



Reconstructionist Temple Beth Israel of Bergen County A Contemporary Look at Tradition

What are our Reconstructionist services like?

- ◆ All Reconstructionist congregations make their own decisions, so services vary from one to the other. Ours are likely a bit different from other temples' services you've attended.
- ◆ We have as much Hebrew as many Conservative synagogues, but our siddur, *Kol Ha'Neshamah*, contains some wonderful, inspirational English readings, which we intersperse throughout our services.
- ◆ We love to sing, and use many traditional melodies as well as more contemporary tunes. Depending upon who is leading services, the melodies may vary from week to week.
- ◆ There are some changes in the liturgy, most notably wording which describes us as the "chosen" people. We are the People who Choose.
- ◆ Our *Shir Hadash* musical Friday night service sets old and new tunes to the accompaniment of drums and guitar, and the joy in the room is infectious—people often get up and dance!
- ◆ Because Reconstructionists do not generally believe that we should resurrect the Temple and bring back animal sacrifice, we choose to omit the *Musaf* service on Shabbat.
- ◆ We invite participation from all congregants: in leading services, chanting Torah and Haftarah and in lively discussions during services. Sometimes we have a bit of meditation, sometimes we talk about important things that happened to us the past week, and sometimes we just enjoy a sense of togetherness.

We invite you to join us Friday night or Saturday morning, to find out what we're really all about!



RTBI Chanukah candle lighting

34 West Magnolia Avenue
Maywood, NJ 07607
201-845-7550
email: info@rtbi-online.org
www.rtbi-online.org



About Reconstructionist Temple Beth Israel

We are a small congregation with a history and tradition of three quarters of a century. At the same time we are an evolving Reconstructionist congregation which is unique to the Bergen County area, and which reflects the changing dynamics of our community and of Judaism today. Among our ranks are young families, mature couples and singles, gays and lesbians, intermarried and non-traditional families, all from diverse backgrounds of religious observance and Jewish knowledge.

We seek to combine the best of these various perspectives to create a warm, welcoming and embracing atmosphere. We maintain a strong commitment to traditions and practices that have defined us, while also recognizing that we can and must be able to adapt these traditions to the new circumstances and challenges that we face in our synagogue, our homes, our workplaces and our communities.

As a participatory congregation, we act in partnership with our rabbi to formulate guidelines and practices that apply our Jewish traditions most meaningfully to our modern times. We encourage our congregants to take part in all aspects of synagogue life and work with them to help them attain the skills they need.

Temple Beth Israel was established in 1928 and since that time it has been the only synagogue in Maywood, New Jersey. Since 1930, the Temple has been housed in a beautiful Arts and Crafts building from 1901. Reconstructionist Temple Beth Israel, originally a Conservative congregation, joined the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation in 1997.



Dues & other fees

Dues

Family membership	\$950
Single membership	\$525

The membership year begins July 1st. Dues may be paid in installments; please contact our Financial Secretary at money@rtbi-online.org or call our office to discuss arrangements.

Members who have paid 50% of their dues by the time of the High Holidays (or who have made other arrangements) are entitled to one High Holiday seat for each member of the immediate family; single memberships receive one seat.

Fees

Annual building fund (<i>per household</i>)	\$100
High Holiday seats for members (extra seats)	\$100
High Holiday seats for non-members	\$150

(fee is applied to membership if you join during the year)

We invite first-time ever attendees to our High Holiday services as our guests. Seating is limited; please reserve your free seat in advance. Call 201-845-7550, ext. 2 for details.

Tuition

Children's Learning Center (Hebrew School) - Grades 1-7	
Members	\$600-700 for the year (based on grade level)
Non-members	\$700-800 for the year (based on grade level)

Preschool class	
Members	\$200 for the year
Non-members	\$300 for the year (sibling discount available)

Students may attend the Children's Learning Center in grades 1-7 for one year as non-members, after which the family must join if the child wishes to continue as a student at RTBI.

People to contact if you have questions:

RTBI office	201-845-7550	info@rtbi-online.org
Rabbi		
Jarah Greenfield	office ext. 6	rabbi@rtbi-online.org
President		
Caryn Starr-Gates	office ext. 5	carynstarr@yahoo.com
Membership		
Linda Shapiro	office ext. 2	lindarshapiro@verizon.net
Children's Learning Center		
Ivan Salinas	office ext. 4	ivangs1@juno.com
Financial Secretary		
Roz Altman		rozzi0630@aol.com

Services at RTBI

Friday night *Kabbalat Shabbat* (welcoming the Sabbath)

8:00 pm, followed by *Oneg*

- ◆ *Shir Hadash*: Once a month we have a musical Friday evening service with guitar, led by Student Cantor Lois Kittner.
- ◆ All Friday night services have a lot of singing. There's a d'var Torah, and often an interesting speaker or learning session after the main part of the service.

Saturday morning services — 10:00 am, followed by *Kiddush*

- ◆ Our service follows a traditional model and includes most of the prayers and blessings with which you are familiar, interlaced with creative moments and friendly interaction.
- ◆ Much of the service is in Hebrew. Our siddur, *Kol Haneshamah*, has the entire service fully transliterated and translated for those with limited Hebrew.
- ◆ On most Saturdays we do a Torah service, with three aliyot; there are occasional Haftorah readings. We invite congregants to read Torah and Haftorah whenever they are able. We also provide a mix of Torah discussions instead of Torah service each month.
- ◆ Student Cantor Lois Kittner or one of our dynamic lay leaders conduct services on those weekends when Rabbi Jarah is not with us.
- ◆ Learner's services and Beit Midrash (House of Study) services take in-depth looks at what's going on.

Children's services and Tot Shabbats are held on a regular basis.



Student Cantor Lois Kittner

Both men and women at RTBI wear *kippot* and *tallitot* (head coverings and prayer shawls) for services. We ask you to wear both for honors on the *bima*, but you are welcome to follow whatever practices make you most comfortable during the rest of the service.



Our Rabbi, Jarah Greenfield

Rabbi Jarah Greenfield graduated from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in June 2009, and is in residence at RTBI on alternate weekends. "The RTBI community is one that is interested in learning and in taking active roles in governance, leading prayer and reading Torah. I see my role not only as a religious functionary but also as a resource. I want to help people bring knowledge and creativity into conversation with ritual and tradition."

Making the decision to become a rabbi was a ten-year process for Jarah (rhymes with Sarah), which began when she was a student at Sarah Lawrence College. In her first-year course on the Hebrew Bible, she was both intellectually enchanted and spiritually enraptured by the content of the Torah and sought out the responses of contemporary feminist biblical scholars. Simultaneously, Jarah's 5-year-old Hebrew School students were teaching her about the simplicity of faith and purity of joy as they responded to her lessons on Jewish holidays and customs. In combination, these and other experiences led Jarah to recognize that living out Judaism meant, for her, both teaching the complexity of the tradition as well as encouraging contemporary spiritual connections to it.

Jarah, who grew up in Miami, FL, worked as the interim and assistant principal of B'nai Jeshurun Hebrew School in New York City and spent a year studying at the Drisha Institute for Jewish Education before entering rabbinical school.

Education

Children's Learning Center

We have made a conscious choice to describe our school as a Learning Center, not just a Hebrew school. We consider learning a life-long endeavor — for children as well as for the entire community.

The idea is that as children learn, we all will learn, whether we're parents or not. It is our intention that those of us who send our children to this school are committed to learning and growing with them. An important component of the community at RTBI is the notion of family learning and experiences.

The RTBI Children's Learning Center has Sunday classes from 9:15am-12:30pm for students in grades 1-7; students are expected to do homework and study Hebrew during the week; a Reconstructionist religious education emphasizes and assumes family involvement in the student's learning. Students will be prepared for bar/bat mitzvah.

Each student will work on a *Tikun Olam* project during the year, as a way to nurture a sense of social awareness, and gives a presentation to their class and family about their project so we all learn together.

New for fall 2010 is an interactive, inter-generational preschool class, led by Rabbi Jarah, for children ages 5 and under and their whole families. These sessions run every other Sunday from 9:30am-10:30am.

We encourage families to attend services—an integral part of the Children's Learning Center and of Jewish life in general. Students are required to attend a certain number of services during the year which helps them learn Hebrew and to become familiar with spiritual aspects of Jewish culture and the service.

For more information, please contact Ivan Salinas at 201-845-7550, ext. 4.



Children's Learning Center learns about the Torah scroll

seriously, as a record of our ancestors' search for moral principles and spiritual practices that can help us become more fully human.

If some Reconstructionists don't believe in a supernatural God who hears and responds to prayer, then what's the point of praying?

There is more to prayer than asking God for favors. Although people may be surprised to see Reconstructionists pray using traditional descriptions of God and God's role in the world, prayer has a vital role to play in the life of a Reconstructionist congregation and each Reconstructionist Jew.

The Hebrew word for praying, "*l'hitpalel*," is a reflexive verb — that is, it applies to oneself, not to one's actions toward the outside world. *L'hitpalel* means to look inside of yourself. This suggests that even when prayers end with God, they begin with us. We don't know whether prayer can change God. We know that it can often change us.

Prayer reinforces values and creates community. In addition, prayer acknowledges that human beings, at least individually, are not the most powerful force in the universe — prayer helps keep us humble!

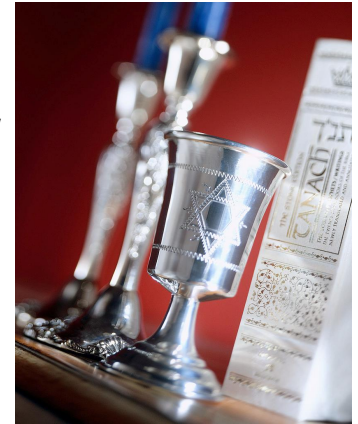
Prayer gives us an opportunity to deepen our spiritual lives, to increase our connection with God and to notice spiritual moments when they occur. Prayer is a spiritual practice that helps us become more aware of what we are thankful for, and what we are longing for.

Prayer also keeps us linked to our history. When we say the Shabbat kiddush over the wine we are saying much the same prayers that our ancestors have said for nearly two thousand years. That is a very powerful connection.

And lastly, prayer is a way that we can come together as a community. During the silent Amidah the entire congregation faces the same direction and prays together soundlessly, as individuals but in a group — this is truly a moment that expresses the intimacy of community. By praying together we share sacred time and connect with each other and with Jewish communities around the world, and forge links to our people's history.

Community and Reconstructionism

In times of celebration, or in trying times, we at RTBI look to members of our congregation for support. We enjoy each other's company casually and socially, revel in each other's successes and often share touching moments from the previous week in services. We hold well-attended community dinners most months, and linger over onegs and lunches. Individuals often host social gatherings in their homes, and



God. For many Reconstructionists, God does not decide everyone's fate individually and intervene in human history through the use of miracles. Exactly what Reconstructionists do believe about God is as unique as each individual. While some of us feel comfortable with a more traditional way of thinking about God, a God with whom they can be in direct relationship, others perceive God more as a *force* in the world, and may feel God in the good things in life – when we see a flower, or when we are satisfied after a good meal. And we may feel God when we act like our better selves – when we help someone, or are nice to someone, or love someone. We can effectively appeal to the natural, inherent spirituality that all children possess, by asking the question not as, "*What is God,*" but rather as, "*When is God.*"

When we say we believe in God, we are really saying that we believe that people can be good, caring, and loving, and that such things are possible when we connect to a force bigger than ourselves.

Many people choose not to believe in God because they understand God as a being that can break the laws of nature and act like a person. Reconstructionists question those ideas about God, as have many Jewish philosophers over time. Reconstructionism has offered many people who previously rejected God a renewed possibility of belief as they have been exposed to different conceptions of God.

Reconstructionism has stressed *belonging* over *believing* when it comes to Jewish identity. Belonging to a group with common commitments, culture and memories gives us a valuable sense of people-hood and mission.

What is the Torah?

Broadly, Torah means all of collected Jewish wisdom throughout time, while more narrowly it refers to the first five books of the Bible, often called "the written Torah." Some Jews believe that the written Torah is the word of God. Others among us assert that the Torah is a collection of history, stories and religious laws that was put together over hundreds and hundreds of years. It is the result of the Jewish people's attempt to understand God, themselves and their origins, and what was important in their lives and in the life of their community.

Many Reconstructionists think that Torah is the result of a connection between human beings and God, and others see it as an explanation of what Jews considered "godly."

While many Reconstructionist Jews do not take the Torah literally, we all take it



Kehillah Learning Center

Our Kehillah Learning Center offers a broad menu of programs for the wider Jewish community both inside and outside the RTBI family. The KLC offers intergenerational programs and events, holiday enrichment and learners' services to help open the portals to prayer and participation in synagogue life.

Throughout the year, participants enjoy family-friendly services, workshops for Jewish parents, group mitzvah projects and community dinners. At RTBI, we understand that families come in many varieties, and all are made to feel welcome.

While most of the programs are geared towards small fries and their parents/guardians, we want to encourage people both young and old to get involved in ways in which they are comfortable. For instance, our religious school students leads a tot Shabbat service in the Spring; older members often volunteer to help kids with crafts projects. Workshops are usually held on Sundays.

KLC programs are free to RTBI members and non-members alike; there's sometimes an extra charge for a dinner or craft activity.

For more information, please contact us at info@rtbi-online.org.

The KLC schedule may include:

- Sept: Children's services for the High Holidays, Sukkot workshop, sukkah decorating and dinner, Simchat Torah celebration
- Dec: Chanukah family service and community dinner
- Jan: Tu B'Shevat seder led by Hebrew School teachers
- Mar: Shabbat Across America, Purim celebration with Purim schpiel by students
- Apr: RTBI Community seder
- May: Service led by oldest CLC students
- June: Intergenerational hike

Beit Midrash (House of Study) — Adult Learning

We have a strong Adult Ed program, with classes year-round. This year we will host a monthly series of classes titled “Natural History in the Bible.”

Recent courses have included:

- ◆ What is Reconstructionism?
- ◆ Kashrut study group
- ◆ Introduction to Jewish Mysticism
- ◆ Adult B’nai Mitzvah classes
- ◆ Introduction to the Tanakh
- ◆ A contemporary view of the Talmud
- ◆ How to lead services
- ◆ Gender and Sexuality in the Torah
- ◆ Torah & Haftarah Chanting for Beginners
- ◆ Read America’s Beginning Hebrew
- ◆ Gabbai Training

Classes are open to the public and everyone is welcome to attend at no charge unless otherwise specified.

Special Study Projects

In keeping with the Reconstructionist model, we are a congregation that institutes policies through values-based decisions. We choose issues which are important to us and study them in depth, looking at scripture,

commentary such as the Talmud and contemporary texts. We feel that it’s important for our decisions to be informed by tradition and by the original intention of scriptural texts, while at the same time we acknowledge that Judaism is an evolving culture.

Recent study topics have included our Kashrut policy. After a year of study we voted to change the RTBI Kashrut kitchen from meat to dairy/vegetarian and to allow members to prepare food at home if they have attended a certification class and agree to follow specific rules of Kosher food preparation.

Another recent topic was patrilineal descent: while the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation recognizes a child as Jewish if either parent is Jewish, RTBI felt that we should make this decision for ourselves, after appropriate study. We adopted the JRF’s policy, but only because we feel it’s appropriate for us.



What is Reconstructionism all about?

What makes Reconstructionists different from Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews?

Reconstructionism is often seen as the most liberal of the Jewish denominations. In attitude toward *halakhah* as tradition rather than as binding law, in belief in equality between women and men, in acceptance of gays and lesbians in all aspects of the life of the congregation, and in inclusion of intermarried families and other non-traditional lifestyles, Reform Judaism and Reconstructionism have taken a stand together as the most progressive elements in Jewish life.

Democratic decision-making. Reconstructionist congregations make many of their decisions about ritual practice on the basis of study, conversation and group decision-making. In contrast, other movements often make such decisions based on policies set by a rabbi or the central institutions of the movement, or leave it solely to individual choice.

Role of the rabbi. In the other movements the rabbi is often the central decision-maker in the community. In Reconstructionism, rabbis are *a* source of authority, not *the* source of authority.

Attitude toward tradition. Reconstructionists are usually quite comfortable with traditional observance, in a vein similar to Conservatives. Our congregation observes *kashrut* strictly in our building and many members also observe at home. Reconstructionists usually include much more Hebrew in their services than Reform. *Kippot* and *tallitot*, garments of prayer and connections to tradition, are very common among Reconstructionists, on both men and women.

Reconstructionist congregations often value smaller congregations, and are oriented towards spirituality and new and innovative forms of worship. These ideals make Reconstructionism unique among the four major streams in American Jewish life.

Do Reconstructionists believe in God?

Definitely. We believe that there is one God, but there are many ways of understanding and talking about God.

Jews have always had a lot of different ways of thinking about

