A Guide to B'nei Mitzvah at Kol Ami

CONGREGATION KOL AMI
ESTABLISHED 1923

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What is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah? Where does this tradition come from?

At its core, the answer is both simple and profound. Across cultures and throughout history, communities have marked the moment when a young person begins the meaningful transition from childhood toward adulthood. Early adolescence is a time of remarkable change—physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually—and societies have long created rituals to honor that transformation.

In Jewish tradition, that milestone is celebrated through the Bar or Bat Mitzvah. More than a ceremony or a celebration, it is a recognition that a young person is stepping into greater responsibility within Jewish life and community. It marks the moment when they begin to take ownership of their relationship with Jewish tradition, learning, and mitzvot.

This moment is not the end of childhood, nor is it the final destination of Jewish learning. Rather, it is an important turning point along a lifelong path of growth, discovery, and connection.

We are thrilled to be working with you at such a special time for your family. Know that we are here to support you in any way. Please reach out with any questions—we would like to make this process as meaningful and as stress-free as possible.

Rabbi Fenster

Rabbi Fisher

Cantor Mendelson

Pam Pass

Jess Lorden

B'nei Mitzvah and Beyond—What Comes Next?

The essence of becoming B'nei Mitzvah is embracing both the privilege and the sacred responsibility of being an active member of the Jewish community. This milestone is the beginning of a lifelong commitment to Jewish learning, meaningful relationships, tzedakah, and mitzvot. We hope every student will continue to grow their Jewish identity and deepen their connection to our community through our engaging teen programs, including 8th Grade, **The HUB**, youth groups, the madrichim program, and many other opportunities to learn, lead, serve, and connect.

For further information, please contact Pam Pass, Religious School Director, at pampass@nykolami.org or Melissa Cohen, Director of Youth Engagement, at melissacohen@nykolami.org.

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GROUP INFORMATION

A shared experience of learning, connection, and community

Much of the early Kol Ami B'nei Mitzvah process is experienced together with other families. These shared moments create a strong sense of community, allowing parents and students to learn alongside one another, build meaningful relationships, and become familiar with the clergy and senior staff who will guide and support them throughout this journey.

SPRING OF 4TH GRADE

The B'nei Mitzvah journey formally begins for most in the spring of your child's 4th grade year.

- Parents receive an email invitation to an introductory B'nei Mitzvah meeting.
    - This meeting is organized by **year of birth** and is 3 years prior to the year being assigned. For example, our meeting in April 2026 included parents of children born in 2016, becoming B'nei Mitzvah in 2029.
- Parents attend an introductory informational meeting, where we outline our B'nei Mitzvah process, explain our personalized services, discuss shared vs. single services, review approximate service length and time of services (AM vs. PM), discuss fees and facilities rental, and answer questions.
- Following the meeting, parents receive a link to submit information via an online form. On this form, we ask for such information as date of birth, school district/school, AM vs. PM preference, approximate number of guests, and for summer birthdays, a preference for fall or spring.
- When choosing AM vs. PM, please keep in mind that:
    - Services typically last 75–90 minutes
        - AM services start at 10am (you should note 9:45am on invitations)
        - PM services start at 5pm (you should note 4:45pm on invitations)
    - The only functional difference is that PM services may conclude with Havdallah
    - There are a limited number of PM services available throughout the year
    - We encourage you to choose what best supports your child and your family
    - Before selecting, we recommend that you attend both morning and evening B'nei Mitzvah services, which will be helpful in making an informed decision
- Submissions are due within 2 weeks of the meeting.
- Please note: As we build the calendar, we do not:
    - Schedule B'nei Mitzvah services during:
        - Jewish holidays
        - Thanksgiving, Labor Day, or Memorial Day weekends

        - School breaks
        - Summer months
        - On weekends with clergy professional commitments
    - Assign the same date to families from the same town (even if one if AM and the other is PM)

- Questions about the form or process may be directed to **Pam Pass** at pampass@nykolami.org.

SUMMER BETWEEN 4TH AND 5TH GRADES

B'nei Mitzvah dates are assigned using the information families submitted in the spring.

Information Shared

- Families receive their assigned date by mail, which includes:
    - The service date/time (AM vs. PM)
    - Whether the service is single or shared
    - Information regarding the B'nei Mitzvah fee deposit
    - Information about facility rentals

- Families are asked within two weeks to:
    - Sign and return the intent form
    - Pay the required deposit on the B'nei Mitzvah fee ($750 deposit starting with 2029 B'nei Mitzvah)

Facilities Rentals

- Once you receive your date, you may reserve Kol Ami for your celebration.
    - All reservations are on a first come, first served basis

- Families may reserve Kol Ami facilities for:
    - Kiddush following a morning service
    - Afternoon celebrations
    - Evening celebrations
    - Friday night family dinners – During the Friday night service, the B'nei Mitzvah family lights the Shabbat candles, and the B'nei Mitzvah child leads the Kiddush. You might like to begin the weekend with a relaxed Shabbat dinner with family and close friends following the service.

- Facility rental costs (as of 2028 B'nei Mitzvah):
    - Kiddush (immediately following the morning service): duration of 2 hours; cost is $2,000
    - Afternoon party: duration of 4 hours; cost is $3,500
    - Evening party: duration of 4 hours; cost is $4,000

- Friday night dinner: contact **Jess Lorden** at 914-949-4717 x101

Note: Security charge is extra; 50% deposit to reserve the space is required

- General Information
  - Families need to use pre-approved caterers.
    - We can provide you with a list of vendors at different price points to choose from and congregant recommendations.
- **Click here** for detailed facilities information.
- Questions about dates, facilities, or celebrations should be directed to **Jess Lorden** at 914-949-4717 x101 (preferred) or jessicalorden@nykolami.org.

RABBI ASSIGNMENTS

The assignment of rabbis is based on clergy availability and scheduling needs.

- Each Kol Ami rabbi brings warmth, intention, and joy to the B'nei Mitzvah experience.
- Families and students will have opportunity to build a meaningful relationship with whichever rabbi is assigned.
- Services officiated by each rabbi are celebratory, thoughtful, and personalized to honor each child and family within the shared life of the community.

B'NEI MITZVAH SERVICES

Kol Ami B'nei Mitzvah services are joyful, meaningful, and personalized. Please note that this is a list of what students typically do. We are happy to discuss customizing your service as it best meets your family needs.

Details

- On the Friday evening of the B'nei Mitzvah weekend, at our congregational Kabbalat Shabbat services, students typically:
  - Light candles with their immediate family and lead the candle blessing
  - Lead Friday night Kiddush
- On Saturdays, at the B'nei Mitzvah, students typically:
  - Chant 3 aliyot (sections) of Torah
  - Deliver a personal d'var Torah (speech about their Torah portion), including a description of their mitzvah project
  - Lead services in both Hebrew and English – the Hebrew prayers are the ones the students practice in Religious School T'fillah (services) and Hebrew Groups

    - Honor Family members throughout the service

- B'nei Mitzvah services include prayers typically led by students:
    - Elohai Neshama
    - Barechu
    - Shema/V'Ahavta
    - Mi Chamocha
    - The beginning of the Amidah (Avot v'Imahot and G'vurot)
    - Mourner's Kaddish

- Services include opportunities to honor and include special family members/close friends. Common options are:
    - Opening the ark
    - Lifting the Torah
    - Dressing the Torah
    - Torah blessings for the first two aliyot (often done by grandparents and parents & older siblings)
    - Special English readings
    - Prayers for Israel/US

Click here for the honors worksheet – ***single*** service.
Click here for the honors worksheet – ***shared*** service.

Non-Jewish Family Members

- Non-Jewish family members are invited to participate in all aspects of the services, depending on your and their comfort level.

SHARED SERVICES

Shared B'nei Mitzvah services are a meaningful and well-established part of Kol Ami's practice. It is our tradition to celebrate our community.

- Each child has a **full and equal role**, just as they would in an individual service:
    - Each student chants a complete Torah portion
    - Each delivers their own d'var Torah (speech about the Torah portion)
    - Each completes an individual mitzvah project

- The service structure allows students to:
    - Lead Hebrew prayers together
    - Lead portions independently – English prayers, Torah Portions, d'var Torah
    - Have family members honored – Torah aliyot (blessings), Open the ark, readings
    - Have full and individual tutoring sessions

- There is ample room for honoring each child's personality and each family's presence.
- Families should reach out to connect at a moment that is most comfortable – the more families get to know each other, the more meaningful a shared service can be.
- In the 3–4 weeks leading up to the service:
    - Students meet with the Rabbi and/or Cantor together
        - These meetings help students feel comfortable leading together
    - Families meet for honors and music planning and the final rehearsal together
        - We recognize that coordinating schedules can be challenging and appreciate families' flexibility and cooperation

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DECEMBER-MARCH OF 6TH GRADE

Required B'nei Mitzvah Workshops

- Workshops provide opportunities for families to:
    - Explore and reflect on important topics, Jewish values, and rituals that will help to make this journey more personal and deepen meaning
    - Reflect on responsibility and community
    - Connect with clergy and other 6th grade families
    - Gain confidence in the process and preparation
- Workshops
    - **Workshop 1:** During Sunday Religious School (students and parents)
    - **Workshop 2:** Saturday morning learning service and Kiddush brunch (families)
    - **Workshop 3:** During Sunday Religious School (students and parents)

FALL OF 7TH GRADE

Required Group Mitzvah Project

7th grade families meet on a scheduled Saturday morning for an opportunity to live Jewish values together and explore what a mitzvah project can look like.

The Special Yad

Each student creates a personalized *yad* to use when chanting Torah during their B'nei Mitzvah service and during the practice leading up to the special day. Our Religious School is thrilled to gift your child with this special and meaningful keepsake. This yad is a special and treasured ritual object that engages each student in creative and memorable preparation for their special day.

INDIVIDUAL INFORMATION

Personalized preparation for each child and family

While the beginning of this journey is shared, the following steps focus on your child's individual preparation and are scheduled based on your assigned service date.

12-15 MONTHS PRIOR

Extra Prep Time Needed

If you believe your child would benefit from additional preparation time due to special needs or other factors, please contact **Tahmina Abedi**, Clergy Assistant at 914-949-4717 x114 or tahminamaudodiabedi@nykolami.org.

Mitzvah Project

The mitzvah project is a central and meaningful part of preparing for Jewish adulthood. Your child should begin a mitzvah project a minimum of 12 months prior to their date.

Purpose

- To help students take responsibility for their actions and their impact on the world.
- To engage in *Tikkun Olam*—repairing the world through meaningful action.
- To move beyond charitable giving toward hands-on involvement.

Goals

- To bring Jewish values out of the classroom and into daily life.
- To encourage offering time, talents, and care to others.
- To foster a habit of service and a sense of fulfillment from helping others.

Planning

- **Click here** to access our:
    - Worksheet that guides students and parents through what type of cause and what type of project is personally meaningful
    - List of organizations that some of our prior students have worked with

Notes

- Your child will share a brief reflection on their mitzvah project and its impact.
- We hope your teens are inspired to have an ongoing connection.
- Questions may be directed to **Pam Pass** at pampass@nykolami.org or 914-949-4717 x124.

Attending Services

Regular attendance at Shabbat services is an important part of preparing for B'nei Mitzvah.

- Attend Friday evening Kabbalat Shabbat services and B'nei Mitzvah services throughout the year. (All B'nei Mitzvah services are open to our congregation.)
    - Experiencing services firsthand will help you become familiar with the prayers, rituals, and flow of the service, allowing you to feel more confident and comfortable on your B'nei Mitzvah day
    - Attending other B'nei Mitzvah celebrations can provide ideas and inspiration as you prepare for your own service
    - Participating in services offers meaningful opportunities to practice your prayers in the context of a live worship experience and to strengthen your connection to the Kol Ami community

Celebration

- There are myriad details to attend to for your celebration. We have a list of vendors (event planners, photographers, DJs, invitations, giveaways, centerpieces, etc.) recommended by congregants. We also have reminders (bathroom baskets, blocks of hotels for out-of-town guests, etc.) that can help make your planning easier. Please contact **Jess Lorden** at 914-949-4717 x101 (preferred) or jessicalorden@nykolami.org for assistance or with any questions.

7-9 MONTHS PRIOR

Schedule First Meeting

- Clergy assistant, Tahmina Abedi, will contact you to schedule the initial meeting with Cantor Mendelson.
- One or both parents attend with the student.
- The current B'nei Mitzvah fee must be paid prior to this meeting ($2,500 as of 2029 B'nei Mitzvah; balance due after deposit already paid is $1,750).
    - The fee includes allotted tutoring sessions, security for the Saturday service, and other associated costs
    - You can see this charge on your ShulCloud account
    - Contact **Jess Lorden** at 914-949-4717 x101 with questions regarding the fee

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6-7 MONTHS PRIOR

First Meeting

- The first meeting is with the cantor.
- Both student and parents attend.
- Make sure to bring Hebrew names for parent(s) and student.
- Study materials are distributed.
- A tutor is assigned at or following this meeting.
    - Your child's tutor will reach out to you to schedule all tutoring sessions
- Music is discussed.
    - All services include a pianist
    - Additional musicians are available for a fee and should be booked 1-3 months prior to the special day
        - In a shared service, families can split the fee
        - Music/musician choices are agreed upon by both families
- You will receive dates for all B'nei Mitzvah meetings with clergy.
    - It should be noted that we make every effort to keep to the schedule but flexibility, especially as we get closer to the date, is appreciated.
- Recordings of prayers and Torah blessings are provided at the student's first solo meeting with the cantor.
    - Parents should keep a copy of the Torah blessings for their own practice.
    - Parent practicing should begin with enough time for mastery.
- Students meet periodically with Cantor Mendelson for guided practice.
- Contact **Cantor Mendelson** with any questions at DanielMendelson@nykolami.org.

Summer Scheduling

- You will be asked about your family's summer availability.
- If preparation overlaps with summer, (for September–February dates), and if your child will be away during the summer, tutoring will begin two months earlier.
    - Zoom tutoring check-ins are available over the summer, consult your tutor
    - For those at sleepaway camp, arrangements would be made between family, tutor, and camp

Schedule Rabbi & Cantor Meetings

- All rabbi, cantor, and rehearsal meetings are scheduled in person immediately following the initial cantor meeting with our clergy assistant, Tahmina Abedi.

- Families are asked to:
    - Make scheduling a priority
    - Be flexible, coordinating multiple calendars can be complex
- Meetings are not scheduled during the students' Religious School hours.
- Families receive:
    - A full appointment schedule
    - Email confirmations prior to each meeting

Rabbi Meetings

There will be a number of meetings with the rabbi to cover such topics as the d'var Torah (speech teaching about their Torah portion), honors, and readings.

- First meeting:
    - Explore the parshah (Torah portion) and its themes
    - Discuss the mitzvah project
    - Review the importance of service attendance
- Ongoing meetings:
    - Develop a personal connection to the Torah portion
    - Write and practice the d'var Torah
    - Choose English readings
    - With parents, select people for honors during the service
- Final rehearsal:
    - Held the week of the B'nei Mitzvah with the immediate family in attendance

D'var Torah Philosophy

- The process of learning and reflection is as important as the final product.
- Each child works differently; our goal is to support growth and authenticity.
- Students should feel like authentic owners and teachers of the lessons they learned from studying their parshah (Torah portion). We want them to feel proud that they can teach Torah in a way that is personal and meaningful to them.

Tallit

- If ordering a special tallit, begin no later than 6 months prior.
    - Some families choose to use a cherished family member's tallit.
- Tallitot ordered from Israel may require additional time; you can also visit a local Judaica store.
- There are some tallitot that don't reflect our Reform beliefs. If you are unsure, please email your officiating rabbi with a picture of the atarah (decorative neckband stitched

onto the top edge of a tallit). They can be reached at jasonfenster@nykolami.org or libbyfisher@nykolami.org.

Kippot

- Kol Ami provides standard white kippot for your guests.
    - Personalized kippot are common and should be ordered 6 months prior
    - Remember to order clips
    - You will need to provide a basket or request one through Jess Lorden

Tutoring

- Our tutors are invested in your child's success! They feel that the preparation should be as rewarding as the special day, and do everything to make your child feel proud, confident, and comfortable along the way.
- Our tutors adapt the learning style that works best for your child. Each tutor has many tools at their disposal and makes sure they match your child's needs.
- Tutoring includes:
    - 15 half-hour sessions
        - The assigned tutor will contact the parents to set up a schedule to meet at a mutually convenient day/time
        - Additional sessions will be recommended if needed, at an additional cost; these should be arranged between tutor and family
    - Torah blessings
    - Torah chanting (You will receive recordings of the Torah aliyot directly from your child's tutor to aid in practicing)
    - Friday Night Kiddush
    - Mourner's Kaddish
- Children's needs vary; parents should support their child in partnership with the tutor.
- If you have any questions about tutoring, or wish to be updated on your child's progress, please reach out to your **child's tutor**.

Practice Expectations

Daily practice is essential and will make an enormous difference in the levels of success, confidence, pride, and enjoyment your child experiences

Cancellations

- Minimum 24-hour notice required for rescheduling, unless there is an emergency.
- Late cancellations count toward allotted tutor sessions.

3–6 MONTHS PRIOR

Parent Responsibilities

- Practice the Torah blessings before and after the Torah reading.
- Share recordings and written blessings with everyone who will have an aliyah.

Photography

- You may take photos in the sanctuary and with the Torah before the service.
- All photography sessions must conclude 30 minutes before the service begins.
    - Families who are sharing a service should coordinate timing
- No photos are permitted to be taken during the service.
- Families should schedule time for photos with **Jess Lorden** at 914-949-4717 x101.

Recording & Streaming

- All services are recorded at no additional cost; families receive a link within two weeks.
- Streaming is available at no additional cost but must be arranged in advance. Contact **Zoe Fuentes** at zoefuentes@nykolami.org for more information.

Oneg Sponsorship

- We welcome your sponsorship of the community oneg after Friday night services. Contact **Jess Lorden** at 914-949-4717 x101 to make arrangements.

1–3 MONTHS PRIOR

Final Preparation & Celebration

- Finalize honors, music, and guest count.
- Finalize celebration plans.
- Book additional musicians (piano provided) – **Click here** for more information.

Security Details

- Kol Ami covers security during the service, who will instruct family and guests in case of emergency.
    - Families cover security during celebrations plus 30 minutes for breakdown
    - Guards are paid in cash
    - Current rate: $45/hour per guard (as of Jan 1, 2026)
    - Guard guidelines:
        - 1 guard: up to 25 children
        - 2 guards: 26- 50 children
        - 3 guards: over 50 children

Jess Lorden makes all security arrangements (914-949-4717 x101).

Gestures of appreciation

- It is a thoughtful gesture to show appreciation to the clergy with a donation to the clergy's respective discretionary funds in any amount that is meaningful to you (cash or check). You can:
    - Drop off with or mail a check to the clergy assistant, Tahmina Abedi.
    - Submit electronically via the Kol Ami website.
- Tips for custodial staff are customary and appreciated (cash)
- Tips for security guards are not included in the fee (cash)

FINAL WEEK

- Bring kippot (with clips) in a basket.
- Let us know in advance if anyone requires special accommodations (e.g., wheelchair accessibility), and we will ensure everything is prepared to meet their needs.
- Confirm streaming with Zoe Fuentes at zoefuentes@nykolami.org.
- If you would prefer not to handle cash on the B'nei Mitzvah day, feel free to drop off marked envelopes with cash tips for custodial staff/security guards with Jess Lorden during this week.

YOUR SPECIAL WEEKEND

Thursday

Final family rehearsal with Rabbi and Cantor.

Friday Night Participation

Your family will be honored with lighting the Shabbat candles towards the beginning of the congregational Kabbalat Shabbat service, and your child will lead Kiddush (blessing over grape juice) at the end. These are special moments where the community is brought into your joy. It also gives the child the opportunity to experience being on the bimah, leading prayers, and getting comfortable in front of a full room.

Saturday – MAZAL TOV!

Your family and friends gather to celebrate this milestone with your family!

- In addition to your guests, there will be two board members in attendance. One will present the synagogue gifts towards the end of the service, and one will usher people to get seated, manage the door, and ensure that there is respect while the service is going on so your child doesn't get distracted and just shines on the bimah!

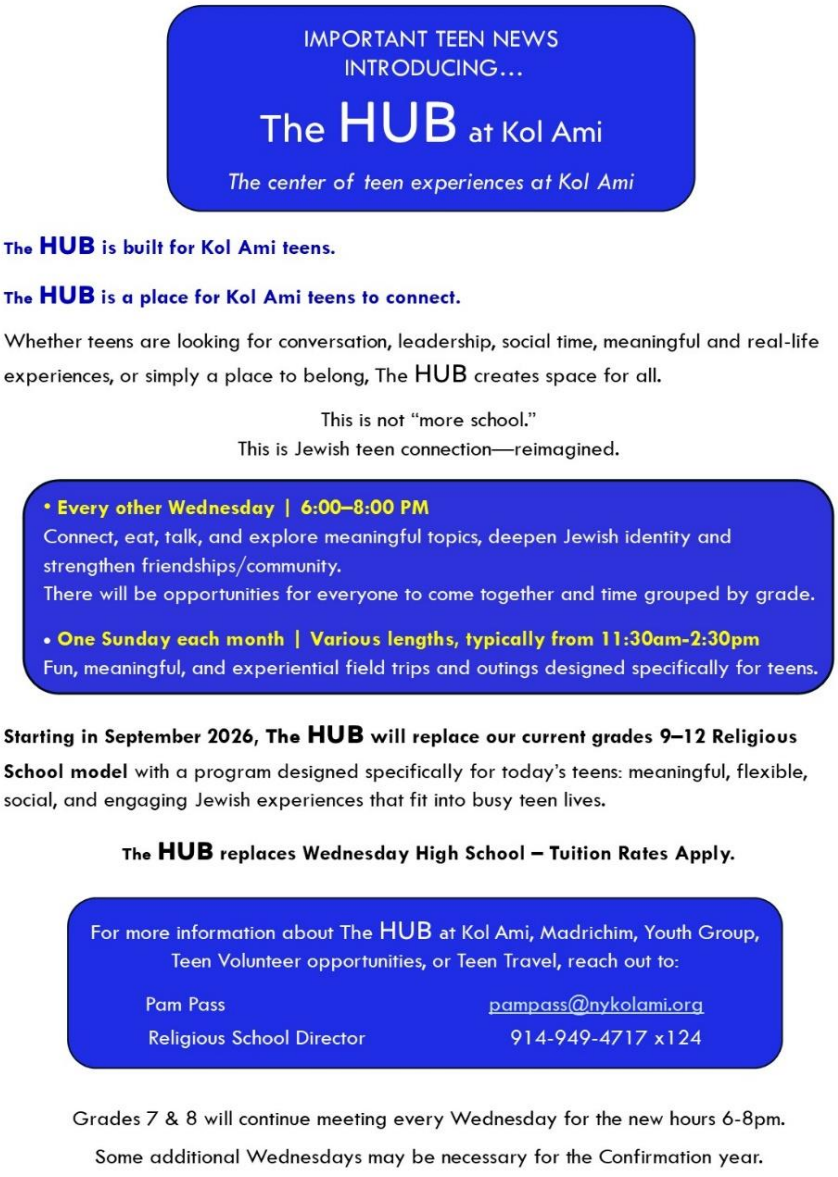
POST B'NEI MITZVAH

Kol Ami's rich offerings for teens post B'nei Mitzvah

Mazal tov on this important milestone!

We hope your child's connection to Jewish life at Kol Ami will continue to grow. Our vibrant teen programs provide opportunities for learning, leadership, service, friendship, and fun, and includes the meaningful milestone of Confirmation. Whether through **The HUB**, youth groups, the madrichim program, or special events, there are many ways for teens to stay connected to our community.

We look forward to continuing this journey with your family. For more information, please contact Pam Pass, Religious School Director, at pampass@nykolami.org or Melissa Cohen, Director of Youth Engagement, at melissacohen@nykolami.org.



GLOSSARY

Aliyah

(1) Sections of the Torah chanting separated by Torah blessings
(2) The honor of being called up to the bimah to chant the Torah blessings or Torah

Bar/Bat Mitzvah (singular) / **B'nei Mitzvah** (plural) – literally, child/children of the commandment, this is the name of the Jewish coming-of-age ceremony where a child chants Torah in public for the first time and teaches about their Torah portion

Bimah – The raised platform from which the service is led

D'var Torah – A teaching written and delivered by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child based on studying their torah portion and finding personal meaning

G'lilah – The honor of dressing the Torah

Hagbah – The honor of lifting the Torah and showing the portion just read to the congregation

Havdalah – Literally separation, this service is said at the end of Shabbat

Kippah (singular) /**Kippot** (plural) – Head covering) worn by men or women during the service

Oneg – the festive nosh shared after Friday night services

Parshah – Torah portion

Simchah – Happy occasion

Tallit (singular) / **Tallitot** (plural) - a Jewish prayer shawl with fringes on its four corners, symbolizing God's commandments and worn during prayer by adults

Torah – The 5 Books of Moses, filled with stories, Jewish values, life lessons, and commandments, helping us to lead lives of meaning and purpose

Yad – Literally hand, it is the special pointer used by the reader to follow along in the Torah