

## **Your First Visit to a Synagogue**

You're probably curious. You might be nervous. We hope you're eager! If you've never been to a synagogue service before and don't know much about Judaism, read on. It's easier than you think.

First and foremost, you ARE welcome here, and we're delighted to have you.

Here is a guide to Temple Beth Shalom in 21 easy steps.

### **1. Why are services on Friday and Saturday? What do you do on Sunday?**

Shabbat is first mentioned in Genesis 2:2-3. "On the seventh day God finished the work that God had made and God rested on the seventh day from all the work which God had made. And God blessed the seventh day and called it holy, and rested from all the work of creation which God made." All Jewish days (including Shabbat) begin in the evening because of the pattern established in Genesis 1:5. "And there was evening and there was morning; a first day." Therefore, we hold our worship services on the Sabbath (Shabbat) which begins on Friday evening and continues into Saturday.

Friday night and Saturday morning services are not the same although they have a lot in common. Friday night services contain Kabbalat Shabbat (Receiving of the Sabbath) followed by evening prayers. This shorter service welcomes the Sabbath with songs and psalms. We begin the service by saying the blessing over the Shabbat candles. The Rabbi might give a short d'var Torah (talk about the Torah). Near the end of service, we say a blessing over the fruit of the vine. Sometimes wine (typically grape juice) is passed out to the congregation and sometimes children are called up front to partake in the blessing (definitely grape juice!) You are welcome to participate. After service concludes, we meet together in the social hall and share some treats at a reception called an oneg. You are also invited to this. It is a great time for us to get to know you better. (We do not have an oneg during the summer.)

Saturday morning service is a bit longer than Friday night. Our services begin at 9 am, but please feel free to come later if you need to. This is not uncommon. One of the differences between Friday and Saturday services is that on Saturday we read the Torah. The Torah is read serially, from one weekly portion through the next, beginning in Genesis, working all the way to

the end of Deuteronomy, and beginning again the next year. Jews all over the world are reading the same portion. Near the beginning of this part of the service, the Torah is taken out of the ark and paraded around the chapel or sanctuary. You will see people stepping out into the aisle and as the Torah passes, they may touch it with their prayer book and then kiss the book, or touch it with the fringe of their tallit and then kiss the fringe. You can do the same if you'd like. This processional is repeated near the end of the Torah service. The Torah portion itself is divided into seven parts. For each part, someone is called up to recite a blessing before and after the reading. This is an honor. At the conclusion of the Torah service, the Rabbi usually leads a Torah discussion (which is participatory) or a delivers sermon.

After Saturday services we have a Kiddush luncheon held in the social hall. Here we say a blessing over the fruit of the vine (called Kiddush) and a blessing over the bread (the bread is called challah and the blessing is called HaMotzi). We hope everyone attending services can also attend our luncheon.

On Sundays at TBS we have religious school and adult education opportunities. Please check our website to see the opportunities available.

*See Question 10 below for more about services.*

## **2. Who can come to services at Temple Beth Shalom?**

There are no rules about who can attend services at TBS. You can come if you're Jewish. You can come if you're not Jewish. We are always happy to welcome you, even if this is an entirely new experience.

## **3. And children?**

Absolutely! Your children are more than welcome, and we understand that with children comes a little whispering and wiggling. We do ask that at the more solemn parts of the service they do their best to remain quiet. You'll be able to tell when these times come: the congregation is typically standing and quiet as well. You are always welcome to take your children out to the foyer if need be. In addition, we have childcare twice a month for children through 2nd grade. Check out our calendar to see if it is available when you come.

During the school year we also have a Friday night service specifically geared for young children. Currently it's held in a small room in our social hall. You

will go through the foyer, into the social hall, and it's in the room with the stained glass windows. It's a very casual and welcoming environment for kids who wiggle a lot. Check out our calendar to see when it is scheduled.

#### **4. What should I wear?**

People generally wear business clothes or casual clothes that you would wear to a dinner or gathering. There are no restrictions on what to wear, although we do ask for the typical expression of modesty you would see in any dress code.

#### **5. There are two entrances. Which one do I use?**

When you park, you will see an entrance in the parking lot on the east side of the building. This is the entrance to our school. For services, you want to use the entrance at the front of our building, the one you saw on the right when you drove into the parking lot.

#### **6. Why is there security?**

Seeing a security figure can seem a bit intimidating, but they are there as a precautionary measure. Temple Beth Shalom is a safe environment for you to visit. If one of the guards talks to you, it's only because they know the members, and they want to get to know you.

#### **7. What's the first thing I'll see when I walk in the door?**

Hopefully you'll see one of our Board Greeters, a friendly face who will greet you, introduce themselves, and help you with anything you need. Don't be afraid to say you're new at this. The greeter will let you know what to do next. If by chance a greeter is not there, look for our Rabbi or another friendly face and take the chance to introduce yourself. You'll be happy you did!

#### **8. Shabbat Shalom?**

You will hear this a lot! It means "Sabbath peace" and is the typical greeting for Shabbat. If it is said to you, you can say it right back or simply say "Thank you." You might also hear "Gut Shabbos." It means the same thing.

#### **9. What are all those doors? Where do I go?**

Look to the left! On the left side of the foyer, you will see a smallish, open room with no door. That's our chapel. Most of our regular services take place in there. If there is no greeter to help seat you, don't worry. You are welcome to sit wherever you want. Up front or in the back, in the middle or next to a wall.

For larger events, our sanctuary is next to the chapel. We hold our High Holy Days services, B'nai Mitzvah services, and Yom HaShoah service in there, along with a few others. It's much larger than our chapel. Once again, you can sit anywhere, but we encourage you to try and plant yourself close to a cluster of people. That way, we can get to know you better. Sometimes the doors are closed if service has already started. If this is the case, feel free to open the door and walk in. If the congregation is standing, please wait until they are once again seated and then find a place to sit.

The doors directly opposite the front doors towards the back of the foyer lead to our Diskin Social Hall where we gather for our oneg on Friday night, our Kiddush luncheon on Saturday afternoon, and other social events. (*see Question 18*)

### **10. And those little round things...what are they?**

Between the chapel and the sanctuary doors there is a bin full of head coverings...kippah (kippot is the plural) or you might have heard them called yarmulkes (yah-muh-kahs) They are of many colors, some are suede, some are satin, some are knit, some are lace. They are all equal. Most of the suede ones have a name and date on the inside commemorating one of our past bat or bar mitzvahs. Grab one of those little round things and put it on your head. A bobby pin or two will help secure it.

Wearing a kippah is not a religious commandment. Rather it is a Jewish custom that over time has come to be associated with Jewish identity and showing respect for God. At Temple Beth Shalom, both men and women wear them. (This is not the case at all synagogues. At some temples only men wear them.) You can wear them whether you're Jewish or not Jewish.

### **11. Okay...I also see people with shawls on. What are those? Do I need one?**

Those shawls are called tallitot (tallit-singular). They are prayer shawls worn by Jews on Saturday mornings or the High Holy Days. At Temple Beth Shalom, both Jewish men and women wear them. (But once again, this is not the case at all synagogues. At some temples only men wear tallitot.) If you are not Jewish, you don't need to worry about them as only Jews wear prayer shawls at services. If you are Jewish and want to wear one, they are in the hallway to the right of the front doors.

## **12. I have been seated and services have started, and I don't understand a word of it. I picked up the book that everyone is holding, and I can't read it!**

Services at Temple Beth Shalom are conducted in a mixture of Hebrew and English. In front of you, you will see two books, both with red covers. The smaller book is called Siddur Lev Shalem, and is the prayerbook we use during the service. The book opens from right to left, which is the direction which Hebrew is read. The book primarily has Hebrew on the right side of the page, and English on the left, and interspersed in small red print is transliteration (Hebrew in English letters.) Page numbers will occasionally be announced by the service leader so that you can follow along. Please feel free to join in, either in Hebrew or in English. On Saturday mornings we also read from the Torah (the first 5 books of the Jewish scriptures: In English: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy). The large red book is our chumash (the Torah, commentaries, and other readings). Our edition is called the Etz Hayim. When it is being read, the service leader announces both page and verse. The Hebrew will be read (on the right side of the book), but you can follow along in English (on the left side of the book).

If you don't have a siddur or chumash, you may get one from the back of the chapel or sanctuary. If you feel unsure about where they are, ask someone around you. They will be more than happy to point the way. Out of respect for its sanctity, please do not put your prayer book or chumash on the floor. If you need to set it down, please place it back in the rack in front of you. You will sometimes see people kiss their prayerbook or chumash. This is a custom of reverence.

## **13. Who's the person leading services?**

Our Rabbi leads the majority of services. You can read more about the Rabbi on our website.

However, services are also peopled by many others. Quite often one of our b'nai mitzvah (a child preparing for her or his bat or bar mitzvah) leads a prayer or a whole section of service. Congregants can lead also. During the Torah service (explained in Question 1) many people participate. We have two people standing on each side of the Torah. These two people (our gabbai) have a few particular duties. They follow along as the person reading Torah chants and correct any mistakes which are made. They call people up for aliyot (the honor of reciting the blessing before the Torah reading is chanted and after it is finished) and the honors of holding up and wrapping the Torah and opening the ark. In addition, many different people can read from the Torah, although the Rabbi is the main reader. At times we have a lay-led service which is completely led by members of the congregation. This happens for particular services a couple of times a year and also when the Rabbi is not present for services. And, of course, when we have a bat or bar mitzvah, the student is the one leading services.

#### **14. What is that cabinet at the front of the chapel and sanctuary and why do people stand when it's open?**

That cabinet is our ark (aron kodesh) where the Torah scrolls are kept. On Saturday morning, the scroll we are currently reading from is taken out of the cabinet. (See Question 1 for more details.) The ark is the focal point of the chapel and sanctuary and treated with great respect because it holds the Torah scrolls. This is the reason we stand when it is open. We also remain standing whenever the Torah scroll is lifted or carried. If it is resting on the podium as it is being read the congregation is generally seated.

Our ark doors were designed by a local artist for TBS and are quite symbolic.

#### **15. Is it all right if I leave the chapel or sanctuary during services? And where is your restroom?**

As a mark of respect, we do not enter or exit when the Torah scroll is being read, lifted, or carried around the sanctuary. (And you can't miss when that is happening; it's a BIG scroll). We also try not to exit when someone is giving a talk, or when the congregation is quiet and standing. Our restroom is down the hallway on the right as you enter into the foyer

from the front doors. We ask that if you are wearing a prayer shawl that you remove it before entering the restroom.

### **16. There seem to be a couple places in services where everyone stands and no one (or only a few people) speak. What is happening?**

The Amidah is the core of every Jewish worship service, and is therefore also referred to as "The Prayer." Amidah literally means "standing" and is a group of blessings recited while standing. It has three sections: first words of praise, then petitions, then thanks. The Amidah is recited silently by all members of the congregation. There are some specific movements associated with it. You will see people stepping forward and back, bowing, and perhaps turning from side to side. This is choreography built into the prayer.

Another especially solemn place in the service is when we recite the Mourner's Kaddish. This is recited in memory of the dead. It is recited on the anniversary of a death of a loved one. Some people recite it at every service even if they are not observing the anniversary of a death. However, others remain quiet during it if they aren't observing an anniversary. Regardless, we all typically stand in solidarity with those who are mourning.

### **17. Is there anything I shouldn't do?**

Not much. On Shabbat, we ask that you turn off your cell phone during services, and do not use it in our social hall or sanctuary. We also ask that you don't take pictures on Shabbat, even at a bat or bar mitzvah or other celebration. And we refrain from writing on Shabbat.

### **18. What do I do at the conclusion of services?**

Of course you can leave (remember to take off your kippah), but we'd really like you to stay and socialize with us so we can get to know you better. On Friday nights we usually have a dessert gathering in the social hall called an oneg. On Saturdays we have a luncheon called a Kiddush. Please come. You are more than welcome. And...don't sit by yourself. If for some reason you haven't been greeted (and we really hope this isn't the case), introduce yourself to someone and sit with them. We really do want to learn all about you!

### **19. I'd like to go deeper into all of this. What can I do?**

We encourage you to get in touch with our Rabbi if you'd like to explore Judaism in more depth. At times we have a yearlong course about the basics of Judaism. At other times there are many adult education opportunities you can take advantage of. Please check them out!

## **20. I'm still just a bit apprehensive.**

Don't worry, we can help you out here. Please feel free to contact someone on our Membership committee. They can make sure you are met at the door and taken care of.

## **21. Just one more question....**

If you have any further questions, don't be afraid to ask. Contact our Membership committee, the Rabbi, or the main office at 509-747-3304 and we'll get you your answer.