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## Making the ceremony enjoyable and the reception more meaningful

# Once in a lifetime event

**M**ost Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies regardless of observance, shares a similar format including the Torah portion, Haftarah portion and the Dvar Torah speech. The spotlight is on the bima and all the months of preparation are put to use in just a few hours.

The level of connection is implied with close relatives and friends but what about the congregation and the majority of guests. Certainly their experience often is based on how well the portions are chanted. In all cases the experience can be greatly enhanced by knowing more about the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child.

This gets the guests involved within the service and therefore it becomes more relevant to them.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah child has spent so much time studying for this adult passage, the guests and congregants can develop an appreciation of what the child has learned and understand the background of what is being chanted.

The best way to accomplish that in a tasteful and subtle way is through the creation of a very personalized program for the guests to read that is



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distributed by an usher as they are walking into the sanctuary or by the kippot. The typical program may include the child's name and an itinerary concerning the service. So much more can be added.

Start off with a note personally thanking and welcoming each one in attendance. A parent usually gives a short talk at the ceremony of thanks and an expression of pride in their child also adds to the enjoyment for the congregation as

a whole.

The ceremony program can also go into detail about the customs of the synagogue, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and an explanation of the Torah and Haftarah readings.

The ceremony program at my son Eric's Bar Mitzvah spoke about the involvement of two previous generations in the Jewish Community. His

great grandmother was honored for her commitment in raising money which helped in the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. His grandmother was the president of several fund raising organizations. This had an impact on strengthening his Jewish identity.

It is very easy to have a program printed by your invitation person or at a local printer. You can send the copy electronically which would allow your printer to capture all the information with keying it and all they would have to do is format it.

The reception normally takes its own form of fun for each individual guest. All the effort is made for the guests to enjoy with good food, drinks, ambiance and entertainment. However, there is opportunity to carry on the meaning of the ceremony at certain times of the reception.

One of the most spiritual rituals at the reception is the candle lighting ceremony. This should

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be meaningful to the guests but usually besides the actual close relatives and friends that are given this honor, the other guests normally detach and talk among themselves.

The big reason for this is the lack of preparation for this special moment. Often the child does not articulate, speaks very quickly or without expression resulting in the guests not being able to understand the words. The kids often look uncomfortable and awkward.

That special moment can be turned into something more meaningful for all the guests if the speech was practiced and rehearsed to achieve the potential each child has of engaging an audience and getting their attention.

At my son's Bar Mitzvah, we used a unique format for the candle lighting ceremony. We video-taped in advance thirteen segments with our son playing a different character and calling the honorees up to light the candles. The guests were entertained waiting in anticipation of what the next character was going to be and there was no issue of the speech being underperformed by a nervous child. You can be creative with the candle lighting ceremony too and honor these significant people in your child's life in an interesting manner for the other guests.

A very important element in your guest's enjoyment is the time you spend with them. The pressures of worrying that all the professionals are doing their job are often very distracting and take you away from your guests.

A capable party planner hired to be your eyes and ears on the day of the party can make all the difference in the world in allowing you to interact with your guests, have peace of mind and be completely satisfied with every element of the party. Enjoyment is contagious and being free to let loose and have fun helps the guests do the same.

The party planner can even contact all the vendors the week of the party to confirm every aspect and make sure on the day that the right photos and video footage are taken not missing close relatives, the entertainment is reading the crowd, the favors are distributed and so much more....

A great affair should be orchestrated with a conductor conducting. You should feel you are a guest at your own affair with no worries. So sit back and relax or get up, dance, smile and enjoy.

*Stacy Lawrence owns Make an Impression, a party planning and invitation store in River Edge, NJ. For more ideas you can visit [www.yourpartyexpert.com](http://www.yourpartyexpert.com) ☆*