

Congregation Beth Am

B'nei Mitzvah Handbook

2024-2025

Rabbi David Kornberg | Rabbi Matthew Earne



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CELEBRATE A B'NEI MITZVAH?

B'nei Mitzvah is a beginning. Jewish law has fixed the age of thirteen for boys and twelve for girls as the beginning of adulthood. Therefore, a child legally enters the stage of “responsibility” at that time and becomes a B'nei Mitzvah. Being a B'nei Mitzvah means reaching the age of Jewish maturity and assuming the privileges, obligations, and responsibilities of following the Mitzvot, the commandments of Jewish law.

This period of training and preparation can be a time of growth and enrichment, not only for the student, but also for the family as a whole. The B'nei Mitzvah should be treated as a catalyst in your child's life—the time for grappling with ideas and identities, both Jewish and secular. It is a time that can have deep significance and be of vital importance to your child's development as an individual and a Jew.

RECEIVING A B'NEI MITZVAH DATE

Receiving a Date

We assign dates in January for all children who are 10 years of age. Dates are assigned by a group of lay leaders, known as the B'nei Mitzvah Appeals Committee, under the oversight of Rabbi Matthew Earne. We take the following guidelines into consideration when assigning dates:

1. We assign dates as close as possible to the child's 13th Hebrew birthday.
2. Boys must receive a date after they turn 13 years according to the Hebrew calendar.
3. Girls may receive a date one month prior or past when they turn 13 years. This is because according to Talmud, girls can have a Bat Mitzvah when they are 12 years old.
4. If a family has a tradition that their daughter has a Bat Mitzvah when she is 12 years, please bring this to Rabbi Earne's attention.

Appealing a Date

From time to time, families will need a different date than the one assigned. The B'nei Mitzvah Appeals Committee will continue to follow our guidelines but will do their best to meet the family's needs. If you should need a date change, please contact Rabbi Earne who can discuss what options are available before he presents the appeal to the committee.

Sharing

Unless requested, we try to avoid having children share their B'nei Mitzvah date. However, we reserve the right to assign sharing a date if no other space is available. If that is the case, we will update families more than a year in advance so families can plan accordingly.

HOW DO I PREPARE MYSELF FOR MY B'NEI MITZVAH CEREMONY?

Preparation for a B'nei Mitzvah begins when the child enters religious school. It is expected that every child be enrolled in the Beth Am Jewish Learning Center, Beth Am Sabra Program or a Jewish Day School before and during his/her B'nei Mitzvah year. It is important to remember and to impress upon our children that the B'nei Mitzvah is not the end of their Jewish Education but rather a very important milestone within it.

Formal B'nei Mitzvah preparation tutorials begin approximately six months prior to a child's B'nei Mitzvah date and continue until the ceremony. Tutors will be assigned by Rabbi Earne and will contact you to arrange a schedule.

HOW DO I CELEBRATE MY B'NEI MITZVAH?

Since the cornerstone of the rite is being called to the Torah for an Aliyah to recite the blessings, a B'nei Mitzvah can take place any time the Torah is read. Traditionally, the Torah is read every Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. The Torah is also read every Festival morning and on Rosh Hodesh (the New Moon) each month. Please remember that Congregation Beth Am is an egalitarian synagogue and that service participation follows the guidelines as such.

THE B'NEI MITZVAH PROGRAM & POLICIES

The B'nei Mitzvah program is specialized to prepare each individual with the necessary skills and knowledge. Please see the following requirements:

All candidates must be Jewish. Please feel free to discuss any issues relating to this with one of the rabbis.

It is synagogue policy **that all families be members in good standing: that all dues, fees, and other financial obligations are 100% fulfilled** at least 6 months prior to the B'nei Mitzvah date.

Jewish Education - All candidates must have successfully completed 5th through 7th grade in a formal Jewish education program. During their 7th grade year, all students and families, regardless of where they are in school, will participate in Beth Am's monthly Tallit 'N T'fillin (TNT) Program. **Each student and family will also participate in the Mitzvah Program, which is incorporated into the monthly TNT schedule.**

Shabbat Attendance - Regularly attending Friday evening and Saturday morning services before the B'nei Mitzvah is paramount (Friday night services are now optional to attend). The B'nei Mitzvah student and their family are expected to attend Shabbat Services at least twelve (12) times during the twelve months prior to the B'nei Mitzvah. Of the twelve services, nine should be Shaharit, depending on the service in which your child will be participating. We also give credit for students who attend services at another congregation. Please email Bonnie Cohen so she can keep track.

All males are required to wear a kippah in the sanctuary. Females participating in the service are required to wear a head covering.

Greeter Duty - As part of our B'nei Mitzvah Program, all students will be volunteers once during the High Holy Days and one other time at a Shabbat service during your B'nei Mitzvah year. For High Holy Days, you will need to sign-up with the volunteer coordinator. Rabbi Earne will assign one Shabbat service over the course of your B'nei Mitzvah year. We ask that parents join their child during greeter duty. Rabbi Earne will provide the necessary information one week before your turn as greeter.

Tutoring - Approximately six months before the B'nei Mitzvah, each student will begin a series of individual meetings with one of our tutors. Students are assigned to a tutor by Rabbi Earne. Tutors will contact you prior to the beginning of lessons to arrange a tutoring schedule.

Each student is expected to study at home each day to fulfill the assignments given. We recommend at least half (1/2) an hour of study every day. B'nei Mitzvah preparation is cumulative learning. It must be repeated and reinforced; studying the day before the next lesson will not accomplish this goal.

We urge parents to carefully supervise your child's study and preparation for lessons. If at any time during the six (6) months of formal training the student falls behind, the parents must provide additional tutoring at their expense until the student is on schedule. Parents will be regularly informed of their child's progress.

B'nei Mitzvah in Israel - If you decide to have your child's B'nei Mitzvah in Israel, please note:

1. Beth Am will provide tutoring for your child.
2. Beth Am may assist you in finding a rabbi in Israel and will coordinate with the rabbi to make sure your child is properly prepared.
3. Upon your return from Israel, the Beth Am rabbis will invite your child for an Aliyah at a regular Saturday morning service to welcome your child to the adult community at Beth Am.

Congregation Beth Am B'nei Mitzvah - A B'nei Mitzvah ceremony is where an individual is welcomed into their community as an adult. Our synagogue's central communal moment when our community is present is Saturday morning. The B'nei Mitzvah student is expected to lead significant parts of this service

Continued Jewish Education - It is expected that the B'nei Mitzvah student and their family make a commitment to continue his/her Jewish education at the Beth Am Sabra Program or equivalent. We believe in the importance of continued Jewish education for the development of a committed and educated Jewish adult.

B'NEI MITZVAH FEES

The fee for the B'nei Mitzvah program is currently \$1700. This fee is in addition to the regular JLC school fees and covers the cost of tutoring, material fees, and other administrative costs. This fee will be charged to your account twelve (12) months prior to the B'nei Mitzvah. As our annual dues increase, so too will our B'nei Mitzvah fees and will be billed at the amount in effect twelve (12) months before the B'nei Mitzvah date.

B'nei Mitzvah Fees Include:

1. Tutoring for 23 Sessions - If student does not come prepared for sessions, and parents would like additional sessions, tutors are available to be hired for additional hours at the rate of \$50 per hour
2. A recording of the livestream, available up to 30 days after each of the B'nei Mitzvah
3. Tikkun/Prayer Book
4. Live Streaming

B'NEI MITZVAH PREPARATION SCHEDULE

Each B'nei Mitzvah family will follow this basic schedule:

Attend Shabbat services regularly. This is essential to provide *the highest level of comfort* for your child on their B'nei Mitzvah day.

6th grade year

Attend three 6th grade Havurah events with classmates.

7th grade year

Attend monthly *TNTs* as a family.

Work monthly on *TNT* Mitzvah Projects.

One year prior

Parents to meet with the Executive Director for an overview of the program and tour of facilities. At this time the B'nei Mitzvah fee is assigned to the family.

8 - 7 months prior to the B'nei Mitzvah

Call Bonnie Cohen to arrange a "6 month" meeting with Rabbi Earne.

6 months prior to B'nei Mitzvah

All families should meet with Rabbi Earne for the "6 month" family meeting.

Students begin weekly tutorial sessions.

Students should be practicing at home at least ½ an hour per day.

B'nei Mitzvah fee should be paid in full at this time.

5 - 3 months prior to B'nei Mitzvah

Student to meet with rabbi to work on speech.

Schedule meeting with the executive director to speak about facility arrangements.

Schedule "6 week" B'nei Mitzvah appointments including rehearsal.

6 weeks prior to B'nei Mitzvah

Family will meet with the rabbi for the “6 week” family meeting.

Student rough draft of speech due at “6 week” meeting.

3 weeks prior to B'nei Mitzvah

Return completed Honors Sheet to the ritual assistant.

Submit final copy of parents’ speech to rabbi. **No more than 500 words.**

Submit copy of booklet, if you are making one, to the rabbi for approval.

Meet with rabbi to tie tzitzit on the tallit.

Week of the B'nei Mitzvah

B'nei Mitzvah rehearsal at 11:30 am

THE REHEARSAL

During the week preceding the B'nei Mitzvah, a rehearsal is held with the B'nei Mitzvah student, the parents, and the rabbi in the sanctuary. The rehearsal takes one and one-half hours (1-1/2 hours) and is important to ensure a smooth flowing B'nei Mitzvah day.

Photography - You may want to have a professional photographer take pictures to commemorate the B'nei Mitzvah. Please remember that no photography, professional or amateur, is permitted at the Synagogue or on its grounds on Shabbat. The facilities of the synagogue are available before or after the B'nei Mitzvah day for taking “simulated” poses. In practice, most people use the time of the rehearsal for taking pictures.

Video – Professional video recording is not permitted in the Synagogue on Shabbat. However, a recording of the livestream is available up to 30 days after each of the B'nei Mitzvah.

IN PREPARATION FOR THE SERVICES

Food Baskets - In lieu of flowers, we ask that you donate two food baskets for the needy to be displayed on the bimah. The contents of the baskets are given to Jewish Family Service after the B'nei Mitzvah and should contain certified KOSHER food. Usually, you may choose empty baskets the Congregation has on hand for this purpose. If you choose to display flowers or plants they must be in addition to the food baskets.

Religious Items - Your child will want to have his/her own Tallit and Kippah for their B'nei Mitzvah. Any of the Jewish bookstores in the area will carry these items.

Invitations - Any reputable printer can print B'nei Mitzvah invitations in varieties of script, colors, and designs. The office can confirm the time the Friday service is scheduled to begin.

It is important to keep in mind that Judaism is about community-building. The B'nei Mitzvah is an important transition into adulthood and how invitations are handled is a lesson in itself. It is disappointing for an individual child to attend a service of a classmate when everyone else is invited for the festivities and they are not, especially when comments are made that exclude the individual. Therefore, if you are planning to invite more than 5 of your child’s classmates, we

encourage you to invite the whole class. Please obtain a current mailing list from Rabbi Earne as close to your anticipated mailing date as possible.

B'NEI MITZVAH ATTIRE SUGGESTIONS

Proper attire includes knee length skirts or dresses (modest attire) for girls, and slacks with collared shirts for boys. Once students have become B'nei Mitzvah, they should wear talitot each Shabbat morning. **Short skirts, bare shoulders, and bare midriffs are not acceptable, and people so dressed will be asked to cover themselves before entering the sanctuary.** We urge all honorees to be conservatively and appropriately dressed as well.

All men, regardless of their faith, are required to wear a kippah in the synagogue building. Females participating in the service are required to wear a head covering. Jewish men and women may wear a tallit (prayer shawl) during appropriate t'fillot.

Please review with your child how to sit on a raised platform.

SATURDAY PARTICIPATION ON SATURDAY MORNING SHAHARIT SERVICE

Parent Blessing - Parents can present their own blessing when they present the tallit at the beginning of the service or parents can present their own blessing for the child's next step on their journey at the end of the service.

Birkhot HaShahar & Psukay D'Zimra - led by the student(s), a family member, or a congregation member. This is up to parents based on your child's ability.

Shaharit - led by the student(s), a family member, or a congregation member.

Torah Service - led by the student(s). At the beginning of the Torah Service, *parents, grandparents, and siblings* walk slowly to the Ark. The Ark is opened, the crown is placed on the Torah, and the Torah is handed down from generation to generation.

At a service with two B'nei Mitzvah students, the Torah will be passed through one family and then through the second family. The student receiving the Sefer Torah second will carry it through the congregation to the *shulhan* (table). The other student will carry the Sefer Torah as it returns to the ark.

Family members stand together in a straight line on the bimah, facing the congregation, while the prayers of *Sh'ma, Ehad* and *Gadlu* (pg 141) are recited. As the student carries the Torah through the congregation, family members should follow the Torah until they reach their seats, at which point they return to their seats.

Torah Readings - The student generally reads at least one Torah portion. Family members and friends are called up to the Torah for the Aliyot. Families are given the privilege of distributing many of these honors to family and friends. The Congregation can provide MP3s to help honorees in practicing and Hebrew blessings which are assigned to them.

All students, whether a Shaharit or Minha service, shared or single, will have three (3) Aliyot to distribute to their family. Typically, one of these is reserved for the B'nei Mitzvah, one for the parents, and the third for the grandparents or other honoree. The other Aliyot will go either to the other B'nei Mitzvah family or to other members of the congregation.

At our Synagogue, both men and women are called to the Torah. In the past, some honorees have had difficulty chanting the blessings. We insist that those who are chosen for Aliyot be thoroughly competent to recite the Torah blessings, so as not to embarrass themselves, you, or our Congregation. Blessings can be located on page 142 of the Siddur. The music can be learned by requesting a MP3 from Rabbi Earne or the tutor.

Family members are encouraged to learn one of the Torah Portions to chant in honor of the B'nei Mitzvah child. Please understand that the portion read from the Torah Scroll does not have vowels and takes significant preparation. 'Cheat sheets' will not be permitted at the shulhan.

All family members assigned a Torah reading that are not regular Torah reads at Beth Am, must be heard by our ritual assistant or Rabbi Earne. This is to ensure all of your guests are set up for success and not an embarrassing situation in front of friends and family.

Following the Maftir reading, the honors of *Hagbah* (lifting the Torah), and *Gelilah* (binding and dressing the Torah) are available for your family.

If there are two B'nei Mitzvah students participating in the service, one family will distribute the honors of *Hagbah* and *Gelilah* and the other family will distribute the honors of the prayers found slightly later in the Torah Service.

Prior to the reading of the Haftarah portion the B'nei Mitzvah presents a short speech.

If there are two B'nei Mitzvah students participating in the service one will read the first portion of the Haftarah and do his/her speech on the Haftarah, and the other will read the second portion of the Haftarah and do his/her speech on the Torah portion prior to its reading.

Following the Haftarah, parents come up to the Shulhan for the Parental Blessing (provided for you). At this point the student has the option of reading the B'nei Mitzvah Pledge. The Rabbi will discuss the pledge with the student during their meetings together.

Additional honors which the family has the opportunity to distribute are: *A Prayer for Our Country* on page 148 (English), *A Prayer for the State of Israel* on page 149 (English or Hebrew), and *A Prayer for Peace* on page 149 (English). All are available on-line at betham.com.

If there are two B'nei Mitzvah students participating in the service, these prayers will be distributed by the family which is not assigning *Hagbah* and *Gelilah*.

Other honors include opening the Ark at the end of the Torah Service. When the Torah is returned to the Ark, those being honored precede the Torah to open the Ark and will be instructed to close the Ark at the appropriate time.

Parents are invited to write their own blessing for their child to be delivered at the beginning of the service or at the end of the Saturday morning service. If parents choose to speak in the beginning, we recommend the theme be regarding the meaning of the Tallit. If parents choose to speak at the end of the service, we recommend the theme be “a blessing for the next steps on the child’s Jewish journey.” Speeches must be submitted to the rabbis for approval three weeks in advance and must be no longer than 500 words combined between both parents.

A DOUBLE B'NEI MITZVAH

We know there is a great deal of concern around the concept of having two students share a morning service. We will work with you every step of the way to make sure that everything works smoothly. We will also be available to assist the families to consider any joint plans to sponsor the Oneg, Kiddush and other reception options at the Synagogue.

B'NEI MITZVAH SPEECH

During the six months prior to the B'nei Mitzvah the student should research and write a rough draft of his/her Haftarah/Torah speech. The rough draft should be brought to the “six week” meeting with the rabbi. **The student is required to read and research commentaries on the appropriate section for his/her speech – either the Torah or the Haftarah - they are different. If you have any questions about which portion the student will be reading, please contact us.**

The speech should be between three and four minutes in length and contain three main sections:

1. The history and background of the piece. (Who wrote it, when, what does it say?)
2. What message in the parsha can be related to life in today’s society?
1. How does it connect to you and your life?

As this is a Dvar Torah, a "Torah Talk," it is appropriate to focus only on these three sections. "Thank You's" may be written out in the pamphlets or expressed orally during the reception.

SOME REMINDERS

All deliveries must be made to the Synagogue before 2:00pm on Friday. Food to be consumed on the premises must be Kosher and obtained from sources approved by the rabbis.

Please remind your guests that photography, writing, and the use of audio or video recorder, are not permitted in the Synagogue or on the Synagogue grounds on Shabbat. Also, please ask your guests to put all pagers or cellular phones on silent mode before entering the sanctuary.

Only soft candies are permitted to be used to “pour” at the B'nei Mitzvah because of the possibility of personal injury. They must be soft, kosher and approved by the rabbis.

If you are having a significant number of non-Jewish guests, a booklet with explanations of the service is a nice way to help them feel more comfortable. Examples are available from Rabbi Earne.

MITZVAH PROJECT, MA'ASER AND FOOD BASKETS

Your B'nei Mitzvah focuses on the reading of the Torah. Our Torah is embedded in values and our hope is that you will put these values into action. To this end, each child is expected to participate in a Mitzvah Project and Ma'aser as part of their B'nei Mitzvah journey.

Mitzvah Project - A key component of the B'nei Mitzvah process is the Mitzvah Project. This program is designed to instill in our students a responsibility to fix and improve the world around us. The project enables the B'nei Mitzvah student to go beyond simply reading about the values and commandments inscribed in the Torah and put them into practice.

At Beth Am, students can choose one of two paths for their B'nei Mitzvah project – a monthly Mitzvah Project or a year-long Mitzvah Project.

For students who choose the monthly Mitzvah Project, the rabbi will select a different mitzvah each month and provide different ways to express that mitzvah. The B'nei Mitzvah chooses one way to express the mitzvah for each project and completes it by the next monthly Tafrit TNT family education class. The advantages of this option are twofold – it exposes students to a variety of mitzvot and this program provides a structured format for the student.

The year-long Mitzvah Project is an alternative to the monthly Mitzvah Project. The student may instead complete a single Mitzvah Project over the course of the year. The B'nei Mitzvah selects and designs the project and submits to Rabbi Earne for approval. Rabbi Earne will assess the project according to requirements and criteria listed on our website.

Ma'aser - In addition to a Mitzvah Project, all students must participate in Ma'aser. Ma'aser comes from the number 10 and is a biblical law that commands all farmers to give 10% of their produce to the poor. All B'nei Mitzvah students, as part of their journey of giving tzedakah, are expected to give 10% of what they receive for the B'nei Mitzvah to a charity of their choice. This will be discussed during the meetings with the rabbis.

Food Baskets - On the day of your child's B'nei Mitzvah all students are expected to decorate the bimah with food baskets to the Jewish Family Service food pantry. The guidelines for these food baskets are given at the "6 month" family meeting with the rabbi. Please note: One cannot decorate the bimah with flowers in the place of food baskets as this takes away from the mitzvah.

HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR DAY A SIMHA, A DAY OF JOY?

There is no "right" way to approach the manner of celebrating a B'nei Mitzvah. The type and amount of activities and food which are provided to guests are the choice of each family. We just ask that the celebration reflect the occasion—that the luncheon/dinner/party honors the child who has just participated in a sacred religious ceremony.

Saturday Kiddush - Sponsor the Kiddush luncheon following Saturday morning services. Please remember your child is celebrating his/her B'nei Mitzvah as a part of the community. If you choose to host a luncheon at the Synagogue directly following services, the community must be invited to

participate. Please include 75 – 100 “regular” congregants. You may speak to the Executive Director for more information.

Saturday S’eudat Shlisheet - If you are having a minhah/maariv service you will need to decide what ‘type’ of S’eudat Shlisheet, third meal, you wish to have between the minhah (afternoon) service and maariv (evening). In our congregation this third meal can be as simple as cookies, cake and drinks; a time to serve hors d’oeuvres; or a sit down meal for your guests. Please speak to the Executive Director for more information.

“Lichayim!” Bottle - At the beginning of each meal, both men and women over 21 years of age are encouraged to gather for a small toast to celebrate life. We suggest families purchase a bottle of approved alcohol to be shared on the day of the simha.

B'NEI MITZVAH SERVICE BOOKLET/PROGRAM

Some families create a booklet with information to help guests understand the service. Should you like to do this we have sample booklets in the office for reference.

THE RECEPTION

Your reception can be held on Motzei Shabbat (Saturday night), Sunday afternoon or evening, or several other times. Remember, a successful party begins by incorporating Judaism. If your simha is on Motzei Shabbat (Saturday evening) we strongly encourage beginning with Havdalah, and it would, therefore begin after Shabbat concludes. As education is an essential part of the B'nei Mitzvah experience, parties should not be planned during JLC or Sabra hours.

The rabbis will regretfully decline your kind invitation to any party that is held outside the Synagogue on Shabbat. They will make every effort to attend parties held on Saturday evening (arrival will be after Shabbat) or Sunday, provided the food served meets kosher dietary requirements.

When choosing outfits for your child’s B'nei Mitzvah as well as for those that they will attend please keep in mind that this is a celebration of their coming of age in Judaism and that their clothing should be in good taste with a reasonable amount of modesty.

THE FOOD

All food that is served at Congregation Beth Am must be kosher.

If you have a luncheon/dinner party at home, in a restaurant, or any place other than the Synagogue, we, of course, cannot insist that it be kosher. However, we respectfully urge you to consider having a kosher meal. If you have any questions regarding Kashrut at your simha please contact us.

HELP YOUR SYNAGOGUE

The B'nei Mitzvah ceremony is an important milestone for the entire family. Recognizing the institution and community that plays a significant role in helping you reach this important ceremony illustrates a valuable lesson in community support. A couple suggestions are:

1. Purchase a prayer book in honor of the B'nei Mitzvah.
2. Purchase a leaf on the Tree of Life Plaque located in the sanctuary. Contact [Susan Mualim](#) for more information.

AFTER THE B'NEI MITZVAH

A successful B'nei Mitzvah is a positive experience that leads to continued Jewish involvement in Beth Am and in the larger Jewish community. You can do this in the following ways:

1. Access your livestream recording to view
2. Continue your involvement in USY at Beth Am.
3. Sign-up for Yad Squad
4. Continue your involvement with our Hebrew High Program, Sabra.
5. Sign-up to be a Madrikh or Teacher Assistance at our JLC.

FINAL WORDS

Please remember that your child as a B'nei Mitzvah is leading services as a celebration of their entering into the adult Jewish community. We know that the details of planning a B'nei Mitzvah can sometimes feel overwhelming but hope that you will keep in mind the intent of the simha. If you have questions or concerns of any kind please feel free to bring them to our attention. Rabbi Earne can be reached at 858-481-8454 or Rabbie@betham.com.

B'NEI MITZVAH FAMILY REFERENCE LIST

Below is a list of names of families who have gone through the B'nei Mitzvah experience at Beth Am. They have volunteered their emails so that you can contact them if you have any questions about the B'nei Mitzvah process.

1. Patrice Gold pjgold1@gmail.com
2. Michele Myron michelemyron@yahoo.com
3. Beth Berger bcreagerb@gmail.com
4. Emma Lefkowitz emmalousam@hotmail.com

Mazal Tov!