

**Hebrew Congregation
of
Somers**

B'nei Mitzvah Manual

Congratulations on embarking on the year your son or daughter will be preparing to become a bar/t mitzvah. It's a very exciting and busy year. In addition to your child continuing with his/her Hebrew school education, this year includes an added component: training to be called to the Torah.

This guide to your child becoming a bar/t mitzvah at Hebrew Congregation of Somers outlines the process and obligations of family and child during this momentous year.

What does becoming a bar/t mitzvah mean?

“Bar” or “bat mitzvah” literally translates as “son or daughter of the commandments” but would be more accurately translated as “one who is obligated to live by the commandments.” In Judaism, when a young person reaches the age of religious majority – 13 for boys and 12 for girls – s/he is considered an adult in terms of the privileges and obligations associated with Jewish religious life.

One of the ways we celebrate the Shabbat, the day of rest, is to read and study Torah each week. On the day a child becomes a bar/t mitzvah, s/he is allowed to be called to say a blessing over the Torah for the first time in his or her life. This is called an “aliyah,” translated as “calling up.”

To become a bar/t mitzvah is not an end-goal in Judaism. Rather, it is a springboard for a life-long endeavor of further study, continued religious, moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth, as well as for continued participation in the life of the synagogue.

We ask that you purchase **PUTTING GOD ON THE GUEST LIST: HOW TO RECLAIM THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF YOUR CHILD'S BAR OR BAT MITZVAH** by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin. There is a version for adults and one for kids. This is an excellent book that describes what the meaning and importance is of the bar/t mitzvah.

PREPARTION FOR YOUR CHILD BECOMING A BAR/T MITZVAH.

Scheduling the date your child is to be called to the Torah as a bar/t mitzvah.

The first step in the bar/t mitzvah process is to provide Rabbi Fred with your child's birthday; based on the birthday, the Rabbi will tell you after what date your child can be called to the Torah. This is predicated on the child's Hebrew birthday and will not be before the boy turns 13 and the girl turns 12.

You will then need to provide preferred dates for your child's bar/t mitzvah to the Rabbi and he will confirm a final date with you (taking into account holidays, vacations, etc.). This should be finalized during the summer.

We strongly recommend that the bar/t mitzvah date be set for late spring through June, or that you wait until fall of the following school year.

Dates will be assigned on a first come, first served basis and will go into the HCS calendar.

It is the synagogue's policy to schedule b'nei mitzvah only on Saturday mornings. If you wish, we can, also, schedule a Friday service the night before the Saturday morning service.

You can, also, speak to Rabbi Fred about your child reading from the Torah in Israel. Rabbi Fred lives in Israel part of the year and can work with you to put together a service in Jerusalem. However, this would not preclude your child from participating in a service at HCS.

Preparation for becoming a bar/t mitzvah.

Preparation for becoming a bar/t mitzvah falls into four broad categories listed below. This manual will address each one in detail:

- Tutoring
- Working with Rabbi Fred
- Attendance at services
- Attendance at Hebrew school

How will the tutoring session work?

We are delighted to have a member of our community, Manny Stern, tutoring the HCS b'nei mitzvah students this year.

Manny's focus is to primarily work individually with each student in sessions that last approximately one half hour. He will initially work with the children as a group for two sessions covering the Torah service and the trope. Subsequently, the lengthy individual sessions will give your child substantially more attention and support than the typical bar/t mitzvah student receives at any synagogue. This, also, allows Manny and your child the flexibility to pace themselves according to the date of the bar/t mitzvah.

Manny encourages parents to sit in on the tutoring sessions so that they can learn along with the children.

The tutoring schedule.

The Hebrew school Hey class will meet on Wednesdays during the regular time slot. Manny will set a schedule with the parents during the first Wednesday Hebrew school class.

Typically, tutoring sessions will take place outside of Hebrew School via Skype. Manny will speak to each parent to develop a schedule that works for both parties. In rare circumstances, if the tutoring is done

during Hebrew school, Manny will pull out the bar/t mitzvah children one by one for their tutoring. Those students not being tutored will remain in class with their Hebrew school teacher. Those children who have completed their Hey year and are only receiving tutoring will meet with Manny at a regular time to be determined by the parents and Manny.

Number of tutoring sessions and remuneration.

Manny's tutoring sessions are paid to the synagogue in advance at \$1000. This includes 20 lessons at \$50/ half hour. Lessons can be taught at Manny's office in Heritage Hills or using Skype.

Most children who put in the effort and practice, 15 lessons should suffice. If some need additional lessons, they can be purchased at \$250 for 5 lessons.

If your child misses a tutoring session, it will be rescheduled (if possible) at Manny's convenience and should be arranged directly with him.

Progress and parents staying informed.

You are strongly encouraged to speak or email with Manny on a regular basis to chart your child's progress. Because of the close attention your child will be receiving, you can expect Manny to provide periodic updates and let you know if your child is struggling, unprepared, or just "goofing off."

The bar/t mitzvah process is not meant to be a lonely activity for your child. We need you to motivate your child by staying involved and aware of his progress and state of mind on a day-to-day basis. You do not need to know how to read Hebrew proficiently nor know the ins-and-outs of the service; view this as a time for you to learn along with your child and continually support his efforts.

PUTTING GOD ON THE GUEST LIST gives you and your children a wonderful overview of the Saturday morning service, Jewish prayer, and the meaning of the bar/t mitzvah. If you have more questions or want to learn more or have questions about your child's progress, please do ask Manny or Rabbi Fred. It's best to email Manny and set a time to talk: mannystern@gmail.com . Rabbi Fred is available on Wednesdays during Hebrew school, and other times by appointment. It is important that you do not wait months and months into the tutoring sessions to have questions – both big and small – answered.

It is, also, important that your child become proficient reading Hebrew phonetically this summer. We strongly recommend that the date of your child's bar/t mitzvah be chosen early so that Rabbi Fred can determine the Torah and Haftarah portions this summer; this will allow your child to begin familiarizing themselves with the reading. They can then dive into their bnei mitzvah preparation and not remedial phonetics.

If you do not have a Chumash (Bible) at home please ask Rabbi Fred for an old Chumash (found in the library upstairs). The ETZ HAYIM in the sanctuary are not to leave the sanctuary under any circumstance – your child will be receiving his own ETZ HAYIM at a special ceremony in September.

What will your child learn with Manny?

Manny will be teaching your child the blessings before and after the Torah and Haftarah, the entire Torah service, the Kiddush (over wine), and the Torah and Haftarah trope (musical notes). These are considered the basic expectations (as well as preparing a d'var Torah –a discussion and interpretation of his/her Torah portion). As your child attends services regularly, these prayers and melody during the Torah readings will become more and more familiar to him and will make studying much easier.

Manny will, also, be helping your children learn their Haftarah, and then, the Torah portions. The children are expected to at least chant the Maftir, the final reading, from the Torah. Chanting Torah and Haftarah are life long skills that we feel are important to master.

Depending on how quickly your child masters this material, s/he has the opportunity to do more portions of the Torah. If you know from the start that you wish your child to do more than the Haftarah and Maftir, you should let Manny and Rabbi Fred know very early on in the tutoring process. If you see that your child is moving forward quickly through the process, you can ask Manny and Rabbi Fred to prepare more readings for him/her a few months before the bar/t mitzvah date.

Special accommodations for children with learning disabilities.

The synagogue recognizes that not all children can meet the minimum expectations noted above because of learning disabilities. It is essential that this be explained to both Manny at the first tutoring session (and to Rabbi Fred when setting your date). Adjustments to expectations will be made involving parents, Manny, and Rabbi Fred. It is important to brief Manny as to how your child best learns and what techniques are used.

So as not to create conflicting messages, please do not unilaterally tell your child, “you are not going to do x or y during your bar/t mitzvah service” without speaking first to Manny and Rabbi Fred and agreeing that this is indeed the case.

What materials will your child receive?

Manny will provide a booklet with the full contents of the Torah service’s prayers, a tool to learn trope, and copies of the Maftir (from the Torah) and the Haftarah. He will, also, provide cd’s of this material. As noted above, Rabbi Fred can provide copies of the Torah and Haftarah readings as soon as a date is finalized.

Your child will receive a Chumash (bible) from HCS in early September; this will contain both the Torah and Haftarah readings, as well as commentary. You may, also, want to purchase a Siddur (prayerbook) from the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (www.jrf.org) for home use.

What bar/t mitzvah preparation will take place during Hebrew school?

The Hebrew school curriculum has been designed to mesh with the bar/t mitzvah instruction. In Hey year the children will study the structure of the Saturday morning (Shachrit) service. The goal is that they not only learn how to read and sing these prayers, but learn what they mean and how they are relevant to them as modern Jews. This material will be covered Sunday mornings from 9-10 am. There will also be a supplemental CD that the students bring home with chapters on the main Saturday morning prayers. This CD will include word-by-word reading help, prayer tunes and Games to facilitate the learning process. Both Manny and the class teacher will be able to check the students progress from home.

What work will Rabbi Fred do with your child?

Rabbi Fred will work with your child to understand the Torah portion that s/he is reading to help the child write a d'var Torah (commentary) that will be read as part of the service. Rabbi Fred will do this on Wednesday afternoons, and will start with each child several months before the bar/t mitzvah date.

We encourage you to get involved with this. In some Reconstructionist congregations, the parent delivers his/her own d'var Torah or can have a "dialogue" with the child.

Attendance at services.

A bar/t mitzvah child's attendance at both Friday and Saturday services throughout the year is a critical part of preparing for the bar/t mitzvah.

It is a requirement of the synagogue. We recommend that you give high priority to scheduling you and your child's regular attendance by reviewing the HCS calendar. We, also, strongly recommend that your child NOT take on any additional activities that may conflict with the time that s/he will need to spend on bar/t mitzvah preparation. You may even want to consider scaling back some of your child's existing extra-curricular activities. This can reduce you and your child's stress and will allow the family and child to focus attention on the bar/t mitzvah.

The final calendar of services will be posted on the HCS website, www.hebrewcongregationofsomers.org sometime this summer. But, you can generally count on Friday night services on the first Friday of the month and Saturday morning services on the remaining weekends. Friday night services start at about 7.15 pm (after the pot luck dinner on the first Friday of the month) and last about 70 minutes. Saturday morning services start at 9.30 am and last about two hours; following the services is a Torah discussion over food.

In order to be prepared for a bar/t mitzvah, your child is expected to attend a minimum of 22 services at HCS between now and your child's bar/t mitzvah. At least 12 of these should be Saturday morning services. There will be a box in the back of the sanctuary where your child will record the services that s/he attends.

Your child and you will become increasingly comfortable with the prayers and structure of the service the more often s/he is there. Parents are the prime motivator of their children, so we need you to reinforce their commitment. One of the most important ways to show your support is to attend services with your child and not drop him/her off while you go shopping or the gym. Your attendance with your child is a wonderful way to spend time with your child and learn along with him/her.

Attendance at Hebrew school.

We expect that your child will attend at least 80% of each month's Hebrew school classes, both Wednesday and Sunday. Your child is, also, expected to complete the Hey instructional year, even if the bar/t mitzvah service occurs before the completion of classes. Tal has been asked to take attendance.

What if my child does not meet the minimum attendance expectations?

Attendance at service and Hebrew school will be monitored by the synagogue staff. Failure to realize minimum attendance requirements at Hebrew school or services may jeopardize your child's preparedness and therefore the anticipated bar/t mitzvah date.

Tikkun olam ("mitzvah") project.

It is typical for a child who is about to become a bar/t mitzvah to engage in a tikkun olam project (if the child has not already begun something). "Tikkun olam" means "repair of the world." The goal is to attach the child to the wider world and community – both Jewish and non-Jewish – and to help in its "repair." As with the bar/t mitzvah process, this is part of a maturation process and also is one of the key tenets of Judaism.

Tikkun olam projects at HCS have varied greatly. B'nei mitzvah students will continue to have the opportunity to pursue their own projects based upon their own interests. Donating a portion of the money received as gifts is nice to do but the child is also required to actively participate in a Tikkun olam project (raise funds, collect and distribute items, volunteer time). Rabbi Fred is, also, available for ideas about projects. The decision of what your child's project is going to be should be made this summer and communicated to Rabbi Fred.

THE SERVICE.

Miscellaneous things to know.

- The service will start promptly at 9:30 am and lasts about two and one-half hours.
- The bar/t mitzvah and his/her immediate family will sit in the front of the sanctuary closest to the Rabbi.
- Though a typical HCS service is informal, a bar/t service is a formal service.
- We strongly recommend that you ask one or two members of the community to serve as ushers. They will direct guests to seating and make sure that they have Sidurrim and Chumashim.
- We ask that you reinforce with your guests, both verbally and in writing as part of the invitations, that photography, videography, and use of electronics (cell phones, iPhones, iPods, etc.) is not permitted in the building during Shabbat. All electronics need to be turned off prior to entering the building.
- Males of all ages – Jewish and non-Jewish – are asked to wear kippot; women are strongly encouraged to wear kippot or other headcoverings. Jewish men are asked to wear tallit (found in the closet by the second set of doors into the sanctuary); tallit are optional for women.
- Clapping for a “job well done” is not done during a service.
- Throwing candy at the newly-adult Jew after the concluding Haftarah blessings is a tradition that many families continue. Candy must be soft and wrapped. You will want to designate one or two people to hand out the candy as the child is reciting the Haftarah blessings.
- All children in your child’s Hebrew school class are to be invited to the service and any celebration. Excluding children is hurtful.

Your child’s participation in the service.

The bulk of your child's time participating in the service will occur during the Torah service. This will occur about 45 minutes after the service begins at 9:30 am. Your child will be responsible for leading the entire service, including the prayers before the Ark. Your child, also, is expected to lead at least one section of Torah from the Torah scroll itself (usually the Maftir, the final section), read the Haftarah (from a print out), the prayers before and after the Torah and Haftarah reading, and a "d'var Torah," a talk about the Torah or Haftarah portion.

Participation of family and friends.

Parents are asked to present their child with a tallit early in the service and later, offer a parental "charge." This is a talk that parents address to their child. You may want to take a few minutes to reflect on your child's adulthood, his/her special talents, or the person from s/he is named. You should consider relating your talk to the Torah or Haftarah portion of the day. One or both parents and/or a close friend or relative can be chosen to speak. You are encouraged to review this with Rabbi Fred.

Jewish family and friends of the family are encouraged to read from the Torah. This is a wonderful tribute to your child, and show him/her the family's commitment to hard work. You should contact the Rabbi six months before the service so that he can choose the readings with you.

There are a number of honors that are available for family and friends of the family. These must be confirmed with the Rabbi at least two weeks prior to the service. The honors for Jewish adults (men over the age of 13, women over the age of 12) include:

- Seven aliyot (blessings before and after each Torah reading).
- Hagbah and Gelillah (Torah lifter and dresser)
- Family members doing aliyot should be familiar with and practice the Torah blessings.

Honors are, also, available for non-Jews. These include readings in the Siddur (to be determined by Rabbi Fred) and remarks delivered to the bar/t mitzvah. Jewish children can be given the honor of opening and closing the Ark.

ASSORTED DETAILS.

Hosting a Kiddush following the Saturday morning service.

We expect that the family of the bar/t mitzvah will host the Kiddush in the social hall following the Saturday morning service. You will need to work with the caretaker, Adrienne, about delivery, set up and clean up. Contact Adrienne at 914-384-6968 at least six months before the date. See the separate section “Renumeration of the caretaker.”

You will need to provide at a minimum: paper goods and utensils; plastic and hot cups and plastic shot (Kiddush) cups; table covers; Kosher wine and grape juice; challah and cake and cookies; coffee and tea, non dairy creamer and sugar; and cold refreshments.

Base your purchases on the number of your guests plus about 10 congregants. All deliveries to the synagogue must be made on Friday prior to sundown; check with Adrienne about this.

Please do not use the food from the refrigerator or freezer in the synagogues kitchen.

Seating in the sanctuary.

Depending on the number of guests at your child bar/t mitzvah service, additional folding chairs may need to be set up. Adrienne will do this but you will need to notify her of the total number of attendees two weeks before the service.

Renumeration of the caretaker.

For a fee of \$200.00 payable directly to HCS one week prior to the bar/t mitzvah, Adrienne will do all of the set up and clean up for the Saturday Kiddush. In addition, she can remain in the social hall during the service. For an additional charge – to be determined between you and Adrienne – she may be available to assist in other ways. This might include serving a buffet Kiddush luncheon, pickup up food, receiving food and supplies during the week prior to the service, and general last minute errands.

Financial obligations to the synagogue.

The synagogue Board expects that all synagogue dues and Hebrew school tuition be paid prior to the child's bar/t mitzvah. Additionally, there is a \$300.00 bima fee.

Many families, also, make a donation to the synagogue in honor of their child's bar/t mitzvah. This can take the form of a donation to the Rabbi's discretionary fund, the purchase of a plaque, or the purchase of Siddurim.

Kippot.

While not a requirement, most families purchase special kippot (yarmulkes) for their guests. These serve as a commemoration of your family' and the community's special day.

Tallit for your child.

As part of the service, the parents will be asked to present their child with a tallit (prayer shawl). You need to allow ample time to shop and

purchase one. You may decide, instead, to present your child with a tallit that belonged to a close relative.

Commemorative booklets.

Commemorative booklets explain the synagogue, the service, a glossary of terms, a summary of the Torah and Haftarah readings, and list of those receiving honors. A personal message from the child and/or the family can, also, be included. You must submit a draft to the Rabbi one month prior to the bar/t mitzvah service to avoid factual errors.

Flowers.

You are welcome to provide flowers and/or plants for the sanctuary, lobby, restrooms and/or social hall. You may want to consider flowers or plants that the synagogue can use afterward to beautify the grounds after the day of your child's bar/t mitzvah.

The celebration.

Not noted above is your need to plan your family's celebration in honor of your child, transportation, purchasing and mailing invitations, buying clothes, and so on. We have a number of members of the community who can offer advice about the myriad of details that you will want to consider and many suggestions about how you can address them.

HCS WISHES YOU LOTS OF "MAZEL" AND HOPE THAT YOU WILL ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.