

## BAR MITZVAH (N.)

*Son of the mitzvah (lit.), one who takes responsibility for mitzvah observance*



“We were lucky to find BCHS and have our son study and prepare for his Bar Mitzvah. The Rabbis studying with Greg made him feel comfort-able and kept us informed during the entire process. It was more than we could ever hope for. From our son studying, to the actual day of the service, BCHS made us feel part of their family.”

-Mike and Svetlana,  
Langhorne, PA



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# BAR MITZVAH 101

## What is a Bar Mitzvah?

In Judaism, the Bar Mitzvah marks a most significant stage in the life of a young Jew. It is the turning point at which a boy is transformed into a full-fledged Jewish adult. The term “Bar Mitzvah” literally means “son of the mitzvah,” in other words, “one who takes re-sponsibility for mitzvah observance.” It is at this time, at the age of thirteen, that he is no longer considered a minor with regard to his responsibility to fulfill the “mitzvos” (commandments) of the Torah.

Becoming a Bar Mitzvah is an important milestone, and as such it is traditionally cele-brated together with family and friends at a joyous celebration.

Since being a Bar Mitzvah lasts a lifetime, it is never too late to celebrate the joy of joining the ranks. Often, the affair is

planned for a weekend or a legal holiday for practical pur-poses. When the ceremony is not scheduled to take place on the actual birthday, some celebrate on a smaller scale on the (Jewish) birthday itself in addition to the larger planned celebration.

As your child reaches the age of Bar Mitzvah, we share with your family the privilege and responsibility of welcoming him into the adult Jewish community. Family participation and support are integral to your child’s success, which is why we ask for family involvement in attaining this goal. Together, we hope to instill the meaning and significance of the occa-sion, to celebrate appropriately, and to honor your child’s place among the Jewish people.

## Préparing for the Momentous Occasion

Don’t know where to start? There’s no need to feel flustered! At BJOC, we are ready to guide you through the entire process.

1-Meet with a BJOC Rabbi to plan the ceremony.

The Rabbi will explain everything you need to know clearly. He will expound on the Jew-ish rituals and customs followed at such occasions and assist you in arranging a kosher affair.

2-Schedule the event.

Provide us with your son’s secular birth-

day and we will calculate his Hebrew birthday – the date that determines when your son actually becomes a Bar Mitzvah. The Rabbi will discuss the various ceremony options you can choose from and a date will be set.

3-Prepare your son.

In the months prior to your son’s thirteenth birthday, Bar Mitzvah lessons are given to in-troduce your son to the concept of “Bar Mitzvah,” and to prepare him for the ceremony.

Throughout the centuries, Jews have traditionally celebrated this pivotal milestone. The specific way Bar Mitzvahs are commemorated varies among the spectrum of Jewish communities. What has not changed is the universal desire among all types of Jews to mark this special moment in a meaningful way.

### The Bar Mitzvah Cerêmony

There actually is no ceremony necessary to make someone a Bar Mitzvah. When a Jewish boy reaches the age of thirteen he automatically becomes a Bar Mitzvah, and stays that way all his life. Nevertheless, it is customary to formally recognize the Bar Mitzvah and the important people in his life in a meaningful religious ceremony in addition to the Bar Mitzvah festivities.

Customarily, there is a Bar Mitzvah ceremony followed by a party.

Common components of the ceremony include honoring the Bar Mitzvah and his family with participation in traditional prayers and/or Torah-reading services, donning tefillin, speeches, and a Mitzvah Project presentation. This is usually followed by

a festive party with family and friends, celebrating the occasion.

The Bar Mitzvah boy gives a speech either as part of the ceremony or at the party. The custom of a Bar Mitzvah boy having an aliya (being called to the Torah) and giv-ing a speech dates back many hundreds of years.

Sometimes, instead of the Bar Mitzvah service being integrated in the regular ser-vice, a special Bar Mitzvah ceremony is planned. When a special ceremony is planned, the parents and Rabbi together decide what they want to include in the ceremony and how they want it to be structured.

Planning a special ceremony empowers parents to make certain that every aspect of the ceremony will be most meaningful and comfortable to everyone involved.

Whichever way you choose to celebrate, we want your son to look forward to his Bar Mitzvah day eagerly, with anticipation and great excitement. We want him to feel special on this day. We want his Bar Mitzvah to be something he will always look back to and reflect upon as a day of personal growth and achievement.

## Tefillin and their Connection to Bar Mitzvah

Tefillin are black leather boxes containing parchments inscribed with the Shema and other biblical passages, fastened with leather straps. Tefillin come in pairs of two; one is set on the head and the other on the upper arm. This is in keeping with the Mitzvah described in the Torah commanding Jewish men to bind tefillin onto the head and upper arm (Deuteronomy 6:8). Tefillin are worn during weekday morning prayers.

Although not officially obligated, young boys are taught to keep the mitzvos even before approaching their Bar Mitzvah. Tefillin, however, are the exception to this rule. A boy only puts on tefillin once he has reached the age of thirteen. For this reason, more than any other practice, tefillin have always served as the mark of honor that a boy receives upon his Bar Mitzvah. Traditionally, the purchase of tefillin for a Bar Mitzvah boy is regarded with special pride by his parents and grandparents.

The donning of tefillin is considered an important part of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony.

Unfortunately, tefillin that are invalid and not kosher are sold. To ensure that your son has a proper, kosher pair, please consult with a Rabbi from BJOC when ordering a pair of tefillin for your son. We will advise you where to obtain a kosher pair.

We also offer the opportunity to go and see how tefillin are made.

## Bar Mitzvah Lessons

Bar Mitzvah lessons prepare your son for his Bar Mitzvah. An interesting curriculum, rich in Jewish heritage, is employed to educate your son on the significance of being a Bar Mitzvah. He will be taught everything he must know to be able to participate en-tirely in the ceremony of choice. If the Bar Mitzvah boy will speak, he is assisted in pre-paring his speech. If he will be participating in prayer or Torah-reading services, he is instructed on what to do and say, and the rituals are practiced. Your son will also be taught how to read Hebrew.

The most important aspect of the Bar Mitzvah is not the party or the performance, but the impact and long term effect this experience will have on the young adult’s identity as a Jew. At this crucial age, the lessons inculcate the Bar Mitzvah boy with basic Jew-ish values and what being Jewish means. He learns Jewish morals relating to G-d, his parents and family, community, Israel, the Jewish nation, and all of humanity. He also gains knowledge about the concept of Mitzvos (commandments), and chooses a Mitz-vah he wants to focus on for his personal Mitzvah project.

## Mitzvah Prôject

We want your son to take pride in his

Jewish identity. We want to inspire within him a sense of responsibility to himself, to his fellow Jews and above all to G-d. In what way can your son better prepare himself for becoming a Bar Mitzvah, than by taking one mitzvah and making it his own?

When doing a Mitzvah Project, the Bar Mitzvah — with consultation of his parents and the Rabbi — selects one or two mitzvos that he would like to take upon himself. He can choose the mitzvah of chessed (kindness), and focus on a specific chessed, such as a charity drive. Or it can be another mitzvah in the Torah such as tefillin, or mezuzah. He can also choose an aspect of keeping Kosher, Jewish prayer, or Shabbos. Some pick two mitzvos; one mitzvah relating to the community and one mitzvah relating to personal or family growth.

The Bar Mitzvah boy, with the help of the Rabbi, researches the mitzvah in depth and prepares a presentation about that particular mitzvah. He usually starts working on keeping the mitzvah right away, so he can present what he has already accomplished, as well as what his plans and goals for the future are, at the ceremony.

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“It is our goal to guide families to lead Jewish lives with pride, with knowledge, and with enthusiasm.”

## Bar Mitzvah Fees:

Our Synagogue does not require membership. There is a \$1000 fee for the Bar Mitzvah celebration.

## Kosher Caterers:

Espresso -  
7814 Castor Ave Philadelphia, PA 19152 (215) 745-0130

Kosher Foods and More -  
2840 Pine Road Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006 (267) 722-8530

Six Points Catering -  
550 Allendale Road King of Prussia, PA 19406 (610) 257-3050

Bagel Nosh -  
380 Clifton Ave Lakewood, NJ 08701 (732) 363-1115

Gelbstains -  
415 Clifton Avenue Lakewood, NJ 08701 (732) 363-3636

Four Corners -  
600 E. County Line Rd Lakewood, NJ 08701 (732) 730-2380

