

Congregation Adath Israel

Synagogue Ritual Policies, Practices, and Traditions



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Synagogue History and Philosophy

Congregation Adath Israel was founded in the early 1900s by a small group of Orthodox Jews who fled poverty and persecution in Eastern Europe. They arrived with little more than their skill as farmers and a desire to worship freely. After settling in Newtown, they worshiped for several years without a building or a Rabbi. They erected their first synagogue in 1919, and the first Rabbi arrived in 1923. The congregation prospered and grew until the 1940s.

After World War II, many younger congregants left what was still a rural Newtown for jobs in large cities. While the remaining members were devout and observed holy days and the Sabbath faithfully, total membership started to decline. By 1970, the congregation consisted of less than 20 families. It became clear that Adath Israel would not survive as an Orthodox institution. The Congregation voted to change to a modern Conservative doctrine.

That change, coupled with a strong focus on equality, flexibility, and religious instruction, helped rekindle Adath Israel. Northern Fairfield County's demographics also changed, providing a steady influx of Jewish families moving in from the New York metropolitan area. Synagogue membership has grown to about 100 families. Most reside in Newtown and the neighboring towns of Monroe, Southbury, Trumbull, and Bethel. Descendants of our original families now worship alongside these many newcomers.

The synagogue has continued to thrive as a progressive and egalitarian Conservative congregation. Recently, we joined *The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ)*, a network of Conservative synagogues around the world that advocate for an authentic and dynamic Judaism.

Women count equally in our minyan and take equal leadership roles in all areas of synagogue life. About a third of our member families are interfaith families and we welcome the involvement and contributions of all family members. Our congregation's Mission Statement nicely sums up our philosophy:

Mission Statement

Congregation Adath Israel is an egalitarian Synagogue dedicated to sustaining Jewish culture, learning, and spirituality in a warm and welcoming environment. We strive to provide families and individuals a connection with Judaism that will endure and be passed from generation to generation.

Our vision is to be the center of Jewish life in the greater Newtown area.

We accomplish this mission by:

- 1) Preserving Jewish Identity by teaching Judaic traditions, culture and values.
- 2) Committing to Tikkun Olam, bettering our communities and the world we live in.
- 3) Encouraging active member participation in all social and spiritual aspects of synagogue life.
- 4) Being an open and diverse community committed to creating an inclusive Jewish congregation for spouses of other religions (traditions) and the LGBTQ community.
- 5) By celebrating, supporting and providing Jewish life-cycle rituals for all members and their families.

Rabbi as Spiritual Leader

Our Rabbi, as our spiritual leader, maintains the high ethical, moral and behavioral standards that are generally accepted as appropriate for a Rabbi within the Conservative Movement. Our Rabbi leads Friday evening, Saturday morning and holiday prayer services. Our Rabbi also teaches in our Religious School and prepares our children for their B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies.

Ritual Policy and Authority

Our religious practices follow the broad guidelines delineated by the USCJ and are specified in our Synagogue By-Laws and related documents as follows:

ARTICLE IV: POLICY MAKING

Section 1: The Board of Directors shall determine and implement the policies of the Synagogue. When the Board deems it appropriate it shall bring matters of policy before the general membership for approval.

Section 2: Matters of Jewish Law (Halacha) shall be determined by the Rabbi (as mora d'atra or "teacher of the community").

Section 3: Matters of religious custom within the Synagogue shall be determined by the Rabbi and the Ritual Committee

Thus, the purpose of the **Ritual Committee** is to:

1. Assist and advise the Rabbi in carrying out the religious program.
2. In the absence of the Rabbi, plan and conduct religious services.
3. Organize and implement High Holiday activities in coordination with the Synagogue's spiritual leaders.
4. Assist the Search Committee in interviewing and recommending candidates for Rabbi and Cantor to the Board.
5. Coordinate with the Education Committee to provide family/children's services and activities.

Schedule of Services

Evening Services. Services are held every Friday evening from September through June and every other Friday evening through the Summer months. These services begin at 7:30 pm and are about 1 ¼ hours long. They are followed by a Kiddush Oneg that includes blessings over wine and challah and a light spread of food.

Morning Services. Full Shabbat morning services are typically held one Saturday of each month from September through June. These services begin at 9:30 am. A second morning service in the month will be scheduled as a "Learning Service" for the B'nai Mitzvah class. It is best to check the synagogue calendar which can be found on the synagogue website at www.congadathisrael.org. Generally, there are no Saturday morning services scheduled during July or August. However, anyone who is interested

in organizing a morning service during the summer is more than welcome to gather a minyan and do so.

High Holiday Services. High Holiday services are scheduled as follows:

Erev Rosh Hashanah (evening before the first day), 7:30 pm.

First and Second day of Rosh Hashanah, 8:30 am.

Tashlich (casting away of sins) service and potluck meal, 5:30 pm of first day of Rosh Hashanah.

Kol Nidre (evening before Yom Kippur), start time will vary depending on sunset.

Yom Kippur Day 8:30 am.

Children Services and Youth and Family Services are held on the first day of Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur day. These services begin at 10 am.

(Please note that there is no evening service following the first day of Rosh Hashanah. Instead, a brief Tashlich (casting away of sins) service and a potluck meal are held at a local park.)

Other Holiday Services. Check our synagogue calendar for the schedule of other holiday services such as Succot, Simchat Torah, Purim, Shavuot, and Lag B'omer.

Yizkor (Memorial) Services. Special Yizkor services are held yearly on Yom Kippur afternoon and on Simchat Torah. Check the synagogue calendar for the times of these services.

Format of our Services

We follow the Conservative liturgy in all of our services. But we include the *Imahot* (our foremothers) as well as the *Avot* (our forefathers) in all prayer services in an effort to be less gendered.

Friday Evenings: On Friday evenings we use Likrat Shabbat, published by the Prayer Book Press. Most prayers are sung using traditional Conservative melodies. A short *D'var Torah* (sermon) is delivered on the weekly Torah portion. We take a Torah out of the Ark each Friday and include it in our prayer service. A congregant is selected each week for the honor of opening the Ark and holding the Torah. On one Friday each

month the service will be lay led by a congregant. The schedule of lay led services will be announced in advance.

Saturday Mornings: On Saturday mornings we use the Rabbinic Assembly's Siddur Lev Shalem. These services are a little more formal than Friday evening services. We offer eight Aliyot, during our Torah service. We have a full chanting of the Haftarah following the Maftir portion of the Torah Reading. We use the Hertz version of the Chumash, published by the Soncino Press. Services typically end between 11:30 and 12:00, and are sometimes followed by a congregant sponsored Kiddush luncheon.

All of our services use a fair amount of Hebrew with inclusion of numerous English readings. All members are encouraged to speak with the Rabbi regarding Hebrew and Synagogue skills. You will find our services more meaningful, the more you participate and understand the various segments that make up the Order of the Service.

We recite the *Misheberach* prayer for healing during each Friday evening service, as well as during each Saturday morning Torah service. Please contact the Rabbi to request a *Misheberach* if you have the need. The *Mourners Kaddish* is also recited at every prayer service and congregants receive notices alerting them to the Yarzeits (memorial dates) of their departed family members.

Shabbat Observances

Participation Many of our member families are interfaith families and we welcome people of all faiths to join us at our services. Our goal is to create a welcoming atmosphere of inclusion and a sense of community where families and family choices are respected and embraced. To this end, all members and their guests may stand on the bimah together during every portion of our services, Jews and non-Jews, alike. Out of respect for the sacred and uniquely Jewish aspects of Torah, we ask that only Jewish members wear a tallit, handle the Torah, and recite the Torah blessings.

Jewish women and men, over Bar or Bat Mitzvah age, count as part of our Minyan (Ten adults). Girls over 12 and 1/2 are counted. Boys must be 13. These 10 Jewish adults

are required to be in the sanctuary before certain rituals can take place and before certain prayers can be chanted.

Kippah and Tallit All men are expected to wear a kippah (otherwise known as a yarmulke or head covering) while in the synagogue. Jewish men are also asked to wear a tallit (prayer shawl) during daytime services and on Kol Nidre. If a Jewish man is called up to the bimah during these services, a tallit is required. Jewish women may wear a tallit and kippah at any time that men do. We ask that Jewish women wear a tallit if they are going to be on the bimah during daytime services and on Kol Nidre. However, it is not required. For non-Jewish men and women, the donning of a tallit and a kippah are optional. There is a collection of kippot and tallitim available for use just outside the door to the sanctuary. We ask that anyone over Bar or Bat Mitzvah age who is called to the Torah, please wear a tallit.

Dress As in any place of worship, respectful and appropriate attire is requested of all members, families and guests while in our sanctuary. We ask that clothing cover shoulders and stomachs. Covering with a tallit is not considered to be adequate covering, as tallitim have a way of slipping off of shoulders. Please no sweat pants or athletic shorts.

Electronics We have a ritual policy of not using any hand-held electronic devices in our sanctuary on Shabbat and other Holidays. We ask that phones and pagers be silenced if not turned off before entering the sanctuary. We know that it is very tempting to use electronic devices with games to quiet a restless child during services. We ask that you please not do so. While we are very liberal in our interpretation of Conservative Jewish doctrine, we still aspire to maintain a sense of the sacred space in our sanctuary, especially on Shabbat. We are aware that our ritual decisions don't always make logical sense: We allow electric amplification with a microphone but we don't allow electronic musical instruments. We allow a video camera that is set to run without interruption, but ask that photographs not be taken during a service. These are not always logical distinctions, but a lot of thought goes into these hairs we split. We try to preserve some of the spirit and sanctity of Shabbat in our sanctuary, creating a

separate and different space where we follow different rules than we do during the rest of the week.

We aim to be a liberal, egalitarian, and accepting community. One thing is for certain, and that is that we are a community in flux, ritually speaking. We try to maintain traditions and at the same time, to balance these ritual decisions with the demands of the community so that we remain vibrant and relevant. If someone doesn't agree with the current ritual decisions they are always encouraged to join in our discussions in the Ritual Committee. Everyone and every opinion are always welcome.

Musical Instruments on Shabbat We have a ritual policy regarding the use of musical instruments in the sanctuary that is also reflective of our being a community in flux. Historically musical instruments of any type have been excluded from Conservative synagogues on Shabbat, in part following Jewish law, and in part as a perpetual state of mourning of the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago. Some Conservative synagogues began admitting the use of instruments as far back as the 1950's. We have been slow to follow and have only recently (2010) begun to allow some musical instruments on Shabbat. We now allow acoustical musical instruments only, at some services. We do not ever allow electronic instruments. Services will not typically include musical instruments unless there is a special program or occasion. These occasions might include a special musical evening that has been announced in advance. They might also include a service which is part of a B'nai Mitzvah weekend in which the B'nai Mitzvah family has specifically requested that there be musical instruments. Generally speaking, the use of musical instruments in any of our services is viewed as a means of increasing the spirituality of the service, and increasing participation, and not as a means of turning a service into a concert type production.

Our policy regarding the use of musical instruments on Shabbat extends outside of the Sanctuary. Any event that takes place in our building on Shabbat is expected to follow the same general policy of allowing acoustical instruments while electronic musical instruments are not acceptable. These instruments can be miked as deemed necessary. Parties with DJ's playing music electronically are not permissible on

Shabbat, but may begin after sundown on Saturday evening.

Challah It is traditional that two challahs are blessed on Shabbat. This tradition is thought to have originated as a way to commemorate the double portion of manna that the Israelites received from God while traveling through the desert after fleeing from Egypt. Any congregant responsible for supplying the challahs for a Shabbat synagogue function is asked to supply two challahs.

Kashrut Policy

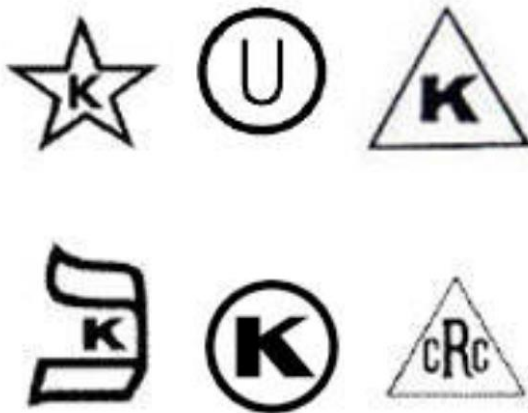
The basic philosophy of Adath Israel is one of modern Conservative Judaism and with this typically comes an adherence to traditional Jewish dietary laws of Kashrut. Realistically, though, we are a congregation of many people from very mixed backgrounds and differing levels of observance and Jewish education. While at one time our congregation was Orthodox and followed strict laws of Kashrut, we currently have very few members who follow any of these laws in or out of their homes. We also live in a community outside of the hub of observant Jewish life, and one where there are no kosher food markets. Therefore our policy has changed considerably over the years in regards to the food brought into our synagogue. We do try still, to honor some of the spirit and essence of traditional Kashrut. To this end, we do continue to observe a strict separation of meat and dairy and we do not allow any shellfish or pork products under any circumstances. We also continue to ask that any store bought food be labeled as kosher.

We do not currently have a full kitchen in our building. That awaits an additional fundraising campaign. We do however serve a lot of food in both our social hall upstairs and our multipurpose room on the lower level. Most of these affairs are congregational potluck meals. Other occasions where food is brought into the synagogue are catered parties. A caterer does not have to be a strictly kosher caterer, but must understand the synagogue's policies regarding food and agree to follow them. By in large these potlucks and parties are dairy meals. That means that the food served is either Dairy or "Parve". {Parve means that a food contains neither Dairy nor Meat. This category

would include vegetable dishes, fish dishes (excluding shellfish), and grains, as long as they are prepared without the addition of meat or dairy (eg. butter)}.

Most of the homemade food brought in by congregants and guests comes from people who do not themselves have kosher kitchens. We ask that people take special care to use clean surfaces in their homes for any food preparation, particularly making sure that there are no residues of oil from meat previously prepared. Food should be brought in dishes and containers that either have been washed in a dishwasher or are new and disposable. Ingredients used in home cooking should either be marked as kosher or be clearly vegetarian items. Please check lists of ingredients.

Anyone bringing store bought food into the synagogue is asked to purchase food that is labeled kosher. Below are examples of labeling that indicates that a food item is kosher:



We do allow meat to be served in the synagogue under very specific circumstances. The following rules apply to any food brought in by a congregant and to any food provided by a caterer: The event must be at an event where no dairy foods are being served. Any side dishes must be meat dishes themselves or be *parve* (see previous page for definition of *parve*). All meat brought into the synagogue must be from a kosher butcher. We have a strict policy of 'bring in / take out' regarding meat in the synagogue. Any meat being served must come in dishes that are removed along with it at the end of a function. It must not come in contact with any of the dishes or serving

utensils that remain in our rudimentary kitchen areas. It should not be stored in any of the synagogue refrigerators. It should be served on dishes that are also removed or on paper that is disposed of. We ask that these policies regarding meat at synagogue functions be followed even when the function is held off the premises. Kosher meats used in picnics and barbecues are kept outside the Synagogue, and separate utensils and grills are kept for meat use.

Food is also frequently brought to the synagogue during Sunday Religious School and weekday Hebrew School. We ask that students bringing snacks into the synagogue bring only dairy or parve items as it is too difficult to monitor where all of these snacks end up. While not a matter of Kashrut, the Religious School also has a policy of no peanuts or tree nuts in snacks, because of food allergies.

B'nai Mitzvah

We have a very active and rigorous B'nai Mitzvah program here at Adath Israel. Following our egalitarian beliefs, boys and girls are treated completely equally in terms of the expectations and the preparations they go through, except for their age. In this we follow the current Conservative Movement ruling that boys must be 13 years plus one day old before their Bar Mitzvah, while girls must only be 12 and a half years old before a Bat Mitzvah. We encourage our children to become fully fluent in the Shabbat prayer services for both Friday evening and Saturday morning. This is in addition to learning to chant both Torah and Haftarah. Please read our detailed *Congregation Adath Israel B'nai Mitzvah Guidelines*, available through our synagogue website at congadathisrael.org for further ritual information about our B'nai Mitzvah program. In addition to these Guidelines, all of the ritual policies found in this Handbook apply to B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies as well.