

Beth Sholom B'nai Israel



Guide for Interfaith Families



A Publication of
Beth Sholom B'nai Israel
Ritual Committee

400 Middle Turnpike East
Manchester CT 06040
www.myshul.org



Welcome Beth Sholom B'nai Israel members and clergy welcome interfaith families and encourage them to be a part of our community. This includes Jewish and non-Jewish members of interfaith families, people who are considering or working towards conversion to Judaism, and people who our tradition calls *reyim ahuvim*—beloved companions—those who are not interested in converting to Judaism, but would like to know more about Judaism or wish to be supportive of the Jews in their family.

Interfaith families who are considering joining the Beth Sholom B'nai Israel community may have questions about the synagogue and its practices. This booklet is intended to help answer some of those questions. In addition, our rabbi is happy to meet with prospective members to discuss these issues in greater depth. He may be reached by calling the synagogue office at 860-643-9563 x101, or by email to myrabbi@myshul.org.

Beth Sholom B'nai Israel is affiliated with the Conservative movement and as such follows certain laws (*halakha*), traditions, and practices, some of which are discussed here. Please do not hesitate to contact our rabbi with any questions.

Participation

Everyone is welcome to participate in Beth Sholom B'nai Israel's worship services, programs, and community activities. If you are attending our worship services but are not familiar with our practices, here are some broad guidelines.

You may sit anywhere in the sanctuary. If you are unaccustomed to our services, a greeter would be happy to seat you with someone who can be helpful.

All males must wear a head covering (*kippa*, sometimes called yarmulke) during services, and it is traditional for males to wear the *kippa*, or other head covering, during other activities in the synagogue building as well. *Kippot* (plural of *kippa*) can be found in bins on your way to the sanctuary or chapel. Females may choose to wear *kippot*.

The *tallit*, or prayer shawl, is worn only by Jews. It is traditional for Jewish males, after the age of thirteen, or Bar Mitzvah (one obligated to observe the commandments), to wear a *tallit* during morning services; some Jewish women, after the age of Bat Mitzvah, choose to wear one as well.





Marriage

Our rabbi is available for consultation and discussion of all marriages. All couples, where one of the spouses is Jewish, are welcome to join Beth Sholom B'nai Israel. Conservative clergy may not participate in a wedding ceremony unless both members of the couple are Jewish. However, our clergy are happy to offer support and advice about the process, whether or not they participate. All marriages, including interfaith marriages, may be announced in our congregational bulletin.

Baby Naming Ceremonies

Beth Sholom B'nai Israel is happy to assist in the creation of a personalized and meaningful naming ceremony for boys and girls born to a Jewish mother or who have been converted according to the Conservative tradition. (See Religious Identity and Conversion below.)

When a baby girl is named in the synagogue on a Saturday morning, it is tradi-

tional for both parents to participate in a blessing known as the *Mi Shebeirach*. This prayer asks God for blessings for the child being named. Parents, Jewish and non-Jewish, appear on the *bima* (pulpit), as well as grandparents, if they wish, for the *Mi Sheberach*.

In addition, when a baby is named in the synagogue, it is traditional for the Jewish parents to be called to the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) with their child for an *aliya* (literally "going up," the honor of reciting the blessings for the Torah). However, only a Jew may have an *aliyah*. This is because the nature of an *aliyah* recognizes the particular covenant between God and the Jewish people. We respect the faith and life choices of those who are not Jewish, and cannot ask them to affirm that which is not in their tradition.



Beth Sholom B'nai Israel offers religious services specifically for children and their parents on the High Holy Days and on some *Shabbatot* (Sabbaths) throughout the year. Services are offered according to the grade level of the children. The schedule of these services is included in our monthly and weekly announcements. All children whose families want them to share in these experiences are welcome to participate in these ser-

**Family
Worship
Services**



Rabbi Leon Wind Religious School

Our religious school has a regional reputation for excellence. It is a point of great pride at our synagogue. Children in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade attend school on Sunday mornings. Students in grades two through seven attend Sunday mornings and Thursday afternoons. Students in grades eight through twelve attend high school classes on Tuesday nights. All children who are Jewish, or are preparing to convert to Judaism, are welcome in our Hebrew School.

In addition to traditional classroom learning, our school offers Shabbat enhancement opportunities and family education workshops. These programs are open to all who are interested.

Religious Identity and Conversion

The Conservative movement's adherence to the traditional Jewish law (*halakha*) of matrilineal descent means that if an individual's mother is Jewish, the individual is Jewish. If the individual's mother is not Jewish, a conversion is required if Jewish identity is desired.

An adult conversion requires a serious, substantial period of study under the supervision of a rabbi. After studying, one

appears before a *Beit Din* (rabbinical tribunal) and immerses in a *mikveh* (ritual bath). A man receives a symbolic circumcision if a medical circumcision has already been performed (*Hatafat Dahm B'rit*), and a surgical circumcision (*B'rit Mila*) if one has not. Once these requirements are satisfied, the individual is recognized as a Jew.

Conversion for a child who is to be raised in a Jewish home includes immersion in a *mikveh* (ritual bath), and for boys the ritual *b'rit milah* (ritual circumcision). For children, conversion is the beginning of a process that is confirmed by the child at his or her Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Our rabbi is happy to discuss conversion issues for babies, children, and adults with anyone who wishes to learn more about the process.



Both parents of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah have the opportunity to participate in aspects of the ceremony and share in the joy of this special occasion. All children must be Jewish in order to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, which affirms the Jewish

**Bar
And
Bat
Mitzvah**

adult's responsibility and obligation to follow the laws and *mitzvot* (commandments) of the Torah.

During a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service at Beth Sholom B'nai Israel, the child will be called to the Torah for an *aliya* (literally "going up," the honor of reciting the blessings for the Torah). In addition, he/she will lead parts of the service, offer his/her own interpretation of the reading (*D'var Torah*), chant the *Haftarah* (segment from the books of Prophets), and usually participate in reading from the Torah. The clergy will meet with the families of the B'nei Mitzvah (plural for Bar or Bat Mitzvah) and discuss the ceremony and family members' participation. We especially encourage this participation as recognition of the special commitment made by parents who may have different faith traditions themselves, but have chosen to share in raising their child as a Jew. The Jewish parent of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah has the opportunity to be called to the Torah for an *aliyah*.

Our services which include Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations are joyous and heartwarming.

Burial and Mourning

Respect for the dead and comfort for the bereaved are the two principles governing Jewish burial. The dead should be buried as soon as family can gather. There is no embalming, cremation, or viewing of the body. Our congregation is very proud that we have

both a men's and women's *Chevra Kadisha*, the group that lovingly prepares the dead for burial by performing the rites of purification (*t'hara*) and dressing the deceased in the shroud (*tachrichin*).

During the burial in the cemetery, friends and family may observe the ritual of lovingly placing earth on the casket of the departed, a *chesed shel emet*—a true act of loving-kindness, one that has no expectation of reward. One need not be Jewish to participate in this ritual.

The Beth Sholom B'nai Israel cemeteries have plots available for purchase at reduced rates for synagogue members. Temple Beth Sholom Memorial Park is in Manchester, and Beit Olam is in Rockville. Interfaith couples may be buried in the Rockville cemetery.

When the burial ceremony is over, all who wish to comfort the bereaved can pay a condolence call to the family members "sitting *shiva*" (mourning) for up to a week following the burial. Sitting *shiva* is an obligation of the immediate family members. Jews are encouraged to sit *shiva* for Jewish and non-Jewish parents. The congregation will arrange for daily prayer services in a *shiva* home.

Traditionally, no flowers are given to the grieving family, but gifts of food are welcomed. (The congregation provides the Shabbat evening meal. This is supported by our *Nichum Aveilim*—comforting the bereaved—fund.) Contributions to a favorite charity given in memory of the deceased are also welcomed.



**The
Beth
Sholom
B'nai
Israel
Community**

Beth Sholom B'nai Israel warmly welcomes anyone seeking a connection to God, to Torah, to a loving Jewish community, or simply wanting to learn more about Judaism—its traditions, practices, and people. As a Conservative congregation, we enthusiastically encourage interfaith families to join our community. The Jewish spouse or partner will officially be a member of the congregation, and the non-Jewish spouse or partner is welcome to be part of the community and encouraged to participate in our social, religious, and educational activities.

This document is an introduction. Please do not hesitate to contact our clergy for more information or assistance in any of these matters or regarding related topics on which you have questions.



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Notes

Throughout this booklet, we have used the transliteration of the Hebrew words, such as *b'rit*. Some may be more familiar with the Ashkenazic pronunciation where the ending "t" is pronounced "s." Then *b'rit* becomes *b'ris* and *ta-lit'* becomes *ta'-lis*.

In certain places in this booklet we have used the terms *non-Jew* or *non-Jewish* for stylistic reasons. We recognize the inadequacy of these terms in describing individuals who follow another or no faith tradition.

A special thanks to the *Keruv* (drawing near) Committee at Temple Emanuel in Newton Centre, MA, and to the Temple Beth El Interfaith Task Force in Portland, ME for permitting our use of their *Keruv* booklet as a model.

Booklet produced by Cantor Anita Schubert

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