

# The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Guide

## Temple Beth Shalom

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Temple Beth Shalom | 760 Route 6, Mahopac, NY 10541

(845) 628-6133 | [office@tbsmahopac.org](mailto:office@tbsmahopac.org)



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Dear Parents,

Mazel Tov on reaching this milestone!

We hope planning for your family's Bar or Bat Mitzvah experience is a fulfilling part of your Jewish journey. "Bar/Bat Mitzvah" literally means "of Age of Mitzvah," meaning that a young person is now responsible for the sacred commandments of Judaism. He or she publically accepts the joys and responsibilities of Jewish adulthood and is held responsible for their actions and take ownership over their beliefs and spiritual life.

During the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony, the young person typically leads a significant portion of Shabbat services on both Friday night and Saturday morning, is called up for his/her first Aliyah (reciting the blessings before and after the Torah reading), reads from the Torah, chants a Haftarah (a selection from the Book of Prophets), and delivers a D'var Torah (a speech about the Torah portion).

Our goal is not to dictate any specific number of prayers or verses that a student should sing, chant, or read. Rather, we want our children to learn what they are capable of learning, study hard, and present their knowledge in a meaningful way. Every child is uniquely individual. The specific elements of the ceremony will be tailored to each student.

Preparation to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah extends far beyond developing the skills to be exercised on this momentous occasion. A young person will truly be ready to assume the responsibilities of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah only if he/she understands the practices and values of Judaism. As parents, teachers, clergy, and tutors, we work together as a team. Please keep extracurricular activities at a minimum during the year of intense preparation leading up to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

All of our Bar/Bat Mitzvah students (accompanied by a parent) are also strongly encouraged to attend Shabbat morning services at least ten times, and five times on Friday nights, during the course of the year before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. We have found that this familiarization with Shabbat services supports the students' learning and comfort.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience is not only about demonstrating skills from the bima. It is also about understanding the meaning of mitzvah and our responsibilities as Jews. To that end, we are asking all of our Bar/Bat Mitzvah students to take on a Mitzvah project during the year. We are asking your child to volunteer time in some community activity subject to the Rabbi's approval.

We encourage families to get involved in all aspects of your child's preparation in this year of growth and transition. Please refer to this guide as you progress with each stage of your plans.

The Rabbi will meet with you and your child approximately 3 months before your simcha (celebration) to help your child with his/her D'var Torah (speech), and to discuss the meaning of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and the Mitzvah Project. Additionally, you will meet with the Kiddush Coordinator.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions throughout this exciting process. We are all here to make this process not only easy, but meaningful and wonderful for your entire family. Once again, we wish you a sincere and hearty Mazel Tov.

Rabbi Sarah Freidson  
*rabbi@tbsmahopac.org*

Libby Spitzer, Education Director  
*libbytbs@gmail.com*

Lynn Michaels, Kiddush Coordinator  
*lynn.michaels@comcast.net*

## What is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

At Temple Beth Shalom we encourage our young people to celebrate their Bar/Bat Mitzvah after their thirteenth birthday according to the Jewish calendar. The actual expression, "Bar/Bat Mitzvah" means "a person subject to mitzvot" - one who bears his or her own responsibility for *mitzvot*, no longer relying on adult members of his/her family to bear responsibility for him/her.

As a Conservative congregation, we strive to give our children equal opportunities in education, performance of mitzvot and opportunities for community service. We understand that every child is unique individual needs; therefore, we strive to treat every individual with *kavod* (respect) and *rahamim* (compassion). We expect every Bar/Bat Mitzvah to develop a basic understanding of the calling to be a Conservative Jew. He or she has an obligation to live a life committed to the pursuit of Torah, *Avodah* and *Gemilut Hasadim* (Study, Prayer and Acts of Loving-Kindness).

## Dates and Tutors

Suggested Bar/Bat Mitzvah dates are given out during the 5<sup>th</sup> grade school year based on your child's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday in the Hebrew calendar, the length of the reading, and calendrical considerations. If you prefer a different date, please email your requested date change to the Rabbi. We will make every effort to give you a date that works for your family.

Every child is unique with differing abilities and preferences. A Saturday morning Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not right for everyone. Alternative options are available. Speak with the Rabbi to discuss what might work best for your child.

Temple Beth Shalom is blessed to have congregants who dedicate significant time and energy tutoring our youth and preparing them for their B'nai Mitzvah. The tutors' compensation is included in the bima fee and is significantly below market rate. Temple Beth Shalom cannot accommodate individual requests for tutors. Younger siblings are assigned their older sibling's tutor to ensure continuity and preserve the relationship between a family and tutor. You may hire an outside tutor, but that individual must be approved by the Rabbi.

## Family Involvement

At Temple Beth Shalom we recognize that each family unit is unique, with varied backgrounds, living situations, and religious involvement. Every family celebrating this rite of passage with their child can participate in and enjoy the training process together. Your child will appreciate it when you take an active interest in his/her preparation. Make an effort to listen to your child practice the Haftarah and Torah portion on a regular basis. Even if you do not know Hebrew, your attention will help build your child's confidence and convey the value you place on Jewish tradition. We can provide you with transliterated text as well. We recognize that many of our families include members of multiple faiths. Temple Beth Shalom strives to make all people comfortable, regardless of your religious background. There is no such thing as a "silly" question! We

encourage you, as a family, to attend services and participate in synagogue events. The more you are involved in the Temple Beth Shalom community, the more comfortable your child will be going through this rite of passage.

### **Family's Relationship to the Synagogue and to Judaism**

- The Bar/Bat Mitzvah must be Jewish according to the standards of the Conservative movement as interpreted by Temple Beth Shalom's Rabbi.
- At least one of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's Jewish parents must be a member in good standing of Temple Beth Shalom.
- At least 3 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the family must be members in good standing and the bimah fee must be paid. The Finance Committee of the congregation will, of course, consider a family's special circumstances.
- In the case of separated or divorced parents, both parents will be offered the opportunity to participate in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah event and its planning unless a custodial agreement or court order states otherwise. If only one parent is a member, that parent has precedence in decision-making but not to the total exclusion of the other.
- Many of us have non-Jewish loved ones who we would like to honor during the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration. There are opportunities for, as well as limitations to, participation of non-Jews in services. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family should consult with the Rabbi as to the types of participation appropriate.
- The student's overall accomplishments in the various educational programs will help determine what specific liturgical and religious components of the Shabbat service he or she can lead. Temple Beth Shalom encourages each Bar/Bat Mitzvah to participate to the full extent of his or her skills. We recognize that people have varying interests and strengths. It is no reflection on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah that he or she chooses to do more or less.
- The Education Director will evaluate each student to establish that the educational requirements have been met.

### **Your Child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Temple Beth Shalom**

Typically, Temple Beth Shalom celebrates the achieving of Bar/Bat Mitzvah (the age of responsibility for Mitzvot) at regularly scheduled, congregational Shabbat services - both on Shabbat morning and on the preceding Friday evening. Your child will have an opportunity to participate in both services, and you, your family, and friends will be recognized and honored there, consistent with our norms and practices.

We strongly recommend families attend services regularly, on Friday night and Saturday morning, to increase your familiarity with Shabbat and Temple Beth Shalom's traditions.

The expectation is to attend 5 Friday night services and 10 Saturday morning services leading up to your celebration.

### Educational Requirements

- In order to celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Temple Beth Shalom, students are required to meet specific educational requirements.
- The Bar/Bat Mitzvah student must be enrolled in the Temple Beth Shalom religious school.
- Students at Temple Beth Shalom Religious School are expected to attend and complete at least 3 years of the Religious School program or another approved Jewish Education venue. Other arrangements must be approved by the Rabbi and Education Director.
- Each student is expected to attend at least **ten (10) Shabbat services** at Temple Beth Shalom on Shabbat morning, **five (5) on Friday night** - in the year prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah event. Ideally the student will be accompanied by a parent in order to build a relationship with the congregation and reinforce their learning in preparation for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate will undertake an individual program with an assigned tutor to learn the synagogue skills that he/she will need to lead the congregation and to read the Torah and Haftarah. This program takes about nine (9) months to one year.
- Each student will meet with the Rabbi approximately three (3) months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The intent is for the student to develop a deeper insight into becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and into the specific Biblical material he or she will read on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah day. With the Rabbi's assistance and consultation, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will develop his/her Mitzvah project and prepare a D'var Torah (speech) to be delivered at services that morning.

### Mitzvah Projects

The Mitzvah Project is an important part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience. It is our hope that by performing community service, our students will become more aware of the larger community as they journey from childhood to adulthood.

Through study and discussion, the Rabbi and/or tutor will help each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student develop a project that addresses needs in the community as well as each child's unique interests and skills. Mitzvah projects can address needs in our own synagogue, the needs in the local community, or issues around the world.

Past Bar/Bat Mitzvah projects have included the following:

Organizing a donation collection: Tallitot and sets of Tefillin to send overseas to Jewish communities in need. Shabbat-appropriate toys and storage containers to

the Synagogue. New or used children's books - selecting a local deserving school or children's hospital and reading to the children. New or used sports equipment and bringing them to a local deserving school.

Volunteering within the Temple: Assessing, organizing and setting up a recycling program for the synagogue. Volunteering babysitting time for congregational programs.

Volunteering within the community: Putnam County Women's Resource Center. Putnam Humane Society.

There are many, many more creative ideas that can be discussed with the Rabbi.

### Shabbat and Jewish Observance

Because the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration usually takes place on Shabbat, we remind the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family that Temple Beth Shalom observes the traditions of Shabbat in accordance with the standards of Conservative Judaism.

- Your family should arrive early for services which begin at 8:00 PM Friday evening and 9:45 AM Saturday morning.
- Please dress in a manner appropriate to a dignified religious service. All men must wear a kippah, and women are encouraged as well. We encourage this at all times in the synagogue building, particularly since the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a religious celebration.
- All Jewish men above the age of Bar Mitzvah should wear a tallit (prayer shawl) during services and must do so if ascending the bimah and receiving an honor. Jewish women are encouraged to wear a tallit as well.
- All Bar/Bat Mitzvah students are expected to wear a tallit for Shabbat morning.
- Photography and video or sound recording violate Shabbat, as does the use of cell phones. Please do not bring cameras, recording equipment, or cell phones into Temple Beth Shalom, or use them anywhere on Temple Beth Shalom premises during Shabbat. Please remind your guests of this as well.
- Smoking is prohibited on Temple Beth Shalom property at all times.
- As a Conservative congregation, we maintain standards of kashrut. All food brought into Temple Beth Shalom must be kosher, from a source having active, valid certification (*hashgachah*) as approved by the Rabbi. We encourage you to follow the guidelines of kashrut for all your celebrations. For more information on kosher caterers, please contact Lynn Michaels, the Kiddush Coordinator.
- Should you be holding an off-site party on Shabbat afternoon following services and Kiddush, please provide directions to your guests in advance. They should not be distributed at the synagogue.

- All items used in the synagogue on Shabbat must be brought into the synagogue building by 12:00 noon on the preceding Friday afternoon. This applies to food, kippot, handouts, and floral arrangements for the Shabbat celebration and anything else planned for use at Temple Beth Shalom on Shabbat.
- Temple Beth Shalom takes no responsibility for personal property left on its premises.

### **Hosting the Congregation**

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family shares its simcha with the entire congregation by serving as host, providing light refreshments after Friday evening Kabbalat Shabbat services, and a Kiddush on Shabbat morning services. This sharing of a common meal is a material way of emphasizing the family's and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's ties to the congregation. It is our hope that any Shabbat afternoon off-site party will take place at such a time that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family and guests will also remain at the synagogue for the Kiddush/luncheon together for at least 30 minutes. The Kiddush Coordinator can assist you with these details.

It is encouraged to invite everyone in the Religious School class to the simcha.

### **Kabbalat Shabbat**

At Temple Beth Shalom, a simple service on Friday evening ushers in the Shabbat. This service takes place at 8:00 PM, runs approximately an hour, and consists of:

Introductory psalms and hymns, the Sh'ma and its blessings, the Silent Amidah, closing prayers, Dvar Torah, Kiddush, Aleinu and a closing hymn.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah child typically leads a significant portion of this service.

### **Shabbat Morning Services**

Our Shabbat morning services begin at 9:45 AM and end at approximately 12:15 PM. It is in these services that your child will have the greatest opportunity to demonstrate his or her readiness to become part of the adult Temple Beth Shalom community with its religious privileges and responsibilities.

The order of our Shabbat morning services is as follows:

- Tallit ceremony, where the parents present the Bar/Bat Mitzvah with their prayer shawl, symbolizing the acceptance of the mitzvot (sacred responsibilities of Jewish life)
- Ma Tovu, Birchot Hashachar and P'sukei D'Zimrah (preliminary blessings and Psalms)
- Shacharit (the morning service).

- The Torah Service - taking out the Sefer Torah (Torah Scroll), often led by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah standing in front of the open Ark. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah then carries the Sefer Torah in procession around the sanctuary to the bimah
- Reading the Torah and Haftarah
- Raising and Dressing the Sefer Torah (Hagbaha and G'lilah)
- Chanting the Haftarah by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- The Bar/Bat Mitzvah D'var Torah
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah blessings from the Rabbi, parents, and grandparents
- Ashrei, Returning the Sefer Torah to the Ark
- Musaf- sometimes led by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- Closing Prayers - often led by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and their religious school classmates

### **Family Participation on Shabbat Morning**

At Shabbat morning services there are many opportunities for participation and for recognition of family and guests. The following rules apply to assigning the honors given out during the service:

- Up to seven (7) aliyot during the reading of the Torah. An aliyah is generally assigned to an individual or couple. Any exceptions are at the discretion of the Rabbi. Typically, the parents of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah share the seventh aliyah, permitting them to remain on the bimah while their child has the Maftir aliyah. The first and second aliyot are reserved for a Cohen and Levi, if present.
- Hagbaha and G'lilah (raising the Torah scroll for display and dressing the Torah scroll) provide opportunities to honor two (2) persons for each Torah scroll used in the day's service. For Hagbaha, it is important to select a person physically able to lift a heavy, awkwardly-shaped object above shoulder level. The people involved should preferably be experienced in this part of the ritual. We are happy to arrange a practice session.
- Opening and closing the Ark to take the Torah from the Ark before it is read, and to return it afterward. Typically two (2) honorees are selected for each, making a total of four (4).
- Chanting from the Torah on Shabbat morning. Loved ones are encouraged to chant one or more aliyot, and may distribute some or all of the Torah readings among capable members of the family or congregation. Torah readers must be able to read directly from the Torah, and may not rely on "cheat sheets" or transliteration.
- Assisting the Bar/Bat Mitzvah or substituting for him/her in the recitation of a Hebrew prayer.
- All recipients of the honors listed above must be Jewish according to the standards of Conservative Judaism as interpreted by the Rabbi.
- Non-Jewish loved ones have several opportunities to be honored with participation in the service. The Rabbi will use her discretion in considering each request made by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family on an individual basis. Examples of opportunities for participation by non-Jews include:
  - A non-Jewish parent or grandparent is encouraged to bless the child.

- A non-Jewish parent can accompany the Torah procession and join their spouse on the bimah for the Aliyah (blessing the Torah).
- Non-Jewish loved ones can lead the Prayers for the Country, Israel and Peace.
- Please speak to the Rabbi about other opportunities as well.

Please ensure that the honorees you select are familiar with the procedure, and can recite or chant the blessings in Hebrew. The tutor and Rabbi are happy to review the blessings with your guests before the event.

Two weeks before the ceremony, provide the Hebrew names of these honorees to the Rabbi so that they can be properly recognized.

### **The Shabbat Morning Kiddush**

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family provides a Kiddush (light meal) for the entire congregation following Shabbat morning services. The Kiddush may be a simple spread or an elaborate buffet luncheon. The Kiddush Coordinator can help you plan the Kiddush to meet your needs and the congregation's standards. Whatever you choose, there are some specific guidelines to follow:

- The Kiddush takes place immediately following services, and is itself a religious function. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah child leads the blessings over the grape juice (Kiddush) and Challah (Motzi). This honor can also be given to a loved one.
- The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family are expected to be present at the congregational Kiddush for a sufficient time in order to allow individual congregants to offer their good wishes and congratulations.
- All in attendance at services are invited to Kiddush. You may host a private luncheon for your guests offsite, but there may not be a separate Kiddush for guests distinct from that offered to the congregation at large.

### **Countdown to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Event**

Here is a partial checklist, arranged in time sequence, to help you in your planning. We try to give you an approximate lead-time for each item, so that you can determine "when to do what."

In what follows, all dates are in advance of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

- The 5<sup>th</sup> grade year: Receive a suggested date from the Rabbi based on your child's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday in the Hebrew calendar. You are welcome to change the date if it doesn't work for your family.
- 2 years or more: Make sure your child is on track with respect to his/her religious school education. Begin to attend services regularly with your child.

- 1 year or more: Reserve the venue for your celebration if you will be hosting a party. Firm up plans for entertainment: caterer, photographer, invitations, musicians, etc.
- Nine months or more: Make arrangements with tutor for Bar/Bat Mitzvah instruction. Please keep all of your appointments. Bear in mind that you and your child have an obligation with respect to attendance at Shabbat services which greatly increases the student's comfort leading services. Don't leave this until the last minute.
- Six months: Consider who from your family might be a Torah Reader, and start making arrangements with the tutor. Review plans for food, entertainment and bimah decorations (flowers and food baskets should be delivered Friday morning) with Kiddush Coordinator. She has a list of approved caterers and bakeries which adhere to Temple Beth Shalom's kashrut policies. Order Tallit for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, kippot for guests. If you choose, arrange for photographs to be taken at Temple Beth Shalom during the week prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Write article about your child for the Temple Times.
- Three months: Meet with the Rabbi to begin writing the D'var Torah (speech). A rough draft will be due approximately four (4) weeks later. Prepare an article for Temple Times about your child.
- Two months: Make appointment with the Kiddush Coordinator to discuss all event details. Discuss participation in services on the Thursday preceding the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- Two weeks: Turn in Aliyah List to the office with Hebrew and English names of family honorees. This ensures enough time to print the program given to your guests at services.
- Week of: Meet with the Rabbi and tutor for a full run through of the service on the bimah. This takes approximately an hour and a half. Many families schedule their photographer and/or videographer for this time period.
- Preceding Friday morning: Make final adjustments. Flowers, food, kippot (with hairpins if required), handouts, delivered by 12 noon.
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah day: Bring all of the materials your child needs to lead services: the D'var Torah (speech), Haftarah, blessings, tallit, kippah, etc. Kippah clips or bobby pins are also recommended. Arrive by 9:30 AM. Sit in the front row of the Sanctuary. Enjoy and marvel at the remarkable person your child is growing into!

## Bar/Bat Mitzvah Check List

Following are the basic tasks that may need attention in the months (or years) before your child's special day.

- Reserve Temple Beth Shalom Social Hall for your celebration, if necessary
- Contact tutor and set up appointments for lessons
- Contact Rabbi and set up appointment to discuss your Mitzvah Project and to study for the D'var Torah (speech)
- Compile guest list with addresses. It is encouraged to invite everyone in the Religious School class to the simcha
- Order invitations, RSVPs, thank you notes, direction cards, purchase stamps (weigh invitations first)
- Attend a minimum of 15 Shabbat services, 10 on Saturday morning (including Shabbat Chavaya) and 5 on Friday evening
- Determine and begin Mitzvah Project (in consultation with Rabbi)
- Assign honors/Torah readings to family/friends with enough notice, and get full Hebrew names
- Order your child's tallit (prayer shawl)
- Address, stamp and send invitations with directions to Temple Beth Shalom to guests
- Write Temple Times article about your child
- Submit child's final Bar/Bat Mitzvah speech to the Rabbi at least 4 weeks before simcha to allow sufficient time for your child to practice delivering it
- Meet with the Kiddush Coordinator to discuss the following:
  - Friday night Oneg
  - Shabbat morning questions
  - Kiddush and celebration
- Submit aliyot form with all necessary Hebrew names 2 weeks in advance to ensure program booklet is printed in time

## Mitzvah Project Form

Please return this form to the Rabbi no later than 6 months prior to your Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. Discuss your project with Rabbi prior to completing this form.

**Name of Bar/Bat Mitzvah:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Project will Benefit:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please write a brief description of the project that you plan:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Timeline to accomplish this project:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal of this project:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Jewish values reflected in this project:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_