



# Congregation Etz Chaim

*Community, Spirituality, and You*

Andrea J. Cosnowsky, Senior Rabbi  
Frederick Kamil, Associate Rabbi  
Carol Meyer, Executive Director  
Marla Friedman, Religious School Principal  
Steven M. Bob, Rabbi Emeritus  
Anne Stein, Educator Emerita  
Rachel Wood, Inclusion Specialist

## JEWISH RITUAL GUIDE

### **BRIT MILAH – SIMCHAT BAT**

#### **Brit Milah (Circumcision and Baby Naming for a Boy)**

Brit milah, which means "covenant of circumcision," is a Jewish ritual performed on a baby boy eight days after he is born. It involves the removal of the foreskin from the penis by a mohel, who is a person that has been trained to safely perform the procedure. Brit milah is also known by the Yiddish word "bris." It is one of the most well-known Jewish customs and signifies the unique relationship between a Jewish boy and God. Traditionally, a baby boy is named after his bris.

#### **Brit Bat (Baby Naming for a Girl)**

As opposed to a brit, circumcision, of a boy on the eighth day, there are no explicit rituals for a girl. Instead, there are customs for a Simchat Bat, celebration of a birth of a daughter. Naming a baby girl at Etz Chaim takes place most of the time on Sunday mornings. At the request of the family it can also take place at a Friday night Shabbat service. Parents are called up, asked to talk about the name they have chosen for their child. A special prayer is said at this time.

To schedule a baby naming, please call Rabbi Cosnowsky or Rabbi Kamil at (630) 627-3912.

### **CONSECRATION**

Consecration is a ceremony to mark the beginning of formal Jewish education, usually when a child is in Kindergarten or 1st grade. At Etz Chaim, this is celebrated on Simchat Torah, and the young participants are given a small replica of a Torah to symbolize the start of their study of Torah, as well as a certificate and t-shirt.

### **BAR/BAT MITZVAH**

Tradition says when Jewish children reach 13 years of age for boys and 12 years for girls they become responsible for their actions. After studying the Hebrew language for several years, they then are called to the Torah and "become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah" (English: daughter (Bat) or son (Bar) of the commandment).

Bar/Bat Mitzvah's are done during a Shabbat service. The child will help lead the Shabbat service, reciting various prayers in both English and Hebrew. During the Torah reading portion of the service is when the child will be called to the Torah to read from it. They read that week's Torah portion which is part of the five books of Moses. Blessings are said before and after the reading and calling someone to say the Torah blessings during a service is called an Aliyah (from the Hebrew: עלייה, from the verb לעלות, meaning, "to rise, to ascend; to go up").



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The Bar/Bat Mitzvah child will also give a Dvar Torah, an interpretation of that week's Torah portion and what it means to them and in today's world. Besides reading from the Torah, the child will read from the Haftarah (selections from the books of the Prophets).

At Etz Chaim, B'nai Mitzvahs (plural) are held on Saturday mornings. The child may lead part, or all of the morning prayer services, will read their Torah and Haftarah portions, and

give a D'var Torah which may include a discussion of that week's Torah portion, Haftarah portion or both. At the end of the service, the Rabbis bestow a special blessing, and he/she is presented with a Bar/Bat Mitzvah certificate from the congregation, plus two other certificates for future travel to Israel, one from the Jewish Federation of the Greater Chicago area and one from NFTY (National Association of Temple Youth).

## **CONFIRMATION**

Confirmation takes place at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> year of religious school. In this ceremony, the now-maturing student "confirms" a commitment to Judaism and to Jewish life. While boys and girls are considered to be spiritual adults by age 13, they are better prepared at age 16 or 17 to make the kind of emotional and intellectual commitment to Judaism that Confirmation implies.

Though originally a ceremony created for Shavuot, in recent years some congregations have changed the date of Confirmation from Shavuot to [Shabbat](#). The reason behind this is to avoid having the Shavuot service focus completely on the Confirmation ceremony.

Here at Etz Chaim, Confirmation is held the Friday night before the last day of Religious school for the year (usually the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday in May). The Confirmation students lead all or part of the service, including the Torah reading. The students focus on a theme — such as God, learning, social justice, or Israel — and will incorporate this into their service and sermon.

## **MARRIAGE**

Traditionally called *kiddushin*, the Jewish wedding ceremony is filled with meaningful customs that the bride and groom undergo to express the significance and purpose of marriage:

**Ketubah (ketuvah)** Written in Aramaic, the marriage contract specifies the bride and groom's commitment to each other. The ketubah is usually signed in a ceremony before the wedding service.

**Chuppah (chupah)** The chuppah is a canopy, usually a decorated piece of cloth, that symbolizes the home the bride and groom will build together. The chuppah is open on all sides, also symbolizing that friends and family are always welcome in the newlywed's home.

**Sheva B'rachot (sheva brachos)** The seven blessings is a series of blessings that is chanted by the Cantor or Rabbi. In Judaism, seven is seen as the mystical number of creation and completion. These blessings thank God for the beauty of the moment and the splendor of life.



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**Ring Ceremony** Typically of flawless gold, the wedding ring represents the unending love and eternal joy a marriage will bring. It is customary to place the ring on the index finger during the exchange. One ancient belief is that the index finger is directly connected by a special artery to the heart and so the couple's hearts are joined.

**Wrapping in the Tallit** During the final benediction the couple is wrapped in two tallitot (prayer shawls) around their shoulders. This wrapping symbolizes the private Jewish life the bride and groom will have together.

**Breaking of the Glass** The wedding ceremony is usually concluded with the groom breaking a glass under his foot. Traditionally, this custom is a reminder of the destruction of the first Temple and the anguish of the Jewish people throughout history. It is also a reminder that relationships are as fragile as glass and must always be treated with care, love and respect.

If you are planning a wedding and want one of our Rabbis to perform the ceremony, we suggest first checking with them on their availability of the dates you are looking at.

## **DEATH RITUALS AND MOURNING**

Respect is always shown to the deceased as well as toward the mourners. This is one of the reasons why traditional Jewish funerals are held so soon after death. It is more respectful to inter the body within a reasonable amount of time rather than having an unnecessary delay. Of course, waiting for relatives to come from a far distance is a respectful reason to delay the burial. This is a decision the family should make in consultation with their rabbi.

A mourner in Judaism is one who is defined as being Kaddish related, which means they are obligated to observe the rites of mourning for the deceased. Those who are considered mourners are the spouse, parent, sibling or child of the deceased. It's important to realize that other family members, although not technically considered mourners, may choose to observe many of the rites of mourning because of the close relationship they had with the deceased.

At Etz Chaim, both of our rabbis preside over funerals or memorial services for members or a member's family. For more information please call either Rabbi Cosnowsky or Rabbi Kamil 630-627-3912.