

B*MITZVAH EXPERIENCE

Class of 2024

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SAJ B*MITZVAH EXPERIENCE

Celebrating as a Family

An innovative two year program

Goals

To connect this Jewish ritual event to the life of your family

To connect to the SAJ community, both your class and the whole synagogue

To increase your Jewish literacy

The change from childhood to adolescence on the way to adulthood is marked in Judaism by the B*mitzvah ceremony. Other life cycle ceremonies are attended by the family and its guests such as weddings or ritual circumcision and often take place outside of synagogues. On the other hand, the b*mitzvah takes place in the context of the larger Jewish community that is the Shabbat synagogue service. This is appropriate because the event marks the child now being able to be a full participant in the ritual practice of the Jewish people---to be a Jewish adult. The Jewish past represented by the Torah, the present by the congregants, and the future by the child all come together in this moment. Yet, it is also a moment in the life cycle of the family. The past is represented by deceased ancestors and by living grandparents, the present by the parents and their friends, and the future by the child and their friends.

Both in the service that day and in what leads up to it, at SAJ we want to not just assist you through this moment in your life, but to provide resources to help you find ways to enhance it. The passage of adolescence is not an easy one for adolescents or their parents. Leaving childhood, exploring independence, emerging sexuality, the challenge of peer relationships, parents recognizing the passage of time, relationships to Judaism are just some of the challenges of this period. Infused with the wisdom of Judaism, we will create a variety of opportunities to discuss, learn about, and explore these challenges.

We also think that the experience of the B*mitzvah will be enhanced if it involves the whole family, especially the parents. There are two main ways we will encourage that involvement: 1) a family D'var Torah (tish)--a talk about the Torah portion or other related topic before services on that day; 2) parent participation in designing and implementing a B*Mitzvah Chavaya project related specifically to your family's Jewish journey at SAJ and in the wider Jewish community.

YEAR 1 – 6th grade

- 1) Attendance in 6th grade Makom as well as Makom Shabbaton.
- 2) Class dinner hosted by the rabbi
- 3) Observe an SAJ B*Mitzvah service
- 4) Design and begin implementing Chavaya Project

- 5) Each student will receive their own Chumash, the book that includes the Torah, translations, and commentary, at a special ceremony on Shabbat morning.
- 6) Meet with parents of recent B*Mitzvah and SAJ administrators to get tips on how to deal with this life cycle event within the family, as well as planning the celebration.
- 7) Explore the why's and how's of chanting Torah.

YEAR 2 - 7th grade

- 1) Attendance in 7th grade Makom and Makom Shabbaton.
- 2) Practicum - This will include learning how to put on and wear a tallis, how to take an aliyah, and how to raise the Torah (hagbah).
- 3) Completion and presentation of Chavaya Project and accompanying poster
- 4) Class dinner hosted by the rabbi
- 5) Working on the Family D'var Torah (tish).
- 6) Parents take turns acting as Greeters during each other's B*Mitzvah services. Each family commits to greeting at two BMTZ services during the year.
- 7) Parents and/or child can write a message to be included in the weekly handout on Shabbat morning.

THE DAY ITSELF

9:00am: Family D'var Torah (tish)

9:45am: Services begin with putting on the tallis. Student may lead the Daily Blessings, the first paragraph of the Shema (V'ahavta), the beginning of the Amidah, and the Shema section of the Torah service.

Family joins Torah processional led by child carrying the Torah.

B*mitzvah will introduce the Torah portion (speech). It will be personalized ("What struck me in the parashah...") and include questions for the congregation to think about.

Family honors including Aliyot (reciting Torah blessings), opening and closing the ark, two English readings, distributing the candy, lifting and dressing the Torah, and siblings have the option of leading the motzi blessing over the challah.

B*mitzvah chants two aliyot from the Torah and is officially called up to recite the blessings.

Mi Shebeirach blessing recited for parents on their aliyah. Mi Shebeirach blessing for B*Mitzvah is recited for child on their aliyah. Candy is thrown and congregation sings Siman Tov and Mazel Tov.

After the Torah is returned to the ark: B*mitzvah receives personalized Kiddush cup from congregation; rabbi's talk about the student; priestly benediction offered by the cantor; communal Shehecheyanu (blessing on special occasion).

Service ends with Kiddush and reception in social hall with entire SAJ community.

SAJ B * MITZVAH EXPERIENCE

Program Outline - Year I Class of 2024

Introduction to BME (B*Mitzvah Experience) at SAJ

Saturday, October 29

12:30-1:30pm (BME@Makom Shabbaton)

Parents only

Explanation of what makes a B*Mitzvah at the SAJ unique, review of the timeline, and overview of resources. Led by Cantor Lisa.

Shabbat Dinner with Rabbi Lauren

Friday, November 18

time tbd

6th graders + parents + siblings

Prepare dinner and gather with other families as a class to enjoy a Shabbat dinner. Come for the food prep and dinner or just come for dinner!

Chumash Ceremony

Saturday, December 3

11:30am-12:00pm (Community Shir)

6th graders + parents

During this short ritual, 6th graders will receive a special book called a chumash, which includes the entire Torah as well as its translation and helpful commentary. Useful for any student of Torah preparing for a b*mitzvah and beyond. Led by Rabbi Lauren and Cantor Lisa.

DIY Tzitzit Program

Saturday, December 3

12:30-1:30pm (BME@Makom Shabbaton)

6th graders + parents

Learn how and where to tie tzitzit, the traditional fringes at the edges of a tallis or garment. Led by Rabbinic Intern Léah Miller.

Observe an SAJ B*Mitzvah

Saturday, December 10

9:45-11:15am (during Makom)

6th graders + parents

Sit with your family to observe a B*Mitzvah Shabbat morning service. The group will gather in the balcony with Educator Debra so you can observe the service but also discuss what is happening and be able to ask questions.

Creating a Chavaya Project

Sunday, December 18

4:00-6:00pm (before SAJ Hanukkah party)

6th graders + 8th graders + parents

What experiences, knowledge, and skills do you want your child to have by the time they become B*Mitzvah? Discuss your family's spiritual goals surrounding this life cycle event and create a B*Mitzvah Chavaya to work on throughout 2023. Observe the current 7th grade class present on their Chavaya Projects. Led by Cantor Lisa, Rabbi Lauren, and Debra.

Debrief Observing B*mitzvah service

Saturday, January 7, 2023

6th graders + parents

12:30-1:30pm (BME@Makom Shabbaton)

Review a video of the highlights of the b*mitzvah service. All questions will be answered!
Led by Debra.

Navigating the Chumash and Chanting Torah

Saturday, January 7, 2023

Parents only

1:30-2:30pm (BME@Makom Shabbaton)

Learn what a chumash is and how it is used. Explore the ancient tradition of Torah chant and discover what is involved in learning these ancient melodies that all our children will learn as part of becoming a B*Mitzvah. We will also examine the Torah Blessings unique to Reconstructionist congregations. Led by Cantor Lisa.

Practicum

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

Parents only on Zoom

7:00-8:30pm

Get helpful tips on planning a B*Mitzvah celebration from those who have been there. You will hear about logistics at SAJ as well as advice about planning your celebration both at SAJ and offsite. Led by Administrative Director Debbie Rudt, Administrator Rachel Bitterfield, and recent B*Mitzvah parents

History and Meaning of B*mitzvah

Saturday, February 11, 2023

6th graders + parents

Led by Rabbi Lauren.

12:30-1:30pm (BME@Makom Shabbaton)

Creating a Family Values Statement

Saturday, March 25, 2023

6th graders + parents

Led by Rabbi Lauren.

12:30-1:30pm (BME@Makom Shabbaton)

Bringing Tzedek, Tzedakah to the B*Mitzvah

Saturday, April 29, 2023

6th graders + parents

Led by Rabbi Lauren.

12:30-1:30pm (BME@Makom Shabbaton)

7th Grade PROGRAMS

- Wrap-up and Presentations of Chavaya Projects
- Writing a Family D'var Torah (tish)
- Practicum – learn how to put on a tallit, have an aliyah, lift a Torah, and review the specific prayers the B*Mitzvah lead in their service
- Class dinner for the whole family
- Lunch with Cantor Lisa and tour of the Lower East Side (spring 2024)

Guidelines for 2024 SAJ B*Mitzvah Families

Service details and preparation

ITEMS PREPARED BY B'NEI MITZVAH

- Chavaya project fulfillment and poster (completed by December 2023)
- Lead congregation in prayer
- Present speech
- Chant aliyot from the Torah and say the Torah blessings

THE BIG DAY

- B'nei mitzvah and their parents may lead the Tish (Family D'var Torah) in the Social Hall from 9:00am to 9:35am. This is an opportune time for the student and parents to contribute their own individual thoughts on the themes of the Torah reading or on the themes of B*Mitzvah.
- Students wear a tallit (prayer shawl) for the first time and put it on just before the service begins and take it off when the service is over (it is not worn during Kiddush). If you do not bring your own tallit, the synagogue will provide one to use that day.
- Families have the option to add additional musical instruments to the morning's service. The cantor always supplements the service on guitar, we will have a drummer during services on most weeks, and there is the option to hire a professional keyboard player for a small fee. A letter is sent out several months before the service with details and includes a form you can submit to request the extra musician.
- Students lead the congregation in prayer. Through their years in Makom t'filah, Hebrew tutoring, and later with B*Mitzvah tutors, they will be prepared to lead the Daily Morning Blessings, the first paragraph of the Shema (V'ahavta), the first two prayers of the Amidah, and the call-and-response Shema-Echad-Gad'lu in the Torah service.
- Students will present a brief introduction to the Torah reading, the speech, that includes their personal reflections on the themes in their portion. Students also chant two aliyot from the Torah and recite the Torah blessings. They carry the Torah scroll around the congregation when it is taken out and when it is returned to the ark.
- The parents have an aliyah. The non-Jewish parent of a B*mitzvah is encouraged to be present up at the bima for the parents' Aliyah. There will be an opportunity to practice the Torah blessings at the final rehearsal, though proper

preparation should be made in advance to make sure parents know these blessings well.

- HEBREW NAME – the office will request your child’s Hebrew name during the Fall before your B*Mitzvah year. This will be used not only to call up the child for their aliyah, but also to have it engraved on a Kiddush cup that is given out as a gift from the *kehillah* (community).
- The family is requested to come upstairs to Kiddush even if for a short time. We understand that many have luncheons immediately after the service, but the congregation would appreciate the chance to greet you properly after the service.
- All SAJ Shabbat morning services are available live online. Friends and family unavailable to visit in person are encouraged to join the service either directly in Zoom or on Facebook, if the family allows permission for this feed. The office will provide you with additional language you can include in your invitations regarding remote service attendance but feel free to request it earlier if you need it sooner than the 2-month honors email. Families also have the option to not livestream the service.

SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

- The family is expected to attend services during the year leading up to the B*Mitzvah. Attending services creates a wonderful opportunity to get to know and feel a part of the larger SAJ community. The day becomes more meaningful for everyone. It is also a great way to become comfortable with the SAJ service so that there is less anxiety on the day of your celebration as well as supporting your fellow SAJ B*Mitzvah families.

GREETERS

- SAJ is a warm and inviting community, including when we have guests join us on Shabbat mornings. It is our custom to have friendly faces to greet guests old and new to SAJ at our Shabbat services. We ask that parents volunteer 2x throughout the year to be a greeter at one of the other B*Mitzvah services, so that at each service we have two greeters ready for this important job.

MAKOM AND MAKOM SHABBATON ATTENDANCE

- Every student who plans to become a B*Mitzvah at SAJ must attend the weekly 6th grade and later 7th grade Makom and monthly Makom Shabbaton sessions throughout the year.

HONORS FOR YOUR RELATIVES & FRIENDS

- In addition to the Aliyah assigned to the B*Mitzvah child and the one assigned to the parent/s, **there is one more Aliyah that the family can assign** to any relatives or friends – making a total of 3 Aliyot for the family. The word ‘Aliyah’ is being used here to refer to the blessings before and after each section of Torah is read.
- There are two versions of the blessings that are chanted for each aliyah, the Reconstructionist and traditional versions. There is an enlarged printout of both versions on the bima during the Torah service. Please be aware of which one you will be preparing and which one you will be reading from during the aliyah as they can be easily confused. SAJ B*Mitzvah parents are *highly* encouraged to use the Reconstructionist version of the blessings.
- MP3 files and texts with transliterations of both the Reconstructionist and Traditional versions of the Before and After blessings are available with your child’s recordings or on our website saj.nyc/Learn/Music. **PLEASE MAKE SURE YOUR RELATIVES HAVE PRACTICED AND ARE MORE THAN PROFICIENT AT RECITING THE BLESSINGS.** If necessary, cantor is willing to hear them chant ahead of time over the phone to make sure they are ready.
- Please see separate sheet titled “Full List of Honors” for descriptions of all the honors available to your family.
- Each family will be emailed several months in advance with a full list of information that the office will need, including the Honors List, number of expected guests, details about Kiddush, etc.

RELATIVES CHANTING TORAH

- In addition to the student, some families may choose to assign the chanting of the remaining aliyot to other family members or friends. If you are interested in this, please contact the cantor to verify which aliyot are available. They will need to be chanted for the cantor, either in person or over the phone, several days beforehand. Please confirm if they would need the text or recordings for these.

MINCHA SERVICE OPTION

· For a variety of reasons, some families elect to have their children become B*Mitzvah during a Shabbat Mincha (Afternoon) service. It is a shorter service and only 3 aliyot are chanted (rather than 5 in total on Shabbat morning). Depending on the time of year it can be tied in with Havdallah, the ritual that ends Shabbat. As Mincha is not a regular service at SAJ most members do not usually attend, though it is open to all. Please consult with the cantor in advance if this is an option your family is considering.

Guidelines for 2024 SAJ B*Mitzvah Families

B*mitzvah Lessons

Timeline

- 4th/5th grade receive b*mitzvah date
- 6th grade begin B*Mitzvah Experience at Makom Shabbaton
- 1 year before b*mitzvah date - cantor will contact family to setup tutoring schedule
- 7th grade continue B*Mitzvah Experience at Makom Shabbaton
- 9-10 months before - student has 6 private tutoring sessions with cantor
- 7-8 months before - student switches to SAJ tutor
- 2-3 months before – student begins sessions with rabbi to prepare their speech (3-4 sessions)
- 2-3 months before – office contacts parents about service details and sponsoring kiddush
- 3 weeks before – student has remainder sessions with cantor as needed
- Thursday before – walk-thru rehearsal with immediate family

Additional Information

- Each student has private lessons in addition to regular Makom and Makom Shabbaton participation. Lessons cannot be during these times.
- Lessons begin approximately 9-10 calendar months before the B*Mitzvah.
- The cantor meets with each student once a week for 30 minutes for the first 6 weeks. The student then meets with the B*Mitzvah tutor for the remainder of the period and spends the last few sessions with the cantor. If your child will be out of town for any reason including school vacation, please contact the cantor directly, otherwise we assume the lesson is taking place.
- Student will review prayers they are to lead in the service with the tutor. Most prayers should be familiar from Makom tefilah and Hebrew tutoring. **Please be sure they regularly attend and practice their Hebrew assignments in the year(s) before b*mitzvah tutoring** so they can give proper attention to learning their Torah assignments.
- Students meet for their sessions through the month of June, even after Makom has ended, and resume after Labor Day. **If your child has a September date, please plan to be in town for the last two weeks of August.**

· PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Once private lessons begin, students are expected to **practice 15-20 minutes EVERY day, including reviewing during the summer.** Students will need an easily accessible MP3 player (such as an iPod or smartphone) to practice both at home and if they are away over the summer at camp or vacation.

· Each student prepares different material specific to their particular Shabbat. Once the student has started lessons, changing the date means learning new material.

· The week of the B*Mitzvah there will be a final rehearsal on the Thursday evening before, and we may have a lesson earlier in the week if needed. During the rehearsal the cantor will review all the logistics of the service. Parents should plan to attend and have their Torah blessings well prepared. Siblings are invited though not required to attend.

· Please notify the cantor if your child has specific learning needs / differences.

· Please notify the cantor if your child should not leave the building without being picked up by a parent or guardian.

Full List of Honors

Below is the list of honors available to your family and friends. Please know that these are all possibilities and by no means are you required to use all of them. The office will email your family approximately 2 months before your date, requesting the names of people to whom you have assigned each of these honors. It is important we receive this information ahead of time and not the day before the B*Mitzvah so we ask you to submit your names no later than 10 days before. A friendly reminder will be sent to you about this, as we know the weeks leading up to the big day may be busy.

English Reading – 1-2 people.

Opening and closing the ark #1 – Up to 2 people.

Opening and closing the ark #2 – Up to 2 people.

Pass out candy – usually 1-2 children

3 Aliyot – student, parent(s), 1 other (usually grandparents, aunts/uncles, close family friends). Torah blessings should be practiced ahead of time and proficient the day of. Recordings and texts of the blessings are available on our website at:
saj.nyc/learn/music/

Lifting the Torah (Hagbah) – should be assigned to someone who has done this before. 1 person.

Dressing the Torah (G'lilah) – 1 person.

Prayer for the Country (English) – 1-2 people.

(optional Motsi – available to siblings)

CHECK LIST FOR B*MITZVAH

- INVITATIONS
- HOTELS FOR OUT OF TOWN GUESTS
- KIPPOT FOR CONGREGATION AND GUESTS
- TALLIS FOR CHILD (optional)
- KIDDUSH
Debbie has names of good caterers – provided during Practicum
- TRI-FOLD POSTER PRESENTATION OF CHAVAYA PROJECT
To be presented at their 7th grade program and later displayed at Kiddush the day-of the service
- LOCATION AND TYPE OF CELEBRATION
Day/night, Adults & kids together vs. adults & kids separate
- REQUEST KEYBOARD PLAYER FOR SERVICE
- TRANSPORTATION TO PARTY
- DJ
- PHOTOGRAPHER
- GIFT IDEAS FOR GUESTS, I.E. DONATIONS
- SUGGESTED READING:
Putting God on the Guest List, by Jeffrey K. Salkin
Also the *For Kids* version
Surviving Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah: The Ultimate Insider's Guide, by Cantor Matt Axelrod

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

Blessing before the reading

Aliyah honoree says:

Ba-r'-hu et A-do-nai ham-vo-rah. יהוה המברך: **בְּרוּךְ** אַתְּ יְהוָה הַמְּבָרֵךְ.

Congregation says:

Ba-ruh A-do-nai ham-vo-rah l'-olam
va-ed. בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה הַמְּבָרֵךְ לְעוֹלָם
וָעֶד:

Aliyah honoree repeats Congregation:

Ba-ruh A-do-nai ham-vo-rah
l'-olam va-ed. **בְּרוּךְ** יְהוָה הַמְּבָרֵךְ
לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Ba-ruh a-ta A-do-nai,

e-lo-hey-nu me-leh ha-o-lam,

a-sher **ker-va-nu la-a-vo--da-to,**

v'-na-tan la-nu et to-ra-to.

Ba-ruh a-ta A-do-nai

no-teyn ha-to-ra.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה

אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

אֲשֶׁר **כָּרַבְנוּ לְעִבּוּדְךָ**

וְנָתַתְּ-לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרַתְךָ:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה

נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

Blessing after the reading

Aliyah honoree says:

Ba-ruh a-ta A-do-nai, בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה

e-lo-hey-nu me-leh ha-o-lam,

אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

a-sher na-tan la-nu

אֲשֶׁר נָתַתְּ-לָנוּ

to-rat e-met,

תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת

v'-ha-yey o-lam

וְחַי עוֹלָם

na-ta b'-to-hey-nu.

נָטַע בְּתוֹכְנוּ:

Ba-ruh a-ta A-do-nai

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה

no-teyn ha-to-ra.

נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה: