



# B'nei Mitzvah Magical Mystery Tour Temple, Beth Elohim (BM3T)

## WELLESLEY, MA

### WHO ARE THE LEARNERS? THE TEACHERS?

- Children in the sixth and seventh grades and occasionally their parents
- Music Educator, Family Educator, Special Needs Coordinator
- Judaic Studies teachers
- Facilitators who accompany learners on their Ma'asim Tovim visits, help prepare them for the visits, and help debrief after the visits.
- Hebrew teachers and Hebrew tutors.

### WHEN DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Ma'asim Tovim (Community service) groups meet 9-12 times, monthly or bi-weekly over the course of the school year.
- Limudei Yahadut (Judaic Studies) and Ivrit (Hebrew) one day a week, either Tuesday night or Wednesday afternoon.
- Shabbaton in the fall each year of the model.

In deciding at which site to do their Ma'asim Tovim and which day to attend mid-week, students and their families can make choices that fit their schedule.

### WHERE DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Limudei Yahadut and Ivrit lessons at the synagogue.
- Ma'asim Tovim at varying sites.
- Shabbaton at Eisner Camp.
- Family learning sessions and Purim Carnival presentations also at synagogue.

### HOW IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED?

- Core components include Ma'asim Tovim, Limudei Yahadut, Ivrit, worship and a Shabbaton creating a combination of classroom and experiential learning.
- Amount of experiential vs. formal learning gets bigger as the kids get older.

- In the fall of sixth grade, students and parents participate in "Pay it Forward", a family learning session during which they learn about the role they have to play in perfecting the world.
- Students choose a Ma'asim Tovim site that they will work at from November of their 6th grade year through the end of their 7th grade year.
- Students cycle through two shabbatonim during BM3T– B'tzelem Elohim and Kehila Kedosha. Both provide opportunities for preliminary learning prior to beginning the work of Ma'asim Tovim.
- Both sixth and seventh graders participate in worship during their mid-week learning.
- Class size is kept low for Hebrew and Limudei Yahadut, 12 or fewer per class.
- Hebrew classes now connected to training for b'nei mitzvah by having Hebrew teacher and Hebrew tutor together in class.

Sixth grade students study the ways in which Judaism and Jewish texts can help them make key decisions in their life. They also study text through a process called "From Moses to Joshua to You". First they consider a text's simple meaning, next any questions they have about it, then what others have said about it, and finally how it relates to them personally. By the time they sit with the rabbi to talk about their own parasha, they've mastered the process.

Seventh grade students study the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel in the first semester. They begin to work with Havaya teachers in the second semester as they prepare for the transition to the high school program.

When students go to their respective Ma'asim Tovim sites, a facilitator travels with them. Faculty do observations at the sites, and they continue to test out ways to capture student learning from the experience.

## WHY IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED THIS WAY?

- Wanted to strike “bar mitzvah project” from kids’ and parents’ vocabulary and instead say, “this is your opportunity to participate in tikkun olam and to make it a part of your life.”
- Congregation draws from over 30 cities and towns.
- To foster a sense of community through the interaction of students, parents, families, clergy, and staff.
- To provide opportunity for serious text study that enables students to create their own connections to the texts with which they engage.

Educator felt strongly that if you really want kids to understand an elevated sense of obligation to do good in the world, you need to empower them to look beyond their immediate family to see what is out there that needs to be repaired.

## KEY FIRST STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

- When educator arrived, she decided to move away from requiring students to choose 13 mitzvot to complete from a large menu of choices including simple household chores.
- The Education team went on a retreat, off-site, to consider how to redesign the 6/7th grade learning experience.

## GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR BM3T.

- BM3T receives support from a large professional team including the youth educator who spends 1/3 of her time coordinating the Ma’asim Tovim sites.
- General governance comes from the Learning Committee that represents various age groups and helps to maintain consistency in terms of policies and lay understanding of the school as a whole.

## BUDGET/RESOURCES

- Significant resources dedicated for professional development for teachers.
- Significant time committed by professional staff, educators and clergy.

## INTEGRATION OF BM3T FAMILIES AND LARGER CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY

- At the end of 5th grade, students participate in a moving-on ceremony that marks the end of their regular religious school experience.
- All 6th and 7th grade students participate in the model, including those in day school settings.
- Students teach the rest of the congregation about their Ma’asim Tovim sites during the congregation-wide Purim carnival.
- Core to the 7th grade year is participating in “A Taste of Havaya”.

## IMPACT ON LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONGREGATION.

- Ma’asim Tovim broadened congregation’s connection to tikkun olam.
- A group of parents with younger children, inspired by Ma’asim Tovim, created Mishpachah Mitzvah Mission, meeting once a month to do mitzvah work together.
- Engaging kids in experiential approach and classroom learning inspires kids to stay connected.