

It is the custom at Congregation Etz Chayim for the parents of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to bless their child during the Shabbat morning service. This handbook was designed to help parents select, personalize or write a blessing for their child. It contains some information on blessings in general, traditional blessings for children and for Bar and Bat Mitzvah, and alternative blessings. In addition, there is information on things to consider in selecting or personalizing a blessing together with questions to help facilitate a conversation between parents and children about what type of blessing might be most meaningful.

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Blessings

- The rabbinic tradition [*Talmud Menachot* 43A] advises us to recite 100 blessings a day. Would that we had one hundred reasons each day to stop and express our wonder and gratitude.
- The word *brachah*, blessing, comes from the word *berech*, bending the knee, the movement of expressing gratitude and wonder for the gifts of life.
- Many of the prayers in the prayer book begin or end with the Hebrew words *Baruch Atah Adonai*. We don't know when this prayer form developed among our people. When King David prayed before the Israelites, he used the words, *Baruch Atah Adonai...*, "Praised be You..." (I Chronicles 29:10) It could be, then, that this form of the blessing is one of the oldest Jewish formulas of prayer.
- According to Moses Maimonides (1135 – 1204), there are three kinds of *brachot*:
 - First there are blessings for the pleasure and enjoyment we derive from tastes, sounds, fragrances, and extraordinary sights. (*Birchot haNehenim*)
 - Second there are the blessings recited at the time of doing *mitzvot* which are commanded by the Torah or tradition. This kind of *brachah* includes the words, "*Asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu...*"--"Who has made us holy/consecrated us with *mitzvot* and commanded us to..." (Birchot Mitzvah)
 - Finally, there are the blessings recited at personal or private occasions. These may be times of joy or moments of sadness, as an expression of affirmation of life and love of G0d. They are not based on a formula, but come from the heart.

Blessings Traditionally Associated with Bar and Bat Mitzvah

Genesis Rabba 63:10

Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shim'on said, A man is [parents are] responsible for his son [their child] until the age of thirteen. Afterwards he [they] must say:

Baruch she-patarani me-onsho shel zeh

Bless the One Who has freed me from responsibility for this one [our son].

Baruch she-patarani me-onshah shel zot

Bless the One Who has freed me from responsibility for this one [our daughter].

Mi Shebeirach for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah

May G0d Who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, bless _____ who has come for an *aliyah* upon reaching the age of *mitzvot*. May the Holy One guard and sustain him/her, helping him/her to be wholehearted in his/her faith, to study Torah and fulfill *mitzvot*, and to walk in G0d's ways. May he/she find favor before G0d and people everywhere. And let us say: Amen.

Shehecheyanu

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
Shehecheyanu v'ki'manu v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh*

Blessed You Adonai our G0d, Ruler of the universe,
Who brought us to life and kept us alive, bringing us to this time.

Blessings from the Parents Of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah

"This is the day the Lord has made;
Let us rejoice and celebrate on it."

With gladness and thanksgiving we praise You, Adonai our God, for having kept us alive, and sustained us, and enabled us to reach this day.

We give thanks for the wondrous privilege of seeing our son/daughter grow day by day, week by week, year by year. For the health and strength You have given him/her, for the mind and spirit with which You endowed him/her, for his/her ability to elicit and return love – for all these precious gifts, we thank You.

Watch over him/her, O God, on this special day and every day. Grant him/her a growing understanding of the true significance of this occasion and a deepening loyalty to everything which it represents. May the teachings of our heritage guide him/her throughout life; and may he/she lead a life worthy of Your blessings.

Adonai our God, author of life and source of all blessings, we praise You for keeping us alive, and sustaining us, and enabling us to reach this day.

Gratefully we thank You for the joyous privilege of seeing our daughter/son attain this milestone. On this day cherished dreams and hopes are fulfilled. On this day new dreams and new hopes are born.

We pray that Your protecting and loving care will accompany her/him wherever she/he goes and in all that she/he does. Help her/him to become all that she/he is capable of

being. Give her/him strength to do all the good things that are within her/his reach. Keep her/him loyal to the best that he has been shown, and to the noblest Jewish teachings she/he has been taught.

May her/his deeds find favor in the eyes of others and be worthy of Your blessings.

On this Shabbat when our daughter/son becomes a Bat/Bar Mitzvah, we have come with her/him and our loved ones to join in worship and to offer our prayer of thanksgiving.

We are grateful, O God, for the privilege of passing along the gift of life which You gave us, thus sharing with You in the miracle of creation. We are grateful for the thirteen years of nurturing this life, for the unnumbered joys and challenges which these years have brought us. Praise to You, Adonai, for keeping us alive, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this day.

Bless our daughter/son, O God; watch over, protect, and guide her/him. Help her/him to continue to grow in body and mind, in soul and character. Keep her/him loyal to our people and to the teachings of our Torah. May her/his life be rich and rewarding. May all her/his deeds bring pride to us, honor to the house of Israel, and glory to Your name.

We thank You, O God, for the joyous fulfillment we feel as our son/daughter reaches the threshold of adulthood.

How privileged we feel that he/she is our son/daughter, and that he/she is bound to us by bonds of love, of memory, and of hope! Praise to You, Adonai our God, who has kept us alive, and sustained us, and enabled us to reach this day.

O God, accept our thankfulness for the thirteen years that have come and gone; bless our hope for the years that are yet to be. May Your mercy and guidance accompany this Bar/Bat Mitzvah at all times, in a life marked by reverence for Torah and love of all Your children.

We thank You for this opportunity to come together with family and friends to celebrate this Shabbat when our son/daughter is called to the Torah as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

We pray that You grant him/her Your gifts of laughter, fulfillment and good health. May he/she be strong but not tough, gentle but not weak. May he/she be righteous, but not self-righteous, honest but not unforgiving. Whenever he/she speaks, may the words be words of wisdom and friendship. May his/her hands build and his/her heart preserve what is good and beautiful in our world. May the voices of the generations of our People move through him/her, and may he/she know that there is a People and a rich heritage to which he/she belongs.

Eternal God, may our son/daughter be a constant source of pride and joy to the Jewish People, to those who have stood with us through the years, to our family and to him/herself.

Our God, may this day of excitement and joy remain always with us. May it be a source of inspiration to us, to enhance our commitment to our People and to our religious heritage.

With family and friends here to join in our celebration of life, we pray that the bonds of love and closeness will grow ever stronger and that our feeling of love for each other will be constantly strengthened.

We pray that this day reminds our son/daughter of the responsibility he/she has as a Jew to do whatever he/she can to make the world a better place for him/her, for the Jewish People, and for all the inhabitants of the earth.

We thank You, Eternal God, for granting strength to reach this day.

We thank You for the joyous privilege of seeing our daughter/son attain this milestone. We recognize that life itself is truly the greatest blessing, but to have the opportunity to share our life with others and to give of ourselves is a gift beyond compare.

We thank You for the special blessing of being able to share in our daughter/son's life, to love, to guide and to nurture her/him as she/he matures. Help us to set a worthy example for our child. May we always have the strength to give her/him the support she/he needs us to give.

Grant our daughter/son a growing understanding of the true significance of this occasion and a deepening loyalty to everything which it represents. We pray that she/he will translate becoming a Bar/t Mitzvah into a life-long commitment to Jewish living and Jewish values. May she/he be a strong link in our Tradition and translate its values and concerns into her/his daily life.

With family and friends here to join in our celebration of life, we pray that the bonds of love and closeness will grow ever stronger and that our feelings of love for each other will be constantly strengthened.

We pray that You grant our daughter/son Your gifts of long years and good health to enable her/him to be a constant source of pride and joy to You, to the Jewish People, to our family and to her/himself.

May you live to see your world fulfilled,
May your destiny be for worlds still to come,
and may you trust in generations past and yet to be.
May your heart be filled with intuition
and your words be filled with insight.

May songs of praise ever be upon your tongue
and your vision be on a straight path before you.
May your eyes shine with the light of holy words
and your face reflect the brightness of the heavens.

May your lips ever speak wisdom
and your fulfillment be in righteousness
even as you ever yearn to hear the words
of the Holy Ancient One of Old.

May your eyes sparkle with the light of Torah,
and your ears hear the music of its words.
May the space between each letter of the scrolls
bring warmth and comfort to your soul.
May the syllables draw holiness from your heart,
and may this holiness be gentle and soothing
to you and all God's creatures.
May your study be passionate,
and meanings bear more meanings
until life arrays itself to you
as a dazzling wedding feast.
And may your conversation,
even of the commonplace,
be a blessing to all who listen to your words
and see the Torah glowing on your face.

Selecting, Adapting or Writing A Blessing For Your Child

It is the custom at Congregation Etz Chayim for the parents of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to bless their child during the Shabbat morning service. Parents are free to select, adapt or write their own blessing.

About Using Or Adapting A Blessing

If you choose to use or adapt one of the blessings from this handbook, please know that they are written in a "generic" form and, as such, do not include a name. Feel free to say the name of your child instead of the words "our son/daughter" or "he/she" if you wish.

Similarly, you should feel free to replace words like "Adonai" and "God," with whatever expressions are most meaningful to you. For instance, you may prefer *Shekhinah*, Eternal One, Ruler of the Universe, Sovereign, Divine Presence, *haShem*, Compassionate One, etc.

The Style Of The Parents' Blessing

Of the three types of blessings described by Maimonides (see page 1 of this handbook) parents' blessings are of both the first and third types -- blessings of enjoyment (which begin with the traditional words, *Baruch Atah Adonai...*) and blessings from the heart on a joyous occasion (which do not follow a formula). Some of us prefer to rely on a blessing formula, finding comfort in the ritual and language of the ages, both because it is so historically resonant and because we ourselves may not feel that creative in expressing our thoughts and feelings. We may also wish to reach out to the congregation with familiar words, such as the *shehecheyanu*, which is always appropriate for reaching a new time. Others of us may prefer to express ourselves in a more original and personal way. Either style, or a combination, is appropriate.

Making Choices Based On A Sharing of Thoughts Between Parents And Child

The questions on the next page are meant to be a starting point for a conversation, for a sharing of thoughts, between parents and child to explore what type of blessing might be most meaningful. *Please do not feel*

bound by these questions--feel free to follow whatever paths open as you talk together. The questions were written bearing in mind that many of the blessings and prayers associated with joyous occasions focus on three things:

- gratitude to God;
- appreciation for all that has been and is; and
- hopes and dreams for the future.

Questions for the Bar/t Mitzvah:

- When you think about your life in general, what are you most proud of? What are you most thankful for? What brings you the most happiness?
- When you think about becoming Bar/t Mitzvah, about leading the Shabbat morning service and being counted as a Jewish adult, what do you feel?
- When you think about the future in general, what do you wish for?
- When you think about your future as a Jewish adult, what do you hope for?
- Are there any people, alive or not, who you really admire? What is it about them that makes you feel that way? Are any of these people Jewish? Can you think of any Jewish role models?
- When your parents bless you during services, does it make a difference to you if the words are in English or Hebrew or some combination?

Questions for the Parents of the Bar/t Mitzvah:

- When you think about your child, what thoughts come to mind? What are you most thankful for? What are you most proud of?
- When you think about your child becoming Bar/t Mitzvah, what do you feel? What are your thoughts about your child leading services and reading Torah? About your child being “counted” as a Jewish adult?
- When you think about your child’s future in general, what hopes, dreams or wishes do you have for him/her?
- When you think about your child’s future as a Jewish adult, what do you hope for? Do you envision your child leading services and/or reading Torah in the future? What else do you envision or wish?
- When you imagine blessing your child as he/she becomes Bar/t Mitzvah, do you think that traditional Jewish words (in Hebrew or in English)--words that may include thoughts about G0d and Torah – might enhance the expression of your feelings and thoughts?

Footnotes & Acknowledgements

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> - [_ednref1](#) As quoted in *Shacharit L’Shabbat*, Congregation Etz Chayim, p. 23

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> - [_ednref2](#) *Ibid.*

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> - [_ednref3](#) *Ibid.*

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> - [_ednref4](#) *Likrat Shabbat*, compiled and translated by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg. The Prayer Book Press, Briegepport, CN, 1973, p. 68.

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref5](#) Adapted from *Likrat Shabbat*, compiled and translated by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg. The Prayer Book Press, Briegepport, CN, 1973, p. 68.

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref6](#) *Ibid.*

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref7](#) *Ibid.* p. 69

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref8](#) *Ibid.*

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref9](#) Adapted from “From the Heart: A compilation of prayers and reflections to be recited as one’s daughter/one’s son become a Bar/Bat Mitzva,” Rabbi Rick Sherwin, Beth El Congregation, Phoenix, AZ

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref10](#) *Ibid.*

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref11](#) *Ibid.*

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref12](#) Adapted from the Talmud, *Berachot 17a*, translated by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner. As quoted in *Living a Jewish Life* by Anita Diamant with Howard Cooper, Harper Perennial, 1991, p. 253.

<http://www.etzchayim.org/Education/BartMitzvah/BartDocs/Section4/theblessings.html> -
[_ednref13](#) Danny Siegel as quoted in *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, The Rabbinical Assembly of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, NY, 1999, p. 367.