

THE NEWSHUL

B'NAI MITZVAH HANDBOOK



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Dear B'nai Mitzvah Families,

The wisdom of Judaism has recognized the significance of marking the in-between places in our lives. The *Mezuzah* that we kiss as we move between our home and the world, and the intertwined candle of *havdalah* which separates sacred from not-yet-sacred time, are both markers of transitory moments. So much goes on in these in-between moments, there is movement and change, sometimes confusion and tension; Judaism has understood that these moments present the opportunity for blessing. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is just that. We take a moment in the life of an individual to say, "You are somewhere in-between childhood and adulthood. Wherever you are on your path, teach us something, and we will bless you."

The B'nai Mitzvah program at The New Shul is different, not just in its form, but also in its approach. The preparation period is one of great anticipation and excitement. While it does involve hard work on the part of each student, it is also fun and rewarding, a time to bond with fellow students in and out of the classroom. Yet a child does not "have" a Bar or Bat Mitzvah—he or she *becomes* one. The moment of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah marks the first step of Jewish maturity and responsibility. It is for this reason that we treat the experience as a process of inner transformation, not simply a ceremonial event.

The New Shul wants to put the spiritual and creative components into what has become, in many instances, merely an excuse for a party. That is why we have developed a B'nai Mitzvah program that is so engaging and multi-faceted. In addition to the school commitment and tutoring, I will have three meetings with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student and/or family (see page 6 for details on these meetings).

Not every Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony at The New Shul will be identical, and not every experience preparing for it will be the same. Our goal, however, is that all will be rewarding, all will be causes for great and joyful celebration, and all will be enriching - not climactic conclusions, but catalysts for an even more exciting and vibrant Jewish life to come.

B'shalom,

Rabbi Zach Fredman

The Bar / Bat Mitzvah

“Bar and Bat Mitzvah is about ritual maturity. It is about growing up as a Jew. It is about becoming a fuller member of the Jewish community. But it is also about moral responsibility, about connecting to Torah, to community, to God.”
(Putting God on the Guest List, Jeffrey K. Salkin, p. 11)

Bar Mitzvah means “son of the commandment” in Aramaic and Hebrew. **Bat Mitzvah** is the feminine form, when a girl becomes a “daughter of the commandment.” These terms can be understood as “a male/female to whom the commandments pertain.” The Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah is the ceremonial occasion that marks the time when a young person is recognized as an adult in the Jewish community and is responsible for performing mitzvot (commandments). Historically, at the age of thirteen, a Jewish boy or a girl has the right to take part in leading religious services, to count in a *minyan* (the minimum number of people needed to perform certain parts of religious services), to form binding contracts and to testify before religious courts.

A Jewish child automatically becomes a Bar or Bat Mitzvah upon reaching the age of thirteen. No ceremony or reception is needed to assume these rights and obligations. The ceremony is not required as it does not fulfill any commandment in the Torah nor is it mentioned in the Talmud (Jewish code of law). The B’nai Mitzvah ceremony is a relatively modern innovation, developed during the late Middle Ages as a ceremony which was integrated into the service at the synagogue and then followed by a social celebration. In Europe during the 15th century, the Bar Mitzvah evolved so that the service and ceremony was followed by *s’udat mitzvah* (festive meal) at which the boy would give his commentary on the weekly Torah portion and would then receive religious gifts such as books and *tefillin* (phylacteries).

The Bat Mitzvah, developed in Italy and in France, was first mentioned in a 19th century book of Jewish law. The first modern American Bat Mitzvah occurred on May 6, 1922 in New York City, when the eldest daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan (the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism) became a Bat Mitzvah. Very few Orthodox congregations have formal Bat Mitzvah ceremonies. Today, Liberal, Reform and Conservative Jewish congregations in the United States and around the world encourage young women and men to become a Bat or Bar Mitzvah at age 13, marking their symbolic entry into Jewish adulthood.

Bar / Bat Mitzvah Questions & Answers

Who can become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at The New Shul?

All children of members of The New Shul are encouraged to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah following their 13th birthdays. In order to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at The New Shul, your child must be enrolled in B'nai Mitzvah Academy by 5th grade. To be fair to all children, every student is required to make a commitment to completing the entire program which concludes at the end of the 8th grade year, regardless of when he/she becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

What are the other requirements for becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

As an expression of commitment to the Jewish tradition and The New Shul community, and as a way to become familiar with the services, its contents, melodies, and meanings, each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student is expected to attend *all* Saturday morning Shabbat Services and as many of the other services (Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat and/or holidays) throughout the year as possible.

How are the Bar/Bat Mitzvah dates determined?

Generally, dates are assigned in order of birth date. However, if a student needs additional time for preparation, the ceremony may be held later.

Where will services take place?

As of now, all B'nai Mitzvah services with The New Shul are held at Village Community School (272 West 10th Street). This room can accommodate approximately 300 people. All Shabbat morning services begin at 10:30am and end around 12:15pm. If you are interested in hosting a larger oneg in the cafeteria, advance reservations are required between our office and VCS.

Who will lead the service?

The Shabbat morning services are led by Rabbi Zach.

Who will train my child?

The New Shul has a team of gifted *madrichim* (guides) who prepare our children and Rabbi Zach will meet with the students often. Amy Eichenwald Golding and Rabbi Zach will match your student with the tutor best suited to his/her interests and learning style.

What does tutoring cost?

Madrichim receive \$80 per hour. Your child will study with his/her *madrich/ah* once a week for 8-12 months (depending on the student's needs) before the ceremony. In addition, there may be costs for books or study materials.

What *Tanach* (Bible) should I purchase for my child?

We recommend that you purchase any one of these three version of the Torah: Etz Hayim Chumash: Torah and Commentary published by United Synagogue of Conservative

Judaism, JPS Hebrew-English Tanach: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS translation, or The Living Torah by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan.

What is expected of the family?

The family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah may choose to create a Shabbat handout for the service. The handout is a wonderful educational tool, which includes the outline of the service and personal messages. A template is available on our website at www.newshul.org.

Some families like to throw candy at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah after her/his Torah reading. This act symbolizes showing our children with sweetness after the completion of this wonderful milestone.

It has become tradition for the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to host the community kiddush following the service on the day of the ceremony. Whether modest or elaborate, the kiddush provides a wonderful way for the entire community to celebrate this joyous occasion together. Families have also chosen to order flowers to be placed on the bimah. Flowers may be delivered at 9:30am on the day of the service.

Each family that is celebrating a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is asked to act as “Shabbat Mensch” for one Saturday morning Shabbat service and one Friday night service during that year. On your date you are asked to arrive early to help set up, greet community members and guests, pass out prayer books and then stay after the service to help put things away.

All financial obligations must be met at least one month before the Bat/Bar Mitzvah (membership, B’nai Mitzvah Academy dues, and B’nai Mitzvah Fee). It is customary for families to make a financial gift to the shul in honor of their child’s coming-of-age and to demonstrate appreciation for and commitment to their community. Gifts have ranged from \$500 to \$2,000, but any amount is greatly appreciated.

We also encourage the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrant to contribute some portion of the gifts that s/he receives to charity. Tzedakah is a fundamental teaching of Judaism and a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an excellent occasion to emphasize its importance.

Can we photograph and videotape the Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Photography is only allowed during the service from the designated area centrally located in the balcony. There is no flash photography allowed during the service. Photos may be taken before and after the service as long as it does not interfere with set-up / clean-up. Videotaping follows the same guidelines as still photography. Video cameras should remain stationary on a tripod in the designated area in the balcony. Unnecessary noise and distraction from the service will result in photographer or videographer to be asked to leave the premises. Please call the office with any questions regarding this issue.

The New Shul *Madrichim*

The year of study and preparation to become a B'nai Mitzvah is one of growth and exploration. There are many people in our community who lead the students on this journey to Jewish adulthood, but none as important and present as your child's B'nai Mitzvah *madrichim*.

The word *madrich* (or *madrichah* for a woman) means "guide." We have decided to use this title because our role far exceeds the job description of a "tutor." A *madrich* is the student's primary teacher in the B'nai Mitzvah process, giving your child the tools to learn how to read Hebrew, chant from the Torah, participate in the Shabbat services, interpret their Torah portion and create a personal teaching based on the text.

This is a long and oftentimes challenging process, but will be one of the most rewarding and memorable experiences in the life of your child and your family. Many parents have told us how much their child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah teacher was missed after the ceremony. "She became part of the family," one mother said.

The *madrichim* of The New Shul are warm, intelligent, and creative individuals with years of teaching experience. Together with Amy Eichenwald Golding and Rabbi Zach, they have developed a B'nai Mitzvah curriculum, which can be adjusted, based on each student's individual needs and talents. This personalized approach to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation allows our students to develop their critical thinking skills and gives them the opportunity to flex their creative muscles while writing their d'var Torah (speech). The *madrichim* use various teaching methods to ensure that each child will be able to read and chant the Hebrew text of the Torah on the day of their B'nai Mitzvah ceremony.

The New Shul has set up a B'nai Mitzvah tutoring policy to make sure each student receives the most thorough preparation possible in the months leading up to his or her ceremony. **There is a minimum of eight months of private tutoring, with one of The New Shul *madrichim*. The *madrich* given to your family is paid \$80 per week, four sessions per month. Please talk to your *madrich* to set up a method of payment. Two sessions a week may be required based on your child's Hebrew level. There is a 24-hour cancellation policy for both student and tutor. Missed lessons should be rescheduled for that or the following week.** Your *madrich* may require the student to have a small tape player/recorder to practice the songs and melodies needed to be learned for her/his Bat/bar Mitzvah. Daily practice of the B'nai Mitzvah material is a necessary component of this learning process. **Please encourage your child to study their prayers and portions as it will make the sessions with the *madrich* more productive and their experience becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah more rewarding.** The B'nai Mitzvah students are also required to attend as many Shabbat services as possible.

It is not a coincidence that the B'nai Mitzvah happens during the 13th year, a time of physical and emotional change. The B'nai Mitzvah process will make your daughter or son a stronger, more self-confident young adult. It is the job of the *madrich* to start your child on the path of discovering what it means to be a Jew.

If you have any questions please contact Rabbi Zach, the *Madrich* Coordinator, at rabbizach@newshul.org, or Bonnie Streigold, at Bonnie@newshul.org

For B'nai Mitzvah Students

Minimum and Maximum Requirements

Torah Chanting: Our *minhag* (custom) is for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to chant in Hebrew, 12-15 verses from the Torah; this can be adjusted by the *madrich* (guide) depending on the student's ability and in consultation with Rabbi Zach. The Torah chanting is preceded and by the traditional Hebrew Torah blessing.

Translation: Our students translate the verses they read into English, often taking on the voice of one of the characters themselves, say God, Sarah, or Moses.

Teachings: Our students offer four teachings, corresponding to their sections from the Torah. Often the teachings include questions for participation from the congregation.

Haftarah: Our *minhag* is for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to, at a minimum, chant the Hebrew blessings that precede and/or follow the Haftarah passage. A creative project elaborating on the themes of the Torah portion (poetry, art, monologue, cookbook, comicbook, etc.) will be made by the student.

Special Additions: Our *minhag* is to make The New Shul worship experience as meaningful and joyful as possible for your family and others, while removing the "proprietary" feeling that is all too common at today's typical Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. We therefore do not have the student lead the entire service, but rather take a leading role during the most key sections of it. Nevertheless, a student may *add* to his/her responsibilities by, for instance, leading the community in a prayer or a song, or developing and presenting a creative interpretation of the Torah translation. Any additional elements must be proposed *well in advance* to the *madrich* and approved by Rabbi Zach.



Honors of the Ceremony

Possible Honors

During the Shabbat morning service in which the Bar or Bat Mitzvah occurs, there are several opportunities for families to distribute honors to family members and friends. These will be worked out with Rabbi Zach, usually one week prior to the service during the rehearsal with the family and tutor. Below are some suggestions for honors that may be filled by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family.

Opening the Ark (2 people)

Chanting an *aliyah* (2 aliyot – up to 10 people can be honored per aliyah)

During the Torah service, *aliyot* are given to the family. An *aliyah* is the honor of “going up” to recite the blessings before and after the reading of a section of Torah by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It is customary for the last *aliyah* to be given to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Other *aliyot* may be given to parents, grandparents, older siblings, and other relatives and friends.

Lifting the Torah (1 person)

This honor happens during the Torah service.

Dressing and/or undressing the Torah (2 people)

This honor happens during the Torah service.

Sitting with the Torah (1 person)

This occurs during the student’s Haftarah creative project, after the Torah is dressed.

Passing the Torah

Before the Torah service, the immediate family (grandparents, parents, older siblings) come up before the congregation and physically *pass* the Torah from one generation to the next until it reaches the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, at which point the *hakafah* (procession) begins.

Holding the Wine/Challah (2 people)

Closing the Ark (2 people)



B'nai Mitzvah check list

- ✓ - Program Template
- ✓ - Parent prayers
- ✓ - List of honors
- ✓ - Schedule a meeting with Rabbi Zach
- ✓ - Are you ordering Kippot/Yarmulkes? We have plenty, so it isn't necessary but many people like to hand them out as a keepsake
- ✓ - Photographer or Videographer? Please remind him/her that no flash may be used during the service and that s/he will be shooting from the balcony during the service.
- ✓ - We recommend that you order flowers for the bimah/stage. If you are throwing a party in another venue, you can bring them to the next space. Flowers can arrive to VCS between 9:30am-10am
- ✓ - Kiddush – Minimum requirement of challah, wine/juice and finger foods. We ask that you cater for approx 10 extra people so that members and ushers can join in on the celebration. Please bring 1-2 table cloths for the tables as well.
- ✓ - We have a wine kiddush cup, but you certainly can bring a personal one that adds sentimental value
- ✓ - Are you going to throw candy? If so, we recommendc sunkist chuckles (they are soft!) and can be bought online on amazon or have a fun field trip to Economy Candy on the LES. Don't forget to bring a basket to put the candy in.
- ✓ - Buy a new Tallis or bing a special one from the family.

If you have any additional questions please contact Joy Haims:
joy@newshul.org

Bar & Bat Mitzvah Book & Website List

Recommended Books for Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Diam, Barbara: *Bat Mitzvah: A Jewish Girls Coming of Age*

David, Judith: *Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is This Anyway?*

Leneman, Helen: *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming Together*

Seifer Sage, Linda: *The Complete Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planner*

Salkin, Rabbi Jeffrey K.: *For KIDS – Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Claim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah*

Salkin, Rabbi Jeffrey K.: *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*

Epstein, Ellen & Jane Lewit: *The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planbook*

Books for Writing a D'var Torah

Beiner, Stan J.: *Sedra Scenes*

Fields, Harvey: *A Torah Commentary for Our Times, (Vol 1-3)*

Goldberg Loeb, Sorel & Barbara Binder Kadden: *Teaching Torah: A Treasury of Insights and Activities*

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Websites

www.bible.ort.org Navigating the Bible. An online Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutor

www.jewschool.com Jew School: Two Jews, Three Opinions

<http://www.mitzvahs.myevent.com> Create your own B'nai Mitzvah website

www.my-bar-mitzvah.com Torah and Haftarah portions. Submit or search for a speech/story on a particular Torah portion. Sample invitations.

www.myjewishlearning.com My Jewish Learning: The Personal Gateway to Jewish Exploration

www.ritualwell.org Ritual Well: Ceremonies for Jewish Living