

III. Ritual Customs at Beth El

Beth El follows the general customs and rituals of the Conservative movement. Within those very broad parameters, Beth El has developed our own minhagim (customs) as well. Please be a regular part of our service and ask the Rabbi if you have any questions about the way the service proceeds at Beth El.

How can we get ready for the big day?

The best way to prepare for the various rituals and to be comfortable with the service is to simply be present on Friday evening and Shabbat morning. B'nei Mitzvah families are expected to attend Shabbat services regularly before the date of the simcha. This will give you time to understand the flow of services, as well as the ways in which simcha families and other congregants participate. Don't wait until three months before your simcha date to become familiar with the service.

On regular Shabbatot, all B'nei Mitzvah students lead the Torah service with their peers. This is excellent practice for leading the community and encourages students to master the material.

As an aid to the Bar or Bat Mitzvah and his or her family, the Rabbi will meet with the family in the sanctuary up to 1 week before the event to run through the service and ceremonial aspects.

When do we meet with the Rabbi?

You will have several opportunities to meet with the Rabbi in anticipation of your simcha. This will include group meetings, especially the Family B'nei Mitzvah Seminars. You and your child will also meet with the Rabbi about four to six weeks prior to the event. At that meeting, you will have the opportunity to discuss the religious significance of the moment as it pertains to you and your family, any concerns you might have, and focus upon the D'var Torah. If you have concerns before that meeting, please contact the office to make an appointment to meet with the Rabbi.

Where's the mitzvah in B'nei Mitzvah?

We expect that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child will look beyond the service and the party to truly begin to assume Jewish adult obligations. As will be addressed in the B'nei Mitzvah seminars, each Bar or Bat Mitzvah is encouraged to initiate a mitzvah project. There is always a need in our community and throughout the metropolitan area and in Israel for helping others. Working with the Rabbi, you will be able to find the appropriate avenue for your family.

In what ways will our family participate in the service?

The simcha family is expected to be seated by the time services start at 9:30am. For information on the order of the service, please see Appendix B.

Your family also is encouraged to participate in the service through the assignment of special honors, which are described in Part IV.

How do we continue to celebrate and grow after my child becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah?

While the Bar or Bat Mitzvah may be focused on one day, it serves as the gateway to a lifetime of adult Jewish experiences. As a community, we value very highly the continued participation of our B'nei Mitzvah in all aspects of synagogue life. In particular, Congregation Beth El has a long-standing and beautiful custom of inviting the most recent Bar or Bat Mitzvah to the Torah for an aliyah at the next Bar or Bat Mitzvah service. We also hope your child will continue to read from the Torah and lead parts of the service throughout the high school years. If he or she completes 13 Torah readings between the Bar or Bat Mitzvah and High School graduation, they will earn a Keter Torah award, including their own Tikkun (book used to prepare to read from the Torah).

What presentation is made to my child?

Toward the conclusion of the service, an officer from the Board of Trustees will welcome the child to the bimah and will mention several gifts given to your child. This includes travel-sized Etz Hayim chumash and a Kiddush cup.

What if there's a baby naming or aufruf that day?

Shabbat morning services are the occasion for Jews to observe various personal events as part of the Jewish community. Although Beth El schedules only one Bar or Bat Mitzvah on a given Shabbat, other s'machot (simchas) may occasionally occur on the same date as your Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Because B'nei Mitzvah dates are assigned years in advance, the synagogue office does not know then what else may fall on your scheduled date. These s'machot add to the joy of the occasion for your family and the entire congregation.

Examples of other s'machot include baby namings and aufrufs (the calling of a bride and groom for an aliyah before the wedding). Aufrufs generally include candy tossing; baby namings include a short welcoming ceremony after the service before the kiddush; both include a mi sheberach at the Torah and a few words spoken by a Rabbi as well as the singing of *Siman Tov u'mazal Tov*. For information about how this affects the Kiddush, see the section in Part V on Sponsoring a Kiddush.

What should I tell my guests about our Shabbat observance?

It is important to maintain the atmosphere of Shabbat both in the synagogue **and** on the grounds. We encourage you to share these guidelines regarding Shabbat observance with your guests who may be unfamiliar with our customs. **Electronic devices, including cell phones, may not be used on the synagogue grounds on Shabbat.** Physicians on call who need to take emergency calls should set their cell phones to a silent/vibrate function, and take or make calls outside the sanctuary. Drawing and

writing are not permitted on Shabbat and smoking is not permitted anywhere on the synagogue grounds. More detailed information is provided in Appendix D, Sample Guidance for Guests.

Is there a dress code?

Men must wear a head covering (kippah) during services and women are welcome and encouraged to do so. Jewish adult males (over the age of 13) also wear a tallit and Jewish adult women are welcome and encouraged to do so.

Women must wear a head covering when participating in the service as a Sh'lichat Tzibur (prayer leader), reading Torah, or receiving an aliyah, opening or closing the Ark, and lifting or binding the Torah. Women leading a reading (eg: Prayer for the Country) are welcome to wear a head covering. Women are encouraged to wear a tallit during services.

Appropriate, modest dress by adults, teens, and all others is expected. Men should at least wear a collared shirt and slacks or khakis. Tank tops or sleeveless clothing are inappropriate, as are low cut clothing. Mini-skirts are unacceptable, as well. Please share these guidelines with your guests, so they will not be in the uncomfortable position of being inappropriately attired.

What if some of my guests have special needs?

The entrance to the synagogue through the ramp on the side of the building is wheelchair accessible. Please contact the office if your guests have other needs.

The ushers can provide large print siddurim to people with vision difficulties.

Do our guests have to sit still for the whole service?

Some of your guests may find Saturday morning services challenging, both due to the length of the services and the extensive use of Hebrew. It is a good idea to let guests know in advance the length of the service and the decorum involved. A sample letter with helpful explanations is attached at the end of this section.

If you expect many out-of-town guests who have not seen each other for a long time, we encourage you to arrange a reunion, such as a Friday night dinner, before the day of the simcha. It is very exciting for family and friends to get together for a happy occasion, and it is often hard to restrain enthusiastic greetings which may be disruptive to others.

It is acceptable to go in and out of the sanctuary during the service, except during a few parts of the service, when the ushers will keep the doors closed. These include:

- when the Ark is open
- during the *Mourner's Kaddish*
- during a D'var Torah (by the Bar or Bat Mitzvah or by anyone else) and other presentations
- during the *Shema* and the three following paragraphs (pages 100-101)

- during the first two pages of the reader's chanting of the *Amidah* (page 115 in *Shacharit*, page 156 in *Musaf*)

During the Haftarah, people may enter the sanctuary but are asked to remain standing quietly near the door until the completion of the chanting of the Haftarah.

What about young children?

Guests wishing to keep small children in the Sanctuary should be asked to bring Shabbat-appropriate toys or books (that do not make noise and do not involve writing or coloring). They are also welcome to read books from the children's book shelf in the back of the sanctuary. They should also be informed that no food may be brought into the sanctuary. Parents are welcome to take them into the lobby during the service, or to accompany them to the Garden Room which is equipped with toys. If Youth Services are taking place, they are welcome to bring their children. We discourage allowing them to run unescorted; or to use the social hall, or any other area where food is being prepared or served.