



CONGREGATION BETH EL

B-Mitzvah Family Guide

Visit www.bethelmc.org for more information and resources.

Updated October 2023

MAZEL TOV!

We know this is an exciting time in the life of your family as your child is preparing to become a B-Mitzvah. All of us at Congregation Beth El are looking forward to celebrating this special day with you.

This guide has been created to assist in the lead-up to the day itself. Whether this is the first such simcha in your family, or one you've celebrated before with older children, we hope you will read this material carefully and take advantage of the other information and resources made available to you.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions. We look forward to assisting you in making your simcha a special occasion for everyone.

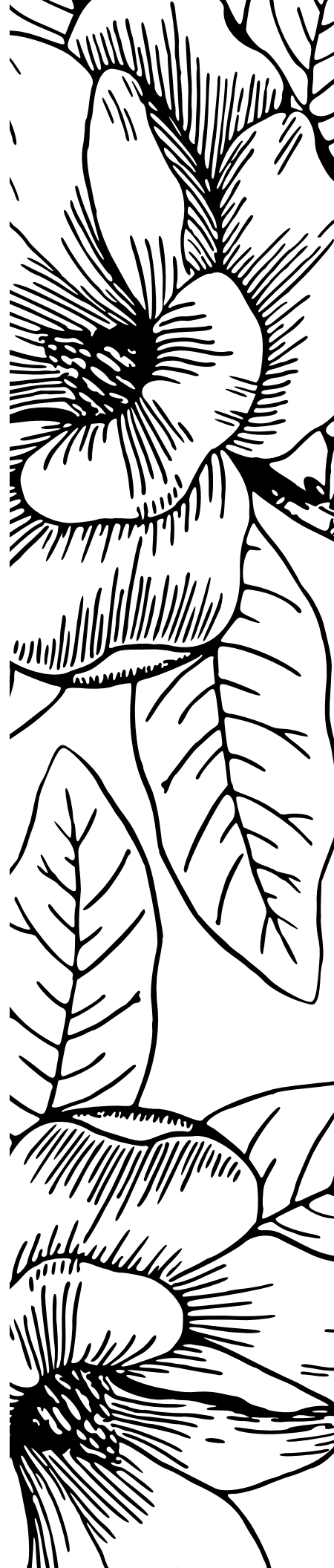
Senior Rabbi, Greg Harris

Associate Rabbi, Deborah Megdal

Hazzan, Asa Fradkin

Executive Director, Heather Garrett

B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator, Robin Finkelstein



OFFERING A PERSPECTIVE

A B-Mitzvah ceremony is a public acknowledgment that a child has become a responsible adult member of the Jewish community. It is an exciting time for families as children are called to the Torah for the first time, and an important step in the transition to adulthood and the acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions. As a public acknowledgment, the B-Mitzvah ceremony takes place in the context of a regular worship service. During the course of that service, the B-Mitzvah is given the opportunity to demonstrate they have acquired skills to lead the congregation in prayer and have become a responsible member of the Jewish community. Beth El is an egalitarian congregation and participation is not dependent on gender. The term B-Mitzvah is an ungendered phrase used to make the ceremony inclusive for all.

Beth El's B-Mitzvah ceremony is an event for the congregation as well as for the family. The congregation looks forward to sharing the joy as our children become young adults. It is important to keep in mind that the B-Mitzvah ceremony is part of the regular congregational service. It is not, and should not be thought of, as a separate, private ceremony only for the B-Mitzvah family. Posters, pictures, and items to be contributed as a mitzvah project are not to be displayed as part of the service or kiddush, but should be part of other aspects of your family's celebration. Beth El encourages celebrations following the service to be consistent with the occasion and in keeping with Shabbat traditions.

The B-Mitzvah program is very closely aligned with Beth El's core values.

- We strive to create a warm and **welcoming** environment that nurtures and cares for our B-Mitzvah students and their families. The environment created through our interactions during the preparation sets the tone for the experience of the B-Mitzvah itself and following.
- Family involvement is key to the success of our program and the B-Mitzvah experience. We are **inclusive** of all family structures and family members. We encourage families to take an active role in the child's preparations and share in their learning.
- It is important to create a **connection** of B-Mitzvah families to the greater Beth El community and create lasting bonds between them, clergy members, tutors, educators, synagogue staff, and peers during their journey through the experience.
- We emphasize the **relevance** of the religious and spiritual significance of the B-Mitzvah. It is our goal for each child to do the best they can and to participate in the service to the full extent of their ability. Preparing for the service is a unique opportunity for them to learn a variety of Judaic skills and values that can be applied to everyday life. Our goal is for each student to feel accomplished.

TIMELINE

3 years - 18 months

Attend the B-Mitzvah Date Assignment Meeting (usually held in December) and complete the online form by the required deadline. Date assignments will be announced in March. B-Mitzvah ceremony dates are initially scheduled by the rabbi, in consultation with the Worship & Spirituality Committee, at least two years before the B-Mitzvah. Any subsequent changes are made only by the rabbi and are subject to availability. Changing circumstances may require a ceremony originally scheduled on a Shabbat morning as a single to become a double. This may occur because new families join Beth El or because of unexpected family issues. Changes are rare and no such change will be made within 12 months before the scheduled date.

Ensure your membership at Beth El is current and your financial obligations are current. It is our policy that families must be members when the B-Mitzvah is scheduled and must remain members through the B-Mitzvah date. *We never want personal finances to be a barrier to participation in the B-Mitzvah program. If you need a revised financial plan, please contact Executive Director Heather Garrett at hgarrett@bethelmc.org.*

Continue your child's Jewish learning as students are expected to have attended an approved program for at least four years after third grade (that is, fourth through seventh grades), or to have attended a Jewish day school. Students must continue their Jewish education while they are preparing for their B-Mitzvah. Any deviations from the required educational background and current study obligations must be discussed with, and approved by, the rabbi and the education director.

Consider making a tallit with your child in the Sisterhood Tallit Workshop. The tallit is a symbol of welcome to adulthood and its responsibilities. It's so much more special if the tallit comes from the heart and includes the loving touches of family members. B-Mitzvah students enjoy being able to choose their own fabric and help with the design. Taking turns tying the tzitzit around the four corners is the ultimate family bonding experience. Many of the beautiful and original tallitot worn at Beth El were designed and handmade in this workshop. No sewing experience is necessary. Look for registration information in the September and October issues of *The Scroll*. Note that this is a very popular program that has been extremely successful for many years. Space is limited and the workshop tends to fill quickly.

Attend the Tachlis meeting (usually held in the Spring) to discuss important information and logistics of the B-Mitzvah.

18 months - 12 months

Monitor your child's knowledge of Hebrew and prayer. The first step in studying the texts used in the service is to ensure your home has a Chumash and a Siddur – texts that should be proud possessions of every Jewish family. At Beth El, we use *Etz Hayim Humash* and *Siddur Lev Shalem*, the most recent Siddur of the Conservative Movement. This Siddur contains not only the prayers themselves, but also commentaries, essays, inspirational poetry, and accessible English translations. This Siddur is a great spiritual companion for you and your child as you embark on the B-Mitzvah experience. Please consider acquiring one for your family.

Receive and complete the online Tutor Selection Form (approx. 15 months prior). Be notified of your child's tutor assignment by the hazzan, connect with the tutor, and begin lessons. The B-Mitzvah honors themselves by the manner in which they participate in the service and are expected to be well prepared. Lessons are usually 30–45 minutes per week and daily practice is strongly encouraged. Financial arrangements are made directly between the family and the tutor. The amount of tutoring needed and the specific tutor's rates are factors in determining the total tutoring cost, which is separate from the B-Mitzvah Administration Fee.

Reserve synagogue space for your private celebration or Friday night dinner, if desired. Contact Office Manager Mysha Johnson at mjohnson@bethelmc.org or x103, for information on available spaces and approved Kosher caterers, as well as all applicable policies, and fees.

12 months - 9 months

Attend Shabbat services, if not already doing so. Regular attendance at services gives students and parents the opportunity to become familiar with the prayers and the structure of the services. Additionally, Junior Congregation is a key way for students to develop the skills necessary to participate comfortably in various parts of the service.

Decide on a Mitzvah Project. One important component of the B-Mitzvah process is the child participating in a Mitzvah project of their choosing. Ideally, the project will be one which taps into their special skill or interest and provides an opportunity for the most meaningful way for them, and the rest of their family if desired, to contribute to their world. For ideas and suggestions, please visit the Beth El website.

Serve at a kiddush. This is a requirement of all B-Mitzvah families in order to build a sense of community. Go to www.bethelmc.org/kiddush and click on the large blue button to access the Sign-Up Genius calendar and select a date when your family can share "30 Minutes and a Smile" with congregants and guests. More information about this important commitment can be found on the B-Mitzvah page of the Beth El website.

Anticipate the B-Mitzvah Administration Fee of \$500 (*subject to change) appearing on your synagogue statement. This fee covers the planning, administrative, operational, and material expenses relating to the B-Mitzvah.

8 months - 6 months

Receive and complete the online form indicating details specific to your child and their service. This form asks for information regarding preferred terminology for the simcha, chosen pronouns, and whether your child would rather receive a kiddush cup or a set of candlesticks as a gift from the Men's Club / Sisterhood.

Meet with the hazzan to monitor your child's study progress and discuss the possibility of them leading additional parts of the service. You may also want to discuss Torah readings for other family members and friends. You will be provided a link to schedule this meeting, which will be held in person at Beth El.

4 months - 3 months

Meet with the officiating rabbi to get to know one another, discuss the B-Mitzvah service and honors, and begin the D'var Torah process. The first meeting will be an in-person meeting with the child and their parent(s)/guardian(s). Subsequent sessions can occur in person or via Zoom and parent(s)/guardian(s) attendance is welcome, but not required.

Order kippot. Jewish and non-Jewish males must wear a head covering while they are in the synagogue. Jewish females must wear a head covering if they will be on the bimah. Gender non-conforming and nonbinary persons may choose their individual practice between the two options outlined for males and females. Some B-Mitzvah families opt to order special, personalized kippot for their service.

Expect to see the Kiddush Fund contribution of \$2300 (*subject to change) appear on your synagogue statement (if the B-Mitzvah service is on a Saturday morning). This fee covers the Classic Kiddush Menu for up to 75 of your guests. You will be provided with more detailed information, menu options, and a timeline, approximately 8 weeks prior to your simcha.

Personal finances should not be a barrier to your ability to sponsor the congregational kiddush. To discuss what financial arrangements can be made to accommodate your specific need, please contact Executive Director Heather Garrett at hgarrett@bethelmc.org.

8 weeks - 6 weeks

Continue meeting with the officiating rabbi to work on the D'var Torah.

Purchase a tallit if one has not already been made or selected. We have a large selection of tallitot in the Beth El Judaica and Gift Shop. When you make a purchase, you are helping to support the Women of Beth El.

Arrange a date and time for your family photos to be taken at the synagogue, if desired. As Beth El does not allow photography on Shabbat, families usually reserve the sanctuary on a weekday afternoon or evening (usually on the same day as the rehearsal) for this purpose. Please contact Ricardo Munster at rmunster@bethelmc.org or x116 to make these arrangements.

Receive kiddush sponsorship information. If the B-Mitzvah service is on a Saturday morning, you are responsible for sponsoring (or co-sponsoring) the congregational kiddush following services. Just as you have enjoyed other's hospitality, now you are able to share your celebration with the community. You will be provided with materials outlining menus, upgrades/additions, fees, policies, and deadlines for submitting menu choices, guest counts, and additional payment (if necessary). If the B-Mitzvah is on a Saturday afternoon or weekday, and you would like to sponsor a kiddush following the service, please contact Office Manager Mysha Johnson at mjohnson@bethelmc.org or x103. Visit the B-Mitzvah page of the Beth El website for more information.

6 weeks - 4 weeks

Receive notice of rehearsal date and time. Parent(s)/guardian(s), the B-Mitzvah, and siblings who are participating in the service should attend. Rehearsals take place with the clergy, generally occur at 5:00 pm on the Wednesday preceding the service, and last 1-1.5 hours.

Finalize assignments for Aliyot and other honors. Assure that honorees have been contacted and are prepared. To avoid potentially difficult situations, please do not assign any honors that are not listed on the Ceremony Information Sheet or discussed beforehand with the rabbi/hazzan. Check the Beth El website for recordings of the Torah Blessings, if needed.

Complete the B-Mitzvah Ceremony Information Sheet and return it to the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator by the stated due date. This form is an integral part in planning the logistics of the day as it designates the people who will receive honors during the service. Honors (for both Jewish and non-Jewish family and friends) are reserved for those celebrating B-Mitzvahs, as well for other members of the congregation. Because Beth El is a large and active congregation, no family is given all of the honors at any one service.

Notify the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator who will be reading which Torah portion(s).

Continue meeting with the hazzan to review Haftarah, Torah, and prayer nusach.

Order a flower arrangement for the bimah (optional). While not required at Beth El, some families decide to have flowers on the bimah for the service. Beth El recommends Bethesda Florist (301-202-4955) or Suburban Florist (301-656-2288) as they are familiar with the best size and shape for the arrangement, as well as our delivery procedures. If you select a different florist, please contact the synagogue office to discuss the necessary details.

Ensure that your synagogue account is current (including yearly membership dues and security fee, BERS tuition, etc.) and that your B-Mitzvah Administration Fee and Kiddush Fund Contribution have been paid.

3 weeks

Send *Helpful Information for Guests* to your B-Mitzvah guests. This document, containing information regarding arrival time, attire, parking, respecting Shabbat, and other important details can be found on the Beth El website.

Notify Beth El of any circumstances that need specific attention. Contact Office Manager Mysha Johnson at mjohnson@bethelmc.org or x103 if any of your guests will require special accommodations or security arrangements.

1 week

Participate in the final rehearsal. Parent(s)/guardian(s), the B-Mitzvah, and siblings who are participating in the service should attend. Make sure that the B-Mitzvah brings all of their materials with them (Torah and Haftarah portions, printed copy of D'var Torah, head covering and tallit, etc.).

Make sure the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator has received a photo of your child for the Shabbat Announcements.

Ensure that Torah readers (besides the B-Mitzvah) have contacted the hazzan to be heard and approved either in person or by phone.

Deliver kippot and other items (if necessary) to Beth El. All Friday deliveries must be made before 1:00 pm as the main office closes early for Shabbat.

THINGS TO KNOW

The information in this guide is geared towards B-Mitzvahs occurring during Shabbat morning services. If your child will be having a Mincha/Maariv/Havdalah or Weekday service, there will be some differences from the stated information including:

- Unless you are expecting over 180 guests, services, family photos, and the final rehearsal will be held in the chapel.
- The service starting time depends on the date of the B-Mitzvah and must be confirmed by the clergy. Havdalah services are normally set by the designated time for Shabbat's conclusion.
- The final rehearsal will generally be held at 5:00 pm on the Tuesday preceding the service.

Our goal is for the B-Mitzvah section of the Beth El website to contain a great deal of helpful information and resources. It is currently in the process of being updated and we ask that you be patient with us as we make the necessary revisions. To access this section of the website, go to www.bethelmc.org and select *PRAYER AND SPIRITUALITY* from the headings across the top. On the drop down menu, select B-MITZVAH (the last option of the column on the left).

The timeline contained in this guide is also being refined as we work to make improvements and provide the most relevant information to our B-Mitzvah families. Be aware that as each timeline item approaches, you will receive more detailed information and guidance from our B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator. If at any point you have questions, or would like more information, please feel free to contact Robin Finkelstein at rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org or 301-652-8569 x131.

Videography and photography is prohibited on Shabbat (both inside and outside of the building). Beth El has installed 3 HD cameras and now makes beautiful, high quality recordings of each service. Assuming there are no technical issues, you will receive a flash drive containing your child's service in the mail during the month following your simcha.

B-Mitzvah services are livestreamed on the Beth El website. Those who are unable to attend in person can go to <https://www.bethelmc.org/spirituality/watch-live/> to view the service in real time or for up to a week afterwards.

Torah Honors – As is customary in the Conservative movement, only Jewish individuals may receive these honors.

- Aliyot – B-Mitzvah families may assign four Aliyot (including the one for the B-Mitzvah child). Other honorees may include parents/guardians, grandparents, and older siblings; aunts, uncles, cousins, close friends and tutors are also commonly included. Up to four people can be given a single Aliyah.

- Lifting and Tying the Torah – B-Mitzvah families may designate the people who lift (MAGBEAH) and tie (GOLEL) the Torah. The honor of lifting the Torah must be given to a person with the ability and expertise to raise the Torah in the proper manner.
- Holding the Torah – B-Mitzvah families may assign a person (often, but not exclusively, a child of 8 to 13 years of age) to sit on the bimah and hold the Torah while the Haftarah is chanted.
- Opening/Closing the Ark – B-Mitzvah families may designate people to come to the bimah to OPEN/CLOSE THE ARK before and/or after the Torah service. We ask that no more than 2 people at a time be assigned this honor.

Other honors are also available and can be assigned to friends or family of any religion. These honors include leading the congregation in prayers for the country, Israel, and peace.

Although the official start time of the Shabbat morning service is 9:15 am, B-Mitzvah guests are encouraged to be in their seats by 9:45 am. The service usually concludes at about noon.

Dress for services should reflect the honor and dignity of Shabbat. It is our practice to dress modestly and it would be inappropriate to enter our sanctuary/chapel wearing overly revealing clothing (for example, shorts or clothing that does not cover the shoulders or midriff).

- Jewish women and girls must wear a head covering if they will be on the bimah. They are required to wear a tallit for Torah reading. Non-Jewish females must wear a head covering if they will be on the bimah.
- Jewish men and boys must wear a head covering while they are in the synagogue. It is customary to put on a tallit before entering the sanctuary/chapel. It is required to put on a tallit when on the bimah to receive an honor. Non-Jewish males must wear a head covering while in the synagogue.
- Nonbinary or Gender non-conforming people may choose their individual practice given the guidelines above.

Beth El's parking lot is not large enough to accommodate all the cars of those attending services. When our lot is full, your guests may park on alternative sites surrounding our facility.

- Subject to church activity, the upper parking lot of the Bethesda United Methodist Church at Old Georgetown Road and Huntington Parkway is available.
- Parking is available on the residential streets opposite the synagogue, across Old Georgetown Road. Limited parking may also be found on the streets surrounding our building. Please do not park on someone's lawn or in a driveway. Montgomery County law prohibits parking within five feet of a driveway as well as any area designated as No Parking. Be aware that Montgomery County Police may ticket and/or tow vehicles that are parked illegally, whether in our lot or on the neighborhood streets.

GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

Aliyah The honor given to a person called to recite the blessings for the reading of a section of the Torah portion. The word translates as "going up."

Bimah The elevated area at the front of the sanctuary/chapel where the Ark holding the Torah scrolls is located, where the clergy speak and lead the service, and where the Torah is read.

Chumash Contains the entire text of the Torah, as well as selections from other writings in the Hebrew Bible. At Beth El, we use Etz Hayim.

D'var Torah A commentary on the Torah portion.

Haftarah The reading from one of the books of the Prophets, chanted after the Torah reading during the Shabbat morning service.

Kiddush The blessing over wine recited at the end of the service. It is also the term used to refer to the light lunch or refreshments usually served following the Shabbat morning service.

Kippah A head covering; also referred to by the Yiddish word, yarmulke.

Havdalah The evening service that marks the end of Shabbat and ushers in the new week. The ritual involves lighting a special havdalah candle with several wicks, blessing a cup of wine and smelling sweet spices.

Ma'ariv The evening prayer service consisting primarily of the evening Shema and Amidah.

Mincha The afternoon prayer service.

Musaf The prayers after the Torah service which conclude the Shabbat morning service.

Nusach The text of a prayer service.

Shacharit The morning service preceding the Torah service.

Siddur The prayer book used throughout the service. It contains ancient Hebrew liturgy as well as modern Hebrew and English prayers. At Beth El, we use *Siddur Lev Shalem*.

Tallit The prayer shawl worn during the service.

Torah The Five Books of Moses written by hand on a parchment scroll wrapped around two wooden rods. The text is written in ancient Hebrew by a specially trained scribe using no vowels or punctuation. A portion of the Torah is read each Shabbat. The Torah is read from start to finish in sequence each year.

WHOM TO CONTACT

Robin Finkelstein, our B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator / Hazzan Assistant, will be your primary contact for all B-Mitzvah matters. If she is unable to help you, she can point you toward the answer or the person with whom you may need to be in touch. Please do not hesitate to email her at **rfinkelstein@bethelmc.org** or call **301-652-8569 x131**.

You are also welcome to contact the people below or call the synagogue at 301-652-2606.

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