



# A VISIT TO A JEWISH PLACE OF WORSHIP BIRMINGHAM PROGRESSIVE SYNAGOGUE

1 Roseland Way, Birmingham B15 1HD



## WELCOME TO BIRMINGHAM PROGRESSIVE SYNAGOGUE (BPS)

A **synagogue** is the Jewish place of worship. This is one of three synagogues in Birmingham. It is a **liberal** or **progressive synagogue**. The other two are Orthodox. The ancestral home of the Jews is the land of Israel. Liberal Judaism is a modern form of Judaism.

The Progressive Jewish community was founded in 1935. The synagogue used to be in Sheepcote Street but this purpose built synagogue was opened in 2008. Jewish people come to the synagogue to pray, to learn and to meet each other.



The way the building is laid out demonstrates the three purposes. The **Community Room (Beit Kneset)** is based on the ground floor. The **House of Learning (Beit Midrash)** is on the first floor and the **House of Prayer (Beit Tefillah)** is on the upper floor. **'Beit'** is Hebrew for 'House'. Worship is in Hebrew, which is one of the languages spoken in modern Israel, and also in English.

## ENTRANCE HALL



The **Tree of Remembrance** was designed by Harry Seager, who was a professional sculptor and member of the synagogue.



The leaves commemorate some loved ones.



The plaque (*left*) celebrates the opening of BPS in 2008, and there are two boards with the names of the synagogue presidents from 1935.



This plaque commemorates the 6 million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust in the Second World War between 1941 and 1945

There is also a shop cabinet where we can buy Jewish items. There are no shops selling Jewish artefacts locally.



## COMMUNITY ROOM - Beit Knesset

As you enter the Community Room, the small box on the top of the right hand door post is a **Mezuzah**. It contains a parchment scroll with the most important Jewish prayer, the **Sh'ma**. It tells us to remember that we have one God. Jewish people put a **mezuzah** on doorposts in the home and synagogue.



The Function Room is used for celebrations, parties, talks, films and meetings. Food is prepared in the **kitchen**. Keeping **Kashrut** (the rules about what Jews can eat) is complicated, so only vegetarian food and some types of fish are provided to make sure the food is **Kosher**. Fair Trade food is used whenever possible.

Preparing for the **Passover** meal of celebration. This commemorates Israel's freedom from slavery in Egypt. It also celebrates the freedom of the Jewish people.



C.Davis

## HOUSE OF LEARNING - Beit Midrash

There are classrooms for the **Cheder**, (pronounced 'hay-der'). This is a school where children aged 3 to 16 learn about Judaism, the Jewish way of life and Hebrew language.



C.Davis

Jewish people believe that learning is very important for people of all ages. So there is a **Library** with books for adults and children.

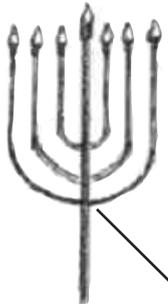
Outside one of the classrooms is a plaque marking the gift of furniture from St John and St Peter's Church. In return, BPS gave a stained glass window to the church. BPS, led by the Rabbi, invest much time and effort into building good relationships with other faiths.

The **Rabbi** has an office here too. This Hebrew word means '**Teacher**'. In Liberal synagogues, the Rabbi can be either a man or a woman. The Rabbi is the leader of the Jewish community. Rabbis lead worship, teach and provide advice on religious matters based on their knowledge of the scriptures and knowledge of religious practices.

## HOUSE OF PRAYER - Beit Tefillah

The House of Prayer on the upper floor is the **Sanctuary** where religious services are held. During religious services, men and women sit together.

Near the Sanctuary is a stained glass panel with a **Magen David** (Star of David.) This hexagon of two intertwined triangles has become the symbol of the Jewish community and is on the Israeli flag. The panel was made by a member of BPS.



The **Holy Ark** (Aron Hakodesh) which means 'Holy Cabinet' is decorated with a representation of the **burning bush** from the story of Moses. Written above the doors is a verse from Psalm 62: 'Wait quietly for God, Oh my soul, for my hope comes from God.'

### Menorah

Seven branched candlestick reminds us of the one that was in the Temple in Jerusalem. It is another important Jewish symbol. It is described in the Book of Exodus in the Bible.



**Ner Tamid** (everlasting light) is a symbol of God's presence.

**Bimah** a platform where the Rabbi or service leader stands.

Inside the Ark are four scrolls, **Sifrei Torah**, written in Hebrew. Each contain the five books of Moses. Jewish people believe there is one God and that the **Torah**, (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) was inspired by God. Its meaning becomes clearer as time goes by.

Beautiful crowns and silver bells called **rimmonim** are attached so that, when the scroll is lifted from the Ark, people can hear that the 'Word of God' is about to be read.



**Yad** or Torah pointer is used to help the reader follow the words and to avoid touching the precious scrolls. The scrolls are handwritten in Hebrew on parchment.

### Festival Tapestry



This shows the main Jewish festivals: Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Hanukkah, Shabbat and Passover,



## MANTLES FOR TORAH SCROLLS

**A Mantle** is a covering. These beautiful mantles cover the Torah scrolls. The designs shown here were created by Simone Bloom in 2008. They were then transferred to fabric and embroidered.



**Burning Bush:** An angel of the Eternal One appeared to him [Moses] in a flaming fire from the midst of the bush. (Exodus. 3:2)



**Vine and Fig Tree** →  
And each person shall sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree. (Micah 4:4)



**Creation:** In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. (Genesis.1:1)



**Noah's Ark:** →  
You shall bring two of every kind into the Ark. (Genesis. 6:19)



## SPECIAL CLOTHES



A **Kippah** (head covering) is worn during prayer times at home and in the synagogue as a sign of respect for God.

Two over-sized prayer shawls hang in the Sanctuary. They were designed by eminent fabric designer Tibor Reich.

A **Tallit** (prayer shawl) is traditionally worn by men and boys during morning prayers. In this liberal synagogue, women and girls from the age of 13 may also wear one. It is worn to put people in the right mood for prayer. It has fringes and knotted tassels to remind us of the 613 commandments in the **Torah**.



Three short films parts one, two and three and quiz accompany this guide.

