



# The Kitchen Bar/Bat Mitzvah Guide

Welcome. If you're thinking about a Bar or Bat or Beit mitzvah for your child, mazel tov! We're glad you found us.

We're incredibly proud of our kids and think our b'nai mitzvah are the best in the land. Our students not only learn how to read Torah, they learn why Torah matters in their lives and in the world. They get tons of one-on-one time with our rabbis and teachers. They get to know our shabbat + services and have the option of storahelling (we'll explain). And of course, everything is done in the context of family and Kitchen-ites. Sounds good, right?

Still, we know it can feel like a mystifying process. That's why we've put this material together to explain what we do and how we got here. By all means, if there's still anything that's unclear, please let us know, we'd love to talk.

Most of all, enjoy this holy ride, we're excited to help and be a part of it.

Noa Kushner  
Founding Rabbi

Spencer Weiss  
Executive Director

Joel Abramovitz  
Senior Family Educator

Asher Shasho Levy  
Hazzan

## INDEX

Here's what you'll find in this document:

1. Every community has its own customs surrounding a bar / bat mitzvah. Take a look at ours. [Good to Know: Kitchen B'nai Mitzvah](#) will tell you about our well-considered approach.
2. Our [B'nai Mitzvah Timeline](#) gives you a bird's eye view of the process, what to expect when, and who on our team is best positioned to help.
3. The [How to Write a Drash](#) (expounding or teaching on Torah) handout along with [Rabbi K's Guide to the 4 Sentence Drash](#) will help explain Rabbi Kushner's step by step approach for teaching Torah.
4. When it comes time to write a blessing, you'll love this [Parent Blessing Guide](#). It takes those moments from being toasts to being charged and transformational.
5. [Day of Details](#) teaches you everything you need to know about coordinating your Kitchen *simcha*.
6. As the time gets closer, you'll want to know who in your family can do what and resources to help them along. That's why we have an [Honors Explained](#) doc (including protocol for blessing the Torah) and a link to an [Honors Worksheet](#) (which you'll fill out closer to the big day).
7. Finally, our team has assembled a group of [Resources](#) to help you in the process.

## 1. GOOD TO KNOW: KITCHEN B'NAI MITZVAH

### GIVING AND RECEIVING

We believe a big part of becoming a bar or bat mitzvah is less about becoming an adult on a given day and more about the process of going from being a 'receiver' (children almost always receive) to learning how to give (adults give, that is a big part of what makes us adults). We consider the Torah that our students read and teach us as their first public Kitchen gift.

Like a homemade present, we don't want a teaching to be perfect or cookie cutter consistent week to week. Rather, we hope that reading and teaching will reflect the one who gives it. We emphasize that the bar / bat mitzvah is not a performance but a gift.

### SHABBAT

Our Kitchen B'nai Mitzvah are taught that the morning of their Bar / Bat Mitzvah is their service *and* that they are also contributing to the spirit of that shabbat and the larger community. This gives our students a larger sense of responsibility and focus in their preparations. They realize the service is "about me" *and* shabbat, *and* the community, and even God.

Kitchen kids experience during Freedom School that on the Shabbat morning of their Bar or Bat Mitzvah, there will be many members of the community who will be there to celebrate them, and there will be others there to say *kaddish* (prayer in memory), and still others who will be there to enjoy Shabbat or to celebrate a new baby or an upcoming trip. It's all part of a great, holy mix they get to join.

### FREEDOM SCHOOL: A SHABBAT CLINIC

Our b'nai mitzvah approach is based fully around Shabbat with our [Freedom School](#) community, starting as young as Kindergarten. In informal, structured, and experiential ways, our kids understand the quality of shabbat in their lives. We see coming to shabbat morning services similar to participating in a "Shabbat clinic." It is a part of the learning where students can experience Storah telling (see below), and be active in the service, either as participants or on the *bimah* in the torah service. Our goal is for the students to know the service and feel comfortable on the day they become b'nai mitzvah. We believe the more time our students spend celebrating Shabbat, the better understanding they will have of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and a fruitful Jewish life.

### TORAH LOVE: PARENTS + STUDENTS + RABBI KUSHNER + HAZZAN ASHER

At The Kitchen, we believe the whole family is a part of the *simcha* (celebration). Our Shabbat class is designed for at least one parent and the Bar or Bat Mitzvah student. When

parents learn alongside their kids, it speaks volumes to those kids about the relevance and meaning of Torah.

Our private teachers help the students learn HOW to read and chant Torah. Torah Love teaches WHY to learn Torah. In a series of interactive exercises, in teams and small groups, parents and students learn how to ask questions of a text. We read commentators and interpretations, compare texts and words even when they contradict one another, and look underneath the plain reading of a text in order to find meaning.

## TWO WAYS TO TEACH: STORAHTELLING OR DRASH?

Our Bar / Bat mitzvah students all learn and teach great Torah. Some do this in a more traditional drash (“expounding”) on their verses. Some work on a script that also teaches something called storah telling.

## WHAT IS STORAHTELLING?

After studying the weekly portion, a student will generate a key question on a piece of Torah and learn interpretations of that section. Then, with a team of seasoned improvisational actors, we create a translation and an interactive script that illuminates these teachings. The script features a line-by-line interpretive translation of each of the three *aliyot* (sections), which are performed live, many times with involvement from the *kahal* (community).

## KITCHEN PRIVATE TEACHERS

We’re very selective about our Kitchen Torah teachers. Torah teachers must be proficient in Hebrew and trope (cantillation), and they also must have a familiarity with creating translations and working with Torah as a resource for meaning. They must know Kitchen tunes, services, and rituals - and be present on the day of the ceremony. We will assign your family a private teacher to start; you must be in touch with Joel directly if you would like to use a non-Kitchen designated Kitchen Torah teacher.

*Note: The rate for the one-to-one sessions is to be determined by the private Torah teachers and families. Freedom School tuition does not include the costs of hiring the individual Torah Teachers. (Early in the process, based on your child’s learning style and experience, the teacher will assess and communicate how many sessions your child will need.)*

In their one-to-one sessions, Torah teachers will teach / guide:

- Hebrew proficiency, reading fluency
- Hebrew translation of keywords and concepts
- Trope / how to chant Torah
- Blessings for aliyot
- How to lead Torah service
- Practicing reading from a Torah scroll (close to date)
- Kitchen customs for inviting family participation in the service

## CLERGY'S PRIVATE SESSIONS

Starting about five months before a student's Bar or Bat mitzvah, Kitchen kids and parents will meet with one of the Kitchen clergy to study the parasha (portion), and work to find an open ended question that the student wants to engage. Commentaries will be provided based on the interest and direction of the student.

In their one-to-one sessions (with students and at least one parent), clergy will teach / guide:

- Helping student to develop a question that will inform teaching / storahelling
- In depth learning of the selected text, providing sources
- Guiding student through writing a teaching / storahelling
- Helping parents with blessing
- Helping student practice giving a teaching or rehearse storahelling

## 2. B'NAI MITZVAH TIMELINE

Time	Family Action	Kitchen Staff Point Person
Start of elementary school	Join <a href="#">Freedom School</a>	Joel (Senior Family Educator)
Fall of 6th grade year	B'nai Mitzvah Family Meeting	Rabbi Noa, Hazzan Asher, Joel, Spencer
December of 6th grade year	Request 3 dates for B'nai Mitzvah	Joel or Spencer (ED) will confirm a date on The Kitchen calendar with you by March of 6th grade year
8-10 months before	Private trope and Torah reading teaching begins (student and private teacher only)	Kitchen-assigned private teacher
7-9 months before	Family meets with assigned Clergy <i>hevruta</i> (study partner); Torah reading from <i>parasha</i> is selected	Clergy <i>Hevruta</i>
6 months before	Initial conversation around logistics, kiddush, etc.	Spencer Weiss
3 months before	3-5 private sessions with student and one parent; Torah study leading to drash	Clergy <i>Hevruta</i>
2 months before	Parents work on blessing	Clergy <i>Hevruta</i>
6-8 weeks before	Select Honors and Torah Readers	Joel
6-8 weeks before	Practice reading with Torah	Private Teacher
6-8 weeks before	Finalize logistical details: kiddush etc.	Spencer Weiss
Week before	Final preparation - Practice giving drash, go over service, any questions	Clergy <i>Hevruta</i>

### 3. HOW TO WRITE A DRASH

\*Some selections from, “Giving a D’var Torah (a word of Torah)” from The Jewish Catalog.

1. Drash comes from the Hebrew word Midrash = to expound. The idea of a drash is to teach or explain or raise questions about something that is in the Torah. Judaism always reads Torah, our most sacred text, with midrashim, with these teachings or expoundings. If you just read the Torah without any teaching or creative interpretation, this is not a Jewish way to read the Torah!

2. So, you need to find a verse that speaks to you, that makes you want to ask a question or solve a problem in the Torah. Sometimes the best way to find a verse is to look at what other teachers have said about that section of the Torah. They might raise your awareness about a section of Torah and then you can study the section, think about it, and come to a different conclusion. Or you might come to the same conclusion but in a different way.

3. It is a delicate balance: if you do not express your opinions in the drash, if there is nothing of you in the drash, then anyone could have written it! On the other hand, if your teaching is JUST your ideas and opinions, then your teaching will lack depth. You will be surprised at how much more you will be connected to your own ideas if you take a look at what other people have said on the same topic.

4. Remember you are the last person in a very long and strong chain of people who have learned and taught from Torah. The more you look at this chain, the more you and the people who hear your drash will learn and be connected to Torah study.

5. Your drash is a gift. It is not a toast and it is not a speech or a lecture. We ask that you save all “Thank yous” for the party or for another time.

6. Keep it simple. If you are teaching a verse, quote only that verse. Only give the absolute minimum of context needed. Some great drashot only focus on one letter! Remember this is the first drash you will give, not the last. There will be many more in your life. You can only do so much this time around.

7. Don’t be afraid to use all KINDS of interpretations to understand your verses. You can look at mystical sources, rabbinic sources, modern art, anything that speaks to you. We will be talking about where to find these sources.

8. Talk about your idea with as many people as possible.

9. Use stories from your life that are meaningful to you to help connect people to your teaching.

## Rabbi Kushner's Famous Guide to the Four-Sentence Drash

Sentence 1: "What I am talking about."

Remember, in Torah it is easy to get sucked into recapping the entire parsha (portion) because one story bleeds into the next. Develop a discipline of only reframing the exact piece you are talking about and giving only the context that is necessary.

Sentence 2: "What's my question?"

This is the key to the whole drash. A question is different from a judgment about the parsha. A good way to start is to brainstorm 20 questions about a given section. Then pick your favorite. Remember, a good question opens doors, it doesn't close them.

Sentence 3: "Here's what someone else said about my question."

The more you know about what someone else said, the deeper your answer is likely to be. Chances are, if you asked it, the rabbis also asked it too and have come up with a variety of answers. You may find several conflicting answers that speak to you.

Sentence 4: "This is what I think."

This does not need to be an ultimate answer. Rather, based on your research and your own creative thinking, what is your answer to your own question?



## 4. PARENT BLESSING GUIDE

1. **Think about the future.** Think of the blessing not only as a reflection on what is, but also as an invitation to what could be.
2. **Use a prayer or a verse from Torah as a springboard.** If you use a piece of text, it will always have a special meaning for you and the one you bless. It will also help to ground what you have to say and give it a theme. (We're happy to help!)
3. **We ask that the blessing not exceed two pages.** If two parents are speaking, each will need to offer no more than one page otherwise it gets to be too much for the community.
4. **Remember that a blessing is not a speech or a teaching.** It does not have to encapsulate your whole relationship past, present or future. Just a hint is usually the most powerful.
5. **Remember that you're bringing blessing to the one being blessed.** The idea is to invoke God, the power of this moment in their personal history or the power of the moment in our community. If the blessing is ONLY about the one blessed, we end up worshipping the one being blessed.

## 5. DAY OF DETAILS

- Day-Of Shabbat
  - On the day of your simcha, please plan to arrive at the location by 9:30 am. Please remember your drash, blessing and tallitot.
  - Fifteen minutes before the start of services, the Rabbi *hevruta*, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student, parents, siblings of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and grandparents only will meet privately. This will be an opportunity to take a moment to reflect, offer blessings and present a *tallit* (optional).
  - If the Freedom School is in session on the day of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, you should schedule your arrival for no later than 9:00 am. You will have the choice of whether or not to attend your regularly scheduled Torah Love class.
  
- Venue + B'nai Mitzvah contribution
  - For the 2024-2025 year, we anticipate that most B'nai Mitzvah will be held at the Friends School. We will not be able to confirm dates with Friends, however, until Spring 2024. If, for any reason, that location falls through, we will work with you to find an alternate, workable and safe location for the simcha.
  - In addition to the sponsorship of kiddush lunch, we ask families to make a contribution of \$500-\$1000 (or an amount that feels significant to your family) to support operational costs preparing and hosting the simcha. If this presents a hardship for your family, please be in touch with [Spencer](#).
  
- Shabbat Lunch
  - As part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration, we ask that you provide lunch for the Kitchen community and your guests. You will be responsible for making the arrangements and coordinating with The Kitchen for delivery and other logistics. The caterer should provide all compostables (plates, napkins, utensils, cups, hot cups for coffee, serving utensils, etc.)
  - You have a few options when it comes to the lunch after services:
    - Two options (and our favorite) are Wise Sons or Izzy's Bagels. [Spencer](#) can put you in touch with their catering department if this is what you choose.
    - If you do not wish to have Wise Sons or Izzy's as your caterer, you may choose another provider. We've done everything from Bi-Rite and Jane's to Brenda's Soul Food and Shorty Goldstein's.
  - Notes on Lunch:
    - You will be responsible for providing any beverages other than water (but we provide grape juice for kiddush!).

- All Kitchen events are vegetarian and Kitchen Kosher. This means no meat, but smoked salmon and trout are okay. We'll be happy to go over any questions with you.
  - If for some reason the caterer brings something not on the Kitchen Kosher list, we won't serve it- sorry!
  - You are responsible for taking or donating all leftovers.
  - All orders must be approved by [Spencer Weiss](#) before submitting.
- Setup/Cleanup
  - If you expect to have more than 75 people for lunch, we will setup the room with a reception feel with about 6-8 tables for people to sit at and two buffets. Because of space constraints, we cannot accommodate seating for everyone- but generally after services, we find most people are more than happy to move around and talk!
- Kippot
  - You are not required to purchase kippot – we have plenty! However, some families like to order kippot as a nice way to mark the occasion.
- Video and Photography
  - In our iPhone obsessed world, we are working hard to keep Shabbat feel connected to what matters. *So we don't allow non-Kitchen live stream videography or photography during the service* (not even from the back, sides, outside the room). After or before, photography will be permitted provided you specifically instruct the \*single\* \*professional\* photographer to keep things informal. Candid shots are great and not disruptive. Please, no flash and no posed pictures. Amateur iPhone photographers are encouraged to keep their phones off and apply their photographic eye another time. We also don't allow photo slideshows or video montages during kiddush so as to keep the shabbat. We'll be happy to go over any specific questions with you.
- Flowers
  - The Kitchen does not provide flowers for your simcha; however, you are more than welcome to spruce the place up. You will be responsible for providing and ensuring delivery and removal of the flowers to / from the site. Kitchen staff can help with set-up and placement once they are on-site.

## 6. HONORS EXPLAINED

### Torah Blessings

The Torah is read in seven sections, each known as an *aliyah*. Blessings are said before and after each section. We call people up to the Torah to chant these blessings.

There are 7 aliyot read on the day of a B'nai Mitzvah. Here's a breakdown of how the aliyot are designated:

1. Chosen by family
2. Chosen by family
3. Chosen by Kitchen
4. Chosen by Kitchen
5. Chosen by family
6. Parent/s of B'nai mitzvah
7. B'nai Mitzvah

We recommend you choose honorees who understand the importance of Torah and who know or will seriously learn the aliyah blessing. If you have people you want to honor who do not fall into this category, we have many other honors to offer (see below).

No more than four people can be called for each aliyah.

You can find a [folder containing the text of the blessings in Hebrew and English + transliteration as well as a recording of the blessings with instructions here](#). Feel free to share it with anyone who needs help.

All those who are blessing the Torah will be called up by their Hebrew name. We use the traditional format when calling: *First Name bat/ben (daughter/son of) Parent(s) Name(s)*. If the person does not have a Hebrew name, we are happy to help them choose one.

### Other Honors

At the beginning of the Torah service, the b'nai mitzvah and immediate family will stand by the *aron*, the ark housing the Torah. Family members can serve as **ark openers**.

At the end of the Torah reading, the Torah will be lifted up so the community can see the writing on the scroll. It is then “dressed” once again in its cover. You can assign one person to **lift** (*hagbah*) and another to **dress** (*gelilah*) the Torah. The person given the honor of lifting needs to be familiar with the ritual and understand how to lift a Torah (The Kitchen Torah is very heavy!).

Before we sit for lunch, we will have **Kiddush** and **Motzi** – blessing over the wine and challah. You can also assign people to help with that. If you need more honors, Joel is happy to help.

You can find the **Honors Worksheet** [here](#) to fill in names for all of the honors.

## 7. RESOURCES

### For Jewish Learning

My Jewish Learning is good resource for all things Jewish, from a wide range of perspectives. There's information on ritual, tradition, culture, liturgy, holidays, and texts.

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/>

Sefaria has a wide range of Jewish texts: Torah/Tanakh, Talmud, Siddurim, and many writings from ancient and medieval sages. There is also a large selection of study sheets on various Jewish topics.

<https://www.sefaria.org/>

### For Torah commentary

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, is a prolific modern commentator who often brings themes of social justice into his writings.

<http://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-homepage/>

Rabbi David Kasher is an Associate Rabbi at IKAR, a Jewish Emergent Community in Los Angeles. He published 5 years of Torah commentaries on his website, ParshaNut. With a degree in political science, a law degree, as well as his rabbinic ordination, he brings a unique perspective to the Torah text.

<http://parshanut.com/archive>

At TheTorah.com, you'll find articles that bring a historical and contextual approach to Torah.

<http://thetorah.com/>

Reformjudaism.org has a section devoted to Torah study. You'll find summaries and commentaries on the weekly Torah portions, as well as other Jewish texts.

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study>

### For buying a Tallit

The b'nai mitzvah will be wearing a tallit (prayer shawl) for the first time. Sometimes a tallit is passed on from another family member, continuing, or starting, a family tradition.

There are two Judaica stores in the Bay Area – Dayenu in the JCCSF and Afikomen in Oakland. The Contemporary Jewish Museum sells tallitot as well. There are also many online options. One of those is Fair Trade Judaica, a Bay Area based organization that helps support fair trade artisans throughout the world. Jerusalem Tallit sells custom, woven tallitot that are more in the heirloom category.

<http://www.dayenu.com/>

<http://fairtradejudaica.org/shop/ritual-objects/>

<http://www.afikomen.com/>

<http://www.jerusalem tallit.com/>

You can also make a tallit out of a fabric of your choosing. The important part of the prayer shawl is the tzitzit, the fringes, that need to be placed at each of the four corners. You can purchase tzitzit at either of the Judaica stores mentioned above. Here is a webpage that gives clear instructions:

<http://www.tallit-shop.com/319-tying-tzitzit/>

A base tallit making kit is available from Torah Aura, with a material, hemmed base in cream or white in different sizes, ready for you to work with in fabric paint, markers, or even duct tape. You will have to buy the tzitzit, the fringes that go on the four corners of the tallit, separately. Those are available at the local Judaica stores.

[http://www.torahaura.com/item\\_Tallit\\_20x70\\_CreamRow=21.aspx](http://www.torahaura.com/item_Tallit_20x70_CreamRow=21.aspx)