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Welcome to the 2020
Celebrations Guide
 for all of your special events
 from
 Jewish Rhode Island

Looking forward to a wedding, B'nai Mitzvah, anniversary or birthday? Let's celebrate! When we started planning for this all-new magazine, almost a year ago, we were excited to offer readers and advertisers an opportunity to share their *simchot*, both large and small. We all love a good party, and we hoped to help the greater Rhode Island Jewish community with tips, stories and advertisers that can make it all happen.

A year ago, nobody could have dreamed that we'd be shut down by a virus. But here we are in the age of COVID-19. We're wearing masks, and social distancing has become a part of any get-together. And the party of our dreams is now a smaller event.

But it turns out that we're quite resilient. In these pages, you'll find stories about event planning during a pandemic, reflections from those who have gone ahead with their *simcha* - or haven't - and some really lovely photos of our senior brides and grooms.

Finally, a huge shout-out to the forward-thinking advertisers who have enough confidence in the value of Jewish Rhode Island to support our new Celebrations guide. Thanks for sticking with us!

This is a tough time for businesses; we hope you will give your business to our advertisers.

And mazel tov on all your *simchot*!

Fran Ostendorf
 Editor



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WEDDINGS

FIRST PERSON

One couple's account of love and weddings in the COVID-19 era

First, and most importantly, getting married during the pandemic turned out not to be the top priority for my fiancée, Tina and me, Adam. A bigger concern has been, and continues to be, that all of our family members, friends and everyone else involved in our wedding (and in general) continue to stay safe.

Despite having to delay our wedding from 2020 to 2021, Tina and I have grown even closer because we are going through this together. We are grateful for our nightly walks and, if anything, this time together has significantly improved how we communicate with each other.

We were engaged in February 2019, while zip-lining in New Zealand, and had planned on getting married in August 2020 in Southern California. Neither of us could have been more excited about the idea of getting married after seven years of dating, including more than two years of a coast-to-coast long-distance relationship.

By the time February 2020 came around, all of our vendors had been finalized, the cake-tasting had been completed, and our vision for the centerpieces had taken shape. Around this time, we both took nearly a week off from work to meet with each and every vendor and to do a walk-through of the venue. COVID-19 was just starting to gain a foothold in Italy, and there did not seem to be any indication that the United States would be terribly impacted.

When the pandemic began to erupt in the U.S. in March, we, along with nearly everyone else, thought this would be temporary; there was no way that our August wedding would be impacted. We were so confident, we placed the order for our wedding invitations on March 10!

We had been invited to a wedding at the end of March, and we couldn't believe it when our friends were forced to postpone their wedding only two weeks before it was to take place. However, as March turned into April, we started to become more and more worried about our own wedding.

Like most Jewish-Persian weddings, it was going to be a large, intricate gathering, and we had family and friends flying in from across the country and around the world. With a long guest list – larger than either of us had predicted – it took a while for us to admit that it might not be possible to have the wedding we wanted during the pandemic.

At first, we avoided talking about the idea that we might have to postpone. But, as the days in April ticked by, we decided together to reserve one of our nightly walks to talk about what we should do. Despite the fact that our wedding invitations were sitting on our kitchen table waiting to be stamped, we knew there was simply no way our wedding was going to happen in 2020.

Initially, staff at our venue – like everyone else – had continued to express confidence that, of course, everything would be OK by August. However, on a Tuesday afternoon in mid-April, our venue gave everyone who had planned a summer wedding the option to reschedule in 2021. But it was on a “first-come, first-served” basis. This meant we had just minutes to pick a summer 2021 date.

We have always considered ourselves to be a great team. Less than an hour after working the phones, we were able to move our entire wedding to June 2021. This included making sure all of our close family members, bridesmaids, groomsmen and vendors were available and were willing to pencil in the new date. Even though it was challenging, part of getting through this has been learning how to manage life not as individuals, but as a couple.

Like many other couples, we have discussed just getting married at the courthouse – or canceling our wedding celebration altogether. But we have decided against either of these options. Given the fact that Jewish and Persian culture and tradition play such an important role in our lives, we knew we had to wait.

While we are already aware that our wedding next summer might look very different from what we had originally intended, we don't mind. The silver lining in this pandemic is that it has helped us – and those around us – to see what is and is not important. Simply put, even though we have continually been apart from our loved ones, in some ways we have gotten closer as we find ourselves calling and checking in on people much more than we used to.

Nearly six months into this pandemic, we still go on our nightly walks. While we hope that the wedding dress that has been hanging out in the back of our bedroom will be worn in 2021, as long as we have each other, that is all we need.

TINA AND ADAM live and work in Los Angeles where they hope to get married in June 2021.



The writers

WEDDINGS

Planning

Event planning in the age of coronavirus

BY MICHAEL SCHEMAILLE

The “new normal” has brought changes to all aspects of our lives, including the ways in which we join together to share important life events such as weddings and Bar or Bat Mitzvahs. In the short-term, many of these events have been canceled, rescheduled or postponed. In the long-term, we can expect significant changes to traditional celebrations.

The following is intended as a generalized guide to “what’s changed” and “what to do now”; specific details, such as social-distancing guidelines and limits on guests, are subject to change. Given the importance of staying up-to-date on these changes, we strongly recommend maintaining regular contact with your event’s vendors and officiants; staying current on state and local guidelines for public gatherings; and the excellent resources offered by the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

The essentials

Your number-one priority should be your health and that of your guests. You don’t want to get sick as a result of your celebration, and you don’t want family and friends to fall ill either. If you decide to go ahead with an in-person event, the following strategies can help to keep everyone as safe as possible:



PHOTO | GLENN OSMUNDSON

Flower bouquets and centerpieces require planning during a pandemic or “normal” times.

the same expectations for your guests ahead of time, whether as part of a mailed invitation or through a follow-up contact. Also remind them to use “hygienic hellos” that avoid kissing, hugging and handshaking. Staggering guests’ arrival and departure times can help to minimize contact with others, as can limiting the duration of your event.

Proceeding with your event

If you do host an in-person event, there’s a lot you can do to make things as safe and comfortable as possible for you, your guests, and event staff and vendors. Think about possible “deal-breakers” to pare down the items and services that are absolutely necessary for your big day; keeping things simple can help to ensure that they go smoothly.

✿ **Downsize.** Consider a “micro-event,” with only the most essential people in attendance. When circumstances become better suited to larger gatherings, you can have a “sequel event” that involves more people.

✿ **Manage your guest lists.** We all want to celebrate with as many of our friends and family members as possible, but in these unusual times large gatherings aren’t always safe or practical. Check local guidelines for size limits on gatherings, and try to keep your in-person guest list as short as possible. Speak to the people on your in-person list about their comfort level and ability to attend; consider excluding those at higher risk of contracting the coronavirus or other illnesses.

If you find yourself needing to uninvite people from your event, do so with as much of a personal touch as possible. Remember that any number of guests can share your special day through livestreaming services such as Zoom.

✿ **Manage your venue.** Any in-person gathering carries some risk; the trick is to mitigate that risk as much as possible. Although outdoor events are generally safer than those held indoors, it’s not always feasible to be outside. If you’re holding your celebration indoors, consider hosting a smaller event in a larger room or blocking off sections of seating to enforce 6-foot social-distancing guidelines. Where possible, use multiple entrances and exits, and discourage crowded waiting areas and queues. Make sure that your venue has adequate ventilation and sanitary facilities, and that venue staff thoroughly clean and disinfect the facility on a regular basis.

✿ **Make sure that everyone is on the same page regarding safety for all.** Coordinate with your vendors and venue management to ensure that everyone follows the same sanitary and distancing procedures. Make sure that all staff members commit to regular hand-washing and to wearing a mask. Set

WEDDINGS

Planning

✿ **Communicate!** Health and safety guidelines can change day-to-day. By communicating changes as they happen, your vendors and guests will know exactly what to expect on the day of your event.

✿ **Be proactive with your vendors.** Make sure your vendors know exactly what you expect from them, and ask for their input in return – their event expertise can be invaluable. Work with your event planner/director to make sure that new protocols won't affect your special day's schedule, and that tables provide adequate spacing between guests; try to seat your guests in their own discrete "pods" or "bubbles." Collaborate with your caterer to ensure safe food service; avoid buffets and other self-service options in favor of plated or prepackaged meals. Instruct any entertainers to avoid sharing their microphones with anyone else, and give some thought to keeping the dance floor clear for only the most important ceremonial dances.

✿ **Read vendor contracts carefully** to ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding deposits and what happens if your event needs to be postponed or canceled. If you must postpone, contact your vendors immediately to find a new date that works for everyone.

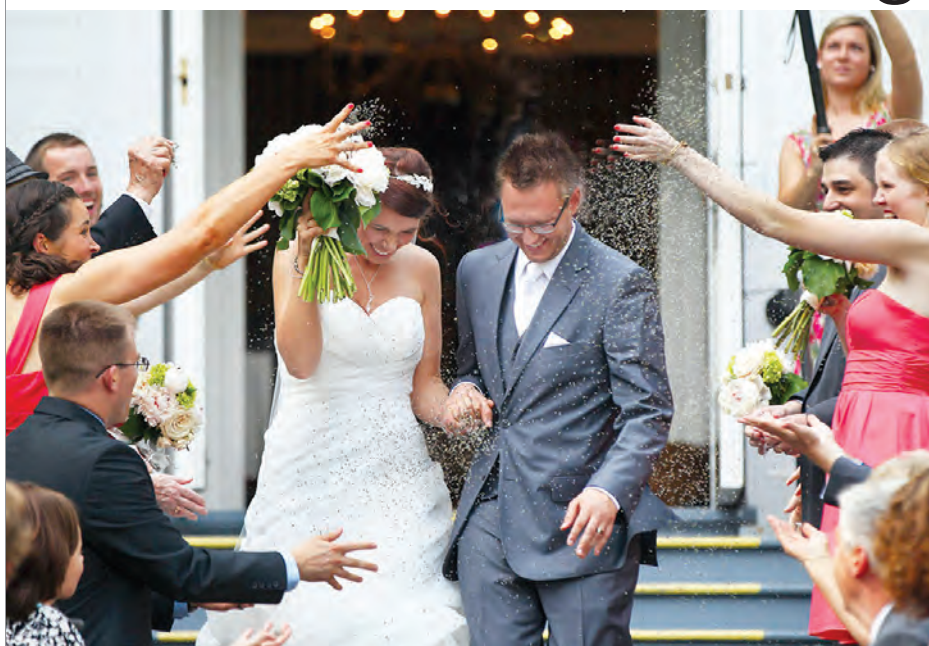
✿ **Event attire and items.** Given the stresses of planning a pandemic-compatible event, it may be worthwhile to consider more casual attire for both celebrants and guests. Casual clothing can be more comfortable, and being fitted for a suit, dress or tuxedo often requires close contact with strangers, which adds an additional layer of risk. Think about wearing what's already in your closet, or buy off-the-rack.

✿ **Order decorations and party favors earlier** than you would in "normal" times, and consider leaving your event date out of any inscriptions. Purchase these items from local vendors if possible to help avoid unforeseen shipping delays. Also think about what value your party favors provide to your guests. Providence-based event planner Sherri Klein offers the idea that "Favors can include personalized face masks themed to coordinate with your decor, and personalized mini hand-sanitizer bottles are also practical and appropriate given the times."

Although these uncertain times require us to take special precautions, there are many ways in which we can share in each other's joy – we must simply remember to be mindful of each other and exercise due caution so we can safely host and enjoy our *simchat*.

MICHAEL SCHEMAILLE (mschemaille@jewishallianceri.org) writes for Jewish Rhode Island and the Jewish Alliance of Greater RI.

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Seena Dittelman and her late husband Martin

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For more information, contact Susan Adler, director of marketing & outreach at 401-732-0037.

WEDDINGS

FIRST PERSON

I got married during the pandemic – and my wedding was perfect

BY DEVORA SCHACTER

On March 16, the man I was dating asked me to become his wife. At the time, social distancing was a relatively new phenomenon and Lysol wipes were still available for purchase at my local drugstore.

However, the fear and uncertainty had begun to spread, and only about 15 people attended my engagement celebration. With the sparse knowledge that we had in early March, I wasn't bothered by the slightly muted celebration, knowing my wedding day would come just a few months later, as is the standard in my Orthodox community. My fiancé returned to his home state of Florida, and I expected to see him again in the next week or so. But as the number of cases began to increase suddenly and shockingly, I soon began to realize that life as we knew it was about to be replaced by an unforeseen reality.

The wedding I had expected would feature the usual aspects of a wedding and proceed as my siblings' ceremonies had: flower arrangements, a beautiful hall, camera crews, catered meals and hours of dancing with all of my friends and family.

It was five weeks until I saw my fiancé again. At first I thought we should push off our wedding to a time of more certainty. However, while deliberating in person, my future husband and I became increasingly aware that the only path to the wedding we envisioned and expected would require significant delay. Under Jewish law, a relationship is not meant to be intimate until after marriage, and a marriage is generally not supposed to be delayed.

Due to the travel restrictions that prevented us from seeing each other, FaceTime became our main means of communication. The allure of a "normal" wedding began to fade if it meant spending more time in this awkward reality.

After returning home, I posed the question to my parents: "Is it possible to plan a wedding for two weeks from today?"

After recovering from the initial shock, they were ready to hear my reasoning. I explained that waiting in limbo indefinitely wasn't worth postponing the very much anticipated next stage of my life. After hearing me out, my ever-supportive parents were on board. With one call to the party planner the following morning, the chaos began.

While we ran frantic errands and attended numerous appointments, our party planner transformed what was once a bare slab of backyard concrete into a draped and detailed outdoor wedding hall. Two weeks later the day arrived, and it was one that the 40 or so people in attendance will never forget.

I'm the youngest of five married siblings, and we were all in agreement that my wedding had an element that was absent from any other we had attended: a pure joy created by the small crowd, allowing everyone to totally focus on the unification of two people.

A positive mindset is one of the most powerful tools we have. Throughout this entire ordeal, I never felt anything other than fortunate. I had been given what so many others hope and pray for – the opportunity to begin the rest of my life with someone who possessed qualities that far exceeded my expectations.

While I understood that our wedding would not be "normal," the essence of what we were trying to achieve on this monumental occasion would be exactly the same. A wedding itself is not the goal but a means to a much greater and higher purpose.

It seems fairly easy to become entangled in and overwhelmed by the details that make up a typical wedding, and the significance of the journey on which the couple is about to embark may become muddled under the layers of other aspects that compete for their attention.

In contrast, our wedding day was stripped down to the bare minimum: We were extremely limited in terms of guests, venue options and even the menu. To me, that "void" was filled with something worth so much more: meaning. The focus of my wedding was nothing other than me and my husband. When his foot broke the glass, we began the life we had long anticipated.

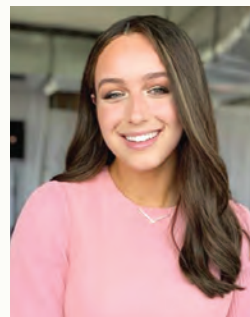
My wedding, bereft of all frills and embellishments, was not a compromise – it was a gift. After a wedding and the excitement of the day has passed, a couple is left with only themselves and the life they will build together.

My husband and I had that mindset since the beginning because we didn't have a regular engagement period. In this way, in the weeks leading up to the wedding, we were able to focus on what we were about to embark upon and what exactly this next stage of life meant to us.

It made the day itself and every day that followed that much more meaningful, knowing the foundation of our marriage was built on our relationship, not the details. My husband and I started our marriage focused on the core of what a marriage is truly about; that's priceless.

Although I originally felt only acceptance for my unconventional wedding situation, in time I began to feel grateful.

I could view my wedding as a chance being taken from me – I choose to see it as an opportunity I was given. A small backyard wedding can appear lacking in its simplicity, but mine was incomparable in its beauty and meaning because of its simplicity.



Devora Schacter

DEVORA SCHACTER is a pre-PA student at Touro College and works as a medical assistant. She lives Brooklyn, New York.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of JTA or its parent company, 70 Faces Media.



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BAT MITZVAH

Throwing candy at the computer: What celebrating your Bat Mitzvah looks like in the time of the coronavirus

BY JOSEFIN DOLSTEN

Midway through Lila Duke's Bat Mitzvah ceremony, her family's cat made an appearance. Minnie's interruption was one of many ways that Lila's coming-of-age ceremony was different from what she had expected.

While the 12-year-old still read her Torah portion in front of more than 100 people, still got to wear a pretty dress and still was showered with candy, she was at home with her parents, Susan and Jon, and younger siblings, Naomi and Ezra, not at her family's Atlanta-area synagogue.

Lila addressed community members on Zoom rather than giving her sermon in a sanctuary. She read the Torah portion she had been practicing for a year from a book instead of a scroll and therefore wasn't able to recite the blessings she had been practicing. And at one point, Minnie jumped up on the table where the family had perched a computer on top of several stacked puzzle boxes and her mom had to rush to get the animal out of the way.

Such is the Bat Mitzvah in the coronavirus era.

With synagogues closed and gatherings prohibited, traditional Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations – which typically include participation in communal services and big, sometimes splashy parties – have become impossible.

"It's different right? Everyone has their Bat Mitzvah or whatever, but not everyone has had a Zoom bat mitzvah," Lila said in a phone interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency a few days after the rite. "I was sad I didn't get to have a party though."

Lila's family plans to have a party for her once it is deemed safe. But even though parties can be postponed, it is harder to delay the service itself. Most kids spend a year training to chant the Torah portion for their specific date, and choosing another date would mean they would have to learn a different reading.

So as with so many events these days, many families are opting instead to do the service virtually, sometimes with drive-by, socially distanced celebrations as well. (Orthodox synagogues do not allow livestreaming on Shabbat). One event planning company has even started offering virtual Bar and Bat Mitzvah planning services, including helping to organize a virtual party complete with party favors and *hora* dancing.

In Lila's case, going virtual meant making some tweaks.

At a typical Bat Mitzvah, a number of family members are called to the Torah to say a blessing ahead of the scroll reading. Since Lila was reading from a book rather than a scroll, however, the Hebrew blessings could not be said. Instead, family members prepared short blessings in English to mimic the traditional order.

The Dukes set up two monitors in their living room, so they could watch both the service leader and the congregants tuning in. Susan Duke had decorated the room with orchids, peonies, tulips and roses from a local florist to make it look festive.

Guests typically shower the Bat Mitzvah with candy after she completes the *Haftarah* reading. In Lila's case, her parents and



PHOTOS | DUKE FAMILY

Lila Duke celebrated her Bat Mitzvah at home as more than 100 guests tuned in on Zoom.



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BAT MITZVAH

A way with words

BY FRAN OSTENDORF

Planning for an event has always been a learning experience, and never more so than today. Sure, by now we all know what social distancing means, but what exactly is a mini-moon?

Here's our guide to some words you're likely to come across as you plan your celebration in the age of COVID-19.

HYGIENIC HELLO. This started with a fist bump, morphed into an elbow bump and now can be jazz hands or any greeting from a socially appropriate distance. Have you seen major league baseball players jumping up and down with hands raised after a home run?

MINIMONY. This is what some people are calling scaled-back wedding celebrations. A minimony is a very small event with an emphasis on the couple's commitment.

MICRO-EVENT. This term existed before the pandemic, but it is gaining traction as people plan events for 20 guests or fewer. These downsized weddings, B'nai Mitzvah, birthday and anniversary parties have all the trappings of a big event but with a more intimate feeling.

SEQUEL EVENT. The big event that will be scheduled when the virus is gone or under control. Many people are having a small ceremony now – whether for a wedding, B'nai Mitzvah or another milestone – and planning on a big party later: A micro-event followed by a sequel event.

MINI-MOON. A short getaway after the wedding, usually close by. Couples are taking these little trips to replace that big honeymoon to an exotic locale. This is another term that was around pre-COVID-19, but it is used much more frequently now.

HONEYMOON. Just the way it sounds: You honeymoon at home.

FRAN OSTENDORF (fostendorf@jewishallianceri.org) is the editor of Jewish Rhode Island.

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

siblings threw Hershey's kisses at her, while the congregants threw sweets at their computer screens and sent her candy emojis in the Zoom chat. Her parents also hoisted her up on a chair after the reading, as is customary during Jewish celebrations.

And just because the guests weren't meeting in person didn't mean they didn't dress up, though the Duke family opted to go without shoes since they weren't leaving the house and Lila wore a comfortable cotton dress rather than the long satin gown she had initially picked out.

Following the three-hour service, Lila's family recited the *Kiddush* and ate the French toast casserole that her mother had cooked as they video chatted with a smaller group of relatives.

Rabbi Analia Bortz, who with her husband, Rabbi Mario Karpui, leads Congregation Or Hadash, the Conservative synagogue where the Dukes are members, had worried originally about whether there would be technical difficulties. But she left the service impressed by how well it worked out and how the community came together to celebrate Lila's special day.

"In 30 years in the pulpit, many things have changed and have left a big hallmark in our lives, most of the time for good reasons, but this one was one of the highlights of our careers," Bortz said. "It was very, very special."

Susan Duke said the service exceeded the family's expectations.

"We just thought we'd try it, and it was so much more intimate and personal and successful than I imagined it could be," the Bat Mitzvah mom said.

One unexpected perk of doing the service on Zoom was that Lila, who had been anxious about doing her Torah reading in front of a large audience, felt less nervous.

"I didn't have a bunch of people watching me doing scary stuff," she said. "They were there but they were on the screen. I felt it wouldn't be as big of a deal as if I was actually there in front of everyone."

Meanwhile, Lila hopes she can serve as a model for other kids who will have to do their coming-of-age ceremonies virtually, too, as it becomes increasingly clear that limitations on large gatherings won't be lifted imminently.

"People were watching me, other people who are going to probably do the same thing," she said. "They wanted to know what it was like."



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BAR | BAT MITZVAH**FIRST PERSON****Here's why I decided to postpone my Bat Mitzvah**

My name is Rosie B., I am 13 years old. My Bat Mitzvah was supposed to take place on April 18, but because of COVID-19 it was postponed. I decided to postpone it because it is very important to me to have my whole family present at my service and celebration. I would rather wait a year to have all my friends and family attend than have a Zoom Bat Mitzvah. I feel that it is important to have the experience of a Bat Mitzvah because it's not just about the prayers and your Torah and *Haftarah* portions. It is also about the people you share it with.

When you become a Bat Mitzvah, you become an adult in the Jewish community. Being a Jewish adult means you have responsibilities in your congregation, and when you have your service you are stepping into the role of a Jewish adult. If you have it on Zoom you are not having the full experience of becoming a Jewish adult and taking on a larger role in the Jewish community. The term "Bat Mitzvah" means daughter of the commandment or covenant. When you become a Bat Mitzvah you take on the responsibilities of passing on the Jewish commandments from God onto your congregation friends and family.

In the *V'havta* prayer it says:

"You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are awake, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Thus you shall remember to observe all My Commandments



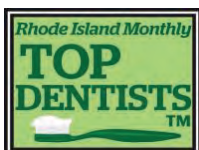
The writer studies using a scroll she received at Consecration.

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BAR | BAT MITZVAH

A timeline for your Bar|Bat Mitzvah

Planning and hosting a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is complicated in the best of times, and the need to account for coronavirus and its related precautions can make the job a daunting one. Coronavirus-related concerns include venue occupancy, travel restrictions, catering, entertainment, and more.

The timeline below assumes a “business as usual” environment, and should be used only as a generalized planning guideline. Keep in mind that you may need extended lead times for any number of items listed, and make sure to communicate regularly with your officiants, vendors, and guests so that your special day goes smoothly and according to local and state guidelines.

18 months before

Determine Torah and *Haftarah* portions with your rabbi and book a tutor, if necessary
Determine budget and preliminary guest list
Begin looking for an event planner, caterer, photographer, florist and/or entertainer

1 year before

Reserve a block of hotel rooms for out-of-town guests
Book a venue for the reception
Determine event themes/colors

9 months before

Tutoring begins
Order invitations and thank-you cards

6 months before

Finalize budget and guest list
Prepare invitation inserts
Order personalized items such as party favors.

5 months before

Bar/Bat Mitzvah begins writing a Dvar Torah
Arrange guest transportation; make sure that all children have a ride home

3 months before

Finalize guest lists for all family-hosted events (Shabbat dinner, Sunday brunch, etc.)

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

and to be holy to your God. I am Adonai your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am Adonai your God.”

When I become Bat Mitzvah, I take on the commandments laid out in this prayer, and it is my job and path to follow through on them with all my heart. The Bat Mitzvah ceremony is a celebration and rite of passage into Jewish adulthood that Jews have participated in for thousands of years.

In the ceremony you pass along your knowledge of the Torah to your family, friends and congregation, and then they can pass it on. The way I see it, you cannot do this over Zoom because it is just a screen that you are talking to and you cannot express emotions to a screen because the screen cannot take it in and absorb it. And that is why for me, it's worth it to wait. Having my family and friends there to celebrate with me is something that I have thought about and looked forward to for many years. In my opinion, it is not worth sacrificing that to just get my service over with via Zoom.

ROSIE B. AND HER FAMILY are waiting till spring 2021 for her Bat Mitzvah. They say they hope that they will then be able to celebrate with family and friends.

Purchase postage for invitations
Work with caterer to finalize reception menu
Coordinate event rentals (chairs, china, linens, etc.)

2 months before

Mail invitations
Confirm *aliyot* with rabbi and designate honorees
Write parents' speech and blessing
Finalize decor, entertainment, seating **1 month before**
Meet with entertainer(s) to pick songs and/or games
Arrange for rehearsal in synagogue sanctuary
Confirm schedule with all vendors
Purchase or gather any items not provided by synagogue or caterer (Kiddush cups, challah knives, etc.)

3 weeks before

Visit tailor to ensure suits/dresses fit properly
Confirm final headcounts

1 week before

Have rehearsal at synagogue
Confirm all details are in place with vendors and venues
Finalize seating chart



Sherri Klein
DRESSLER

Wedding & Event Planner | Bar & Bat Mitzvahs
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