

## Guidelines for B'nai Mitzvah

### Am Shalom Congregation

Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a Hebrew idiom meaning “one responsible for the mitzvah.” The term “B'nai” is the gender-neutral term for the plural of “Bar” and “Bat.” It refers to a person who has reached the age when s/he can be held responsible for observing and fulfilling the mitzvot, the commandments, that God expects that we observe and honour as Jews. The young person preparing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah will learn to fulfill the mitzvot of leading the congregation in blessing, reading, and teaching Torah. \*Note: the word “mitzvah” does not mean “a good deed or a good thing”.

The ceremony marks a special time in a young person's life. **It is a celebration marking a person's acceptance of their Jewish responsibilities as a full member of the community.** Once a child has become a Bar or a Bat mitzvah, they are considered as an adult in Judaism and can now be counted towards a minyan (a prayer quorum), lead a service, and be called to the Torah (for an aliyah or to read/chant) for the rest of their lives.

It is **not** intended to be an excuse for a party, or a celebration marking the end of one's Jewish education. Judaism has always held the values of education and knowledge high; the achievement of Bar or Bat Mitzvah is but one of many steps along the way as a Jewish adult.

At Am Shalom we want to encourage lifelong involvement in the greater Jewish community, and have established these guidelines to help families and children prepare and plan for the event.

B'nai Mitzvah take place during a regularly scheduled Shabbat morning service, when the whole community is present. It should not be a private service or a service that would require a special invitation to the community at large.

## PREPARATION FOR B'NAI MITZVAH

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah date will be arranged in consultation with the rabbi/spiritual leader and the synagogue office. Please be in touch with the synagogue with your requested date and we will do our best to accommodate.

The actual preparation for a Bar/Bat mitzvah begins with the earliest exposure of a young person to the life of the congregation, and continues through religious school and all the worship experiences of a young lifetime. When a date is set for your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the rabbi/spiritual leader will be in touch to begin the process. Elements in the process will almost certainly include:

\* Continuation of studies in Am Shalom's Religious School. **A student who is preparing for B'nai Mitzvah is still expected to be enrolled in, and regularly attend, Shabbat morning Religious School classes until the conclusion of Grade Eight.**

\* Private tutoring to learn the Torah and Haftarah blessings and how to chant your child's particular Torah portion. There are 2 options for the B'nai Mitzvah ceremony and the option chosen may be adjusted for each individual student as needed. Option 1: the student will do 3 Aliyot, a d'var Torah, blessings before and after Torah and Haftarah and some additional prayers. Option 2 will be to do only 1 Aliyah, the prayers before and after, a d'var Torah and the student will lead more of the common prayers with the congregation joining in. The Haftarah may be chanted in Hebrew or read in Hebrew or English. The common prayers may include: Ashrei, Shma and Ve'ahavta, and Adon Olam. This tutoring will begin at least 7 months before the Bar/Bar Mitzvah date and will be held weekly at the synagogue or via Skype on pre-arranged afternoons/evenings. Arrangements for either in person or remote lessons will be made through the spiritual leader/synagogue office with the tutor.

\* Regular attendance at Shabbat morning and holiday services at Am Shalom – very important!

\* Working with the rabbi/spiritual leader to prepare a D'var Torah (translates to "lesson from the Torah"), which will be presented to the congregation during the service.

\* Fulfilling the "Eilu Devarim Thirteen Mitzvot Program" in the year leading up to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. (Or an agreed upon alternate program.)

\* Arranging a time about two weeks prior to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah for your child to chant his or her Torah portion for the rabbi/spiritual leader (in person, over the telephone, or through Skype).

**In order for the child to feel comfortable during services, candidates are asked to attend at least 8 regularly scheduled Shabbat or holiday services in the year preceding the ceremony.**

## **EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate is called on to chant from the Torah scroll. It is not considered proper for the portion to be memorized. Therefore the candidate should be able to read Hebrew at a fairly proficient level. They should be able to open up a siddur and be able to read the Hebrew, even if it is at a slow rate.

In order to ensure a confident, prepared, and successful B'nai Mitzvah student, **regular attendance at Am Shalom's Religious School is required for at least three consecutive years leading up to B'nai Mitzvah** (or its equivalent elsewhere - please speak to the rabbi/spiritual leader about this). Am Shalom's Religious School will educate your child about the Jewish holidays, customs, prayer, history, Jewish culture, Israel, and tikkun olam.

Continuation of studies in Am Shalom's Religious School throughout preparation for Bar or Bat Mitzvah is required. **Students are still expected to be enrolled in, and regularly attend, Shabbat morning Religious School classes until the conclusion of Grade Eight.**

## **MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS**

The family of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate should be members in good standing of Am Shalom. Those unable to afford full fees can arrange a customized fee schedule. Please contact the synagogue office for a confidential conversation.

## **FEES**

The fee for private tutoring to prepare each student for Bar/Bat Mitzvah is \$60 per class (subject to change). This tutoring will begin at least 7 months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The office, rabbi/spiritual leader, and the tutor assume your child will be available each week once lessons begin, but are prepared to be somewhat flexible due to public school vacation schedules, overnight camp, and family vacations.