

**Religious Guidelines for  
Ohavi Zedek Synagogue**

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## 1) Introduction

The joy in Judaism is grounded in the unbroken continuity of a tradition that began almost four thousand years ago. The genius of the ancient rabbis, the sages of Israel, was their capacity to create what we know as Judaism out of the Temple-based tradition of ancient Israel. The secret to their success was their insight that the continuing power of tradition is its capacity to grow as we Jews grow. Ohavi Zedek Synagogue is rooted in this understanding of our need always to balance tradition and change.

We delight at OZ in our self respect and mutual respect as Jews, understanding that there is no one way to be a Jew and that Judaism thrives on its interaction with the larger culture. Many of our families include both children of Israel and children of other traditions and culture. Our heterogeneity gives us strength and feeds our capacity to grow personally and as a community.

Coming from so many different places within, and from outside of, Judaism, we are committed to each other's freedom to grow, each in our own way. At the same time, what holds us together as a community is our respect for the communal nature of Judaism. Within our building and on our grounds in Burlington, and in our shared activities away from North Prospect Street, we are committed to respecting a common core of values and practices through which we come together as a congregation.

The guidelines described in this booklet are intended to educate and guide us as we increasingly gather in each other's homes and in other settings away from the synagogue building and grounds. We understand that many of us, members and friends of OZ, were not raised with knowledge of traditional Jewish practices. These guidelines are designed to educate as much as to define our shared understanding of the essence of Judaism at Ohavi Zedek Synagogue. If in any way you find a lack of clarity in what is described here, we urge you to seek the guidance of the congregation's Senior Rabbi, who delights in our diversity and is committed to nurturing self-respect and mutual respect as hallmarks of OZ's communal life.

## 2) Kashrut and Food

"The sacred within us," Carolyn Baker has written, "instinctively resonates with the sanctity of food." For millennia, Judaism has recognized this truth and defined our eating on the basis of what we call *kashrut*. At Ohavi Zedek we respect everyone's understanding of the sanctity of food. At the same time, so that those of us with the most traditional understanding of *kashrut* can experience the sacred within when eating together, we honor their interpretation of *kashrut* in our shared eating. As our community grows to include many more events away from our building and grounds, we are giving a lot of thought to how this all works when we share food in our homes, in the woods or wherever we gather to eat.

Our abiding value is hospitality; Judaism holds *hachnasat orchim* or the welcoming of guests in high esteem. We learn this value from Abraham, who, according to tradition, had a tent open on all sides to welcome travelers from all directions. We want to reach out to all who attend OZ events and to honor their individual backgrounds, affiliations and experience, and at the same time we ask that all respect the integrity of our synagogue life and standards.

Integral to *hachnasat orchim* is the serving of food. In almost every culture, the sharing of food builds community and fellowship. Just as Judaism sanctifies the hosting of guests, it sanctifies the food we eat through kashrut. The rules as taught to us by the Torah and by our sages' elaboration on the Torah's understandings do not immediately suggest a logical reason to the question, "Why do Jews keep kosher?" Nevertheless, for millennia, Jews have been sanctifying their food and the act of eating through the observance of the rules of kashrut.

As a Conservative synagogue, OZ is committed to the mitzvah of kashrut. Yet we recognize that, within our pluralistic community, there is a diversity of interpretations and observance of kashrut. Thus, we try to set policies and guidelines to ensure that all members and their guests are as comfortable as possible.

In OZ's kitchen, we require a strict standard of kashrut. For potlucks and events held outside of OZ, where food is not prepared in the OZ kitchen, we ask participants to respect and honor the guidelines below to make events as inclusive as possible for all members of our community and their friends who may wish to attend.

#### **a) Potlucks and Meals Not Prepared in the OZ Kitchen**

These guidelines are for events considered to be under the umbrella of OZ where food is being served.

- Food should be vegetarian, dairy or *pareve* (*pareve* items are foods without any meat or dairy ingredients). Jewish dietary laws consider *pareve* food to be neutral, and it can be eaten with either meat or milk dishes. No meat or dishes containing meat ingredients should be served.
- Eggs and milk products are acceptable.
- No *treiph* food should be served. *Treiph* items are foods forbidden by rabbinic law such as shellfish, pork products, etc.
- Due to the complexities around kashrut and fish, we suggest that fish not be served for meals held outside OZ or potlucks at OZ. If fish is to be served, a few acceptable types of fish are salmon, lox, tuna, cod, and tilapia. For other choices please consult the Rabbi for guidance on the selection of the choice of fish.
- A *hechshar* (a rabbinical product certification, qualifying foods that conform to the requirements of Jewish law or *halakha*) is preferred but not required for prepared foods. Some common *hechshar* symbols are available at <http://www.kashrut.com/agencies/>. Please check commercially prepared food items for ingredients that may conflict with the policies above (such as chicken or beef stock, etc.).

- We ask that the host and/or event organizer familiarize him/herself with these guidelines and act as kashrut supervisor for the event to ensure that all foods being served comply with these guidelines.
- Ohavi Zedek does not hold potluck meals or events during the eight days of Passover.

## **b) Restaurants**

- Whenever possible, a kosher or vegetarian restaurant should be chosen.
- When not possible, OZ folks and friends are encouraged to select menu items that follow the kashrut guidelines listed above in section A.
- When using a pre-ordered menu, items included should conform to these policies.

## **3) Shabbat/Yom Tov Events**

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel teaches us that Judaism is about the sanctification of time (unlike the religion of ancient Israel, which celebrated the sacred space of the Holy Temple). To sanctify is to set apart. At the core of Judaism's understanding of the sanctification of time is our setting apart the time of Shabbat and Yom Tov festivals such as Rosh Hashanah, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. We endeavor to create boundaries about what we do at these times so that we can remember how precious these hours are, and in doing so, teach our children about these special times.

The guidelines below will help to clarify some of the ways in which we create these boundaries in time within Ohavi Zedek, and we ask that these observances be extended to all events sponsored by OZ that occur off site on Shabbat or Yom Tov (see above) so that all members of our community may feel welcome to attend and participate.

- All Shabbat activities should have a Shabbat theme. The content can vary and should be evaluated by the event's coordinator and the senior rabbi.
- Organized drawing or writing activities except for preschool aged children or for safety/security is not recommended. For example, parents can sign in and out their children at child-care during the Holidays.
- Financial transactions are to be made either pre- or post- Shabbat for activities that will take place on Shabbat or Yom Tov.

- Photography or videography is not allowed on Shabbat or Yom Tov.
- Events requiring participants to drive on Shabbat or Yom Tov should only be for the purpose of an activity relating to Shabbat or Yom Tov.
- We encourage that candles be lit before the beginning of Shabbat. Candle lighting time is 18 minutes before sundown. Candle lighting times can be found in the “Voice” or on the OZ website.
- The Havdalah ceremony should be performed at or after Shabbat/Yom Tov ends. The time is available in the “Voice” or on the website.
- Unamplified acoustic instruments may be used at alternative services to bring participants closer to Shabbat/Holidays, but not for entertainment. The senior Rabbi should approve the types of instruments used.
- The transport of items for personal use, or for use during a Shabbat or Yom Tov themed event, is permitted at Ohavi Zedek.
- Exceptions to these guidelines, l’shem chinukh (for the sake of education), should be addressed to the senior rabbi of Ohavi Zedek prior to the event.
- We ask that families not cook on Shabbat when hosting an OZ event. Preparation of cold foods, e.g., salads, or cutting fruit is permitted on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Cooking can take place on Yom Tov, which are Rosh Hashanah (both days), the first two days of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret-Simḥat Torah, the first two and last two days of Passover, and both days of Shavuot.
- Food may be heated on Shabbat or Yom Tov in an oven set below 350 degrees Fahrenheit

#### 4) Prayer

For generation after generation, Jews have nurtured their inner life through reflection, meditation and prayer. There is simplicity to our ways of helping ourselves to deepen our understanding of the

sacred. Over the years, two traditions have developed around (1) covering our heads and (2) wearing a *tallit* (prayer shawl) with its fringes (*tzitzit*) to remind us of our responsibilities in being human. As we move towards creating equity for women and men in many areas of our lives, so too, do we do so in regard to head covering and the wearing of a *tallit*. We endeavor to create standards of practice that reflect our own evolving values in this regard so that the *wearing of Kippot and tallit at all OZ sponsored prayer services is consistent with the standards observed at OZ.*

- It is expected that all men and boys should wear Kippot for prayer services.
- It is expected that all women and girls should wear Kippot or an appropriate head covering if leading the prayer service or on the bimah (or the space designated as the bimah for services held outside OZ's sanctuary). Otherwise, Kippot and head coverings are optional for women.
- It is expected that all Jewish men and boys called to the bimah during a morning service (or the space designated as the bimah for services held outside OZ's sanctuary) must wear a kippah and tallit (prayer shawl).
- It is expected that all Jewish women and girls called to the bimah during a morning service (or the space designated as the bimah for services held outside OZ's sanctuary) should wear a kippah or an appropriate head covering, and a tallit (prayer shawl), if they are reading from Torah, chanting from Haftarah or carrying and/or lifting a Torah scroll.

## 5) Torah Reading

A *sefer Torah*, a Torah scroll, is one of the few "things" to which Judaism accords a value of *kedushah*, sanctity. A *sefer Torah*, though a physical object, is invested with the great love that generations of Jews have taught to their children through time. There are reasons why Jews rush into burning buildings to rescue a *sefer Torah*. We treat it with utmost respect for infused in it is our understanding of all that is sacred for us, has been sacred for generations of our people, and we trust will continue to carry forward such love through generations to come. This is why we are very careful in our use of a *sefer Torah*.

- Torah readings can only occur from a *sefer Torah* (a Torah scroll) that has been certified kosher by a *sofer* (a Torah scribe).
- If a Torah scroll is to be lent for an event off-site Torah scrolls may only be moved or lent for use off site if the Torah is read during three separate services at that location. Alternative Torah

“readings” or Torah readings without a scroll are permitted during alternative services or at off site services.

## **6) B’nai Mitzvah Ceremonies**

At Ohavi Zedek Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies we welcome our 13-year-old congregants as “adult” members of our community. The ceremonies typically occur as part of the Shabbat morning service held in the main sanctuary at OZ, are open to the entire community, provide a way for our congregants to meet our new “adults”, and for our B’nai Mitzvah to feel a part of OZ. We strongly urge families to participate in these traditional ceremonies at OZ. However, if families wish to seek alternative B’nai Mitzvah experiences, they may consult with the senior rabbi to determine if their child’s ceremony can be held at a different service where the Torah is read. Examples of these include “Shabbat in the Round” or other alternative Shabbat morning service, Shabbat afternoon service, Rosh Chodesh (new moon), or Monday or Thursday morning services. Our rabbis welcome opportunities to meet families who have children approaching this very important milestone in a young person’s life, and encourage all families to meet with them. Although Ohavi Zedek rabbis and/or staff do not officiate at B’nai Mitzvah or non-traditional “coming of age” ceremonies held outside of Ohavi Zedek synagogue and grounds, they will explore options and ideas with families who are looking for different ways to personalize this Rite of Passage. It is important that this celebration be a beautiful and personal time of connection between our young adults, their families, and the Ohavi Zedek community.