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## ***INTRODUCTION***

Mazal Tov! You are about to embark on a wonderful journey because preparing for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a process not just for the child, but for the family as well.

In preparing this guide, we hope to help minimize the stress and maximize the meaning that this event and preparing for it will entail for you and your child. It is meant to go hand in hand with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Guidelines of the synagogue. It has been prepared by two veteran parents with five B'nai Mitzvah between us, and with input from other recent Bar/Bat Mitzvah families. As you go through the planning process, we welcome your comments and additions.

We have always known that there are as many ways to celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzvah as there are youngsters. What we have learned from the Covid-19 Pandemic, is that there are even more ways to celebrate this milestone than we ever could have imagined. We hope that by the time your family is ready to celebrate this wonderful event, things will be back to “normal” or whatever the new normal turns out to be. One thing we do know is that PSJC will find a way to make the experience meaningful for your family, and especially for your youngster. How your child “performs” is not nearly as important as the values and love for Judaism that should be inculcated at this time. With some thought and communication, you can shape your *simcha* (joyous occasion) so that it will reflect your own style and values, and become an opportunity for growth now and cherished memories for years to come.

It is our fervent hope and expectation that we will have resumed full use of our building well before your child's bar/bat mitzvah. Therefore, the information, guidelines and forms in this packet have been prepared based on PSJC's standard policies, procedures and fees. However, you will be informed of any pandemic necessitated changes.

In keeping with PSJC's philosophy of inclusion, if the pandemic has changed your family's financial situation, and these negative effects have not been mitigated as your child's bar/bat mitzvah approaches, please contact the Treasurer for a confidential discussion of your circumstances as regards to the fees that are normally charged.

Finally, since these materials are being prepared while we are still in the midst of the pandemic, things may still be in flux for some of the programs and resources mentioned. Some have gone virtual, some may be on pause, and some may be discontinued at a later day. We apologize for any disappointment or inconvenience this may cause.

If you are reading this guide, chances are you have already set your date and are beginning to think about what comes next. That's good, because organization is the key to successful Bar/Bat Mitzvah planning, both in terms of the religious ceremony itself and any festivities you wish to celebrate afterwards.

## ***SPIRITUAL PREPARATION***

## Study

Rabbi Debra Bennet of Plainview points out that preparing for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is not just a time of growth and learning for the youngster. It can be a great opportunity for the whole family. She suggests the following questions to spark family discussions:

1. *What can my child teach me?* Show your interest and respect for the work your child is doing by asking them to share what they are learning with you.
2. *What does this day mean to you?* Let your child know exactly why this matters to you. Don't assume they already know. In fact, you may both be surprised by what comes out in this discussion.
3. *What will the family "take-away" be?* Becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah does not end when the event is over. Will you choose to incorporate new family rituals such as Torah discussions or other family activities on Shabbat? Commit to participating in an ongoing tzedakah project?

Together, you can find ways to make your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah experience meaningful for many years to come.

## Shaarei Mitzvah

Shaarei Mitzvah directly translates to "Gates of Mitzvah" and is the PSJC program for students in their Bnai Mitzvah year and their families. We begin in the spring of the 5th grade year with one or two gatherings to kick-off our joint exploration into the Bnai Mitzvah process and what it means to enter into Jewish adulthood. Throughout the 6th and 7th grade years, students participate in a variety of experiences at PSJC and in settings around New York City.

Student experiences may include the Lower East Side Scavenger Hunt, an exploration of Borough Park, and a Tzedakah workshop with a Jewish Social Justice organization. Families will have opportunities for at home text study related to the field trips and experiences they and/or their children will be having. Additionally, there are workshops on how to write and give a dvar Torah, guest speakers, and more! Families join together for Shabbat meals and programs that explore Jewish identity, values, community building, and more. Parent sessions with Rabbi Carie Carter allow parents to explore what the Bnai Mitzvah process means to them, as well as an exploration of the Shabbat morning service itself.

Another important aspect of preparing for a PSJC Bar/Bat Mitzvah involves strengthening the connection between Bar/Bat Mitzvah families and the greater PSJC community. Greeting familiar faces and welcoming new ones as a Shabbat morning usher is a great way of enhancing that connection. Parents will be expected to serve as ushers for at least one Shabbat morning in the 5-6 week period prior to their child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The ushering coordinator will contact you approximately six months prior to your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah to discuss date(s) for an ushering assignment.

Once the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date is set, and you know what *parshah* (weekly Torah reading) and *Haftarah* (selection from the Prophets) your child will be reading, you can decide how to proceed. A general rule of thumb is to begin far enough in advance to allow your child to learn the trope

(musical cantillation), master the Hebrew text and grapple with its meaning well in advance of the actual Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. How long this takes varies from child to child depending on the child's knowledge of Hebrew, musicality, willingness to study and quickness to learn. Generally six to twelve months of study is recommended. Although some students have successfully prepared in shorter amounts of time, others have faced their Bar/Bat Mitzvah plagued by stress and a lack of confidence that could have been avoided by better preparation. This does not serve the child or the parents well.

Next comes the decision as to who should tutor your child. The Rabbi maintains a list of potential tutors from within and outside the community. In selecting a tutor, take into account your child's needs, personality and learning style. Payment for the services of a tutor is the family's responsibility.

If a parent or other close friend or relative has the skills and willingness to take on Torah and/or Haftarah tutoring, this could be a powerful experience to share – if it can be carried out in a non-stressful manner. If not, it is better to hire an outside tutor. If a parent is going to assume responsibility for the preparation, it is important to consult from time to time with one of the tutors or the Rabbi to be sure you are pacing yourselves well time-wise and that the preparation meets with the standards of the congregation.

Since the “choreography” of the Torah service can be confusing, try to have your child complete his/her preparation at least two weeks ahead of the actual date, to allow your child to spend some time with the tutor practicing in the synagogue.

It is the custom at PSJC to give each Bar/Bat Mitzvah a book related to the Holocaust. Students and parents may want to incorporate this important topic into their year of preparation and study. The Museum of Jewish Heritage has an excellent on-line program designed for middle and high school aged students, *“Coming of Age in the Holocaust, Coming of Age Now”*. This interactive website ([www.comingofagenow.org](http://www.comingofagenow.org)) features first-person accounts of Holocaust survivors, integrating compelling videos, narratives and primary documents with online discussions and engaging activities. Students can explore history as well as themes of identity and personal responsibility. Registration for this program requires parental consent.

## Tefillin

An often-overlooked step in the process for preparing Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation involves learning to put on *tefillin* (phylacteries). Wearing *tefillin* is an ancient ritual practice. Many people are not familiar with the custom, as *tefillin* are not worn on Shabbat. Children should begin to learn to wear them several months before their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday (according to the Hebrew calendar). If the child's tutor does not feel comfortable teaching your child the intricacies of putting on *tefillin*, the Rabbi or any of the regular weekday minyan attendees would be pleased to assist in the process.

If you would like to share this experience with the community, you can bring your child to the regular Wednesday morning minyan or schedule a special morning minyan on or shortly after your child's Hebrew birthday. Although it's not necessary, if your child prepares the *leyning* or another part of the morning service for that day, doing something for the smaller group can help take the edge off their nervousness for the actual Bar/Bat Mitzvah day. Participating in morning services

can be a warm and more intimate celebration of their coming of age, especially if followed by bagels and cream cheese.

## Tzedakah

The spiritual preparation for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah goes well beyond the academic preparation. This is an excellent opportunity for you and your youngster to explore ways to add more “mitzvah” to your lives.

Each student chooses a Bar/Bat Mitzvah project of some kind in which they make a significant effort to “do good in the world” as a first step in being a responsible member of the Jewish community. Several organizations you are probably already familiar with have excellent programs that allow youngsters to have a real impact through their Bar/Bat Mitzvah projects. A few are listed below. The rabbi and leaders of the Shaarei Mitzvah program will help your child develop a project that is appropriate for them.

Information about Hadassah’s project opportunities and support can be obtained by calling Rosemarie Torres at (212) 303-4543.

UJA Federation NY connects bar and bat mitzvah students with a “mitzvah coordinator” to brainstorm ideas based on their interests and hobbies. For more information, contact Elana Atlas (212.836.1632 / [atlase@ujafedny.org](mailto:atlase@ujafedny.org)). Since a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is just the beginning (and certainly not the culmination) of Jewish involvement, Federation offers programs for older teens as well through the Teen Philanthropic Leadership Division. Elana Atlas would be the contact person for this program as well.

Kulanu (Hebrew for “all of us”), is a non-profit organization that has helped isolated Jewish communities around the globe since 1994. Information about their work, possible mitzvah projects, and instructions on how to get started is included in your packet.

You may have noticed that a number of PSJC’ers have been sporting beautiful multi-colored hand crocheted kippot that were provided by a previous Bat Mitzvah family. What you may not know is that choosing these kippot was not just an aesthetic choice. It was an opportunity for *tikun olam*. These kippot were purchased through MayaWorks, an organization that markets the work of Mayan artisans who otherwise have no outlet for their handiwork. According to its website ([www.mayaworks.org](http://www.mayaworks.org)), MayaWorks believes that “community development happens through the economic development of women who otherwise have limited ways to participate or contribute to the economic stability of their families. Giving women an opportunity to earn an income from their skills gives them self-confidence and hope for themselves, their children, their family and their village.”

Yad LaKashish: Lifeline for the Old is a non-profit organization empowering and supporting over 300 elderly and disabled Jerusalem residents on a daily basis, providing a creative work environment and invaluable support services, giving the elderly a sense of purpose and community as well as financial assistance. Beautiful tallisim, Judaica and other gift items are available through their website, [www.lifeline.org.il](http://www.lifeline.org.il).

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) is not just about trees anymore. They are involved in many areas supporting the land and people of Israel and a variety of mitzvah projects are possible if your child would like to support their efforts ([education@jnf.org](mailto:education@jnf.org)).

In these times of social upheaval, youngsters are often deeply affected by the injustices they see in the world. Choosing a mitzvah project that addresses one of these areas can enable your child to feel empowered and plant the seeds for a lifetime of activism. A number of agencies and organizations that are working to alleviate racial and social injustice are included in the Resource Guide.

Be'chol Lashon (Hebrew for "in every language") (<https://globaljews.org/explore/global-mitzvah-projects/>) strengthens Jewish identity by raising awareness about the ethnic, racial and cultural diversity of Jewish identity and experience. Be'chol Lashon brings the historic Jewish commitment to civil rights and racial justice forward into the 21st century.

Hazon ([www.hazon.org](http://www.hazon.org)), the largest faith-based environmental organization in the U.S., has recently launched the Jewish Youth Climate Movement (JYCM) (<https://www.jewishyouthclimatemovement.org/>) dedicated to mitigating climate change by empowering young people, mobilizing our communities and taking action, using Jewish values as a motivation to create a more equitable and sustainable world for all.

For 139 years, guided by Jewish values and history, HIAS ([www.HIAS.org](http://www.HIAS.org)) has worked to protect the most vulnerable refugees, helping them build new lives and reuniting them with their families in safety and freedom. Although volunteers must be over the age of 18, there are other ways to support their important work.

And, of course, PSJC's Rodfei Tzedek (literally, pursuers of justice) social action committee engages in a variety of projects that might interest your child. They may also be able to support any initiatives that your youngster is planning.

Financially as well, this is an incredible opportunity to be sure your values are transmitted to your child. Remind them of the Torah's teaching to donate 10% to the poor. For the first time in their life, your child will probably have the financial resources to make a substantial contribution. A donation of 10% of the gifts a child receives can really make an impact. Discuss the issues that concern your child the most and help them locate appropriate avenues for contribution. Depending on your child's inclination, they may want to donate to AIDS or cancer research, Israel, Ronald McDonald House, Save the Children or Make-A-Wish Foundation, just as a few examples. Having the acknowledgment sent to the child in their own name will reinforce a sense of accomplishment. Your child can also make a "directed-donation." For example, your child could ask Make-a-Wish to use the gift to buy a pet or take a 10-14 year old to a ball game. Similarly, a donation to some organizations (i.e. Hadassah or Emunah) will help sponsor a Bar/Bat Mitzvah for an underprivileged child. If requested, the charity will tell your child exactly how their donation was applied. You and your child may need to do some legwork to determine what recipient organizations are "right" for your child.

Likewise, you may wish to donate a percentage of what you will be spending on feeding your guests to an organization that feeds the hungry (such as those listed in the Resource Guide) and/or use food baskets to decorate the sanctuary in lieu of flowers. Many florists are willing to attractively package non-perishable goods for a fee. The food baskets can be donated to CHIPS or another

organization after Shabbat. CHIPS (Christian Help in Park Slope) is a nonprofit charitable organization that has been dedicated to helping the poor, the needy, and the homeless as well as those in emergency situations. CHIPS serves more than 70,000 meals annually and gives temporary shelter to more than 2,000 people each year. You may also want to look into arrangements for donating leftover food from your party to CHIPS or City Harvest. Such arrangements generally need to be made in advance. Youngsters who wish to augment their efforts to help the hungry can contact Liz Braun at Mazon, the Jewish Response to Hunger (800-813-0557) or [LBraun@mazon.org](mailto:LBraun@mazon.org)). In addition to the flyer that is in your packet, Mazon has prepared a detailed guide for youngsters interested in a Mazon-connected project.

Naturally, contributions to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund (which serves to help many in need in and around our community) are always welcome and might resonate for youngsters who wish to honor their connection to the PSJC community.

Some families will mention their choices for donations either in their invitation packages, in the brochure explaining the service (if they choose to have one) or in a separate handout about their project, or at the end of their D'var Torah in the hopes of having their guests donate as well. Others view this as a private matter. It is a matter of personal preference.

Another idea is to make a donation honoring not only the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child but also the person they were named after. (In most Ashkenazic and some Sephardic or Mizrahi communities, babies are named after departed relatives.) One family in another congregation chose to dedicate a *yahrtzeit* light at each child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah (or, for PSJC, a leaf on the Kiddush room memorial tree). At the service they spoke briefly about why they had named their child for the person being remembered.

Extensive ideas and links pertaining to *tzedakah* options and enrichment activities can be found at [www.areyvut.org](http://www.areyvut.org). Just click on the "Mitzvah projects" link and take off from there.

The Mitzvah Project Book by Liz Suneby and Diane Heiman is another useful resource.

## Identity

The pre- and post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah years are formative ones in terms of your adolescent's sense of identity, both as an individual and as a Jew. An excellent way to enhance the growth of their Jewish identity is by encouraging them to become active participants in a Jewish youth group. Teenagers are invited and encouraged to join Geshar, our teen "Jewish discussion" program, USY, BBYO or any of the wonderful Jewish youth groups in Brooklyn. In accordance with their new status as members of the adult community, post-B'Nai Mitzvah are invited and encouraged to sign up to lead parts of the service, leyn Torah or chant their own or a new Haftarah. Many post-B'nai Mitzvah also serve as *Madrichim* (assistants to our teachers) in the Hebrew School.

## Israel

Bar/Bat Mitzvah has always been considered an ideal time for a trip to Israel. Even in these troubled times, a trip to Israel can be an enjoyable way to help your teenager gain a strengthened commitment to Judaism and a finer understanding of the political, cultural, and religious issues that face us as Jews in the contemporary world.

There are numerous Bar/Bat Mitzvah tours, and many packages allow the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child to travel for free. Most tour agencies have taken steps to maximize security. Tours are offered by the agencies listed in the Resource Guide, among many others.

These tours vary in their prices and degree of religious observance. With some planning, it is possible to have both an incredible trip to Israel and a modest celebration here (since your extended family probably won't travel to Israel with you) for the same expense that might otherwise be spent on a more lavish affair alone.

If this is not the right time for such a trip, talk to your youngster about putting aside some of the gifts received to pay for a trip to Israel at a later date. Many wonderful programs exist for 15-18 year olds to spend time in Israel with other teens.

For a more immersive experience, High School teens can spend a term in Israel through the Alexander Muss High School in Israel ([www.amhsi.org](http://www.amhsi.org)). Six, eight and eighteen week options are available. Your packet includes a certificate that enables you to register for a \$500 tuition discount for one of these programs. There is no obligation to participate, but the offer must be validated within 60 days of your child's bar or bat mitzvah.

## **The Friday Evening Service**

PSJC holds Erev Shabbat services every Friday evening. These services last a little more than an hour and are more intimate than Saturday morning. Our monthly Lev Tahor is a lay-led, all singing service (followed by a delicious pot-luck dinner) that might be especially appealing. Consider having your child participate in services on the Friday night of his/her Bar/Bat Mitzvah Shabbat. It is a good way to expand the celebration, and, like Wednesday morning participation, leading the community in even a few prayers before the morning of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah can definitely "take the edge off" the child's nervousness. The Kiddush Room or lower sanctuary can often be rented for an extended-family Friday night dinner.

## **The Shabbat Morning Service**

Although it is natural for a certain amount of attention to be focused on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, it is important for the family to realize that the Bar or Bat Mitzvah is just one part of the normal weekly Shabbat Service. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family is not responsible for the service and so should relax and know the service will proceed as it always does.



However, one of the great benefits of belonging to PSJC is the opportunity for self-expression. Although the format of the service is largely pre-determined, there is much room for making your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah a most special Shabbat for you personally.

Each person who participates in the service adds something unique. Think about what you might like that to be. Davening at PSJC typically is led by different community members, who each serve as a Shaliach Tzibor (prayer leader) for the four sections of the service: P'seukai Dizimrah, Shacharit, Torah and Musaf. Are there particular members of the congregation you would like to ask to lead services, or read from the Torah? Ask them. Most people will be honored. If you would like our Cantor, Judy Ribnick to conduct part of the service, contact her well in advance to discuss her availability and fee. Cantor Ribnick's phone number is listed in the Resource Guide.

Musical instruments are not permitted during Shabbat morning services (Pseukei D'zimra/Shacharit/Torah/Musaf). With prior approval from the Rabbi, some musical instruments may be allowed during Friday night Kaballat Shabbat services and on Saturday afternoon during Mincha services. In all cases where an instrument may be permitted, they are meant as an adjunct to the service, to enhance the service experience and not ever to replace congregational participation.

Are there family members or friends who would like to participate either by *leyning*, leading whole sections or a particular prayer in Hebrew or English? These preferences should be discussed with the Rabbi, the *davening* coordinator ([davening@psjc.org](mailto:davening@psjc.org)) or *leyning* coordinator ([leyning@psjc.org](mailto:leyning@psjc.org)) well in advance to be sure there are no problems or conflicts. Keep in mind that participants in almost all parts of the service must be post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Jewish according to Conservative Halachah. The Prayers for Peace and the Country may be led by non-Jewish individuals, and there may be some other participation open to younger or non-Jewish friends or relatives as well. This must be discussed with the Rabbi.

If you would like a particular PSJC community member to lead a part of the Shabbat morning service, please contact the Davening Coordinator at [davening@psjc.org](mailto:davening@psjc.org), at least one month before the bar or bat mitzvah to arrange this. If you would like the bar or bat mitzvah youth, a family member or non-PSJC friend to lead a part of the service, please first check with the Rabbi at least a month in advance - we will ask the family member/friend to do a quick "run-through" with either the Rabbi or the Davening Coordinator to ensure that they understand PSJC conventions, meet our standards, etc. **Please do not ever assign individuals to lead davening on Shabbat morning without connecting with the Davening Coordinator, nor Shabbat morning Torah reading without connecting with the Leyning Coordinator.** For those celebrating bnai mitzvah at Mincha or another time besides Shabbat morning, all coordination is done solely with the Rabbi.

We understand that having the bar or bat mitzvah youth, family members or friends lead parts of the service may add to the joy of the celebration, and we try to grant these requests whenever possible. However, we cannot promise that any request made less than one month prior to the date can be accommodated, as other arrangements may have already been made. In the case of the bar or bat mitzvah youth, if it is not clear whether they will be able to learn to lead a part until the week of the event, let the davening coordinator know a month in advance that they are hoping to be able lead, so that there can be a backup in the wings in case they cannot do so in the end. In addition, if circumstances transpire that make it impossible for your family member or friend to lead part of

the service as planned, the Davening Coordinator should be notified as quickly as possible (davening@psjc.org) so that they can find a replacement leader.

Every synagogue is different. Therefore, service leaders, if not from PSJC, should review the service with the Rabbi or the *davening* coordinator at least a week before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Likewise, if there is someone you would like to have *leyn* (chant the Torah), please contact the leyning coordinator (leyning@psjc.org) **at least a month or two in advance**. Otherwise, other volunteers may have already signed up and begun to prepare. Those who are *leyning* Torah must be able to chant directly from the Torah, without looking at notes. Family members or friends who will be *leyning* are also urged to review with the Rabbi before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

When assigning various roles in the service, it is important to consider not only whom you would like to honor, but also their ability to perform the tasks you are assigning. If you are assigning an *aliyah* to someone who may not be familiar with the blessings, it may be helpful to send them a copy of the blessings (see Appendix A) and/or a sound file or tape so they can be prepared when they are called to the Torah. Please remind everyone who will have an *aliyah* that they need to remain at the lectern (“*amud*”) until the person with the next *aliyah* finishes his or her *aliyah*.

Anyone on the *bimah* or having a Torah related honor must wear a head covering and *tallit*. Be sure any guests who participate in the service are aware of this.

Some women may not be accustomed to, or comfortable with, wearing a *tallit*, and some unmarried women may not be used to covering their heads. Therefore, it is important to explain (before the event) that they will be expected to wear both a *tallit* and head covering when they are called to the Torah, and be sure this is agreeable.

In selecting someone for *Hagbah* (lifting the Torah) it is important to choose someone who is physically capable of assuming this honor. This is particularly critical at certain times of the year when the weight of the Torah is skewed to one side or the other. You can check with the Rabbi as to whether or not this is a concern. You might want to provide your designated *Hagbah* and *Gelilah*, who will dress the Torah, with the recommendations provided in Appendix C.

Lastly, the privilege of opening the ark sounds simple enough, but there is some degree of choreography involved. Again, it may be helpful to send a copy of Appendix B to the person who will be doing this for you so they can be prepared and confident on the day of the service. Please remind those opening the ark (beginning or end) not to leave the *Bimah* until the Rabbi leaves the *Bimah*.

Please ask any relatives or friends who are receiving honors to sit near the front of the sanctuary, preferably on the end of the row. It is ideal for people with *Aliyot* to come sit at the front in advance of their honor (e.g., the fourth *Aliyah* should come forward during the third *Aliyah*).

Although this is a special day for you and your family, it may also hold significance for other members of the community who may be celebrating *aufrufs*, engagements or baby namings, or observing *yahrtzeits*. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that this day may not be “exclusively yours” and that added events may arise unexpectedly. With graciousness and flexibility, the needs of all can be accommodated.

In terms of the content of the service, are there certain melodies you prefer or prayers you want included? Feel free to speak to the Rabbi or the person leading that part of the service. Please remember though, that nothing can be added to or deleted from the service without approval from the Rabbi.

Other synagogues include rituals that you may like. For example, in other synagogues, the parents might say a “*Shehecheyanu*” as they help their child don the *tallit* for the first time. Some parents have recited the prayer thanking God for releasing them from the responsibility for their child’s deeds. Please speak to the Rabbi if you would like to include either of these rituals.

Many parents enjoy the opportunity to bestow a blessing upon their child during the Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony, and PSJC is happy to include this in the service if the parents so choose. Reciting the Priestly benediction (in Hebrew and/or English) that parents traditionally give to their children on Shabbat is always appropriate. Using a more modern or creative prayer is also possible. Examples of such prayers can be found in Appendices E, F, G, H and I.

**Please note that the parents’ prayer is not an opportunity to tell your child how proud you are of them, or to share personal stories or histories. The prayer is a part of the service and should be an actual prayer lasting no more than two minutes, even if split between two parents.** Naturally, you will want to express your pride in your child, commend them for their hard work and comment on their many wonderful attributes. It would be more appropriate to express these heartfelt sentiments, in as much detail as you wish, in a speech at the reception.

Parents who prefer a more personalized prayer for their child are advised to consult the guidelines presented in Appendix D. The Rabbi is available to help you choose or develop your prayer. **All prayers must be written (not improvised) and approved by the Rabbi at least two days before the Shabbat of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah.**

The D’var Torah is an opportunity for the Bar or Bat Mitzvah youth to take on an important teaching role in the community. While it is customary to thank the Rabbi and tutor at the end of the talk, extensive thanks to specific relatives and friends for attending the simcha also should be saved for the celebration party. If you are preparing a brochure to hand out at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, you might want to include an explanation that the D’var is a part of the service, and not a performance and as such, applause is not appropriate. Instead, calling out “Yasher koach” (may your strength be increased) lets them know you think they did a great job.

The big question that always comes up is “How much should the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child do?” This is a very personal matter to be discussed with the Rabbi and the child’s tutor. Except in special circumstances, chanting one Aliyah from the Torah (usually Maftir), chanting the *haftarah* and preparing a *D’var Torah* is the minimum required by the PSJC community. Some people feel the experience of becoming a bar/bat mitzvah is a more meaningful rite of passage if it challenges the child. If the preparation is too easy, the child loses an important opportunity for growth and learning and does not experience the satisfaction and pride that come from meeting a challenge. For some youngsters meeting the minimum requirements is sufficiently challenging. For others, however, leading part of the service or additional Torah reading is appropriate. Do not forget to have your child prepared to lead *Kiddush* (blessing over the wine) and/or *Motzei* (blessing over the bread) after services.

It is equally important that the demands are not so great that the child becomes a nervous wreck. Balance must be maintained so that the experience remains meaningful, positive and basically joyful. Bar/Bat Mitzvah should never be a competition of who does more, either among peers or siblings. Likewise, if your child has special needs that make even the minimum levels of participation seem impossible, speak to the Rabbi. One of the most moving Bnai Mitzvahs our congregation was privileged to share was that of a youngster with severe learning disabilities. In any case, relax. Believe it or not, the kids want to do well and they generally do. Parents have often commented on their surprise and delight at how their child “rose” to the occasion!

## Shabbat Etiquette

Services begin at 10 am and conclude between 12:30 pm and 1:00 pm. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah family should be at the synagogue by 9:30 am on the day of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

This may be a long service for those who are not familiar with it. If you feel that your guests will be restless, you may want to ask them to arrive a little later. It is ok to let them know when the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child will begin their part in the service. Your child’s tutor or the Rabbi should be able to advise you on an approximate time.

PSJC welcomes our younger members and visitors. However, in order to create and maintain a prayerful space throughout the service, we encourage parents to take advantage of the books that can be found in the library right outside the sanctuary, or the toys that are available downstairs if their youngsters need a break from the service. **Please note that young children must be accompanied by an adult, or responsible teenager, when using the library.**

Parents with young children are also invited to join the various services for children that take place downstairs. Our ushers can direct you to the appropriate service for your child’s age group. Likewise, adults who need a break, or wish to socialize, are also asked to utilize the Kiddush room, back yard or downstairs areas. Please keep in mind that sounds from the Kiddush room do carry into the sanctuary.

As a sign of respect, the PSJC expectation is that everyone (regardless of gender identity or marital status), including youngsters wear a head covering inside the Sanctuary. A variety of head coverings are available at the back of the sanctuary.

The balcony is generally only used on Shabbat when we have a large crowd. For safety reasons, children are not allowed in the balcony unsupervised.

Photography or recording of any kind (audio, video or writing) is not allowed on Shabbat.

Please make sure all cell phones or paging devices are turned off (or at least put on vibrate mode) before entering the building on Shabbat. **We ask that nobody use the phone (for talking or texting) anywhere in the synagogue building, in the yard, on the steps, or on the front balcony on Shabbat.**

Please refrain from smoking in the synagogue, directly in front of the entrance to the synagogue, in the yard or on the balcony.

Applause is not appropriate in the synagogue. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not a performance. The child is participating in a religious ritual. A heartfelt *Yasher Koach!* (Yiddishized Hebrew for “May your strength be increased!”) is always appreciated and appropriate.

Many Conservative Jews observe the traditional custom of not traveling on Shabbat. If you have arranged for a bus or other transportation for your guests, please do not have it wait or load directly in front of either of the synagogue entrances.

Guests who are not familiar with traditional Shabbat services will probably be unaware of our customs. It may be helpful to include the guide to Shabbat etiquette provided in Appendix J along with your invitations, and to repeat these guidelines in any booklet you might prepare to use at the service. Understanding these guidelines in advance can help you guests feel more comfortable, and will help the service proceed with the desired dignity and decorum.

## The Accoutrements

**Booklets.** If some of your guests are not Jewish (or are non-observant Jews for that matter), preparing a guide to the service is recommended. Printed booklets may also be helpful to guests from Reform or Orthodox backgrounds who might not be familiar with the fine points of services at PSJC. Families who have furnished printed guides have received very appreciative feedback. Depending on how much personal detail you include, the guide can also serve as a lovely souvenir of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

There are two options for brochures:

- 1) PSJC Brochure – PSJC will make a personalized brochure for a small fee (note that this is actually a fundraiser for PSJC, and thus the fee is a donation). The cost is \$275 for 150 two-sided full color brochures. The booklet provides an overview of the services and customs at PSJC, and is available in two different formats with a variety of colors and cover design options. Personalization includes an individualized cover (with child’s name in Hebrew and English, date, and *parsha*), identification of all participants (family and friends) within the text, and added text, if desired. Please see the samples and information sheet in your packet, and contact Elizabeth Schnur at [esschnur@gmail.com](mailto:esschnur@gmail.com) or 718-499-4036 if you are interested in this option.
- 2) Self-made – This option allows you to use your own creativity and artwork to create a brochure. If you take this option **please be careful not to copy text** from the PSJC brochure. However, please do include the following statement:

“We ask everyone to help maintain the character of the day of Shabbat by turning off cell phones and other electronic devices. Please also do not applaud during the service, take photos or videos, write, smoke, or use electronics (cell phones, etc.) anywhere on the grounds, including the front steps, porch, yard, and building.”

One creative PSJC parent rolled her daughter’s Bat Mitzvah guide up like scroll, tied each with a ribbon (imprinted with her daughter’s name!) and placed them in a basket for the ushers to give out.

Samples of various other guides that have been used are also included in your packet.

Feel free to adapt the text to your needs, but be sure to contact the artists of the community for their permission before using their artwork. Please try not to include the Hebrew names for God in these booklets.

Some families (especially those with large guest lists) have opted to include copies of the child's Torah portion and *haftarah* to ensure there would be enough copies for all. If you are copying the *parshah* and/or *haftarah*, remember that they will probably include God's name. Therefore, you will need to include a note that they should not be discarded in the usual manner. Rather, they should be brought home by those who wish to keep them, or left in the Shul for burial.

**Babysitting.** If you have young children in your immediate family (6 and under) you may want to consider bringing a babysitter your child knows with you to the synagogue. It would be the babysitter's responsibility to remove the child when the child becomes restless (and just about any child will, because it is a long service). This is one day when you will want to focus your full attention on the service, and your older child. You will not want to have to leave the sanctuary; nor will you want the service disrupted.

**Head Coverings.** Most families supply the shul with *kippot* (yarmulkes) imprinted inside with the child's name and date of the event. It is not required but again, provides a nice souvenir and ensures that enough are on hand. It is generally recommended that you purchase enough for your guests plus an additional 80 for shul members. Although many members have their own, if yours are nice they will want one, too. Shortly before your Bar/Bat Mitzvah you may want to check our supply of lace doilies, as some women prefer these. Doilies are extremely inexpensive. If we are running low (or you do not care for what is on hand), you can purchase these as well. Lastly, go to a beauty supply store and buy a large box of bobby pins. A kippah that won't stay on can be very annoying.

*Kippot* can be purchased at most regular Judaica shops. The Resource Guide lists several sources for Judaica, including *kippot*.

**Flowers.** Flowers for the front of the sanctuary are not mandatory but B'Nai Mitzvah families typically provide them, and they do add to the beauty of the morning. You can order from a local florist or bring them in and arrange them yourself, which will greatly reduce the cost. In any event, the entire set-up must be done before 12 noon on Friday. Please call the synagogue office to arrange for entry to the sanctuary. If flowers are still on hand from a previous Shabbat, weeding out those that have wilted and supplementing with some fresh stems may be all you will need to do to achieve a nice effect. Using dried flowers is another possibility.

In lieu of flowers, some families have prepared baskets of dried goods which can then be donated to a food pantry.

**Candy.** People have different opinions about the candy toss. A basic rule of thumb: make it kosher and keep it soft! Tying it into little packets is not necessary but it does make the collection afterward (usually done by the Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah crowd) easier. Netting is preferable to plastic or other wraps because it is quieter when opened. Inexpensive netting is available by the yard at craft stores. Pre-cut netting is also available, but it costs a lot more. Good sources for Kosher candy by

the pound are listed in the resource guide. Please be careful that any candy you purchase has a Kosher certification posted (if buying by the pound) or on the package. Using straw baskets to hold the candy is preferable to paper or plastic shopping bags because the bags tend to make noise when the candy is being given out.

Younger siblings or cousins are often asked to distribute the candy, which is a sweet way to include them in the service. The candy needs to be distributed quickly. The best time to do this is right after *Hagba* (the lifting of the Torah), while the Torah is being dressed and people are still singing. Three to four 6-12-year olds are most efficient. Line up some older assistants to help minimize the disruption of the service. **No candy may be thrown from the balcony.**

Another option that some may prefer is to throw cut flowers instead of candy.

**Tallit.** There are a number of places you can go to purchase a *tallit* for your child. You will find a selection of them in the Resource Guide for Judaica Sources.

For the ultimate in unique *tallitot*, you may want to contact congregant Merrie Handfinger for a ready-made or custom-designed and created *tallit* and/or bag for your *tallit*.

**Please note that all accoutrements (brochures, candy, flowers, and/or head coverings) must be brought to the shul by noon on Friday.**

## Kiddush

Any celebration involves food. It is customary for the family to sponsor the Kiddush after the service as a way to include the community in the celebration. This is expected even if you have a luncheon planned for your guests. Usually, this will amount to either a simple Kiddush or something nicer, but going wild is not necessary. It need only be Kiddush – not lunch. You and your family should plan to stay at kiddush for at least half an hour after services so that the community as a whole can celebrate with you.

This can be a bit overwhelming as there are so many choices. You may want to do a bit of exploration regarding caterers and menu options on your own. However, when it comes time to place the order, you will probably want to have this done through the Shul Office as this will usually allow you to get the synagogue discount and tax exempt status as well as a donation receipt once the Shul receives payment for the kiddush.

PSJC defines caterers in two different ways: full-service and vendors.

- PSJC uses vendors for Kiddush when food is delivered to PSJC and our facilities staff stores, refrigerates, and plates the food in the Social Hall. Examples include Chiffon's, Kosher Bagel Hole, and Fairway.
- Full-service caterers are hired by the family (but paid through PSJC). Families research local kosher caterers. While PSJC facilities staff remains on site, the caterers bring their own warming ovens and event staff.

- Families using our kiddush vendors should go through the office for sample menus etc. as some won't agree to bill the office if they receive an order directly from a parent.
- Full-service caterers should be contacted directly by the family. After the family and caterer decide on a menu, the Rabbi, Facilities Manager, and Synagogue Administrator are brought into the conversation in an on-site meeting.

A copy of PSJC's current Kiddush Policy and Kiddush check list which will be submitted to the office is included in this packet. Please read these guidelines carefully as they contain detailed information regarding Kiddush expectations, fees and suggestions. Any difficulty in complying with this policy (whether financial, logistical or otherwise) should be discussed early on with PSJC's Synagogue Administrator and/or the Rabbi.

The Kiddush should be dairy or *pareve*, and of course, must be Kosher. Beyond these basic guidelines, there is much variation in how a Kiddush can be planned. However you decide to proceed, maintaining periodic communication with the office is essential to making your Kiddush planning as smooth a process as possible.

The first question to address is whether your priority is convenience or economy. It is possible to put together a very gracious Kiddush for less than you might think – if you are willing to put some effort into it. Or, you can let your fingers do the walking if you are willing to pay for convenience. Either way, the first step should always be to contact the office and our staff help you get started and work with you throughout the process.

**Baked Goods.** Chiffon's Bakery is the bakery the shul normally uses and their challah, cakes and cookies are all delicious. Their staff is quite good at helping determine the appropriate amount to order – especially if they are told what other food you expect to put out. The office can place your order, and have it delivered.

**Other Food.** If economy is your priority, COSTCO offers a wide variety of items to choose from. However, it is important to **be careful about *kashrut*** if you go to COSTCO: some items are kosher; others are not.

Fresh fruit from the market is a beautiful way to fill out the Kiddush table.

If you are planning to purchase the food for Kiddush in bulk, it must be in the shul by 12 noon on Friday. Because our kitchen staff is limited, **you are expected to arrange the food on platters for serving ahead of time. Bagels must be cut ahead of time. Food will be put out as it is found.** Our kitchen has some serving dishes. Depending on the number of people you are having, you may need to pick up some plastic serving platters and/or bowls at a party supply store. Color-coordinated platters can make for more polished presentation but it is not at all necessary. Discount party goods can be purchased at Party City or Amazing Savings.

Our kitchen elves are almost magical in terms of how efficiently they get Kiddush out. However, since the demands of setting up a Bar/Bat Mitzvah kiddush exceed those of a normal Shabbat, parents are asked to arrange (and cover the nominal cost of) additional kitchen staffing. Please refer to the Kiddush Policy guidelines for recommended staffing. The PSJC Office can help you with these arrangements. This small additional expense is well worth the smoothness it adds to everyone's Shabbat experience. As mentioned in the Kiddush Policy tips are expected for the



Facilities Manager and crew; an envelope with cash can be left with the office the week prior to the event.

For those of you who do not have the time, energy or inclination to pull the Kiddush together yourself, there are several good sources for catered platters. A few are listed in both the Resource Guide, and the Kiddush guidelines provided by the shul, and as noted above, you will probably want to have the shul office handle this for you.

Caterers tend to over-estimate the amount of food needed so it may be a good idea to give them a lower number of guests than you really expect. Be clear about whether you intend to provide a light snack or lunch. A number of caterers listed in the back will also provide workers to help set up your Kiddush on Shabbat. If you are planning a more lavish Kiddush, this can be extremely helpful, particularly if there are bagels to be cut or other labor-intensive needs. Again, all this can be handled through the PSJC Office.

Whether you plan to bring the food in yourself or plan to have the caterer deliver, check with the office and find out when someone will be available to open the sanctuary and kitchen to receive deliveries. If at all possible, coordinate your deliveries for a particular time and be there yourself to be sure everything arrives properly.

About a week before your simcha, the office will schedule a meeting with you and our Facilities Manager, to finalize kiddush set-up and logistics. **Please do not contact the Facilities Manager directly.** Our Synagogue Administrator will be your liaison.

## ***THE CELEBRATION***

Once you have set the date for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah, you will want to begin planning your celebration. If you are planning a luncheon at home, this is not a concern. But many catering halls book dates far in advance and options may be lost if you don't move quickly.

Keeping organized records is essential to planning your affair. Set up a chart where you can record and update the following information:

- Name, address, and phone number of guests
- Ages of guests (caterers usually charge less for children)
- Whether or not you received their response
- Whether or not they are coming
- Gifts received
- Date thank you note sent

Allow space to write special comments, such as dietary or other needs you will have to accommodate.

## The Guest List

Before you can begin further planning, it is important to come up with a preliminary guest list. Although it will change, it is necessary to have a sense of how many people you are expecting so you will know what size catering facility you will need.

Questions are often asked about the etiquette of inviting classmates from Hebrew School and/or the child's secular school. It is not necessary that all classmates be invited to a Bar/Bat mitzvah party. However, common decency would suggest that it is wrong to exclude only one or two youngsters as this could lead to very hurt feelings. Therefore, the recommendation would be to either invite only selected friends which is generally understood and accepted, or be magnanimous and invite everyone. These guidelines should apply to the service as well. Ideally, it would be wonderful if all members of the B'Nai Mitzvah class attended services for each of the B'Nai Mitzvah, but ultimately, respect for the youngsters' feelings should remain the priority.

The family guest list is a can of worms we won't even touch. Just keep in mind that *Shalom Bayit* (peace in the home) is an important tenet of Judaism and you do not want whom you choose to invite or exclude triggering a family feud. In terms of seating arrangements, if you work from the assumption that your guests are all adults and you expect them to conduct themselves accordingly, they probably will.

## Planning the Party

*Kashrut* is an important tenet of Conservative Judaism. This booklet will only deal with kosher caterers even though we recognize that a number of congregants may not keep kosher. Dairy and fish meals are in accord with our understanding of *kashrut*, whether or not under formal rabbinic supervision. We urge you to avoid blatantly non-kosher food such as unsupervised meat, shellfish, pork and the mixing of meat and dairy. Questions should be raised with the Rabbi who will gladly explain the meaning of *kashrut*, and discuss details of observance.

Environmental concerns and fair labor practices are certainly consistent with Jewish values, and you may want to take such issues into account in planning your event. Talking to vendors you are considering about using locally grown and/or "fair trade" foods is another way of adding *mitzvah* to your celebration. You can also ask the Shul Administrator to inquire about this when planning your Kiddush.

The Resource Guide lists of some of the most frequently used catering halls. In addition to these resources, PSJC's downstairs space is also available for rental. For information about rental fees and guidelines concerning the use of this space (particularly for events taking place on or immediately after Shabbat), please consult the Shul Office and/or the Rabbi.

In scheduling your party, you will have to choose between an afternoon or evening reception. Factors to take into account include how strictly your family and guests observe Shabbat as it affects transportation, music and photography. Also, you will want to give yourself enough time to mingle at Kiddush without feeling pressured to run out and get to the party on time.

Ideally, it is most comfortable to schedule an afternoon reception beginning at 1:30 or 2:00 pm, depending on how close to PSJC you will be. Services end between 12:30 and 1:00. You will be

expected to spend at least 30 minutes at Kiddush so the community will have the opportunity to share its warm wishes with you. It is unlikely that you would be leaving PSJC much before 1:15 p.m.

If you are planning an evening party, you will also have to think about what to do with your out-of-town guests during the intervening hours. Fortunately, if you do not feel you have the space or the inclination to entertain them in your home, Brooklyn provides a number of places where your guests can enjoyably pass the time including Prospect Park, the Prospect Park Zoo, the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Transit Museum or even Barnes & Noble. If you contact the museums, you may be able to purchase pre-paid passes for the guests so they will not have to be concerned with this on Shabbat.

A growing number of families have been incorporating *Havdalah* into their celebrations as a way of completing their Shabbat experience. This may be done at the beginning of an evening celebration or at the end of an afternoon reception, depending on the time of the year. In order to involve your guests, you may want several *Havdalah* candles on hand. The service for *Havdalah* can be found in *Sim Shalom* or many Benchers. Samples of *Havdalah* services compiled by PSJC members can be found in back of your folder. You can speak to the Rabbi for advice on including *Havdalah* in your celebration.

One family decided to schedule consecutive celebrations. A cocktail reception for adults and family was held from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm, followed by *Havdalah*. *Havdalah* provided a wonderful transition from the adult reception to the party for the youngsters immediately following. An arrangement like this works best when you are working with a facility which you rent for an extended block of time, such as PSJC's downstairs space, or if you are having your celebration at home.

Once these issues have been settled, it is time to find out exactly what is included in your party package:

1. Are flowers or balloons included?
2. Is liquor included or extra? Will they use brand names or house labels?
3. Do they prepare the seating cards?
4. Are *kippot* included?
5. Are gratuities included?
6. Valet parking? Coat checking?
7. What is the minimum you must guarantee and will be charged for?
8. Do they have a sound system and will you be charged extra if you choose to use it?
9. If you are planning a kosher affair, who certifies the *kashrut*? Is the kitchen Kosher (and the dishes) or do they merely use kosher ingredients? If you need to provide Glatt Kosher meals how will this be handled?
10. If you are planning a winter affair ask about the cancellation policy in case of a blizzard.

Ask to sample the food and if possible to see an affair to get a sense of their presentation. When you do this, dress accordingly so you can be as discreet as possible. You wouldn't want someone showing up in jogging clothes at your party.

When looking at the hall, see if there is handicap access. Older guests that you do not think of as handicapped may have difficulty with a lot of steps. Also look at the restrooms – it's hardly the most important thing, but a lack of cleanliness can be a real turn-off.

If you are planning a buffet reception (as opposed to a sit-down meal) be aware that the pacing tends to be different and there may be a greater tendency for guests to leave earlier than you anticipate. This can create a strange feeling for those remaining until the end of the party. Those planning a buffet may want to consider extending the cocktail hour and shortening the main reception.

Another pacing issue is actually a matter of coordination. Your caterer will understandably want your guests to eat while the food is still hot/fresh. At the same time, your DJ or Band will be working to build a certain momentum of energy and excitement. Introduce them to one another and spend a moment discussing this before the party begins because you will not want to be concerned with such things once the party is underway.

Most catering packages include wine and/or liquor as well. However, if you have a choice of bringing your own, or are planning a nice Shabbat dinner for the extended family, you might want to keep in mind that PSJC often holds a wine-tasting before Passover. This would be an excellent opportunity to sample and purchase fine wines – and benefit PSJC at the same time.

## Invitations

Select your invitations approximately four months ahead of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The invitations should be mailed out at least six to eight weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

When selecting the invitations, the first question is economy versus convenience. If you have computer skills, there are many stationery options available at stores like STAPLES and you may want to do the invitations yourself at home. This is the most cost-effective approach but it is labor-intensive. You can also use the internet to purchase invitations at a discount.

If you want more personalized, but professional invitations, for a fee, you can contact an artist about either designing your invitation or helping you with the layout.

Order more invitations than you think you will need. Some invitations get lost in the mail. You may find yourself wanting to invite people that were not on your original list. If you run out of professional invitations, they may charge you the full set-up fee to run a second batch.

When deciding which wording and format you will use, consider whether or not you expect to invite everyone to the reception. You may have a number of acquaintances you would like to invite to the service, but not necessarily to the party. People in this category might include associates from work, parents of your child's friends, and teachers from Hebrew or secular school. Most of these acquaintances would not expect to be invited to the party but would be honored to be invited to the service and Kiddush. If this is the case, you may want to print the information about the celebration on a separate reception card and limit the wording on the invitation to information about the service and the fact that Kiddush will follow.

One Bat Mitzvah had a number of families where the parents were invited to the service, but only the youngsters were being invited to the party. They handled this by putting the reception card in its own inner envelope with the invited child's name on it, whereas the outer envelope containing the full invitation had been addressed to the whole family.

Addressing the envelopes by calligraphy is not necessary, but some people like it. If you have a computer, you can achieve this effect by selecting an appropriate font. However, allow plenty of time because you will have to feed each envelope into your printer individually. Bona fide calligraphy is still available though it is quite costly and also requires a lot of time.

Before mailing out your invitations, take a complete sample to the post office to confirm the amount of postage required.

For professional invitations, see the Resource Guide for some suggestions. PSJC members have worked with all the resources listed and found them to be extremely helpful and accommodating. Several will provide discounts, so don't forget to ask.

There are a number of additional items you may want to include with your invitations. As noted earlier, it would probably be very helpful to include the orientation to our services provided in Appendix J. You may also want to consider sending a letter in which you can:

1. Invite guests to let you know if they would like to participate in the service in some way.
2. Inquire about dietary needs.
3. Provide information about accommodations for out-of-town guests.
4. Provide information about how they can spend any free time beyond the events you are scheduling.

If you know who you wish to honor with an *aliyah*, *Hagbah* or an Ark Opening during the service and you think they may need to prepare ahead of time, you can include a copy of the blessings they will recite or the guidelines from the Appendices.

## Music/Entertainment

Music often adds to the festiveness of a party. This can be provided via your own selection of tapes and CD's, a DJ or live musicians and should be planned with your guest list in mind. Some of the songs your kids may request can include lyrics that are not suitable at Bar/Bat Mitzvahs. Be sure your DJ only uses "cleaned-up" versions. Several DJ's that have been used by our congregants are listed in the Resource Guide.

When interviewing entertainers (especially DJ's), do not let yourselves be talked into more than you need or want. Some DJ's do not want to work an affair if you do not hire professional dancers. If you want professional dancers or whatever else, that is up to you. However, Jews have been celebrating joyous simchas for hundreds of years without professional assistance. So, decide what you want and hold firm.

Some people enjoy klezmer music. Some DJ's can provide recorded klezmer music if you request it ahead of time. If you prefer live music, several bands in the New York area perform this type of music. Some klezmer bands are listed in the Resource Guide. If you decide to hire a klezmer band, ask if they perform any other music as you may want variety. Klezmer bands who work in heavily Orthodox Brooklyn neighborhoods may not play for "mixed" dancing (men and women together).

Before hiring any entertainers, ask to see them perform at an affair. Many entertainment companies have several bands or DJ's. Be sure you are seeing the ones that will be at your affair. Have their names listed on the contract.

There are halachic issues involved with having live or recorded music on Shabbat. If this is an issue for you or your guests, there are other ways to enliven your party. You can hire a professional storyteller or a cappella singers. Some providers of a capella singers are included in the resource guide. Ask each guest to prepare a song or game to lead, or a memory to share. Perhaps you or one of your guests could pen a song about the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child set to a favorite song. Print up copies to distribute to your guests to sing along and then keep as souvenirs.

## Photography

Although photography is not permitted on Shabbat, you may want formal pictures of this occasion in our beautiful sanctuary. Schedule a photo session about a week before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Do not wait until the next day. It will be anti-climactic, you will be tired, and it will not be the same. While you are there, don't forget to make a video recording of your child reading their *maftir*, *haftarah* and speech. They probably will not do it as perfectly as they will at the actual Bar/Bat Mitzvah, but it will still be a priceless keepsake. Rumor has it that the Rabbi may be amenable to participating in this photo session if you ask. Just check the shul calendar before coordinating with the photographer and make sure arrangements have been made to get into the shul and to lock the building when you are done.

For party photographs, be sure to communicate clearly with your photographer about what you want. Do not assume. Be sure to discuss the photographer's time frame for giving you the proofs and the finished album or pictures.

Think about and tell your photographer if you want:

- Table pictures (this ensures you will have a picture of everybody at your affair)
- Candid pictures
- Formal pictures? Who? When? Where? How would you like this done?

Be sure the photographer and DJ or maitre d' coordinate to carry out your wishes.

Horror stories abound about amateurs who have failed to deliver. This is a once-in-a-lifetime event and you want it to be recorded properly.

Some photographers are listed in the Resource Guide.

## Accommodations

There are several options for accommodating out-of-town guests. The closest hotels are the LaQuinta Inn, Hotel LeBleu and Brooklyn Way Hotel. For guests who will travel on Shabbat, the Brooklyn Marriott and the Best Western Hotel are also options. Rates vary at these hotels, but you can also ask about a group discount rate depending on the number of rooms you will need.

A number of PSJC members are also B&B proprietors. Mentioning PSJC will most likely lead to a discount. The addresses and phone numbers are listed in the Resource Guide, along with a website that will link you to a number of other B&B's in the Ditmas Park area.

At Airbnb ([www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com)) visitors can connect with a wide variety of options at all price ranges ranging from crashing on a couch to use of a luxurious apartment or house.

Checking on-line reviews, and/or asking for references, is always a good idea before confirming a reservation at any site.

Another option for guests who wish to be within walking distance of the shul is home hospitality with our members. Several weeks before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah you can run a notice in the weekly Shabbat Bulletin. You can send your requested notice to the office ([office@psjc.org](mailto:office@psjc.org)). If you are already a subscriber, you can also send out a message on the shul discussion listserve ([psjc-discuss@yahoogroups.com](mailto:psjc-discuss@yahoogroups.com)). Otherwise, you may need to ask someone who is a subscriber to post for you. Be specific about the number of guests you need to accommodate and any particular needs they may have. It is also advisable to get specific information about the accommodations being offered. For example, do they have pets? Young children? Is their home kosher? How close to the synagogue are they? Will your guests have to climb stairs? How many? This type of information will help you arrange good matches between volunteer hosts and guests. Although our community has generally been most gracious in welcoming guests, please keep in mind that this is only a favor some members are willing to provide.

## Gifts

You may be asked to suggest a gift that can be given to your child. This is a perfect time to begin their own collection of Judaica that will last a lifetime, and serve to directly connect them to Jewish rituals at shul as well as at home.

Items to consider include a Kiddush cup (which can be engraved with the child's Hebrew name), Shabbat candlesticks, a Shofar (don't forget to call the High Holiday coordinator and sign up!), a *yad* (pointer for reading Torah) or Chanukah menorah. A gift certificate to a good Judaica store is always appropriate. Eichler's has a great selection of Judaica giftware.

For those who want to support Israel, State of Israel Bonds Mazel Tov Gift Bonds are available starting at \$100. The bonds mature in 5 years – just in time for college! There is also a bond option for those wishing to give a smaller gift. The eMitzvah Bond, also maturing in 5 years, available exclusively online, starts at just \$36, with available \$18 increments up to a \$90 maximum.

JNF's new Be Inscribed project offers the opportunity, starting at \$36, to honor your Bar/Bat Mitzvah (or anybody else) by inscribing a letter, word, verse, chapter or more in a Torah being written atop Massada. A beautiful certificate will be sent to the youngster.

One PSJC family found a lovely alternative to the picture boards that have become popular at B'nai Mitzvah celebrations. For a modest fee, at an easy to use website, [www.blurb.com](http://www.blurb.com), they designed a personalized book about their child's life from his birth up to and including photos of him participating in his Bar Mitzvah Project. The book brought many smiles to everyone sharing the day,

and undoubtedly became a cherished keepsake for the Bar Mitzvah himself.

## **LAST REMARKS**

Please keep in mind that the list of facilities and services provided is by no means comprehensive. Rather, we are including a few resources to help you begin your search. Those mentioned have been recommended by PSJC families, but we offer no guarantees. Also, in the time that passes from the point when you receive this packet and when you actually plan your event, vendors change addresses and phone numbers, and may even go out of business. We keep the list as current as we can, but things change. You can contact the office for an updated list if you feel the need. And please make sure to keep us posted if there are changes you discover- if places move or close, if you have feedback to share or if you have new vendors to recommend.

Before contracting for any services, ask for references and to see their work for yourself. Also, you may want to check with the authors of this manual or other PSJC Bar/Bat Mitzvah veterans for support, ideas and more specific advice about the various aspects of Bar/Bat Mitzvah planning.

Once you have decided to engage a provider, obtain a detailed written contract as to exactly what services will be delivered, by whom, payment schedule and contingency arrangements (i.e. what if the specific photographer or entertainer you are expecting has an emergency, who can you expect in their place and how will you be notified of any changes?).

In order to maintain the sanctity of Shabbat, ensure that contracts with any musicians, entertainers and caterers are drawn up in such a way that payment is not made on Shabbat. Once again, any questions should be raised with the Rabbi.

Don't forget, any time you plan such a big event, there will be stress. If at all possible, arrange to take the day or two before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah off so you can take care of the last minute details in a less pressured manner. Do not hesitate to hire extra help around the house so you do not run yourself ragged. It is well worth the investment.

## **Share Your Experience**

We hope you have found this booklet helpful in planning your Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Just remember to enjoy it. After your event is over, pass the torch to the next relay runners. Share your ideas for the next edition of this guidebook!

*Ilene Rubenstein and Helene Santo, December 16, 2020*