



# Beth Ami Community Nursery School

## Parent Handbook 2019-2020

\* Returning parents please note that every year there are changes made to this handbook. Please read this in its entirety and note the updated changes.



Founded in 1979, Beth Ami Community Nursery School is a Reggio-inspired, Jewish nursery school, dedicated to providing developmentally appropriate, open-ended experiences for all children in a joyful, safe, and rich learning environment. Our goals for each child are that they develop a positive self-image, independence, creative thinking skills, and respect for differences. Our school is a program of Congregation Beth Ami, and is located on the Congregation Beth Ami campus. We warmly welcome families of all backgrounds and religious affiliations.

### **Process vs. Product**

Teachers design projects which emphasize process over product. The learning that happens within the process is more important than the end result. Here are some phrases parents can use for similar emphasis:

“You chose such vibrant colors! Which is your favorite?”

“Tell me about your project.”

### **REGGIO-INSPIRED CURRICULUM**

Our curriculum is child-centered, with themes and activities emerging from the observations of the teachers and the interests of the children. This emergent curriculum is inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which emphasizes children’s competence, trusting relationships, and the role of children in constructing their own understandings of the world via interactions with people, materials, and the environment.

At BACNS, children are active participants in their learning, where exploration, discovery, and invention are of primary importance. Literacy development, beginning math concepts, the scientific method, critical thinking and problem-solving skills are woven into the inquiry process.

### **JEWISH CURRICULUM**

We celebrate Jewish traditions by reading stories, singing songs in Hebrew and Yiddish, dancing, cooking, learning about and celebrating the holidays, and celebrating the end-of-the-week Shabbat (Sabbath) together as a school. We welcome Shabbat every Friday by singing, lighting candles, saying blessing over grape juice, and baking challah (braided egg bread).

We teach Jewish values such as *Kavod* (respect/honor), *Chesed* (loving kindness), *Tza’ar Ba’alay Cha’yim* (avoiding cruelty to animals) and *Tzedakah* (Giving to those in need). These values are woven into the fabric of our everyday, and are of huge importance to children.

### **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

We view moments of struggle, whether over a mutually-desired toy or a move to exclude one-another, as learning opportunities. Rather than jumping in and solving the problem or putting someone in timeout, we support the children as they navigate the issue and problem-solve together, so they can gain and practice the tools (such as self-advocacy, empathy, and solution-generation) that they will need to do this independently in the long run.

When conflicts arise, teachers will reflect and validate the feelings of all involved, ensure that all sides are heard, facilitate conflict resolution, and when necessary, suggest solutions or model negotiating skills. For example, a teacher might say, “It looks like you both want to play with that toy, but we only have one. What could we do to solve this problem?”



If and when a child poses a threat to him/herself or others or needs time and/or space to calm down, s/he may be removed temporarily from the situation, classroom, playground, etc. At these times, a teacher either remains with the child, talking calmly, or a quiet space is provided for the child somewhere in the classroom. It is usually left up to the child to determine when s/he feels ready to talk or re-enter the social scene. Alternatives for future situations may be discussed, as will validation of the feelings behind the behavior. For example, a child may be told, "It is okay to be angry, but it is not okay to hurt anyone. You may..." and then alternatives may be suggested. Physical outlets may be provided for a very angry child when needed, such as foam balls to squeeze or throw, or play dough to pound.

## \*\*\*\*\* HOURS OF OPERATION & DAILY SCHEDULE \*\*\*\*\*

- 7:30 a.m. A.M. Extended Care begins on the yard or in a classroom (weather-dependent)
- 9:00 a.m. CORE school day begins. Each class follows its own schedule, but this time will include extended inquiry/play both inside and out, snack, circle time, and lunch.
- 1:00 p.m. CORE school day ends for all classes.
- 1-5:30 p.m. P.M. Extended Care begins at 1 p.m.: Nappers head to room 1/2, while non-nappers head to the play yard (Weather permitting).
- 1:00 p.m. Enrichment classes begin. They end between 1:30-1:45 p.m.
- 3:00 p.m. If they haven't yet, by 3 p.m. the children transition inside for snack, potty and water break, followed by mixed age play indoors. The Aftercare room is set with provocations and activities geared toward the unique needs of our Aftercare group.
- 5:30 p.m. School closes.

### **CORE School Day**

All of our CORE classes are offered Monday-Friday. Families may choose to enroll children anywhere from 2-5 days per week in Shorashim and Nevatim (our youngest class) and 3-5 days a week in all other classes.

### **Extended Day Care (EDC)**

We offer EDC five days a week for students of all ages starting at 7:30 a.m. and ending at 5:30 p.m. Our pick up times after 1pm are 3:30, 4:30 and 5:30. For our nappers, we provide mats and a calm nap space with soothing music. Parents provide sheets and any other items that may help children sleep. As children wake up, they merge with the non-napping group. Our EDC program is low-key, individualized, and care based.

### **Drop-In Days/Hours**

We offer drop-in days during the CORE program as well as extended care hours IF pre-arranged. Online request form used for making request. See our fee schedule for cost.



### **Enrichment Activities**

At 1 p.m. each day, we bring in specialists who teach music, art, gymnastics and sport when the Core day has ended. Parents who choose to enroll their children in the enrichment classes pay for them directly to the enrichment program and separately from their regular monthly tuition and extended care services. Please see our website for current class offerings.

### **Shabbat**

Every Friday, we celebrate the traditions of Shabbat (the Sabbath). One family from each class brings in unbaked challah (egg bread) dough, and the children shape and make their own small challah. We have a school-wide gathering that involves singing, movement, and stories with the Rabbi. Each child will bring home his/her challah at the end of their school day.

## \*\*\*\*\* NEAR-YEAR-ROUND COVERAGE \*\*\*\*\*

### **Academic School Year & Summer Session**

Our academic School year operates from the end of August through the beginning of June. We offer four two-week summer sessions to accommodate Summer vacation schedules. Our Summer program continues with our philosophy of emergent curriculum, and incorporates “camp style” themes for each session. The children will also have more time spent outside exploring the vibrant uniqueness to Summer days with special activities on our yard and grass.

### **School Closures**

BACNS is closed on National as well as Jewish holidays. We are closed for a two-week Winter break that aligns with Rincon Valley public schools and a one-week Spring break that corresponds with the Rincon Valley school district as well. We are closed one week at the beginning of Summer and two weeks at the end.

**Jewish Holiday closures:** BACNS closes for certain Jewish holidays. Please see calendar for specific holiday closures and early closures.



## ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

### Gate Policy

The gate is the key point of entrance into the Nursery School and entry is strictly controlled. For the safety of all students, families and staff, every person entering the school must use their own gate code for entry. DO NOT hold the door open to allow someone else to enter with you. There is NO tailgating. After you enter, the gate must close so others can use their own personal code to enter. If a person does not have a code, they must buzz in to have the gate opened by a staff member. Gate codes are an important record for determining who has accessed the school campus.

### The Front Gate

Our key-coded front gate is a part of our ongoing effort to keep our children and school safe. Each family will choose a personalized code. We ask that families only share this code on a need-to-know basis. If you forget your code, buzz the office and we'll let you in.

### Arrival

Upon arriving, please wait until your scheduled start time and then accompany your child to his or her classroom or the yard and sign in.

Early care begins on the yard (weather-permitting) or in room one of our Early Care rooms. At 9 a.m., Shorashim, Nevatim and Shtilim begin their day in their classroom, while Anafim and Alim start their day on the yard.

### Sign In & Sign Out

Preschool is governed by requirements established by the State of California. Rules of compliance (CCR, Title 22, Sections 101226.1{b} and 101229.1) dictate practices that assure the health and safety of children in our school. Brightwheel is the digital record keeping program we use at Beth Ami. Every child will have their own designated Brightwheel account to use for daily sign-in and sign-out. These signatures are a legal document which transfer responsibility for the child between the center and the child's authorized representative. It is critically important that each child be signed in and out every day with their caregiver's code AND full legal signature. Sign-in and out is done on tablets located in your child's classroom or on the tablet available during extended care hours.

### Authorization for Pick-Up

Only those individuals 18 years and older who have been previously authorized by a parent through Brightwheel will be allowed to pick up a child. If the staff does not know the person who has been authorized to pick up a child, the staff person will ask for a picture I.D. Please let teachers know if someone new will be picking your child up. Additional authorized pick-ups can be added throughout the year. Please notify/alert staff by email or Brightwheel message so we may note the change and anticipate seeing a new person at pick-up time.



## HELPING YOUR CHILD ADJUST TO SCHOOL

To make your child's adjustment to their new setting easier, talk about it a lot beforehand. Explain how you will drop them off, stay close by, and you will come back right after lunch, or nap, depending on your child's schedule. If they stay for a longer day, and pick up is 4:30 p.m. or 5:30 p.m., check in with office staff to talk about the afternoon schedule so you can prepare your child for their new routine and when they can expect to see you.

If this is your child's first school or out-of-home care experience, it can help to read books about school such as, *The Night Before Preschool* or *Maisy Goes to Preschool* or most any other children's book featuring a character going to preschool for the first time. This way, you'll be able to introduce some of the things your child may see or do for the first time. Such things as eating together at a snack table, lining up to go outside, circle times and napping on mats may be new for your child; seeing these things in advance will be tremendously helpful in readying them for the experience.

Some children need a transitional object to take from school to home. The best transitional object would be something like a stuffed animal or lovey that can live in their cubby during the school day for visits when needed for comfort. We ask all families to **provide a picture of the whole family so that your child can look at it for comfort.** This can stay in their cubby and be there any time for your child to look at if and when they need to. And tell your child's teachers about what makes your child feel secure.

It can help to have a phrase that you can say to your child each time you part, something like: "Mommy's/Daddy's/etc. never gone long and s/he always comes back," and/or to have an exit ritual, such as a fence kiss on the yard. Be sure to say goodbye when you leave.

We hope you won't be anxious or embarrassed if your child is upset and cries. It's important to leave when you say you will, even if they protest. Know that a teacher will help your child find an activity or a comforting lap, that separation upset usually ends shortly after you leave, and we will call you if it doesn't. Feel free to call us any time for reassurance.

Sometimes, children may announce that they do not want to go to school that day. Try saying, "Now is the time to go to preschool. Later we will be together" or "Preschool is your work and I will be doing my work when we are apart." Your child may be fearful of missing out on special times that Mom or Dad, or a caregiver shares with a younger sibling. Assure them of your plans to spend time together after school and your confidence of their success in school.

## WHAT WE OFFER

### Learning Environment – CORE & Extended Day Care

The school provides a creative setting conducive to curiosity and discovery. The environment is designed to foster independence and responsibility. The classrooms are organized into learning areas with a variety of rich materials. We encourage the children to make choices and follow their interests. Our yard is equipped with play and climbing structures, an area for wheeled toys, an imaginative play area, sand and water play, a musical garden, natural and human-made materials that the children use to create their own play spaces, and evolving gardens for work, observation, and interaction with nature.



Our Extended Day Care (EDC) program is a continuation of our morning program in some ways and a departure in others. We maintain the same level of intentionality, nurturing, and engagement. But we are in a mixed-age setting, with even greater individualization. We try to mirror what would be happening at home: play, snacks, naps, snuggles, and stories.

### **Staff**

The success of our school depends on the dedicated and skilled individuals who make up our staff. Our teachers are experienced at working with young children and have received their degrees and/or certifications in Early Childhood Education. Our staff is committed to on-going professional development which includes regular training and workshops, as well as regular collaboration in teaching teams and whole staff.

The Director is responsible for supervising the day-to-day operation of the Nursery School and works closely with the teachers in developing and implementing the daily program.

## **ADMISSION & PLACEMENT POLICIES**

### **Student Qualifications**

Our goal is to best serve each child and family in the school; therefore, each child must be:

- Ready for the group experiences a preschool has to offer.
- Able to benefit from the program offered.

### **Class Placement**

The staff works thoughtfully and diligently at the complex process of determining placement of the children in each classroom. Multiple criteria are considered in making these decisions, which include, but are not limited to: what's best for each child, what's best for the group, age and development of each child, gender and personality balance, friendships, and schedule. We will try to honor parent requests. However, final decisions are made by staff.

## **ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL READINESS AND PLACEMENT IN OUR PROGRAM**

Our goal is to partner with you to support your child's growth in all areas. Once a child enters our program, the teachers' role is to observe your child to become familiar with them, learn their interests, and assess their development. Since parents know their child best, you'll be asked to complete an Ages and Stages Questionnaire, which will help guide teachers and will be taken into consideration as your child's teachers formulate strategies to support their individual education.

In following the Americans with Disabilities Act, please discuss your child's needs with the Director so that we are aware of any special circumstances. Full disclosure before admission is critical in order for us to best meet your child's needs. Admission may be reconsidered if the information submitted is found to be inaccurate or incomplete and this results in our inability to provide for your child's needs.

We are committed to the best learning experiences for your child and are invested in your child's success. We also recognize that children have different learning styles and needs in the classroom. In the event we observe developmental concerns or behaviors we feel call for input by other experts, we will ask your permission to contact the Early



Learning Institute (ELI). ELI can observe your child and consult with staff and your family to come up with a plan of action. We will attempt to accommodate your child. We will meet with you and your child to determine if our program is suitable. If we are not able to meet your child's needs within our current staffing patterns, we will give parents the time and assistance needed to create or find a more appropriate environment and other resources.

In the case of repeated and severe behavioral issues or developmental challenges, a cooperative home-to-school plan will be devised collaboratively by teachers, director, and parents. It may include regular check-ins, at-home and at-school strategies, benchmarks for improvement, a modified schedule, and/or a requirement that someone (i.e. an aide) provide regular one-on-one support for your child. Should the need arise for an aide, continued placement may depend on the family providing one.

In rare circumstances, your child may not be ready for the school experience. This could include not being able to separate from his or her parents without severe upset. We will work closely with you and your child to ease anxiety, smooth their transition and participate in school. However, there may be instances where we feel all staff strategies have been exhausted and a child is not yet ready for school.

### **Mandated Reporting**

Your child's health and safety are of utmost importance. The teachers and staff at BACNS are mandated reporters, and are legally required to alert Child Protective Services (CPS) when necessary. For further information, please visit <http://www.che.ca.gov/ls/ss/ap/childabuserreportingguide.asp> or contact BACNS Director.

## **DAILY NEEDS: FOOD**

### **Lunches**

Lunchtime has both learning and social opportunities and can be an important part of the school day. Since lunchtime is included in our Nursery School program, you will need to provide this meal in a lunch box or bag, with a drink. We are a kosher and a peanut-free facility. (Tree nuts are okay, but must be labeled. Teachers will have colored tape and a marker to write on and label your child's lunch "tree nuts" when you sign them in that day). We recommend sending small amounts of a variety of foods. The list in grey on the next page should help you figure out what you can and cannot send to BACNS.

### **Snacks**

**Please discuss any food allergies that your child may have with your child's teacher and the Director.** The Director will post a list of all children with food allergies in the kitchen visible to all staff, subs, and all others engaged in snack preparation.

We offer wholesome and nutritious snacks each morning and afternoon. Sometimes, snacks are reflective of the Jewish holiday or the subject area being explored on a given day. All snack foods are appropriate for our kosher facility and peanut-free.

If your child requires a strict diet or food restriction, please pack a snack for your child. This will help eliminate any food safety situations that could arise.

Snacks primarily include cheese sticks, fruit, and whole grain crackers. Snack menu will be posted in the office as well as your child's classroom.

If you have a surplus harvest from your garden or orchard, this would be a wonderful gift to the school.



Please speak to your child's teacher about arranging to bring in a special cultural dish or a birthday snack or to come in and cook with the class.

**Sorry. Please save these foods for home:**

- \* No meat, poultry, or shellfish (per kosher rules)
- \* No peanuts or peanut butter due to allergies

**YES! Definitely Send Foods on this List!**

- \* Yoghurt
- \* Cheese, cheese sticks
- \* Fruit (melon, peaches, seedless grapes, bananas, pineapple, clementine's, apple slices, figs, persimmons, berries...)
- \* Vegetables (carrots (sliced), celery, broccoli, cucumbers, peppers, snap peas, peas, frozen mixed veggies, cherry tomatoes (sliced)...)
- \* Hummus
- \* Beans
- \* Avocado
- \* Rice, Quinoa, other grains
- \* Tofu
- \* Eggs – hardboiled, scrambled, egg salad...
- \* Pasta, ravioli, gnocchi
- \* Grilled cheese or cheese sandwiches
- \* Tuna fish sandwiches
- \* Sunflower butter, almond butter, soy butter, wowbutter sandwiches
- \* Veggie sandwiches
- \* Dried fruit, raisins, craisins, dried mango, etc...
- \* Cottage cheese
- \* Quesadillas
- \* Seaweed snacks
- \* Peanut-free granola or granola bars
- \* Peanut-free Veggie Burgers
- \* Peanut-free Crackers, Pretzels or Pita Chips
- \* Peanut-free trail mix
- \* Tree nuts/seeds
- \* Olives
- \* Veggie chips/straws
- \* Baked snap peas
- \* Cereals (Cheerios, Shredded Wheat...)
- \* Soy substitutes for meat (e.g. Tofu dogs, tempeh, tofurkey)



## \*\*\*\*\* DAILY NEEDS: \*\*\*\*\*

# \*\*\*\*\* CLOTHING/BEDDING/EMERGENCY KITS \*\*\*\*\*

### Clothing

Appropriate clothing for play is extremely important. Children need to feel comfortable, free to fully explore the school environment, and be self-reliant during their school play. If children worry about getting messy, it could potentially interfere with creative experiences. Rugged, washable play clothes and tennis shoes are ideal for Nursery School. Please...

- Make sure clothes are easily laundered. Preschool paint containers state that they are washable, but certain fabrics launder better than others.
- Garments should be easy for little fingers and hands to manage. This helps lead to the independence the children strive for. Overalls are not recommended.
- A sweater or jacket should be provided even on sunny days. We recommend sunscreen and waterproof shoes/sandals (please, no flip-flops) for outside play on warm days. Additionally, children should bring rain boots and a raincoat during rainy weather.
- **If you send sunscreen** with your child to school, you must label it with your child's **FIRST AND LAST NAME**. You can put this in a clear plastic container or zip lock bag with the Medication Release Form. There is one Medication Release Form located in this packet. Additional forms are available in our office. They can be printed from our website. (CA State Licensing **REQUIRES** that we have this form filled out in order to apply sunscreen)
- **It is recommended that all clothing be labeled with the child's name.**

### Changes of Clothes

Children need multiple articles of labeled clothing to be kept in their cubby. This will help tremendously in the case of potty accidents, water play, spills, etc. We find that, while we have extra clothes here, children often prefer to wear their own. This should include:

- |                                      |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Socks                              | • Extra pair of shoes if possible |
| • Underwear, pull-ups and/or diapers | • Sweatshirt or jacket            |
| • Pants and shorts                   | • Long- and short-sleeved shirts  |

Check your child's cubby regularly to ensure extra clothing is available. If you notice your child is wearing different clothes at pick-up, or if your child changes sizes, please replenish as needed.



### **Items from home**

Unless you have been notified that it is a “sharing day,” we ask that you leave your child's toys at home. Please check with your child's teacher about the appropriateness of any books, music, or toys you wish to lend to the class. Toys of violence, war toys, and masks should not be brought to school.

### **Extended Day Care Bedding**

We provide a padded floor mat for naptime. Please bring a **labeled** light blanket and a crib-size sheet. Pillows, if you send one, should be small and also labeled. Please provide a clearly-labeled cloth bag or backpack to contain the afternoon bedding. A small comfort soft toy could also be part of the EDC kit.

For health and hygiene, we ask that parents take bedding home for laundering once a week.

### **Emergency Preparedness Kits**

Upon arrival on your child's first day of school, we will collect the emergency preparedness clothing kits to store at school in the event of an emergency. The instructions for the kit are in the back pocket of this handbook. You may collect your child's previous year's kit at our year-end potluck picnic. If your child is staying for the summer program, you may update your kit at that time.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Daily Communication Between Teachers and Parents**

Along with our commitment to the children's development, we value open and ongoing communication with parents. In addition to yearly scheduled conferences, teachers are available for informal, brief conversations at drop off and pick up time. Teachers and staff will also be using the Brightwheel app to communicate with parents. Feel free to contact staff members if you have any need to talk about your child's progress or for a daily update on anything that you feel is relevant that you would like staff to know about.

In addition to verbal check-ins, each classroom has notebooks for you to write anything that teachers may need to know that day (perhaps your child didn't sleep well the night before or someone out-of-the-ordinary will be picking up). Look for written documentation on or near the cubbies that list the happenings of the day, and documentation panels around the room periodically that show pictures and descriptions of children's thought processes and learning.

If you need to communicate with a teacher and they are busy with the children, you can always request a phone call from the teacher, schedule appointment or send an e-mail. E-mails and teachers' contact info will go out at Back to School Night.

Feel free to call the Nursery School Director or stop in the office at any time as well.

### **E-Mail Newsletter**

A regular newsletter goes out to all parents and guardians to communicate and remind about upcoming events, holiday celebrations, reminders regarding school closures, school policies and important dates and deadlines. You will also find links to school forms, the calendar, and learn about opportunities to help out around the school. You



are responsible for the information in the newsletter, so please make sure that each parent or guardian provides us with an e-mail address that you check regularly.

### **Phone Calls/E-mail**

The Nursery School welcomes your comments and questions. Please feel free to call or e-mail us. Since the teachers' first priority is your child, they may not be able to come to the phone during class hours. The teacher or director will call you back as promptly as possible.

### **Brightwheel service**

When you apply you will be enrolled into Brightwheel, a comprehensive platform for billing, communication and daily sign-in/sign-out records. You will periodically receive messages reminding you of important deadlines and of upcoming events. You can also opt in or out of notifications that alert you of your child's nap and different activities your child is participating in at school. Brightwheel will also handle all your billing needs and much of the registration process for your child. If you have any questions about this service or want more information, contact the office by e-mail at [ns@bethamisr.org](mailto:ns@bethamisr.org) or by calling 360-3030. Please download the Brightwheel app and check notification settings to personalize your individual preferences.

### **Automated Emergency Phone Calls**

In the event of an emergency or an emergency school closure, you will receive an automated phone call. Please make sure that your mobile and home phone numbers are up-to-date in our records so that we will be able to contact you. You will also receive a Brightwheel notification.

### **Information Requests**

Any parent of a child attending Beth Ami Community Nursery School has the right to review documentation concerning his or her child, so long as this review keeps confidential the records of other children.

In the event that two parents are separated or divorced and sharing custody, and one parent requests information, that request shall be granted, and both parents shall receive copies of the information requested, unless BACNS receives a court order or valid legal objection from one parent to bar the other from receiving the information

### **NS Office Contact Info**

Phone: (707) 360-3030

E-mail: [NS@BethAmiSR.org](mailto:NS@BethAmiSR.org)

### **NS Director Contact Info**

Office Phone: See above

Cell: (707) 291-5873

E-mail: [NSDirector@BethAmiSR.org](mailto:NSDirector@BethAmiSR.org)

### **Congregation Beth Ami Contact Info**

Phone: (707) 360-3000

E-mail: [Office@BethAmiSR.org](mailto:Office@BethAmiSR.org)

## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Family involvement in the Nursery School is an integral component of our program. Our community is made up of our families, and the more we get to know each other, the more involved we are in each other's lives, the more we celebrate together and work together and lean on each other, the stronger we become. Please contribute to our warm, vibrant community by being an active part of it: Reach out to a new family so that they feel welcome and included, look at photos around the classroom with your child so that they can see how much you value what they are learning, volunteer at an event so that you can get to know other parents and see first-hand what is happening at school.



We thank you for making our school a richer place by being a part of it, and by participating in the following ways:

**Challah:** Families with a child attending on Fridays will be asked to sign up to bring unbaked challah dough for the class to bake in celebration of Shabbat (about once every 2-3 months). This activity is parent dependent! We can't do it without you! Sign-ups to bring Challah dough are in each classroom. If you aren't much of a baker, it is also ok to bring in store-bought pizza dough (about 3-4 bags for a class). Please confirm quantities with your child's teacher.

**Field trips:** We rely on parents who are able to chaperone/drive on field trips.

**Participating in one of our working groups:** We have wonderful families who are fully engaged in our school community. If your schedule allows, we hope that you will consider joining our Parent Club, our Advisory Council, and/or helping to organize our annual fundraiser.

**Parent Work hours:** Families are responsible for volunteering a total of **10** hours per year. All work hours must be completed by the end of the school year. If the hours are not completed, we will approach you about donating \$20 per unfinished hour in lieu of time.

There are also other ways to get involved at the school. We welcome all interested parents to join in as often as they want and are able to.

### **Special Events**

Over the course of the school year, we celebrate special events such as Jewish Holiday celebrations, our annual fundraiser, and our year-end potluck picnic. These celebrations are for all our nursery school families. We welcome and encourage your participation in preparing and organizing for these events. Your support and participation are highly valued in helping to create a strong sense of community. Volunteering for these events also counts towards your Parent Work Hours. Many of these dates are on the calendar, some will come later in the newsletter, and we hope that you will plan to attend.

### **Advisory Council**

The Advisory Council is comprised of current and alumni parents, as well as experts in Early Childhood Education and other fields from the broader community. They meet monthly with the director to provide guidance on the direction of the school. Topics include the immediate needs of the school, long-term planning, revising the parent handbook and shaping school policy, tuition plans and more. A member of the Advisory Council also serves as a liaison to the Congregation Beth Ami Board. Sign-ups will be out at Back to School Night.

### **Parent Work Hours**

The activities that count towards work hours should benefit the morale, the physical environment, and the well-being of the school. Here is a list of activities that count toward the ten work hours:

- Working in the garden
- Chaperoning field trips
- Cleaning/organizing teacher resource library/supply rooms, etc.
- Fixing/building structures in and out of the classroom
- Making food for teacher meetings or special school events (you will be notified when cooking for particular events is requested)
- Set up/working during event/clean up for any of the Jewish Events for our Nursery School Community (i.e. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Chanukah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim Carnival and Passover)
- Doing prep work for teachers
- Working on paperwork for the office.
- Active involvement in the Parent Club and/or Advisory Council



## **Parent Club**

The Nursery School's Parent Club is composed of parents/guardians of current nursery school students who wish to be involved in creating and supporting Nursery School activities and goals. The Parent Club acts as a liaison between parents and the Nursery School Administration.

### **Parent Club Roles & Goals**

- Raising funds for the school, including organizing the annual auction.
- Assisting with Jewish holiday celebrations and other major events for the Nursery School community
- Inspiring and fostering family involvement in the school
- Organizing class field trips and mom's/dad's nights out.
- Identifying concerns and suggestions of parents and facilitating communication between home and school
- Welcoming all new families and supporting each other in joyous and difficult times (birth, adoption, illness, death, family stress)

The purpose of the Parent Club is to increase benefits provided by the school to the children and their families and to facilitate parent's greater involvement in the Nursery School and in their children's education. We hope that all interested parents will join this club and know that they are truly valued as an integral part of the Nursery School community. Sign-ups for Parent Club will be out at Back to School Night.

The club meets monthly or more often when needed. Anyone wishing to attend a committee meeting is welcome to do so. We will also need a "Classroom Parent Rep" for each class that will attend the committee meetings to serve as a liaison between the teachers and the Parent Club. If you wish to make a presentation to the Parent Club, please contact the Classroom Parent Rep five days in advance of the monthly meeting to discuss your thoughts for placement on the agenda.

## **Parent Education Workshops**

We occasionally offer parent workshops throughout the year on a variety of topics, including parenting classes, Judaism 101, etc. Your ideas and suggestions for workshops are always welcome. We will alert you to special parenting and family events in our community.

## **Fundraising**

Fundraising is an important part of making our school run well and keeping us current and of the highest quality. We work hard to keep tuition costs as low as possible while maintaining our low ratios and supporting our wonderful teachers, and keeping our classrooms stocked with rich materials. In order to close the gap between tuition and the cost of a high quality program, the Parent Club works on a variety of fundraising initiatives each year and families are encouraged to participate in any way that they can.

## **Donations**

Donations to the Nursery School are always appreciated. Anyone interested in making a tax-deductible contribution may do so via the Director or Congregation Beth Ami office. Traditionally, families in our community have made contributions to the school in



honor, memory, or recognition of others and in celebration of birthdays and anniversaries. All cash donations and donated materials directed to the nursery school benefit the children at Beth Ami Community Nursery School and are tax-deductible.

### **Scholarship Donations**

In recent years, we have created the Jill Tager Scholarship Fund so that our school can be accessible to all. We appreciate the help of anyone who wants to give the Gift of Beth Ami by giving a tax-deductible donation to our scholarship fund.

## **SPECIAL EXPERIENCES**

### **Birthdays**

Children enjoy celebrating their birthdays at school. Each teacher invites you to bring a **healthy birthday treat for your child's birthday**. Please speak to teachers about appropriate snacks and make arrangements with your child's teacher in advance.

If you are hosting a birthday party for your child outside of school, **please do not hand out party invitations at school unless the entire class is invited**. Please mail them instead. A digital and paper Family Directory will be distributed so you will have addresses should you need them.

### **Field Trips**

Field trips offer the three, four and five-year-olds a unique opportunity to experience an environment away from school. Much thought and planning go into developing curriculum for these trips. Children are prepared with information and what to expect. Afterwards, all subject areas are integrated to educationally capitalize on the learning stimulated by the outing.

Excursions may include visits to farms, parks, museums, markets, and neighborhood walks into the community. Each child will need a signed permission slip that will be kept on file. You will find this in your registration packet. We encourage all parents to participate in the program by volunteering to drive on trips or accompanying us to increase our adult-to-child ratio for these events. All children must travel in car seats. We ask the parent to secure the seat when possible. The law requires all drivers to have a copy of their current insurance on file at the school specifically listing the driver(s) by name.

### **Shabbat**

Although the Sabbath officially begins at sundown on Friday and lasts until three stars are sighted on Saturday evening, we celebrate Shabbat at school every Friday morning with an "Oneg Shabbat," when we sing songs and recite blessings over the candles, the grape juice, and the challah (egg bread). We encourage and welcome families to join us in our celebration at 11:30 a.m., when we sing together and read a story with Rabbi Miller.

Families take turns bringing in a double batch of challah dough so that the children can braid their own loaves each week. Each family provides the challah dough several times a year. You may also bring flowers and/or tablecloths to decorate the room when



your turn to bring challah dough comes around. Recipes for challah dough are available in the classroom or Director's office, and on our website.

### **Non-Jewish Holidays**

As a school, we do not celebrate Halloween or Valentine's Day. We also do not do anything specific to celebrate Mother and Father's Day, but do not discourage conversation around any of these holidays if and when they come up as topics brought up by the children.

Both Halloween and Valentine's Day celebrations are related to the Christian Saint Days calendar and are not compatible with our Judaic focus or with Congregation Beth Ami as an institution.

Please support us by telling your children that our costume holiday with treats is Purim, when we dress up and distribute *mishloach manot* (gifts of food).

Please also support us by the following:

- Do NOT bring candy to school, in lunch or to distribute to the children (at any time, but specifically) for Halloween and Valentine's Day
- Do NOT send your child wearing a costume to school for Halloween
- Do not bring Valentine's Day or Halloween cards or other related items to school

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **Healthy Children at School**

Your child's health is of major importance to all of us. Prior to enrollment, you must complete and return your child's health form signed by a physician and your child's immunization record, including tuberculin clearance.

We understand many of you send your children to BACNS both because of our educational philosophy AND because you rely on us for childcare. However, our illness policy is strict for the well-being of your child, of other children, and of our teachers. Each morning, please assess the health of your child.

We ask that you keep your child home if they are sick, and understand that we will call you to pick them up if they develop an illness while at school. See the gray box below for the full list of symptoms and illnesses that necessitate staying (or going) home.

Also keep in mind that suppressing an illness with decongestants, ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and cough syrup, will not remove the contagious nature of the illnesses. Please do not send your child to school if they require these medications.

If your child has a bacterial infection, s/he must be on antibiotics for 24 hours before returning to school.

In the event of head lice, please inform the office immediately. We require that children be free of all nits before returning to school.

We may require a doctor's note for your child to return to school (such as in the case of a rash or a diagnosis of allergies rather than pink eye).

### **Celebrating home culture at school**

As a part of our multicultural focus and honoring the whole child, we welcome families with other traditions and celebrations to bring us information and materials about them. As an example, we have had parents visit classrooms during Lunar New Year to introduce the children to that holiday. Please speak to teachers about the appropriateness or desirability of activities or treats for celebrations other than Jewish holidays.



**A Notice will be sent out to all families at the first case of any communal disease**

**Please keep your child home if s/he:**

- Has a fever (temperature over 100.4<sup>o</sup>) or has had a **fever during the last 24-hour period**. If you have used fever-reducing medicine in the last 24 hours to stave off a fever, please keep your child home another day.
- Has vomited or has had diarrhea **within the past 24 hours**.
- Has another symptom of a communicable disease:
  - Red and/or dripping eyes
  - Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)- signs of discharge, itching of eyes, redness of eyes, swelling of eyes, eyes sealed shut with crust.
  - Fever
  - Sore throat accompanied by white spots on throat or other symptoms
  - Headache
  - Rash (without a doctor's note clearing your child)
  - Abdominal pain
  - Ear ache
  - Swollen glands
  - Mucous
  - Coughing/sneezing
  - Acts listless or drowsy
  - Has glassy eyes or a flushed face
  - Has indication of head lice.
- Has been prescribed an antibiotic/remedy by a physician/practitioner within the last 24 hours. **Your child needs to be on antibiotics for at least 24 hours before returning to school.** (The staff can administer medication, as long as the medication comes in the original container and a Medication Form is properly and fully filled out. Instructions with doctor's orders must be left in writing on a form that we will provide.)

**Please notify the school at once if your child has a communicable disease or has been exposed to one.**

**including head lice.**

this will allow families to prepare and be aware of simple's and signs.

**When children become sick at school**

In the event a child becomes sick at school, **we will first call the parent(s)** and then, if unable to contact the parent(s), proceed to the list of emergency contacts. The child will be isolated until the parent or an authorized adult arrives for pick up. Parents are asked to arrive within 30 minutes of receiving the call or make arrangements for others to supply care. We feel that children who are too sick or tired to play outside or fully participate in our program should be at home. Children with non-contagious medical restrictions, documented by a physician, will be kept inside during inclement weather at the parent's request or the teacher's discretion.

We appreciate your support in this situation, as our staff all strive to

provide optimal care at all times for individual children and meet the needs of the group, at the same time.

Per licensing requirements, every family needs to maintain a list of viable emergency contacts as well as phone numbers where we can reach the parents at all times. In the event we cannot reach the parents listed we will then contact the emergency contacts that have been provided.

If you have an additional child (i.e. sibling of student) who is ill, **PLEASE DO NOT** bring the sick sibling into the classroom when dropping off your student.



### **In Case of Accidental Injury**

The staff will administer necessary first aid treatment to your child. For other minor injuries we will make an attempt to contact a parent. If we cannot reach you or a contact from your emergency list, we will call the child's physician or one of the school's consulting physicians. When necessary, we will call an ambulance. You will be expected to assume responsibility for any incurred expenses. There is a requirement that a signed consent form about this policy be in each child's file.

Whenever first aid is given, teachers fill out an "Ouch Report" and place a copy in your child's cubby and in their file.

### **Mandated Reporting**

In the interests of your child's health and safety, we wish to remind you that as teachers we are mandated reporters to CPS when necessary. For further information please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/sslap/childabusereportingguide.asp> or contact the BACNS Director.

## **EMERGENCIES AND NATURAL DISASTERS**

In the event of an emergency or natural disaster, in conjunction with the Parent Advisory Council and the President of the Congregation, based upon all available facts at the time, the Director will determine school closure. Families will be promptly notified if any such situation arises and will be kept apprised of the closure status through the emergency.

There **will not be any tuition refunds if the school is forced to have an emergency closure**, or close due to protocols mandated by CA state licensing or recommendations from the Department of Health and Human Services. **Notices will go out by 6:00am.**

### **Emergency Procedures**

If an emergency does arise at Congregation Beth Ami, the following will occur:

1. Should there be a reason for closing the Nursery School on any given day, staff will call the Executive Director, Nursery School Director, and the first scheduled nursery staff teacher.
2. After further assessment and feedback, the Director will inform all families of any closure or delay in school operation **via Brightwheel message AND automated phone call.**
3. In addition, we will inform families if we will remain closed until further notice.

If an emergency occurs while children are in attendance, the Director will assess the need for early pick-up, and parents will receive a message through Brightwheel and an automated call. If we can't get in touch with you, we will continue calling (from your "Identification and Emergency Information" form) until someone is reached for pick-up. Children need to be picked up within 30 minutes of the notification. If children are not picked up within that 30 minutes window, then the 5:30pm late pick up policy will go into effect. Rolling blackouts do not always cause the school to close. If a blackout occurs, we check with PG&E and other emergency information to assess our safety to remain on site. Should we need to evacuate, our temporary relocation site is **Spring Creek Elementary School across the street from Congregation Beth Ami. Our secondary evacuation site, should there be a reason our first site is deemed unsafe, is St.**



**Mark Lutheran Church. This is also on Mayette, further down the road, West, in the direction of Yulupa.**

### **Emergency Drills**

Emergency drills will be conducted monthly. The drills will rotate as followed; earthquake, fire and then intruder, and one drill per month. During these drills the teachers will incorporate age-appropriate materials and practice into the daily classroom activities. For example: **Fire drill**, teachers might bring out fire fighter dramatic play, puzzles, they might talk about what fire fighters do and how they help keep us safe. For an **Earthquake drill** teachers might do an activity where children are turtles walking to the pond and all of a sudden the earth starts to shake and they have to stop what they are doing and drop and tuck into their turtle shell. For an **Intruder drill**, teachers will do activities that allow practice and play for how quiet the kids can be, then alternate between loud and quiet and wiggly and still. They might also practice running in a zig zag line like animals. For the intruder drills we will be talking to the children about an “unsafe person/s”. This is the word that we will use to describe anyone that is on the campus that requires we go into a lock down situation.

## **ADMISSION POLICIES**

### **Application**

Application and registration is ongoing. New and returning families wishing to enroll for the next school year should submit a completed application form and non-refundable application fee for each child returning or new to the school. Applications are preferred before March 1st so that we may place students in classes appropriately. We will continue to accept applications after that date however, and place students in classes if there is space. Once we are full, new applicants will be placed in a wait pool.

### **Required Paperwork**

A complete and current individual file on each child will be maintained at the Nursery School.

### **The file will consist of:**

- Identifying information
- Child's social and developmental history
- Child's medical history
- A physician's pre-admission report
- Required immunizations
- An emergency release form
- A general field-trip permission slip
- An Admission Agreement signed by a parent
- Payment plan information
- Child's Ages and Stages Questionnaire

### **This file will also contain three statements signed by a parent indicating that he or she has read:**

- This Parent Handbook
- The Personal Rights sheet
- The Parents' Rights sheet



- All of these documents must be on file before a child begins school.

**In the event of full enrollment, priority in registration will be as follows:**

1. Continuing students (those in current classes)
2. Siblings of a concurrently enrolled student
3. Siblings of previously enrolled students
4. Members of any Sonoma County Synagogue
5. New students who have at least one Jewish parent
6. New students

## FINANCIAL POLICY

### Application Fee

Each application (for each child, each school year) must be submitted with a non-refundable application fee.

### Placement Guarantee

Upon notification of admission to the program, each family must submit their Intent to Enroll form by Friday, April 19th which authorizes your **non-refundable placement guarantee payment, equal to 10% of the annual tuition**, for each child no later than **May 15<sup>th</sup> (For RETURNING FAMILIES) to reserve this spot and on May 1st for NEW FAMILIES**. The placement guarantee payment will be applied to the last month of the annual tuition and will be forfeited for withdrawal prior to the end of the school year.

### Payment of Tuition and Fees

Tuition and enrollment is for the full 10-month school year. All invoices come via Brightwheel, and you can arrange payment through the Brightwheel system. Tuition payment plans are as follows:

**1. Installment payments by automatic withdrawal from your bank account (ACH):**

Annual tuition can be paid in monthly installments through automatic withdrawal from your checking or savings account. Monthly tuition payments will be automatically deducted from your bank account for nine months, beginning August 15th through April 15<sup>th</sup>.

**2. Two Monthly Payments:**

You can also choose to pay two monthly payments. Half your monthly tuition on the 1st and the balance of your monthly bill on the 15th.

*Please note that nursery school tuition and childcare fees may be tax deductible for working parents. Please consult your tax professional for more information. Our Federal Tax ID number is 94-156 6549.*

### Insufficient Funds/Late Payment Fee

If your invoice is not paid on the date that it is billed, the Late Payment process begins with a reminder email on the following day from the Brightwheel automated system. The second day your invoice is not paid, an email will be sent to you from the Assistant Director of Finances & Family Services reminding you to pay your bill. If on the third day your bill is not paid, a physical notice will be put in your child's cubby. On the



fifth day the invoice is not paid, your child's account will incur a \$25 late fee. If your child's account incurs two consecutive late payment fees, you will be asked to withdraw your child from the school until your balance is settled. It is your responsibility to pay your invoices on time regardless of payment method (cash, check, or ACH). Early payment is accepted to ensure payments are made on time.

### **Refund Policy**

Refunds will not be given for:

- Holidays, vacation, and teacher in-service and professional development days
- School closure due to natural disasters or emergency
- Picking up your child early from class or after-school care
- Days your child missed due to illness—including days out because of contagious illness such as chicken pox, head lice, whooping cough, flu, etc.
- Days your child missed due to family plans, including vacations, visiting relatives, etc.

### **Program Changes**

If you wish to change your child's regular schedule, or extended daycare, you must request this by filling out the Change in Schedule Form online on our website (<http://bethamisr.org/education/nursery-school/>) in Quick Links. You will need approval at least **one week prior to** the beginning of the month for the schedule change to take effect on the first of the month. You will be notified if there is room prior to assuming any schedule request change.

30 days notice is required to drop scheduled school days or extended day care hours, so that we may make an attempt to fill those days/hours. If the request is made with less than 30 days notice, you will be charged for the full 30 days.

Each family receives one free schedule change, and each subsequent schedule change is \$50.

### **Early Withdrawal**

30 days written notice is required when a child withdraws from our program. Notice of withdrawal must be provided by US Mail attention Nursery School Director, 4676 Mayette Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95405 or by e-mail to NSDirector@BethAmiSR.org. Tuition will be charged for the period from the date of enrollment until 30 days after the notification has been received.

**The placement guarantee, application fee, and tuition fees prior to the 30-day mark are non-refundable.**



### **Late Pick-Up**

Late pick-up is NOT the same as drop-in extended care. Drop-in care is scheduled at least three school days prior to the day in question. To request a Drop-in, fill out a Drop-in Request form online, available on our website (<http://bethamisr.org/education/nursery-school/>) under Quick Links, as well as on the Newsletter, also under Quick Links. You will receive notice by email if the request is approved.

### **Being late for pick-up time will result in the following charges:**

- The first time, there will be a 10-minute grace period, followed by a \$10 charge for each additional 10 minutes late.
- The second time and beyond, there will be a \$10 charge for every 10 minutes (with no grace period).
- **If your pick up time is at 5:30pm and you have not arrived, regardless of whether or not it is the first time, you will be charged \$1 per minute until you have picked up your child.**
- If you do not arrive by 6pm, it is California state law that we call the police and report and abandoned child.

Please keep in mind that your child's safety is our priority. We schedule our after-noon staff based on the number of children we expect to have with us after CORE hours.

### **Enrichment**

Enrichment classes are optional and happen immediately following the CORE school day. Registration and payment go directly through the third party that runs the class.

**If your child is signed up for enrichment only, please be outside the classroom as the class ends to avoid late pickup fees.**



**TUITION AND FEES**

**Tuition Schedule and Fees for 2019-20**

CORE School Day 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Extended care outside of the Core day is available before school at 7:30 a.m. and after school until 5:30 p.m. Schedules must be pre-arranged with the office and must be the same from week to week. There is NO EARLY CARE on the first day of school and PICK-UP IS AT 1PM on the last day of school.

**Tuition Schedule**

Days Per Week	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Early Care Tier 1	Early Care Tier 2
2 days (2's room only)	\$4,258.80	\$5,948.25	\$6,399.35	\$7,010.93	\$335.79	\$1,007.37
3 days/wk	\$5,842.20	\$8,135.64	\$8,761.56	\$9,595.67	\$503.69	\$1,511.06
4 days/wk	\$7,425.60	\$10,483.53	\$11,318.08	\$11,978.91	\$611.58	\$1,834.76
5 days/wk	\$8,648.64	\$12,124.08	\$13,075.39	\$13,826.53	\$764.40	\$2,293.20

**Definitions of Tiers**

- Tier 1.....9-1 (4 hours)
- Tier 2.....9-3:30 (6.5 hours)
- Tier 3.....9-4:30 (7.5 hours)
- Tier 4.....9-5:30 (8.5 hours)
- Early Care 1.....8:30-9:00 (0.5 hours)
- Early Care 2.....7:30-9:00 (1.5 hours)

\*Discounts: 10% tuition discount is offered for current membership in ANY Sonoma County Synagogue. 3% Multiple sibling discount is offered for concurrently enrolled siblings and applies to second (and third, etc.) Discounts apply ONLY to CORE tuition and not to extended care or enrichment. One discount per family, if multiple discounts apply highest discount will be taken.



### Schedule Changes

Each family receives one free schedule change, and each subsequent schedule change will cost \$50. We do not offer make-up days due to absences, holidays, or vacations.

Pre-arranged Extended Care is available before school at 7:30 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. While schedules may be tailored to individual family needs, schedules must be pre-arranged with the office and must be the same from week to week. Schedule changes, drop-in days, and drop-in Extended Care MAY be available if scheduled at least 3 days ahead of time WITH confirmation from the office. You may request a schedule change or drop-in day online at <http://bethamisr.org/education/nursery-school>. We do not offer make-up days due to absences, holidays, or vacations. **There is NO EARLY CARE on the first day of school and NO Aftercare on the last day of school.**

### Drop-In Extended Care

Drop-in care MAY be available if scheduled at least 72 hours ahead of time WITH confirmation from the office. Same day drop-ins will be charged a \$25 Same Day Fee.

### Drop-In Rates Per Day

Tier 1.....	\$50
Tier 2.....	\$75
Tier 3.....	\$85
Tier 4.....	\$95
Early Care.....	\$20

### Scholarships

Scholarships may be available on a limited basis for families unable to pay full tuition. All requests are confidential and are based upon need and verification of income. Applications are available in the BACNS office and are due no later than June 1 (or the following business day) for a determination for the coming school year. Notice of scholarship award will come in early July. If you are unable to attend BACNS because the scholarship amount awarded is not enough to make attending financially feasible, this is the only time placement guarantee will be refunded.



## JEWISH HOLIDAYS 101

### Jewish Holidays

The following Jewish holidays, listed in chronological order as they are celebrated during the school year, are an important emphasis in our preschool curriculum. The dates of these holidays differ from year to year as we follow the lunar calendar. Jewish holidays are observed from sundown to sundown like Shabbat.



**Rosh Hashanah**, the Jewish New Year, begins the ten-day period known as the High Holidays or “the Days of Awe.” Rosh Hashanah is also known as the “birthday of the world,” the “day of remembrance,” and the “day of the shofar.” Rosh Hashanah celebrates the ability of people to change and grow, as it is a time for deep thought, self-examination and prayer.

**Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement, is the holiday in which the Jewish people ask for forgiveness and forgive others. Yom Kippur, the most solemn and holy day of the Jewish year, is the last day of the ten days of awe and marks the end of the ten-day period of the High Holidays.

**Sukkot** is a fall harvest festival. Sukkot is also known as the “Festival of the Booths,” as it commemorates the time that the Jewish people lived in temporary huts (sukkot) during their wandering and during their time of harvest in the fields. Sukkot is a time of feasting and of giving thanks for the harvest.



**Simchat Torah**, meaning “rejoicing with the Torah”, is a happy holiday celebrated with gaiety and festivity. On Simchat Torah, the last portion of the Torah in the book of Deuteronomy and the first verses of the book of Genesis are read in the same Temple service, signifying that the Torah has no beginning and no end.

**Hanukkah**, a joyous holiday celebrated for eight days, commemorates the victory of the Jews over the Greeks, and the right to once again, practice Judaism. Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Temple after the victory over the Greeks. Hanukkah is also called the “Festival of Lights” in remembrance of the tiny amount of oil that miraculously burned in the Temple menorah for eight days at the time of the rededication of the Temple.



**Tu B'Shevat** celebrates the “Birthday of the Trees.” This Jewish holiday validates the importance of nature and stresses the need for people to care for trees, plants, and objects in nature. It is customary to plant trees on Tu B'Shevat.



**Purim**, a time of merriment and great fun, is one of the happiest of Jewish holidays. The festival of Purim derives from the biblical story of Esther and commemorates the Jewish people's success over Haman, who tried to destroy them. It is a holiday celebrated by re-telling the story, dressing up in costume, and making and shaking groggers (noisemakers) whenever Haman's name is mentioned.



**Pesach** celebrates the most important event in Jewish history, which is the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt. This holiday recalls the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt, their eventual freedom and their arrival in the Promised Land in Canaan. Pesach is celebrated for eight days with a special meal, special foods, and specific traditional practices. Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot comprise the cycle of festivals spanning the Exodus story.



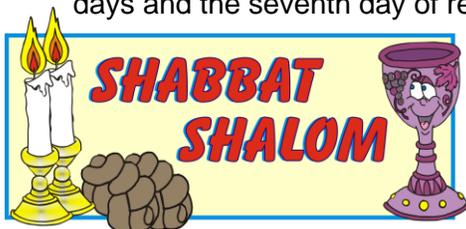
**Yom Ha-atzmaut**, the "Day of Independence," is the Jewish holiday celebrating Israel's attainment of statehood. Israel's Independence Day commemorates its es-

tablishment once again as the homeland of the Jewish people.

**Lag B'Omer** is a minor Jewish holiday that focuses on the importance of study and learning. Lag B'Omer is celebrated on the 33rd day of the 50 days of the counting of the "omer," or the measure of the newly ripened barley. Historically, the Lag B'Omer holiday provided a break from this serious harvest time.

**Shavuot** celebrates the day the Jews were given the Torah, the guidelines of Jewish life, on Mount Sinai. It is also a celebration of the time of harvest and the offering of the first fruits of the new harvest. On Shavuot the Jewish people decorate the synagogue with greens and flowers, wear white clothing, and eat dairy dishes.

**Shabbat:** The Jewish holiday of Shabbat is a joyous occasion celebrated every Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. Shabbat commemorates the creation of the world in six days and the seventh day of rest. Shabbat is a special time for people to come to-



gether each week to be with family and friends, to rest, to think, to share, to sing, and to have a good time. The observance of Shabbat begins with a traditional ritual that includes blessings while lighting candles, drinking wine, and eating challah (twisted egg bread).