

PREPARING FOR THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Mazel Tov. Beth Shalom is here to help you every step of the way to make the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as successful and meaningful as possible.

Your student will receive group and private lessons in preparation for this special milestone in all your lives. Rabbi Grossman teaches a mini-course for Bar/Bat Mitzvah students and their parents to discuss larger issues of God, faith, the significance of Jewish values and observance, as well as exploring ways to interpret the Biblical text so that it is meaningful for us today. **ATTENDANCE AT THE RABBI'S CLASSES IS MANDATORY FOR ALL BAR/BAT MITZVAH STUDENTS AND AT LEAST ONE PARENT, THOSE AT BETH SHALOM RELIGIOUS SCHOOL AND THOSE IN JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS.** You and your child will also have individual family sessions with Rabbi Grossman beginning approximately twelve (12) weeks before the big day to develop and review the *D'var Torah* (Bar/Bat Mitzvah speech) and to get to know the student and family better. (See Section 7 on page 7-8 for what to bring to this meeting.) You are responsible for calling the Rabbi's assistant at least sixteen (16) weeks prior to your simcha to schedule that session. Both parents should attend the first lesson if possible. At least one parent should be present for all lessons with Rabbi Grossman. A special session of Rabbi Grossman's B'nai Mitzvah class will be devoted to the preparation of the *D'var Torah*. It is important for at least one parent to attend this session, if at all possible.

While our Religious School program will teach the basics of Hebrew recitation and teach the content and melodies of many of the prayers of the service, it is the Tutor who will prepare the student to read Torah and Haftarah in addition to preparing the student to lead the prayers he or she has spent time learning. In addition, your student will begin private Sabbath meetings with Cantor Walters and tutor to review the service and monitor progress from private lessons.

One of our B'nai Mitzvah Coordinators will be assigned to review the available honors with you, help you consider your options, and be available to answer questions and provide guidance as you determine how best to involve yourselves and your loved ones on this special day. **While your assigned B'nai Mitzvah coordinator will make initial contact with you approximately three (3) months prior to the service, you are responsible for being in touch with the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator assigned to you eight (8) weeks prior to the simcha to review the synagogue's guidelines. You must also contact your B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator at least four (4) weeks prior to your event to submit a final version of your honors for signature.** You may still make changes after that time, as necessary. Such changes must be approved by the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator or they will not be processed by the office for use during your event.

During the year preceding Bar/Bat Mitzvah, regular service attendance is mandatory (see below). You and your student will become familiar with our service. Your student will become used to leading the congregation as he or she is assigned to lead a growing variety of prayers as the year progresses. Parental support is important. A student can feel proud of his or her step by step accomplishments and know that his or her parents are proudly watching as he/she leads congregational prayers.

Our children learn most by what we do, not by what we make them do. Making Judaism a weekly and daily part of our lives helps ensure that they and their children (our grandchildren) remain Jewish. Along these lines, if you are not doing so already, you may want to set aside time each Friday evening for dinner together as a family sanctified by the profoundly beautiful ceremonies of lighting Sabbath candles, reciting kiddush over kosher wine (or grape juice) and reciting the HaMotzi blessing over bread. The 6th Grade Shabbaton is also organized in part with the goal of allowing your family to have the opportunity to learn these blessings.

Alternatives to Shabbat Morning:

Although you already have a date assigned by the time you receive this, we want to include the Beth Shalom policy on alternatives to Shabbat morning in this guide so that in the event of unforeseen circumstances you need to make a change of date, you are aware of your options.

As an alternative to a Saturday morning Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a family may request that the student participate in a similar manner (Shacharit, *D'var Torah*, Torah reading, Haftarah reading, Torah service) during the morning services on the following holidays: Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret. It is also possible to voluntarily double, either with another family, or with siblings who are one grade apart. Siblings may have a joint ceremony under the following conditions: (1) The children are no more than one year apart in Religious School. (2) Each child stays “in grade” for B’nai Mitzvah year programs. (3) The ceremony is scheduled during the younger child’s B’nai Mitzvah year and in accordance with the synagogue’s general scheduling policies.

There are many reasons why a Minhah, afternoon/havdallah service may be preferable for your child and family. In the case of a special needs student, where it may not be possible for the child to fully participate in the Saturday morning or holiday service (as outlined above), the student's capacities will be evaluated by the Education Director or Cantor so that the student's participation in the service may be adjusted appropriately. If a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not educationally advisable in the setting of a Saturday or holiday morning service, or in other special circumstances, then alternative arrangements may be made, including: (1) another regular congregational service that includes a Torah reading, such as a Sunday morning minyan that falls on Rosh Hodesh, Hol-HaMoed, Hanukkah or Purim; or (2) a Saturday afternoon Minhah service, scheduled in advance with the Rabbi and Religious Committee Chairperson. Sunday B’nai Mitzvah services will not be scheduled on days the Religious School is in session.

Your Student's Role

1. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Day Itself

By the day of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah itself, the student will be able to lead a significant part of the Saturday morning service (Shacharit), give a *D'var Torah*, (Bar/Bat Mitzvah speech introducing the Torah or Haftorah portion of the week,) read from the Torah and the Haftorah, and lead the Torah service returning the Torah to the Ark. Students who would like to lead more of the Saturday morning service are encouraged to study to do so under the guidance of their tutors and Cantor Walters. Students can lead all or part of Shacharit and even the introductory service (Pesukei D'Zimrot). Students who have mastered all of Shacharit (including the full Amidah) and the Torah service may choose to lead all of Musaf as well.

All students are encouraged to lead Friday evening Kiddush. This experience sanctifies the Sabbath and helps prepare the student for the next day. Friday evening service is composed of two parts: Kabbalat Shabbat and Maariv. Once the student has mastered the entire Shacharit (at least with the Hechi Kedusha – the first three blessings) and Torah service, students can optionally lead one or both of these sections of the Friday evening service in addition to Kiddush. If your student is considering leading Friday evening service, the family should notify the synagogue office at least six (6) weeks prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date and discuss their options with Cantor Walters.

2. Attendance Requirements in the Religious School

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony is a major milestone in the religious and educational life of the student and the beginning of more comprehensive and mature studies in Judaism on the High School level. Continuous and regular studies in our Religious School program, or a Jewish Day School, beginning with the third grade, is required for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony at Beth Shalom. Arrangements for special students may be made with the Rabbi, Education Director, and Education Committee Chairperson.

3. Attendance at Religious Services

Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidates are required to attend Sabbath Services each week. In the service your child will learn the order of the services, be exposed to the chanting of the prayers, the brachot (blessings) of the Torah and the brachot of the Haftorah and have an opportunity to become comfortable with leading the congregation from the bimah.

Parents are strongly advised to attend with their children, however, every child must be accompanied by a responsible adult (e.g. parent, friend's parent or grandparent). Attendance at a simcha elsewhere is an excused absence as are illness and significant family obligations.

4. Attendance at the Rabbi's Bar/Bat Mitzvah Mini-Course

Religious School and Day School students and their parents will be required to attend the mini-course with Rabbi Grossman which will give the Rabbi a chance to get to know you and your student and give students a chance to explore some of the more challenging aspects of faith, prayer, learning, peer pressure and Jewish identity in a safe, non-judgmental environment with his or her peers under Rabbi Grossman's guidance. (The curriculum is enclosed in this guide for your information.) The goal of this mini-course is to give each student the tools necessary to be able to go beyond the training of childhood to grapple with the questions raised as one matures in the context of the family. At least one parent should attend each session to which parents are invited. **Parents are urged to support this program by ensuring that their students have completed the homework for each session and by attending these sessions.**

In addition to Sunday morning class programs, Rabbi Grossman leads a series of special programs designed to build group identity and Jewish skills including a trip and a shabbaton. These programs rely on parent involvement. More information will be shared during orientation.

5. Individualized Bar Mitzvah Instructions

At least one year before the Bar Mitzvah ceremony your student should begin private tutoring in which Haftarah and Torah readings are taught. The tutor will also help coordinate the student's role in the services, ensure the student's competency in leading prayers, and familiarize the student and family with synagogue etiquette and how to respectfully handle the Torah Scrolls. This tutoring may be done by a parent, a friend or a tutor and **must** be approved by the Cantor. It is the responsibility of the parent to make sure that the student studies regularly. If a tutor is necessary, remuneration is to be arranged on a private basis. Only approved tutors may be used. A list is included in this guide. The tutor or instructor should work with the family in conjunction with the Rabbi, the Cantor, and the lay coordinator responsible for Torah reading assignments, to make sure everything is properly prepared for the big day.

The family should coordinate with the tutor or instructor all Torah readings and then the tutor or instructor should, in turn, verify with the congregation's Torah Coordinator, that they have the proper chapter and verse breakdowns for each of the aliyah readings. The congregation's Torah Coordinator should be notified not later than eight (8) weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah of which Torah readings will be covered by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student and any other family or friends.

If a parent wants to tutor his or her own child, the prior approval of the Cantor is required. In such a situation, the family should verify all Torah readings with the Cantor.

To protect the sanctity of the Torah reading and present to the student the proper message of Torah study, all Torah readers must know how to read Torah trop and not just memorize their reading. A Torah reader, not previously approved by Cantor Richard Walters, who wants to read Torah at a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, must be approved by Cantor Walters no later than fifteen (15) days prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The potential reader will not be allowed to read if he or she does not contact the Cantor and receive approval not later than fifteen (15) days prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It is the potential reader's responsibility to contact the Cantor. This may be done over

the phone at a time of mutual convenience. Approval by your tutor is not an acceptable substitute for approval by Cantor Walters.

6. Meetings with Cantor Walters

Cantor Walters has provided a schedule of dates when he will meet with your student to ensure that he or she has mastered all of the necessary Bar/Bat Mitzvah skills. You will find this schedule included in this handbook. Please read it carefully and speak to the Cantor if you have any questions.

7. Meetings with Rabbi Grossman

At least sixteen (16) weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah you should call the Rabbi's assistant at the Shul office (410)-531-5115 to arrange for you and your child to meet with Rabbi Grossman to begin to prepare her/his D'var Torah (the speech given by your student to introduce the Torah or Haftorah reading). (Those with celebrations in the summer and/or near the High Holidays will meet the preceding spring and have their D'var Torah prepared ahead of time, usually before the end of June, to accommodate scheduling difficulties.) These meetings may take place while Religious School is in session.

Rabbi Grossman will have several meetings with you and your child. These meetings provide an opportunity for Rabbi Grossman to get to know the student and family better, become familiar with your family history and family tree, work with your student on his or her *D'var Torah* and practice its delivery.

If at all possible, both parents should attend this first meeting with Rabbi Grossman. Alternatively, both parents can attend the last session. Please let Rabbi's assistant know if this is necessary so that the schedule can be adjusted accordingly. At least one parent or guardian is required for every session with Rabbi Grossman. **If you have any special concerns that would require an initial family meeting with Rabbi Grossman without the student, please notify the office immediately to schedule an appointment.**

Before the first meeting the student should have:

- 1) Read through a good English translation of his/her entire parsha (the full Torah and Haftorah for the week - not just the triennial section the synagogue will actually be reading).
- 2) Read through the resource packet (provided by the office) that includes a summary of the Torah reading, commentary and thought questions. *This packet should not be read until the entire text in the Torah and Haftorah has been read.*
- 3) Completed the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Student Workbook which includes directed questions about the Torah and Haftorah reading for the week.
- 4) If the student knows what s/he wants to speak about, the student can prepare an outline following the outline on pages 12-13 of the blue student workbook included at the end of this section for your convenience. If the student does not know what s/he wants to speak about, the Rabbi can help the student discover an appropriate subject to discuss.
- 5) Please bring to this meeting copies of the completed pages from the following pages

of the blue workbook: 2,3,10,11, 14-18.

- 6) Please also bring a copy of your Family Tree form **from this handbook*** that includes emergency contact information; also bring:
- 7) A copy of the version of your family's Honors Sheet* seen by the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator;
- 8) A signed copy of Guidelines for B'nai Mitzvah Service Honors*

* All these forms are available in the forms section of this binder.

How to best help your student with the D'var Torah: This is a wonderful opportunity for family Torah study. Please help your student work through his/her ideas about the parsha and review his/her speech for correct spelling, grammar, and comprehensibility, but let the student phrase the speech in his or her own words and let it reflect the student's own thoughts. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Bookshelf list in this handbook includes suggestions for good English translations of the Bible which you should add to your home library if you do not already own one of these versions as well as reputable internet sites and other resources.

8. Mitzvah Project

Each B'nai Mitzvah student is expected to complete a Mitzvah (social action) project. It can be as simple as collecting items for a needy cause to raising money for a worthy charity. Some ideas can be found in the back of this binder. Feel free to speak with Rabbi Grossman about your ideas. Beth Shalom can also help by publicizing your student's project.