

History of Our Synagogue

In 1985, a small group of men and women founded Congregation Bet Haverim (CBH), which means House of Friends, on behalf of lesbian and gay Jews who wanted to live openly in the context of our Jewish heritage. Many of these years, CBH has been almost exclusively gay and lesbian. With no real inclusive liturgy to guide us, we created our own within the tradition, and bound by our love for Judaism and our commitment to each other's protection and safety, we became more than a congregation; we became a thriving community rich with warmth and characterized by a generosity of spirit and an openness to change.

The appeal of such a community proved not to be limited to the lesbian and gay community, though! For some who were not lesbian or gay, CBH represented and could potentially fulfil what was lacking for them in the larger Jewish community. In a courageous move, CBH opened its home to those members of the straight community who had been waiting with respect and desire just outside the doors. In a mutually courageous move, those straight members stepped inside. None of us knew what we were creating.

Today, CBH is a diverse community with a membership that is about half LGBT and half straight allies. Our membership is growing rapidly; our walls, which ripple with the laughter of children (and adults), can barely contain the energy, creativity, and genuine caring among our members. By all accounts, CBH is a successful congregation that has come through a number of difficult times to become the model of diversity many in our movement consider us to be.

History of Our School

Our educational program, Haverim Beyahad, (Friends Together) began in 1995 as a dream shared among a handful of long-time and new synagogue members. These pioneers envisioned a school in which learning would be engaging, exciting, alive, creative, experiential and hands-on. They envisioned a place where people of all ages would learn in tandem and in dialogue. They envisioned a place where adults and children would talk openly about all the ways in which we are diverse. Above all, they envisioned a place in which children and adults would come away feeling positive and connected to being Jewish.

In the fall of 1995, their dream came true as our school opened with 10 enthusiastic children and a handful of dedicated adult learners. Here in 2010, our size has grown ten-fold, with over 100 weekly students in grades K-7. In addition to our weekly Sunday School classes, we have monthly Parent 'n Me classes for our preschoolers and monthly classes for our teens. We also have mid-week B'nai Mitzvah preparation classes, Intergenerational Learning, and Adult Education.

Haverim Beyahad Mission Statement

Haverim Beyahad is the Education Program of Congregation Bet Haverim, a Reconstructionist synagogue founded by lesbians and gay men and embracing all Jews and their loved ones. Congregation Bet Haverim begins with the assumption that all members, young and old, are still learning. We welcome and invite each person in our community to join us.

Our educational program strives to foster a greater sense of connection to Jewish community and tradition, to develop our sense of awe and wonderment, and to promote value-based living. We strive to make Jewish teachings accessible to our students, allowing them to relate what they learn in class to their own lives in meaningful ways, whether to pause and appreciate the sense of awe that comes during a walk in the woods, to feel connected to generations of Jews through ritual, or to consider how different Jewish thinkers would encourage them to behave in any given situation – and to feel empowered to agree or disagree with those teachings based on their own systems of values. In addition to considering our own daily lives, we strive to be more mindful, as a community, of the world *beyond* our own daily social existences by participating in acts of *Tikkun Olam*, the healing of the world, in our broader community.

We are committed to learning that is intergenerational, with adults studying alongside children in the school, joining together at community celebrations and building an environment in the home that fosters ongoing Jewish learning. We understand Jewish education as a life-long pursuit that takes place in the classroom, in the home, in the synagogue, and in the community at-large.

We are committed to pluralism in our education program and in our daily lives, and our school actively celebrates the richness of our differences. We welcome families who practice and experience Judaism in a variety of ways: our families are interfaith and multi-racial, Hebrew-speaking and Hebrew-learning, ritual mavens and ritual learners, skeptics and spiritualists. Our children have single parents, gay parents, and straight parents, who come from many different religious, social, and cultural backgrounds. We are brought together by a love of Judaism, a desire to be both loved and challenged by our community, and an interest in identifying and living out our values. We strive to live lives that embrace the Torah's teaching that we are all made in God's image – to be so genuinely inclusive that we've forgotten we're being inclusive, to offer a welcome that is so welcome that it's not an effort, it's just who we are.

Sunday Morning Adult Learning Programs

Frequently during the year, special adult learning sessions will be held while the children are in class. In the past, these have included such favorites as *Shabbat vs. Soccer Saturdays* – a frank discussion about how to make Shabbat a meaningful day of rest in the face of soccer, ballet, piano, and birthday parties; *Living, Learning, and Celebrating as an Interfaith Family*; *Talking to your Kids about God* (when you're not sure what you think about God in the first place ...), *No Dumb Questions: Introduction to the Transgender Experience*, and *Politics and Israel: Talking to Your Kids About What They Hear on NPR*, as well as some Israeli dance instruction. Adult programming changes yearly to reflect the interests of the community – feedback and ideas are always welcome!

Our Wider Community: Congregation Bet Haverim

While we at Haverim Beyahad strive to provide the richest experience possible for our students on Sunday mornings, we also hope that families will become involved in our wider congregation and take advantage of its diverse offerings. Participation in the life of our Jewish community provides a living context for the things that are taught on Sundays, and involvement in the congregation is an indispensable part of helping children develop strong, positive, individual Jewish identities.

Prayer services are integral to Congregation Bet Haverim. We gather for Friday night services weekly – usually at 7:30pm – and Shabbat morning services twice each month. Once a month, we offer a shorter Kabbalat Shabbat service, beginning at 6:30 and followed by a community potluck dinner and informal singing. (This is a particularly good service for families with children in 2nd through 5th grade.) For families with young children, we also offer “Tot Shabbat” services once each month – a shorter, earlier service of songs and stories, geared toward the 2-6 year old crowd. Whenever our community celebrates b'nai mitzvah during a Saturday morning service, there is free childcare available, should that make more sense for some members of your family. Our calendar of Shabbat and holiday celebrations is always available online at <http://www.congregationbethaverim.org>.

In addition to Shabbat and holiday observances, groups within Congregation Bet Haverim focus on Jewish expression through music, through Tikkun Olam, through chant and meditation, and through ritual, to name only our most commonly followed spiritual paths. We very much hope that you and your family will find CBH to be a place where every member of your family can feel at home.

Congregation Bet Haverim's Membership Committee holds informal orientation sessions throughout the year for new, returning, and prospective members, focusing on creating and preserving an understanding of our community and its heritage. Participants learn more about a Reconstructionist approach to Judaism as well as our Synagogue's structure, mission, and programming.

Haverim Beyahad Curriculum

Our school's mission manifests in our curriculum in 3 discrete sections of our morning, each focusing on different learning experiences: Family Minyan, Hebrew, and Judaics.

Family Minyan is a gathering of our students and their families from 9:30-10:00 each Sunday. During this time, we learn, recite, and think about morning prayers. In addition to being important community time, the educational goals of minyan are to familiarize students with the words and melodies of morning prayers so that they will feel at home in the synagogue, and to help to make prayer a meaningful experience for each person in our community by talking about issues of meaning and spiritual connection as they come up in traditional prayers. To that end, minyan incorporates stories and teachings to help each person find new ways of understanding and connecting to Jewish liturgy. It is also, quite simply, a time for our community to come together and sing.

Our classroom curriculum is divided between siddur Hebrew and Judaics. The primary goal of our Hebrew program is to prepare students to read fluently from the siddur and the Torah. Coupled with a vocabulary of the 200 words that appear most frequently in the siddur, this skill will allow our children to participate in the life of the synagogue and lay the groundwork for further Hebrew study, whether ancient or modern. Our Hebrew classes are divided by skill level, rather than by age, in order to best meet the needs of our students. For students who can read comfortably from the siddur, we offer an enrichment class that, on alternate years, focuses on either trope or Modern Hebrew.

The pillars of our Judaics curriculum are Torah, Worship (in terms of spirituality and in terms of developing comfort with Jewish liturgy, and including holiday and lifecycle rituals), and Social Values. Within each of these areas, teachers seek to incorporate a range of Jewish values and modes of expression, imparting to students the Reconstructionist belief that Judaism is an evolving civilization and celebrating its language, art, and history alongside its religion. Attention to diverse Jewish perspectives and experiences is woven into each class session.

Grades 1-5 use the Chai curriculum, produced by the reform movement, which centers on the following teachings:

- Torah is an ongoing dialogue between the text and its students.
- Torah is real in our daily lives; it is with us wherever we are.
- Developing skills to study Torah is essential to integrating Torah into our lives.
- Avodah (Worship) is the work we do to find sacred connections to God, community, & self
- Engaging in the work of avodah can bring order, beauty, meaning & insight to our lives.
- We have a responsibility to perform acts of g'milut chasadim (loving kindness) to make the world a better, holier place.

In order to promote a more personal connection to Jewish learning, 6th and 7th graders choose between 3 tracks for their Judaics learning. The offerings, which rotate from year to year, include Judaism and the Visual Arts, Judaism and Music, Judaism in America, and Jewish Identity in Film. Each of these courses of study supports engagement with a broad spectrum of Jewish learning including texts, history, values, and culture, but the approach to these materials will vary from class to class. For example, children in the arts track might read a Torah story, talk about its ambiguities, examine some illuminated manuscripts, and then create their own; they might spend a week looking at photography from an Eastern European shtetl, talk about 19th and 20th century Jewish European history, and then go into Atlanta to take pictures that they believe reflect Jewish life as they know it; they might learn the rituals of havdalah, look at many different spice boxes, and then craft one that they believe captures, in some way, the essence of the ritual. Our hope is that by allowing older students a voice in how they engage Jewish learning, they will feel greater personal investment – and interest – in what they are learning.

CHAI: Learning for Jewish Life Curriculum

Enduring Understandings

Enduring understandings are the "big ideas," the concepts that provide the foundation for a lifetime of Jewish learning and living. The big concepts of the CHAI Curriculum are Torah, Avodah and G'milut Chasadim. Each grade level, from Kitah Alef through Zayin, focuses on specific aspects of each of these themes.

Torah

Torah is an ongoing dialogue between the text and its students.

Torah is real in our daily lives; it is with us wherever we are.

Developing skills to study Torah is essential to integrating Torah into our lives.

Kitah Alef: I am part of the ongoing story of Torah and the Jewish people

Kitah Bet: Studying Torah can teach me important lessons about how God wants me to live.

Kitah Gimmel: The laws and rules found in the Torah can help us to live a life filled with holy moments.

Kitah Dalet: With the promise of a holy land (Eretz Yisrael), we as a holy people (Am Yisrael) have a responsibility to work towards becoming holy by observing the brit (covenant).

Kitah Hey: The words and messages of the prophets are at the heart of modern, progressive Judaism.

Avodah

Avodah is the work we do to find sacred connections to God, community, & self

Engaging in the work of avodah can bring order, beauty, meaning & insight to our lives.

Kitah Alef: My Jewish acts help me discover the beauty and order of sacred time and my place in the Jewish story.

Kitah Bet: Jewish stories, celebrations and rituals help me understand and express my relationship with God.

Kitah Gimmel: Through *avodah* we can make our lives and the world more *kadosh* (holy).

Kitah Dalet: *Keva* and *kavanah*, the fixed order of worship and the personal intention we bring to prayer, are complementary aspects of Jewish worship, combining to help us make sacred connections.

Kitah Hey: The practice of prayer can help me grow through personal reflection, can increase my connection to the Jewish people, and can strengthen my relationship with God.

G'milut Chasadim - Loving Kindness

We have a responsibility to perform acts of *g'milut chasadim* (loving kindness) to make the world a better, holier place.

Kitah Alef: I am a part of the ongoing story of the Jewish people when I perform acts of *g'milut chasadim*.

Kitah Bet: We make the world a better place by performing acts of *g'milut chasadim* in our everyday lives.

Kitah Gimmel: Each individual act of *g'milut chasadim* can make the world more *kadosh* (holy).

Kitah Dalet: We have a responsibility to perform acts of *g'milut chasadim* for the people we encounter in our daily lives.

Kitah Hey: We are all part of *K'lal Yisrael* and have a responsibility to actively support and sustain the Jewish community.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

The B'nai Mitzvah process is a powerful lifecycle ritual that invites us to reflect on what it means for our children to become Jewish adults in the context our families and our community. While each celebration contains certain core elements (helping to lead services, chanting from the Torah, offering a d'var, and completing a Tikkun Olam project), each family works individually with Rabbi Josh to put together a course of preparation and a service that reflects the values, passions, and personality of their child and their family.

In addition to Sunday school, students approaching their Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations attend a special, mid-week B'nai Mitzvah class with a small cohort of their peers, as well as several individual and family sessions with the rabbi. Most students engage a tutor to help with the preparation of their Torah portion, and all students work on Tikkun Olam projects and attend many a Shabbat morning service in the year leading up to the celebration. It is not a small investment of time and energy for anyone involved, but the results are truly transformative.

Monthly classes

In addition to our weekly classes for grades K-7 and our weekday afternoon classes geared toward b'nai mitzvah preparation, we offer monthly classes for pre-schoolers and teens.

Parent 'n Me

Parent 'n Me is dedicated to helping each child develop a framework for understanding Jewish holidays, Jewish ethics and culture, and, most importantly, themselves. Upon their departure from the Parent n' Me experience, they will have acquired a working understanding of Jewish prayer, blessings, spirituality, Hebrew words and phrases, the relationship of Israel to their Judaic roots, as well as an understanding of the value of differences and the importance of respect, honoring themselves, their families, their community and all living things.

Teen Class

It is our belief that Jewish learning is a lifelong pursuit that does not end with a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and all children who celebrate b'nai mitzvah in our community commit to continuing involvement in the school, either as madrichim Sunday mornings or in our Teen Club, for at least a year following their celebrations. While the specific theme of the club varies from year to year, the general focus is on Jewish identity and self-expression.