

Bnai Mitzvah Guide  
Congregation Beth El - Keser Israel  
בית אל - כתר ישראל  
תשפ"ג | 5783 | 2022-23

Congregation BEKI  
85 Harrison Street  
New Haven, Connecticut 06515  
[www.beki.org](http://www.beki.org)

Shalom!

Welcome to the BEKI Bnai Mitzvah Process!

The bnai mitzvah celebration has several spiritual functions: to celebrate a child's growth and maturity; to recognize the growth and maturity of the child's family; to put all of these personal-psychological goals in a Jewish context and make sense of the child's and family's growth in the context of Judaism.

It sounds like a lot, right? It is – but we are going to be here with you.

Growing up is hard, and the ages around sixth, seventh, and eighth grades are often ones beset by emotional insecurity. One of my goals as a rabbi is to help your child feel affirmed and celebrated in that time period, and to do so in a Jewish manner – by lifting up the Jewish values that have guided and can guide your child, and by helping them to feel a sense of achievement.

The family work of a bnai mitzvah is hard, too. It involves reminding your child to study, practicing centuries-old musical chant (called Torah trope) as applied to the words of the Hebrew Bible, specifically the Pentateuch, or Chumash. It involves logistics, planning, and money. It involves invitations, family dynamics, and pressure – often, this is the first planned lifecycle event in a family's life since marriage. It can bring up insecurities about what a family looks like or what a family's finances are like, and those aren't easy. My goal here as a rabbi is to help be with you in these moments of stress, perhaps to shine a light on them, and perhaps to help you grow in the challenging spaces.

Because more than anything, a bnai mitzvah is a chance for joy and love. I've seen people so moved by the process – I have seen kids no one believed in express themselves, I have seen divorced parents work together for children's benefit, I have seen celebrations that are full of love after experiences of family losses. This process can be transformational.

In this document, you'll see in front of you what we call the "tachlis," the nuts and bolts of the process. But what's most important is your child's and your hearts. As the Baal Shem Tov tells us, רחמנא ליבא בעי – Rachmana Liba Baei, God wants our hearts.

B'ahavah,

Rabbi Eric Woodward

### *A Note on Education*

We expect that the b'mitzvah will have completed educational requirements at Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel's religious school, Ezra Academy, or an equivalent program approved by the Rabbi. For students with special needs, parents are urged to consult with the Education Director and Rabbi to help plan appropriate educational goals and strategies. Please let the Rabbi know if your child has an IEP, so that we can work with you to plan a meaningful simchah.

### *A Note on Gender Expression and Identity*

Many children, especially at roughly bnai mitzvah age, begin to grow in their gender expression and identity, whether one assigned at birth or not. We here at BEKI are a welcoming community that is here to support your child's growth into whoever they may be – aware particularly that the bnai mitzvah process can be one of affirmation of your child's growth. We use the singular, gender-free phrase of “b'mitzvah,” alongside “bnai mitzvah,” a plural usage, and also the gendered phrases of “bat” and “bar” mitzvah. If there is something we can do to further help your child feel seen, please let us know.

### *A Note on Jewish Personal Status*

The Conservative Movement technically recognizes people as Jewish who either converted to Judaism or were born to a Jewish mother. However, many people have been born to Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers. Rabbi Woodward, in agreement with the writings of the *Mishpetei Uziel* (Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, the first Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) considers children born to Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers to be “*zera Yisrael*.” This means that a person's patrilineal descent is indeed religiously significant. They should immerse in a mikvah as a joyous confirmation of status. Please speak to Rabbi Woodward if this describes you.

### *A Note on Interfaith Families*

BEKI believes in taking a robustly welcoming stance toward interfaith families. Coming from an interfaith and multi-racial family himself, Rabbi Woodward considers the spiritual inclusion of non-Jewish relatives in the service to be deeply important. But there is rarely a one-size-fits-all approach, so please speak to Rabbi Woodward about your family. In the case of parental aliyot to the Torah, only a Jewish person says the blessing, but a non-Jewish partner can stand next to the parent during the recitation of the aliyah.

### *A Note on Synagogue Membership*

In order to assign you a date, you must be a member of our synagogue. Synagogue membership is a way of throwing in your lot with our community and vision, and we never let finances get in the way of joining.

## **Core Tasks**

### **Assigning the date:**

In the late fall or winter of fifth-grade, we will be in contact with the entire expected bnai mitzvah class, holding a meeting to go over the process and this guide. At this meeting, a form will be transmitted to families, asking for information, particularly around selecting a date, and asking for your child's English birthdate. After this, we will assign you a tentative date. But please know that we are assigning this to help you – it is not set in stone. We will work with you to find the right date if this one does not work for you. When you have a date that does work, you will fill out a room usage agreement and submit it to the office along with a reservation fee.

### **Planning the Learning:**

Bnai Mitzvah learning builds on skills learned in BINA or at school, but employs the use of a tutor to teach a student the specific texts and skills for the day. You'll work with the Rabbi to find an appropriate tutor. You should get in contact with a tutor one year before the bnai mitzvah date. You will pay the tutor directly.

You will meet with Rabbi Woodward several times during the process. One meeting will be a family intake meeting – the parents and child will meet with Rabbi Woodward to talk about hopes and goals for the day and the process. This should occur about nine months before the ceremony. Then, over the next months, the Rabbi and your child will meet about three or four times to write the speech together. Last, on the week of the b'mitzvah, the Rabbi will go over delivery of the speech at a rehearsal in which your tutor will facilitate your reading from the Torah as practice.

We hope that you will enroll in Teen Keshet, our teen education program, as we run classes for grades 7-8 during the year.

The specific material your child will learn will be determined via conversation with the Rabbi and the tutor. We are here to make sure that your child feels both pushed and supported – and that they feel love and connection to Judaism.

Regular attendance at Shabbat services by the child and family is required during the preparation process. This attendance cultivates both familiarity with the prayers and community, and a sense of authenticity. The student will be encouraged to lead some prayers at Shabbat services in preparation for the b'mitzvah celebration.

### **Planning the Service:**

The day of the b'mitzvah involves the distribution of various ritual honors to people. You will find a worksheet to help you with this elsewhere in this packet. Please note that only one person at a time is called for a Torah aliyah. There are seven aliyot in the course of a Shabbat Torah

service, some or all of which may be assigned as honors related to the b'mitzvah. All people of any gender who have an aliyah are required to wear a head covering. Only adults who are Jewish (as determined by the Rabbi) may be called for an aliyah, and the same is true for two additional honorary roles which happen during the Torah service: hagbah (lifting the Torah), and gelilah (wrapping or dressing the Torah). You will go over the aliyah worksheet with the rabbi in your family intake meeting.

Reading from the Torah (as distinct from the aliyah) is another way family members and friends might participate in the service, and we will be delighted to include them. Please notify the Ritual Coordinator, who maintains an online Google doc for all Torah reading assignments.

Those receiving aliyot at the invitation of the family should be informed of that invitation. Those who might benefit from reviewing the Torah blessings beforehand should be sent a copy. The completed (or partially completed) Aliyah Worksheet should be presented to the Rabbi at least ten days before the event.

Throwing candy: If you wish, you may select a few relatives or grown-up friends to pass out individually wrapped Sunkist Fruit Gems candy, to be thrown as part of a joyful custom while the congregation sings "Siman Tov U'Mazel Tov." This food must also be delivered to the building before Shabbat. The Rabbi will discuss with you when they will be distributed and thrown. Please note that confetti, glitter, sparkles and canned string are NOT permitted anywhere in the building, and please inform your guests who might not be aware of this rule.

At BEKI, it is our custom that we do not clap following achievements by a bnai mitzvah celebrant, in order to show that this is not a performance. Instead, we offer the traditional Hebrew phrase, "Yasher Koach," which means, "well done!"

Notice in the BEKI Bulletin will appear giving the date of the service. The editor will request a digital photo and some information (school, hobbies) about the b'mitzvah. You'll also be asked if you want to call it a b'mitzvah, bat mitzvah, or bar mitzvah. Unless otherwise requested, a notice will be sent to the Connecticut Jewish Ledger for publication.

Shabbat Morning services begin at 9:15 am, and the celebrating family should arrive by that time. If the b'mitzvah would like water during the service, please bring a bottle with a "sports top." A cup of water may not be placed on the reader's table.

### **Planning the Day:**

Budget planning should begin after determining the date. How much are you able to spend on this event? What is most important? Although some families opt for elaborate celebratory affairs, a simple observance is in keeping with values of the BEKI community.

Kiddush on Shabbat is part of the celebration. Therefore, the family is required to sponsor the event for the entire congregation present as well as their guests. The menu may be dairy or

pareve, but must follow both our kashrut policies and our expectation that any chocolate products be fair trade. To protect members of our community with severe allergies, we do not serve peanuts or peanut products, and we mark anything made with tree nuts. Our tradition is that along with the food, the family provides a bottle of Scotch or whiskey for the kiddush – unless the family has an objection to the consumption of such a beverage at that moment.

You may hire an approved kosher caterer or choose to join the Bnai Mitzvah Kiddush Committee. The committee is a collective of parents who prepare kiddush meals for one another's children's simchas. The commitment to help prepare meals begins years before your celebration. If you wish to use the bnai mitzvah kiddush committee, please note when you select a date for your event that there are certain dates on which the committee does not operate – be sure to communicate with the committee about this. The current head of the Bnai Mitzvah Kiddush Committee is Mark Oppenheimer – see the end of the document for contact information.

If you wish to hold a party at BEKI on Saturday night, it cannot begin before the end of Shabbat. Saturday evening events must end by 12 midnight. Bear in mind that this means that during the summer, events at BEKI likely cannot begin until after 9 pm on a Saturday night.

For events taking place Saturday night, please note that all delivery and set-up must be accomplished before or after (but never during) Shabbat, for caterer, music, decorations, centerpieces, and anything else. Please make sure your vendors understand this.

Rather than rent linens, you are welcome to choose tablecloths from the Sisterhood supply. Your obligation is to return them (clean) within ten days after your event. They can be washed with normal detergent, though food might need to be scraped off and stain treatment applied. If you choose to have the linens commercially washed, dry cleaning is not required; a wash-and-fold service is sufficient.

Directions to BEKI can be found on our website. Please note on invitations that our Shabbat morning service begins at 9:15 am. Be sure to verify in writing the starting time of any Saturday night event with the Office Manager and your food and music providers before printing invitations.

Deciding whom to invite can be difficult due to budget constraints and other considerations. If the b'mitzvah was a student in BINA, our religious school, invitations to all classmates are required, for both the service and kiddush and any additional party. Ezra Academy has a similar policy. It is appropriate to invite the Rabbi, Education Director, b'mitzvah tutor and their families to the service and Kiddush at the synagogue, but it is not necessary to invite them to subsequent parties. If your child attends Ezra Academy, it is appropriate to invite the principal and any teachers to the service and kiddush.

Please inform guests and vendors of synagogue etiquette and rules. All children or classmates should be either in services with their adults or in one of the children's programs. Youth who are

not accustomed to attending services at BEKI may not be familiar with the etiquette and expectations of our congregation; please remember that you are responsible for your invited guests. The Office Manager will need to know the approximate number of guests expected in order to provide for their needs while in the building. Smoking is not permitted at BEKI. Photography, recording, use of cell phones, and writing are not permitted in the premises on Shabbat or Festivals. In the sanctuary, male-identified people are expected to wear a head covering, and all people are required to wear a head covering while on the bima or at the reader's table. Guests who are not Jewish are asked not to wear a tallit.

Souvenir kipot, bentshers (Grace After Meals song booklets) and table decorations are optional. Items that are not permitted to be handled on Shabbat, such as coins, musical instruments, writing and coloring utensils, candles, cameras, electronic or electrical devices or battery-operated toys may not be used as "favors" on Shabbat. A small number of wicker baskets are available for kipot and other uses; speak with the Office Manager for more information. All food items brought into the building must be delivered at a pre-arranged time prior to Shabbat and under BEKI's kashrut supervision. Non-kosher food items may not be used as table decorations.

Photography is permitted during the rehearsal. Be sure to check with your photographer for availability. Photography is not permitted any time on Shabbat or Festivals at the synagogue, and is not permitted during any actual service (even on weekdays). If you would like to schedule a photo session, please contact the Office Manager for room availability. The rabbi can be available with some notice.

Caterer's Inventory: A menu list from any outside caterer must be presented to the Office at least two or three weeks beforehand to facilitate kashrut and inventory control. The kashrut supervisor will need to know what is planned and to check that any chocolate items are fair trade. The week of the b'mitzvah, the Caterer's delivery must be scheduled with the Building Manager and BEKI's kashrut supervisor. The inventory must bear the signature or seal of the caterer's kashrut supervisor. Arrangements must be made for removing leftover food and decorations and for other clean-up after the event.

Suggested Timeline:

Winter of fifth-grade:

- Decide date

Spring of fifth-grade or fall of sixth grade:

- Choose a tutor
- Decide whether a party is going to happen at BEKI
- Decide whether you will cater the kiddush or participate in kiddush committee

Nine months before:

- If catering the kiddush, confirm caterer
- Meet with rabbi for family intake
- Attend Shabbat services regularly in the months ahead

Two weeks before:

- Inform people with aliyot (so they can practice the blessings, as needed)
- Submit the Aliyah Worksheet
- If catering, menu submitted by caterer

The week before:

- Rehearsal for b'mitzvah with tutor and rabbi
- If catering, delivery scheduled
- Arrange pickup time for leftover food and all decorations

On Sunday or Monday:

- Pick up leftover food and all decorations

Eric Woodward, Rabbi 203-389-2108 x120, [rabbi@beki.org](mailto:rabbi@beki.org)

Peggy Hackett, Office Manager 203-389-2108 x114, [office@beki.org](mailto:office@beki.org)

Michael Barone, Building Manager 203-389-2108 x157, [facilities@beki.org](mailto:facilities@beki.org)

Annie Norman-Schiff, Education Director 860-502-5337, [anormanschiff@beki.org](mailto:anormanschiff@beki.org)

Rachel Adelstein, Ritual Coordinator [ritualcoordinator@beki.org](mailto:ritualcoordinator@beki.org)

Mark Oppenheimer, Bnai Mitzvah Kiddush Committee Liaison, 203-589-3725,  
[mark.e.oppenheimer@gmail.com](mailto:mark.e.oppenheimer@gmail.com)

Harriet Friedman, Sisterhood Liaison 203.675.8607, [giftshop@beki.org](mailto:giftshop@beki.org)

Rachel Bashevkin, President [president@beki.org](mailto:president@beki.org)



Shabbat Morning Aliyah Worksheet

Pesukei DeZimra: \_\_\_\_\_

Shacharit: \_\_\_\_\_

Torah Service: \_\_\_\_\_ Will this person carry the scroll? Yes . No .  
(If not, Scroll Carrier: \_\_\_\_\_)

Two Ark Openers (English names): \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_

Torah Readers provided by celebrant's family (optional) by prior arrangement:

Chapter and Verse to be read	English Name of Reader
1 _____	_____
2 _____	_____
3 _____	_____
4 _____	_____
5 _____	_____
6 _____	_____
7 _____	_____

Maftir \_\_\_\_\_

Torah Blessing Aliyot (people called to Torah) One person per aliyah

English Name	Hebrew Name (indicate if person is a Kohen or Levi)
1 _____	_____
2 _____	_____
3 _____	_____
4 _____	_____
5 _____	_____
6 _____	_____
7 _____	_____

Maftir (b'mitzvah) \_\_\_\_\_

Hagbah (Lifting Torah) (English & Hebrew Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Gelilah (Wrapping Torah) (English & Hebrew Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Prayer for United States: \_\_\_\_\_

Prayer for Israel (English or Hebrew): \_\_\_\_\_

Prayer for Peace: \_\_\_\_\_

Two Ark Closers (English names): \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_

Musaf: English name: \_\_\_\_\_

Kiddush will be led by: English Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Congregation Beth El Keser Israel**

85 Harrison Street, New Haven, CT 06515-1724 (203) 389-2108 x114

**ROOM USAGE AGREEMENT FOR BNAI MITZVAH.**

NOTE: Members must be current with all BEKI obligations or have finalized financial arrangements with the Office Manager and/or Treasurer at least 3 months before the function.

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_ Requested date of b'mitzvah: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of b'mitzvah celebrant: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of adult(s): \_\_\_\_\_

For evening party: Start/End Time of Event: \_\_\_\_\_

(Note: Events must end by midnight.)

\_\_\_ Yes, I want to use Sisterhood tablecloths. Contact Harriet Friedman, 203.675.8607. You are obliged to return them—washed and folded—within ten days. Other options: You can purchase disposable tablecloths or your caterer can provide linens.

Name of Kosher Caterer: \_\_\_\_\_

Caterer Contact Person and Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate Number of invited guests: \_\_\_\_\_

You must agree to the terms as listed below:

- There is no smoking anywhere on the property at any time.
- All decisions regarding allowable activities are at the Rabbi's discretion.
- The use of musical instruments, recordings, and photography is not permitted in the synagogue on Shabbat and Festivals.
- BEKI is not responsible for property left on the premises.
- You must supply responsible adults (at least 21 years old) to be chaperones at all children's events. These adults must be present when the first child arrives and stay until the last child leaves.
- You will be responsible for any damage to the facilities caused by your event.
- All external doors must remain locked, never propped open. For evening events, you must arrange a door greeter plan with the Office Manager.
- All kashrut policies, including BEKI's fair trade chocolate policy, must be followed. The caterer's delivery must be scheduled with the Building Manager and BEKI's kashrut supervisor. The inventory must bear the signature or seal of the caterer's kashrut supervisor.
- For events taking place on Saturday night, please note that all delivery and set-up must be accomplished before or after (but never during) Shabbat. The starting time of the event (which in the summer could be after 9 pm) must be approved in writing by the BEKI Rabbi.
- Vendors must provide proof of at least one million dollar property & liability insurance and name BEKI as additional insured.
- All supplies must be removed from the property promptly after the events; arrangements should be made with the Building Manager.
- Office Manager Peggy Hackett should be contacted for further clarification.

## ROOM RATES

*Additional fees may apply for Sundays or Public Holidays.*

**Reservation fee** (to be applied towards total costs) \$150

### Security Guard

BEKI will hire, but you will need to pay for a Security Guard at \$45 per hour, minimum of 4 hours.

**Catered lunch** in social hall (2 hour max) \$350

Additional per hour \$75

This fee does not include caterer or vendor costs but does include announcement and publication of sponsorship, kashrut supervision, use of the kitchen by a kosher caterer, wine and grape juice, set-up and clean-up of the room, trash removal and standard custodial services.

**Dinner Party** in social hall (4 hour max; must end by midnight) \$500

Additional per hour \$75

This fee includes kashrut supervision, use of the kitchen by a caterer, setting up and clean-up of the room, trash removal and standard custodial services.

### Children's Room

By special arrangement. Please contact Office Manager Peggy Hackett.

### Payment Schedule

- a) The reservation fee is due when the date is booked.
- b) Four months before the event: One-half payment of fees is due, or payment in full if total is less than \$400.
- c) Two months before the event: Balance due, along with updated number of guests.
- d) There is a penalty of 5% of the current balance due on any late scheduled payment (minimum penalty \$20).
- e) Unforeseen items/charges must be paid within 15 days after the event.

**Total Fees for this event:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

On Behalf of BEKI: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel  
ק"ק בית-ישראל כתר-ישראל  
85 Harrison Street at Whalley Avenue • New Haven CT 06515-1724  
(203) 389-2108 • office@beki.org • www.beki.org

Dear Kosher Caterer,

We understand that you have been contracted by \_\_\_\_\_ for the date of \_\_\_\_\_ at our synagogue.

We ask that you call our office several days before your delivery so that our Building Manager and our mashgiah can plan to meet you.

Deliveries of food will be accepted only upon presentation of (1) a complete inventory and invoice signed by your mashgiah; (2) a certificate of insurance and documentation of Workman's Compensation coverage, if your employees will be working on our premises for the event.

Please understand that our Congregation is a traditionally observant Conservative community. All food must be delivered prior to Shabbat. Lighting fires, operating electric appliances such as coffee makers and can openers, and cooking are not permitted on Shabbat. Reheating of food is permitted only when the ovens are set before Shabbat by our building manager at your desired temperature before Shabbat and are not adjusted on Shabbat. Stovetop reheating and use of open flame are not permitted on Shabbat. Reconstituting instant coffee or tea is permitted only if the water is kept hot from before Shabbat. Fresh brewing coffee is prohibited on Shabbat. Please note as well our fair-trade chocolate policy: <https://www.beki.org/resources/food/>. To protect members of our community with severe allergies, we do not serve peanuts or peanut products, and we mark anything made with tree nuts.

For Saturday night events, no preparations may be made at the synagogue on Shabbat. Cleanup from an afternoon affair may be completed at the time of the affair. Access to the building for Saturday night affairs will not be allowed until one hour after sunset. Please plan menu and logistics accordingly.

Your employees may not bring food or drink to our premises unless it is under the supervision of your mashgiah and our office is so informed in advance by your mashgiah. Our facility is non-smoking. For building security, doors cannot be left open or unlocked. We would be appreciative if you could instruct your staff of these rules and procedures.

We trust that all will go well and we look forward to working with you. Thank you for your careful attention.

Rabbi Eric Woodward

Rachel Bashevkin, President

Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel

85 Harrison Street at Whalley Avenue • New Haven CT 06515-1724  
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Dear DJ, Band Manager, Party Planner, Photographer or Vendor:

We understand that you have been contracted by \_\_\_\_\_ for the date of \_\_\_\_\_ at our synagogue.

We ask that you call our office several days before your delivery so that our Building Manager can plan to meet you.

Please understand that our Congregation is a traditionally observant Conservative community. Lighting fires, writing, recording, using musical instruments, filling balloons, operating electric appliances such as amplifiers, phones and cameras is not permitted on Shabbat. Delivery and set-up of equipment may not take place on Shabbat. All deliveries and set-up must be made before Shabbat or after Shabbat.

Parties must end by midnight.

Cleanup from an afternoon event may be completed at the time of the affair. For Saturday night events (commencing after Shabbat ends), no preparations may be made at the synagogue on Shabbat. Access to the building will not be allowed until one hour after sunset. Please plan accordingly. For the date indicated above, deliveries and set-up can take place only after \_\_\_\_\_ pm.

You and your staff may not bring food or drink items into our building at any time without the direct supervision of our kashrut supervisor. This includes food to be served at meals, table decorations, candy, your staff's personal meals and snacks, coffee and soft drinks, and any other consumable items. Please notify us several days in advance of the affair if you wish to bring in any food or drink items. Our facility is non-smoking.

We would be appreciative if you could instruct your staff of these rules and procedures. We trust that all will go well and we look forward to working with you.  
Thank you for your careful attention.

Rabbi Eric Woodward

Rachel Bashevkin, President