

## **B'NAI MITZVAH HANDBOOK**

### **TEMPLE ETZ RIMON**

Temple Etz Rimon is pleased to offer this handbook to parents and prospective B'nai Mitzvah students to help with preparations for your significant and joyous simcha. We trust that this handbook will be useful as you and your child prepare for your child's B'nai Mitzvah.

#### **HISTORICAL NOTE AND ROLE OF THE CEREMONY**

Bar/Bat Mitzvah - meaning "obligation by the commandments" - historically meant the formal assumption, by a young Jew, of the obligation to fulfill the commandments: the religious and legal obligations of being a Jew. Although the formal ceremony of Bar Mitzvah appears to date back only to the 15th century, the status of obligation at 13 has much earlier antecedents. The Bat Mitzvah ceremony is a creation of the 20th century. We regard the importance and function of each as identical and we do not differentiate between boys and girls in responsibility, training, or ritual participation associated with Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

At Temple Etz Rimon, we try to strike a balance between emphasis on the celebration of the rite as a personal achievement of the B'nai Mitzvah and the fact that the ceremony is a fully integrated aspect of our regular worship. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a congregant participating with our congregational family in our service. We take pride in our Bar/Bat Mitzvah as an individual having achieved the learning to lead us as a prayer leader, a Torah reader, and chanter of the Haftarah portion of the week. Importantly, we welcome the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as part of the congregation as a full and important member.

#### **ELIGIBILITY**

Age - After the child's 13th birthday

Education - For a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Temple Etz Rimon, enrollment in and regular attendance at Camp Pomegranate, our religious school (for a minimum of four full years immediately prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah year or completion of similar studies at another religious school) and enrollment in and regular attendance with satisfactory completion of the entire academic year of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, is required.

Financial Obligations – All past due balances must be paid before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

#### **ASSIGNMENT OF DATES**

In April or May of the year before a student's 13th birthday, parents of eligible candidates will be sent a form to request a Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. If you would like information about the subject matter or length of the Torah portion or the Haftarah, or other special ritual requirements associated with certain dates, please ask. As much as possible, we will try to accommodate preferences. If there is a conflict, the Rabbi and the Chair of the Religious Practices Committee will confer with the affected parties. A \$300 B'nai Mitzvah fee is charged and is due upon selection of a date.

#### **BOOKS AND FEES**

The Temple provides the B'nai Mitzvah with a siddur for Shabbat and festivals. After a date is confirmed, the appropriate Haftarah booklet and Torah portion information will be provided.

## SUMMARY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH YEAR

The 7th grade class curriculum covers many areas of study, including prayer, history, ethics, values, and the mechanics of the service. Students also learn about the 'geography' of the prayer book, the special symbols of Judaism, the hows and whys of the Tallit and Tefillin. Prayers are often discussed to discover their relevance for today.

### TRAINING: BAR/BAT MITZVAH TUTORS

In addition to continuing in Camp Pomegranate's educational program for the full year of their B'nai Mitzvah, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will require tutoring to learn to chant the Torah blessings, the Haftarah, and the Torah reading and portions of the service. Although the time required for preparation varies among students, we strongly recommend that tutoring begin one year before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. This is a separate fee, made payable to the tutor (whether the rabbi or another qualified individual). If the person you select to tutor your student is not someone who regularly tutors in our synagogue, the director of the religious school or the Rabbi must approve him. Additionally, a meeting or telephone conversation between the prospective tutor and the Rabbi should be arranged to familiarize the tutor with our procedures before the tutorial process begins.

Approximately 6 months before the B'nai Mitzvah, you will be notified that individual preparatory lessons are to begin. The duration of lessons vary, but most will last 45 minutes. A week or two prior to the service, there will be a rehearsal in the sanctuary with the Rabbi, student, and immediate family members. The rehearsal will in effect be a mock service, with a reading from the Torah and emphasis on proper choreography (when to stand, sit, turn to ark, etc.) so that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will feel entirely comfortable on the bimah.

The required skills for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah can be divided into three components:

1. Prayer and Worship Leadership: Mastery of prayers in Hebrew and/or English, and chanting where appropriate. Your child will likely use the New Reform Siddur (prayer book), Mishkan Tefillah, as well as a CD recording to prepare for the service. No material is expected to be memorized. The essential skill required is to be able to read and/or chant the Hebrew and English portions and, above all, to lead the service with a sense of kavanah (an inwardly felt care for the prayers and for Jewish tradition.)

2. Chanting of the Torah portion and Haftarah portion

- a) The Torah or chumash is the Five Books of Moses, beginning with God's creation of the world and ending with the death of Moses. There is a yearly cycle of Torah reading and one portion (sometimes two) is designated for each week. The students chant typically between 10 and 18 verses. Students will be taught the music used to chant blessings along with the cantillation (ancient musical system) for Torah and Haftarah texts. The amount of material given to each student is variable and is adjusted both to individual capabilities and the student's willingness to work.

- b) Students will chant from the haftarah portion of the week. The haftarah, even though it sounds like Torah, is something quite different. Originating from the Hebrew verb meaning to conclude, the haftarah is chanted at the conclusion of the Torah service. Each haftarah derives from the Prophetic writings, which describe later events in the history of our people. The most famous of the prophets include Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. The musical sound of the haftarah chanting is markedly distinct from the Torah cantillation. Torah chanting has a sing-song quality corresponding to a straightforward delivery of the words, whereas haftarah is in a minor key and evokes a stern and even mournful message. Usually students chant three or four haftarah verses along with the preceding and concluding blessings.

### 3. Writing and Delivery of a D'var Torah or Commentary

Each student will be asked to grapple with the Torah portion from which he is chanting. Together with the Rabbi, the student will explore the text, perhaps considering the commentaries of various Jewish thinkers throughout the ages. Most importantly, the B'nai Mitzvah will search to find his individual voice within the text, including: what does this Torah portion say to me? How is it relevant to my life, my family, my community, our world? There is no required length; some divrei torah (plural form) are quite brief while others can be several pages long. Rather than the length, what is essential is evidence of a sincere inquiry/encounter with the text.

Once the individual lessons begin, there is an expectation that students will devote at least 15 minutes daily to their service and Torah preparations. If a child has a learning disability or emotional difficulties, this must be brought to the attention of the Rabbi well in advance of the onset of private lessons. In some cases, because of a serious learning problem or inability to master material taught in Hebrew class, the Rabbi may find it necessary to recommend additional lessons with a private tutor. Members of our faculty are available and the cost is paid by the family.

#### MITZVAH PROJECT

Each student is required to complete a mitzvah project that will personalize and add substance to what it means to become a son or daughter of the commandment. We envision the project as a long-term effort that the student plans and undertakes. The project will be due 2 weeks prior to the student's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The project should support a cause or issue about which the student feels strongly, and which can be completed with minimal parental or guest involvement. The Rabbi must approve all mitzvah projects six months in advance of the B'nai Mitzvah.

#### SHABBAT SERVICE ATTENDANCE PRIOR TO BAR/BAT MITZVAH

While at religious school, your child will have learned many of the most important prayers needed to participate in a Shabbat service. Regular attendance at Shabbat morning services for the year before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is expected for the family. It is important that the family be familiar with our Sanctuary and our services. What will help your child the most in preparing for his Bar/Bat Mitzvah is coming to Temple. Consequently, we require that you bring your son or daughter to at least four Friday night and four Saturday morning services during their B'nai Mitzvah year. Your participation facilitates the learning process, and makes Bar/Bat Mitzvah a high point, rather than an accident, in your child's life.

#### DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RABBI

Once a date is selected, parents and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate should schedule a meeting with the Rabbi at least a year prior to the event, normally after the orientation meeting. Meeting with the Rabbi provides an opportunity to discuss the meaning of Bar/Bat Mitzvah with the child and parents; to confirm the Torah and Haftarah readings and any special requirements for the scheduled date; to discuss tutoring plans, and to approve the choice of tutor (if he or she is one not previously certified as a tutor by the Temple).

The Rabbi will answer questions regarding the service. The rabbi works with interfaith families, and families with non-Jewish relatives, to comfortably include non-Jews in the service.

#### THE B'NAI MITZVAH SERVICE

We encourage maximum participation by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. If family and friends are qualified to read portions of the Torah or lead parts of the service not assigned to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, we welcome their participation.

It is important to remember that the Bar or Bat Mitzvah is conducted within the context of a regular service. Someone who volunteers to read a portion of the Torah and is unprepared can make himself and others uncomfortable. We have materials and volunteers to help in the preparation.

Please work with the rabbi regarding the parts of the service and which Torah reading the Bar/Bat Mitzvah or honorees of the family will be leading. Complete the Participants and Honors form at the end of this handbook and submit it to the school director two weeks in advance of the B'nai Mitzvah.

#### BAR/BAT MITZVAH HONORS

Every effort will be made to honor relatives and friends of the family with an opportunity to participate in the service. Generally about eight (8) honors, including opening and closing the Ark, carrying the Torah, three or more Aliyot (being called to the Torah to recite the blessings before and after a portion of the reading), and lifting, tying, and putting away the Torah are assigned. There is no obligation to fill all honors on the list. The Congregation conducts services every week and is prepared to fill any and all honors. Please let the Rabbi know which honors you will need filled by a member of the congregation.

Please ask the friends and family you wish to be called to recite blessings before and after a Torah portion to practice sufficiently to correctly recite the Hebrew words. The Rabbi will gladly instruct any Aliyah recipient to recite the blessings (a transliterated version is included in this handbook) and learn to chant them if desired. Taking time to practice in advance by the honoree enhances the service and the occasion for the B'nai Mitzvah. Learning to recite the blessings takes only a short time. Proper preparation is a sign of respect for God, yourself, your family, and our Temple.

If you are assigning the honor of lifting the Torah to a relative or guest who is not experienced and comfortable with lifting, please arrange with the Rabbi for the person to have a brief training session. It is extremely important that the person lifting the Torah handle it in an appropriately secure manner. Please note that you do not have to assign this honor; the Congregation has people who can properly lift the Torah.

#### SHABBAT OBSERVANCE

Observance of all aspects of Shabbat is important to our community life at Temple Etz Rimon. Although we are a Reform congregation, please ensure that guests are aware that smoking, taking photographs and using hand-held recorders anywhere in the sanctuary are prohibited on Shabbat. A video recording can be set up in the sanctuary as long as the placement of the recorder does not intrude upon the service. We request that cell phones be turned off.

Families who wish to take pictures can arrange to do so before or after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

#### SHABBAT HANDOUTS

Many families prepare a handout that serves as an introduction and guide to the service for visitors on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah day (however, a separate handout is not necessary). You may prepare your own handout, which can include supplemental readings or prayers. Please submit a draft to the Rabbi for review at least two weeks in advance of the service.

#### FLOWERS

If the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family wishes to purchase a fresh floral arrangement for the bimah, you are welcome to do so, but it is not required.

## PRESENTS and TZEDAKAH

During the service, the Congregation will present the Bar/Bat Mitzvah with a prayer book with a dedicated book plate, a certificate suitable for framing, and a ritual object (such as a Kiddush cup, candlesticks, or spice box) to start their Jewish home.

Prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah day, it is customary to make a contribution to the Temple in the amount of \$350 to any of the operating funds. In addition to the general fund, options include: the prayer book fund, Camp Pomegranate fund, the Camp Pomegranate Director Fund, and the Camp Pomegranate financial aid fund.

## THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH KIDDUSH

Every Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is required to sponsor a Shabbat Kiddush. The family has a range of choices for celebration, from a simple buffet Kiddush to a catered luncheon after the service. Depending upon the time of year, the Kiddush can be served in Pilgrim Hall or on the patio at Pilgrim Church.

When planning the Kiddush, please work with the Oneg Chair to base your attendance estimates on congregants as well as invited guests. There is something special about being a part of Temple Etz Rimon and being able to share your simcha with your Synagogue family. A meal that accompanies a Bar/Bat Mitzvah or other life-cycle observances is a Seudat Mitzvah, a religiously-commanded festive meal. A reception and spirit of Shabbat rest enhances the meaning of the religious ceremony.

Either your caterer or a kitchen coordinator of your choice must be the supervisor of the food preparation on the morning of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Pilgrim Church permits only persons with a food handlers' license in the kitchen. Six months before the date of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, families should meet with the Oneg Chair to make plans for the Kiddush luncheon.

## TORAH BLESSINGS

### Blessings Before The Torah Reading

Each congregant honored with an aliyah recites these berachot:

Borchu et Adonai ha-m'vorach.

Congregation responds: Baruch Adonai ha-m'vorach l'olam va-ed.

Congregant continues: Baruch Adonai ha-m'vorach l'olam va-ed.

Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher bachar banu mi-kol ha-amim, v'natan lanu et torato.  
Baruch attah Adonai, noten ha-torah.

### Blessings After The Torah Reading

Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher natan lanu torat emet, v'chayei olam nata b'tochenu.  
Baruch attah Adonai, noten ha-torah.

### Suggested Reading

Putting God on the Guest List - How to reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah  
By: Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin, Paperback - 100 pages (August 1998)

Jewish Lights Publishing; ISBN: 1580230156