

Temple Adath Yeshurun

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Guidebook

**2020 Edition**

# בס״ד

# INTRODUCTION

The journey toward becoming a bar/bat mitzvah is an exciting process. It concludes a young person’s foundational education and begins a new and more mature phase of learning and exploring the possibilities for a rich and meaningful Jewish life. The bar/t mitzvah ceremony is a special moment of taking on adult responsibility for one’s cultural, ethical, and spiritual life as well as leadership in our community. It is our privilege to share this learning process and celebration with you and your family!

In this manual, you will find information to help you understand the learning process for the ceremony and preparations for the celebration. Of course, no manual will be exhaustive. Please know that you are welcome to come to us at any time to share your questions and thoughts. We are committed to this being an enjoyable and empowering journey!

# THE MEANING OF BECOMING A BAR/T MITZVAH

Every culture has ways of marking the transition from childhood to adulthood and the assumption of full membership in the community. In Judaism, the beginning of adolescence (age 13) is the moment that we emphasize for young adults to take on adult responsibility and public roles of leadership. We recognize that the process of “growing up” continues beyond this age, but we invite young people to take ownership of their considerable capacities to make mature decisions and contribute to the lives of those around them. This is also the age at which the *mitzvot*, the charges or sacred duties of Torah and Jewish life, became theirs to own and to fulfill.

It is the responsibility of parents and the Jewish community to provide young people education, experience, inspiration and role modeling such that they will be ready to make the cognitive jump from dependence to responsibility and the practical shift into full participation. We are excited to partner with students and parents as we prepare for this exciting transition together!

# STUDY AND PREPARATION

Preparing to become a bar/t mitzvah is a dynamic process that involves a variety of Jewish and personal experiences. Reaching this rite of passage involves not only the mastery of technical skills needed for Shabbat services, but also an inner transformation.

Though the most intensive period of preparation occurs in the year before the event, there are many actions that can be taken in advance to make the process easier and more enjoyable. For example, we encourage parents and students to:

1. Devote extra time and attention to Hebrew study and reading skills,
2. Attend services on a regular basis to gain familiarity with the liturgy and a personal relationship with our community’s prayer practice,
3. Speak with the Rabbi about questions you have about Judaism as they come up and share your areas of interest. Rabbi Zehavi is happy to talk with you and share resources to further your passions and commitments.

**Date Assignments**

The date for your child’s bar/t mitzvah event is based on his or her 13th birthday dated on the Jewish calendar. If you have questions about the date provided by the synagogue, please contact the Education Director. Before study has begun, there is flexibility to postpone the date of the event. However, the ceremony cannot take place before the student has reached the age of 13 on the Jewish calendar.

**Family Education**

As part of the sixth grade curriculum, we have some Sunday classes which parents attend with their children. These classes focus on the religious, educational and personal aspects of becoming a bar/t mitzvah. They also give parents an opportunity to share the experience with the other families. Practically speaking, the sessions provide parents useful information and a deeper understanding of the process ahead.

**Sixth Grade Classes with the Cantor**

During these weekly lessons, the Cantor teaches the blessings and trope for Torah and Haftarah in a group setting to provide a foundation for reading individual Torah and Haftarah portions. The students also learn some of the prayers for Shabbat services.

**Individual Lessons with the Cantor**

Private sessions with the Cantor begin approximately a year before the bar/t mitzvah ceremony and focus on chanting from the Torah and Haftarah as well as leading portions of the service. The Cantor becomes well acquainted with your child and tailors the learning experience for him/her.

These sessions are central to your child gaining comfort and proficiency for the ceremony. Please maintain regular contact with the Cantor to track your child’s progress. You are invited to attend sessions from time to time so that you gain a better sense of how to support his/her study. Consistency and regular practice are the keys to adequate preparation and to a sense of confidence and pride.

**Study with the Rabbi to Prepare a Teaching (*devar torah*)**

The Rabbi will help the student understand his/her week’s Torah portion, discussing compelling aspects of the reading as well as some of the different modes of traditional interpretation. The Rabbi may also provide ancient, medieval, or modern commentaries to enrich the learning. Students will write and prepare their own teaching with the Rabbi’s guidance.

Sessions begin around six months before the event, with frequency of meetings depending on the student’s progress. Parents are encouraged to stay in contact with the Rabbi to track student progress as well as ensure that students complete assignments between lessons. However, we ask that parents take care not to involve themselves in the writing of the *devar torah*. Similarly, in most cases it is preferable that parents refrain from sitting in on sessions. The Rabbi welcomes all questions and concerns.

**Mitzvah Project**

The responsibility to help others and ability to assume roles of leadership are core elements of becoming a bar/t mitzvah. All students will choose and carry out a project to benefit the wider community. They are welcome to discuss their ideas with the Rabbi or Cantor. Though some parental involvement may be necessary, the planning and execution should be performed substantially by the student. Students are encouraged to consider projects that will inspire or involve the participation of others.

**Service Attendance**

Students should attend services regularly and **a minimum of twice per month on Shabbat morning and once per month on Friday evening**. The more they participate in communal prayer, the better they will understand the service and the more personally relevant it will be for them. Their experience of services and understanding of the liturgy will be a regular topic of discussion during lessons. Students learn the services and practice leading them in large part through attendance. Therefore, students who do not attend with the expected regularly will not be prepared to lead as their peers.

Participation in services is similarly important for the rest of the family. It is part of what builds relationship and a sense of community between your family and those who will celebrate with you at the bar/t mitzvah ceremony. These are also the people who will be with you on future occasions of joy and tragedy.

We are committed to every member of the family having access to and comfort with our services, regardless of personal background. You are warmly encouraged to contact the Rabbi to schedule a time to discuss any questions or to receive and explanation of the liturgy.

**Other Expectations**

Private study with the Rabbi and Cantor is a special opportunity and should be taken seriously. This preparation complements religious school studies. Students are expected to devote themselves to getting the most possible out of both their religious school and private lessons.

**Student Individuality**

We recognize that each student is different in his/her needs, aptitudes, and passions. Therefore, study and preparation to become a bar/t mitzvah are adapted on an individual basis. Though 6th grade lessons take place with the entire cohort, private sessions with the Rabbi and Cantor afford a great degree of flexibility and the capacity to respond to each student’s pace and interests. If there is any insight that you believe might help us understand your child or respond to his/her needs, please share it with the Rabbi, Cantor, or Educational Director.

If there are special circumstances or special needs, we are committed to working with you to overcome any obstacles. Alternatives are available and can be explored - we will work to establish a reasonable accommodation. However, the special circumstances must be known well in advance so adjustments can be made. Please inform the Rabbi, Cantor or Educational Director about these concerns as soon as possible. All communications are considered confidential.

# ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CEREMONY

**Honors**

You have the opportunity to give honors to your family members and guests. You will receive a form (paper or electronic) on which to list those people you choose to honor during the service. We will need the Hebrew name (her/his name and her/his parents’ names) of anyone who is called up to the Torah. The Rabbi will review the list with you approximately one month before the day of the service.

You may assign up to five *‘aliyot* (the honor of reciting the Torah blessings). The congregation reserves two *‘aliyot*: one for those who have a celebration (such as a birthday, anniversary, *aufruf* or baby naming), and the other for those who are observing a *yahrzeit* during the coming week. To accommodate large numbers of family or friends, groups such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins may receive an *‘aliyah* together. The parents customarily take the seventh *‘aliyah* (which is part of the total count of five) to be by the child during his/her *‘aliyah*.

In addition to the *‘aliyot*, possible honors for you and your guests include:

* Two to four people to open and close the ark curtain,
* One person to lift the Torah (male: *magbiah*, female: *magbihah*),
* One person to dress the Torah (male: *golel*, female: *golelet*),
* Two people to carry the Torah - one for the start and one for the end of the Torah service,
* Others to recite public prayers in English, such as the Prayer for the Congregation, Prayer for Our Country, and Prayer for Peace.

Relatives and friends who are proficient Torah readers may also read from the Torah if you wish to grant them the honor. Please contact the Cantor at least three months in advance to sign up your family Torah readers. The Cantor and the Torah coordinator will assign portions and prepare materials as needed. All Torah readers should be prepared to read their assigned portion for the Cantor 2-3 weeks in advance of the date.

It is a priority that families be able to extend honors regardless of the recipient’s personal background. Please speak with the Rabbi to discuss ideas for honoring non-Jewish parents, relatives, and friends. Also, materials and instruction are available to guide those who are unfamiliar with a given honor. We ask that you notify your guests well in advance of their honor and what is involved.

Please note the relation to you of all honor recipients on the honors form so that they can be called up personally by the Rabbi.

***Kippot (yarmulkes)***

If you are ordering custom *kippot*, make sure they are in the Executive Director’s office by Thursday morning. If you plan to use synagogue *kippot*, please tell the Executive Director. *Kippot* will be arranged on a table at the sanctuary entrance for guests.

**Flowers and Decorations**

Families are responsible for providing at least one basket of flowers for the pulpit. If finances are an issue in this regard, please speak to the Executive Director.

Please review your plans for decorations with the Executive Director. Balloons may not be inflated nor may decorations be constructed on Shabbat.

All food, both food being served or used in table decorations, must be kosher.

Table decorations may not be taken out of the synagogue until after Shabbat. If an evening function is held in the synagogue on Saturday, please be sure to make arrangements for removal of the decorations. Items should be removed on Sunday unless prior arrangements have been made for temporary storage until Monday morning.

**All items must be delivered by 3:00 pm on Friday.** You can make arrangements to have decorations safely stored in locked rooms.

**Kiddush**

*Kiddush* is part of our practice as a Shabbat community. Families are responsible for providing at least a basic *kiddush* for the entire congregation as well as their own guests. Please account for 50 congregants in addition to your guests when planning. If finances are an issue, please speak to the Executive Director. Only approved caterers may prepare the *kiddush*.

**Invitations**

We ask that all the children in your child’s class be invited to the service and celebration. Since the class is a community, we want our students to show care and concern for each other and do not want anyone to feel left out. You will receive a list of all students in the class.

**The Judaica Shop**

The Shop at TAY, a service of the Temple Adath Yeshurun Sisterhood, is a source for ritual objects your child may need. Both *tefillin* and a *tallit* can be purchased through the shop. This is also a very good place to purchase gifts that the bar/t mitzvah will cherish for a lifetime. Special orders can be taken if enough advance notice is given to the Judaica Shop coordinator. The shop is normally open on Sunday mornings when Sunday school is in session and by appointment.

# THE WEEK BEFORE AND DAY OF THE BAR/T MITZVAH CEREMONY

**Friday Evening:** Shabbat Services begin at 5:30 p.m. and end about 6:30 p.m. Please plan to be at the synagogue no later than 5:15 p.m. Shabbat clothing is appropriate. Your child will conduct portions of the service. If you would like to take pictures on Friday afternoon, please let the Executive Director know so appropriate arrangements can be made. Photos must be completed by 5:00 p.m. or when Shabbat begins, whichever is earlier.

**Saturday Morning:** Services begin at 9:15 a.m. and end around noon. Plan to arrive at the synagogue by 8:50 a.m. The Executive Director and a representative from the Board of Directors will seat you and facilitate your participation in the service. The Rabbi and Cantor will help you with the details when you are on the pulpit. A member of the congregation will have the list of your honorees (which you provided) and assist them as needed. Members of our Board of Trustees will serve as greeters for the Shabbat services. We invite you to relax and enjoy!

# Information Guests Should Know

*Dress*

People who will be called up to the pulpit should dress modestly and appropriately. For example: very short skirts, exposed midriffs or shoulders, and jeans are not appropriate attire. Men and boys should wear shirts with ties. Jackets are optional for boys. You may want to include a note in your invitation with this information.

*Ritual Attire*

All male guests, including children, wear *kippot* in the synagogue building. Jewish male guests wear a *tallit*. Both garments are available in the main lobby. As we are an egalitarian community, women are welcome to wear a *kippah*, an alternative head covering, and/or a *tallit*.

*Children*

The synagogue provides babysitting for very young children as well as programming for school-age children. You should check to see if we have a Junior Congregation service the week of your event. Many older children choose to sit with friends in the sanctuary.

Let us know if you expect many young children to join as guests so that we can insure adequate babysitting coverage.

*Information Booklets*

Inside the pews is a booklet entitled *Temple Adath Yeshurun: Our Story* which gives the history of Temple Adath Yeshurun and explains the Shabbat morning service.

If you plan to prepare a special booklet for your guests, either to mail or hand out at services, the Rabbi will review it with you. **Please give him a draft at least six weeks before the occasion.** Please have the copies of the hand-out to the Executive Director by Thursday morning.

# CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE BAR/T MITZVAH

# Shabbat Observance at Temple Adath Yeshurun

## The Shabbat is a time of holiness, set apart from the rest of the week. We ask you, and please ask your guests, to help us maintain the sense of holiness by:

* Refraining from use of electronic devices in this building,
* In particular, not taking photographs by camera or smartphone at any time on Shabbat anywhere on synagogue grounds,
* Silencing or turning off cell phones,
* Discouraging guests from bringing gifts to the synagogue on Shabbat,
* Refraining from smoking on the grounds. (To protect the health of all, Temple Adath Yeshurun is **always** a no smoking building. This includes the parking lot and grounds.)

## We thank you and your guests for your participation in making the Shabbat of your celebration, like every Shabbat, a time of sanctity and peace for the entire community.

## Tzedakah

## The custom of giving *tzedakah* (charity) is a way of marking any festive occasion in Jewish life. There are many ways to contribute. One wonderful option is the Teen Funders Program through the Jewish Community Foundation Teen Funders, which matches the bar/t mitzvah’s donations and offers them multiple opportunities during the year to choose how to allocate their funds. Another option is to choose an allocated fund at the synagogue which connects with an area of interest and commitment for the bar/t mitzvah. And, of course, there are an abundance of social welfare organizations and causes worthy of support.

Families might also include table decorations of canned food or other items that can be donated to a local food bank or shelter. Another way to give to charity might be to donate floral centerpieces to the Jewish Home of Central New York or other local hospitals.

## Havdalah

If you are planning to have a dinner reception at the synagogue on Saturday evening, you should plan to start the evening with a *Havdalah* service. This beautiful ritual marks the end of Shabbat and the beginning of the new week. The service time is set by nightfall. Taking only several minutes, it is an intimate and warm

way to begin the evening. The Rabbi can tell you what time Shabbat ends on your weekend and will be happy to arrange the service for you as well.

## The Reception

A meal of celebration is part of Jewish rites of passage. It is considered a *mitzvah* and sacred event. The meal following a bar/t mitzvah ceremony should be kosher. The synagogue building is a wonderful venue, with a professional grade kitchen with all necessary amenities. The building is reserved for your event until

you inform us otherwise or six months before the event. Many special arrangements can be made in order to have your celebration at the synagogue.

# SYNAGOGUE ARRANGEMENTS AND POLICIES

The Executive Director is the key link to making arrangements at the synagogue. Please make an appointment with her at least **six months in advance** to review how she can help. She can provide

information regarding approved caterers and florists. Some arrangements you need to make with the Executive Director include:

## Type of Function

Although the ballroom is specifically reserved for your child’s bar/t mitzvah celebration both in the morning and evening, we *must* know your definite plans at least six months before your function. This allows the synagogue to make use of the facilities for synagogue programs or other functions.

## Caterers, Food and Security

An approved professional caterer is required for all events at Temple Adath Yeshurun. A list of caterers is included in the Appendix. Families are expected to provide a *kiddush* that is not less than the standard *kiddush* for Shabbat morning.

We will be able to best assure that the room setup for your event meets your needs if you speak with the Executive Director in advance. You should discuss with your caterer the placement of tables for guests, food, beverages, etc. The caterer will send the Executive Director the completed room set-up form a few

days prior to the event. The TAY Maintenance Department sets up the tables and chairs per the caterer’s instructions.

A security guard is required for Shabbat morning services and evening parties. You will be charged to have security present. Please see the enclosed Schedule of Fees for details.

Leftovers from *kiddush* or luncheon remain in the synagogue building until Shabbat has ended. Please contact the Executive Director to make arrangements.

## Alcohol and Wine

We require a non-alcoholic alternative be available whenever alcohol is served. For example, grape juice must be available when wine is served. All wine, champagne and grape juice for sacramental use *must* be kosher. The synagogue follows New York state law for drinking age for all guests.

## Financial Obligations

Temple Adath Yeshurun requires members’ accounts (dues and school tuition) be current prior to a bar/bat mitzvah event, unless arrangements have been made in advance with the Executive Director. Room rental fees are due at least one week prior to the event. Room rental charges vary depending upon which room is used. Please see the enclosed Schedule of Fees for more information.

# CLOSING

A bar/t mitzvah celebration is an exciting moment of transition for the student as well as the entire family. We look forward to sharing in this process with you, ensuring that it is an opportunity for deepening relationship and Jewish commitment, and supporting your family in any way we can.

May all in your family grow from strength to strength!