



# 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.

#### **In this handbook:**

- How will my child be assigned a date?
- How do we learn about Temple Beth-El's B'nai Mitzvah journey and expectations as a family?
- When will my child begin tutoring for the B'nai Mitzvah?
- Who does the tutoring and where?
- How much time will my child need to practice each week?
- How much is the B'nai Mitzvah fee and what does it cover?
- When is the B'nai Mitzvah fee due?
- What time does the service begin and what time is customary to put on invitations?
- How will our family members be able to participate in the service?
- Who else participates in the service?
- Is there a dress code?
- What will the student learn for the service?
- How else will my child prepare?
- May we throw candy?
- What should I plan for Friday night before the Saturday morning service?
- May I hold a family dinner on the Friday night or a party on Saturday or Sunday in the Social Hall?
- May we take photos or video during the service?
- What comes next?

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

**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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade year. A similar meeting will be held for the children in the late winter of 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

**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, including as sleepaway camp. The timing also takes into account vacation weeks during the school year and summer. Tutoring is available during most weeks over the summer.

We assess the children's ability to decode and read basic Hebrew at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 achieve readiness for b'nai mitzvah tutoring. If your child needs extra tutoring, you will be advised by the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Parents will also be advised of mid-year assessment concerns. We are always mindful of the abilities 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 in writing their devar Torah and learning siddur 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. The prayers are available for downloading and practicing from our website and children will need 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.

**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 2023-2024 is \$1550. 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 we will offer after services. 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.

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 \$300- 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 at [admin@betheljc.org](mailto:admin@betheljc.org).

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 ceremony. 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 b'nai mitzvah family will meet in Rabbi Moritt's office at 10.30. The service normally concludes between at about 12.40 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 Rabbi Moritt 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.

We encourage family members to chant a section Torah in honor of your b'nai mitzvah child. Please advise Rabbi or Cantor as early as possible if members of your family would like to participate in this way. We will support them in this endeavor, if requested.

Your family will have the responsibility to act as ushers/greeters 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 a warm and welcoming face that morning. Please plan on arriving at 10.10am on your ushering morning. Rabbi 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 of our community. 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 begins reading 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 their teaching, which applies 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 and prayers 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. It is required that your child attends at least 7 Shabbat morning services. It is expected that your child will attend the b’nai mitzvah ceremonies of your child’s classmates (including those ceremonies *after* your child’s). 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 at [admin@betheljc.org](mailto:admin@betheljc.org).

**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 by the fall of 2024, at which point it will be a lovely space to hold your simcha/party. We are pleased to offer the space to our members for their simcha celebrations. Please be in touch with our office manager for schedule and rates for our members at [admin@betheljc.org](mailto:admin@betheljc.org).

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

A: While there is no photography of any kind permitted during the service, we encourage families to pose for photos on the bimah either before or after the service. Photos before the service may begin at 9am and must be completed by 10:00 am. Please arrange early entrance with our office manager at [admin@betheljc.org](mailto:admin@betheljc.org). Photos with the Torah itself should only be taken under the supervision of either Rabbi or Cantor to ensure proper and respectful handling of the scroll.

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.

