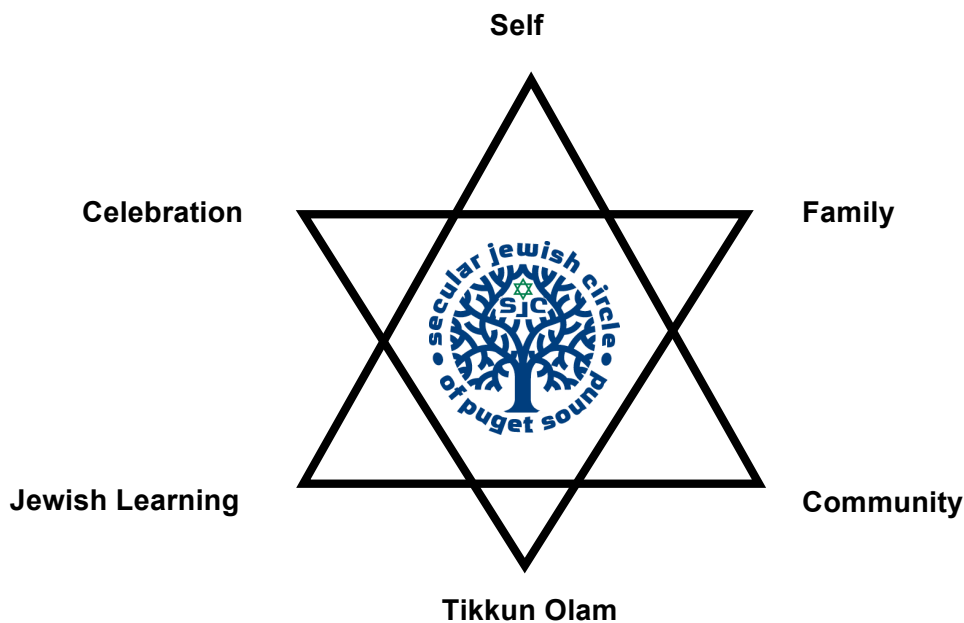


SJC B'nai Mitzvah Program



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Symbolically, the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony allows us to proclaim that as a family, we are changing and the changes are good. At the same time, it allows us to proclaim that as a family, we are stable and connected emotionally (even if, in many cases, no longer legally) to each other and to those who came before us. And what's so interesting is that it is precisely this stability, these connections that allow us to change. To the extent that we feel stable and connected, we are capable of taking risks and of moving on. The ceremony allows our child to announce, 'I am ready to be treated differently.' And it allows us as parents and elders to announce—however ambivalently— 'We are ready to treat you differently—no matter how hard it is to accept the idea that our baby is growing up and we will have less and less control.' Through this ritual of continuity, we are proclaiming our changes. And through this proclamation, we are enhancing our stability. This is precisely what ritual's classic magic is all about: the ability to promote change and continuity simultaneously. It is a paradox, wonderful and very human.

-- Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is This, Anyway? by Judith Davis, Ed.D.

Secular Humanistic *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*

Secular Humanistic Judaism celebrates the history, culture, and values of the Jewish people. The rituals of Secular Humanistic Judaism are rooted in tradition, while simultaneously reflecting modern humanistic beliefs and values.

Bar Mitzvah literally means “son of the commandment.” In classical Judaism, the *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony formally marked the time when a boy was expected to assume responsibility for observing the laws of Judaism. Before the age of thirteen, a child was presumed to be under his parents’ control; after his thirteenth birthday, the obligation to obey the commandments of the *Torah* was his own, and he was then considered part of the adult community.

For Humanistic Jews, *Bar / Bat Mitzvah* means “son or daughter of responsibility,” or “son or daughter of commitment.” In modern American society, age thirteen no longer represents the beginning of adulthood and the responsibilities that go with it. Thirteen year olds are not prepared to strike out on their own; however, they can be expected to demonstrate greater independence and depth of thought, competence, and commitment. This is an important period when boys and girls are able to examine and question their worlds and to shape their ideas more deeply than before. No longer a child, but not yet an adult, the teen must now exercise a new level of responsibility that comes with increased independence. A Secular Humanistic *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony no longer marks the beginning of adulthood, but a time of transition from childhood to adolescence.

A Secular Humanistic *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony signifies a young person’s desire to become more responsible for his or her own decisions and actions, and to identify with the many previous generations of Jews. The ceremony acknowledges the teen’s realization and acceptance of the philosophy that we are responsible for our actions; and that our actions affect our own lives and the lives of those around us. It is an expression of the family’s enthusiasm for engaging with the teen in a more mature relationship with increasing independence. It is conducted in the embrace of family and community, and in the center of Jewish tradition; it is a declaration of increasing distance, yet also one of connection and continuity.

SJC’s *B’nai Mitzvah* Program

SJC’s Shalom Sunday *B’nai Mitzvah* is an optional two year program for students enrolled in *our Kita Gimmel* class. The program focuses students’ attention on:

- studying the beliefs and values of Secular Humanistic Judaism and determining what is relevant and important to them;
- experiencing Jewish culture, including food, music, theater, humor and film;
- participating in Secular Jewish Circle community events and programs;
- participating in community service and social action projects;
- annually setting and meeting a personal goal;

- annually planning and preparing a Jewish holiday celebration and meal;
- designing, completing, and presenting a project rooted in Secular Humanistic Jewish values, and
- preparing and leading their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremonies

The *B'nai Mitzvah* program has six components: self, family, community, *tikkun olam*, Jewish learning, and celebration. The *B'nai Mitzvah* program requirements are a combination of group classroom work, group field trips and community service, and individual study and action. Using elements of the traditional *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony as a framework, SJC *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremonies reflect our community's humanistic values and are personalized to create meaning to each *B'nai Mitzvah* student and family.

The *B'nai Mitzvah* project

All second year *B'nai Mitzvah* students choose a project, to be completed by the date of their ceremony or the end of the school year, whichever comes first. Students and their parents are encouraged to read about Jewish and Humanistic values, including: *tzedekah* (justice, righteous way to give); *bal taschit* (do not destroy); *hachnasat orchim* (welcoming the stranger); *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick); *hiddur p'nai zaken* (honoring the elderly); *taz'ar ba'alei chayim* (kindness to animals); and *Talmud Torah* (Jewish study). Students spend time thinking about their passions and interests, and identify several potential project topics that reflect one or more of the values. After exploring these options further, students select a project and create a work plan. When the project is complete, students decide what they want to teach the community about their project, and present their lesson in a speech at their ceremonies. The *B'nai Mitzvah* project is unique to each student.

The Remember Us Program

Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project offers an invitation to children preparing for *Bar/Bat mitzvah* to connect with the memory of children lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the *Torah*. The Project provides the student with the name of a lost child, information about him/her, and suggestions for simple acts of remembrance. Families report that participation adds depth and meaning to the *bar/bat mitzvah* experience. <http://www.remember-us.org/about.html>

Parents' role in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah

During the two years of the *B'nai Mitzvah* program, we expect parents and families to be active in the SJC community. While only the *B'nai Mitzvah* student is required to attend class, the reality is that for two years, the entire family participates in the *B'nai Mitzvah* program by supporting the *B'nai Mitzvah* student, helping organize events, and attending SJC programs. For many, the commitment feels large at a time when they are already busy with school and extra-curricular commitments. Yet the reward is great. Without exception, our families and graduates look back on the two-year of *B'nai Mitzvah* and feel it deepened their experience as Secular Humanistic Jews, and helped them grow as individuals and a family. Parents have multiple roles to play:

First, parents need to provide their student with the structure, practical assistance, encouragement and coaching necessary to help their student be successful, including completing the program requirements in a timely manner. Parent involvement and attention is required for the *B'nai Mitzvah* project, which is a significant undertaking in the second year of the program. The *B'nai Mitzvah* program expects students to take on a lot of responsibility and independence, yet most students still need parent support to be successful. We expect parents to be aware of the requirements as well as the progress their student is making toward completing them.

Second, parents take the lead with their child on creating the ceremony, with the assistance of the ceremony leader. Parents are responsible for all the logistical planning for the ceremony, including invitations, space, parking, and food.

Third, parents are required to volunteer in support of the program for the duration of their child's participation in the program. Volunteer work includes helping coordinate the program, tracking student progress, teaching classes, supervising lunch break on class days, organizing community service events, organizing field trips, and helping students complete group program requirements.

Program Expectations

Oversight of the program is provided by a *B'nai Mitzvah* Board, comprised of SJC members. The Board is responsible for determining whether or when students satisfactorily complete the program requirements. The Board reviews each student's progress and provides guidance to ensure that the second year project, Jewish identity essay, and ceremony are consistent with Secular Humanistic Jewish beliefs, values, and practices.

When families choose a trained Secular Humanist Ceremony Leader, the *B'nai Mitzvah* board will generally defer to that person's judgment.

***B'nai Mitzvah* Student and Family**

1. The *B'nai Mitzvah* program requires that parents be involved in their child's studies and support and help him or her throughout the process. For the two years of the program, families are expected to make a significant commitment of time to ensure a valuable experience, including arranging the family's schedule so that the student can participate in the classroom and out-of-classroom scheduled program activities.
2. The student must be enrolled in SJC's Shalom Sunday School *Kitah Gimmel* and have completed at least two years of Shalom Sunday. The student will remain active in Shalom Sunday classes until the end of the school year in which the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* occurs and/or all program requirements are fulfilled.
3. Prior to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony, the student will have completed all requirements satisfactorily with the exception of those events scheduled after the ceremony date.
4. The parents of the *B'nai mitzvah* students will volunteer to chaperone at least one outing during the school year, more if necessary. The parents will also attend meetings with other parents and *B'nai Mitzvah* administrators held during the year.
5. The student and family must maintain regular communication with the *B'nai Mitzvah* program (including responding to emails and phone calls).
6. The family must be members in good standing* with SJC during preparation of and at the time of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. (*current in all dues and tuition payments, or with a functioning payment plan.)

***Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Ceremony**

1. All ceremonial elements will be consistent with the Secular Humanistic Jewish philosophy and approach to life. The ceremony will be humanistic and non-theistic in language, ritual, and contents, with an emphasis on the following beliefs:
 - a. Judaism is the evolving culture and civilization of the Jewish people. It draws its strength from a wide variety of cultural roots and social movements.
 - b. We have the power and the responsibility to shape our lives according to our evolving individual beliefs and values independent of divine authority.
 - c. Community is integral to Judaism.
 - d. Jewish culture and education are essential to the continuity of our community.
 - e. Social action is an important and necessary expression of our Jewish values and traditions.
2. Any reference to or use of a prayer, ritual or object which could be

- interpreted as having a theistic meaning must be put in the context of a Secular Humanistic Jewish practice (e.g., traditional *sh'ma* or mourner's *kaddish*, head covering, *tallis*, *Torah* portion, etc.). The ceremony leader shall not wear any personal garments that are generally interpreted as having a theistic basis, nor shall s/he engage in any theistic activity during the ceremony.
3. The ceremony should include the following elements: Welcoming, including an explanation of a Secular Humanistic *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*; *Shabbat* or *Havdalah* (if the ceremony falls on or at the end of *Shabbat*), humanistic *Kaddish* (memorial); Jewish Identity, *B'nai Mitzvah* project presentation; *Aliyot* (special words from family / friends); and good wishes from the parents and SJC community. At *Shabbat* ceremonies, the student leads the community in reciting the blessings over the *challah* and wine.
 4. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student will make two spoken presentations, one addressing Jewish identity, and the other teaching about the *B'nai Mitzvah* project. The student will lead a substantial portion of the ceremony such as the *Shabbat* portion (when appropriate), humanistic *kaddish* (memorial), and musical portions.
 5. All materials read in a language other than English will be translated, and content for group participation written in Hebrew must be transliterated.
 6. The ceremony will be described and advertised as an SJC community event, and the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* family will invite the SJC membership through an announcement in the SJC newsletter. The family may choose to host a gathering after the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony. We recognize, however, that it may present a hardship for some to feed all community members who attend. There are many other options available, including only serving hors d'oeuvres or light desserts, separating the ceremony and the post ceremony event for family and close friends, or asking the community (or specific members) to help with a potluck *oneg Shabbat*.

Ceremony Leader

The ceremony leader is contracted separately by the family as an independent consultant. The ceremony leader serves as a mentor and/or teacher for the student preparing for the *B'nai Mitzvah* project, Jewish Identity essay, and the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony. Ideally, the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony leaders are certified Secular Humanistic Jewish celebrants. The ceremony leader's responsibilities include:

1. Being well-versed in Secular Humanistic Jewish philosophy and SJC's *B'nai Mitzvah* program and requirements.
2. Providing tutorial supervision of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student's individual project, Jewish Identity essay and presentations.
3. Informing families regarding parameters of Secular Humanistic Jewish practice as it relates to *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. Ceremony content and presentation must be compatible with SJC's secular humanistic philosophy and values, and sources appropriately cited.
4. Working with the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student and family to prepare and/or

- reproduce materials for the ceremony, and ensuring that SJC is provided a copy for archival purposes.
5. Ensuring that the ceremony is accessible and understandable to attendees, many of whom may not be familiar with Jewish practice or customs as used in the student's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.
 6. Communicating frequently with the SJC *B'nai Mitzvah* teacher and board concerning the student's progress as well as any issues that arise (including timely response to emails and phone messages).

SJC's Responsibilities

1. Provide information on Secular Humanistic Jewish practice/philosophy to Ceremony Leaders and to all upcoming *B'nai Mitzvah* families.
2. Communicate with families and Ceremony Leaders, including keeping them informed of the program schedule, changes in the overall program and/or of any issues that could delay or cancel a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* at SJC.
3. Determine whether and when students satisfactorily complete the program requirements.
4. Make a presentation to the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* student at the ceremony.
5. Monitor the family's membership status with SJC, ensuring that payments or other arrangements are current.

B'nai Mitzvah Program Requirements

B'nai Mitzvah Requirement	Year 1	Year 2
Self (individual)		
Personal Goal: Set a personal goal during Rosh Hashanah and work to achieve it during the year	Yes	Yes
Family (individual)		
Jewish Holiday: Plan and prepare one Jewish holiday celebration with your family	Yes	Yes
Jewish Food: Prepare a Jewish food for friends or family	Yes	Yes
Community (group) – participate in 5 community events per year		
Rosh Hashanah: Assist/participate in SJC's Rosh Hashanah celebration	Yes	Yes
Shabbat: Participate SJC Shabbats	Yes	Yes
Hanukkah: Help out at SJC's Hanukkah party	Yes	Yes
Tu B'Shevat: Help out at SJC's Tu B'shevat Seder	Yes	Yes
Purim: Help with JCC Purim Carnival or Schpiel	Yes	Yes
Passover: Assist with SJC Passover Seder	Yes	Yes
Rummage Sale: Help with the SJC Rummage sale or other community events as necessary	Yes	Yes
Tikkun Olam/Tzedekah (group)		
Participate in five B'nai Mitzvah group community service and social action projects.	Yes	Yes
Jewish Learning (group and individual)		
Classes: Attend monthly B'nai Mitzvah classes and complete homework	Yes	Yes
Field Trips: Attend B'nai Mitzvah educational and cultural field trips	Yes	Yes
Project: Select and complete a major project related to being a Secular Humanistic Jew.	No	Yes
Personal Identity: Write an essay about your identity as a Secular Humanistic Jew	No	Yes
Celebration (individual)		
Attend SJC bar/bat mitzvah celebrations	Yes	Yes
Prepare your own bar/bat mitzvah ceremony	No	Yes
Participate in the <i>Remember Us</i> program	No	Recommended



SJC *B'nai Mitzvah* Program Family Acknowledgement

I have read and understand the details of the Secular Jewish Circle's B'nai mitzvah program.

Student Name

Student Name

Parent #1 Name

Parent #2 Name

Parent #1 Signature

Parent #2 Signature