

IKAR • עיקר

B'nai Mitzvah Handbook

IKAR
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PHILOSOPHY

Every person in our community is on a journey -- trying to make sense of what it means to be a Jew and a human being in the world. Our children are also on this journey. The Rabbis teach that Torah was given down in fire, and in fire it is to be transmitted. In our teaching, we try to recapture the intensity of that fire, to strive to understand what message it has for us today. We teach our children to question, to debate, to fall in love with Torah, finding their own voices in the chorus of our tradition.

Our students don't *have* a bar or bat mitzvah -- they *become* a bar or bat mitzvah. They become responsible adults in the Jewish community and in the world. They have the privilege of entering into the sublime world of Torah study, exploring the mysteries of the texts and ideas that have sustained our people. They become partners in the work of tikkun, of fulfilling the Prophetic mandate for the universal recognition of human dignity, the loving pursuit of justice, and shalom. They learn of the dangers of apathy and indifference and begin to ask questions about what they can do to make a difference.

Preparation for b'nai mitzvah is an exciting time for our students and their families. The bar/bat mitzvah is not the end of the journey, it is the beginning. Our students are affirming, publicly, that they are part of the conversation, and their families and our community are responding with a resounding *YES! We believe that you have something important to say, and we are ready to hear you.*

This handbook is designed to guide parents and students through the process of preparing for b'nai mitzvah. If you have any questions or need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact the IKAR office at 323-634-1870.

PREPARATION

Educational and Community Requirements

B'nai mitzvah at IKAR reflect the culmination of several years of study, reflection, and action, and the beginning of a mature, long-term commitment to a meaningful relationship with Judaism, the Jewish people, and the world. B'nai mitzvah are marked by students standing before the Torah, before their family, friends and community, demonstrating that they are ready to begin to transition into adulthood, and willing to become responsible members of the community and world.

B'nai mitzvah at IKAR are true celebrations for our entire community, and so we require that students prepare within the context of our community as actively involved members of IKAR. *Preparation for b'nai mitzvah means beginning formal Jewish education by 3rd grade, if not earlier.* This includes participation in *all* required Limudim classes and experiences. If a student misses any class, she is required to make up any work she may have missed. If she misses more than 25% of classes over the course of the year (due to illness or other extenuating circumstances) she will meet with the rabbi, education director and teacher to determine appropriate make-up material. This is not to be punitive, but rather to ensure that all students are prepared for their bar/bat mitzvah.

We will not schedule a student's bar/bat mitzvah date until we are certain that student has acquired or is on the road to acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to become a bar/bat mitzvah at IKAR. Additionally, six months prior to the scheduled bar/bat mitzvah, if a student has not complied with above requirements, the student and parents meet with the rabbi,

education director and teacher to assess the most appropriate response – either postponing the bar/bat mitzvah or taking on additional make-up material.

If new members to IKAR have previously participated in other Jewish educational settings, the student's background will be discussed with our education director so that we can determine the best way to fully integrate him/her into IKAR's program.

In general, IKAR b'nai mitzvah occur when a child turns 13 years old. Given the individual student's educational background and life experiences, it could be best to wait one or two years after the 13th birthday, in order to ensure that the student is prepared – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, developmentally – for the experience. Preparedness is determined jointly by the rabbi, parents, and the student.

Students with Special Needs

Our rabbi, education director, musical director and teachers are committed to helping all of our students find the best way to prepare for b'nai mitzvah. If a student has a learning challenge that affects his or her ability to learn, please contact us so that we can discuss ways of attaining our shared goals for the student.

Meetings with the Rabbi and Rabbinic Intern

There will be several private meetings between the rabbi, the students, and the families of the b'nai mitzvah. Meetings should be scheduled through the IKAR office.

- Approximately 3 months prior to the service the rabbi meets with each student and his/her parents for an introductory look at the *parashah*. In preparation for this meeting, the student should read his/her *parashah* numerous times and write questions and issues that emerge from the *parashah*. Questions must be submitted to the rabbinic office 48 hours in advance of the meeting.
- Following the 3 month meeting with the rabbi, the student meets 2-3 times with the rabbinic intern or fellow to find commentaries, discuss interpretations and solidify an approach to the d'var torah.
- Approximately 3-4 weeks prior to the service the rabbi meets with the student to hear the development of the *d'var Torah*. The student must come to this meeting prepared to share a full first draft, which is submitted to the IKAR office 48 hours in advance of the meeting.
- Two weeks prior to the service a final draft of the *d'var Torah* is given to the rabbi for approval.
- The week of the service the rabbi or rabbinic fellow and the musical director meet with the student and parents to go over the final draft of the *d'var Torah*, practice reading from the Torah scroll, discuss any last minute issues or needs, and help prepare the student and family spiritually for the final steps of the bar/bat mitzvah journey.

Meetings with the Musical Director

The musical director will be in contact with all IKAR-approved tutors to ensure that each student is progressing on schedule for his/her bar/bat mitzvah. Approximately 4-6 weeks prior to the service, the musical director will meet with each student to review progress on his/her Torah and Haftarah portions. If the musical director determines that the student needs greater attention/focus in order to be prepared for the bar/bat mitzvah, it will be discussed with parents at that time. As mentioned above, students will have their final meeting with the musical director and the rabbi the week of the service to practice reading from the actual Torah scroll and to make sure that the student feels comfortable with the choreography of the Torah service.

Meetings with a Private Tutor

Approximately 8 months prior to the service, students will begin working with IKAR approved private tutors at the expense of the family. Tutors teach students how to chant their Torah and Haftarah portions and review how to make all of the blessings before and after the Torah and Haftarah readings. Individual tutors will communicate regularly with the musical director and education director to discuss strategies, deal with specific needs and make sure students are on track.

PROGRAM

Learning Experiences

Throughout the course of the b'nai mitzvah experience, students build off of learning from previous years and become proficient in the following areas:

1. **TORAH:** Students learn how to engage text seriously, study traditional rabbinic commentaries and find their own voices in the tradition.
2. **ETHICS and SOCIAL JUSTICE:** Through participation in Minyan Tzedek (community organizing, IKAR-style), students examine core Jewish values, in theory and in practice.
3. **BASIC JEWISH LITERACY:** Students are able to access basic Jewish texts and have familiarity and understanding of the Jewish calendar (holidays) and Jewish living (life cycle events, Jewish ritual objects and symbols, key blessings, etc.).
4. **DAVENING:** Students become active participants in the davening of our community, learning the structure and meaning of the prayer service, and finding their own points of access to meaningful prayer and ritual experiences.
5. **HEBREW:** Students increase their comfort with Hebrew reading and acquire a basic Hebrew vocabulary, including words related to Torah study and Jewish life, and common Hebrew phrases.
6. **TORAH READING:** Students are trained in Torah and Haftarah Trope so that they acquire the skills to read any *parashah*.

This class is a wonderful opportunity for students not only to acquire skills, but to begin to wrestle with who they are as Jews and as human beings and what that means about the way that they live their lives. As one of our students wrote about the experience:

If all Hebrew schools were like IKAR's b'nai mitzvah, there would be a lot more observant Jews in the world. Our class is small and intimate; everyone is treated as a mature individual. We have deep, drawn out discussions on a single verse of the Torah, we go way beyond the *p'shat* (the simple) understanding. Everyone has freedom of speech, and when people hear our interpretations, not many adults can believe our ages. We discuss all realms of Judaism, from global action to Hebrew roots.

We expect our b'nai mitzvah students to take a leadership role in the community, participating actively in prayer, learning, ritual and justice projects, and guiding/ mentoring younger students in Limudim.

Minyan Tzedek

Part of what makes the Jewish life of our community so rich and compelling is the depth of our willingness to engage in the work of the world. At IKAR we preach a torah of social responsibility, compassion and tikkun, healing. Working toward the realization of our greatest aspirations as Jews and as Americans requires partnerships, relationships, and a shared sense of mission and purpose. Minyan Tzedek mobilizes IKARites to work together to create the social change we seek.

In lieu of an individualized tikkun project, IKAR's 7th graders will engage together in IKAR's Minyan Tzedek initiative. Working with a group facilitator/teacher, the students will determine the topic (education or food/hunger) and the components of the path (text study, hands-on work, teaching the Limudim community, etc.) and then work together in that area.

Tzedakah

Although not formally part of our curriculum, many students request that their families and friends make donations to specific funds *in lieu* of gifts; some children donate a portion of the money that they receive as a gift. There are so many wonderful organizations (including IKAR itself) that support the sacred work of building and nurturing community and restoring dignity to all human beings – this is a great opportunity for parents to work with children to identify tzedakah priorities and make an offering in honor of the student's achievement. This will also help ensure that the student remains focused on what the bar/bat mitzvah is truly about.

In addition to whatever organization you choose to contribute to, we encourage you to consider a gift of 3% of the cost of your child's bar/ bat mitzvah celebration to MAZON (www.mazon.org) to fight hunger in the United States.

Jewish Identity and Spirituality

In the year leading up to bar/bat mitzvah, students learn about the *mikvah*, the ritual bath, as an opportunity for spiritual awakening, as well as the final step in the process of conversion. In the week preceding *each* bar/bat mitzvah, the class will create and attend a *mikvah* ceremony for the student becoming a bar/bat mitzvah. Every student will participate in this ritual – for some students it will be the final stage in conversion, an opportunity to affirm *halakhically* (legally) their Jewish identity. For all students it holds the potential for a moment of spiritual depth and possibility in the context of a loving and supportive community.

B'nai Mitzvah Mentor Families

The education director will match each family with a family that has been through the process. The alumni families will be available to answer questions and offer advice based on their own experiences. They will also share the various traditions that have helped make the IKAR b'nai mitzvah experience so meaningful. Bar/bat mitzvah students will also have the opportunity to meet and speak with an older student who has been through the experience.

THE BIG DAY

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony

During the Bar/bat mitzvah ceremony, students will:

- Read Torah and Haftarah (the selection from the Prophets chosen to compliment the weekly Torah reading). Students will read their entire Torah portion, as well as a significant portion of their Haftarah.
- Chant all of the blessings before and after the Torah and Haftarah reading in Hebrew.

- Give a *d'var Torah* (a teaching of approximately 5 minutes), with their reflections on the *parashah*.
- Help lead the Torah service

Honors

We encourage the families to participate actively in the Shabbat morning service of the bar/bat mitzvah. There are many ways to honor members of the family. Jewish friends and family over the age of 13 can be given the following honors (though not all honors need to be distributed):

- *Petiha* (opening the ark) beginning of Torah service
- *Aliyah 1* (recitation of the blessing)
- *Aliyah 2* (recitation of the blessing)
- *Aliyah 3* (recitation of the blessing)
- *Hagba* (lifting the Torah)
- *Glilah* (dressing the Torah)
- Torah holder (during Haftarah)
- “*Huppah*” holders (during the blessings from parents and rabbi) – 4 people
- *Ashrei*
- *Petiha* (opening the ark) end of Torah service

Additionally, parents will be invited to recite *birkhat kohanim*, the priestly blessing, over their child during the service. This blessing, which originated as a priestly blessing in the Torah, is traditionally said by parents to their children every Shabbat evening.

A transliteration and traditional translation are provided below. We invite you to creatively interpret the traditional blessing and write a three line blessing of your own to your child, which you can share at the bar/bat mitzvah.

For example, “May God’s face shine upon you, and be gracious to you” could be interpreted as: “May you be a reflection to the world of the power of learning, love and blessing, forever inspiring your family, friends and community.”

בְּרַכְךָ ה' וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ :
 אֲרֵה פָנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַן :
 יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם :

*Y'verekhekha Adonai v'yishmerekha
 Ya'er Adonai panav elekha vi'huneka
 Yisa Adonai panav elekha v'yasem lekha shalom.*

May God bless you, and keep you:
 May God's face shine upon you, and be gracious to you:
 May God lift up God's face to you, and grant you peace.
 (Numbers 6:22-27)

B'nai Mitzvah Booklet

The b'nai mitzvah booklet is a special tradition at IKAR where each bar/bat mitzvah shares his/her own unique voice with the community. Through this booklet, the community learns about the students' hopes and dreams, their most meaningful educational moments, their deepest concerns about the world, the honors going to various family members, their families' blessings for them, and their classmates' blessing for them. The creation of this booklet will be coordinated with the IKAR office.

Kiddush/Celebration

We trust that students and families who have journeyed through our b'nai mitzvah process will uphold the virtues of gratitude and humility when planning their celebrations. The bar/bat mitzvah is about the process of each child becoming a responsible young adult. While it is appropriate to celebrate with great joy at b'nai mitzvah, it should be done in the spirit of the learning and community experience reflected throughout the bar/bat mitzvah training at IKAR. As such, we hope and expect that all members of the b'nai mitzvah class will be invited to any celebration the family is having.

We ask that all b'nai mitzvah families sponsor the community kiddush following services, so that the whole community can celebrate with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and his/her family.

A Final Word

IKAR's b'nai mitzvah program was designed so that our children would experience a rich, nuanced, open-minded and unapologetic approach to Judaism, one that they could simultaneously struggle with, debate and love, one that would help them understand who they are in the world and what their responsibilities are to others. It is crucial that these objectives not get lost in the competing pressures and chaos of bar/bat mitzvah preparation, but rather that they remain at the forefront of our children's b'nai mitzvah experience. We look forward to sharing this exciting journey with you and your family.

B'NAI MITZVAH TIMELINE

The below timeline details important dates related to preparation for the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony.

1-3 Years Prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

- Confirm membership status and educational requirements with IKAR office
- Participate in the b'nai mitzvah orientation meeting (fall of the child's 5th and 6th grade year)
- After completing the b'nai mitzvah information form, receive confirmation of your child's bar/bat mitzvah date from the IKAR office
- Schedule all meeting dates with rabbi, musical director and rabbinic intern. Scheduling can be made through the IKAR office

1 Year Prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

- Receive packet from IKAR office and musical director with Torah and Haftarah portions, as well as relevant blessings/prayers
- Hire and coordinate meeting times with an IKAR-approved tutor
- Offer to help/volunteer at other IKAR bar/bat mitzvah celebrations
- At approximately 8 months, student begins working weekly with IKAR-approved tutor on Torah and Haftarah

3-4 Months Prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

- At approximately 3 months, meet with the rabbi for an introductory look at *the parashah*. In preparation for this meeting, the student should read his/her *parashah* numerous times and write questions and issues that emerge from the *parashah*. Questions must be submitted to the rabbinic office 48 hours in advance of the meeting.
- Following the 3 month meeting with the rabbi, meet 2-3 times with the rabbinic intern or fellow to find commentaries, discuss interpretations and solidify an approach to the d'var torah.
- Contact IKAR office to schedule mikvah date
- Contact IKAR office to discuss catering options for Kiddush for your child's bar/bat mitzvah

2 Months Prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

- At approximately 3-4 weeks, meet with rabbi and rabbinic intern to review a full first draft. In preparation, students submit the draft/ outline to the IKAR office **48 hours in advance** of the meeting
- At approximately 4-6 weeks, meet with musical director to go over Torah and Haftarah portions, as well as the blessings (student should be proficient in all areas and need only slight honing)
- Meet with rabbinic intern or fellow about *d'var Torah* as needed to incorporate rabbi's comments and add final touches (approximately 1-2 times)
- Contact the IKAR office to discuss your child's b'nai mitzvah booklet
- Decide who will get honors at your child's ceremony and give the list to the IKAR office
- Make sure student has a *tallit* and *kipah* for the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony

Final Month

- Two weeks prior to bar/bat mitzvah, turn in final draft of *d'var Torah* to the rabbi
- One week prior to bar/bat mitzvah, review/practice final draft of *d'var Torah* with rabbi or rabbinic fellow and musical director and participate in "dry run" of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony with musical director and/or tutor.
- Contact IKAR office to review/confirm arrangements for the day, including the number of guests your family is expecting
- Turn in b'nai mitzvah booklet to IKAR office at least two weeks prior to ceremony
- Participate in a *mikvah* ceremony at the AJU (University of Judaism)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How should IKAR be noted on invitations, etc.?

IKAR should be noted just like that – IKAR. We also encourage families to use the Hebrew spelling for IKAR, עיקר, on any printed material. If you have additional questions, please contact the IKAR office.

Do I need to wear a tallit and kippah?

Yes! This is the *minhag*, or custom/tradition, of our community.

How can we make our non-Jewish friends feel more comfortable at my child's bar/bat mitzvah service?

Our services are welcoming and accessible to people of all backgrounds. You are welcome to share with friends and family our Shabbat map, which explains the rituals and liturgy, before the service.

Who prints the b'nai mitzvah booklets?

IKAR is happy to print the b'nai mitzvah booklets for all families. If you wish to print your own booklet, please contact the IKAR office.

How can we involve younger siblings?

There are many age-appropriate honors for younger siblings including leading the community in Ashrei and/or Motzi following services.

What does the family have to provide for the congregation for Saturday Kiddush?

Please contact the IKAR office to discuss catering options.

GLOSSARY

Aliyah – Lit. “going up” and refers to the honor of being called up to read from the Torah

Bar – Lit. “son”

Bat – Lit. “daughter”

D'var Torah – Lit. “a word of Torah,” and refers to a teaching delivered by the bar/bat mitzvah that includes thought/insights about the Torah and Haftarah portion, as well as reflections on becoming a bar or bat mitzvah

Glilah – The person honored with rolling and dressing the Torah

Haftarah – Refers to a specific section of the biblical prophets read in services immediately after the corresponding Torah section.

Hagbah – The person honored with lifting the Torah

Kippah - A Jewish head covering worn for worship, religious study, meals, or at any other time; also called yarmulke.

Maftir - The aliyah consisting of the last few lines of the Torah reading, or the person assigned that aliyah. The person assigned the maftir aliyah also chants the Haftarah (the bar/bat mitzvah)

Mikvah - A Jewish communal bath that provides an opportunity for spiritual awakening, as well as the final step in the process of conversion

Mitzvah – Lit. “commandment;” thus, a Bar Mitzvah is a “son of the commandment” and a Bat Mitzvah is a “daughter of the commandment”

Parashah – Lit. “division” and refers to the weekly Torah reading

Petiha – The honor of opening the Ark

Tallit – Prayer shawl worn by Jews as reminders of G-d's commandments

Tikkun Olam – “Repairing the world” – the Jewish obligation to pursue social justice

Torah – The Torah is also known as the Humash, Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses

Yad – Lit. “hand” and refers to the pointer one uses when reading from the Torah