



## INFORMATION FOR GUESTS

### Helping Our Guests Understand and Share in the Service

***(Please feel free to share this information with invited guests: [www.betham.org/BigDayGuestInfo](http://www.betham.org/BigDayGuestInfo))***

We are delighted that you will be with us to share our joy on this special day.

We appreciate that the service at Congregation Beth Am may be unfamiliar to you, and have provided the information below to help add to your understanding and enjoyment.

The Congregation Beth Am, which means “House of the People” in Hebrew, was designed to resemble the tent of the patriarch Abraham, which was open on all sides so as to welcome strangers and guests. Our sanctuary is surrounded by glass to convey this same sense of inclusion and openness. Services are led from the *Bimah* (pulpit) at the front of the sanctuary. On the eastern wall of the *Bimah* (facing Jerusalem) is the Holy Ark, which contains the Torah.

Above the Ark is a small light, called the Ner Tamid (Eternal Light), which reminds us of God’s constant presence in our midst.

#### *The Torah*

The Torah is the sacred scroll, hand-inscribed in Hebrew, with the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Our Ark contains several scrolls, each with the same text. It is considered a mitzvah (commandment) to have more than one Torah scroll. Whenever the Ark is opened or the Torah is lifted, the congregation rises to show respect for our holy teachings. It is a special honor to be invited to open and close the Ark during the service.

#### *Dress and Decorum*

You may notice that some people in the congregation have their heads covered with a *kippah* (Hebrew for skullcap; also called a *Yarmulke* in Yiddish). Wearing a *kippah* is not required. It is a sign of reverence, indicating our awareness that there is One who is above us. Some adult Jewish worshippers also wear a *tallit* (prayer shawl). The fringes (*tzitzit*) of the prayer shawl remind us of the mitzvot (commandments) in the Torah.

Some of you have asked about the dress code. Dress as you would for any special occasion, and be mindful of the holiness of the place — boys should wear a jacket or a nice sweater, no T-shirts or jeans please, and girls should wear skirts, dresses or a nice pantsuit (no very short skirts or bare shoulders).

Please be aware, as well, that loud talking, giggling and gum chewing are inappropriate in our sanctuary. **We ask that you turn off all cell phones so as not to disturb the service.**

### *The Service*

Our Shabbat worship service is a joyous and peaceful celebration of the seventh day. Jewish worship in a Reform synagogue is expressed through songs and prayers, some ancient and some contemporary, in both Hebrew and English.

Our Siddurim (prayerbooks) are found in the pews inside the sanctuary. It opens from right to left, as Hebrew is written. Our Siddur explains the reasons and history behind many of the prayers. It also prompts you, explaining when to sit, stand, etc.

The service is highly participatory — the congregation is meant to be actively involved rather than silent spectators. Be sure to use the prayerbook, and to join in as much as you can.

If you arrive a few moments early, take a moment to look through the Siddur to acquaint yourself with the service. Many of the prayers and songs appear in Hebrew, English and transliteration (the English phonetic version of the Hebrew). So even if you do not know Hebrew, you can say the Hebrew words by sounding out the transliteration.

**About Children** - The service will last about two hours. The service may be a bit long for youngsters. Folks with children usually sit at the back or sides of the Sanctuary, so they can get outside easily if they wish. Feel free to take your child out to the playground or elsewhere in the building if he or she becomes restless. There are also quiet activity bags located at the back of the Sanctuary to help occupy children.

### *Structure of the Service*

A Jewish worship service is a collection or set of prayers grouped into major sections. These headings are indicated in the prayerbook.

It's the Sabbath - the day of rest and refreshment of the soul. Our service opens with song, followed by some study, psalms of praise and blessings that remind us of the miracles of daily life.

**Friday Night** - Our Friday night service begins with the lighting of the Shabbat candles. The families of our B'nei Mitzvah have the honor of lighting the Shabbat candles. The Friday night kiddush will be chanted by the B'nei Mitzvah.

**The Call to Worship** - The service officially begins with the chanting of Bar'chu ("Let us Praise"). It is a "call and response" prayer. The Cantor or Cantorial Soloist invites the congregation to praise God, and the congregation responds, while bowing, then stands straight. This gesture is an expression of humility in the presence of God. The Translated Prayer: "Praised be the Holy One, the Infinite, now and forever!"

**The Sh'ma and its Blessings** - The Call to Worship is followed by a blessing that acknowledges God as creator of the universe (Yotzeir Or, "The One Who Creates Light" in the morning service, or Ma'ariv

Aravim, "The One Who Brings On The Evening" in the evening service), and a second blessing that thanks God for showing love to the Jewish people through the gift of Torah (Ahavah Rabbah, "With Great Love" in the morning service, or Ahavat Olam, "Eternal Love" in the evening service). These blessings lead into the Sh'ma, the central affirmation of Jewish faith, taken from our Torah - Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

The words of the Sh'ma are the last words that an observant Jew says at night, and the last words spoken before dying. It states the Jewish belief that God is singular and unique, and proclaims our duty to love, study and teach God's word. Translation: "Hear, O Israel, the Eternal is our God; the Eternal is One." You may notice that some people close or cover their eyes while reciting the Sh'ma. This custom helps us shut out external distractions and focus on the meaning of the words.

Following the Sh'ma is the Ge'ulah (Redemption) prayer, which recalls the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and thanks God for helping us survive other dark times in our personal and national life.

**The Amidah** - The Standing Prayer is said standing, facing east, towards Jerusalem.

It is a central section of our liturgy, evoking what the Jewish people need: to be linked to our ancestors; to believe that there is a reality which transcends the grave; to feel part of God's holiness; to open our heart with sincerity to God; to give thanks; to find fulfillment, peace and shalom (wholeness).

The Amidah consists of seven blessings on the Sabbath (on the weekdays there are 19 blessings). We recite the first few blessings together, then continue individually in silence. This is a period for personal prayer or meditation. If you wish, you may follow the traditional liturgy, or read the English prayers, poems and meditations in the Siddur, or take time for your own thoughts and prayers. When you finish, you may be seated.

**The Torah Service** — The centerpiece of the Shabbat morning service is the reading of Torah and a text from the Prophets (the Haftarah). The Torah, containing the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, is a link with Jewish history and with Jews throughout the world, who will read the same Torah portion on this day. Standing before the Ark, the parents of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah offer their child some personal words of blessing, before passing the Torah through the generations and placing it in their child's arms. Opening the Ark during the Torah service is considered to be a great honor. This honor is often given to friends or family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

It is customary to carry the Torah scroll through the synagogue for everyone to see and touch. This Hakafah (circling) recalls the Israelites' journey through the wilderness; it also demonstrates that the Torah belongs to all of us, not just those who stand on the *bimah*. The congregation sings as the Torah is carried through our midst. At this time, many people touch the Torah with the fringes of their prayer shawl or the corner of their prayer book, and then kiss the fringes or the book. This shows our love for our ancient and holy teaching. We honor the Torah by never turning our back on it, so it is proper to turn around and follow the journey of the Torah, watching as it is carried through the congregation.

The young people who are celebrating Bar or Bat Mitzvah (the age of religious responsibility) will be called for the first time for an aliyah (the honor of reciting the blessing before and after the Torah reading), and will read from the Torah. Reading Torah is not easy, Hebrew is difficult: It reads from

right to left and there are no vowels or punctuation in the Torah scroll. Torah readers must also learn a special chant (trop) for the public reading of Torah.

Before the Torah chanting, one of the B'nei Mitzvah will deliver a D'var Torah—a commentary on the weekly Torah portion, which teaches about some element of Jewish history, values or practice, and applies the lesson to our lives today. This ability to study and teach Torah or Haftarah is a mark of maturity, and is an honor accorded those who have attained the age of religious responsibility in the Jewish community.

The weekly Torah portion is divided into sections, each preceded and followed by a blessing. Friends and family, as well as members of our congregation, are honored by being invited to recite these blessings. The congregation follows along with the reading, in Hebrew and/or English, in the *Chumash* (from the Hebrew word for “five”), a book containing the Hebrew text of the five books of the Torah, Haftarah, Commentary and an English translation.

Once the Torah reading is complete, the Torah is lifted into the air (hagbahah) and dressed (g'lilah). Lifting and dressing the Torah are considered to be great honors. These honors are often performed by friends and family of the B'nei Mitzvah.

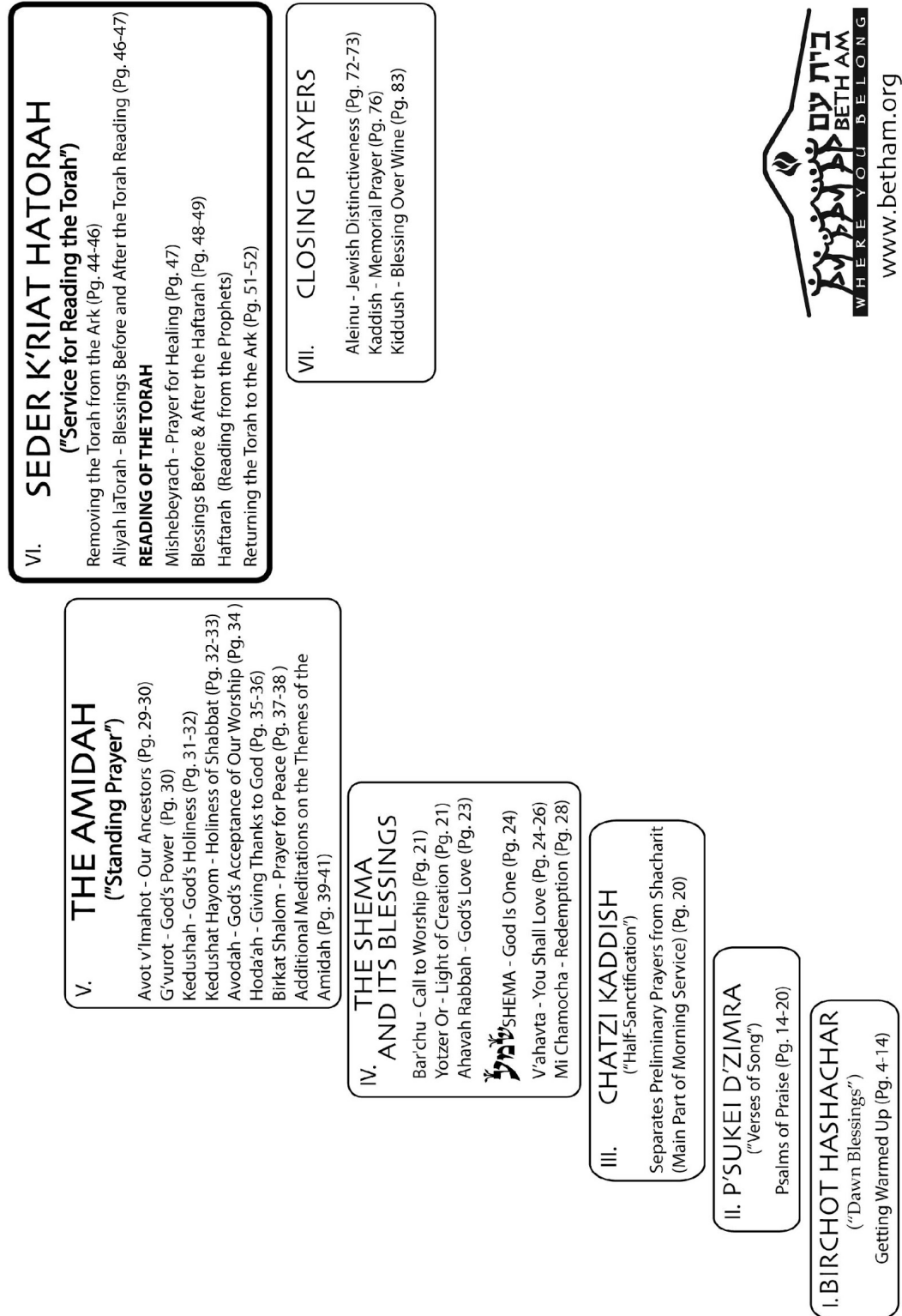
The Haftarah (reading from the Prophets) is usually linked thematically to the Torah portion for the week. A D'var Haftarah—a commentary on the Haftarah—will be given by one of the B'nei Mitzvah. Following this introduction to the portion, the Haftarah will be chanted, along with the blessings that precede and follow the reading. The congregation follows along in the Chumash.

At the conclusion of the Haftarah chanting, the Torah will be returned to the Ark, and the Rabbi and Cantor or Cantorial Soloist will invoke God's blessing upon those becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah before the Holy Ark.

**Concluding Prayers**—Concluding prayers begin with the Aleinu, which acknowledges that God has given the Jewish people a unique destiny: to strive for the repair and healing of our broken world (*tikkun olam*). After the Aleinu, we recite the Mourners' Kaddish, to honor the memory of those who have died. The Kaddish does not mention death, but praises God and acknowledges the precious gift of life.

# **SHABBAT SERVICE SATURDAY MORNING** SHACHARIT (the morning prayer service) is divided into seven major sections which "ascend" to the Torah Reading Service, the high point of the service, and then "descend" through the closing prayers.

For those who respond better to visual descriptions, see the following flowchart of the service:



### ***Kiddush and haMotzi***

Following the service, there will be some special presentations to the B'nei Mitzvah. We also join together in Kiddush, the blessing over wine (a symbol of joy in Judaism), and haMotzi, the blessing which thanks God for bringing forth bread from the earth.

### ***REMINDER***

**Beth Am's Photography Policy on Shabbat** — A brief outline of the photography policy of our synagogue is posted above the entrance to the main sanctuary. The full policy states: Please refrain from flash photography during our Shabbat and festival worship services. Flash-free photography is permitted from OUTSIDE the sacred space of our sanctuary — whether the main sanctuary, outdoor sanctuary, or the Beit Kehillah. Please set up all cameras, tripods, and video cameras just outside the sanctuary entrance and **do not block the center aisle**. This will enhance the worship experience for all in attendance.

Once again, we are delighted that you will be sharing this special day with us! We truly appreciate your show of support, respect and love. Please contact us at (650) 493-4661 if you have any questions or concerns.

# What Non-Jews Need to Know

*This material is adapted from Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah by Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin, published by Jewish Lights Publishing, P.O. Box 237, Sunset Farm Offices, Rte. 4, Woodstock, VT 05091. The publisher grants permission to you to copy this for distribution to your guests.*

Jews and Christians look at many things differently. We have a different theology, a different liturgy, a different holiday cycle, and a different life cycle.

But Jews and Christians share certain things, and that sharing is no less profound than the differences. As philosopher Martin Buber once said, "Jews and Christians share a Book and a hope" — a Messianic hope. Jews and Christians "share" the first five books of the Bible. We both believe in a God that can be approached through prayer and worship. We believe in a God who loves and who is revealed through Scripture and holy interventions in history.

Jews and Christians also share a belief in the power of ritual. Rituals make a group distinctive and transmit identity from generation to generation. They dramatize a religious group's beliefs about the world and about how God interacts with it.

Bar and Bat Mitzvah means that a thirteen-year-old Jewish child is old enough to perform mitzvot (the commandments of Jewish life). It is one of the most venerable and most potent of Jewish symbols and rituals. When a Jewish child becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah, he or she publicly reads a section from the Torah, the Five Books of Moses. Each week, every congregation in the Jewish world reads the identical passage. In this way, the youth is linked to the entire Jewish people, regardless of where the thirteen-year-old happens to live. The youth also reads a Haftarah, which is a selection of the weekly section of the prophetic writings—from Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, etc., or from historical books like Judges, Samuel or Kings.

## *There is More to the Service than Meets the Ear*

The Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony occurs during the Sabbath worship service. The first part of the service ends with the congregation singing Mi Chamocha ("Who is like You among the gods that are worshipped?"). It echoes the song that Moses and the Israelites sang at the shores of the Red Sea when the Israelites had been saved from the Egyptians. The second part of the service ends with a prayer for peace for the Jewish people and for the whole world. During the third section of the service, the Torah is read. The Haftarah, by tradition, must end on a note of nechemta (comfort). This portion of the service ends with the implicit hope that all humanity will embrace God's words.

The entire service concludes with two prayers: Aleinu, a triumphant plea that the world will ultimately recognize that there is only one God, and Kaddish, a plaintive mourner's prayer which proclaims that God's Kingdom, the fulfillment of God's hopes for the world, will come someday. Kaddish's form and function are closely related to the Lord's Prayer.

The ultimate message of the service is the triumph of hope: Hope for freedom, hope for peace, hope that all our words will end on joyful notes, hope for universal redemption.

### *There is More to the Torah Scroll than Meets the Eye*

The Torah symbolizes the moment when God met the Jewish people at Sinai and made a covenant with them. It reminds us of God's revelation and of God's intervention in human history.

The Torah also symbolizes all that the Jewish people hold sacred: stories, laws, histories, poetry. When a Jewish child reads from the Torah, he or she is enveloped in its heritage, in its power, in the majesty of Sinai. He or she says to the community: "I am now thirteen years old. I am now ready to fulfill the covenant with God by being responsible for performing mitzvot, the obligations of Jewish life."

### *Many Ritual Moments of Becoming Are Similar*

Most religions—many cultures—have their moments of becoming. It is a moment when an individual goes from childhood to maturity, a moment of sacred initiation.

Historically, age 13 was when a child was considered to be spiritually and legally mature — in other words, responsible for their own choices. There is a prayer that has been recited by parents thanking God for releasing them from responsibility for the child who has now become Bar or Bat Mitzvah. At a brit milah or baby naming the parents make a pledge that their infant will grow up to study Torah. Now the child takes that responsibility on him or herself.

Bar and Bat Mitzvah is a symbolic way to usher a child into the adult Jewish community, a way for the entire community to say to that no-longer-child, "All we cherish, all we hope to be, the sum total of our visions, we place them in your hands. May God make you ready. May God make you strong."