

CONGREGATION OR ZARUA

BAR/BAT MITZVAH HANDBOOK



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

THE DATE

A girl becomes a *Bat Mitzvah* when she reaches the age of twelve; a boy a *Bar Mitzvah* at thirteen. In truth, therefore, *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is not an event or a ceremony. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* translates as “son or daughter of the commandment,” which means that a child is old enough to be responsible for the *mitzvot*, the commandments that a Jew performs in order to live a Jewish life and to sanctify life.

When your child is ten or so, the synagogue sends a letter asking you for a preference of several *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* dates. These dates should follow as closely as possible your child’s Hebrew birthday. While boys must be at least thirteen, girls may celebrate their Bat Mitzvah at any time after their twelfth birthday. Girls in Jewish Day Schools most frequently mark the event closer to turning twelve while those in secular schools often prefer a date closer to thirteen. We are sensitive to the fact that parents often need to confirm a date with their child’s school two to three years beforehand.

The synagogue office will send a letter confirming your child’s *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* date. In order to hold your date, it is important to return all signed forms by the requested due dates.

THE LESSONS

Children at Congregation Or Zarua prepare for their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* by studying with a private tutor. Please contact the Youth Education Director (iburgess@orzarua.org) for the name of a tutor who will work best with your child. About one year before your child’s *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, you will receive a letter confirming the *Parasha* and *Haftarah* for your child. Your tutor needs to review this letter, and a signed copy must be returned to the office. This will help ensure that your child studies the correct readings. Study then begins about ten months prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. If you believe your child may need a longer period of study because of their Hebrew skills or summer vacation or other extenuating circumstances, contact the Youth Education Director as soon as possible.

FAMILY ATTENDANCE AT SHABBAT SERVICES

You and your child must attend *Shabbat* services regularly prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. The importance of this cannot be overstated. By attending *Shabbat* services, you and your child will become familiar with the service, making the day you are looking forward to even more comfortable for you and your family. You will also become firmly rooted in the life of the Congregation and gain much needed knowledge and meaning from so doing.

REQUIREMENTS

In order to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Congregation Or Zarua, some basic requirements must be met. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- All children must be enrolled in our Religious School or attend an accredited Hebrew Day School up to the time of their *simhah*. This helps insure the child's Hebrew proficiency as well as gives them the formal Jewish foundation that is so important to their growth and development into lifelong Jews.
- Families are encouraged to attend several Friday evening and *Shabbat* morning services at Or Zarua, prior to their own date, so as to become familiar with the nuances of our services and what the expectations are of each child and family. Check our newsletter, website or weekly e-mail blasts for service times as they may differ on Friday nights.
- The family's financial obligations to the synagogue (including all dues, tuitions, rental fees and pledges) must be satisfied at least 90 days prior to the *simhah* date. If special arrangements need to be made, please contact the Executive Director, Helene Santo, (212) 452-2310 x14, as soon as the need becomes apparent.

YOUR CHILD'S BAR/BAT MITZVAH

FRIDAY EVENING SERVICE

Our Friday evening service begins at sundown (but not later than 6:45 pm.) This service takes one hour and fifteen minutes. The OZ newsletter, e-mail blasts and website always note 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/Bat Mitzvah* child or a family member is invited to lead *Kiddush* during the service.

To arrange a Friday night *Shabbat* dinner in our Social Hall, please call the Executive Director.

SHABBAT MORNING SERVICE & 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 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* family traditionally sits in the first row to the right of the *bimah*, as you face the ark. The Torah service begins at approximately 9:45 am and our services are completed at approximately 12:15 pm.

Our sanctuary seats approximately 225 people. Therefore, Bar/Bat Mitzvah families are asked to limit their invitees to no more than 100 people. In so doing, everyone will then have a seat. Additionally, we will not create any fire hazards or violations and insure the safety and well being of all who worship with us enhance the intimacy and warmth of our service and sanctuary.

All men are required to wear *kipot*. Head coverings are also available for women. All Jewish men over age 13 are requested to wear *tallitot*, available at the back of the Sanctuary. Dresses should be modest with no bare shoulders or short skirts.

Kiddush follows the service. If you are planning an off-site luncheon 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*'!

To arrange a Saturday *Shabbat* lunch in our Social Hall, or to order enhancements to our weekly fare, please contact the Executive Director (hsanto@orzarua.org) or Rabbinic Administrative Assistant Deborah Wenger (dwenger@orzarua.org) and they will be happy to assist you.

MEETING WITH RABBI BOLTON

Rabbi Bolton meets with the *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* students four times prior to their *Bat/Bar Mitzvah* services and one time afterwards. About four months before your date, the Administrative Assistant will contact you to set up dates for these meetings.

Parents of boys need to purchase *tefillin* and the Rabbi will instruct in their use. The Rabbi also can tell you where to buy *tefillin*.

At the last meeting, the Rabbi does a full run through with the parents. At that time, please bring your list of requests for *aliyot*. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* families are permitted two *aliyot*, not including the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* child. Depending on the number of *yahrzeits* or other *simhahs* (such as a baby naming) in any particular week there may be additional *aliyot* available on *Shabbat*. Include the English and Hebrew names (*e.g.*, Shoshana bat Israel v'Bracha) of all people you wish to receive *aliyot* (note: it is preferable to have one person per *aliyah*, but we can accommodate up to two people per *aliyah*). It is important that those assigned *aliyot* know the procedures and blessings involved when called to the Torah. Please ensure that everyone is fully prepared. For your convenience, the *brachot* and melodies may be downloaded from our website. Transliteration is also available for those who require it.

KIDDUSH ARRANGEMENTS

At least one month prior to your child's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, call the Administrative Assistant to discuss your *Kiddush* needs. As Congregation Or Zarua orders food for approximately 100 Congregants, we will need to order additional food to accommodate your guests.

RECEPTION ARRANGEMENTS

The Social Hall may be rented for your *simhah*. This can be a Friday night *Shabbat* dinner, a *Shabbat* afternoon lunch, or a Sunday or *Rosh Hodesh* brunch. Please contact the Executive Director well in advance of your date to discuss your needs. Note that the Or Zarua Social Hall seats approximately 90 people for a buffet-style meal. Lists of approved caterers and rental rates are available from Executive Director Helene Santo, (212) 452-2310 x14.

FAQs

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 child's needs and abilities. The general standard, in order, is:

Blessings before and after the Torah reading.
The *maftir* portion of the Torah reading.
Haftarah, with its blessings before and after.

Some children find the *maftir* too challenging, which is fine. Other children may wish to read more of the Torah. This should be discussed with your tutor, the Youth Education Director or Rabbi.

Q. WHAT IS PROPER SHABBAT "ETIQUETTE"?

A. At Or Zarua we refrain from smoking, taking pictures, writing, and using the phone on *Shabbat*. Bringing gifts, gift envelopes, cameras, and sign-in books to the synagogue also is inappropriate on *Shabbat*. Cellular phones and beepers should be turned off. Physicians who must carry beepers should set them on silent mode. Men should wear kipot and tallitot when in the sanctuary and they are available in the vestibules just outside the sanctuary entrances.

Q. IS THERE PROPER ATTIRE FOR SYNAGOGUE?

A. Men generally wear business attire (tie and jacket) to synagogue. Women should dress modestly, with skirts being at or below the knee and shoulders covered, and children should be neatly dressed. The family should communicate these guidelines to all of their invited guests so that everyone is in compliance and no one feels uncomfortable while in our midst.

Q. HOW MANY GUESTS CAN WE INVITE?

A. Our Sanctuary seats approximately 225 people. In addition to the regular attendees on *Shabbat* mornings, we can welcome about 100 guests. In order to preserve the intimate feeling and learning environment of Or Zarua, that makes our *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs* so special, it is very important to respect the limitations of our space.

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 these services. Contact the Youth Education Director for the specific offerings on your particular *Shabbat*.

Q. DO WE ORDER KIPOT?

A. Or Zarua provides *kipot*, and you need not purchase any. If you order special *kipot*, please bring them to the synagogue office the week prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, and our staff will put them in the sanctuary for *Shabbat*.

Q. DO WE ORDER FLOWERS?

A. Or Zarua does not use flowers on its *bimah*. Our elegant sanctuary is decorated with its *daveners*, and we have found that to be just the right kind of beauty. We also prefer not to use flowers at the Kiddush.

Q. DO WE BRING CANDY?

A. Or Zarua provides wrapped, soft candy that may be thrown at the *Bar/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. Or Zarua does not permit photography or video taping on *Shabbat*. You can arrange to have your photographer meet you at the synagogue during the week prior to your child's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Please coordinate times with the Administrative Assistant at least three weeks in advance. If you want the ark opened when taking pictures, further arrangements must be made with the Executive Director. Note that furniture on the *bimah* may not be moved.

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 child and family. We have scheduled *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs* on *Rosh Hodesh*, Mondays and Thursdays, *Hanukkah*, and *Hol Hamoed* mornings when the Torah is read. This is particularly useful for families with many relatives from out of town who do not drive on *Shabbat*. The Congregation does not plan *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs* on Festivals because of crowding.

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

A. Or Zarua strongly discourages lavish *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* receptions. Modesty is basic to the philosophy of the community, and most of our families have traditionally had a luncheon and a special children's event following *Shabbat*.

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 can read Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin's book, *Putting God on the Guest List*.

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

A. There are many ways that you and your child can put the *mitzvah* back in the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

Here are some suggestions:

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

Your child can deliver a “*Dvar Torah*” on the Torah or Haftarah reading 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. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is not a graduation, but rather 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:

Volunteer as a family to serve at Or Zarua's neighborhood *Hesed* project.

Join the Congregation on a *Dorot* visit.

Arrange to have the leftover food from your reception picked up by *City Harvest*.

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

Q. WHAT IS THE OR ZARUA BAR/BAT MITZVAH TZEDAKAH PROGRAM?

A. For more information about *mitzvah* projects, please contact the Youth Education Director, Ilana Burgess (iburgess@orzarua.org).

CONTACT INFORMATION

Website: www.orzarua.org

The synagogue's main phone number is: **(212) 452-2310**. The fax number is: **(212) 452-2103**

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We hope you have found this information to be of value in understanding and planning your upcoming *simhah*.

If there are other elements you feel we've overlooked or areas that could use enhancing or improvement, please don't hesitate to bring them to our attention.

Once again, Mazal Tov! We look forward to sharing this wonderful event with you and your child and hope that it is just one of many we celebrate together.