

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Family Guide



Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley

105 Hudson Road
Sudbury, Massachusetts 01776
(978) 443-9622
info@bethelsudbury.org

Contents

Dates and planning	3
When will it be?	3
Planning timeline	3
Beth El staff and members who will help you	5
Preparation and learning for the bar/bat mitzvah service	6
Attending services	6
Tikkun olam, mitzvah and tzedakah	6
Mitzvah suggestions	6
Torah reading preparation	8
Torah Class	8
The role of the gabbaim	8
D'var Torah preparation	9
The ritual role of the bar/bat mitzvah and family	9
Erev Shabbat services	9
The symbolic passing of Torah through the generations	9
Determining aliyot	10
The bat/bar mitzvah's siblings	10
Including non-Jewish relatives	10
Preparing the parental blessing	11
Thursday morning minyan	11
Providing a congregational kiddush	11
After your child's bar/bat mitzvah	11
Celebration logistics	12
Ushers	12
Kiddush luncheon details	13
Flowers or decoration for the bimah	15
Kippot and tallitot	15
Gifts for the bar/bat mitzvah	15
Recording and photography	15
Liquor	15
Music	15
Additional questions and answers	16
Donations and gifts to Beth El staff	16
Beth El fees	16
Annual Shabbat oneg obligation	16
Guides for b'nai mitzvah guests	16
Other ways to honor your family and friends	16

Dates and planning

When will it be?

Congregation Beth El's b'nai mitzvah date assignment process is designed to reflect the essence of Beth El—we are a caring community. To that end, we have established a procedure that considers the needs of the congregation.

About one and a half to two years prior to your family's *simcha*, you will receive a letter from either the rabbi or the b'nai mitzvah coordinators asking you to attend a meeting with other families going through the bar or bat mitzvah process within the same ritual year. At that meeting, you will receive your child's assigned bar or bat mitzvah date. Occasionally, the b'nai mitzvah coordinators will need to contact some of the families ahead of time—for example, to arrange doubles, to incorporate a new Beth El family with a bat or bar mitzvah, or to eliminate a conflict with a date.

Dates are assigned in two seasonal groups. Children with birthdays from January 1 to June 30 are usually in the fall Torah class before their b'nai mitzvah. Children with birthdays from July 1 to December 31 are placed in the spring Torah class before their b'nai mitzvah. At Beth El, there are no celebrations in July and August.

Bar and bat mitzvahs are celebrated throughout the year at Beth El, with the exception of July and August. Thus, you will be assigned a date no sooner than your child's thirteenth birthday. Typically, the dates are assigned in chronological order according to a child's birthdate. Occasionally, a b'nai mitzvah group may be large and to accommodate everyone, it's necessary to book doubles based on the available dates. *

We strive to accommodate all families. Our ability to be flexible in determining dates will be determined by the number of children in a given group. Assigned dates may not be changed unless extraordinary circumstances arise, in which case the next available date will be assigned.

** Certain Shabbat morning dates are not available for b'nai mitzvahs such as secular or religious holidays, planned congregational retreats, dates reserved for congregational services only, and dates on which either the Rabbi or cantor is not available. Generally, there are three Shabbats per month that are available.*

Other celebrations on the same day

Shabbat morning services occur every week at Beth El, regardless of weather, season or secular or religious events. *Tefilah* (prayer) is a major factor in building and sustaining the Beth El community; people come to pray together and to hear the words of Torah regardless of any other special events that might take place on a particular Shabbat. Therefore, it is quite possible that other members' special events may occur on the Shabbat of your child's bar/bat mitzvah. Events such as *brit milah* (baby naming), *aufbruch* (pre-wedding *aliyah*), a *tefilat haderech* (prayer for the road—usually a sendoff for someone leaving for Israel) or people reading from Torah for other personal reasons, may also be shared with the community. Your child's bar/bat mitzvah will be enhanced by the active participation of other members of the community and by other *simchas* that occur.

Planning timeline

As a guide for planning your *simcha*, we suggest following this timetable. We encourage you to contact a b'nai mitzvah coordinator should you need more details or have questions or concerns. Items in **red type** are logistical rather than religious/ritual in nature.

18 to 24 months in advance of the b'nai mitzvah date:

- B'nai mitzvah coordinators or rabbi sends letter to families notifying them of the date assignment meeting
- B'nai mitzvah coordinators make initial calls to families to identify date issues
- B'nai mitzvah dates are assigned
- The b'nai mitzvah meeting occurs, including an overview discussion led by rabbi with the temple administrator in attendance

12 to 18 months in advance:

- Reserve hall(s) for luncheon and/or evening reception(s) with temple administrator
- Determine whether you will use community catering or caterer, Simple Serving accommodators for kiddush and receptions
- When plans for celebration are determined, book DJ/band, photographer, florist, etc.

One year in advance:

- Follow up meeting with b'nai mitzvah coordinators and the rabbi to discuss the process and address questions

Six months in advance:

- Torah Class for b'nai mitzvah children and parents, culminating in weekend Torah Class retreat
- Torah and Haftarah portions are assigned and child's tutoring with the cantor begins
- Gabbaim are assigned (see page 8)
- Order invitations

Three months in advance:

- Meet with gabbai
- Determine and notify recipients of *aliyot*
- Obtain and send CDs and printed portions to recipients of *aliyot*
- Child begins preparation of *d'var Torah* with the rabbi
- Order *bimah* arrangement and other floral arrangements and centerpieces
- Continue to update temple administrator as plans are formalized and additions are made to your vendor list

Two months in advance:

- Rabbi works with bar/bat mitzvah to prepare *d'var Torah* (secretary will contact you to set up appointments)
- Send out invitations
- Attend Parental Blessing Workshop

One month in advance:

- Identify and notify ushers, send them guidelines, and discuss your plans with them
- Schedule meeting with the temple administrator to discuss room setup and arrangement for your kiddush and/or reception at Beth El (e.g., approximate number of guests, number of tables needed, arrangement of tables for buffet and for seating, deliveries)

One week in advance:

- Notify temple administrator of final guest count and any changes or additions to kiddush and/or reception plans.
- Attend Thursday morning minyan

The night before:

- Attend Friday night services

Day of bar/bat mitzvah:

- Meet with rabbi at Beth El at 10 a.m. with service beginning at 10:30 a.m.

Beth El staff and members who will help you**Rabbi**

Together with members and associates of the Beth El senior staff, our rabbi leads the Torah classes and the Shabbat weekend Torah class retreat for the B'nai mitzvah families during the year preceding your child's bar/bat mitzvah. The rabbi guides the children in the preparation of their *divrei Torah*. Please be sure to make an appointment to speak to the rabbi about any specific religious, familial or personal questions concerning this important time in the life of your child and family.

Cantor

Our cantor (sometimes together with other qualified Beth El staff) will tutor your bar/bat mitzvah in the chanting of the Torah and Haftarah portions. The cantor will not only teach them to chant their assigned portions, but will teach them how to chant and read the Torah and Haftarah trope marks (musical/chanting notations).

B'nai mitzvah coordinators

The coordinators are responsible for assigning the dates for the b'nai mitzvah and for providing lay leadership to facilitate the bar/bat mitzvah process for Beth El families. They schedule various meetings with the b'nai mitzvah families to provide practical information and support regarding their *simchas*. The coordinators are available to answer questions that may arise in the course of your preparations. They are responsible for maintaining this b'nai mitzvah handbook and for updating and organizing the wealth of *simcha* planning ideas available to you.

We strongly encourage you to contact the Beth El b'nai mitzvah coordinators with questions about any aspect of your *simcha*. They will ensure that you receive timely and accurate answers, help in decision making, and warm support for your concerns and issues.

Temple administrator

Our temple administrator is responsible for monitoring the congregational calendar. Parents will be introduced to the temple administrator at the one-year and two year b'nai mitzvah family meetings. Contact the temple administrator a year in advance of your date to reserve the building for your celebrations. A personal meeting will be scheduled 90 days prior to your reception. The temple administrator supervises billing charges, and maintains caterer registration forms, policies and procedures. The temple office maintains a portfolio of information about caterers, photographers, rental companies, accommodators, florists, files of sample invitations and other similar information to help families plan their celebrations.

Events Coordinator

Our event coordinator is the source of practical details regarding the use of the Beth El building. Kim Pecorella will be on site the day of your *simcha* and she will be your contact through the event.

Preparation and learning for the bar/bat mitzvah service

Attending services

During the year preceding your child's bar/bat mitzvah, this is the best way to become involved in the Beth El community. We strongly encourage you to attend Friday night and Saturday morning services with your child and family as often as possible to ensure you will understand and be comfortable with the rhythms, flow and content that make up a Shabbat experience at Beth El. By participating in services at Beth El, you will better relate to the traditions of *tefilah* (prayer) and how Beth El's traditions or *minhagim* blend with what you know from past experience. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet and become friends with members of our unique community. Participation in Shabbat services will expose you to a variety of community activities and help you to find a comfortable level of participation in them.

Tikkun olam, mitzvah and tzedakah

"A generation can only receive the teachings in the sense that it renews them. We do not take unless we also give." — Martin Buber

It is a commandment in Judaism and a *minhag* at Beth El to continuously strive to make the world a better place. As part of the transition from childhood to adulthood, the bar/bat mitzvah becomes able to help our congregation in its efforts to perform acts of *tikkun olam*, or repairing the world.

The following is a sampling of ideas and anecdotal stories that bring acts of *tikkun olam* into a traditional bar/bat mitzvah celebration. You will also find ideas for creating a non-traditional celebration in which *tikkun olam*, *mitzvah*, or *tzedakah* is a major component. Our purpose is to provide a guide from which you may determine a way to individualize this beautiful and ancient tradition of reaching out to help others as you celebrate your own *simcha*. We encourage you to contact the bar/bat mitzvah committee with your questions and any ideas you may have on how to make *tikkun olam* a part of your *simcha*, adding spirit, loving kindness and holiness to its meaning.

Mitzvah suggestions

Prior to the bar/bat mitzvah:

- Perform a *mitzvah* during bar/bat mitzvah year. The child chooses a specific *mitzvah*, often involving community service, and designs a project to advance that *mitzvah*. The project can span up to a year preceding or following the child's bar/bat mitzvah and emphasizes the idea that a bar/bat mitzvah is responsible for doing a *mitzvah*. A successful project generates a sense of accomplishment, and an enhanced understanding of the commandment of *mitzvah* in a Jewish life.
- Create a *mitzvah hevra* for planning and preparing the member's *simchas*.
- Decide on a *mitzvah* such as visiting the sick, performing acts of kindness or, as the Torah puts it, "making peace where there is strife," and keep a *mitzvah* journal to record his/her actions, feelings and emotions during the project.
- Participate in the Dnepropetrovsk Kehillah Project (DKP). This overseas project partners the Boston Jewish community with Dnepropetrovsk, a city in southeastern Ukraine, home today to 60,000 Jews. One project offered is the B'nai Mitzvah Project that allows students of bar and bat mitzvah age to perform the mitzvah of giving gifts and *tzedakah* to B'nai Mitzvah in Dnepropetrovsk.

- Participate in the bar/bat mitzvah Program for Immigrants Below the Poverty Line at The Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa, Israel. This is a reform organization that ensures that new immigrants who live below the poverty line can become bar/bat mitzvah with honor and respect.
- Purchase a Plaut Torah book for Beth El in commemoration of the child's bar/bat mitzvah.

During your celebration:

- Celebrate Havdallah before the start of a Saturday evening party.
- Donate a percentage of the cost of the celebration to Mazon, a national Jewish organization feeding the hungry, or an appropriate charity. For example, one family gave a donation to Mazon in honor of their child's bar mitzvah and in honor of the guests. A note saying "A donation to Mazon was made in your honor" was included inside each place card in lieu of party favors.
- Donate gift money. For example, one bat mitzvah gave all of her gift money to an organization doing research on a serious illness that afflicted one of her cousins.
- Give guests the honor of participating by asking them to bring an item for a food bank, a library or another *tzedakah* organization.
- Suggest in the invitation that your guests donate to a charity in honor of the bar/bat mitzvah in lieu of gifts.
- Prepare a card for each guest with a list of three charities chosen by the bar/bat mitzvah child. Instead of party favors, the guest chooses one charity, and the bar/bat mitzvah family donates to that charity in his/her honor.
- Utilize centerpieces for *tzedakah*. A bat mitzvah gave money that would have been spent on centerpieces to an animal rights organization. She and her father made Noah's ark centerpieces. Other centerpiece ideas are canned goods, plants, books, toys, stuffed animals or other items that will be donated after the *simcha* to fulfill the need at food banks, nursing homes, shelters or children's shelters. Some families use the money that would have been spent on party centerpieces as charity donations.
- Use the celebration itself to perform an act of *tikkun olam*. One article tells of a child and a troupe of 43 guests, upon learning that an old synagogue was being restored, traveled to the site, donned work gloves and face masks, and swept, dusted and shined several hundred feet of blackened brass to gleaming. The souvenir group photo showed everyone smiling and wearing T-shirts that said "I Shined With Shira."
- Honor the sacrifices made by victims and heroes of the Holocaust. One child became involved with the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, an organization that provides assistance to surviving Christians who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. She chose to add meaning to her *simcha* by participating in "twinning" a program that twins a bar/bat mitzvah child with a Jewish boy or girl who died in the Holocaust before turning 13.
- Participate in a program that recognizes a Jew of similar age in need and working to donate money to better his/her world.
- Celebrate your child's bar/bat mitzvah with a concert or study session open to the entire congregation. One family, who sponsored an evening of music with the "Voice of the Turtle," helped to create a strong sense of community with their *simcha*.

Ideas for *tikkun olam* are limitless. We encourage you to contact the b'nai mitzvah coordinator to obtain guidance and references on how to enhance your *simcha* as you enrich the world.

Torah reading preparation

The weekly Torah portion will be divided into seven *aliyot* (readings). In the case of a single bar/bat mitzvah, the bar/bat mitzvah chants the seventh *aliyah*. In the case of a double bar/bat mitzvah, one child chants the first *aliyah* and the other chants the seventh. Each Beth El bar/bat mitzvah chant (read and sing) verses of Torah directly from the Torah scroll. Our cantor, along with other qualified staff members, helps our member children both technically and spiritually, to prepare to chant from the Torah. With one-on-one Beth El staff guidance, your child will learn the musical language of the Torah—“trope” marks—and will practice his/her portion until she/he can read from the actual scroll which contains no marks of any kind—vowels or trope—other than the actual Hebrew letters. In addition, most students learn a few verses of the weekly Haftarah portion, a reading from the Prophets that accompanies the Torah portion. Your child will also learn the *brachot* for both Torah and Haftarah and may chant several verses of Haftarah.

General preparation for Torah reading takes about six months and includes tutoring once a week with the cantor. Should your child be assigned an early fall (September or October) bar/bat mitzvah, **please be certain to inform our cantor in the early spring if your child will be away at summer camp.**

Torah Class

Beth El's Torah Class experience is truly one of the most unique and enriching aspects of the Beth El bar/bat mitzvah *simcha* process. The Beth El senior staff, including our rabbi and cantor, will lead an essential (you really don't want to miss any of this) series of classes on Torah that focuses on the relevance of this time in your child's life, as well as on many other Judaic teachings. These classes and activities, which are only for the b'nai mitzvah and their parents, are designed specifically to enable parents to learn with their pre-teen children and to offer a unique opportunity to bond with other Beth El families who share this special time in their child's/family's lives.

The highlight of these classes is an obligatory Shabbat retreat weekend, a spiritual and personal experience for the b'nai mitzvah and their parents, from Friday late afternoon to Sunday afternoon. This generally takes place on a weekend sometime prior to the children's *simchas*. Costs for this weekend will be passed on to the class. A \$200 deposit will be billed two to three months prior to the retreat weekend, with a final billing occurring a week after final costs are assessed after the conclusion of the retreat weekend. The total cost for the retreat is roughly \$800 per family.

The role of the *gabbaim*

Beth El is very fortunate to have a team of talented and learned *gabbaim* who graciously volunteer their time and wealth of knowledge to our community and assist in the Torah readings and liturgy on Shabbat mornings when there is a bar/bat mitzvah. Our *gabbaim* are responsible for coordinating the Torah readings, providing a *d'var Torah* or Torah teaching, based on the weekly *parasha* or portion, choosing the verses that will be read (except for those read by the bar/bat mitzvah), calling the seven Torah readers as well as the scroll lifter and dresser (*hagbah* and *g'lilah*) and ensuring that the Torah is read properly. *Gabbaim* also provide valuable guidance and coaching to the bar/bat mitzvah and his/her family during the months leading up to the *simcha*.

Gabbaim are typically assigned six months before the bar/bat mitzvah date. The head gabbai makes the individual date assignments, and although families may ask a Gabbai to volunteer for your bar/bat mitzvah, preferences cannot be guaranteed. The gabbai will contact your family about six months prior to your simcha, to introduce him/herself and schedule a first meeting. At that time, your gabbai will outline the details of a Shabbat morning service, including the details of the Torah service, and will address your questions about this portion of the Shabbat morning service.

With the family's help and input, the gabbai assigns the remaining available *aliyot* (see next page).

***D'var Torah* preparation**

As part of his/her ritual experience, and to share a teaching with the congregation, each bar/bat mitzvah is required to write and deliver a *d'var Torah* (personal teaching) on his or her Torah portion. Our rabbi teaches your child to interpret the text and guides the child in finding relevance in his/her particular portion. Under this personal tutelage, your child is encouraged to expand upon this learning. This offers your child a rare opportunity—to be a teacher to his/her community. It is a unique moment for your child, for your family and for the entire congregation to experience the teachings from the perspective of a 13-year-old child, who is taking his/her first steps into Jewish adulthood as part of the community at Beth El. Three months before your child's bar/bat mitzvah date, you will be contacted by the office in order to schedule study meetings with the rabbi and your child.

The ritual role of the bar/bat mitzvah and family

In thinking about the many facets of your simcha, we strongly encourage you and your family to attend Beth El services to become familiar with our traditions and with the flow of the service. It is the best way to learn and get ideas for your own simcha.

Erev Shabbat services

It is strongly encouraged at Beth El for the bar/bat mitzvah family and their out-of-town guests to enjoy a Shabbat dinner and attend *Kabbalat Shabbat* services the Friday evening prior to the child's bar/bat mitzvah. The parents of the bar/bat mitzvah are invited to read the prayer for candle lighting and light the candles at this service.

The symbolic passing of Torah through the generations

One of the many highlights of a Beth El bar/bat mitzvah is the passing of the Torah from grandparents to parents to the bar/bat mitzvah. It symbolizes the handing down of Torah from generation to generation of Jews beginning at Mount Sinai. The ritual requires the grandparents, parents and child to stand with the rabbi on the *bimah*. The rabbi removes a Torah from the ark and guides its passing from the grandparents to the parents and to the child—a very powerful validation of Judaism.

At Beth El, as with most Jewish communities today, we are blessed with many family blendings, including families with non-Jewish parents or grandparents. Since a non-Jewish grandparent or parent is not part of this chain of Jewish tradition, for them to pass the Torah would not be in keeping with the ceremony's symbolic meaning. For this part of the ritual, the congregation

welcomes all non-Jewish parents and/or grandparents to stand on the *bimah* to witness the handing down of the Torah, thereby participating in a meaningful way.

Determining *aliyot*

In our tradition, people may be honored with an *aliyah*, or honor. Traditional ritual *aliyot* are the seven Shabbat Torah readings and the scroll lifter and dresser (*hagbah* and *g'lilah*). It is the Beth El *minhag* to reserve three congregational *aliyot* for regular community participation in Shabbat services. Members of our community may ask for *aliyot* to commemorate a recent special event such as recovery from illness, a new job or their own *simcha* (see "Other celebrations on the same day," page 16).

The family may designate in addition to the bar/bat mitzvah, three Torah readers and *hagbah* and *g'lilah*. The readers may read in Hebrew or English. *Hagbah* and *g'lilah* must be assigned to Jews. It is our tradition to call Jews receiving *aliyot* to the Torah by their Hebrew name and the Hebrew names of their father and mother. The first *aliyah* must be read in Hebrew. If the family cannot provide a Hebrew reader, the gabbai will arrange for a member of the congregation to have that honor. At Beth El, a person receiving the honor of reading from the Torah in Hebrew is required to read or chant the blessings before and after the portion and to read or chant at least three verses **directly** from the Torah scroll, which does not have vowels or trope marks.

Your child's *simcha* is an excellent opportunity for Jewish parents and/or grandparents of the bar/bar mitzvah to read Torah, perhaps for the first time, or you may wish to honor a dear Jewish relative or friend. Your gabbai will determine the appropriate portions for your *aliyot*. Readers, who wish to read and/or chant Hebrew, may request audiotapes that will enable them to practice their portions so as to be able to fluently read and/or chant from the unmarked scroll.

Should you wish to honor a person who cannot read Hebrew or a non-Jewish friend or relative, he/she may read the English translation from the Plaut Torah book. We suggest that you send a copy of the Plaut Torah book verses to your English readers so they can practice pronouncing unfamiliar names and places.

The bat/bar mitzvah's siblings

As adult members of the Beth El community, siblings of the bar/bat mitzvah who have been through their own bar/bat mitzvah are encouraged to be called for an *aliyah* and are strongly encouraged to read Hebrew from the Torah itself. Pre- bar/bat mitzvah siblings are not expected to participate in the Shabbat morning liturgy and service, except to delight in the special day for their family. Immediate members of the b'nai mitzvah family are seated in the first row for the morning liturgy and service.

Including non-Jewish relatives

Beth El welcomes the involvement of all family members and encourages them to enjoy your child's bar/bat mitzvah. Because a bar/bar mitzvah often raises sensitive family issues relating to religious observance, we encourage you to meet with our rabbi and cantor well in advance of your *simcha*, to discuss your questions or concerns about how to handle blended, extended, intermarried, or other family issues. For more information, see "Other ways to honor your family and friends" on page 16.

Preparing the parental blessing

Another highly powerful and meaningful aspect of a Beth El bar/bat mitzvah is our custom providing a child's parents with the opportunity to publicly bless their child. At the conclusion of the Torah and Haftarah readings, the bar/bat mitzvah's parents may face their child and offer their blessing to her/him. As this is an extremely emotional moment, it is essential that you prepare your blessing and bring a written copy from which to read. We ask that the parent speaks briefly; the blessing should be limited to 250 words. It is particularly meaningful to focus the blessing on the child's connections to Judaism. Although we encourage only one parent to deliver the blessing, we recognize that for some families, this is difficult. Please discuss any concerns of this nature with the rabbi or cantor. A parent's blessing workshop will be scheduled to help guide parents.

Thursday morning minyan

Beth El's weekday service is held every Thursday morning at 7 a.m. This minyan provides an opportunity for the bar/bat mitzvah to read/chant his or her Torah portion in front of a small, informal congregation. So as not to technically become a bar/bat mitzvah, a friend or relative chants the blessings before and after the reading. Some children invite close friends who are thirteen years old (often from their Torah or Hebrew school class) to recite the blessings for them. The Thursday minyan immediately prior to the date of the bar/bat mitzvah is the general choice.

Providing a congregational kiddush

It is considered a privilege and a *mitzvah* (commandment) in Jewish tradition to feed all attendees to a *simcha*, invited guests or not. Throughout the centuries and around the world, Jews share in this *seudat mitzvah* (obligatory feast), whether their *simcha* is a wedding, a *brit*, or a bar/bat mitzvah, and it is the Beth El *minhag* to carry on that beautiful tradition. Everyone attending Beth El's regular Shabbat service is invited to the kiddush, traditionally a light lunch. On a Shabbat when a bar/bat mitzvah is celebrated, it is the privilege and honor for the bar/bat mitzvah family to host that Shabbat's kiddush for their community, in celebration of their child's accomplishment.

Some bar/bat mitzvah families use Community Catering, whereby the family appoints a coordinator to sign up fellow congregants (particular other family's from the child's Torah class) to provide a dish. See page 13 for details.

The kiddush begins with ceremonial blessings over the wine and *challah*, in the sanctuary immediately following the service. The community blesses your child and family with a *shehechianu*. As the Shabbat host family, you are expected to remain at Beth El to accept the community's good wishes and enjoy the feast with your guests. This lovely *minhag* is particularly important to remember if you are planning a later luncheon celebration. The host family(s) remains at the *simcha* for at least one hour. Ideas and suggestions for providing your kiddush are included further on in this guide.

After your child's bar/bat mitzvah

Upon becoming a bar/bat mitzvah, your young adult may now be part of a *minyan*, attend a *shiva*, become a regular Beth El Torah reader. At Beth El, post-bar/bat mitzvah young adults are encouraged to read their Torah portion each year and to read Torah at High Holidays and other Shabbat services during the year.

Celebration logistics

Ushers

To welcome congregants and guests and offer assistance throughout the service, it is Beth El's custom to request that members serve as ushers. On Shabbat mornings that include bar/bat mitzvah celebrations, it is customary for the Beth El host family to select four or five members to serve as ushers for that service. This appointment is considered an honor and families often choose their ushers from among the families in their Torah class. If there are two families celebrating a double b'nai mitzvah, we suggest that the two families select seven members to serve as ushers.

Before services:

The b'nai mitzvah family should provide boutonnieres for the ushers to identify them for the attendees. In-house boutonnieres belonging to the congregation are available upon request.

Ushers should arrive no later than 10 a.m. to welcome congregants and guests to Beth El. They should assist people who arrive early or those who need special assistance. Ushers should direct both members and guests into the foyer as there is a *Torah* study group that meets in the loft. Family members, guests and congregants are allowed into the sanctuary **after** the Torah study has ended (usually between 10:15 and 10:20). Ushers should try to limit noise in the hallways as much as possible.

Since it is not appropriate to bring gifts into the sanctuary, ushers should direct guests who bring gifts to leave them in the family's container in the coatroom. (see section on gifts above).

Ushers should remind persons who are carrying a camera, video or audio recorder that the use of such devices is not permitted during services. Cell phone use causes distraction for those in prayer. Ushers may firmly remind individuals that cell phones must be turned off in the services.

Once the Torah study has ended, ushers will open the sanctuary doors and inform people in the hallway and foyer that services will begin shortly and to please take their seats in the sanctuary. Whenever possible, guests and congregants should be directed to the seats nearest the windows and nearest the front, since these are more difficult to fill once the service has begun. Families with young children should be seated in the section nearest the doors, since they often need a quick exit. Young teens not sitting with their families should be seated on the sides of the sanctuary, and, if possible, should not be seated in large groups. If there are many teens attending the *simcha*, there should be an usher posted near them to control their noise and limit their entrances and exits during the service.

At about 10:25, encourage all guests to enter the sanctuary and be seated, then close the sanctuary doors, which should remain closed during the service.

During services:

Once services have begun, the ushers should not hesitate to direct people who may be talking in the hallway into the foyer to limit noise, as the sanctuary doors do not block the noise from anything other than very quiet conversation. The ushers should also open and close the doors for those leaving the sanctuary during the service.

Ushers should ensure that every person has a prayer book, and that Torah books are distributed as necessary (preferably before the service begins). The wearing of *kippot* (yarmulkes) and

tallitot (prayer shawls) is optional at Beth El. Extras of both are available near the sanctuary doors for those who wish to wear them.

Once the sanctuary becomes crowded, it will become the responsibility of the ushers to help people find seats, and possibly to set up extra folding chairs.

If guests arrive while one person is speaking, ushers should ask them to remain at the entrance to the sanctuary until the speech or reading is concluded. Ushers should also encourage guests to not enter or leave the sanctuary while someone is at the *bimah* teaching or speaking to the community.

Children are *always* welcome at Beth El services, and their voices enrich the congregational singing and reading. However, when a single person is addressing the congregation, such as during a *d'var Torah*, sermon, parental blessing, personal prayer or Torah reading, young children's voices may be uncomfortably distracting. If an usher observes a distracting child, he/she should assist the parent and child in leaving the sanctuary immediately. The service can be heard in the foyer through a speaker so parents who must attend to a crying child may continue to listen to the service. Ushers should remember to invite parents and children back into the sanctuary when the child has quieted.

If young children in the foyer become noisy enough to be heard in the sanctuary even with the foyer doors closed, ushers should direct them out of the foyer and into the *Kolel* or one of the classrooms.

After services:

At the conclusion of the service, the ushers should prop open the doors to the sanctuary, help in collecting and shelving the prayer books and *Torah* books, and assist people in moving out of the sanctuary as quickly as possible. Once all of the guests have left the room, the doors should be shut to allow the Kiddush setup to continue with minimal interruption. The ushers should help to stack chairs, move tables, and assist if necessary with the setup for the *Kiddush*.

Upon completion of the setup, ushers should open the sanctuary doors and assist with the distribution of the wine, helping to move the crowd into the sanctuary and towards the celebration on the *bimah*.

After the blessings for the wine and challah are completed, the ushers' duties are complete.

Kiddush luncheon details

The following is a guide to details and ideas for hosting your *seudat mitzvah*, your kiddush to celebrate your child's bar/bat mitzvah. As the host, you may choose to arrange for your kiddush to be catered by professionals or you may prefer to provide a meal prepared by you and/or your family and friends. Please ask the temple administrator for Beth El's own Community Catering information. Families may ask friends to serve and clean up, and others hire accommodators to set up, serve and clean up. How you arrange your Kiddush is a matter of personal preference, and all of these options have been used successfully at Beth El. We encourage you to speak with a b'nai mitzvah coordinator to help you determine what approach is best for you and your family. Please refer to "Rules and Regulations Governing the Rental and Use of Facilities" for specific information. Contact the temple administrator to reserve the facilities needed.

If you choose a caterer and/or accommodator, the caterer registration form and a copy of the insurance binder must be filed in the Beth El office with the executive director within a month of your *simcha*.

If your plans call for a sit-down luncheon immediately following the service, you will need to provide seating for 50 congregants in addition to your own invited guests. The maximum seating capacity is 230. Beth El will supply the round tables and white linens for those extra tables. At a Beth El sit down luncheon, seating is generally communal, with an option for the host family to set aside a few tables for family.

For private lunch celebrations, set up may begin no sooner than one hour following the conclusion of the service, allowing ample time for the community to socialize and enjoy the kiddush.

When two b'nai mitzvahs are celebrated on the same day, or when an *aufruf* or *brit milah* is scheduled for the same Shabbat as a bar/bat mitzvah, we suggest that all those celebrating a *simcha* should share the financial and other obligations for the kiddush. A successful method for dividing financial obligation is for each host family to pay the per head food charge for their invited guests, and the bar/bat mitzvah family (if there is a double, they split the cost in half) and pay for the congregants.

The congregation provides the following for a Beth El kiddush: paper tablecloths and small plastic kiddush cups, coffee and tea. It is the host family(s) responsibility to provide sweet kosher wine, grape juice, ceremonial *challah*, the festive meal, and paper goods—luncheon and dessert plates, utensils, both hot and cold drink cups, napkins and serving utensils. All floral arrangements and decorations are provided at the discretion of the bar/bat mitzvah families.

It is a Beth El *minhag* to provide at least three meal noshes and one dessert nosh and drink for each person attending the kiddush. All food must be either dairy and/or *pareve*, or if meat is being served, it must be kosher and no dairy is allowed. The following are suggested foods that are often enjoyed at Beth El:

Lunch items

- Cheese and crackers or bread
- Cut vegetables with assorted dips
- Deviled eggs
- Cut fruit, fruit salads
- Gefilte fish, herring, whitefish, poached salmon
- Tuna, egg, whitefish salads
- Pasta salads, pasta and vegetable/green salads
- Hummus and pita bread
- Kugels—hot and/or cold
- Bagels, assorted breads and cream cheeses
- Spinach-filo triangles
- Sushi (kosher fish only)
- Tabouli
- Vegetarian egg rolls and/or stuffed grape leaves

Desserts

- Assorted coffee cakes and cakes
- Cookies
- Assorted bars
- Fruit platter
- Candies

If you have leftovers, beyond those you give to friends or take home and use to feed your out-of-town guests the next day, you should consider donating your extra food to local shelters. Check with the temple office for names of shelters and other institutions that accept food donations. Please remove and dispose of all leftovers following your celebration. Any food leftover in the kitchen will not be saved.

Flowers or decoration for the *bimah*

Beth El families typically purchase floral arrangements, often reflective of the natural seasons, for the *bimah*, to creating a beautiful and festive feel in our sanctuary. This can also provide a lovely background to family photos taken after the kiddush. The decision to provide a *bimah* arrangement and also provide flowers, centerpieces, or other table decorations for your kiddush is a matter of personal choice and budget. Information on local florists is available at the Beth El office. Please make arrangements with the temple office so that the delivery takes place before the Friday night service. You may wish to donate your flowers to a local hospital or nursing home after your celebration. Please consider donating living plants to the Gan Hadarot Garden when making your arrangements.

Kippot and tallitot

The traditions of wearing *kippot* and *tallitot*, often worn by both men and women at Beth El, are optional, a personal decision even when chanting Torah. The bar/bat mitzvah family's decision to offer *kippot* embossed with their child's bar/bat mitzvah date and name is also a matter of personal choice.

Gifts for the bar/bat mitzvah

Guests often bring gifts for the bar/bat mitzvah with them to the *simcha*. We suggest that families provide an appropriate container for gifts on a table provided. This will deter them from bringing gifts into the sanctuary on Shabbat and will help ensure that they are not misplaced, forgotten or lost.

Recording and photography

Please note that no sound recording, videography or photography is allowed during the service. However, all are allowed during the kiddush. Taking pictures before the service is not allowed. Taking family photos during the transition time between service and kiddush is an excellent time for family photos on the *bimah*.

Liquor

The host family provides sweet kosher wine and grape juice for your kiddush. Since Beth El is a place of worship and study, the *minhag* at parties is to refrain from serving hard liquor or beer. Please refer to "Rules and Regulations Governing the Rental and Use of Facilities," available in the temple office, for temple rules in serving liquor at your celebration.

Music

For families choosing to celebrate their simchas with a luncheon party at Beth El, we encourage music in keeping with the spirit of Shabbat. Klezmer, folk music and jazz are generally the entertainment at Shabbat parties. A DJ may be hired but may not set up equipment until after the kiddush. There are no musical preferences for celebrations that occur after Shabbat.

Additional questions and answers

Donations and gifts to Beth El staff

The decision to donate money or purchase a gift for a person on the Beth El staff is personal and optional. Donations to Beth El on behalf of a staff member are appropriate. A list of donation funds and their purpose, including the rabbi's and cantor's discretionary funds is available in the office.

Beth El fees

Fees for tutoring and for the use of Beth El facilities are set each year at the congregation's annual meeting. Tutoring fees will automatically appear on your Beth El statement. Tutoring fees for 2014-2015 are \$500 per child. Beth El facilities for receptions must be reserved one year prior to the bar/bat mitzvah. Check with the temple administrator to secure your date and for more information.

Annual Shabbat *oneg* obligation

We are often asked if the family's kiddush serves as their annual Beth El *oneg* obligation. The answer is no. Your family is expected to provide a regular congregational *oneg Shabbat*. Many families enjoy preparing an *oneg* the Friday evening prior to a good friend's or Torah class member's bar/bat mitzvah to support the family and ensure that the *oneg* is festive.

Guides for b'nai mitzvah guests

Although some congregations encourage the family to prepare a guide to the service for family and friends who are not members or not Jewish so they will understand the service, at Beth El that practice is discouraged. We encourage people to participate in the service rather than read about it while it's happening. Booklets require people who might otherwise be listening and participating to read and turn pages. Beth El's services are warm and welcoming, encouraging even people who do not know Hebrew to participate in the *niggunim* (melodies) and read the inspiring English writings in our prayer book. It is a time to be "in the moment"—to reflect, to listen and to enjoy. Some families choose to send information about our services and our practices to friends and relatives, with their invitation.

Other ways to honor your family and friends

There are many opportunities during the course of a bar/bat mitzvah weekend to honor family and friends beyond the traditional *aliyot*. At a family Shabbat dinner before the Friday night service, you may honor family members by requesting that they light candles and lead blessings. If you plan a Saturday evening celebration, you may first include a *Havdallah* service in which family or friends may lead and participate. Another honor is that of the Saturday evening *motzi*. Delivering a tribute to the bar/bat mitzvah during your celebration is a meaningful way to honor a non-Jewish relative. Younger siblings may participate in many of these activities and rituals.