

BAR/BAT-MITZVAH HANDBOOK



CONGREGATION OR ZARUA
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Welcome to the process of thinking about and preparing for your daughter's bat-mitzvah or your son's bar-mitzvah. Many questions have probably arisen and others will surely arise. This handbook is intended to help you with the many questions and details that are part of the bar- and bat-mitzvah celebration. It reflects how bar- and bat-mitzvahs are uniquely celebrated at Congregation Or Zarua. A girl becomes a bat-mitzvah when she reaches the age of twelve; a boy becomes a bar-mitzvah at thirteen. In truth, therefore, bar- or bat-mitzvah is not an event or a ceremony. Bar- or bat-mitzvah literally translates as "son or daughter of the commandment." It really means "old enough to be responsible for the mitzvot. Mitzvot are the commandments that a Jew performs in order to not only live a Jewish life, but also to sanctify life.

Bar- and bat -mitzvah celebrations are exhilarating times for Jewish families.

Mazal Tov.

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PLANNING A BAR/BAT-MITZVAH AT CONGREGATION OR ZARUA: A TIMELINE

THE DATE

Different secular and day schools begin to ask families about a child's bar- and bat-mitzvah dates at different times. Some schools begin talking with their families as much as three years or more in advance. We generally find two years to be a safe amount of time, but are sensitive to the fact that parents may need to know earlier. Call Rabbi Wechsler to set a bar/bat-mitzvah date. The date should follow, as close as reasonably possible, the twelfth or thirteenth Hebrew Birthday. This can easily be established by talking with Rabbi Wechsler. While the date for boys is thirteen, we find that girls will want to have their bat-mitzvah at various times after their twelfth birthday. Girls in Jewish Day Schools most frequently mark the event after turning twelve. Those in public and private schools may do the same or may prefer a date closer to thirteen. Once the date is set, the bar/bat-Mitzvah form is signed by the family, Rabbi Wechsler and Executive Director.

THE LESSONS

Children at Congregation Or Zarua prepare for their bar/bat-mitzvahs by studying with a private tutor. They begin studying with their tutor approximately ten months prior to their date. Please contact the Educational Director to obtain the name of a tutor that is most likely to work well with your child. If you believe more time is required and/or your child has special needs, contact Rabbi Wechsler.

FAMILY ATTENDANCE AT SHABBAT SERVICES

It is highly recommended that you and your child attend Shabbat services regularly prior to the bar/bat-mitzvah date. The importance of this cannot be overstated. By attending Shabbat services, you and your child will become familiar with the service. The day you are looking forward to will become firmly attached to the life of the Congregation providing great meaning to the event.

KIDDUSH ARRANGEMENTS

At least one month prior to your date, call the Executive Director to discuss your Kiddush needs. Congregation Or Zarua orders food for approximately 100 Congregants. We will need to order additional food to accommodate your guests. The cost of the Kiddush depends on your number of guests.

PLANNING A BAR/BAT-MITZVAH AT CONGREGATION OR ZARUA: A TIMELINE (CONT.)

RECEPTION ARRANGEMENTS

The Social Hall can be rented for a catered reception either following Shabbat services or at another time. It can also be rented for a Friday night dinner prior to the bar/bat Mitzvah. Please call the Executive Director well in advance of your date to discuss your reception needs and Or Zarua's House Rules. The Or Zarua Social Hall can seat 100 people.

MEETING WITH RABBI WECHSLER

Rabbi Wechsler will meet with your child three times prior to your date. Approximately two months before your date, you should call the synagogue office to arrange these meetings.

Rabbi Wechsler will meet individually with your child to review preparations. Parents of boys need to purchase a pair of tefillin and the Rabbi will instruct in their use. Rabbi Wechsler will tell you where to buy tefillin.

At the third meeting, we do a full run-through, together with the parents. Please bring with you your list of requests for aliyot. Bar/bat mitzvah families are entitled to two aliyot, not including the bar or bat-mitzvah child. There may be more aliyot available depending on the number of yahrzeits or other simhahs (like a baby naming) in any particular week. Please bring the English and Hebrew names of all people whom you would like to receive aliyot. Please try to include the mother's and father's Hebrew names (i.e. Shoshana bat Israel v'Bracha). It is important that those assigned aliyot know the procedures and blessing involved when called to the Torah. Please ensure that they are fully prepared.

F.A.Q.s

Q. WHAT IS PROPER SHABBAT “ETIQUETTE”?

A. At Or Zarua we refrain from smoking, taking pictures, writing, and using the phone. Bringing gifts, gift envelopes, cameras, and sign-in books to the synagogue is inappropriate on Shabbat. Cellular phones and beepers should be turned off. Physicians who must carry beepers should set them in silent mode.

Q. IS THERE PROPER ATTIRE FOR SYNAGOGUE?

A. Men generally wear business attire (tie and jacket) to synagogue. Women should dress modestly. Children should be neat and dressed nicely.

Q. HOW MANY GUESTS CAN WE INVITE?

A. We can welcome about 100 guests. The Sanctuary seats 225. Approximately 120 people regularly attend Shabbat morning services. In determining the number of guests you can invite, you do not need to count people who regularly attend Shabbat morning services.

Q. DO WE ORDER KIPOT?

A. Or Zarua has plenty of kipot and you need not purchase any. If you decide to order imprinted kipot, it should be done two to three months before the date. Special kipot can also be ordered from Israel. Bring the kipot to the synagogue office the Friday morning before the bar/bat-mitzvah. The kipot will be put out on Shabbat morning.

Q. ARE THERE SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

A. Congregation Or Zarua offers several different age-appropriate children's services each Shabbat. Your guests are most welcome at those services.

F.A.Q.s (CONT.)

Q. DO WE ORDER FLOWERS?

A. Congregation Or Zarua does not use flowers on its Bimah and we ask you not to purchase flowers. Our elegant sanctuary is decorated with its daveners and we have found that to be just the right kind of beauty. We prefer not to use flowers at the Kiddush as well.

Q. DO WE BRING CANDY?

A. Congregation Or Zarua provides soft candy that will be thrown at the bar- or bat-mitzvah child at the conclusion of the blessings over the Torah. Ushers distribute the candy throughout the main floor of the sanctuary.

Q. HOW CAN WE ARRANGE PHOTOGRAPHY?

A. Congregation Or Zarua does not permit photography or video taping on Shabbat. To arrange with Or Zarua to have your photographer meet you at the synagogue during the week prior to your child's bar- or bat-mitzvah date, please call the synagogue office at least one week in advance. Your child's tutor must be present if you want the ark to be opened for your photographs,

Q. WHICH FRIENDS SHOULD MY CHILD INVITE?

A. Children have friends from a variety of places – their school, their camps, their activities, their neighborhoods, and their family. Children should share this simhah with a variety of their friends. However, it is most appropriate for children in Or Zarua's Hebrew School to invite all Hebrew School classmates to their bar/bat-mitzvah service.

Q. WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THE MEGA BAR/BAT-MITZVAH?

A. Or Zarua strongly discourages lavish bar or bat-mitzvah receptions. Modesty is basic to the philosophy of the community, and most of our families have traditionally had a luncheon and often a special children's event.

F.A.Q.s (CONT.)

Q. WHAT IS MY CHILD EXPECTED TO DO IN THE SHABBAT MORNING SERVICE?

- A.** Or Zarua tries to make the bar/bat-mitzvah best suit each individual child's needs and abilities. The general standard is:
- 1) Blessings before and after the Torah reading
 - 2) The maftir portion of the Torah reading
 - 3) Haftarah, with its blessings before and after
- Some children find the maftir too challenging and that is fine. Other children wish to read more of the Torah reading and that is encouraged. Please inform Rabbi Wechsler or Dr. Yaakov Schechter of the details three months in advance.

Q. IS A SHABBAT MORNING SERVICE THE ONLY OPTION FOR AN OR ZARUA BAR/BAT-MITZVAH?

- A.** Again, Or Zarua's philosophy is to make the bar/bat-mitzvah best suit the individual child's and family's needs. Or Zarua has scheduled bar/bat-mitzvahs on Rosh Hodesh. That is particularly useful for families with many relatives who do not drive on Shabbat and who do not live locally. Or Zarua has also scheduled bar/bat-mitzvahs on Shabbat afternoons as well as on Monday and Thursday mornings when it suits the family's needs.

Q. HOW CAN WE ENHANCE THE TRUE MEANING OF THE BAR/BAT-MITZVAH?

- A.** Many parents who are looking for inspiration and meaning in their upcoming simhah and want to reclaim its sense of holy purpose or reacquaint themselves with the customs and meanings of these sacred moments read Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin's book, *Putting God on the Guest List*.

F.A.Q.s (CONT.)

Q. HOW CAN WE PUT THE MITZVAH BACK IN THE BAR/BAT-MITZVAH?

- A.** There are several things that you and your child can do to help put the mitzvah back in the bar- or bat-mitzvah.

Here are some suggestions:

Make sure that any reception you may have outside the building follows the laws of Kashrut. This is a central mitzvah for a Jewish family.

Suggest that your child prepare a “Dvar Torah” on the Torah or Haftarah reading that will be delivered at your reception. A moment of study will transform a meal into a seudat mitzvah, a meal that marks the performance of a mitzvah.

Focus on your child’s continuing education. We have never viewed the bar/bat-mitzvah as a graduation. Rather it is a step to a new and higher level of maturity and involvement in Jewish study and practice.

Your child can perform gemilut chasadim, acts of loving-kindness. Encourage your child to visit someone who has lost a loved one, or to visit or call on someone who is ill. Volunteer as a family to serve at Or Zarua’s Hesed project in the neighborhood.

Go on a Dorot visit with the Congregation. Arrange to have the leftover food from your reception picked up by City Harvest.

Your child can donate a portion of his/her bar- or bat-mitzvah gifts to tzedakah. Think about “Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger” (12401 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 303, Los Angeles, CA 90025-1015).

Plan a family trip to Israel or invest in the “Gift of Israel” for a future trip.

YOUR CHILD'S BAR/BAT-MITZVAH

FRIDAY EVENING SERVICE

Our Friday evening service begins at sundown (but not later than 6:45 P.M.) This service takes one hour and 15 minutes. The Newsletter always notes the starting time.

It is expected that your immediate family will attend, and you may also choose to include extended family and friends at this short service.

Either the bar- or bat-mitzvah child or a family member is invited to lead Kiddush during the service.

If you want to arrange a Friday night Shabbat dinner in our Social Hall, please call the Executive Director.

SHABBAT MORNING SERVICE and KIDDUSH

Our Shabbat morning service begins at 9 am. Your family, and those receiving honors, should be in their seats promptly at this time. The Bat/Bat Mitzvah family traditionally sits in the first row of seats to the right of the Bimah. The Torah service begins at approximately 9:45 A.M. and our services are completed at about 12:15 P.M.

All men are required to wear kipot. Headcoverings are available for women. These are immediately inside the Sanctuary. All Jewish men over age 13 are requested to wear tallitot. These are available at the back of the Sanctuary. The Ushers will assist you and your guests.

Kiddush follows the service. If you are planning a luncheon reception off-site following the service, please expect to spend a few minutes at the Kiddush so that the Or Zarua community can greet you and wish you Mazal Tov.

We look forward to this simhah and to many other simhahs that your family will enjoy as members of Congregation Or Zarua. Mazal Tov!