

Congregation Kol Ami
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania



AN INTIMATE AND DYNAMIC COMMUNITY

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Letter from Rabbi Leah R. Berkowitz</i>	Page 3
<i>History of B'nai Mitzvah</i>	Page 4-5
<i>Keeping B'nai Mitzvah in Perspective</i>	Page 6
<i>The B'nai Mitzvah Process: Requirements and Expectations</i>	Pages 7-11
<i>Other Information & Details</i>	Pages 11-12

APPENDICIES

<i>The Tzedakah Project: Ways to Enrich the Mitzvah</i>	Pages 14-23
<i>Aliyah Primer</i>	Pages 24-27
<i>Student Tracking Sheet</i>	Page 28
<i>B'nai Mitzvah d'var Torah Preparation</i>	Page 29-33
<i>S'udat Mitzvah: Reception Suggestions</i>	Pages 34-37

A Letter from Rabbi Berkowitz

Shalom *B'nai Mitzvah* Families!

We are about to embark upon an incredible adventure together. In the near future, your child(ren) will be called to the Torah as *B'nai Mitzvah*, a literally a “child of the commandments.” Today, however, we understand the word *mitzvah* as a “sacred obligation,” the responsibility we take upon ourselves to live our best lives, support our community, and help change the world for the better.

We are so looking forward to learning with your child(ren), and from them, as they read from the Torah, lead our worship service, share with us their thoughts on the weekly Torah portion, and inspire us to acts of *tikun olam* with their *tzedakah* project.

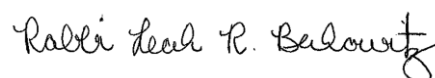
When a person is called to the Torah to recite the blessings before and after the reading, that honor is called an *aliyah*. The word *aliyah* means “going up.” This has a practical explanation, of course: going up to the *bimah* usually involves climbing a few stairs. But there is a spiritual component to this as well. There is an understanding that, when you come up to the *bimah*, you are ascending to a higher spiritual plane.

Your child(ren)’s *B'nai Mitzvah* is a moment of ascent, both for your child and for your family. This is your child(ren)’s moment to “step up” in front of our entire community and show that they are ready to accept the responsibilities of Jewish adulthood. It is also your family’s moment to “step up”—by helping your child(ren) to prepare to accept these responsibilities, by celebrating your child(ren)’s entrance into this new role, and by sharing your own Jewish values with your child(ren) so that they can begin to develop their own Jewish identity.

The rabbis say that “The world stands on three things—on learning, on worship, and on acts of lovingkindness” (Pirke Avot 1:2). The *B'nai Mitzvah* process we have designed—and the guidelines we have included in this handbook—will provide your child(ren), and your family, the opportunity to engage in each of these primary Jewish acts, both on your own and as a part of the Congregation Kol Ami Community.

Becoming *B'nai Mitzvah* can be a meaningful and inspiring journey, and it can be a challenging and scary one. All of us at Congregation Kol Ami are here to be your partners in navigating the ups and downs of preparing your child(ren) and your family for this sacred moment. Please do not hesitate to contact us when you need help or have concerns. We are here to support you and to celebrate your child(ren) as they reach this important milestone.

B'hatzlacha (May you have great success)!



Rabbi Leah R. Berkowitz

A HISTORY OF THE B'NAI MITZVAH CEREMONIES

Compiled by Bert Wagner

All societies determine a specific age that separates childhood from adulthood—the age when an individual assumes their religious and communal responsibilities to the society in which they live. Like most traditions, the ceremonies connected with becoming a *B'nai Mitzvah* at age thirteen evolved over time. It has always been viewed as one moment in the process of spiritual growth and commitment to the Jewish people.

The establishment of becoming a *Bar Mitzvah* at thirteen years plus one day for boys and a *Bat Mitzvah* at twelve years plus one day for girls has several origins. The *Talmud* records that during the time of the Second Temple (520 B.C.E.–70 C.E.), it was traditional for Sages to bless a child who had completed his first fast day at the age of twelve or thirteen. In *Pirkei Avot* (“Ethics of the Fathers,” second century C.E.) it is written, “At thirteen one is ready to do *mitzvot*.” By the time the *Talmud* was completed in the sixth century C.E., boys of thirteen years plus one day had assumed full responsibility for performing the *mitzvot*, hence the term *Bar Mitzvah*, “son of the commandment.” This also had legal ramifications: These boys were now counted in a *minyan* and could act as witnesses. There was no formal rite, only a public blessing by the father that he was no longer responsible for his son’s adherence to these sacred obligations, of Judaism.

The earliest *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony consisted of blessing and reading the last section of the weekly portion of the *Torah*, the *maftir*, meaning the extra reading, since the boy was not a *Bar mMitzvah* until after the service, and reading the *haftarah* portion. The most important part of the rite was a *d'rashah* or *d'var Torah*, a sermonette on the *Torah* or *haftarah* portion. Since the *Bar Mitzvah* was assuming adult religious responsibilities, he was expected to show his understanding of those responsibilities to his family and, more importantly, to the community. Structurally, the *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony is essentially the same as it originally was. It wasn’t until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that we find records of a *Bar Mitzvah* being invited to lead part of the worship service.

A public ceremony in celebration of a girl becoming a *Bat Mitzvah*, “daughter of the commandment,” did not come into formal being in North America until 1922. Dr. Judith Kaplan-Eisenstein, the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, blessed and read the *Torah* portion from a book “at a respectable distance” from the *Torah* scroll. The regular celebration of girls becoming *B'not Mitzvah* came into prominence in Reform congregations particularly in the second half of the 20th century and is generally identical in form to the celebration of a *Bar Mitzvah*. **[Rabbi Berkowitz’s Note:** Since we in the Reform movement strive to be egalitarian, we now require that all students—regardless of gender—turn 13 before becoming *B'nai Mitzvah*.]

It should be noted that the rite of confirmation originated in the Reform Movement in Germany in 1810 and included girls in 1817. Since it was felt that a thirteen-year-old was too young to understand the precepts of Judaism, the celebration of a boy becoming a *Bar Mitzvah* was dropped in favor of confirmation, which was held at age sixteen or seventeen because that was deemed a more mature age to assume the responsibilities of Judaism. Today, most congregations hold both ceremonies.

Historically, all joyous occasions were celebrated in some manner, and becoming a *B'nai Mitzvah* was no exception. However, unlike weddings at which we are commanded to rejoice with bride and groom, the *B'nai Mitzvah* has no such mandate. In early years the celebrations varied from a simple *Kiddush* of wine, brandy, and cake following the service to more elaborate meals for the family and friends. The Rabbis urged families not to have elaborate celebrations and always to provide for the poor in order to fulfill the *mitzvah*. The *d'rashah* was delivered by the *B'nai Mitzvah* some time during the celebration in order to emphasize its religious aspects. Gifts were generally limited to books, or religious items, or “sermon gifts,” which were small amounts of money given as thanks for the sermonette. Among Moroccan Jews, this money was given to the boy’s teacher.

Historically, *B'nai Mitzvah* has been viewed as a first step in a young person's acceptance of the obligations to family and community as a responsible Jew. It was and should continue to be the beginning of a lifetime of the performance of *mitzvot*, study, prayer, and a commitment to share the destiny of the Jewish people.

KEEPING B'NAI MITZVAH IN PERSPECTIVE

(Adapted from the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Handbook: A Manual for Parent and Student,
Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ)

- **B'nai Mitzvah Is About Accepting the Responsibilities of Jewish Adulthood.** This is the bottom line of *becoming a B'nai Mitzvah*. It's not about acquiring the skills of reading *Torah*, saying prayers, or writing speeches. It's about acquiring the skill of responding to a challenge: taking on the *mitzvah*, the sacred obligation, of leading our community for a Shabbat. This is how Judaism defines maturity.
- **The Torah Is the Center of Judaism.** Everything we do as Jews, everything we believe, everything we value revolves around the *Torah*. The *Torah* is the testimony of our people's encounter with God. However, you interpret those events in the wilderness of Sinai some three millennia ago, what cannot be dismissed is the sacredness with which our ancestors have embraced this legacy. This is why the first *mitzvah* we expect our children to fulfill is to stand at the *Torah*.
- **B'nai Mitzvah Is a Community Observance.** It is not by coincidence that we choose to hold this initiation ceremony in public. To be a Jew means to live within a covenantal relationship—not only with God but with other Jews as well. *B'nai Mitzvah* marks the entry of the child as a full-fledged member of the community. The awarding of an *aliyah*, (“going up to the *Torah*”), is a gift of the Jewish people. For this reason, the marking of the child's coming of age takes place in the synagogue—the communal home.
- **The B'nai Mitzvah Ceremony Is Not a Performance: It's a Celebration.** The synagogue is not a theater, and the *bimah* is not a stage, and the congregation is not an audience. We are a community that comes together for *Shabbat* and festivals, to celebrate the *simchas* of our neighbors, and to support each other through difficult times. We are all here to support one another. Therefore, only *mistake* one can make at a *B'nai Mitzvah* is to lose sight of this truth.
- **Try to Think of the Reception That Follows Not as a Separate Event but as a Continuation of the Celebration.** The formal name for the meal after a *B'nai Mitzvah* is a *s'udat mitzvah*. This meal is in honor of the performance of a *mitzvah*. It, too, is a sacred gathering. This is not to say that it must be solemn; it *is* to say, however, that the spirit of the celebration should be perpetuated through the performance of *mitzvot*. The recitation of the blessings and the setting aside of a portion of one's bounty for the poor demonstrate that the celebration was not an isolated event but a standard from which to follow.

[Rabbi Berkowitz's Note: Remember, also, that the celebration is meant to reflect who you are as a family—and who your child is—at this moment in time. You don't have to spend a lot of money, or do something fancy, to impress us. There need not be dancing, drinking, or formalwear if that's not who you are, or if you'd rather save the money for your child's future. You don't have to do what everyone else is doing, especially if you find yourself not being able to include people in your celebration because of cost. A pool party, pizza at a rec hall, a picnic in the park, a trip to a climbing wall, or a casual meal at home—any of these are completely appropriate ways to celebrate this moment that won't break the bank.]

- **The Meaning of Becoming a B'nai Mitzvah Is Enduring Only If It Takes Place within a Context of Continued Jewish Growth.** Being a *B'nai Mitzvah* is not the experience of a lifetime. It is a lifetime experience—a state of being that remains with us throughout our lives. Indeed, the true measure of *performance* comes not on the day one becomes a *B'nai Mitzvah* but in the days that follow. In other words, becoming a *B'nai Mitzvah* should be thought of as a Jewish “commencement,” marking not an end point but a beginning—a beginning of a lifetime of *mitzvot*, a beginning of a lifetime of learning. As such, it is our firm belief that the *B'nai Mitzvah* celebration is validated and enhanced by a commitment to continue religious education in our Confirmation Academy and participation in our Temple Youth Group.

“THE B’NAI MITZVAH PROCESS”

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

The Board of Trustees of Congregation Kol Ami has enacted the following standards for *B’nai Mitzvah*:

Academic: Our *B’nai Mitzvah* must have at least four years (or the equivalent) of regular attendance in a religious school preceding their *B’nai Mitzvah* year and must be attending a recognized religious school during the year of their *B’nai Mitzvah*.

Membership: Only children of members in good standing will have a date assigned for a *B’nai Mitzvah* at Congregation Kol Ami. Parents of the *B’nai Mitzvah* candidate must be Congregation members in good standing in order for their children to become *B’nai Mitzvah* at the synagogue. All financial commitments to Kol Ami must be paid in full sixty (60) days prior to a child’s *B’nai Mitzvah* ceremony. This includes dues for the year, as well as all Religious School tuition and *B’nai Mitzvah* fees. The Board of Trustees sets the *B’nai Mitzvah* fee annually, and you will be informed in a timely manner.

The *B’nai Mitzvah* fee covers the tutoring and training to prepare your child for the service.

Any special tutoring that is necessary on top of what we provide will be at the parents’ expense.

Attendance at Shabbat Services: While the *B’nai Mitzvah* service celebrates the themes of the *Shabbat* liturgy that we read and sing throughout the year, there is a certain choreography to this service that requires familiarity well before the child’s special day dawns.

At Congregation Kol Ami, the *B’nai Mitzvah* leads virtually the entire service. This comes as a result of months of study and rehearsal with Rabbi Berkowitz.

During the service, both family and friends will have the opportunity to participate in the service by opening and closing the ark, handing down the *Torah* “from generation to generation,” undressing and dressing the *Torah*, blessing the *Torah*, and speaking to the *B’nai Mitzvah*. It is our fond hope that the *B’nai Mitzvah* and the family will also be able to join with the congregation in singing the *Shabbat* melodies of the service, born of familiarity with the *Shabbat* service. Since the *B’nai Mitzvah* will be seated on the *bimah* facing the congregation, both familiarity with our *Shabbat* songs and participation in singing them is important during the service.

To ensure that every family is comfortable with the rituals of our *Shabbat* worship, we require that every *B’nai Mitzvah* candidate and their parent(s) attend at least four (4) *Shabbat* services in each year of grades three through ten. During each of the two years prior to a child’s *B’nai Mitzvah*, two of those services must be *B’nai Mitzvah* services at Kol Ami to ensure familiarity with our services. These services include the High Holy Days Services, *Shabbat* and holiday services, and our Student Choir services, in which they and/or their classmates might be participating. Students *Shabbat* service attendance cards are available on the cabinet outside of the Sanctuary. It is the student’s responsibility to have their card signed by Rabbi Berkowitz or any member of the Board of Trustees or usher after each service and then return the signed card to the file box.

B'nai Mitzvah Preparation:

A year prior to the date of your child's *B'nai Mitzvah* ceremony, Rabbi Berkowitz will arrange to meet with you and your child. At that time, she will review the service and the prayers for which your child will be responsible in both English and Hebrew. In addition, the rabbi will give your child their *Torah* and *Haftarah* Portions. At this meeting, you and the rabbi will schedule weekly meetings for your child over a 10-month period, adhering to the following timetable: 10 meetings with Rabbi Berkowitz, 10 with a tutor, six with the rabbi, six with the tutor, then 4-6 rehearsals in the sanctuary.

Ten months prior:

Weekly 30-minute meetings will commence with Rabbi Berkowitz to explore and discuss the themes in the *Torah* Portion (determined by the date of the *B'nai Mitzvah*) and the *Haftarah* Portion (a selection from the Prophets or Writings which reflect a theme found in the *Torah* Portion). At the conclusion of the first round of studying with the rabbi, the *B'nai Mitzvah* will select at least twelve verses from the *Torah* Portion which are of the greatest interest to them. These will be the verses that will be read or chanted during the *B'nai Mitzvah* ceremony.

Eight months prior:

The *B'nai Mitzvah* will be responsible for refining fluent readings of all the Hebrew and English prayers found in the *Shabbat* service, as well as the blessings for the *Torah* and *Haftarah*. At the same time, they will begin to practice reading or chanting the verses that have been selected from the *Torah* Portion – initially with vowels, and eventually without vowels – as well as the verses from the *Haftarah*. During this time frame, the student will study the *Haftarah* Portion with the rabbi and will choose at least ten verses to read or chant at the *B'nai Mitzvah* service.

Six months prior:

The *B'nai Mitzvah* will be able to read the Hebrew and English prayers with competence and confidence. They will also be able to read or chant the *Torah* Portion and the *Haftarah* Portion, with vowels.

The *B'nai Mitzvah* will continue to review the reading of the Hebrew prayers of the service, as well as the *Haftarah* Portion. The transition will also be made from reading the *Torah* text with vowels to reading it without vowels which is how it appears in the *Torah*.

The *B'nai Mitzvah* will continue to craft their speech in response to questions posed by the rabbi. Eventually these written thoughts will be edited in a form suitable for presentation during the service.

Within three months of the *B'nai Mitzvah* ceremony, the student should feel quite confident about their ability to read the *Torah* text without vowels, while simultaneously refining their ability to read the prayers, the blessings, and *Haftarah* Portion in Hebrew as well.

Two months prior:

The *B'nai Mitzvah* will begin to rehearse the complete service in the sanctuary as it will be celebrated, paying particular attention to cues, to develop comfort with the choreography of the service.

One month prior:

The *B'nai Mitzvah* will continue to meet with Rabbi Berkowitz to rehearse the service in the sanctuary, approximately six times, more or less as needed. These rehearsals will include reading or chanting the *Torah* Portion from the Kol Ami *Torah*. One hour prior to the ceremony,

the rehearsal will include everyone who will have a part in the service.

Trope: During the 6th grade year, our Cantorial Soloist, Rebecca Schwartz teaches a Trope (Cantillation) Class during Wednesday Hebrew School. This class will teach them the fundamentals of *Torah* Trope reading that will allow them to not only chant their own chosen *B'nai Mitzvah* portions, but many in the future as well.

D'var Torah (Presentation on the Torah or Haftarah Portion): The *D'var Torah* will be written by the *B'nai Mitzvah*, though certainly in consultation with the family. The majority of the speech will be based on the twelve or more verses that they choose to read or chant from the *Torah*, addressing why those particular verses were chosen, the context in which they are found, and the meaning that the *B'nai Mitzvah* discovers in them, as well as responses to other questions posed by the rabbi.

The *B'nai Mitzvah* may also be asked to write about lessons learned from their family, pride in Jewish identity, their commitment to *tzedakah* and/or their *mitzvah* project, and their hopes for the future. The "*D'var Torah*" will also include a statement of gratitude to members of the family. We encourage students to keep these thanks concise and general so as not to make anyone feel left out. More detailed "thank yous" might take place during the reception, through toasts or a candlelighting ceremony.

The Hour Prior to The Ceremony: This rehearsal is absolutely vital, both to calm the *B'nai Mitzvah* and to rehearse parts which have been assigned as honors to members and/or friends of the family.

At this rehearsal, the rabbi will meet with everyone who has a part in the service in order to familiarize them with what they are doing, when they are to be called to the *bimah*, or to the *Torah* Readers Table, and to literally "walk through" their parts. This includes asking those to be honored with *Aliyot* ("*Aliyahs*") – blessings over the *Torah* – to learn the proper procedure for coming to the *bimah* as well as the opportunity to practice their reading or chanting of the blessings; where members of the immediate family will stand for the handing down of the *Torah*; and the appropriate place for the parental words and blessing.

Rehearsals ensure that everyone feels comfortable and confident participating in our services, and also ensures that the service will run in a smooth and dignified way.

The Time and Duration of The Service: You will need to determine whether you would like to celebrate your child's *B'nai Mitzvah* on a Friday evening, Saturday morning, or early Saturday evening. The Saturday evening service is a bit shorter because the liturgy is briefer, though it does include the *Havdalah* service (braided candle, wine and spices). All services include readings from the *Torah* and the *Haftarah*, as well as having the *B'nai Mitzvah* lead the congregation in virtually all of the English and Hebrew portions of the service.

- ***The Friday evening Kabbalat Shabbat service commences at 7:30 p.m. and will conclude by approximately 9:15 p.m.***
- ***The Saturday morning Shacharit service begins at 10:00 a.m. and concludes by approximately 12:15 p.m.***
- ***The Saturday evening Mincha service will begin at 5:00 p.m. and will conclude by approximately 6:45 p.m.***

Location: All *B'nai Mitzvah* services take place in our sanctuary. The address is:

8201 High School Road
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania 19027

Please request that your guests arrive fifteen minutes before the service is scheduled to begin to ensure that they arrive in a timely manner.

Dress and Decorum: Our *B'nai Mitzvah*, their families, and their guests are encouraged to dress appropriately for a house of worship. One might wear a button-down shirt and dress pants, with a jacket and/or tie, or a suit. One might also wear a dress, skirt suit, or skirt-and-top-outfit that completely covers the shoulders (regardless of whether one plans to wear a *tallit* over it) and reaches at least to just above the knee. Our primary goal is for our *B'nai Mitzvah* to feel comfortable and confident in whatever they choose to wear.

Please make sure your child's shoes are comfortable and sturdy enough to stand and walk in, as they will be standing on the *bimah* for a long time, and walking up and down stairs carrying the *Torah* scroll. You might want to bring your child's shoes to the last few rehearsals to practice!

Parents are urged to speak with their child(ren) about proper decorum for this special day. In addition, students should speak in advance to their peers about the sanctity of the service and appropriate service behavior. We will remind all guests at the beginning of the service to turn off electronic devices and put them away during the service.

Photographs And Video: Photographs may be taken during the rehearsal prior to the service but not during the service. Videotaping is permitted in the back of the sanctuary. Please speak to Elaine Stevens, Executive Director, prior to the day of the service to determine the proper location.

Flowers: We would love for each family to provide floral arrangements for the sanctuary. Please speak to Elaine Stevens, Executive Director, regarding arrangements.

Home Study: All of these responsibilities require study time with your child's tutor and the Rabbi but most importantly, study time at home. We suggest your child devote a minimum of ½ hour five days a week towards their *B'nai Mitzvah* responsibilities. In order that last minute pressures and preparations can be avoided, regular daily practice is essential!

***Mitzvah* as Part of the *B'nai Mitzvah*:** A *mitzvah* is a sacred obligation, a commitment, according to Jewish law. Some of the most important *mitzvot* are *tzedakah*—the pursuit of justice—and *gemilut chasadim*—acts of loving-kindness. As your child approaches the age of *B'nai Mitzvah*, the performance of *mitzvot* should become a significant part of their studies. During the *B'nai Mitzvah* year, the students will be asked to choose a personal *Mitzvah* Project. This Project should reflect the individual's interests and talents if at all possible.

Mitzvah projects include an active component such as volunteering at a nursing home, hospital or shelter, collecting canned food for the hungry or clothing for the homeless, planting trees in Israel, or contributing to a worthy cause within the Jewish or general community. By practicing *mitzvot*, we hope that students begin a life-long habit of doing deeds of loving kindness for those around them. Remember that the responsibility of *mitzvot* begins at the age of *B'nai Mitzvah* but should continue for a lifetime. We expect that each *B'nai Mitzvah* candidate will commit to a specific *mitzvah/tzedakah* project.

Ten months before the child's *B'nai Mitzvah*, we will arrange a meeting between the *B'nai Mitzvah* student, parent(s), and the rabbi. At this meeting, we will present an overview of the *mitzvah* project process. From this moment on, the family and rabbi will remain in communication about the status of this project, determining goals, setting due dates, and ensuring that the project is completed successfully. While it is understood that time obligations vary depending on the specific project, each project should require no less than 13 hours of commitment.

We hope that you, the parent, will actively participate with your child in their performance of *mitzvot* by offering advice, time for discussion and reflection and transportation when needed. Please refrain from organizing the entire project for your child. This is a great opportunity for students to learn how to communicate with adults and think through a project from start to finish. Students are encouraged to talk about their *mitzvah* project as part of their *Dvar Torah*.

The *B'nai Mitzvah* Ceremony – Part of the Bigger Picture of Congregational Life: Your child's *simcha* is an important part of the ongoing life cycle and religious life of Congregation Kol Ami. The *B'nai Mitzvah* is one aspect of the worship service. In addition, other occasions in the lives of Kol Ami families may also be recognized at services (i.e., special birthdays, anniversaries, baby namings, *aufruf* for a wedding, etc.). We see this as a double *simcha*, double joy, for our congregation and the entire Kol Ami family. Your familiarity with the entire worship service, not only your child's or your part, is essential in order for you to understand the meaning of this occasion. It is especially important to attend *Shabbat* services regularly with your child during the year leading up to your child's *B'nai Mitzvah*. This will ensure your familiarity with the service, in addition to giving your child a positive message about being part of a community. Family attendance and participation in congregational life reinforce the messages of Jewish identity and continuity.

The *B'nai Mitzvah* & Hebrew School: Students need to understand that it is their responsibility to finish the school year after their *B'nai Mitzvah* in order for them to complete the Congregation Kol Ami Religious School program and be eligible for the Confirmation Academy Program. If a student becomes *B'nai Mitzvah* prior to the end of the Religious school year, the student and the family accept the obligation of completing the rest of the school year with regular attendance to Religious School.

A Donation to Congregation Kol Ami: *Tzedakah*

One of the concepts that Rabbi Berkowitz and our *B'nai Mitzvah* students discuss is the Reform Movement's emphasis on what is called "Prophetic Judaism": the words of Isaiah, Micah, Amos and Jeremiah, which encourage us to share our blessings and care for those who are vulnerable, to be sources of blessings for our People and for all people who, like us, are created in the Divine Image.

In keeping with this, we encourage our *B'nai Mitzvah* celebrants to make a contribution to an organization or charity meaningful to you and your family. There are many appropriate funds at Kol Ami which would benefit our congregation or others in the greater community which you might consider. Some are listed on the next page:

Funds:

Should you wish to make a contribution to any of the congregation's funds, please send your gift to Ms. Elaine Stevens, Executive Director, 8201 High School Road, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania 19027

ADULT EDUCATION FUND: Enables us to provide lifelong educational programming focused on Jewish history and contemporary issues.

ARTS AND CULTURE FUND: Enables us to provide funding for cultural programs, including music and arts, the preservation and maintenance of artwork within the synagogue, and the beautification of the meditation garden.

B'NAI MITZVAH AND CONFIRMATION FUND: Enables us to provide appropriate gifts (books, *kiddush* cups, and *Shabbat* candlesticks) when our young adults celebrate their *B'nai Mitzvah* and Confirmation.

'DISCOVER ISRAEL' FUND: Enables us to provide scholarships to enable children of our members to participate in approved peer-group trips to Israel.

FAMILY CAMP WEEKEND FUND: Enables us to underwrite the cost of Family Camp Weekend programs and to welcome specialists on a "weekend away" to explore a Jewish theme with our rabbi.

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION FUND: Enables us to offer age-appropriate programs to our religious school students. A variety of educational initiatives will be sponsored including but not limited to speaker programs, intolerance awareness, and travel to memorial museums/sites - all with a focus on its current relevance.

LIBRARY FUND: Enables us to purchase educational material for our members.

ONEG SHABBAT FUND: Enables us to provide refreshments following *Shabbat* services.

RABBI'S DISCRETIONARY FUND: Enables Rabbi Berkowitz to give *tzedakah* to those in need, in the name of the Congregation, to provide support to synagogue programming and scholarships for Jewish experiences for our members.

RABBI'S EMPOWERMENT AND VISION FUND: Enables Rabbi Berkowitz to create meaningful experiences rooted in the Jewish story. Create a giving opportunity where funds can go to our general operations and support Rabbi Berkowitz to fulfill her passions and Kol Ami's vision.

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL FUND: Enables us to provide resources and programs for the benefit of our children in the religious school.

SYNAGOGUE FUND: Enables us to provide for the general well-being of the Congregation.

YOUTH FUND: Enables us to provide scholarships to enable children of our members to participate in Jewish enrichment experiences at camps, youth enclaves, and other programs.

We are aware that you will have many questions as the *B'nai Mitzvah* process continues. We are here to help you and to assure your family that the day of your *simcha* will be beautiful, meaningful and long remembered. We look forward to celebrating your child's becoming a *B'nai Mitzvah* with you and your family!

APPENDICIES

WAYS TO ENRICH THE MITZVAH

“Here I am, send me”

The idea of *mitzvah*, which can mean “commandment” or “sacred obligation,” is central to Jewish identity. It is one of the most important ideas Judaism gave to the world: A relationship with God entails mutual responsibility. It involves giving of ourselves admirably.

We have provided a list of things to do and organizations that you and your family might consider. If you don’t know about these organizations, research a few. Learn about and experience *tzedaka*, “pursuing justice,” *gemilut chasadim*, “acts of lovingkindness,” and *tikkun olam*, “repairing the world.” The Social Action committee is available as a trusted resource as you take on adult Jewish responsibilities. What we do shapes who we are. Have fun making Jewish values real!

The following list of Kol Ami Social Justice Programs provides examples of what our community has been engaged in over the years. This will start the conversation as you find your own personal way to make your contribution. The most important thing is that you genuinely feel good in the work you do. That you feel connected to Jews, past and present, to our Jewish tradition. *Mitzvot* teach us to sanctify life, bring families together and foster altruism and self-esteem, crucial to the life of the *B’nai Mitzvah*.

- *Gemilut chasadim* often involves giving of your time, feeling communal solidarity by imitating God’s concern for the world:
 - a. Become active in the Youth Group
 - b. Visit the elderly—family members, a neighbor, a loved one
 - c. Work on a sustainability project
 - d. Work in a soup kitchen
 - e. Collect needed items for those less fortunate
 - f. Plan projects during Mitzvah Day
 - g. Participate in a walk-a-thon or race for your personal cause

- *Tzedakah*, the *mitzvah* of pursuing justice through sacred giving, is also a sacred obligation in Judaism:
 - a. Help the hungry, the poor, the elderly, the homeless
 - b. Support medical research and medical support groups
 - c. Support inclusive programs
 - d. Support Jewish causes

Kol Ami Social Justice Activities

Animal Care

The National Greyhound Adoption
SPCA
Sam's Hope
Thorncroft Equestrian Center for Therapeutic Riding

Children and Families

Big Brothers/Big Sisters
Calcutta House
Cradles to Crayons
Head Start
Heart to Heart
Interfaith Housing Alliance
Jenkintown Day Nursery
Jewish Family and Children Services
Our Brothers Place
Project H.O.M.E.
People's Emergency Center
The Recovery Residence at St. Elizabeth's
Ruby's Kids
The Baby Bureau

Community Care, Screenings, Walks

Elkins Park Library
Susanna DeLaurentis Walk-A-Thon
United Cerebral Palsy Association
Million Mom March
Medbridge Medical & Physical Rehab
Planned Parenthood SE PA
Plant a Seed Foundation
Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth
Sara Smiles
Victor Center for Prevention of Jewish Genetic Diseases- Einstein Med Center

Drives

American Red Cross Blood Drive
Cell Phone Collection
Foster-a-foster child toy drive
High Holy Day and Passover Food Drives
St. Christopher's Hospital for Children – Book and Toy Drive
Operation Paperback

Packages for Cuba
Winter Coat Drive
Marines Toys for Tots

Education

Philadelphia Education Fund - Scholars college-mentoring program

Environment

High School Park
The Village of Arts & Humanities

Gun Control

CeaseFire PA

Holocaust

Jewish Foundation for the Righteous
US Holocaust Memorial Museum

Hunger/Homelessness

Act Against Hunger
Bethesda Broad
Cook for a Friend
Cookies for Overseas
Greater Philadelphia Food Bank
Habitat for Humanity
Manna on Main Street
Mitzvah Food Pantry
Pathways to Housing PA
Philabundance
Stop Hunger Now
Share Food Program
Ronald McDonald House
Jewish Relief Agency

Inclusion/Special Needs

Cheltenham Little League- Challenger's Division
Children's Hemiplegia & Stroke Assoc
Horsham Challenger Little League
ICan Shine
J/CHAI – Jewish Community Home for Adult Independence
Palooza Activity Center, Inc.
One America

Israel

Aleh

Friends of United Hatzalah of Israel

Friends of Yemin Orde

Israel Lacrosse Assoc

Israel Tennis Centers

Mifalot-sports to enhance self-confidence

HIAS

Seniors

Abramson Center

Hosts for Hospitals

Jeanes Vital Age Senior Adult Day Care Center

Summersgate

Willow Lake Assisted Living Residence

Philadelphia Geriatric Center, OYR

“ON THREE THINGS THE WORLD STANDS: ON LEARNING, ON PRAYER, AND ON ACTS OF LOVINGKINDNESS.”—
PIRKE AVOT 1:2

TZEDAKAH PROJECT

B'NAI MITZVAH |
EXPECTATIONS:

1. Design a project that uses your unique talents and interests, and partners with a local or national organization, to directly help our community and the world around you.
2. Submit a project proposal to the Rabbi.
3. Complete at least 13 hours of community service related to your project. Fill out the form below describing what you did for each hour and have it signed by a parent or an adult with whom you are volunteering.
4. Reflect on your project, how it felt for you and how it helped others, by journaling after each experience of working on your project.
5. Submit this task sheet and your reflections, along with a one-page summary of your experience, to the rabbi (**6 weeks prior to B'nai Mitzvah**)

WHERE DO I START? Go through the steps below with an adult.

1. **Brainstorm**—Make a list: What are issues that I see in my community that need my attention?
2. **Decide**—Choose one issue from your list: What issue am I most passionate about?
3. **Research**—Go online or ask an adult: What organization or group in my community is doing something to address this issue?
4. **Connect**—Contact one of the groups from your research: What does this group need that I might be able to help them get?
5. **Think**—Consider your own talents, interests, and skills: How can I use what I love and what I'm good at to help this organization to get what they need?
6. **Design**—Make a plan: What will I do to help this organization in my community? What time, skills, materials, and help do I need to make this happen?
7. **Do**—Put your plan into action! Make sure it includes 13 hours of service!
8. **Reflect**—After each experience, write or record (audio, video, photo) what your experience was like: What did I do? Who did I help? How did I feel? What did I learn?
9. **Present**—Take your reflections and prepare a one-page (or a short video or podcast) reflection for the rabbi. Use the questions from #8, as well as question #10 below.
10. **Continue**—Think of how you might continue this project as an adult: What will be my involvement with this issue, cause, or organization in the future? How will I take what I've learned to make the world a better place?

“ON THREE THINGS THE WORLD STANDS: ON LEARNING, ON PRAYER, AND ON ACTS OF LOVINGKINDNESS.” —
 PIRKE AVOT 1:2

TZEDAKAH PROJECT

B'NAI MITZVAH TRACKING SHEET |

STUDENT NAME: _____

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR YOUR PROJECT AND WHY?):

TZEDAKAH EXPERIENCE	DATE	REFLECTION	PARENT INITIALS
Brainstorm a project idea with your parent(s).	[Date]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Submit a proposal to the Rabbi	[Date]	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	

TZEDAKAH EXPERIENCE	DATE	REFLECTION	PARENT INITIALS
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Bring your tracking sheet, journal, and one-page reflection to the Rabbi	6 weeks before <i>B'nai</i> <i>Mitzvah</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Speak about your <i>Tzedakah</i> project at your bar/bat mitzvah	<i>B'nai Mitzvah</i> day!	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

“ON THREE THINGS THE WORLD STANDS: ON LEARNING, ON PRAYER, AND ON ACTS OF LOVINGKINDNESS.” — PIRKE AVOT 1:2

TZEDAKAH PROJECT

B'NAI MITZVAH TRACKING SHEET |

STUDENT NAME: _____

SAMPLE JOURNAL PAGE:

DATE _____ ACTIVITY _____

1. What did I do today?

2. Who did I help today? How did I help them?

3. How did I feel while I was doing this? Why?

4. What did I learn today? Will I do anything differently next time?

ALIYAH PRIMER

Below are the basic fundamentals of being called to the *Torah* (*Aliyah* - Hebrew) at Congregation Kol Ami. Meaning to “go up” or “ascend,” *aliyah* also implies a spiritual ascent. An *aliyah* is considered to be one of the most sacred privileges in Judaism. Consequently, you must be Jewish and “of age” (i.e., a *B’nai Mitzvah*) to qualify for an *aliyah*. Indeed, the ceremony of *b’nai mitzvah* is a celebration of a child’s first *aliyah*.

Hebrew Name

Proper form requires you to be called to the *Torah* by your Hebrew name. This includes not only your given name but the name(s) of your Jewish parents. The formula would thus be:

For male-identified people	<i>Ya’akov ben Avraham v’Sarah</i>
For female-identified people	<i>Rachel bat Avraham v’Sarah</i>
For gender-non-conforming people	<i>Lior mibeit Avraham v’Sarah</i>

Although Hebrew names are the benchmark for this tradition, Yiddish names are also acceptable.

If a person has converted to Judaism, their “parents” names are *Avraham v’Sarah*.

The First Blessing

Below is the blessing recited in Hebrew prior to the reading of the *Torah*. You should recite the first line, wait for the congregation to respond with the second line, then repeat that second line, and read the rest of the first blessing.

בְּרַכּוּ אֶת יְיָ הַמְּבָרָךְ.

You Start: *Bar’chu et Adonai ham’vorach.*

Bless Adonai who is blessed.

בָּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְּבָרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

Congregation Responds: *Baruch Adonai ham’vorach l’olam va-ed.*

Blessed is Adonai who is blessed now and forever.

בָּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְּבָרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל
הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

You Repeat: *Baruch Adonai ham’vorach l’olam va-ed.*

You Continue: *Baruch atah, Adonai*

Eloheinu, Melech haolam,

asher bachar banu mikol haamim,

v’natan lanu et Torato.

Baruch atah, Adonai, notein haTorah.

(The congregation responds, “Amen.”)

Blessed is Adonai who is blessed now and forever.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has chosen us from among the peoples, and given us the *Torah*. Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the *Torah*.

The Torah Reading

Following the conclusion of the first *b'rachah*, the reader will read the selection from the *Torah* in Hebrew and English. When the *B'nai Mitzvah* is finished, the *B'nai Mitzvah* will indicate that the place where the reading ends.

The Concluding Blessing

Following the reading of the *Torah* selection, the concluding *b'rachah* is offered. Again, the person offering the blessing will touch the place in the *sefer Torah* (scroll) with the *tzitzit* (fringes) of their *tallit* (prayer shawl) or the corner of their *siddur* (prayer book) and may choose to grasp the posts of the Torah scroll while reciting the blessing.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרַת
אֱמֶת, וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נְטִיעַ בְּתוֹכֵנוּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

*Baruch atah, Adonai
Eloheinu, Melech haolam,
asher natan lanu Torat emet,
v'chayei olam nata b'tocheinu.
Baruch atah, Adonai, notein haTorah.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe,
who has given us a Torah of truth, implanting within us eternal life.
Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the Torah.

(The congregation responds, "Amen.")

After the Concluding Blessing

Following the concluding blessing, the *B'nai Mitzvah* will step back from the *Torah* Reader's Table where you may congratulate the *B'nai Mitzvah* before returning to your seats.

A larger print version of the prayers appears on the following pages.

Blessing Before the Torah Reading

בְּרַכּוּ אֶת יְיָ הַמְּבָרָךְ.

Leader: *Bar'chu et Adonai ham'vorach.*

Bless Adonai who is blessed.

בָּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְּבָרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

Congregation: *Baruch Adonai ham'vorach l'olam va-ed.*

Blessed is Adonai who is blessed now and forever.

בָּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְּבָרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל
הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

Leader Repeats: *Baruch Adonai ham'vorach l'olam va-ed.*

Leader Continues: *Baruch atah, Adonai
Eloheinu, Melech haolam,
asher bachar banu mikol haamim,
v'natan lanu et Torato.
Baruch atah, Adonai, notein haTorah.*

Blessed is Adonai who is blessed now and forever.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has chosen us from

among the peoples, and given us the *Torah*. Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the *Torah*.

Blessing After the Torah Reading

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרַת
אֱמֶת, וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

*Baruch atah, Adonai
Eloheinu, Melech haolam,
asher natan lanu Torat emet,
v'chayei olam nata b'tocheinu.
Baruch atah, Adonai, notein haTorah.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe,
who has given us a *Torah* of truth, implanting within us eternal life.
Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the **Torah**.

Sample B'nai Mitzvah Tracking Sheet

Name of Student _____

Parent(s) Name and Contact _____

B'nai Mitzvah Date and Torah Portion _____

Tutor _____

Prayer	Assigned	Read	Fluent	Chanted	Ready
<i>Barchu</i>					
<i>Yotzer Or</i>					
<i>Shema</i>					
<i>V'Ahavta</i>					
<i>Avot v'Imahot</i>					
<i>Gevurot</i>					
Blessing Before <i>Torah</i>					
Blessing After <i>Torah</i>					
Blessing Before <i>Haftarah</i>					
Blessing After <i>Haftarah</i>					
English Readings					

Torah Verse	Assigned	Read w/vowels	Fluent	Chanted	W/O Vowels

Haftarah Verse	Assigned	Read w/vowels	Fluent	Chanted	W/O Vowels

B'nai Mitzvah D'var Torah Prep Questions

1. Who am I and what is important to me? Tell us about your family, your school, and your interests.
2. What is my Torah portion about?
(Please include the name of the portion and its location in the Torah – Book and Chapter)
3. Why is this portion (or main story) important in general?
4. Why is this portion/story important to Jews and/or the Jewish Community?
5. Why is it important to the world at large?
(Why should all people care about this message/meaning?)
6. Why is it important to be Jewish?
7. Why am I becoming a *B'nai Mitzvah*?

8. Why is it important to become a *B'nai Mitzvah*?

(Why is it important to me, my family, the Jewish people- etc)

9. What did I do for my *Mitzvah* project?

10. How will I continue to be involved in the Jewish community (the Temple) now that I've become a *B'nai Mitzvah*?

11. Who would I like to thank for helping me become a *B'nai Mitzvah*?

A MINI-COURSE ON WRITING A

DRASH OR D'VAR TORAH (TORAH COMMENTARY)

A *d'var Torah*--literally a "word of *Torah*," is a lesson or sermon interpreting a text, which can be delivered by anyone. It reflects the basic Jewish belief that there are an infinite number of ways to interpret the *Torah*, as it says in *Pirke Avot* 5:22, "Turn it and turn it; for everything is in it," and in the rabbinic idea that each person who stood at Sinai saw a different face of *Torah*.

Preparing and presenting a *d'var Torah* doesn't necessarily demand vast Jewish knowledge or extensive public-speaking skills. You only need to be willing to explore a text and to share your exploration with others.

Preparation for Writing a *d'var Torah*:

Step 1: Read your entire portion in English with an adult.

Step 2: Read commentaries and summaries of your portion from written and on-line sources.

Step 3: Identify the story, theme, or subject found in the *Torah* or *Haftarah* that you wish to interpret – pick a section that you find particularly interesting, puzzling, or relevant. Think of:

- the actions of a particular character;
- the unexpected use of a word or phrase;
- a strange or unfamiliar concept or practice;
- a difficult theological claim;
- a connection to something that you have experienced or that has meaning in your life.

(You might also look to ways that your *Torah* portion is connected to your *tzedakah* project or, if you haven't decided what to do for your *tzedakah* project, you might look to your *Torah* portion for ideas. How does this portion suggest we help others?)

Step 4: Ask challenging questions about the section. Once you have identified a major question and a few sub-questions, you can begin looking for potential answers to these questions. No question has a single answer. Be prepared to explore several possibilities.

Step 5: Re-read the commentaries to see if anyone else has answered your question.

Step 6: Write a thesis statement in which you suggest a possible resolution of your question. Try to answer these questions based on your research, your reading of the text, and by using your own experience and the experiences of your friends, family, the news, etc.

Think of your *D'var Torah* as a Five Paragraph Essay:

Paragraph 1: Summarize your *Torah* or *Haftarah* portion, particularly the sections on which you'll be focusing, so that the congregation can understand your discussion.

Paragraph 2: Pose an interesting question that struck you while you were reading. Why is this question interesting to you? Why does it matter?

Paragraph 3: Give a few examples of how other people in other commentaries have answered this question. Do you agree with their answers or disagree? Why?

Paragraph 4: Share your own answers to this question. This is a great place to include what you believe the message of this *Torah* portion to be, what it means to you personally, and how that might impact how we should act in the world. How does this *Torah* portion reflect your own Jewish values or the values of your family? If it ties in, this is a great place to talk about your *tzedakah* project!

Paragraph 5: A summary and a statement to inspire the listeners to “take to heart” the message of the *Torah/Haftarah* interpretation.

You may also include your thanks to everyone helped you to prepare for your *b'nai mitzvah*, as well as all who came to share in your special day. Thank your parents, your siblings, and your tutor specifically, but otherwise, you want to keep these thanks as general as possible so as not to leave anyone out. (Longer, more detailed thanks can be shared at your celebration in the form of toasts or candlelighting ceremonies!).

On-line Resources for Preparing a *D'var Torah* (Torah Commentary):

Reform Judaism: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study>

(This site also has a guide on writing a *d'var Torah*: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/how-write-dvar-torah>)

My Jewish Learning: <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/index-of-weekly-torah-portion-commentaries/>

G-dcast (Animated cartoons about the weekly Torah portion): <http://www.bimbam.com/>

D'var Tzedek from American Jewish World Service (Connecting the weekly Torah portion to issues of social justice): <https://ajws.org/dvar-tzedek/>

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR *S'UDAT MITZVAH*/RECEPTION

(Adapted from the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Handbook: A Manual for Parent and Student,
Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ)

The religious part of the *b'nai mitzvah* ceremony occurs in the sanctuary. Choosing to focus on Jewish values during your later celebration will continue to sanctify the day and make it special and memorable. Remember, everything we do with our children teaches them something.

Decide as a family what you are celebrating and what this moment in your life means. This decision will help guide you through the rest of the planning stages. You may find the text *Putting God on the Guest List* by Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (Jewish Lights Publishing) to be quite helpful.

Consider Jewish Values in Your Decision Making

- *G'milut Chasadim*—Acts of Loving Kindness
- *Tzedakah*—Righteousness/Justice/Sacred Giving
- *Talmud Torah*—Study of the *Torah*
- *Hidur P'nei Zakein*—Honoring the Elderly
- *Zicharon*—Memory
- *Shabbat*—Honoring *Shabbat*
- *Tzar Ba'alei Chayim*—Non-Cruelty to Animals
- *Tikun Hanefesh*—Repairing the Self
- *Tikun Olam*—Repairing the World

Theme

Having a theme for your celebration might help you organize your vision for the day as well as serve as an educational tool for your family and friends. The challenge is to find an appropriate, relevant idea that reflects the Jewish values important to you. You might want to focus on a value or *mitzvah* addressed in your *Torah* portion. For example:

- *B'reishit*, the first portion in Genesis, is about Creation. Use the theme of *tikun olam*, “repairing the world,” and incorporate an environmental project into your celebration. Or consider creating or beginning something that will benefit the world in some way. One idea is to establish a food reclamation program in your school that calls upon kids to donate the uneaten, wrapped portions of their lunches (e.g., unopened juice boxes, packaged snacks), which you will take to the local food pantry on a weekly basis.
- The *Torah* portion *Noach* lends itself to the theme of showing kindness to animals. You can find out about species that are becoming extinct, get information about what we can do to help, and distribute it to your guests. You can ask guests to bring old towels, leashes, food, etc., for an animal shelter and then set a time when everyone can go there to help out. This theme is an easy one to feature throughout your entire celebration.
- If Moses figures prominently in your portion, consider the theme of leadership. You can learn about other famous leaders. Consider the following: What are the essential characteristics of leadership? From a Jewish point of view, what makes a good leader? If you are having a candle lighting ceremony, ask each person to think of a different leader and the qualities the leader had that he or she would like you to emulate. Contribute to the North American Federation of Temple Youth either in general or to its Leadership Training Programs in particular in order to help our Jewish leaders of tomorrow.
- Your *Torah* portion might speak about blessings. You may decide to think about the blessings you have in your life and try to ensure that others who are less fortunate are blessed in similar ways. For example, food is a blessing. Organize a collection of canned goods and spend some time at the food pantry, shelving supplies. Use canned food as the centerpiece for your tables and then donate the food to the hungry. Involve your guests in cooking food for the local soup kitchen. It is possible to use the temple

kitchen for this purpose.

Tzedakah

- The invitation sets the tone for the celebration and can let your guests know what is important to you. In lieu of sending an expensive invitation, utilize your desktop publishing skills and make your own. Note on the back of the card that the simplicity of the invitation represents a donation to a *tzedakah* organization that you chose. The thank-you note can also be produced in this way.
- Donate 3% of the total cost of food to Mazon, an organization that helps feed hungry people nationwide. If you contact them ahead of time, they will send you cards to put on your tables, indicating that you have made a contribution.
- In honor of each of your guests, give donations that can make a difference in the lives of others, not party favors that will cost you the same amount and end up in the trash. Purchase a tree in Israel for each guest or each candlelighter. Purchase a “mootual fund,” a share of a cow on Reform Kibbutz Lotan, for each of your guests.
- Check to see if the leftover food can be donated to a soup kitchen that accepts prepared food.
- Make either a financial donation to or purchase something specific for the temple, religious school, or temple library in honor of your becoming a *b'nai mitzvah*.
- Flowers purchased to decorate the *bimah* can be donated to a local hospital or nursing home, not left in the temple to wither. Let someone else enjoy them.

[Rabbi Berkowitz's Note: *Bimah* decorations and centerpieces can be made from many things aside from flowers. You can put anything in a pretty basket or a glass container and make it look festive: canned goods, pet supplies, sports equipment, children's books, or toys—I once saw centerpieces made out of vases filled with LEGO!]

Entertainment

- Include Israeli dancing, not just the hora. Perhaps think about hiring someone to teach Israeli dancing. Consider featuring klezmer music as part of the party entertainment. There is also a Jewish storytellers network in New York City that can provide you with the names of local people who might add some very magical moments to your celebration.
- It is possible to do a *mitzvah* project in place of or in addition to some form of entertainment. Why not rent a local school gym and sponsor a *mitzvah* basketball game. Ask friends to support one of the teams and pledge any amount of money for each point scored. Cook for the soup kitchen with your friends. Participate in a walk to raise money for a non-profit you support.
- The party should reflect the initial values on which the *B'nai Mitzvah* ceremony is based. Don't be afraid to be different.

Candle Lighting

Make the candle lighting ceremony meaningful and Jewish: use your own theme and be creative. If your theme is Jewish heroes/heroines, ask each candle lighter to think of a specific characteristic of a great Jewish hero/heroine whom they would like you to aspire to as you grow up. Or if your theme is dreams, ask each candle lighter to think of a dream that they hope the *B'nai Mitzvah* child will fulfill. Requesting your family and friends to prepare for this honor ahead of time includes them in the celebration in a meaningful way. Their words for the *b'nai mitzvah* may become one of the most treasured aspects of the celebration.

[Rabbi Berkowitz's Note: There is no Jewish law saying that you have to have a candlelighting ceremony. Feel free to skip this if it is too much of a production for your family!]

Centerpieces

Choose something simple. Cut flowers can be beautiful and elegant on any table and can be donated to a local nursing home after the party. If you want, choose something that goes with your theme if you have one. For example, if your theme is Famous Jewish Sports Figures and you decide to use sports equipment as part of your centerpiece, research which organizations can use that sports equipment and donate the centerpiece items to them after the party. Put a card on your table to let your guests know that even the sports equipment is going to be used in a Jewishly meaningful way. If your theme is Israel, you can purchase trees from the Jewish National Fund and make centerpieces that incorporate the certificates the JNF sends you. Make your own centerpieces. Do you dry flowers? Are you handy with woodworking? Incorporate something personal into your decorations. Can you make a centerpiece out of something that can be donated after the party to people in need?

[Rabbi Berkowitz's Note: You might also consider how to reduce the large amount of waste that sometimes comes with a catered affair. Consider decorations that can be reused or donated, or check with families who have a *simcha* close to yours about what you might collectively purchase and share. If you are using disposable utensils, consider purchasing brands that are compostable.]

Keep it Jewish

Begin the meal with *Kiddush* and *Motzi* and end it with the singing of *Birkat HaMazon* or the shorter version, *Brich Rachamana*. Consider ending the celebration with *Havdalah* if the party will end late Saturday afternoon. Begin with *Havdalah* before a Saturday evening event.

Table Mitzvah Projects

Take every opportunity to provide guests with a way to be involved in a *mitzvah*. Simple table projects can work well and teach Jewish values in very simple ways. For example, if your theme is Blessings, research organizations that bring blessings to others, and put information about them on the table. Indicate that you will be donating some of your gift money to these groups in honor of the guests at your celebration. Ask each table of guests to discuss the organizations and indicate on a provided card which one they would like you to support. This will not only get people talking and learning but will undoubtedly raise even more money for some worthy groups that you have selected to support. If your theme is Learning, Reading, Books, etc., you can purchase books from the temple book fair (which you are planning to donate to a children's hospital ward or homeless shelter) to use as table centerpieces. Guests can also be asked to bring children's books to donate. And finally, you can set up a reading station where guests will have the opportunity to make a tape of the storybook they brought so that hospitalized children can either use it alone or listen to it while looking at the book.

[Rabbi Berkowitz's Note: Make sure you consult with local non-profit organizations before putting together a project. You want to make sure that you are giving the organization something it really needs!]

Celebration Variations

It is most common to have a celebration of some kind at a catering hall or restaurant directly after services. Other models that deserve your consideration include:

- Using the temple social hall for a luncheon for guests or a Kiddush for the entire congregation;
- Having a luncheon at home; [Rabbi Berkowitz did this and highly recommends it!]
- Providing a luncheon for adult guests immediately after services and then having a more informal party for the children later that evening or the next day;
- Inviting everyone to a mystery location and then involving them in a *mitzvah* project;
- Taking a family trip to Israel; [Rabbi Berkowitz did this with her family and it was great!]
- Taking a family trip to the town in Europe (or any place in the world) from which your ancestors came and explore your Jewish roots together; and
- Any combination of the above.

Closing Thoughts

Everything you do to make your *B'nai Mitzvah* celebration personal, filled with your values, and meaningful will enhance the experience for all. Every celebration need not look as if it's been shaped by the same cookie cutter. Have your celebration reflect who you are and what you believe as an individual and as a family. Make Jewish choices, and don't be afraid to be different. It's worth it! The memories of how you worked together and your incredibly meaningful celebration will last a lifetime. Put God on the guest list for your *B'nai Mitzvah*.

[Rabbi Berkowitz's Note: Sometimes, when planning a *simcha* such as a wedding or *b'nai mitzvah*, I encourage couples or families to choose three words that reflect what you want to experience during this celebration. Whenever you have to make a decision, or whenever something is causing unnecessary stress, come back to your three words and let them guide you as you take the next step forward.

I learned this from a couple who chose the following words for their wedding: Joy, Love, Community. You might pick words such as: Family, Responsibility, Commitment, Growing Up, Connection, Fun (remember, this is supposed to be fun!). You might also choose from Jewish values like *Tikun Olam* (Repairing the World), *Gemilut Chasadim* (Acts of Lovingkindness), or *Shomrei Adamah* (Protecting the Earth).

This is a long and complex process, and it brings up a lot of feelings and, sometimes, frustrations. Having a touchstone to return to in the rough moments helps us to remember why we are doing this in the first place!]