



BECOMING B'NEI MITZVAH
AT CONGREGATION BETH AM:
A Guide for Parents

BETHAM.ORG/BNEI-MITZVAH

CONGREGATION BETH AM

26790 Arastradero Road | Los Altos Hills, CA | (650) 493-4661



Who to Contact at Congregation Beth Am

Our staff and clergy are happy to answer any additional questions you may have after reading this handbook. Please feel free to contact us at any time. We are here to support you. For answers to your questions, please call (650) 493-4661 or email as follows.

For questions regarding requirements of the B'nei Mitzvah process:	Cantor Jaime Shpall cantor_shpall@betham.org
For questions regarding learning challenges, special needs, or Hebrew program (pre-B'nei Mitzvah):	Sarah Lauing SLauing@betham.org
For questions regarding billing, membership, or fees:	Rachel Tasch RTasch@betham.org
GROUP EMAIL ADDRESSES	Shared with team listed below
For questions regarding scheduling appointments with clergy or tutors, date selection, Beit Midrash, parent responsibilities or general questions:	Bneimitzvah@betham.org
For questions about reserving the Social Hall, luncheon or party set up (e.g., how many tables in the social hall):	setup@betham.org

B'nei Mitzvah Team:

Rachel O’Ryan
Roryan@betham.org

Kelsey Cole
KCole@betham.org

Molly Roston
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Welcome to B'nei Mitzvah at Congregation Beth Am!

We're so happy to be on this journey with your family, and to celebrate this *simchah* with you at Congregation Beth Am!

Becoming Bat/Bat Mitzvah (or in the plural form, B'nei Mitzvah) is a rite of passage for young people in the Reform Jewish community. By marking this milestone at Congregation Beth Am, we hope it becomes a meaningful, memorable and enjoyable time for your family. In the process of guiding your child through the preparation and study leading up to the service, we hope to engage you in life at Beth Am, connecting you with fellow congregants and deepening your experience here.

A considerable amount of thought and care has gone into planning the arc of your child's preparation in Hebrew and Judaica, and into helping you forge connections with your community during the lead-up to B'nei Mitzvah and beyond. In this handbook, we'll discuss the educational requirements for B'nei Mitzvah students, the practical aspects of preparing for the service and celebration, and the nuts and bolts of the B'nei Mitzvah program at Beth Am.

A Positive Experience for All Families

Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an important milestone in a young person's Jewish life. While it is a time of great excitement and joy, it can also be a time of some anxiety and self-doubt. The transition years from "tween" to "teen" are charged with great emotions. In addition to experiencing physical changes, young people begin to question authority and form opinions of their own. As all of this occurs they may ask questions about why they are engaging in the process of becoming B'nei Mitzvah.

Occasionally, students convince themselves they are not capable of mastering the material, or that they are not up to the task in some other way. These self-doubts are not only natural but somewhat expected at this time in a young person's life. Remember that generations of our youth have asked these same questions and have, nonetheless, successfully and joyfully celebrated becoming B'nei Mitzvah.

At Congregation Beth Am we believe that every young person deserves the opportunity to celebrate becoming B'nei Mitzvah. We know that not all students learn the same way or have the same natural talents or abilities, and that they come from very different life experiences. We are committed to working with every student and to making this event a truly positive and enriching experience for every family. If you would like to discuss your child's special learning needs, please contact Cantor Jaime Shpall at (650) 493-4661.

B'nei Mitzvah Program Goals

Congregation Beth Am's B'nei Mitzvah program rests on three main pillars: (1) Jewish literacy and knowledge; (2) community; and (3) a sense of personal accomplishment.

Based on these three pillars, the B'nei Mitzvah program aims:

1. To strengthen the student's familiarity with the Shabbat worship service and Hebrew liturgy.

To that end, we prepare students to:

§ Lead a portion of the service;

§ Chant Torah and Haftarah;

§ Put on a tallit and say the appropriate blessing;

§ Understand, discuss and teach his/her Torah or Haftarah portion;

§ Comprehend basic Hebrew words and easily decode Hebrew prayers.

2. To create an ongoing sense of community at Beth Am for students and their families so that they can develop a deep and lasting connection with the synagogue, the staff and the Jewish people. This sense of belonging will lead to a desire to remain involved in their community and continue to participate in Jewish life after they each become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

3. To enable students to work to their full potential, feel a sense of significant accomplishment, enhanced maturity and a sense of responsibility for one's self and others. As such, students will actively engage in *tikkun olam* as a way of demonstrating their acceptance of this responsibility.

Practical Requirements for Becoming B'nei Mitzvah at Congregation Beth Am

Students become eligible for B'nei Mitzvah upon:

1. Reaching their 13th birthday (in either the Jewish or secular calendar).

2. Completion of four years of Hebrew study in our Hebrew program.

3. Continuous enrollment in one of our age-appropriate youth education (Judaica) programs for at least four consecutive years (this enrollment may start before Hebrew program but must also be concurrent with the years of Hebrew program attendance). In addition, attendance in one of our youth education programs is required for the entire school year in which a child becomes B'nei Mitzvah.

Jewish Day School students may waive our Hebrew and Judaica requirements, although we encourage youth education enrollment since attendance helps students make friends in the Beth Am community.

All students are required to attend the Beit Midrash program, starting about seven months before their individual service dates. Students who are unable to participate in Beit Midrash may make alternative plans on an exception basis.

For families new to the area, enrollment in another accredited Hebrew and Judaica program (in

another synagogue) for the requisite years will be accepted toward Beth Am's four-year requirement.

Study Requirements for B'nei Mitzvah at Beth Am

Throughout their years of study at Beth Am, we try to instill in our children a sense of purpose as well as a commitment to Judaism and to *tikkun olam*. By becoming B'nei Mitzvah, our young people demonstrate their ongoing commitment to both Jewish and universal values — values which include Jewish ritual practice, community prayer, education (both religious and secular), *tzedakah* and living a moral and ethical life.

Becoming B'nei Mitzvah at Congregation Beth Am involves a minimum of four years of study in our Hebrew and Judaica educational programs. In the months before becoming B'nei Mitzvah, our children join Beit Midrash, a group class held on Sunday mornings. In Beit Midrash and individual tutoring sessions, students prepare to lead a congregational worship service and to chant from the Torah and Haftarah portions of the day.

Jewish learning is a lifelong pursuit, and it continues for teens at Congregation Beth Am. Beyond B'nei Mitzvah, our Confirmation program provides teens with continued social and educational programming. We encourage you and your family to continue your involvement in synagogue life.

PLEASE MAKE A NOTE OF THIS AND DO NOT SCHEDULE MORE THAN TWO WEEKS AWAY FROM HOME DURING THE SEVEN MONTHS PRIOR TO THE B'NEI MITZVAH CEREMONY, OR AT ALL DURING THE FINAL SIX WEEKS.

Fees

To support the special instruction your child will receive throughout the B'nei Mitzvah preparation process, Congregation Beth Am assesses a B'nei Mitzvah fee to cover the costs of Beit Midrash and individual tutoring sessions prior to beginning study with the Cantor/soloist and Rabbi. It also covers the cost of providing trays of snacks (the "pre-neg") before the Friday night service, and it entitles you to access our live streaming of the Shabbat morning service and receive a recording of it. Because our internal costs for non-partnered B'nei Mitzvah are significantly higher than for partnered B'nei Mitzvah, we need to charge a higher B'nei Mitzvah fee for a non-partnered service. The B'nei Mitzvah fee is currently set at \$1200 per child for a partnered service and \$2000 per student for those who request a non-partnered service. This fee will be added to the statement you receive about 9 months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. The amount is to be paid in full when your child begins his or her training 7 months before the date.

Many people celebrate the simcha of B'nei Mitzvah by making a donation to Tzedakah. It is customary for families to donate to the discretionary funds of the officiating rabbi and cantor.

These funds allow our clergy to offer assistance to congregants in need. Parents often wonder about the amount they should donate. Any level is appreciated.

Securing a Date for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony

Approximately 24 months prior to your child's 13th birthday, you will receive a Bar/Bat Mitzvah date packet containing the following items:

1. A letter notifying you of your child's current eligibility for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. This letter will explain the complete process for securing a Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.
2. A list of all students at Beth Am who are eligible to become B'nei Mitzvah in the same calendar year as your son or daughter. This list will include birthdates and phone numbers.
3. A form to fill out and return to us, letting us know your date preferences as well as an opportunity to request a specific partner for your child.

A note on partnering: We are experimenting with the option for families to request a non-partnered service for any reason. We strongly want to encourage (and incentivize) families to choose the partnering option because we believe partnering is a valuable experience, and also because partnered services allow us to ensure that most students will celebrate their Bar/Bat Mitzvah on a date relatively close to their 13th birthday. However, we understand that some families have a reason they would prefer not to partner with another family. To the extent we are able, we will accommodate those requests.

All children become B'nei Mitzvah in a congregational worship service — no service is a private event. When two young people become B'nei Mitzvah together, the joy of our community is increased. We introduced this practice over 15 years ago, and it has been part of our culture ever since. It has been our experience that partnering is a positive experience for most children. The children feel supported by being up on the *bimah* with another student, and sharing the service can be a help to parents in many ways as well. Families get to know each other through the process and can share or offset some of the costs of hosting an event such as the Kiddush lunch. In the past, we have kept some service dates as singles to accommodate students with special needs, which we will continue to do

Once you have selected a date for the B'nei Mitzvah ceremony, the next step is the actual service preparation process. A great deal of preparation has already been done by your Bar/Bat Mitzvah-to-be in either their Day School or Beth Am's youth education programs. S/he probably already knows a great deal of the service and has some facility with the prayers s/he will be leading. The best way for your entire family to prepare for the B'nei Mitzvah ceremony is to attend services at Beth Am regularly. Through regular service attendance, your family will learn the prayers and the prayer melodies, and become familiar with the B'nei Mitzvah ceremony.

Family Programming: 6th Grade B'nei Mitzvah Family Retreat

The B'nei Mitzvah Family Retreat is an opportunity for families of 6th graders to meet, socialize and explore the meaning of B'nei Mitzvah. Your whole family is invited to participate in this fun weekend of events. Programming will include a special presentation of B'nei Mitzvah Torah portions, along with outdoor recreation, group learning lead by the Beth Am Clergy and a campfire with s'mores and songs.

Registration is available online. The retreat cost includes activities and meals. For additional information, please contact Cantor Shpall at (650) 493-4661 or cantor_shpall@betham.org.

The B'nei Mitzvah Service

On the day of his/her Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the student becomes the teacher as s/he stands on the bimah alongside the Rabbi and Cantor. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah will help the clergy lead the service, chant Torah and Haftarah and teach the congregation in his/her *d'var Torah* and/or *d'var Haftarah*. While every student is different (making each service unique), students typically fulfill the following service components:

Service

The B'nei Mitzvah will lead the Shabbat morning prayers alongside his/her partner, the Cantor or Cantorial Soloist and the Rabbi.

Torah Reading

Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student will read four *aliyot* of Torah. When there are two B'nei Mitzvah on the same Shabbat, a total of eight *aliyot* of Torah will be read, four for each student. Each *aliyah* normally consists of three verses of Torah, which means they will read a total of approximately 12 verses. Your family may designate people who will have an *aliyah* to recite the blessings over the Torah for three *aliyot* (you may invite any number of people per *aliyah*). The fourth *aliyah* is for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. A typical arrangement might include aunts, uncles, cousins or close family friends for the first *Aliyah*, grandparents for the second *Aliyah* and parents and older siblings for the third *Aliyah*.

The older of the two B'nei Mitzvah students will read Torah first, and the younger student will read Haftarah first.

Haftarah Reading

Each Torah portion has a corresponding Haftarah portion (a reading from the Prophets). Each student will read approximately three verses. The younger student will read first and the older student will read second. The first reader will begin with the blessing before reading the Haftarah, and the second reader will conclude with the blessing after reading the Haftarah. If

there is no partner, the student will chant both of the blessings before and after the Haftarah portion.

D'var Torah/Haftarah

Each student will be given the opportunity to teach the congregation about the Torah or Haftarah portion. The student will work with his/her officiating Rabbi to find a meaningful connection between the portion and the student's life. Partnered students will decide together who will speak about the Torah and who will speak about the Haftarah. If needed, they will flip a coin to decide. B'nei Mitzvah students do not give "thank you" speeches during the service; this should be done at the party or the reception following the service.

FOR ALL POLICIES REGARDING PHOTOGRAPHY/VIDEOGRAPHY, BIMAH FLOWERS, AND USE OF THE SANCTUARY, PLEASE SEE THE FACILITY USE RULES.

Parent Responsibilities at the B'nei Mitzvah Ceremony

Parent support is essential throughout the entire project. This includes encouraging daily practice sessions, timely arrival at sessions with the tutor or clergy and regularly attending Shabbat services. Reading sections of Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's book, *Putting God on the Guest List*, together as a family may be especially helpful.

Aliyah (Blessings recited before and after the Torah reading)

On Shabbat, there will be eight aliyot of Torah read. An aliyah normally consists of three or more verses of Torah. Each B'nei Mitzvah reads four aliyot. Any number of people may be called up for an aliyah. Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah family may choose people to recite the blessings for three aliyot. The third aliyah is usually given to the parents of the B'nei Mitzvah.

Parents' Blessing

Parents are given the opportunity to bless their child in front of the open Ark just before we take the Torah out and pass it through the generations to your B'nei Mitzvah. The blessing may be written by the parents. Your blessing should be spoken to your child in the presence of the congregation. However, it is not a speech to the congregation. This is a very powerful moment for your son or daughter. Please remember that at the celebrations surrounding the service, you will have ample opportunity to speak at length with, and about, your child. However, out of respect for the congregation and the integrity of the communal service, we ask that you keep your blessing to your child during the service brief (no more than one page in length, double spaced) and from the heart.

Friday Night Hors D'Oeuvres

As of April 2017, the pre-service refreshments are built into the b'nei mitzvah fee, so there is no longer a need to coordinate this separately.

The Commitment to the Seven Month Preparation Process: A Timeline

Studying to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah requires consistency. **PLEASE MAKE A NOTE OF THIS AND DO NOT SCHEDULE MORE THAN TWO WEEKS AWAY FROM HOME DURING THE SEVEN MONTHS PRIOR TO THE B'NEI MITZVAH CEREMONY OR ANY TIME AWAY DURING THE FINAL SIX WEEKS.** Depending on the child, it may also be helpful to lighten up on extracurricular activities so that this time does not become too stressful. If your child is going to be out of town during the seven month preparation period, please let us know before the six months begin so we can adjust their schedule accordingly. If your child is ill on a day when s/he is supposed to be here at Beth Am, please let us know, and keep him/her home!

We expect your child to review and study consistently between the sessions at Beth Am. If your child has special learning needs, please contact Cantor Shpall (cantor_shpall@betham.org) to discuss B'nei Mitzvah study arrangements. If your child is enrolled in our Hebrew program, Sarah Lauing (SLauing@betham.org) should be made aware of your child's learning needs. She will accordingly plan that your child starts her/his B'nei Mitzvah studies earlier than seven months prior to her/his date. If you are not sure if your child should start learning earlier, please feel free to make an appointment with Sarah Lauing so that she might evaluate your child's Hebrew progress. Cantor Shpall will guide you in determining the best starting date for your child. Special learning needs should not be a deterrent to your child's achieving this important Jewish milestone. At Beth Am we are committed to offering all of our children the opportunity to celebrate becoming B'nei Mitzvah.

Logistics/Keeping in Touch

If you have any questions about the process, feel free to email bneimitzvah@betham.org. You will receive emails from our office regarding scheduling of appointments, the *Tzedakah/Tikkun Olam* project, ushering and other reminders. Please keep an eye out for emails from us, and if a response is required, we'd appreciate hearing back from you in a timely manner.

The final preparation process generally follows the timeline below.

Attendance and Practicing

As you can appreciate, it is important that your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah study be a priority during the seven months prior to your date. During the 28 weeks of Beit Midrash and individual tutoring, we expect your child to be regularly practicing at home between classes and tutoring appointments. Plan on daily practice sessions of 15-20 minutes.

We also require 24-hour notice if you are going to miss an individual tutoring appointment (last minute illness is an excused absence). Please keep your child home if s/he is sick. If either of these requirements are not met, you will be billed an additional fee for the missed appointment at the rate of \$30/half hour to cover the lost time of the tutor or prayer class teacher.

When B'nei Mitzvah study is interrupted for two or more consecutive weeks, the study process may be seriously compromised adding unneeded stress for your child. **PLEASE MAKE A NOTE OF THIS AND DO NOT SCHEDULE MORE THAN TWO WEEKS AWAY FROM HOME DURING THE SEVEN MONTHS PRIOR TO THE B'NEI MITZVAH CEREMONY OR ANY TIME AWAY DURING THE FINAL SIX WEEKS.**

Role and Responsibilities of Parents

Please be supportive of your child's study schedule and encourage his/her study routine. The activities leading up to the B'nei Mitzvah should be a family affair – please don't let your Bar/Bat Mitzvah feel as if s/he is missing out on fun family activities due to Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. Some supportive activities you can consider doing are attending services together as a family and encouraging your child to select a [Tzedakah/Tikkun Olam project](#) that the whole family can become involved with.

In addition to your child's commitment, there are expectations of you as parents as well. Parents will also be called a few weeks before the Bat/Bat Mitzvah to meet with Cantor Shpall to discuss Honors, and with your assigned Rabbi to discuss the parent blessing that will be given during the B'nei Mitzvah service.

Tzedakah/Tikkun Olam Service Project

Students are free to work with whatever organization they choose for their *Tzedakah/Tikkun Olam* project. We choose to leave this part of the B'nei Mitzvah process open ended intentionally so that your student can choose a project that s/he finds personally meaningful. Students can complete this requirement by volunteering for a local charitable organization, raising donations for a cause or finding other creative ways to give of themselves and contribute to their community.

If you need some suggestions to get started on a *Tzedakah/Tikkun Olam* project, please refer to the [Tzedakah/Tikkun Olam project](#) page.

Seven Months Before: Beit Midrash

Students who are about seven months away from B'nei Mitzvah will participate in the Beit Midrash, a group class held on Sunday mornings at Beth Am. **Students are expected to attend Beit Midrash up until their b'nei mitzvah date.** In the Beit Midrash, there will be different groups of students practicing the various prayers. Imagine one table of kids practicing the Sh'ma and

V'ahavta, another practicing the Amidah, another the Kaddish, and so on (kind of like a study hall).

Cantor Shpall, along with other clergy members on a rotational basis, will assist the kids as needed and work with them individually on their Torah and Haftarah portions. The current tutors will also assist in the Beit Midrash. Putting their skills to practice and incorporating experiential learning, the kids will take part in a weekly Sunday morning service during the Beit Midrash time that will be led by the students who are becoming B'nei Mitzvah are the soonest.

They will also attend Shabbat morning services together roughly four times during the seven month period, usually instead of a Sunday meeting that week. There will be a nice ritual initiation as a new child starts the Beit Midrash in which the community of kids welcomes the new student. New students will be paired with a "buddy" who has been in the Beit Midrash for a number of months.

We will be in touch a few weeks in advance to let you know the date your child(ren) will be starting the Beit Midrash (about seven months before your child(ren)'s Bar/Bat Mitzvah date), and the full set of dates your child(ren) is (are) expected to attend the Beit Midrash.

Please note: if you feel your child would benefit from attending additional sessions of Beit Midrash, please speak with the cantor.

Programming for Parents: Morasha

Morasha (which means "heritage") is our program for the parents of upcoming B'nei Mitzvah. At Morasha, you will get to meet the parents of other upcoming B'nei Mitzvah, and together learn about the importance of committing to the process culminating in your child(ren)'s transition from student to teacher. More information about the Morasha program is provided directly to each cohort of parents. *(Please note: in some years, this material is built into the family retreat.)*

Five to Six Months Before: Family Meeting

Family Meeting – Between five and six months before the B'nei Mitzvah ceremony, there will be a short ceremony with the parents and student where the student will be presented their Torah portion by their officiating rabbi and Cantor Shpall. They will then sit down and meet with the Cantor for the student and parents to address any questions or concerns. This meeting also serves as an opportunity to check in about the process thus far and to look ahead for what to expect as the process continues. At this meeting Cantor Shpall will review general study and preparation guidelines for each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student.

Four Months Before: Individual Tutoring

Individual tutoring will begin sixteen weeks before the b'nei mitzvah ceremony. The student will begin working one on one with a tutor for ten half hour sessions. B'nei Mitzvah students must work with Beth Am tutors and with Cantor Shpall. This time spent together enables those of us

at Beth Am to get to know our students as individuals. We value these relationships very highly and look forward to creating them. It is the time we spend with each individual student that enables us to personalize every B'nei Mitzvah experience.

Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, students benefit from working with other tutors in our community in addition to Beth Am's B'nei Mitzvah tutors. If our Cantor or tutors believe that a student could use some extra help with structuring her/his study time, or with Hebrew, they will recommend extra tutoring to the student and to you. There are wonderful tutors in our community who can supplement the teaching a student is receiving from Beth Am tutors. We can refer you to one of these tutors should the need for extra tutoring arise.

Six Weeks Before: Parent and Student Meetings

Parents Honors Meeting: Your family has the opportunity to designate many of the people to be honored in the service during which your child will be called to the Torah for the first time. Each family meets with the Cantor to discuss these honors in the two to four weeks prior to the service, and then turns in the final honors form to our B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator no later than the Monday before the B'nei Mitzvah service. Beth Am uses the information to create a service program (the Shabbat Shalom handout) that is distributed at Friday night and Saturday morning services.

Assigning Honors to Friends and Family Members

It is the goal of our congregation to balance many aspects of *kavod*, that is, giving honor and respect, as we formulate the role of non-Jewish parent and family members in our congregational worship. The following considerations all play a role in guiding our thinking: Judaism is both a universalistic and a particularistic faith tradition. While many of its central ideas are shared by the great faith traditions of the world, its prayers, its holy language and many of its practices are particularistic — unique to the Jewish people. These holy deeds are incumbent upon Jews as a way of life but are not binding on non-Jews.

Some of our words of prayer are particularistic. Certain prayers, such as the blessings before and after reading from the Torah, refer to the particular obligations Jews owe to God. Moreover, some actions also fall into this category (for example, lifting the Torah into the air, *hagbahah*). While those who are not Jews are welcome to say these blessings at home or along with the congregation, it is not considered fitting (as it is not their obligation) for them to lead the congregation in these blessings. Though the parallel is not perfect, a Christian or Buddhist or Muslim would not lead Jews in the performance of a *mitzvah*, just as a Jew would not lead a Christian in taking communion or lead the call to worship in a mosque.

On the other hand, certain prayers, such as *HaMotzi*, do not contain these particularistic words. These prayers are appropriate for anyone to say. Moreover, there are other actions, such as opening the Ark or dressing the Torah, which may be performed by any person your family would like to honor.

Parent Blessing Meeting: Parents will also meet once with the officiating Rabbi to discuss the blessing for their student. **Parents should bring a draft of their blessing to this meeting for the rabbi to review.** These meetings are scheduled for 30 minutes and do not include the student.

Student Meetings: The student will meet weekly with the officiating Rabbi for the six weeks leading up to the B'nei Mitzvah date to prepare the *d'var Torah* or *d'var Haftarah*. Each Rabbi meeting is 30 minutes.

Students will also meet weekly with the Cantor for these last six weeks. For the first four meetings, students will meet with the Cantor for half an hour. For the last two meetings, your student will meet in the Sanctuary on the bimah with Cantor Shpall and his/her partner (if there is one) for 60 minutes. The two bimah sessions are planned to help the students become comfortable with the space, practice reading from the Torah scroll and gain comfort in singing with their partner while working through the entire service.

One Month Before: Publicity

In general, Congregation Beth Am's privacy guidelines allow congregants' names and identifying information to be used only in internal communications. We include the student's name and Bar/Bat Mitzvah date in the service calendar on our website. The photo and biographical information we request about each Bar/Bat Mitzvah student are included in the monthly email sent to members but not in the *Builder* newsletter. However, it is our custom for B'nei Mitzvah students and their parents to be listed in the "Mazel Tov" section of the *J. Weekly* publication. If you would prefer that we not include your child's name in the *J. Weekly*, please let Rachel Tasch know (at publicity@betham.org) at least six months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

One to Four Weeks Before: Ushering at Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preceding Yours

To develop a greater sense of community in the B'nei Mitzvah class, Beth Am requests that your family usher for and attend the B'nei Mitzvah Saturday morning service preceding the service when your child becomes Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It is often, but not always, the Saturday morning service preceding your date. We request that your entire immediate family come to the B'nei Mitzvah service for which you have been assigned to usher. You will be contacted by the B'nei Mitzvah Coordinator to give you the date when your family is to usher.

Ushering duties include:

§ Arrive a half hour before services begin in order to be in the foyer and greet people as they arrive. Please smile, and welcome everyone with "Shabbat Shalom" as you hand them a service program (note: prayer books are located in the pews). Remember that you will be the face of Beth Am that morning.

§ If necessary, please remind the videographer and photographer to remain in the foyer during

the service and not to block the center aisle. We do not allow flash photography at any time during worship at Beth Am.

§ Please stay in the foyer for 15 minutes after the service has started in order to greet latecomers and show them where we are in the prayerbook.

§ Please take your seats in the back row of the synagogue and be alert for young people and others who may be disruptive. Please separate large groupings of young people if necessary.

§ If the service at which you are ushering is a single Bar/Bat Mitzvah, your family will be called forward for an ark opening toward the latter part of the service.

One Week Before: Friday Evening

The B'nei Mitzvah students chant *V'ahavta* at the Friday evening service the weekend preceding their B'nei Mitzvah.

One Day Before: Family Practice and Friday Evening Service

Family Practice: The Friday morning before the ceremony, the B'nei Mitzvah students and their parents have a final rehearsal on the bimah with Cantor Shpall. This practice typically takes place from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and is for the students and parents (not the entire extended family).

The Friday Evening Service: The Friday evening immediately prior to the B'nei Mitzvah service, your family will participate in the Shabbat evening service, which begins at 6:15 p.m. Female family members will help lead the Shabbat candle lighting, and *Kiddush* is led by our B'nei Mitzvah and their fathers (if present).

The Day of the B'nei Mitzvah Ceremony

Enjoy!

On Saturday or weekday mornings, the service begins at 10:30 a.m. At 10:15 a.m. your family — along with grandparents if you wish — will meet with the Rabbi in her/his office.

Beyond B'nei Mitzvah: Continued Study and Confirmation

Students who become B'nei Mitzvah at Congregation Beth Am are encouraged to continue their Jewish education here at least through Confirmation in 10th grade. Becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not a conclusion, but an important milestone on the Jewish journey of lifelong learning. We hope teens will continue to engage with all of the programs we have to offer here beyond B'nei Mitzvah. To learn more about these programs, visit the [Teen Programming](#) page on our website.

Celebrations

This section is devoted to helping you plan your celebration. We delight in celebrating when our sons and daughters reach this important milestone in their lives. The kind of celebration that is appropriate for your family can only be determined by you, your family and your partner family together. Below we offer some thoughts, guidelines and practical information to help guide you through this process.

Celebrating at Beth Am

(Based on a policy approved by the Beth Am Board of Directors in September of 2012.)

The Beth Am Social Hall is our dedicated space for a *Kiddush* luncheon following the Shabbat service, as well as afternoon celebrations. We encourage families to discuss their intentions for the *Kiddush* lunch as part of choosing a partner family/date. For partnered B'nei Mitzvah families, the *Kiddush* lunch is a shared experience, unless one family prefers to go off-site for the luncheon. Typically, partnered families share the expenses of the *Kiddush* lunch proportionate to their number of guests. If partnered families both prefer to hold an afternoon celebration (typically more elaborate) instead of a *Kiddush* lunch, they can share that celebration at Beth Am or elect to go off-site. Should a partner be assigned to an originally non-partnered family during the process, it is expected that the *Kiddush* lunch becomes a shared experience. In cases where one family prefers a *Kiddush* lunch and the other an afternoon celebration, preference toward using the Social Hall will go to the *Kiddush* lunch.

For Saturday evening celebrations, as well as Shabbat dinners on Friday evenings, Beth Am usually has multiple spaces available for our congregants to rent. These spaces can include the Conference Room, Rooms 5 and 6, Beit Kehillah and Social Hall.

There is a fee for use of the Social Hall as well as our other event spaces. Please contact us at setup@betham.org or (650) 493-4661 to learn about our current fee schedule and to obtain a contract for your event. Additionally, our Executive Director Rachel Tasch is available as a resource for families who would like to discuss the planning process in general.

What Makes a Good Party?

Think about all the parties you have ever been to in your life — the big and the small. What made the meaningful events meaningful? What was it that contributed to the dissatisfaction you experienced at other events?

Was it great to see Aunt Rose? How did it feel having all of your family together in one place at the same time? Did good friends bring special meaning to the event or to the day? Did watching Bubbe and Zeyde dance together “make” the party?

Was the music too loud? Could people who hadn't seen each other in years actually carry on a conversation together? Were there too many distractions? When you wanted to talk to

someone, was that person busy getting a henna tattoo or having a picture taken? Did you keep asking yourself, “Wow, I wonder what Herb (or Sally or Joe) spent on this?”

Some questions you will need to consider in planning your celebration are:

- § Do you want to have a party, or would you rather take a trip to Israel, to Jewish New York or someplace else? Would your son or daughter enjoy going somewhere special with friends?
- § Do you prefer a simple *Oneg Shabbat*, a buffet *Kiddush* lunch or a more elaborate luncheon with assigned seating? Or, are you more of the evening party type?
- § Does your family do best at small gatherings? Or do you like big affairs?
- § Does it make sense to have a buffet *Kiddush* lunch and then have a kids only party later on?

Perhaps the most important questions to ask are:

- § How can we celebrate in a meaningful way?
- § How can we retain the religious and emotional significance of the event?
- § Does our celebration express the values of community, family, caring and *tzedakah*?

Invitations

Choosing invitations is one of the more fun activities associated with your celebration. There are myriad designs to choose from. Some things to consider as you look are:

- § What kind of paper are the invitations printed on? Some companies use recycled paper, which may be a nice step toward the *mitzvah* of cherishing the earth’s resources. You may wish to take this a step further and consider electronic invitations, eliminating the need for paper or stamps.
- § Is there any Hebrew on the invitation? Does it look like it has something to do with B’nei Mitzvah?
- § Can you print an especially meaningful line from your son’s or daughter’s Torah portion on the invitation?
- § Have you used your son’s or daughter’s Hebrew name, as well as his/her English name?
- § As you choose the wording, remember that someone “becomes” a Bar or Bat Mitzvah; they do not “have” a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. We therefore don’t invite people to the Bar /Bat Mitzvah. Instead we invite them to the community service during which a young person “will celebrate becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah,” or “will be called to the Torah as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.”

Communicating Your Values and Project

Many Beth Am students and their families have sent additional notes with their invitations in order to communicate the Jewish values on which they wish to focus. These values have included expectations for dress and conduct during the worship service, Judaic information for non-Jewish guests and suggestions for giving *tzedakah* in lieu of gifts. It might also be appropriate to mention your child’s *tikkun olam* project and suggest ways of giving that reflect the focus of the project. For instance, if your child volunteered at the local Humane Society, you

might suggest that guests give to the Humane Society or Israeli Guide Dogs for the Blind Society. If your child helped serve food at a shelter, you might suggest that contributions be made in his/her honor to that shelter, or to Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger. See the following pages for Jewish giving suggestions. We encourage families to use a bimah display that reflects their values — for instance, books to be donated to a school or canned goods to be donated to the hungry.

The following are some examples of notices that students in our congregation have included in their invitations. In an enclosed, photocopied letter:

Dear Friends and Family,

In thinking about what is important to me in becoming a Jewish adult, one of the things I feel is very important is giving to charities. *Tikkun olam*, which means “repairing the world,” and *g’milut chasadim*, which means “acts of loving kindness,” are Jewish values I think are very meaningful. I enjoyed working in a soup kitchen this year and hope to work with underprivileged preschoolers next year. I also enjoyed giving some of my allowance each Chanukah to various charities. Three organizations I especially want to help this year are described below.

[Jewish and non-Jewish giving suggestions were listed here, with 3-5 sentences of description that the Bat Mitzvah wrote herself.]

So, if you are thinking of giving me a gift in honor of my Bat Mitzvah, I wanted you to know that I would greatly appreciate a contribution to one of these organizations.

Thanks and Love,
Rachel

or enclosed as a card that matches the invitation:

Dear Family and Friends,

Your presence on July 14th is the only present I need! If you would like to do more, I would appreciate your contribution to the American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society or a charity of your choice. See you soon!

Love,
David

Budget

Every family's celebration budget will be different. Important items to consider when putting your budget together include invitations, postage, food, music, flowers or other centerpieces, photographer, videographer, site fees, decorations, entertainment and *tzedakah*. Including *tzedakah* in your celebration budget will ensure that you do not forget to plan for it.

Beth Am encourages every family to make *tzedakah* a part of your celebration. There are many ways to do this. You might create centerpieces for your tables using toys or books or canned goods to donate. You might encourage guests to make a donation in lieu of a gift. You might make a donation to MAZON, A Jewish Response to Hunger, or some other organization. Be creative! There are so many opportunities for *tikkun olam* in this joyous occasion!

For more in-depth celebration planning, a good resource is *The Complete Bar/Bat Mitzvah Book* by Patti Moskovitz (much of the material in this section has been adapted from Patti's book).

Glossary

Aliyah/Aliyot (plural) Literally, “going up.” Refers to ascending the *Bimah* for an honor to the blessings recited before and after the Torah reading and to the Torah reading itself.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Ceremony for 13-year old or older boy or girl welcoming him or her into the adult community

Bimah Raised platform in the synagogue from which the Torah is read

B’nei Mitzvah Plural of Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Challah Braided egg bread eaten on Shabbat and festivals

Chumash From the word “Chameish,” meaning “five,” as in five books of Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Refers to the books which contain Torah, Haftarah and commentary. At Beth Am we use the Gunther Plaut Torah Commentary, or the Plaut Chumash.

D’var Torah Literally, a “word of Torah.” Refers to the interpretation and explanation of the Torah portion which the Rabbi and a Bar/Bat Mitzvah deliver.

D’var Haftarah The interpretation and explanation of the Haftarah portion.

G’lilah Dressing the Torah

G’milut Chasadim Acts of lovingkindness

Haftarah A section from the books of the prophets which is assigned to a particular Shabbat or Festival. Haftarot (plural) often are attached to a particular Torah portion, but may instead be attached to the day. For example, there is a special Haftarah portion for the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Hagbahah Lifting the Torah into the air after the reading is completed

haMotzi Blessing said over the challah

Kavod Honor, esteem

Kiddush Blessing said over the wine

Mitzvah Commandment

Morasha Inheritance, legacy

P'ticha Ark opening

Tallit Prayer shawl

Tikkun Olam Repairing the world

Torah The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Also known as the five books of Moses.

Trop In Hebrew, the “Ta’amei HaMikrah.” Refers to the signs in the Torah and Haftarah text that indicate how the text should be chanted.

Tzedakah Righteous giving

V’ahavta One of the prayers students lead on Friday evening and Saturday morning which follows the Sh’ma and is drawn from Deuteronomy (Deut. 6:5-9)

Sources/Bibliography

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Handbooks and Guides from the following congregations were especially helpful in preparing this manual:

- Congregation Har Zion of Denver, Colorado
Particularly the section on Interfaith Families from which much has been borrowed.
- Temple Emanu-El of San Jose, California
Particularly the introduction and the history of Bar/Bat Mitzvah from which much has been borrowed.

Also helpful in preparing this handbook was:

- “The Complete Bar/Bat Mitzvah Book: Everything You Need to Plan a Meaningful Celebration”, by Patti Moskowitz (Career Press)
Particularly for the section on celebrations.
- “Putting God on the Guest List, 3rd Edition: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah”, by Jeffrey K. Salkin