

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Congregation Beth Shalom. In order to enable you to better understand the meaning of the service, we have provided this brochure.

About Beth Shalom and the Sanctuary. Beth Shalom (House of Peace) is affiliated with the Reform branch of Judaism. Our religious services are conducted in this synagogue having the congregation oriented towards the *Aron HaKodesh* or Ark of the Holy. Contained within the *Aron HaKodesh* are our Torah scrolls: each scroll is handwritten parchment containing the Pentateuch –the first 5 books of the Bible. Above the *Aron HaKodesh* is the *Ner Tamid* (Eternal Light), which symbolizes the presence of God through the constant presence of light at the sanctuary. The inscription above our Ark is a Biblical quote, *Lekhu VeNelkhalh Be-Or Adonai*, and translates to “Come, let us walk in the light of Adonai (God)”.

About our Service Customs. In our service we pray and read from Hebrew and English texts. Following a very ancient tradition, some members cover their heads with a *Kipah* to mark this as a special moment and place, and as a sign of respect and awareness of the presence of God. *Kipot* (skull caps) are provided for all, and non-Jewish guests may also wear them. The *Tallit* (prayer shawl) is worn by worshipers who want to fulfill the biblical commandment of using this symbol to remember our duties to God. All attendees, Jewish and non-Jewish, are asked to stand when the congregation rises as a sign of respect to the ceremony and the worshipers. The prayer book used in the service is read as all books in Hebrew are: from right to left. It contains all the prayers that we will recite during the service, and often includes notes or comments to deepen our understanding of the prayer.

About Being a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. An important life cycle event for a young Jewish person, the Bar Mitzvah (for a boy) or Bat Mitzvah (for a girl), is one of the most traditional and momentous of Jewish symbols and rituals. To become a "Bar/Bat Mitzvah" literally means to become “one who is responsible for the commandments”. At the age of 13, Judaism considers children as becoming responsible for their own religious and ethical obligations -the commandments. Although a Jewish child becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah just by reaching that age, it has become common practice to formally recognize this occasion by having the Bar/Bat Mitzvah lead the congregation at services for the first time as a fully responsible Jew. Today, **student's name** will demonstrate that **he/she** has become skilled in reading and chanting Hebrew holy texts -the Torah, the Prophets, and the Prayer book - and also that **he/she** understands the significance of the moral, ethical and ritual duties of a maturing Jew. In becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, **student's name** participates in a tradition that began in antiquity, and which has continued from generation to generation, thus insuring the continuity of our faith and our people throughout the centuries.

About our Shabbat Morning Service

The first part of our service -*Bircot Hashakhar* and *Pesukei DeZimra* (morning blessings and verses of song) consists primarily of our thanks to God for the blessings we receive each day, and includes psalms and other Biblical songs -to create the appropriate attitude

and atmosphere for prayer. As we thank and praise God, we sharpen our focus for the meaning and purpose of prayer.

The central part of our service is built around the *Shema Israel* – the Jewish and Biblical proclamation of belief in and loyalty to One God. This is followed by the *Amidah* (Standing prayer) in which we express directly to God our thanks, our concerns and our ideals, both as individuals and as a community.

We then proceed to read from the Holy Books: the *Torah Service* includes reading or chanting from the Torah and the Haftarah (from the books of the Prophets). The portion of the Torah that is read today is **enter Torah portion** from **enter book, chapter and verses (e.g., Genesis, 11:1-10)**. At this time, it is customary to honor family and friends by calling them up to the *Bimah* (pulpit), to recite the blessings while **student's name** reads the Torah. Learning the centuries-old techniques of reading the Torah is part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah training and is especially difficult because, unlike the books with which the congregation follows the service, the Torah scroll has no punctuation marks (neither some vowels, nor musical notations).

The Haftarah reading on this Shabbat is from the **enter Haftorah portion**.

student's name will also offer a *Devar Torah*, a personal commentary related to the Torah reading. Parents and/or members of the congregation may also offer some comments at this time.

The *Closing Prayers* are additional songs and hymns of praise to God and include the *Kaddish Yatom* (mourner's Kaddish) -a prayer of remembrance for the departed. The service concludes with the *Kiddush* -a consecration of the day of Shabbat with a cup of wine as a symbol of joy, and *HaMotzi*, a blessing of thanksgiving for the food and nourishment we receive from God.

Family may choose (is encouraged) to add texts of Torah and Haftorah portions in the booklet (English translations and/or Hebrew – ask the Rabbi for assistance)