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# **B'nai Mitzvah Parent Handbook**

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*Updated January 2016*



**TEMPLE ISRAEL**

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## Dear B'nai Mitzvah families of 2016-2017,

We are overjoyed that you are a part of the Temple Israel family, and we as your clergy are honored to share in your Jewish journey. As you approach the final year during which your child will prepare to become Bar or Bat Mitzvah, we look forward to deepening our relationship and learning with your entire family in preparation for this milestone.

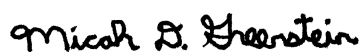
The term Bar/Bat Mitzvah means “Son/Daughter of Mitzvah.” According to Judaism, at the age of 13 an individual can now take on additional religious privileges and responsibilities. Mitzvot, literally “commandments,” are the responsibilities of a Jew. Before reaching the age of Bar or Bat Mitzvah, children voluntarily perform mitzvot. Following Bar/Bat Mitzvah, mitzvot become obligatory. In this regard, the idea of fulfilling the commandments suggests accepting responsibility as an adult. This is sacred and deserving of celebration.

The central idea in Jewish tradition has been that young people “come of age” around the age of thirteen. It should be noted that even if no public ceremony takes place, a Jewish boy or girl becomes a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at the appropriate age. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an important milestone in what we hope will be a lifetime of Jewish learning and living.

Although Bar Mitzvah has occurred for several centuries, Bat Mitzvah is a twentieth century development. The first recorded Bat Mitzvah was celebrated by Judith Kaplan Eisenstein in 1922. The practice did not become commonplace until the 1950s, first in Reform congregations and later in Conservative synagogues.

Our hope is that this handbook will answer many of your questions, however, if at any time during your B'nai Mitzvah journey you have any additional questions that have not been addressed, please contact Rabbi Bess at [rabbibess@tmemphis.org](mailto:rabbibess@tmemphis.org) or (901) 937-2771 or Jackie Evans at [jackiee@tmemphis.org](mailto:jackiee@tmemphis.org) or (901) 937-2777. Again, we look forward to learning and growing with you and your family throughout the B'nai Mitzvah process.

Mazel tov on the approach of this special day!



Rabbi Micah Greenstein



Rabbi Bess Wohlner



Rabbi Katie Bauman



Abbie Strauss

## B'nai Mitzvah Timeline

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### 9 – 8 Months Before Your Service

**☐ Family Orientation Meeting with Rabbi Bess Wohlner and Julie Fortune!**

In this meeting Rabbi Bess will walk your family through Temple Israel's entire *B'nai Mitzvah* process. Additionally, you will be able to share what your hopes and expectations are as a family. You will then meet with our Director of Teen Engagement, Julie Fortune, to learn more about choosing a *Mitzvah* project. These projects “put the *mitzvah* in your *bar/bat mitzvah*” and ensure we live our values through helping others.

### 8 – 7 Months Before Your Service

**☐ Family Torah Study Session with Rabbi Feivel Strauss!**

You will be invited to an orientation session for families having their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* around the time of yours. In this session, you will receive your Torah portion, learn about how to find meaning in that portion, select the part of your *Torah* portion you will read at your service.

### 6 Months Before Your Service

**☐ B'nai Mitzvah Bootcamp Begins!**

Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student will also begin attending Rabbi Katie Bauman's weekly (Sunday mornings from 9:30am – 10:30am) class with the other students who are preparing for their *B'nai Mitzvah* services. In this class, the students will delve more deeply into the meaning of prayers and customs related to the process, study the *Torah* portion of the week, and work with teen tutors who will provide additional Hebrew learning support.

**☐ Tutoring begins!**

Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student will begin working weekly with Abbie Strauss or another excellent tutor whose role will be to support your child in his/her *Torah* and *Haftarah* Hebrew learning, as well as making sure he/she feels comfortable leading the prayers of the service.

### 3 Months Before Your Service

***D'var Torah Study Session with Rabbi Bess Wohlner!***

Meet with Rabbi Bess to study your *Torah* portion. In this meeting you will come up with a few themes you could talk about in your *d'var Torah* (speech) at your service.

***D'var Torah Coaching Begins!***

After meeting with Rabbi Bess you will be assigned a *D'var Torah* Coach to help you write your speech. This person will help your child articulate his/her connection to the *Torah* portion, formulate it into a message for the congregation, and craft a *d'var Torah* (speech) to be delivered on the *bimah* at the service. Each of these coaches is a skilled communicator, a great Jewish teacher, and a dedicated volunteer who loves working with and getting to know your child.

### 4 Weeks Before Your Service

***Mentoring Begins!***

Your child will be assigned a mentor who will run through every aspect of the service with the student in the chapel or sanctuary.

### 3 Weeks Before Your Service

***Rabbi's Class!***

For the three weeks leading up to your service, your child will attend a class with one of our rabbis in which he/she will have the chance to practice reading from the *Torah* scroll and delivering their *d'var Torah* from the *bimah*. This class is held on Wednesdays from 4:00pm – 5:00pm.

***Parent Meeting with a Rabbi!***

Jackie Evans will contact you to set up a parent meeting with one of our rabbis in preparation for the service. This meeting will focus on your feelings as parents at this moment in the life of your family as well as any questions or concerns you have about the service itself.

### Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah!

- One of our rabbis will meet you at 9:00am to prepare your family for participation in the service (when to come to the *bimah*, where to stand, practice reciting the *Torah* blessing, etc.) This is practice time for all the family participants. (Your child has been practicing for months!).

*\*If you are planning to have photos taken, plan to be finished by 9 a.m.*

- The service begins at 10:00 a.m. & typically lasts until 12:00 p.m.

# **Tutors, D'var Torah Coaches, and Mentors**

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*Who aside from clergy will your child meet as part of their B'nai Mitzvah process?*

## **Hebrew Tutors & Torah Training**

During Rabbi Katie's class on Sundays, each student will be paired with a temple teen to review their prayers and Torah portion.

During the week, you will have scheduled times on either Tuesday or Wednesday afternoons. Each 30-minute appointment is split into two 15-minute sessions. During one half, the student will work with our Music Director, Abbie Strauss or Rabbi Katie Bauman on their Torah and Haftarah portions. During the other half, the student will work on their prayers with one of our handpicked tutors.

*\*Note: If you wish to have additional/extra tutoring for your child, please contact Jackie Evans in the Religious School office at [jackiee@timempis.org](mailto:jackiee@timempis.org) or (901) 937-2777 to connect with our temple-approved tutors.*

## **D'var Torah Coaches**

Approximately three months before your B'nai Mitzvah you will have a meeting with Rabbi Bess in which you will study your Torah portion in depth. After this meeting, you will be partnered with one of our D'var Torah Coaches. Our coaches are temple members and volunteers. Their purpose is to help support the student in the D'var Torah writing process. This includes continuing to discuss the portion with the student and helping draw parallels between the lessons of the Torah and today.

## **Mentors**

One month before your B'nai Mitzvah you will be matched with a mentor. Our mentors are temple volunteers who will rehearse every single aspect of the B'nai Mitzvah service with the student. This includes when to sit or stand, when to read page numbers, reading at a good pace, practicing projecting their voice, etc.

## Mitzvah Project Guidelines

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Becoming a Jewish adult entails much more than being a leader in our Temple Israel community – it also means that one takes on the responsibility of serving others. As such, our students all develop a meaningful volunteer project to participate in during their *b'nai mitzvah* process. This is an opportunity to get involved and make meaningful connections with the Memphis community and/or the greater Jewish community. Positively contributing to the world in which we live is the obligation of every Jew.

Julie Fortune, Temple Israel's Director of Youth Engagement, is serving as our Mitzvah Project Coordinator and will work with your family to identify a meaningful opportunity for civic engagement during your *b'nai mitzvah* year.

You need to have one touch point with your organization/activity a month for a total of 9 visits over the course of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade school year. Any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the Mitzvah Project can be sent to Julie Fortune at [julief@tmemphis.org](mailto:julief@tmemphis.org).

### **We encourage you to choose a project that is:**

- Meaningful to you personally
- Something that will help you connect to other people
- Something you can continue long after your Bar or Bat Mitzvah
- Something that is “hands-on,” rather than simply collecting donations or money (although we encourage you to do both!)
- Inclusive of your family or friends (the more people that you involve, the deeper the impact)

# Living Jewish and Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah

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## Resources for Torah Study Online

### [www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study](http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study)

The Union for Reform Judaism is the umbrella organization of our denomination. Their website has years of commentary on each Torah portion as interpreted by various rabbis and members of our movement.

### [www.g-dcast.com](http://www.g-dcast.com)

This organization creates Jewish video content that explains Torah, holidays and more. Look up your Torah portion on their site and watch the video. It'll give you a great summary of what your portion is about as well as add some interpretive meaning to it.

### [www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com)

This website offers written summaries of every Torah and Haftarah portion. Additionally, you can often find some interpretations of the portions as understood by various rabbis and Jewish leaders.

### [www.ajws.org/dvar-tzedek/](http://www.ajws.org/dvar-tzedek/)

American Jewish World Service is a “nonprofit organization dedicated to providing nonsectarian humanitarian assistance and emergency relief to disadvantaged people worldwide.” In light of that mission, they provide an archive of Torah commentaries that tie each portion to a message about social justice.

## Suggested Book List

*These are just a few books that may help add meaning to your B'nai Mitzvah journey as a family. If you are interested in more recommendations, please contact Rabbi Bess Wohlner.*

Mogel, Wendy. *Blessing of a B Minus*. New York: Scribner Publishing, 2010.

Salkin, Jeffrey K. *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005.

Salkin, Jeffrey K. *For Kids – Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007.



## The Voice – Temple’s Newsletter

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Part of being in an extended congregational family is sharing in each other’s *simchas* (joyous occasions). To that end, we would love to include high resolution headshot photos of those who are becoming b'nai mitzvah in Temple Israel's newsletter, the Voice, and possibly other communication platforms including our weekly e-mails, website ([timemphis.org](http://timemphis.org)), Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We would also like to include a brief bio of your child and a description of his or her b'nai mitzvah project.

Here is an example to pattern the description: Aaron Bardos, son of Michelle and Istvan Bardos, will become bar mitzvah on July 4. A rising 8th grade student at Riverdale Elementary School, Aaron is a member of the band, the National Junior Honor Society, the National Junior Beta Club, and he is a Duke TIP Scholar. He enjoys playing soccer for Germantown Legends and reading. For his bar mitzvah project, he volunteered with TOPSoccer, an outreach program that enables children with intellectual or physical disabilities to play soccer. Aaron is the grandson of Dr. Denes Bardos and the late Agota Bardos, and of the late Marilyn and Joseph Shapiro.

The deadline to receive the blurbs and photos are the first of the month for the next month's publication. For example, if your child is becoming bar mitzvah in January, the deadline is December 1.

If you would also like to submit your family’s simcha to the Hebrew Watchman, follow the same instructions as far as content needed for The Voice. The deadline for the Hebrew Watchman is two Thursdays before your B’nai Mitzvah at Noon.

## Aliyot & Service Honors

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The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is the ultimate family *simcha*, as such, here at Temple Israel we embrace every family member that is part of raising this Jewish child, including those who are not Jewish. We want every person to feel comfortable with his or her participation in the service. You will have the opportunity to honor family members and/or friends of the family. Below each honor is explained in depth. Before your service, you will receive an honors sheet to fill out so that we may invite them to the *bimah* for their honor. If you have any questions about how your family can participate, please contact Rabbi Bess.

## **Opening & Closing the Ark**

As the Torah service begins, you may choose to give two people the honor of opening the ark doors as a Torah is taken out in preparation for the Torah passing ceremony.

## **Torah Passing**

The Torah is removed from the Ark and is passed from generation to generation ending with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This gesture symbolizes the passing of Jewish tradition from one generation to the next.

## **Aliyot (Torah Blessings)**

The honor of reciting the blessings over the Torah is called an *aliyah* (plural, *aliyot*), which means “going up.” This refers both to the physical ascent of the person to the *bimah* where the Torah is read and to the spiritual uplifting associated with participation in this hallowed ritual.<sup>1</sup> At Temple Israel B’nai Mitzvah there are three *aliyot*. The first two are assigned honors and the third is for the B’nai Mitzvah student. For these honors, please provide us with English and Hebrew names.

## **Lifting the Torah**

At the conclusion of the Torah reading, someone is invited to lift the Torah and show it to the congregation.

## **Dressing the Torah**

At the same time that someone is called up to lift the Torah, someone else is also invited to dress the Torah.

## **Kiddush & Motzi (Saturday Morning)**

After the service concludes, the community will congregate outside the sanctuary for Kiddush (blessing over the wine) and Motzi (blessing over bread) before heading to the luncheon.

## **Ushers for Shabbat Morning**

Some families choose to honor friends or family members by asking them to usher for the Saturday morning service. This consists of handing out prayerbooks and service programs to guests as they enter before the start of the service.

## **Who Sits on the Bimah**

Each family decides who they prefer to be on the bimah in addition to the student. Options include, but are not limited to:

- Parents (one or both), Grandparents, etc.
- No one except for the student so that the family may watch their child lead the service from the front row.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/aliyah/#>

## Parents' Blessing

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There can be nothing so special at a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony as the Jewish words a parent gives to his or her child. Earlier in the service, there will be a moment when the Torah passing happens. That is a physical illustration of what you are doing – handing Torah down, taking care of it enough to give it to your child, showing him or her how to hold it, how to carry it, how to treasure it. Your example is the most powerful force in their Jewish lives, regardless of your background.

The words you share with your child in front of the congregation on that day are a “Torah passing” in words. They are a chance for you to make your child strong with words of faith and love in him or her, to convey your wishes and prayers, and to say thank you to God and to this community for the gift of that precious moment.

Many parents question how to go about writing those words, which should be brief – about 3 minutes is best. One way to go about it is to make it in itself a sort of D’var Torah. Read your child’s Torah portion and come up with your own message for your child based on it.

Another method is to think of your child, of when they were little, of them today in the other room, of them that day, all dressed up and having achieved so much. Then, finish these sentences for yourselves, and use them when crafting your speech:

- I thank God that you are...
- I pray to God that you will...
- My Jewish wish for you is...

That moment, though between you and your child, happens before the eyes of your community. The words should be words from your heart spoken to your child that convey your feelings and hopes for your child not just as an individual, but as a Jewish young adult.

An example of a parents’ blessing is included on the following page.

## Parents' Blessing: Sample

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Hi Max,

You know that we love you, are proud of you and that we think you are a good person. We say this to you all the time. What we don't often talk about is what I wish for you Jewishly. Now is a perfect time for that. I wish for you to always remember that you are a Jew, and to be curious about and love your religion. Today you have committed your life to learning about it. You certainly now know the difference between reading the ancient text in the Torah with Grandma's Yad and a text you received on your iPhone with the swipe of your finger! Two very different kinds of texts that you can receive and read.

I wish for you to never forget the moment 3 generations handed the Torah down to you. We are a small chain of people in an ancient history that continues with Max Klayman Blen. You will move up the line in that chain and know how precious a gift the Torah is that you are giving to your children, grandchildren, and God willing as we saw today with Grandmama, GREAT grandchildren.

I hope that there will be times when Judaism amazes you, like it amazes me today. And not if, but when, you visit Israel, you will be forever changed.

I wish for you to blend into the big world. We sent you to school here at Temple to first show you who you are. Once the foundation was set, you joined the diversity at Lausanne. And you fit right in. You didn't hide within the group you already knew. You opened yourself up to all who is out there, while maintaining the connections you already had. I believe you already understand that you are a small part of a much bigger chain that wraps around the whole world.

I wish for you to always remember that you are a Jewish athlete, not an athlete who is Jewish. You have been blessed by the coaches you spoke of in your speech today because they have always respected that you would not be there if practice and games fell during Hebrew school or a Jewish holiday.

As you prepared for this day, your mind grew, and so much was expected of you. I realize now more than ever that our growth is not dependent on time and aging, but what we learn and do during that period of time. I grew as a Jew preparing you for this day, too! Your life cycle events will always be my life cycle events, just from a different point of view.

We are so proud of you today. The things that don't come easy to you looked effortless, but we know it wasn't. Enjoy this moment that you've worked so hard for, knowing that the scoreboard shows a win today.

I love you!

*Written by Marcy Blen for her son Max  
B'nai Mitzvah class of 2013*

## Live Internet Streaming

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For friends or family members who are not able to join you here in Memphis, Temple Israel has the ability to live stream the service on the Internet through our website. If you wish to take advantage of this technology, please let us know.

## Photography

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We understand the importance of documenting this sacred family occasion. If you plan to have pictures taken with your family in front of the ark or of your child reading the Torah, please do so before your family's rehearsal at 9:00 a.m. Photos can only be taken during the ceremony from outside the glass doors of either the sanctuary or chapel.

## Kippot (Singular: Kippah) and Tallitot (Singular: Tallit)

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*Kippot* (*yarmulkes* or skull caps) and *tallitot* (ritual garment for morning prayer) are provided by the synagogue for use at all *bar/bat mitzvahs*. Some families choose to offer their own *kippot* for their guests by having them specially made for the event. Some families also choose to present a special *tallit* at the beginning of their child's service. These are often *tallitot* that were bought especially for the occasion, perhaps in Israel, or family heirlooms. If you would like assistance in picking a *tallit*, please visit our WRJ gift shop! And, if you have any questions regarding personalized *kippot*, we are happy to direct you.

## Service Programs

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A service program is a small handout that is distributed to all your guests with the prayerbook as they enter the service. It often contains thank yous to various people involved in the process, the Torah and Haftarah portions in Hebrew and English, and perhaps an explanation of the service/ritual itself. Temple Israel is happy to help create a basic program for your child's service. However, if you wish for something more professional, you may design and print at your own expense. If you would like to peruse examples of programs of all sorts to get ideas of what you would like to create for your service, please contact Jackie Evans at [jackiee@timemphis.org](mailto:jackiee@timemphis.org) to make an appointment to view our collection.

## Glossary of Terms

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### **Aliyah (Plural: Aliyot):**

The act of going up to the Torah to recite blessings that thank God for the Torah. One blessing is recited before each Torah reading and one blessing is recited after each Torah reading. There are typically three *aliyot* at Temple Israel on Shabbat morning.

### **Bar/Bat Mitzvah:**

Literally son of/daughter of commandments, respectively (Plural: B'nai). It refers to the transition from a Jewish child to becoming a Jewish adult.

### **Bimah:**

Means “stage” in Modern Hebrew. Refers to the area from where the service is being led.

### **D’var Torah:**

Speech that explains and illuminates the Torah text (plural: *Divrei Torah*).

### **Haftarah:**

A portion from the Prophets section of the Bible corresponding to a particular Torah portion.

### **Hakafah:**

A procession around the congregation with whoever is carrying the Torah in the lead.

### **Kippah/Yarmulke:**

Ritual head covering, sometimes called a “skull cap”.

### **Mazal Tov:**

Hebrew. Used as a way to say, “congratulations!”

### **Minhag:**

Literally, “custom”. Many congregations may have their own *minhagim* (customs) that differ from others.

### **Parasha:**

The section of Torah read during a given week. Each week during the year has its own parasha. We generally read 9 - 20 verses from the weekly parasha during Shabbat morning worship.

**Shaliach Tzibur:**

Hebrew for “public emissary,” refers to the prayer leader of the service.

**Siddur:**

The prayerbook.

**Simcha:**

Hebrew for “joyous occasion”.

**Tallit:**

A ritual garment with fringes that is worn during morning services.

**Tefillah:**

The Hebrew word for “prayer”. Refers to the Jewish worship service.

**Torah:**

The Five Books of Moses, which is the first section of the Bible. The Torah scroll contains these five books written by hand in Hebrew on specially prepared parchment by a trained scribe called a *sofer*.

**Trope:**

A system of symbols used to dictate the melody for the ritual chanting of the reading of Torah and other books of the Bible.

**Yad:**

The pointer used by the reader, often shaped like a hand. The Torah reader takes care not to touch the scroll directly with his or her own hand, so that the *yad* (“hand” in Hebrew) becomes an extension of the reader to assist in an accurate and smooth reading.

**Yashar Koach:**

Literally, “straight strength”. Figuratively, “may you have strength” or “may your strength be increased”. It is used as a way to congratulate someone after he or she has participated in leading any aspect of the worship service.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jewfaq.org/express.htm>