

TEMPLE B'NAI TORAH CHAVURAH HANDBOOK



TEMPLE
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TORAH
בני תורה

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What is a Chavurah?

What does “Chavurah” mean?

The word “chavurah” (chavurot is plural) comes from the Hebrew word “Chaver”, meaning friend.

What is a Chavurah?

A Chavurah is a group of approximately 6-10 families or up to 20 individuals who get together on a regular basis to celebrate Jewish life. The difference between a Chavurah and any other social group is that all members must make a commitment to the group to meet regularly, usually at least once a month.

What is the advantage of a Chavurah?

Getting to know people in a larger congregation can be intimidating for some. A Chavurah is a terrific way to get connected with your Temple community, essentially creating a small community within the larger one.

What kinds of things does a Chavurah do?

It’s up to you! Your group can enjoy Shabbat together, have a Chanukah party, build a sukkah, participate in outdoor activities, go to movies, participate in Tikkun Olam together, have guest speakers at your gatherings –the sky is the limit. Each Chavurah determines the types of activities it wants...some involve children, some do not.

What if I don’t connect with everyone in my group?

In any group, there may very well be one or two people you can’t seem to get to know. The best advice is to stick with it...you may be surprised what can happen over time. If the group is just not working out for you, you can contact a member of the Chavurah Committee by emailing tbchavurot@a.templebnaitorah.org to discuss other options.

Who do I contact to notify on changes in the Chavurah (membership etc.)?

Send an email to tbchavurot@a.templebnaitorah.org and describe the changes. The Committee will send out emails periodically requesting updated information on Chavurot.

Do I need to be a member of Temple B’nai Torah in order to join a Chavurah?

Yes, this is one of the benefits of membership.

The Six C's of Chavurah

COMMITMENT

It is essential to a Chavurah. Commitment involves each group member taking time, energy, and responsibility in the planning, execution, and participation in the group's activities.

COOPERATION

Groups become cohesive through interaction of all members. Decisions should be reached through consensus, not through default. All participants (including quiet ones) should be encouraged to voice their opinions without giving long speeches or monopolizing.

COMMUNICATION

For a group to be gratifying to its members, it is important that each member become an effective communicator. This means developing both active listening and speaking skills. It is important to express yourself directly, honestly, appropriately and with respect for everyone.

COMPROMISE

Even with good communication and a desire to reach consensus, compromises will inevitably need to be made. Working out compromises leads to a more cohesive group. Differences between members are inevitable, both in personality and in needs. It is important to increase one's tolerance and flexibility.

When a compromise needs to be reached, discuss the situation before it saps energy from the group. There are several "rules" to follow to reach effective compromises:

- Communicate directly — do not gossip, complain or talk about the person(s) outside the group.
- Communicate with care, concern, honesty, respect and directness.
- Communicate the behavior of the person(s), and be concrete and specific when you are describing what bothers you. Speak for and from yourself.
- Communicate during the appropriate time. If you have a personal issue with someone, have the discussion in private, between the two of you. If several of you are having issues, it is probably affecting the rest of the group and is best worked out with the group. Do not include children in this process, and be aware not to "gang up" on anyone.
- Communicate with receptivity. Be open to feedback about yourself. Use your active listening skills.

COMPANIONSHIP

It is important to know when you join a Chavurah whether you are seeking or avoiding an extended family situation. If you know your own needs and those of the other members, you can find the kind of companionship and degree of intimacy that you desire from the group.

CHANGE

Becoming a cohesive Chavurah is a continuous process. The needs of the group members, both individually and collectively will change over time. Periodically, the group should set aside some time just to review its goals and expectations to see if they are current and meeting the needs of all its members most of the time.

CHILDREN: The possible 7th C

If children are included in your Chavurah, early discussion on dealing with conflict amongst the children is highly recommended! Set some basic ground rules ahead of time with the kids and between parents. This will greatly reduce the potential for problems getting out of hand. If there are lots of kids, ground rules might actually be typed up and distributed when you do your initial planning.

Don't let conflicts simmer...dealing with them in a timely fashion is highly recommended.

Favorite Chavurah Tips

Pick one or two people who will be the representatives of your Chavurah so the Temple or others know who to contact for information. These people do not have any more “power” than anyone else in your Chavurah, but are willing to commit to the work of communications for the group. These roles should change from year to year so that everyone has the opportunity to serve as representative.

Decide as a group how to best communicate with each other...phone, email or postal mail.

Decide what your general goals will be and what you want to do, based on a combination of social activities, Jewish issues, holiday celebrations, etc. Try and reach a consensus which satisfies the majority of people. This requires patience and “give and take” (see the Six C’s of Chavurah).

Plan a monthly schedule at least 6 months in advance – a year of planning (at least dates) is ideal! Include dates, who is responsible for hosting, location and program ideas if possible. Send out a copy of the schedule to each member.

Each member agrees to coordinate and host an event. They are then responsible for reminders as the time gets closer. Fulfill your commitment to each other by doing your share.

Attend regularly – make it a priority. Work together to make the gatherings something you look forward to.

BE REALISTIC IN YOUR EXPECTATIONS and recognize the dynamics of your own Chavurah. Some groups will become *real* extended families; others will develop *some* close friendships within the group but share a common bond with everyone and enjoy a variety of experiences together. Others will be united in their dedication to a common focus like community service or Judaic study. Don’t compare yourselves but strive for the elements which make your Chavurah special to you...with the following exceptions:

What everyone in each Chavurah should have in common is a desire to strengthen your Jewish ties and those of your family, to enrich yourself Jewishly, to feel connected with other Temple members and to enjoy!

Check *D’varim*, *TBT Congregational Weekly Email*, *Ha-Etone: News from TBT Religious School* and *The JT News* for upcoming events to attend together as a group. These could serve as your monthly event or extras!

CHAVURAH PROGRAM IDEAS

Tikkun Olam: As Jews it is our responsibility to care for each other, our community, the greater community and the world.

- Volunteer as a group for a Temple program: Chanukkah, Purim, Passover, High Holy Days...host a 3rd Friday Community Shabbat Dinner for the community.
- As a group, make a commitment to volunteer for a human service organization (JFS Food Bank, Kline Galland, Multifaith AIDS Work, etc.)
- Collect money regularly to give as Tzedakah to different organizations.
- Participate as a group in local events: NW AIDS Walk, Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, Cystic Fibrosis Walk, Crossroads Feed, Jewish Family Services' Channukah Adopt a Family Program, Multi-Faith Habitat for Humanity Event...

Discussions: Chavurot are often frustrated by the futility of small talk. In an effort to get people to reveal themselves a bit, and to encourage discussion of personal values and experiences, these topics are sure to work. Try going around the room asking people to complete unfinished sentences. For example:

- My most significant book, poem, play or person...
- My most memorable Jewish moment...
- If I won ten million dollars in the lottery I would...
- A good Jew is one who...
- I hope my children remember me as
- The Jewish Community's most pressing problem is...

LEARNING ALL YEAR LONG...some ideas to get you started:

Comparative religions

How other Jews Practice

What Judaism says about...(any social issue)

Discuss a book everyone agrees to read

Jewish history, customs, life cycle events...

Invite clergy or someone of interest to speak to your group

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

As has already been stated – the sky's the limit!

- Camping
- Picnics
- Movies
- Museums
- Day Trips
- Meals together
- Bowling
- Skating
- Concerts
- Political activities

CELEBRATING HOLIDAYS TOGETHER:

Shabbat: Have dinner together either at Temple or in homes. If the group is too big to have dinner at one place, split up for the main meal and casually join together for dessert.

Havdallah: Having a gathering on a Saturday evening? Start it with the Havdallah service. It's a beautiful and simple service marking the end of Shabbat. You can get a copy of the service from the Temple and we'll help you learn the tunes.

High Holidays: Have dinner at someone's home on Rosh Hashana or break the Yom Kippur fast together. Attend services as a group. Tashlich is a great gathering on Rosh Hashana afternoon.

Sukkot: Build a sukkah together or if one member is already doing the construction, join to decorate and share a meal. In keeping with the customs of inviting *Ushpizin* (symbolic guests), have everyone think of someone they'd like to invite "in spirit" to join the Chavurah in the sukkah and explain their choices.

Chanukah: This is a wonderful time for a party – with or without children! It is also the perfect time for discussion. Chanukah always raises issues: explaining the secular Christmas to a Jewish child, negotiating both Chanukah and Christmas in an interfaith household, feelings of being outside the mainstream culture, materialism...you get the idea!

Tu B' shevat: The New Year of Trees falls in late January or early February. It's a great time to plant...maybe as a group, rotate each year at a different member's home and over the years, the Chavurah will enjoy seeing the tangible evidence of its growth.

Purim: Join together in the mitzvot of giving *Shalach Manot* (gifts of food to friends and neighbors). Prepare packages of treats together and then deliver them yourselves. It is also a mitzvot to give tzedakah of money to at least two needy individuals. Volunteer at or attend the Temple megillah reading and purimspiel!

Passover: If some or all of your Chavurah have no other family in town, join together for first night seder. Gathering any of the other nights or attending the Temple Community Seder together on the second night is also a great way to connect. Share the responsibilities for cooking and parts of the seder...have the kids do the story in a play.

Yom Ha'shoah: Holocaust Memorial Day can be observed by having a special service as a group or attending the Temple observance. Another idea is watching an appropriate movie with discussion in someone's home.

Shavuot: Attend services and join the community in celebrating the consecration of the Confirmation class. Join the late night study at Temple or have one yourself!

BECOMING AN EXTENDED FAMILY:

Hanukat Habayit (Dedication of the Home): When a member moves into a new home, have everyone bring both food and a special wish for the new homeowners. Be together to hang a mezuzah and bless the new house.

Making a Donation: giving tzedakah or host an Oneg at the Temple on behalf of the Chavurah can be done to honor any special simcha or to memorialize a loss. Times to make donations include: births, graduations, retirements, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, recovery from illness, deaths, yahrzeits, etc. Donations to Temple or another cherished organization is welcomed.

Shiva & Meal Preparations: Be there for each other during times of family loss. Have the Chavurah assume responsibility for meals during Shiva and sit Shiva with the family.

Bar & Bat Mitzvah: When a member celebrates a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, have the whole Chavurah in attendance on Friday night to welcome family and friends or during morning or evening Saturday Shabbat services. You can also participate by helping to provide food for the Oneg Shabbat.

LONG TERM PROGRAM PLANNING FOR CHAVUROT

Hold program planning meetings at a minimum of at least every 6 months...planning for a year is great, though usually easier after the first year.

Divide up the responsibilities for this planning meeting: who is taking notes, who will send out the final schedule to all members, refreshments, facilitating the meeting, etc.

Remind all members in advance to bring personal calendars to this meeting.

Brainstorm possible programs. Consider a combination of social, educational, cultural, community service and religious events (check the ideas list in this booklet and add to it). Reach consensus on the balance between family and adult only activities. Clarify again some of your goals as a group.

Schedule your dates. Some Chavurot find that a specific time in the month (e.g. every 3rd weekend) works best for the most commitment. Other groups hand pick dates per the groups calendars. Finding what works for your group is essential for best turn out...trial and error in the first couple planning sessions may be necessary for long term success.

Decide who will have responsibility for each program calendared. This can be done alphabetically by last names, or by interest in a specific program. If some change is needed, it is the responsibility of the individual in charge of that event to switch dates with someone else or find a replacement host. *Be sure to notify everyone of the change.*

Decide how you want to handle food: potluck each time, host provides refreshments or others supply food when not hosting?

When you send out the copy of the finalized schedule to each member of the Chavurah, include an up-to-date roster and directions to each home or venue (if needed). You may also wish to include a list of members' birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

Commit to participating regularly!! It really is the only way for the group to deepen the bonds between members for long term success. And have fun!

Check in with the group on occasion. Are the programs meeting everyone's needs and desires for the Chavurah?

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY FACILITATE YOUR ASSIGNED EVENT

When monthly gatherings are agreed upon and planned in advance, specific programs can be clarified, increasing interest and commitment in attendance. Keep gatherings, informal, relaxed and low key...this is supposed to be fun!

Send out a reminder to everyone by your agreed upon method (email? Phone?) ten days to two weeks in advance and request some form of RSVP. Clarify any unusual details or directions. If you decide on email as the main method of communication and you do not hear from someone, you may want to follow-up with a phone call. You may want to send an email reminder a day or two before the gathering.

Prepare for your programming early...it helps to be organized. Make reservations in plenty of time. If research of a topic is necessary, utilize the Temple staff or other resources. Prepare in advance key questions or helpful information to start discussions, as appropriate.

Encourage your members to arrive on time and begin promptly. As host, you will most likely act as facilitator. Encourage everyone to participate in discussions and help gently avoid anyone dominating the conversation by asking other's opinions. If a guest speaker is involved, confirm time and directions in the week prior.

Plan ahead for refreshments: decide if it will be pot luck, or rotated amongst the group from event to event.

Try to find an appropriate closing for your group...decide if you will end at a particular time and then follow through.

Enjoy the time together!