

Congregation Beth Israel

B'nei Mitzvah Handbook

—Ne'arim Program, 2011-'12 —

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Time for Community and Family Celebration

What are “B'nei Mitzvah”?

Celebrating Our Values

Making It Count

The Ne'arim Program

Requirements and Expectations

Study Materials

The Nuts and Bolts of Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation

Getting Help from a Consulting Member

Setting Dates

Invitations

Decorations

Programs

What Happens at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Celebration?

What Do the Parents Do?

Honors for Other Participants in the Service

The Participation of Non-Jews

Blessing for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's Family

Tossing Candy

Tallit

Kippot (Yarmulkes)

What to Wear

Photography/Videography

Additional Resources:

Tzedakah Project Ideas

Guidance For Writing A D'var Torah

Ideas for the Parents' Talk

Aliyah Primer

Honors Work Sheet

Kashrut at CBI

Your Se'udat Mitzvah/Reception

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah Checklist for Parents

Your Feedback

So, You Still Have A Few Questions?

A Time for Community and Family Celebration

Many parents describe the experience of seeing their child standing on the bimah as a bar or bat mitzvah as one of life's most moving events. It is a moment in which we imagine that we have passed our tradition and our values on to a new generation. It is a moment in which we remember past generations and feel connected to them. It is a moment in which the community feels that we have given a child a basic foundation for living a Jewish life.

Bar and bat mitzvah celebrations are neither a beginning nor an end. We know that our thirteen-year-olds are not yet adults. We hope that their paths of Jewish learning will continue for a lifetime. Becoming a bar/bat mitzvah, though, is an important milestone through a turbulent time in the lives of adolescents and their families. It is important to make it a meaningful and memorable experience.

This booklet is meant to help guide your family through the bar/bat mitzvah process. It attempts to answer questions about our community's policies and expectations. It is designed to provide you with some tools to help your family make the most of the experience.

What are "B'nei Mitzvah"?

"Bar mitzvah" is not a verb. A person isn't "bar mitzvahed." "Bar mitzvah" is also not the name of a religious service or of a social event. Rather, a bar or bat mitzvah is a person—a Jew who has come of age and entered a special relationship with the Jewish community and with God.

A "mitzvah" is a commandment. More than "good deeds," the mitzvot (plural of mitzvah) are things we do because doing them draws us closer to God and to living a meaningful life. A mitzvah can be fulfilling an ethical obligation, like helping the poor. A mitzvah can be performing a ritual, like lighting Shabbat candles. Doing a mitzvah is not "following orders," rather, it is something that we do to give our lives meaning and to fulfill our spiritual needs.

"Bar mitzvah" literally means, "son of commandment," and can be understood to mean, "a man who is a part of the community of people who are bound by mitzvot." "Bat Mitzvah" is the same in female form. In Hebrew, the plural of "bar mitzvah" and "bat mitzvah" is "b'nei mitzvah." ("B'not mitzvah" is the plural for just women.) We talk about "b'nei mitzvah" when we talk about our children who are becoming members of the sacred community of people who respond to God with sacred action.

Traditionally, children become b'nei mitzvah when they turn thirteen (or, in some communities, twelve for girls). We celebrate the young person's coming of age by inviting him or her to read from the Torah with the accompanying blessings. Even without the ceremony, though, every Jewish child becomes a bar or bat mitzvah with the coming of age.

Some adults who never celebrated becoming b'nei mitzvah as children choose to have such celebrations as adults. Often these "adult b'nei mitzvah" are people who converted to Judaism, or women who were not able to celebrate becoming b'not mitzvah as girls because the ritual was not observed in their community. This can be a powerful experience for many Jewish adults, and the CBI community encourages adults to consider it. This booklet, however, is intended for young people who choose to celebrate becoming b'nei mitzvah at or near the age of thirteen.

Celebrating Our Values

Becoming a bar or bat mitzvah is much more than an excuse for a party or for showing off Hebrew reading skills. Coming of age in Jewish tradition is an expression of our Jewish values as individuals and as a community.

Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Means Accepting Responsibility. It's easy for parents to feel proud of their children when they see them reading from the Torah after months of preparation. But becoming a bar/bat mitzvah is more than acquiring the skill of Torah reading. Jewish children who choose to celebrate becoming b'nei mitzvah in the synagogue are making a choice to identify with the Jewish people and with Jewish values. They announce their choice to assume responsibility for living a life of meaning with ethical and spiritual purpose.

The Torah Is the Center of Judaism. Everything we do as Jews, everything we believe, everything we value revolves around the Torah. The Torah is the testimony of our people's encounter with God. In whatever way we understand Torah—whether as a divine revelation, a human text about striving for God, or a combination of the two—it is a text that has been embraced with the highest sanctity by the Jewish people. This is why the first mitzvah we expect our children to fulfill as b'nei mitzvah is to read publicly from the Torah.

B'nei Mitzvah Celebrations are Communal. It is no coincidence that we hold this ceremony in public. To be a Jew means to live in covenant—not only with God but with other Jews, too. Becoming a bar/bat mitzvah marks the beginning of a child's entry into the community as a full-fledged member. The awarding of an aliyah, ("being called to the Torah"), is a gift of the Jewish people. For this reason, we celebrate a child's coming of age in the synagogue—our communal home—during a time of regular communal gathering.

It's Not a Performance—It's a Celebration. The synagogue is not a theater and the congregation is not an audience. The celebration of a child becoming a bar/bat mitzvah takes lots of hard preparation, but it is not a performance. This also means that the only "mistake" a bar or bat mitzvah can make at the celebration is to lose sight of this truth.

Think of the Reception as a Continuation of the Celebration. Judaism has a formal name for the meal after the service in which a bar/bat mitzvah reads from Torah. It is a se'udat mitzvah, a meal to honor the performance of a mitzvah. It, too, is a sacred, joyful gathering. By reciting appropriate blessings at the se'udat mitzvah and by setting aside a portion of the plenty for the poor, we demonstrate that the words of Torah spoken at the synagogue were not an isolated or empty gesture, but a sincere declaration of our intentions in all that we do.

Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is Just the Beginning. Being a bat or bar mitzvah is not the "experience of a lifetime"—rather, it is the beginning of a lifetime of Jewish experience. A bar/bat mitzvah is not measured by what he or she does on the bimah, but in the days and years that follow the ritual. Becoming a bar/bat mitzvah should begin a lifetime of spiritual growth and of Jewish learning.

Making It Count

Making It Count: A Covenant for Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a ten-page study guide prepared by the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) that focuses on four Jewish values that are specific to becoming a bar/bat mitzvah. They are:

- * Talmud Torah: Lifelong Learning
- * Avodah: Service to God
- * Mitzvah: Commandment
- * K'hilah: Community

Making It Count: A Covenant for Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is available to download from the URJ website. Simply log onto <http://urj.org/worship/bneimitzvah/> and click on "Making It Count" to download the study guide.

The Ne'arim Program

Congregation Beth Israel's education program for pre-bar/bat mitzvah students is called Ne'arim, Hebrew for "Youths." Students generally enter the Ne'arim program the year they begin fifth grade in secular school. The program meets on Mondays from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. and has two sections:

- 1) A course in Jewish values, thought and history taught by the rabbi. The course rotates through three basic topics over three years: "God," "Torah" and "Israel (the Jewish people)." This year, the Judaics program will also feature some new creative, hands-on projects designed to get the students thinking about their Judaism in different ways.
- 2) Hebrew instruction in our Mitkadem program. Mitkadem focuses on reading prayerbook Hebrew with special attention to basic vocabulary and understanding the ideas in the prayers. Students in Mitkadem are able to progress at their own pace.

During the months prior to a child's bar/bat mitzvah celebration, additional tutorial time will be scheduled for preparing the Torah reading. Our Torah reading tutor for b'nei mitzvah students is Vanessa Harper, a Williams College student with extensive experience in preparing young people to read or chant from Torah. B'nei Mitzvah tutoring with Ms. Harper and Rabbi Barenblat is covered in the Ne'arim enrollment fee.

Students are expected to participate fully in the Ne'arim program until the end of the school year of their bar/bat mitzvah celebration.

Requirements and Expectations

Congregation Beth Israel sets meaningful requirements for Ne'arim students and their families before they can celebrate their acceptance of Torah as a bar/bat mitzvah:

- * In order to form a connection with the community and classmates, Ne'arim students must be enrolled in the Ne'arim program for a minimum of two years—preferably three—before celebrating becoming a bar/bat mitzvah at CBI. At the discretion of the rabbi and the congregation, a student who has had equivalent training at another congregation or school after the age of nine may celebrate becoming a bar/bat mitzvah at CBI after one year in the Ne'arim program.

* Students must attend class regularly. Students can make up for a limited number of missed classes with additional written assignments if there are extenuating circumstances. Children who miss more than six classes during the year will be asked to postpone their b'nei mitzvah celebrations.

* Each bar/bat mitzvah serves as the "Torah Reader" for his or her day of celebration, a role referred to as the Ba'al K'riah (male) or Ba'alat K'riah (female). This role requires the student to learn ten to twenty verses in Hebrew from the week's Torah portion and the appropriate blessings. The Torah scroll is unvocalized (without vowels or accent marks) and all b'nei mitzvah are expected to read directly from the scroll (or chant, if they prefer). This is a difficult task that requires a large investment of the student's time, especially in the six to eight months prior to the celebration. It is essential that students prepare Hebrew reading assignments regularly and master them to the standard and satisfaction of the Torah reading tutor and the rabbi before the bar/bat mitzvah celebration.

Please note: we will make alternative arrangements for any b'nei mitzvah student with a learning disability who is unable to master reading from Torah or reading Hebrew. Please do not let anxiety around your child's linguistic capabilities prevent you, and your child, from celebrating this milestone in your child's Jewish life. (For more, see the "Special Needs" section on the next page of this booklet.)

* Each Ne'arim student must attend and participate in one of CBI's Shabbat services (Saturday morning) with a parent or parents at least once a month during the school year. During the six months before his or her celebration, student should attend one additional Shabbat morning service each month. Students and parents should arrive on time and attend the entire service. Ne'arim students who do not attend at least seven services during the school year will be asked to postpone their b'nei mitzvah celebrations.

* Ne'arim families are strongly encouraged to explore new and deeper Shabbat and holiday observances in their home on a regular basis. The rabbi is available to discuss ways for families to expand and strengthen meaningful Shabbat and holiday observance in their homes.

* If a b'nei mitzvah family opts for a havdalah b'nei mitzvah, that service will consist of mincha (afternoon service, with Torah reading), havdalah (the ceremony ending Shabbat and beginning the new week), and ma'ariv (evening service.) In that case, the b'nei mitzvah student would be expected to learn the prayers for havdalah and to learn the special prayers recited during Shabbat mincha time. We also expect the family, in that case, to commit to celebrating havdalah several times during the year so the student can practice the havdalah blessings.

* Each student must complete a meaningful Tzedakah Project, selected and developed in conjunction with the rabbi, before celebrating becoming a bar/bat mitzvah. (Specific suggestions for Tzedakah Projects can be found later in this booklet).

* Each student must prepare a d'var Torah—a short teaching based on their Torah reading—that he or she will deliver at the service celebrating his or her becoming a bar/bat mitzvah. Parents play an important role in helping their child identify meaningful themes in the text that apply to the student's life and experience. The rabbi also will work with the student in developing and writing the d'var Torah. The d'var Torah is not a "thank you" speech, but it may be appropriate for it to include brief expressions of appreciation to parents and teachers. (Some helpful points on writing a d'var Torah can be found later in this booklet.)

* The family of each student in our Ne'arim program must be a member of CBI. Exceptions may be made for Jewish students who do not have a Jewish custodial parent.

* Students in CBI's education programs must not simultaneously be enrolled in the religious education program of any non-Jewish faith. Please speak to the rabbi if you have any questions about this.

* It is customary for the family of the bar/bat mitzvah to host the kiddush following the service. This does not need to be elaborate. The bar/bat mitzvah's family should provide refreshments similar to what we offer on a typical Shabbat morning—cheese and crackers, vegetables and dip, for example—in quantities suitable for members of the congregation and invited guests. Later in this booklet you'll find our congregation's policies on food served in the synagogue.

Special Needs Students

Our congregation takes great pride in making every bar/bat mitzvah celebration special. There are occasions when this requires us to acknowledge the special needs of some students. We will do everything possible to work with student with special needs—such as physical, mental or developmental disabilities—to maximize their sense of accomplishment and pride in Jewish identity. Please feel free to discuss your child's special needs and any concerns you might have with the rabbi.

Study Materials

Textbooks and other materials used in the Ne'arim program are provided. The cost is included in the enrollment fee. Each student will be provided with a copy of his or her Torah portion months in advance of celebrating becoming a bar/bat mitzvah. If requested, the rabbi or Torah reading tutor will make an audio recording (CD or MP3) of the Torah portion, read or chanted. The actual verses to be read or chanted will be chosen by the rabbi.

The Nuts and Bolts of Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation

Getting Help from a Consulting Member

As a small congregation, CBI depends on volunteers to make our services run smoothly. At most of our Shabbat services, volunteers host the service by greeting people as they arrive and by setting up the kiddush or other events following the service. However, on the occasion of a bar/bat mitzvah, when the hosting family is not able to fulfill many of these responsibilities, someone else must take them on. That is why we have set up a system of "Consulting Members" to manage the details and to give the family of the bar/bat mitzvah guidance in the process of planning the logistics of this joyous occasion.

The bar/bat mitzvah family must choose a CBI Member to be the Consulting Member for the event. The synagogue office can help you identify an appropriate Consulting Member. This person can assist you with questions of procedures and help the family with many of the tasks that otherwise would fall upon the service host, such as:

* Arranging for ushers to hand out prayerbooks, kippot, and programs, if a significant number of guests is expected.

* Talking with the Rabbi about the assigning of honors in the service.

* Providing a Kiddush for all who attend the service, including CBI congregants and guests. CBI provides only the quantities of wine, grape juice, and challah that are provided for a typical Shabbat morning Kiddush. Most b'nei mitzvah celebrations require larger quantities, for which the bar/bat mitzvah family is responsible. Additional foods must be dairy/vegetarian, in accordance with CBI's rules of kashrut. (See page 18).

* Arranging for people to set up the Kiddush, and afterwards to clean up the Kiddush, kitchen, and incidental messes.

* If the celebrating family wishes to host a meal in the synagogue following the service (beyond the Kiddush), they should begin planning well in advance, with the Consulting Member, regarding procedures, responsibilities, and applicable fees.

It is important to understand that having a Consulting Member is not optional. It is essential to making the service run smoothly, both for the benefit of the family of the bar/bat mitzvah and for the congregation.

Setting Dates

Because of the size of our congregation, we are fortunate to have great flexibility in scheduling b'nei mitzvah celebrations. Usually, the date chosen is soon after the child's thirteenth birthday on the secular calendar. Some families choose a date for their celebration by picking a date with a weekly Torah portion that is particularly meaningful to the child. It is also possible to select a date that meets the needs of family traveling from long distances. A date should be chosen approximately one year in advance. All dates must be approved by the rabbi.

B'nei mitzvah celebrations should be scheduled for a time during which CBI has regularly scheduled services, excluding the High Holy Days. Generally, b'nei mitzvah celebrations are scheduled for Shabbat mornings. This year we are also exploring the possibility of havdalah b'nei mitzvah celebrations (mincha, havdalah, and maariv services on a Saturday afternoon/evening.) All b'nei mitzvah celebrations will be held at CBI's synagogue.

Requests for other days, times and locations for b'nei mitzvah celebrations will be considered but are strongly discouraged. In keeping with our values, we insist that the celebration of a Jewish child's coming of age be a public celebration, held at a time and place of communal gathering.

Invitations

Like all CBI services, the synagogue service at which a bar/bat mitzvah is celebrated is open to all and will be included in the congregation's announcements. In addition, you may wish to send personal invitations to your invited guests, near and far. The invitation should make clear that the service is our congregation's regular Shabbat service.

Here is one suggestion for the wording of the invitation: "We invite you to join us at Shabbat services at Congregation Beth Israel in North Adams on the morning of [date] at which our son/daughter, [name], will be called to the Torah as a bar/bat mitzvah. A reception will follow the service at ..."

Of course, you may ask the rabbi if you have any questions about invitations for your family's celebration.

Decorations

It is not necessary for the family of the bar/bat mitzvah to provide decorations for the sanctuary. We are very pleased with the beauty of our sanctuary as it is and we hope that your guests will enjoy the views of the Berkshire Mountains. Families may place a modest and limited display of flowers on the bimah if they wish. Please consult the rabbi in advance concerning any sanctuary decorations.

Programs

The rabbi will prepare a handout sheet for the service that includes the Torah reading and basic information about the service. Some families choose to create an additional service program for congregants and guests at the service. Programs can include a message from the family of the bar/bat mitzvah, information about the tzedakah project, and identifying the people who will be accepting honors at the service. If you wish, consult with the rabbi about ideas for a service program. There is a sample program later in this booklet.

What Happens at the Bar / Bat Mitzvah Celebration?

What Do the Parents Do?

Besides kvelling (“taking beaming delight”), the parent or parents’ ritual involvement on the day of the bar/bat mitzvah celebration likely includes an aliyah (the honor of reciting the Torah blessings) and offering a brief blessing to the bar/bat mitzvah. A non-Jewish parent may accompany the Jewish parent to the bimah for an aliyah without reciting the blessings, in accordance with CBI’s policies on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. (A copy of these policies is available in the synagogue office).

Honors for Other Participants in the Service

Honors are an important part of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. A variety of opportunities for family and friends exist within the Shabbat or Festival morning service. Below is a basic guide to honors. Included in this B’nei Mitzvah handbook is an honors work sheet on page 17. If you have any questions, please speak to the rabbi.

Aliyah

Aliyah means “going up” and refers to the person or people who recite the blessings before and after the Torah reading. In our congregation, we usually have three aliyot (plural of aliyah) during the Torah service that can be given to an individual or group of people. There can be as many as seven aliyot on Shabbat, however each aliyah must be at least three verses long. Additional aliyot require additional preparation of verses by the bar/bat mitzvah. The last aliyah usually is given to the bar/bat mitzvah. Other aliyot may be assigned to adult Jewish friends and family.

An Important Note: The celebration of the bar/bat mitzvah is part of the congregation’s regular worship service. It is not a private ceremony. Under some circumstances, an aliyah will be given to a member of the congregation for a special occasion. For example, an aliyah is traditionally offered to a couple on the Shabbat before their wedding or following the birth of a child.

Turgeman

The turgeman is the person who translates the Torah reading into the vernacular (English). This may be assigned as an additional honor to an adult Jew or it may be done by the person called for the aliyah.

Petichah

The aron kodesh (holy ark) is opened at the beginning of the Torah service and closed at the end. The honor of opening and closing the ark is called petichah. It may be assigned to up to two Jewish people (including a child or children) for each opening and closing.

Hagbahah and Gelilah

After the Torah is read, the Torah is raised and shown to the congregation in the honor called hagbahah. This honor should be given to a Jewish adult who is able to lift our rather heavy Torah scrolls comfortably and confidently. The rabbi will provide a brief lesson. (Please do not assign this honor to anyone with back, arm, wrist or hand problems.) The honor of rolling, tying and dressing the scroll is called gelilah and may be given to any adult Jew.

The Motzi

A Jewish family member or friend may receive the honor of reciting the blessing over the bread at the kiddush or at the reception following the service. The blessing is called the Motzi for one of the words in it, "HaMotzi lechem min ha'aretz," "The One who brings out bread from the earth."

The Participation of Non-Jews

We welcome the participation of non-Jewish family and friends. We want all of your guests to feel welcome. However, non-Jews may not be given Torah service honors because of the special meaning accorded to the Torah service by Jewish tradition. It is appropriate for non-Jews to be invited to recite special readings that are not part of the matbei'a tefillah (the traditional worship service). Such readings must be approved by the rabbi and may include a prayer for peace, a psalm or a meaningful modern poem. In the instance of a bar/bat mitzvah with married, interfaith parents, both parents typically come up for an aliyah, but only the Jewish parent recites the blessings.

Blessing for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's Family

The coming of age of a child is a rite of passage for the whole family, not just the bar/bat mitzvah. The rabbi usually will offer members of the bar/bat mitzvah's family an opportunity during the service to come up to the bimah together for a family blessing (including non-Jewish family members). This is also an appropriate way to include and recognize younger siblings in the celebration.

Tossing Candy

Tossing candy upon the bar/bat mitzvah after the d'var Torah is a traditional way of wishing him or her a "sweet life." If you would like, you may provide small candies to give to members of the congregation. (We've had good luck with Life Savers and Starbursts that come in individual wax paper wrappers. Avoid candies with plastic or cellophane wrappers that make a lot of noise when handled.) The family may ask a couple of children to hand the candy out at an appropriate time in the service.

Tallit

Jewish men and women are encouraged to wear a tallit (tallis, or prayer shawl) during morning services, but it is not required. As the tallit represents the acceptance of the mitzvot, it is not appropriate for non-Jews or children under the age of bar/bat mitzvah to wear one. Tallitot (plural of tallit) are available at the synagogue for members and guests.

Many families give their bar/bat mitzvah a tallit to wear at the service. The tallitot that children receive at their bar/bat mitzvah celebrations often become cherished possessions. There are resources for purchasing tallitot on the internet. Concepts of Art in Lenox (413-637-4845) has many styles.

Kippot (Yarmulkes)

Traditionally, all Jewish men and boys wear a kippah (yarmulke). The wearing of a kippah, however, is not mandated by Jewish law and it is not limited to men. There are no restrictions on non-Jews wearing a kippah. Kippot (plural of kippah) are available at the synagogue for members and guests.

Many families choose to provide kippot with the name of the bar/bat mitzvah printed or embroidered into them. There are numerous resources on the internet for ordering specially personalized kippot. If you order kippot for the occasion, make sure that you allow several weeks for printing and shipping.

What to Wear

We respectfully request that clothing be appropriately modest. Inform your family and guests that they should dress for a religious service. Formal evening wear, low neck lines, tee shirts and bare shoulders are not appropriate for our Shabbat services. You can direct your guests to check the CBI website for information on appropriate attire for CBI worship services.

Photography/Videography

The synagogue is sacred space and our services take place in sacred time. It is CBI's policy not to allow photography or videography during any part of the service, including the Torah reading. We suggest that you include notice of this policy in the service program. You can arrange for photos of the bar/bat mitzvah, the family and the rabbi before the service. Such arrangements must be made ahead of time and photography must be concluded at least one half hour before the beginning of the service.

Additional Resources:

Tzedakah Project Ideas

Tzedakah is an obligation in Judaism: It involves giving our time, money, or raising money to further the cause of justice in the world. Here is a list of things to do and organizations that your family might consider helping. If you don't know about these organizations, check them out. It's good to learn about the ways in which people are doing tikkun olam, "repairing the world."

Obviously, this is not a complete list. You may find your own way to fulfill the obligation of tzedakah. The most important thing is not how much you give, but that you make a genuine commitment to help in a way that is meaningful to you. This is one of the ways in which a

bar/bat mitzvah can show his or her desire to take on adult Jewish responsibilities.

1. Give of Your Time:

- a. Volunteer to work in the synagogue or in our religious education programs (Avodah, Hand in Hand and Aleph-Bet)
- b. Visit the elderly—family members, a neighbor, or a nursing home. There are a number of nursing homes in our area that are always looking for volunteers: Sweet Brook, Williamstown Commons, North Adams Commons, and more
- c. Work on a project to help the environment.
- d. Work at a free meals program, like the one run by the Berkshire Food Project at the First Congregational Church in North Adams, or CBI's Take and Eat program.
- e. Collect old but usable clothes, toys, tapes, videos, etc., and give them to the needy and the homeless through an organization like Community Action in North Adams.
- f. Participate in a walk-a-thon for a cause you care about.
- g. Work on a project for Habitat for Humanity.

2. Raise Money for a good cause

- a. Help the hungry, the poor, and the homeless by helping to raise money for organizations like these:
 - * Louison House, the homeless shelter in Adams
 - * Mazon: Jewish Response to Hunger. Donate 3% of the cost of your celebration or a part of your bar/bat mitzvah gifts. www.mazon.org
 - * The Berkshire Immigrant Center www.berkshireic.com
 - * Jewish Federation of the Berkshires www.jewishberkshires.org
 - * The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) www.hias.org
 - * American Jewish World Service www.ajws.org
 - * Habitat for Humanity www.habitat.org
- b. Help support medical research and medical support groups
 - * Local hospitals or nationally recognized specialty hospitals
 - * Specific disease groups: Cancer Care, The Kidney Foundation, AIDS, MS, Heart Association, etc.
 - * Hadassah www.hadassah.org
- c. Help other support groups
 - * Berkshire County Kids' Place www.kidsplaceonline.org
 - * P-FLAG: Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. www.pflag.org
 - * JACS, AA, and other organizations dealing with substance abuse
 - * The Jewish Guild for the Blind. www.jgb.org
- d. Help Jewish Causes
 - * The Fund for Reform Judaism. www.uahc.org/development/fund.shtml
 - * ALEPH: the Alliance for Jewish Renewal, www.aleph.org
 - * ARZA/WORLD UNION, North America. www.rj.org/arzawuna/
 - * WUPJ: World Union for Progressive Judaism. www.wupj.org
 - * WRJ: Women of Reform Judaism. www.rj.org/wrj
 - * NFTB: North Am. Federation of Temple Brotherhoods. www.nftb.org

- * HUC-JIR: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.
www.huc.edu
- * Leo Baeck School in Haifa, Israel
- * Rabbis for Human Rights (Israel)
- * Rabbis for Human Rights (America)
- * Jewish Voice for Peace
- * The Shalom Center, www.theshalomcenter.org

Guidance For Writing A D'var Torah

(From the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Handbook: A Manual for Parent and Student, Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ)

A d'var Torah (literally, a "word of Torah") is no more than the identification of a question about the Torah followed by a straightforward and simple answer. It is not a sermon or a term paper. It is a single idea based on the text of the Torah.

Part 1 The first step is to "identify" the question and/or the difficulty in the Torah portion.

There are two ways to look at the Torah portion:

- * You may choose to address the larger theme that runs throughout the text (for example, talking about the concept of law for the portion that contains the Ten Commandments);
or
- * You may choose to examine a single verse or even just a word in the Torah portion (for example: What can we learn about the Binding of Isaac from the fact that at the end of the story Abraham returns "alone"?).

Part 2 Once you have identified the question or problem, you need to consider how you would resolve it. What are your thoughts about it? What do you think is the way to read the Torah? The wonderful thing about Torah study is that there are no wrong answers. The process of midrash is the combination of the text and the reader. Torah is only complete when we put ourselves, through our ideas and questions, into the text. This makes the Torah not just an ancient document but a living and never-ending source of Truth. Think of the Torah as a ma-ayan, a "well," or a sha-ar, a "gateway," to important ideas. We want to hear the ideas you have to offer about the Torah.

Part 3 The last part of the d'var Torah is applying the lesson you have taught us to our lives today. This part is especially powerful when you apply it to your life, particularly as a bat or bar mitzvah.

The three parts of the d'var then are:

- * The introduction and identification of the question and/or the difficulty of the text;
- * Your solution; and
- * Applying the lesson (the solution) to our lives today.

The d'var Torah is not merely a thank-you speech. It is a teaching. On this day, you are a teacher.

Use the form on the next page to get started.

Here's How To Get Started on a D'var Torah

My Torah portion is _____ from the Book of _____.

The section from my Torah portion from which I will be reading is about:

Three questions I have about my Torah portion are: (e.g., What doesn't make sense?)

1)

2)

3)

Possible answers to one of the above questions are:

1)

2)

3)

Write about a situation in your own life that reminds you of your portion.

Ideas for the Parents' Talk

(Adapted from the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Handbook: A Manual for Parent and Student, Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ)

Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Shimon said: A man is responsible for his son until the age of thirteen; thereafter he must say, "Blessed is the One who has freed me from the responsibility of this boy!"

—Midrash Genesis Rabbah 63:10

The tradition of parents offering a blessing at a child's coming of age ceremony is ancient. The above quotation shows that it was performed thousands of years ago on the occasion of a child's first aliyah. Although it might seem inappropriate to recite a prayer freeing yourself from responsibility for your child, its underlying principle is instructive in thinking about what you might say to your son or daughter on the day he or she celebrates becoming a bar/bat mitzvah.

The intent of the parent's talk during our service is to give the mother and/or father the opportunity to publicly acknowledge—in a sacred setting—the joy and pride they feel at that moment. What is even more important, they also can share their hopes and dreams for their child. In other words, it is an opportunity to put the meaning of that special moment into words.

This is a unique opportunity—in the presence of community, friends and family—to tell your son or daughter about your hopes for him or her, and to ask God's blessings on your child's future. The talk should be addressed to your child, not to the congregation. Speak in the second person. For example, do not tell the congregation, "When Richard was a small child, we knew that he was special." Instead, say to your child, "Richard, when you were a small child, we knew that you were special." It makes a huge difference in keeping the focus on your child, which is where it belongs on this occasion.

You may wish to include a blessing for your child like one of the examples below, or to write something of your own. In any event, it's best to prepare your remarks in advance. Also, shorter is better. Each parent's remarks should be no more than two minutes. (Again, this is your child's moment, not yours). When you are done, please feel free to hug your child. Crying is permitted.

Below are some examples of blessings that parents can offer on this occasion:

* * *

Praised is God who has granted new responsibility to _____ and to us. As you begin to enjoy your new status among the Jewish people, a status that redefines your role in life, may God grant us the wisdom to continue as guides and parents, allowing you to live in accordance with the teachings of our Torah as a responsible Jewish adult.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,

(For a male) *shep'tarani mei-onsho shelazeh.*

(For a female) *shep'tarani mei-onshah shelazot.*

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, who has freed us of some responsibilities and conferred new ones upon _____.

Aliyah Primer

Below are the basic fundamentals of being called to the Torah for an aliyah. "Aliyah" Means to "go up" or "ascend." The word, as applied to the Torah honor, also implies a spiritual ascent. An aliyah is considered one of the most sacred honors in Judaism. Consequently, you must be Jewish and "of age" (a bar/bat mitzvah) to qualify for an aliyah. The ceremony of bar/bat mitzvah is a celebration of a child's first aliyah.

Jewish Name

Proper form requires you to be called to the Torah by your Jewish name. This includes not only your given name but the name(s) of your father and/or mother. Here are examples of the forms of Jewish names:

For men	Ya'akov ben Avraham v'Sarah
For women	Rachel bat Avraham v'Sarah

Although Jewish names are often called "Hebrew names," they may be either Hebrew or Yiddish.

Going Up

When your name is called, go up to the bimah, and stand next to the reader. She or he will point to the place in the sefer Torah (the Torah scroll) where she or he is reading. Touch that spot with the tzitzit (fringes) of your tallit (prayer shawl) or the avnet (Torah binding cloth, called a "wimpel" in Yiddish) and then kiss the tzitzit or avnet. At this point the reader will close the scroll. Some people choose to grasp the two wooden posts of the scroll while reciting the b'rachah (the blessing).

The First Blessing

Below is the blessing recited in Hebrew prior to the reading of the Torah. You should recite the first line, wait for the congregation to respond with the second line, then repeat that second line, and read the rest of the first blessing.

You: Bar'chu et Adonai ham'vorach.

The congregation: Baruch Adonai ham'vorach l'olam va-ed!

You: Baruch Adonai ham'vorach l'olam va-ed!

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam
asher bachar banu mikol ha-amim v'natan lanu et Torato.
Baruch Atah Adonai Notein ha-Torah.

The congregation: Amein!

Bless Adonai, the blessed One.
Blessed is Adonai, the blessed One forever and ever.
Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Source of all being,
who has chosen us from among the peoples and given us the Torah.
Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the Torah. Amen.

The Torah Reading

Following the conclusion of the first blessing, the reader will read the selection from the Torah. After completing the reading, the reader will indicate where the last word appears in the scroll. Again, touch that spot with the tzitzit of your tallit or the avnet and then kiss the tzitzit or avnet. The reader will close the scroll.

The Concluding Blessing

Following the Torah reading, the concluding berachah is recited. Again, the person offering the blessing may choose to grasp the posts of the Torah scroll while reciting the blessing:

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam
Asher natan lanu Torat emet
V'chayei olam nata b'tocheinu.
Baruch Atah Adonai notein ha Torah.

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Source of all being,
who has given us the Torah of truth
and implanted within us eternal life.
Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the Torah.

The congregation responds, "Amen."

After the Concluding Blessing

The person honored with the aliyah is often asked to read the translation of the Torah reading. This honor may also be given to another individual. Following the concluding blessing and translation, you should return to your seat.

Honors Work Sheet

Use this form to assign honors to the people you wish to honor at the service. These are the possible honors. You do not need to assign them all. The rabbi will help you to complete this sheet. Please make sure that all of the people to whom you have assigned honors know what is expected of them.

P'tichah (Opening the ark)—1 to 4 people _____

Hakafah (Carrying the Torah in procession before the reading)

NOTE: The bar/bat mitzvah usually carries the Torah in the procession after the reading.

Aliyah (Torah blessings)—Each aliyah can be assigned to one person or a small group of people (often a married couple). The third aliyah is reserved for the bar/bat mitzvah.

NOTE: Under some circumstances, an aliyah will be given to a member of the congregation for a special occasion. For example, an aliyah is traditionally offered to a couple on the Shabbat before their wedding or following the birth of a child. The rabbi will inform you if there is a need to assign an aliyah for an occasion such as this.

English Names

Jewish Names*

1.

2.

3.

Turgeman

(Translators)

Hagbahah (Lifting the Torah) _____

G'lilah (Dressing the Torah) _____

Motzi (reciting the blessing over the bread) _____

* Jewish names are usually Hebrew or Yiddish. They include the name of the person's father or the names of the person's father and mother. Examples are: Yonatan ben Shmuel v'Sara (Shmuel and Sara are the Jewish names of the parents), Rachel bat Moshe, or Oznat bat Avraham u'Ferl. Ask the rabbi if you have questions.

Kashrut at CBI

The synagogue's kitchen is not a kosher kitchen. However, the congregation has established standards for the foods that are appropriate to prepare in the kitchen and to serve in the synagogue. If you are hiring an outside caterer to serve food in the synagogue, please be sure that they are aware of these policies.

As a congregation, we have decided to keep the food served at all congregational functions "kosher style." We recognize that "kosher style" does not connote any level of observance of traditional Jewish law. Rather, it is a choice based on our response to Jewish custom and culture.

We have agreed to maintain these standards:

- No food will be served that includes pork (ham, bacon, etc.), shellfish (shrimp, lobster, etc.), or other categories of food that are specifically forbidden in Jewish law (octopus, squid, etc.).
- No food will be served that contains a mixture of meat and dairy products (cheeseburgers, meat on pizza, etc.)
- All meals are designated as either "meat" or "dairy."
- All Onegs and Kiddushes following Shabbat services are designated "dairy," unless it is announced otherwise in advance.
- At our "dairy meals" no food should be served that includes meat (except fish).
- At our "meat meals" no food should be served that includes any dairy products in its preparation (milk, butter, cheese, yogurt, etc.).
- We do not require the separation of "meat" and "milk" dishes, pots, utensils, etc.
- We do not require acceptable meats (beef, chicken, etc.) to be certified kosher according to traditional standards.
- We do not require processed foods to bear the symbol of a rabbinic authority (heksher).
- During the seven days of Passover, foods and products containing leaven will be removed from the kitchen and only foods free of leaven may be served at congregational events.

In addition, the rabbi makes these requests reflecting Jewish values of preserving life and preventing waste and cruelty:

- An effort should be made to serve healthy foods. We wish to limit foods prepared with refined sugar or that are high in fat. We encourage vegetarian choices. We encourage serving fresh fruits and vegetables whenever food is served.
- We encourage foods that reflect our environmental concerns. This includes making vegetarian choices and serving organic fruits and vegetables. We should especially avoid the meat of animals that are known to have been treated cruelly.

Your Se'udat Mitzvah/Reception

(From the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Handbook: A Manual for Parent and Student, Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ)

The religious part of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony occurs in the sanctuary. Choosing to focus on Jewish values during your later celebration will continue to sanctify the day and make it special and memorable. Remember, everything we do with our children teaches them something.

Decide as a family what you are celebrating and what this moment in your life means. This decision will help guide you through the rest of the planning stages. You may find the text Putting God on the Guest List by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (Jewish Lights Publishing) to be quite helpful.

Consider Jewish Values in Your Decision Making

- * G'milut Chasadim—Acts of Loving Kindness
- * Tzedakah—Righteousness/Justice/Sacred Giving
- * Talmud Torah—Study of the Torah
- * Hiddur P'nei Zakein—Honoring the Elderly
- * Zicharon—Memory
- * Shabbat—Honoring Shabbat
- * Tzar Ba'alei Chayim—Non-Cruelty to Animals
- * Tikkun Hanefesh—Repairing the Self
- * Tikkun Olam—Repairing the World

Some Tzedakah Suggestions:

* The invitation sets the tone for the celebration and can let your guests know what is important to you. Note on the back of the card that the simplicity of the invitation represents a donation to a tzedakah organization that you chose. The thank-you note can also be produced in this way.

* Donate 3% of the total cost of food to Mazon, an organization that helps feed hungry people nationwide. If you contact them ahead of time, they will send you cards to put on your tables, indicating that you have made a contribution.

* Give donations that can make a difference in the lives of others, not party favors that will cost you the same amount and end up in the trash. Give each guest a certificate indicating that a gift has been made in their honor to support Kibbutz Lotan or the Leo Baeck Education Center in Israel.

* Check to see if the leftover food can be donated to a soup kitchen. If you are somewhat insistent, many restaurants and caterers will help with this.

* Make either a financial donation to, or purchase something specific for CBI, our religious education program, or the synagogue library in honor of your becoming a bar/bat mitzvah.

Keep it Jewish

Begin the meal with Kiddush and Motzi and end it with singing Birkat HaMazon, the blessing after meals. Consider ending the celebration with Havdalah if the party will end late Saturday afternoon. Begin with Havdalah before a Saturday evening event.

Celebration Variations

It is common to have a celebration of some kind at a restaurant directly after services. Other models that deserve your consideration include:

- * Using the synagogue for a luncheon for guests following the Kiddush;
- * Having a luncheon at home;
- * Providing a luncheon for adult guests immediately after services and then having a more informal party for the children later that evening or the next day;
- * Inviting everyone to a mystery location and then involving them in a mitzvah project;
- * Taking a family trip to Israel;
- * Taking a family trip to the town in Europe (or any place in the world) from which your ancestors came and explore your Jewish roots together; and
- * Any combination of the above.

Closing Thoughts

Everything you do to make your bar/bat mitzvah celebration personal, filled with your values, and meaningful will enhance the experience for all. Every celebration need not look as if it's been shaped by the same cookie cutter. Have your celebration reflect who you are and what you believe as an individual and as a family. Make Jewish choices, and don't be afraid to be different. It's worth it! The memories of how you worked together and your incredibly meaningful celebration will last a lifetime. Put God on the guest list for your bar/bat mitzvah.

A Bar / Bat Mitzvah Checklist for Parents

Six to eight months ahead

- * The bar / bat mitzvah will begin to study his / her Torah reading
- * Begin discussing the d'var Torah with the bar / bat mitzvah—ask, “What do you want to say?”
- * Begin planning a tzeddakah project with the bar / bat mitzvah
- * Arrange for a CBI “consulting member” to help you with preparations
- * Make a guest list and order (or make) invitations
- * Arrange accommodations for out-of-town guests (hotel rooms, etc.)
- * Create a plan for the reception; hire a caterer, restaurant, music, etc., if you are using
- * Create a plan for transporting guests, if necessary
- * Hire a photographer, if you are using one

Two months ahead

- * Work with bar / bat mitzvah on tzeddakah project
- * Make decisions about giving service honors; ask for Hebrew names of people with aliyot
- * Prepare service program
- * Mail invitations
- * Order kippot (yarmulkes)
- * Select clothes for the occasion

One month ahead

- * Work with bar / bat mitzvah on the d'var Torah
- * Prepare parents' blessings
- * Finalize food, decorations and seating plans with caterers, restaurants, etc.
- * Order kosher meals, if necessary, for guests requiring them
- * Start writing “thank you” notes

One week ahead

- * Prepare wrapped candies for the service (if using)
- * Take photographs at the synagogue

Bring to Synagogue on the day of the service!

- * D'var Torah
- * Parents' blessing
- * Programs
- * Food for kiddush
- * Tallit
- * Kippot
- * Candy

Your Feedback

No process is perfect and we're always trying to improve ours. The rabbi wants to hear your feedback about our education programs to convey it to the Education Committee and our teachers. If you have comments or suggestions about any aspect of the Ne'arim Program, about your bar/bat mitzvah experience, or about this handbook, please feel free to contact the rabbi about your concerns. CBI is committed to treating your comments with confidentiality and appropriate attention.

So, You Still Have A Few Questions?

Please feel free to consult the rabbi if you have any questions about your child's bar/bat mitzvah celebration. The rabbi is happy to talk with you about meeting b'nei mitzvah requirements, tutoring, the d'var Torah, honors, kippot (yarmulkes), the kiddush following the service, the parental blessing, photography in the sanctuary, scheduling of dates, Shabbat attendance, special needs, the Torah blessings, tutoring schedule, Tzedakah Projects and more.

Just ask!