



**RTFH** The Reform Temple  
of Forest Hills



## ***B'NAI MITZVAH* HANDBOOK**

**Revised: October 2023**

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## B'NAI MITZVAH

*Mazel tov!* The celebration of *Bar Mitzvah* or *Bat Mitzvah* (general plural/non-gender specific: *B'nai Mitzvah*) is a joyous time for a Jewish family. It recognizes the beginning of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Young people demonstrate they are ready to take on adult responsibilities in the sacred context of prayer and community. *B'nai Mitzvah* is a powerful and meaningful accomplishment for a thirteen-year-old and one of the most memorable and cherished events for a family.

*B'nai Mitzvah* is the beginning of adult Jewish life, **not graduation from Religious School**. Here at RTFH, it is understood that *B'nai Mitzvah* represents a continuing commitment to Jewish learning and growth, and this understanding permits all of us to celebrate the ritual with integrity. It is our cherished hope and expectation that students will continue their Jewish education through ToFHY and Confirmation, by chanting Torah, becoming a *madrich* in the Religious School, or in any one of the numerous opportunities to engage in Judaism here in the Temple community.

## **HISTORY OF *BAR MITZVAH***

*Bar/Bat Mitzvah* literally means someone “Responsible for the Commandment.” In earlier times, the term signified that an individual would be held legally responsible for their actions. In past times, a boy was considered to be *Bar Mitzvah* upon reaching the age of thirteen. His father would be called to the *Bimah* at the service nearest to his son’s thirteenth birthday when the *Torah* would be read. The father would recite a blessing thanking God that he was no longer legally responsible for his son’s actions. In later years, to acknowledge that thirteen-year-olds had the skills and *halachic* (legal) abilities to lead services, a boy would participate in the leadership of a synagogue service including reading from the *Torah* and *Haftarah* (a section of the Prophetic books of the Bible) and offering an explanation of the weekly *Torah* portion called a *D’var Torah*. A celebratory meal often followed the service.

## **B'NAI MITZVAH AND REFORM JUDAISM**

For many years, Reform congregations only celebrated Confirmation so there would be equality in the roles and participation of boys and girls. Later, the celebration of *B'nai Mitzvah* reemerged. The expectations and participation of *B'nai Mitzvah* students vary significantly from synagogue to synagogue.

*Bat Mitzvah* was first observed in 1922. It was introduced to emphasize the concept of equality of boys and girls in Jewish religious ritual and education. In most Reform

congregations, the ceremony of *Bat Mitzvah* and its educational requirements are identical to those of *Bar Mitzvah*. This is true for the Reform Temple of Forest Hills (RTFH). To recognize the gender identities of our teenagers, some ceremonies use terms such as *B'nai Mitzvah*, *Brit Mitzvah*, *B-Mitzvah*, among others. Specific terminology will be worked out with each student and family.

### ***B'NAI MITZVAH AT THE REFORM TEMPLE OF FOREST HILLS***

The goal of the celebration of *B'nai Mitzvah* at RTFH is to enable students to begin acting as Jewish adults. We read in *Pirke Avot* 1:2, “The world is sustained by three things: by *Torah*, by worship, and by loving deeds.” Our *B'nai Mitzvah* program focuses on students engaging in each of these areas in preparation for a lifetime of Jewish action and belief.

Most commonly, a student will demonstrate proficiency in these areas:

- Torah* – chanting a section of the weekly *Torah* and *Haftarah* portions in Hebrew and teaching the congregation about the weekly *Torah* portion in a *D'var Torah*
- Worship* – leading most of the *Shabbat* morning prayer service
- Loving Deeds* – participating in a *Mitzvah* project
- Community* – Celebrating with family, friends, and the RTFH congregation



### **STUDENT REQUIREMENTS**

#### **ALL JEWISH STUDENTS CAN BECOME B'NAI MITZVAH**

While this handbook details the expectations and requirements most commonly seen at *B'nai Mitzvah* at RTFH, we are committed to the opportunity for all Jewish children to celebrate this important lifecycle milestone. Specific adjustments to match individual student's educational, physical, and emotional needs will be made. We challenge and support every student so they can feel successful about the task before them. Please speak to the Rabbi, Cantor, or Educational Leader directly with any concerns about your child.

### **EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

For a typical *B'nai Mitzvah*, a student must have been enrolled in our Religious School and must have completed (or be in the process of completing) study in the Religious School 4<sup>th</sup> grade through 7<sup>th</sup> grade. A student's family must be members in good standing regarding their financial obligations to RTFH, including for the year in which the *B'nai Mitzvah* is scheduled. Students who have their service during their 7<sup>th</sup> grade year are expected to continue their studies to the end of the school year.



### **APPOINTMENTS AND MATERIALS**

The clergy work directly with *b'nai mitzvah* students to prepare for the big celebration.

#### **CANTOR PINCUS APPOINTMENTS – TORAH, HAFTARAH, AND PRAYERS**

Approximately 5-6 months prior to your child's ceremony, each student will start weekly lessons to learn their prayers, Torah, and haftarah. The first lesson is a “getting to know you” with the Cantor, student, and parent(s). Depending on the class size, students may meet with a tutor for 3-5 lessons following the first lesson before resuming weekly lessons with the Cantor. Subsequent lessons do not require parental attendance. Lessons are 25-

30 minutes long. Each week, the student will be given homework with recordings to study. It is their responsibility to make sure they have all the learning aids they need! We recommend 20 minutes practice per day, increasing as the ceremony approaches. The Cantor's teaching days are primarily Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Appointments are made directly with the Cantor.

### **FAMILY MEETING**

About 4 months prior to the service, the *b'nai mitzvah* family – student, parent(s), and siblings whenever possible – meet with Rabbi Mark Kaiserman. This is an opportunity to share your individual concerns and excitement. A full review of family honors and other details will take place specific to your family.

### **RABBI KAISERMAN APPOINTMENTS – D'VAR TORAH/TORAH SPEECH AND SERVICE PREP**

Approximately 3 months prior to the service, each student will begin to meet one-on-one with Rabbi Mark Kaiserman to write their *D'var Torah* (Torah speech). This speech will be individualized and based on a selection chosen by the student from the weekly Torah portion. Most of the speech is based on the modern concerns and ideas of the student. Students primarily write at home using technology to work with Rabbi Kaiserman to edit and help refine the speech. The speech also includes sections on the student's Mitzvah Project and thank yous for the *b'nai mitzvah* service. The student meets individually with the Rabbi – parents need not attend.

### **BIMAH REHEARSAL**

Students will have a chance to practice out of the Torah in the weeks leading up to the ceremony with Cantor Pincus.

In the week of the service, the student will have a full rehearsal of prayers, Torah, Haftarah, and *D'var Torah* in the sanctuary with Rabbi Kaiserman. This is held in the late afternoon and parent(s) need to attend. Siblings are strongly encouraged. Family participation/honors will also be reviewed and confirmed as well as individual concerns and questions. When completed, the student will be ready for their service.

### **MATERIALS**

During their preparation, each student will receive a *B'nai Mitzvah* Torah portion book that includes the Torah Aliyah blessings, their Torah portion in Hebrew (with and without vowels) and in English, their Haftarah in Hebrew and English, and commentary on their portion. They will also get a prayer binder with the Shabbat morning service in Hebrew and English. Audio recordings (MP3s) of the Torah and Haftarah portions will be provided to each student. You can find audio for most prayers at [www.rtfh.org/blessings](http://www.rtfh.org/blessings).

The student will chant Torah from the actual Torah scroll. They will lead the Haftarah and their prayers directly from this booklet and binder.



### **B'NAI MITZVAH SHABBAT OVERVIEW**

#### **FRIDAY NIGHT SHABBAT EVENING**

The *B'nai Mitzvah* celebration begins on *Shabbat* evening at services. The *B'nai Mitzvah* and their immediate family (i.e., parents, siblings) will help lead the blessings over the

*Shabbat* candles and *Kiddush* from the *Bimah*. Students will also help lead the *V'ahavta*. At some Friday night services, the student will also have a chance to share the initial section of the Torah reading. Many families optionally add to the celebration that evening by having a *Shabbat* dinner with their family and friends. It is especially wonderful when RTFH students come to the Friday night service to support their classmate.

### **SATURDAY MORNING/SHABBAT MORNING**

Each student conducts the major part of the *Shabbat* Morning Service and chants part of the weekly portion from the *Torah* and a section from the corresponding *Haftarah*. Students also teach about their *Torah* portion in a *D'var Torah*. There are numerous opportunities for family and friends to have honors during the *Shabbat* service. These are explained below under "Family Honors."

The Rabbi will offer his thoughts on the weekly Torah portion and the *B'nai Mitzvah*. The Rabbi and the Cantor will offer the priestly blessing to the *B'nai Mitzvah*.

A Temple leader will present gifts on behalf of the Women's Connection, ToFHY, and the congregation including the *yad* that each student designs and makes in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **TIME**

*Shabbat* Morning services begin PROMPTLY on Saturday mornings at 10:30am and end approximately at 12:00pm. The *B'nai Mitzvah* is the *Shabbat* service. Invited guests should be made aware of the timing so that they attend the service in its entirety.

### **TALLITOT AND KIPPOT**

The wearing of a *Kippah* (Yarmulke) and/or a *Tallit* (Prayer Shawl) is a personal choice in Reform Judaism. Both boys and girls may choose to wear a *Kippah* and/or *Tallit*. Students, parents, and guests are not obligated to wear *Tallit* or *Kippah* nor are they discouraged. RTFH provides *Kippot* and some *Tallitot* for use at services. Many families choose to create their own *Kippot*. If you make your own *Kippot* and have extras after the service, consider donating them to RTFH for use at future RTFH services.

### **FAMILY HONORS**

During the *B'nai Mitzvah Shabbat* weekend, there are a number of opportunities to honor particular family members and friends. Full details of these honors will be discussed during the initial appointment with Rabbi Kaiserman and any questions or concerns may be addressed to him. A brief overview is listed here. If you have any questions with regard to participation by the student or family, please do not hesitate to ask the Rabbi or Cantor.

*FRIDAY NIGHT* – The student, their siblings, and parent(s) are called to the *Bimah* to help lead English readings and the blessings for candles and *Kiddush*.

*TALLIT PRESENTATION* – If a *B'nai Mitzvah* is going to wear a *Tallit*, the *Tallit* may be presented to them privately before services (by their parent(s) before services) or publicly on the *Bimah* (by parent(s) or any family member or friend).

*PASSING THE TORAH FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION* – During the *Shabbat* morning *Torah* service, the student, their siblings, parent(s), grandparents (and great-grandparents!) are called to the *Bimah* to symbolically pass the *Torah* – *L'dor vaDor* – through the generations.

*OPENING THE ARK* – At the beginning and the end of the Torah service, family/friends can open and close the Ark.

*LIFTING AND DRESSING THE TORAH* – After the Torah is chanted, family/friends can lift and dress the Torah.

*ALIYOT* – Family members/friends can be called up to the *Bimah* to lead the blessings before and after the chanting of the *Torah* by the *B'nai Mitzvah*. This is known as an *Aliyah*. Most students have two *Aliyot* with which to honor others plus one reserved exclusively for the *B'nai Mitzvah*. Anyone called up for an *Aliyah* must be at least 13 years old. Both men and women may be honored. People often called include parent(s), grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings and cousins. Audio to the Torah blessings and other prayers can be found at [www.rtfh.org/blessings](http://www.rtfh.org/blessings).

*An Aliyah is a special honor in Judaism. Anyone called to the Torah is expected to know and have rehearsed the blessings in order to maintain the dignity and sanctity of the service.*

*KADDISH* – Before the Mourner's *Kaddish*, the names of any deceased family or friends of the *B'nai Mitzvah* family are read by the Rabbi to honor their memory.

*KIDDUSH AND MOTZI* – At the conclusion of the *Shabbat* morning service, families may invite anyone up as we share the final blessings. Families often call up siblings, cousins of all ages, or their immediate family.

### **YOUR FAMILY'S HONORS**

Every family has different needs in how they are included in the service. We try to adjust to match your family as best we can. Honors are open to individuals of any age or religion with a few exceptions – we are an inclusive synagogue, and all your loved ones are welcome to have an honor. To offer the *Aliyah* to the Torah, you must be 13 years old or over. Further, if you are not Jewish, you must join with someone Jewish to do the *Aliyah*. The goal of honors is not to try and squeeze every single person you know into the *Bimah*. Rabbi Kaiserman can help you work out the honors for your family.

### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

Photos can be taken the morning of the service in the Sanctuary between 9:00-10:00am. At 10:00am, photos with the Torah and clergy can be taken, but must be concluded by 10:10am.

Clergy must be present to open the Ark or hold the Torah. If a family would like to take photos on another day, it should be arranged through the Temple office. The Rabbi, Cantor, and *Torah* are only available for photos on Saturday morning.

During the service, a photographer can only shoot from a stationary position from the back of the room. Please discuss with the Rabbi.

### **LIVESTREAM**

All services in the sanctuary can be livestreamed for easy access for those who cannot attend in person. For Saturday morning services, a family can choose to:

1. Have a produced video with two cameras and live edits and zooms for \$200.

2. Have a single static camera with no panning or zooming for free.
3. Not have any livestreaming at all.

A digital copy of any livestreamed service will be provided to the family for their own personal use. Broadcasting and archiving the Saturday service on the Temple's YouTube page is an available option. Friday night services are always livestreamed.

All services can be accessed live at [rtfh.org/live](http://rtfh.org/live). Archived copies of services are available at [www.youtube.com/reformtempleofforesthills](http://www.youtube.com/reformtempleofforesthills).



## **MITZVOT AND TZEDAKAH**

### ***MITZVAH PROJECTS***

To be a Jew means to help make this a better world. It is a commandment (*mitzvah*) to fix the world. As part of the preparations for the *B'nai Mitzvah*, each student must engage in a personal *Mitzvah* project.

A *Mitzvah* project is a volunteer project where a student helps make the world a better place and doesn't get paid. The project should be engaging and meaningful to the student. It can utilize skills and interests he/she has (for example art, music, basketball). It can be on a topic that is personally powerful (for example the homeless, cancer, children). It can be done with other students, family, friends, or by themselves.

Some students create their own *Mitzvah* opportunity. Others join in existing programs or volunteer opportunities. Each project should have an individual stamp on it. For example, if you are volunteering in a set program, how can you add something unique, special, or original? If you are collecting items, how can you expand the project to be more than acquiring things from friends? Ultimately, the *Mitzvah* project is the responsibility of the *B'nai Mitzvah* as an evolving young adult.

*Mitzvah* Projects must be completed *before* the *B'nai Mitzvah* unless arrangements have been made with the Rabbi. Students are encouraged to get started on their *Mitzvah* projects early.

All students will work with Mitzvah Project Central ([www.tzedekamerica.org/mitzvah-project-central](http://www.tzedekamerica.org/mitzvah-project-central)) individually to plan their mitzvah project. Their website has many opportunities and ideas for mitzvah projects. You can also choose a project or organization not from their database, but all students will work one-on-one with Mitzvah Project Central throughout your project.

### ***MITZVAH POSTER***

To recognize the efforts of our students, each *B'nai Mitzvah* will create a poster recounting their *Mitzvah* project. This poster will be displayed outside the Sanctuary during the Friday night and Saturday morning service of the *B'nai Mitzvah* Shabbat. All posters will be kept by Temple and shared with upcoming *B'nai Mitzvah* for inspiration. Families will be contacted to come pick them up later if they wish.



## **SHARING MITZVOT**

Bringing *Mitzvot* to your reception elevates it from a party to a sacred celebration. There are numerous ways to bring *Tzedakah* and acts of loving-kindness into your receptions and celebration.

### *COMMUNITY*

Inviting each student's Religious School classmates is a way of celebrating our synagogue community. It's important to also attend each other's services to learn more and support friends and classmates.

On Friday night, you'll celebrate with the extended RTFH community at Shabbat services including the Oneg. On Saturday morning, the congregation will be almost exclusively your friends and family. You do not need to consider non-invited guests in terms of numbers or any reception following services.

### *CENTERPIECES*

One way to add to the meaning of the reception is by making *Mitzvot* centerpieces. Instead of flowers or balloons, consider spending the same money on items to donate – or use items collected from a collection from your *Mitzvah* project. A pile of sporting goods or baby toys with a small note explaining where they are being donated makes a more engaging and spiritual statement than flowers. The student may even ask your guests to bring something to donate.

### *PARTY*

It is always important to remember that the party is occurring because of the *B'nai Mitzvah* service, and not the other way around. The party should reflect the values that were expressed by the nature and power of the *Shabbat* service. Judaism encourages joyous celebration. Does your celebration reflect the meaning and ideals of *B'nai Mitzvah* and *Shabbat*?

### *TZEDAKAH*

Students often receive numerous gifts of money from family and friends. To help teach young adults the importance of sharing their own fortune with others, it is appropriate for each student to take a percentage of their monetary gifts and donate to a charity of their choice. As a young adult, *B'nai Mitzvah* students are committing to a lifetime of *Tzedakah*. Learning this lesson at thirteen can lead to a lifetime of giving. Donating to any of the funds at your own Temple is common and encouraged.

### *SHARING YOUR SIMCHA*

Historically, Jewish *simchas* could not occur until the poor and the hungry of a community were fed. In today's world, where the need is even greater, we can symbolically observe that tradition by donating 3% of the costs of our celebration to a hunger or relief organization. With thousands of dollars being spent on lavish celebrations, sharing a small percentage of those costs on the needy helps transform our parties into a reflection of Jewish values.

There are numerous appropriate organizations to consider. MAZON, a Jewish Response to Hunger, has been at the forefront of hunger relief around the world. Created by Reform Jews, MAZON gives to people from all backgrounds across the world and has programs to



directly support and acknowledge the *B'nai Mitzvah* celebration. Learn more at [www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org).

#### *THE RABBI AND THE CANTOR*

Although Rabbi Kaiserman and the Cantor help prepare and lead the *B'nai Mitzvah* as part of their jobs, it is customary to thank them for their work and commitments. The clergy and their immediate family are usually invited to the *Kiddush* or party, and they attend as their schedules permit. Most commonly, families donate to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund and Cantor's Discretionary Fund to support the synagogue and to thank the clergy for their efforts.



### **PARENTAL AND FAMILY REQUIREMENTS AND FINANCES**

#### **PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT**

Parents are essential to the success of their child's *B'nai Mitzvah*. Your supportive and eager participation will go a long way to helping your child recognize the power of this day. By keeping the party and reception in perspective, you can help to emphasize the importance and meaning of the *B'nai Mitzvah* Service.

While students are expected, as young adults, to be responsible for their own materials, studies, and requirements, it is crucial for parents to encourage and monitor their child's study and preparation at home. Even if you do not know Hebrew, you can help your child with their *D'var Torah*, English prayers, and use transliteration to help with Hebrew, and keep focus on this day. The *B'nai Mitzvah* is a major event and will necessitate scaling back other activities to accommodate the increased workload allowing your child to better focus on the event. Audio versions of many of the prayers can be found at [www.rtfh.org/ blessings](http://www.rtfh.org/ blessings). Almost all the prayers have been part of the religious school journey and will be very familiar to each student.

#### **SERVICE ATTENDANCE AND GREETING/USHERING**

Attending Shabbat evening and morning services before a *B'nai Mitzvah's* special day will help them become familiar and more comfortable with the service. It will also help connect the family to the RTFH community and them to you. Students who attend services regularly are more confident and comfortable on the special day.

With this in mind, all students are expected to attend services at RTFH in anticipation of their ceremony. Attending services is an excellent way for your child to become more comfortable and confident on the day of their *simcha* and contributes to the creation of our Jewish community together. We hope that you will attend with your child, whether online or in-person!

It is our expectation that you will attend at least ten Shabbat services during each school year, of which at least five must be either the 8:00 PM Shabbat evening service or the 10:30 AM morning service. A book is available in the lobby to mark which services each student attends.

Additionally, all 6<sup>th</sup> grade families will help support the Temple community by ushering/greeting at one Saturday morning service in the year before their *B'nai Mitzvah*. Families will receive an invitation to sign up. Family ushers will arrive at 10:00am and need

to stay through the end of services at approximately 12:00pm to welcome and support the guests.

**FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS**

Temple members must be considered in good standing **eight (8) months prior to the *B'nai Mitzvah* date**. This means they must fulfill all of their current and prior financial obligations including all fees associated with the fiscal year in which the *B'nai Mitzvah* will occur. All fees, including Membership Contribution, Religious School fees, and building fund, must be up-to-date before tutoring can begin with the Cantor. In addition, the *B'nai Mitzvah* Date Confirmation Fee of \$250 must be paid within 2 months of receiving your service date. The *B'nai Mitzvah* Fee must be paid in full **twelve (12) months before the *B'nai Mitzvah***. It distracts from the dignity of the occasion to engage in payment requests right before the service. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Allan Hoberman, Director of Operations and Finance via email at [allan@rtfh.org](mailto:allan@rtfh.org) or at 718-261-2901. Note: There is no additional cost for a Temple member to use the Sanctuary for their service.

**WOMEN'S CONNECTION ONEG SHABBAT**

It is customary for the *B'nai Mitzvah* family to sponsor the Oneg Shabbat on Friday nights as part of the RTFH community. To sponsor the Oneg Shabbat, please notify Sheryl Hausman via email at [sheryl@rtfh.org](mailto:sheryl@rtfh.org). A Women's Connection representative will then contact you to discuss the oneg. The cost of a standard oneg is \$175 and includes cake, cookies, and coffee. Please inform the Women's Connection representative if you have dietary needs.

**EVENT FACILITIES**

If you wish to use our facilities such as the Ballroom or Garden Room for catering or room rental, please make arrangements with Sheryl Hausman, Office Administrator, or with Allan Hoberman, Director of Operations and Finance, as soon as possible. Your *B'nai Mitzvah* date does not automatically insure room availability on that date.

**B'NAI MITZVAH FEES (CURRENT AS OF OCTOBER 2023)**

*B'nai Mitzvah* Date Confirmation.....\$250

Needs to be paid within two (2) months of receiving *B'nai Mitzvah* Date in order to confirm this date.

*B'nai Mitzvah* Fee..... \$1,250

Needs to be paid twelve (12) months before the *B'nai Mitzvah* Date.

\$500 will be deducted from the cost of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade ToFHY tuition if the *B'nai Mitzvah* fee has been paid in full.

Oneg Shabbat..... \$175

Produced Live Stream..... \$200

**CONTRIBUTIONS ARE OFTEN MADE TO:**

- Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
- Cantor's Discretionary Fund
- Or to another fund at Temple at [rtfh.org/donate](http://rtfh.org/donate)

## **FOLLOWING THE B'NAI MITZVAH**

### **ToFHY**

Our ToFHY (Temple of Forest Hills Youth) program meets on Wednesday evenings (6:10-8:10pm). ToFHY is our dynamic, social, educational and fun program for 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders. With student-led programs under the direction of our Youth Director and Rabbi, ToFHYites learn and socialize together with their whole class while building their Jewish identity and having a great time. ToFHY takes trips, has shul-ins, does mitzvah projects, leads services, and eats a lot. Students often participate in regional and national NFTY events interacting with Jewish teens from across the area and even North America. Many of our *B'nai Mitzvah* students are able to get a glimpse of ToFHY from programs that are open to 7<sup>th</sup> graders throughout the year, as well as end-of-the year events introducing 7<sup>th</sup> graders to this exceptional youth program. Please contact our Youth Director, Rabbi Kaiserman, or Faye Gilman for more details.

### **CONFIRMATION**

Having mastered the basics of Jewish education, a world of issues and questions await every young adult. More sophisticated Jewish learning during 10<sup>th</sup> grade will give our teenagers the skills and tools to thrive as Jewish adults. Students join their classmates in an amazing year of Confirmation with the Rabbi, celebrated on *Shavuot* at the end of the year. A trip to the Religious Action Center in Washington, DC, is a highlight of this engaging year. Continuing one's Jewish education following *B'nai Mitzvah* helps to prepare our children to enter the adult world as educated, committed Jews.

### **TEEN TEACHING - MADRICHIM**

Post *B'nai Mitzvah*, students continue their learning by teaching others in our Religious School as Teaching Assistants on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. This job is a great way to build skills, help others, and make a difference. The students have the opportunity to continue to celebrate connections within the community. Many of the students use their experiences when applying for summer positions as well as for college applications.

### **TORAH READINGS**

On *Simchat Torah*, all *B'nai Mitzvah* from the past year are invited to join other students in sharing one verse from their Torah portion as we unroll the Torah scroll. Information will be sent to each student.

Students are also invited to reprise their *B'nai Mitzvah* Torah portion or learn a new one for a subsequent Shabbat or Holiday service. See the Rabbi or Cantor to arrange it.

***Mazel tov on the exciting journey ahead!***

We are honored to share this Jewish milestone with your family and our entire synagogue.

## **SOME THOUGHTS FROM RABBI MARK KAISERMAN**

Congratulations on beginning the exciting journey for your child, and your whole family, towards becoming a *B'nai Mitzvah*.

The *B'nai Mitzvah* service should be a transformative highlight of growing up for every Jewish teenager. In the preparation and leading of the service, the Jewish young adult engages in all aspects of Jewish adulthood: *Torah*, *Avodah*, and *Gemilut Chasadim* - study, worship, and acts of loving kindness. All of these are done in the context of their community.

*B'nai Mitzvah* preparations work best when they are a family affair. Students will respond more positively to attending services, engaging in community service, and studying *Torah* if they see their parents modeling and joining them in these tasks. Other hobbies and activities will have to be limited or curtailed during the preparation time to enable your child to focus on this exciting and challenging task. *B'nai Mitzvah* that becomes the center of a family's life is a celebration that will have a dramatic, positive effect for a lifetime.

Throughout this handbook are numerous suggestions on how you can elevate the sanctity of your celebration and reception to reflect the holiness and power of the event. One essential book of wisdom to consult in your preparations is Jeffrey Salkin's *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*. There is also a version just for students. Please contact me for further discussion or brainstorming.

Although there is a standard listing of requirements for a student's preparation, every Jewish young man and woman can become *B'nai Mitzvah*. Services can be adapted to make sure every student is successfully challenged according to their own particular needs or circumstances. The growth to Jewish adulthood is in the hard work of preparation and commitment. The service is the celebration of those efforts by family, friends, and synagogue community.

We hope that this service is a springboard to other opportunities of Jewish involvement and self-discovery by your *B'nai Mitzvah* and by your family. This is not a "graduation" ceremony from Jewish study, only the beginning of Jewish adulthood. Being a Jewish adult means creating regular occasions for *Mitzvot*, Jewish study, and worship. To let our children end their Jewish education at this point would leave them with only a child's understanding of their faith. Parents should make it clear in the context of this celebration that they expect Jewish education to continue through confirmation, high school graduation, and beyond.

All of us at RTFH look forward to the joy of learning, praying, and celebrating with your child and your family. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any question or concern at any point in the process. *Mazel tov!*