Guide for Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parents at Bet Am Shalom

Prepared by
Bet Am Shalom Ritual Committee
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A GUIDE FOR BAR/BAT MITZVAH FAMILIES AT BET AM SHALOM

Mazal tov! You are about to embark on one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences in the life of a Jewish family. It is also one that requires careful planning and preparation. To help you through the process, the Ritual Committee of Bet Am Shalom has prepared this guide. Please read it so you have a clear understanding of what lies ahead. *For more personal assistance, a committee member assigned as your "liaison" will contact you about six months before the event, to discuss the fine points and any of your concerns.*

In order to have a bar/bat mitzvah at Bet Am Shalom, students must meet one of the following criteria:

- Enrollment in Jewish day school or Bet Am Shalom Torah La'am with regular attendance through the end of 7th grade. Torah La'am and day school students are highly encouraged to continue their Jewish education with our BAS teen Jewish community in the Dor Hahemshekh program.
- Children with special needs. Parents will be asked to provide a copy of their child's Individual Education Plan (IEP), so that the school and parents can work together to determine how to provide the best possible learning experience.
- Travel from great geographical distances. In this case, reciprocal arrangements may be made with a school pre-approved by the Rabbi and the Education Director.

We look forward to working with all of you and your child(ren) in this exciting process.

THE MEANING OF THE DAY

The bar/bat mitzvah is a momentous event for your family. Your child's entry into Jewish adulthood weaves together religious, communal, family, and social dimensions, each important in its own way. We in the Bet Am Shalom community share with you in the religious and communal aspects. Together, we decide how our children are to be admitted to adulthood and how to conduct this rite of passage. At Bet Am Shalom we set this rite in the Shabbat service in the synagogue, where the coming-of-age child demonstrates his/her readiness to fulfill the obligations of the Jewish adult.

We hope that the central focus of the day will be the service and not the subsequent party, important as that is. You may not realize it, but everyone in the Bet Am Shalom community feels a vested interest in your child and shares in your simcha. The dignity of the service gives meaning to the day, not just for you but for the entire congregation.

The service is no different on the Shabbat of your child's bar/bat mitzvah than on any other Shabbat, except for the child's participation. Ideally, your family and your child are comfortable in the synagogue and can participate confidently in the service. For those less familiar with our service, you can achieve this comfort level simply by coming to the synagogue as often as you can – observing the rhythms and rituals of the service, absorbing the words and melodies of the prayers. ***While Bet Am Shalom formally requires your child to attend a minimum of five Shabbat morning services prior to the bar/bat mitzvah, this is a bare minimum.*** We look forward to seeing your whole family more frequently at Shabbat services.

THE FORMAL PREPARATION

On the bar/bat mitzvah day, your child will do the following:

Chant from the Torah (one or more of the seven aliyot), plus the *Maftir* section (the eighth aliyah) and the *Haftarah* of the day.

- ❑ **You should arrange tutoring for this basic part of your child's participation beginning nine to twelve months before the event,** taking into account your child's Hebrew reading proficiency and the calendar (e.g., summer vacation). If you have a tutor in mind, please check with the Rabbi or Abby before making an agreement with the tutor. Rabbi Bronstein or Education Director Abby Reiken will be happy to recommend skilled tutors who are familiar with our rituals and routines. Please contact Rabbi Bronstein and/or Education Director Abby Reiken for recommendations of skilled tutors are familiar with our rituals and routines. The tutoring fees are paid directly to the tutor.

Teach the congregation some Torah before chanting the Haftarah, by giving a short D'rash (also called a D'var Torah, "a word of Torah") about the ideas, beliefs, doubts, or questions inspired by the Torah and Haftarah portions.

- ❑ **Your child will meet privately with Rabbi Bronstein approximately three months before the day to prepare this brief talk. The office will contact you to schedule appointments with the Rabbi.** This part of the process is rewarding not only as a wonderful experience in independent thinking for your child, but also as a chance for one-on-one interaction with the Rabbi. Most parents will find that they do not need to be directly involved in the writing process of the child's d'rash.

Lead the Torah Service – Taking the Torah out of the Ark before the Torah reading and returning it to the Ark after the conclusion of the reading. The bar/bat mitzvah will lead the congregation in the opening and closing prayers of the "Torah Service" as well as the concluding liturgy of the overall service.

- ❑ **In order for your child to feel confident and prepared, he/she will meet with Rabbi Fredda Cohen four times in the main sanctuary to learn the liturgy and choreography of the Torah Service and to practice from the actual Torah scroll that he/she will be reading from, well in advance of the day of the actual service.** (This is not to be confused with private tutoring sessions.) The office will contact you to schedule appointments with Rabbi Cohen.

As parents, you play a vital role throughout in ensuring that your child is adequately prepared – by chauffeuring, encouraging, helping, checking on progress – doing whatever it takes to make your child feel successful.

During the semester prior to the bar/bat mitzvah, students and their parents attend Sunday morning sessions with Rabbi Bronstein, known as the Rabbi's Mitzvah Class, where families explore together the larger issues of God, Torah, Covenant, Mitzvah.

FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN THE SERVICE

Parent's *D'rash*

One of the parents of the bar/bat mitzvah will present a commentary on the Torah portion for that Shabbat. The d'rash is a treatment of an idea or theme in the Torah portion and should be approximately 1,000 words in length (four double-spaced pages) and last 7-10 minutes. This assignment is a challenging and wonderful opportunity to deepen your own knowledge of the tradition and to share actively with your child in the experience of the bar/bat mitzvah. Rabbi Bronstein is available to help with the preparation of this talk and to review the final text. To allow time for review, please send your final draft to him two weeks prior to the event. The Bet Am Shalom library has many helpful reference materials. Allow plenty of time for study, writing, and review.

Aliyot

The weekly Torah portion or "parshah" is divided into eight aliyot (aliyah means "going up"). A person who is given an aliyah is "called up to the Torah." (See "Aliyah Information Sheet" elsewhere in the preparation materials found on betamshalom.org.)

When there is a bar/bat mitzvah, three of the eight *aliyot* are given to congregants. Four are reserved for members or guests of the bar/bat mitzvah family. The eighth aliyah is referred to as the "Maftir" and is reserved for the bar/bat mitzvah child. Although you may designate your four aliyot in any order that you wish, it is customary for the parents of the bar/bat mitzvah to take the seventh *aliyah*, the one prior to the Maftir, so that they are on the *bima* when their child is called for his/her first *aliyah*.

Each of the eight people called to the Torah recites a blessing before and after the Torah verses are chanted. A gabbai – one of two aides on the bima – calls up each honoree using his/her English and Hebrew names and the Hebrew names of his/her parents.

Please select the people you wish to honor with aliyot, list their English and Hebrew names on the accompanying sheet, and return it to the BAS office one month prior to your child's service. Any Jew, male or female, who is at least 13 years of age, is eligible to receive an *aliyah*. It is your responsibility to make sure that your honorees are prepared to recite the Torah blessings fluently in Hebrew. The texts of the blessings are available at the reading table in both traditional and Reconstructionist versions, written in Hebrew letters and in transliteration. Please send your honorees a copy of the blessings – included in this Guide – in advance, urging them to practice. Recordings of the blessings are available on the BAS website, www.betamshalom.org/prayers.

In addition to the four persons you will select for the *aliyot* that require blessings, there are two other honors for which no blessing is recited. These are lifting the Torah (hagbahah) after the Torah reading is completed and dressing it (g'lilah). Please assign these honors as well, and supply the names on the enclosed sheet.

It is possible for two people to share an aliyah. If necessary, you can honor additional family members with the opening and closing of the ark.

Bet Am Shalom permits non-member Torah readers for one or two of the aliyot. If you wish to have family members or friends who are qualified Torah readers take part in this way, arrangements must be made in advance with Debra Abrahams Weiner. Once you have determined which sections of the Torah will be read by your child and other friends or family members, it is very important that any sections still unassigned be made known to Debbie, debra.weiner@stifel.com, at least **four** weeks prior to your simcha so that she can find congregants to prepare those sections.

Finally, younger siblings may wish to lead the singing of one of these prayers/hymns: Ashrei, Ein Kelohenu, Adon Olam. You should arrange this with the Rabbi.

Other Participants

During the Torah reading, two gabbais (or gabba'im) assist with the proceedings on the bima. Before the Torah reading, congregants Debbie Abrahams Weiner or Joel Crystal will select the gabba'im from among qualified congregants. If you know qualified congregants whom you would like to take on this role on your day, please notify Debbie or Joel in advance.

Greeters/Ushers

Three members of the Board of Trustees and School Board, assigned by the office, will serve as ushers to greet incoming worshipers, distribute prayer books and kippot, encourage the wearing of tallitot, and help maintain decorum.

Chaperones

In order to assist/encourage appropriate decorum, we also assign parents from the Rabbi's Mitzvah Class to chaperone on one Shabbat during the semester of your child's date. You will receive your assignment and general instructions well in advance.

PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

All details regarding physical arrangements – for the service, for the kiddush afterward, and for your scheduled luncheon or party if held in the building – must be confirmed up two or three months in advance and coordinated with the administrative staff.

Some families provide flowers for the bima. This is completely optional. During warm weather months, you could also choose live plants that can be planted on the grounds after your simcha. Penny Grossman, penjack1@verizon.net, from the Garden Chevra is available to identify plants that would be suitable for the property and to discuss location and planting of your selections.

Some families also provide kippot for their guests and members of the congregation. This is completely optional.

You are not limited by any maximum number of guests; however, you need to provide the office the number of guests in advance so that the room can be set up accordingly. *For Saturday and*

*Sunday afternoon rentals**, before committing with a caterer or sending out invitations,** please discuss your preferred party start time with the office to determine if your desired timing can be accommodated.*

For parties with 30 or more children, we require and will arrange and bill you for security. ***Families may not make private security arrangements.*** The number of guards will depend upon the number of young guests.

If your guests will be making use of the weekly Shabbat babysitting, please notify the BAS office of the expected number of children so that we can be sure the room is adequately staffed.

THE KIDDUSH

It is customary for the bar/bat mitzvah family to host a light luncheon kiddush, (a reception), following the Shabbat morning service. In addition to your invited guests, you should also plan for approximately 110 congregants. As noted above, contact the synagogue office at least 60 days prior to your event to discuss arrangements, including applicable charges. **If you plan to have an afternoon reception at a location other than the synagogue, we strongly encourage you to plan the start time of your private party to allow you to remain during the kiddush to celebrate with members of the congregation who will be eager to congratulate your family.**

You may choose your own caterer, but we do offer a kiddush option for b'nai mitzvah families. In lieu of hiring a caterer directly, you may choose to order your kiddush food at a discounted rate through the BAS office from the regular Kosher caterer used for congregational kiddushes. Since the process is standardized, you will receive the synagogue pricing, with the ability to upgrade through available enhancements (i.e., lox and the trimmings). Please contact the office no less than three weeks prior to your date if you would like to use this option.

Any catering option must observe the dietary laws, kashrut, as defined for our synagogue. Details are included elsewhere in this Guide and on the member section of the BAS website under Policies and Procedures, but the basic parameters are as follows:

- For a meat meal for a Shabbat dinner or private party, use of a certified kosher caterer is required.

- For dairy food, you may choose a non-kosher caterer. *If you choose this option, the menu and ingredients must be reviewed and approved by Rabbi Bronstein <u>at least two weeks ahead of the event</u>.*

- It is customary for the Kiddush to be dairy.

- If you choose to prepare the kiddush yourself, synagogue kashrut regulations will apply.

- If you plan to hold a private reception (in addition to hosting the kiddush), please consult with the BAS Office regarding your catering choices. Due to the limitations of our kitchen facilities, using multiple caterers must be discussed with the office and is not recommended.

- There is often food left over after the Kiddush. If you do not plan to take the leftovers home, the Green Chevra will make arrangements to donate the leftovers to a local shelter. They should be contacted in advance to arrange for someone to make the delivery. Please contact the office for more information.

POST-KIDDUSH FESTIVITIES

We hope that wherever you decide to hold a celebration after the service, the atmosphere will be consistent with Shabbat. This means taking into account the menu, type of music, the noise level, dress, and activities for the children. If a luncheon is held in the synagogue, the synagogue's *kashrut* rules must be observed. You will have the "right of first refusal" to rent the building for a private reception on the afternoon or evening of your date; however, you will be required to place a non-refundable deposit by 18 months in advance to ensure that the date remains available for your use. You will also be asked to enter into a rental contract agreement which details the arrangements. Please contact the synagogue office at 914-946-8851, to discuss rental arrangements.

FEES

Fees for bar/bat mitzvah preparation services provided by the synagogue, as detailed in the separate schedule included with this Guide, and any facility rental and b'nai mitzvah fees, must be paid in full in advance of the date of your simcha, pursuant to the terms of the rental agreement.

SHABBAT REGULATIONS

In order to maintain the Shabbat atmosphere:

- Picture taking or videotaping is not permitted during the service or the kiddush. Posed pictures may be taken at the rehearsal or on another occasion. Pictures and video are allowed during the private reception <u>in the rented spaces only</u>.

- No electronic devices, for talking or texting, may be used on the synagogue premises until after the conclusion of the kiddush. Amplified music is not allowed during kiddush, but may begin at your luncheon or reception no earlier than one hour from the end of service. Amplification of music is not permitted outdoors at the synagogue at any time on Shabbat.

- All entertainment activities (whether held on Shabbat or at other times) must be approved by the administrative staff. In cases where there is a risk of damage to the building, a security deposit will be required from the vendor. Under no circumstances are activities involving ball throwing or other airborne objects allowed. The rental contract includes a detailed list of the building regulations.

- Smoking is not permitted in the synagogue or on the synagogue grounds.

- Sign-in boards are not allowed in any public area of the synagogue. They are allowed inside the private rental space.

- Balloons, photo boards, etc. should not be displayed until after the kiddush and only in the rooms you have rented for your private event.

- A "candle lighting ceremony" is not permitted at kiddush, but may take place at your reception or luncheon *no earlier than one hour from the end of service*.

Rabbi Bronstein, your Ritual Committee liaison, or the synagogue office staff will be happy to discuss any of these regulations with you as well as any special needs you may have. Please speak with the Rabbi if you have any questions about the appropriateness of any activity or practice, whether with regard to the spirit of Shabbat or the tone of your bar/bat mitzvah celebration. A letter from Rabbi Bronstein is included in this Guide for further guidance on kiddush restrictions.

We wish you a joyous and spiritually enriching bar/bat mitzvah experience; the entire congregation looks forward to celebrating with you and your family.

ALIYAH INFORMATION

An aliyah is a significant honor, but one that comes infrequently to many of us. If you have never had an aliyah before, or it was so long ago that it is no longer familiar to you, this information sheet is intended to acquaint you (or re-acquaint you) with the customs and procedures surrounding an aliyah, as practiced at Bet Am Shalom Synagogue. The goal here is to give you a comfort level that will enable you to enjoy the experience.

What is an Aliyah?

Aliyah means "going up." It refers to "going up" to the bima to participate in the Torah service.

The weekly Torah portion read on Shabbat is divided into eight reading sections, or "aliyot." Those persons assigned to "go up" to the Torah for an aliyah recite a blessing before and after their sections are read. The eighth aliyah, the "Maftir" section, is always given to the bar or bat mitzvah who will be chanting the Haftarah – a selection from the Prophets – for that particular Shabbat.

What are the blessings?

You will find the blessings that are recited before and after the reading of each Torah section included in this Guide. They are written out in Hebrew and transliteration and with an English translation (for your information). Either of two versions of the opening blessing may be used: the traditional version, which includes the phrase, "*asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim*" (you have chosen us from among all the peoples), or the Reconstructionist version, which uses the phrase "*asher kervanu la'avodato*" (you have brought us near to your service). Either version is perfectly acceptable.

Both versions of the opening blessing are recited in the same traditional fashion: You chant the first line; the congregation responds with the second line; you repeat that second line, and then go on to chant the rest of the blessing. There is only one version of the closing blessing, and you read it straight through. ***If you are not in the habit of reciting or hearing these blessings regularly, it would be an excellent idea to spend some time practicing them.*** The Reconstructionist version of the aliyah blessings are on the BAS website under www.betamshalom.org/prayers . Telephone coaching from a member of the Ritual Committee is also available.

What is the appropriate ritual attire?

Bet Am Shalom is completely egalitarian in ritual observance and encourages every Jewish adult to wear a kippah and a tallit at services. Those called up for the honor of an aliyah wear a tallit, which we view as a sign of respect for the Torah, unrelated to gender. A member of the BAS Ritual Committee will be pleased to discuss this or any other aspect of Shabbat services with you.

What is the choreography?

Each person who has an aliyah is called up by name. If you are a guest of a bar/bat mitzvah family and have been assigned an aliyah prior to the service, your Hebrew and English names will be on a prepared list at the bima. It is a good idea to come forward to the reading table even before your name is called, to ensure a smooth transition.

When you go up for your aliyah, the following people will already be up at the bima: the "calling" gabbai, who calls your name; the "pointing" gabbai, who points to the section in the Torah scroll that is being read and shows you the text of the blessing; the Torah reader; and the person(s) who had the previous aliyah.

When the calling gabbai finishes calling your name, you move to stand directly in front of the Torah scroll. The pointing gabbai then points to the spot where the Torah reading will commence. You place the fringe of your tallit on that spot, kiss the fringe, hold onto the Torah's rollers, and chant the opening blessing. Follow the reading while your section is being read.

When the reading is concluded, the pointing gabbai will point to the end of the section; once again, you will touch that spot with the fringe of your tallit, kiss the fringe, hold the rollers, and chant the concluding blessing. You then stand next to the pointing gabbai through the next aliyah and Torah reading. When that aliyah is completed and the recitation of the concluding blessing is complete, you return to your seat. As you do so, people will shake your hand and say "*Yasher Koach*" (may you have strength), which is the way we congratulate you for having had the honor of an aliyah.

What are the Hagbah And G'lilah Aliyot?

The hagbah and g'lilah (sometimes referred to as the "lifter and dresser") are honors that come after the Torah is read. The two people receiving these aliyahs are also called up by name. The hagbah lifts up the open Torah scroll by the handles (slowly and carefully, using the reading stand as a lever), and turns around, so that three columns of the text of the open scroll are visible to the congregation. The hagbah is then seated next to the ark, while holding the scroll. The g'lilah helps the hagbah close the scroll, and then dresses the Torah, putting on the belt first, followed by the mantle, the breastplate, the pointer (yad), and finally the crowns. The Torah is then placed on a special stand. The gabbais will guide you in these tasks. After the Torah scroll is set down, the hagbah and g'lilah return to their seats.