



# B'nai Mitzvah Handbook



## Section Navigation

[Introduction](#)

[Planning and Questions](#)

[Preparations](#)

[The Service and the B'nai Mitzvah Family](#)

[Logistics, Programs, and Event Planning](#)

[Appendix A](#)

[Appendix B](#)

## Contents

The Congregational Community and Your Family Family Commitment	1
Congregation Rodef Shalom Staff	2
Fees Music Shabbat Kiddush Mitzvah Project B'nai Mitzvah Dates and Events to Remember Prior to B'nai Mitzvah (months, weeks) Educational Service Participation Goals Individual Tutoring D'var Torah and Regular Meetings with the Rabbi Honors, Handout, and Spotlight Article Final Run-Through	3
Participation of Non-Jewish Family and Friends Honors Interfaith Families Assigning Aliyot for Shabbat Morning Assigning the honors of lifting and tying the Torah (Hagbah and G'lilah) How to do Hagbah and G'lilah Ark Openings Assigning Torah Readers Honors Form Etiquette During Honors Parent Blessing Tossing Sweets Kippot	7
Shabbat Observance at Rodef Shalom Events Printed Program Photography Kiddush Luncheon Catering Decorations Parties	10
Being Called for an Aliyah	12
Forms for Becoming a Bar, Bat, or B'nai Mitzvah at Rodef Shalom	13

# Introduction

## Welcome!

Mazel tov on reaching this exciting moment! We are overjoyed to welcome your child into Jewish adulthood as they become Bar, Bat, or B'nai Mitzvah. We hope that this is a time of joy and celebration, a moment to reflect on how far your child has come in their Jewish learning, and an opportunity to dream about the next step in their Jewish journey. We are privileged to walk this path with you.

This manual contains the policies, philosophy and specifics related to becoming Bar, Bat, or B'nai Mitzvah at Rodef Shalom. Our hope is that this guide will help all families have a smooth, rich and rewarding experience throughout the process.

Please pay special attention to the [Checklist and Timeline for B'nai Mitzvah](#) on pages 3 and 4, as well as the various forms that are required. All current forms are linked in [Appendix B](#) and are also accessible on [Rodef Shalom's B'nai Mitzvah web page](#).

## The Congregational Community & Your Family

Rodef Shalom is a vibrant, inclusive, Shabbat-oriented community. The B'nai Mitzvah ceremony is one of many celebrations, programs, rites of passage, and life cycle events that take place during the course of the year. Sharing simchas builds our sense of community.

Each B'nai Mitzvah at Rodef Shalom takes place during our regularly scheduled congregational services. The congregation welcomes our B'nai Mitzvah students as they take their place in our congregational family. Together, we share the joy and pride of this significant achievement.

## Family Commitment

B'nai Mitzvah students, in accordance with the Conservative Movement, must either have been born to a Jewish mother or have had a recognized conversion. Please contact [Rabbi Kobrin](#) as soon as possible if there are any questions or issues regarding this requirement.

### Strategies for success:

- Regular attendance at R School on Wednesdays and Saturdays
- Attendance at Shabbat services (in addition to R Shabbat)
- Showing interest, support, and a positive attitude while practicing
- Prioritizing, modifying, or pausing extra-curricular activities

Families must be members in good standing when they choose a date.

The B'nai Mitzvah student must meet attendance requirements to retain their selected date.

**Students with separated or divorced parents:** In Rodef Shalom's desire to best support our B'nai Mitzvah students, our policy is to communicate with both parents, regardless of membership status. Please feel free to consult with our rabbis or the others listed on page 2 for assistance in planning. It can be useful to have copies of study materials at both parents' homes (please contact [Sean Sanford](#) for an extra copy if relevant).

## Planning and Questions

### Congregation Rodef Shalom Staff

#### Rabbi Rachel Kobrin Spiritual Leader

Rabbi Kobrin will work with you to help you choose the best style of service for your family. (i.e. traditional, musical, full Torah reading verses triennial cycle, etc.) She will work one-on-one with your child on their D'var Torah and support your family through the B'nai Mitzvah process.

#### Rabbi Carrie Benveniste Director of Congregational Learning

Rabbi Carrie will help to coordinate your child's date, support their experience in R School and their B'nai Mitzvah cohort, and evaluate your child's progress at specific points throughout the year.

#### Amy Berkowitz Caplan Executive Director

Amy will assist your family with any building rentals (usage outside of Shabbat morning) and additional logistics.

#### Sean Sanford Clergy and Executive Director Assistant

Sean will support your family by coordinating initial meetings with Rabbi Kobrin, gathering information for the B'nai Mitzvah service, and assisting with many of your questions.

We strive to make the B'nai Mitzvah experience wonderfully joyful and meaningful for every family. If you have a special circumstance or need accommodations regarding schedule or financial commitments, please reach out to [Rabbi Carrie](#) or [Rabbi Kobrin](#). We are available to help and support throughout this journey—from today through B'nai Mitzvah and beyond.

## Preparations

### Fees

- There is a \$500 B'nai Mitzvah fee charged following B'nai Mitzvah date confirmation.
- Students in 7th grade also pay a \$300 R School fee.
- Tutoring costs are paid directly by the family and are not part of the B'nai Mitzvah fee.
- Please note that costs for the Kiddush luncheon are not included as part of the B'nai Mitzvah fee.
- If families choose a Music Shabbat, a \$350 deposit is required to reserve David Ross.
- Final fees are due one month prior to the mitzvah date.
- The B'nai Mitzvah fee covers some of the costs involved in preparation, including:
  - Study materials
  - Time with Rabbi Kobrin and Rabbi Carrie
  - Additional staff preparation

### Music Shabbat

Families may choose a Music Shabbat style service. Music Shabbat has become a favorite with families and includes our Music Director, David Ross. David is a prolific musician who works for synagogues throughout the Denver metro area. A \$350 deposit is required to reserve David. If a family reserves David and chooses to not have a musical Shabbat, then they will lose the deposit. If a family continues with Music Shabbat, then we will reimburse the deposit.

### Kiddush

B'nai Mitzvah families pay for the Kiddish luncheon on the day of their Bar/Bat/B'nai Mitzvah. Lymone Caterers is the only vendor who may be used for Shabbat or Holiday Kiddush luncheons. Please contact [Simone of Lymone Caterers](#) to discuss your kiddush luncheon.

The rates posted on the Kiddush Sponsorship page on our website do not reflect the rates we pay each week for Kiddush and are intended to support our fundraising needs. Further, the rates that the synagogue pays are not available to B'nai Mitzvah families. The synagogue typically pays a lower rate for weekly kiddush lunches due to various factors including kitchen usage, rate of utilization, and more.

For families facing financial hardship, please contact [Amy Berkowitz Caplan](#) or [Rabbi Kobrin](#).

### Mitzvah Project

Congregation Rodef Shalom encourages all students to participate in a mitzvah project as part of their B'nai Mitzvah preparations. These projects are intended to provide an opportunity for each student to experience the importance of doing a mitzvah “ben adam l’chavero” – a sacred obligation between one person and another. We encourage students to focus on an area of society that brings them distress; the goal is for our kids to see that they can make a difference. The world is struggling and we know our kids can alleviate a bit of the pain. We hope that their mitzvah project inspires them to continue to do acts of chesed (loving kindness) for many years to come.

## Preparations continued

### B'nai Mitzvah Dates and Events to Remember

#### 5th Grade

- Attend the B'nai Mitzvah Family Orientation (March).
- Date Confirmation and Parsha assignment.
- You will have one year to pay the \$500 B'nai mitzvah fee after confirming your date.

#### 12-15 Months Prior to B'nai Mitzvah

- Family meeting with Rabbi Kobrin
- Join family programming sessions (school year program)
- Schedule and take Student Hebrew Assessment, with Rabbi Carrie to determine tutoring needs
- Begin working with B'nai Mitzvah tutor on Haftarah and Torah
- Please see the list of recommended private tutors (contact [Sean Sanford](#) for most up to date list)

#### Nine Months Prior

- Research and choose Mitzvah Project.

#### Three Months Prior

- Set meetings with [Rabbi Kobrin](#) to explore and develop your D'var Torah
- Communicate with [Rabbi Kobrin](#) about which Torah portions your child, your family, and your friends will be leyning

#### One Month to One Week Prior

- Three weeks before: email [Sean Sanford](#) the Bar/Bat/B'nai Mitzvah child's questionnaire and photo for e-news.
- Complete the aliyot/leyning and honors form at least two weeks prior to your simcha (the form is linked in Appendix B and is also accessible on Rodef Shalom's B'nai Mitzvah web page.)
- Families must keep three aliyot open for the community.
- Schedule rehearsal in sanctuary with [Rabbi Kobrin](#). This session is scheduled Tuesday through Thursday between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. and for approximately 1 1/2 hours. It is important that both parents attend this session. Candid photos or videos may be taken at this session, and your professional photographer can come to take pictures before or after the rehearsal.

#### One Week in Advance

- Submit guest list and final attendance numbers.

### Educational Expectations

- At least two years enrolled in R School or Day School and participation in Shabbat morning programming.

## Preparations continued

### Service Participation Goals

For each service, there is a standard participation level for B'nai Mitzvah students at Rodef Shalom.

These are the sections of the service that a Bar/Bat/B'nai Mitzvah generally leads or chants, and therefore mastery of these sections of the service is the initial goal of B'nai Mitzvah preparation:

- Torah Service
- Maftir Torah reading
- Aliyah blessings
- Haftorah and Blessings
- Ashrei

Additional pieces of the service that some of our students lead include:

- Shacharit
- Mussaf
- Additional Torah readings

If your family has selected a music service, the Bar/Bat/B'nai Mitzvah child can join the davening team for that day.

We will modify expectations, depending on the needs of our students. We want all of our students to feel successful and to be proud of their accomplishments.

We do not allow the B'nai Mitzvah student to lead the entire service. We are a highly participatory community and always have multiple leaders on Shabbat mornings, including the days of B'nai Mitzvah celebrations.

### Individual Tutoring

Before tutoring begins, the family will meet with [Rabbi Carrie](#) to discuss expectations and questions surrounding the B'nai Mitzvah process. At this time, the student will receive their binder with study materials. They will also discuss tutor and sponsor options, if a tutor has not already been selected by the family.

Tutoring generally begins approximately 12 months prior to the B'nai Mitzvah. The amount of individual tutoring required by B'nai Mitzvah students differs.

[Rabbi Carrie](#) maintains a list of suggested tutors and can make suggestions to best meet your child's needs.

Tutoring sessions should last 30 to 60 minutes and take place once a week – and often more than once a week closer to the simcha.

Tutoring costs are paid directly by the family to the tutor.

You can help to reduce the amount of tutoring needed by supervising your child's practice at home and actively following along during Shabbat morning services.

Should families choose a tutor who is not suggested by Rodef Shalom, please contact [Rabbi Carrie](#) before tutoring begins for approval. All the service participation guidelines will still apply and Rodef Shalom clergy will still determine each child's participation in the service.

## Preparations continued

### D'var Torah and Regular Meetings with the Rabbi

Rabbi Kobrin will work with your child on their D'var Torah. Your child will begin regular meetings with [Rabbi Kobrin](#) about 3 months prior to their B'nai Mitzvah.

You will be contacted by Sean Sanford when it is time to schedule these appointments. These meetings may be in person, over Zoom, or by phone, based on mutual availability. We will do our best to accommodate preferred methods of meeting.

### Honors, Handout, and Spotlight Article

To provide us your list of those participating in the service, thank you messages for the handout, and Q&A for the Friday email before the B'nai Mitzvah service, complete and submit your forms within the required timelines prior to your B'nai Mitzvah. All current forms are linked in Appendix B and are also accessible on Rodef Shalom's B'nai Mitzvah web page.

### Final Run-Through

- A final run-through of the B'nai Mitzvah service will be scheduled within a few weeks prior to the service.
- This session is scheduled Tuesday through Thursday between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. and lasts for approximately 1 1/2 hours.
- It is important that both parents attend this session.
- Candid photos or videos may be taken at this session, and if you choose you may have your professional photographer come to take pictures before or after the rehearsal.



## The Service and the B'nai Mitzvah Family

Families who have questions regarding non-Jewish family participation should contact [Rabbi Kobrin](#). It is our goal for all family members to have a meaningful way to be part of your child's B'nai Mitzvah.

All parts of the service not specifically identified as allocated to families are reserved for the general congregation. If you have a special circumstance and would like to honor a family member with leading an additional prayer, please discuss this possibility with [Rabbi Kobrin](#).

### Honors

What is an Aliyah?

An Aliyah is the blessing recited before and after the Torah is read. Our policy states that every individual chanting an Aliyah must be Jewish.

### Interfaith Families

We warmly welcome both parents onto the Bima while their child is reading Torah. Per our policy, we will call the Jewish parent to chant the Aliyah and invite both parents to come up and stand with their child.

### Participation of Non-Jewish Family and Friends

Non-Jewish family and friends may be honored with the reading of the Prayer for our Country or Prayer for Peace.

Grandparents and parents, regardless of faith background, can stand on the Bima during the Jewish parent's and grandparent's aliyah.

### Assigning Aliyot for Shabbat Morning

Consistent with the concept of community, three Aliyot are reserved each Shabbat for members of the general Rodef Shalom community. B'nai Mitzvah families generally choose honorees for the Aliyot as follows:

1. The B'nai Mitzvah child will have the maftir aliyah.
2. The parents of the B'nai Mitzvah child will have the 7th aliyah.
3. You are free to give out three of the remaining aliyot.
4. When assigning Aliyot, a parent generally should not immediately follow their child.
5. The Blessings in Hebrew and in English transliteration are on the Bima. All honorees should practice the blessings and associated rituals to insure a smooth flow of the service.

### Assigning the Honors of Lifting and Tying the Torah (Hagbah and G'lilah)

- These honors follow the Torah readings.
- Those receiving these honors must be Jewish.
- Choose two people for these honors; one for Hagbah and one for G'lilah. See definitions below.
- These honors do not require any knowledge of Hebrew.
- On special Shabbatot (e.g., Rosh Hodesh) more than one Torah may be read from.
- If more than one Torah is read from, additional Hagbah & G'lilah is reserved for the congregation.

## The Service and the B'nai Mitzvah Family *continued*

### How to do Hagbah and G'lilah

The person honored with Hagbah stands behind the podium to lift up the Torah, unrolls it to display the reading, and turns around so the congregants can see the actual writing on the parchment. This person should be capable of lifting a Torah above their head, which can weigh up to 40 pounds and be unevenly distributed. We ask that you give this role to a person who has lifted a Torah previously.

The person honored with G'lilah then ties and dresses the Torah. The Gabbai (person helping with the Torah service) will assist in this process.

### Ark Openings

You may choose people for the ark openings in small groups.

You will not need to provide Hebrew names for these people, and no special skills are required. However, these honorees must be Jewish. If you would like to include non-Jewish family, you may have additional people (beyond the 2) for this honor.

### Assigning Torah Readers

If you would like Torah portions to be read by skilled family members or friends, please contact [Rabbi Kobrin](#) at least three months prior to the service to find out which portions are available. Torah reading is an option for families; it is not mandatory. If you would like to choose all of your Torah readers for the Shabbat of your child's simcha you can; however, please know that we are happy to have members of the community take these roles as well.

Readers need not be members of the synagogue. However, they must be able to read their portions directly from the Torah with proper Hebrew pronunciation and with the use of the traditional Torah trope.

### Honors Form

The Honors Form provides spaces for you to include the names of all of your honorees. This should be submitted no later than two (2) weeks prior to the B'nai Mitzvah, and before the run-through in the sanctuary. The information is used for the service program and by those conducting the service. The form is linked in Appendix B and is also accessible on Rodef Shalom's B'nai Mitzvah web page.

### Etiquette During Honors

- Anyone (regardless of age) who comes onto the Bima for any reason must wear a head covering.
- Head coverings are provided by the congregation for all services in the sanctuary.
- Men who have an Aliyah must wear a tallit; women are strongly encouraged to do so.

## The Service and the B'nai Mitzvah Family *continued*

### Parent Blessing

Parents are invited to bless their child. These blessings are an opportunity to impart hopes, wishes, and dreams to your child on their special day. We ask that your remarks not exceed 5 minutes total—700 words. Your remarks should be submitted to Rabbi Kobrin three weeks ahead of your child's simcha.

### Tossing Sweets

Families are invited to provide kosher sweets for the congregation to toss at the B'nai Mitzvah following their Haftorah reading. Rodef Shalom allows any candies that are kosher and do not contain nuts. Most families prefer Sunkist Fruit Gems (gels). Rabbi Kobrin will \*guard\* the candy baskets and allow your child's siblings/friends/cousins to pass out the candy only during the blessing after the Haftorah. The Congregation will sing Simon Tov u'Mazal Tov and niggunim while/after the candy is thrown and many families like to dance (and even lift their child in a chair) at this time.

## Logistics, Programs, and Event Planning

### Kippot

- Families may purchase special kippot to be worn by guests. Please note that this is optional and based on family preference. We do not recommend any specific vendors.
- Many families order enough kippot for half of the guests that they are anticipating.

**Reminder:** Please bring your sweets and kippot to the synagogue before Friday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. (the day prior to your simcha) and leave them with Sean Sanford, our Clergy Assistant.

### Shabbat Observance at Rodef Shalom Events

In keeping with Shabbat, and in accordance with the practices of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Congregation Rodef Shalom observes the following policies. These policies apply from the time of candle lighting (18 minutes before sundown) on Friday evening until three stars are visible in the sky on Saturday evening –about 54 minutes after sunset.

**In observance of Shabbat, we refrain from the following:**

- Writing, cutting and the handling of money.
- Bringing in/taking out of the synagogue items for your celebration.
- Photography
- Cell phone use inside or outside on synagogue grounds. (Phones must be silenced in the sanctuary. We request that in emergencies, people take their phones down the block.)
- Smoking, vaping, chewing tobacco, nicotine, cannabis, or similar products.
- If a festival or holiday falls on Friday, the synagogue will be closed, and all items must be brought in on the previous day at 2:00 p.m.

### Printed Program

Congregation Rodef Shalom prints a weekly Shabbat program that provides congregants and guests with information about the service. Families will have the opportunity to supply Rodef Shalom with thank you notes to be included in the program.

Should you choose to supply a supplemental handout, you may do so. However, you will be responsible for all printing. All supplements must be approved by [Rabbi Kobrin](#) or [Rabbi Carrie](#) no less than two weeks prior to the B'nai Mitzvah.

### Photography

You may choose to schedule a session with your photographer, on a day other than the final rehearsal, in the sanctuary prior to the B'nai Mitzvah. This session is often scheduled on the Friday immediately prior to the B'nai Mitzvah so that out-of-town relatives may participate, or on the previous Friday. As taking photographs or videos is not permitted on Shabbat during the actual B'nai Mitzvah, please remember that all photos on Friday must be completed by 2:00 p.m.

Please contact [Sean Sanford](#) who will assist you with scheduling.

Photographers must have approval from the rabbis to remove a Torah from the Ark and may not unroll it without assistance. For photographs of Torah reading or other pictures with the Torah unrolled, the rabbis, an approved tutor, or a confident parent must be present.

[Return to Contents Page](#)

## Logistics, Programs, and Event Planning continued

### Kiddush Luncheon

At Congregation Rodef Shalom, a B’nai Mitzvah is an event shared by the entire congregation. Parents or other family members are expected to host a Kiddush luncheon at Rodef Shalom after the Shabbat Morning Service. This Kiddush serves to welcome the B’nai Mitzvah into the Jewish community at large.

We do not differentiate between guests who received a personal invitation from the B’nai Mitzvah families and other members of the congregation, and private luncheons at Rodef Shalom following B’nai Mitzvah are not permitted. Tables should not be reserved specifically for “invited guests”. Reserving tables for elderly or disabled guests and one table for the immediate family is appropriate.

In a similar manner, if the B’nai Mitzvah is held on a morning other than Shabbat and the family hosts a breakfast at Rodef Shalom, it is appropriate to invite all those in attendance.

### Catering

#### Kiddush Luncheon

For the Kiddush Luncheon you must use our in-house caterer, Lymone Caterers. Please contact [Simone of Lymone Caterers](#) to discuss your kiddush luncheon.

#### Friday Night Dinner/Saturday evening celebrations

- Families may choose to host Friday night Shabbat dinner or parties after Shabbat at Rodef Shalom for an additional rental fee.
- You must use [Lymone Caters](#) for Friday night dinners at Rodef Shalom.
- Please contact [Amy Berkowitz Caplan](#) at least three months prior to your event to discuss space availability and additional logistical details.

### Decorations

Decorations and centerpieces can be set up by the family or party planner on the Friday afternoon preceding the event and must be completed by 2:00 p.m. Should there be a conflict on Friday afternoon with another synagogue event, alternative arrangements will be made in advance.

### Parties

In the spirit of fostering a sense of community and acceptance of all children:

- Please invite everyone in your child’s B’nai Mitzvah class to the service and lunch.
- If you are having an additional celebration, such as a Saturday night party, the entire B’nai Mitzvah class (Rodef Shalom students) should be invited.
- Please encourage your child to support all of the other students in their class by attending the services and celebrations for each B’nai Mitzvah.

**Note:** Immediately before addressing invitations, request an updated list of your child’s B’nai Mitzvah class from [Cate Sawyer](#).

## Appendix A

### Being Called for an Aliyah

If you are honored with an Aliyah at Rodef Shalom, the following procedure will be followed:

- You will be called up by your Hebrew name by the Gabbai (person helping the with the Torah service), who will also say your name in English.
- Men must wear a tallit and a kippah. Women must wear a head covering; wearing a tallit is strongly encouraged. Note: tallitot can be found outside the sanctuary door. Kippot and head coverings are in the lobby.
- You will be called to the Aliyah after the person before you have made their concluding blessing. We ask that you sit on the bench behind the Torah reading for the Aliyah prior to yours. When called by the Gabbai, go to the amud/podium and stand to the Torah reader's right.
- At the podium, the reader will point out the place in the Torah where they will begin reading. You should take the end of your tallit and touch that place in the Torah with it, then kiss the tallit. A woman not wearing a tallit touches the place in the Torah with the sash used to tie the Torah, then kisses it.
- You should then grasp onto the wooden handles of the Torah with your hands.
- You will find the blessings on the sheet called Torah Blessings written in the Hebrew and in English transliteration, on a laminated sheet next to the Torah. You will recite these blessings.
- If you are called to the Torah with one other person, both of you should follow the above procedure.
- If you are called with more than one person, only those called by their Hebrew names will kiss the Torah.
- At the end of the Aliyah, you will touch your tallit to the final word of the Torah reading, kiss it, close the scroll, and while holding the handles, you will say the blessing after the Torah reading.

## Appendix B

### Required Forms for Becoming Bar, Bat, or B'nai Mitzvah. at Rodef Shalom

Complete and submit the following online form at least 2 weeks prior to your simcha:

[B'nai Mitzvah Honors and Aliyot](#)

Complete and submit the following online form at least 3 weeks prior to your simcha:

[Thank You From The B'nai Mitzvah Family](#)

Request the following form to complete and submit at least 3 weeks prior to your simcha:

[Mitzvah Child Questionnaire Form](#) (please include photo with questionnaire)

Email Sean your guest list and final attendance numbers 1 week prior to your simcha:

[Sean Sanford](#)

The B'nai Mitzvah Handbook and required forms are also accessible on Rodef Shalom's B'nai Mitzvah web page.

*Many Voices, One Community*



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