

## IS MY CHILD REQUIRED TO DO A MITZVAH PROJECT?

With the message today of *tikun olam*, making this world a better place to live in, doing community service or volunteer work should not only be done for the sake of one's Bar/Bat Mitzvah, but should be part of one's life.

## WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE ATTIRE FOR THE FAMILY OF THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

Whether the ceremony is held in a synagogue or in another venue, the family should dress as if they are going to a High Holiday service at their synagogue. Men and boys should wear a suit or jacket with a tie. I usually prefer women and girls to have their shoulders covered. One should check with their synagogue for the proper dress code and decorum.

## HOW MANY ALIYOT ARE THERE?

It depends on the custom of the synagogue or clergy. Conservative and Orthodox synagogues on a Saturday morning contain seven aliyot plus the *maftir*, which is the concluding section that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is honored with an aliyah. They may also chant that section. Each Reform and Reconstructionist synagogue and freelance clergy vary on the number of aliyot.

## SHOULD WE CHOOSE AN EVENING AFFAIR OR AN AFTERNOON KIDDISH LUNCHEON?

An evening affair is a great transition if your family is having a Havdalah service that takes place on a Saturday afternoon in the winter. You may want to find out from your synagogue or clergy-person if a Havdalah service is an option. In the spring and fall, Shabbat is not over until late in the evening, so you may want to take that into consideration. If you are having a morning ceremony and want an evening affair, you may want to think about your guests and how they will spend the

afternoon if they do not live in close proximity to the synagogue or venue. Many families will opt to follow the ceremony by a buffet style Kiddush luncheon when they are hosting an evening party. You may want to also consider your budget. An evening affair especially in the spring and summer months is higher priced than an afternoon party.

## CAN WE GO OVER EXACTLY WHAT OUR CHILD WILL BE DOING IN THE SERVICE?

It is important to schedule a meeting with your child's rabbi or cantor and ask them for an outline of the service highlighted with your child's duties. Each child is unique, has different strengths and weaknesses, and may lead more or less of the service depending on their particular needs. Today, many synagogues and freelance clergy are inclusive. It is possible for a severely special needs child to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. If a child is not capable of reading, but can sing by memory, he or she can fulfill the minimum Bar/Bat Mitzvah requirement by chanting the Torah blessings.

## MAY WE CHOOSE SPECIAL MUSICAL SELECTIONS OR READINGS?

Each synagogue or clergy-person has their own style of service. Some of them have planned melodies and readings, while others may give you the option to choose the melodies and readings that you prefer.

## ARE THERE ANY GUIDELINES THAT WE SHOULD SHARE WITH OUR GUESTS?

Usually each synagogue prints out a booklet to describe their service and their decorum. Most importantly, they should know to respect the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the family, and the venue. In the beginning of every service after welcoming the guests, I always ask them to turn off their cell phones so that they fully enjoy participating in this beautiful



coming of age ritual. There also needs to be an emphasis that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony is more than just the party. There are many children who only attend the reception and miss out on the cultural and spiritual meaning of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. ♦



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