

BT D&I ~ 10.55ish

Kavod Committee @ BT - Formed in 2019, with the goal to ensure that ANYONE who wants to be a part of Beth Tikvah's kehila kadosha or sacred community and participate in spiritual, educational, celebratory, and life event activities is welcome.

While there are so many facets to Inclusion & Diversity, our focus so far and in the coming months has been on the following 3:

1. Interfaith Inclusion
2. LGBTQ+ Inclusion
3. Inclusion of those with all levels of ability, physical, emotional and intellectual

Some of the activities/events the Kavod Committee has presented:

Moroccan Shabbat dinner & entertainment; Discussion entitled Jews of Colour with Rivka Cambell; viewing of the movie Etzlenu/Cleaning Time; and most recently, forum & speaker panel entitled Navigating Gender & Sexuality in the 21st century

We intend to offer more opportunities for outreach, awareness, events and learning to you all in the future.

In my preparation to speak about the Kavod committee, I have been deeply inspired by the work & resources I have found through United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ).

For anyone who is not familiar, the USCJ is the network that ensures there are thriving centers of Jewish practice across North America, Israel, and beyond that celebrate both tradition and contemporary life. USCJ commits to demonstrate what an authentic and dynamic Judaism looks like, inspire people to be a part of it, and advance its critical role in the world.

One of the USCJ Values statements which resonates strongly with me personally as well as aligning nicely with the mission of our Kavod committee is this:

We find unity in diversity.

USCJ describes this as: A range of viewpoints and backgrounds—religious, racial, ethnic, sexual, and socio-political—strengthens us all. We celebrate our differences and believe that those differences make our wholeness possible.

A specific action that I recently learned about, and which inspired hope in my heart is this:

In 2016, the USCJ formed the ‘Commission on Community & Covenant in the 21st Century’, which is comprised of 15 thought leaders from across the conservative movement (including our very own Rabbi Susie Tandler). This Commission was created in 2016 to explore how USCJ can most effectively guide its member congregations as they create a path to welcome those who are or desire to be in a relationship with the Jewish community. This Commission proposed changes which were overwhelmingly accepted in 2017, to USCJ’s Membership Standards for Congregational Practice to include language that was specifically inclusive of Interfaith Families.

To quote the USCJ:

As a valued and trusted partner, we are committed to assisting welcoming, vibrant, and caring Jewish communities to fully engage the spiritual gifts of all community members. We celebrate the diversity among and within our kehillot and encourage the engagement of all those who seek a spiritual and communal home in an authentic and dynamic Jewish setting. We call on all of our kehillot to open their doors wide to all who want to enter. Let us strive to make the words of Isaiah a reality in our time as it is said in Isaiah chapter 56, verse 7 “My House will be called a house of prayer for all people”.

Now I'd like to share a bit of my personal story and my reasons for being here today:

My desire to be a part of opening the doors of inclusion, in its many forms, is primarily due to my own identity as a member of an interfaith family.

Since my husband Shawn welcomed me into his life and into his Jewish community (over 20 years ago), I have grown to love, honor and respect the beautiful traditions, rituals and ceremonies of the Jewish faith.

One of the first events I recall was an invitation to Rosh Hashanah lunch at my now mother-in-law's home. At this lunch, I was introduced for the first time to many of the members of their large, loving and LOUD Jewish community. I still remember feeling simultaneously honored to be included in the sacred gathering as well as a strong and painful feeling of 'otherness'.

This dichotomy has continued to be a theme for me and for us as Shawn & I first navigated entering into an Interfaith marriage and then went on to navigate the privilege of parenting two wonderful, loving and yes, LOUD daughters, who both identify as Jewish.

As my family and I have walked this path, there have been many moments and will continue to be many more where our family's 'otherness' as an Interfaith Family have been challenging and painful for us and for those around us. In particular, it has been and will continue to be milestone moments like lifecycle events, rituals, and ceremonies that cause the most pain.

My motivation in becoming a member of BT's Kavod committee is to play an active role in bringing about awareness and, more importantly, change. I would wholeheartedly love to see more families that look like mine be openly welcomed into our Kehila Kadosha.

Invitation to participate

In closing, on behalf of myself and the Kavod committee, I would like to offer an open invitation to connect in one of the following ways:

We welcome all who wish to Participate in committee

We welcome all feedback, suggestions, ideas

We welcome all who bring to our attention any areas related to Diversity & Inclusion that you feel need our attention.

In short, you are all welcome to tell us what you need.