



THE REFORM TEMPLE OF FOREST HILLS



BAR/BAT MITZVAH HANDBOOK
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THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Mazel tov! The celebration of *Bar Mitzvah* or *Bat 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. A *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is a powerful and meaningful accomplishment for a thirteen-year-old and one of the most memorable and cherished events for a family.

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 his/her actions. 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*, and offering an explanation of the weekly *Torah* portion called a *D’var Torah*. A celebratory meal often followed the service.

BAR/BAT 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* reemerged. The expectations and participation of *B’nai Mitzvah* (plural of *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*) students vary significantly from synagogue to synagogue.

Bat Mitzvah is a relatively new tradition first observed in 1921. 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).

BAR/BAT MITZVAH AT THE REFORM TEMPLE OF FOREST HILLS

The goal of the celebration of *Bar/Bat 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 *Bar/Bat 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 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

Bar/Bat Mitzvah is the beginning of adult Jewish life, **not graduation from Religious School**. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* represents a commitment to Jewish learning and education. The entire spiritual message of this rite of passage is compromised when Jewish education is halted at this point. In order to celebrate *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* with integrity, RTFH’s expectation is that students will continue their Jewish education through ToFHY and Confirmation.



STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

ALL JEWISH STUDENTS CAN HAVE A BAR/BAT MITZVAH

While this handbook details the expectations and requirements of the most common *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* at RTFH, we are committed to the opportunity for all Jewish children to celebrate this important lifecycle milestone. Individual 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, a student must be enrolled in our Religious School and must have completed (or be in the process of completing) study in the Religious School 4th grade through 7th grade. A student’s family must be members in good standing regarding their financial obligations to RTFH.



APPOINTMENTS AND MATERIALS

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

FAMILY MEETING

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

CANTOR JACOBSON APPOINTMENTS – TORAH, HAFTARAH, AND PRAYERS

Approximately 5-6 months prior to your child’s *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date, each student will meet regularly with Cantor Deborah Jacobson to study their Torah portion (with and without vowels), Haftarah portion, and the Hebrew prayers. These meetings are essential, but must supplement study and preparation at home during the week. Many of the prayers are on our Temple Website for students and parents to access – www.rtfh.org/blessings

RABBI KAISERMAN APPOINTMENTS – D’VAR TORAH/TORAH SPEECH AND SERVICE PREP

Approximately 2-3 months prior to the service, each student will begin to meet 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 their Torah portion. Most of the speech is based on the modern concerns and ideas of the student. Students will do most of the writing at home using technology to work with Rabbi Kaiserman to edit and help refine the speech. The speech also includes a section 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

In the week before 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 afternoon or early evening and parent(s) are needed to attend. Siblings are 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 his/her 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

Although the student will read/chant Torah from the actual Torah scroll, they will lead the Haftarah and their prayers directly from this booklet and binder.



BAR/BAT MITZVAH SHABBAT OVERVIEW

FRIDAY NIGHT/SHABBAT EVENING

The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebration begins on *Shabbat* evening at services. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and his/her immediate family (ex. 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 services, the student will also have a chance to share a small 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* (a section of the Prophetic books of the Bible). 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. The Rabbi and the Cantor will offer the priestly blessing upon the *Bar/Bat 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 7th grade.

TIME

Shabbat Morning services begin PROMPTLY on Saturday mornings at 10:30am and end approximately at 12:00pm. The *Bar/Bat 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 general use at future services.

FAMILY HONORS

During the *Bar/Bat 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. More details and options will be provided in the meeting with Rabbi Kaiserman. 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, his/her 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is going to wear a *Tallit*, the *Tallit* may be presented to him/her privately before services (by his/her parent(s) in the Rabbi’s study) 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, his/her siblings, parent(s), grandparents (and great-grandparents!) are called to the *Bimah* to symbolically pass the *Torah* – *L’dor vaDor* – through the generations. The family then brings the *Torah* into the midst of the congregation for a *Hakafah* (circuit of the *Torah*).

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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. This is known as an *Aliyah*. Most students have two *Aliyot* with which to honor others plus one reserved exclusively for the *Bar/Bat 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. A few families choose to have a single *Aliyah* including the entire family. Audio to the *Torah* blessings and other prayers can be found at <http://www.rtfh.org/worship/prayers-and-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 some exceptions. 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 love onto the *Bimah*. Excessive honors detract from the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and from the service. 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.

Videographers on stationary tripods and photographer from a stationary position from the back of the room are possible. Please discuss with the Rabbi.



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 *Bar/Bat 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, skateboarding). 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 himself/herself.

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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* as an evolving young adult.

Mitzvah Projects must be completed *before* the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* unless arrangements have been made with the Rabbi. Students are encouraged to get started on their *Mitzvah* projects early. The Social Action Committee has resources and guidance available for families upon request.

MITZVAH POSTER

To recognize the efforts of our students, each *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* will create a poster (or similar display) recounting his/her *Mitzvah* project. This poster will be displayed outside the Sanctuary during the Friday night and Saturday morning service of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Weekend. 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 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.

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 *Bar/Bat 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 his/her choice. As a young adult, *Bar/Bat 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebration. Learn more at www.mazon.org.

THE RABBI AND THE CANTOR

Although Rabbi Kaiserman and Cantor Jacobson help prepare and lead the *Bar/Bat 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. Traditionally, 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 DETAILS

PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT

Parents are essential to the success of their child's *Bar/Bat 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 *Bar/Bat 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 his/her *D'var Torah*, English prayers, and use transliteration to help with Hebrew, and keep focus on this day. The *Bar/Bat 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 <http://www.rtfh.org/worship/prayers-and-blessings>.

Attending Shabbat evening and morning services before your child's special day will help you become familiar and more comfortable with the service. It will also help connect you to the RTFH community and them to you.

FAMILY USHERING

So that every student and their family experiences a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* at RTFH, as well as helps support the Temple community, each family will usher at one Saturday morning service in the year before their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Families will receive an invitation to sign up or can go to goo.gl/jvFhN6. Family ushers will arrive at 10:00am and be expected to stay through the end of services at approximately 12:00pm.

FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS

Temple members must be current in the payment of dues, *B'nai Mitzvah* fees, Religious School fees, and other amounts no later than six month prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date or before the student begins tutoring with the Cantor (whichever is earlier). 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 call the Temple Administrator.

WOMEN'S CONNECTION ONEG SHABBAT

It is customary for the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* family to sponsor the Oneg Shabbat and the Flowers for the Pulpit. To sponsor the Oneg Shabbat, a representative from Women's Connection will contact a parent approximately one month before the service to request the donation. The Oneg on Friday evening following services is a dessert snack including cake and coffee. If you wish to order a sheet cake in addition to the other cake, there will be an additional fee. Please notify the Women's Connection Representative if you wish to order a sheet cake or have dietary needs.

EVENT FACILITIES

If you wish to use our facilities for catering or room rental, please make arrangements with Carol Slotkin, Temple Administrator, as soon as possible. Your *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date does not automatically insure room availability on that date.

BAR/BAT MITZVAH FEES (CURRENT AS OF JANUARY 2018)

REQUIRED

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Fee..... \$1,500

The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Fee needs to be paid in full before tutoring with the Cantor begins approximately 6 months before the service.

\$500 will be deducted from the cost of 8th Grade ToFHY if the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* fee has already been paid.

OPTIONAL

Oneg Shabbat.....\$200

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE OFTEN MADE TO:

- Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
- Cantor's Discretionary Fund

- Enhanced Music Fund
- Leonard & Mildred Friedman Scholarship Fund
- Carol Parness Early Childhood Fund
- Caring Committee Fund
- Religious School Fund
- Sacred Spaces Fund
- Temple General Fund
and others

FOLLOWING THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH

ToFHY

On Wednesday evenings (6:10-8:10pm) is our ToFHY (Temple of Forest Hills Youth) program, which is a dynamic, social, educational, and fun program for 8th-12th graders. With student led programs under the direction of your 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 7th graders throughout the year, as well as end-of-the year events introducing 7th graders to this exceptional youth program. Please contact Rabbi Kaiserman or Faye Gilman for more details.

CONFIRMATION

Having mastered the basics of Jewish education, a world of issues and questions await your young adult. More sophisticated Jewish learning during 10th 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* helps to prepare our children to enter the adult world as educated, committed Jews.

TEEN TEACHING

Post *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, students continue their learning by teaching others in our Religious School as Teaching Assistants on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons when available. This job is a great way to build skills, help others, and make a difference. The students have the opportunity to continue to build 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 *Bar/Bat 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 *Bar/Bat 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

The *Bar/Bat 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.

Bar/Bat 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. A *Bar/Bat 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Services can be adapted to make sure every student is successfully challenged according to his/her 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 *Bar/Bat 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!*

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