

To Our B'nai Mitzvah Families:

Few events in Jewish family life reverberate with more joy than the B'nai Mitzvah experience. In many families, these are especially blessed events because they may involve the shared participation of three or even four generations of one family, something that happens all too rarely in a lifetime. In addition, this simcha symbolizes the achievement of children in developing a deeper link to the Jewish faith, the achievement of parents in nurturing a child to the edge of adulthood, and the achievement of grandparents in sustaining the chain of Jewish generations.

At Beth El we cherish every simcha and seek to make yours a memorable moment of spiritual delight in the life of your family. This manual has been prepared to guide you through the process we follow in our congregation, to familiarize you with the enjoyable experiences that lie before you, and to assist you in your preparations.

We hope that you will call upon us if we can be of help. Above all, we pray that you will long remember the joy of this occasion in your lives together.

Yours truly,

Rabbi Steven P. Schwartz

Welcome greeting:

- **Structure:**

- **Shlosa d'varim:**

- **prayer,**

- **Torah,**

- **acts of loving kindness**

- **Bar bat mitzvah year is not just a time for learning jewish values but also for living them**

Prayer:

Attending services before a Bar or Bat Mitzvah will be an invaluable service to you. It will help you feel comfortable and build a familiarity with all the aspects of the service and your mitzvah day. This also includes attending other's Bar and Bat Mitzvah to support our peers.

Torah:

Acts of Loving Kindness:

Optional mandatory service component

Policy:

Bar and Bat Mitzvah students are eligible for a date if they are the children of members, and, or attending Beth El's Religious School. Students need to be enrolled in either a Jewish Day School or in Beth El's Religious School for the year that they are tutoring and the year of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Requirements:

- **Religious School Requirements**
 - **-RS gift to student**

Expectations:

Timeline:

infographic maybe / spruce it up / dynamic

3 years out

- receive date and Bnai Mitzvah Booklet

2 years out-

- Building Community
- Shabbaton (Cantor Blatt)

1 year out

- attend Bnai Mitzvah Orientation
- begin tutoring

Overview of Services

- **Morning Minyan:**
- **Friday Night:**
- **Shacharit:**
- **Mincha Ma'ariv:**
- **Rosh Chodesh Service:**

What are student's parts in the service:

The Pathway of Learning:

- orientation
- tutoring
- virtual / in person
- how tutoring works
- how often do they tutor
- issues -> who do they contact

Family Participation in service

- readings
- honors

Dress policy:

Please be advised that our synagogue is an area where our dress should be respectful of our sacred space. Some will choose to wear a jacket, tie, and slacks, and for those that choose to wear a dress or a skirt, the shoulders should be covered and the hem line should reach the knees.

Mikvah:

All Bnai Mitzvah students are recommended to go to Beth El's Mikvah. Please contact...to schedule this, and meet with... to discuss the event.

Diverse Family Situations:

Our Congregation has a long-standing policy regarding the participation of family members in situations involving divorce. This policy may affect honors, pulpit and bulletin announcements, and participation in the service. Please discuss these situations with Cantor Thom King well in advance of the B'nai Mitzvah date.

Conclusion:

- **payment**
- **commemorate the day**
 - **Kiddush**
 - **Photography**

List of Contacts

Rabbi Steven Schwartz, Senior Rabbi	steven@bethelbalto.com
Rabbi Dana Saroken, Associate Rabbi	dana@bethelbalto.com
Cantor Thom King, Cantor	thom@bethelbalto.com
Cantor Melanie Blatt, Cantor Educator	melanie@bethelbalto.com
Ben Wachstein, Executive Director	benw@bethelbalto.com
Amanda Beitman, Director of Development	amanda@bethelbalto.com
Amy Goldberg, Religious School Director	amy@bethelbalto.com
Ben Kreshtool, Ritual Director	ben@bethelbalto.com
Andy Shankman, B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator	ashankman@bethelbalto.com
Yvonne Epstein, Assistant to Clergy	yvonne@bethelbalto.com

Beth El's Philosophy

Beth El Congregation takes great pride in its commitment to preparing young people to become B'nai Mitzvah. This preparation is not limited to the B'nai Mitzvah as a goal in and of itself, but as a stepping-stone to a lifetime of Jewish living and learning. It is our goal to help children see the B'nai Mitzvah preparation process, as well as the ceremony itself, as a time for increased personal commitment to Judaism and to the Jewish people. Above all, we seek to foster in our young people an appreciation of the meaning of the continuity of the Jewish faith and tradition through the generations of their families. At Beth El, we see the B'nai Mitzvah as a family event, not an individual exercise. It is in this respect that we seek to enlist parental cooperation and involvement on the path to becoming a B'nai Mitzvah. Every member of the professional staff extends himself/herself in a deep and personal way to enrich the B'nai Mitzvah experience for our youngsters and their families. Please feel free to call upon any of the individuals listed on the previous page for assistance at any time during the preparation process.

The Beth El philosophy seeks to integrate the B'nai Mitzvah celebration with the traditional worship service. What makes the B'nai Mitzvah ceremony so meaningful is the context in which it occurs — namely, prayer and Torah reading together with the Beth El Congregation and community. Thus, the congregation and community become an extension of the family of the B'nai Mitzvah child. It is through this practice that your child recognizes most profoundly that their Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a significant link to the historic continuity of our people and of Beth El Congregation. The Sabbath of your child's ceremony may embrace many other Simchas, including milestone anniversaries and birthdays, yahrzeits, baby-namings, and Auf Rufs. There might also be programs of special relevance to the synagogue or the area Jewish community. These programs invariably add to the worship experience. Such moments dramatically intensify the meaning of a B'nai Mitzvah ceremony by creating a sacred setting for Jewish life-cycle events.

Planning Your Event

Clergy Participation

The Beth El Clergy intend to be present at all B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies. In the event of an unlikely absence, the family will be contacted personally by Rabbi Steven Schwartz.

Aliyot

Beth El provides many opportunities to honor family and friends of the B'nai Mitzvah through participation in the service. These honors are given in the form of Aliyot. The total number of aliyot given to each B'nai Mitzvah family may be limited in order to serve the more than 1700 other families in the congregation who are observing special occasions. Cantor Thom King will meet with your family well in advance of your simcha to discuss the number of aliyot you will be given. If you or a family member would like to read a Torah portion, contact Ben Kreshtool, Beth El Ritual Director at ben@bethelbalto.com. He will facilitate your request.

Typical numbers of Aliyot include:

- 1 English reading during the Friday night service for up to 2 people
- 2 people to open the Ark to take out the Torah or return the Torah – usually done by the mother and father
- 1 person to carry the Torah in a procession which includes the mother, father, and siblings
- For a single B'nai Mitzvah, up to 3 Aliyot, which include a Hebrew prayer before and after each Torah reading for up to 3 people
- For a double B'nai Mitzvah, up to 2 Aliyot, which include a Hebrew prayer before and after each Torah reading for up to 3 people
- 1 English responsive reading during Shabbat service for up to 2 people
- 1 person to either lift the Torah (Hagba) or dress the Torah (Gelilah)
- Interfaith readings are available upon request

Dress Policy

Beth El is a (house of worship), and a B'nai Mitzvah ceremony is an important event. We expect those who are attending services to wear **tasteful** and **modest** clothing. It is our custom for men and women ascending the bimah, including the B'nai Mitzvah child, to wear a kippah (head covering) and tallit (prayer shawl). A special kippah or tallit makes a wonderful keepsake of the day that your child can wear for years to come. The Beth El Gift Shop has a large selection of these items and will give you a discount for your purchases. Men and boys should wear a jacket, tie, and kippah. Women and girls need to have their shoulders covered and wear skirts or dresses which come close to or below the knee. We hope that everyone attending the B'nai Mitzvah, including family members and friends, will dress respectfully in Beth El's sanctuary.

Jewish Identity and Special Family Situations

The Conservative Movement defines Jewish identity through the religious identity of the mother. When a child is born of a non-Jewish mother, we require that he/she undergoes a formal conversion to Judaism. Beth El has a Mikvah (ritual bath) on site and our rabbis are happy to discuss how to incorporate this added element into your simcha.

Our Congregation has a long-standing policy regarding the participation of family members in situations involving divorce. This policy may affect honors, pulpit and bulletin announcements, and participation in the service. Please discuss these situations with Cantor Thom King well in advance of the B'nai Mitzvah date.

Kiddush Luncheon

Every B'nai Mitzvah family helps to sponsor a Kiddush for the congregation following the Saturday morning service. It has long been our congregation's belief that it is especially gracious when families plan a Kiddush luncheon which includes the extending of an invitation to our regular worshippers. This reflects a sense of community and warmth. Our hope is that you, your family, and your guests will join our Congregational Kiddush. However, if you prefer to host a private event, we can accommodate you and your guests. - - will be delighted to meet with you to help plan your Kiddush or luncheon. Contact - -approximately four months in advance of your simcha date so that she can explain the many options available. Please feel free to contact her prior to that time if you have any questions.

Kiddushim for Double B'nai Mitzvah

We do our best to work out the details of either a joint Kiddush luncheon or separate Kiddush luncheons to the satisfaction of both families. Because we are fortunate to have more than one large room to accommodate our simcha families, it is possible for Beth El to cater multiple functions at one time.

Additional Celebrations (?)


Beth El believes that a religious simcha celebrated in the synagogue should reflect Jewish standards. To that end, all food served in the synagogue must be kosher. To encourage B'nai Mitzvah families to remain in the synagogue for their private celebrations, the Congregation allows the use of modest vocal and instrumental musical enhancement, as well as traditional Israeli dancing.

Invitations

Please note that services begin on Saturday morning at **10:00 a.m.** promptly and advise your guests accordingly. The correct address of the synagogue for your invitations is:

**Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland 21208**

If you would like, you may obtain driving directions from our website. We also publish a brochure entitled **“A Visitor’s Guide to Worship at Beth El Congregation.”** In addition, Beth El has a dress policy that we request you include in your invitation mailing so that your guests of all ages can dress appropriately. Here is a copy of that policy for your convenience. Copies of this small card are available for your invitations upon request.



Beth El is a synagogue and a B'nai Mitzvah is a serious event. Clothing worn to services should be **tasteful** and **modest**. Men and boys should wear a jacket, tie, and kippah. Women and girls need to have their shoulders covered and wear skirts or dresses which *come close to or below the knee*.

We look forward to celebrating with you!

Kippot, Tallit, and Other Items

The Beth El Sisterhood Judaica Shop sells many ritual items that can be used for your simcha. There is a large selection from which to choose and all price ranges. The Shop provides all B'nai Mitzvah families with a discount on all of your purchases.

When bringing kippot to Beth El prior to your child's simcha, please do so in 2 baskets. Each basket will be placed on either side of the entrance to the Berman-Rubin Sanctuary on Shabbat morning.

Photography and Videography

Photography and videography are never permitted in the sanctuary on Shabbat. We respectfully request that you refrain from using cameras, video cameras, and cell phones to take pictures or videos during Shabbat services. Families may arrange to have formal photo and video sessions in the Sanctuary ahead of the date of the actual ceremony, although we cannot schedule such sessions on Fridays. Arrangements of this kind must be made well in advance through the Senior Events Manager. At photo sessions photographers and families must not remove Torahs from the Ark or handle any of the bimah equipment, including microphones, books, etc.

Payment Policies

B'nai Mitzvah fees cover all instruction and materials for your child's preparation including electronic media, rehearsals with the clergy, the bimah floral arrangement, coat check when needed, and a video file of the service. The fees are due when billed and should be paid accordingly. Hebrew School tuition for the B'nai Mitzvah candidate is payable in full at the beginning of the school year. No allowances on tuition will be made for a B'nai Mitzvah student who withdraws from school at any time after the beginning of the school year.

Kiddush Fees

Kiddush fees must be paid in full two weeks before the simcha. Parents are allowed to make periodic payments to facilitate fulfilling this requirement. Questions about these payments should be directed to the - - The price of every Kiddush luncheon depends on multiple variables including, the cost of food, setup, serving, and number of guests. Please coordinate and allow the - - to plan accordingly.

Event Timeline

Three years ahead - Assignment of B'nai Mitzvah Dates

Dates are assigned to B'nai Mitzvah families three years in advance. The committee meets each year and shortly thereafter, families will receive a letter with their assigned date. Each child is assigned a date as close to their thirteenth birthday as possible. There is no guarantee that someone who is assigned a "single" Bar/Bat Mitzvah will ultimately have one. The synagogue reserves the right to add others to a given date when necessary. Parents are asked to accept their dates as assigned. A request to change a date will be satisfied, if possible, after being reviewed by the B'nai Mitzvah committee.

Families have the option to choose a Shabbat morning or a Mincha/Ma'ariv/Havdallah service. A Mincha/Ma'ariv/Havdallah ceremony takes place about an hour and a half before Shabbat ends. This time varies with the sunset around the year. Havdallah B'nai Mitzvah students do not chant a Haftarah but do learn Torah readings and have an Aliyah. They also have the opportunity to help lead the Havdallah service. Havdallah B'nai Mitzvot are not shared, and they take place in the Gorn Chapel, rather than the Rubin Sanctuary. To request a Havdallah Bar/Bat Mitzvah, please contact Andy Shankman at 410-484-4543 or ashankman@bethelbalto.com after your initial date has been assigned.

All candidates for B'nai Mitzvah must be enrolled in our Religious School during the year leading up to the B'nai Mitzvah and the year of the B'nai Mitzvah; or are the child of a Member of the Congregation that attends Jewish Day School. If you have questions regarding the requirements, please contact Religious School Director Amy Goldberg at 410-484-4543 or amy@bethelbalto.com.

Twelve months ahead – B’nai Mitzvah Instruction- [Add religious school requirements here?](#)

Tutoring begins approximately twelve months prior to your simcha. To maintain our educational and religious standards, **all B’nai Mitzvah tutoring is provided by our Beth El tutors.** We have an amazing tutoring staff, and we can accommodate students with different learning styles. There will be a B’nai Mitzvah tutoring orientation for you and your child to attend to begin Bar or Bat Mitzvah lessons. Lessons occur 2 times a week for all students. You will be able to schedule lesson days and times that fit your child’s and your schedule. At the orientation, you will meet many Beth El staff members who will be interacting with you and your child.

We encourage family members to read Torah portions during the service. If you or other members of your family are interested in reading a Torah portion, please contact our Ritual Director.

Four to six months ahead meet Senior Events Manager

Four months before your simcha contact - - in order to plan the social aspects of your simcha (Kiddush following services, Kiddush luncheon, private party, photo session, etc.) at 410-484-0411 or - -

Three months ahead meet Cantor Thom King, Rabbi Steven Schwartz, Rabbi Dana Saroken, Ritual Director, Senior Events Manager, and Development Director

Three months before your simcha date, please schedule the following meetings:

- Cantor Thom King to discuss the simcha process, including aliyot and Torah readings for your family. Cantor King will also be rehearsing with your child beginning 3 weeks before your event. Contact Yvonne Epstein, assistant to the Clergy to schedule those rehearsals at 410-484-0411 or yvonne@bethelbalto.com.
- - - to schedule your formal pictures and videography for the week before your simcha at 410-484-0411 or - -

- Rabbi Saroken to help your child prepare an interpretation of the Torah reading (D'var Torah). Contact Rebecca Tapper to schedule this meeting at 410-484-0411 or rtapper@bethelbalto.com.
- Rabbi Schwartz to discuss the meaning of the event as a family celebration and to help the child prepare a message to the family and congregation. Contact Yvonne Epstein to schedule this meeting at 410-484-0411 or yvonne@bethelbalto.com.
- Cantor King to arrange rehearsals with your child so that he/she will feel more comfortable being on the Bimah and participating in the service. Contact Yvonne Epstein to schedule this meeting at 410-484-0411 or yvonne@bethelbalto.com.
- Ben Kreshtool, Ritual Director to discuss the Daily Minyan and Friday Night Kiddush (see below for explanations) ben@bethelbalto.com.
- You will be able to meet with the Development Director Amanda Beitman to choose a piece of Judaica or some other way to honor and dedicate your child's B'nai Mitzvah.

One Week ahead

- **Monday or Thursday Daily Minyan** – All B'nai Mitzvah students will attend the Daily Minyan which begins at **8:00 am** on the Monday or Thursday morning during the week before their simcha. They will put on Tallit and T'filin, participate in the Minyan, and receive an Aliyah to the Torah. **We request families to arrive by 7:40 a.m.**
- **Friday Night Kiddush** – All B'nai Mitzvah will chant the Kiddush at the Friday evening Kabbalat Service that begins at **6:00 pm** in the Gorn Chapel.

Conclusion

Commitment to the Synagogue and Your Family's Future

Your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a time to teach them the value of tzedakah. It is customary to make a donation to Beth El Congregation. Many parents make a donation through the purchase of an honorary plaque or the dedication of an object of religious or ritual art so that the child can always see and recall his/her connection to Beth El. Dedicating an item of Judaica at Beth El is a wonderful opportunity to show your children how highly you regard them and your synagogue. It is a way to model the importance of giving in appreciation for blessings God has given you. We are proud that many generations of the same family have established this ongoing link to our congregation. Please contact our Director of Development Amanda Beitman at 410-484-0411 or amanda@bethelbalto.com, to make these arrangements.

Special B'nai Mitzvah Responsibilities

If your child would like to participate in a Mitzvah Project, please speak with Andy Shankman, who will be happy to offer ideas and guide your child through the process.

We thank you and are happy to share in your B'nai Mitzvah experience. We want to make this time in your life as stress-free as possible. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call on us at Beth El.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Vocabulary

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

This means Son or Daughter of the commandment. Upon reaching the age of 13, a Jewish child becomes responsible for their own Jewish identity and commitment to Jewish practice. It is common to celebrate this milestone by being invited to the Torah for an Aliyah for the first time. B'nai Mitzvah is the plural form of Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Aliyah

The blessing that is recited over a portion of the Torah. On Shabbat morning, we read 7 Aliyot, plus one extra (called the Maftir), and on Shabbat afternoon, we read 3 Aliyot. It is traditional for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah to recite the blessings over the Maftir portion. Aliyot can also refer to other honors such as carrying the Torah.

Maftir

This is the first Torah portion your child will learn to chant. It is the additional Torah portion which is often set aside for B'nai Mitzvah.

Haftarah

The Haftarah is a section of the prophets that was established to correspond with the Torah reading during the Rabbinic time period. Each week we read a section of the prophets, which has a connection to the Torah portion. It is traditional for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah to chant this section of the prophets on Shabbat morning. There is no Haftarah during Shabbat afternoon B'nai Mitzvah.

Mincha/Ma'ariv/Havdallah B'nai Mitzvah

This is a celebration that takes place on Shabbat afternoon. The primary difference is that no Haftarah is chanted.

Tallit

A prayer shawl worn by Jewish adults once they become a B'nai Mitzvah. It is worn during morning services. The Tallit is always worn by a person reading from the Torah.

T'filin

The wearing of T'filin is a mitzvah found in the Torah. These black leather boxes have the Sh'ma written on a parchment inside. They are placed on your arm and between your eyes during the morning service. Your child will learn to wrap T'filin as part of their tutoring process. They will wear T'filin during their weekday morning service. T'filin are not worn on Shabbat.