

Bar/Bat Mitzvah:
Frequently Asked Questions

If my child does not want to have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, should I abandon the idea?

While I firmly believe in honoring our children, I also believe that as parents, we are obligated to make wise choices on their behalf. It is up to us to enrich their lives with positive and empowering experiences just as it is our duty to feed and cloth them properly. I can categorically state that the Bar or Bat Mitzvah will be a positive and profoundly enriching experience for your child. Time and time again, teens have told me, "It made me feel like I could do anything." That, in itself, should be reason enough to persevere with the studies and with the personal sacrifices which accompany such a journey.

Should I resist the temptation to spend more than my family can afford on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Having officiated in hundreds of Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations of all sizes and budgets...I passionately believe that the money spent does not make the day. In some cases, it in itself can serve as a distraction from the essence of the event and from the values that it represents.

If I state 10:00 AM on the invitations, when should I anticipate that the service will commence?

Usually, a 10:00 invitation suggests that the service will start between 10:15 and 10:30.

How long does the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service last?

The duration of the service is approximately one and a half hours. The Shabbat afternoon service includes the beautiful havdallah ceremony and is therefore slightly longer.

Can my photographer/videographer shoot film during the service?

As long as photographers are discrete and do not use flash photography, I welcome them to record the entire event. Usually, families do formal photography prior to the service. See your photographer for a suggested starting time.

How many prayer books should I have printed?

Most, if not all congregants should have a prayer book. Ironically, it is usually the children who benefit most from the ability to follow along in the service and who therefore are less disruptive as a result.

Should we provide kippot (yarmulkes) for all of the male guests?

Male Jews wear kippot to acknowledge God's presence above them, and as symbolic of their obligations to God. It is customary for one to wear kippot during all Jewish life-cycle events (including baby namings, bar mitzvahs and funerals). It is therefore appropriate to make kippot available for both Jewish and non-Jewish male guests.

How can I honor non-Jewish family members or friends?

Having worked extensively with inter-faith families, I welcome non-Jewish family members to the bima. There are many opportunities for their participation in the service.

When and why are candies thrown during the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service?

There is a wonderful custom of showering the Bar or Bat Mitzvah with “sweetness” at the conclusion of the Haftarah service following the Torah reading. It can be a wonderful surprise for your child. Please only use soft candy! (Sunkist Gourmet Soft Chews hurt the least...)

Can younger siblings be included in aliyot (Torah honors)?

No, children under Bar or Bat Mitzvah age are not honored with aliyahs. They can, however, participate in the service by opening the Ark, wrapping the Torah after the reading, or by reciting a reading in Hebrew or English. Some children also join parents in making brief speeches in tribute to their siblings.

What constitutes a “Dedication Page”?

The Dedication Page is usually found at the start of the prayer book and is not read aloud during the service. It is a letter of welcome from the family to their guests.

Can we have input in the assembly of the prayer book?

Absolutely. You are welcome to include photographs, artwork, and poems to the siddur.

Should we include candle lighting in the service?

According to Jewish law, once Shabbat candles have been lit on Friday night, we refrain from lighting others until the sun has set on Saturday. While I personally do not object to candle lightings in parties, I do not believe that they belong to the Shabbat prayer service.

Who is required to wear a tallit?

According to Jewish law, men above the age of Bar Mitzvah are required to wrap themselves in tallits (prayer shawls), at least while praying. While women are not required to wear tallits, they are also not prohibited from doing so.

How many aliyot (Torah honors) are included in the service?

It is customary to include seven aliyot (Torah readings) on Shabbat morning and three in a Shabbat afternoon service. I base the number on the student’s abilities and the family’s requirements. In most cases, the student prepares four aliyot.

If I am honored with an aliyah, what am I required to do?

First of all, mazel tov! An aliyah is a great honor. You will be asked to recite two Hebrew blessings – one preceding and one following the section of Torah which is read in your honor. I strongly advise you to familiarize yourself with the blessings prior the date of the service. It is a good custom for families to send these blessings to honorees long before the date of the service.

Is it true that a cantor can perform all life-cycle ceremonies (birth, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, weddings, funerals)?

Yes. Jewish law permits any knowledgeable Jew to perform these rites. I frequently perform life cycle services for congregants as well as for other members of the community. While I sometimes co-officiate with rabbis, I more frequently lead services alone.

Should we order a riser for the ceremony?

A 20' x 10' x 1' riser (stage) works well in most locations.

If we are not in a synagogue, do you provide the Torah and furnishings?

Yes. We can provide the Torah, as well as a beautiful hardwood Ark and podiums. We also provide a high quality sound system.

Is it customary for teens to donate a portion of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah gift money to charity?

Yes, it is a wonderful first act of Jewish adulthood. Regardless of the nature of the charity (though I do recommend researching their practices), the act of giving is an important one. As a guideline, in keeping with Jewish laws of tzedakah (charity), it is customary to donate ten percent of the total received.

[If you have any questions which are not addressed in this document, please contact me for clarification.](#)