

**Beth Chaim Religious School  
Parent Handbook  
2008 – 2009 / 5769**

**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ, וְצִוָּנוּ  
לְעִסּוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה:**

*Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Who makes us holy through Your commandments and commands us to immerse ourselves in study.*

*Blessing recited before beginning study*

**Rabbi Eric Wisnia  
Rabbi Jeremy Master  
Cantor Stuart Binder  
Anne Berman-Waldorf  
*Director of Lifelong Education***

## **Brit of Education**

### **A covenant between parents & the Beth Chaim Religious School**

This *Brit* is a contract between the Religious School of Congregation Beth Chaim and our families, together we agree that:

Religious School can educate our children about Judaism, but

Only in our homes can we turn them into caring, committed Jews by teaching through our own dedication to study, prayer and the welfare of *K'lal Yisrael*, the worldwide Jewish community.

Religious School can teach about Jewish rituals, but

Only in our homes can we transmit the meaning of these ancient and beautiful rituals into the essence of our lives.

Religious School can teach about God, but

Only in our homes can we instill a sense of spirituality and connectedness to Jewish history, theology and peoplehood.

Religious School can teach Jewish ethics and principles, but

Only in our homes can we demonstrate these values in our everyday personal and business dealings.

Religious School can teach about *Shabbat*, but

Only in our homes can we instill the meaning and spirit of *Shabbat* by providing the experience of *Shabbat shalom*.

Religious School can teach the rituals of Jewish prayer, but

Only by attending *Shabbat* and holiday services, can we ensure participation and a level of comfort with synagogue life and practice.

Religious School can teach the messages of *Torah*, but

Only in our homes can we demonstrate the importance of continued dialogue with this ancient text by engaging in family discussions centered on Jewish themes and values.

Religious School can teach the ideals of *Tikkun Olam*, but

Only in our homes can we demonstrate this value by involving ourselves in bettering our world.

By working together in partnership, the Beth Chaim Religious School and our member families can create strong Jewish identities in our students and inspire a love of Judaism which will carry them well beyond their Religious School years, creating in our children and in our selves a love of lifelong Jewish learning.

## Beth Chaim Religious School Curriculum Philosophy and Goals

The goal of Jewish education at Congregation Beth Chaim is to produce Reform Jews who:

1. Express pride in their heritage, are excited about being Jewish and about our traditions; are familiar with the rituals and customs of Shabbat and holidays and who understand the reasons for these observances.
2. Can describe the different ways Jews have conceptualized God throughout history and who can affirm a personal perspective of God and spirituality.
3. Have a clear understanding of the nature of prayer and are comfortable with the structure and contents of the prayer book.
4. Can explain the important values and mitzvot which have guided our people for 4,000 years (e.g. Tzedakkah, K'lal Yisrael; the centrality of family; the importance of study; the Ten Commandments; justice for all peoples; etc.), who understand the Jewish devotion to these values and who, themselves, are committed to live by these values.
5. Understand the place of Hebrew in Jewish tradition.
6. Have an understanding of the special rituals we, as a people, use to mark significant life cycle events and who desire to observe these events in their lifetimes and in the life passages of their families.
7. Enthusiastically support and participate in the life of the synagogue, the Jewish community and the community at large.
8. See themselves and their actions as important links in the chain of "*Am Yisrael*," the Jewish people.
9. Affirm their historic and enduring bond to the Land of Israel.

### Hebrew/ *T'filot* Curriculum: Kindergarten – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

The Hebrew curriculum at the Beth Chaim Religious School is a prayer-based one. Our students are exposed to Hebrew letters and vowels with the goal of giving them the skills to be active participants in Shabbat and holiday services.

Students are also exposed to Hebrew vocabulary as a way of connecting them to Israel as a modern country.

<b>Kindergarten</b>	Introduced to Hebrew letters through multi-sensory activities.
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Grade</b>	Focuses on learning the names and sounds of the Hebrew Aleph-Bet.
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Grade</b>	Vowels are taught; students end the year reading simple syllables.
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Grade</b>	Students practice reading skills through words related to Jewish values and traditions.
<b>4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Grades</b>	Students use a three-year curriculum series designed to give mastery over the Shabbat liturgy. Students will participate in school <i>minyanim</i> .

**Hebrew Homework** is clearly defined and should take no more than 5 – 10 minutes a night. Additional Hebrew study materials (flashcards, Computer programs, supplemental textbooks, etc.) are available from the Religious School office.

**Hebrew tutoring** is available for those students requiring additional assistance. Please call the Religious School office for information on this program.

## Judaic Curriculum

The Judaic program is designed to equip our students to make Jewish choices in the modern world. Students study a range of topics, each building on what was learned the previous year. The topics are approached in a multi-sensory manner, through art, music, drama, storytelling and other creative and hands-on activities.

**Judaic Homework** may range from reading pages in the textbook to writing a paragraph, researching on the Web, answering questions, preparing a presentation or creating a poster, puzzle or other project. Periodically, the teacher may assign “family homework” or projects that are designed to enhance “Jewish Family Time” at home. Homework is given at the teacher’s discretion.

## Holiday Curriculum

**Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> grade**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> grade**  
**4<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade**

Focuses on the Biblical stories and traditions.  
Holidays are the focus of the curriculum (My Jewish Year).  
Students study the home observances for each holiday.  
Holidays and Hebrew are combined through blessings.  
Students use original texts and hands-on holiday activities.

## Post B’nai Mitzvah Education A Values Based Approach to Jewish Living

**7<sup>th</sup> Grade:** This curriculum is designed to expose our students to a wide variety of topics, challenging the emerging critical thinking skills of these young adults. Students will take courses focusing on: Reform Judaism; Israel; Jewish Values in modern culture and Torah.

**8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> Grade – Taught by Anne Berman-Waldorf and Cantor Stuart Binder:** Each class session will be a self-contained unit focusing on issues related to being Jewish in the modern world.

**Confirmation: the 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Year – taught by Rabbi Eric Wisnia:** Students, in an informal manner, examine the issues raised by the lives and teachings of the ancient Prophets and how their wisdom and insights guide us in ethical living.

**Post-Confirmation Dinner Program for students in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades:** Students meet monthly for dinner and discussion with Rabbi Eric Wisnia. An important part of the High School program is our **Trip to Philadelphia: January 9 – 11, 2009**. All 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students are invited to join Rabbi Eric Wisnia and Cantor Stuart Binder on this program which combines Jewish, secular and social activities.

### College Outreach

Congregation Beth Chaim stays in touch with our college students through mailings and e-mails from Rabbi Eric Wisnia. Students are also sent gifts for the Jewish holidays.

## Textbooks

Our textbooks are chosen to reflect the goals and philosophy of the school, Congregation Beth Chaim and the Reform Movement. These books offer our students and teachers a framework through which to explore Jewish texts, tradition, history and values.

Each student is provided with one complete set of textbooks, which are his/hers to keep. If a textbook is lost during the school year, a replacement copy will be provided at the family's expense.

Grade	Hebrew Texts	Judaic Texts
Kindergarten	<b>Building Jewish Life: Beginnings</b> <i>An integrated approach to the celebratory aspects of home, family, synagogue and community. A different Hebrew letter is introduced in each lesson through key concept words.</i>	
First	Sam the Detective	Let's Discover Shabbat
Second	Shalom Alef Bet Shalom Alef Bet Homework Folder	My Jewish Year
Third	Shalom Uvrachah – script edition Shalom Uvrachah Homework Folder	Partners with God The Ten Commandments Activity Book
Fourth	Hineni 1 Hineni 1 – workbook	Journey of a Lifetime The Synagogue Welcome to Israel (Wednesday)
Fifth	Hineni 2 Hineni 2 - workbook	Jewish Heroes, Jewish Values Babaganewz (Wednesday)
Sixth	Hineni 3 Hineni 3 – workbook Beth Chaim Prayer Packet (Wednesday)	A Topical Bible America: The Jewish Experience (Wed)
Seventh	Beth Chaim Prayer Packet <i>(for those students who have not completed their B'nai Mitzvah studies)</i>	Handouts provided in classes
Special Needs	Variety of Hebrew Texts offered to suit individual learning styles	Let's Discover Shabbat Let's Discover the Bible My Synagogue Scrapbook Jewish Heroes, Jewish Values Welcome to Israel (Wednesday) Babaganewz (Wednesday) Other books based on student interest

# Beth Chaim Religious School: Consecration to Confirmation Jewish Milestones

## Consecration

This ceremony honors our incoming Kindergarten students and marks the beginning of a student's participation in formal Jewish Education. The event begins with dinner and the ceremony takes place on the Shabbat during Sukkot. A special blessing is bestowed upon the students as they stand under a tallit, held aloft by their grandparents/special friends, signifying the passage of Jewish knowledge from one generation to the next. Consecration will take place on Friday, October 17, 2008, beginning at 6 pm.

## Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Bar/Bat Mitzvah is one of the most beautiful ceremonies in Jewish life. Bar/Bat Mitzvah, as we know it today, is a 13<sup>th</sup> century ritual denoting the beginning of Jewish adulthood. Congregation Beth Chaim requires 6 years of study in Religious School prior to a child becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Students must be enrolled in/attending Religious School during the year they become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. All parents whose children are in our Religious School, and meet the above requirement of 6 years of study, will be contacted approximately 2 years in advance with regard to a Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

**Before B'nai Mitzvah lessons may begin, the following criteria must be met:**

- a) Current enrollment in the Religious School.
- b) Attendance and enrollment period requirements satisfied.
- c) All financial obligations to the synagogue have been met.

Approximately nine months prior to the child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah date, students will receive their assigned prayers as well as information about Prayer Competency Evaluation and review opportunities. Six months prior to the assigned date, students will be contacted by Cantor Stuart Binder to arrange for individual lessons with a B'nai Mitzvah tutor. Private lessons with the tutor last until 2 months before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. During the last two months, the children will meet with Cantor Binder as they complete their preparations.

## Shabbat B'nai Mitzvah Class

Students, grouped by B'nai Mitzvah date, meet for seven weeks on Shabbat morning at Beth Chaim. The program begins at 10 am when the students will attend the Shabbat morning service. Following the Service, the students attend a Torah class with Rabbis Wisnia and Master where the Rabbis will discuss the history, values and customs surrounding Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The program concludes at 12:30 pm. Parents will receive letters in the mail informing them of the dates of their child's class. The first class, which begins at 8:45 am, for each session is for the family; parents are required to attend.

## Confirmation

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Reform Judaism introduced the ceremony of Confirmation, which marks the conscious acceptance of Judaism by mature, thinking young adults. **All B'nai Mitzvah (sons and daughters of the Commandment) are fully expected to complete classes through Confirmation (10<sup>th</sup> grade). Confirmation complements B'nai Mitzvah, affirming the first obligation of a Jewish adult to value and continue Jewish learning.** Confirmation takes place on Erev Shavuot. This year's Confirmation service will be Thursday, May 28, 2009 at 7pm.

## **Student Responsibilities**

It is your child's responsibility to bring *tzedakkah* money to each class session. Giving to those less fortunate is an important Jewish value, one which is taught by us and must be reinforced by parents. The amount is less important than the conscious effort to contribute. *Tzedakkah* is totaled up and distributed at the end of the year. A list of all the recipients will be published in the Beth Chaim newsletter.

## **Standards of Behavior Behavioral Expectations**

We provide a warm and nurturing environment, one in which every child and teacher is expected to interact in a manner consistent with Jewish values. Our students are expected to:

- Be courteous and respectful to each other, to their teachers and to all staff members of our congregation.
- Treat visitors to the building in an appropriate manner.
- Show respect for all areas of the synagogue.
- Leave the classroom **ONLY** with the permission of the teacher.

## **Discipline Policy**

The Discipline Policy at the Beth Chaim Religious School is a progressive one, providing ample opportunity for students to change their behavior before the consequences escalate to the next level. Student behavior which infringes on the rights of others and/or on personal or school property will not be tolerated.

- First Infraction: Teacher shall issue a verbal reminder, pointing out the unacceptable conduct and offering suggestions for positive behavior.
- Second Infraction: Student is sent to the Director of Lifelong Education's office and will not be permitted to return to class for the remainder of the day. Student is expected to complete all missed assignments; parents will be notified.
- Third Infraction: A conference is arranged with the teacher, the parents, the student and the Director of Lifelong Education. A student is not allowed back into class until this meeting has occurred.

## **Honoring One Another *Mechabed Zeh et Zeh,***

All those associated with Congregation Beth Chaim Religious School are expected to conduct themselves as outlined in the values presented in Torah; this includes showing respect to all participants in our school. Students and teachers will work together to express the value of tolerance, by respecting differences and achieving consensus or, alternatively, agreeing to disagree appropriately. Harsh language will not be tolerated nor will threats of violence.

Any student who verbally or physically assaults or threatens another person will immediately be suspended with further disciplinary action to be determined by the Rabbi and the Director of Lifelong Education.

## **Honoring the Sanctity of Beth Chaim: *K'dushat HaMakom***

In recognition of the holiness of our synagogue and of the material being studied, we ask that parents and children show respect by adhering to the following standards of dress.

- Students should be dressed in neat casual clothing. Clothing that is dirty, torn or tattered sends a message of disrespect.
- Students attending sports events before or following class may wear their uniforms to the synagogue. Cleats may NOT be worn anywhere in the building.
- Clothing advertising and/or glorifying drug paraphernalia, alcohol products, drinking/taking drugs or sexual behavior may not be worn to class.

## **Damages to School/Synagogue Property**

The Congregational Board has resolved that: *Any student who is found to have vandalized the building in any way will be expected to pay for the damage: parents will held responsible for the actions of their children.*

## **Parent Responsibilities**

Jewish education, at its finest, represents a partnership between the school and the home. The concepts and ideals of Judaism are taught in the classroom; the home is the “lab” where these ideas are put into practice, the theories tested, the rituals experienced. As parents and educators, we all have the same goal, to foster a life-long love of Judaism in each of our children/students.

Participation in the Beth Chaim Religious School implies responsibilities on the part of the parents, including:

- Modeling positive Jewish values and behaviors and being supportive of the educational process.
- Bringing your child to school on time, with all necessary books and completed homework assignments.
- Regularly checking your child’s Religious School backpack for notices.
- Checking that your child has completed homework assignments timely and in an appropriate fashion. Students in grades 1 – 6, in addition to any other assigned work, are expected to practice their Hebrew reading for 5 – 10 minutes each night.
- Participating in Family Education programs and volunteering to assist with special school events.
- Behaving sensibly during drop off and pick up. Please drive slowly in the parking lot and obey the directions of the Parent Monitors. When parking your car, park only in designated spaces (only use those marked “Handicapped” if your car is appropriately tagged).
- Fulfilling your obligation to be a Parent Monitor. If you cannot monitor on your assigned date, please notify the Religious School office; we will find you a replacement.
- Maintaining communication with the Religious School. Please do not hesitate to contact the Director of Lifelong Education to express any comments or concerns you may have.

By working together, we can create the next generation of Jewish learners and leaders.

## **Attendance Policy:** *Applies to all students from Consecration to Confirmation*

Attendance is expected at 75% of all class sessions in order to fulfill the requirements of each grade. Failure to meet the attendance requirement will oblige the student to do either/both of the following at the family's expense:

- Complete make up work before the start of the new school year which may include summer tutoring.
- Assume additional course work and/or tutoring at the next grade level.

Attendance below 50% will result in non-completion of the grade necessitating a meeting with the Director of Lifelong Education, the Rabbi and the Vice President of Ritual to discuss rescheduling of the student's Bar/Bat Mitzvah date.

## **Absences**

Please make every effort to plan your family calendar so that your child attends Religious School regularly. Religious School plays an important role in shaping a Jewish identity. Consistent attendance and parental support create a positive attitude toward Jewish learning and observance. If you know that your child will not be in class, please contact the Religious School office so that we can inform your child's teacher and provide you with any missed material and assigned homework. Students are responsible for completing any missed assignments.

## **Lateness**

Late students must report to the SCHOOL OFFICE for pass. A parent is not to take a student directly to the classroom.

## **Early Dismissal**

Parents should come to the Main office and ask to have their child paged. The following are **not to occur under any circumstances**.

- A parent is **not** to pick up a child at the classroom – this is disruptive and presents a security risk.
- A student will **not** be dismissed to the parking lot/exit doors.

## **Progress Reports / Parent Conferences**

Progress reports are sent out twice a year; in January and in June. The Progress Report serves as a formal communication between the school and home. Parent Conferences provide an opportunity to discuss your child's progress and to plan for the second semester. Parents will be asked to sign up in advance for a conference. Each conference will last 10 minutes and is designed to allow for a brief meeting between parent and teacher. **Parent Conferences will be held on Sunday, February 1, 2009.**

**School Schedule:**

**Sunday Classes** (3 years old to 6<sup>th</sup> grade)  
First Session: 8:30 am – 10:30 am  
Second Session: 11 am – 1 pm

Junior Choir Rehearsals, 10:30 – 11 am

**Monday classes** (7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> grades)  
7<sup>th</sup> grade 7 – 8:30 pm  
8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> grades 6:30 – 8:30 pm (separate schedule will be mailed to participants)  
10<sup>th</sup> grade 6:30 (1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Mondays); 7 pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday

**Wednesday classes** (4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grades)  
First session 4:30 – 6 pm  
Second session 6:30 – 8 pm

**Inclement Weather**

**Sunday**

The sources available to check on closing/early dismissal are the following:

- Congregational website ([www.bethchaim.org](http://www.bethchaim.org)) – info scrolls across the top of the screen
- Religious School office answering machine (609-799-9693)
- Contact Anne Berman-Waldorf (215-369-1154 or 215-519-1286)

Remember to check any of these sources before leaving for the Synagogue. Your safety is important to us.

**Monday and Wednesday**

The same as above applies, plus ...If West Windsor-Plainsboro schools are closed or close early due to weather, the Religious School will be closed and classes cancelled.

**RELIGIOUS SCHOOL IS EITHER OPEN OR CLOSED;  
WE DO NOT HAVE DELAYED OPENINGS**

**Important Phone Numbers**

Religious School Office  
Carol Cagliari, Administrative Asst.  
[ccagliari@bethchaim.org](mailto:ccagliari@bethchaim.org)  
phone 609-799-9693  
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