

B'nei Mitzvah Guide

You are about to embark on the exciting, yet sometimes challenging and frustrating, process of planning a B'nei Mitzvah. In the months to come, you will be spending a lot of time going to lessons at the synagogue to learn your Torah and Haftorah portions and to prepare your speech and service. Planning the celebration or *Simcha* or the “party” part of your B'nei Mitzvah will also consume a lot of time and energy. This packet is designed to help you plan the party that goes along with your B'nei Mitzvah ceremony; placing the whole day within a Jewish and community-oriented spirit. A few things to remember:

Your B'nei Mitzvah ceremony and reception is your B'nei Mitzvah ceremony and reception. Start to think early about who you might want to include in your ceremony and if there are any special readings or family traditions that you want included. Tailor your reception to your family's personality, interest and budget. A festive B'nei Mitzvah reception can be a relaxed party at home, at the synagogue, or at a restaurant or can be a more formal affair at a hotel. Think about ways to add your personality and style to the party. The size, time (afternoon or evening), menu, music selection, entertainment and decorations are all up to you.

A B'nei Mitzvah party is an extension of the ceremony and part of Jewish tradition. In Judaism, we are commanded to celebrate a happy event or *simcha*; not only the ritual of a B'nei Mitzvah ceremony, but also the celebration afterwards. Consider how to make your reception reflect the Jewish nature of the day. Include the recitation of the brachot over the wine and bread at the reception or incorporate Jewish music and dancing into the celebration.

Also think about the whole weekend in a Jewish context:

- Consider having a special Shabbat evening dinner on the night before the B'nei Mitzvah for family and friends from out-of-town.
- Invite friends and family to Friday night services (the B'nei Mitzvah is required to go to the Shabbat service the evening before).
- If you are having a Saturday evening party or if you have friends and family over to your house that evening, consider including a short *Havdalah* service to mark the end of Shabbat.

A B'nei Mitzvah marks a young person's entrance into Jewish adulthood and acceptance of the commandments of Judaism. One of these commandments is to help those who are less fortunate. Each B'nei Mitzvah student is highly encouraged to complete a *tikkun olam* or *tzedakah* project as part of his/her preparation. This could include giving a portion of gift money to a needy cause or spending some time completing a community or social action project.

A B'nei Mitzvah ceremony is a community-wide event. It marks a young person's entrance into Jewish adulthood within the Jewish community to which he or she belongs. The Beth Shalom community is encouraged to attend all B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies; as their presence will only add to the joy of the day.

- You are encouraged to invite all the children in your B'nei Mitzvah child's religious school class to the ceremony and reception; as these are your child's most immediate Jewish community.
- Please also make sure that there is an Oneg after the ceremony for everybody to attend, even if you are going soon afterwards to a private reception. This Oneg can be modest; challah, juice or wine, some sweets or fruit is fine.
- The synagogue will provide one or two congregants set up and clean up on the morning of the B'nei Mitzvah ceremony.
- The B'nei Mitzvah family is responsible for providing the refreshments for the Oneg after the ceremony. You are encouraged to team up with one or two of the other families having B'nei

Mitzvah in your year. They can help set-up and provide food for your Kiddush. In return, you can help them on their special day.

- Another alternative is to hire the sisterhood to cater your Oneg. They will work with you on a menu handle the setup, preparation, and cleanup for the Oneg.
- There is a fee for the use of the synagogue; please contact the synagogue office at least one month before your B'nei mitzvah date for details.

Many families ask about the Oneg Shabbat the night before the ceremony.

- The synagogue will provide a regular Oneg Shabbat.
- The B'nei Mitzvah family is asked to provide additional food proportional to the number of guests who will be joining them.
- If you will have 10 additional guests at Shabbat evening services, then a platter of cookies would be appropriate.
- You might also want to provide a special cake or napkins and plates in a favorite color.

A check-list for the B'nei Mitzvah service:

1. Tallit and tallit bag.
2. Kippot/yarmulkas for guests -- perhaps a special kippah for the B'nei Mitzvah.
3. Programs for the service. The rabbi, Hal Zenick, or Larry Ginsburg can provide examples. Please show your program to the rabbi before having it printed.
4. Challah and Kiddush cup at the reception.
5. Havdalah set for Saturday evening; you can borrow one from the synagogue.
6. Outline of the service to Hal Zenick a month before your B'nei Mitzvah.
7. Soft candy (no chocolate, please) to throw at the B'nei Mitzvah (this is entirely optional).

Other Arrangements and Possibilities:

(This list is meant to be a guide. Some items might not fit into each family's *overall vision* for the B'nei Mitzvah.)

1. Location for the party and menu.
2. Music or other entertainment.
3. Flowers or other center-pieces.
4. Photographer and/or videographer. Note: There is no flash photography allowed during the ceremony.
5. Hotel arrangements, transportation and welcome bags for out-of-town guests.
6. Cake for party, candy for tables, favors for the party.
7. Invitations, thank you notes, printed napkins.
8. Colors and theme for the party.
9. Guest book. Some families also have made a special poster on foam-core with pictures or symbols important to their child for guests to sign. It can be framed afterwards.
10. Donations to synagogue in honor of the event. It is a common practice, but not a requirement, to make donations to honor the people who have contributed to the preparation of the B'nei mitzvah child.

A Great Resource:

Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin, \$21.95/hard-back, \$14.95/paperback, order from Jewish Lights Publishing, 800-962-4544. It is sometimes available at Barnes and Noble book-store.