

# Bet Am Shalom Discovery Survey: Executive Summary

1 Dec 2022

Prior to the formation of a rabbinic search committee, the BAS Discovery Committee was created and tasked with setting the stage for the search by first gaining a better understanding of the Bet Am Shalom congregation: who we are, what is important to us, and where we would like to go as a community. The committee decided to conduct a congregational survey, and follow that with a series of focused discussions and smaller group meetings. This Executive Summary will highlight the methods and selected findings of the survey.

In July 2022, the Discovery Committee fielded a brief online survey of the congregation. The survey's objective was to inform discussions of what our members value most about synagogue life. The survey was sent to 652 BAS members, principally by email. Printed copies of the survey were sent with self-addressed stamped envelopes to those members who preferred hard copies to emails. Over a five-week period, four separate reminders were sent to congregants urging them to complete the survey. When the survey was closed on August 18, 2022, BAS had received 462 member responses, reflecting at least 313 unique households. This represented 71% of all individual members and 81% of all households, a response rate that makes the results statistically significant.

The Discovery Survey enumerated 21 aspects of synagogue life, and asked members to rate how important each of those aspects was to them. These aspects were grouped into six broad themes: (1) Ritual, Prayer, and Spiritual Inspiration; (2) Family Programming and Children's Education; (3) Social Programming and Adult Education; (4) Personal and Community Engagement; (5) Life Events and Pastoral Care; and (6) Israel & American Jewry.

The aspects of synagogue life that were consistently ranked as very important to all congregants included high holidays, diversity, life-cycle event support, and looking to BAS as a place to befriend and socialize with others within the Jewish community. Those aspects of synagogue life which members generally considered the least important to them included connecting with ancestors, pastoral care, using the synagogue as a forum to discuss Israel and American Jewry, lectures and classes, inter-generational opportunities, and a place to pray.

There were group differences within the congregation. The Discovery Committee conducted several analyses, including distinguishing members based on how long they had been BAS members and whether or not they had minor children living in their household. Although there were few differences in what is important to congregants based on how long they had been BAS members, several items did stand out. Those who have been members for more than 20 years were more likely to value BAS for mutual support and as a venue to discuss Israel and American Jewry. Newer members were more likely than long-time members to regard BAS as a place for being spiritually inspired.

The greatest differences were seen when members with minor children were contrasted with members without minor children in the household. Those **without** minor children found the following were more important aspects of BAS than did those with minor children: observing high holidays; observing Shabbat; life-cycle events; mutual support; BAS as a venue for ethical, intellectual, and spiritual growth; attending classes and lectures; the inspiration of music and song; BAS as a place to pray or learn sacred

texts; and BAS as a space to discuss Israel and American Jewry. Those **with** minor children were more likely to note the importance to them of BAS for educating children, family programming, and connecting to families and ancestors.

The Discovery Committee concluded that although such findings may suggest that BAS has two cohorts – one without minor children living in their household and one with children in the house – the data more likely suggests that how each group views institutional engagement with Bet Am Shalom is reflective of their different stages of life.

Those with minor children are clearly more focused on child-rearing and the internal demands of family life, and they view the synagogue more “practically” – as a place to meet specific family needs. It is entirely likely that these members with minor children will engage in synagogue life differently over time, as their social roles as direct caregivers change.

A slide presentation with more detailed findings can be accessed at the [Bet Am Shalom website](#).