



Temple House of Israel Bulletin

A Member Congregation of the Union for Reform Judaism
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Our mission is to perpetuate Jewish life and identity through a welcoming community of spirituality, learning, service, joy and worship

JANUARY 2018 / TEVET — SHEVAT 5778

President's Message

Dear members and friends,

December is almost over and I cannot wait for the new year to begin. We have much to do as a congregation this coming year; looking inward and sharing our ideas and thoughts on the congregational survey and projecting forward to shape our small community. Don't forget the religious services and social events that will fill the spring and summer months as well. We will be busy and productive, working with and for each other to support and build our congregation. The work may be tiresome, but it is important and vital. Please take some time this year to be an active part of temple life.

Consider an active role in the temple by taking on a leadership position in the Women's Group, which is looking for a president and/or co-presidents. Interested in social media? Consider enhancing and keeping our public profile current on Facebook and other social media platforms. Do you have skills, hobbies or specialties that dovetail with facets of our small community? Please take some time now to be a celebrated part of temple life.

Consider attending one of the many services and activities scheduled for the month of January and early February, including two Rabbi-led services and a Tu B'Shevat seder.

January 6: Rabbi-led Healing service – A new addition to the types of services offered. A healing service will focus on prayers and meditations for those needing support, love and healing.

January 19: Rabbi-led service – Shabbat evening service with English and Hebrew readings and prayers.

January 31: Tu B'Shevat seder - Join us for a Tu B'Shevat celebration to mark the New Year for Trees as we taste the fruit that is yet to come. Enjoy fresh and dried fruits and nuts, wine, grape juice and select desserts.



February 2: Rabbi-led service and Pulpit exchange with Rev. Shelby Owens – A Shabbat evening service with English and Hebrew readings and prayers with a guest clergy sharing a D'var Torah.

Hope to meet you at THOI in 2018!
Bonny Strassler

From the Rabbi's Desk

Dear Temple House of Israel Congregants and Friends,
Hard to believe that Chanukah has already come and gone, and we are already near to Tu Be'Shevat! I hope you are staying warm and healthy in this unpredictable weather.

The themed Shabbat on December 1st was a discussion of the Torah parashah Vayishlach. It was fun, different, and interesting. We had a nice group of folks there, and we really started to delve into the text, trying to see how the story could be understood. It was a wonderful discussion, and most of those present had read the Torah portion ahead of time, so they were able to participate fully! As usual with Torah discussions, we ran out of time and steam long before we ran out of material to talk about. :) We are planning another such evening on Friday, March 16th. I hope to see you there and learn from you.

The Saturday morning service December 16th was a small-ish turnout, but we had a great discussion of Parashah Mikeitz, and a lovely Kiddush luncheon. Bonny Strassler did a really nice job of filling in at the last moment, leading us in song. I was very happy to see that we have been successful at developing a cadre of people who can step in and lead music or services, and read Torah and Haftarah when needed. I am delighted and hope that will continue and grow.

January 6th is something a bit different. We will have a 'healing' service. Rather than the usual liturgy and ritual, we will gather as a kehilah kadoshah (a holy community), read, chant, and sing psalms and other materials related to healing, meditate, offer an opportunity for those present to express what healing they wish, and for whom, and then close with prayer and song. There will be no Torah or Haftarah at this service, and we will not follow the standard matbe-ah (format and order) of the service. We are also likely to hold this service in the social hall, rather than the sanctuary. Come and give it a try!

January 31st, Wednesday evening, we will celebrate Tu Be'Shevat with a seder. We did this last year and it was absolutely lovely. Look for more information in this bulletin, but this is a seder, an ordered ritual, with foods relating to trees. It celebrates G-d's creation and the fruitful bounty that we receive from it, the image of trees as symbols of Torah and knowledge and G-d's presence in the world, as well as representing the connection of heaven and earth. We touch on the practical, the mystical and the spiritual as we move between the four worlds of creation through texts, prayers and symbols. Lots of fun, with great food, interesting texts, excellent company and four glasses of wine! Be sure to mark the date and join us.

Looking a bit further ahead, February 2nd we will enjoy a visit from Rev. Shelby Owen who will be our guest preacher for the devar Torah. [I will be speaking at Emmanuel Episcopal on Sunday the 4th in exchange—you are welcome to join me.]

Contacting Rabbi Joe

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 phone number is 925-272-8563 (925-2-RAVJOE). Please note and use this number—messages left elsewhere are not checked regularly.

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.

Women's Group

- Eight women gathered at Debbie's house for the December meeting. We completed 7 Journey Bags for children entering the foster care system. Thanks to Elizabeth for coordinating our efforts. Thanks also to Debbie for providing lunch and conducting the meeting.
- The Chanukah party included a group menorah lighting, good food (as usual), and a classy menorah sculpture made from canned food which will now be donated to the Food Bank. Congratulations to Marsha Pillet who won 90+ pieces of gelt and promptly divided it all among the people finishing their meals.
- **Available for lunch on January 3rd?** We're gathering at SILK ROAD in Waynesboro at 12 noon. Please RSVP to Michelle Clark by 12/30 so she can make a reservation for the group. Michelle_Clark@verizon.net. You don't have to be a Women's Group member - **Everyone is welcome.** Hope to see you there!
- We voted to fund the Tu B'Shevat seder scheduled for January 31st. (details for the seder on page 8)
- The **2018 Yard Sale**, a major Women's Group fundraiser, will be held April 20 and 22. Please start saving/collecting and otherwise donating any gently used items and consider contributing baked goods. Even if you're not an active member in the Women's Group, we hope you'll participate. Elizabeth needs help to organize, set up and clean up.
- Our next meeting will be Sunday, **February 11 at 2 pm** in the social hall and will be facilitated by Gail Davis.

News from the Pews

- **Mi Sheberach/Refuah Shelemach:** Thoughts and prayers for Greg Cizek, Kate Goldenberg, Tom Davis (Gail's husband) Dennis Ward and Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, to Jim Clark, and Michelle as well, Leah Farmer, Nancy Witt, Steve Guberman, Sue Solomon, Daniel Heifetz as he goes through physical therapy after his broken wrist, Shirley Brand, Dan Schorsch and Ellen as well, Linda Jones, Heidi Lasser, and Joanne Simons (Carla Donley's aunt) .
- Patty and Larry Sutker welcomed son Gordon, his wife Yael and baby Liam from Israel to join son Colin and his son Arlo (after they were stuck in the Atlanta airport blackout) for their holiday reunion.
- Robert Pendleton is now at King's Daughters Center on North Augusta Street.

Religious School

- Religious school resumes on January 7th.
- The Religious School Shabbat and Consecration Service will be held Saturday morning at Beth El. (No school that Sunday).
- Religious School Tu B'Shevat seder will be held on January 28th.

For more information please contact Dara Hall at mddmhall@verizon.net.

SHORTY

Our next meeting of the Staunton Harrisonburg Reform Temple Youth will be held on Sunday, January 21st at Beth El

SHORTY small but mighty; A few can change the world!

January Celebrations

Happy Birthdays

Rich Young celebrates on January 16th
 Dennis Ward celebrates on January 29th
 Doug Degen celebrates on January 31st



We honor the memories of our loved ones at this season

January Yahrzeits

A. David Biatch	Sophie Cohen	Robert Davis
Morris Degen	Marjorie Edelman	Milton Finkel
Leah Frank	Arthur Kaufman	Pauline Prince
Emily Schorsch	Daniel Seligmann	Morton Sloane
Lamartine Strauss	Augusta Swit	Flora Switzer
Solomon Switzer	Roberta Weber	Abraham Weinberg
Abraham Weinberg	Ethel Weinberg	Johanna Weinberg



HAPPY NEW YEAR !
2018

Donations

Thank you to the following people who support our small congregation with their much appreciated financial donations:

For Yizkor Karen Lange
 For the general fund Ruth Chodrow
 Anonymous
 In Memory of Adam Clark Ellen Cohen and Eric Weidman
 (to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund)
 In honor of Seymour, Libbie and Stephen Lee Dubinsky Gail Davis

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Rabbi's Message

The Sap is Rising

Following Chanukah last month, the next holiday that appears on the Jewish calendar is Tu Be'Shevat (literally the 15th of Shevat). This is a strange mix of a Jewish 'arbor day' 'earth day', and the 'arrival of spring'. It is the holiday known as the 'new year for the trees'. It occurs in early spring, roughly six or so weeks before the vernal (or spring) equinox.

I suggest 'arbor day' because it is an event dealing with trees. This holiday is understood to be the time when the trees that have been somewhat dormant during the colder period begin the process of preparing to bud and produce leaves. The sap begins to flow upward, carrying nutrients, sugar and water to be used in the new growth the tree is forming. Of course, different trees vary in timing, and each species also varies in timing based on geographical consideration, but the date for Tu Be'Shevat was set by observation of the first tree to flower in Israel; that is the almond tress, which flowers early, and was used as the marker to establish the holiday.

This annual rising of the sap, and the subsequent flowering, was used as the marker for the 'age' of the trees. Age mattered to the Israelites because there was a mitzvah (commandment) regarding not harvesting the fruit of a tree before the tree had sufficient time to establish a viable root system and adequate growth to sustain itself. This practice continues through today: orchardists and arboriculturalists do something similar.

To fulfill this obligation to allow the tree time to develop, one had to know how 'old' a tree was, and that is how Tu Be'Shevat came to be seen as the 'birthday' of the trees. It was the date on which each tree became one year older, as it were, as that one could determine when it was permissible to take the fruit for sale or other use.

Trees, as we know, provide produce in the form of fruits, nuts, leaves and seeds, in addition to shade, land stabilization, erosion control, wind breaks, water management, carbon sequestration, oxygen and wood. In this way, trees are seen as an essential aspect of nature, and a major feature of G-d's creation.

This is the source of the connection to 'earth day', and the custom that has grown up to fund the planting of trees in Israel. For many years now, certainly since my youth, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) would run annual campaigns to encourage the planting of trees in Israel, and they had some success. Many groves were planted, and there were significant gains in specific regions in modifying and improving the conditions on the ground. Unfortunately, as the protests against Israel became more violent, these groves of trees were often a victim, with arson used to destroy them. Consequently, there has been some reforestation, and modest improvement in the land use and conditions, but nowhere near what it could have been if left undisturbed to grow.

Violence against nature of this sort is anathema to Judaism. We are taught in the Torah (five books of Moses) and Talmud (elucidation on the interpretation and implementation of Jewish law) that even when besieging a city, it is forbidden to uproot or burn trees, nor may we render the land unusable or non-arable—it is our duty to protect and preserve G-d's creation.

This is why there is such a strong push in Jewish thought for development of renewable resources, rather than those that are depleted by use, or those that require significant destruction in order to access them, such as coal and oil for power, clear but logging of wood, mountain top removal, dumping of chemical waste in waterways pumping of poisonous chemicals into the groundwater table, destruction of habitat for many species, and so on.

Rabbi's Message (cont'd)

The timing of Tu Be'Shevat leads naturally to the aspect of seeing it as a 'spring' holiday. It falls (usually) after the worst of the 'winter' or cold rainy season has occurred, when we are often profoundly ready for a change, and it serves as a harbinger of the coming spring season with new growth, more pleasant weather, longer days and more light—similar to the feelings to which the first robin of the season is associated by many. The concept of Tu Be'Shevat is that the season has 'turned' and is now beginning the 'behind the scenes' preparations that will lead shortly to the visible aspects we will enjoy, including the budding, first leaves, and flowers that will appear shortly. This is the re-invigoration and arousal of all around us, and—we hope—ourselves as well. So Tu Be'Shevat marks the start of the spring season, encouraging us to 'hang on' for a little while more when we will see and enjoy the re-growth and renewal that is the hallmark of spring. The Tu Be'Shevat seder is an ordered ritual, similar to the Passover seder, at which we eat foods that are symbolic, largely the fruit of trees, and study texts and stories that relate to trees, including the image of the Torah as a tree of life, the connection between heaven and earth as the Sefirotic Tree, and trees as an image of the human being. If you are interested in learning more, consider attending a Tu Be'Shevat seder!

Chag Rosh Hashonah Le'ilanot Sameach [happy new year for the trees],
Rabbi Joe Blair

Torah Restoration Challenge

Alan and Vickie Goldenberg's previous generous gift paid for the restoration of one of our three Torah scrolls.

One of the two remaining scrolls also needs repairs. The pre-repair evaluation (including shipping and insurance) will cost approximately \$1000.

An anonymous benefactor has offered to match contributions up to a total of \$750 to establish a fund of \$1,500 to pay for the evaluation. Excess funds, if any, will be applied to the cost of restoration.

As far as we know, there is no other guaranteed way to double your money instantly. Because of pending changes in the tax law, there has never been a better time to write a check to the temple. **To participate in the Torah Restoration Challenge, make out your check dated "December __, 2017" to THOI and write TRC OR "Torah Restoration Challenge" on the bottom and drop it in the mail – the sooner the better. Donations will continue to be accepted in the new year!**



**Torah for Fun
by
Heidi
Yalowitz
Lasser**

The light advances

In December, a Facebook Friend posted a reminder that depression may afflict someone close to you during the holiday season. Why bring this up now? The holiday stretch from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day is over, and we begin a new secular cycle. We may be in the period following these events, but the Torah and Jewish observances never leave us without something to contemplate throughout the year. Otherwise, January can become a month of resting on one's laurels without making an effort.

The Torah readings during January recount our Exodus from Egypt and wanderings in the desert. We finish the month with Tu B'Shevat, the "New years of the Trees" even as we look out the window and see ice. The two are linked, I think, by hope that there is both a Mount Sinai, and a Tree of Life within us all. Out of the darkness of enslavement and the despair of winter, we emerged as a mixed multitude of individuals, who could not sustain as individuals alone.

The Torah notes that there was fear and hesitancy. In order to move forward we had to join together, and concurrently take individual action to declare personal readiness. Individually, we can reclaim the spark of unique individuality that keeps us going year after year without so many external distractions. Part of our inner selves has changed, even as we reflect on the disappointments of the past, anticipate the springtime and the hope of the future.

As we plant a new tree, or simply start seeds for an indoor herb garden this month, we do not forget those trees destroyed by fire, or the ones pillaged for paper production. With the increase in sunlight, we do not forget our own moments of darkness and depression or those who are suffocating with relentless despair. A new cycle is not about encouraging amnesia surrounding pain, it is to cultivate fresh approaches to address old problems.

It will be a few months before we are in the Pesach/Spring season, when we read Torah portions recounting what transpired after the plagues. In January, we can anticipate the hope of the renewed covenant, but the time to anticipate and cultivate it, to work towards and prepare for it, to declare a willingness to learn, is now.
