

Egalitarianism and Beth Tikvah

(sent out by Rabbi Grover on April 27, via email, following the Special General Meeting)

Dear Friends,

Since Beth Tikvah's founding, we have been committed to the inclusion of women in our congregational life. Tonight, with a clear and resounding voice, we have voted to make that inclusion unrestricted and unconditional. From today forward, Beth Tikvah will be an egalitarian synagogue.

I am very pleased with the results of the vote, but even more pleased with the process that led up to it. This change was not achieved because of a ruling from on high. It came from study, questioning, and reflection, culminating with a democratic vote by our membership. Truly, we made this decision together.

For those who are pleased with the outcome, I hope you will use this opportunity to discover more of our Jewish heritage. All of your clergy and professional staff are ready and committed to help with your spiritual growth in Torah. This especially includes women who would like to know more about the implications of egalitarianism as pertaining to their obligations. For those who are disappointed, we are also here. Whether you need guidance or support, or if you just want to vent - we are still your clergy and your congregation. We are here for everyone. Pluralism is a Jewish value and we are stronger because of our differing viewpoints.

All rulings pertaining to halakha are the responsibility of the Mara d'Atra. I would therefore like to make the following rulings, which represent changes from our current practice. They shall apply immediately.

1. With the exception of those mitzvot determined by sexual anatomy, we affirm the equal obligation of adult men and women in observing the mitzvot.
2. All minyanim which take place at Beth Tikvah, or are conducted under our auspices, shall count men and women (post bar/bat mitzvah age) equally in constituting a minyan for prayer. A person may not refuse to be counted towards the minyan. The staff shall not make calls or find other participants for the service once ten participants are present.
3. Since men and women are equally obligated in the mitzvot, a woman fulfills the prayer obligations of the community just like a man does. Women shall be eligible to lead all services at Beth Tikvah, or services conducted under our auspices.

4. We recognize the diversity of opinions and levels of comfort for women in undertaking the new obligations imposed by the adoption of egalitarianism. Therefore, while equality of obligation shall be the educational model of the Synagogue, the Synagogue shall not impose ritual or status restrictions on any woman or group of women who choose not to perform these new mitzvot.

Further rulings and/or changes to policy may result in the coming months and years as we respond to all the new challenges that this egalitarian model may create.

I am grateful to our past rabbinic and lay leadership who have helped navigate these challenges from the early days of the shul. And in our day - to the Board, the Executive, the Gender Equality Committee, the Rabbinic Advisory Committee, and the Ritual Committee for working together to ensure proper process. We do not thank you sufficiently for your dedication and commitment. I thank the membership for its courage, patience, and seriousness in approaching this issue. Other synagogues have been watching us, and we have much to be proud of.

Finally, I would like to thank the women of our shul. Beth Tikvah would not exist today if it were not for your wisdom, your passion for community, and your commitment to Jewish life. Of that, we are all certain. For too long, you have been told that you cannot lead, cannot participate, cannot count, and cannot be equal. Tonight, as we approach Shavuot, we embraced a new vision of Torah, enhanced by your leadership, your counting, your participation, and your equality. Tonight we invited you to stand with us, side-by-side, again, at Sinai. We need you here.

"May the favor of God rest upon us and make all our efforts successful."

Sincerely,



Rabbi Jarrod Grover

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