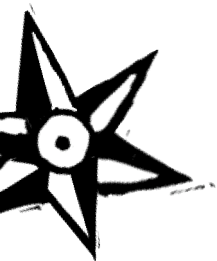


YOU ARE
welcome
HERE

Interfaith
Families at
Temple Beth El

a publication of the
Temple Beth El
Interfaith Task Force
400 Deering Avenue
Portland, Maine 04103





The Temple Beth El Community

and its clergy welcome participation in our community by interfaith families. This includes Jews, people who are considering or working towards conversion to Judaism, those who are members of interfaith families, and people who our tradition calls *rey'im abuvim*, 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 Temple Beth El community may have questions about the synagogue and its

...those who are members of interfaith families, and people who are not interested in converting to Judaism but would like to know more

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 and may be reached by calling the synagogue office at 207-774-2649.



Temple Beth El is a member of the Conservative movement and as such follows certain laws (*halakhab*), traditions, and practices, some of which are discussed here. Please do not hesitate to contact our rabbi with any questions about these and other practices.

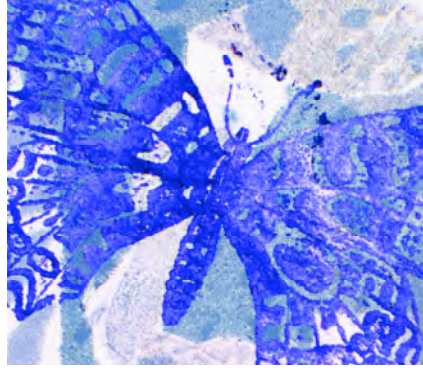


PARTICIPATION AT TEMPLE BETH EL

Everyone is welcome to participate in Temple Beth El'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 except at certain times during the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During those services, the lower sanctuary



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

tradition calls rey'im ahavim, beloved companions—those who about Judaism or wish to be supportive of the Jews in their family...

seats are reserved for those who have purchased special tickets. Please contact the office if you are interested in purchasing the tickets for these seats.

KIPPOT & TALLIT

All males must wear a head covering (*kippah*, sometimes called *yarmulke*) at our services and it is traditional for males to wear the *kippah*, or other head covering, during other activities in the synagogue building as well. *Kippot* (plural of *kippah*) are available inside the entrances to the synagogue and outside of the sanctuary as well. Females may choose to wear *kippot*.

MARRIAGE

Our rabbi is available for consultation and discussion of all marriages. Conservative clergy may not participate in a wedding 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.

Temple Beth El invites all couples to celebrate their *simcha* (special occasion) with the congregation in the singing of the congratulatory song, *Siman Tov u Mazel Tov*, during services. All families, where one of the individuals is Jewish, are welcome to become members of Temple Beth El.



BABY NAMING CEREMONIES

Temple Beth El is happy to assist in the creation of a meaningful naming ceremony for both boys and girls born to a Jewish mother or who

have been converted according to the Conservative tradition. (See Religious Identity & Conversion below.)

When a baby is named in the synagogue on a Saturday morning, it is traditional for both parents to participate in a blessing known as the *misheberach*. The *misheberach* asks God for blessings for the child being named. Parents, Jew and non-Jew, appear on the *bimah* (pulpit), as well as grandparents, if they wish, for the *misheberach*. The child is given a Hebrew name, which includes “daughter/son of” followed by the name(s) of the Jewish parent(s).

“...And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee: for whither and where thou lodgest, I will lodge:

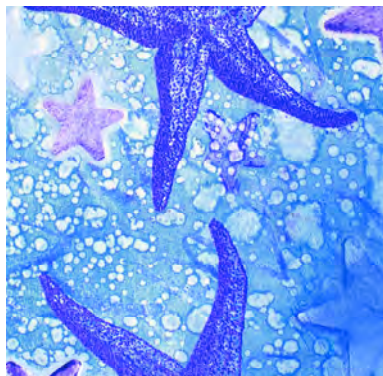
In addition, when a baby is named in the synagogue, it is traditional for the Jewish parents to be called to the Torah (the books Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) with their child for an *aliyah* (literally “going up,” the honor of reciting the blessings for the Torah). However, only a Jew

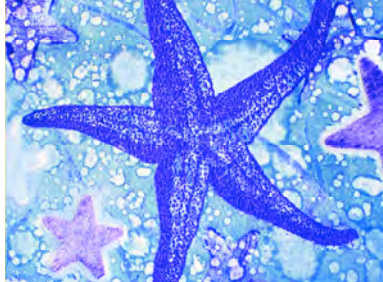
may have an *aliyah*. This is because the nature of an *aliyah* recognizes the particular covenant between God and the Jewish people. We respect the faith and life choices of those who are not Jewish and cannot ask them to affirm that which is not in their tradition.

CHILDREN'S RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Temple Beth El offers religious services specifically for children: Kol Yeladim for children and their parents, ages birth to five, and Kids Kehillah for ages six through twelve. These services imbue our children with a love of Jewish tradition and rituals. The children celebrate Shabbat (Sabbath) with prayers over wine and challah (braided bread). They listen to the sound of the *shofar* (ram’s horn) before Rosh Hashanah. They eat a meal in the sukkah (temporary dwelling)

during the holiday of Sukkot. They help light the Chanukah candles. They boo the tyrant,





RELIGIOUS IDENTITY & CONVERSION

Haman, on Purim. They talk about Pharaoh and the exodus from Egypt at model *sedarim* (Passover meals).

All children whose families want them to share in these experiences, including interfaith families, are welcome to participate in these services.

TEMPLE BETH EL HEBREW SCHOOL

Children attend Hebrew School on Sunday mornings in kindergarten, first and second grades. In third through seventh grades, they attend on Sunday mornings and on Wednesday afternoons, after school. Eighth grade students attend once per week on Sunday. Temple Beth El also offers a once per week

thou goest, I will go;

thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God"

Hebrew High School for ninth through twelfth grade students.

All children who are Jewish, being raised as Jews or are preparing to convert are welcome in our Hebrew School.

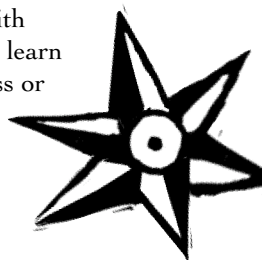
The Conservative Movement's adherence to the traditional Jewish law (*halakha*) of matrilineal descent means that if an individual's mother is Jewish, the individual is Jewish, and if the individual's mother is not Jewish, the individual must be converted in order to become Jewish.

An adult conversion requires a serious and substantial period of study under the supervision of a rabbi. After studying, one appears before a *beit din* (Jewish tribunal) and immerses in a *mikveh* (ritual bath). A man receives a symbolic circumcision if a medical circumcision has already been performed, and a surgical circumcision if one has not. Once these three requirements are satisfied, the individual is recognized as a Jew.

Conversion for a baby or a young child includes immersion in a *mikveh* (ritual bath) and for boys, the ritual *brit milah* (ritual circumcision).

For children, conversion is the beginning of a process that is confirmed by the child at their 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 or the ritual itself.



BAR/BAT MITZVAH

All children and adults must be Jewish in order to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, which affirms the Jewish adult's responsibility and obligations to follow the laws and the *mitzvot* (good deeds and obligations) of the Torah.

Children in our Hebrew School in the sixth and seventh grades express much excitement in anticipation of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, which usually takes place when the children are 13 years old. Adults may also affirm their Jewish identity through an adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah.



At a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Temple Beth El, the child will usually participate in reading from the Torah and chanting the Haftarah (segment from the books of Prophets), offer his/her own interpretation of the reading (*D'var Torah*) and will be called to the Torah for an *aliyah* (literally "going up," the honor of reciting the blessings for the Torah).

Both parents have the opportunity to participate in aspects of the ceremony and share in the joy of this special occasion. The clergy and religious school director will meet with all families of B'nai Mitzvah (plural for Bar or Bat) and discuss the ceremony and various roles and participation.

"Love therefore the stranger; for you

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 also has the opportunity to be called to the Torah for an *aliyah*.

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.

During 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. It is a demonstration of love and respect, with no expectation of reward. One need not be Jewish to participate in this ritual.



The Temple Beth El cemetery (Temple Beth El Memorial Park) has a consecrated area dedicated to members of the Jewish faith as well as one dedicated to Jews and non-Jews who wish to be buried together.

and non-Jew alike may observe these customs.

Our rabbi is happy to answer any questions related to burial and mourning practices.

were strangers in the land of Egypt."

When burial is over, all who wish to comfort the bereaved visit where the family members "sit shiva" (mourn) for up to a week following the burial. Sitting shiva is an obligation of the immediate family members. Jews may sit shiva for non-Jewish parents.

ואדוותם את דגור

Traditionally, no flowers are given to the grieving family but gifts of food are welcomed. Contributions to a favorite charity given in memory of the deceased are also welcomed.

During the mourning period (11 months for children of the deceased, 30 days for other family members), and on the anniversary of the death, mourners traditionally stand to recite the Mourner's Kaddish (prayer praising God) during religious services. If you wish to rise to honor the memory of the deceased, we welcome you to stand and join the mourners as they rise to recite the prayer.

Some families hold an unveiling of the gravestone approximately a year after burial. Unveiling customs vary family to family. Jew

THE TEMPLE BETH EL COMMUNITY

Temple Beth El warmly welcomes anyone seeking a connection to God, to Torah, or simply wanting to learn more about Judaism, its traditions, practices, and people. We encourage questions and are happy to discuss any issues or answer any questions. We appreciate and encourage your interest. In this spirit, we believe we can all learn together and grow as a welcoming community.

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 for which you have questions.



Note: Throughout this booklet, we have used the transliteration of the Hebrew words, such as *brit*. Some may be more familiar with the Ashkenazic (European) pronunciation where the ending “t” is pronounced “s,” making *brit* pronounced *bris* and *tallit* pronounced *tallis*.

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 faith tradition or none at all.

A special thanks to the Keruv (drawing near) Committee at Temple Emanuel in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, for permitting our use of their keruv brochure.

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