



August 20, 2020

To: Bet Torah Bar/Bat Mitzvah Families:

Re: Enhancement of Bet Torah Zoom Shabbat Services with the **BBM Home Torah Program**

As we continue our efforts to create meaningful remote Shabbat and other services for our Bet Torah family, we have identified one way that we believe can significantly enhance the experience of our Bar/Bat Mitzvah (BBM) children and their families – reading from an actual Torah scroll. Our new **BBM Home Torah Program** also will enhance the experience of our many other congregants who participate in our Zoom Shabbat services.¹

So, on a provisional basis, we now will allow those BBM families who want their BBM child to read from a Torah scroll to borrow one of Bet Torah's Torahs. We have carefully considered the related health, *halachic* (Jewish law), and practical implications and are implementing protocols to help assure the safety of the BBM family, those at the synagogue who will interact with them, and our Torahs themselves. From an educational component about the religious significance of the Torah and its handling to special protocols and travel bags to protect the Torah, we designed the **BBM Home Torah Program** in a way that is both meaningful and safe for all involved.

We are excited to be able to enhance BBM Torah services to more closely resemble those of our regular sanctuary services. The BBM child will be able to read from a Torah scroll, as will others at the BBM home who desire to do so, just as they could at a Bet Torah Sanctuary service. The BBM child and anyone physically present in the BBM home who is being honored with an *Aliyah* (i.e., one who is called up to the Torah to recite the blessings before and after a particular Torah reading) will be permitted to recite the traditional blessings as long as the Torah reader for that *Aliyah* also is present in the BBM home and will be reading from the Torah scroll. In all other situations, the *Aliyah* honoree will recite the special *limmud* (Torah study) blessings that we have been using these last few months during our special "Torah study" portion of the Shabbat morning service.

¹ While this letter focuses on the Shabbat services, the program and its procedures are equally applicable (with certain timing adjustments) to BBM families whose child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah is on a weekday, such as a Rosh Chodesh (new month) service.

Regrettably, other aspects of our traditional Shabbat Torah service, including a Torah processional and the lifting and dressing of the Torah (*hagbah* and *galilah*), remain on the sideline for now to protect our Torahs.

Please note that we are *offering* BBM families the opportunity for their child to read from a Torah scroll, but we are ***not requiring*** it. For a BBM child, preparing for the big day and actually reading from the Torah on that day present unique challenges. These include not being able to practice from the Torah scroll ahead of time and reading without the support of a nearby *Gabbai* (who usually assists with the Torah service) to step in when needed (although we will provide instruction and aid in advance). In cases where the BBM family prefers not to borrow a Torah, that BBM child's service instead would follow the "Torah study" format we have developed for remote services in which portions are read from the *chumash*, the book containing the text of the Torah.

This opportunity is being offered on a provisional basis and will apply only to BBM services held remotely. Once we've gained experience with this program, we will consider whether to expand it to Shabbat services that are not BBM services.

We welcome your comments about this provisional program and your suggestions for other ways to enhance our remote Bar/Bat Mitzvah services.

If you have questions regarding this program or the protocols for the program (see attached), you can reach out to our clergy or to me at vpirtual@bettorah.org, Heidi Widom at heidwidom@optonline.net or Marnie Metsch at mpulver@pulver.net

Sincerely,

Peter Linden
Chair, Bet Torah Ritual Committee

and

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