

Congregation Shir Tikvah

Bat/Bar Mitzvah Practical Guidelines for Parents

1. How much will my child do during the Tefilah (prayer service)?

Your child will be offered the honor of chanting the *Haftarah* reading for that Shabbat. Circumstances and ability will inform our joint decision – you, the tutor, and the Rabbi – regarding what else your child will do: leading some of the regular congregational prayers, for example, and probably the *maftir* (three verses), if not more, during the ritual reading of the Torah. Your child will also prepare a *d'var Torah* introducing the Torah reading.

2. How often does my child need to go to Saturday morning Tefilah?

The easy answer: as often as you can. A good guideline might be that you should bring your child to Shir Tikvah *Tefilah* for as long as it takes for them to feel comfortable with the prayers, and this normally occurs after attending at least 10 Shabbat morning services. There is a certain comfort level in knowing what to expect which can't be conveyed any other way, so the more often you can go, the easier it will be for your child to feel at home and confident in our *minhag* (customs).

3. How do I direct my child in finding a mitzvah project?

Jewish tradition teaches that one gives thanks by giving; for that reason, many Jews mark happy occasions by giving *zedakah*. The Mitzvah Project introduces your child to this important concept, and the project should reflect some aspect of the child's personality as well as Jewish ethics. One example: a child worked at the dog shelter, and taught the congregation the Jewish ethic of *tzaar baalei hayim*, sensitivity to "the pain of animals", in his *d'var Torah*.

As part of the Nashira Education Project, your child will be exposed to many good causes. The following is a good web site to begin investigating ideas for mitzvah projects: <http://www.babaganewz.com/partyplanner/images/mitzvahProjects.pdf>

4. Does a Bat/Bar Mitzvah family have to participate in the Friday night service?

You are certainly warmly invited to have the honor of lighting the candles and leading the Kiddush during Erev Shabbat *Tefilah*. But you are not required to attend, and many of our families do choose to celebrate Shabbat at home with their visiting family and guests. If you choose to come to services and you expect to bring more than 20 guests with you, you should provide an additional loaf of hallah.

5. Can I have a photographer at the service?

This is not a performance and having a photographer or someone openly videotaping the service can be a distraction. Any photos or videotaping can be done as long as they are taken from the side room off of the main sanctuary or in the rear of the sanctuary on a tripod – but it should be as unobtrusive as possible. No flashes and no load clicking.

6. Who gives the blessings (*aliyot*) prior to the reading of the Torah?

Reading from the Torah is different from the honor of an *aliyah* to the Torah, strangely enough! The "*aliyah*" is defined as the honor of chanting the blessings before and after the Torah is read. Your child will have the final *aliyah*- "last is best", as they say in Hebrew, no matter how much or little Torah s/he reads. Usually the parent/s do the blessing for the next-to-last *aliyah*, regardless of who actually reads that part of the Torah. Sometimes the person who is given the honor of the blessing will also be able to read, but it is not necessary.

7. Who may read from the Torah besides the Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Certainly, if you have family members who would like to read from the Torah on the morning of your child's *aliyah* as a bar/bat mitzvah, they are welcome to participate, as are friends. Other members of our community may also participate in reading the Torah that morning, and, almost certainly, the rabbi will be involved.

If you have Jewish family or friends reading Torah, please get a firm confirmation that they are indeed committed to reading/chanting. When you have that list as fail-safe as you can get it, the Rabbi will assign readings. They will each be 3 verses long. Also, even though your child has learned to chant the Torah and will do so, it is not required at Shir Tikvah for the Torah to be chanted by the other readers.

8. Who are the three people who welcome my child into the Jewish community?

Three people from the Shir Tikvah community are selected to represent the entire Jewish community, and welcome the Bar/Bat Mitzvah into that community. It is not your job to arrange for them during the service. Rabbi does that. If you like, she will explain the idea more thoroughly to you when you meet. Of course, if you have people in mind you would like to be considered for this, just ask Rabbi.

9. I have family members who are not Jewish. Is it appropriate for them to have an *Aliyah*?

It is not appropriate to offer the blessing over the Torah to a non-Jew. The blessing requires the one reading it to give thanks to God "who has given us the Torah." We try not to ask people to say things that aren't true to their own spiritual reality.

However, we do invite non-Jewish family members to be part of a larger group that includes Jews in an aliyah when and if it seems appropriate - like a non-Jewish parent who was at least as instrumental as the Jewish parent in bringing the child to that moment, through support, carpooling and other kinds of parental help. We don't expect the non-Jewish parent or other relative to recite the blessing, but they are welcome to come up and stand with those who will recite it.

We try to limit the number of *aliyot* to five, but we have gone as far as the traditional number, which is seven, on some occasions. You can haggle with the rabbi on that one. Traditionally at Shir Tikvah, there are four or five *aliyot*, with the Bat/Bar Mitzvah being the last one.

10. What else can family members do?

Other honors you can consider offering to people, in consultation with Rabbi.

- Holding the Torah aloft for all to see (two strong people).
- Helping to dress the Torah (one person).
- opening the Ark doors

Again, you'll consult on an individual basis with Rabbi on this one, and she'll do her best to make sure that the process is not too stressful for you.

If you have a non-Jewish family member whom you wish to honor and don't see how you can do that, given the above, talk to the Rabbi. She will work it out in the best possible way for your family and your family dynamic.

11. There is no applause at the service, how can we celebrate my child completing her part in the service?

In order to satisfy the impulse to applaud, we have congregants and guests throw candy at the end of the Haftarah service. It is suggested that you bring soft, well-wrapped candy (**no chocolate!**). Please respect the **NO CHOCOLATE** rule when it comes to choosing the **non-chocolate** candy for throwing. Machine sealed candy is best.

Please have 6 to 8 people designated to give out the **non-chocolate** candy and let them know they need to watch the Rabbi for a sign as to when it is best to start passing it out. In the past, people have asked their Nashira classmates or cousins/siblings to pass out the candy. Shir Tikvah will provide up to 8 baskets to hold the candy.

12. Is it appropriate for the parents of the Bat Mitzvah to give a speech at any point of the service?

At the end of the service, everyone will be asked to come to the front of the sanctuary for Kiddush. After the blessings, you will have a chance to thank all of the people who have helped you and your child reach this day, and perhaps remember a special

someone who could not be there. It is **not** customary at Shir Tikvah to speak on the accomplishments of your child during this part of the service. You may do so at your private party. So, no speeches, please.

13. After the service, do I provide food for a luncheon, hallah?

We do ask that you bring hallah and wine for Kiddush after the service. You will probably need to have 4 to 5 loaves as well as servers and a couple of bottles of “Jewish” wine (depending on the size of the crowd expected).

You are **NOT** required to give a luncheon. It is very important that each family's choice of luncheon, no luncheon, be respected. There is **NO** expectation that the family host a luncheon for the entire congregation. It's nice if it is an appropriate option for the family, since it gives the entire congregation a chance to celebrate together, but it is not required and will not always be the right choice for the family. None of us has the ability to judge that choice. Besides, the primary celebration is at the tefilah itself.

If you do choose to have a luncheon, here are a few things to know:

- The Shir Tikvah kitchen is not kosher but we don't mix meat and dairy so the luncheon should either be a meat lunch or a dairy lunch. Vegetarian is of course, OK, no pork or shellfish. There are usually about 30 people who attend Saturday morning services so you should count on including them if you provide lunch after services.
- There are several caterers who have already catered events at Shir Tikvah and are trained in using our kitchen and it's clean up. Ask the office for a list of caterers.
- You may choose to use a different caterer, however, if they are willing to be trained. This takes about a half-hour and costs \$20.
- You may also cater it yourself. It is our recommendation that if you do cater it yourself that you hire someone to set up the platters and re-stock the food during the lunch, essentially, a caterer. This will take a lot of the pressure off of your 4 families.
- Remember that at least one of your 4 families needs to be trained in kitchen cleanup.
- It is the family's responsibility to ensure that all volunteers (4 families) know what their responsibilities are before, during, and after the lunch.
- The luncheon can consist of a simple oneg of bagels and cream cheese to a full spread. It can also be a standing reception-type. All styles have occurred at Shir Tikvah to great success.

Please plan to meet about 3 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to discuss details. If you have a luncheon, it is asked that you have it at Bridgeport so that everyone attending the service will be included.

14. Who takes care of set up and clean up after the luncheon?

We ask that families holding a luncheon at Bridgeport be responsible for finding 4 families to be responsible for set up and cleanup of the basement. The family will also be responsible for arranging for a regular member of the Shir Tikvah Set Up/Cleanup Committee to be available for oversight if there are no Kitchen-Trained volunteers included in the 4 families.

The family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will not be responsible for doing the cleanup, only for ensuring that the 4 scheduled families are committed to being there.

There is a chance that very soon the option of paying for a cleaning service will be possible for your bar/bat mitzvah reception/luncheon. Please ask Michael Wood when you begin planning.

15. Do I need to make a Program of the Service?

Like all things at Shir Tikvah, a Program of the Service is **not** required. Each family should judge whether it will be helpful for guests who are not familiar with what a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is, or what occurs during Shabbat services. They can read it before the service begins and get a flavor of what is to come. If you do choose to make a Program, remember two things: first, you will be taking 90% of them back to be recycled as congregants will not keep them, and second, there is no standard Program.

That being said, you do not have to re-invent the wheel. Programs from past Bar/Bat Mitzvahs are available and "plagiarism" is encouraged. They have ranged from a one-page (front and back) to several pages long. Some have included the Torah and Haftarah portions in both Hebrew and English, and some have included a table of the sequence of the service.

Below is an example of a Program of the Service you might want to use to give to your guests when they arrive for the start of Shabbat morning services:

The Bat Mitzvah:

Today, we are celebrating a Bat Mitzvah, the coming-of-age ceremony in which 12-year old girls join the Jewish community with full rights and responsibilities. Literally translated, the Hebrew words mean "daughter of the covenant."

In practice, it means that (name) has reached the age at which she is old enough to understand and practice "*mitzvot*" – the commandments for living a Jewish life, which range from helping the poor to honoring the Sabbath.

From this day forward, she can be counted as one of the 10 adults in the "*minyan*" – the 10 adult Jews required for a Jewish service. (name) can be called upon to read the weekly passage from the Torah, an honor that marks her connection to Jewish law and responsibilities.

The Service:

(Name)'s Bat Mitzvah is part of Shir Tikvah's regular weekly Shabbat (Saturday) service. Men wear yarmulkes, or kipot, as a sign of respect, though this is not required. The prayer book translates virtually all of the service into English and the rabbi will signal when the congregation stands as part of the prayer service. Photos are not permitted.

____ **(name)** ____ will lead the congregation in prayers. But the focal point of the service, and of her Bat Mitzvah, is the weekly reading of the Torah and Haftarah, the Book of Prophets.

Today's Torah passage is _____. **(Name)**'s Haftarah is drawn from the _____. Both readings are chanted.

Some additional information that might be helpful;

Two major thoughts to keep in mind:

- Please check with Rabbi when you have questions about the ceremony rather than share impressions of what might be true (for example, how to pick the three people who welcome the child to the congregation); and
- As each family approaches the big day, please refer back to this Parent Guide. It will make a lot more sense when you are 2 months out and starting to really focus on your questions.

Additional information about Shir Tikvah:

- Shir Tikvah congregants can be a valuable resource with your Bar/Bat Mitzvah planning needs.
- Number of Tables available: 12, each can seat 12, but typically at least 2 tables are reserved for food, leaving 10 available for seating.
- Tablecloths available: 14 white ones are large enough to cover the large tables and 2 blue ones are smaller and work for the side tables (drinks/desert). There are also 16 taupe tablecloths that will cover card tables. If you use the tablecloths, please make arrangements for washing/drying/returning them before the next Shabbat.
- Flowers for the *Bimah*? Not encouraged
- Cell phones: make sure your guests turn them off
- Kiddush cups available: about 125
- Dishes: 200 white ceramic dishes, 200 forks, 200 spoons