



Becoming a B-Mitzvah at Congregation Rodfei Zedek

November 2020

Mazal Tov! We look forward to celebrating this special milestone with you and your family. At Congregation Rodfei Zedek, every B-Mitzvah is unique and attaining this milestone is a cause for joy for our community. We are here to support and assist you in every way, so that this celebration is a meaningful acknowledgment of your pride in being Jewish and your ongoing commitment to the Jewish people.

Becoming a B-Mitzvah means more than the events of one day. It is a gateway to a lifetime of learning, growth, and connection with Jewish life, past, present, and future. This booklet is intended to help you prepare for and celebrate this special time with confidence and joy.

Rabbi David Minkus and Cantor Rachel Rosenberg

Valuing our Diversity

As we value the unique diversity of our community including our younger members, we know that “one size does not fit all” when it comes to becoming a “B-Mitzvah” – a gender-neutral term we have chosen to refer to this important milestone. As “One Community, Many Voices,” we at CRZ are committed to working with each family to craft an experience that is most meaningful and appropriate and look forward to exploring the possibilities with you.

In the recent past, one Bat Mitzvah chose to paint and display a painting to depict her Torah portion. Another Bar Mitzvah chose an interactive D’var Torah (literally “words of Torah” - this is the speech that is common to many Shabbat celebrations) format to encourage broader participation in the Torah study. There are many more possibilities that we have yet to see. We value both tradition and innovation and there is room to explore avenues across the spectrum as we work together to create meaning at this important time.

Attending the Orientation Meeting

An orientation meeting for B’nai Mitzvah (gender neutral plural of bar/bat mitzvah) and their parents is held in the fall for families with a B-Mitzvah planned for the next 12-24 months. Families have the opportunity to ask questions as they approach this important life cycle event and explore the various ways to mark the occasion that best meets their needs as a family and as part of the broader community.

Selecting a Date

As the central element of becoming a B-Mitzvah is being called up to the Torah (“*aliyah laTorah*”) to chant the Torah blessings, any service when the Torah is read can be a time for celebrating this milestone. Most families choose to have the B-Mitzvah on Shabbat morning, either at the **Masorti** service when the full Torah portion is read, or at a **Na’aseh V’Nishma** service which uses musical instruments and where a significant, yet shorter Torah reading is included. The broader community’s presence at the service adds to the joy of the special milestone as it is a celebration for all of us.

Occasionally, a different time of the week when the Torah is read is chosen for the service, such as a Shabbat afternoon, Monday or Thursday morning, Festivals, or Rosh Chodesh - the beginning of a new Hebrew month. Your family may wish to consider a B-Mitzvah trip to Israel; families who travel to Israel often select a different Shabbat for being called to the Torah at Rodfei Zedek so that the *simcha* (joyous occasion) can be additionally celebrated with our community.

To select the particular date and accompanying Torah portion, parents and the future B-Mitzvah meet together with the Rabbi and Cantor approximately two years in advance of the child’s 13th birthday.

Preparing for the Service where the B-Mitzvah is Called to the Torah

In the year approaching the B-Mitzvah, families are encouraged to attend several Friday night and Shabbat morning services to become familiar with the elements of the service, and so that they are better prepared to feel comfortable at -- and derive meaning from -- the various aspects of the B-Mitzvah celebration. It is wonderful when families attend each other's B-mitzvah services, with or without a formal invitation, so that we can support and learn from one another as we celebrate together.

To prepare the specific Torah and Haftarah portions and associated prayers, students work with the Cantor or with a private tutor for approximately one year ahead of time. About three months in advance of the service, students meet with the Rabbi several times to study the Torah portion and to prepare for writing the D'var Torah, the speech shared at the service. The D'var Torah enables the B-Mitzvah to express insights into the Torah portion and into the meaning of becoming a full member of the Jewish community. A week or two prior to the service, a rehearsal in the Sanctuary is held to enable the B-Mitzvah to chant from the actual Torah scroll and practice delivering the D'var Torah from the bimah.

There are a variety of ways a B-Mitzvah can participate during the service itself. Individual participation can vary and can include the following elements:

- Chanting the Torah blessings (called to the Torah for an "Aliyah")
- Chanting one or more sections / aliyot of the Torah portion in Hebrew
- Chanting the Haftarah portion – a selection from the Prophets, in Hebrew and/or English
- Chanting the blessings before and after the Haftarah
- Delivering a D'var Torah, a speech about gleanings from the Torah portion and reflections about becoming a B-Mitzvah
- Leading the Torah service on Shabbat morning
- Leading Kiddush on Friday night

Gatherings with the B'nai Mitzvah Cohort

During the year leading up to the B-Mitzvah, there are monthly gatherings with the Rabbi and Cantor and other 6th/7th graders from the community, sometimes with, and other times without their families. These gatherings often include exploring the meaning of becoming a B-Mitzvah, joining together for a Shabbat dinner, making home-made (shul-made) ice cream, learning about tallit and tefillin, giving back to the community, and more. These events help our diverse community of young adults come together at this important milestone in their lives, a milestone that we hope will be meaningful as it yields a lasting impact.

The B-Mitzvah Weekend

With the start of Shabbat at sundown on Friday, some families choose to attend the Friday evening service with their guests, followed by a Shabbat dinner at the synagogue or home. During the service, the B-Mitzvah has the opportunity to lead the Kiddush, the prayer over the wine.

The **Masorti** service on Shabbat morning begins at 9:30 a.m.; this service includes the reading of the entire Torah reading. The **Na’aseh V’Nishma** service uses musical instruments and includes a relatively shorter Torah reading; it begins at 10:00 a.m. when a B-Mitzvah is celebrated. At both styles of services, family and friends have the opportunity to participate in honors such as opening the Ark, leading readings in English or Hebrew, chanting from the Torah, or being called to the Torah for an aliyah. There are honors available for both Jewish and non-Jewish family and friends. The Rabbi and Cantor work with families to coordinate these honors for the service. Some honors are available to the broader community as there may be someone celebrating a special birthday or anniversary, or another observing a *yahrzeit* – the anniversary of the passing of a loved one.

Family members and friends with honors should make a special effort to arrive on time and identify themselves to the “gabbai” – the person facilitating the honors on that particular day. The gabbai will communicate any special instructions as well as the timing for going up to the bimah for the honor. It is helpful to designate someone who knows the honorees to help the gabbai identify those receiving an honor.

Program Booklets

Some families prepare a printed program to help guests feel more comfortable and engaged at the synagogue and during the service. Contents usually include a brief explanation of the symbols in the Sanctuary and a description of various roles of those participating during the service. If you’d like to provide such a program, please provide a draft to the Rabbi and Cantor at least four weeks in advance to review and finalize the wording. Please ensure that copies of the program booklets are delivered to Rodfei Zedek before Shabbat.

Celebrate with Community

Shabbat morning services are followed by a celebratory Kiddush lunch at Rodfei Zedek, as this is an essential component to our celebration of Shabbat. Coming together for Kiddush lunch strengthens community, allowing us to enjoy the company of both old and new friends and encouraging thoughtful, lively conversation. We are grateful for the generosity of those who sponsor a Kiddush lunch through our “Adopt-a-Shabbat” program. As a new B-Mitzvah is welcomed by -- and is a celebration for -- the Rodfei Zedek community, we are grateful to our B-Mitzvah families for sponsoring the Kiddush lunch for the entire community through the “Adopt-a-Shabbat” program.

Please contact the Executive Director to share your vision for this part of your day. She will provide information about caterers and will share other details about planning for a wonderful Kiddush lunch. Celebrations within the synagogue are planned in observance of both Shabbat and Kashrut. Our primary contact for Kiddush lunch is Joyce Feuer, who can also help with other aspects of the celebration such as invitations. Some families choose to provide flowers for the bimah or Atrium. The office can recommend florists as needed.

“G’milut Chasadim” – Acts of Loving Kindness

As part of the preparation process, the B-Mitzvah often finds it meaningful to choose a special activity or project that gives back to the broader community in which to engage throughout the year and beyond. This helps to teach the important Jewish value of *tzedakah* and conveys to each student the importance of integrating *tzedakah* and acts of loving kindness into their lives.

There are many options for suitable projects based on the preferences of each B-Mitzvah, and families are encouraged to explore the options. One example is the “Chain-of-Memory” project through the Illinois Holocaust Museum which pairs a B-Mitzvah with a child of the Shoah (Holocaust) who did not survive; this connection is one that can be most meaningful and powerful at this special time.

In addition, we are beginning a special project to develop and stock a food pantry at Rodfei Zedek. This is a project we hope the B-Mitzvah cohort as a group will help to plan and lead for the benefit of the broader community.

Gifts

Rodfei Zedek is pleased to present special gifts to our B’nai Mitzvah. These usually include: an Etz Hayim Chumash (Five Books of Moses) and a Kiddush cup from Rodfei Zedek’s Sisterhood. Many families buy their child their own tallit or prayer shawl that will be worn for the first time at the service.

The Sisterhood gift shop can help you choose a variety of ritual objects and other appropriate gifts from their stock and from a variety of Jewish catalogues. Please reach out to Carol Gittler, carolearth@gmail.com, for help with selecting a kippah, tallit, yad, or other ritual items as desired.

Candy

A common custom at Rodfei Zedek and throughout the Jewish world is to throw candy at the bar/bat mitzvah during the service, to increase the “sweetness” of the moment. CRZ will provide candy for this tradition.

Costs

There are a number of fees to be aware of when planning for a B-Mitzvah:

- There is a \$600 B-Mitzvah registration fee for members of the congregation. The fee for non-members who are affiliated with Akiba-Schechter or the Jewish Enrichment Center is \$1200. The fee for non-members is \$2,500. This fee is paid at the time the date is reserved.
- There is a separate cost for individual tutoring for learn to chant the Torah and Haftarah portions and associated prayers and blessings. Those preparing for their B-Mitzvah should plan on approximately 25-40 lessons spanning the year leading up to the B-Mitzvah. Fees for tutoring can range from \$50 to \$110 per lesson, depending on the tutor. Cantor Rosenberg works with most of our B-Mitzvah students and some students work with outside tutors. Please contact Cantor Rosenberg directly for availability and referrals (cantor@rodfei.org).
- Sponsorship of the Kiddush lunch for the community through the Adopt-a-Shabbat program; costs vary depending on the number of guests and the selections for the lunch.
- Rental fee for spaces in the building for private parties and dinners, and associated costs.

Please be in touch with the Executive Director once your date is confirmed, to discuss your specific needs as you plan for this joyous occasion.

Suggested Timeline

Two years in advance:	Attend the fall orientation meeting Schedule a meeting with the Rabbi and Cantor to choose a date Pay the registration fee to reserve the date
One year in advance:	Arrange for weekly studies with the Cantor or an approved tutor Contact the Executive Director to discuss the non-ritual aspects such as the Kiddush lunch and building space requests
Three months in advance:	Coordinate Torah reading assignments with the Cantor Schedule a meeting for the B-Mitzvah to meet with the Rabbi to learn about the Torah portion and to begin to write the <i>D'var Torah</i> (<i>speech given by the B-Mitzvah during the service</i>)
Two months in advance:	Schedule the rehearsal in the Sanctuary with the Cantor Schedule a separate time for pictures if desired, with the Executive Director Coordinate final details for the Kiddush lunch and other logistics with the office
One month in advance:	Finalize the <i>D'var Torah</i> with the Rabbi Finalize the honors with the Cantor
One week in advance:	Attend the “run-thru” from the bimah with the family and Cantor
Day of B-Mitzvah:	Relax and enjoy every moment!

MAZAL TOV!

