



Kol Ami
B'nai Mitzvah Program (Youth)
Policy and Expectations
(updated 2016)

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I. B'nai Mitzvah Program - Vision Statement

Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah carries much meaning – as well as much joy – because it reflects the young person's readiness to become a practicing member of the Jewish community. It is not, as is often supposed, a single occasion or the endpoint of a child's Jewish education and learning. It is a capability, a process, and a choice that the young person freely makes. He/she *becomes* a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, actualizing the studies he/she has undertaken and publicly demonstrating commitment to our religious traditions by leading the Shabbat service, chanting from the Torah, expounding on the Torah portion read, and performing a Tikkun Olam (social action) project.

We in the Kol Ami community celebrate the readiness of each student with the student and his/her family. As much as the student takes joy and pride in the demonstration of Jewish knowledge, comfort in our tradition, and commitment to ethical action, so does the community. And we wish to support the student and family along the way, through Kol Ami's trademark warmth, flexibility, acceptance of individual and family differences, and emphasis on community.

Our intent is for each child who becomes a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to feel he/she has reached a spiritually meaningful time, has achieved something special, and is on the way to greater Jewish knowledge and involvement. To that end, we shall embrace the student and family as they prepare for this unique and most meaningful passage.

II. B'nai Mitzvah Policy and Expectations

Foundational Information

The age at which a child is deemed ready to be called to the Torah as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is 12 or older for a girl and 13 or older for a boy.

The family must be members of Kol Ami in good standing for at least a year prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The student must have completed at least two years of formal Jewish education – either participation in Kol Ami's Jewish Children's Education Program (JCEP) or a program of Jewish education approved by the chair of Kol Ami's Children's and Family Programming Committee.

At the time of, and during the process of preparing for the Bar or Bat Mitzvah service, a child must be enrolled in JCEP or another formal Jewish education program approved by Kol Ami's chair of the Children's and Family Programming Committee. The celebration of a youth's Bar or Bat Mitzvah should not be viewed as the endpoint of her/his Jewish education but as a benchmark along a lifetime path of learning. It is our expectation, therefore, that children will continue in JCEP (if they are enrolled) through the end of the semester or, preferably year, in which their Bar/Bat Mitzvah takes place – and that their family will stay apprised of other social and learning opportunities (whether at Kol Ami or elsewhere in the Northern Virginia area) so that the student remains engaged with his/her peers as well as with Jewish education and culture in general.

Kol Ami usually plans the Bar or Bat Mitzvah service around a single child/adult but also allows families to pair up for a "double" celebration. This should be discussed with the chair of the Children's and Family Programming Committee and the Rabbi or lay spiritual leader of their choosing well in advance. Whether the family works with our Rabbi or not, each child will meet with our Rabbi individually to discuss the meaning of becoming a Bat or Bar Mitzvah and to discuss their chosen parsha.

Our intent is to recognize the unique talents, capabilities, and interests of each student in order for this passage in the child's life to be highly meaningful and memorable – both for the student, his/her family, and the Kol Ami community.

Kol Ami's Rabbi and ritual leadership are always happy to work with any family to ensure that the life cycle rituals celebrated meet the unique spiritual needs of the child and her/his parents or caregivers. Working in a creative way that honors both evolving Jewish tradition and the changing realities of today's families is a value that the Kol Ami family holds dear.

The family is advised to confirm, as early as possible, their child's religious status through a conversation with the Rabbi. Our congregation tracks with the precepts and practices of Reconstructionism in allowing children of Jewish and non-Jewish parents to seek a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Under Reconstructionism, a child is considered Jewish if either birth parent is Jewish and if the child has been raised in a manner that reinforces his/her Jewish identity from birth. In accordance with Reconstructionist philosophy and custom, our community considers children welcomed by adoption into Kol Ami families to be Jewish if the children have been brought into the greater Jewish "family" via the traditional rituals of *brit milah* (circumcision), *mikvah* (ritual immersion) and a welcoming ceremony for boys, and *mikvah* and a welcoming ceremony for girls.

The student/family will, in consultation with the Rabbi, be able to select a Torah portion ("parsha") that falls in the reading cycle near (but not before) the date of the child's birthday or on a date which is desirable for all parties involved. The child will learn to chant twenty-one verses (equal to seven aliyot of three verses each) from the Torah, which will be read from the Torah scroll. The amount to be read may be determined on an individual basis. If twenty-one verses is too challenging for the child, this amount may be adjusted.

Scheduling needs to occur well in advance of the service itself. Preparations will actually cover approximately a 12 to 18-month period preceding the date selected (see timeline document within this document).

Though our expectation is that the service be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington (UUCA) or wherever Kol Ami is currently meeting for services, it can be held elsewhere if the UUCA is booked or if the family chooses another facility. If the family plans to utilize the UUCA they should work with Kol Ami's coordinator and to reserve the facilities they want (e.g. sanctuary, fellowship hall), discuss related fees and sign any necessary UUCA agreements (please review FAQ for B'nai Mitzvah Service and Celebration on Kol Ami's website).

If the service is not held at the UUCA, every effort should be made to invite Kol Ami members and encourage them to attend. This will enable the occasion to truly constitute a community as well as a family celebration.

At the outset of the 12 to 18-month preparatory period, families are encouraged to review the contents of this policy and expectations (noted with asterisks) and obtain several additional resources:

- Congregational B'nai Mitzvah vision statement*
- Congregational B'nai Mitzvah requirements and expectations*
- Planning and preparation timeline/to do list*

- FAQ for B'nai Mitzvah Service and Celebration
- Procedure for Securing Shabbat Hosts for B'nai Mitzvahs and Responsibilities of Shabbat Hosts
- List of recommended resources to help the student and family gather the spiritual meaning of this unique life passage*
- CD of the Shabbat morning service
- Names of potential tutors (to learn trope) with contact information
- Copies of these two books: *Putting God On The Guest List: How To Reclaim The Spiritual Meaning Of Your Child's Bar Or Bat Mitzvah* by Jeffrey K. Salkin and *For Kids - Putting God on Your Guest List - 2nd Edition: How to Claim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah* by Jeffrey K. Salkin

Children who are 12 years of age at the beginning of the Kol Ami JCEP school year will receive additional training within our Jewish Children's Education Program designed to help them ease into B'nai Mitzvah preparations. For example, further emphasis will be placed on Hebrew reading and synagogue skills. Age-appropriate ethical lessons/discussions will be held to help the students think about the meaning of their Torah portion and eventual Tikkun Olam project. The Torah trope signs and melodies will also be introduced so students have a start on work to be done with their Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutor. The Rabbi will also present at least one lesson for this group of children during the school year to further familiarize them with aspects of their B'nai Mitzvah preparations.

Participation in Religious Services

The length of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service can expand or contract depending on elements of the service such as: the number of aliyot (the blessings recited by family members and family friends); length of the parent's blessing for the child; the passing of the Torah from generation to generation; the number of prayers and readings that the child conducts; inclusion of a Haftorah portion and related blessings; the music that is selected throughout the service; the Rabbi or lay leader's explanation of various service elements; and more. It is critical for the family to discuss with the Rabbi or lay spiritual leader of their choosing early on which elements they wish to include and the optimal length of the service. In order to reduce the time accorded to explanations of prayers throughout the service, families may wish to provide service attendees with a program that serves to highlight certain aspects of the service.

The student will need to be familiar with Hebrew as found in the Reconstructionist siddur and ready to lead at least the following prayers during the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service:

- Blessing for Tallit
- Barchu
- Sh'ma and V'ahavta
- Hatzi Kaddish
- Beginning of Torah service
- Torah blessings (Reconstructionist version)
- Aleinu (Reconstructionist version)
- Adon Olam

In order to learn these prayers, Kol Ami requires that the family purchase or borrow a copy of *Kol Haneshamah Shabbat Vehagim*, the Reconstructionist siddur used at our services. Lightly used copies of this siddur can be purchased. The advantage of the student having his/her own copy allow for notations and to get used to the 'feel' of it in their hands. Alternatively, a copy can be borrowed from Kol Ami so long as it is not written in and returned to the congregation immediately after the Bar or Bat Mitzvah service in the identical condition as when it was initially borrowed.

It is important for the student and family to feel familiar and comfortable with Kol Ami's Shabbat services so that leading the above prayers – and potentially others – is something s/he will welcome with open arms. The best way to do this is for the student and family to participate in services over the 12 to 18-month preparatory period. A complementary benefit to this active participation in Shabbat services is that the community will get to know the child better. Furthermore, when parents/caregivers attend with their children they are modeling engagement in our religious community. For all these reasons, attendance at 10 Shabbat morning services (at a minimum) over the 12 to 18-month period is required. At least half of the Shabbat morning services (5) the family attends will be at Kol Ami; the other half (up to 5) may be at other congregations. The Rabbi will discuss the importance of attending Shabbat morning services with the child and family when planning begins. Parents/caregivers need to keep track of this and will be asked to provide evidence of this participation near to the date of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah (see form to complete in B'nai Mitzvah Program materials).

Parents/caregivers are expected to play an active role in the service in a number of ways. Parents/caregivers who are Jewish are encouraged to lead Judeo-specific prayers, chant from the Torah (if they are comfortable doing so), present a poem, blessing or words of inspiration to their child. Parents/caregivers who are not Jewish are encouraged to participate in the service in myriad other ways, such as offering a reading or poem in English, playing/singing a fitting musical piece, etc. A non-Jewish parent is also warmly welcomed to bless his/her child as part of the service. Options can be discussed with the spiritual leader conducting the service.

Working with the Rabbi and Tutor

Approximately 12 to 18 months before the date selected for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the student and family will contact our Rabbi (if our Rabbi will officiate) to discuss available dates. Once desired dates are determined, the family will contact Kol Ami's coordinator or chair of the Ritual Committee to check availability of the UUCA if that is the desired facility. If the Rabbi (is to officiate) and the UUCA rooms are available, family is to notify the Ritual Committee so this Bar/Bat Mitzvah is put on the service schedule.

If the Rabbi will officiate, the student and family will schedule three one-on-one meetings in the months leading up to the Bat/Bar Mitzvah, and will schedule one rehearsal with the Rabbi to take place at UUCA (if the event is being held there) or in a mutually agreed-upon location. If the Rabbi will not officiate, the family is nevertheless encouraged to schedule two individual meetings with the Rabbi.

Meetings between the Rabbi and child will, in any case, cover the following:

- Study of the chosen parsha, developing an understanding of its meaning especially in relation to contemporary life
- Development of a thoughtful d'var Torah (speech conveying the above)
- Discussion and decision on a Tikkun Olam (social action) project
- Consideration of what kind of person/Jew the student would like to become
- Development of a plan encompassing elements of the service to be included or excluded as well as the respective roles in the service of family members and friends. (This aspect will be created in conjunction with the child's parents/caregivers.)

The student will concurrently work with his/her chosen tutor (see Kol Ami list of possible tutors) to:

- Become familiar with synagogue skills (e.g., putting on a prayer shawl or tallit)
- Learn to recite the Reconstructionist blessings before and after the Torah reading
- Learn to chant twenty-one verses (equal to seven aliyot of three verses each) from the Torah, which will be read from the Torah scroll. The amount to be read may be determined on an individual basis. If twenty-one verses is too challenging for the child, this amount may be adjusted.
- Learn to chant a Haftorah portion (reading from the Prophets) and the attendant Reconstructionist blessing if the student/family decide they would like to do this.

Chanting a Haftorah portion is optional. If the student/family decides not to chant a Haftorah portion, an alternative is to incorporate in the d'var Torah a theme related to the Haftorah (which traditionally complements that week's Torah portion in some way).

Yet another option is to read a portion of the Haftorah in English while the blessings are recited by a family member, friend, or congregant.

The aliyot (being called to the Torah) represent an opportunity for the family to honor select family and friends. As one aliyah will be reserved for members of the Kol Ami community – and the student him/herself will have the final aliyah – between 4 and 5 aliyot will be available to the family. (An aliyah can involve just one person, a couple, or the participation of many.)

Still other opportunities to honor family and friends present themselves, such as: carrying the Torah, lifting the Torah (“hagbah”), wrapping the Torah (“gelilah”), opening and closing the ark, and taking a reading (either Hebrew or English as appropriate) during the service.

Kol Ami’s guiding spirit calls upon the student to develop a Tikkun Olam project as he/she becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. “Social action” is envisioned broadly, to include projects that foster creativity, learning or other avenues through which the student may enlighten members of the Kol Ami and broader community. Projects will necessarily reflect the student’s talents and interests and must be confirmed with the Rabbi.

Examples include:

- An art project (e.g., creating a topographical map of Israel, designing and making a ritual object)
- Personal interviews (e.g., researching family history, interviewing older people about the role Judaism plays in their lives)
- Conducting a cause-related campaign (e.g., collecting donations or marshaling a letter-writing effort over the Internet).

Particulars about the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service

In recognition of the community aspect of the B’nai Mitzvah celebration, the entire congregation will be informed of the planned event and invited to the service.

Family members are encouraged to wear a yarmulke during the service. Family members who are called to the Torah for an aliyah are strongly encouraged to wear a prayer shawl (tallis) during the aliyah.

Photography or videotaping is allowed during the service if the photographer or videographer can operate their equipment from the balcony in the UUCA sanctuary using a tripod and no flash. This ensures that there to be no movement of equipment by the operator and no disruption to the worshippers. Photographs or videos can be taken prior to the service as long as they are concluded thirty minutes prior to the beginning of the service. In addition, photographs or videos can be taken once the

service concludes. Photographs or videos with the Torah and other ceremonial items may be taken as long as these items are returned by the family to their proper storage location. Photography or videotaping without any restrictions is allowed at the reception.

As the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a community celebration, families are expected to host a Kiddush after the service for the whole Kol Ami community and guests. If the family wishes to hold its own more private celebration after the Kiddush, arrangements should be respectful of the community.

In order to learn from the experience of families at Kol Ami that have previously celebrated a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the family is encouraged to review the FAQ for B'nai Mitzvah Service and Celebration document available on the Kol Ami website and/or contact the Chair of the Children's and Family Programming Committee with questions as the family embarks on their planning.

In accordance with an Israeli custom, the family may choose to bring non-meltable candy in baskets which can be (if desired by the family) tossed gently toward the Bat or Bat Mitzvah child after the Torah/Haftorah service. The family should designate at least one adult supervisor and several children to quietly and non-obtrusively hand out the candy to people in attendance.

Families are encouraged to arrange a donation to a local food bank of any leftovers from the lunch.

III. Continuation of Jewish Education

At Kol Ami, we do not view the celebration of a child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah as an endpoint of her or his Jewish education but as a benchmark along a lifetime path of learning. It is our expectation that children will continue in JCEP through the end of the semester in which their Bar/Bat Mitzvah takes place – and that their family will stay apprised of other social and learning opportunities (whether at Kol Ami or elsewhere) so that the student remains engaged with his/her peers as well as with Jewish education and culture in general.

Kol Ami strongly encourages Bar/Bat Mitzvah students to continue their religious education and involvement with the Jewish community. Pathways include:

- Involvement in Kol Ami's JCEP program as a student or student assistant
- Participation in Kol Ami's religious services
- Involvement in a Kol Ami community teen group
- Attending Camp JRF or Camp Moshava in the summer
- Involvement with the Chavurah No'ar at Adat Shalom (a post Bar/Bat Mitzvah group)
- B'nei Brith Youth Organization (BBYO) activities (there are groups in Northern Virginia run out of the Jewish Community Center)
- Participation in Kol Nova (a Northern Virginia children's choir)
- Special trips to locations of Jewish merit (e.g., Philadelphia as home of the Jewish Reconstructionist Movement and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College)
- Continuation of Tikkun Olam projects
- "Post-graduate" education (e.g., at Congregation Adat Reyim)

IV. Checklist of Elements for Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service

Each family should expect to include the following elements in their child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. However, each family is also encouraged to work with the Rabbi (or leader of their choosing) to incorporate their wants and desires for this celebration – and to consider their child's special talents and capabilities – so that the service is ultimately unique, memorable and significant for the child, family members, and the Kol Ami community. Early on in the planning each family should discuss desired elements and service length with the Rabbi.

Child will be prepared to lead the following basic prayers during the service:

- Barchu
- Sh'ma and V'ahavta
- Hatzi Kaddish
- Torah blessings (Reconstructionist version)
- Aleinu (Reconstructionist version)
- Adon Olam

Child will work with the Rabbi (or leader of their choosing) to choose the Torah Parsha for their service and be prepared to do the following:

- Become familiar with synagogue skills (e.g., putting on a tallit)
- Learn to recite the Reconstructionist blessings before and after the Torah reading
- Learn to chant twenty-one verses (equal to seven aliyot of three verses each) from the Torah, which will be read from the Torah scroll. The amount to be read may be determined on an individual basis. If twenty-one verses is too challenging for the child, this amount may be adjusted.
- Have up to 7 aliyot (being called to the Torah) to honor select family and friends. As one or two aliyot will be reserved for members of the Kol Ami community – and the student him/herself will have the final aliyah – between 4 and 5 will be available to the family. (An aliyah can involve just one person, a couple, or the participation of many.)
- Learn to *leyn* (chant) the chosen parsha through work with a tutor to master the trope signs and melodies
- Learn to chant a Haftorah portion (reading from the Prophets) and the attendant Reconstructionist blessing if the student/family decide they would like to do this.
- Recite the Haftorah blessings.

Child will work with the Rabbi (or leader of their choosing) to be prepared to do the following:

- Study their parsha with the Rabbi (or leader of their choosing) to develop an understanding of the meaning and discuss how the parsha relates to contemporary life
- Develop and deliver a thoughtful d'var Torah

Parents/caretakers will want to develop a short talk to deliver to their child during the service after their child delivers their d'var Torah.

V. B'nai Mitzvah Preparation Timeline/To Do List

This timeline/to do list is designed to help you in the planning of your child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah. It includes only the religious and educational aspects of this event. For insight on planning the celebratory aspects we encourage you to consult the short "lessons learned" document that highlights some useful advice from families at Kol Ami that have celebrated this milestone.

*Meet/contact the Rabbi to identify desired/available date **12 to 18 Months**

*Contact Kol Ami coordinator/Ritual Committee/UUCA to determine availability of space

*Notify Kol Ami coordinator/Ritual Committee once date is determined to reserve on the ritual/service calendar

*Discuss /choose a parsha

*Attend orientation for families (if conducted)

*Read over the B'nai Mitzvah Program Policy

*Explore options for tutors

*Identify a private tutor **9 to 12 Months**

*Make appointment with Rabbi to talk about d'var Torah

*Begin attending Sat. morning services regularly

*Begin studying trope with tutor

*Identify Tikkun Olam project

*Meetings #1 and #2 with Rabbi to discuss Torah portion

*Continuing study of parsha & prayers **3 to 6 Months**

*Meeting #3 with Rabbi to discuss

Torah portion, Tikkun Olam project, and elements of the service

*Confirm arrangements/reservation with UUCA and complete agreement (work with Kol Ami coordinator) **2 to 3 Months**

*Continue working on Torah (and possibly Haftorah) portion with tutor

*Organize aliyot and send Reconstructionist version of Torah blessings to everyone who has an aliyah

*Ensure familiarity with prayers the child will be leading

*Send copy of prayers/readings to family and friends who will be participating in the service

*Publicize Tikkun Olam project (especially if charitable donations will be sought)

*Finalize d'var Torah

4 Weeks

*Polish aliyot and prayers the child will lead

*Identify person giving Congregational gift

*Send reminders to everyone involved in Service

*Parents/caregivers compose remarks of blessings to child

*Meet with Rabbi, tutor, and

1 to 2 Weeks

UUCA Administrator for onsite rehearsal

Bat/Bat Mitzvah Celebration

Celebration Day

Note: Attending Shabbat services is a requirement of Kol Ami and our B'nai Mitzvah Program Policy reads as follows: It is important for the student and family to feel familiar and comfortable with Kol Ami's Shabbat services so that leading the above prayers – and potentially others – is something s/he will welcome with open arms. The best way to do this is for the student and family to agree to participate in services over the 18-month preparatory period. A complementary benefit to this active participation in Shabbat services is that the community will get to know the child better. Furthermore, when parents/caregivers attend with their children they are modeling engagement in our religious community. For all these reasons, attendance at 10 Shabbat morning services (at a minimum) over the 18-month period is required. At least half of the Shabbat morning services (5) the family attends will be at Kol Ami; the other half (up to 5) may be at other congregations. The Rabbi will discuss the importance of attending Shabbat morning services with the child and family when planning begins. Parents/caregivers need to keep track of this and will be asked to provide evidence of this participation near to the date of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Signature of student: _____

Signature of parent: _____

VII. B'nei Mitzvah Program – Reading and Resource List

1. *Putting God On The Guest List: How To Reclaim The Spiritual Meaning Of Your Child's Bar Or Bat Mitzvah* by Jeffrey K. Salkin and *For Kids - Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Claim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah* by Jeffrey K. Salkin (second edition). (Note: one copy of each of these books will be provided to each family.)
2. *Make Your Own Bar/Bat Mitzvah: A Personal Approach to Creating a Meaningful Rite of Passage*, by Rabbi Goldie Milgram (available new/used on Amazon and other online sites)
3. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Guide to Coming of Age Together*. Edited by Cantor Helen Leneman (available new/used on Amazon and other online sites)
4. *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim* (third edition), The Reconstructionist Press, 2009. (Available new/used on Amazon and other online sites – can also be borrowed from Kol Ami so long as it is not written in and returned to the congregation immediately after the Bar or Bat Mitzvah service in the identical condition as when it was initially borrowed.)