

Congregation Sha'are Shalom Religious School

B'NAI MITZVAH HANDBOOK



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CONGREGATION SHA'ARE SHALOM B'NAI MITZVAH GUIDELINES

POINTS OF CONTACT

Executive Director – point of contact for ensuring dues obligations are met, coordinating building operations and security

Rabbi – assist with date assignment, officiate, guide d'var torah and personal prayer writing

Director of Education – oversee religious school requirements and advisor of 13 mitzvot project

B'nai Mitzvah Tutor – weekly sessions to prepare Torah reading, Haftarah (optional), prayers for service leadership, rehearsal

Ritual Chair or Liaison – assist with date assignment, organization of honors and confer on decisions/adjustments

Simcha Manager – assist with planning and coordination of kiddush on day of event

Technology Coordinator – assist with streaming and recording

MEMBERSHIP AND FEES

A family must be in good standing with regard to membership and financial obligations at the start of the school year the child begins his/her bar/bat mitzvah training and on the actual date of the service. If this condition is not met, your date may be canceled. The family is responsible for payment of the bar/bat mitzvah fee set by Congregation Sha'are Shalom.

SETTING THE DATE

During a student's 5th grade year, Sha'are Shalom will inform families of the proposed date for b'nai mitzvah. The date is based on the Hebrew calendar and will be scheduled for the closest possible Shabbat following a 13th birthday, but not before unless an exception has been approved. The date will be on a regularly scheduled Shabbat morning service.

PREREQUISITES FOR B'NAI MITZVAH

In order to become a bar/bat mitzvah, the student must have progressed to the seventh grade of Congregation Sha'are Shalom's Religious School program, or its equivalent. He/she must be enrolled in and actively attending Religious School. Students are

expected to attend Religious School classes for the whole seventh grade year, regardless of their bar/bat mitzvah date. Only Jewish children – that is, children of Jewish mothers or children who have been formally converted to Judaism – are eligible to celebrate becoming a bar/bat mitzvah at Sha’are Shalom and will be assigned a bar/bat mitzvah date. If you have any questions, please consult the Rabbi.

During the years leading up to your child’s bar/bat mitzvah, your family will have many opportunities to attend Shabbat services (Friday night and Saturday morning), in order to become familiar with the service and be prepared to participate in a leadership role on the day of the *simcha*.

Beginning a year in advance and concluding before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date, as outlined below, your child will work to complete the 13 Mitzvot program both in religious school with peers as well as on his/her own at home and with family..

GOALS

Depending on your child’s ability, your child will have the opportunity to participate and lead in the following:

- Recite the *Shema* and other prayers at the Friday night service
- Learn the Torah *brachot* (blessings) to be called to the Torah for an *aliyah*
- Learn Torah trope and chant at least one Torah reading
- Prepare a *d’var Torah* (short sermon) related to the Torah or Haftarah portion
- Lead portions of Shabbat morning services
- Personalize and complete the **13 Mitzvot** program

Students who are able (based on a collaborative decision with the B’nai Mitzvah Tutor) may also learn a Haftarah reading and will be prepared to lead the Torah and Musaf services on Shabbat morning. Adjustments to the Haftarah may be made depending on portion length and student ability. If your child has the desire and demonstrates the ability to lead the Friday night service, in whole or in part, he or she may do so with the approval of the Ritual Committee.

B’NAI MITZVAH TRAINING

Between 6 and 8 months prior to the bar/bat mitzvah date, students will start to receive individual tutoring from a b’nai mitzvah instructor. Tutors will contact the family to set up the schedule of weekly lessons. Lessons are typically for a half hour but longer sessions can be arranged if needed.

D’VAR TORAH AND PERSONAL PRAYERS

Publicly sharing words of Torah and individual prayers are the most personal statements that a celebrant can make during the course of a bat/bar mitzvah. It is an opportunity that most 13 year-old students typically never have and these statements help make becoming

bar/bat mitzvah such a special experience. Three months before your student's date, the Rabbi will schedule an initial meeting to discuss these writing activities. Your student will receive resources and support from the Rabbi throughout their research, writing and speaking.

13 MITZVOT PROJECT

The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony celebrates the child's coming of age as a Jewish "adult" with full responsibility for performing *mitzvot*, which are the duties and obligations of Jewish life. All students complete our **13 MITZVOT** program, a learning-through-doing program based on rabbinic teachings. According to tradition, there are 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah. The Rabbis taught that all *mitzvot* fall into one of three areas: study, worship, and loving deeds. As they tell us:

"The world depends on three things: on Torah, on worship, and on loving deeds." –Pirkei Avot 1:2

13 MITZVOT has been created around these three categories of *mitzvot*: *Torah* (study), *avodah* (worship) and *gemilut hasadim* (loving deeds). To help prepare each student for becoming a bar/bat mitzvah, the student will be asked to fulfill *mitzvot* from each category. The completed **13 MITZVOT** packet should be turned in to the Director of Education and Youth Activities **three weeks** prior to the child's bar/bat mitzvah.

TORAH HONORS

Note: This section pertains to our traditional in-person services and may be modified to accommodate pandemic conditions.

The Ritual Committee welcomes the family to participate and honor guests with parts of the Torah service. The congregation reserves a set of honors for the bar/bat mitzvah family and guests including taking an *aliyah*, carrying the Torah, helping to open/close the Ark, dressing the Torah, and leading English readings. Some honors can only be assigned to Jews, while others are open to anyone. Since the bar/bat mitzvah takes place during the regular Shabbat Morning service, there will be *aliyot* reserved for congregants.

There are *four aliyot* reserved for the bar/bat mitzvah family plus an *aliyah* for the bar/bat mitzvah child. If the child is reading Haftarah, he/she will have the Maftir *aliyah*. If the child is not reading Haftarah, he/she will most likely be assigned the 7th *aliyah*. Typically, the *aliyah* prior to the bar/bat mitzvah is for the parents. Both Jewish and non-Jewish parents are invited up to the Torah to celebrate this occasion.

If parents are divorced and do not wish to share the parental *aliyah*, they may each have one. In this case, the family would only have two more *aliyot* to assign. If the family has two children celebrating their bar/bat mitzvah at the same service, two of the family's *aliyot* will be given to their children, leaving the family with three *aliyot* to assign, unless the children choose to share the *aliyah*.

Please complete the *Honors Form* and send it to the B'nai Mitzvah Liaison to the Ritual Committee at least three weeks before the service. Please make all attempts to have the honorees' complete Hebrew names: this means listing the person's Hebrew name and the Hebrew names of that person's parents. Also, please indicate if any of the honorees are Kohen or Levis. Please keep groups coming up for *aliyot* to no more than four people.

Outside of *aliyot* to the Torah, additional honors available to the Jewish members/guests of the bar/bat mitzvah family include:

- Carrying the Torah from the Ark at the beginning of the Torah service
- Returning the Torah to the Ark at the end of the Torah service
- Opening/Closing the Ark at the beginning of the Torah service
- Opening/Closing the Ark at the end of the Torah Service
- Dressing the Torah

There are also two English readings for families to choose from and that list will be sent out with the reminder to complete the *aliyot* form. All readings can be done by Jews or non-Jews.

Please consult with the Ritual Chair at least two months before the service if any family members or friends would like to chant a Torah portion.

ROLES OF PARENTS

Parents (or other chosen representative) are invited to present a *tallit* to their child prior to the beginning of the Torah service.

In lieu of making speeches, parents are invited to share words of blessing with their child on the *bimah* by reciting the *Parents' Prayer* or crafting your own blessing.

We suggest you educate all of your guests about synagogue behavior. This includes the following:

- Cell phones must be turned off
- Writing, drawing, and coloring are prohibited on Shabbat
- No photography or videotaping on Shabbat, with the exception of the synagogue's use of technology for streaming and recording the service for remote access
- Eating and drinking (except water) are prohibited in the sanctuary
- Smoking is prohibited anywhere on the synagogue grounds
- All males must wear a *kippah* on their heads
- Women approaching the *bimah* must have their head covered
- Modest dress for everyone is encouraged
- Gifts should not be brought to the synagogue on Shabbat

FAMILY INCLUSION

At Sha'are Shalom, we believe that parents and family have a right to celebrate these life moments no matter their religion. We also believe in honoring parents' and relatives' decisions with respect to their own religious choices. We strive to balance these values with our commitment to Jewish tradition as reflected in the following:

- The Bar/Bat Mitzvah's Reading from the Torah
Reading from the Torah scroll (*Sefer Torah*), our most revered scripture, is a sacred moment in the bar/bat mitzvah rite. Therefore, parents regardless of faith, may stand on the *bimah* alongside their child, while he or she reads from the Torah. Then, while on the *bimah*, parents regardless of faith, may receive and give special blessings.
- A Child's Hebrew Name
We include both parents, regardless of faith, in their child's Hebrew name, e.g. *Ya'akov ben Yitzhak v'Gloria*.
- Torah Processional and Recessional
We encourage parents regardless of faith to join the Torah processional and recessional to greet friends and family and receive blessings from their guests.
- Tallit Presentation
Anyone may present a *tallit* to a bar/bat mitzvah.

B'NAI MITZVAH CELEBRATIONS

Note: This section pertains to our traditional in-person services and may be modified to accommodate pandemic conditions.

At Sha'are Shalom, we pride ourselves on being a warm and welcoming community. Our Religious School places a heavy emphasis on creating community in the classroom and encourages all of our students to be kind and caring toward one another. As such, we strongly encourage that every family invites all their child's Religious School classmates to their b'nai mitzvah celebration so that no one feels left out.

CANDY

If the family chooses, congregants in the first four rows are invited to shower the bar/bat mitzvah with candy at the designated time. Here are some guidelines:

- The Ritual Committee will provide a supply of Jelly Beans, but the bar/bat mitzvah family is responsible for packing bags in the synagogue and tying double knots. Families wishing to use this supply must donate \$20 to the Ritual Committee.

- If the family chooses not to use jelly beans, the candy chosen to be used must:
 - Be soft
 - Be kosher, pareve and nut-free
 - If items need to be packaged individually; must be done at the synagogue

Families should be aware that even without plastic wrapping, the distribution of candy can be noisy and disruptive. For ease of distribution, it is recommended that members of the Ritual Committee or designees be responsible for handing out the candy

PROGRAMS

Program books are a wonderful way to educate visitors while also personalizing the service. To ensure accurate representation of the synagogue rituals and service components, program books need to be approved by the Executive Director prior to printing. For examples of program books, please contact the Director of Education and Youth Activities.

FRIDAY NIGHT ONEGS

Families of a bar or bat mitzvah are asked to share their *simcha* with the congregation and their guests by co-sponsoring the *oneg* after Friday night services. They, along with one or two other congregant families, will be assigned to provide the Friday night *oneg* prior to their child's bar or bat mitzvah. All food must comply with the current food policy of Congregation Sha'are Shalom.

SATURDAY MORNING KIDDUSH

Families of a bar or bat mitzvah sponsor the *kiddush*, open to the entire congregation, following their child's bar or bat mitzvah service. All food must comply with the current food policy of Congregation Sha'are Shalom.