

Jan. - Feb. 2015
Tevet Shvat Adar 5775

The Star

Newsletter of Temple Beth Torah
Wethersfield, CT
Vol. 18 No.3

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Message from Rabbi Seth Riemer

Last month we celebrated a *nes gado!* (big miracle) that, according to tradition, happened long ago in the land of Israel. (I'm referring, of course, to the Hanukkah story.) There's a related concept—that of the *nes katan* / little miracle. The idea is that God's grace works through all kinds of situations, large and small. We should not view the small miracles as trivial. One such *nes katan* is Temple Beth Torah.

Sometimes the miracle occurs on a vast scale and involves tremendous drama, amazing events, sudden interventions, decisive actions and world transforming outcomes. At other times—more often, in fact—the story of God's miracles is something that keeps happening quietly on a modest, even mundane scale, just as we read in the Jewish prayerbook's thanksgiving blessing recited three times daily: "We acknowledge you, declare your praise, and thank you for our lives entrusted to your hand, our souls placed in your care, for your miracles that greet us every day, and for your wonders and the good things that are with us every hour, morning, noon, and night" (quoted from the translation in the Reconstructionist prayerbook).

The prayer goes on to acknowledge that God's "kindness never stops." Our day-to-day

experience of God's gifts doesn't grab attention—isn't flashy like the Burning Bush, the parting of the Sea, or God's voice thundering from Mt. Sinai—but is just as important as those rare occasions when the divine presence breaks into our lives in a spectacular way. TBT is one of God's everyday, low-key miracles.

Like the Jewish people, TBT keeps happening despite the odds: its continued existence is in a certain sense amazing. Unlike other successful synagogues, it operates on a shoestring budget, does not have a full-time professional staff, has a very slender portfolio of programs and activities and is not affiliated with a denomination for validation and support. And yet for over half a century it has served a definite need in a particular niche of the larger Jewish community. Moreover, it is—in its own unpretentious and slightly quirky way—thriving.

A synagogue's religious school enrollment is typically the bellwether of its future and sign of its overall vitality. Our one-day-a-week Sunday school's numbers are never large, and they fluctuate from year to year, but, just when one might expect the school to fold for lack of students, it resurges.

The phenomenon is a little like that of the prank birthday candle that someone repeatedly tries to blow out.

It flickers and wavers and sputters but then comes flaming back with surprising stubbornness. One year, our numbers are down to just a handful of students, and then the next year the number is back up. Remarkably, that number has increased slightly even over the course of this school year!

At times I puzzle over this. What's the attraction—why do people send their children to TBT?

It's not really all so hard to figure out. Many—and I believe most—Jewish parents in this country have a simple goal for their children's Jewish education. They want their kids to have a basic exposure to Jewish values and Hebrew language, enough to have a bar/bat mitzvah service and feel proud of being Jewish. While

bigger, more ambitious synagogue religious schools claim to provide much more than this, the reality is that those professionally driven programs are in most cases trying to impose on people a set of unwanted expectations, and the disconnect between what the Jewish professional cadre tells Jewish families they need and what Jewish families know they want creates friction and hypocrisy.

TBT has, by contrast, the unmistakable (and very Jewish!) virtue—not just in its Sunday school, but in all aspects of its life—of practicing what it preaches, not patronizing its members, and genuinely respecting and honoring people on their own terms. In today's overbearing educational climate, that too is something of a miracle!

Message from Executive Committee

We would like to share with the Congregation our success this season in attracting some new members whose primary purpose for affiliation is our Jewish Education Program. Led by our Spiritual Leader, Rabbi Seth (Riemer) who teaches the children entering the fourth grade and older, looking to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and our newly-hired Jewish education instructor, Tricia Bonse, working with the younger students, the program this season has ten youngsters enrolled.

Our newest members seem to be seeking a Jewish education for their children, devoid of dogma, but with an appreciation for Jewish traditions and holiday participation. We listened to them, and have fashioned our Jewish Education program to cater to their needs.

Ms. Bonse has a background in performance arts and was known to Rabbi Seth both through his theater connections in the area and his Jewish Studies program. Vivacious, creative and fun to be around, Tricia is inspiring her young students to appreciate the spiritual foundation of the various Jewish holidays. In turn, her students look forward to Sunday sessions that are always lively and fun to participate in.

Today, we have ten students in our Sunday School program with a couple of more parents considering enrolling their children...a record number going back a dozen or so years. The difference: Rabbi Seth's leadership and our commitment to welcoming families of all walks of Jewish life (convert, mixed religious affiliations, or couples looking to ensure a credible Jewish education for their children).

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Checknoff

Nominations

Cecile Bronfin

Artist-in-Residence

Phil Lohman with Ralph Horowitz

TempleBethTorahWethersfield.org

We find that we can accommodate the needs of this disparate Jewish community and that appealing to this group seems to be our future. What we need from the Congregation at-large is an appreciation of our capability to serve this new community and to get the word out that we are the Congregation that can deliver the educational and spiritual program that so many are seeking but cannot find among our competitive congregations. We are an affordable alternative to the monolithic organizations in our area that have a huge overhead to support and need to charge their members accordingly. We, this Board, need your implicit support to help get the word out that we are the local Congregation that can serve the needs of a modern Jewish community. We are not Reform, Conservative or Orthodox. Rather, we are an Egalitarian Jewish institution dedicated to teaching our young the values we cherish and need to pass on to future generations.

Golden Book Donations

In Memory of

EZRA JOSEPH GUBBAY

By Cecile & Barry Bronfin

By Andie & Barry Goldberg

By Debra & Joseph Hammer

By Rhoda & Fred London

Temple Beth Torah Memorial Park

After many years as the chair of the TBT Memorial Park, Harold Nevins will be retiring from that position. Thank you, Harold, from all of us. Barry Goldberg has taken over this important role.

Burial plots are very reasonably priced and include perpetual care.

\$600 per plot for Temple Beth Torah members

\$900 per plot for non-members

Oneg Schedule

January 9 Helene Rosenblatt
 January 16 Kathi and Eliot Mag
 January 23 Susan and Jonathan Reuben
 January 30 Sallyanne and Barry Scott

February 6 Deb and Joe Hammer
 February 13 Gloria and Stan Zwirn
 February 20 Phil and Geraldene Lohman
 February 27 Fred and Rhoda London

March 6 Robert and Karen Klein
 March 13 Fred and Susan Cohan
 March 20 Ruth Brainin
 March 27 Heather and Daryl Latorra

April 3 First Seder, No Services
 April 10 Harriet and Leo Rosen
 April 17 Caren and Michael Rice
 April 24 Carol Gershenson

May 1 Elisha and Eric Rose
 May 8 Carrie and Rich Brody
 May 15 Kristy Notarangelo and Leonard Lev
 May 22 Tracey and Moshe Sondik
 May 29 Debbie Ehrlich

June 5 Rita and Harold Nevins
 June 12 Judy and Marty Gold
 June 19 Gary and Sara Evans
 June 26 Nancy Stillman

Shalom! This is the TBT Oneg Calendar. ***If you cannot participate on your "Host" date, please switch with someone else or find a substitute!*** As a Host, you will need kosher grape juice and a challah. You can also bring cake/brownies, fruit, soda, seltzer, cider, etc. or whatever else you feel like sharing.

Tablecloths are in the kitchen, upper cabinets about 3 down from the refrigerator. If you use a cloth one, just please take it home, wash it and bring it back the next time you come to TBT. In the lower cabinets to the left of the sink, you will find napkins, dessert plates, plastic cutlery and hot and cold drink cups. We should also have ample small wine/juice cups. Just before services are over, count heads and pour the juice. Keep in mind that we don't usually get huge crowds on a typical Friday night, so plan for about 15 people. Thanks for cleaning up when you are done!

Thank you to all of our Gift Card Shoppers

We just sold Stew Leonard gift cards and earned \$145! Since the beginning of our fiscal year, the Temple has received a total of \$448 from Stop and Shop, Big Y, Crown and Stew Leonard's. Cost to the card purchasers – **nothing**. The purchasers pay the face value and get the face value.

Thank you to: Deb and Aaron Jainchill, Kathi and Eliot Mag, Judy and Marty Gold, Helga Rome, Harriett and Leo Rosen, Rhoda and Fred London, the Reubens, Carol Gershenson, Deb and Joe Hammer.

School calendar and challah list

Jan.	11 Lev
	25 Evans
Feb.	1 Sondik
	8 Rose
	22 Brody
March 1	Rice – Purim Party
	8 Lev
	15 Evans
	22 Sondik
April	12 Rose
	19 Brody
	26 Rice
May	3 Lev
	10 Evans
	17 Sondik
	31 Rose
June	7 Brody
	14 Rice



Quiz Question

What letter on the dreidel is different for dreidels in Israel vs. dreidels everywhere else and why?

The first two Hebrew school students answering this question will get a small prize. I heard the Rabbi explaining this on December 21. Send your answer to ssreuben@snet.net

It is important that the children attend Shabbat services on Friday nights at 7:00 p.m. They will also enjoy the Tu B'Shvat Seder, and the Purim Megillah reading.

Tu B'Shvat Seder Tuesday, Feb. 3, 7 p.m.

Celebrate the Jewish New Year for Trees, Tu B'Shvat, meaning the Fifteenth of the month of Shvat. This year we will celebrate on Tuesday, February 3. Join us after your dinner with a fruit centered Seder.

The family-friendly Seder has readings, songs, red and white wine or grape juice. The readings describe the seasons of the year and the meaning of the four different fruit categories – fully edible, edible outer, edible inner, inedible. Please RSVP to Sallyanne (860-828-3377) and let her know what you are bringing!

Purim on Sunday, March 1

We'll have a megillah (scroll of Esther), costumes, a party and maybe even a shpiel (silly skit). Join us for a fun Purim celebration starting at 11:00 am. Who wants to work on the Shpiel? Who has ideas for games? We have had 'Learn the Torah while standing on one leg' contests, ring toss, bake some hamantaschen cookies and more.



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Any Actors out there?

Rabbi Seth is putting on a new play and looking for a male actor to play a small-time gangster in his 60s. If you are interested in auditioning or know someone who might be interested, e-mail at sethriemer@aol.com

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