



B'nai Mitzvah Guide

*A resource for families planning a
Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration*

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Shalom!

If you are reading this Kol Hadash B'nai Mitzvah Guide, you are likely:

- Curious about our Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program
- The parent of a student approaching Bar/Bat Mitzvah age
- Finding out more about Kol Hadash

Or...

- All of the above!

We are very glad that you have opened this booklet, whatever your reasons. We hope that you will find it useful for your purposes.

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What is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

The History of the Bar Mitzvah

The Bar Mitzvah – and the Bat Mitzvah, its modern counterpart for girls – is a coming-of-age ceremony. At one time, the ceremony for males probably included circumcision at age 13, a rite that was later moved to the eighth day after birth. In ancient times, adulthood arrived with the onset of puberty.

In rabbinic Judaism, the Bar Mitzvah marked the time when a boy assumed individual responsibility for the commandments of Jewish law. Before the age of thirteen, a child was presumed to be a parent's responsibility; after his thirteenth birthday (or twelfth for girls), the obligation to obey the positive commandments of the Torah and of the Rabbis was his own. He was considered a part of the adult community, a "son (*bar*) of commandment (*mitzvah*)."

Once responsible for his own behavior, the Bar Mitzvah could now read from the Torah during the Saturday morning religious service. However, the practice of calling a thirteen-year-old boy to read from the Torah on the occasion of becoming Bar Mitzvah is not specifically prescribed in Jewish law and was not practiced widely until the fifteenth century. It was around this time that the tradition of the boy creating a commentary on a Jewish text also became popular.

Thirteen-year-old girls did not obtain the privilege of celebrating a Bat Mitzvah until about eighty years ago, since in rabbinic Judaism historically (and in Orthodox Judaism today) women are not eligible to lead the public Shabbat Torah reading. From the first Bat Mitzvah in the 1920s, the ceremony has grown in popularity and today is practically universal throughout the non-Orthodox Jewish denominations.

In contemporary Reform and Conservative Judaism, it is customary for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to read from the Torah portion or Haftarah for a particular Shabbat on or after his/her thirteenth birthday, as well as to present a commentary on the text and on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience and to lead a portion of the Shabbat service.

The Humanistic Bar and Bat Mitzvah

In modern American society, thirteen no longer represents the beginning of adulthood, but rather the onset of adolescence – a period of searching for one’s identity and life path. Thirteen-year-olds can respond to more challenges than were expected of them as children; they can demonstrate greater independence and depth of thought, competence, and commitment.

A Humanistic Bar or Bat Mitzvah provides public encouragement and recognition of the development of these capacities on the road to maturity. It signifies a young person’s desire to become more responsible for his or her own decisions and actions, and to identify with previous generations of the Jewish people who have done so. The Hebrew word *mitzvah* today is used in two ways. The original meaning was “commandment,” but a second meaning of *mitzvah* is “Good Deed.” Thus for Humanistic Jews, a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* also signifies a “son/daughter of good deeds.”

Humanistic Jews mark this life passage by encouraging the Mitzvah student to select a Jewish text or project with which they feel a personal affinity as the basis for their study. In their Jewish education at Kol Hadash, the students receive a thorough grounding in Jewish history, Hebrew, Jewish culture, and Humanistic Judaism. The Humanistic Mitzvah presentation declares membership in the Jewish people and in the human community of ethical citizens.

Requirements of the Kol Hadash Bar/Bat Mitzvah

To celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Kol Hadash, a child is expected to:

- Regularly attend Sunday School beginning in third grade
- Complete two-year B'nai Mitzvah class (6th and 7th Grade), in addition to Sunday School
- Meet periodically with Rabbi Chalom in the year leading up to the Mitzvah celebration
- Study and prepare to read a Hebrew selection (Torah, Bible or other Hebrew literature) and deliver a paper in English (commentary on Hebrew reading or results of an in-depth, relevant project — research, artistic expression, or activity)

*Note: families of older students who wish to prepare for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah should contact the Youth Education Director to discuss options.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah student is also encouraged to:

- Complete a mitzvah (service) project that demonstrates a willingness to think of others and contribute to his/her community.

It is expected that each Bar/Bat Mitzvah child and his/her parents will usher and help with a simple oneg at two B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies during the year of or prior to his/her own Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Because a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony also welcomes a student into the Kol Hadash community, all congregants are invited to attend the service.

The student's parents or guardians must be members of Kol Hadash and meet all financial obligations for the Mitzvah celebration, including membership dues, tuition and fees, facility rental, Oneg Shabbat, etc. See Appendix II for more detail.

Choosing a Date

The first formal step to celebrating a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Kol Hadash is to set a date for the event. Most families try to find a date close to their child's 13th birthday, but others choose dates for convenience.

The Mitzvah date is selected in consultation with the Youth Education Director 18-24 months before the celebration.

Mitzvah families can choose among a Friday night, Saturday morning, or Saturday evening service. Fall ceremonies generally cannot be scheduled before November 1st, depending on the dates of the High Holidays in that particular year.

If you are considering a fall ceremony, this would require that Hebrew tutoring or project work would take place during the previous summer and might preclude overnight camp or a lengthy family vacation. Keep this in mind when selecting a Mitzvah date.

The service must be held at the North Shore Unitarian Church, 2100 Half Day Rd., Deerfield, unless other arrangements are approved in advance by the Youth Education Director and the Rabbi. Our Torah and ark are housed here, and it is the most appropriate location for B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies. Reserving, contracting and paying for the facility are the responsibility of the family. The Youth Education Director will make arrangements to use the facility for rehearsals during the two weeks prior to the ceremony; this is included in the facility rental fee.

To reserve a date at the North Shore Unitarian Church, once it has been approved by the Youth Education Director, contact the church administrator at (847) 234-2460 x100.

The Heller Nature Center is an approved location for B'nai Mitzvah services with smaller guest lists. For larger guest lists, the Gorton Community Center (site of KHHC High Holiday Services) should also be used.

Noting that a Bar/Bat Mitzvah services is a community event and not just a private family event, services should be held in one of Kol Hadash's regularly used spaces (see above). Approval for any alternate location must be made by the Rabbi and the Education Director.

The family is expected to host an oneg following the ceremony; this may be as simple as *challah*, cookies, and juice. The family is responsible for providing the food, drinks, and paper goods. Please note that use of the Hearth Room foyer is included in the rental fee for the Unitarian Church; there is an additional charge to use the adjacent Fellowship Hall for an extended oneg.

Some families choose to host a simple oneg following the service and then a separate party at another location. Kol Hadash is not involved in the planning of or assistance with parties. See the section titled "The Ethics of Celebration" for more discussion about parties.

B'nai Mitzvah Classes

Sixth Grade Year

In 6th grade Hebrew School, the students acquire the basic Hebrew reading ability they will need for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah presentations. The curriculum is self-paced, and has been very effective for many years in developing the required skills. More advanced students will be able to complete the course in less than two semesters and will begin learning the basics of Hebrew as a living language. The 6th grade class is generally held on Monday evenings at the Kol Hadash office in Lincolnshire. A class after Sunday School at Deerfield High School (11:30-12:30) may be offered but this is not guaranteed and depends on enrollment.

Seventh Grade Year

The second year of the program, for 7th graders, is taught by Rabbi Chalom. Because Hebrew is a central component of Rabbi Chalom's teaching, the 6th grade year (or equivalent) must be completed to take his 7th grade class. One is not required to celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in order to take the Kol Hadash Hebrew program. The 7th grade class is held on Monday evenings at the Kol Hadash office in Lincolnshire.

*Note: Enrollment in both years of the program, in addition to regular Sunday School attendance, is required for all B'nai Mitzvah students.

In the 7th grade B'nai Mitzvah class, there are four major learning objectives:

1) Practice reading and understanding the students' B'nai Mitzvah Hebrew readings

By the time of their Mitzvah services, students will be very familiar with both the pronunciation and the meaning of their Hebrew readings. Students will read and interpret their own and other students' Hebrew portions, with special focus on the closest Mitzvah celebration.

2) Understand Hebrew as a Living Language

Students will master simple Hebrew conversations, grammar, and vocabulary, as well as songs sung in Israel and at Kol Hadash. This language study will be complementary to their B'nai Mitzvah Hebrew reading skills.

3) Understand the Bar/Bat Mitzvah concept and celebration

Students will reflect on the history and significance of their own ceremony, as well as review the basic elements of other B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies they will likely attend over the course of the 7th grade year. This will make them more familiar with what they see in other congregations and prepare them to explain the distinctive approach of Kol Hadash and Humanistic Judaism.

4) Understand Humanistic Judaism

Students will have a good understanding of the basics of Humanistic Judaism: its values, its approach to Jewish life and personal ethics, its roots and history, and its celebrations.

Creating the Mitzvah Presentation

For their Mitzvah presentations, students may choose one of the following, with the Rabbi's guidance:

- 1) A Hebrew selection from the Torah, which is read in Hebrew from the Torah scroll and in English translation during the service.
- 2) A Hebrew selection from another part of the Bible or from medieval or modern Hebrew literature. The selection is read in Hebrew and in English translation.
- 3) A project based on research, activity, or artistic expression. In this case, the Hebrew reading would be shorter, and chosen to relate to the theme of the project. The project should be a vehicle for the student's demonstration of knowledge about some aspect of Jewish history or culture, how the topic relates to the Jewish community, and how the student can contribute to his/her community.

For each of the above, Rabbi Chalom meets with students approximately one year prior to the ceremony to help them choose a text and/or a project. Once a text or topic is chosen, it is time to begin the Mitzvah paper, the student's commentary on the selected text or project; traditionally, the Bar or Bat Mitzvah's commentary on his/her Torah portion is called a *d'var Torah*. Rabbi Chalom meets with the student periodically as the paper is developed. For project-based presentations, the timing of the paper will depend on the nature of the project. The paper should be finished before Hebrew tutoring begins, although changes may be made up to six weeks before the service.

The goal of the Hebrew reading is to demonstrate a connection with Jewish culture. **For presentations based on Hebrew texts, regular Hebrew tutoring with a Kol Hadash tutor begins at least 14 weeks before the event; the tutoring schedule should be finalized five months before the event. For project-based presentations, the length of the tutoring schedule will be based on the selected shorter Hebrew reading.**

It is very important that the tutoring schedule be consistent and without interruption, so that the student can make adequate progress. If you are considering a fall ceremony, summer tutoring or project work might preclude overnight camp or a lengthy family vacation. Keep this in mind when selecting a Mitzvah date.

The Project may be:

- A written research project that will be presented at the Mitzvah ceremony
- A project involving artistic expression, such as music, visual art, creative writing (prose, poetry), or a performance that is presented at the Mitzvah ceremony.
- An in-depth service-oriented project with a clear learning component, a summary of which is presented at the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. This should be significantly more involved and over a longer period of time than the mitzvah project as outlined in the next section (Community Service).

All projects must have Jewish content and involve a learning experience. Some examples are:

- A researched and written report on a Jewish figure or historical event (such as a biographical presentation of Albert Einstein as a Jewish hero or a paper comparing and contrasting anti-Semitism in Europe in the early 20th century and anti-Semitism in Europe today)
- Artwork created in the style of a Jewish artist and displayed at the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, accompanied by an oral presentation about the work.
- Weekly volunteer work at a center for Jewish elderly and the compilation of an oral history of American Jewish Life in the early-mid 20th century.

Community Service

Kol Hadash's requirements for B'nai Mitzvah services include Sunday School for Jewish cultural education and Hebrew School for familiarity with Jewish language. We also feel that community service enables students to live out the ideals of Humanistic Judaism, improving the world through human effort. By performing community service, the students can learn valuable lessons about good citizenship, personal responsibility, and the importance of community mutual assistance.

The choice of how and where to volunteer lies with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child and his/her family; guidance can be provided by the Youth Education Director and the Rabbi. Many public and private schools require community service, and that experience can certainly 'double' for the Mitzvah community service. The mitzvah project can be as simple as doing small activities during the year prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah or more substantial participation in a charitable activity, or any project or activity that serves the child's family or community. The mitzvah project should involve at least 13 hours of work during the year before the Mitzvah celebration.

There are opportunities at Kol Hadash to assist our educational programs, including family services on Friday nights and special events like the Hanukkah service or the Purim carnival. There are also many kinds of service agencies in the Jewish and general community looking for assistance; animal shelters, food banks, and local libraries are just a few examples. Many students choose to include their Community Service experience in their Mitzvah paper as part of their presentation.

If you would like further suggestions of Community Service opportunities, please contact the Youth Education Director.

The Ethics of Celebration

One of the most challenging aspects of the B'nai Mitzvah process for the family and the student is finding an appropriate way to celebrate the mitzvah student. His/her achievements should not pass by without celebration, but the excesses of extravagant mitzvah parties are infamous. Mitzvah parties have the potential either to reinforce or to undermine the values of the ceremony and our congregation, so families are encouraged to find fitting ways to celebrate their child's achievement.

Children invited to the mitzvah service should be accompanied by their parents (who should therefore also be invited to the service)—this helps both to demonstrate the importance of the event and to maintain decorum during the mitzvah presentation. It is also expected that friends of the mitzvah student who are invited to the mitzvah party will also be invited to the mitzvah service, which, after all, is the real reason for the celebration.

Entirely acceptable alternatives to large formal parties may also include:

- A family trip to a special destination (such as Washington, DC, New York City, Israel)
- An event for friends at a special destination (amusement park, bowling, sporting event)
- A fun community service activity
- A smaller event for family and close friends

For those families who choose a Mitzvah party, you have the option of celebrating at the Unitarian Church, using the adjacent Fellowship Hall; the church charges an additional fee for using this room. In the past, families have hosted dessert receptions after Friday evening services or informal lunch buffets after Saturday morning services.

Invitations

Families are responsible for selecting and printing invitations to the service. Text should include the following (substituting Unitarian Church information with other site information as necessary):

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation
at
North Shore Unitarian Church
2100 Half Day Road
Deerfield, Illinois

Please consult the Rabbi or Youth Education Director for assistance with appropriate text for the invitation.

The Mitzvah Service

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah service is designed to celebrate the growing maturity and independence of the student. Families work with the Rabbi to create a ceremony that is meaningful to them and consistent with the values and traditions of Humanistic Judaism and Kol Hadash. The Mitzvah service is a special opportunity to honor family and friends by having them participate in the celebration.

The Liturgy and Music

Families may use Kol Hadash's standard Bar/Bat Mitzvah service or may customize the service with an array of liturgy and music with the Rabbi's approval. If the Mitzvah celebration is a Havdallah service on a Saturday evening, there are special symbols to include: wine, a spice box, and a havdallah (braided) candle.

The standard cover for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service includes the Mitzvah student's name (in Hebrew and English), the date of the event in the Jewish and general calendars, the Rabbi's or other officiant's name, and the name and logo of Kol Hadash. Families may create a customized cover with the approval of the Rabbi and Youth Education Director.

The service must be finalized **at least 6 weeks before the Mitzvah event**. The Rabbi will send the family an electronic file of the service in PDF format. The family is responsible for printing the service.

Kol Hadash's pianist and soloists provide music during the service. Their services are arranged by the Youth Education Director.

The Leader

The ceremony may be led by the Rabbi or a lay-leader of the congregation (dependent on availability).

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Student

As part of the ceremony, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is expected to:

- Read from the Torah or an alternative Hebrew text.
- Give a short speech that includes a summary and explanation of the Torah portion, other Hebrew reading, or project, including the reason the child chose it and its relevance to his/her life.
- Lead several portions of the service, in English and Hebrew.

Optional:

- A speech on a topic relevant to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience, i.e. the significance of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to the child, a topic relating to the Torah portion or Hebrew selection, an explanation of the child's Mitzvah project, thank-you to the people who helped with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, etc.

Other elements of the ceremony include:

- An opening explanation of Humanistic Judaism
- Parents' address to the child
- Inter-generational passing of the Torah
- Rabbi's response to the Mitzvah presentation
- Candlelighting

The Mitzvah family chooses readers for the service, as well as family and friends to honor with the candlelighting ceremony. A sample candlelighting order is below:

The Mitzvah Tutor
Friends of the Mitzvah Student
Aunts, Uncles, Cousins
Grandparents
Siblings
Parents
The Mitzvah Student

Humanistic Decorum

The Mitzvah event and its participants should exemplify the values of Humanistic Judaism; therefore, theistic texts and practices, such as wearing a *tallit* (prayer shawl) or *kippah* (*yarmulke*/skullcap), are inappropriate and are not included in the service.

Rehearsals

In the two weeks before the ceremony, the student rehearses at the Unitarian Church three times: once with the tutor and Youth Education Director the first week, and twice with the Rabbi and tutor (if available) the week of the service. Sites other than the Unitarian Church may not be able to accommodate these rehearsals.

On the day of the service, there is a final rehearsal, to begin no later than one hour before the ceremony; all readers must attend.

These rehearsals allow students to feel comfortable speaking in the space for the service and allow the tutor and Rabbi to offer last-minute tips on presentation and to walk through the ceremony as it will take place. If the Mitzvah family plans to take family photographs before the event, they should arrive at the Unitarian Church **at least one hour before the final rehearsal begins, or two hours before the ceremony.** The family can also contact the Unitarian Church to arrange a time to take photographs before the date of the ceremony.

The Mitzvah Celebration

In addition to arranging for the rental of the Unitarian Church and hosting the oneg, the family is responsible for the printing of their service. On the day of the ceremony, service booklets can be left in the foyer for ushers to distribute. The family may reserve seats for their close family in the first two rows of the audience by placing services on those chairs.

Each Mitzvah family (parents and student) agrees to serve as ushers and to help with the oneg at two services before, or in the year of, their own service. This will be coordinated by the Youth Education Director. Ushers distribute services, maintain order and decorum among the invited guests during the service, and help those guests who require assistance. Ushers also help set up the oneg and clean up afterward.

To maintain decorum and assure good guest behavior, we require that private security/chaperone services be hired for services with 50 or more children attending. Families should contact the Education Director for a referral and must provide Kol Hadash with confirmation of hiring.

We encourage families to invite friends of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah with their parents, to discourage large numbers of young guests who are unattended and more likely to become unruly. Families should also designate adult friends or family members to sit among younger guests in the sanctuary to maintain decorum.

Approximately 15 minutes before the ceremony begins, the Rabbi and the immediate Mitzvah family (parents, siblings and Mitzvah student) will meet away from the sanctuary and foyer to reflect on the moment at hand and to relax before the exciting event.

Final Thoughts

The Mitzvah celebration should not be considered the end of Jewish education – it is only the beginning.

Just as we do not finish learning about life in middle school, participating in Jewish culture continues through high school into college and adulthood. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah should be a peak on a continual relationship with the Jewish people and with Humanistic Judaism. It is expected that Bar/Bat Mitzvah students will complete the 7th and 8th grade years of Sunday School and continue on to Confirmation.

It is our hope that the Kol Hadash Mitzvah experience is an opportunity to grow intellectually, emotionally, and personally; to develop skills and self-confidence; and to experience a meaningful connection to the Jewish people and to humanity. The Mitzvah celebration should provide family and community the opportunity to celebrate and applaud these achievements and to reaffirm their own commitments.

It takes a congregation to create a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It takes a lifetime to explore what it means to be a Humanistic Jew and a good human being.

Appendix I – The Countdown

6th Grade	Student attends weekday Hebrew School in addition to Sunday School.
7th Grade:	Student attends weekday B'nai Mitzvah class with Rabbi Chalom, in addition to Sunday School.
Month 24-18	Select Mitzvah Date with Youth Education Director
Month 12	Family meets with the Rabbi. Student meets with the Rabbi to discuss Hebrew reading or other project. Student begins to plan Mitzvah service project. B'nai Mitzvah fee is due.
Month 11	Student finalizes Hebrew reading selection or project and meets with the Rabbi to discuss his/her commentary.
Month 10-9	Student writes rough draft, in consultation with Rabbi.
Month 8	Student edits/refines paper, in consultation with Rabbi.
Month 7-6	Student completes paper. Hebrew tutoring schedule is finalized.
Month 4	Hebrew tutoring begins about 14 weeks before ceremony. Family meets with Rabbi to discuss service.
Month 3	Hebrew tutoring continues.
Month 2	Hebrew tutoring continues. Student begins presentation practice. Service is finalized.
Month 1	Family gives list of readers/candle-lighters to Rabbi. Hebrew tutoring and presentation practice continue.

One week prior: The student rehearses one day at the Unitarian Church with the Rabbi and/or tutor.

The week of the service: The student rehearses two days at the Unitarian Church with the Rabbi and/or tutor.

On the day of the service: a final rehearsal, to begin no later than one hour before the service, is held with the Rabbi; all readers must attend.

Note: The timetable will vary for students undertaking project-based presentations, but the project should begin no later than eight months before the ceremony.

Appendix II – Fees and Financial Obligations

Mitzvah family must be dues-paying members of Kol Hadash.

Student must be enrolled in Kol Hadash Sunday School and Hebrew School with consequent financial obligations.

Fees are subject to change at the discretion of the Youth Education Committee.

Sunday School--\$355 per year (discount for siblings)
6th grade Hebrew School--\$900
7th grade B'nai Mitzvah class--\$200
B'nai Mitzvah fee--\$850

The B'nai Mitzvah fee is charged to cover administrative costs, including fees for tutoring and musicians' services at the ceremony. Payment of the fee is due one year before the date of the service. This fee does not include the costs of renting the facility for the ceremony or printing the B'nai Mitzvah service booklet to be used during the ceremony.

The Unitarian Church offers Kol Hadash families a special rate of \$600 to rent the sanctuary and Hearth Room, including rehearsals. There is an additional charge for use of the Fellowship Hall for an extended oneg as well as custodial fees. Rental of the Fellowship Hall is significantly more expensive for a Friday night than a Saturday morning; this rate is currently \$1,250 for a Friday night and \$450 for Saturday through 3:00 pm. This rate was correct at time of printing but is subject to change. Families should contact the Unitarian Church to confirm the rental rate and to arrange for a rental contract.

**Appendix III —
Sample Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service Cover**

הבר מצווה של
סטיבן ג'קובס

**The Bar Mitzvah
of
Steven Jacobs**

September 9, 2006
16 Elul, 5766



Rabbi Adam Chalom

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation is a welcoming Jewish home that honors Jewish tradition and empowers independent, human-focused choices.

We celebrate being Jewish through our human-focused philosophy of life. We believe that human beings possess the intelligence and wisdom to determine the purpose and course of their lives

We honor Jewish tradition and heritage through cultural and educational exploration, and we celebrate holidays and life-cycle events together. We seek positive Jewish connections relevant to our everyday lives.

Kol Hadash empowers its members to make independent choices, to live lives of integrity, and to create positive change in the world. We believe in the fundamental importance of individual responsibility to shape lives of significance and dignity.

We encourage our children to value their Jewish identity and to feel confident in their ability to think for themselves.

✧ Kol Hadash provides a **Home** – a place you can belong and feel welcome.

✧ Kol Hadash creates **Connections** – relevant and meaningful relationships with other Jews, broader Jewish culture and our community.

✧ Kol Hadash stimulates **Ideas** – new ways of thinking about relevant Jewish and Humanist philosophy, ethics, literature, culture and history.

For more information, please contact:

Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation

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