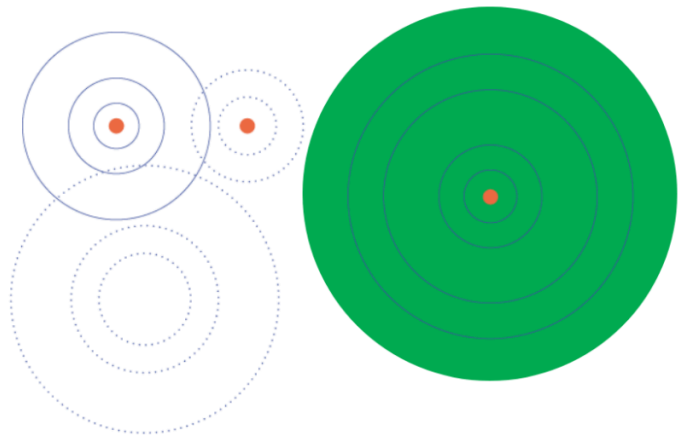




The JLA Bar & Bat Mitzvah Guide:

Creating Memories and Meaning



Dear JLA Families,

Mazal tov on planning to celebrate your child becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah! Whether you have a well-developed plan for how you would like to mark this momentous occasion or are at the beginning of formulating your plans, we are here to support your family in making this occasion meaningful and memorable.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration is a critical moment for every family. We are committed to supporting you as you design and create the celebration marking this momentous occasion.

We are available to support you during this particular time for your family, and we hope these important family celebrations will build the foundations of our JLA community. It is an honor for us to offer you any support as you plan for this event, and we pray that in the years ahead, we always have reasons to come together for happy and joyous celebrations. Mazal tov!

- The JLA Judaic Studies Team

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Understanding the Bar/Bat Mitzvah

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a moment in every child's development that traditionally marks the beginning of new responsibilities for the child within their Jewish life and community. According to Jewish tradition, upon becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a young man/woman is now independently obligated and responsible for observing the Mitzvot of the Torah and making their unique contributions to the Jewish community.

The term "Bar Mitzvah" (for boys) and "Bat Mitzvah" (for girls) translates to "son/daughter of the commandments." At the age of 13 for boys and 12 for girls, Jewish young men and women are deemed responsible for observing the Torah's 613 mitzvot. According to the Jewish calendar, a child is considered 13 or 12, which follows a lunar cycle. To determine the Hebrew birthday of your child, visit Hebrew Date Converter - Hebcal.com

At JLA, we are enthusiastic about your celebration of this momentous occasion and see its significance directly aligned with the goal of the education we are offering our students. We hope that every student at JLA will spend considerable time imagining and exploring how they might uniquely contribute to the Jewish community. We hope that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations will anchor our students' lives as they begin their growth as leaders of their Jewish community.

Embracing Tradition & Creating Memorable Celebrations

The new status that comes with becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is reflected in the traditional manner in which this occasion is often celebrated. These rituals and celebrations are usually meaningful and memorable but are not required by Jewish Law. Some rituals can be facilitated at JLA, and others would be appropriate for another venue.

Below is a list of rituals and ceremonies that have traditionally added significance and meaning to mark this special occasion:

1. Torah Reading and Aliyah la-Torah (for boys)

The Bar Mitzvah boy may read from the Torah scroll on a Shabbat or Monday/Thursday morning in front of a synagogue congregation as part of Shacharit, the morning prayer service. Reading from the Torah is an expression of dedication to observing the Torah's mitzvot and studying its many lessons throughout one's life.

This reading can be an entire Torah portion or a smaller selection called an *aliyah*. Many Bar Mitzvah boys may also chant the *Haftorah*¹, an additional text reading recited in synagogue following Torah reading. While family and community customs may determine whether and how much a Bar Mitzvah boy reads from the Torah, reading from a Torah scroll requires considerable preparation due to the unique tune accompanying this practice and the absence of vowels within a Torah scroll. Often, Bar Mitzvah boys spend at least a year learning their Torah portion before their Bar Mitzvah. While we do not offer instruction in Torah reading from a Torah scroll at JLA, many excellent tutors are available locally, and we can provide referrals upon request.

The Bar Mitzvah boy is called up to recite a blessing over the Torah for the first time (known as an *aliyah*) during the Torah service of Shacharit, either on Shabbat or a Monday/Thursday morning. The blessing recited by the Bar Mitzvah boy declares his commitment to growing in his study of Torah and understanding of the *Mitzvot*. There is a custom for parents, at the time of the son's first *aliyah*, to recite a blessing that celebrates the independence and growth of their child. The

¹ [When and Why We Read the Haftorah](#)

text of the blessing in Hebrew and English and more information on the practice of reciting it can be found here: [Baruch Shepetrani - a Bar Mitzvah Blessing - Chabad.org](http://BaruchShepetrani.com)

At JLA, we will offer Bar Mitzvah boys an *aliyah* on the Thursday morning following their Hebrew birthday. While we don't have Shabbat morning services at JLA, we do read from the Torah scroll on Monday and Thursday mornings and invite all of our Bar Mitzvah boys to read for the Torah scroll in school to mark their becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

2. Torah Study and Blessings (for Girls/Boys)

The Bar / Bat Mitzvah student may share a Dvar Torah publicly with a community in the synagogue or at a gathering of family and friends. The Dvar Torah is usually an idea derived from the weekly Torah portion and is an opportunity for the Bar / Bat Mitzvah students to reflect on their new dedication to observing the Torah's Mitzvot.

The Bat Mitzvah student dedicates time before their Bar / Bat Mitzvah celebration by studying a section of the Torah and identifying ideas and thoughts within this section that they find interesting. After reviewing the selected Torah portion, the student organizes their ideas and formulate them into a Dvar Torah. Resources like sefaria.org, rabbisacks.org, chabad.org, aish.com, or any of our Judaic staff can be helpful to work on organizing ideas into a Dvar Torah.

While a Dvar Torah is traditionally considered a written speech presented orally, it does not need to be. We encourage families to consider what medium would be most meaningful for their child to share their ideas. Slides, video presentations, and artwork of various kinds are all media that can be used to express powerful and inspirational Torah messages and concepts.

At JLA, the presentation of this Dvar Torah by the Bar or Bat Mitzvah student will happen immediately after Shacharit on Thursdays for boys and on Tuesdays for girls. During the service, we also offer the students a special prayer (*Mi Sheberach*), wishing them continued strength and success in their development as Jews.

3. Leading a Tefillah/Prayer Service (for boys)

The Bar Mitzvah boy may lead the Tefillah service on Shabbat or during the week at the *Shaliach Tzibbur* or *Hazzan*. The honor of leading the community in prayers requires familiarity with the prayers recited by the community and confidence in leading the chanting and singing of the prayer service.

At JLA, we welcome a Bar Mitzvah boy who would like to lead the morning services to mark their becoming a Bar Mitzvah and would invite them to do so in either of our minyanim, Ashkenaz, or Sefard.

4. Finding Your Voice in the Torah & Our History:

In becoming a Bar / Bat Mitzvah, many young men and women choose to undertake the production of a significant scholarly contribution to the Torah world.

This project would require a student to identify their area of interest a year before their Bar / Bat Mitzvah and create a plan for their research and material production. While ambitious, this type of project can have the most meaning for a student who is highly driven by their interest in Jewish content. Areas of study could range from Jewish law to culture and history.

We have seen students publish books, essays, and multimedia presentations that highlight mastery of their subject and celebrate the students' newfound place in the Jewish community. This opportunity may be pursued in the Bar / Bat Mitzvah Option 9 course or through our Friday Nesher Program.

5. A Kindness Campaign

In becoming an adult Jewish community member, many young men and women choose to mark this occasion by organizing a campaign for a cause or an organization that they find meaningful. While these campaigns often focus on raising funds for an organization, we encourage you to think about other ways in which a Bar / Bat Mitzvah student can support the mission of their chosen organization. We have seen students collect and distribute backpacks for children in need in Israel, organize perishable food drives for the Kosher Food Bank of Miami, and create murals to beautify parts of town.

JLA has partnerships with local and international organizations and can help you explore a kindness campaign if you are interested in integrating one as part of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration.

Celebrating a Bar / Bat Mitzvah Outside of JLA

As we celebrate important occasions in our students' lives, we recognize the diversity within our JLA Jewish community. Our students come from Sephardi and Ashkenazi homes and are American, Latin, Israeli, and European. We have families who are strict in their observance of Shabbat² and the laws of kosher³ inside and outside their homes, and we have families whose connection to Judaism is more centered around Zionism, values, and family traditions. Likewise, we have families where Orthodox practice has been the norm for generations and families for whom JLA will be their first sustained engagement with Judaism and the Jewish world.

It is a unique privilege and unparalleled learning opportunity for our students to be part of such a rich and diverse Jewish community. As educators, we want to do our utmost to ensure that this diversity becomes an opportunity for building understanding, sensitivity, and respect amongst our student body rather than an excuse for divisiveness, exclusion, and derision. And for 6th and 7th graders, there is no more critical moment for building - or undermining - class camaraderie and cohesion than celebrating each student's Bar and Bat Mitzvah. Therefore, to ensure that these celebrations become the celebratory, festive, and bonding experiences we all want them to be, we ask all members of our JLA community to abide by the following set of guidelines:

1. **Inclusion:** There is no better way to celebrate a Bar / Bat Mitzvah than through the mitzvah to ensure no one feels left out of the celebration. We therefore ask that whenever one invites JLA students to a festival, they include, at a minimum, all the students of their child's gender in their grade. If they choose to invite the opposite gender, we ask that all of the students of the opposite gender be included as well. We hope that the small size of our school prevents this policy from becoming an undue burden on any family. If you have concerns, please contact Rabbi Shaffer (yshafer@jlamiami.org) for guidance.
2. **Communication:** At JLA, we firmly believe it is not our role to dictate a particular style or approach to a family celebration. That is a profoundly personal decision. However, given the varying levels of observance amongst our families and the discomfort that is often associated with asking questions of this nature to families one doesn't necessarily know well, we want to do our utmost to ensure that all families have the information they need to make an informed decision about their child's participation in a Bar / Bat Mitzvah

² E.g., will only walk to synagogue on Shabbat

³ E.g., will only eat at a restaurant with kosher supervision or purchase food with kosher supervision

celebration. To that end, please connect with Rabbi Shaffer to share your plans for your celebrations, specifically regarding kashrut and Shabbat. Please understand that our purpose is not to pry and certainly not to pass judgment. Rather, it is so that a family who may be unsure of whether an event meets their family's standards can then call Rabbi Shaffer, who can share the relevant details they need to make their decision.

3. **Kosher Option:** The Miami area has many outstanding food establishments and excellent caterers certified by one of the local Orthodox kashrut agencies. Selecting one of these options as the provider for your celebration will ensure that all of our students can participate equally. If you need help identifying such an option or determining who the kashrut agency is, please contact Rabbi Shaffer, who would gladly help. At the same time, we understand that having a certified kosher caterer for the entire event may not be feasible for every family. We, therefore, ask only that the hosts be mindful of those students who are strictly kosher and provide a certified kosher option for them. Again, for help figuring out how best to do so, please do not hesitate to contact Rabbi Shaffer (yshaffer@jlamiami.org).
4. **Shabbat Observance:** While Shabbat is a beautiful and appropriate time to celebrate a Bar / Bat Mitzvah, it is essential to note that some JLA families may not travel in a car on Shabbat and to participate. They would need home hospitality for Friday night within walking distance to the celebration and kosher meals for Friday night and Shabbat. It is equally important to note that some JLA families drive on Shabbat, and some might need to familiarize themselves with various Shabbat observances and ceremonies. We therefore ask that hosts of a Shabbat celebration that will take place in an Orthodox setting do their utmost to ensure that the event is welcoming for students from less observant backgrounds.
5. **Respect for Declines:** Just as our community honors the right of every family to celebrate in the way that best reflects their background, traditions, and values, we ask that every family respect the decision of another family to decline an invitation if it does not feel comfortable for them. It is vital in such situations that the adults reinforce with their children that the decision to join or not to join a celebration is not a reflection of friendship, respect, or judgment but may simply reflect a family's commitment to a set of standards or traditions that is different from their own.

Celebrating a Bar / Bat Mitzvah at JLA

At JLA, we believe celebrating a Bar / Bat Mitzvah is critical for our students to mark their new status as fully-fledged adults in the Jewish community. We would like to encourage all students and their families to celebrate this milestone with the JLA community in addition to or in lieu of another celebration. Tefillah services will have time to honor those who have become a Bar / Bat Mitzvah on Tuesday and Thursday mornings.

On Thursdays, boys who became Bar Mitzvah may receive an *Aliya la-Torah*. On Tuesdays, girls or boys who became Bar / Bat Mitzvah will be offered the opportunity to share a short, prepared Dvar Torah following the conclusion of *Shacharit*. We invite the family of the Bar / Bat Mitzvah student to join us for these celebrations and offer the opportunity to sponsor an upgraded breakfast as part of the occasion.

Should you choose to celebrate the Bar/ Bat Mitzvah at JLA, you can invite members of your extended family and friends to participate (up to 25 people) and sponsor a grade-wide breakfast celebration following the conclusion of Shacharit.

A Bar / Bat Mitzvah celebration in which a family chooses to sponsor an upgraded breakfast will follow the following schedule:

7:30 AM	Families are invited to join us for introductory morning prayers (<i>Pesukei de'Zimrah</i>)
7:45 AM	Shacharit (Morning Services) begins
Thursday Mornings ~8:05 AM	Bar Mitzvah Boys will be called to the Torah. A special prayer for blessing and success (<i>Mi Shebeirach</i>) will be recited for those students who have become Bar / Bat Mitzvahs at this time.
Tuesday Mornings ~8:10 AM	Bat Mitzvah Girls will offer a short Dvar Torah to their grade following morning Shacharit.
8:15 AM	Bar / Bat Mitzvah students will receive a gift and special wishes from the leadership of JLA.
8:30 - 9:00 AM	Grade-wide special breakfast for the Bar / Bat Mitzvah student, their grade, and any guests in attendance (<i>sponsorship required</i>).

While families will be expected to cover the cost of the celebratory breakfast, JLA is committed to making the opportunity to celebrate together accessible to all of its students. To request a specific date for an in-school Bar / Bat Mitzvah celebration please visit: [Bar / Bat Mitzvah Reservation Form](#).

Bar / Bat Mitzvah Celebrations That Conflict With School Attendance

While we anticipate that the opportunity to celebrate a student's Bar or Bat Mitzvah in JLA will be meaningful, we recognize that some families may choose to celebrate this occasion at an early morning ceremony at their local synagogue or Chabad. While we encourage our students and their families to integrate with their communities and are thrilled at the prospect of our students having a spiritual home in addition to JLA, we ask for your sensitivity about potential conflicts with the rigorous academic schedule at JLA and the disruption that scheduling a party during the school day could create.

PLEASE NOTE: Students who attend an out-of-school celebration that conflicts with their ability to attend school will be considered absent for the periods they miss. Consistent with JLA student policies, this absence will count towards their annual allotment of 16 absences.

While celebrating on or near the day of the student's birthday adds special meaning to this occasion, it can create challenges for many students who would like to participate when the celebration occurs on a weekday and conflicts with school. Please consider utilizing JLA as the site of your weekday celebration while planning a more elaborate celebration on the weekend. Rabbi Shaffer is available to discuss what this might look like.

Meaningful Conversations to Have with Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah Child

Planning a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an opportunity for parents and children to connect and explore together what might make an event or a celebration meaningful. Below are some prompts and

games that help you have these conversations and design a meaningful celebration for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Prompts - We encourage both parents and children to discuss these questions with each other!

1. What parts of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration are most meaningful? How about highlighting those elements in our celebration to make it more personal and significant for you? (Specifically for parents: what do you remember most about your Bar / Bat Mitzvah?)
2. How might we give back to our community or engage in *chesed*/kindness as part of our Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration? What causes or organizations are important to our family, and how might we incorporate them into our celebrations? What new cause might we look for that reflects our passionate values?
3. How can we infuse Jewish values and traditions into our Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration to create a deeper connection to our past? Do specific rituals, prayers, or teachings resonate with you, and how can we incorporate them meaningfully? Can we use a family heirloom (e.g., a *siddur*, a *talent*, or a *kiddush* cup)? Is there a particular relative(s) whose memory we can honor?

Games to Play—Preparing the game will take some work. You will need note cards, markers, and some fun time together to prepare the game and play it together!

1. "Meaningful *Mitzvah* Matching": Create a deck of cards with a different Mitzvah written on each (for example, a *Tzitzit*, *Shabbat* candles, *Tzedakah*, etc.). Each player draws a card and discusses how they might incorporate that particular mitzvah into the Bar / Bat *Mitzvah* celebration. Encourage creative thinking and brainstorming as you explore various ways to make a positive impact. For extra fun, the other participants must guess which *Mitzvah* is being drawn (a.k.a. Charades).
2. "Symbolic Scavenger Hunt": Design a scavenger hunt where each clue represents an aspect of the Bar / Bat Mitzvah celebration. For example, one clue could lead to a charity organization where the family can volunteer, or another could lead to a Jewish text or book that can provoke discussions about traditions and customs. As the family finds each clue around the house, discuss the item's significance or location and brainstorm ways to incorporate it into the celebration.

Be in Touch!

As our JLA community continues to take shape and our first students step through our doors, we know that our community will grow through celebrations and care for one another, both at happy and challenging times. We are committed to building a close-knit community that is respectful and driven to thoughtfully celebrate our happiest moments together.

Should you have any questions, concerns, or thoughts regarding Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration policies, please contact Rabbi Yechiel Shaffer at yshaffer@jlamiami.org.