

A Guide to *Bat* and *Bar Mitzvah* at Kerem Shalom



As we shape a warm and caring Kerem Shalom community guided by Jewish values and practice, we are committed to imbuing the *B'nai Mitzvah*¹ process, service and celebration with the following values:

- Forming community, supporting each other
- Being inclusive and welcoming
- Experiencing Torah
- Marking the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* as a beginning
- Honoring Shabbat
- Valuing the unique makeup of each family and the unique spirit of each child

As your family and the entire 7th grade class embark on the *B'nai Mitzvah* year, we hope that your experience will be full of meaning, joy and the warm embrace of community.

T'filah/Prayer

Preparing to Plan the Service: Being present at Shabbat services is a wonderful way to develop comfort and familiarity with Shabbat and *B'nai Mitzvah* services at Kerem Shalom. Your family should attend at least one Shabbat morning service prior to your initial meeting with the rabbi. The synagogue office will contact you approximately three months before the *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* to schedule this meeting. Attending services enables you to come to this meeting with ideas to make your child's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service even more meaningful.

Preparing to Lead the Service: There is a range of options for your child's participation in his or her *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* service. Your child's participation will be in accordance with his or her capabilities as determined by the rabbi, cantorial soloist and education director. Families should expect to engage the services of an approved *B'nai Mitzvah* tutor.

Honors in the Service: In the spirit of welcoming your personal friends and family to Kerem Shalom, we invite you to offer them meaningful honors and roles in the *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* service. The attached chart, "Kerem Shalom *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Honors" lists some possible ways your guests can participate in the service. The rabbi will review the honor sheet in detail with you during your initial meeting.

Helper Families: One of the ways that 7th grade families support their community is by serving as helper families for each other's *B'nai Mitzvah* services. Parent(s) and the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student serve in this capacity *together*. Once helper families have completed their set-up responsibilities, they should join the Shabbat morning service. The synagogue office will be in touch to schedule your date(s) and will provide you with details regarding these responsibilities.

Continuing the Chain: To maintain the connection to your community after your child's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, Kerem Shalom will invite every recent *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* for the honor of an *aliyah* (recitation of the Torah blessings only) during a Shabbat morning service in the week(s)

¹ *B'nai Mitzvah* is the plural of *Bat/Bar Mitzvah*.

following her or his *Bat/Bar Mitzvah*. On occasion, another honor may be substituted; please discuss and schedule this honor with the rabbi.

From planning through the post-*Bar/Bat Mitzvah* period, we hope that your family's participation in services will add joy and meaning to your celebration and strengthen your connection with Kerem Shalom.

Minhag HaMakom/Customs at Kerem Shalom²

There are a number of *B'nai Mitzvah* customs and practices at Kerem Shalom.

B'nai Mitzvah Age and Dates: *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* dates are given out at the end of the 5th grade year. If you have any questions about this process or your date, please speak with Education Director Joan Perlman. In the spirit of egalitarian treatment of all students, our policy at Kerem Shalom is that one must be 13 years or older according to either the Gregorian or Hebrew calendar on the date of his or her *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*³.

Morning Services: *B'nai Mitzvah* take place at Kerem Shalom during Saturday morning community Shabbat services.

Commitment to Community: Becoming *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is a significant life event that represents a beginning, not an ending. One of the commitments our students make is to continue to be present for each other as a community after their *B'nai Mitzvah*. We ask for a commitment from each student to complete the 7th grade year in good standing. We strongly urge students to engage in Kerem Shalom's 8th grade and high school programs, which are more social in nature and strengthen the interpersonal connections created over the course of their Hebrew School experience.

Taking a Break from Technology: While we all rely on technology, we also recognize its encroachment in every aspect of our lives. The wisdom of Shabbat is that we need a periodic break from the pressures of the week to renew ourselves by being fully present in community. To this end, we respectfully request that no electronics be used in our sanctuary during services on Shabbat (except for devices used for accessibility). Photographs may be taken until 9:30 a.m. on Shabbat morning and may resume 1/2 hour after the service. The basis for this practice is not *halachah* (traditional Jewish law), but rather our community's desire to fully experience the delight of Shabbat and be wholly present with each other. We hope that you will take the opportunity that Shabbat provides to unplug throughout the day.

We ask you to consider including the preceding paragraph in your service handouts and informational emails to guests, so that they will know to unplug while they are with us on Shabbat. Thank you.

² We will gladly make accommodations, when appropriate, for students with special needs regarding the customs and practices detailed here. Please speak with the rabbi.

³ Accommodations may be made upon request for Jewish Day School students, whose day school communities may practice a different *minhag* (custom).

Kehillah Kedoshah/Sacred Community

Inclusivity: As a welcoming, inclusive and sacred community, Kerem Shalom places great importance on being present for each other. In this spirit, please make an effort to attend the joyous services of your fellow community members, keeping in mind that some students will celebrate their services in the fall of the 8th grade year. We strongly encourage you to invite the entire 7th grade class to your child's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Invitations are appreciated and strengthen community bonds. Please see the attached document for sample language you may consider for your invitation.

Seudat Mitzvah/Celebration: The meaning of the day extends beyond the conclusion of the service through your entire celebration. As you plan your *seudat mitzvah* (celebration), please keep in mind the values of inclusivity, community, joy, *tzedakah* (charity⁴), moderation and focusing on what's important.

Mitzvah Projects: Upon becoming *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, your child receives privileges and assumes responsibilities, one of which is *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). 7th graders engage in *tikkun olam* through their *mitzvah* projects. Your child should choose a cause that he/she finds meaningful, with guidance from you and/or the synagogue. Suggestions are available on the Kerem Shalom website under "Worship/Lifecycle Events/*Bat and Bar Mitzvah*". *Mitzvah* Day in the fall and our Social Action Committee are also great sources of ideas. It is important not to leave the *mitzvah* project until the last moment as it requires a dedication of time and effort. Monetary donations are a wonderful gesture but donations alone do not constitute a *mitzvah* project. Please feel free to discuss the project with the rabbi, education director or family education director. *Mitzvah* project proposal forms will be filled out early in the Hebrew school year. Projects should be completed by the end of the 7th grade year but *need not be completed by your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Through these projects, students make valuable contributions to worthy causes beyond Kerem Shalom. *B'nai Mitzvah* students will share their *mitzvah* projects with the congregation and each other at a special Friday night Shabbat service in the spring of the 7th grade year.

Service to Our Community: Another way to foster sacred community is through service to one's own community. We ask our students to give 3 or more hours of their time to Kerem Shalom, helping with childcare, *onegs* (social gatherings after services), mailings, library work, yard work, special events, etc. One of these hours must be when school is not in session. Many volunteer opportunities are brief but all are a great way to meet people and help the congregation.

Tzedakah/Charity⁴: We are incredibly grateful for each family's dedication of time, energy and financial support to our community. Thank you! In Jewish tradition, there is a custom of giving *tzedakah* at celebratory moments as an expression of gratitude and appreciation. After your

⁴ *Tzedakah* literally means "righteousness" but the term is used commonly to refer to monetary donations.

joyous day, if you feel moved to do so, please consider making a donation to Kerem Shalom to support our sacred community, and/or to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund to support *tikkun olam*. The Rabbi's Discretionary Fund allows the rabbi to provide assistance to individuals, charitable organizations and programs. Your support is a time-honored expression of Jewish tradition and sets a strong example for your child. Many *B'nai Mitzvah* students give a portion of monetary gifts they receive to support a worthy organization of their choice.

Mazel Tov!/Congratulations!

We are here to share the experience with you and to help you in any way that we can. On behalf of the Kerem Shalom clergy, staff and our entire sacred community, we wish you a hearty *mazel tov!*

Please contact KS for: Sample invitation wording, Kerem Shalom *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Honors, Timeline for Preparation of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* service