

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים – *Vayigdelu Ha-ne'arim*

“And the Kids Grew Up”: The B’nai Mitzvah Process at OZS

Mazal Tov and Welcome!

It is fitting that we start with the words, “Mazal Tov!” Months from now, at the climax of your family’s b’nai mitzvah celebration, the community will sing, “Siman Tov U’Mazal Tov” – “Good omen and good fortune” – as they pelt your child with candy. Behind that joyful moment is a process of learning and preparation for the b’nai mitzvah students and families. It is our great fortune to stand alongside you throughout this journey, and to share in the joy and pride that your children bring to the OZS community and to the Jewish people. We are here for you, and the families you see in this room are here for you as well. *Kadima!* – Let’s get started!

The Basics: What is a bar/bat mitzvah?

The Hebrew phrase *bar mitzvah* (בֶּר מִצְוָה) means “son of the commandments,” and *bat mitzvah* (בַּת מִצְוָה) means “daughter of the commandments.” The rabbis of the Talmud explain that young children are their parents’ responsibility; they can’t be held fully accountable for their choices. At age 13 for boys and 12 for girls, they continue, children become obligated to live thoughtful Jewish lives and to take responsibility for their actions. Simply by virtue of turning one year older, they are seen as adult members of the Jewish community.

Today, our conception of *b’nai mitzvah* (the plural term) builds on this ancient description, with some modifications. We live in a more egalitarian society, and age 13 has become the standard moment for Jewish girls, as well as boys, to come of age (though some families still choose to celebrate a bat mitzvah at age 12). Also, while the rabbis decreed that children automatically become b’nai mitzvah, we believe that our children must actively participate in this coming of age through a process of learning, leadership, and lovingkindness. Our young people take ownership of their b’nai mitzvah by leading Jewish rituals, sharing words of Torah, and doing acts of service. Finally, we understand responsibility slightly differently than the rabbis did. Students: even in the months *before* your b’nai mitzvah, you need to step up and take responsibility. And parents: we hope you will not *fully* leave your children to fend for themselves the moment they step off the bimah!

Creating Meaning and Joy

Let’s just say it: the b’nai mitzvah process can feel stressful! Students are navigating a second language (Hebrew), a complex document (the Torah), and a challenging daily reality (being a teenager) – and they are doing it up on the bimah in front of the congregation. Parents are thinking about financial costs, managing logistics, and helping their kids practice prayers and rituals with which they may not feel confident. And like any gathering of family and community members, a bar/bat mitzvah can raise hard or uncomfortable dynamics. This is not easy stuff!

And yet b’nai mitzvah are *simchas* – moments of great joy! We work with students to find meaning in their preparation, whether that means their mitzvah project, their drash, their Torah reading, or all of the above. We encourage parents to check in regularly with their kids, asking questions about the ideas and themes of their Torah reading, listening to them practice their Haftarah even if the words and melodies are unfamiliar.

Finally, we hope you will find joy in the community of families celebrating b’nai mitzvah over the coming months. Let this be a group that supports each other, cooks for one another, celebrates these *simchas* together.

Rabbi Shani Abramowitz and Joseph Eskin

B'nai Mitzvah and Family Goals

Fill out this sheet for all the members of your family, starting with the b'nai mitzvah student. Though not every family member will have a goal in every category, this is one way to imagine this as a family-wide commitment.

Skill-Based Goal <i>(Leading part of the service, saying a blessing over food, etc.)</i>					
Learning Goal <i>(Studying the Torah portion or haftarah, learning about the b'nai mitzvah process, etc.)</i>					
Mitzvah Goal <i>(Creating a mitzvah project, participating in service or charity, etc.)</i>					
Family Goal <i>(Nightly dinner, weekly game night, etc.)</i>					
Self-Care Goal <i>(Comfort TV binge, favorite outdoor activity, etc.)</i>					

B'nai Mitzvah Timeline

1) 1 Year Before: Commitment to the Community

Beginning one year before their b'nai mitzvah, students are expected to come to Shabbat morning services 2 times per month. They are also expected to come to Friday evening services 1 time per month. Attending regularly is critical for gaining familiarity with the service and demonstrating a sense of commitment to the community.

2) 8 Months Before: Learning and Mitzvot

In conversation with the Rabbi and Religious School Director, develop a list of services, Torah and Haftarah readings, and prayers that the bar/bat mitzvah will lead. This can always be adjusted later on, but it will provide a road map for study. There are tutors and mentors in the community who can work with b'nai mitzvah students. The Rabbi will meet with b'nai mitzvah students to help them develop, write, and prepare to deliver a Shabbat drash.

Additionally, the bar/bat mitzvah should decide on a mitzvah project and begin planning. Religious School classes, the Rabbi, the Religious School Director, and community mentors can provide support for this project.

3) 6 Months Before: Imagining the Celebration

Book Caterer for kiddush lunch: The Office Manager can provide a list of commonly used caterers.

Invitations: Purchase, address, and send out invitations.

Tallit: Many families purchase a new tallit for the bar/bat mitzvah. There are many styles to choose from, and prices range. Some hang over your shoulders like a shawl. Others are larger and cover your back.

People of all genders can choose any style. Tallitot can be bought on websites like [this](#) or [this](#), or at the OZS Gift Shop. Tallitot are also available to borrow at OZS. (Note: the distinction between "Men's" and "Women's" tallit on these websites is not necessarily relevant – students should choose a tallit they like.)

Tefillin: Many people receive their first set of *tefillin* – ritual items worn during weekday morning prayers – for their bat/bat mitzvah. Tefillin are precious items, and can be expensive. A pair may last for the rest of your life, or even beyond. If you are interested in purchasing tefillin, please speak to the Rabbi or Religious School Director.

Kippot: Many families purchase kippot with the bar/bat mitzvah's name and the date inscribed on them.

Flowers: Order flowers.

4) 1 Month Before: OZS Bulletin

Please provide wording and a picture of your child to the Office Manager for the Bulletin announcement. This is needed in the month prior to the bulletin in which the announcement will appear.

Work with the Rabbi to determine Honors for Shabbat (See "Shabbat Morning Honors" below).

5) 2 Weeks Before: Information for the Program

Submit information to the Office Manager for the program packet: Honors, Thank-You from the family, explanation of mitzvah project, photo of bar/bat mitzvah. The program is typically printed on white bond paper, but you can provide nicer paper if you prefer (approximately 100 sheets for a single-fold program).

6) The Week Of: Final Preparations

Flowers: If planning for floral arrangement(s), coordinate delivery date/time with the Office Manager.

Kippot: If providing kippot, ensure they are at OZS prior to Friday evening services.

Photos: Photo sessions can be arranged at OZS during the week (no photography on Shabbat).

Cooking: Often, b’nai mitzvah students and families will help bake desserts for Friday or Saturday during the week leading up to the celebration.

7) The Big “Day”: The B’nai Mitzvah Shabbat

Friday Evening: The bar/bat mitzvah may help lead Kabbalat Shabbat services at OZS, and should plan to attend. Family members can be honored with the chance to recite readings, make blessings (over the wine, over the bread), and share words of Torah. Some families choose to celebrate with a Shabbat dinner for family and/or friends after services.

Saturday Morning: The bar/bat mitzvah will help to lead Shabbat morning services at OZS. During this service, they officially become b’nai mitzvah as they rise to bless the Torah as it is read. Family members can be honored with the chance to lead services, read Torah, recite readings, and participate in ritual moments. The bar/bat mitzvah often shares words of Torah and gratitude. Parents often share words of congratulations to their child. Many families choose to celebrate with a Kiddush lunch for the community after services.

8) The Celebration?

Some families choose to celebrate with a party, either the Saturday night or Sunday after the bar/bat mitzvah or at a later point. This could be an open-house for family and friends, a party at a venue with a dance floor, an afternoon at an arcade or trampoline park, a picnic at the park, or any other number of things. Whenever applicable, it is gracious to invite other b’nai mitzvah students to join in the celebration.

Shabbat Morning Honors

Pesukei D’Zimrah: Shacharit: Present Tallit just before start of Torah Service: Torah Service: Gabbai(m): First Aliyah: Reader: Second Aliyah: Reader: Third Aliyah: Reader: Fourth Aliyah: Reader: Fifth Aliyah: Reader:	Sixth Aliyah: Reader: Seventh Aliyah: Reader: Maftir: Reader: Opening Ark: Lift Torah: Wrap Torah: Haftorah: English readings (if any): Closing Ark: Ushers (if any): Lead Adon Olam:
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B'nai Mitzvah Student Responsibilities

Preparing for Prayer Services: *Each student prepares differently for their bar/bat mitzvah, and no two celebrations look the same. The ritual component is intuitive for some and less so for others, meaningful to some and less so to others, but every student earns a rich sense of accomplishment through their preparation. Each student and family, together with the Rabbi and Religious School Director, must think through the ritual responsibilities the student will take on. We encourage students to take on as much as they can confidently manage – this learning lasts a lifetime. Here is the full menu of options:*

Friday

- Kabbalat Shabbat (Psalms to welcome the Sabbath)
- Ma'ariv (Traditional evening prayers)
- Kiddush (Blessing over wine)
- Hamotzi (Blessing over bread)

Saturday

- P'sukei D'Zimra (Opening Psalms)
- Shacharit (Traditional morning service)
- Torah Service (Before and after the reading)
- Torah Reading (1-7 *aliyot*, or readings)
- Torah Blessings
- Haftarah (Chanting from Prophets)
- D'rash (Speech on the Torah reading, written with support from the Rabbi)
- Mussaf (Additional Service for Sabbath and Holidays)
- Havdalah (Saturday night service separating Shabbat from the week ahead)

B'nai Mitzvah Project: *Each student is encouraged to see this not only as a ritual occasion filled with Hebrew words and traditional melodies, but as a moment to play an active role in Tikkun Olam – repairing a broken world. In the year leading up to their bar/bat mitzvah, students are expected to develop a project that does good in the world around them, and that connects to something they are passionate about. Many community members are happy to connect students to organizations and causes that may inspire them. Possibilities include:*

- Volunteering at an organization connected to a favorite hobby or interest
- Raising money to donate to a charitable organization
- Collecting food or supplies to donate to a charitable organization
- Visiting with sick or elderly members of the community
- Advocating for a local or global cause

Religious School Aide: *After becoming a bar/bat mitzvah, students are encouraged to work as classroom aides in the OZS Religious School, where they contribute to the community and develop educational and professional skills.*

Continuing Education and Community Involvement: *The bar/bat mitzvah is not the end, but the beginning! We hope students will continue learning, expand their ritual skills, participate actively in youth programs, and remain deeply involved in the community. And we hope that parents will continue to volunteer, support OZS youth, and deepen their own Jewish learning and ritual skills as well!*

Costs

Note: *If you have any concerns about costs associated with the bar/bat mitzvah, please reach out to Rabbi Abramowitz to discuss alternative options. Cost should not be a barrier to a full and joyous celebration.*

The following is a list of either required or typical costs associated with b'nai mitzvah celebrations:

Required

- B'nai Mitzvah Fee (\$200, covering the cost of ordering candy, preparing/printing the program, incidentals)

Typical (Estimates only - costs will fluctuate)

- Invitations for guests (\$200-\$400, depending on choice of invitations and number of guests)
 - ***More families are turning to online invitations, which are cheaper or even free.
- Tallit (\$100-\$300, including bag, depending on size, style, shipping, etc.)
- Tefillin (\$200-\$800 – a wide range based on details related to quality, craftsmanship, and style)
- Kippot (\$150-\$300, depending on material and number of guests)
- Challah and wine for kiddush on Friday and on Saturday
- Caterer (\$3000-\$5000, depending on menu and number of guests)
- Flowers (\$100-\$500, depending on florist, size, and arrangement[s])
- Donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund (It is common to make a donation after the event to express appreciation for the Rabbi)