



CONGREGATION Shir Tikvah

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Overview

The terms *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah* mean “liable to the commandments”. If you are reading this, your child is considering committing him or herself to participation in the Jewish community in general and in the Shir Tikvah community in particular. Welcome to this opportunity to learn and grow as a family.

The ceremony of *bar mitzvah* or *bat mitzvah* is not a performance or a graduation from religious education. Instead, it is a metaphor for a door opening into the adult level of Jewish ritual life. Preparing for the ceremony is a chance for your child to experiment with the sense of what it means to be a responsible Jewish adult. It’s also a chance for the family to deepen its understanding of Jewish identity and belonging. The ceremony itself marks our congregation’s recognition of the newest member of our community, as well as a celebration that the student has chosen to enter into a life of adult responsibilities and *mitzvot*.

This issue of choice is key. A student is automatically eligible to become a member of the Jewish religious community at age 12 ½ (for girls) or 13 (for boys). Whether they participate in the ceremony marking that transition is a decision the child and family must make together.

During the *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony, the child is:

- a. Offered the honor of participating in the **regular congregational prayers**, including the reading of the **Torah** and **Haftarah**, on a Saturday morning.
- b. Invited to prepare a **d’var Torah**, a short presentation in which the child speaks of his or her own understanding of what he/she is about to read from the scroll.
- c. Encouraged to give thanks for this celebration by doing *tzedakah* in the form of a **mitzvah project**.

Preparing for the ceremony can be very meaningful for the child, the family and the entire congregation. It is worthwhile to carefully consider the reality of the work involved to make sure the family is ready to support the child in reaching this goal.

The celebration of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Shir Tikvah is not necessarily similar to what you may be familiar with at other congregations. Please don’t assume anything based on prior experience elsewhere! We are always ready to explain, and you will learn a lot simply by your participation in our Shabbat morning services. Staff and clergy will work with you throughout the process.

Timeline

Rabbi Ariel and the Shir Tikvah staff will be your family's guides through the process of preparing for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Here is an approximate timeline of that process.

1½ - 2 years prior: Meet with Rabbi: Discuss the process of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Shir Tikvah. If students choose to move forward, this meeting will include setting a date and picking a tutor. Your family must be members in good financial standing to proceed.

1 year prior: Meet with Rabbi: Check in on the tutoring process. Discuss the mitzvah project. At this point, families should also begin attending Shabbat morning services.

6 months prior: Meet with Rabbi: Check in on the tutoring process. Student and Rabbi should discuss d'var Torah.

3 months prior: Meet with Rabbi: Check in on the tutoring process. Student and Rabbi should discuss d'var Torah.

3 months prior: Meet with Amelia Schroth: Discuss logistics surrounding the ceremony and Kiddush luncheon, if any. Give Amelia (and Rabbi) your child's Hebrew name.

*PAYMENT IS DUE AT THIS TIME.**

\$350 – covers the cost of hallah, candy, wine and staff time

\$195 – covers additional staff time if an on-site luncheon planned

1 month prior: Meet with Rabbi: Discuss various honors you might choose to offer to family and friends, such as an *aliyah* (being called to the Torah), *hagba'ah* (lifting the Torah for the congregation to see) and *gelilah* (dressing the Torah in its vestments).

1 month prior: At Home: Student should begin creating a visual display of his/her mitzvah project.

1 week before: Meet with Rabbi: Rehearsal – walk through the service and practice reading from the actual scroll. Bring mitzvah project display. Send electronic copy of d'var Torah to the office.

1 day before: Rest and Relax

Enjoy Shabbat dinner with your friends and family. It will be a wonderful event.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah – Preparing for the Ceremony

TUTORING

After your initial meeting, Rabbi Ariel will make the initial contact to connect you with a tutor. Schedule an initial meeting, then work out a mutually convenient (usually weekly at first, possibly becoming bi-weekly) schedule to follow.

Tutors are independent contractors and are to be paid by the Bat/Bar Mitzvah family. When feasible, two students may prepare together. The amount of time a student will need to adequately prepare depends on the individual.

One of the benefits of working with a tutor is that each student can work at his or her own pace and prepare the amount of material determined appropriate by Rabbi, the tutor and the family. This may include the Torah *maftir*, the Torah blessings, regular congregation prayers, as well as the *Haftarah* and *d'var Torah*. Some students also opt to learn some conversational Hebrew; others prefer to deepen their understanding of the prayer Hebrew and their expertise in singing the different chanted melodies.

ATTEND SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES

The more you and your family become a part of the community, the more meaningful it will be when it is your child's turn to lead prayer. You and your child will need to be quite comfortable with the structure, choreography, and tunes of the regular Saturday morning service. This will require attendance on at least 10 or more occasions. The majority of families begin attending at least a year prior to the ceremony. You are both more than welcome to begin attending the adult Torah Study which immediately precedes the service.

MITZVAH PROJECT

Jewish tradition teaches that one gives thanks by giving; for that reason, many Jews mark happy occasions by giving *tzedakah*. The Mitzvah Project introduces your child to this important concept, and the project should reflect some aspect of the child's personality as well as Jewish ethics. One example: a child worked at the dog shelter and taught the congregation the Jewish ethic of *tzaar baalei hayim*, sensitivity to "the pain of animals", in his *d'var Torah*.

As part of the Nashira Education Project, your child will be exposed to many good causes. If you need support in choosing a project, consult with the Rabbi, your tutor or Katie Schneider, Education Director.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah – The Ceremony

EREV SHABBAT

You are certainly warmly invited to have the honor of lighting the candles and leading the Kiddush during Erev Shabbat *Tefilah* the evening before. But you are not required to attend, and many of our families choose to celebrate Shabbat at home with their visiting family and guests. If you choose to come to services and you expect to bring more than 20 guests with you, expect to provide an additional loaf of hallah.

GREETERS FOR THE SERVICE

In the past, members of Hevra serve at the greeters at door. If you have other wishes, you'll have a chance to discuss it with Amelia in your check-in with her 3 months prior to the event.

PROGRAM FOR THE SERVICE

A program is **not** required. Each family should judge whether it will be helpful for guests who are not familiar with what a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is, or what occurs during Shabbat services. They can read it before the service begins and get a flavor of what is to come. If you do choose to make a program, remember two things: first, you will be taking 90% of them back to be recycled as congregants will not keep them, and second, there is no standard Program.

That being said, you do not have to re-invent the wheel. Programs from past Bar/Bat Mitzvahs are available and "plagiarism" is encouraged. They have ranged from a one-page (front and back) to several pages long.

If you are creating a program, we recommend including the Torah and Haftarah portions in both Hebrew and English.

If you are interested in seeing examples created by other families, let the Shir Tikvah office know, we have many copies available.

PHOTOGRAPHY/VIDEOTAPE

This is not a performance. Having a photographer or someone openly videotaping the service is not appropriate. Any photos or videotaping must be done before the service begins (posed pictures with family and friends) or after it ends (candids during the socializing after we say the blessings over wine and hallah).

THE HONOR OF AN ALIYAH

The "*aliyah*" is defined as the honor of chanting the blessings before and after the Torah is read. Your child will have the final *aliyah*- "last is best", as they say in Hebrew, no matter how much or little Torah s/he reads. Usually the parent/s do the blessing for the next-to-last *aliyah*, regardless of who actually reads that part of the Torah. Sometimes the person who is given the honor of the blessing will also be able to read, but it is not necessary.

Because of the text of the blessing, it's not appropriate to offer this honor to a non-Jew. However, we do invite non-Jewish family members to be part of a larger group that includes Jews in an *aliyah* when and if it seems appropriate - like a non-Jewish parent, who was likely at least as instrumental as the Jewish parent in bringing the child to that moment, through support, carpooling and other kinds of parental help. We don't expect the non-Jewish parent or other relative to recite the blessing, but they are welcome to come up and stand with those who will recite it.

There are seven *aliyot* and the *maftir*.

READING FROM THE TORAH

If you have family members who would like to read from the Torah, they are welcome to participate, as are friends. Other members of our community may also participate in reading the Torah that morning, and, almost certainly, the Rabbi will be involved.

If you have Jewish family or friends reading Torah, please get a firm confirmation that they are indeed committed to reading/chanting. When you have that list as fail-safe as you can get it, the Rabbi will assign readings. They will each be at least 3 verses long. Also, even though your child has learned to chant the Torah and will do so, it is not required at Shir Tikvah for the Torah to be chanted by the other readers.

OTHER HONORS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

Other honors you can consider offering to people, in consultation with Rabbi:

- Holding the Torah aloft for all to see (two strong people).
- Helping to dress the Torah (one person).
- Opening the Ark doors

If you have a non-Jewish family member whom you wish to honor and don't see how you can do that, given the above, talk to the Rabbi. She will work it out in the best possible way for your family and your family dynamic. Remember that sometimes it's best to honor family and friends at a private family gathering.

REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE COMMUNITY

Three people from the Shir Tikvah community are selected to represent the entire Jewish community, and welcome the Bar/Bat Mitzvah into that community. It is not your job to arrange for them during the service. Rabbi does that. If you have people in mind you would like to be considered for this, just ask Rabbi.

CELEBRATING AT THE END

There is no applause at the service. In order to satisfy the impulse to applaud, we follow the custom of inviting congregants and guests to throw candy at the end of the *Haftarah* recitation.

Our *minhag* at Shir Tikvah is for Hevra members to pass out the candy. You may suggest cousins, siblings or classmates to help as well.

At the end of the service, everyone will be asked to come to the front of the sanctuary for Kiddush. After the blessings, parents will have a chance to express their gratitude. (You might thank the people who have helped you and your child reach this day, and perhaps even remember a special someone who could not be there. It is **not** customary at Shir Tikvah to speak on the accomplishments of your child during this part of the service. You may do so at your private party.)

Bar/Bat Mitzvah – After the Ceremony

There are several options if families would like to offer refreshments for their guests and the rest of the congregation after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. There have been many different kinds of events after the ceremony. A luncheon is often a nice option, since it gives the entire congregation a chance to celebrate together, but it is not required and will not always be the right choice.

LUNCHEON PROTOCOL

Our luncheon policies are as follows:

1. Your additional luncheon fee covers 2 staff members to provide set up/clean up and food service. We will also provide linens, dishware, glasses, etc.
2. Luncheon: provide the food through a restaurant and arrange for delivery by 11:30 on the day of the event. **There will be no exceptions to this rule.** Shir Tikvah has worked with YaHala, Baby Doll Pizza, Nicholas', Elephants Delicatessen and Kenny & Zuke's in the past. *Please confirm your vendors with the office.*
3. Dessert: can be homemade. *Please confirm delivery arrangements with the office.*

The Shir Tikvah kitchen is not kosher according to Jewish law, but we follow kosher practice. **We don't mix meat and dairy and there is no pork or shellfish.** Vegetarian is always an option. There are usually about 40 people who attend Saturday morning services so count on including them if you provide lunch after services.

The luncheon can be anything from a simple Kiddush lunch of bagels and cream cheese to a full spread. It can also be a standing reception-type. All styles have occurred at Shir Tikvah with great success.

SPECIAL KIDDUSH

Families may opt for a special Kiddush upstairs in the back of the shul rather than a luncheon. This may include cookies, juice or fruit. Paper goods will need to be provided by the families. Families will be asked to help clean up after the event. There is no additional charge for this option, unless extra staff is required.