opportunity to discuss with your family the three different versions of the blessings as shown here, and choose the one that speaks to each of you individually. The laminated copy on the Torah table shows the traditional (Orthodox) version only.





# Torah Blessings

## Before the Torah reading:

**Reader(s):**

בָּרְכוּ אֶת יְהוָה הַמְּבֹרָךְ:

*Barchu et Adonai hamvorach*

(Blessed is THE INFINITE, the blessed One!)

**Congregation:**

בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה הַמְּבֹרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

*Baruch Adonai hamvorach l'olam va'ed.*

(Blessed is THE INFINITE, the blessed One, now and forever!)

**Reader(s):**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר ...

*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, asher*

(Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, ...)

.. בָּחַר-בָּנוּ מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים

*bachar banu mikol ha-amim*

(...who has chosen from all peoples...)

... בָּחַר-בָּנוּ עִם כָּל-הָעַמִּים

*bachar banu im kol ha-amim*

(...who has chosen us along with all peoples...)

... קָרַבְנוּ לְעִבּוּדְךָ

*ker banu la'avodato*

(...who has drawn us to your service...)

וְנָתַן-לָנוּ אֶת-תּוֹרָתוֹ: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

*v'natan lanu et Torato. Baruch ata Adonai, notain ha-Torah.*

(and has given us your Torah. Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE, who gives the Torah.)

## After the Torah reading:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לָנוּ תּוֹרָה

אֶמֶת וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכָנוּ: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, asher natan lanu torat emet v'chayei olam nota*

*b'tocheinu. Baruch ata Adonai, notain ha-Torah.*

(Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who has given us the Torah of truth, and planted in our midst eternal life. Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE, who gives the Torah.)

\* This is the historic, Orthodox version, and the one found on the Torah table at TBI.

\*\* This is an alternative form of the blessing said by many at TBI.

\*\*\* This is the Reconstructionist blessing found in Kol Haneshama.

## Parents' Blessing

Parents have an opportunity to give a special blessing to their child on the bima during the bar/bat mitzvah service. Take some time to write out a blessing that is succinct, meaningful, and personal. This is not a time for a lengthy speech remembering all the joys and challenges of parenting the bar/bat mitzvah. Parents are encouraged to do such things at post-service receptions. Given that the parent blessing is in the context of the whole community's regular Shabbat service, **it should take no more than about 2 minutes**. If it were to go on a resume, it's not appropriate here. Here's a good sample speech:

### *Parent's Blessing at a Bar / Bat Mitzvah by David Zarzycki*

*Today as you start your journey into the next phase of your life, we would like to send you on your way with a few blessings and wishes:*

*May you be blessed with good health and long life. May you be full of energy well into your old age and may your strength endure long after the belly-button revealing fashions of today have mercifully passed into oblivion. May you see a hundred fragrant springs, and may you sip your tea over the fires of a hundred cozy winters.*

*I know that you already have a mind of your own, my dear. I love that you stand up for what you think is right, even if, on the extremely infrequent occasion, who you are standing up to is me. May you be blessed with the wisdom to know what is important and what is not.*

*May you be blessed with courage: the courage to do what is right even when it is scary, difficult, inconvenient, or painful. May you bear defeat, disappointment and discouragement without losing heart, for those things will come in your life. And that may well be your greatest test of courage.*

*May you be blessed with compassion. May your heart go out to those who are in need. May your hands be gentle. May you be slow to anger, and quick to forgive. But may you also be uncompromising and fierce in your search for justice.*

*May you be blessed with a sense of humor. May you crack up and even be a little hyper on a regular basis and may laughter follow your footsteps along any path you tread, be it bitter or sweet.*

*May you always be aware of the wonder and the bounty that surround you, and may a sense of gratitude be your constant companion.*

## Hagbah and Gelillah

Two additional honors are hagbah and gelillah, raising and dressing the Torah. After the aliyot and the Torah readings, a final blessing is said and then the Torah is unrolled and lifted up in the air. The person lifting the Torah sits and the coverings are put on the Torah. After the Torah is fully "dressed," the Torah is temporarily placed in the Torah holder on the bimah.

The person designated to lift the Torah should be strong enough to lift the heavy scroll (and depending on the time of year, one side will be heavier than the other). The person doing hagbah should have done it before to be familiar and comfortable with what can be an awkward, nervous-making responsibility. If not, training/practice is available at TBI if they can be at the rehearsal. If you don't

have someone comfortable doing hagbah, TBI can suggest a competent honoree. The person designated to perform gelillah (dressing the Torah) need not have any strength qualifications.

Both of these honors should be given to people who identify as Jewish. The rabbi and/or gabbayim will guide the participants through the “choreography” of this part of the service.

## Opening and Closing the Ark

The ark which holds the Torah is open and closed at the beginning and the end of the Torah service. This honor is often a good one for younger siblings or cousins, or an older family member or friend.

## Gabbayim:

These are the people who stand beside the Torah while it is being read and make sure that it is being read accurately, gently providing reminders and corrections as necessary to those chanting Torah. Typically, your mentor will act as one of the gabbayim. You can talk to your mentor and/or Rabbi Ruhi about who to ask to be the other gabbai.

## Candy

There is a tradition in some synagogues of throwing candy at the b’nai mitzvah when they have completed their Torah readings. This is not part of TBI customs, and we ask you to please refrain from throwing candy during the service.

## Special Readings or Prayers

Additional guests may be given honors by offering readings or prayers. This is optional. A prayer for peace, or the Prayer for Social Justice are common ones, although others can be chosen as long as they fit the theme of the day. Please check any readings with the rabbi before assigning them to guests. There are three possible choices from our siddur included here.

### TEFILAH LAMEMSHALAH / PRAYER FOR THE COUNTRY

Sovereign of the universe, mercifully receive our prayer for our land and its government. Let your blessing pour out on this land and on all officials of this country who are occupied, in good faith, with the public needs. Instruct them from your Torah’s laws, enable them to understand your principles of justice, so that peace and tranquility, happiness and freedom, might never turn away from our land. Please, WISE ONE, God of the lifebreath of all flesh, waken your spirit within all inhabitants of our land, and plant among the peoples of different nationalities and faiths who dwell here, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. Uproot from their hearts all hatred and enmity, all jealousy and vying for supremacy. Fulfill the yearning of all the people of our country to speak proudly in its honor. Fulfill their desire to see it become a light to all nations. Therefore, may it be your will, that our land should be a blessing to all inhabitants of the globe. Cause to dwell among all peoples friendship and freedom. And soon fulfill the vision of your prophet: “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Let them learn no longer ways of war.” And let us say: Amen.

From p. 418 of our Shabbat siddur, *Kol Haneshemah*

## SOCIAL ACTION

We cannot merely pray to God to end war;  
For the world was made in such a way  
That we must find our own path of peace  
Within ourselves and with our neighbor.

We cannot merely pray to God to root out prejudice;  
For we already have eyes  
With which to see the good in all people  
If we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to God to end starvation;  
For we already have the resources  
With which to feed the entire world  
If we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to God to end despair;  
For we already have the power  
To clear away slums and to give hope  
If we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to God to end disease:  
For we already have great minds  
With which to search out cures and healings  
If we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we pray instead  
For strength, determination, and will power,  
To *do* instead of merely to pray  
To *become* instead of merely to wish;  
That our world may be safe,  
And that our lives may be blessed.

-Jack Riemer (adapted)  
From p. 772 of our Shabbat siddur, *Kol Haneshemah*

## Belief in God

We cannot actually picture goodness. It is not a being; it is a force, like electricity. Nobody ever actually saw electricity. We know that it exists. We can see and feel what electricity does. If we have an electric heater and connect it, we get heat. If we have an electric motor and attach it to a vehicle, we get the vehicle to move. In other words, we get to know what electricity is by what it does. In the same way, we get to know what God is by what God makes us do: when people are, so to speak, connected with God, they do good things. We call such people godly and their acts godly. Whenever this force is active, we say that God has exercised influence and power.

Belief in God, therefore, has to do...with human nature, with the way individual men and women act, with their attitudes, their ideas of what is good and what is bad, with their ideals. Belief in God has to do with our attitude toward life itself. Do we find life good? Is life worthwhile? If we believe that life is worthwhile, that it is good, that in spite of sickness and accidents, in spite of poverty and war, in spite of all the sad and difficult conditions in the world, the world is a wonderful place to live in and can be made a still better place, then we believe in God. When we believe in God, we cannot be discouraged because we believe that all the misery in the world is due, not to the fact that misery must be there, that it is a necessary part of life, but to the fact that we have not yet discovered how to do away with that misery.

-Ira Eisenstein (adapted)  
From p. 773 of our Shabbat siddur, *Kol Haneshemah*

## Section 6

### **Additional Resources**

- Glossary of Hebrew B’nai Mitzvah Terms
- Recommended Reading: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Books for Parents and Students
- “More Than Just a Party: Creating Meaningful *B’nai Mitzvah*” by Judith Kuper Jaffe
- “When Bar/Bat Mitzvah Loses Meaning” by Janet Marder
- “The Bar Mitzvah Tisch” by Steve Greene
- “Three Rules for a Better Bar or Bat Mitzvah” by Mark Oppenheimer



## Glossary of Hebrew B'nai Mitzvah Terms

<b>Aliyah</b>	“Ascending” to the Torah; being called up to the bimah. (Plural = <i>aliyot</i> )
<b>Amidah</b>	The prayer of 18 benedictions that includes these themes (among others): praise for Adonai and gratitude for all Adonai has given us.
<b>Bar mitzvah</b>	Literally, “son of the commandments.” Traditionally at age 13 boys become responsible for carrying out the mitzvot (commandments) of Jewish practice.
<b>Bat mitzvah</b>	Literally, “daughter of the commandments.” A newer tradition for girls age 12 or older (13 at TBI) with the same focus as the bar mitzvah.
<b>Bimah</b>	The raised platform at the front of the sanctuary from which the service is led.
<b>B’nai mitzvah</b>	Plural for bar or bat mitzvah.
<b>Challah</b>	The braided egg bread served on Shabbat.
<b>Chumash</b>	The Torah in book form, used together with the siddur as part of the Saturday morning service.
<b>Davvening</b>	Praying with focus and intention.
<b>D’var Torah</b>	Literally “a word of Torah.” The sermon or teaching on the Torah portion. B’nai mitzvah students often prepare a talk of about 10 minutes, sharing what happens in the Torah portion and his/her take on what we can learn from it. This comes after extended study of the parasha, discussion with the rabbi, investigation of how rabbis of long ago interpreted the text and how contemporary thinkers understand it. (Plural = <i>divrei Torah</i> )
<b>Erev Shabbat</b>	Sabbath (Friday night) service.
<b>Gabbai</b>	The layperson responsible for keeping things in ritual order in the synagogue and during the service. (Feminine = gabbayit, plural = <i>gabbayim</i> )
<b>Haftarah</b>	Note: This is not ‘Half-a- Torah.’ Rather, it is the weekly excerpt from the Prophets selected by the ancient rabbis to augment the weekly parasha. There is generally a thematic link between the Haftarah reading and the Torah reading, though occasionally the Haftarah is more connected to a particular time of year in the Jewish calendar than to the Torah portion it accompanies. Students do not need to refer to the Haftarah in writing their d’var Torah, but if they want to they can!
<b>Hatzi Kaddish</b>	Literally, this means “half” or “short” kaddish. It’s an Aramaic prayer of praise used to separate segments of the service from each other.
<b>Kaddish Titkabal</b>	The complete Aramaic prayer of praise that ends the Amidah.

<b>Kedushah</b>	The passionate section at the center of the Amidah extolling the holiness of God and Shabbat.
<b>Ketuvim</b>	This is the third section of the Tanach (Jewish Bible), called “The Writings,” It contains the books of Proverbs, Psalms, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Ezra, Esther, Chronicles, etc.
<b>Kiddush</b>	Blessing over the wine to sanctify Shabbat or festivals.
<b>Kippah</b>	A head-covering customarily worn to show Jewish religious identity and respect for God. Also called yarmulkah (in Yiddish) or skull-cap.
<b>Leyn</b>	To chant from the Torah scroll.
<b>Ma’ariv</b>	Evening service
<b>Maftir</b>	The final portion of the weekly Torah parasha. It is often read by the b’nai mitzvah student on Shabbat.
<b>Midrash</b>	Rabbinic literature that offers insights about people and events that can add new dimensions to the stories and laws in the Tanach. The Bible brings up many questions and has many mysterious gaps in information. Midrashim (plural of midrash) fill in the blanks and offer background to flesh out some of the stories. Students may look to midrash to help understand their Torah portions. Rabbi Ruhi Sophia can assist with this.
<b>Mincha</b>	Afternoon service
<b>Minhag</b>	The custom. Congregations share certain customs, and many minhagim (pl) may be specific to that particular community.
<b>Mitzvah</b>	Good deed, commandment of righteous behavior (Plural = mitzvot).
<b>Nevi’im</b>	This is the second section of the Tanach (Jewish Bible), and it means “the prophets.” It includes such books as Joshua, Judges, Isaiah, Jonah, and Hosea, etc.
<b>Nikkud</b>	The marks that demonstrate vowel sounds in Hebrew. (plural = nikkudot)
<b>Parasha</b>	The weekly Torah portion. (plural = parshiot)
<b>Rabbi/Rav/Rebbe</b>	Teacher and synagogue leader.
<b>The Rabbis</b>	The expression “the Rabbis” is often used to refer to the many generations of rabbis over the past two thousand years who shared interpretations and commentaries on the Torah and other sacred texts. “Commentary” is a term used to refer to their interpretations and gleanings on the text.
<b>Shabbat</b>	The Sabbath. Shabbat begins sundown on Friday evening and ends Saturday evening when three stars can be seen in the sky.



<b>Shacharit</b>	Morning Service
<b>Shehecheyanu</b>	Hebrew prayer that thanks God for giving us life, sustaining us, and allowing us to reach this moment. It is said on the first day of a yearly holiday, for the first fruits of the season, upon seeing someone for the first time in 30 days, and at special rites and occasions.
<b>Sh'ma</b>	Central Hebrew prayer acknowledging the oneness of God.
<b>Siddur</b>	The Hebrew prayer book with a specific sequence of prayers.
<b>Tallit</b>	A prayer shawl with tzitzit (fringes) worn by Jews during Shacharit.
<b>Tannach</b>	The combined texts of the Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.
<b>Tefillin</b>	Small, black leather, cube-shaped cases containing Torah texts written on parchment, which according to Torah and tradition are worn as reminders of God and one's obligations to do mitzvot during daily life.
<b>T'fillah</b>	Prayer
<b>Tikkun</b>	To fix or repair. With "Olam" it refers to "repairing the world" in reference to improving our world's ecology and access to justice.
<b>Torah</b>	The main sacred text of the Jewish people, containing the 5 books (or the Pentateuch), including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It is the basis for laws and ethics, and represents the core of Judaism. Every week, we study and recite from one Torah portion ( <i>parasha</i> ). The Torah is NOT the entire Jewish Bible ( <i>Tanach</i> ); it makes up only the first of the three sections.
<b>Trope</b>	Cantillation marks and associated melody used for chanting the Torah and Haftarah.
<b>Tzedakah</b>	Literally, "justice," more generally, the righteous act of giving, usually money, to improve the world (charity).
<b>Yarmulke</b>	Yiddish for "kippah."

## **Recommended Reading**

### **Bar/Bat Mitzvah Books for Parents and Students**

*Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is This, Anyway? The Guide for Parents through a Family Rite of Passage* by Judith Davis. An excellent book on the emotional challenges and issues that arise as part of the bar/bat Mitzvah year.

*Putting G-d on the Guest List* by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (Jewish Lights, 1996) Excellent introduction to the meaning of b'nai mitzvah, how to deal with questions about G-d and religion, making a meaningful reception celebration, and also a good synopsis of the Shabbat service prayers. There is a fine section on families with parents of different backgrounds.

*Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming of Age Together* by Helen Leneman (Jewish Lights, 1996) A practical guide that gives parents and teens the "how-to" information they need to navigate the bar/bat mitzvah process and grow as a family through this experience. Rabbis, cantors and Jewish educators from the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements, parents, and even teens speak from their own experience.

*Bar Mitzvah, A Jewish Boy's Coming of Age* by Eric Kimmel (Puffin/Penguin, 1995)

*Bat Mitzvah, A Jewish Girl's Coming of Age* by Barbara Golden (Viking/Penguin, 1995)

Introduction to and history of the b'nai mitzvah ceremony in an easy to read format.

*A Spiritual Journey: The Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah Handbook*, ed. Rabbi Cutter (Behrman House, 1993) A guide to both the practical issues of becoming a bar or bat mitzvah and the milestone's spiritual and emotional significance.

*The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Memory Book* by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin and Helena Salkin (Jewish Lights, 2001) The perfect gift to help a bar or bat mitzvah preserve the spiritual memories of this sacred event. This hands-on album is designed to help everyone involved better participate in creating the spiritual meaning of this joyful rite of passage.

*Danny Siegel's Bar and Bat Mitzvah Book: A Practical Guide for Changing the World Through Your Simcha* by Danny Siegel (The Town House Press, 2004) This book will guide the entire family in preparations with a focus on how integrate mitzvot into the process. There are a lot of inspirational quotes in the book that can be useful in writing a d'var Torah.

*With all my Heart, with all my Mind: Thirteen Stories about Growing up Jewish* edited by Sandy Asher (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1999) What does it mean to grow up Jewish? How can young people reconcile centuries of tradition with the modern world? The stories will make you laugh, cry, think, and above all explore what it means to be a Jew.

## MORE THAN JUST A PARTY

CREATING MEANINGFUL B'NAI MITZVAH

by JUDITH KUPER JAFFE

Four and a half years ago, on receiving her *bat mitzvah* date, my younger daughter began to plan for the event, putting her imagination in high gear. She liked what her older sister had done, choosing *Lag B'Omer* as the theme of her reception and using both her *D'var Torah* and a garden party “motif” to teach guests something about the holiday. She had also arranged to contribute leftover party food to a local food shelter. After much consideration, her younger sister decided that the theme of *Tu B'Shevat* would suit her February *bat mitzvah*.

Once again, the chosen theme was conveyed both through the *D'var Torah* and the decorations, as guests learned more about *Tu B'Shevat* and how to “fit” an ancient concept into 20<sup>th</sup> century suburbia. But there was more, and, looking back, Sheryl is especially proud of what she accomplished.

On the day of her *simcha*, during her *D'var Torah*, Sheryl noted that the centerpieces to be placed on each table during the party that evening would contain a “rare breed of flowers called socks and gloves.” Following the party, she said, the “flowers” would be transformed back to their original state (literally socks and gloves), washed, and donated to Jewish families who had recently immigrated and settled in our community.

For six months prior to her *bat mitzvah*, she had enhanced her formal *bat mitzvah* preparation with the secondary task of sock rolling and flower arranging. Following the reception, at the Jewish Community Center of Paramus, New Jersey, Sheryl invited her friends to unroll the socks and gloves, then launder and deliver them to the newly arrived families to help see them through a difficult winter in the Northeast.

Ours is only one family among a growing number striving to deepen the meaning of the *bar* and *bat mitzvah* celebration. Today, many people are asking some important questions: What will remain after the lavish party? Will anyone have gained—other than the band and the caterer? How has this gala celebration helped transform the *bar/bat mitzvah* child into a *mensch*?

Allison Freilich of B'nai Emet in Minneapolis happily recalls her *bat mitzvah*, in which her whole family participated. While several family members chanted from the Torah, Allison and her uncle, a *hazzan*, sang several duets during the service. The centerpieces at the reception were food items that were later donated to a local food shelf, but that was “pretty common that year,” according to Freilich, who credits this phenomenon to former Rabbi Howard Siegel, who strongly promoted the concept.

“I was a flower lover,” says Freilich, “but after hearing what the rabbi said, I decided it was a waste of money when this could really be used for the good of the community.”

But Allison went even further. She invited approximately 40 friends to “A Magical Mystery Tour” on a Saturday night. After dinner and entertainment, the guests were transported to a large supermarket for a “scavenger hunt.” As she recalls, they were clearly confused.

In fact, the Freilichs had planted clues throughout the store during the previous week. The children hunted for specific foods only to have Allison’s family purchase the food and donate it to the local food bank. According to Allison’s mother, this—rather than the dinner and entertainment—turned out to be the highlight of her daughter’s *bat mitzvah* celebration.

Later this year, Allison’s brothers Daniel and Ryan will be celebrating their *b'nai mitzvah*. They are planning to use toy centerpieces at their reception, which they will later contribute to the local Jewish Family Service and new Crisis Nursery, which holds children for 72 hours in an emergency family situation.

The idea of using centerpieces as items of *tzedakah* is clearly catching on. Education Director Jane Myers of Temple Emanuel in Providence, RI, explains that in her congregation, centerpieces at synagogue

events routinely consist of books, food and toys to be donated later to appropriate charities. In a variation of this concept, Temple B'nai Israel in Millburn, NJ, uses food baskets in lieu of *bimah* flowers.

Sherry Rutman of Minneapolis wanted to make her daughter Leah's *simcha* "a real *mitzvah*." In the beginning, Leah wasn't too excited about the idea, fearing that friends would think "it was dorky." Now, after seeing their reactions, she feels differently. Leah placed plants on the tables at her reception and subsequently took her friends to the local Ronald McDonald House, where they planted the flowers and learned more about the facility. A few years later, a sign there still bears her name.

Last year, a group of sixth grade parents, including Rutman and Temple B'nai Emet Education Director Missy Lavintman, came together to find ways in which their children, from a variety of communities, could bond in religious school. They hit upon the idea of a "hands-on" *mitzvah* project.

Students held a "bowl-a-thon" to raise money, then decided to contribute the proceeds to a local homeless shelter. After purchasing such items as coloring books and crayons for the children residing there, they held an ice cream social that brought together families from the shelter and families from the synagogue. Nineteen of the 22 *b'nai mitzvah* candidates shared in this experience and created a scrapbook to commemorate it. Lavintman's daughter, Donielle, recalls that when she entered the shelter, she felt "very lucky to have a home and a family." She plans to incorporate her experience into her *bat mitzvah D'var Torah*.

Hey students in the B'nai Emet religious school also participate in a *Tzedakah* Coop, each contributing \$100 and then researching and investigating different organizations before allocating the money. Families of the *b'nai mitzvah* are strongly encouraged to contribute to organizations such as Mazon.

Family Programmer Diane Lasken of Temple Emunah in Lexington, Massachusetts, recalls the recent *Hol Ha Moed Sukkot bat mitzvah* of Hannah Kreiger-Bensen. The service included special prayers for *Sukkot*, including *Hallel* and *Hoshanot*. The family encouraged their guests to bring *lulavim* and *etrogim* and then purchased an additional 18 sets so that everyone would have an opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvah*.

Following the service, a luncheon was held in the synagogue. During the meal, Hannah's friends were invited upstairs to complete a social action project. Markers, paper, crayons, and other art materials had been provided by the *bat mitzvah* family. The guests, supervised by both parents and the synagogue USY leaders, decorated gift bags and contributed them later to children at two food pantries.

Judy and Jules Gutin of Teaneck, New Jersey, celebrated their daughter Ariella's *bat mitzvah* last year. Enclosed in the announcement was a letter explaining that the invitation was not a request for a gift. Rather, the family asked that a contribution be made to one of the organizations Ariella suggested, and noted that ten percent of all monetary gifts would be donated to these groups. Ariella also asked each guest to bring one new wrapped toy to be distributed to needy children.

Today, many synagogues are launching *tzedakah* curricula for *b'nai mitzvah*, while other congregations have enthusiastically embraced the concept of community service. In addition, an increasing number of individual families are working to energize this traditional life-cycle event, highlighting specifically Jewish concepts and hands-on experiences in *tikkun olam*. Clearly it takes only a few families to make a difference. Once planted, the "*mitzvah* seed" can blossom and grow in every community.

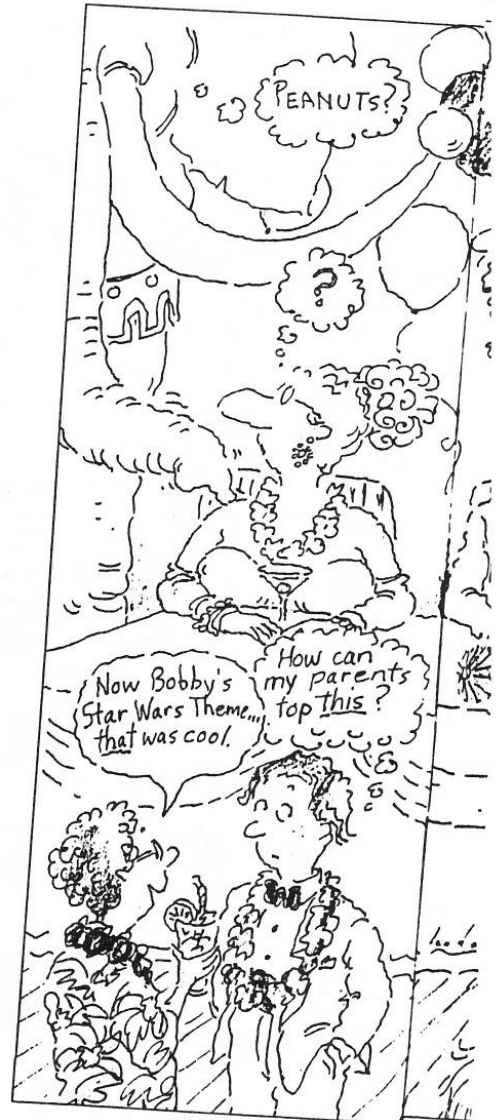
The author resides in River Edge, New Jersey, and is a member of the Jewish Community Center of Paramus. She is a frequent contributor to Jewish publications.

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# WHEN Bar/Bat Mitzvah LOSES MEANING

By Janet Marder

Can a custom that, in some communities, has been hijacked by the forces of materialism return to its simple and dignified religious origins?



She is a professional party planner in a large city. "I do maybe 75 bar or bat mitzvahs a year," she says. After 13 years in the business, she has seen everything. "People are spending between \$100 and \$200 per person for the reception—anywhere from 10 to 50 thousand dollars, though last January I did one for \$90,000. Everyone has a theme: Broadway, outer space, 'barn mitzvah' (a barbecue hoedown).

"We've had all kinds of entertainment, from stagecoach rides and fire

eaters to candymakers who do caramel sculptures. We have belly dancers, break dancers, and celebrity look-alikes. And, of course, there's Robbie the Robot, who's programmed for witty repartee with the guests ('Aunt Bertha—how are things in Miami? And how's Uncle Ed?').

"Let's face it, it's a production. I'm in the *simchah* business."

Last May the UAHC Board of Trustees decided the "simchah business" had gone too far. In a resolution written by Rabbi Herbert Bronstein of

North Shore Congregation Israel, Glencoe, IL the board declared that, "due to excessive and inappropriate celebration, bar/ bat mitzvah has become an occasion for idolatry and the relentless commercial colonization of our sacred events."

Adopted unanimously, the resolution decries "excesses of wasteful consumption...glitzy theme events, sophisticated entertainment...and expensive party favors." It calls on the UAHC to promote bar/bat mitzvah celebrations characterized by "family



cohesion, authentic friendship, acts of *tzedakah* and parties suitable for children." Committing the UAHC to publish a Reform guide to bar/bat mitzvah celebrations, the resolution also encourages congregations to set their own guidelines.

The resolution has struck a responsive chord among rabbis, particularly in large urban congregations, where the problem seems most acute. Rabbis of these synagogues speak with embarrassment and anger about overblown celebrations that may cost

\$100,000 or more, and each has a horror story to cite, such as the bat mitzvah with table centerpieces showing photos of the girl with shopping bags from expensive boutiques. "I've seen every theme except human sacrifice," comments one rabbi. Says another, "What's wrong with the real theme of bar mitzvah: Jewish commitment?"

The issue is not new in the Jewish community. In 1964, the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed a similar resolution, and both statements are in the tradition of "sumptuary laws"

by which medieval rabbis tried to limit the extent of communal celebrations.

The Reform attitude toward bar/bat mitzvah was addressed by the CCAR Responsa Committee in 1979. It stated, in part: "Every effort should be exerted to maintain the family festivities in the religious mood at the bar/bat mitzvah. Some of the efforts of early Reform in favor of confirmation against bar mitzvah were prompted by the extravagant celebration of bar mitzvah, which had removed its primary religious significance. We vigorously oppose such ex-



cesses, as they destroy the meaning of bar/bat mitzvah."

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner of Congregation Beth El, Sudbury, MA sees powerful forces at work in these opulent celebrations. "Nowadays people in our culture marry and have children later than they used to. So when their kids reach bar/bat mitzvah age the grandparents are older, closer to death. Also, the parents are richer. The parties are by invitation only; they're planned many months in advance. Many of the guests have arrived at the party by airplane at enormous expense. Thus, all the circumstances that once prevailed at weddings now prevail at bar/bat mitzvah time. The desire for a major celebration is very strong and deeply rooted. We can't stop people from feeling this way; we just have to find a way to channel the feelings constructively."

Some Reform Jews wonder what the fuss is all about. Says one parent, "They can pass any resolutions they want. The truth is that he's our only child and the only grandchild in the family, and we wanted to have a big party."

One mother, who says the bar mitzvah receptions for her two sons were "exceptionally elaborate—more so than for our daughter, because we won't be making a wedding for our sons"—has mixed feelings about the UAHC resolution. "On the one hand, I think I feel in my gut that these receptions have gotten out of hand. On the other hand, I don't think they should be passing a resolution about this; it seems a little out of bounds. How you celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah seems pretty much a matter of individual taste."



Bar/bat mitzvah t-shirts reportedly have become the latest fad.

Others reply that the issue is not just the cost of the celebration. "Spending a lot of money doesn't necessarily make for a vulgar affair," says Rabbi John Moscovitz of Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, "and having a luncheon for 300 people is not the same as hiring a baseball player or a stripper to perform."

Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin of Central Synagogue, Rockville Centre, NY comments, "It's not what you spend—it's what you give. A \$25,000 bar mitzvah that includes a substantial donation to a charitable organization is morally and Jewishly preferable to a more modest affair where no *tzedakah* is given." Salkin, author of *Putting God on the Guest List: How To Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*, suggests that the question is not whether cele-

brations are done "in good taste" but whether they reflect Jewish values. "We have to distinguish aesthetics from the ethical issues."

What, then, are some of the ethical issues to consider? A recent statement of the Toronto Board of Rabbis asserts that, while Jewish tradition mandates joyful celebrations for weddings and bar mitzvahs, it condemns "excesses of gluttony." Moreover, the "exorbitant expenditure of funds... encourages [those] who cannot afford it to try to emulate their... neighbors, with disaster the inevitable result." Though such cases are clearly the exception rather than the rule, rabbis around the country confirm that they occur. "I've had congregants in my office literally crying because they'd taken out a second mortgage in order to afford a big bar mitzvah bash," says

one. "They say, 'Of course, rabbi, this is not what we wanted, but we can't embarrass our child in front of his friends.'"

In addition to the financial strain caused by "keeping up with the Kohnses," some Jewish leaders worry that children are psychologically harmed by the intense social pressures they face. "Kids live in dread of having a party that's boring," says Rabbi Elizabeth Singer of Westchester Reform Temple, Scarsdale, NY. "They feel a strong need to do something unique—and that gets harder and harder if there's a bar/bat mitzvah every week." One child echoed this concern: "I knew I couldn't give a party like everyone else; we couldn't afford it. I was afraid people would make fun of my party and say it was a bomb. You know how kids are."

Many children expect a big celebration party. Says one boy, "After you do the ceremony you've worked so hard for, it's nice to get rewarded with a really great party."

#### Disruptive Behavior

Rabbis and laypeople alike also complain of the rude and disruptive behavior that sometimes accompanies elaborate b'nai mitzvah receptions. "At receptions in our temple building we've had vandalism, usually by kids

### UAHC Resources

"Guidelines: Lesson Plans for the Intermediate Years," a revised edition of the UAHC William and Frances Schuster Curriculum, is a curriculum development resource for the pre-bar/bat mitzvah years of religious school. Edited by Gail Teicher Fellus, RJE, "Guidelines" contains a dozen complete lessons devoted to the topics of brit and mitzvah. To order, send \$25.00 + \$2.50 shipping/handling to: UAHC Press, 838 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10021.

not affiliated with our congregation," says Rabbi Ben Kamin of The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Cleveland, OH. "In their minds there's no separation between the holy and the profane; it really breaks my heart."

Carrie Parks, a member of North Shore Congregation Israel in Glencoe, IL, sent out letters to 100 kids after disruptive behavior turned her carefully planned bat mitzvah reception into a nightmare. "I know my rabbi thinks that big parties are a problem, but I have to disagree. I don't think the parties are the problem. When I was growing up, I went to fabulous bar mitzvahs at fancy hotels, just as we have today. But we were well-behaved then. We would never think of running through hotel lobbies on a rampage. The real problem is that too many kids aren't learning to respect the religious nature of the celebration."

A related problem is alcohol abuse among minors at such *simchahs*, says Fern Barishman, director of the Alcohol Drug Action Program of Jewish Family Service in Los Angeles. "So often when I talk to clients about when they started drinking, they tell me it all began at their bar mitzvah or that of a friend. Kids think bar/bat mitzvah is about becoming a man or a woman and that makes drinking okay. When adults are out on the dance floor, I see kids drinking what's left in their glasses, pouring liquor into soda bottles. Why not make b'nai mitzvah alcohol-safe events? Maybe families could have a bar where people pay for their drinks, rather than an open bar, and they could then donate the money to Mothers Against Drunk Driving."

#### Who Owns the Service?

Many rabbis speak regretfully of the "privatization" of bar/bat mitzvah, noting that almost all of those attending a Shabbat morning service when a bar or bat mitzvah takes place are guests invited by the family. When congregants not invited by the family do show up at such services, they often express discomfort, feeling that they are not welcome in the synagogue without an invitation. Some b'nai mitzvah families object to the scheduling of congregational events such as baby namings during "their" service. "I have to remind them," says one rabbi, "that it's not their service—it's God's."

Some rabbis are convinced that allowing families to create personalized bar/bat mitzvah liturgies and having the child conduct the entire service subverts

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## MODEL BAR/BAT MITZVAH PROGRAMS

What are synagogues doing to lower their dropout rate? Some have worked diligently to develop outstanding high school programs. Beth Israel of San Diego, CA offers a two-year post-bar/bat mitzvah program to train religious school teachers. Others, such as Temple B'nai Jeshurun of Des Moines, IA, retain 80% of their b'nai mitzvah by working with Federation to offer incentives such as community-subsidized trips to Israel and Washington, D.C.

A number of congregational programs have shifted the focus of b'nai mitzvah from a one-time "performance" to a process of growing into lifelong Jewish commitment. Several synagogues, such as Shir HaMa'alot in Newport Beach, CA and Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, MS, require all b'nai mitzvah to take on a tzedakah project. At Sinai Temple in Springfield, MA, bar/bat mitzvah students must complete two projects—one for the synagogue and one for the community. B'nai mitzvah in these congregations often ask their guests to make charitable donations in lieu of gifts.

In an effort to involve parents as well as children, Temple Beth Am of Miami has established a bar/bat mitzvah tzedakah collective—a fund supported by all b'nai mitzvah families, who decide together where to donate the money. And Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Beachwood, OH encourages parents to set up a tzedakah fund in honor of their child's bar or bat mitzvah; the child distributes the annual interest to the charity of his/her choice.

While serving Congregation Shir Chadash in Los Gatos, CA, Rabbi Nahum Ward developed the Family Torah Study program to involve parents and children preparing for bar/bat mitzvah in ongoing Jewish learning. Participants and the rabbi meet as a havurah (prayer or study group) every three weeks for a potluck dinner and inter-generational discussion of each Torah portion, led by the child studying that portion. The strong sense of fellowship that develops among the families has helped ensure that very few students drop out before confirmation.

Especially notable are the comprehensive "mitzvah programs" such as the one developed at Larchmont Temple in Larchmont, NY; Central Synagogue in Rockville Centre, NY; and Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Cleveland, OH. All are organized on the "merit badge" system, by which bar/bat mitzvah students are required to perform tasks in certain categories and thus to learn by doing. Rabbi Jeffrey Sirkman of Larchmont Temple, for instance, organized his "Bemitzvotav" program around the themes of Torah (Jewish learning), Avodah (Jewish living), and Gemilut Hasadim (Jewish doing).

At Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple the program is patterned after the famous Mishnah which begins: "These are the obligations without measure, whose reward, too, is without measure" and lists 10 categories of mitzvot (Honor your mother and father; Attend the synagogue regularly; Welcome the stranger; etc.), including 5-20 ways a child can perform each one.

Similarly, Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's "10 to Get Ready" program at Central Synagogue in Rockville Center, NY includes mitzvah categories such as memory, the sanctity of speech, and kindness to animals. Salkin explains that he originally developed the program for children with learning disabilities "in order to put the emphasis back on mitzvah rather than Torah-reading performance."

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## When Bar/Bat Mitzvah Loses Meaning

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the very meaning of the event by turning the worshipers into onlookers at one family's private pageant. "I think the proper way for a child to become bar or bat mitzvah is in the embrace of the congregation, and that can happen only in a congregational service," says Rabbi Dov Taylor of Temple Solel, Highland Park, IL. A Southern California rabbi puts it this way: "The real issue is who owns the service? The ceremony is about welcoming a child into the congregation—not having a child take over the congregation for a day."

That message is conveyed at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, Canada, where b'nai mitzvah do not deliver speeches but simply read from the Torah and Haftarah, and at Beth El in Sudbury, MA, where two *aliyot* are always reserved for congregants not invited by the bar/bat mitzvah family.

Other rabbis are not disturbed by the unabashedly private nature of most bar/bat mitzvah services. Rabbi Ben

Kamin of The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Cleveland says, "Our services are very personalized and extremely meaningful to families." He and others encourage b'nai mitzvah to conduct as much of the service as possible, believing that the ability to lead prayer is an essential skill for young Jews to master.

Most rabbis wrestle uneasily with the dilemma of how to make bar/bat mitzvah services meaningful to families without undermining the public nature of Shabbat worship. Many have tried to resolve the tension between private and public needs by developing alternate *minyanim* and/or Torah study groups that meet every Shabbat morning.

### The "Drop-Out" Phenomenon

Reform leaders have long viewed bar mitzvah with some ambivalence, primarily because it so often has resulted in a child's premature graduation from Jewish education. This concern, among oth-

ers, led to the creation of the confirmation ceremony, which by the middle of the 20th century had superseded bar mitzvah in many Reform congregations. Nevertheless, the "drop-out" phenomenon continues to trouble rabbis in congregations of all sizes; today about half of all Jewish children end their religious education after bar/bat mitzvah.

The cessation of learning at this age is particularly disturbing because

bar/bat mitzvah is not, contrary to popular opinion, the age of maturity but the age of religious commitment. Writes Herbert Bronstein: "At the time when one is celebrating this observance, whose meaning is 'I take on the responsibilities of being a Jew,' central to which...is the study of Torah, for parents to allow their children simply to...walk away from their religious education makes a mockery of bar/bat mitzvah...no matter how effusively it is celebrated."

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**"I was afraid people would make fun of my party and say it was a bomb. You know how kids are."**

## When Bar/Bat Mitzvah Loses Meaning

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Bar/bat mitzvah is now celebrated in some 96% of Reform congregations. Clearly, the notion of a child's coming of age at 13 has a powerful hold on the Jewish psyche. But can a custom that, in some communities, has been hijacked by the forces of materialism return to its simple and dignified religious origins? Can a service too often focused on showing off a child's Hebrew performance before an "audience" of invited guests recapture the sense of congregational worship and communal embrace? And can a day that for half of our children represents their farewell to Jewish study be transformed instead into a moment that genuinely initiates them into a lifetime of *mitzvot*?

The UAHC Board of Trustees resolution on bar/bat mitzvah, while only a beginning, is a gesture of hope that such change is possible. "It's easy for the board to pass resolutions," says its chairman, Mel Merians. "The real question is what impact this resolution will have—and

that depends on how seriously and sensitively we undertake the responsibility of educating our people."

To implement the resolution, the Commission on Religious Living has appointed a special subcommittee chaired by Rabbi Alan Bregman, which is in the process of developing suggested guidelines and procedures for conducting bar and bat mitzvah celebrations with dignity and sensitivity. In 1990, the CCAR published "Divrei Benei Mitzvah," a guideline for rabbis working with bar/bat mitzvah families.

Even rabbis serving communities they describe as "centers of wretched excess" believe the resolution will be warmly welcomed by many congregants. While the recession has had a significant impact on the scale of celebrations, there has also been, says one Long Island rabbi, "a quiet revolution against glitz. More people are turning away in disgust from the excesses of the '80s."

Rabbi Jerome Davidson of Temple Beth El, Great Neck, NY, who has spoken extensively on this issue, believes "the time is ripe for change. Our people are waiting for their leaders to stand up for Jewish values. It

remains to be seen whether temple leaders will change the way they celebrate, for, after all, they set the tone." Beth El already imposes limits on the kind of music, decorations, and entertainment permitted for bar/bat mitzvah receptions held in the synagogue.

Other synagogues, fearing loss of income, may hesitate to impose guidelines that will encourage members to hold their celebrations elsewhere. "The great danger," says one rabbi, "is that we're simply going to be perceived as prudes and killjoys who want to take the fun out of bar/bat mitzvah."

Some argue, however, that the true joy of bar/bat mitzvah does not inhere in the merchandising gimmicks that now sully the occasion. One can have a genuine *simchah*, they maintain, without turning it into a business. Authentic bar/bat mitzvah celebrations, says Rabbi Herbert Bronstein, "are gatherings which will be remembered not by a show of abundance but for the abundance of good feeling the celebrants have for one another." □

Rabbi Janet Marder is associate regional director of the UAHC Pacific Southwest Council in Los Angeles, CA.

# The Bar Mitzvah Tisch

*A father finds a creative new way to introduce his son to the larger community just before his bar mitzvah ceremony.*

BY STEVE L. GREENE



Steve L. Greene, right, invited adult friends and mentors of his son, Marcus, to speak to him before his bar mitzvah.

In the days before my son Marcus' bar mitzvah last fall, I realized I also wanted to offer him a contemporary experience that he could reflect upon long after the religious service and weekend of celebration were over. Ultimately I came up with a little known ceremony called the bar mitzvah tisch. The idea originates with the groom's tisch, an Ashkenazic tradition associated with weddings. The word tisch is Yiddish for table. It refers to the table set with snacks and drinks where the groom's friends, teachers and relatives gather before the wedding ceremony to offer their congratulations and best wishes and to share words, stories and songs of Torah. The purpose of the tisch is to celebrate with the groom and take his mind off the upcoming ceremony and marriage. Since a 13-year-old also might be filled with anxiety

and anticipation in the days prior to his bar mitzvah, I thought a bar mitzvah tisch might have the same benefit for Marcus.

I invited to the tisch a number of Jewish adult friends who had observed Marcus' growth and maturation in school, on sports teams and in synagogue life. I included his bar mitzvah tutor, David Kintzer, a high school senior. David had not only been a role model, mentoring and instructing Marcus to lead services, read Torah and chant the haftarah, but had become a close friend and buddy on the basketball court. I also invited a college student, Martin Safer, who had known Marcus for many years, and whose family had participated with us on a group trip to Israel in 2006. A major objective of the tisch was to provide insightful discussion and reflection for Marcus. So to avoid distractions, his peers were not invited. I chose to invite men only in keeping with the tradition of an all-male groom's tisch.

Because I had designed the bar mitzvah tisch late in the game, Marcus first learned of it on the Monday before the Thursday of the tisch, with his bar mitzvah on that Shabbat. He was not exactly thrilled: "I didn't want to be with a bunch of adults and no kids. I didn't understand the whole point since I had never heard about a bar mitzvah tisch before."

For the tisch, I rented the gymnasium and party room of a nearby community center. As an icebreaker, for the first hour everyone played basketball and/or volleyball. It was especially symbolic for me to play on Marcus' team to show him the way into the adult aspects of our Jewish community through active play and teamwork.

During the second hour, light refreshments were served around a large table (the "tisch"). I welcomed everyone and invited them as elders in Marcus' community to share insights with him as he approached his bar mitzvah.

While there is much emphasis on encouraging our sons to grow up quickly, Oscar Kipersztok advised Marcus, "as you grow up, remember to keep some of your child spirit in you."

Jim Levy, the father of one of Marcus' soccer teammates, talked about the importance of taking risks and being willing to make mistakes. He recounted a recent soccer tournament game in which Marcus' team lost 2-0. Following the game, one of the mothers of the winning team reported that her son's coach had added ineligible players to his roster to fortify his squad. A major statute of the rules of competition had been broken: a coach cannot play someone who is not registered properly. The coach admitted his mistake and his team had to withdraw from the tournament. Ultimately, Marcus' team was awarded the tournament title, and a priceless lesson was learned about the mitzvah of reporting injustice.

I was gratified when Sam Perlin told my son that we, his parents, were role models of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) in the Jewish community and in the larger community.

Preparations for the bar mitzvah can be a two-way street between tutor and student. David Kintzer said that he "learns so much from his students during the process of teaching them." David also remarked that he, too, has much to learn about life and a whole host of important subjects as he travels on his own educational journey.

Mitch Klein told Marcus that wherever he goes in life he would always have his Jewish community, his friends, family, Jewish traditions, and institutions to depend on during times of need.

I have discovered that celebrations find their truest meaning when shared with one's community. The bar mitzvah tisch was an opportunity to blend the importance of belonging to a brotherhood and community with the recognition that personal spiritual awakening takes place through stories and life lessons conveyed by mentors and role models.

I think Phil Levin summed up the value of the experience best. "The bar mitzvah tisch transcends even the importance of a men's club whose mission is brotherhood and service programs, since it is a time for a young Jewish man to bond with men and mentors from his community."

When I asked Marcus afterward how he felt about his bar mitzvah tisch, he said that he was really glad we had done it. "It was a lot of fun playing with the adults. After the discussion part, I felt more relaxed about my bar mitzvah. It made me feel like I was joining the adult part of the Jewish community. And the food was delicious."

### **Suggestions for Making a Bar Mitzvah Tisch – My Top Ten List**

1. Be creative in planning the event and be sure to take photos and/or videos.
2. Consider for discussion themes such as: joining the larger Jewish community, tikkun olam, community building, life lessons, humor, funny stories.
3. Blend in hobbies or special interests of the bar mitzvah into the program.
4. Use the Bar Mitzvah Tisch as a chance to emphasize or bridge the boy's bar mitzvah service project with the upcoming Shabbat ceremony.
5. Invite a special guest to add some special symbolic words of wisdom and encouragement. This could be a sports figure or another community leader with a link to the bar mitzvah boy's bar mitzvah service project.
6. Play some kind of sports such as basketball, volleyball or baseball as an ice breaker to let people get acquainted while breaking a sweat and having some fun before sitting together to focus on the potentials of the young guest of honor.
7. After the ice breaker serve light refreshments while everyone meets around a big table to share thoughts and guidance to the bar mitzvah boy.

8. Have the guests build something together such as a play structure for a school, participate in building or repairing a house with Habitat for Humanity.
9. Consider not inviting the peers of the bar mitzvah so that he is not distracted by his friends, especially during the discussion time. This allows him to consider the deeper meaning of the program.
10. Weave together examples of virtuous character traits through stories about self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty and faith, which likens the program to a hero's journey adding appeal and linkage to joining the Jewish community in a more mature status.

Steve L. Greene, MD, is medical director of the Advanced Dermatology and Laser Institute of Seattle. He attended Camp Ramah in the Berkshires as a camper and a counselor.

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# Three Rules for a Better Bar or Bat Mitzvah

Jews do the milestone event all wrong. Here's a quick, and meaningful, fix.

By **Mark Oppenheimer**

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About a dozen years ago, I traveled across the country crashing bar and bat mitzvahs, from Arkansas to Alaska. I sneaked into one swank New York City bar mitzvah party by posing as a security guard. I stealthily trailed a deluxe coach in my station wagon to figure out where the 13-year-olds were going for the after-party. I got mistaken for one of the hired dancers. I ate a lot of free finger food. It was all research for my book *Thirteen and a Day: The Bar and Bat Mitzvah Across America*. In the end, despite all the pop-culture ridicule that the bar and bat mitzvah come in for, the TV and movie depictions of bitchy, prematurely mature adolescents at lavish parties (e.g. in *Sex and the City*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and many more), I argued that bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies—despite not being in the Torah, not being required, and being widely derided—are valuable coming-of-age ceremonies, and there's a good reason that Jews who do almost nothing else Jewish nonetheless think that maybe their children should do this crazy thing.

The book is long out of print, probably because I didn't have the vision to title it *The Bar Mitzvah Crasher*; the immensely popular movie *The Wedding Crashers* came out the same year my book did, and if I had piggybacked on the title, and set myself up as the Owen Wilson character, I'd probably still be counting my royalties. (If my book ever comes back into print, we know what we'll retitle it.) Nevertheless, I still get emails from people who have happened on the book one way or another. And the question they most often have is, "How can we make our kid's bar [or bat] mitzvah something special? How can we do it *right*?" How, in other words, can they avoid becoming a cliché, a party in search of a purpose?

I wrote *Thirteen and a Day* the year that I turned 31, a year before I even had any children, so I was understandably reluctant to offer any prescriptions. But now, years later, as my first daughter approaches bat mitzvah age, I have finally screwed up the courage to offer some wisdom. I still haven't seen as many bar and bat mitzvahs as the average middle-schooler from a Jewish town on Long Island, but I've seen plenty, and talked to the rabbis and caterers, the hired "party motivators," the florists, the Torah tutors. I've earned the T-shirt. I now give it to you. Ready? Here is my wisdom, in a nutshell:

*The bar or bat mitzvah ceremony represents the child's joining the community of Jewish adults.*

From that definition, we can infer three big rules, drawing on three key words—*ceremony*, *community*, *adults*. We'll take those one at a time.

First, it is a *ceremony*, but one that changes all the time. In the early text Genesis Rabbah, from the first millennium C.E., the bar mitzvah is simply the moment when the father recites the *shepatarani* prayer, which says, in effect, "Thanks, God, for making my son old enough that if he screws up, it's on him, not me"—which, if you think about it, is still a workable definition of adulthood, when you are responsible for your own sins. Ages of first marriage or first

driver's license change with time and place, but moral responsibility really does come around early adolescence. Anyway, the ceremony has grown and changed since then, achieving something like its current form beginning in the Middle Ages. But the important thing is that it has evolved, which means that *it is not fixed; no one form is commanded or required*.

The bar and bat mitzvah ceremony has come to mean reading from a Torah scroll or leading part of the Shabbat service, although it didn't have to evolve that way (more on that in a moment). But it's so much more. It can involve a speech by the boy or girl. It can involve a testimony about the boy or girl from the rabbi. Usually, the parents say some words. The grandparents are acknowledged. At one temple near me, the rabbi always speaks about the Torah scroll itself, which in this case was rescued from Europe after the Holocaust. The multifaceted nature of the ceremony, with parts added over time, indicates that it could permit even more innovation—including the abolition, in some cases, of the requirement that the child chant Torah. The bat mitzvah was a 20th-century innovation, and, at first, it did not include reading Torah (and in more Orthodox circles, sometimes still doesn't—if girls have bat mitzvah ceremonies at all). Throughout Jewish history, chanting Torah has been a specialized skill that only a minority of Jewish men, and a tinier minority of women, have had. There is no reason that we should keep torturing nonmusical children—or shy children, or those with stage-fright—by requiring them to perform a very specific skill that many will never do again.

We need more and different kinds of ceremonies, honoring the special gifts of each child. The child can perform tasks other than chanting Torah—indeed, the nearly ubiquitous inclusion of a speech is a step in that direction. But the ceremony could also be broadened to better include other people. Could multiple members of the congregation stand up to speak about the boy or girl? Should elementary school teachers, some of them gentiles, come to talk to about ways the bar or bat mitzvah has been a leader in school? What about the peer group, the friends—could they have some role other than putting on their best suits and dresses and partying afterward? Becoming a man or a woman is indeed a milestone, and it should be celebrated, ceremoniously. But that could, and should, mean many different things.

Second, the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony welcomes a Jew into a *community*. So it should not be a private ceremony. I don't recommend a trip to Israel with some siblings and Bubbe and Zayde. As much as I like off-script, do-it-yourself religious creativity, being a Jewish adult means joining a Jewish community. It means being welcomed by an intergenerational community of elderly people, empty-nesters, young parents, and babies. And, ideally, it means having the poise and training to greet all those kinds of Jews, of different ages, with a smile and an appropriate greeting. It's a moment when you are expected to deal with Jews outside your narrow age cohort, some of whom you may not know well. Because the Jewish family is diverse and multifarious, and we belong to all of them, and they to us.

So I recommend that if a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony is important to a family, they join a community. Maybe it's a temple or synagogue, maybe it's an independent havurah, maybe it's a group of other Jews struggling to find the right community. Maybe it's an online community (as a last resort—Shabbat dinners are harder that way, as are hugs). Whatever it is, they won't all be your kind of people. You won't love every one of them. Some of them won't share your politics or your beliefs. Some of them will seem snooty, others tacky. Some will seem too observant,

others too casual about observance. But some of them will be loving and bring unexpected riches to your life. Judaism is a communal religion; we don't do monasticism or hermeticism, and we can only pray fully in a group of 10. A central goal of the adult Jewish life should be spending some time with other Jews, and that bar or bat mitzvah can be a good time to start.

Jewish events are public events, by the way. Brises, for example, aren't supposed to be by invitation; like shivas, sitting for the dead, they are announced to the community, and anyone can drop by. No reason a bar mitzvah can't be an occasion to invite lots of people you don't know, or barely know. They'll feel honored, and you might make new friends.

And if, for whatever reason, there aren't other Jews around, then have your ceremony around all your gentile friends (who can be invited even if there are plenty of other Jews). Take the occasion to explain to them, and show them, what your very different tradition is.

Finally, the bar or bat mitzvah is a ceremony welcoming a Jewish child to the community of Jewish *adults*. So it raises the question of what makes one an adult. Above, I noted that it's the onset of moral responsibility. OK—so what else? Well, in most Jewish communities today, the adulthood is performed at the bar or bat mitzvah by *leyning* Torah, a skill the boy or girl may never again use. And, generally, the bar or bat mitzvah functions as a temporary graduation from Judaism, the Jew not to be seen again until his or her wedding (maybe). But what if we treated the bar or bat mitzvah as the onset of new adult responsibilities?

I believe that rabbis should talk with boys and girls approaching their bar or bat mitzvahs and say something like this: "Our community has a range of needs from its adults. We need people to chant Torah, yes. But we also need people to visit our sick elderly people in hospice. We need people to babysit during certain events when parents are busy. We need people to rake leaves and shovel snow. We need people to chop vegetables for the *kiddush* lunches. We need people to show up to help make a minyan. We need people to stuff envelopes for the monthly mailing. We need people to do *tikkun olam* for the wider, and non-Jewish, community. So: which of these gifts are you going to give us after you become a bar or bat mitzvah?"

In other words, flip the "bar mitzvah project." Make it not a yearlong final exam leading up to the day you graduate from Judaism, but rather a commitment that you will undertake as a newly minted adult. Such an approach makes sense theologically. It gives a rabbi better grounds to talk about what Jewish adulthood really means—what we owe each other. And it honors the unique gifts of every child, including special-needs children, children with stage fright, tone-deaf children, and those who love being Jewish but aren't moved by Jewish liturgy. This would, of course, be an expectation, not a contract; plenty of b'nai and b'not mitzvah would fail to uphold their commitments. But that's OK. Plenty of much older adults fail, in all sorts of ways, all the time. Jews are human, after all. The point is to think of Jewish adulthood in a fuller way, a more realistic way. A better way.

What do these three rules mean in practice? They mean that, first, a bar mitzvah should have a ceremonial component: a date; an invitation; the child *doing* something, whether chanting Torah, or giving a talk, or leading a discussion of a Jewish text, or leading a song circle, or going off-site to clean up a park and then concluding with a

discussion of Jewish environmental values—somehow demonstrating the gifts she or he plans to give to the Jewish community henceforth; then a celebration, one that is comfortable for, and unique to, the child. Second, the ceremony (and celebration) should go beyond the child's immediate circle, to suggest an evolving and expanding commitment to Jews, and to humanity. Third, the new adult should be able to speak concretely and meaningfully about what she or he plans to do differently, particularly in a Jewish context, now that adulthood has arrived. Come to think of it, that's good advice for all of us. One thing I learned writing my book is that bar and bat mitzvah really are family occasions when everyone from the child to the parents to estranged Great Aunt Estelle has a reckoning with what it means to be Jewish and to be human. Giving us all that opportunity is the central work of the bar and bat mitzvah—not just the ceremonies, but the new adults themselves.

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*Accessed from* <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/224030/rules-for-a-better-bar-mitzvah>



## 24 Questions Parents May Wish to Ask Themselves

אל תתנע-טוב מבצעו בקלות לאל ידך [ידך] לעשות  
Do not hold back from doing good for others  
When you have the power to do so. (Proverbs 3:27)

Raising a child is lived in small time units. It is so much a day-by-day affair. It is time-consuming beyond anything you imagined when your daughter or son was born, and has been filled with pleasures and worries, highs and lows. Mostly, though, it is been essentially "normal," even-flowing.

Now, though, Bar/Bat Mitzvah is approaching. It may have caught you off guard, and in your mind it may give you a feeling of all-of-a-sudden. This is hardly like the routine of buying new shoes for Rachel, shlepping Max to a baseball game, or driving Shira to school because she overslept and missed the bus.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a different class and magnitude of life experience, for your child...and for you as a parent. Simchas/שמחות, joyous family celebrations, are an ideal opportunity to consider and re-think certain momentous real-Life topics that may last have been thought about at your child's birth.

The following are just a few of the possible questions that may be somewhere in the back of your mind and which you might want to actively think about as your child is about to enter a brand-new stage of Jewish life. Your Glorious Child is about to become a Mitzvah Person. What does it all mean?

The questions are listed in no particular order of importance:

1. What do I want my child to be when he or she grows up? This question is not about the usual categories of "occupation," "field of endeavor," or "ways to make a living," but rather, what kind of human being and Jew would I want my daughter or son to be? There often is a degree of overlap between "making a living" and "the kind of person someone is." You are asking the question now in order to get to the very heart of the matter: Is being a Mitzvah Person and a Mensch the highest priority or in some way of secondary importance?

2. Have I ever asked myself, "Is my child gifted in Tikkun Olam-type Mitzvahs?" It is hoped that not only you will look for this potential in your child, but also your child's teachers will look. Indeed, if everyone — parents, grandparents, friends, teachers — would look at children for this kind of talent, the sum-total of Mitzvahs and Tikkun Olam in the world would increase exponentially. You are already watching for promise in music, math, sports and the like. Taking note of Mitzvah-talent is of no less importance.
3. When I think about the future development of my child, what do I mean when I say — "There are no guarantees"? In the larger sense, this cliché (as with all clichés) is only a partial truth. "No guarantees" is obviously an aspect of the nature and flow of life. However, even though there are no guarantees, it is possible to ask yourself how you would change the odds, offering your child a better chance to become a Mitzvah-doing-Mensch.
4. What do I mean when I say to myself, "I want the best for my child?" What does "the best" mean? In what contexts and in relation to what other things, people, and events in life do you want your child to be "the best"? What are the ultimate reasons for being "the best"? In which ways is being "the best" an authentic Jewish value, and in which other ways is it not?
5. What do I mean when I say, "I want my child to be happy"?
6. What do I mean when I say, "I want my child to be successful"?
7. Exactly what aspects of my child's personality and activities my child is engaged in make me particularly proud?
8. What do I mean when I say, "I want my child to have what I never had?" Perhaps writing out a list of these opportunities and items will help you to answer this one more completely. Your own list may include things such as "I want them not to be lonely," and "I want them to have a close, loving relationship with me" if these were missing in your own life. Asking this question and the previous one should help parents focus more on their child as a separate person, and helps the parents avoid the pitfall of "living through their children."
9. When I say to myself or to my child, "Count your blessings" — what exactly do I mean? The Talmud teaches that every Jew should recite 100 blessings every day. (Menachot 43b)<sup>2</sup> It might be worthwhile at this time to make a list of what you consider to be 100 of your personal blessings...and to ask yourself, "Does my child understand what these blessings are in my life and why I consider them to be blessings? Ask your child to make a list for her or his own life's blessings."
10. Have I discussed my own Mitzvah work with my child and other family members?

11. Have I spoken to my child about where I give my Tzedakah money, and how I decide where and how much to give. Have I taught this child that there are really two different *kinds* of money in his or her life: (a) personal money and (b) Tzedakah money?
12. Have I told my child that I am donating to Tzedakah in honor of his or her becoming a Mitzvah Person?
13. What is the relationship between my child's education and what kind of a person he or she is and will possibly become? Does it contribute to his or her Jewish and human character (in Yiddish - *בנינוש'ס מענטשליכקייט* / "Menschlichkeit")?
14. What is the relationship between my child's Jewish education and what kind of a person he or she is and will possibly become? Does it contribute to his or her essential character (in Yiddish - "Menschlichkeit")?
15. Do you expect your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Bar/Bat Mitzvah Mitzvah Project to contribute towards her or his becoming a Mensch? Is there an *automatic, potential*, or a *possible* connection between doing Mitzvahs and becoming/being a Mensch?
16. If my child came home with a 97 or 98 on an exam or paper, did I ever ask him or her, "What did you get wrong?" (And did my parents do the same to me, too?) Is this the best approach to teaching my child The Ultimate Meaning of Education, Menschlichkeit, Torah, Mitzvahs, Tikkun Olam, Being Jewish? What would be a healthier approach to getting good grades?
17. Jewish tradition teaches, "Mitzvahs were given in order to refine human beings" (Leviticus Rabba 13:3). As my child becomes a Bat/Bar Mitzvah, what qualities would I like to see "refined out" of her/his personality, (i.e., the superficial, the silly, the meaningless, etc.)? What qualities would I like to see remain, appear, or become predominant in my child?
18. Who are my child's heroes? Are Mitzvah heroes a significant part of his or her understanding of what a teacher is? Do they understand that learning from these Giants of Tikkun Olam can play a crucial part in his or her life? Does my child make the connection that, in some way, this is the kind of person he or she may want to be when he or she "grows up"?
19. Who are my child's friends? What kind of *חברים/chevra* — the group he or she spends the most time with — is this group of friends? Are they "into" doing Mitzvahs?
20. (Not a question) Finish the sentence (when addressing my child), "You should use all of your [God-given] gifts for..." Parents and child should *all* finish that sentence and discuss their answers.

21. You are probably saying to yourself, "How did this happen so quickly? It seems like not so long ago my child was just born/crawling/speaking/walking/entering kindergarten?" The non-question is: Finish the sentence, "Life is short, therefore..." Have your child do the same and compare and discuss your answers. Friends and students have also suggested that it may be equally productive to finish the sentence, "Life is long, therefore..." Your answers may include, "Therefore there is time to change who I am and what I do with my time and Self" and "Losing friends because they drift away is terrible, but life is long, there is time to make new, true friends."
22. How seriously do I take my own commitment to Judaism and things Jewish? For example, in the area of Torah study, does my child see me engaged in personal study and Torah classes? Jewish tradition actually teaches (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 245:2) that adult education takes precedence over that of children. There are many reasons for this ruling, but one of the most important ones is that without Torah knowledge, how will a parent teach the child?  
An appropriate analogy from air travel comes to mind. The flight attendant says, "In the event of loss of oxygen, put on your oxygen mask first, *then* put one on your child." When we first hear this, it doesn't sound right. On second thought, though, we understand that this makes perfect sense, and is really the "normal" way to react in an emergency. A dysfunctional adult deprived of oxygen if of no use to the child. So, too, "normal" thinking gives precedence to adult education. But as we know, children are very perceptive. They learn very quickly if Mommy or Daddy just drops them off at Hebrew School and picks them up afterwards. It "feels" to them like it's a burden for the parent to *sleep* them back and forth. They also get the message *very* quickly when religious school classes take second place to other outside activities.
23. How seriously do I take my own dedication to Tikkun Olam, and if I am serious about it and actively commit to Mitzvah projects, do I do it alone, or with my family, or both?
24. Does my image of being a role model for my child approximate my child's perception of me? Does my daughter or son see me as deep, thoughtful, superficial, silly, workaholic, generous with my time and money, loving, distant, (sadly) irritable at work and pleasant at home or pleasant and irritable at home?  
A classic example of a child "getting" it is the story of a fisherman named Tuck Donnelly. While working as a manager on a commercial fishing vessel, one of Tuck Donnelly's crew members told him how distressed he was about how much fish they had to throw back — dead or alive. Perfectly good protein that could feed hungry

Americans was being wasted. Because of government regulations, they were allowed to keep only pollock and cod. After many meetings and long negotiations, Donnelly succeeded in having the government change the regulations and now his Mitzvah project, SeaShare, has become a supplier of millions of pounds of fish to food banks, soup kitchens, and shelters around the country. Commercial vessels and processors have come "on board," and many thousands of Americans are eating more healthy food due to SeaShare's efforts. It's a wonderful Mitzvah story, to be sure.

The question remains, do Mr. Donnelly's children "get it"? Do they know what Daddy is "all about"? The answer is a most definite Yes, and the proof is that one day, Mr. Donnelly's wife, Jax, overheard a conversation between their daughter, Rachel and two friends. The first one said, "My Dad's a lawyer, and he makes a lot of money." The second one said, "My Dad's a doctor, and he makes a lot of money." Rachel's words say it all — "My Dad feeds hungry people."

Taken from *Danny Siegel's Bar and Bat Mitzvah Book: A Practical Guide to Changing the World through your Simcha*, p. 6-10.



# Section 7

## Forms/Handouts

This section is for your:

- parasha resources (to be picked up during Kita Vav (6<sup>th</sup> grade) year)
- research on your d'var
- handouts to be received in b'nai mitzvah family meetings
- any other important b'nai mitzvah related stuff you acquire

(items found in the back pocket, these can also be found at [tinyurl.com/TBIbmitz](http://tinyurl.com/TBIbmitz) and [www.tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah](http://www.tbieugene.org/education/bnai-mitzvah))

- B'nai Mitzvah Program Entrance Form
- B'nai Mitzvah Studies Agreement
- B'nai Mitzvah Fee Schedule
- B'nai Mitzvah Timeline & Checklist
- Friday Oneg Shabbat Procedures
- Caterer's Handout
- B'nai Mitzvah Honors List
- Service Attendance Tracker
- Sample Family Volunteer Roles Sign-up

