



Temple Beth-El

B'nai* Mitzvah Planning Guide

The Practicalities and FAQ

Mazal Tov! Your child is nearing the age of b'nai mitzvah. This time is filled with many questions and even potential anxieties. We hope this planning guide will be helpful in beginning to answer your many questions. Our clergy and religious school are committed to guiding you and your child through these next exciting months. Please feel free to contact any of us with questions and know that Rabbi Moritt's door is open for concerns or sensitivities you would like to discuss privately.

The year or two before your child becomes b'nai mitzvah is filled with many opportunities to deepen your and their personal connections to our tradition and make the experience more meaningful for the entire family. The community of Beth-El is delighted to accompany your family on this journey.

Q: How will my child be assigned a date?

A: Our practice at Temple Beth-El is that children celebrate their B'nai Mitzvah on a Shabbat morning on or after their thirteenth birthday. This is the same for both boys and girls. A "B'nai Mitzvah Date Request Form" is available in the "Member Login" section of our website on which parents may request their top 3 preferred dates after their child's 13th birthday. Parents may also list dates that should be avoided due to family conflicts on that form.

We will do our best to accommodate requests, however families must understand that those preferences may conflict with the Jewish, congregational, rabbinic or cantorial calendars as well as requests of other families. Rabbi Moritt assigns all dates, usually when children are in the 5th grade and parents will receive a letter with the assigned date.

Q. How do we learn about Temple Beth-El's B'nai Mitzvah journey and expectations as a family?

Each fall, Rabbi Moritt conducts a meeting for parents (only) of children turning 13 within 2-3 years, during which she outlines the process as well as Beth-El's practices and policies. The expectation is that parents will attend this meeting in the fall of either their child's 5th or 6th grade year. A similar meeting will be held for the children in the late winter of 6th grade.

**B'nai Mitzvah* is the gender-neutral term, similar to the use of "they" to refer to either gender.

Q: When will my child begin tutoring for the B'nai Mitzvah?

A: Most students begin six months before the service. The goal is to provide twenty weekly half-hour lessons each with the cantor and rabbi. Tutoring is generally held over zoom (Cantor & Rabbi) and Google docs (Rabbi). There will be a 2-hour rehearsal during the week of your b'nai mitzvah during which all parents and available siblings should be present. Your child will also attend 2 additional in-sanctuary meetings during the weeks immediately preceding their b'nai mitzvah date. Some students begin earlier than six months based on individual needs. The timing also takes into account vacation weeks during the school year and summer. Tutoring is available during some weeks over the summer for those students who are available.

We assess the children's ability to decode and read basic Hebrew at the end of 6th grade. Children must reach this baseline *before b'nai mitzvah tutoring begins*. We firmly believe that children with consistent religious school attendance and homework will easily reach the required level by the end of 6th grade. However, for those special cases where extra Hebrew tutoring is appropriate, we are happy to recommend a teacher to help boost your child's Hebrew skills to a place of readiness for b'nai mitzvah tutoring to begin. If your child needs extra tutoring, you will be advised by the end of 6th grade. We are always mindful of children with special needs. If you have any questions or concerns, please be in touch with Rabbi Moritt.

Q: Who does the tutoring and where?

Currently Rabbi Moritt tutors all students individually on their devar Torah and the prayers on Zoom on Tuesdays afternoons. Our Cantor tutors the children on their Torah and Haftarah portions and their respective blessings, according to her schedule. Many of the prayers are available for downloading and practicing from our website and children are strongly encouraged to avail themselves of this tool. They can be found at <https://www.betheljc.org/members-section/bnai-mitzvah/resources/> Note that you will need to establish login credentials to access the members section of the website. Tutoring by Zoom may be possible for part of the process for some students.

Q: How much time will my child need to practice each week?

A: This varies from student to student, but a good rule of thumb is one to two hours each week, spread over several days. Please keep in mind that your child may also have Religious School assignments, *since all b'nai mitzvah candidates are required to complete 7th grade in our Religious School, which often continues after your child's b'nai mitzvah.*

Q: How much is the B'nai Mitzvah fee and what does it cover?

A: The fee for ceremonies held in FY 2022-2023 is \$1400. Your fee includes tutoring, one set of study materials for your child's Torah/Haftarah portion, the cost of the accompanist (usually Ben Rauch), and the challah/juice we will offer at kiddush. The balance of the fee offsets some of the temple's expenses for the b'nai mitzvah, and accounts for our cantor's and rabbi's time and involvement. As with any professional appointment, missed sessions interfere with our staff and clergy's ability to plan and function properly. We budget for 20 tutoring sessions per child. Please note that sessions that are missed or cancelled without 24-hour notice may incur additional tutoring charges, based on the individual progress of your child.

Q: How much is the B'nai Mitzvah fee and what does it cover? (cont)

Temple Beth-El currently receives funding for security personnel at our b'nai mitzvah services through a federal grant which expires yearly with no guarantee of renewal. If this grant is not renewed, the b'nai mitzvah fee may be increased by an additional \$200-\$250 to cover the cost of security during the service.

It is customary for families to donate fresh flowers or alternative decorations to adorn the bimah and to sponsor the Shabbat *oneg* nourishment for the Kabbalat Shabbat service the evening before your b'nai mitzvah during which your child will lead the congregation in the kiddush prayer. You may designate the Temple office to arrange for the flowers and *oneg* nourishment directly and on line by going to <https://www.betheljc.org/give/donate-pay/> and indicating either/both bimah flowers and/or *oneg* nourishment. If you prefer to purchase the flowers and food yourself, please let our office manager know in advance.

Families are also encouraged to contribute to their child's "class gift" to the Temple to benefit future generations of Temple Beth-El.

Q: When is the B'nai Mitzvah fee due?

A: The B'nai Mitzvah fee is due in full by the time tutoring begins, which is about 6 months before your child's b'nai mitzvah. You are welcome to pay it in installments as long as it is completed by that time. If there is financial hardship, contact Rabbi Moritt or our president privately to discuss. This fee is separate from Religious School tuition and Terumah, which must also be current within two months of your b'nai mitzvah. You may make all b'nai mitzvah fee and other payments directly from our website at <https://www.betheljc.org/give/donate-pay/> and indicate b'nai mitzvah fee.

Q: What time does the service begin and what time is customary to put on invitations?

A: The service begins at 10:30 am as a regular Temple Beth-El Shabbat morning service that your b'nai mitzvah child will co-lead for the congregation and guests along with the rabbi and cantor. Many families choose to list the start time as 10:15 so that their families will be present from the beginning of the service. The service normally concludes between at about 12.30 pm. We do not conduct afternoon or Havdalah B'nai Mitzvah services.

Q: How will our family members be able to participate in the service?

A: There are many honors for family members and friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The honors sheet will be given to the family at the start of tutoring. Assignments should be finalized in consultation with the rabbi about a month before the service date. As a community event, congregants will also participate in the Torah service. Please speak to Rabbi Moritt to acknowledge your family's special relationships within the community.

Your family will have the responsibility act as the ushers on the morning of b'nai mitzvah immediately preceding your child's b'nai mitzvah. This includes greeting our guests, offering them a siddur and chumash, inviting them to take a seat and answering any general questions they may have. Basically, you act as an ambassador for Temple Beth-El and warm and welcoming face that mornings. Please plan on arriving at 10.10am on your ushering morning. Rabbi Moritt will answer any other questions you may have on this and give you your specific ushering assignment date at your family meeting.

Q: Who else participates in the service?

A: Aside from the rabbi, cantor and accompanist, the first aliya or Torah reading will be offered by members of the congregation. Beth-El is proud to welcome your child into Jewish maturity in the context of the Shabbat morning service our community conducts every week. This will be ritualized in the "passing of the yad" from the congregant of your choice to our newest member (your child), just before (s)he reads from the Torah.

Q: Is there a dress code?

This is a good place to mention that proper attire is required for anyone called to the bimah for an honor, i.e.; no sloppy sneakers, shoulders should be covered, hemlines for dresses/skirts/appropriate shorts should be no shorter than 1"-2" above the knee for all genders. Please choose your synagogue attire accordingly.

Q: What will the student learn for the service?

A: The students normally lead most or all of the Torah Service as well as the closing prayers at the end of the service. Each student normally chants 9-11 verses of Torah (from the Torah scroll) plus several verses of Haftarah (selection from Prophets.) Each student works with the rabbi to prepare his or her talk applying a lesson of the Torah portion to everyday life. All elements of leading the service can be adjusted for students with special needs. Additional verses of Torah are available for students or family members who would like to chant additional verses.

Q: How else will my child prepare?

A: Your child is required to attend services 12 times during the 12 months prior to becoming b'nai mitzvah. At least 7 of these must be Shabbat morning services. Attending the b'nai mitzvah ceremonies of your child's classmates (including those ceremonies after your child's) is expected and these attendances will count toward the mandatory minimum. Check the congregational calendar to schedule those mornings during which there will be a b'nai mitzvah or Torah reading, since those are the best to familiarize all with the service and will serve to best prepare your child for his/her special morning.

Regular attendance at our monthly First Friday Family services and High Holy Day services are also required and are part of the school curriculum.

Q: May we throw candy?

A: Spreading the sweetness of the occasion is a time-honored tradition that we support. At the same time, the safety of our members and guests is our primary concern. If you choose to bring candy to throw, we require that it must be limited to individually wrapped *soft* jelly candies (i.e. Sunkist Fruit Gems)

Q: What should I plan for Friday night before the Saturday morning service?

A: The Friday evening service is at 7.30 pm except the first and final Fridays of the month when services begin at 6:30 pm. Please arrive fifteen minutes before the service. Near the start of the service, your family/child will be invited to lead English readings before the candle-lighting and the wine blessing. There is an Oneg Shabbat after the service each week, and many families like to sponsor the food that Friday evening in honor of the occasion. You can arrange for this online at <https://www.betheljc.org/give/donate-pay/> and the Temple will make the food arrangements. Alternatively, you may choose to provide the refreshments yourself, either purchased or home-made. Please talk to our Office Manager about quantities.

Q: May I hold a family dinner on the Friday night or a party on Saturday or Sunday in the Social Hall?

A: Currently our Social Hall is under construction but anticipate its completion soon, at which point it will be a lovely space to hold your simcha/party. Please be in touch with our office manager for schedule and rates for our members.

Q: May we take photos or video during the service?

A: While there is no photography allowed during the service, we encourage families to pose for photos on the bimah either before or after the service. Photos before the service must be completed by 10:00 am. Thanks to the generosity of previous b'nai mitzvah families, Temple Beth-El is now able to live-stream and record our b'nai mitzvah services, eliminating the need for families to hire a private videographer. The link to the Temple's YouTube Chanel to watch the service is: <https://bit.ly/3ac8BuD>. Consistent with our policy before we secured the equipment, the service is recorded only from the balcony, and with a fixed camera that remains stationary during the entire service. Any additional video recording of the service arranged by the family must adhere to the same policy.

Q: What comes next?

We hope your child will consider becoming a madrich(a)- teen leader/assistant in our Religious School next year. Temple Beth-El is delighted to invite your child to participate in our Youth Group. Our Youth Group currently meets monthly and is a wonderful way to stay connected with the temple and friends from religious school with primarily social activities coupled with social action projects.

