

# Inclusive Orthodoxy at the Beit Boyer Synagogue in Talpiot, Jerusalem

This growing neighborhood shul epitomizes the growing open-outlook stream in Orthodoxy.

Jacob Solomon | May 28, 2014 10:35 AM



Aron Hakodesh at the Beit Boyer synagogue in Talpiot. Credit: Jacob Solomon

The synagogue in Beit Boyer is officially called Kehilat Talpiot Hachadasha, but everybody simply calls it after its host building. It is situated in Talpiot, an upmarket neighborhood in south Jerusalem built by the British Mandate for employees of the Anglo-Palestine Bank, which was the forerunner of Bank Leumi.

The story of the Beit Boyer synagogue started nearly twenty years ago, when the younger, more Anglo element of the hilltop parent-synagogue created a community based on greater gender equality (that remained however subject to *halakha*), organized activities for children during the service, full-throated participatory singing, cultural activities, and a tradition of service to the wider community.

Beit Boyer runs on forward-looking Orthodox lines, under the *halakhic* guidance of ex-MK Rabbi Michael Melchior. Its character reflects the somewhat scholarly but relaxed religious climate of the neighborhood.

The *mechitza* is side-by-side so women can feel more integrated into the proceedings. Each Shabbat-morning *drasha* (sermon) is delivered by a different male or female participant.

Women do not actually lead the services or read from the Torah, except on special occasions, and then supposedly not in male hearing. These include *bat mitzvot*, and the *sixth hakafa* on Simchat Torah when the ladies dance with Sefer Torah inside the shul, with the men temporarily evicted to the courtyard outside.

For its small size, the Beit Boyer *shul* has a distinguished family-type clientele. One Shabbat morning, I numbered almost a *minyan* of rabbis, a *minyan* of professors, and a *minyan* of doctors. It could however do with a millionaire or two to finance the long-dreamed-of construction of purpose-built accommodation.

Beit Boyer has its own trademark customs. The *nussach* is “follow the leader” – Ashkenazi or Sepharadi. There is no auctioning of *aliyot*, but those honored are invited to take a card with the quaint and polite “should you wish to make a donation, please make your check payable to...”

Once a month, Friday night is Shlomo Carlebach night, though the repertoire is wide enough for the same service never to occur twice: Boyer teases out variety in Carlebach.

On Yom Kippur, Boyer has a special *Mussaf* service: four-part harmony communal singing at its very, very devoted best. Always led by the same founder-member distinguished lawyer, his chemistry with the *kehilla* adds on a new – and utterly appropriate – musical interpolation and interpretation of the sacred texts. Leaving *Mussaf* early and resurfacing at *Neilah* just doesn’t happen; the sadness is when it’s all over.

The announcements – peppered with humor – come at the very end of the service; not before Adon Olam, but after it. So there is no hiatus of early-departing worshippers. Then – on a kiddush Shabbat – the *mechitza* comes down, the chairs are moved to the side, the swing doors open to a procession of pre-laid tables, and the old friends eagerly catch up with the latest over a well-spread board.

*Sabbath services at Beth Boyer begin at around sundown in the evening and at 8:35 am in the morning; weekdays at 7:30 am.*

*Take the bus #7 to Ein Gedi Street and then three minutes on foot. Go a few paces down the hill, turn left into Efrata Street, walk to its end, and continue along a short footpath that turns abruptly right and then left. Beit Boyer is at #36 Efrata Street.*



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