

Greenwich Reform Synagogue
Religious School
B'nei Mitzvah Handbook



Mazal Tov! It's time to begin your preparations to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. As you grow into a young adult, our GRS community is excited to welcome you into Jewish adulthood. The new stage of life you're about to enter is one marked by increased responsibility and increased learning. Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah means that you're prepared to take your place as a full member of the Jewish people, who is responsible for their actions and who can be counted on to participate in every aspect of Jewish life.

But becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not the end of your Jewish education. It is really only the beginning. Once you become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, it means you've mastered the basics and are now ready to study Jewish wisdom, history, philosophy, and theology in a deeper way. It also means that you are now responsible for your Jewish – and secular -- actions and decisions. Our hope is that GRS will be a safe and supportive community in which you can grow into Jewish adulthood while you are wrestling with these decisions.

We hope you will continue to enrich our synagogue and world through your presence and participation during - and after - the B'nei Mitzvah process. You are unique, beautiful and holy and no one will ever be like you and have your insights into Torah and other Jewish texts. We want to learn from and with you, just as much as we want to teach you. And at the same time, you are still learning and growing and we – Rabbi Gerson and Eliana – have wisdom and guidance to offer. We are excited to travel with you as you take the first steps into Jewish adulthood.

Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah is only the beginning of your Jewish journey, and I hope that it will be the first of many *simchas* that we will celebrate together throughout your life. And so I look forward to sharing the *bima* with you when you are called to the Torah for the first time and studying with you and getting to know you in the coming months and years.

B'vracha (Blessings),

Rabbi Gerson

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PREPARATION

We hope that this booklet will answer all the questions you may have about the preparation process. It's a period of hard work and intense study for the student and planning for the family. We here at GRS -- Rabbi Jordie Gerson, Director of Education Eliana Hall, Cantor Harriet Dunkerley, and Temple Administrator Hadas Elias -- are always here to answer any questions.

Throughout this process, there will be many ways to prepare for your becoming a bar/bat mitzvah. One of these is to come regularly to Friday night services and participate. This way, you will become familiar with the prayers and customs in a Shabbat service.

We expect regular attendance from our students and their families throughout the Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation months - you should plan to attend Friday night services a minimum of 7 times in the year leading up to your bar/bat mitzvah - we will provide a sign up sheet outside the sanctuary, so we can track your attendance. (You should have attended all seven services by 6 weeks before your own ceremony.)

BAR/BAT MITZVAH SUPPLIES AND TUTORING INFORMATION:

Eight months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service, you will begin working with Cantor Harriet. The private sessions will include all Torah and Haftarah preparation. Our B'nei Mitzvah team will contact you when it's time to begin. Six weeks prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service, you will meet with Rabbi Gerson for three sessions to study the meaning of your Torah portion and to begin writing your *D'var Torah*/sermon.

Parents, you will need to supply your child with a way to listen to electronic audio files such as a computer, smartphone, tablet or iPod.

GRS will provide your child with the following items:

1. A book that is specific to their Torah portion that containing all the Torah and Haftarah texts for their week.
2. Recordings of the prayers and blessings and the Torah and Haftarah portions to learn from
3. A prayer packet containing copies of all the prayers the student needs to learn and lead in their service.

Cantor Harriet makes all tutoring appointments. A tutoring schedule will be emailed to you weekly. If you need to make any changes or if you ever have to cancel a session, please call Cantor Harriet at the Temple Office, 203-629-0018 and let her know.

Cantor Harriet will contact you and your parents if you are falling behind so that you can stay on track. Please be sure to communicate with Eliana, or the Cantor, if your child is struggling or having difficulties so we can work together to create a learning plan that works. Please let us

know if your child has any different learning needs so that we can tailor the sessions and the tutoring to them. All information shared with us is confidential.

B'nei Mitzvah students should spend a minimum of 20 minutes every day on their B'nei Mitzvah studies and listen to the recording of their Torah portion daily.

Every student is expected to attend Sunday School and Hebrew classes throughout their Bar/Bat Mitzvah year and after the ceremony itself. An attendance rate of 80% is mandatory.

Students continuing their Bar/Bat Mitzvah studies over the summer should make arrangements while they're out of town, or traveling. For students attending Jewish summer camp, arrangements can be made to study with a Rabbi or tutor while at camp. Be sure to notify Eliana of your summer plans.

REHEARSAL:

During the week of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, there will be a final family rehearsal with Rabbi Gerson or Cantor Harriet on a Tuesday late afternoon. Parents and student should be present at that Tuesday rehearsal. We recommend not inviting friends, siblings, grandparents, etc. to this final rehearsal, as students tend to be made very anxious by extra attendees.

MITZVAH PROJECT

Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is about each student taking responsibility for the Jewish community - and the broader community - as a young adult. We strive to impress upon our students that part of being a Jewish adult is seeing ourselves as God's partners in *tzedakah* (charity, or righteous giving) and *tikkun olam* (social action). In service of this vision, we require each student to complete 15 hours of community service. Students can participate in one ongoing project or participate in a series of different opportunities, but we ask that you keep a log of dates and times so that we will know what you are doing. We also ask that every family spends at least one Saturday night volunteering with other GRS members to serve food at Inspirica (see below). Students should participate in projects and programs that are personally meaningful -- if you need suggestions for local volunteer opportunities, please feel free to ask the Rabbi or Eliana for help.

Dinners at Inspirica Shelter

GRS volunteers serve a meal the first Saturday evening of each month. Volunteers must be accompanied by an adult. Please contact Joy Davis at 914-582-7535 or email jomarda@optonline.net to coordinate your visit. **Everyone is asked to complete one Saturday of volunteering here as part of their 15 hours.**

Projects at Jewish Family Service of Greenwich

JFS offers a variety of programs for teens to get involved. Whether you are interested in volunteering once a week or once every couple of months, there are lots of ways for you to help! For example, teens can read to or play cards with a senior, help with lawn chores or shoveling, bring a friendly pet on a visit to a senior, help make and deliver holiday food packages, and so much more! For a complete listing of ways that teens can volunteer, please contact the JFS office at (203) 622-1881.

Linus Blankets

Project Linus provides handmade blankets to hospitals, police and fire departments and various agencies to be distributed to children in stressful situations. The need is for child-sized blankets which may be hand knitted, crocheted or quilted. You may also make a "no sew" fleece blanket. Instructions and sizes are on the Linus website at www.projectlinus.org.

MAZON

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger raises funds to help alleviate hunger in this country and around the world. MAZON's Bar/Bat Mitzvah Project encourages students to find personally meaningful ways to incorporate tzedakah (charity/justice) into their new lives as Jewish adults. Our program is designed for students to mix and match tzedakah & tikkun olam opportunities to create a partnership with MAZON that is unique for each young adult. Learn more about program offerings at mazon.org.

Design-Your-Own Mitzvah Project

Oftentimes, we find that projects that students choose on their own are the most meaningful. Many of our students have designed their own mitzvah projects, volunteering with a service organization, in a school program or doing art or theater projects. If you choose one of these alternatives, please write up a synopsis of your project and submit it to Eliana or Rabbi Gerson for final approval.

THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH CEREMONY

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony marks the first time young Jews leads the congregation in prayer and is called to the Torah. **All bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies will be *Shacharit* (morning) prayer services and will begin at 10:00 am. In addition, the musical and liturgical choices for the service are at the discretion of our clergy. There will be no changes to the start time or liturgical content of the prayer service for a bar or bat mitzvah service.**

It's customary for adult Jews to wear a *tallit*, a prayer shawl, for morning services, especially when reading from the Torah. Families can use the *tallitot* provided by the synagogue if they wish but most families use this lifecycle event to purchase their child their first *tallit*. These can also be ordered online or purchased at Judaica shops in NYC. Many people also wear a *kippah*, the head covering. Again, GRS *kippot* are available but many families choose to order *kippot* as gifts for guests to mark the occasion. *Kippot* can be worn by everybody - men and women, Jews and non-Jews. *Tallitot* are worn only by adult Jews, and **only at morning services** (with the yearly exception of the Kol Nidre service on the evening of Yom Kippur).

The morning of your child's service will be the first time they will wrap themselves in a *tallit*. Twenty minutes before the service starts, the family will gather with Rabbi Gerson in her office to go over the ceremony, answer any questions, and present you with important paperwork.

At the beginning of the Torah service (another rubric inside the larger service), families will be invited in front of the congregation to participate in the *Shalshet HaKabbalah* – the Chain of Tradition. At this moment, we'll (literally) pass the Torah down through the generations until it is placed in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's arms. Rabbi Gerson will work with you to help you decide who should be included in this ceremony.

As a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, your child will:

1. Lead the service in partnership with the Rabbi and Cantor.
2. Chant their Torah portion.
3. Read or chant the Haftarah portion.
4. Offer their own D'var Torah.
5. Lead the Kiddush and Motzi prayers after the service.

At the Friday Shabbat evening service of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be invited to light Shabbat candles. The student will lead the Shema and the V'ahavta as well as the Kiddush and Motzi.

ALIYOT AND OTHER HONORS

Three weeks prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, you must submit to Hadas Elias a list of the people to be called to the *bima* for *aliyot* and other honors. Please include all Hebrew names of those being called forward for an *aliyah* (Torah blessing). If you are unsure about Hebrew names, please feel free to email Rabbi Gerson (rabbigerson@grs.org).

At the Torah service, when your child is chanting or reading Torah, they are fulfilling the role of *Ba'al Kriah* – Torah Reader. An *aliyah* is the honor of being called up to the *bima* to offer the blessing before and after the reading of a section of the week's Torah portion. Your child will be reading from the Torah for a minimum of three and a maximum of six *aliyot*. The reading for each *aliyah* consists of several verses of the Torah.

Your list should include names and relationship to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student. It is customary for the list to begin with friends or relatives more distantly related to the child and end with the parents, and finally the student themselves. The final *aliyah* is always reserved for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Other Honors

Ushers: Ushers for B'nei Mitzvah services should be the next GRS Bar/Bat Mitzvah student and their parents. They will work help greet everyone at services and hand out prayerbooks and programs. They should plan to arrive at GRS no later than 9:45 a.m. to ensure that they are ready to greet people as they enter the sanctuary.

Torah Dressers: These honors can be given to adults or children. Dressers help take everything off the Torah before the reading and help put everything back on afterward before we put the Torah away. They do not have to be synagogue members, nor do they have to be Jewish.

Hagbah -- Raising the Torah: This is an honor that must be done by a Jewish adult, preferably one who has experience in raising the Torah. The adult should be strong and comfortable lifting the (approximately 50 pound) Torah. Please remember, if they drop it, we all get to fast (sunup to sundown) for forty days, so choose carefully. If you don't have someone, we can have a synagogue volunteer.

Ark Opener/Closer: This can be done by adults or children, Jews or non-Jews.

Important Note: You must contact each person receiving an honor and inform them that they will be invited onto the bima, even teachers and rabbis. If they need a recording or to practice the blessings, let us know, and we will help them prepare.

INVITATIONS AND PROGRAMS

INVITATIONS:

When selecting your invitation, it is good to keep in mind the religious significance of the occasion. Invitations may be engraved, printed, custom designed, handmade, or electronic.

Order or create your invitations well in advance (5-6 months.) This leaves plenty of room to correct errors. Remember to order extra invitations and envelopes for the unexpected. Please be aware in the wording of invitations that the celebrant is not “Bar Mitzvahed” but rather that he or she “becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah” or “is called to the Torah as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.” Rabbi Gerson is happy to proofread your invitations for any Hebrew to ensure names are spelled correctly. As a general rule, invitations are usually mailed to your guests eight weeks prior to the date.

The Saturday Morning Service begins promptly at 10 a.m. You may also want to include an invitation to the Friday Evening Service which begins at 7 p.m (oneg at 6:30 PM). If you are interested in having an optional dinner reception on Friday night or an optional *Kiddush* luncheon immediately after Saturday service, please check with Hadas about requirements and costs. The community expectation is that if you have a Friday night Shabbat dinner and/or a *Kiddush* luncheon they will be open to the entire synagogue community.

SYNAGOGUE WEEKLY EMAIL:

About a month before your child’s Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the weekly GRS email will include a photograph, the child’s name and parents’ names, and Bar/Bat Mitzvah date of upcoming B'nei Mitzvah students. To include your child’s photograph, please email a headshot to Hadas Elias at hadaselias@grs.org, one month before for inclusion in the Bulletin. If you do not submit a photo, just your child’s name and Bar/Bat Mitzvah date will appear.

DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS...

PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEOGRAPHY:

On the day of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, families may take photos at the bima in the morning before the service or immediately following the service. Photography may begin at 8:30 a.m. and must be concluded by 9:30 a.m. This means all photo equipment needs to be put away by 9:30 am. A synagogue representative can be available at 9:00 a.m. to take out the Torah for 'ritual' photos if the family requests such in advance.

Having a recording of this special day is important to some families, so if you wish to preserve the memory on video, we encourage you to hire a professional videographer. Please contact Hadas Elias to discuss accommodations and limitations in order for us to continue to offer this privilege. Any cameras or recorders used during the service must be silent and unobtrusive.

FLOWERS:

Many families provide fresh floral arrangements for the *bima* on the weekend of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Please contact the Temple office with regards to times for floral delivery on the Friday preceding the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It is your responsibility to take the flowers with you after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah if you wish to keep them. An alternative to flowers is the JFS Mitzvah Baskets. A minimum donation of \$250 to Jewish Family Services of Greenwich helps fund such programs as Supermarketing for Seniors and counseling for children and teens. More details and photos here: <https://jfsgreenwich.org/bar-bat-mitzvah/>

GIFTS TO THE RABBI'S DISCRETIONARY FUND OR THE SYNAGOGUE:

Most families choose to express their appreciation and joy by giving a donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund. This is a cherished Jewish custom that transforms one family's blessing into a blessing for the synagogue community. This practice of *tzedakah* helps set a wonderful tone for the day and gives your child a powerful example of how we really celebrate our blessings in the Jewish community. The Rabbi's Discretionary Fund is used to make donations to Jewish charities, buy books, and provide for other GRS-related expenses.

CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES... (APPROPRIATELY)

APPROPRIATE DRESS:

At both *Kabbalat* Shabbat (Friday evening service) prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and at the Shabbat morning service, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student and his/her family should wear clothing appropriate for the *bima*. Modesty is an important value in Judaism and should be reflected in the way that you, your guests, and your child dress. Shabbat is a special time so clothing worn at services should be special.

Suits, dresses, slacks, khakis, skirts, blouses and sweaters are all appropriate choices. Shorts, t-shirts, and tank tops are never appropriate attire for Shabbat services. Skirts should be closer to the knees than to the tush (if you can't bow for the *Bar'chu*, it's definitely too short) and shoulders should be covered. *** Girls, please remember you will be carrying a Torah. The higher the heel, the harder the *hakafah* (Torah carrying).

There are some tactful ways to include this information in your invitations.

THE CELEBRATION:

The celebration has, for too many families, become the focal point of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience. We have worked diligently to help your child understand the true meaning of this event. To that end, we are asking all parents to help your child understand the importance of inclusion and kindness on this day.

Please invite the entire Bar/Bat Mitzvah group and your child's grade level to the celebration.

We know that not everyone's kids hang out together outside GRS. We understand that your child may not want to invite everyone. Now imagine being the parent of the one child who is left out. *Please be our partner in creating a truly inclusive, caring, and kind GRS family and help us ensure that no child here feels left out, embarrassed, or ostracized.* The Jewish value of *gemilut-chasadim* (loving-kindness) begins at home; please model it.

FRIDAY NIGHT ONEG SHABBAT AND SATURDAY KIDDUSH:

Sponsorship of the Friday night *Oneg Shabbat* and the Saturday morning *Kiddush* on the weekend of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is included in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation fee. Your sponsorship covers Challah, wine, white grape juice, and plastic wine cups, for the *Kiddush* table. You may enhance your Bar/Bat Mitzvah Oneg and Kiddush in many different ways. Please contact Hadas Elias to discuss ways to make your simcha unique.

RECEPTIONS AFTER THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH:

If you are interested in having an optional dinner reception on Friday night or an optional *Kiddush* luncheon immediately after Saturday service, please check with Hadas about requirements and costs. The community expectation is that if you have a Friday night Shabbat dinner and/or a *Kiddush* luncheon they will be open to the entire synagogue community.

Please keep these fellow congregants in mind when planning.

BAR/BAT MITZVAH COSTS

All Bar/Bat Mitzvah fees and all Temple dues and fees must be paid in full two months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date unless provisions are made with the Hadas Elias. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah fee is not refundable. These prices are subject to change. If you have any questions or concerns or to discuss your temple account, contact Hadas Elias.

KASHRUT POLICY: Food Service Standards and Guidelines

Any function held on the premises must be Kashrut, or “kosher style.”
All menus must be submitted to the Temple office a minimum of one (1) week prior to the event for approval.

What is Kashrut/Kosher Policy?

- Meat and dairy are never served in the same dish, but may be served in separate dishes or served at separate courses at the same event
- **Shellfish and pork products are completely forbidden**
- Fish and eggs are “parve,” (considered “neutral”), and can be served with either meat or dairy
- Chicken and other poultry are considered meat
- All products that come from milk are considered dairy (cheese, cream, butter, etc.)

EXAMPLES:

Acceptable: turkey sandwiches OR cheese sandwiches may be served (but not both).

NOT Acceptable: turkey with cheese sandwiches or a chicken parmigiana entrée or the like.

“By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the above dietary policy, and understand that violation of this policy will forfeit the return of my security deposit.”

Signature of User _____ Date _____

Signature of Administrator _____ Date _____

READING LIST

Many families may choose to enrich their experience by reading about the process of becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah and what it means. The following is a list of books that address this lifecycle event and may be of use to you as you prepare for your child's experience. These are not required, they are a resource. If you have suggestions of other books that can be added to the list, please feel free to share them with Rabbi Gerson so they can be considered.

Amichai, Yehuda: *The World is a Room and Other Stories*, Jewish Publication Society, 1984.

Blue, Rose: *The 13th Year: A Bar Mitzvah Story*, Watts, 1977 (fiction).

Davis, Judith: *Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is This, Anyway?*, St. Martin's Griffin, 1998.

Drucker, Malka: *Celebrating Life: Jewish Rites of Passage*, Holiday House, 1984.

Goldin, Barbara Diamond: *Bat Mitzvah: A Jewish Girl's Coming of Age*, Viking, 1995.

Kimmel, Eric A.: *Bar Mitzvah: A Jewish Boy's Coming of Age*, Viking, 1995.

Leneman, Cantor Helen (ed.): *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming of Age Together*, Jewish Lights, 2001.

Lewit, Jane & Ellen Epstein: *The Bar-Bat Mitzvah Plan Book*, Scarborough House, 1991.

Moscovitz, Patti: *The Complete Bar/Bat Mitzvah Book: Everything You Need to Plan a Meaningful Celebration*, Career Press, 2000.

Neusner, Jacob: *Mitzvah: Basic Jewish Ideas*, Rossel Books, 1981.

Provost, Gary & Gail Levine-Freidus: *Good If It Goes*, Bradbury Press, 1984 (fiction).

Reisfeld, Randi: *The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survival Guide*, Carol Publishing Group, 1992.

Sage, Linda Seifer: *The Complete Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planner*, St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Salkin, Rabbi Jeffrey K.: *For Kids - Putting God on Your Guest List*, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010.

Siegel, Danny: *Tell Me a Mitzvah: Little and Big Ways to Repair the World*, Kar-Ben, 1993.

Timeline Checklist

Completed

Approximately two years in advance

- B'nei Mitzvah dates are selected by GRS and the family.

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Year leading up to service (7th/8th grade)

- Students are to attend at least 7 GRS Friday night services. (Sign-in sheet will be provided).
- Students and parents attend Family B'nei Mitzvah seminars with Rabbi Gerson and Eliana Hall.
- Parents meet with Hadas to discuss B'nei Mitzvah procedures.
- Student signs *Tikkun Olam* contract and begins the project.

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6-8 months prior to service

- Begin to prepare *Torah/Haftarah* portions with Cantor.

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8 weeks prior to service

- All financial obligations are paid in full.

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6 weeks prior to service

- *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and parents have an initial meeting with Rabbi Gerson to discuss the creation of the *D'var Torah* and the service.
- Hadas sends information regarding sponsorship of *Oneg Shabbat*, ordering of JFS baskets, Friday night candle lighting/*kiddush* & *motzi*, and bio and photo for the newsletter.

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Tuesday afternoon prior to service

- An on-site dress rehearsal with the clergy.

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Day of Service

- Professional photographs may be taken on *bima* up until 30 minutes prior to service.

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Week After Service

- Donation made to Rabbi's Discretionary Fund or General Fund in honor of student.

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Contract for *Tikkun Olam* Project

(To be returned to Rabbi Gerson)

I, _____ propose the following 15-hour project.

Name and Address of Organization/Agency:

Name of Supervisor: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Description of Project:

When will I do this project? (Days, times, etc)

Reason for choosing this project:

The name of this *mitzvah* (in Hebrew and in English) is:

I, _____, understand that my child has agreed to fulfil the above stated *Tikkun Olam* project as part of our requirements to become *bat/bar mitzvah* at Greenwich Reform Synagogue.

Student Signature: _____

Student Name (please print neatly):

Parent Signature: _____

Rabbi's Signature: _____

Date: _____