

THE BEAUTY OF SHABBAT IN OUR LIVES

RABBI DAVID B. THOMAS
secretary@bethelsudbury.org

On Friday evening, October 21, the sanctuary was full as people joined Lorel and me in welcoming Shabbat with a new Kabbalat Shabbat format for Beth El. Over 100 stayed for a tasty catered meal. We sang, we prayed, we celebrated and we reflected on the meaning of Shabbat in our lives and in the life of our community. I was delighted so many people accepted our invitation to think creatively about how to enhance our lives and strengthen our communal observance. Together, we tasted the sweetness and the joy of Shabbat.

That Friday night was the beginning of something big for us at Beth El. It was the culmination of months of dialogue with members of the congregation about our spiritual practices, both personal and communal.

My participation in the process was, of course, informed by my own experience of Shabbat. On a typical week, by the time Friday rolls around, I'm tired. My week, as always, is filled with appointments, meetings and classes. Every week is a full week. Honestly, my life sometimes reads like a chapter from James Joyce's *Ulysses* — one, long, run-on sentence with

absolutely no punctuation.

That is, until Shabbat comes in all her glory and quietly whispers; "Hush." Shabbat invites me to stop, dampen the noise and put the week — and my life — into perspective. Shabbat punctuates my existence — not with a full stop — but with a semicolon. It gives me a breather to pause and reflect.

At 6:30, Marcy kindles the lights, drawing the warm glow of flickering flame — once, twice, three times to her face. We close our eyes and sing. We hold our children close and whisper words of blessing. Usually, by the time I sip the sweet grape juice of kiddush, the tension has melted away and I feel the peaceful presence of *Shabbat*.

I THINK WE NEED SHABBAT MORE THAN WE ARE READY TO ADMIT.

The thing I love most about Shabbat is that I have no control over it. I see it as the most precious gift. When it comes to Shabbat, I don't have to plan it, program it, implement it, guide or direct it. Shabbat has a life of its own. It exists beyond and apart from me. I take great comfort in knowing that Shabbat doesn't actually need me at all. Shabbat will come at sundown on Friday night and depart with the appearance of three stars on

Saturday, and there's absolutely nothing I can do about it. Except to recognize it, affirm it and make myself present for it.

So I am not worried about Shabbat — Shabbat can take care of herself. I am worried about us because I think we need Shabbat more than we are ready to admit. As individuals, our sanity depends on Shabbat rest. Furthermore, our survival as a community depends on Shabbat as well.

VITAL RESPITE

What is it about Shabbat that I can't live without? It is not just the rest and serenity I need. Michael Kogan reminds me that "God calls the Sabbath a sign between me and the children of Israel forever." If so, when I observe Shabbat I do not simply meet a personal need or check off another mitzvah fulfilled. When I observe Shabbat, I see myself as one of an eternal people called at Sinai to witness God's presence in the world. All Israel is one covenanted people and Shabbat is the sign that connects us with one another and with God. There is something essentially communal about Shabbat. Although Shabbat has the power to strengthen relationships within our families, as a sign of the covenant it serves to deepen our connection to community.

What is our communal experience of Shabbat here at Beth El? By and

large it is pretty wonderful. We have a committed core of regulars who celebrate Shabbat with joy every Saturday morning throughout the year.

On Shabbat morning, the parking lot is full as, on average, sixty people participate in Torah study in four different Hevrot. Some go home to enjoy the day with family; others stay for services to *daven*, celebrate a Bat Mitzvah, rejoice with a wedding couple, read and hear Torah. Shabbat morning is a time of connection and celebration through learning, dance and song. Oh yes. And there's food. Kid-dush at Beth El, whether potluck or catered is *hamish*, warm and inviting. When it comes to living Shabbat as a community, Saturday morning is a great Beth El success.

For many months I have longed for a way to experience the same sense of vibrancy and life when we welcome Shabbat on Friday nights. Over the years, as more people have chosen to make Shabbat morning their time to gather with our community, Friday night has waited patiently for our attention.

GREETING AND WELCOME

After many months of consideration in dialogue with members, lay leaders and with Lorel, I am delighted that we have figured out a way to greet and welcome Shabbat in celebration as one community. Together we are creating a Kabbalat Shabbat experience that welcomes Shabbat with a communal practice that feels vital and meaningful. We aim to consistently draw more participants and we are actively promoting rest, restoration and a deep sense of connection with family and community.

Imagine how you might make Friday nights at Beth El a part of your life. You might leave work when you can, and arrive when you can. You will be welcomed even if you come in the middle or show up just in time for dinner.

In my ideal vision, there would be hors d'oeuvres in the foyer for those who get here before 6:00. As you stroll into the sanctuary, you'll be greeted by a member who smiles as she hands you a prayer book. The sanctuary is calm. You notice music playing softly as you find a place at the table. You glance around in anticipation as you look for your friends. After a welcoming *niggun*, we light candles and sing the blessings and prepare to greet Shabbat. Seven psalms sung in glorious harmony mark the days of the week that have past. With each song, you let go of the cares and concerns of that day.

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IN TIME FOR DINNER.

I see children and parents, students and elders uplifted by the mood we create together. After *Lecha Dodi*, children may be invited to participate in their own Shabbat experience across the hall. For adults, the *T'fillah* affords the opportunity for personal prayer or reflection.

A brief *d'var* Torah keeps us in rhythm with the cycle of readings. Kiddush marks the transition to dinner, with some choosing to return home with family and friends. Others will enjoy a Shabbat meal in the Temple with the community. Either way, we

relax and schmooze, lingering over dessert and coffee with people we care about. Some nights there might be a talk. On others someone could organize singing or Israeli dancing. The teens will gather for their own dinners and programs after joining us for services.

I am excited by our vision for these plans. All you have to do is to come and be with us on Friday nights. Together we can build on our strengths as a community and bring even more life and joy to Shabbat eve. Every week is a new opportunity to bid farewell to the week that has passed, to welcome Shabbat in joyous celebration, and to gather with family and friends to reconnect with one another and with God. Whether you welcome Shabbat at home or with us in the sanctuary, I hope you will regularly experience the sweetness and the joy of Shabbat eve.



PRAYER

CANTOR LOREL ZAR-KESSLER
cantor@bethelsudbury.org

I think about Beth El a lot. Some would say, too much. But, I've never felt my work ended when I crossed over 128 to the "other side" at night. The heart is always guiding me, the thoughts are always pushing me toward what is... and what might be with this community of ours.

So, I worry – about membership, about my teaching, about Shir El's future, and very very often about Shabbat and our prayer life at Beth El: Who's coming to services? Who's not? Why not? What is the number that makes enough people to create

community on Friday night? On Shabbat morning? Who believes in prayer, anyway? Who believes in God?

The list goes on, and the churning can become dispiriting — to me, personally, and to all of you, through my constant questioning.

So, *L'chora's* resurgence is giving me a lovely gift. I decided to stop asking myself so many questions and to start asking you. I found three congregants who were willing to sit down for a few minutes and talk to me about their personal prayer life and the communal experience of prayer and worship as we live it at Beth El. Open-ended questions with wonderful, open-hearted responses.

So, please, read on. Enjoy the thoughts and feelings of your fellow Beth-Elers. And please, please, feel free to continue the conversation. I'd love the opportunity to talk with each and every one of you. Just asking and receiving such important teachings in return has soothed my path tremendously. And we'll talk again!

What is your own personal prayer experience? How is prayer a part of your own life?

For me, I don't see myself as an "observant" Jew and really don't find myself praying too often. Prayer gives me some peaceful feelings, but I don't really believe everything I say.

Even as I say that, though, I think that down deep, I am a believer. I live my life with God inside me; it's all part of who I am. Prayer doesn't have to be something I've learned and repeat. It can be deeds in my life that connect me — to my Judaism, to my mother, to the search for comfort. For example, some of the moments that feel holiest

to me come when I'm working at the medical program on Tuesday nights, working with others. I feel like, "Gee, I'm not that bad a Jew after all."

I'm not a believer in God, that is, a ruler on High, a king on a throne. The power of nature, the potential for real goodness in the world comes closer to my personal view of God. I remember praying as a kid, mostly out of fear, trying to keep something bad from happening. And even as an adult, those turbulent rides on airplanes bring out a "Please, God" in me, but then I think, who am I saying 'please' to? I don't pray for things, good or bad. I see prayer more as meditation, a centering, a searching for that purity of hope.

IF I DIDN'T HAVE THE BETH EL PRAYER EXPERIENCE, I WOULDNT PRAY AT ALL.

I have such an ambivalent relationship to prayer! I long to have an active prayer life that I feel comfortable with; one in which I feel connected to God, and to myself — because prayer helps me build that connection which builds upon itself and becomes a cycle of enhancing. Well, I have experienced what I so want to experience only a handful of times. Is it my fault? If I did it right, often enough, with the right kavanah and attention. . . I get so judgmental of myself. It's like I can't get out of my own way.

How do you feel about our communal prayer experiences at Beth El? What is the value of our services for you?

When I'm at services, especially Friday night, I love it. I love the break it gives me from the week. It's a more quiet, reflective service, and the singing

gives me a peaceful, comforting feeling. What keeps me from coming more often is tiredness. I'm not an evening person, so the earlier the better for me. If my husband cared more, I think we might come more, though neither of us pushes it. But, the service itself is fine — what do you need to change?

I have no personal drive to be part of a communal prayer experience. My daily, weekly routine is filled with working with and helping others, and I've truly had "enough" people by Friday. It's as if my well of intimacy is filled up already, and I just need to be done — to relax, to have time by myself. Still, services can give me a quiet, listening opportunity. When my wife thinks I'm sleeping, I often am really meditating or listening to the sounds around me.

Ah, I love coming to services! Most of my prayer life is in a group. I don't do a lot of praying on my own. The prayer is mine, but I need to be surrounded by everyone else in order to make something happen. I need the "holding" environment that allows the prayer to take me. The singing is a huge part of the experience for me — with people searching for their own experience within the unity of voices singing together.

What is Beth El's responsibility in providing prayer services for this community?

Essential: without prayer and services, we're not a synagogue. We start with services. From there we can build toward other things: we can add a school, a community center. . . but we are nothing without our services. You can call yourself something else, but not a synagogue.

I'd like to see more people want-

ing to come to services, but I think their lives just get in the way. Generations ago, people lived near their synagogues; it could more easily be the center of their lives. The priorities have changed and the intensity of personal lives removes us from the connection to communal Shabbat experiences. We can't even get the Oneg people to come!

I LIVE MY LIFE WITH GOD
INSIDE ME; IT'S ALL PART
OF WHO I AM.

I think it would be too radical an idea to cut out Friday night services, even though most people don't participate. A great thing about Beth El is that I've never felt judged for doing or not doing. The congregation offers many different opportunities, and Shabbat services are seen as one of many options. There should be no shame in choosing, or not choosing to attend.

If I didn't have the Beth El prayer experience, I wouldn't pray at all. I can't say I would try to find it in other communities—I might easily forget that it even matters to me.

Coming to services has become a habit to me. Because it's a habit, I am brought face to face, at least once a week, with the idea that I have decided that it is important to me to feel God's presence in my life and to have a relationship with God. Since we speak of prayer as the way we talk to God, then, if I don't practice that and build a competency, I'm missing out on an important way of having God in my life. I'd miss out on connecting with a part of myself. When I'm really conscious, present with the notion that this is about

being in relationship to God, I am much gentler with myself; I am called to my better self. I allow that to happen more when I am really present. I would miss the chance to keep trying.



THE YOM KIPPUR HALF-TIME SHOW

NINA PRICE

edudirect@bethelsudbury.org

As I lay on the hospital bed attached to a fetal monitor and blood pressure cuff, waiting to be officially admitted to the hospital to give birth, I said to the midwife, "I hope it's not a boy because that would mean a Yom Kippur bris." Fortunately, my midwife was Jewish and understood my concern about having a bris on Yom Kippur. Seven and a half hours after I was admitted to the hospital I did, in fact, give birth to a healthy baby boy, Eitan Huw Price, on the third of Tishrei 5765.

Ever since I announced my pregnancy and my expected due date of mid-September, people had commented on the possibility of a Yom Kippur bris. In fact, a Yom Kippur bris became an ongoing joke in my circle of family and friends since the possibility seemed pretty remote and comical. Trying to find a mohel on Yom Kippur was something I dreaded. Celebrating a bris on a solemn day like Yom Kippur would be challenging. Not to mention the logistical nightmare of facilitating such a celebration.

In spite of my concerns, having Eitan's bris on Yom Kippur was a wonderful experience that led me to further appreciate the power of

community. When I reflect upon Eitan's bris, the first image that comes to mind is the overwhelming sense of joy I experienced when Jeremy, Eitan, and I entered the sanctuary at Beth El to a chorus of singing and a panorama of familiar faces. The solemn intensity of the Day of Atonement seemed to shift to create a powerful atmosphere of celebration upon Eitan's entrance into the room. The energy that tends to build up through the Neilah service at the conclusion of Yom Kippur arrived early this year as we welcomed Eitan into the covenant of the Jewish people. At that moment, I truly felt embraced by the community of Beth El as well as the friends and family who had come to celebrate Eitan's bris.

Another moving part of Eitan's bris was the way in which the Beth El community warmly welcomed my entire family, especially my great-grandmother, Lee Reichart. When we first brought Eitan into the sanctuary we passed him *l'dor va'dor*, from generation to generation, starting with my great-grandmother. When I mentioned that Lee was 101 years old, she stood up, and the entire congregation applauded her. The public celebration of my great-grandmother becoming a great-great-grandmother energized her and added one more story to the enormous compendium of her amazing life. Just a few months after Eitan's bris, Lee broke her hip and shortly thereafter passed away. During her time in the hospital my great-grandmother enthusiastically told her doctors and

nurses about her great-great-grandson and how she proudly stood at his bris.

Eitan's bris has become a story that can be shared by both my family and the Beth El community with fond recollection. Following Eitan's bris Sandy Sherizen commented on how much he liked the "half-time show" on Yom Kippur. Although I am not really a football fan, beyond rooting for the Patriots, I find Sandy's comparison of Eitan's bris to a half-time show particularly fitting. Besides giving football players a short rest, half-time shows highlight celebrities. On the day of Eitan's bris, the Beth El community made my great-grandmother feel like a celebrity. The joy on Lee's face is not only a moment she treasured, but it is a memory that my family and I now cherish in her absence.

JEREMY, EITAN, AND I
ENTERED THE SANCTUARY
AT BETH EL TO A CHORUS
OF SINGING AND A PANORAMA
OF FAMILIAR FACES.

I want to sincerely thank the entire Beth El community for your warmth and care. I feel privileged to work for and be a part of such a vibrant, embracing community. While Eitan may one day tire of hearing people say, "I remember your bris on Yom Kippur. It was a great half-time show," I never will. The joy of that day will stay etched in my mind and will continue to exemplify the strength of the Beth El community.



*Nina Price is Beth El's Director of
Congregational Learning.*

AN UPDATE FROM BETH EL'S STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

SHEILA GOLDBERG, LAURIE
MARGOLIES AND FERN
CHERTOK

*submitted by Jim Ball
balldiamant@comcast.net*

PHASE II NOW UNDERWAY

For the past year our congregation has been involved in a Strategic Planning initiative. The Strategic Planning Committee is a group of congregants from all segments of the Beth community. We are charged by the Board with confronting the important challenges we face as a congregation and developing a plan to make our spiritual home stronger, more welcoming to new and current members, and more financially secure.

During Phase I of the strategic planning process we conducted intensive information gathering. During this phase, we employed congregational meetings, "visioning" sessions, regular meetings with staff members and the Board, a survey of congregants, Focus Groups and individual interview sessions to probe the concerns, experiences and hopes of our community. Our aim was to gather as much information as possible about Beth El and to involve as many members of the community as possible.

Our committee has also investigated national trends in congregational life, assembled demographic information about Beth El and the region, and developed a Guiding Statement, Values and Overarching Goals, which we distributed to the congregation last spring. Following a preliminary report

to the Board, we received their approval to move forward with Phase II of the process, which we will explain below. We are also preparing a full report on Phase I, which we will distribute to the entire congregation in the near future. Our goal is to present a final plan to the Board for its approval early next year.

PHASE II: WORK GROUPS, TARGETED INSIGHTS, ACTION PLANS

To move the strategic planning process forward to its next stage, we have assembled four Work Groups based on the findings from Phase I. These work groups are built upon four domains that encompass the life and breadth of our congregation:

- How We Come Together: Community
- How we Study, Pray, And Act: Education, Ritual/Tefillah & Tikun Olam
- How We Do Business: Governance, Finance and Human Resources
- How We Reach In and Out: Communication, Marketing & Technology

Each work group is comprised of two members of the Strategic Planning Committee, co-facilitators who are currently involved (or have been involved) in the Work Group's topic area, staff representatives, congregants who are involved in or have an interest in these areas, and a teen representative.

Each work group will:

- 1) Articulate "targeted insights" for action, and two or three long-term goals consistent with the Guiding Statement, Values, Overarching goals, and the information gathered through-

out Phase I. 2) Develop a set of measurable, short-term objectives to achieve these goals; and 3) Determine the tactics necessary to achieve these objectives and the resources required.

We also understand that these Groups cannot work in isolation. The life of our congregation is a moving stream and the work of the Strategic Planning Committee needs to be incorporated into the ongoing planning and goals of Beth El's existing committees. Toward this end, we plan a major session where Work groups share their goals and objectives, consider where they may connect and, where necessary, combine efforts. We hope to have this process completed by late December or early January, at which point we will begin the final phase and make recommendations to the Board and the congregation.

OUR GOAL IS TO PRESENT
A FINAL PLAN TO THE
BOARD FOR ITS APPROVAL
EARLY NEXT YEAR.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the hard work and great insights of the many people who have contributed to this work. We have striven, at each step of the Strategic Planning process, to involve as many members of the congregation as possible, to invite the full spectrum of opinions, and to make sure that what we do receives the input and blessings of the staff and the Board. This process has truly been one where we have been guided by you, the Beth El community. Our ultimate aim is to make recommendations, not make policy ourselves — and to help create a unified vision for the future of our beloved

congregation. Thank you all for your help, encouragement and involvement in this process. Together we are helping to create *k'hilah k'doshah*, a sacred community.



The Strategic Planning Committee is comprised of Laurie Margolies, Fern Chertok and Sheila Goldberg, co-chairs: Jim Ball, Michael Daitzman, Barry David, Elsie Navisky, Jan Rybeck, Beth Schine, Paul Schrager, Deb Schwartz, Sandy Sherizen, and Daniel Block, High School Representative.

CHANGING BETH EL'S BY-LAWS

LARRY SUSSKIND
susskind@mit.edu

Every community needs to formalize the rules by which it intends to govern itself. This allows members, particularly new members, to understand their responsibilities and to hold each other accountable. It also avoids the need to improvise new ways of handling decisions every time tough choices have to be made. Finally, it ensures smooth transitions in leadership by guaranteeing continuity in governance. Beth El's by-laws describe the kind of community we aspire to be.

They also impose a series of constraints on us. Unfortunately, for many in the congregation, our current by-laws seem outmoded. They are inconsistent with the way we actually like to govern ourselves. They imply a level of formality (more appropriate to the public sector than to a community-of-faith) that is inconsistent with the informal style we prefer. They assume

an operating structure more appropriate to a very small congregation rather than to the medium-sized congregation we have become. Now is the time to revise the by-laws and bring them into line with the kind of community we want to be.

Beginning last spring, the By-laws Committee started interviewing members of the Congregation and talking to those who have held (and currently hold) leadership positions. We have looked at our current by-laws in light of five concerns: involvement, responsiveness, credibility, institutional capacity, and efficiency. We believe that there are four major changes that need to be made.

We are initiating a congregation-wide conversation on the revisions we suggest. Over the next few months we will circulate a draft proposal that includes a rather sweeping set of changes. Based on the reactions we get, we will circulate a final version of our suggested by-law changes in time for a vote at the annual meeting.

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION

The current by-laws basically structure the annual meeting as if it were a Massachusetts town meeting — with all members invited to vote on every major policy question, including every line item in the budget and every major hiring decision. They imagine the Beth El Board of Directors as the Selectmen and the Congregation as the voters who have to keep them in line.

Not surprisingly, they tend to produce the same conflicts that town meetings face; namely, factions square off repeatedly on the same themes while a few individuals have a dispro-

portionate say because they know how to express their ideas in a manner that can win over the crowd. Whoever turns up at the once-a-year meeting gets to vote, whether they have thought hard about the questions up for consideration or not. The majority rule.

This does not take account of the enormous amount of work that the Board (and particularly the officers) put in each year trying to understand the pros and cons of various ways of proceeding. It creates a setting in which the loudest complainers dominate the discussion (and often trivialize what has been accomplished). It does nothing to build trust or encourage members to share responsibility for the well-being of the community.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors includes the officers and others with specific portfolios or administrative responsibilities. There is no way to guarantee, however, that the concerns or interests of all the different categories of members (i.e. people with children in the school, couples with pre-school children, singles, retirees, those with strong commitments to social action, etc.) are represented on the Board. Board members are required to put in a great deal of time.

They are often disappointed to find that the annual meeting may question or even countermand recommendations that they have spent months developing (and on which they have finally reached an informal agreement). Often, a committee will find that it has been working at cross-purposes to another. It is hard to get members of the Congregation to join the Board because they see how often Board decisions are overturned.

It is hard to justify putting in so much time serving on the Board when the Congregation doesn't seem to trust the Board to act in the Congregation's best interests.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Many members of the Congregation believe that "the same small group" of congregants (i.e. the long-time members) is in control of everything. Long-time members, on the other hand, who have graciously accepted repeated assignments, wonder why others won't do their "fair share." The officers find it difficult to get new members to run for office. The Board has made a commitment to leadership development, but it seems as if structural issues often get in the way. Even in the face of these difficulties, more than 100 members at Beth El (representing perhaps 20% or more of member households) serve on committees every year.

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They put in a great deal of time only to discover that the annual meeting is not supportive of what they propose. They wish they could have more say over larger policy questions (beyond just the scope of their committee assignment), but they don't want to put in even more time serving on the Board because the Board doesn't seem to have any more authority than the Committees. It is from these active Committee members, that it makes the

most sense to find new leaders in the Congregation. Yet, the task of tapping such people is daunting. This is complicated by the fact that it is necessary to serve on the Board for several terms to have a real impact.

The first year, new members learn how things work. In the second year, they pick an issue and try to push it forward. Then, their term is over, leaving no champion to ensure effective implementation (if something was enacted) or no one to keep the idea alive if whatever was proposed was rejected.

ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF

In this case I refer to the Rabbi, the Cantor, the director of education, and others. For many years, there was a distinctly adversarial relationship that characterized certain interactions between the professional staff and the Congregation. This emerged most sharply at moments when contract issues (i.e. salaries, schedules, benefits, and performance evaluations) had to be considered, but it spilled over from time to time into battles over everyday decision-making about aspects of temple operation or policy. Our annual meetings, on occasion, have been used to provide a platform for individual members with personal complaints to attack some aspect of the performance of the professional staff.

Even the Board of Directors, at times, has been unclear about the nature of its partnership with the professional staff. Should it treat them as employees? Or, as a community-of-faith, should we aspire to a different model of partnership?

On all four of these issues, we have specific recommendations for change. Before spelling these out on a line-by-line basis, we want to engage everyone in a discussion of the general ideas behind our recommendations.

ANNUAL MEETING

With regard to the annual meeting, we want to make a major shift. We think that the annual meeting (which we think should be held later in the spring) should be regarded as an occasion for the Board to report to the membership on what has happened during the preceding year and for the Congregation to respond to on-going concerns that the Board wants to raise. More importantly, we think the annual meeting should be used as a time to celebrate the Congregation's accomplishments and to determine the policy questions to which the Board should give priority in the year ahead. As such, it should be run by the officers (without a Parliamentarian). It might even take the form of a day-long series of celebratory events that brings everyone to the temple.

While the membership would have a chance to vote (up or down) on the proposed dues for the coming year, the details of the budget would be decided ahead of time by an expanded Board of Directors (see below). If members are concerned with the job the Board is doing, they would have an opportunity to vote for new officers, run for office themselves, or volunteer to work on one of the relevant committees. We should not use discussion of the annual budget as either a proxy for reviewing the performance of the professional staff or as an occasion for individuals to raise personal concerns.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We suggest increasing the size of the Board of Directors to 25 to ensure adequate representation of all segments of the membership. At least five new members should be added, specifically to represent parents with pre-school children, parents with children in the elementary school, parents with junior high/high school age children, single or married adults without children, and retirees. The terms that Board members serve should be staggered so that there is always a third of the Board with at least two years experience. We also think that a slightly expanded Executive Committee (with ten members, at least two of whom should be at-large members and not Vice Presidents) should be appointed every year so that the increased size of the Board does not get in the way of operating efficiently, especially in an emergency. We do not think the Executive Committee should be a decision-making group, rather it should vet all issues and help to focus the conversation at full Board meetings. In our view, the Finance Committee should prepare the budget while the Executive Committee should make final budget decisions. We also think it makes sense to require a two-thirds vote of the full Board to enact an annual budget.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

While we think the two proposals above will make it much easier to convince members to serve in leadership positions, we also propose to create a Committee of Committees or an Advisory Forum — perhaps convened by the Strategic Planning Committee — that meets twice a year (once in the beginning of the fall to review imple-

mentation of the priorities presented and discussed at the previous annual meeting and once in the spring — before the next annual meeting — to help set the agenda for that meeting).

This would involve inviting everyone serving on any one of the twenty-one standing Committees to come to two afternoon brainstorming discussions. It would provide a way for those most active in the affairs of the Congregation to participate in setting the policy agenda for the Board and in reviewing the work of the Board and all the Committees. The fact is, this would channel the involvement of all the most active members of the Congregation in a constructive way (and make it easier to adjust to the change we are proposing in the role of the annual meeting).

PROFESSIONAL STAFF

We think that the professional staff ought to be invited to sit with the Board of Directors in a much more explicit partnership. At present, the Rabbi is invited to meet with the Executive Committee. This involvement (and perhaps a similar invitation to the Cantor) should be mandated in the by-laws. There is a Human Resources Committee that will continue to review the staff's performance on an annual basis and handle questions about salaries and benefits.

It is inappropriate in our view for these details to be discussed at the annual meeting. (There are ways to report the budget decisions of the Board to the membership without listing the salaries of each individual.) While the full Congregation should continue to vote to hire (or re-hire) the Rabbi and the Cantor, we think these

decisions should be up or down votes that do not involve Congregational review of the details of proposed contracts (which should be prepared ahead of time by the Human Resources Committee and approved by a two-thirds vote of the Board).

The changes described above will require extensive revisions to the Beth El By-Laws. We think they need to be made and that they only make sense as a package. We'll make sure that the new language meets all the relevant legal requirements. Members of the By-Laws Committee will be fanning out over the next few months to meet with any and all groups that want to discuss the changes in our draft proposal. We are also preparing a web page on which we will post both the existing by-laws and the new language we have in mind. Perhaps we can generate an on-line dialogue. Efforts to overhaul the by-laws over the past decade have failed. Now is the time to make fundamental changes. There is a new spirit of trust and good will we can build on. Our goal is to generate a consensus that will pass easily at the next Annual Meeting.



Larry Susskind is Co-chair of the By-Laws Committee and a long-time member of the Congregation.

OPPOSITES ATTRACT — AND ENRICH

ROB WOODS

Woods_Robert@emc.com

About 30 years ago I shared a big, draughty loft a few blocks from the World Trade Center with a Japanese-American woman. We were roommates and naturally there were times when we upset each other. But when she did something that angered me, I simply bottled that emotion up and walked around angry for 3 days. Then I would mention “something” to her. She was furious that I had been so repressed and told me so immediately. “Just let it out!”, as I recall, were her exact wise words.

I've always been fascinated by discovering new ways to improve myself, to hone my skills in various endeavors. Recently, it has become clear to me that facing uncomfortable circumstances and interacting with irritating people are very effective ways to learn and evolve. Why is this insight important?

Something quite startling happens in order for a beautiful pearl to be created: the *irritant* of a grain of sand inside the oyster is its genesis. How does a pianist make gorgeous music? An exquisite mixture of the ebony and ivory keys — the black and white notes — must work together in concert. Successful marriages often work because of a creative *tension* and we often learn when provoked by our partner. My overarching question is: Why can people in larger groups, like religious sects or even nations, not *work* with their “opposites” to similar, worthwhile ends?

In the beginning, at least in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Adam and Eve serve as the original “old married couple.” God proclaims that it is not good for a man to live alone. My guess is that, left to his own mean devices, he would simply self-destruct. Instead, God provides Adam with an *ezer k'negdo* — translated from Hebrew, this means “a helper *opposite* him.”

Various Rabbis teach that your opposite can help you out. An obvious example for this original couple is in their ability to procreate. The essence of this teaching is that your opposite is your complement: you are not complete without him or her. In our highly chauvinist, polarized world this idea should have real validity: our opposite, even our enemy, can complement us and our (parochial) views. Who knows which unlikely person or group will open us up and make us whole?

HOW CAN WE REACH BEYOND OUR DIFFERENCES AND HATREDS TO SEE OUR COMMONALITY?

In my own family, being the fifth of six children, I was trained at any early age to defend myself and get a lot of attention by using a sharp wit, that is, sarcasm, jibes and “zingers.” But as soon as I hung out with friends after college not trained in this verbal abuse, they showed me how hostile and indirect sarcasm is, and suggested an opposite approach: just say what you feel directly (the anger, love, or disappointment, for example). The lesson for me happened when my old sense of what's cool or right was shaken up, when I saw a way to interact with

people outside of my usual, limited way of life. I was forced to “wake up,” as Buddhists say, because I had to become attuned to a different group’s sensibility.

It’s rare that I view a film as a morality tale, but the recent film, *Far From Heaven*, dramatically illustrates how opposites attract. At the same time, being naïve in this harsh world is not a wise stance: like the moth drawn to a flame, each party must be aware of the *dangers* of such an attraction. The scene is set in suburban America in the mid-1950s, when everything was supposed to be rosy: the happily married couple with kids, a new Chevrolet in every garage. But in this case, the husband leaves the wife because he has an awful secret (he’s gay). What’s more, she becomes attracted to the African-American gardener who is a widower and far more sympathetic and considerate than her husband. These two years for and learn so much from each other, which is very poignant, since the whole rest of the film reeks of the incredible conventionality and corrosive racism of the 1950s.

I believe parallels to our current international situation can be drawn here. We have our own brand of American conventional wisdom: for example, we see ourselves as the world’s protector, supreme provider of freedom and democracy, even when most Europeans see this aspect of us as arrogance. Deep racial and religious divides still exist worldwide, between Jews and Arabs, Moslems and Christians, to name only two instances. Because the Christians, Jews and Moslems share a common ancestor, Abraham, the enmity and bloodshed among these three religious

groups are particularly ironic and tragic. How can we reach beyond our differences and hatreds to see our commonality?

The “Melting Pot” (multi-cultural) social structure of America and Europe is here to stay: what strategies do we have to create a peaceful coexistence among so many diverse peoples? Specific to religious polarizations, we must get away from the “I’m right / You’re wrong” mentality of many religious groups. Religious practices and beliefs are highly *subjective* by definition: for instance, an Orthodox Jew would never eat a cheese burger.

Why? God gave them *kashrut* (dietary laws)... But they do not proclaim the rest of the world can’t fill up on Big Whoppers.

RABBIS TEACH THAT YOUR OPPOSITE CAN HELP YOU OUT.

A recent NPR radio program described the recent rise in how static people’s political views have become: the “blue” (Democratic) states see only blue in news stories, while the “red” (Republican) states spin them to see only red. This kind of “black and white” mentality prevents healthy dialog and arguments. This polarization stunts our growth and learning. I see a need to bring such opposing parties together to re-learn the art of *dialog* and *negotiation*.

Two techniques used in religious study may exemplify how a dialog might be possible amongst Christians, Moslems and Jews: the practice of *midrash* and “biblio-drama.” The first is a simple discussion based on personal interpretation (the usual

translation of the Hebrew, *midrash*, is interpretation). The second depends on your taking the part of a person within the religious text and speaking with that person’s voice.

An example of *midrash* can be based on the Christian teaching about how Jesus viewed Mary Magdalene, who was seen by many others as a sinner. Jesus saw her as worthy of redemption. My interpretation might follow the words of a Hasidic teacher (Yaakov Yosef): “Even when you see something ugly or unbecoming in another person, you should turn your heart to thinking that the Holy One *dwells there too*, since there is no place devoid of Holiness...” The ramifications of such a teaching are enormous. Knowing that “*that other person*” is not only acceptable, but part of the same sacred space you inhabit is critical to re-shaping our consciousness.

An example of biblio-drama would be a discussion of the Ishmael story among people of the three Abrahamic religions. The technology behind biblio-drama depends on each person providing their own unique perspective on a character within the story. You could choose Abraham, Hagar, or Ishmael, but God and an “Angel” also speak to Hagar — so a participant could take on the voice and perspective of that Angel or God (also known as Allah or Adonai, depending on the language and book used as reference). The group holds each viewpoint as valid. No perspective is written off as “wrong.” Obviously, negotiation and conflict resolution come into play. Most importantly, I’ve seen a great deal of learning take place for all participants.

In High School I went through the

somewhat jarring experience of living with a Moslem family in Tehran one summer, followed by having a Turkish student live with our family outside of Boston for a year. We had different eating habits, religious practices, and social conventions, but we worked and lived together with mutual respect. 37 years later, this “Terrible Turk” and I count each other as best of friends. How could I possibly imagine that whole groups of modern people could start tolerating their so-called enemies? We must begin at a grass-roots level — two people at a time, if necessary. Every (heterosexual) marriage reflects the co-existence of two radically different “operating systems”: the male and female. One telling joke about gender differences shows an ornate control panel with a huge variety of dials, knobs and sliders, labeled “Woman.” The other panel has one simple On/Off switch. The label is “Man.” To engage fully in life, to create life, we need one another — and this rich, profoundly different set of values and mores each group holds dear. In the 2004 movie, *Hotel Rwanda*, a Hutu man and Tutsi wife cling to each other and their children, as the surrounding countryside is littered with the corpses of their respective tribe members. The battle between the two tribes cost the country well over a million lives in 1994.

The world has social and political rifts, ones almost impossible to imagine healing. We have our work cut out for us: but there is every reason to carry on the work Eve began when showing up as Adam’s “helper opposite him.” I see no choice for a fuller, richer life than to engage with our opposites and to

strive for a wider and more peaceful co-existence.

Give examples of how I as husband or father learn from the “opposition” of my wife and kids. Conclude that from such learning techniques, larger and larger groups of people must learn to live and learn from their “opposites.”



Rob Woods is a member of the Chevra Kadisha and co-chair of the Leadership Development Committee.

PARENTAL BLESSING FOR YELENA E. TAYTSLIN (LEAH MIRIAM) —

MARCH 12, 2005

CATHRYN S. KANER

cat@cat-co.com

Our dear Lena, You bring us much joy every day — and especially today as you have blossomed into a Bat Mitzvah, a daughter of our commandments. May G-d always bless and protect you. Your Hebrew name, Leah Miriam, honors two courageous women of the Bible. Like Leah and Miriam, you had to overcome great obstacles, and became stronger because of them. May your indomitable spirit continue to help you triumph over the goblins, orcs, and trolls who may darken your path.

Your Torah portion spoke of many precious gemstones. We are here to tell you that you are our gem — more precious than we could ever imagined. You easily find joy in everyday life, and it shines through your sparkling eyes.

May you continue to be a valuable light to those around you — and to yourself.

We have no doubt that your life will have interesting convolutions. Your intelligence, your creativity, your great sense of humor, and your compassion for others will serve you well as you make your way in this world. We love the board games you create, your silly and original “on rambles the cow” cards, and the handwritten newspapers with helpful coupons you bestow upon us. May you continue to approach life with this love for creativity, reading, and writing — especially as you decide on a career.

Your Dad and grandparents immigrated to this country to find freedom and prosperity. May you remember where we came from, remember the struggles of our relatives and ancestors to find a better existence, and value the full life we have here. And, should hard times befall you, may you always remember our family motto: We’re rich because we have each other.

Like the yarns entwined in the priestly garments detailed in your Torah portion, may you continue to weave Judaism and strong values into your life.

Dear Lena, we love you to infinity and beyond.



Cathryn Kaner is CEO of a technology marketing company who works and lives in Framingham with her husband Ilya and their three beautiful children, Lena, Suzanna, & Alexander.

REMARKS FOR MY WARREN KOHN AWARD EVENT

LARRY LOWENTHAL

I am truly honored to receive the Warren Kohn Award from JCRC. I knew Warren Kohn and I deeply respected him as a sensitive, dignified, and effective community leader.

What a wonderful turnout! I am reminded of Woody Allen's classic observation: "90% of life is showing up." We Jewish professionals can attest to the truth of that remark.

I am touched by JCRC's selection of me this year, because it is a kind and gracious gesture which I will long remember. Thank you, Nancy Kaufman, Fay Grayjower, whom I have known for almost 30 years and Rick Mann, co-chairs of this event. Let's be honest: one of the most powerful of all human needs is the need to be appreciated. And I am no different from other human beings in that respect.

But as long as we are talking about appreciation, let me seize this opportunity to express my own appreciation to my AJC colleagues — Suzi Schuller, Associate Director, Terri Hootstein, Development Director, Andrea Taylor, Office Coordinator, Ariel Glassman, Development Assistant, and Carol Urwitz, our patient and indefatigable bookkeeper. These five women make my life incredibly easy. They handle the grinding details of daily organizational life which leaves me free to do all the fun work — meeting diplomats, making speeches, writing op eds, and driving forth the AJC agenda in the community.

I also wish to thank Jim Kaufman, our AJC Chapter president who spends almost as much time at this job as I do and all the other officers and Board members who give time, money and effort to support the work of our agency. Thank you to David Harris, our national Director, and to Jon Levine, Director of all AJC chapters, for making the trip from NY to be here today. Your presence confirms the ongoing support that every chapter receives from National AJC.

And thanks to my wife, Pauline, and my three children — Marc, Eve, and Jessica — and all my other family members, friends and colleagues who have chosen to come here today to see me flourish in my 15 minutes of fame. Let me share a few snapshots of my personal odyssey, moments of my life that might explain the shaping of my Jewish commitment, and the reasons why I am standing before you now.

ON THE ROAD

I was born in 1938. By the time I was 7 years old, one third of the Jewish people had been systematically murdered. I was aware of that reality through photos and stories and conversation in my family and the knowledge of the Holocaust has haunted me all my life.

In the spring of 1960, at the age of 22, I read Jack Kerouac's **On the Road**, a book that literally changed my life. That summer, I hitchhiked and bussed over 10,000 miles through America and Mexico. I traveled through the South for the first time, and was horrified by the sight of Jim Crow America.

Enraged and dangerously foolhardy, as only a 22-year-old can be, I defiantly drank at "colored" water fountains, used "colored" mens rooms, and sat in the back of busses with Black people. I was finally arrested on a Saturday night in New Orleans for walking with a Black woman on Canal Street. I was formally charged with vagrancy and loitering and sentenced to 10 days in prison.

I DEFIANTLY DRANK AT
"COLORED" WATER
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"COLORED" MEN'S' ROOMS,
AND SAT IN THE BACK OF
BUSSES.

In prison, I had direct contact with the *Wretched of the Earth* to use Frantz Fanon's term. I came to an existential understanding of the Jewish imperative to feel compassion toward the weak and powerless, the rejected, the unwanted, the locked in and the locked out, the "bottom dogs" of society, the poor and disenfranchised. In that teeming, rigidly segregated New Orleans prison, where my life was threatened by angry guards who resented a New York Jew intruding into their racist culture, I witnessed a world that contradicted everything I had ever learned about being Jewish: I witnessed a world without mercy.

When I was finally released, I remember two young men, serving time for hitchhiking, pleading with me to write about what I had seen in prison, to tell the public what really went on inside those walls. I swore I would. I never did. I feel guilty about my broken promise even today. I rarely mention this episode, except to

my family and friends, but I know that those ten days powerfully shaped my consciousness as a Jew.

Three years later, in 1963, I joined a quarter of a million other Americans in the historic Civil Rights March on Washington. I had never heard the song “We Shall Overcome” before. I did not know the words. But, at the end of a hot, long and emotionally exhausting day, I heard the electrifying speech by Martin Luther King, and I knew that a my lifetime of anguish over racism in America had found the immortal words of hope.

In 1966, I decided to trace my ancestral roots.

PURSUING ANCESTORS

I drove my own car from Bremerhaven, Germany to Moscow, and then 2000 miles through the Soviet Union. On the way, I stopped at Auschwitz in Poland. I reluctantly entered the concentration camp museum, passed somberly by the glassed in exhibits of human artifacts—eyeglasses, children’s toys, artificial limbs, suitcases piled to the ceiling. Among hundreds of suitcases I saw one with my name on it—L.LOWENTHAL. My friends, that moment of recognition remains the most indelible memory of my life.

I stayed overnight in 12 Soviet cities—cities that had been ravaged by the Nazi onslaught during World War II—Smolensk, Minsk, Kursk, Oriel, Kharkhav, Leningrad, Rovno, Lvov. I managed to spend a morning in Zhitomer in the Ukraine, the town where my grandparents came from almost a century ago. I spoke to Jews in that town, so nervous they spoke in whispers when they pointed out the post office that used to be their syna-

gogue. I asked if I could contact their relatives in the United States. They said no, it would be better if I did not.

I left Zhitomer feeling depressed and impotent.

I traveled to Baby Yar, and stared at the ravine where 90,000 Jews were murdered in 4 days—the equivalent of the entire population of Newton, Mass. I asked the guide why there was no mention of the fact that 90% of the victims were Jews. He said in the Soviet Union “such ethnic distinctions were inappropriate.”

One year later, in 1967, the Six Day War made Zionists out of every Jew in the world. Along with every one else, I waited agonizingly for two weeks before the War, wondering if another Holocaust was to explode upon the Jewish people. In light of Israel’s stunning victory, we tend to forget that frightening prelude before the war when the entire Jewish population of Israel seemed potentially doomed.

Profoundly stirred by the War, I moved to Israel in 1970, taught at Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University, and experienced the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War huddled in a bomb shelter in Tel Aviv with my wife and two small children. I grieved over the deaths of two of my students and the widowing of three others. Yair, the best student in my Hemingway seminar, was incinerated in his tank in the Sinai Desert campaign. No trace of his body was ever found. In 1974, I was drafted into the Israel Army at the age of 36. I remember being on guard duty in Sharm el Sheik, all alone in the middle of the night, looking at a blood red moon and thinking—this is a long way from

Teaneck, New Jersey. But I knew why I was there, and I knew why Israel then—as now—stands at the center of my emotional life as a Jew.

RECLAMATION

For if the Holocaust is the nadir—the very depth of the Jewish historical experience—the recreation of the Jewish State of Israel is the acme, the peak, the resurrection of the Jewish people. Death and Resurrection—the most primal of all human motifs—is as applicable to the Jewish spiritual psyche as it is to the Christian.

So what does Jewish community work mean to me now, after all these formative experiences?

So much of my work is in intergroup relations, the forging of coalitions for the advancement of mutual interests, the promotion of dialogue, and the minimizing of intergroup tensions. As a small minority in America, Jews can not afford to stand alone.

Woody Allen has a funny comic bit that has relevance to this point. I went to NYU as an undergraduate, he tells his audience. But they kicked me out for cheating on my Metaphysics final. I looked into the soul of the boy sitting next to me.

But Woody’s joke is precisely the point of intergroup relations. If you can’t look into the soul of the African American, the Latino, the Christian, the Muslim, or the German seeking atonement for the past, then you should not enter the field of Jewish Communal Relations.

Let me share a secret that is known, at least implicitly, to every successful Jewish professional in this business. The words are those of the

poet Maya Angelou, but the relevance is mine.

“In the end, no one will remember what you said. And in the end, no one will remember what you did. But in the end, no one will ever forget how you made them feel.”

In summary, after almost thirty years in the field, I can say that being a Jewish professional means bearing our historic burden: in the words of Al Vorspan, to face the world and its pain head on; to engage in endless study and moral debate; to cherish human life and to pursue justice — whether for Rwandans, Sudanese, Bosnians, Kosavars, or Armenians — to enhance the life of the mind, and to be God’s partner in repairing this broken and incomplete world. And it is to remember, above all, that indifference to the problems that confront society is the unforgivable Jewish sin.

In conclusion, let me say that I am proud to be a Jewish Communal professional; I am proud to work for the American Jewish Committee; I am proud to be a friend and colleague of so many talented people at JCRC, CJP, HILLEL, ADL, and all the other Jewish agencies that have made Boston the envy of Jewish America, and I am proud, to say the least, of receiving the Warren B. Kohn Award at this wonderful event today. Thank you.



Lawrence D. Lowenthal is the Executive Director of the Greater Boston Chapter of the American Jewish Committee, received the Warren Kohn Award from the JCRC in June, 2005.

UNPREPARED FOR DAYS OF AWE

GAIL KAZIN

gailkazin@comcast.net

The Holidays were upon us and I was not really there... I was disengaged and disinterested. Other than a trip to Hurwitz Kosher Butcher to buy brisket and chicken for soup, I was literally unprepared. In fact that cooking was the only tangible delineation that the week to come was different. I drove to NY to visit my sister the weekend prior to Rosh Hashana, as her daughter was hospitalized and her ex husband was of no support. I came back, went through the motions of serving Erev Rosh Hashanah dinner and showed up for services.

No commitment, no preparation for these Days of Awe.

I remember immediately noticing that Lorel wasn’t smiling, realized what was going on and got pre-occupied by my concern for how she would feel. But if I closed my eyes the music filled the room and at some level I was present in the room. Perhaps I could engage if I just breathed.

Rabbi Thomas then challenged me to think about my theology... did I have one? Could I make any sense out of where G-d fits into my existence?

Do I understand the struggles that seem to beset so many people that I love?

How can I relate to my sons’ strong voice that counters my own need for religion?

So the week went on, and I thought a lot about how my own spiritual journey has connected me with this community.

I talked to a friend and we commiserated about how it really does “take a village” to raise a family and how we are each sure we ended up in Sudbury because Beth El would be our spiritual home even though we didn’t know it at the time.

Then the news of Marilyn Kessler’s death. And of my yoga teachers’ sister. By the time Kol Nidre arrived it had been a very long week. It was still raining.

I was in need of another dose of inspiration.

RABBI THOMAS THEN
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ONE?

David’s very personal telling of his dad’s illness, the way in which the loss of his dad’s former self had impacted his entire family spoke to me. I cried for him, and for myself, recalling the loss of both my parents many years ago. I hoped my own children would honor me some day as David was honoring his parents.

Yizkor was different yet powerful. It was hard to speak my parents’ names aloud. We were all in the sanctuary alone with our losses and yet supported by everyone. It was an important way to honor our loved ones.

When I could sing no more during Neilah, it was because my voice was cracking. The tears were real. The day was ending. These days of awe had meant something.

I was no longer disengaged; I was in fact reconnected spiritually and in touch with that part of myself. I was

breathing deeply. I was in that wonderful place of just being.

But the week was not over!

The celebration for Lorel was upon us. (I wondered whether a week after her mother-in-law's death, and while she was dealing with her "slight health difficulty" was this the right timing?)

It was an amazing Shabbat, to honor Lorel, to be amongst this community.

Rabbi Kushner's Torah study raised new questions for me. The more I thought about it, I realized how my own personal theology is to be in the moment; appreciating the here and now, reflecting on the beauty of the world we live in.

I took in the beauty of Shir El's *L'or'el*.

And listened closely to Lorel's words about learning how to receive!

Sukkot and Simchat Torah have now come and gone. I look out at the gorgeous colored leaves and I know that I journeyed through the past few weeks, taking it all in. And I have the new year ahead of me to learn more about how my personal theology helps to sustain me.



Gail Libowsky Kazin has been a Beth El member since 1987; she is a member of the Youth Committee, the Chevra Kadisha and volunteers at the Metro West Free Medical Program as a nurse practitioner.

ROSH HASHONAH PRAYER

ELIZABETH DAVID

EDavid1121@aol.com

Hineni G-d; here I am, as I approach my 70th birthday

Thank you for being there when the seed was planted that became me

Thank you for the blessings and challenges of my childhood that shaped Me

Thank you for Cynthia Richmond's sweet sixteen party where I met my Beloved

Barry 54 years ago

Thank you for my five precious children and their beloved life partners Who

So enrich my life

Thank you for my five precious grandchildren who bring me joy beyond Measure

Thank you for seven granddogs, two grandcats, and pretty bird

Thank you for my dear friends who love me no matter what

Thank you for this blessed community that I grew up in religiously and Spiritually

Now, I am very aware of the passage of time, oh G-d

So, hineni, what is next? What is next for the time I have in front of Me?

One thing I know for sure. I want to continue to fulfill the promise Of the

Seed planted so long ago

The seed that became me—that bloomed, flourishes still and will

Someday

Wither and die

So help me oh G-d to remember that living in your presence is enough

And all

Else will follow

L'shem shamayim; for the sake of heaven

Amen



Elizabeth David has been involved with Beth El for more than thirty-five years in various capacities and is currently a volunteer for the Free Medical Program.

BLESSINGS AND CURSES

CARL OFFNER

offner@cs.umb.edu

Blessings and Curses occur twice in the Torah: in Leviticus and in Deuteronomy. The form of these passages undoubtedly derives from ancient middle-eastern vassal treaties, but the fact that they occur twice in the Torah indicates that there were two sources at least, and that they seemed to be pretty significant even at the time the Torah was put in its final form, during the period of the prophets.

The curses are horrendous, and would have been horrendous in any age. Traditionally, therefore, these passages were read hurriedly in a low voice in the synagogue. And in fact, since no one wanted to read them at all, it was often the duty of the synagogue custodian to read them.

This, however, does not appear to be the way they were originally intended. Here is the way they are introduced in Deuteronomy:

The Levites shall then proclaim in a loud voice to all the men of Israel: Why “in a loud voice?” I don’t know. But a few years ago when I read that line and the first batch of curses that followed, it struck me that it sounded like stage directions for a reenactment of a speech at a town meeting.

Now all right, they didn’t have New England town meetings back then. But they had something. And Deuteronomy seems to have been written during a period of social unrest. What this unrest consisted of, I also don’t know — maybe no one does. But that never stopped the Rabbis

from coming up with a midrash, and it’s not going to stop me.

We can assume, based on what we read in the prophets, that there was a certain amount of corruption. Perhaps it was not uncommon for poor farmers to have their land legally stolen. Perhaps the sons of the poor were conscripted into the army, while the wealthy found ways out. Perhaps daughters of ordinary people were in danger of being raped by sons of the well connected, and there was no effective recourse.

THEY DIDN'T HAVE NEW
ENGLAND TOWN
MEETINGS BACK THEN.
BUT THEY HAD
SOMETHING.

One can imagine that this caused a lot of resentment and social unrest. Perhaps the important people of the time felt that something had to be done. So they decided that they would say that the problem was that the temple sacrifices were too widely dispersed and that they should henceforth all take place in Jerusalem, yeah — that would take care of things.

They called a meeting to announce this.

So here is the scene: at the front of the gathering, facing the people, were the influential and well connected: a representative of the King, the highest priests, some judges and wealthy landowners. One of them gave a long speech announcing their plan. It was a pretty boring speech, because it was intended to be boring. They wanted to cool people down. And you know, even though most people thought that

this was pretty unsatisfying, still most people are reticent to speak publicly, especially to contradict powerful and high-ranking figures. So there was an uncomfortable silence.

But then a person — most likely a man, but maybe a woman — most likely someone that would be referred to as a prophet — stood up and walked to the front of the gathering, faced the audience, and started to speak.

In a loud voice. He — or she — started out by referring to the Ten Commandments, things that no one could possibly disagree with:

“Cursed be the man who makes a sculptured or molten image, abhorred by the Lord, a craftsman’s handiwork, and sets it up in secret.

“Cursed be he who insults his father or mother.”

And all the people said: “*Amen.*”

The speaker moved on to some basic Torah; surely no one would disagree:

“Cursed be he who moves his neighbor’s landmark.

“Cursed be he who misdirects a blind person on his way.

“Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.”

And all the people said: “*Amen.*”

Then the speaker moved on to some powerful taboos. No disagreement here either:

“Cursed be he who lies with his father’s wife, for he has removed his father’s garment.

“Cursed be he who lies with any beast.

“Cursed be he who lies with his sister.

“Cursed be he who lies with his mother-in-law.”

And all the people said: “*Amen.*”

Then the speaker paused, and turned to face the wealthy and powerful at the front of the gathering, and continued, in a loud voice:

“Cursed be he who strikes down his neighbor in secret.”

And all the people said: “*Amen.*”

“Cursed be he who accepts a bribe in the case of the murder of an innocent person.”

And all the people said: “*Amen.*”

“Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Teaching and observe them.”

And all the people said: “*Amen.*” — and maybe that’s why this passage is prescribed to be read “in a loud voice.”



Carl Offner is a former public school teacher, and a software engineer who is active in social action projects at Beth El, the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee, and Brit Tzedek v'Shalom.

OUR RABBINICAL INTERN: RABBI RANDY KAFKA

ROSIE ROSENZWEIG

jewmomrose@aol.com

Randy has been in our family’s lives for at least two decades. However, it wasn’t until 1996 that she and her little boy presented my husband with her hand-bound book: “Bloom Where You Are Planted: A Spiritual Guide to Putting Down Roots” by Randy R Kafka, Ed.D.

In the inscription, she quoted our Rosenzweig family motto from Pirkei Avot 1:14: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”

The motto is in a painting Rabbi Kushner once did when he still wore blue jeans to shul; it’s on my husband’s business cards; it was in each child’s high school yearbook. Randy had spent the last few days with her son hand-binding this small gem.

From that moment on, I began to notice and absorb any comment Randy offered, especially when studying together. In the Preface she says the book came from her own experience “to feel rooted where they live” beginning with her “surviving small-town volunteer organizations but gradually [evolving] to include a broader vision of belonging.

Little did I realize then that Randy had set forth on her personal training ground to becoming a rabbi. She quoted the Jewish wisdom texts throughout and even sprinkled some understanding of the meditative process. As a long-time practitioner

myself, this last bent made me notice her even more.

In the book, she advises the reader to “avoid public recognition . . . [and to] Recognize the flow of ‘martyr’ thoughts as well,” — This from a young Jewish mother seeking to remake herself in her own eyes and in the new model of feminist Jewish Renewal.

When Randy quietly said she was attending rabbinical school, I realized that she had finally found her calling and a place where her spiritual search would prove useful to others. She can now handle Aramaic with ease and offers lovely interpretations of classical Jewish texts.

Now in her present incarnation as our intern and a third-year rabbinical student at Hebrew College Rabbinical School in Newton, she is also responsible for co-teaching the (extremely large) Siyyum class with Rabbi Thomas, leading a Torah study chevra for “beginners,” facilitating a monthly discussion group for Beth El members who are in the process of conversion to Judaism, delivering an occasional divrei Torah on Shabbat; if time permits she hopes to do some *Bet Midrash* teaching during Lorel’s sabbatical along with adult Ed offerings as time permits.

THERE IS A REAL NEED
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SPECIFICALLY JEWISH,
CONNECTION.

She would also like to help develop a Bikkur Cholim (visiting the ill) group. This will be a natural extension from her previous rabbinical internship at Metrowest Jewish Family Service — doing outreach to the

Jewish elderly in Metrowest — supervised by Malka Young a longtime member of Beth El. She put her heart and soul into this because she feels that “there is a real need for human, and specifically Jewish, connection for those elderly Jews living either alone, in assisted living, or in nursing care facilities in our area — so many precious, lonely souls, with no connection to any synagogue even though they live so close by.” She has also done chaplaincy training (CPE) at St. Vincent’s hospital in Worcester.

Her past incarnations include: Doctorate in Counseling Psychology, Harvard University 1989 (thesis on parental versus friends’ influences on teen drug use). There her thesis advisor, Perry London (z”l), was like a second father to her. He was also a wonderful role model of a life-long lover of Jewish learning. “After my graduation in 1989, my son Jacob was born,” she said. “During his childhood I worked in a quirky assortment of part-

time jobs — first as an academic (research and adjunct teaching at several colleges), then later as a magazine editor, then as a Learning-smith salesperson, and finally as director of the tiny Berlin Public Library (for six years). The library job turned out to be very ‘rabbinic. In a small town, the library is the social/gossip center, and people often spoke with me at the circulation desk about what was happening in their lives. I also had the experience of writing a grant proposal that won \$1 million from the state towards the building of a new library, which unfortunately the town voted down!

“The process of waking up to the rabbinic ‘calling’ took many years. As with other decisions in my life, this one was clear to my husband Alan and friends long before it was apparent to me! Even though my mother is still baffled, my childhood New Jersey rabbi, who is orthodox and was publicly opposed to women on the

bimah, is now a very dear friend and colleague and one of my biggest fans. I am happier than I have ever been in my life! And it’s not just the intensive studying — it’s also the deep, loving connections with colleagues and teachers, the challenging work of building holy community... (I am in the ‘pioneer’ class.)”

After hanging out at Larry’s Torah study group on Shabbat mornings about 20 years ago, she says it’s a treat to come back now and see so many familiar faces.



Rosie Rosenzweig is Resident Scholar in Women’s Studies Brandeis University, Author of A Jewish Mother in Shangri-la (Shambhala) and Founder of Mitbonenim, a Meditation society at Brandeis

TZEDEK V'HESED AND GIFTS THAT CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

JUDY GOLDBERG

judygbg@aol.com

The Tzedek V'Hesed Committee was founded to help Beth El members do what they're already doing. We know that Beth El members are generous with Tzedaka. We also know that congregants support a variety of charities and causes, often chosen for personal reasons—maybe volunteering at a hospice that cared for a terminally ill loved one, maybe donating to an animal shelter from which a beloved pet was adopted. The Tzedek V'Hesed Committee was designed to be a resource for congregants who want to mobilize Beth El members to join them in performing Tikun Olam. Here's an example:

Gifts That Can Change the World, the Tzedek V'Hesed project that Ann Klein and I have been directing for the past eight years, arose out of my desire to expand the practice of giving charity at holiday time rather than exchanging small gifts. I guess I've accumulated too many *tchatchkes*. . . So I created an "alternative gifts" catalog and order form for Tzedaka-friendly Beth El members. That Beth El children could meaningfully participate by designing artwork for donation cards was an added bonus.

Eight years later we have donated over \$23,000 to 33 different, mostly small organizations, many of which have been suggested by Beth El members.

Not only have significant funds been raised, but the important work of these organizations has been publicized both to congregants and to the recipients of the over 2,500 cards that have been mailed all over the world.

It's a little, simple, seasonal project. Not everyone at Beth El participates. Some people don't even know about it. My hope is that the continued success of this and other lay-led projects will inspire others to mobilize our generous community members to repair yet another small corner of the world.

Images of selected cards and names of the young Beth El artists can be found on the Website. This year cards will be available for ordering until the end of January.



Judy Goldberg has been a member of Beth El since 1985 and is co-chair of the Tzedek V'Hesed Committee.

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Kevin Fogarty, *Editor*
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kevinjfofarty@yahoo.com. Just
mention *Lichora* in the subject field.

IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|--|---|
| THE BEAUTY OF SHABBAT IN OUR LIVES PRAYER | RABBI DAVID THOMAS LOREL ZAR-KESSLER |
| AN UPDATE FROM BETH EL'S STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE | JIM BALL |
| CHANGING BETH EL'S BY-LAWS | LARRY SUSSKIND |
| OPPOSITES ATTRACT — AND ENRICH | ROB WOODS |
| PARENTAL BLESSING FOR YELENA E. TAYTSLIN | CATHRYN S. KANER |
| REMARKS FOR WARREN KOHN AWARD | LARRY LOWENTHAL |
| UNPREPARED FOR DAYS OF AWE | GAIL KAZIN |
| ROSH HASHONAH PRAYER | ELIZABETH DAVID |
| BLESSINGS AND CURSES | CARL OFFNER |
| OUR RABBINICAL INTERN | ROSIE ROSENZWEIG |
| GIFTS THAT CAN CHANGE THE WORLD | JUDY GOLDBERG |

LICHORA is the spiritual and literary publication of Congregation Beth El in Sudbury. It is a forum for members of Beth El to express themselves on topics closest to their hearts. Though we encourage pieces to be framed within a Jewish context, it is not a requirement. They should, however, be understandable to non-Jews. Given the page limits of our magazine, article length should be between 1,000 and 1,500 words.

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LICHORA לכאורה

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105 HUDSON ROAD
SUDBURY, MASSACHUSETTS 01776

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