

CONGREGATION  
KEHILLAT SHALOM

BNAI MITZVAH MANUAL

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## INTRODUCTION

Kehillat Shalom wishes Mazal Tov to you and your family on the occasion of your forthcoming Simcha. The entire congregation shares your excitement as you embark upon this wonderful experience. The Bnai Mitzvah ceremony you and your family will be celebrating in the near future is a special time of happiness and joy, as well as of pride and commitment. Celebrating this milestone in our congregation, and in the context of a religious service, expresses the profound link between the Bnai Mitzvah, the Jewish community, and God. We hope that the basic religious significance of the joyous event remains central to your plans and guides the way you celebrate this important occasion.

At Congregation Kehillat Shalom, it is our goal to ensure that the Bnai Mitzvah process is a very special one, full of joy and meaning. We feel very strongly that each family should participate actively in this important event to deepen its meaning and to strengthen our community ties. In Jewish tradition, to

reach the age of religious maturity is to become responsible for observing the mitzvot. Thus, one comes of age as a Bar Mitzvah—“Son of the Commandment,” or Bat Mitzvah—“Daughter of the Commandment.” In a technical sense, this happens automatically upon reaching the proper age. But since our Jewish tradition seeks to add many kinds of beauty, through ceremony in our lives, this process of coming of age at 13 years for a boy and 12 or 13 years for a girl, has become a milestone, which we celebrate within the context of a worship service. Indeed, we like to emphasize that this is a community celebration, in which all the Jewish People rejoice, rather than merely a private family celebration.

Planning for this event can seem overwhelming. We know that there will be numerous details for you to think about during the upcoming months. The information in this booklet describes our synagogue policies and answers many of the questions that arise as a family prepares to celebrate a Bnai Mitzvah. Please consult this handbook often and the timeline supplied frequently. Please do not hesitate to call the synagogue office for any additional questions that may arise.

Once again, Mazal Tov to you and your family. We look forward to the celebration of your simcha in our congregation.

## SETTING THE DATE

Parents should contact the synagogue office approximately two years before the child's 13th birthday to reserve a date for the Bnai Mitzvah. A letter of reminder will be sent from the synagogue to parents at the beginning of the student's Gimel year in the Religious School, or in the case of Day School students, the beginning of fifth grade. Selection of a date will be made in consultation with the Ritual Committee and is based on the child's Hebrew birthday and his/her Hebrew reading ability. While it is our minhag (tradition) at Congregation Kehillat Shalom, to schedule the Bar or Bat Mitzvah shortly after the child's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, a girl may choose to have Bat Mitzvah after her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. If this option is chosen, it needs to be understood from the outset, that the Bat Mitzvah celebrant is (if a Religious School student) still required to complete the Hey class. Day School students may be required by their school to set a date as much as three years in advance of the simcha in order to avoid conflicts with classmates who attend other synagogues.

## ROLE AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE CANDIDATE

1. It is essential to understand that to become a Bnai Mitzvah is a process, not an event. That is, one becomes a Bnai Mitzvah in recognition of having fulfilled a number of educational and maturation steps, not simply having been trained intensively for a one-day performance. In the broadest sense, Bnai Mitzvah lessons began many years ago, with the creation of a Jewish atmosphere in your home, with involvement in Synagogue observances, attendance at Religious School or Day School and in seeking an active level of participation in Jewish life. This series of experiences intensifies approximately eight to twelve months before the actual Shabbat of the Bnai Mitzvah as study begins with the Bnai Mitzvah teacher. As a Conservative congregation, we operate under the educational code of the United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education. As a part of this code, every child must spend five years in the congregation's Religious School or in any other approved Religious/Hebrew School or Day School/Yeshiva in order to be privileged to become a Bnai Mitzvah at our Shabbat service. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the Ritual Committee, under certain extenuating circumstances.

2. Since our congregation places emphasis on a sound Jewish education, one who completes his/her five years of Jewish studies prior to the Bnai Mitzvah year must, at least for the year of the Bnai Mitzvah, be concurrently enrolled in an approved program of continued study.

3. In addition, each child is required to attend a minimum of ten Kehillat Shalom Shabbat services beginning between six to eight months prior to the Bnai Mitzvah. This rule was established for many reasons. The more a child and family attend services, the greater their comfort level will be at the child's own bar or bat mitzvah. This in turn leads to increased participation, enjoyment and meaning of the Bnai Mitzvah by everyone.

4. Each Bnai Mitzvah candidate is required to attend special tutorial lessons in cantillation (trope) of the Torah and Haftarah in order to master the skills most closely associated with the ceremony. The Bnai Mitzvah family should contact a tutor to schedule sessions beginning approximately nine to twelve months prior to the date of celebration. A list of Bnai Mitzvah tutors is available upon request. Tutorial lessons with the Bnai Mitzvah tutor should meet a minimum of once a week for a half-hour. Each student is expected to learn the cantillation (trope) notes for reading the Torah and Haftarah. Once the student is familiar with the names and musical patterns of these notes, the Bnai Mitzvah tutor will apply them to the individual student's Bnai Mitzvah portion. Thus, the candidate will not only learn his/her individual Bnai Mitzvah portions, but also how to chant the note sequences for any portion. It is our hope that, after the celebration, the Bnai Mitzvah celebrant will continue to participate in our services by chanting his/her portions on the anniversary of the Bnai Mitzvah and, with advance notice and preparation (assisted by the Bnai Mitzvah tutor), other portions as well.

5. During the Bnai Mitzvah service, the celebrant shall, as a minimum, chant the blessings before and after the Torah reading, chant the maftir portion from the Torah, and chant the blessings before the Haftarah, the Haftarah, and the blessings after the Haftarah. In addition, the Bnai Mitzvah candidate is also expected to deliver a D'var Torah (sermonette). The D'var Torah is prepared under guidance of the Ritual Committee.

6. We encourage all Bnai Mitzvah candidates, who are willing and able to participate beyond the minimum requirements, to lead other parts of the service. These may include the Shacharit Service, Torah Service, further Torah reading, the Introductory Service (Psukei D'Zimrah) and Musaf. Those Bnai Mitzvah candidates wishing to lead the congregation in these additional areas should inform the synagogue within two months of the Bnai Mitzvah.

7. All Bar Mitzvah candidates should own a set of tefillin and a tallit. If necessary, instructions on the use and meaning of tefillin and tallit can be given by the Rabbi or Ritual Committee.

## ROLE AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE FAMILY

1. Families must be members in good standing of Kehillat Shalom for the year in which the Bnai Mitzvah is to take place, with dues and other financial obligations to the synagogue fully paid no later than 60 days before the simcha.

2. Bnai Mitzvah families are obligated to pay a Bnai Mitzvah fee of \$650.00 per child broken down as follows: 1) \$200 for TJM maintenance who are responsible for arranging tables and chairs before

and after the event and final clean up of social, sanctuary when applicable, kitchen and common areas; 2) \$150 for purchase of two Etz Hayims to be donated in the name of the Bnai Mitzvah, 3) \$50 for miscellaneous printing costs, 4) \$250 contribution to the Visiting Rabbi fund.

3. The family is also to provide a Kiddush that includes the entire congregation and any invited guests, following the service on the day of the Bnai Mitzvah. If, under unusual circumstances, the Bnai Mitzvah takes place on a day other than Shabbat, the family is still responsible for providing a Kiddush on the Shabbat closest to the Bnai Mitzvah. At Kehillat Shalom, we like to emphasize that this is a community celebration in which all Jewish people rejoice, rather than a private family celebration.

4. Parents are expected to attend services with their child(ren) in the months preceding the Bnai Mitzvah date. Bnai Mitzvah candidates are obligated to fulfill certain attendance requirements at weekday and Shabbat morning services (see above, "Role and Requirements of the Bnai Mitzvah," items 3 and 4) and we encourage the family to attend services as well. This will enable the family to become familiar with the order and length of the service, and it is hoped that with familiarity and regular attendance will come the desire to participate in as much of the service as possible.

5. Parents of Bnai Mitzvah candidates will be invited to attend a Bnai Mitzvah Orientation meeting prior to the child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

6. You may contact the Kehillat Shalom synagogue office approximately six weeks before the Bnai Mitzvah to schedule a rehearsal time. This rehearsal should be held no less than three weeks before the Bnai Mitzvah. All rehearsals will take place where the service (i.e., sanctuary or social hall) is to be held. At the time of the rehearsal, you should review those parts of the service in which the family is involved. The Bnai Mitzvah candidate will rehearse each portion of the service for which he/she is responsible.

7. Bnai Mitzvah families will meet with the Service Coordinator on an individual basis approximately four weeks prior to the Bnai Mitzvah to discuss the distribution of honors and to ask any additional questions. It is the responsibility of the parents to contact the Service Coordinator to set an appointment.

## FRIDAY EVENING SERVICES

Please let the synagogue know as early as possible if you wish to do a Kabbalat Shabbat service on the evening of the Bnai Mitzvah.

## SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES

Shabbat morning services at Congregation Kehillat Shalom begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. and typically conclude by noon. The Bnai Mitzvah family is expected to arrive by 9:15 a.m. for services.

Guests receiving kavodim (honors) and aliyot (Torah honors) must be present by 9:45 a.m. Please identify anyone receiving honors or aliyot to the Service Coordinator before the beginning of the service.

## DISTRIBUTION OF HONORS

There are a number of kavodim (honors) and aliyot (Torah honors) distributed to men and women during the course of the Shabbat morning services. The Bnai Mitzvah family may assign eight (8) kavodim for Ark openings (four people each for two Ark openings), up to six (6) aliyot to the Torah, and Hagbah and Gelilah (wrapping the Torah) to their guests. In addition, the Maftir aliyah is given to the Bnai Mitzvah. All people receiving honors must be Jewish and all those called to the Torah for an aliyah must be familiar with the Torah blessings. The position of vocal Gabbai (Gabbai Rishon) must be given either to a Kehillat Shalom member or presiding clergy. The position of second Gabbai (Gabbai Shani) can be given out by the family as an honor, but only to a competent Torah reader. The person called for Gelilah will be instructed in how to bind and wrap the Torah. The person called for Hagbah has to be able to lift the Torah.

In addition to the above kavodim and aliyot, the Bnai Mitzvah family may assign the reading of the prayer for our country, and/or the prayer for the State of Israel, Hebrew and English version, to Jewish family members or friends. Such additional honors must be arranged in advance. If the parents wish to speak to the child during the service, it must be in the form of a prayer. Bnai Mitzvah families are encouraged to limit the prayer to appropriate content (i.e., noting the hard work and study that went into the Bnai Mitzvah preparation).

The Shabbat Service Honors Form must be completed and returned to the Service Coordinator no later than two weeks before the Bnai Mitzvah. Should one of the designees not be present when called, a substitute will be called from the congregation-at-large, unless a suitable family member or friend is available. Parents and children or siblings should not be given consecutive aliyot. In the event that a Kohen or Levi are members of the family, they may be given their respective aliyot, namely, the first and second. If the entire family is Kohanim, Leviim, or both, please consult with the Ritual Chair for the distribution of honors.

## THE TORAH SERVICE

On each Shabbat morning, during the chanting of the weekly portion from the Torah scroll, seven people are called consecutively to the Torah for an aliyah. Being called to the Torah has always been considered an honor in Judaism. The spiritual importance of this honor is seen in the name of the ritual, "aliyah," which means "ascending." Some people are reluctant to accept an aliyah because they are unfamiliar with the exact procedure. Actually, having an aliyah is quite simple and anyone can easily become an "expert." An usher will direct those honored to the proper seats shortly before their aliyah begins. The last honor is called the Maftir aliyah and is reserved for the Bnai Mitzvah. The Maftir aliyah may be preceded by an Acharon (extra aliyah) in special cases and is always followed by Hagbah and Gelilah. When recipients of the aliyah are called (by their Hebrew names) to the Torah, they go directly to the Shulchan (lectern upon which the Torah is resting) and stand to the right of the Baal Koreh (Torah reader). The Baal Koreh will indicate to them the place in the Torah scroll where the reading begins. The honoree then takes one of the tzitzit (corner fringes) of the tallit, or the end of the sash that binds the Torah, touches the indicated place in the Torah with the tzitzit (or sash) and kisses it as a sign of respect. They then chant or recite the first Torah blessing. Next, the Baal Koreh will chant a portion directly from the Torah scroll. When he finishes, he will point to the place where he concluded and the honorees should

again take the tzitzit (or sash), touch the indicated concluding point, kiss the tzitzit (or sash) and then chant or recite the concluding Torah blessing.

After saying the blessing, the next person is called for an aliyah. The first honoree moves to the right side of the Shulchan (lectern). After the next aliyah comes to its conclusion and the second Torah blessing is said, the first honoree shakes the hand of each person at the Shulchan and returns to his/her seat in the congregation. There is no need to bring a book to the Bima. A copy of the blessings (in Hebrew and in English transliteration) is on the Shulchan.

All people called to the Torah should know their own Hebrew name as well as the Hebrew names of their father and/or mother (for example, Yaakov ben Yitzhak or Dina bat Yaakov veLeah). Copies of the Torah blessings are available in advance in order to give honorees the opportunity to prepare before the day of the Bnai Mitzvah. Please contact the Ritual Chair if you need a copy. These should be returned to the Synagogue after the Bnai Mitzvah ceremony for proper handling and disposal.

## BNAI MITZVAH CEREMONIES

The Maftir aliyah, to which the Bnai Mitzvah is called, works the same way as the others except that the Bnai Mitzvah acts as the Baal(at) Koreh and reads his/her portion. This is the first opportunity for a Bnai Mitzvah to take his or her first lead role in a service. Upon conclusion of the aliyah and the second Torah blessing, Hagbah and Gelilah are called to raise and wrap the Torah. The congregation rises as the Torah is raised. When the Torah is securely wrapped, the congregation is seated and the Bnai Mitzvah recites the blessings before the Haftarah, the Haftarah, and the blessings after the Haftarah. When the blessings after the Haftarah come to an end, the Bnai Mitzvah may deliver a D'var Torah (sermonette), which discusses the Torah and/or Haftarah portion from a personal perspective. A Kehillat Shalom member or presiding clergy will then deliver the charge and the Bnai Mitzvah gifts. Before the Bnai Mitzvah actually leads a part of the service, there can be an optional ceremony handing the tallit to the Bnai Mitzvah. It is Kehillat Shalom policy for all Bnai Mitzvah to wear a tallit.

At the conclusion of the Bnai Mitzvah charge, the Presiding Officer will present the Bnai Mitzvah with gifts from the synagogue.

The Bnai Mitzvah may conduct various parts of the service, including the entire Torah Service, Musaf, or any other part for which s/he feels capable. If able, the Bnai Mitzvah is also encouraged to serve as Baal(at) Koreh for as much of the weekly parashah as possible.

## SHABBAT ATTIRE

Shabbat services are filled with beauty and dignity. Thus, it is befitting for the Bnai Mitzvah family and their guests to dress in a manner that reflects dignity, beauty and modesty. It is the tradition of our congregation that all Jewish adults wear a tallit. Those actively leading the service or given an honor must wear a tallit. In keeping with the conservative tradition, all Jewish men and adult women should

cover their heads. Non-Jewish male guests should wear a kippah, as a sign of respect, but should not don a tallit.

## KASHRUT AND CATERING

The social affair celebrating a Bnai Mitzvah is considered by Jewish Tradition to be a "Seudat Mitzvah" (a meal which celebrates and is, in and of itself, part of a mitzvah) and thus an integral part of the entire Bnai Mitzvah religious and spiritual experience. Therefore, all social celebrations connected with the Bnai Mitzvah, whether for children or adults, should adhere to the Jewish dietary laws (the laws of Kashrut).

In order to facilitate the fulfillment of this Kashrut requirement, the Kehillat Shalom Kiddush Committee can help make arrangements for the Kiddush. You may choose, instead, to hire any kosher caterer properly certified by a recognized Rabbinical authority. Please contact the office if you would like names of some approved kosher catering firms. Please be aware that you may choose any kosher caterer that you wish but they must be approved by the CRC or Kopf K.

Should you wish to use a kosher caterer not found on the synagogue's "Approved Kosher Caterers" list, the caterer may apply to Congregation Kehillat Shalom for admission to the list. The Ritual/Steering Committee will determine acceptability of the certification of Kashrut. This may require the continual presence of a Mashgiach on the premises.

Please keep in mind that all food brought into the synagogue must be kosher and in compliance with Congregation Kehillat Shalom's standards of Kashrut. The congregation is not responsible for the adequacy of any kosher caterer.

It is also the family's responsibility to provide adequate set-up, serving and clean-up staff for the Kiddush aspect of the simcha. Please plan on providing two workers for each 75 guests. For example, if you have invited 150 guests and there are approximately 75 KS members-guests, you would be required to provide six workers.

## USE AND RENTAL OF FACILITIES

Use of the social hall during Kehillat Shalom's designated time (Shabbat Friday Evening or Saturday Morning Service) is included in your membership at Kehillat Shalom. Outside of these times, rental arrangements for the use of Temple Judea Mizpah's social hall must be made with their Executive Director directly.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainers performing at a Shabbat luncheon affair (such as storytellers, etc.) must abide by the congregation's policy of Shabbat observance. This policy precludes the usage of musical instruments. For more details, please consult with the Ritual Chair. No entertainment will be permitted on Shabbat if it has not met with the Ritual Chair's approval in advance.

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING

As was mentioned earlier, cameras, video and audio recorders are not allowed in or around the synagogue on Shabbat. Arrangements may be made for picture taking in the Sanctuary at another time. In addition, cell phone and pagers should not be brought into the synagogue on Shabbat. If they are needed for emergencies, please make sure that they are turned to silent or vibrate.

## DELIVERIES

Families are requested to adhere to the principles of Shabbat in all their activities concerning the Bnai Mitzvah. In order to ensure that deliveries are not made on Shabbat (or Festivals), please arrange to have all deliveries, such as food, drink, flowers caterer's equipment, etc., made to the synagogue on the Friday preceding the Bnai Mitzvah **by noon**. Please notify the Kehillat Shalom synagogue office in advance about the nature and number of deliveries expected.

In order to maintain the sanctity of Shabbat, families may NOT remove flowers, food or liquor during Shabbat, but may do so after Shabbat, immediately following Havdalah.

## INVITATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Invitations should be ordered approximately five or six months before the Bnai Mitzvah. Invitations should announce the day, date and time of the services (Saturday morning, 9:30 a.m.) as well as the nature of the occasion, the name of the Bnai Mitzvah and the names of the hosting parents. Please remember to include the name of the congregation and the address. Many people choose (for friends of the Bnai Mitzvah) to include an insert with a pick-up time so that children need not call home for a ride. (***The telephones at the synagogue are not to be used on Shabbat.***) For out-of-town guests, you may wish to enclose directions. You may also wish to include the Hebrew date as well and the name of the Torah portion to be chanted. The Ritual Chair will be happy to supply you with this information.

Invitations to local and out-of-town guests should be mailed at least six weeks in advance. Invitations going overseas or to Canada should be mailed eight weeks ahead.

In addition, announcement of the forthcoming Bnai Mitzvah will be published in the Congregation Kehillat Shalom e-mail newsletter. Please send general information and a picture of the Bnai Mitzvah by ***no later than one month before the Bnai Mitzvah.*** The announcement will appear on the website for a brief period preceding and following the Bnai Mitzvah.

## MAKE THIS A SPECIAL DAY

Many families like to develop their own customs and practices to further enhance the meaning and significance of the Bnai Mitzvah. Adding to the celebration in these significant ways helps make the Bnai Mitzvah occasion a very special day. It helps personalize the simcha and makes the whole family feel more involved. Some suggestions of how to make your simcha something extraordinary are listed below. We at Congregation Kehillat Shalom encourage you to consider including many of these suggestions in your own plans:

1. *Making one's own tallit or kippah.* Designing and making one's own tallit and/or kippah is an opportunity to beautify these ritual items in a personal way. It also provides an opportunity to learn in detail the laws and customs surrounding these particularly Jewish garments. If completed on time, the Bnai Mitzvah candidate may wear his/her creations for the ceremony. Please consult with the Ritual Committee, about requirements for kosher tallitot and kippot. They will be happy to help and to suggest appropriate designs.

2. *Creating a family history and passing on a family ritual or religious item.* Often families utilize the opportunity of the Bnai Mitzvah to acquaint the Bnai Mitzvah candidate with his/her family history. The family shares in the research and collection of family facts, photos and heirlooms. If a tallit, siddur, Torah or other religious or ritual items of an ancestor are available or can be found, its presentation to the Bnai Mitzvah candidate as a gift forms a powerful spiritual link to his/her family and to past generations of Jews. Public presentation of such items may take place at the Bnai Mitzvah after prior consultation with the Ritual Committee.

3. *Creating unique centerpieces for the Kiddush tables.* Several successful ideas that benefit others include using fresh fruit or canned goods to be sent to a food pantry, flowers or toys to be sent to a hospital or nursing home after the Bnai Mitzvah or books purchased for the synagogue in the Bnai Mitzvah's name.

4. *Planting a tree in Israel in honor of every guest with a certificate given as a party favor.* Tree certificates also make an interesting invitation.

5. *Having the Bnai Mitzvah student donate a percentage of the gifts received to a charity of his/her choice.* If the amount to be given is known in advance and you would like a public announcement to be made, we will be happy to mention of such an act of loving kindness in our congratulations.

6. *Families wishing to make a gift to Congregation Kehillat Shalom should make it in honor of the Bnai Mitzvah and should specify the area in which it is to be used.*

7. *Make a donation to a worthy Jewish charity or relief organization.* Families often express the wish to include tzedakah, the concept of sharing, as an integral part of the Bnai Mitzvah. There are many worthwhile Jewish charity and relief organizations from which to choose.

## GIFTS

The Bnai Mitzvah is more than an ordinary birthday. The gifts that the candidate receives, therefore, should reflect the Jewish character and spiritual nature of this important milestone. Some suggestions include the following:

1. *The Tanach (Hebrew Bible),* particularly the Jewish Publication Society's new English translation.

2. *The Siddur (Prayer book)*, particularly *Siddur Sim Shalom*, the Prayer book published by the Conservative Movement. It contains a beautiful, modern translation and a special section for home use.
3. *A Chumash, particularly Etz Hayim*, the Chumash published by the Conservative Movement. The Etz Hayim Chumash containing all of the Torah readings, Haftarot, and insightful commentary.
4. *A gift membership in the Jewish Publication Society* which entitles the recipient to two or more books of his/her own choice. For more information about JPS, please write them at 1930 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.
5. *A Kiddush cup*, used to bless Shabbat and holidays.
6. *Shabbat and Holy Day candlesticks*.
7. *Books*. We are known worldwide as the "People of the Book" so books are always considered a beautiful and appropriate gift. The Steering Committee is more than willing to suggest a number of titles from which to choose. Also, the Kehillat Shalom web page ([www.kehillatshalom.org](http://www.kehillatshalom.org)) contains suggested titles. A hotlink from our web page will connect you directly to *Amazon.com* from which you may order directly. Any book ordered through our hotlink will generate a donation from *Amazon.com* to our synagogue.
8. *Israeli art and/or Jewish ritual objects*. Beautifully crafted and original works of art and Jewish ritual objects from Israel make special gifts that help form a tangible connection between the Bnai Mitzvah and the Land of Israel. Many beautiful items are available or can be ordered from our Gift Shop.
9. *Albums of recorded Jewish music*, both modern and traditional, demonstrate the rich and vibrant culture of our people. The Steering Committee would be happy to suggest titles if you wish.
10. *A State of Israel Bond* makes an excellent gift for a Bnai Mitzvah.
11. *JUF Bnai Mitzvah Gift of Israel*: Donations to this fund from family and friends of the Bnai Mitzvah student can be applied toward an approved trip to Israel during High School and/or college. Please contact the JUF for more information.

### WHAT IS BNAI MITZVAH?

Bnai Mitzvah is more than the celebration of a thirteenth birthday. Birthdays come every year, but Bnai Mitzvah comes once in a lifetime. Bnai Mitzvah is the first public declaration of a young Jewish adult's acceptance of the heritage of Israel and his/her affirmation of a personal commitment to the Jewish way of life. Thus, the Bnai Mitzvah should not be seen as the end of Jewish education and involvement, but rather as the beginning. Bnai Mitzvah is not a graduation but a commencement of Jewish adulthood.

Bnai Mitzvah is a religious experience shared with family and friends. The experience calls for introspection, thinking about one's Jewishness, and pledging to carry on the mission of our heritage with pride, conviction and commitment. It is also a time for parents to ask themselves if they have provided the kind of Jewish atmosphere and environment for their child(ren) that guarantees -- as best as one can -- an attachment, love, and understanding of what it means to be a Jew. The Bnai Mitzvah is a way of saying to the Jewish boy or girl that he or she is indeed important to our family and to our People.

## THE ORIGIN OF BNAI MITZVAH

The term Bar Mitzvah means "one who is capable of and responsible for observing the mitzvot" (the laws and commandments of the Torah and Judaism). It refers to a religiously responsible Jewish adult. In ancient Rabbinic literature, Rabbi Judah Ben Tema, a sage of the second century, observed that "a young boy of 13 is obligated to fulfill the commandments" (Avot 5:23). The Talmud (Yoma 82a) requires that children be trained for the time when they must fast the full day on Yom Kippur, namely, age 13 for boys and age 12 for girls. Thus, the concept of a Bnai Mitzvah dates back to Talmudic times.

The Bar Mitzvah ceremony has evolved over many centuries. However, not until the 13th century in Germany were any special ceremonies associated with the Bar Mitzvah. Later sources refer to the Bar Mitzvah's privilege of being called to the Torah for the final aliyah (Maftir) and chanting of the prophetic selection (Haftarah). From the 16th century we learn about the custom of delivering a sermon or a legal (halachic) exposition. We also learn about a scholar's custom of serving a festive banquet (seudah) upon the completion of a tractate of the Talmud and that it later was associated with the Bar Mitzvah celebration. Also associated with the Bar Mitzvah were the instructions in putting on tefillin and in some communities, the tallit as well. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony historically took place on any morning the Torah was read (Monday, Thursday, Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Holidays), but in recent times Shabbat has been preferred.

In the 18th century, the question was raised by one authority about whether the father should be required (as in the case of a Bar Mitzvah) to thank God when his daughter reached the age of 12, because from that time on he was no longer responsible, in the eyes of Jewish Law, for his daughter's pattern of observances. However, it was not until recent decades (chiefly within the Conservative Movement and through the work of Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan) that a religious ceremony comparable to a Bar Mitzvah was developed for girls and called a Bat Mitzvah. Since then, the ceremony of Bat Mitzvah has spread throughout the United States and the world, and beyond the Conservative Movement to many Orthodox, Reconstructionist and Reform communities.

Bat Mitzvah, which also means "one who is capable of and is responsible for observing the mitzvot" (the laws and commandments of the Torah and Judaism), is a ceremony that offers religious status and recognition to a Jewish girl. At Congregation Kehilla t Shalom, boys and girls receive the same religious training and Jewish education. Thus, it has become our custom to celebrate a Bat Mitzvah at age 13 in the same fashion as a Bar Mitzvah.

## A MODERN PHILOSOPHY OF BNAI MITZVAH

Bnai Mitzvah at Congregation Kehillat Shalom is the moment when a young Jewish boy or girl assumes the privileges and obligations of Judaism and the Jewish People for the first time in his/her life.

We believe it to be a public declaration of loyalty to God, Torah and the People of Israel. It is a pledge of allegiance to the ideals and dreams of parents and grandparents, of teachers and Rabbis, of an ancient and contemporary way of life.

Rather than seeing the Bnai Mitzvah ceremony as the end of Jewish training for our child(ren), the culmination of their religious studies, we see it as the commencement of higher Jewish learning. From that day on, the young Jewish adult is equipped to begin a serious, mature study of his/her faith and heritage. Until that point, the knowledge of Judaism possessed by the student is limited and conceptually juvenile. From the time of the Bnai Mitzvah on, each Jewish boy and girl is able to study Bible, Hebrew, Jewish history and literature, and the cognate subjects with the maturity of the adolescent and young adult years. All too often, many of our people retain a simplistic conception of Judaism because their Jewish education ended at age 13.

Bnai Mitzvah should be a powerful incentive for you and your child(ren) to continue studying Judaism. For this reason we highly recommend that every child celebrating a Bnai Mitzvah make a commitment to continue his/her studies in our Hebrew High School. Program professionals teach these classes and all deal with relevant and meaningful subjects that speak to today's adolescents.

Basic to any child's Jewish education is the teaching of Jewish values. We, at Kehillat Shalom, try from the beginning to inculcate the power to distinguish between what is important and what is trivial, between what is genuinely good and what is merely glitter. Often the Bnai Mitzvah party neutralizes all that we have attempted to teach. We hope that care will be taken to ensure that the social event does not overshadow the religious service itself, especially when the social event takes place outside the congregation.

We believe that to derive lasting religious inspiration from the Bnai Mitzvah, one must always bear in mind that the most important aspect of this religious milestone is the Bnai Mitzvah rite that takes place during the course of our regular Shabbat morning services. There is plenty of time after the service and during the banquet party (seudah) for socializing. We hope that the Bnai Mitzvah family will take the lead in and responsibility for ensuring that dignity, sanctity, and decorum will embrace the natural beauty of our Shabbat worship.

It is our fervent hope and prayer that the celebration of a Bnai Mitzvah in your family will be an occasion of joy and happiness, of dignity and reverence for tradition, of meaning and purpose for the celebrants and the community.

## A YEAR LATER

Many of our children and adults return year after year to chant their Haftarah on the anniversary of their Bnai Mitzvah. As long as there are no other simchot (simchas) on that day, we are delighted to honor requests to recite Haftarah in commemoration of one's Bnai Mitzvah. The Bnai mitzvah tutor or a member of the Ritual Committee will be happy to help refresh one's memory.

## TIMELINE FOR BNAI MITZVAH PLANNING

24- 18 months ahead

- establish Bnai Mitzvah date with Kehillat Shalom
  - notify out-of town friends and family of date
- 18 - 12 months ahead
- reserve necessary rooms for simcha
  - engage photographer
  - contract with entertainment
- 12 months ahead
- contract with approved kosher caterer
  - attend services on Shabbat
  - begin lessons with Bnai Mitzvah tutor
- 6 months ahead
- acquire tallit and tefillin
  - reconfirm with photographer
  - reconfirm with entertainment
  - reconfirm with site of simcha celebrations
- 4 - 5 months ahead
- order invitations
  - confirm with caterer
- 3 months ahead
- have child assessed for readiness by synagogue
  - meet with caterer to finalize menu
  - book florist
  - meet with synagogue to discuss room arrangements and specific needs
- 8 weeks ahead
- mail overseas and Canadian invitations
  - pay outstanding balances to synagogue
  - order kippot
  - turn in Kehillat Shalom student profile for bulletin
- 6 weeks ahead
- mail out-of-town and local invitations
  - meet with Service Coordinator regarding honors and Bnai Mitzvah's d'var Torah
  - clarify time frame for picture-taking session with synagogue
  - have Bnai Mitzvah child prepare D'var Torah
  - place announcement in JUF News
  - make appointment for run through
- 4 weeks ahead
- advise synagogue office of final physical arrangements, availability of kippot, etc.
  - ensure those receiving aliyot and kavodim (honors) know the skills required and have any necessary information
- 2 weeks ahead
- submit Aliyah/Honors Form
- 1 week ahead

- run through and take photographs

Friday before

- all deliveries made before 12:00 noon

Shabbat morning

- arrive a minimum of 25 minutes before service scheduled to start
- Enjoy and Kvel!

## GLOSSARY

ACHARON	* lit. = last; an extra aliyah added when needed
ALIYAH	* plural = aliyot, Torah honor
ARON HAKODESH	* Holy Ark which houses the scrolls of the Torah
BAAL KOREH	* fem. = Baalat Koreh, Torah reader
BAR MITZVAH	* lit. = son of the commandments; one who is capable of and responsible for observing the mitzvot
BAT MITZVAH	* lit. = daughter of the commandments; one who is capable of and responsible for observing the mitzvot
BIMAH	* platform (or stage) from which religious services are conducted
BNAI TORAH	* lit. = children of the Torah;
DVAR TORAH	* lit. = a word of Torah; sermonette
ETZ CHAIM	* tree of life
GELILAH	* Honor of wrapping the Torah
HAFTARAH	* selected reading from the Prophets
HAGBAH	* Torah honor of raising the Torah
HAMOTZI	* blessing over bread
HAVDALLAH	* ceremony that brings Shabbat to a conclusion
KASHRUT	* Jewish dietary laws

KETANAH	* a female minor, under the age of 12
KIBBUD/KAVOD	* plural = kavodim; honor, usually an Ark opening
KIDDUSH	* blessing over wine, also: light refreshments following services
KIPPAH	* plural = kippot; skull cap, Yiddish: yarmulke
KOSHER	* lit. = proper, fit; usually refers to Jewish dietary laws, but also applies to attitudes and behavior
MAFTIR	* last aliyah in the Torah reading
MAZAL TOV	* congratulations
MINYAN	* official quorum for public worship, ten Jewish men or women at or above the age of 13
MITZVAH	* plural = mitzvot; commandments, religious imperatives
ROSH CHODESH	* the new moon signifying the beginning of a new month on the Hebrew calendar
SEUDAH	* festive banquet, meal or party
SHEHECHEYANU	* Prayer of Thanksgiving
SHULCHAN	* Lit: table; lectern used for reading the Torah
SIDDUR	* prayer book
SIMCHA	* a joyous occasion, especially referring to family life and rituals
TALLIT	* plural = tallitot; fringed prayer shawl
TALMUD	* the Oral Law
TANAKH	* the complete Hebrew Bible consisting of the Pentateuch, Prophets and Writings
TEFILLAH	* prayer
TEFILLIN	* lit. = pertaining to prayer; leather boxes containing portions from the Torah bound on the arm and forehead
TORAH	* the Written Law
TROPE	* Yiddish word for the notes of cantillation

TZEDAKAH

\* lit. = righteous act; refers to giving charity

TZITZIT

\* corner fringes on the tallit which remind us to fulfill the 613 commandments ordained by God