

Veheyey Braḥah:
And you shall be a blessing...

CONGREGATION AHAVAS ACHIM

**BAT/BAR MITZVAH HANDBOOK
& COMMUNITY GUIDELINES**

FOR DISTRIBUTION AUTUMN 2008
B'NAI MITZVAH CLASSES

5769 / 2008-2009
5770 / 2009-2010

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Shalom B'nai Mitzvah students and families:

Welcome to the bar/bat mitzvah study program at Congregation Ahavas Achim; it is an honor for everyone at Ahavas Achim to share in the *simcha*, the joyous celebration, so we begin by wishing *mazal tov* to you on this upcoming event! Indeed, your celebration is a special moment for the bar/bat mitzvah and the whole family.

This handbook is an introduction to the process by which your family, especially the child becoming bar/bat mitzvah, will prepare for this celebration. Hopefully, the enclosed materials will further your understanding, ease some of your concerns, and help you to understand the way Congregation Ahavas Achim understands this life cycle event.

Literally, *bat/bar mitzvah* means roughly “daughter/son of commandments,” and is traditionally understood as “becoming” a woman or a man in Jewish life. This rite of passage is, of course, only one part of the process of becoming an adult, specifically a Jewish adult. It is a time of transition for everyone in the family, as young people begin to take on adult responsibilities within the Jewish community; the transition culminates in the rite of passage, leading the community in prayer and Torah learning.

We are thrilled to have the opportunity to celebrate with you, and hope to help you so that the process of study and preparation is smooth. This does not mean that it will be easy. There is a lot of work involved for the child who is becoming bat/bar mitzvah. Additionally, this is a time of transition in your family—perhaps the rabbis of olden times created this rite-of-passage in recognition of the independence that our youth begin to assert at about this age. It is time for children to take on additional responsibilities, and it is a time for shifting relationships. May the transitions strengthen your family relationships.

Hatzlacha (luck) and *mazal tov* (congratulations), may you have great joy and strength in this time.

From Congregation Ahavas Achim's By-Laws, Article XII, Section 2:

Membership is required for a minimum of two (2) years prior to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, unless the candidate and family is transferring from another synagogue where the family was a member in good standing. Additionally, a minimum of two years of Jewish education, or its equivalent, is required for any candidate prior to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Any final decision regarding the adequacy of a candidate's religious and educational preparation to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah shall be made at the Rabbi's discretion, with the concurrence of the Religious Committee. Exceptions to this rule may be granted by request to and majority vote of the Religious Committee and the Board of Directors.

Parental Involvement and Selection of Dates:

Dates for B'nai Mitzvah are selected by the religious committee, using the Congregational calendar, avoiding Jewish holidays where possible, and aiming for the Shabbat closest to the child's 13th birthday *or the family's preferred date after the birthday*.

Families (parent(s) and students) will meet with the rabbi in the fall of both years of Kitah Dalet. Additionally, during the 2nd year of Kitah Dalet there are several Tuesday sessions where parents are invited to join with the rabbi and their child(ren). Parents of Kitah Dalet students are encouraged to form a cohort to support each other through these celebrations.

Celebrating with the Community:

Please note that the congregation asks that each child specifically invite all of Kitah Dalet to their bat/bar mitzvah celebration. Students are also asked to submit to the Bulletin a short personal introduction, including a photograph, inviting the Congregation to attend their service. Note that the Bulletin is published every *other* month; in order to provide ample time for invitations, submissions should be made as follows:

<u>Celebration Weekend</u>	<u>Submission Date</u>
○ 2 nd week of January – 1 st week of March	December 10 th
○ 2 nd week of March – 1 st week of May	February 10 th
○ 2 nd week of May – 1 st week of July	April 10 th
○ 2 nd week of July – 1 st week of September	June 10 th
○ 2 nd week of September – 1 st week of November	August 10 th
○ 2 nd week of November – 1 st week of January	October 10 th

Costs for Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

The board of the congregation sets the fee for B'nai Mitzvah celebrations. This fee goes to offset building and professional expenses. In addition, the fee also reserves the use of the building and facilities to the bar/bat mitzvah family (in agreement with the congregation) for Shabbat celebrations. In addition, the family is expected to cover costs of cleaning, usually by hiring our normal cleaning people; this may include setting up extra chairs.

Typically, parents find the above costs to be only a small portion of the cost of celebrating the Bar/Bat Mitzvah of their child(ren). It is up to the family to determine the particulars of the celebratory party. Please see chapter 6 of *Putting God on the Guest List* for perspectives on the party. Please remember that the synagogue and your home are reasonable locations for your celebrations; additional information can be gleaned from members of the synagogue who have held such celebrations in the past. Families are also expected to purchase books (see below) for student and family preparations.

Educational Preparation:

School and Service Attendance:

Candidates for b'nai mitzvah are expected to attend Religious School on Sundays and Tuesdays throughout the two years of Kitah Dalet. The curriculum for these two years is geared towards preparing students to lead and feel comfortable in services and to have a strong handle on Torah study and Jewish living.

In the year prior to the bar/bat mitzvah celebration, candidates are expected to attend at least three (3) Saturday morning services (especially but not exclusively B'nai Mitzvah) at Ahavas Achim. Candidates are also required to attend at least three (3) Friday services in the Dalet 1 year, and at least five (5) Friday services in the Dalet 2 year. Families are strongly encouraged to attend services more frequently. B'nai mitzvah candidates are also expected to attend and participate in leadership of the Friday evening services on the 2 Friday nights prior to their bar/bat mitzvah celebration.

Students are expected to be prepared to begin Hebrew Level 5 in the first year of Kitah Dalet. Students who are not prepared, regardless of the reason, are expected to receive private tutoring at the expense of the family (names of tutors are available from the Hebrew School Committee or the rabbi).

Tutoring/meetings with the rabbi:

The rabbi will provide recordings of all prayers, the Torah reading, Torah and Haftarah blessings, at least three months prior to the service. An outline of the service, with portions that all students must learn in bold, can be found in this handbook, and is also the Hebrew class curriculum for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah year. The bar/bat mitzvah is encouraged to learn and lead additional portions of the Friday and Saturday, according to their skill and interest (this is *not* a contest).

B'nai mitzvah candidates are expected to develop fluency in the prayers through study in the Hebrew School. The Hebrew School curriculum provides both Hebrew studies and studies in Jewish Life focused on spiritual development in preparation for becoming a responsible member of the Jewish community.

Complementary to the Hebrew school curriculum, each b'nai mitzvah candidate will meet with the rabbi for tutoring sessions beginning three months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration. Each family is entitled to twelve (12) sessions of approximately 45 minutes with the rabbi, including a preliminary family meeting and a final rehearsal (two hours, usually the Thursday prior to the services; most families bring a photographer to this

session, as photos may not be taken during services). These sessions with the rabbi will focus on final preparation of Torah reading and on writing of the D'var Torah (words of Torah).

The rabbi and/or Hebrew school teacher will assess the student's level approximately six months prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. If it is deemed that the student requires work in addition to Hebrew school and the sessions (up to twelve) with the rabbi, the synagogue will work with the family to find an appropriate tutor; associated costs are the responsibility of the family.

Required Reading

The following books are pre-ordered through the synagogue and may be purchased at cost.

Parents are asked to read *Putting God on the Guest List* by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (Jewish Lights Press). B'nai mitzvah candidates will read the "For Kids" version of this book in their Tuesday evening studies with the rabbi. Parents are encouraged to meet as a group or to reach out to each other as they come up with questions in relation to the book. If there is enough interest, the rabbi may be engaged for one or two sessions to discuss particular issues.

Kitah Dalet II students are required to read and complete the worksheets in the companion volume *For Kids—Putting God on the Guest List* (Jewish Lights Press). This book will make up part of our Tuesday afternoon school sessions.

Kitah Dalet I/Hebrew 5 students are required to obtain their own copy of the red Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshamah* Shabbat *siddur* (prayer book) that we use in the synagogue. These will be provided during Hebrew school and the families will be billed. The *siddur* is an invaluable tool for this occasion, the rest of the bar/bat mitzvah's lives, and a great foundation for a Jewish library. It will form the basis of Hebrew 5 and 6 studies.

Tikkun Olam (Mitzveh Project)

B'nai mitzvah candidates are required to engage in Tikkun Olam (social action/ community service)—often through a particular *Mitzveh Project* as designed and agreed upon by the candidate, the family and the rabbi. Tikkun Olam opportunities may occur in conjunction with Hebrew School, as well. Students are typically asked to do consistent work for about six months prior to the bar/bat mitzvah celebration, and to keep a journal of their experiences with the project. The celebration should be neither an end nor a goal in Tikkun Olam; rather, we hope that this be the beginning of a life of community service.

Possible Tikkun Olam projects include:

- Tutoring a single student
- Assisting a particular teacher with younger students
- Working in animal shelters; exercising greyhounds
- Helping at the Red Cross, cleaning materials or stocking emergency rations
- Visiting elderly

We recognize that in recent years some realms in which our students have previously engaged in successful community service volunteer projects have placed age limits. We encourage you to think creatively, to engage in a project as a family.

In consultation with the rabbi, each b'nai mitzvah candidate is expected to find, contact, and research one Jewish *tzedakah* organization, ideally related to his/her particular *tikkun olam* project, and to create a poster to help educate the B'nai Mitzvah class, the Congregation, and others invited to the bar/bat mitzvah celebration about the group. Each child will be asked to give 10% of monies received in bat/bar mitzvah gifts to *tzedakah*; these monies may be split between the researched organization and the local mitzvah project. Candidates are encouraged, but not required, to seek possible funds in Israel.

Bn'ai Mitzvah Services: Sample Outline

The following outlines for Friday and Saturday services show pages corresponding to the *Kol Haneshamah* siddur. The bar/bat mitzvah is expected to read items in **bold**. Each bat/bar mitzvah will write a personal prayer on (at least) two of the italicized—one on Friday night and one on Saturday morning. Additional *poem* slots may be filled by the bat/bar mitzvah or by members of the family with readings selected from the prayer book or from other sources; reading selection must be completed and approved by the rabbi two weeks before the celebration.

Friday Night—Kabbalat Shabbat

- p.5 Candles- family- page 5
**poem after candle blessing* read by parent*
- p.13 Shalom Aleichem
- p.23-25 Lead English/ responsive reading**
- p.26 Yismechu Hashamayim (Ps. 96) p. 26
Poem of Praise
- p.41-47 Lecha Dodi
- p.49 Tov Lehodot or Tzaddik Katamar
- p.57 Barechu**
- p.59 El chai
- p.63 Ahavat Olam**
- p.65 Shema/Ve'ahavta**
Poem on "salvation"
- p.75 Mi hamocha**
- p.80 Help us lie.../Hashkivenu**
- p.84 Veshamru (rise)
- p.91-107 Silent Amidah
- p.107 Oseh Shalom**
Story read by b'nai mitzvah
- p.121 Aleinu**
Reading or Poem on Tikkun Olam
- p.123 Mourner's Kaddish (Rabbi)
- p.133 Adon Olam**
Kiddush / Hamotzi (upstairs)

Saturday Morning—Shabbat Shaharit

- p.143-44 Tallit w/ family member**
- p.141 Ma Tovu**
- p.155-160 Blessings (alternate Heb/Eng)**
- p.165 Elohay Neshamah
Poem #1
- p.176-178 Baruch She'amar**
- p. 177 *below line*
- p.209-211 Tov Lehodot or Tzadik Katamar
- p.231 Psalm 150, Hallelu →

- p.234 Nishmat Kol Chai (English)**
Poem on soul
- p.247 Barechu & Yotzer**
Poem on creation or love
- p.272-274 Ahavah Rabah
- p.277 Shema/Ve'ahavta**
- p.284 Tallit Reading English**
Poem on "salvation"
- p.290 Mi hamocha**
- p.294-305 Amidah blessings 1, 2 & 3**
- p.307-323 silent 307-323
- p.323 Oseh Shalom**
(Hallel when calendar requires)
- p.383 Torah Service**
- p.385 Ark is opened by family member(s)**
- 5 aliyahs allotted for family
 - 2 aliyahs reserved for community
 - maftir aliyah for Bat/Bar Mitzvah
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah reads at least the maftir Torah reading.**
Hagba and Galilah, lifting and dressing the Torah may be granted to (Jewish) members of the family or to members of the congregation.
- p.409 Haftarah blessings reading of Haftarah**
- p.433-441 return Torah
Ark is opened by family member(s)
- Bar-Bat Mitzvah speech**
Parent's talk
Synagogue presenters
Rabbi's talk
Song
- p.445 Aleinu**
Poem on Tikkun Olam
- p.451 Mourner's Kaddish
- p.459 Adon Olam**
Kiddush/Hamotzi (upstairs)
SOFT candy thrown in celebration

Other Important information:

Donations—It is customary to make contributions to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund and in addition to synagogue funds in honor of life-cycle events. Purchasing a plaque for the Tree of Life in the entryway of the synagogue is a wonderful way to contribute to the synagogue and provide a lasting tribute to your *simcha* (joyous celebration). These are tax-exempt funds. The president of the congregation can help make appropriate suggestions as to amounts and the purpose of the different funds.

Oneg—A small snack, usually consisting of sweets, cheese, fruit, juice, and (decaffeinated) coffee follows services Friday and Saturday. The ***family of the bar/bat mitzvah hosts both during the weekend. Challah and Kiddush wine/juice are required***—blessings will be done upstairs in the sanctuary at the conclusion of the service. Generally 30-50 people attend services from the congregation on a regular Friday night. On Shabbat morning there are usually about 15-20 members from the congregation. Sometimes, families provide a light lunch after Shabbat morning services. This can be called a "high kiddush" or a "high oneg." The family is responsible for setting and cleaning up.

Flowers—It is traditional to bring flowers to illuminate the bima for the weekend. "Rent-a-flower" is a great approach since often plants left in the building are effected by the extreme temperature fluctuations in the building.

Clean-up—Each family is expected to ensure that the synagogue building is picked-up and cleaned to the best extent possible after the Saturday event before the cleaning person arrives to take care of the building. This includes checking the sanctuary, kitchen, bathrooms, and "play areas" for all garbage, leftover candy, and debris. All toys and major trash, spills, dropped food, etc., should be clean-up.

Some Suggested Catering (not an endorsement):

We understand that not everyone in our community has the same standard for kosher food. With that understanding, we ask that you please assure that there is a vegetarian or fish option at your events.

The synagogue can hold up to 75-80 downstairs comfortably; more can be accommodated outside in a rented tent. (Note: Family gets day use of synagogue building and facility with the bar/bat mitzvah fee.)

All "in-house" synagogue events must be kosher and menu approved by rabbi.

- Fiddleheads (Hancock)
- Kristin's Bakery and Café (Washington Street, Keene)
- Gap Mountain Bakery (Colony Mill Marketplace)
- Sunflower Café & Catering (Fitzwilliam)
- "Everyday Gourmet" (Kristin Petricola) 352-9850
- Your Friends and family!!

Some Halls/Places (not an endorsement):

- Keene State College
- Best Western (Keene)
- Stonewall Farm
- Alyson's Orchard
- Keene Country Club
- Peterborough Country Club



Mitzvah Project Brit / Covenant
Congregation Ahavas Achim

“You are not required to complete the work,
yet you are not allowed to abstain from it.”

Mishnah Avot 2:1 (Teachings of our Ancestors)

I, _____, known by my Jewish name as

_____ recognize that it is a mitzvah to do *tikkun olam*, repair the world. As part of becoming an adult member of this Jewish community, I make a covenant to participate in a weekly mitzvah project for 6 months prior to my bat / bar mitzvah. I will keep a weekly log or journal of my work.

I understand that a mitzvah project is a community service project that involves directly participating in an activity such as, but not limited to: visiting a hospital, visiting a “shut-in” member of the community, volunteering in a soup kitchen, volunteering in a humane society, volunteering in a nursing home, assisting children at risk. It is up to me to determine the local group with which I will volunteer.

If I am unable to fulfill this covenant by the time of the service, I will continue to do the weekly work until the time is completed.

Project description: _____

Signatures

B.Mitzvah _____ Date _____

Parent _____ Date _____

Rabbi _____ Date _____