

# Mazal Tov!

## Our Simchah Party

*Rejoice and be happy, beloved companions*

The wedding blessings

### Mazal Tov – Congratulations!

Mazal Tov on your simchah! We are delighted that you are celebrating your special occasion within our community.

'Le'chaim - to life', goes the famous song from *Fiddler On The Roof*. Joy is so important in Judaism that the Talmud teaches, in a cheerful exaggeration, that the holy spirit dwells only amidst the joy of the commandments. This joy, *simchah shel mitzvah*, includes the celebration of life events, such as the naming of a baby girl, a Brit, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, weddings, anniversaries and major birthdays, as well as the festivals and such special Jewish occasions as the completion of a period of study or of the reading of a sacred text.

People often have questions about preparing for their simchah party. These may include concerns about the Jewish content of the celebration, the blessings and rituals around the celebratory meal, issues about kashrut and questions about giving *tzedakah*, charity. This short leaflet is intended to offer helpful suggestions and guidance for those who might be seeking them on these important matters.

### Torah

Several factors create an atmosphere of *simchah shel mitzvah*: the presence of friends and family, the enjoyment of food and drink, good music, good humour and, last but certainly not least, the study of Torah. The latter may consist of formal teachings from the Torah based on the Jewish significance of the occasion, the portion of the week or the season of the year, or it may comprise more personal and homely references to Jewish wisdom, insight and humour. But a good speech at a Jewish celebration is always enriched by containing references to Jewish tradition. (There are many helpful books and websites available; please see the suggestions at the end of this booklet.)

It has been said that, just as there is no true *simchah* without food and a *le'chaim*, so there is no true *simchah* without words of Torah.



## The NNLS Simchah Guide



[www.nnls-masorti.org.uk](http://www.nnls-masorti.org.uk)

## Kashrut

Masorti Judaism is committed to the practice of Kashrut; we therefore consider it important that the endeavour is made to honour this commitment at any celebration. Inclusivity matters to us all; every host would want all their guests, including the most observant, to feel comfortable at their *simchah*.

We encourage you to make use of the kashrut supervision service now provided by our own Masorti Bet Din. This is a helpful, user-friendly and inexpensive way of ensuring the kashrut of your celebration. For detailed information about this service and on how to arrange a kosher *simchah* please go to:  
[www.europeanmasortibetdin.org/kashrut\\_supervision.htm](http://www.europeanmasortibetdin.org/kashrut_supervision.htm)

If you choose not to follow this route, we would kindly ask you to ensure that you do not serve non-kosher foods. This involves carefully checking through all the ingredients on the (vegetarian or fish) menu to make sure that all items, (especially fats and sauces) contain no unkosher products or additives. Hotels and restaurants will generally agree to steam-clean their kitchen surfaces, pots, fryers and dishes. We recommend that you ask the Rabbi to guide you through the conversation you need to have with the proprietors.

But, as already said, our preferred option is that you kindly serve supervised food. Wine at a *simchah* should also be kosher.

If you are celebrating at home, and have questions about how to develop the kashrut of your own kitchen, or indeed any queries and concerns, the Rabbi will be very pleased to help you.

## Timing

It's important to be inclusive and to celebrate in a way which enables all our friends, observant, less observant, and members of other faiths, to feel comfortable.

This concern may involve the starting time and location of the *simchah*. It is therefore much appreciated if you kindly try to ensure that the timing and location of your party do not conflict with the traditional observance of Shabbat or a festival.

If you are having a festive meal on Shabbat and have any questions about Shabbat observance, we will be very happy to try to help.

## Ethical Consumption

We are committed as a community to ethical consumption, and would encourage the use of Fairtrade or local products wherever possible. Judaism teaches us to avoid unnecessary waste: we – and/or our caterers should therefore minimise waste and, wherever possible, arrange for any edible excess to be sent to local charities or otherwise reused. If disposable cutlery or dishes have to be used, they should be biodegradable and as environmentally harmless as possible.

We would like any *simchah* in our community to aim for the smallest carbon footprint, and we suggest you mention this to friends and family. Guests should kindly be asked to consider possible alternatives to short haul flights.

The Synagogue does have its own carbon neutralisation fund. Details of it can be obtained through the Synagogue office.

The way we celebrate offers us a positive and happy opportunity to demonstrate respect for our environment, because, as Judaism teaches us, the world belongs to God.

For more information on Fairtrade products you can go to [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk), and for kippot to [www.fairtradekipot.org](http://www.fairtradekipot.org). You can also email [fairtrade@jhub.org.uk](mailto:fairtrade@jhub.org.uk).

## Berachot – Blessings Over Food

Blessings are a way of expressing our appreciation for the privileges and responsibilities which life has granted us.

People often ask about which blessings they should say over what foods and when they should say them. The following is intended to provide in brief the key information about these practices:

Meals should begin with the ritual washing of hands and *hamotzi*, the blessing over bread. Facilities should therefore be provided for hand washing and guests should be offered the opportunity to go and wash a couple of moments before the *hamotzi* blessing is said. While it is nice to have a large *challah* over which to say *hamotzi*, it is equally possible to do so (except on Shabbat) over a roll or other bread.

*Birkat hamazon*, the blessing after meals ('grace after meals' or *bensching*) should be said at the conclusion of the meal. The general

custom is to ask one of the guests to lead it. Asking a young person to lead it in 'Noam style' will add much spirit to the occasion.

At a wedding, the *sheva berachot*, the seven marriage blessings, are said immediately after the *bensching*. If you are not sure how to arrange this, please ask the Rabbi, who will be glad to advise you.

If the *simchah* does not include a full meal, but rather a *le'chaim* and finger food (small savouries, cakes, fruit) it should begin with the *ba'al/at simchah*, the host or hostess, making the blessing over wine (*bore pri hagafen*) and over one of the snacks.

The blessing after snacks, the *berachah acharonah*, should be said when the main period for eating is over. If you are not sure what blessings to say, please ask and the Rabbi will be happy to guide you.

### **Tzedakah - Charity**

Although *tzedakah* is often translated as 'charity', it actually means giving to the needy because it is just and right to do so. The commandment of *tzedakah* calls on us to be generous and thoughtful at all times. But it is especially appropriate to give to others when we ourselves are in the happy position of celebrating a joyous occasion in our own lives.

A Bar or Bat Mitzvah is also an excellent time for a young person to show their commitment to this value. Some people choose to mark their celebration by twinning with a family who do not have the means to celebrate.

In America the organisation Mazon suggests that two per cent of the cost of the *simchah* be given to organisations which provide food and water to the hungry; there are many routes through which a similar amount can be donated in this country. A commitment to *tzedakah* is also an appropriate manner for a couple embarking on married life to express their values.

There are many ways to give and the Synagogue or the Rabbi can provide more information on particular options. The Synagogue has a full list of charities to which it is committed in any given year. It is also customary to give to the Synagogue itself.

There can be no true *simchah shel mitzvah* without the giving of *tzedakah*. If you have any questions, or if we can help in any way, please contact our Executive Director, Claire Mandel, by email at [execdirector@nnls-masorti.org.uk](mailto:execdirector@nnls-masorti.org.uk) or call her at the Synagogue office on 020 8346 8560.

### **Helpful Books**

Artson, Bradley Shavit: *The Bedside Torah, Wisdom, Visions and Dreams*  
Artson, Bradley Shavit: *The Everyday Torah: Weekly Reflections and Inspirations*

Greenberg, Irving: *The Jewish Way in Living the Holidays*

Jacobs, Louis: *The Book of Jewish Practice*

Jacobs, Louis: *The Jewish Religion, A Companion*

Telushkin, Joseph: *Jewish Wisdom*

Telushkin, Joseph: *Jewish Values*

Wittenberg, Jonathan: *The Eternal Journey, Meditations on the Jewish Year*

We would be glad to learn of any websites and books you have found helpful and would like to recommend to others.

## **It is a great mitzvah to be joyful always**

*Rebbe Nachman of Breslav*