

Havurah

Welcome! As a member of B'nai Shalom of Olney, we invite you to join a Havurah and to take part in a wonderful, unique experience that has enhanced many people's lives.

What Is A Havurah?

A Havurah offers friendship, an extended family, and a great way to be a part of a close-knit group within the expanding B'nai Shalom of Olney family. Havurah comes from the Hebrew word *chaver*, meaning "friend." A Havurah is a small group of families, couples or individuals (usually 10-12 couples or families or up to 20 individuals) who share common interests and the desire to get together on a regular basis to socialize, learn and celebrate Jewish life together. Havurah events do not replace other events at B'nai Shalom of Olney, rather they supplement and support the synagogue's social, religious and intellectual activities.

What Is The Advantage of a Havurah?

Meeting people in a larger congregation can be intimidating, but membership in a Havurah can make a large congregation seem more intimate and personal. A number of B'nai Shalom of Olney's Havurot have been together for years. Members of a Havurah truly become your extended family at B'nai Shalom of Olney and can be counted on to both celebrate life cycle events together and when necessary, provide comfort and support during times of sadness, illness and loss.

What Kinds Of Things Does A Havurah Do?

It's up to you! Each Havurah determines its own programs based on its own needs, which could include sharing holiday celebrations and life cycle events, socializing and attending B'nai Shalom of Olney events together. One Havurah may celebrate holidays such as enjoying a Shabbat dinner together, building a Sukkah or having a Hanukkah party. Another Havurah may want to perform mitzvot by participating in community service projects. Other Havurot have gone camping or have invited speakers to their meetings to discuss a variety of topics related to Jewish life.

Who Runs The Havurah And Plans Events?

Every Havurah runs itself. Each Havurah establishes its own guidelines as to where and how often (usually monthly) it should meet and the type of activities it will hold, such as social, religious or study. Each also decides such issues as which family should lead the Havurah, should the group center around the children, how big the group should be and if the number of members should be limited. Typically the size is limited to what is considered a workable number of members. The most successful groups normally choose a "leader" who ensures that member contact information is current and that events are being planned and attended. Members usually take turns planning events. The "leader" should rotate annually.

How Is A Havurah Formed?

When you join B'nai Shalom of Olney you are given a Havurah application form. After returning a completed application, you will be "matched up" with others who have similar interests, backgrounds and requests. At the first meeting of your new Havurah, a Havurah committee member will be present to help break the ice, to explain about how a Havurah functions and to give programming ideas.

How Are New Members Added To Existing Havurot?

If your Havurah is in need of new members, call the BSO office and you will be directed to the current Havurah chair, who will assist you. You may also personally invite any BSO member to be a part of your group. Please inform the Havurah chair of any changes in your Havurah.

Why Does B'nai Shalom of Olney Do This?

We are very proud of the growth that B'nai Shalom has experienced over the past few years. However, we are aware of the sense of isolation that is easily felt when membership gets as large as ours. We regret that sometimes important moments of your life may be overlooked within our shul. A Havurah will ensure that your connection to BSO's family will be a solid and meaningful one. To this end, BSO will help you connect with congregants that share your interests, are at similar crossroads in their lives and are equally committed to providing a special Jewish experience for themselves and their families.

How Can I Start the Process of Joining A Havurah?

Please return a completed application to the B'nai Shalom of Olney Office or mail it to B'nai Shalom of Olney, Attn: Havurah Chair, 18401 Burtfield Drive, Olney, MD 20832. We are constantly trying to match people in order to add to or form new Havurot.