

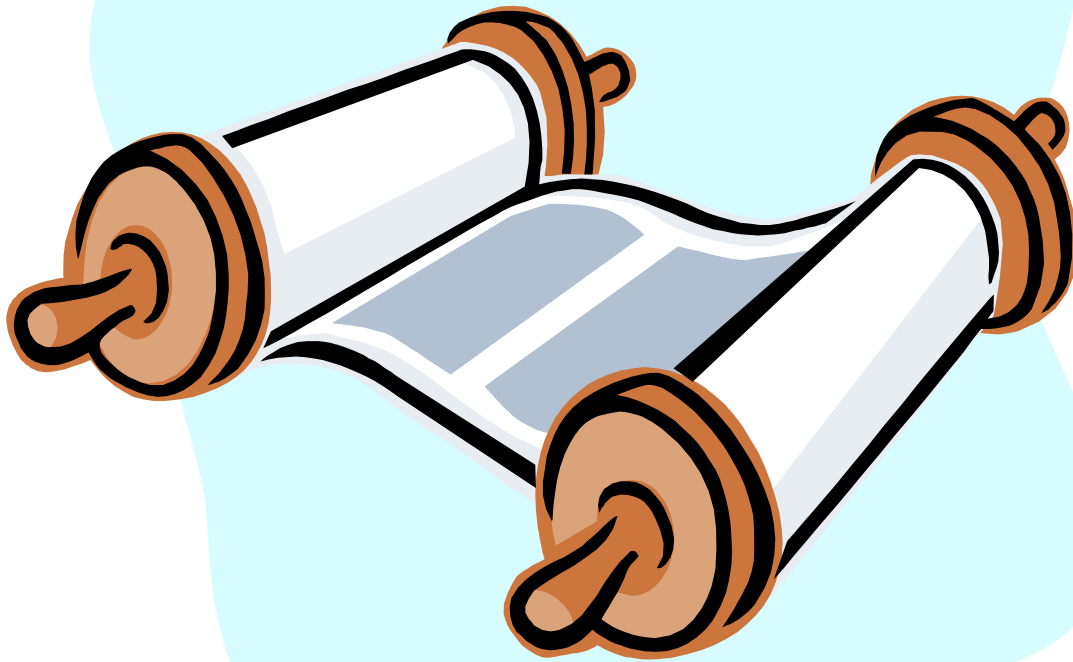
TEMPLE ADAT ELOHIM

your place to learn...grow...connect...

Bar Mitzvah

Bat Mitzvah

2010-2011



2420 East Hillcrest Drive, Thousand Oaks, CA 91362

Temple Office (805) 497-7101 Fax (805) 495-6971

Religious School (805) 497-0361

www.adatelohim.com

Mazal Tov on beginning the process toward Bar/Bat Mitzvah! We hope that this booklet will answer all of the questions you may have about the Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation process at Temple Adat Elohim. It is a time of hard work and intense study for the student and often a time of exhausting planning for a meaningful celebration for the family. The Rabbis, Cantor, Director of Education, Executive Director, and Clergy Assistant are always available to handle any unanswered questions.

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BAR/BAT MITZVAH AT TEMPLE ADAT ELOHIM

We are honored that you have chosen to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah within the Temple Adat Elohim community. By taking this step on your journey, you are affirming your connection with the Jewish people and our tradition. In addition to the many who will wish you a *mazal tov* (congratulations) on completing your childhood studies of Judaism, we also extend a *todah rabbah* (thank you) for establishing your identity within our 3500 year history, a *todah rabbah* for claiming your place within the modern adult Jewish community, and a *todah rabbah* for leading us into the future.

The process of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not easy. As you already know, it requires years of study and practice. Yet, Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an age, not an event. It is a status that you achieve by learning to lead a service, but even more so, it is a title you earn by understanding the importance of community and *mitzvot* (sacred obligations). To this end, part of the process of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is fulfilling *mitzvot* (which will be described in the following pages). Our hope is that this opportunity for doing *mitzvot* will be embraced as a blessing rather than a burden. Fulfilling these *mitzvot* can be a wonderful experience not just for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah but for the entire family. The practice of these *mitzvot* can also be seen as a start to a life of finding greater meaning within our tradition.

Preparing to lead the service is an obvious goal of our study program. Our tutors and clergy will build upon the groundwork established within our Religious School program. You will learn to read prayers with confidence, sing with pride, and inspire our congregation through your words. Our goal during these months is to help hone your Hebrew skills so that you will feel more at home within our TAE worship services, and also so that you will feel a greater sense of comfort in any synagogue during your lifetime.

Finally, our hope is that through this process you will feel embraced by the Jewish community. It is our privilege and joy as your Rabbis and Cantor to be able to spend this private time with you. In some cases, this may be the first significant time that we have to learn about each other, ask questions, laugh and perhaps even cry together. We treasure this time to open doors for you and to show you the possibilities within Judaism. We also recognize that as much as we may be able to teach you, Bar/Bat Mitzvah students are often our best teachers.

Thank you for embarking on this experience with us. May it be filled with blessings and love, a sense of accomplishment and pride, and the beginning of many good things.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Ted Riter

Rabbi Rebecca L. Dubowe

Cantor David Shukiar

TIMELINE

Beginning of Summer between 6th-7th grade or beginning of 7th grade:

Students who will become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in January-April of their 7th grade year begin tutoring in the summer before 7th grade. All other students begin tutoring on Tuesday nights in September of their 7th grade year.

Seven months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

The Clergy Assistant will call the family to set up an appointment with one of our Rabbis, the student and the student's parent/s.

Six months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

One of our Rabbis will meet with the family to provide an overview of the service and the training process, and answer any questions that family members might have.

Begin completing the required Mitzvah Projects (see the next pages)

Two months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

The Clergy Assistant will call to make four appointments with one of our Rabbis and the student to work on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah sermon. The student and parents will attend at least the first meeting of this series together.

The Cantor will meet weekly for the final 4-5 weeks with the student to review prayers and run through the entire service, including reading from the Torah.

Three weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

The family turns in their Honors List to the Clergy Assistant (see pages 14-15 and 34-38)

The student must have completed all of the Mitzvah Projects by this date.

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah student must:

1. Complete three and a half years of Religious School classes, four hours a week, prior to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Credit can be given for attendance at another Temple's Religious School, as assessed by the Director of Education. Students must be enrolled and attending Temple Adat Elohim Religious School through the end of seventh grade or their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, whichever date is later. In addition, we strongly encourage all students to continue their Jewish education through Confirmation.
2. Have knowledge of the Jewish holidays, Jewish history and culture, and the basic observances of the Jewish faith, all of which they will be taught during our Religious School classes.
3. Be able to read Hebrew, including chanting his/her portion directly from the Torah.
4. Be able to chant the prayers and blessings, as well as the Haftarah.
5. Complete the four Mitzvah Projects listed below, which are designed to help the student recognize that *mitzvot* (good deeds and sacred obligations) are an important part of being Jewish. (The 5th Mitzvah is optional.)
 - ◆ Mitzvah #1: Performing a community service project (see page 5).
 - ◆ Mitzvah #2: Attending three Friday night and three Saturday (morning or afternoon) services, beginning 6 months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah (see page 6).
 - ◆ Mitzvah #3: Participating in two *Shabbatot* with their families (see page 7).
 - ◆ Mitzvah #4: Greeting service attendees at Saturday morning services (see p7).
 - ◆ Mitzvah #5: Participating in "Remember Us". This is an optional project. (see page 8.)

MITZVAH #1

Repairing the world, *tikkun olam*, is a central *mitzvah* (sacred obligation) of Judaism. Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate is expected to perform a community service project. The best way to get started is to think about:

1. **What are my strengths?** If you are good at reading, for example, you might choose to tutor someone or read to someone in a convalescent home. If you love animals, you might volunteer at an animal shelter.
2. **What are hobbies I enjoy?** If you like to garden, you might help a disabled neighbor with their gardening needs. If you are interested in the environment, you might collect cans and bottles for recycling and donate money you raise to an environmental organization.
3. **What are some areas I would like to learn about?** Some examples: If you want to learn more about homelessness, you might collect clothing, books, toiletries for our TAE homeless shelter; if you are interested in hunger, you might collect cans for a food bank, and pack and distribute food; if you are interested in the elderly, you might celebrate holidays at the Jewish Home for the Aging.

Here are some places you can go to find a Mitzvah Project:

1. Social Action Committee – TAE: socialaction@adatelohim.com
2. Mana Food Drive: 3020 Crescent, Thousand Oaks, CA, (805) 497-4959
3. Gramercy Place Family Shelter: (213) 387-1238
Takes clothes, toys, etc.
4. Many Mansions: (805) 497-0344
Works with homeless and disabled people
5. Domestic Violence / Battered Women of Ventura County: (800) 451-4499
6. RAIN Project: 1732 Lewis Road, Camarillo, CA, (805) 389-3308
Provides temporary housing for families
7. SOVA: 16439 Vanowen Street , Van Nuys , CA 91406, Phone: (818) 988-7682 ,
SOVAinfo@jfsla.org
Community Food and Resource Program
8. Youth Service America: 1-800-VOLUNTEER (www.servenet.org)

MITZVAH #2

Each student must attend Shabbat services on three Friday nights and three Saturdays (morning or afternoon) at Temple Adat Elohim in the 6 months prior to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This requirement must be completed by 3 weeks prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. Students should be accompanied by a parent or parents for these services and it is suggested that the student bring his/her notebook.

To meet the necessary requirements, please fill in the following coupons and hand them to one of our Clergy following each service.

Friday Night		Saturday Morning/Afternoon
Student Name:		Student Name:
Service Date:		Service Date:
Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date:		Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date:

Friday Night		Saturday Morning/Afternoon
Student Name:		Student Name:
Service Date:		Service Date:
Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date:		Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date:

Friday Night		Saturday Morning/Afternoon
Student Name:		Student Name:
Service Date:		Service Date:
Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date:		Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date:

MITZVAH #3 --Family Shabbat Ritual

Enjoy two *Shabbatot* together as a family. You should take responsibility for planning a menu, cooking, setting up, cleaning up, leading the *b'rachot* (blessings) and asking your family questions about the experiences of the past week.

MITZVAH #4 – Saturday Service Greeters

Represent our congregation by greeting service attendees and preparing the wine and *challah* at Saturday morning or afternoon services. We ask that you and your family participate in this *mitzvah* at least twice before becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Please contact Sherry Watnick to make arrangements (805-499-8008).

MITZVAH #5



Invitation to the student from

Remember Us

The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

One of our wisest Jewish teachers, the Ba'al Shem Tov, taught:
Remembrance is the secret of redemption.

It means that the simple act of remembering someone restores that person's value and meaning, and adds meaning and value to your own life.

One-and-a-half million Jewish children were lost during the Holocaust before they had a chance to grow into Jewish adults, many before their own call to the Torah.

This is an invitation to bring the memory of one of these children with you as you become bar/bat Mitzvah.

The **Remember Us** program is simple and does not add any extra time:

- 1** Your teacher will give you the name of a lost child, and whatever information we know about him or her.
- 2** Keep that child in your thoughts — however you like — as you prepare for your bar/bat mitzvah.
- 3** When you do a mitzvah, do it b'shem — in the name of— the child whose memory you are carrying.
- 4** When you stand in front of the Torah, speak the name of your child, in whatever way you choose.

After bar/bat mitzvah, our tradition allows you to do the mitzvah of saying the Kaddish prayer for a family member or someone who you want to remember who has died. You will learn it as part of your bar/bat mitzvah.

- 5** Become the Kaddish-sayer for the child whose memory you keep. Choose a good day to say the prayer and light a memorial candle. It could be Yom Hashoah (the day Jews everywhere remember the Holocaust), Yom Kippur, or the anniversary of your bar/bat mitzvah.

Through these simple acts, done in the normal unfolding of your own life, you will be helping to redeem the life of a lost Jewish child.

Peace and a blessing, shalom uvracha. Congratulations, and thank you.

**Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah project: www.remember-us.org
WHAT DOES A BAR/BAT MITZVAH DO?**

There are basically three areas of participation for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at a Shabbat service: to be a *Sh'liach Tzibur* (leader of worship), *Darshan* (teacher of Torah), and *Ba'al K'riyah* (chanter of Torah and Haftarah).

Sh'liach Tzibur

One of the oldest and most prestigious roles in the synagogue is to be the *Sh'liach Tzibur*. Literally, the “representative of the community,” the *Sh'liach Tzibur* leads the congregation in prayer. Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student joins with the Rabbis and Cantor in this sacred role.

On Friday night, it is our custom for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to light the Shabbat candles (accompanied by family members), chant the Kiddush, and lead one additional prayer.

On Saturday, the student has a larger role and leads many of the service’s Hebrew and English prayers. In the instance of a shared service, the liturgy will be divided and prayers may be added to accommodate two students.

Darshan

Prior to the reading of Torah, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will deliver a *d’var Torah* (sermon) based upon the week’s Torah portion. This teaching will be prepared in consultation with one of the Rabbis. Guidelines for the preparation of a *d’var Torah* can be found on page 11.

Ba'al K'riyah

Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah assumes the role of the *Ba'al(at) K'riyah*, Torah reader, for the day. This entails the learning of eight *aliyot* from the week’s Torah portion, which may range from one to three verses each.

The Torah is unvocalized (without the vowels or accents); moreover, each student is expected to learn the trope or traditional cantillation melody. This skill is taught by the Cantor and tutors both in the Religious School and in private tutoring sessions.

Following the reading of Torah, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will chant the Haftarah or secondary biblical reading. Like the Torah reading, the Haftarah is chanted according to a specific melody to be learned from the Cantor and tutors. The number of verses to be read will be determined by the Cantor.

Materials

Each student will be provided with a copy of his or her Torah and Haftarah portions, which contains the Hebrew texts and English translations, as well as helpful commentary. In addition, the Cantor will make a CD of the Torah and Haftarah portions. The tutor will give each student a notebook that contains a *siddur* (prayer book), which she or he will use on the day of the ceremony.

An Important Note: Our congregation takes great pride in making every Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration special, even though the participation of each student is basically the same. There are occasions when special circumstances necessitate an adjustment in the student's participation. We will do everything possible to work with each student as an individual, with the ultimate goal of maximizing his or her self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Please feel free to discuss any concerns you might have with either of the Rabbis or the Cantor.

WHAT DOES A PARENT DO?

Besides *kvelling* (untranslatable), the parental involvement in a Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration includes:

Friday Night: Accompanying the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to light the Shabbat candles.

Saturday: Participating in the ceremonial handing down of the Torah. Reciting blessings for the seventh *aliyah*. Offering a blessing for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

BAR/BAT MITZVAH SERMON

The sermon gives you an opportunity to teach the congregation about your Torah portion.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah sermon is written under the guidance of one of our Rabbis. Two months prior to the service date the family will meet with a Rabbi to begin this study and writing process. The Rabbi will provide a suggested outline of the sermon and background material. Although the Rabbi will suggest topics, you are encouraged to use your creativity to come up with alternate topics.

There are two ways to look at the Torah portion:

You may choose to address the larger theme that runs throughout the text (e.g., talking about the concept of *law* for the portion that contains the Ten Commandments); or

You may choose to examine a single verse or even just a word in the Torah portion (e.g., What can we learn about the Binding of Isaac from the fact that at the end of the story Abraham returns *alone*?).

The next step is to “identify” the question and/or the difficulty in the Torah portion.

Once you have done that, the Rabbi will provide you with opinions and commentaries on your topic written by scholars throughout the generations.

After quoting various scholars and rabbis, you need to consider how *you* would resolve the question or difficulty. What are your thoughts about it? What do *you* think is the way to read the Torah? The wonderful thing about Torah study is that there are no wrong answers. The process of *midrash* is the combination of the text *and* the reader. Torah is only complete when we put ourselves, through our ideas and questions, into the text. This makes the Torah not just an ancient document but a living and never-ending source of Truth. Think of the Torah as a *ma-ayan*, a “well,” or a *sha-ar*, a “gateway,” to important ideas. What we want to hear are the ideas *you* have to offer about the Torah.

The last part of the *d’var Torah* is applying the lesson you have taught us to our lives today. This part is especially powerful when you apply it to your life, particularly as a Bat or Bar Mitzvah.

The three parts of the *d’var* then are: The introduction and identification of the question and/or the difficulty of the text; your solution; and applying the lesson (the solution) to our lives today.

Please Note...

The *d’var Torah* is **not** a thank-you speech. It is a teaching.
On this day, you are a teacher.

PARENTS' MESSAGE

Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Shimon said: A man is responsible for his son until the age of thirteen; thereafter he must say, "Blessed are You who has now freed me from the responsibility of the boy." (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 63:10)

The tradition of the parent reciting a blessing upon a child's coming of age is quite ancient. The above text indicates that it was ritualized and probably performed on the occasion of the child's first *aliyah*. And, although it might seem a bit inappropriate to recite a prayer freeing yourself from responsibility for your child, its underlying principle should be most instructive in preparing your remarks to your son or daughter. Indeed, in many ways the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony marks the individuation of the child: It is the commencement of a young person's acceptance of adult responsibility and the freeing of the parent from that task.

The intent of the parental prayer in our service is to afford the mother and/or father the opportunity to publicly acknowledge -- in a sacred setting -- the joy and pride they feel at that moment. More importantly, however, they can also use that time to share their hopes and dreams for their child, particularly in relation to his or her being called to the Torah. In other words, it's an opportunity to articulate the meaning of the moment.

This ritual is not to be confused with the addresses that take place at the *s'udat mitzvah* or celebration following the service. The message at the service is a unique opportunity -- in the presence of your community as well as friends and family -- to ask for God's blessings for your daughter or son. The gesture should be addressed to your child, not the congregation. Moreover, it should be directed toward the future. Where is it that you hope this moment will lead your child? What do you hope that he or she will take from it?

This opportunity to speak will be immediately after the Torah is returned to the Ark. You may wish to use some of the examples provided below or write something entirely unique. In any event, we encourage you to prepare your remarks in advance. We also respectfully request that each parent's remarks not exceed three minutes. When you are done, please feel free to hug your child. Crying is permitted.

Sample Prayers

Into our hands, O God, You have placed Your Torah, to be held high by parents and children and taught by one generation to the next.

Whatever has befallen us, our people have remained steadfast in loyalty to the Torah. It was carried into exile in the arms of parents that children might not be deprived of their birthright.

And now I pray that you, my child, will always be worthy of this inheritance. Take its teaching into your heart, and in turn pass it on to your children and those who come

after you. May you be a faithful Jew, searching for wisdom and truth, working for justice and peace. Thus will you be among those who labor to bring nearer the day when God will be One and God's name will be One. (Gates of Prayer)

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May your eyes sparkle with the light of Torah,
and your ears hear the music of its words.
May the space between each letter of the scrolls
bring warmth and comfort to your soul.
May the syllables draw holiness from your heart,
and may this holiness be gentle and soothing
to you and all God's creatures.
May your study be passionate,
and meanings bear more meanings
until life arrays itself to you
as a dazzling wedding feast.
And may your conversation,
even of the commonplace,
be a blessing to all who listen to your words
and see the Torah glowing on your face.

(Danny Siegel)

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Praised is God who has granted new responsibility to _____ and to us. As _____ begins to enjoy his/her new status among the Jewish people, a status that redefines our own role in his/her life, may God grant us the wisdom to continue as guides and counselors, allowing _____ to live in accordance with the teachings of our Torah as a responsible Jewish adult.

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam

(For a male) shep'tarani mei-ancho shelazeh.

(For a female) shep'tarani mei-anshah shelazoh.

Praised are You, *Adonai* our God, who rules the universe, who has freed us of some responsibilities and conferred new ones upon _____.

(The Rabbinical Assembly)

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"We thank you, O God, for the joyous fulfillment we feel as our daughter/son reaches the threshold of womanhood/manhood/adulthood. O God, accept our thankfulness for the thirteen years that have come and gone; bless our hope for the years that are yet to be...."

We give thanks for the wondrous privilege of seeing our son/daughter grow day by day, week by week, year by year. For the health and strength You have given him/her, for the mind and spirit with which You endowed him/her, for his/her ability to elicit and return love – for all these precious gifts, we thank You...."

INCLUDING SPECIAL GUESTS

Many families wish to honor family members, friends and others who have been an integral part of the life of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. There are many opportunities to do this during the Shabbat service. Because many of our traditions involve affirmation of a covenantal relationship with Torah and the Jewish people, some of these honors are reserved for members of the Jewish faith.

Speaking roles – All speaking roles are reserved for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the parents, a representative from the congregation and our TAE clergy.

Tallit– Wearing a *tallit* is a sign of entrance into adult responsibility in the Jewish community. The *tallit* is usually presented to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah by parents or grandparents, but anyone may be chosen for this honor. The presenter should understand the full meaning of wearing a *tallit*. Please ask the Rabbi or Cantor if you have any questions.

Ark – The ark contains three Torah scrolls and is opened before the Torah is passed from generation to generation. Anyone may participate in this honor.

Torah Passing – Passing the Torah from generation to generation represents the *Shalsholet Kabbalah* (chain of our tradition). Parents, older siblings, and Jewish grandparents are invited to participate in this honor. Non-Jewish parents of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah are also welcome to participate in this custom. Both men and women may be included in this ritual.

Undressing and Dressing the Torah -- The Torah is undressed and then dressed before and after the Torah is read. Jewish children and adults of any age are welcome to participate in this honor.

Aliyot -- “Being called up to read the Torah,” is an honor usually reserved for family and close friends who recite a blessing before and after a portion of the Torah is read. The reading of the Torah in public is an ancient tradition, dating back to the third century B.C.E. Those who chant the blessings must be Jewish and at least 13 years old because, with these blessings, the individual affirms acceptance of the Torah and its Jewish teachings. The last person to receive an *aliyah* is the Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Our Clergy Assistant has copies of the Hebrew blessings available for you to send in advance to those who will receive this honor.

Non-Jewish family members may accompany the person reciting the blessings, though it would not be appropriate for them to recite the blessings themselves as this would serve as an affirmation of Jewish faith and practice. We respectfully ask that you do not bring younger children to the Torah for the *aliyah*.

All Honorees – Please remind all honorees to dress modestly and appropriately (see page 16 for further guidelines).

Including Non-Jewish Family Members and Friends

As a community, we greatly value the contribution of all parents in raising their children as Jews. We use the occasion of a child becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah to honor parents of all faiths, while respecting the integrity of individuals and our Shabbat service. Our policy at TAE is to invite non-Jewish parents to speak to their children on the *bima*, to pass the Torah from generation to generation, to accompany their spouse while the Torah is read, and to stand with their family as their child lights the Shabbat candles on Friday night.

Family and friends of other faiths are also welcome to open the ark, present a *tallit*, and accompany Jewish family members and friends to the Torah as the Jewish individual recites the appropriate Hebrew blessings. Other rituals in the worship service are reserved for Jewish individuals, as these rituals affirm an affiliation with and a faith in Judaism.

Families with Divorce or Parental Separation

A Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony can pose many challenges for a family when there has been a divorce or separation. Feelings of joy and pride in your child will hopefully supersede all other feelings and guide the family through this unique time. It is most helpful when decisions about *aliyot* and other honors, parental speeches, and forms of celebration are made mutually and amicably. Our Clergy are always available for guidance in helping to make decisions that are in keeping with the spirit of the occasion and in the best interests of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

CONDUCT, ATTIRE, AND CUSTOMS IN THE SANCTUARY

Attire

Proper attire should be worn by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, all attendants and guests. This is a religious ceremony in the Sanctuary of our Temple, and attire should reflect the sanctity of the day. For men, this could mean business suits, slacks and sweaters, etc. For women, slacks or appropriately modest skirts or dresses. Shoulders should be covered. Garments like blue jeans and t-shirts would not be appropriate, nor would overly suggestive or revealing clothing.

Behavior

It is customary for a number of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah's friends or schoolmates to be invited. Many of these guests may not have experience in a service setting. Please make sure that all guests are aware that talking, excessive moving about and/or leaving the sanctuary and other distractions are discouraged. All guests should be aware that the service itself commands their respect and attention, as it represents a great deal of effort over many years by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. If there are school-age guests attending without their own families, it is suggested that they be seated together in the front of the Sanctuary, to the left as you enter. We ask that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah family assign a family member or friend to monitor their behavior. Younger children are required to sit with their families. If guests are being disruptive, they may be asked to leave the sanctuary.

Small Children

Crying is a normal part of life for babies and small children, but can be distracting. To allow all guests to enjoy the service, including those with small children, our "cry room" (called the "Shalom Room") is located in the Sanctuary, with windows and a sound system to allow those in the room to see and hear the service.

Cell Phones and other handheld electronic devices

All attendants should turn off cell phones and other handheld electronic devices during the ceremony. If a pager or phone must be left on for emergency reasons, it must be in a silent mode. Any talking or texting on a cell phone is inappropriate and should only be done outside the sanctuary.

Other Rules of Conduct

There are several practices that are unique to Jewish religious services, and go somewhat beyond basic manners and courtesies. These apply to all attendees, even those who are not Jewish. They include:

- When the doors to the Ark are open and when the Torah is out of the Ark, all present stand except while the Torah is laid on a table for reading or held by a seated person on the *bima*.

- There are certain prayers during which the congregation stands. It is not required, but courteous to do so even by those not actually participating in the prayer.
- People should not leave or enter the sanctuary while the congregation is standing, or while the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is speaking or being addressed.
- Food, drink, and chewing gum are not allowed in the Sanctuary.

The people leading the service will make it clear when to stand or sit. People without experience with the service need not worry.

Photography/videotaping

Out of respect for the work put in by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as well as for religious reasons, there will be no videotaping or photography allowed in the Sanctuary during the service. Camera noise, and especially flash, can be surprisingly distracting or even disruptive. A videotape shot from the sound booth in the back of the Sanctuary can be provided by the Temple for a fee (please check with Temple Office), or you may hire your own videographer to tape from the booth. Families may wish to arrange for photography before or after the service.

Our families are welcome to take pictures in our lovely Sanctuary prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Please note that there are special hours during the week that are varied sufficiently to allow choices for you and the photographer. The following days and hours are available for your family:

Monday – Thursday	10:00 a.m. -- 3:00 p.m.
Friday	11:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Saturday	8:00 a.m. -- 9:30 a.m.
Saturday	3:30 p.m. -- 4:30 p.m.

Saturdays are available for photography but are not generally recommended as the Bar or Bat Mitzvah child may be feeling a lot of pressure just before the event. Please note: the left and center Torah are not to be used during the photo session. You may use the Torah on the right (as you are looking at the ark). This is because the center Torah is prepared ahead of time for reading at the service and the Torah on the left was rescued from Czechoslovakia after the Holocaust and is very fragile. When the photographer or family returns the Torah to the Ark, please be sure it is placed in the exact spot and dressed the way it was found. The Torah reading table may not be moved for pictures. It is extremely important that there is compliance on these policies.

Thirty minutes prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, all camera equipment, lights, etc. must be completely removed from the Sanctuary (except for video set up in the booth).

If there is anything we can help you with, or if you have a question, please call the Temple Executive Director or Clergy Assistant at 805-497-7101. We would be very happy to assist in any way we can.

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

The following categories describe what obligations will arise throughout the process of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. These costs are subject to change; please contact the Temple Office for the most up-to-date information.

Tuition

The B'nai Mitzvah Tutorial Fee is included in the 7th grade Religious School tuition.

Oneg Shabbat

The family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah traditionally sponsors the Friday evening Oneg Shabbat that takes place the night before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. This is a social gathering for those who attend Friday night services, and typically consists of cookies, fruit, snacks, juice, and coffee.

Flowers/Sanctuary Decorations

There is an additional cost for flowers and Saturday morning Kiddush. Please contact the Temple Office for specific costs.

Reception/Catering

It is not required that a post-service reception be held at the Temple. However, we offer an excellent facility that is naturally convenient to your guests, and catering is provided by our caterer, *Parties At Your Door*. Please contact the Temple for details. (See page 19).

Thanking the Clergy and Staff

An appropriate way to thank the Clergy for guiding your child to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is through a contribution to their discretionary funds, which are used for supporting Temple programming and the needy in our community and furthering the goals and values of Temple Adat Elohim. Contributions are also encouraged to the Temple on behalf of other staff, teachers and tutors who have helped your child along the way.

SOCIAL HALL RESERVATIONS

1. Our Social Hall is available to your family for your celebration. Reservations for the Social Hall begin approximately 3 years prior to your scheduled event.
2. Once the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date is confirmed in writing, all Temple Adat Elohim families are given 12 weeks to reserve the Social Hall before it is opened up to use by non-member families.
3. If you select a morning Bar/Bat Mitzvah service at 10:00 AM your family has the first priority for a luncheon reception in the Social Hall from 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM.
4. If you are sharing a morning service, reservations for the Social Hall are on a first-come-first-served basis.
5. If you select an evening Bar/Bat Mitzvah service at 5:00 PM, your family has the first priority for a dinner reception in the Social Hall from 6:30 PM - 11:30 PM
6. The family holding the evening service will have the first priority to reserve the Social Hall for an evening reception. If after 12 weeks, they have chosen not to use the Social Hall, then the family holding the morning service may have the option to reserve the Social Hall for the evening.
7. If your family chooses a morning service and no afternoon service is calendared on that date, you may reserve the Social Hall for an evening party.
8. If the Social Hall is still available any time after the 12 week period you will have the option to reserve it.
9. The Social Hall is considered reserved only upon confirmation from Parties At Your Door.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding Social Hall reservations, please call the Temple Office at (805) 497-7101.

NEWSPAPER NOTICES

Should you wish to place a notice regarding your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the *Los Angeles Jewish Journal* Celebrations section or *Ventura County Star*, we suggest you provide the following information:

- Name of Synagogue
- Name of Bar/Bat Mitzvah Student
- Both Parents' Names
- Date of Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- Child's School
- Child's Hobbies and Interests
- Mitzvah Project

You can send the above information (by email or snail mail) preferably at the beginning or end of the month.

Contact information for the *L.A. Jewish Journal*:

Send Bar/Bat Mitzvah announcements to:

Personally Speaking:

The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles

3580 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1510

Los Angeles, CA 90010

celebrations@jewishjournal.com

The *Ventura County Star* also accepts submissions in the "Your News" section. Some items from *Your News* are also picked up on their main website and/or printed in the *Ventura County Star* newspaper. Contact information can be found at: <http://yournews.venturacountystar.com/>

RITUAL OBJECTS

There are several items that come into use during the service, and some guests may not be aware of the typical customs relating to those items, particularly those who are not Jewish.

Headcoverings

Kippot, also called *Yarmulkes*, are worn by many people during religious services. While often identified as a particularly Jewish item, there is little in Jewish Law requiring them, and they are typically worn as a sign of piety and respect for God during prayers. It is not uncommon for non-Jewish men to wear them during the service, and doing so *will not be seen as a sign or statement about their own religious beliefs*. Many women choose to wear a *kippah* as well, especially in the Reform community. We encourage but do not require their use at Temple Adat Elohim. A small number of *kippot* are available in the Temple Lobby. If a large number of guests will be attending, the host family may want to provide extras. They can be purchased at low cost through the Sisterhood Gift Shop.

Tallit

The *tallit*, or prayer shawl, is worn to fulfill a biblical commandment to wear fringes (*tzitzit*) on the corner of one's garments. A shawl is worn with the fringes attached to remind us of our sacred obligations to God and the community. *Tallitot* are worn in our community by both Jewish men and women over the age of thirteen. *Tallitot* are available for guests in the foyer. Tallitot are worn during morning services by congregants and at all services by those honored with an *aliyah* and by prayer leaders.

The Torah/Ark

The Torah scroll itself is considered a sacred object, because of its contents. Additionally, a Torah Scroll represents nearly a year of labor by a single scribe. There are several things to keep in mind when handling such a revered item.

- NEVER is the side of the parchment with the writing touched by hands or fingers. A scroll can be expected to last for centuries, but not if it is touched. Parchment tends to pick up oils and dirt much more readily than paper. During our services, it is only touched lightly by the *tallit* fringes of some participants, and by the pointer (*yad*) used by the reader.
- When the Ark doors are open, the entire congregation stands. When the Torah is laid flat on the table for reading, or held by a seated person, people may sit.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

The Meaning of Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Leneman, Cantor Helen. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics, A Practical Guide to Coming Of Age Together*, Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996

Salkin, Jeffrey K. *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*, Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1992.

Salkin, Jeffrey K. *For Kids: Putting God on the Guest List: How to Claim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah*, Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

Torah

Fields, Harvey J. *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, New York: UAHC Press, 1991.

Plaut, W. Gunther, ed. *Torah: A Modern Commentary*, New York: UAHC Press, 2005.

Basic Jewish Concepts

Diamant, Anita and Howard Cooper. *Living A Jewish Life: Jewish Traditions Customs and Values for Today's Families*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.

Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *40 Things You Can Do To Save The Jewish People*. Los Angeles: Alef Design Group, 1993.

Kushner, Harold, *To Life: A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking*. New York: Warner Books, 1993.

Telushkin, Joseph. *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1991.

Mitzvah Project

Siegel, Danny. *Gym Shoes and Irises: Personalized Tzedakah (Books 1 and 2)*. Spring Valley, NY: The Town House Press, 1988.

RECOMMENDED WEB SITES

For a link to a wide variety of Jewish resources on the Internet, you can go to:

www.urj.org

www.socialaction.com

www.clickonjudaism.com

GLOSSARY

Aliyah: literally means “going up.” It refers to the honor of being called up to the bimah to recite or chant the blessings over the Torah. Plural: “aliyot.”

Aron Hakodesh: literally means “the Holy Ark,” the special cabinet in which the Torah scrolls are kept in the synagogue.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah: literally means “son/daughter of the commandment.” It is a ceremony marking a youngster’s becoming, at age 13, an adult member of the Jewish community. Plural: “B’nai Mitzvah.”

B’racha: literally means “blessing.” Plural: “brachot”.

Bimah: literally means “stage.” This is the location from which the services are conducted.

D’var Torah: literally means “word of Torah.” It is an explanation and/or interpretation of the weekly Torah portion.

Haftarah: literally means “completion.” It is a selection from the Books of the Prophets, read or chanted after the weekly Torah portion, during the service on Shabbat and holidays. The Haftarah passage is thematically linked to the Torah portion of the week.

Havdalah: literally means “separation.” It is the ceremony that marks the end of the Shabbat and the beginning of the new week. Havdalah takes place at the end of Shabbat with blessings over wine, spices and the Havdalah candle.

Kippah: also called “yarmulke,” is the ritual head covering worn during services as a sign of modesty, reverence, and respect.

Mitzvah: literally means “commandment,” a religious obligation; mitzvah refers to one of the 613 commandments in the Torah. It has come to mean “good deed.” Plural: “mitzvot”.

Motzi: the blessing chanted or read over bread.

Ner Tamid: literally means “Eternal Light.” It is the light over the Ark that is never turned off, meant to recall the lamp that was always burning in the Temple in Jerusalem, to remind us of God’s continuous presence in our midst.

Oneg Shabbat: the celebration of the Shabbat following Friday night services.

Parashah: the weekly Torah portion, also referred to as the “sidra.”

Sefer Torah: the handwritten scroll of the Torah that is read during services.

Seudat Mitzvah: a festive meal that honors a lifecycle event or a simcha (joyous celebration).

Shehecheyanu: literally means “God who has kept us alive.” This is the blessing for beginnings and other significant occasions in people’s lives such as birth, bar/bat mitzvah and marriage.

Shema Yisrael: literally means “Hear, O Israel,” and is the main statement of Jewish belief, affirming that God is ONE. Recited during the worship service, the congregation declares: “Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, God is One.”

Siddur: literally means “order.” It is the Hebrew term used for the prayerbook.

Tallit: a ritual prayer shawl with fringes (tzitzit) worn during all daytime prayer services to remind Jews of God’s commandments.

Tikkun Olam: literally means “repairing the world.” It is the concept in Judaism that Jews, as part of the human family, have a responsibility to contribute to the well-being of the world.

Torah: literally means “teaching” or “direction.” Torah is the Five Books of Moses, which includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Tzedakah: literally means “justice” or “righteousness.” It is the Hebrew word we use for charity and charitable acts. It is customary to give tzedakah prior to lighting the Shabbat candles in the home, in honor of a simcha (a joyous celebration), and in memory of a loved one. We keep a tzedakah box, as many synagogues do, just outside the Sanctuary.

Ve'ahavta: literally means “and you shall love.” It is the prayer from Deuteronomy 6:5-9 that obligates us to love God and to teach Judaism to future generations; it is part of the Shema, the central prayer of the service.

Yad: literally means “hand.” It is the pointer used while reading from the Torah scroll.



March 2, 2007

Week 171, Day 5

12 Adar 5767

Bar/Bat Mitzvah: Beginning, Not An End Rabbi Jan Katzew

The following op-ed piece is from the March 2, 2007 issue of [the New York Jewish Week](#) and is reprinted with permission.

About a year ago, I received a call from a motion picture marketing executive who asked me to preview the soon-to-be-released “Keeping Up With the Steins,” a “commentary” on b’nei mitzvah as they are celebrated in North America. My interest was piqued: A mainstream movie about the commercialization of b’nei mitzvah ... perhaps this would engender a “teachable moment,” particularly in light of these propositions, which experience has shown increasingly to be true:

- Adults are spending too much of their disposable income on b’nei mitzvah celebrations.
- B’nei mitzvah children internalize the message that the religious ceremony is less meaningful than the party that follows.
- Families believe that bar and bat mitzvah represent the end of formal Jewish education.
- Parents are living vicariously through their children and, consequently, creating celebrations that are more for adults than for middle school students.
- American Judaism has assimilated values that are more consonant with America than with Judaism.

While I defer to the judgment of others, I left the movie feeling profoundly underwhelmed, but hopeful that viewers would be moved to converse with family members and friends about just how much, in this particular case, art imitates life. We have turned a rite of passage into a rite of passage, the responsibility of attaining religious status into the entitlement of social status. “Keeping Up With the Steins” is an unlikely candidate for an Academy Award, but it has served a purpose if it causes us to pause and consider the cultural phenomenon that prompted its production and distribution.

According to Avot de Rabbi Natan (Chapter 16), at the age of 13, the yetzer tov (good impulse) is born and with it, our capacity for conscious pro-social, empathic and compassionate behavior. B’nei mitzvah are intended to catalyze a character-building process that lasts a lifetime. It is therefore painfully ironic that we may be party (pun intended) to the yetzer hara (evil impulse) running amok at precisely the moment when the yetzer tov first sees the light of day.

I realize that I am skating on thin ice — or treading on sacred ground — by criticizing the

manner in which b'nei mitzvah are being celebrated by America's Jewish families, many, if not most, of whom have yet to embrace the idea that a bar or bat mitzvah is a simcha that marks the beginning of a choice to lead a Jewish life.

Arguably, the greatest challenge we face in Jewish education inheres to the perception that a bar or bat mitzvah represents an endpoint. By mandating minimum expectations for becoming bar or bat mitzvah, we have created an artificial bubble of Jewish learning between grades three and seven. The bar or bat mitzvah party for the youngest child in the family too often celebrates the end of synagogue affiliation.

“Mitoch lo lishma ba lishma” — out of an ulterior motive (may) come a pure motive. This principle adduced in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:5) epitomizes our assignment as Jewish educators. We have three or four years in which to persuade families who came for a service that they really came for a covenant. We will not always win, but I hope we never will give up. Some of us who are now teachers of Torah may have arrested temporarily our Jewish study at age 13.

I realize that cultural change is a complex, foreboding process and that urging families to infuse their children's b'nei mitzvah with religious meaning and significance designed to last a lifetime is akin to pointing a hose at a tidal wave. However, the hose we are using draws water from sacred sources that regenerate, so I choose to believe that we are reaching one extreme that is destined to moderate and, thus, achieve a dynamic equilibrium.

As we live longer, it becomes less reasonable that one's Jewish life should reach its apex at age 13. Instead, we can help to place bar and bat mitzvah in the perspective of lifelong Jewish learning and living — an acceptance of communal responsibility, a beginning of conscious commitment and a promise to make a meaningful contribution to the people of Israel in covenant with the God of Israel. A rich Jewish life does not have to be expensive — at least it should not have to be expensive.

We are already b'nei and b'not mitzvah. Our children, on the other hand, are just in the process of becoming. Bar and bat mitzvah is a process and a status that regrettably has devolved too often into a product and an event. It is our collective challenge to take a population of episodic Jews and help them live continual Jewish lives, so that life's celebrations and tribulations will be seamless parts of their Jewish identities rather than an interruption in their “normal” lives.

Rabbi Jan Katzew is director of Lifelong Jewish Learning at the Union for Reform Judaism .

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Jewish Journal of Los Angeles

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Skateboarder's project links charity and sport

By Shoshana Lewin, Contributing Writer



Devin Schneider looks like a typical 13-year-old boy: his long hair covers dark brown eyes, a smile reveals a mouthful of braces, and he wears a long hooded sweatshirt, T-shirt and jeans. He's quiet, sometimes keeping his eyes downcast as he thinks of what to say.

But Devin Schneider isn't your typical 13-year-old. Not even close.

Many students his age struggle to come up with a mitzvah project that speaks to their interests, but choosing one was easy for this skateboarder from Temple Adat Elohim in Thousand Oaks.

Devin collected materials and money to create more than 30 skateboards for Boarding House Mentors, a nonprofit group that works with at-risk youth and teaches them to skateboard and surf.

"I was getting ideas from Rabbi [Ted] Riter," Devin said. "He asked me what I liked to do and I said I liked to play guitar and skateboard. So we came up with the idea to get skateboards and parts, new, old, as many as I could."

Devin never thought he would get to bring his love for skateboarding into his rite of passage: "I thought it would be like my sister, and I'd work at a shelter, but this was a lot more fun."

His love of skateboarding began when he was 9, when a friend introduced him to the sport. But it was no surprise to Devin's parents, Scott and Mindy, who both skateboarded when they were younger.

"It surprised me that he hadn't done it yet at that point," Mindy Schneider said, noting that while she enjoyed skateboarding as a teen, she wouldn't get on a skateboard now.

Amazingly, Devin has only injured himself once, and that was while snowboarding with his family in Mammoth. The Schneiders also have gone to the X-Games for the past few years and have built a mini-skate park in their back yard, complete with ramps and rails.

But finding a public place in the Conejo Valley to board isn't so easy. Devin, who loves performing tricks on stairs, says that skateboarders get an unwarranted bad rap.

"People think of skateboarders as vandals ... that we break things," Devin said. "And that's not what we do. They kick us out of places. We'll be at stairs at a school and a teacher threatens to call the cops."

Some of his friends have even been issued \$185 tickets for trespassing.

That her son and his friends are given a hard time doesn't make Mindy Schneider happy either.

"They just want to have fun ... and they are being harassed," she said. "I get it if there were around cars, but when they are trying to stay out of people's way, it's annoying."

While Mindy Schneider mentioned that some members of the Thousand Oaks City Council are looking into creating a local skate park in the Conejo Valley, she said she doesn't expect it to happen any time soon. So on Fridays, Mindy drives her son to Skatelab in Simi Valley, a museum and indoor skating park where he can hang out with his friends, who affectionately refer to him by his online moniker Sk-8r Jew.

It's a name to which he doesn't take offense, especially since being Jewish is an important part of his life.

Last July the Schneider family -- including two grandparents -- went with Adat Elohim to Israel, where Devin became a bar mitzvah on top of Masada.

"It is very different having a bar mitzvah there on top of Masada, as opposed to here in a synagogue," Mindy Schneider said.

When Devin isn't on his surfboard (as he plans to be this summer at camp Hess-Kramer), snowboard or skateboard, he's rocking on his guitar, most recently at the Canyon Club in Agoura Hills, as a student at the School of Rock. His tune of choice? Guns 'n' Roses "Sweet Child of Mine." He said he might even have a chance to play in the youth band at the temple -- if they can accommodate his electric guitar.

Next year, when he starts at Agoura High School, he's been asked to join the school's skateboarding club. However, at this point he said he's focusing on having fun, rather than competing. "I don't think I'm good enough," Devin said.

In the spring, Devin and his family will be going to Vans Skate Park in Orange County to give out the boards and teach kids how to skateboard. Mindy and Devin said they owe a lot to friends, neighbors and the Transition skate shop in Moorpark for making Devin's project a reality. Devin said he plans to continue fixing up boards and instructing others in the tricks of the trade.

But no lesson in the world can match the feeling of being on a board. "When you are going on your board and about to do a trick, and it is one you've tried a bunch of times and you could never do it -- and then you finally can -- it's the best feeling ever, because you've accomplished something," Devin said.

Boarding House Mentors <http://www.boardinghousementors.org/>

Temple Adat Elohim <http://www.adatelohim.com/>

Skatelab www.skatelab.com

skateboarding.com

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Jewish Journal of Los Angeles

11 August 2006

Rite of Passage Bestows Bundle of Intangible Gifts

By Sharon Duke Estroff

When we think of bar and bat mitzvah gifts, many things come to mind: fountain pens, cuff links, picture frames, checks. But the true gifts of this religious rite of passage extend far beyond the envelopes and boxes piled up at the party door. Here are a few of the intangible yet invaluable presents the bar or bat mitzvah ritual bestows upon our families.

What the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony Gives to Our Child:

Confidence

If we look into the eyes of the bar mitzvah boy during the first moments of his service, we will see one thing and one thing only -- pure, unadulterated panic. But as the service progresses, he stands up straighter and walks taller, until he's officially playing the crowd by "Adon Olam."

At the Kiddush -- as the mazel tovs pile on like lox on bagels -- we look again at the bar mitzvah boy, and we see that he is beaming in pure, unadulterated confidence. (The kind of confidence that grows into genuine, deserved, self-esteem that will help him to make strong, independent decisions at a time in his life when peer pressure is at its pinnacle.)

Resilience

Researchers have tapped resilience -- the fundamental ability to roll with the punches of life -- to be among the most powerful predictors of children's future success and happiness. The b'nai mitzvah experience is an exercise in resilience. For not only must our children study their Torah portions for months on end -- they stumble over them for months on end (as anyone who has ever tried to read trope can attest!)

Not only do they write and rewrite their dvar Torah, they must conquer their nerves and deliver it to hundreds of congregants. The b'nai mitzvah process is a series of hurdles and jumps -- a long, hard race with a flag of steadfast resilience waving fervently at the finish line.

L'dor v'Dor

A beautiful and increasingly popular tradition is to open the ark and pass the Torah from grandparents to parents to the bar/bat mitzvah child. This passing of the holy scroll is the embodiment of l'dor v'dor, from generation to generation.

Adolescence is by definition a time of transition -- a steady stream of physical, emotional and social changes. Yet when our child receives the Torah -- passed hand to hand to him -- on the morning of his bar mitzvah, he feels the stability, consistency and safety that comes in being embedded in generations of tradition.

What Our Child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony Gives Us as Parents:

An Opportunity to Express Our Love for Our Child.

Caught up in the rocket pace of 21st century life, we scarcely have a moment to tell our children how we feel about them. Sure we kiss them goodnight and tell them we love them (if they are nice enough to still let us do so), but rarely -- if ever -- do we express it in the emotional, heartfelt way we do on the day they become a bar or bat mitzvah. Reaffirmation of Our Purpose. All modesty aside here, bringing our son or daughter to the bar or bat mitzvah bimah is a mega-accomplishment. It means we've put valuable time and resources into ensuring our child receives a Jewish education, is armed with a Jewish identity, and have fulfilled our obligation to God, to ourselves, to our children and to our people.

A Rite of Passage of Our Very Own

The bar or bat mitzvah is a rite of passage for our children -- a marker of their transition from one stage of life to another. But it is also a rite of passage for us. For as our children transform into teenagers, we must transform as parents. In our child's bar or bat mitzvah we have a stepping stone to help us find our way to the next stage in our parental journey.

A Wonderful, Happy Family Memory

Flashbulb memories are memories that stick around in our minds for the long haul. Our child's bar or bat mitzvah is a surefire flashbulb memory -- a festive, jubilant, meaningful family memory that will nourish our family's soul for years to come.

Life in Perspective

It's all too easy to get caught up in the everyday hassles of parenting (i.e., carpools, homework, schlepping to extracurriculars). But every now then, something comes along and puts it all in perspective, enabling us to savor the moment and stop -- at least temporarily -- and smell the roses.

Our child's bar or bat mitzvah is one of those rare and glorious times in our lives when the universe all lines up. When we feel God's divine presence, know exactly what matters and what does not and understand exactly why we're here.

Sharon Duke Estroff is an internationally syndicated Jewish parenting columnist, award-winning Jewish educator and mother of four. Her first book, "Can I Have a Cell Phone for Hanukkah? The Essential 411 on Raising Modern Jewish Kids," will be published by Broadway Books, a division of Random House, in 2007.

From the LA Times: Coming of age



Football success is an article of faith for Taylor Mays, a starting safety as a USC freshman who traces his uncommon maturity to studying for his bar mitzvah

By Gary Klein, Times Staff Writer

December 29, 2006

Some of what makes Taylor Mays a precociously talented safety for USC can be traced back to when he was 13. There were months of intense study. Repetitive practice. And memorization of every nuance of his responsibilities. Mays was preparing for his bar mitzvah. The experience of reading from the Torah shaped him in ways he did not anticipate, ways that have helped him thrive as a person and an athlete.

"I don't think at the time I really understood what that meant," Mays said of the ceremony that is a Jewish rite of passage into adulthood. "Now, looking back on it, I feel like I have come a long way in regard to maturity and becoming an adult. "I think that helped me do it."

Mays' mature approach, and his considerable talent, helped him move seamlessly into USC's starting lineup after junior Josh Pinkard suffered a season-ending knee injury in the opener against Arkansas. The hard-hitting Mays, who was selected to several freshman All-American teams, will be a key component for the eighth-ranked Trojans when they play third-ranked Michigan in the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day.

"He's a high achiever, driven, all of the positive things you could say about a young man," USC Coach Pete Carroll said. "He wants to be great and he's willing to do what it takes to be great. He doesn't just talk about it, he does it."

Mays, 18, took cues about drive and achievement from his parents. His mother, Laurie, is an executive vice president for Nordstrom; his father, Stafford, a former NFL defensive lineman, is an executive for Microsoft. "They have molded who I am," Mays said. "I have seen them as examples."

Mays said that being the son of a white, Jewish mother and an African American father in Seattle made him "kind of a rarity," an appropriate description for Mays on the athletic field as well. At 6 feet 4 and 225 pounds, Mays is larger than many safeties. A state sprint champion, he is equally adept at running down quarterbacks, running backs and receivers or pulverizing them in head-on collisions.

Mays' athletic prowess was evident early in life. "Even when he was 2, he had that build," his mother said. Mays begged to play tackle football in elementary school but his father forbid it. Stafford Mays played in college at Washington and in the NFL for nine years. He did not want his oldest son to play a sport so hard on the body until he was in the eighth grade.

But Stafford relented after watching sixth-grader Taylor play defense for a soccer team. "He was annihilating guys that wanted to go to the goal," Stafford recalled. "I just knew, 'This is it.' "

Taylor played football the following year with enthusiasm that bordered on obsessive. Once, his father came home and found him studying. The subject was math and Taylor was poring over equations. With his helmet on. "I go, 'Uh-oh, we're in trouble,' " Stafford said, laughing.

It wasn't always lighthearted. Taylor cried during the car ride home from one of his first football practices. Stafford had watched the workout and he told his son that he was not showing the necessary intensity and aggression to play defensive end. "When we got home, on the cement, he made me pass rush against him," Taylor said, chuckling at the memory. "He thought he was Jackie Slater or something."

The next year, as he was getting ready for high school, Mays' parents let him set his own path. Taylor chose to attend O'Dea High, an all-boys Catholic school with a rich athletic tradition. "They had a good football program, a structured program," Mays said. "There were really no other places besides there that I wanted to go."

At O'Dea, Mays decided to give up baseball, a sport at which he excelled. The decision rankled his father so to placate Dad, Mays went out for track — and won state titles in the 100- and 200-meter sprints as a sophomore in 2004. Meanwhile, he became one of the nation's top college football prospects and, he said, "loved every second" of his high school experience.

"There was always a maturity about him when it came to his schoolwork and football," said Monte Kohler, who has coached football at O'Dea for 22 years. "But as hard as he worked to prepare for a game and other things, he could still be a kid."

Before his senior year, Mays began narrowing his potential college choices. Washington was in the mix because of location and his father's connection. Ultimately, though, it came down to Michigan and USC. Mays, a Charles Woodson fan, was leaning toward attending Michigan, the 1997 Heisman Trophy winner's alma mater, after a trip to Ann Arbor in the summer of 2005. But when he visited a USC practice during training camp he became enamored of the Trojans. His father had played for the Minnesota Vikings when a young Carroll was a member of Bud Grant's staff, and Stafford Mays remembered the energy and fun the coach brought to the game.

Taylor Mays, however, said a challenge from Athletic Director Mike Garrett closed the deal. "He said, 'If you're scared of competition, if you're scared you're going to get lost in the shuffle, don't come here because competition only brings out the best,' " Mays recalled. "That turned it over for me. In my mind I said, 'All right. I'm coming here.' "

Mays arrived on campus last summer and began studying film and the playbook. Shortly after training camp began in August, he was in the safety rotation with Pinkard and sophomore Kevin Ellison. "I never felt physically intimidated by anything, but mentally there was so much stuff that I had no clue about," he said.

Two weeks after Pinkard was injured against Arkansas, Mays started for the first time in USC's next game, against Nebraska. He showed flashes over the next four games — intercepting a pass on the final play to preserve a win over Washington State — but mostly played conservatively. "It was not until midyear that you understood that he understood," Carroll said.

Mays made a game-high 11 tackles against Oregon State, intercepted passes against Oregon and California, and delivered several bone-jarring hits against Notre Dame. "Watching them play and seeing some of the hits they've made, they get me out of my seat," NFL Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott, an All-American at USC, said of Mays and Ellison.

Without prompting, Mays credits defensive backs coach Rocky Seto, Carroll, Ellison, Pinkard, Lott, Troy Polamalu, Darnell Bing and just about every other safety in USC history for helping him progress. He also notes that his journey has just started, that there is more maturing to be done.

"It's like I'm just scratching the surface of everything," he said.

English Name

Hebrew Name

7.

8. (Bar/Bat Mitzvah) _____

Dress Torah (Jewish participants): _____

Hold Torah on pulpit (Jewish adult): _____

Speak to our children (Parents of Bar/Bat Mitzvah only. See pages 12-13):

Kaddish: Please list names of any deceased family members who are being remembered on this day. It does not need to be their *yartzeit* (the anniversary of their death) nor must the loved one be Jewish to be remembered with our kaddish reading. You may also include a child's "Remember Us" twin (see page 8).

Name

Relationship to Student
