



Temple House of Israel Bulletin

A Member Congregation of the Union for Reform Judaism
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www.thoi.org

Our mission is to perpetuate Jewish life and identity through a welcoming community of spirituality, learning, service, joy and worship

DECEMBER 2017 / KISLEV — TEVET 5778

Chanukah Potluck Dinner and Party
December 17, 2017 beginning at 6:00 pm
Members whose last name begins with:

- A—D please bring salad or side dish
- E—H please bring drinks
- J—P please bring main dish
- R—T please bring latkes
- U—Z please bring dessert



Bring your menorahs and candles
so we can kindle the lights of the holiday together
Potluck dinner immediately following

President's Message

Dear members and friends,
November was a busy month with many activities and good attendance at services and the film discussion. Many thanks to Rev. Ed Covert for speaking and sharing his take on the Torah portion. It is always nice to hear a fresh perspective! The one thing all these events had in common was thoughtful discussion of Torah and how we can make a positive contribution in the lives of our family and our community. With Thanksgiving just days away, what an appropriate time to consider how we interact with those around us.

For the past six years, the temple purchased and organized with Eric Stamer a Christmas Eve meal for residents at the Valley Mission. This was a valuable and significant opportunity for service to the community which, unfortunately, is not available to us this year. There is so much need in our area that I'm certain we can fill this void in another way. Please keep your ears and open for opportunities and direct any suggestions for a congregation-wide service project to me or another board member. We would love to hear from you!

Finally, THOI board is putting the final touches on our congregational survey. Please be on the lookout for an email as it is distributed, hopefully in December. If preferred, a paper copy can be mailed to you. Please contact me or another board member to add your name to the snail mail list. As always, we really want to hear your constructive comments, wants and needs. Please take the time to participate.

Bonny Strassler

From the Rabbi's Desk

Dear Temple House of Israel Congregants and Friends,

I write this just a few days prior to Thanksgiving, and I am happy to acknowledge that I have much for which I am grateful. I hope that is true in your life as well.

Other than Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, the next celebration on the Jewish calendar is Chanukah. May the light of this festival brighten your days and your soul.

Mi Sheberach/Refuah Shelemach:

Thoughts and prayers for Heidi Lasser, Daniel Heifetz, Leah Farmer, Greg Ciszek, Dennis Ward, Tom Davis (Gail's husband), Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, Jim Clark, Michelle Clark and their daughter Lauren, Nancy Witt, Steve Guberman, Shirley Brand, Sue Solomon, Dan Schorsch, Linda Jones (Dan and Ellen Schorsch's daughter), Joanne Simons (Carla Donley's aunt), Kate Goldenberg (granddaughter of Vicki and Alan Goldenberg), and Ellen Werther.

Editor's Note: Please contact me or Rabbi Joe to provide current, up-to-date additions or corrections to this list.

Mazal tov to Team Tikvah on their success, and Congratulations on exceeding the goal for fundraising and Tzedakah to support the effort to prevent suicides. Chazak chazak, vetitchazek—may you go from strength to strength, and be strengthened, and may the loss and suffering caused by this tragedy be prevented in future.

Rabbi's message begins on page 5 

Reaching the Rabbi

Please note: Rabbi Joe may be reached by email at **RabbiJoeB@hotmail.com** Other email addresses may not reach him in a timely fashion, or at all. He reads email regularly, except on Jewish Holidays or Shabbat, when he does not use the computer.

His cell number is 925-272-8563 (925-2-RAVJOE).
Please note this number.

Telephone messages left at the Congregation number are only checked sporadically.

PLEASE CALL if you have any urgent messages or in case of an emergency, and please let Rabbi Joe know if you or anyone you know is ill or would want a call or visit for any reason.

You are also invited to contact Rabbi Joe to arrange an appointment to meet. Rabbi Joe will be happy to make an appointment to speak with you, so that he can offer you his full, undivided attention.

News from the Pews

- Happy family holiday visits from son Gordon, daughter-in-law Yael, and grandson Liam visiting Patty and Larry Sutker.
- Our condolences to Robert (aka Bobby) Pendleton whose wonderful wife Betty passed away in October. Donations in Betty's memory may be made to Ebenezer Baptist Church.
- Hoping for a smooth recovery for Heidi Lasser as she heals from foot surgery.

December Celebrations

Happy Birthdays to

Robert Pendleton celebrates on December 11th
Alan Goldenberg who celebrates on December 12th
Beth Young celebrating on December 14th
Sam Goldenberg also on the 14th
Sarah Grove-Humphries on December 15th
Rosalie Waterman on December 19th
Eliana Brown on the 22nd
Jesse Landsberg Ward was born December 25th
Anna Degen on December 28th
Philip Chodrow also on the 28th



Happy Anniversary to Ellen and Lou Boden on December 7th

Torah for Fun by Heidi Yalowitz Lasser

In the past, I regarded Judaic pedagogy as being fraught with abstractions, paternalism and dogma. It kept me away for decades until I was prepared to acknowledge that Judaism had changed, and in order to access it, I had to change my attitude toward it.

I started reading the weekly Parsha with commentary and found websites offering a variety of interpretations. Most importantly, the excitement of Torah developed when I pondered the relevance in today's world and to my own spiritual needs. There are 100s of directions one Parsha can lead the reader. Sometimes the Rabbi's sermon addresses the questions that arose in my mind, sometimes not. Most of the time I sit and listen, but in a recent Friday night Torah service, I couldn't contain myself. I had read about Sarah's (Sarai) decision to offer Hagar to Abraham (Avram). I wondered if Avram disclosed to Sarah that G-d told him that he would have an heir; did they both assume that offering Hagar was the only option? What does this say about how we handle divine messages when the details seem to be left out? Is there a Midrash out there?

This sparked another question from the pew. Is Sarah part of the Covenant even though the Parsha is written as though this is a male prerogative? Torah study is an opportunity to transcend the written word in order to make it personal, contemporary and relevant.

Reading the Parsha before a service or, just one article discussing it makes the Torah service an experience of communal spirituality. We are journeying as one in those few minutes. To me, that moment of unity while the words are chanted is sacred.

Women's Group

- **Team Tikvah** was named Top Team for fundraising efforts at the **Greater Augusta Out of the Darkness Walk** on **October 21**. Between us we raised \$2569 to support the efforts to prevent suicides!
- The Women's Group is continuing to fill Journey Bags for children entering the foster care system. These bags are filled with necessary items and some personal items to ease a child's placement into the system. The requested items are listed below. You do NOT need to supply all the items in a bag—any contribution will be appreciated. **The items should be new**. We hope to fill the bags at our December meeting.

9 year-olds boys and girls

shampoo	lotion	body wash
Underwear	comb or brush	toothbrush/toothpaste
pillowcase	hair ties	stuffed or small toy
pajamas	blanket	backpacks
socks	Chap-stick	pens/crayons/pencils
coloring books	journals	books & child's bible

10-12 year-olds boys and girls

Eliminated from the list above: coloring books, crayons and pencils

Added to the list above: deodorant, games or activities

- THOI cares about you! Please let Michelle know if you have a health issue or need support. michelle_clark@verizon.net.
- A reminder that the flamingoes are available to delight and celebrate a birthday, anniversary or any special occasion for only \$25. Call or email Debbie deb1130@hotmail.com or 540-688-8058.
- Thanks to Elizabeth Schwartz who chaired our November meeting and for coordinating our Journey Bags.
- **Debbie Jacobs will chair the December 10th meeting at 2 pm.**



Donations

Thank you to these generous people who have recently made donations to Temple House of Israel

<u>In memory of Adam Clark, son of Michelle & Jim Clark</u>	Ruth Chodrow
(building fund)	Kenneth and Letty Rosen
.....	.....Steve and Patti Cohen,
.....	David, Lizzy and Rachel
.....	.....David and Carolyn Hockstein
.....	.....Lynne Landsberg and Dennis Ward
(general fund)	Patricia Shamer
(Rabbi's discretionary fund)	Michelle and Jim Clark
.....	Steve and Patti Cohen, David, Lizzy and Rachel
.....	..... Sara Lenes
.....	..... Ellen and Drew Scurachio
<u>In Honor of the High Holidays</u>	Frances Sadler
<u>To the General Fund</u>	David Hockstein
.....	..... Joanne Hirsch
<u>For Tzedakah</u>	Latifa Kropf
.....	..... Joseph Siron
<u>To the Women's Group</u> for the Journey Bags	Martha and Doug Degen
.....	..... Beth and Rich Young

We honor the memories of our loved ones who died at this season

**December
Yahrzeits**

Flora Barth	Joseph Barth	Louis Belfor
David Brownold	Hannah Degen	Anne Goldberg
Rose Greenfield	Aaron Harris	Sadie Jacobsen
Elain Werther	Max Klotz	Milton Klotz
Clara Litvin	Earl Nicely	Tina Rosenberg
Abraham Rosenberg	Simon Rosenthal	Alma Samuels
Phillip Seltzer	Albert Shultz	Lydia Switzer
Rhea Walters	Irvin Weinberg	Seymour Isaac
Joseph Loewner	Sara Sachs	Fannie Snyder
Morris Snyder	Hubert "Danny" Thompson	

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Trustee	Alan Goldenberg	885-6878	adgvlg@gmail.com
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**Rabbi's
Message**

Light(s) in the Darkness

If you have or had a Jewish child in your life, you know that the merest mention of Chanukah elicits excitement and anticipation, bringing up images of playing with the dreidel, eating Chanukah gelt (chocolate coins) and loads of gifts in the offing. Both children and adults find pictures of sufganiyot (jelly donuts) and latkes (fried potato pancakes) jumping to mind.

Though these pleasant and joyful images and thoughts predominate, they don't actually touch the heart of this celebration, and as time goes on, I find myself thinking that they miss the point completely. Here, a brief piece to help refocus.

The background: Chanukah is not a biblical holiday, and is therefore not 'ordained by G-d'. It was established by the political elite and the sages to acknowledge a significant but troubling series of events in Jewish history. It was originally presented as a celebration of a military victory—the story of the brave Maccabees, led by Judah, prevailing over the depraved Hellenized Assyrians under Antiochus Epiphanes.

Of course, this is a tremendous oversimplification. In fact, the books of Maccabees, on which the story of Chanukah is based, cover the reigns of Antiochus, Antiochus Epiphanes, and Antiochus Eupator from the Assyrians, as well as Demetrius, Ptolemy Philpator, and many others from the Seleucids, Ptolemades, Persians, Romans and additional peoples and nations. It is a sprawling, messy, confusing story of constant battles, switching allegiances, betrayals, and conquests among a panoply of rivals and would-be rulers. And there are really two tellings of the

Rabbi's Message (cont'd)

History in the Books of Maccabees; it is extremely likely that these tellings were combined, and that the mixture is what became the basis for the tale we now tell, but not without significant changes being introduced. The story is conflated and reduced, whittled down to a single narrative, not a history of many years of battles and quiet times among a rotating cast of villains and heroes playing out. The heroes are cleansed, dressed up and made more presentable and sympathetic, the enemies are combined and made more villainous, heinous, and dastardly and a level of piety and religious veneer is overlaid on the story. Cue the music for a melodrama and get out the black and the white hats!

Of note is that in the books of Maccabees, in no place in either telling is there a mention of any oil required for the lamp in the Temple when it was rededicated—that is a later addition, a detail invented by someone who saw the rededication mentioned in the narrative, and created a midrash about the oil to make the story more palatable. This midrash presents G-d in a positive and more acceptable way, not anthropomorphic, not vengeful, not harsh, but working a tiny miracle to permit the Israelites to properly serve G-d in difficult circumstances.

That tiny insertion speaks to a massive human need. We want reassurance that G-d is there and concerned with us, but it has to be on a scale we can accept. A lamp that remains lit when the fuel is insufficient to sustain it fits the bill. It is neither too massive nor does it stretch credulity too far. At the same time, the specific insertion chosen is a symbol that implies so much more. It is not selected by chance at all.

We are offered the hope that if there was a miracle, G-d had to cause it, which speaks to both G-d existing and G-d caring about us enough to perform miracles. At the same time, the fact that it is related to light points at G-d as creator (Let there be light!), and the glowing sparks that are embedded in everything and animate us as humans (the divine sparks from creation according to one well-known midrash). This is reinforced further when we realize that the mitzvah associated with Chanukah is to kindle the Chanukiah—to bring light into being and enlighten the world around us, celebrating G-d's creation and our part of it.

More, G-d is often described as light—so in our kindling, we are bringing G-d into our presence, making G-d manifest and immanent to those who see that light.

The essence of this holiday is not the gifts, nor the foods, nor the dreidel game. (Sorry kids, gift giving is not the mitzvah!) It is found in the gathering of friends and family who together kindle the lights in a Chanukiyah (special nine light menorah) and say the blessings, and remind themselves of how they are to make G-d immanent and manifest in their lives and in the world. It is a call to each of us to live in a godly fashion.

May your life be brightened by the light at this festival of lights, may the manifestation of light indicate the presence and blessing of G-d for you and those you care about, and may you be inspired by the light to be a light to those around you.

Chag urim sameach (happy holiday of lights),
Rabbi Joe Blair