



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

MARCH 2018 / ADAR — NISSAN 5778

From our Temple President

Dear members and friends,

Just last week my dog Jax was sprayed by a skunk at 6 o'clock in the morning! The smell is not an easy one to describe, but overpowering, pervasive and obnoxious are a few adjectives that come to mind. Jax was quickly de-skunked and smelled better by midday. However, the heavy residue of skunk odor lingered and only now is dissipating, albeit very, very, slowly. I often reflected this past week how grateful I am that in the heat of skunk detonation that everything I needed to mitigate the problem was in the house: peroxide, baking soda and dish soap. While I didn't have enough peroxide to make a full batch of the skunk bath, I did have enough to make half. It did the trick! Can I still smell a little skunk? YES, but it is a level I can live with. An inconvenience, not a disaster.

Within temple life there are inconveniences, some greater and smaller to each of us, but they are present. Our individual and collective responses to these inconveniences can be our greatest asset or our greatest hindrance. Logical, sensible, balanced are the adjective that come to mind as the way to respond. These are the very type of responses gathered in the membership survey focused on the questions of who we are and what our hopes are for the future of THOI.

So let's take a look at one of the questions this month. Here it is: **In what activities or areas would you like to see THOI invest more effort?** Not surprisingly many of the same ideas were shared repeatedly by members. Here are the eight areas noted for greater investment and the survey summary for each:

Growth	Services	Community Outreach
Educational Courses	Social Engagement	Congregational Unity & Focus
Youth Engagement	General Operations	

1. **Growth:** respondents wish to see growth in the number of members at THOI. Some common ideas were gaining new memberships through increasing THOI's presence in the Staunton community and is social media presence, as well as improving on new guest/member engagement.
2. **Community Outreach:** many respondents said that community outreach was one of the areas where they most want to see greater focus. Just under 13% of of respondents said that they would like to see THOI participate in volunteer and social justice work. Several said they would like to see more interfaith work and connections with other religious groups in the area. A common suggestion in this area is to host more events that will bring the public into contact or relationship with THOI.
3. **Youth Engagement:** respondents would like to see more effort to draw youth and young adults into the congregation and to get them engaged in THOI's events and well being.

President's Message (cont'd)

4. **Social Climate:** a common suggestion was to have more social gatherings outside of services. Specific requests mentioned a few times were a men's group, and the celebration of more Jewish holidays.
5. **Services:** a number of respondents cited wishes to see improvements to the services. The largest request was to see the services make the Torah more applicable to the everyday lives of members. Other thoughts include using more English in services and making the services more accessible to different Jewish Movements.
6. **Educational Courses:** Overall, the respondents enjoy the Biblical Hebrew classes, and would love to see more classes like it, such as class in conversational Hebrew, foundational Jewish religious practices, Jewish culture & perspectives, and Reform liturgy.
7. **Congregational Unity and Focus:** there was a theme in the responses of seeing renewed unity between all parts of the congregation from leadership to the Board, to members. Many wanted to see more interaction between the Board and Rabbi and all members of the congregation, including visitors and new members. Several respondents wanted to see a clarification and refocus on the kind of Jewish doctrine/movement with which THOI wishes to align.
8. **General Operations:** this area includes a wide array of other items such as maintenance of grounds, a written bulletin and increased fiscal transparency.

For temple leadership, these responses are helpful and so informative to chart our way forward to rebuilding and building anew a solid core for our Jewish community. Suggestions and comments are not enough to move us in the direction nearly 70% of you shared. Your participation, your willingness to bring talent, expertise and desire to enrich temple life is THOI's greatest asset. Even though we may be short quantities of one or two ingredients to make a full batch of vibrancy at the temple, I am grateful that we have all the ingredients available in any quantity to make a positive, welcoming community.

L'Shalom
Bonny Strassler

March services and events

- **Lay led Service celebrating Purim at 7:30 pm on March 2 with a reading of the Book of Esther. Oneg by Ruth and Vera.**
- **March 16 at 7:30 Shabbat Service followed by Torah study with oneg by Bonnie and Mike and Greg**
- **Passover Seder at 6:00 pm on March 31.** (see attached flyer)

HAPPY PURIM



HAPPY PASSOVER

From the Rabbi's Desk

Dear Temple House of Israel Congregants and Friends,

We have moved into our Spring holiday season. It began the end of January with TuB'Shevat, continued at the end of February with Purim and now enters into Pesach at the end of March. Immediately after Pesach comes Yom HaSho'ah, Yom Hazikaron, and Yom Ha'atzma'ut, all during the period of the counting of the Omer, which continues into May. May this surfeit of holidays, celebrations, and commemorations bring you joy and good memories.

The pulpit exchange with Rev. Shelby Owen from Emmanuel Episcopal was our (I believe) fifth year doing this, and was quite nice.

The Spring Community Awareness Shabbat service was very successful and quite well received. As part of our commemoration of Jewish Disabilities Awareness and Inclusion Month, the Women's Group arranged for ASL interpreters to sign the service and we reached out to those in the community that might want to take advantage of this service. The very significant turnout both honored and delighted us.

The March 16th service is scheduled as another thematic discussion. The Torah portion is Vayikra, Leviticus 3:1-4:26. It is also Shabbat haChodesh—the Shabbat marking the start of the month of Nisan, the start of the year for us and leading up to Shabbat HaGadol, the Great Sabbath which falls immediately prior to Passover. The reading deals with the offerings in the Temple for well-being and for sin, giving details about what can be offered and how to offer it. Comparing these two kinds of offering and thinking about offerings and sacrifice in general should lead to a very interesting conversation. Neither the Torah nor the Haftarah will be read during the service; we will shorten the service and instead have a Torah discussion/conversation over the Oneg Shabbat. I am looking forward to seeing you there and learning with you.

Rabbi Joe's message is on page 5

Rabbi's Contact Information

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 phone number is 925-272-8563 (925-2-RAVJOE).**

Please note and use this number—messages left elsewhere are not checked regularly.
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.

News from the Pews

- **Our congregation mourns the loss of our former Rabbi Lynne Landsberg.** Lynne lost her battle with cancer on February 26th. Our thoughts and prayers go to her husband, Dennis Ward and their son, Jesse, and the rest of the Landsberg and Ward families. The funeral was held March 1 at Temple Micah in Washington DC. Interment was at Temple House of Israel's cemetery the following day. In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to the American Association of People with Disabilities, 2013 H Street NW, DC 20006 and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, 2027 Massachusetts Ave., DC 20036
- **Our sincere condolences go Sam Witt and the family of Nancy Witt** following her passing on February 26th. A graveside service was performed by Rabbi Joe on March 1 at the cemetery. Donations may be made to THOI in Nancy's memory.
- **Mi Sheberach:** Continued thoughts and prayers for Shirley Brand, Leah Farmer, Steve Guberman, Joanne Simons (Carla Donley's aunt), and Dan Schorsch.
- **Refuah Shelemach:** Recovery and support for Greg Cizek, Jim Clark, Michelle Clark, Tom Davis (Gail's husband), Kate Goldenberg, Sherry Lowe, Sue Solomon, Ellen Schorsch and Dennis Ward.
- Grandma Ellen Werther has returned from California where she visited her beautiful grandson and helped celebrate his first birthday.
- Gordon Sutker has been hired by Facebook and will be based in Tel Aviv near his home. Mazel tov! He'll start working there after Passover.
- We wish a speedy recovery to Janne Heifetz following her recent hip replacement surgery.

Celebrations

Happy Birthdays

Steve Guberman celebrates on March 2nd
Lou Boden celebrates on March 10th
Rebecca Pereles on March 14th
Laura Jean Brand on March 19th
Laurie Berman on March 28th



Happy Anniversaries

Laura Jean and Asher Brand celebrating 34 (?) years together in March
Bonnie and Mike Brown celebrating their March 23, 1996 wedding

Women's Group

- Our **Spring Yard Sale** is just around the corner. Mark **April 20 and 22** on your calendars. But before then, collect your gently used items, in particular: small furniture, housewares, garden items, clothing, jewelry, linens, books, children's items. No exercise equipment or exceedingly heavy items.
Drop off times: Before or after services on March 16 and/or April 6
Sundays 2:00—3:30 March 25 and April 8 and April 15
PLEASE come help set up on Sunday, April 15th 2:00—3:30
- Come for a nosh and stay for a meeting! Our next **Women's Group meeting will be held on March 11th at 2:00 pm at the home of Carol and Buffy Shapiro**, 316 Berkeley Place (about 4 blocks from the temple). The main agenda item is the yard sale but please come with any other ideas or projects you may have for the group to discuss. Light refreshments will be served, so please let Carol and Buffy know if you plan to attend. pinxid@gmail.com or 703-517-4666.

Judaica Shop

Our Judaica Shop now features items for Passover. Thanks to Marsha Pillet for ordering new products and for the new displays. Our prices are below retail! If you'd like to place a special order, please contact Marsha directly at horsebaskets@gmail.com.

Rabbi's Message

Karayt

In the Torah and Talmud, there are certain actions that are seen as punishable. When we look at the various punishments they seem to come in a hierarchy. All of them are seen as offensive to G-d, so we are enjoined to make sacrifices or offerings to G-d as an expression of our remorse, regret, or wish to do better. This type of offering or sacrifice is discussed in the book Vayikra (Leviticus).

Most of these actions require the process of Teshuvah or repentance, recognizing that we have made an error, taking steps to not repeat it, seeking forgiveness of the one(s) injured by our action, and seeking to set it right, before finally approaching G-d to ask for forgiveness.

Some of the time, those actions of repentance are not possible. For example, when our action has irredeemably destroyed something that can have no monetary value assigned, or that simply cannot be replaced, and there is no way to set it right. This is discussed in the context of reputation. When we have acted in a way that destroys someone's reputation, it is considered as irredeemable, because harmful words once said cannot be recalled or retrieved, so this action is seen as a form of murder—here, just as in murder, we cannot repair the damage. And if the person is sufficiently damaged, they may be in no position to offer forgiveness. In actual murder, there is the additional aspect that we cannot ask for forgiveness—the only one who can forgive is no longer able to respond.

The Torah and Talmud have a series of punishments of varying weights levied. For most things, we are directed to the process of Teshuvah, followed by an offering to G-d, as described. For those things for which Teshuvah cannot be effective, the texts speak of four forms of capital punishment: death by stoning, decapitation, burning or strangulation. It is arguable how or if these penalties were levied, but this is what is seen as the legitimate punishment for crimes against other persons.

For punishment of transgressions directly against G-d, we read the story of Korach and his followers. When they offended G-d by challenging G-d's selection of Moses, they and their families were swallowed by a pit that opened beneath their feet, and they went down to Sheol entirely—which implies that they died on the spot. This was harsh, but it is in line with the punishments we have mentioned.

On a completely other level, and only for specific crimes, there is one more severe (I would argue) class of punishment mentioned. It is to become 'Karyat'. Literally, it means cutting off. What it refers to is that a person who violates a direct commandment and acts in a manner that is offensive to G-d will suffer this punishment, which consists not of death or torture but of being severed from G-d and the Hebrews. The prime example of this is the one that fails to observe the commandments concerning leaven at Passover. That person is subject to this punishment. The punishment is that they have no connection to the community, to the Jewish people, or to G-d, and their future is ended. Their descendants will die out, they will have no connections or community, and no family. It is not that they will simply die which might be more merciful; they will be alone and lonely in a way that no human being should ever be.

Every year leading up to Passover I re-read this description, and I think about what a blessing my family, friends and community are, and how much these define who I am. Without these connections, I would feel adrift. If I had no community at all, I would be lost, alive, but without any meaning or purpose; my life would feel empty. I don't think I would know what to do, or care about doing it.

Rabbi's Message (cont'd)

When I think of this I can't understand why anyone would cut themselves off from their community, or choose not to be part of it. Worse than the old saying "cut off your nose to spite your face" - it is closer to "kill your soul to punish someone else who isn't even aware of it". It is among the saddest sights I know or can imagine. You may not believe the religious basis of this idea, but you have to see that conceptually it applies to all because it addresses basic human needs and behaviors. All I can do in this regard when I see people in this category is to feel deeply saddened that these people have made this choice, which harms themselves and those around them, and pray for them to find wholeness.

Chag HaAviv Sameach [happy Spring holiday],
Rabbi Joe Blair

Torah is Fun from Heidi Lasser

A Stiff Necked Story

By the time you read this, I would have attempted to leyn Torah for the first time in my life. Part of me is hoping we do not have a Minyan the night I am scheduled, so that I can delay this indefinitely.

Most of the words in the reading are unfamiliar to me and I came close to crafting a plea via email to be released from this honor. Before doing so, I decided I would practice a few more times and focus on the meaning of the passage. I prayed that combing through an interlinear translation would generate some self-confidence.

This coincided with an acute bout of back pain. Having been discharged from physical therapy following foot surgery, I had started back on my gym routine and overdid it. I ignored virtually every piece of advice I was given and convinced myself that a youthful mind would translate to a forgiving body. I therefore, once again, found myself cooped up more than I preferred.

My eyes landed on the word Bosh/Beshash (Exodus 32:1; *the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down the mountain*). The word can refer to becoming anxious. And in some contexts the word refers to being ashamed. I interpreted this as a description of my emotions regarding the Torah reading. The delay in my grasp of the material had generated anxiety and fear that I would perform poorly in front of the congregation. The Israelites, with Aaron as a co-conspirator, formed the Golden Calf as a means of coping with uncomfortable feelings and a loss of trust. Although I didn't fashion a statue, my memories of being called "Dummy!" and similar terms of endearments, rose to the surface. It almost led me to give up on myself.

As I read further into the Parsha, G-d's wrath is tempered by Moses. Giving up by destroying the people is not a solution because these are the very same ones who are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. "Remember...how you swore to them I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars in heaven" (Ex 32:13).

There is so much more to the people than this misadventure, and more to me than my inability to grasp cantillation in a few weeks.

If G-d can forgive the Israelites for creating an idol, and be willing to acknowledge the precious relationship the Eternal has with the people, could I not forgive myself for allowing flash backs to undermine my potential.

I became curious about the term "stiff necked people (qoshe oreph)" because I wanted to see if there was a connection between the display of anxiety and fear on one hand, and having a covenant with G-d on the other hand. The word "qoshe" refers to stubbornness, but also to being oppressed. In one translation I saw that the word can indicate sorrow. Yes, I was hurt by the verbal and emotional abuse I



Heidi's Torah for Fun (cont'd)

experienced, and learned how to be gentle with myself over the past two decades. How many others are walking around with similar pain, and remain tightly bound by memories? And, do they not behave destructively and seek immediate gratification to assuage the backward pull of negative experiences? "Oreph" does refer to the neck in most translations, particularly the nape. Right before I concluded that there is little more to discuss, I saw that the word can refer to the back, as in Joshua's prayer (7:8) "Oh Lord what shall I say when Israel turns their backs before their enemies". For me the answer will emerge, even if I must remain tethered to a heating pad for awhile to figure it out. My prayer is that I maintain a sense of trust in myself, the people in my surroundings and in G-d, in order to fulfill my personal covenant. And may it be so for you.

Outreach

Our Community Awareness Shabbat with outreach to the hearing impaired as part of Jewish Disabilities Awareness month was a resounding success! Huge thanks go to Heidi Lasser who not only chaired the event but worked behind the scenes arranging the sign language interpreters for the deaf community and coordinating every detail. Thanks also to Debbie who suggested including sign language and to Linda and Marsha for coordinating the delicious oneg. An enjoyable evening was had by all.

You can contribute to Temple House of Israel in many ways:

1. We have met the challenge from an anonymous benefactor for our Torah's repair estimate. Additional funds will be needed to actually do the restoration. Contribute to our **Torah Restoration**, by making out your check to THOI and writing TRC OR "Torah Restoration" on the bottom.

2. THOI is registered at **amazonsmile.com**. Any time you shop at Amazon simply go to smile.amazon.com from the web browser on your computer or mobile device and a portion will be donated to THOI. You may also want to add a bookmark to smile.amazon.com to make it even easier.
3. **Honoring someone or something?** Birthday, anniversary, special event? For only \$25 you can have a flock of flamingos delivered anywhere in the vicinity.

4. Did you know that **THOI is on Facebook**? Our presence on social media will potentially reach more Jews and non-Jews alike and will perhaps generate new members. Ellen W has agreed to keep our site updated and provide timely information of our activities. **Please "like" and "follow" the THOI Facebook** page to take advantage of this important social media tool.

Many ways to benefit THOI

March Donations

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

For the general fund Asher and Laura Jean Brand
..... Shirley Brand
For the building fund Jim Osborne
..... Jan Kaufman and Art Goldsmith

Extra Activities of Interest

On **March 15**, the **Wayne Theater** is screening “**Big Sonia**”, a film by Leah Warshawski. The film explores what it means to be a survivor and how this affects families and generations. Will you let your trauma define you? Or will your past make you stronger? The show starts at 7:00 pm and is pay what you will.

On **March 16**, the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center in Charlottesville will be screening and discussing of “**I’m Not a Racist...Am I?**”, a 90-minute film about 12 NYC teenagers talking about race over a year’s time.

As part of the Virginia Festival of the Book, there will be a reading and questions with Nathan Englander, author of the short story collection ***What we Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank***. This will take place at the **Jefferson-Madison Northside Regional Library, 705 Rio Road West in Charlottesville on March 22, 6:00—7:30.**

March Yahrzeits

Louis Cohen	Louis Cohen, Jr.	Rose Freiburger
Manny Gutnick	Irving Janus	Irving Kamerman
Joseph Kamerman	Leah Kamerman	Annie Klotz
Abraham Kreitzer	Abraham Levin	Adrian Neuman
Bertram Peretz	Harry Rasking	Moses Rosenthal
Rebecca Rosenthal	Regina Ruttenberg	Ralph Seltzer
Dorothy Ward	Albert Shultz	Sophie Strauss
Irving Waxman	C. Herman Weinberg	Samuel Zeldin
