

## **Congregation Beth Am**

### **Frequently Asked Questions About Conversion**

#### ***What does the conversion process entail?***

Each congregation has a slightly different conversion process. At Beth Am, those who would like to convert are asked to take the Introduction to Judaism class, to regularly attend Shabbat services and Torah study, to observe the holidays and attend other community events, and to meet with a member of the clergy monthly for discussion and individual guidance.

#### ***How long does the conversion process take?***

Typically, it takes about a year, so that the conversion student can experience the full cycle of Jewish holidays and a year of Torah study. Those who have a substantial background of Jewish study and practice may complete the process in less time.

#### ***How is the conversion process completed?***

When the prospective convert is ready to finalize the conversion, they are asked to write a statement, describing their journey to Judaism and why they wish to convert. The prospective convert then meets with the Beit Din, a “rabbinical court” of three clergy members, who will ask them questions based on their statement. This is not a test of the prospective convert’s Jewish knowledge; rather, it is a chance to explore with them what they appreciate about Judaism, what they have learned so far, and what their future Jewish journey might look like. After the conversation, the Beit Din confers briefly and then formally welcomes the convert into the Jewish community.

Following the Beit Din, the convert and sponsoring rabbi will go to the mikveh, the ritual bath, where the convert will immerse three times and recite the blessings for immersion.

#### ***Do I have to be circumcised to convert to Judaism?***

According to *halakhah* (Jewish law), any male who wishes to convert to Judaism must be circumcised. However, the Reform Movement does not require circumcision for adult males to convert.

#### ***I’m not sure that I want to convert and don’t feel ready to meet with a clergy member. Are there other ways to explore Judaism?***

You are welcome to attend any Beth Am worship services, programs or classes – all are open to any interested member of the community.

#### ***Is the Introduction to Judaism class only for those who are planning to convert?***

You may enroll in Introduction to Judaism whether or not you intend to convert. If you are contemplating marriage to someone who is Jewish, we encourage both of you to take the course together.

This course is for anyone who wishes to learn (or re-learn) more about Judaism. All are welcome: non-Jews, Jews, interfaith couples or those considering conversion. Students will learn the basics of Judaism in a friendly and informal atmosphere. We'll explore fundamental aspects of Jewish practices, such as holiday observance and life-cycle celebrations. We'll also discuss Jewish understandings of God and religious beliefs, important Jewish texts, Jewish history, music and literature, and the significance of Israel in Judaism today.

***I'm not sure if I believe in God. Does this disqualify me from conversion?***

Judaism is a big tent, and embraces those whose faith is strong as well as those who struggle with matters of belief. We recognize that there are many ways of defining God, and our tradition encompasses a wide spectrum of beliefs. Jews are asked to study, learn and seek the Holy One throughout our lives. We believe that the journey towards God may take many years, and that each of us should try to grow spiritually and deepen our connection with the Divine. Most important is a commitment to practice and live by the teachings of Judaism.

***I'm a little nervous about coming to services, since I've never been to a synagogue before. Can someone help?***

Yes! Contact Rabbi Sarah Weissman at [rabbi\\_weissman@betham.org](mailto:rabbi_weissman@betham.org), and she can connect you with a Beth Am member who will be happy to sit with you at Shabbat services, answer your questions and act as your guide.