

Congregation Keneseth Israel
Policies, Practices & Guidelines

Policy, Practice or Guideline: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Services: Family Participation

Source: Religious Practice Committee

Date Adopted: 6/1988

Dates Revised: 12/2022

- I. Introduction: Using various criteria, families choose relatives and friends to participate in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. In almost every case, member families approach the service as a private matter and believe they, with the Rabbi's assistance, have an absolute right to determine the amount and type of participation.
- II. Policy Statement: It is the policy at KI to welcome family members to the *Bimah* and provide them with guidelines to participate in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service.
- III. History: The Rabbi, Parents and grandparents 'pass' the Torah to the B/M to symbolize the transmission of Jewish tradition from one generation to the next. The actual passing of the Torah from one generation to the next was replaced instead with the Rabbi holding the Torah and each grandparent in turn touches the Scroll. The Torah is then passed to the parents and subsequently to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- IV. Definitions:
- V. Procedure. At the discretion of the Clergy, the opportunities to participate for various family members include:
 - a. **Candle & Kiddush** (Shabbat). Usually Mother and Father; the B/M often participates; entire nuclear family stands together and divides reading; occasionally other members of the family are included e.g. grandparent. Prayer should be led only by Jewish members.
 - b. **The Morning Prayer**. This is read at the beginning of Shabbat morning service and it can be designated for a sibling. It is occasionally read by another relative. Prayer should be led only by Jewish members.
 - c. **Torah Transmission**. While a non-Jewish parent or grandparent may come to the *Bimah*, only those who have supported the child's Jewish education would actually participate directly. The Rabbi will meet with the family prior to the event to determine to what extent the non-Jewish family member(s) have supported the child's Jewish education.

- d. **Hakafa.** B/M carries the Torah around the Sanctuary with the Rabbi and parents in the procession. Occasionally the Rabbi or parent holds the Torah.
- e. **Aliyahs.** The B/M chants the Torah portion in the number of sections determined by the Clergy. The blessings are said before and after each section. The parents say the blessings prior to the B/M child. Other family members, usually the grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings say the blessings for the other sections. While any family member could stand at the reading desk, during the Torah Service, only Jewish family members would say the traditional Torah blessing. During the Torah transmission the non-Jewish member would stand with his/her Jewish spouse during the parental *aliya*, without singing the blessing. A reading for non-Jewish relatives may be provided.
- f. **Parents' Remarks.** Parents are permitted to speak and address their child during the service and usually in response to the child's speech, reflect on the meaning of the occasion.
- g. **Ark Doors.** At three different points in the service (before and during the Torah service as well as the *Aleinu*) the Ark doors are opened and closed. This gives other family members an opportunity to participate. Since there is no religious or liturgical significance to opening or closing the Ark doors, any relative is permitted to do this.
- h. **Torah Ornaments.** As many as four people may participate in the undressing and dressing of the Torah. Since the Torah is the central Jewish symbol, only Jewish relatives would dress and undress the Torah.
- i. **Raising the Torah.** The Torah is raised and turned for the congregation to view. At the Rabbi's discretion, the holder will be approved. They must be Jewish, experienced with the ritual, and strong enough to ensure that the Scroll will not fall.
- j. **Conclusion.** The nuclear family stands together during the child's *aliyah* and recites the *Shehechyanu* with the Rabbi and congregation.
- k. **Concluding Motzi & Kiddish.** These prayers should be led by the Clergy and Jewish individuals. A reading in English for the non-Jewish spouse may be provided.

VI. Reference: