



Introduction

Bar Mitzvah as we know it today is perhaps 600 years old. Prior to that time, the structure was not uniform. In the Talmud, the term “Bar Mitzvah” was applied to every adult male Jew; age thirteen was regarded as the age when the man assumed religious responsibility.

The core of the traditional ceremony was the calling up of the young man for the reading of the “maftir,” the final verses or aliya of the weekly Torah portion. He had the honor of reading the “Haftarah,” or prophetic reading. He would then teach the attendees (give a D’var Torah) about the meaning or importance of the weekly portion. The young man “became Bar Mitzvah” or was a “Son of Mitzvah,” meaning he was now responsible for his own religious life and following the mitzvot commanded in the Torah. A simple festive meal or other small gathering of the community was the extent of the non-synagogue recognition of the event. The focus was on the religious coming of age, not an elaborate celebration.

Nowadays, both Jewish girls and boys can participate in a ceremony marking their becoming B’nai Mitzvah (more than one Bar/Bat Mitzvah). The religious aspect takes as many forms as there are families. Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon (mincha) with Havdalah, Rosh Chodesh (new moon) or any time the Torah is read (except for major holidays) are options available to the family.

The ceremony of B’nai Mitzvah marks an important step in the total development of a Jewish child, but it does not signify that the child has reached the conclusion of his/her Jewish education. On the contrary, it suggests that the student must now begin to acquire a more mature understanding of Judaism as a way of life and assume the unique responsibilities borne by every Jew. Acquiring knowledge is necessary to make the informed choices expected of a modern Jew. Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Temple Beth Ami is one step along the way. The synagogue has opportunities for the continuation of the religious journey. We strongly encourage the student to continue on well into adulthood.

Often the religious aspect of this rite of passage is lost or diminished in light of the celebration. This manual focuses on the religious training required. There are books, websites and community members who can give tips and help with the more social aspects of this momentous occasion.

Friday Evening Service of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah weekend

It is tradition for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to attend the Friday night service of the same weekend. The student will assist Rabbi Blazer in conducting the service. Family members will be invited to light the Shabbat Candles. Traditionally the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family sponsors the oneg of the Friday night service through the Sisterhood. This is a separate fee payable to Sisterhood. Out of town guests are welcome and encouraged to attend. If you want to honor one of your guests on Friday evening discuss this and any other changes with Rabbi Blazer.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony

As was stated earlier, there are many varieties of Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremonies. When you request your date you will have the chance to specify time of day. Once your date has been approved, you can begin the planning for the religious part of this milestone. Again, there are many resources, including members of our congregation who can give advice and get you started on the celebratory portions.

Through out the religious service there are opportunities to honor family and friends. Rabbi Mark will help you decide the number of people you will call to have an aliyah while the student reads. Additionally there are readings from the prayer book that can be assigned to your chosen guests.

Some families have chosen to create their own service based on our standard service. Photos or related pictures can make the prayer book or program booklet a beautiful keepsake as well. While following the form of the synagogue's service gives structure to the "created" service, the opportunity to add readings, special prayers or music can add deeper personal meaning to the day. Rabbi Blazer has samples of the different services that have been used here and can guide you through the process. Rabbi Blazer must approve any additions or changes to the service. The family of the Bar/Bat mitzvah candidate is responsible for the reproduction of a special prayer book or program if one is needed.

Cantor Ellis's services are included for members. Adding a musical accompanist is another way to personalize the service. If you would like to hire Eileen to accompany Cantor Ellis please ask the Synagogue administrator for her contact information. You will be responsible for contacting Eileen and securing her services. If you want an accompanist or an alternative cantor, please discuss this with Rabbi Blazer.



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B'nai Mitzvah are more than the family celebrating the achievement; this is an opportunity for the community to welcome a new "adult" member. It is the synagogue's policy that a service held at the Temple be open to all members. Obviously, the members who aren't part of your group do not need to be included in the celebration afterwards.

Ethics and Etiquette of the Celebration

A Bar/Bat mitzvah is an event of religious significance and a time for family and friends. The joy and meaning of this rite of passage does not depend on lavish gifts or expensive parties. Each one is created for the child. Create a celebration that you and your family are happy with the style and content. Please do not feel pressured to keep up with someone else's idea of a celebration.

There are some basic guidelines for behavior during a Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

Plan on arriving at **least an hour before** the scheduled event. You don't want to arrive after your guests. A Temple Board member will either meet you at the synagogue or give you a key for the weekend.

Photographs and Videotaping are allowed during the service as long as the equipment is at the back of the sanctuary, and does not distract from the sanctity of the day. Your photographer or videographer, whether paid or a family member must follow the guidelines approved by the Board. Please ensure that they have received a copy. They will be required to sign that they have received it. By limiting the movement of photographers we hope to maintain the atmosphere during a religious service. Please contact the Education director or Synagogue administrator for the photography guidelines.

At the conclusion of the service the family is responsible for removing gifts, books and personal items from the sanctuary. Gifts should not be opened until after the service is completed.

Clothing should reflect the feeling of the day. Jeans and shorts are not appropriate. Revealing clothing is unacceptable. If in doubt, chose something else.

Requirements for Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Temple Beth Ami has established the following standards to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

1. For the student:

- A. Boys are eligible to become B'nai Mitzvah any time after their thirteenth birthdays. Girls need to be at least twelve.
- B. The candidate must attain and demonstrate general knowledge of the prayer book and the forms of public and private worship.
- C. The candidate will be able to read and comprehend selected portions of the Torah and Haftarah (if Saturday morning) and recite the appropriate blessings.
- D. During the year preceding the Bar/Bat Mitzvah the candidate must attend at least 12 religious services. Attendance at other synagogues is acceptable. If the 12 hours are not met, Families can participate in volunteer opportunities at the Synagogue, such as Tot Shabbat, Onegs, among others, to be approved by Education Director, in lieu of synagogue attendance.
- E. Candidates will be prompt and regularly attend tutorial sessions.
- F. Candidates are expected to study on a daily basis. Students who study a little each day tend to excel and enjoy the entire experience much more than those who cram just prior to a lesson or even the "big day."
- G. B'nai Mitzvah is not one day to get through or simply a hurdle to overcome. The entire period of training and preparation can be a time of growth and enrichment, not only for the student, but also for the family as a whole. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah should be treated as a stepping stone in a child's life leading down the path of religious and secular growth. It is a beginning of a new period of learning.
- H. In addition to reading from the Torah, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will also give a two to five minute speech. This speech generally includes a welcome, discussion of the Torah portion (D'var Torah) including the meaning of the Torah portion and/or the relevance to current times. Some students have included brief descriptions of their religious journeys and goals for the future. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah may also include something about their chosen mitzvah project. It is also appropriate to welcome attendees and thank anyone they believe needs to be thanked. Rabbi Blazer will discuss the specifics and help edit the speech. Parents will need to contact Rabbi directly (rabbi@templebethami.org) no less than 1 month in advance to schedule an appointment to discuss the portion and the D'var Torah.



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- I. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah must participate in, document and report on a "Mitzvah Project" they have undertaken. The entire family is encouraged to do this activity together. The "Mitzvah Project" can take any form that is meaningful for the student and their family. The project should be approved by Rabbi Blazer who can also help the student find a project if he/she is having trouble.

Requirements for the Family

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is more than just a graduation. It is a chance for the entire family to celebrate their heritage and applaud one family member's achievements to date. It is our hope that the family learns along with the candidate. We encourage all parents, grandparents and extended family to confirm their connection to Judaism during this exciting time.

1. The family should act as a role model for the candidate, by regularly attending and participating in the weekly Shabbat, varied holiday services and if possible, volunteering. Attendance at synagogue events is encouraged as this helps build a sense of community. By attending events that are social as well as spiritual the student sees that Judaism is not something contained in a book or a classroom, but is a part of life as a whole.
2. The family of the Bar/Bat mitzvah must be a member in good standing of Temple Beth Ami. This includes the responsibility to see that all Temple financial obligations are paid in full 3 months prior to the event, unless other arrangements are made.
3. The family must work with the candidate to assist in their studies, tutorial and ceremony and ideally the mitzvah project. Family involvement and support are invaluable to the successful candidate.
4. The family will be required to pay a B'nai Mitzvah fee of \$650 to the synagogue at This fee includes 15 sessions of tutoring and an administration fee. If the student does not practice sufficiently to see progress or attend religious services regularly, additional sessions may be required. If the Rabbi or Education Director believe additional sessions are necessary, the parent will be responsible for any additional tutoring at the cost of \$50 an hour.
5. Students who are enrolled, but do not attend Hebrew School regularly will need extra sessions. The tutoring is a supplement to the Hebrew school training, but does not replace it. This includes students who become Bar/Bat Mitzvah before their

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Zayen year (7 grade) or before February of their Zayen year. The cost of these sessions is the responsibility of the parent and is in addition to the standard fee.

6. All students must have attended at least 3 years of Temple Beth Ami Judaica programming, including the Zayen year as this class benefits from studying with the Rabbi.
7. Students who do not use the in-house tutoring must still pay an administrative fee of \$275 and are responsible to make their own arrangements with a tutor approved by the Rabbi.
7. The family needs to contact the Synagogue Sisterhood at least 6 weeks prior to plan for Oneg, Shabbat Kiddush and candy (for throwing, an optional tradition). There are separate costs for these activities.
8. It is traditional to make a donation to the Temple and/or the Rabbi's discretionary fund in honor of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. We also have a Tree of Life that can commemorate this occasion. Please ask if you need ideas or more information.
9. Our sanctuary can hold approximately 150 people. If you are expecting many more, alternative arrangements may need to be made. If the Religious service needs to be held off site, there is a fee of \$180 to move the Torah, prayer books and Ark. Please consult the Temple Administrator or Education Director.

Special Note:

If there are special circumstances that make it burdensome to complete these requirements, please discuss the situation with the Rabbi or Education Director. If there are financial challenges, contact the executive board (president@templebethami.org)

We are committed to giving each child in our community the opportunity to study and celebrate his/her heritage. Please know we will make every effort within our capabilities to meet the special needs of any child and/or family

Conclusion

This pamphlet is only a guideline to the Temple's policies and practices of B'nai Mitzvah. The variations are endless. Please ask questions, read books and surf the Internet to find more information and traditions from other areas. We are here to help make this memorable and meaningful.