



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

AUGUST 2015 / Av-ELUL 5775

Board

As we start the new year, please feel free to contact any of the board members or Rabbi Joe with your ideas and suggestions. Your input (and willingness to serve) is what keeps our community connected.

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President's Message

Welcome back to the start of a new congregational year.

There are several things to tell you in this message. First is a reminder about Amazon Smile. If you order things from the Amazon web site, you can contribute to the temple easily. Before you begin to shop at Amazon.com, go to the thoi.org web site and click on the Amazon Smile bar at the bottom of the first page of the site. Clicking the bar takes you to Amazon. Make your order as usual. Because you entered the website through the amazon smile portal on thoi.org, a small part of your order will go to THOI as a donation without your spending any extra time or money. Great idea from Amazon! You will receive an e-mail verifying the transaction afterwards.

Second, Patty Sutker has agreed to become our new temple treasurer, relieving Ellen Boden, who has had the job for about 8 years – a long, long time. Over the course of the next few months Patty will learn the system and move into the job. Thank you, Patty, for helping us out. Also, thanks so much to Ellen for her many years of service.

Our temple year will begin with our first service on August 28, followed by the welcome picnic on Sunday, August 30, at my house, 15 Brookwood Road, Staunton at 5 pm. More details will follow about the picnic. The oneg sign-up sheet will be available at both events.

The High Holiday services will look different this year. Rabbi Joe, Rabbi Sue and cantorial soloist Laura Mandeles will keep each service to a two-hour time frame and we will be using a new CCAR High Holiday prayerbook – the Mishkan HaNefesh.

Rosalie Waterman, temple president

From the Rabbi's Desk

Dear Temple House of Israel Congregants and Friends,

Continuing the saga of my recent study mission, I have picked out something this month from my time in Prague, and from my time in Israel. (The section on Prague was originally written to be included in the last Bulletin, but did not make it into the combined June-July edition.)

Remember, the trip was effectively in three segments: a New York component, a Prague/Czech Republic component, and an Israel component. The Israel component had both a Tsefat (Safed) and a Jerusalem focus. Each component had a different focus, a different feeling, and a different set of lessons.

I found Prague to be a beautiful city, almost fairy-tale like. It is quite old, dating back to well before the 1800s. It was not bombed or destroyed in the second world war, as so much of Europe was – both happily and sadly, it was simply absorbed without battles, and then it had no military targets to be hit during World War II, so it was spared much of the destruction that was visited on other locations in those years. Because it was not significantly damaged or changed by the war, many of the structures, monuments, and memorials of the Jewish community remained intact and relatively unscathed, so it was possible to visit and see these beautiful buildings and impressive cemeteries.

For example, the hotel in which I stayed in Prague was formerly the business office of an insurance company at which worked a clerk who did well and was respected in his fifteen years with the company, so they preserved his office as a sort of museum when he became famous. His name was Franz Kafka, and I had the room above his.

One moment that brought chills to me was standing in the tiny graveyard, known as the old Jewish cemetery, in what is now the center of Prague, in the Jewish ghetto of Josefov (named for Emperor Joseph II), outside one of the synagogues. We walked up steps to enter the cemetery, which was above the street level. We entered to find that there were only narrow paths winding among the gravestones, which were packed together, with literally no space, looking a little like the teeth lined up in rows, leaning this way and that, in the mouth of a shark.

It was explained to us that with the limited area available for burial, the custom had arisen to bury until the graveyard was full, placing a gravestone on each grave (much as we do here). When the graveyard was full, the community brought in earth and placed it on top of the existing graves to a depth of six feet or more, lifting the gravestones on top of the newly placed earth. Then, another person would be buried in that location, digging no deeper than six feet, and a second gravestone would be placed on that spot. The same thing happened multiple times. In this particular graveyard, it was known that this process had been followed at least five times, so that there were graves six deep – the result of burials reaching back a long time. And that explained the steps and the rising pathways – we were climbing up to the top of the hill that was created by this cemetery.

All of this hit home for me as I stopped to look at a larger than usual monument right next to the path. As in the other gravesites, there were five or six gravestones in this one spot, but this one was closest to the path, and was very noticeable. What I read on it was that this was the burial place of Rabbi Yehudah (Judah) Lowe (c. 1520-1609). I know of Rabbi Lowe as a famous Jewish philosopher, talmudist, scholar, teacher, and a mystic, but he is known best as the Maharal of Prague, the famous Rabbi who was reputed to have created the Golem. He and his wife were buried together at this spot. This was not only history, but Jewish history, the resting place of someone whose writings I had studied, and about whom I had learned, and I was deeply moved to be able to stand there, touch the monument, and place a stone on it. It was the intersection of the past (both his and mine), and the present, and I could feel Jewish history telescope and collapse into a single instant in my life.

I learned much more in Prague, but I am trying to be respectful of space limitations and the time of those reading this. I will only say that my time in Prague was brief – just a day and a half really, but it was amazingly eye opening and affected me deeply. I would certainly return to see more, and to learn more about what I did see.

The Israel segment of the study mission was, if anything, even more intense and packed than the period leading up to it. One of the trip participants described it as '16 days, three countries, six cities, and 11 cemeteries'.

More on that part of the trip on page 8 of this bulletin.

From the Rabbi's Desk (con't)

THINGS GONE BY and THINGS TO COME

It was good to see Laurie Berman, along with Rachael, Elana and Sara, and Tom Brody and Will, Tim and Lee Beasley even though the occasion was the Memorial Celebration of Janet Brody's life.

I fear that given how fast the summer has seemed to go, August is going to flash by. I will be welcoming the campers from the Emmanuel Episcopal Church program to THOI, traveling with the Shorty Youth Group for a day outing, going with the Shorty group and the Daled class of the Religious school to the Holocaust museum and Washington Monument, as well as continuing with Pastoral care, planning events, communication with congregants, and outreach to the larger community.

As we enter September, we jump right into the High Holy days. We enter our busiest period of the year beginning the evening of September the 13th with Erev Rosh HaShanah.

Religious services will be held on July 24th, August 28th before we reach the High Holidays.

TORAH

The Torah Parashiot for the coming weeks are Va'etchanan (Shabbat Nachamu), Eikev (Rosh Chodesh Elul), Re'eh, Shofetim, Ki Teitzei, Ki Tavo, Nitzavim, Rosh Hashanah, Vayeilech (Shabbat Shuvah), Yom Kippur, and Ha'azinu. As always, we overlook the final reading in Deuteronomy, Vezot Habrachah, featuring the death of Moses.

Rosh Chodesh Tamuz was on June 17th and 18th. Rosh Chodesh for Av was July 17th. Rosh Chodesh Elul is on August 15 and 16th. Rosh Chodesh Tishrei is September 14th.

We are in year 2 of the triennial cycle (the middle or second part of the cycle). That means we read the 'middle' section of the weekly Torah Parashah – usually what would be Aliyot 3 and 4 in a reading of the full Parashah.

Rabbi's Message

It is certainly hot enough to let us know that it is summer, and that is thought to be a time when things at the congregation slow down, but the reality is that now is when planning and preparations are underway. If you have anything about which you wish to speak with me or any requests for the coming year, please be in touch.

As we enter this cycle of review, repentance, and renewal, may we seek the best and highest of our self, and see it in others.

B'virkat Shalom,
Rabbi Joe Blair

Contacting the Rabbi

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 CALL if you have any urgent messages or in case of an emergency. 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.

Things of note

LOOK AT THE TEMPLE LIBRARY!

We've culled approximately 250 "ancient texts" (aka duplicates or outdated books) from our library to make room for new editions to our collection. The **NEW BOOKS** section is located on one shelf. Come peruse, check out and read novels, biography, history, humor, philosophy and religion, mysticism, the Holocaust and reference.

The 250 books we culled are now yours for the taking. Bookshelves in 2 locations (across from the bulletin board in the back hall and also near the side entrance door) are loaded with books which are looking for a new home. **Please take one or more!** Any books left on those shelves after September 30 will be given to the Staunton and/or Augusta County libraries for their book sales.

Thanks to Nadia Webb, Lynne Landsberg and others within our community for donating current books. Check them out! Read them!

The Women's Group

Our next meeting is on August 9th at 2:00.

We will be taking nominations for the positions of President, Secretary/ Treasurer. (Rosalie has said she would continue being secretary but she has been doing it for two years so....) Technically, my term as Madam President is up but I am willing to stay on through September, at which point I will become Madam President Emeritus. Anyone who is interested should contact me so I can give them an overview of the position. I prefer they email me at junetenth1935@gmail.com. We have never had a treasurer and there is very little the treasurer needs to do. In addition, we will discuss a self-defense class (Debbie). And Leah will give an update on the book discussion scheduled for October. We will also discuss what needs to be done for the High Holidays.

There will be a second opportunity to learn **Hebrew calligraphy** on Tuesday, August 25, 3-5 pm. **All are welcome to attend.** You DO NOT need any knowledge of Hebrew; you DO NOT need any knowledge of calligraphy. You'll learn a basic alphabet and go home with a hand-calligraphed bookmark with your Hebrew name (or anything else you want) on it. If you can hold a pen, you can do Hebrew calligraphy! All materials will be provided - just let Ruth know at [540-886-2252](tel:540-886-2252) or rchodrow@gmail.com if you're coming.

Women's Group 2015-16 Ongoing Fundraiser

We have started a fun fundraiser for this coming year - for a \$25 fee, 6 adult and 6 bright pink baby plastic flamingoes can be ordered to be stealthfully placed in the yard of a local friend, relative, neighbor, etc. along with your message telling them why they have been "flocked" (e.g. happy birthday or anniversary, to say thank you or Mazel Tov or just on account of because!!) These adorable flamingoes will visit for 24 hours and then be picked up by someone from the stealth flamingo flocking team. To order a flocking, please contact: Debbie Jacobs at: deb1130@hotmail.com or Beth Young at: bydesign1993@gmail.com

NEWS FROM THE PEWS

- ❖ Ellen Werther's son Jonathan recently earned his MBA from UCLA's Anderson School. It has been an exciting year for the Werther family.
- ❖ Mazal tov to Greg Ciszek who has decided to return to the classroom and work with the smiling faces of 6th grade students.
- ❖ Nancy Witt appreciates calls if you find some time to chat with her.
- ❖ Dan and Ellen Schorsch would welcome your support.
- ❖ Mazal tov to Lynne Landsberg on the most recent recognition for her work with disabilities. You can see more about this on the RAC website, under the announcement of the Thornburgh Family award for working with people with disabilities.

Religious School

Religious school 2015-16 will begin on Sunday, September 6th! We have a wonderful year planned – can't wait to see you soon!
If you have a new student interested in joining Beth El Religious School, please contact Dara Hall, Principal at mddmhall@verizon.net.

SHORTY

SHORTY visited Lake Anna on Monday, July 6th. Thanks so much to the Lovinger family for hosting this awesome event for our youth group! There are still some more fun events in store for SHORTY this summer – a movie at the Alamo in Winchester on August 12th and a trip to Washington DC with our religious school dalet class on August 30th. Hope to see you there!

For more information about SHORTY and youth group events, please contact Becky Mintzer, youth group advisor at rem82398@aol.com.

Donations

Thank you to the following generous people who have recently made donations to the temple. All are gratefully appreciated!

In memory of Elbert Evan Ward.....Lynne Landsberg
Anonymous Donors for the new High Holiday Books
..... HVAC improvement for Joe's office
In memory of Janet BrodySue and John Field
.....Heidi Simmons
.....Martha and Doug Degen
.....Ruth Chodrow
.....Elizabeth and Ken Schwartz
.....Beth and Rich Young
General FundLee Hersch
.....Sales at Staunton Antiques Center

August Yahrzeits

Charles Brand	Louise Cohen	Mildred Fay Degen	Bernard Goldsmith
Albert Gomberg	David Greenstein	Cynthia Grossman	Anna Harris
Louis Kamerman	Julius Kane	Mabel Kaplan	Samuel Loewner
Donald Mindell	Lucy Nicely	Doris Patterson	Shirley Peretz
Eva Roberts	Esther Rosenthal	Rachel Rothenberg	Sandra Schoenberg
Vivian Schorsch	Samuel Sebell	Madeline Shultz	Charles Switzer
Miriam Wasserman			

August Calendar and Services

						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19 Board Meet 7:00	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28 Shabbat Service 7:30	29
30 Picnic at the Watermans – 5 pm	31					

August Birthdays

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Ellen Boden on August 6

Lillian Blair on August 9th

Stephanie Brand on August 11th

AJ Hartung as well as

Joe Kristoff on August 13

Nadine Chase on August 23

Mark Schorsch is celebrating his birthday on August 30

New Members Mini-Profiles

Debbie Jacobs, our v. p. of membership, was able to catch up with 3 people:

Sue Solomon actually joined more than 6 months ago, but we're finally giving her a formal and friendly THOI welcome in this bulletin! Sue and her husband live in Wintergreen, after living in Fairfax for a long time where she was a special education teacher for 43 years!! A friend told her about THOI and she checked us out. She enjoyed meeting the people at services, and decided to become a member. Sue grew up in Brooklyn. Like almost all of us, her favorite Jewish foods include: latkes, bagels and lox, brisket, kugel and oddly enough gefilte fish and chopped liver! Sue is passionate about tennis and said she tries to play 4 or 5 times per week. Also she loves going to concerts and shows.

It's been great seeing Sue at the informal women's group lunches, the June discussion with Rabbi Joe and MBC Chaplain Katie Lowe, and Shabbat services.

New Members Mini- Profiles

Diana Black grew up in Falls Church VA and was Bat Mitzvah'd at Agudas Achim Congregation in Alexandria, a Conservative congregation.

She is married to Dave Black and joined THOI because she wanted to be part of a Reform Jewish community, both for her own sake and for that of her future progeny. Diana is a children's program at the Staunton Public Library where the kids (and parents and grandparents, too) absolutely love her big smile and enthusiasm.

Diana's favorite holiday is Passover, partly because of the 'top notch' food that comes with Passover - her favorite being her homemade matzoh ball soup! She's a huge foodie, and loves cooking with her husband.

Diana loves literature, particularly books for children, and has an M.A. in English from JMU. She is a semi-professional actor/singer, active in local theater. In the past year, she's worked with ShenanArts (*BIG FISH, the Musical*, and *It's De-Lovely*, a concert of Romantic Music) as well as *Clever By Half*. You may have already seen her performances without knowing she's a member of THOI! Her passions include: travel, sports, games, arts, music, volunteering, pets (she said she loves her 4 kitties, probably more than healthy!-), politics, gardening, crafts, hiking and she's very active on Facebook sharing these passions!

We are so happy Diana has chosen to become a member of our congregation and look forward to getting to know her!

Bonny Strassler is originally from Buffalo NY but moved to Waynesboro a little while ago (when she was in high school!)....she says she never acquired a southern accent! When she first considered converting to Judaism, she contacted Rabbi Joe and did Torah study, learned Hebrew and has become very involved with the Women's Group. Her family, husband Frank, and three sons: Philip 14, Ben 12, and James 9 years old are all very supportive, even though they attend Emmanuel Episcopal. They occasionally enjoy coming to temple, for what else...the oneg!

When asked what her favorite Jewish holiday is, she replied "the next one approaching!" (as they are all new to her) and her favorite Jewish food is golabaki or stuffed cabbage rolls.. She said, "Jewish food is not so different from the traditional Polish dishes prepared by my grandmothers and mother during my childhood." Bonny is a special education teacher at McGaheysville Elementary School in Rockingham County, working primarily with students with learning disabilities. In her free time (summer?), she enjoys playing cards, board games (Mah Jongg!), singing in a choir, knitting, volunteering, traveling and walking her dog.

Bonny's got a contagious smile and we're happy to be smiling right back at her.

The Israeli
Portion of
Rabbi's
Mission
Trip
(cont'd
from page
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In keeping with that description, one of our first expeditions in Israel was to Beit She'arim, the site of the Sanhedrin, and specifically to the tombs (or catacombs, more precisely) that are there, dating back roughly 2,000 years - Beit She'arim is known to have been in use for burials in the Herodian period. (An academic article from 2010 on Beit She'arim, which has a few photos that might be of interest can be found here.

http://www.academia.edu/2562591/Burial_Practices_in_Beth_Shearim)

We were incredibly fortunate to have Dr. Tzvi Gal (a foremost Israeli archeologist, who is very familiar with this site, and who wrote the nomination for World Heritage recognition of the site) as guide and teacher for our visit. This visit was quite amazing, and really helped to drive home the image that we have from Torah, in Bereshit (Gen.) 23, where Sarah dies, and Abraham acquires a cave in which to lay her body, and later we hear about Abraham himself (and multiple of his descendants) being interred in the same cave. After a period of time, we are told, the mourners return, and the deceased is 'gathered to [their] people' (as described for Abraham in Bereshit 25:9).

In Beit She'arim we saw what would best be described as 'sarcophagi' and 'trough graves' where bodies could lay while the flesh decayed, and all around us were the many niches carved into the walls of the limestone caves, with smaller 'troughs' dug out on the bottom of the niches. These niches were wide enough to contain the longest bone in a human body, and the troughs would hold the dust that would gather as the bones themselves slowly broke down over time, adding to the dust of ancestors – truly being 'gathered to one's people'.

This site was fabulous, and is recognized as such. Here is a link to a story that appeared in the Jerusalem Post on July 18th, 2015 about the site, and how it has been added to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization list of World Heritage sites.

<http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Culture/UNESCO-lists-necropolis-of-Beit-Shearim-as-World-Heritage-Site-408045>. This video and description fall far short of doing the site justice - it was amazing and fascinating. As a matter of reference for both location and time, this is in the North of Israel, in the area where the Sanhedrin operated, and spans the time from Herod on, the period when the Mishnah and Gemara were hammered out, creating the Talmud.

Those interred there include Rabbi Judah Hanasi and Rabban Gamliel, and many others among the sages we study in the Talmud. It was an awesome thought to be standing in the location where so many of the revered teachers and shapers of Judaism were put to rest.

This ancient burial site was the oldest we visited on the study mission (the older biblical site of the cave of Machpelah in Hebron is not directly accessible, and the tomb of Rachel in Bethlehem is not on most itineraries because of harassment and attacks on visitors; and other burial sites that are as old as or older than Beit She'arim exist only as archeological sites or are not open to visitors.

At the opposite end of the timeline, we visited the very new and modern Yarkon cemetery in Petach Tikvah. Here, as a space/land saving measure, the architect Tuvia Sagiv (together with Uri Ponger) has designed a massive land conserving and fully Halachically compliant approach to 'high-rise' cemeteries. You can see a story about it, along with a photo of one of the buildings (there will be multiple on the site – truly a 'necropolis') here:

The Israeli
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from pg 8)

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/dda4e211a68d424ab06eea4687e5d35d/israel-raises-dead-skyward-cemetery>. In this facility, and others in Israel, including in Jerusalem, we also saw double or 'stacked' burial as a common practice (a husband and wife are buried in the same plot, one above the other, with two monuments, or one larger monument for both), and we also saw kukhim (niches) cut into the walls of the structures, with the person being 'buried' by being slid in lying down, then dirt inserted, and a monument used as the covering of the opening in the wall.

In the Sanhedria cemetery in Jerusalem, we saw yet another approach now in use. There, tunnel drilling equipment was being used to dig into the sides of the hills, creating pathways into the mountains that are large enough for three lanes of traffic, perhaps twenty-five feet high at the peak of the arch and thirty-six feet wide, with niches drilled into the walls of the 'cave' or tunnel six high, creating thousands of burial sites in the space below the cemetery above it.

Many of us on the mission trip found these approaches challenging, and difficult to accept, but given the limited space available, and the high demand for burial in Israel, there may be a legitimate need to use this approach. I have to say, however, that I prefer the "standard" style of 'field burial', with individual graves in rows that we see in much of North America. I have trouble imagining a positive response if I had to visit the burial site of a loved one and had to walk into and stand inside a long, artificially lighted tunnel to look at a monument inset into the wall of the tunnel ten feet or more above where I stood.

Of course, there was so much more to the mission trip, but I think I may be taxing the patience of those reading, so I will end here.