

TEMPLE JUDEA

B'NAI MITZVAH HANDBOOK



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TEMPLE JUDEA B'NAI MITZVAH HANDBOOK

Dear Students,

You are about to begin an exciting journey leading you to the moment you will become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. We are very excited to be your partners and teachers as you begin this journey. We hope you will learn to love and appreciate all that Judaism has to offer you. We are looking forward to taking this journey with you.

If you ever have any questions or concerns, please contact us either by calling our office or e-mailing us.

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Joel Levine

Rabbi Yaron Kapitulnik

Dear Parents,

As your child begins this journey, so are you beginning your own journey, seeing your child grow and mature into a responsible young Jewish adult. This passage is not only theirs but yours as well. We invite and encourage you and your entire family to take an active role in this process of growth, self-realization and fulfillment. This is a very special time in your family's life and we want to thank you for allowing us to guide you and to be a part of your journey.

This packet is intended to help answer many questions and explain Temple Judea's B'nai Mitzvah program and your partnership with us. There are many milestones along our road to your child's B'nai Mitzvah and we will be here for you. Please read this first packet carefully and contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Joel Levine

Rabbi Yaron Kapitulnik

What Is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah – and what is it not?

A few words on our philosophy:

Becoming a B'nai Mitzvah Is about the acceptance of responsibility.

This is how Judaism defines maturity. Becoming a B'nai Mitzvah means that the 13-year old student is now, according to Jewish tradition, responsible for his or her own actions. As one becomes a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, one begins to make his or her own decisions about the role Judaism will play in their lives. In the process of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah our students will solidify their Jewish identity.

The Torah Is the Center of Judaism.

Everything we do as Jews, everything we believe, everything we value revolves around the Torah. The Torah is the testimony of our people's encounter with God. And however you interpret those events in the wilderness of Sinai some three millennia ago, what cannot be dismissed is the sacredness with which our ancestors have embraced this legacy. This is why studying and reading Torah is at the center of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is a Community Observance.

It is not by coincidence that we choose to hold this initiation ceremony in public. To be a Jew means to live within a covenantal relationship—not only with God but with other Jews as well. Having a Bar or Bat Mitzvah marks the entry of the child as a full-fledged member to the Jewish community.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony Is Not a Performance

It is a Celebration. The synagogue is not a theater, and the bima is not a stage, and the congregation is not an audience. More to the point, the only mistake one can make at a bar/bat mitzvah is to lose sight of this truth.

Our Bnai Mitzvah program is guided by the following principles:

- **Our program allows for elective learning and individual expression.** We believe that each and every student is an individual human being with different talents, likes and personal connection to Judaism. The process of becoming a Bar/bat Mitzvah **MUST** include the opportunity to choose various ways in which each student can connect to his or her own Jewish identity.
- **Our program recognizes the need to set common standards of Jewish knowledge.** There is a level of knowledge regarding Jewish traditions and values that we expect our students to achieve. We believe that with guidance and support and with appropriate flexibility (when needed) all our students can demonstrate skills that will prepare them to live their lives as active and contributing participants in the Jewish communal life.
- **It's about the process not the "performance."** The process of becoming a B'nai Mitzvah is a process that should be spread over a period of time that allows for study without pressure.
- **It's about the entire family, not just the student.** The process of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah will be a monumental experience not just for the student but also for the entire family. Our program supports and encourages the participation of the entire family in the process.
- **The meaning of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is enduring only if it takes place within a context of continued Jewish growth.** Becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is not the experience of a lifetime, rather a lifetime experience, a state of being that remains with us throughout our lives. In other words, becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah should be thought of as a Jewish "commencement," marking not an end point but a beginning—a beginning of a lifetime of mitzvot, a beginning of a lifetime of learning. As such, it is our firm belief that the Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration is validated and enhanced by a commitment to continue religious education to confirmation and post-confirmation classes as well as participation in our Temple Judea Youth Group and our regional and national youth group affiliations.

Requirements and Expectations

Temple Judea recognizes the need to create a basic uniform program for all B'nai Mitzvah students while maintaining a personal approach to each and every student according to their needs and preferences.

Based on this understanding, our program is divided into core curriculum and electives.

In order to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Temple Judea, each and every student will be required to achieve 80 credits from our core curriculum and an additional 100 elective credits.

All children becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Temple Judea need to complete our program. It doesn't matter if your child has recently joined our religious school, has been here for many years, or is not attending our religious school because they are a student at a Jewish Day School. If there are special arrangements that must be made to accommodate your child, this must be done in partnership with Rabbi Kapitulnik. Please contact the office to schedule an appointment with Rabbi Kapitulnik as soon as possible.

What to expect each grade year

3 rd Grade	Choosing a date.
4 th Grade	Attending Religious School, learning basic Hebrew language skills.
5 th Grade	Expanding students' learning of prayers and blessings.
6 th Grade	Including Students of the Meyer Jewish Academy Students begin to study Trope system (Torah Cantillation), B'nai Mitzvah preparations, private meetings with Rabbis and Cantors.
7 th grade	Continuing B'nai Mitzvah preparations as well as participating as tutors in religious school and working towards completion of core and elective credits.

3rd Grade - Choosing a date:

Towards the end of **3rd grade** you and your child will be asked to choose a date for your child's Bar or bar Mitzvah.

Here are some of the guidelines regarding how to choose a date:

- We recommend that your child be at least 13 years old or at least in 7th grade.
- When choosing a date, remember that according to the Jewish calendar your child might be turning 13 before his or her secular 13th Birthday (according to the Gregorian calendar)
- Please be prepared to choose 2 possible dates, as we cannot guarantee any date on the Temple calendar.
- Jewish Day School students should check with their school's B'nai Mitzvah calendar to avoid any student conflicts.

In order to receive a date, each family is required to be a Temple Judea member in good standing. A date that has already been confirmed with Rabbi Kapitulnik is placed on a master Temple calendar. The Temple reserves the right to make changes to the master calendar, and in the event that there is a conflict, you will be notified well in advance.

4th Grade – Attending our Religious School

In the beginning of 4th grade, students and their families will participate in a celebratory service which will mark the beginning of their training. Immediately following this ceremony, students can start our B'nai Mitzvah program.

- Students will be required to participate both in religious school on Sundays (9:30 am-noon) and in Hebrew school on Wednesdays (4:30pm-6:00pm).
- Students acquire basic Hebrew language skills allowing them to read and write Hebrew. We use a program called **P.H.D. (Phonetic Hebrew Decoding)** and the students will complete a set of 3 books. The students will progress according to their ability.

5th grade – Expanding Students Learning of Prayers and Blessings

- Students will use the Mitkadem program. This program was created by the Union for Reform Judaism which allows for individual learning of various prayers and blessings, giving emphasis to understanding the meaning and thought behind them.

- In grades 5-7, students will be able to participate in ongoing group meetings that will be led by our Rabbis. These meetings will usually take place on Tuesday afternoons and on Wednesday afternoons before Hebrew school. The dates and topics for these meetings will be announced in advance. By attending these meetings students will be able to gain elective and/or core credits.

6th Grade – Students Begin to Study Trope System (Torah Cantillation)

B'nai Mitzvah Preparations, Private Meetings with Rabbis and Cantors

- Approximately 6 months prior to the actual date, students will schedule personal weekly or bi-weekly (according to need) meetings with the Rabbis and Cantors in order to prepare for their specific Torah portion and D'var Torah.

B'nai Mitzvah Chavurot

Soon after receiving a date for your Bar or Bat Mitzvah, you will receive a list of families whose children will be celebrating their Bar or Bat Mitzvah in the week's preceding or following your special date. In the three years from 4th-7th grades, you will have various opportunities to meet as a group *Chavurah*. Meeting dates will be given well in advance. You will have opportunities to celebrate Shabbat and Havdallah together. Additionally, you will be invited to worship together in order to become familiar with the Shabbat morning services. We hope that the relationships created within your Chavurah will allow you to get to know the other students and their families, building a stronger supporting community.

B'nai Mitzvah Days

Each year we will have B'nai Mitzvah workshops for all of our students and families. During these workshops we will have hands-on experiences both in prayer and in study as well as in the preparation of the following items that will be a part of the B'nai Mitzvah celebration:

- 4th grade students and families will prepare a **Yad**, a Jewish ritual pointer used to point to the text in the Torah.
- 5th grade students and families will prepare a **Wimple**, a special piece of cloth used to securely close the Torah scroll.

- 6th grade students will take part in a **Talit** workshop in which they will create their own unique Talit they can use for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Shabbaton

Every year, we will offer families the opportunity to experience the taste and joy of Shabbat in our annual Shabbat retreat (Shabbaton). We encourage you to take part in this retreat. This is a great opportunity to experience the beauty of Shabbat from beginning to end surrounded by friends and family. We especially recommend this for those in 6th grade, the summer previous to your Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

The next section is an overview of the core and elective curriculum, followed by a summary of the requirements arranged in a very easy to follow chart. In the appendix you will find a detailed explanation of the credit system.

Curriculum for B'nai Mitzvah at Temple Judea

Mitzvot:

Core:

- Students will perform a total of 30 hours of community service.

Elective:

- Additional hours of community service
- An approved Mitzvah project
- Participation in the Teen Tzedakah Project.

Torah:

Core:

- Students will understand and recite the blessings before and after Torah reading.
- Students will be able to chant the *Maftir* portion of their torah. (The *Maftir* is the last 3 sentences of every Torah portion).
- Students will understand and recite the blessings before and after the Haftarah reading.
- Students will write and deliver D'var Torah.

Elective:

- Reading additional Aliyot during service.
- Reading Haftarah in Hebrew.
- Writing short insights on the weekly torah portion.

Prayer:

Core:

Student will understand and be able to recite the following prayers:

- Shema – Ve'ahavta
- Chatzi Kaddish / Mourners Kaddish
- 2 First blessings of the Amidah :Avot and Gevurot
- Aleinu

Elective:

Student will understand and be able to recite the following prayers:
(According to Mitkadem Units)

- Morning blessings
- Shema blessings
- Mi kamocho
- Complete Amidah
- Torah service

Shabbat:

Core:

- Student will recite and understand the Kiddush
- Student will know blessings for Kabbalat Shabbat and Havdala
- Student will understand and lead the following prayers:
Shalom Aleichem

Lecha Dodi
Ve'Shamru
Adon Olam

Elective:

- Attending Friday night services.
- Attending a Temple Judea Shabbaton with at least one parent.

Israel:

Core:

- Complete historical timeline of Israel.
- Learn 8 basic conversations in Hebrew from Ulpan Alef program.
- Complete workbook on Jerusalem.

Elective:

Participate in a Temple Judea trip to Israel

- Establish contact with an Israeli penpal and complete tasks together
- Complete workbook on Israeli sights and Israeli people

Jewish Thought:

Core:

- Study the first 2 chapters of Pirkei Avot with Rabbi – Ethics of Our Fathers and complete worksheets.

Elective:

- Study additional chapters of Pirkei Avot at home with parents – Ethics of Our Fathers.
- Demonstrate the practice of a Middot (Jewish values)

Jewish Bookshelf:

Core:

- Read and discuss at least one story from each of the following:
- Judges, Kings, Prophets, Megilahs, Psalms
- Read a book from the list and write a book report.

Elective:

- Book report or movie report of choice from list.

Holidays:

Core:

Study and complete workbook for the following holidays:

- Rosh Hashanah
- Yom Kippur
- Passover

Elective:

Study and complete workbook for the following holidays :

- Sukkot
- Simchat Torah
- Tu B'shevat
- Purim
- Shavuot

Financial Responsibilities

The B'nai Mitzvah fee is \$1500. In order to help our families, we are spreading this sum over 4 years beginning in the 4th grade.

6 th Grade billing	\$1500 (divided by 2)	\$750
5 th Grade billing	\$1500 (divided by 3)	\$500
4 th Grade billing	\$1500 (divided by 4)	\$375

The Bnai Mitzvah fee covers everything related to your ceremony including preparing for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Friday night honors and Saturday service.

Your student will take part in the following workshops: Yad making, Talit workshop, Wimple design workshop

Each student will receive: Trope Book, Etz Hayim Torah

PLEASE NOTE:

- 1- An additional security fee of \$120 is required for attendance over 100 people.
- 2- A chaperone is required for all rentals with a fee of \$100, 4 hour minimum

Any arrangement for further food service is considered a rental and needs to be coordinated with the office.

All financial obligations must be current with the Temple in order to secure the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. Changes in fees might occur during the year. Please verify updated charges with the Temple's office.

Our Rabbis help families in need through their discretionary funds. It is a custom, if possible, to make a donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund in honor of the event. This donation will help us ensure each and every family's right to celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzvah for their child. We thank you in advance for your generosity.

If for any reason the B'nai Mitzvah date needs to be rescheduled due to financial reasons, student readiness as determined by the Rabbi, or extenuating circumstances, the Temple can not be held responsible for any financial commitments that were made by the family.

All prices are subject to change. Please call our office to verify information.

Dress Code

Talmud, Shabbat 113a – It is written regarding Shabbat, “You shall honor it, refraining from performing ordinary tasks.” ‘You shall honor it’ indicates that your Shabbat clothing should not be like your weekday clothing. This follows along the lines of R' Yochanan's practice of calling his clothing, ‘The source of my honor’.

Temple Judea is a reform temple and does not have a strict dress code; however, we ask that you will respect the holiness of our temple and use

modesty and good judgment when you choose your clothing. We also ask that you will advise your guests to follow our dress code guidelines.

General dress code for Shabbat services:

Appropriate dress code for men includes slacks and shirt, Jackets and suits are optional. Kippah and Talit are recommended for Shabbat morning services. Appropriate dress code for women and young girls include skirt or dress which reaches the knee or any pants suit. The following clothing is not acceptable: tank tops, spaghetti straps, tee shirts with offensive slogans, short shorts, pants that could be considered pajama pants, and shirts and pants that do not cover the midriff.

Friday Evening and Saturday Morning Services Information

Times of service

Friday evening: Service time 7:30 unless otherwise indicated.

Shabbat morning services start at 10:00 AM

Talit and Kipot

Special Kipot with the name and date embossed on the inside may be ordered through our WRJ Gift Shop at least 3 months prior to the event. The Temple has a minimal amount of Talitot and Kipot for guests. Most families do order or pass on a special Talit and Kipah for the Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Programs

The Temple office has a master of our Shabbat service program with listing of the order of service, honors and explanations. It is the family's responsibility to print these programs after Rabbi Kapitulnik has approved them.

Social Hall

Rental of the Social Hall for a luncheon and/or dinner party starts at \$250 for members and must be arranged directly with the Temple office. A rental agreement must be signed and returned with a security deposit. The complete fee is due 1 month prior to event. Additional security is required for all rentals.

Flowers

Flowers are ordered by the Temple's office and are included in the cost of the B'nai Mitzvah fee.

Video and Photography

Pictures may be taken before the event when the building is open. If the Rabbi is included in the pictures, be sure to make arrangements with him directly. During the service we allow stationary videotaping.

Flash photography is not permitted at any time during the Service.

Logistics

There will be many questions that will come up as your child's date comes closer. We are all available to answer questions and concerns. Please do not hesitate to ask, as there is always something that comes up that will be unique to you and your family.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah service itself:

An Important Note:

Our congregation takes great pride in making every Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration special, even though the participation of each student is basically the same. There are occasions, however, when special circumstances necessitate an adjustment in the student's participation. We will do everything possible to work with each student as an individual, with the ultimate goal of maximizing his or her self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Please feel free to discuss any concerns you might have with either of the Rabbis

What Does A Bar/Bat Mitzvah Do?

There are basically four areas of participation for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at a Shabbat morning service: to be a *sh'liach tzibur*, "leader of worship;" to chant from the Torah and the haftarah; and to offer a *D'var Torah* or teaching on the week's Torah portion.

Sh'liach Tzibur: One of the oldest and most prestigious roles in the synagogue is to be the sh'liach tzibur. Literally, the "representative of the community," the sh'liach tzibur leads the congregation in prayer. Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student joins with the cantor in this sacred role.

The D'var Torah

Following the reading of Torah, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will deliver a brief introduction to the week's Torah portion. This teaching will be prepared in consultation with the rabbi.

The K'riat Hatorah

Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah assumes the role of the *baal k'riah*, "Torah reader," for the day. This entails the learning of *parashiyot* or selections from the week's Torah portion.

The Haftarah

Following the reading of Torah, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will chant the haftarah or secondary biblical reading. Like the Torah reading, the haftarah is chanted according to a specific melody.

What Do The Parents Do?

Besides *kvelling* (proud pleasure) and being an active part in the preparation process, the parental involvement in a Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration includes:

- Offering the English readings for the candle lighting on Friday night
- Participating in the ceremony of the handing down of the Torah
- Having an *Aliyah*; reciting the Torah blessings
- Offering a prayer for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

All of the above will be coordinated by Rabbi Levine.

HONORS

Honors are an important part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Family and friends who are given honors cease to be observers and become active participants. A variety of opportunities for family and friends exist within the Shabbat morning worship service.

Below is a basic guide to Bar/Bat Mitzvah honors. Included in this *B'nai Mitzvah Handbook* is an honors worksheet. If you have any questions, please speak to our Rabbis.

Speaking Parts: *Aliyot*

An *aliyah* is the act of being called to the Torah. For every *Aliyah* there also needs to be a person reading torah, be it the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student, a family member or friend, or the cantor.

Non-speaking Parts

Honors include opening and closing of the ark, a Torah lifter, *hagbah*, and a Torah dresser, *g'lilah*.

The Involvement of Younger Siblings and Children

Siblings or other young children should be given age-appropriate honors, such as helping to dress the Torah or carrying the ornaments in the torah procession. Siblings may also help in leading the Ha*Motzi* blessing over the Challah, at the conclusion of the *Kiddush*. Older siblings can be given an *aliyah*.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR S'UDAT MITZVAH (RECEPTION)

The religious part of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony occurs in the Sanctuary. Choosing to focus on Jewish values during your later celebration will continue to sanctify the day and make it special and memorable. Remember, everything we do with our children teaches them something.

Decide as a family what you are celebrating and what this moment in your life means. This decision will help guide you through the rest of the planning stages. You may find the text *Putting God on the Guest List* by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (Jewish Lights Publishing) to be quite helpful. This book is available in our school library.

Consider Jewish Values in Your Decision Making

- *G'milut Chasadim*—Acts of Loving Kindness
- *Tzedakah*—Righteousness/Justice/Sacred Giving
- *Talmud Torah*—Study of the Torah
- *Hidur P'nei Zakein*—Honoring the Elderly
- *Zicharon*—Memory
- Shabbat—Honoring Shabbat
- *Tzar Ba'alei Chayim*—Non-Cruelty to Animals
- *Tikkun Hanefesh*—Repairing the Self
- *Tikkun Olam*—Repairing the World

Theme

Having a theme for your celebration might help you organize your vision for the day as well as serve as an educational tool for your family and friends. The challenge is to find an appropriate, relevant idea that reflects the Jewish values important to you. You might want to focus on a value or mitzvah addressed in your Torah portion. For example:

- *B'reishit*, the first portion in Genesis, is about Creation. Use the theme of *tikkun olam*, “repairing the world,” and incorporate an environmental project into your celebration. Or consider creating or beginning something that will benefit the world in some way. One idea is to establish a food reclamation program in your school that calls upon kids to donate the uneaten, wrapped portions of their lunches (e.g., unopened juice boxes, packaged snacks), which you will take to the local food pantry on a weekly basis.
- The Torah portion *Noach* lends itself to the theme of showing kindness to animals. You can find out about species that are becoming extinct, get information about what we can do to help, and distribute it to your guests. You can ask guests to bring old towels, leashes, food, etc., for an animal shelter and then set a time when everyone can go there to help out. This theme is an easy one to feature throughout your entire celebration.
- There is a portion in Genesis called *Toldot*, which means “Generations.”

You might use this occasion to learn about the generations in your family. Make a family tree and use it as table centerpieces. Contribute to organizations that focus on intergenerational activities.

- In the portion *Vayeishev*, Joseph interprets dreams. Use the theme of dreams throughout your celebration. Contribute to organizations that make dreams come true for those in need, such as the *Make a Wish Foundation* or *Myriam's Dream*. Purchase *kippot* made by the elderly in workshops supported by *Myriam's Dream*, a nonprofit organization that helps older people throughout the world.
- The first portion of the Book of Exodus is called *Sh'mot*, meaning "Names." Be creative. Consider the following: In what ways are names important? What does your name mean? What about other names? What is the meaning of your Jewish name? For whom are you named? Find out the *g'matria* (the numerical equivalent in Hebrew) of your name and its significance. Does it tell you anything about yourself? Contribute to an organization that helps newborn babies—those who are first being named. Contribute to one of the Holocaust museums or organizations—places that keep alive the names of those who were lost but are not forgotten.
- If Moses figures prominently in your portion, consider the theme of leadership. You can learn about other famous leaders. Consider the following: What are the essential characteristics of leadership? From a Jewish point of view, what makes a good leader? If you are having a candlelighting ceremony, ask each person to think of a different leader and the qualities the leader had that he or she would like you to emulate. Contribute to the North American Federation of Temple Youth either in general or to its Leadership Training Programs in particular in order to help our Jewish leaders of tomorrow.
- Your Torah portion might speak about blessings. You may decide to think about the blessings you have in your life and try to insure that others who are less fortunate are blessed in similar ways. For example, food is a blessing.
- Organize a collection of canned goods and spend some time at the food pantry, shelving supplies. Use canned food as the centerpiece for your tables and then donate the food to the hungry. Involve your guests in cooking food for the local soup kitchen. It is possible to use the temple kitchen for this purpose.

Tzedakah

- The invitation sets the tone for the celebration and can let your guests know what is important to you. In lieu of sending an expensive invitation, utilize your desktop publishing skills and make your own. Note on the back of the card that the simplicity of the invitation represents a donation to a *tzedakah* organization that you chose. The thank-you note can also be produced in this way.
- Donate 3% of the total cost of food to Mazon, an organization that helps feed hungry people nationwide. If you contact them ahead of time, they

will send you cards to put on your tables, indicating that you have made a contribution.

- In honor of each of your guests, give donations that can make a difference in the lives of others instead of party favors that will cost you the same amount and end up in the trash.
- Check to see if the leftover food from your party can be donated to a soup kitchen. If you are somewhat insistent, many restaurants and caterers will help with this.
- Make either a financial donation to or purchase something specific for the temple, religious school, or temple library in honor of your becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- Flowers purchased to decorate the *bimah* can be donated to a local hospital or nursing home, not left in the temple to wither. Let someone else enjoy them.

Entertainment

- Include Israeli dancing, not just the Hora. Perhaps think about hiring someone to teach Israeli dancing. Consider featuring klezmer music as part of the party entertainment.
- It is possible to do a mitzvah project in place of or in addition to some form of entertainment. Why not rent a local school gym and sponsor a mitzvah basketball game. Ask friends to support one of the teams and pledge any amount of money for each point scored. Cook for the soup kitchen with your friends. Be creative!
- The party should reflect the initial values on which the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony is based. Don't be afraid to be different.

Centerpieces

Choose something simple. Cut flowers can be beautiful and elegant on any table and can be donated to a local nursing home after the party. If you want, choose something that goes with your theme if you have one. For example, if your theme is Famous Jewish Sports Figures and you decide to use sports equipment as part of your centerpiece, research which organizations can use that sports equipment and donate the centerpiece items to them after the party. Put a card on your table to let your guests know that even the sports equipment is going to be used in a Jewish meaningful way. If your theme is Israel, you can purchase trees from the Jewish National Fund and make centerpieces that incorporate the certificates the JNF sends you. Make your own centerpieces. Do you dry flowers? Are you handy with woodworking? Incorporate something personal into your decorations. Can you make a centerpiece out of something that can be donated after the party to people in need?

Celebration Variations

It is most common to have a celebration of some kind at a catering hall or restaurant directly after services. Other models that deserve your consideration include:

- ♣ Using the temple social hall for a luncheon for guests or a Kiddush for the

entire congregation;

- ♣ Having a luncheon at home;
- ♣ Providing a luncheon for adult guests immediately after services and then having a more informal party for the children later that evening or the next day;
- ♣ Inviting everyone to a mystery location and then involving them in a mitzvah project;
- ♣ Taking a family trip to Israel;
- ♣ Taking a family trip to the town in Europe (or any place in the world) from which your ancestors came and exploring your Jewish roots together or
- ♣ Any combination of the above.

Closing Thoughts

Everything you do to make your Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration personal, filled with your values, and meaningful will enhance the experience for all. Every celebration need not look as if it's been shaped by the same cookie cutter. Have your celebration reflect who you are and what you believe as an individual and as a family. Make Jewish choices, and don't be afraid to be different. It's worth it! The memories of how you worked together and your incredibly meaningful celebration will last a lifetime.

Many wishes for lots of Mazal Tov!

Information for this booklet was adopted from the Union of Reform Judaism.

APPENDIX

A HISTORY OF THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH CEREMONIES

All societies determine a specific age that separates childhood from adulthood—the age when an individual assumes his or her religious and communal responsibilities to the society in which he or she lives. Like most traditions, the ceremonies connected with becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at age thirteen evolved over time. It has always been viewed as one moment in the process of spiritual growth and commitment to the Jewish people.

The establishment of becoming a Bar Mitzvah at thirteen years plus one day for boys and a Bat Mitzvah at twelve years plus one day for girls has several origins. The Talmud records that during the time of the Second Temple (520 B.C.E.–70 C.E.), it was traditional for sages to bless a child who had completed his first fast day at the age of twelve or thirteen. In *Pirkei Avot* (“Ethics of the Fathers,” second century C.E.) it is written, “At thirteen one is ready to do mitzvot.” By the time the Talmud was completed in the sixth century C.E., boys of thirteen years plus one day had assumed full responsibility for performing the mitzvot, hence the term Bar Mitzvah, “son of the commandment.” This also had legal ramifications: These boys were now counted in a *minyan* and could act as witnesses. There was no formal rite, only a public blessing by the father, that he was no longer responsible for the sins of the son.

The earliest Bar Mitzvah ceremony consisted of blessing and reading the last section of the weekly portion of the Torah, the *maftir*, meaning the extra reading, since the boy was not a Bar Mitzvah until after the service, and reading the haftarah portion. The most important part of the rite was a *d'rashah* or *d'var Torah*, a sermonette on the Torah or haftarah portion. Since the Bar Mitzvah was assuming adult religious responsibilities, he was expected to show his understanding of those responsibilities to his family and, more importantly, to the community. Structurally, the Bar Mitzvah ceremony is essentially the same as it originally was. It wasn't until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that we find records of a Bar Mitzvah being invited to lead part of the worship service.

A public ceremony in celebration of a girl becoming a Bat Mitzvah, “daughter of the commandment,” did not come into formal being in North America until 1922. Dr. Judith Kaplan-Eisenstein, the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan. The regular celebration of girls becoming *Bnot Mitzvah* came into prominence in Reform congregations particularly in the second half of the 20th century and is generally identical in form to the celebration of a Bar Mitzvah.

It should be noted that the rite of confirmation originated in the Reform Movement in Germany in 1810 and included girls in 1817. Since it was felt that a thirteen-year-old was too young to understand the precepts of Judaism, the celebration of a boy becoming a Bar Mitzvah was dropped in favor of confirmation, which was held at age sixteen or seventeen because that was deemed a more mature age to assume the responsibilities of Judaism.

Historically, all joyous occasions were celebrated in some manner, and becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah was no exception. However, unlike weddings at which we are commanded to rejoice with bride and groom, the Bar Mitzvah has no such mandate. In early years the celebrations varied from a simple *Kiddush* of wine, brandy, and cake following the service to more elaborate meals for the family and friends. The Rabbis urged families not to have elaborate celebrations and always to provide for the poor in order to fulfill the mitzvah. The *d'rashah* was delivered by the Bar Mitzvah some time during the celebration in order to emphasize its religious aspects. Gifts were generally limited to books, or religious items, or "sermon gifts," which were small amounts of money given as thanks for the sermonette. Among Moroccan Jews, this money was given to the boy's teacher.

Historically, Bar/Bat Mitzvah has been viewed as a first step in a young person's acceptance of the obligations to family and community as a responsible Jew. It was and should continue to be the beginning of a lifetime of the performance of mitzvot, study, prayer, and a commitment to share the destiny of the Jewish people.