

# B'nai Mitzvah FAQ during Covid-19

August 2020

## Introduction

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In our on-going efforts to maintain regular and transparent communication about Beth El's Covid response, this FAQ list was generated by b'nai mitzvah families and expanded on by staff. As is the nature of these types of questions and answers documents, this will be updated as we refine our answers and additional questions arise. I have also had individual conversations with many families regarding their specific circumstances. Questions have clustered on technology, off-site participation, exact choreography of the service, scheduling / rescheduling / re-re-scheduling, and assuring a meaningful moment for your child(ren).

Before I continue, I want to thank you for your incredible effort to support your family and bringing a spirit of generosity and community to the b'nai mitzvah discussions. There is no 'play book' for these circumstances. I appreciate the emotional, logistical, and developmental complexities faced by families and our teenagers. (My daughter's bat mitzvah is scheduled for March 2021 so I share the litany of unknowns.) I also want to thank Beth El's staff and leadership who have been intensely focused on this with creativity and open-mindedness.

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# Frequently Asked Questions

*not in any particular order*

## Topic – Technology During The Service

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We are right on schedule for the installation of Zoom capabilities in the sanctuary and chapel. On July 18, we did our first service utilizing upgraded cameras and production capabilities. It was a tremendous success and included many notes for tweaks. Each week moving forward, we will be utilizing these platforms as we train people on its use, understand how the choreography of the service needs to be adjusted for Covid precautions, and get more comfortable with this aspect of the service.

<https://www.bethelmc.org/spiritual-life/live-service-streaming/> - This is the link for the livestream of services. On the right side of your screen, you will see previously recorded livestream services. We recommend watching July 25 as an indication of the technological capabilities.

If you scan through time marker 1:00 through 1:30, you will see people participating remotely – the haftarah and a responsive reading for the Prayer for Peace. The remote capabilities are being installed in both the sanctuary and chapel.

## Topic – Honors From Off-Site

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### Q) Can family and friends join the service from off-site?

A) Yes! Even though we will have very limited in-person attendance due to Covid restrictions, your family and friends can join the service via our streaming service.

### Q) How will people participate who have honors?

A) People with honors will log into the service through a separate dedicated link. Utilizing a Zoom platform, people can have an Aliyah, do a special prayer (Prayers for Country, Peace or Israel), ashrei, etc. They must log into the service through this alternative link. The link should *not* be shared with general service attendees though. We have developed some basic guidelines for honorees:

- **Please have your Zoom screen name actually be your name** – This step will help the “producer” know who is present and comes up next.
- **Be aware of your background** – is your bed unmade behind you or a ceiling fan twirling overhead? Take a moment to ‘curate’ your background.

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- **Participate from a quiet area, and be aware of ambient noises** – is the dishwasher running or the dog barking?
- **Do not have other devices running the service in the same room.** It might cause feedback between the devices and the delay will be confusing.
- **Do not begin till you see yourself on the screen.** The technology is voice-activated so you can begin with something like... “The Ashrei is on page XXX” or simply a subtle throat clearing before “Barchu et...” should be enough.
- **Be sure to be heard** – please be aware of your positioning to the microphone. Having the microphone close to you is preferred so people in the sanctuary and others online will be able to clearly hear you.
- **Prevent Feedback** – Please have one device in the room where you are for the honor. Often feedback is caused by multiple devices (computers, phones, tablets, etc.) being tuned in at the same time. Muting other devices does not always prevent feedback so leave other devices in another room.

A detailed instruction sheet will be sent to each family to distribute to those having honors.

### Q) Can you explain more about remote participation?

A) Remote participants (people with honors) will join the service through a dedicated Zoom link which will be provided by Beth El. General service attendees will attend through a different link (<https://www.bethelmc.org/spiritual-life/live-service-streaming/>) From this link, they can select the Sanctuary or the Chapel’s streaming.

People having an honor from off-site must be in a single location. Zoom will not work well if people at two different locations are trying to read a prayer together. It is a limit of Zoom. For example, two sets of grandparents trying to recite a single Aliyah together. In this circumstance, we will be flexible in allowing an additional Aliyah if needed for grandparents. We cannot do this for various aunts/uncles etc spread across the country because there are limits to the number of aliyot available in the service.

### Q) What technology does someone need to join services as a general worshipper or having an honor?

A) People just need a computer with internet access. Someone having an honor should also have a camera and microphone. It is best to test this out prior to the morning of the service.

### Q) Are the Bender Sanctuary and the Swoff Chapel both ‘wired’ for online services?

A) Yes, the technology in both of our main worship spaces are being upgraded. We are taking into account how each space is / can be used beyond services as well. Each room’s set up takes into account multiple potential uses. We are building this out for the longer term and not

exclusively for this moment. While not identical set-ups, we are confident the experience in each worship space will be warm, welcoming and engaging.

## Topic – Attending In-Person

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### Q) How many people can be in-person?

A) According to Montgomery County's Phase 2 restrictions, 20 worshippers are allowed in the sanctuary or chapel. Clergy and other Beth El personnel do not count towards this number. Your family *does* count towards this number meaning bar mitzvah child, sibling, mother, father equals 4 people of the 20 in either worship space.

### Q) How does this in-person limit work if my family is sharing the bar/bat mitzvah morning with another family?

If the morning is shared with two families, each family will be allowed 10 people in person. On a shared morning, should a family invite fewer than 10 people, it is requested that they inform the officiating rabbi so the possibility of others being included in the service can be considered (either the other family inviting a few more people or other congregants.)

### Q) What in-person restrictions are in place due to Covid?

Guided by Beth El's Reopening Task Force and the medical professionals on that committee:

- Physical distancing will be maintained at all times
- The worship spaces have been marked to limit seating
- Masks will be worn by everyone while at Beth El including during the service and by clergy and the bar/bat mitzvah child(ren).
- Every person entering the building must be:
  - On a list provided to the office by Thursday prior the celebration. As a way to maintain limits on attendance in the building, people not on that list will not be allowed access.
  - Each person on the list will also be temperature checked. Someone with a temperature of 100.4 or higher will not be allowed to enter the building.
  - Further, anyone who came with that person also will not be allowed to enter. For example, if a cousin arrives with a temperature, the cousin and any sibling or parent who arrived with that cousin will all be told to participate online and not allowed to enter the building.
- People are *discouraged* to attend if they are in at-risk categories including but not limited to:

- 65 years of age or older
- Pre-existing medical conditions (cancer, diabetes, heart disease or other conditions that impact the immune system's ability to fight germs.)
- Feeling sick themselves
- Travelled from Covid 'hot spot' regions of the country or abroad
- Communal kippot and tallitot have been removed so people on-site should bring their own. Yadot for Torah reading are available for single use before each will be sanitized.
- Individual masks will be available if someone forgets theirs but people should come prepared with their own mask and prepared to wear it throughout being in Beth El. (Individuals refusing to wear a mask over their nose and mouth will be told to leave.)

### Q) What time should our family and guests arrive for services?

A) So people can be checked in, temperatures checked and people get settled into the new seating arrangements in the sanctuary / chapel, everyone should arrive by 9am. The service begins promptly at 9:15am.

### Q) What is the new choreography for in-person honors?

A) The intent is to reduce movement so that individual 'bubbles' do not bump into each other. A microphone has been set up in front of the sanctuary for use by people having an Aliyah or reading special prayers. This stand is appropriately distanced from others. While it feels separate for those few in the sanctuary, the streaming experience will be very different since they will not see the physical distancing. As has been stated, all people at Beth El will wear a mask throughout including while having an Aliyah, reading Ashrei or special reading.

Additionally, only the person reading Torah will be standing at the center table. Clergy / gabbaim will stand at the clergy podiums.

### Q) Can we use our kippot even though they have the 'original' bar / bat mitzvah date?

A) Absolutely. Feel free to bring them at the rehearsal or before Shabbat and we will make sure they are available.

## Topic – Specific Prayers / Honors

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Prayers can be read responsively. We have tried this several times and it worked well. There is a slight delay so people should read a little slower (and louder) than normal but it works very well.

- **Aliyot** – in person or remote, remote honoree(s) but be in a single location
- **Ark Opening** – in person, limited to 2 people
- **Ashrei** – in person or remote, remote honoree(s) but be in a single location
- **Ein Kelohenu** - in person or remote, remote honoree(s) but be in a single location
- **Hagbah / Galilah** – under consideration based on the close encounter necessary
- **Prayers for Country / Peace / Israel** - in person or remote, remote honoree(s) but be in a single location
- **Torah reading** – Torah readings must be done from a Torah Scroll.

## Topic – Rescheduling B’nai Mitzvah

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**Q) We continue to be unsure about the pandemic and are interested in learning about rescheduling the simcha.**

A) From March 2020 and forward, many b’nai mitzvah have been rescheduled. We are working closely with families to find new dates. Our continued goal is to make this a meaningful moment for your family even as we are all adjusting to troubling circumstances. While your child may be currently assigned a Saturday morning service, we are open to adjusting the service to a weekday or Shabbat afternoon if that will fit your family’s needs. If you want more information or to consider rescheduling, please set up a discussion with Rabbi Harris. (For ease of scheduling, please send a note to Ricardo Munster at [rmunster@bethelmc.org](mailto:rmunster@bethelmc.org))

**Q) Can Beth El help our family with services other than Saturday morning?**

A) Absolutely! We have already been working with families with meaningful services on Shabbat morning, Shabbat afternoon, and Monday / Thursday mornings. All services occur under the same restrictions as occurring at Beth El and in compliance with local rules. This means restrictions on attendance, physical distancing, etc. will be observed.

**Q) What about off-site b’nai mitzvah – our backyard, a park or other venue?**

A) We have helped families with officiating on weekday remote b’nai mitzvah. These have taken different shapes over these months. We have lent a Torah scroll to families, a few prayerbooks, established a Zoom link and other supports. Beth El clergy are not able to officiate in-person at off-site b’nai mitzvah due to caution surrounding Covid. Clergy may be available for remote officiating.

## Topic – Final Preparations

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### Q) Will there be an in-person rehearsal before the simcha?

A) Yes. We will have a full in-person rehearsal the week of the celebration. This will allow you to feel comfortable with the modifications in the sanctuary or chapel. We want everything to be comfortable and practice is the best way.

### Q) Can we have a session with our photographer before the service?

A) Photography is not allowed during the service but the sanctuary can be reserved for your family and a photographer at another time. Often families do the rehearsal and photos on the same afternoon. Please call the synagogue office for more information.

### Q) How often should my child(ren) be meeting with the tutor?

A) Beth El has a terrific cadre of tutors. Please discuss this with the tutor since it is dependent on your child's current level of preparation, when their ceremony date is scheduled and their fluency of learning of the content.

## Topic – Further Questions

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### Q) Who can I contact with a specific question?

A) Please contact Rabbi Harris ([gharris@bethelmc.org](mailto:gharris@bethelmc.org)) and copy Ricardo Munster ([rmunster@bethelmc.org](mailto:rmunster@bethelmc.org)) with any additional questions. This document will be periodically updated.