

The Beth El Bridge

Keeping the Jewish Community Connected

Beth El Congregation Harrisonburg, Virginia December/January 2006-07

Empowering women of Reform Judaism

By Janet Kohen

Editors' note: The following sermon was given by our own Janet Kohen, representing the Women of Reform Judaism and the Mid-Atlantic Region, during Sisterhood Shabbat at Temple Beth Ahabah in Richmond Oct. 27. We think it will be instructive for Beth El members as well.

When Katie Roeper called and asked me to speak to you tonight on the topic of Midrash, and how I could empower you, women of Reform Judaism, to study and create your own midrashim, I felt a little like Rabbi Akiva, who is purported to have been asked to explain the whole Torah — “al regel achat” — while standing on one foot. Rabbi Akiva, being Rabbi Akiva, had a ready answer, now often quoted: “Love your neighbor as yourself. All the rest is commentary. Now go and study it.” I am no Rabbi Akiva! I have no simple sentence that can empower each of you to create meaning for yourselves from Torah study. I can only share with you some personal experiences, factual information, and hopefully a lot of loving encouragement.

I come to you without much in the way of formal credentials. What I have to share with you tonight comes from the heart of a Jewish woman who always wanted to know why.

Growing up in the 1950's in a conservative, male oriented synagogue, that wasn't always a popular question. In truth, I didn't even ask my questions then because the ethos was so clearly male inspired and dominated. I never became a radical feminist in the 70's, although I was sympathetic with many feminist issues. However, as a Jewish woman I found my essential being completely unrepresented in biblical text and male-defined tradition. Though all of life's experiences are revealed in Torah, — until recent years they've not been revealed from a woman's viewpoint. So how do we understand the underlying messages in Torah in a way that is especially meaningful to us today? One way is by creating our own Midrashim as complements to the existing body of commentary. Now that I've given you some reason for undertaking midrashic study and creating new Midrashim it's time to explain what Midrash is and how one can create a Midrash.

Midrash — what is it? The word itself comes from the root d'rash, to seek or investigate.

It most ordinarily refers to a collected body of Rabbinic literature that attempts to clarify or explain or interpret. Midrash refers to exposition (exegesis) that looks into the spirit of the text from different perspectives, thereby developing interpretations that are not immediately obvious.

According to Talmud, Midrash is like “a hammer which awakens the slumbering sparks in a rock.” Writing Midrash is a way to personalize biblical text — to find the living heart of the Bible.

To paraphrase Rabbi Gunther Plaut As Reform Jews we may understand Torah to have been revealed to Moses. After that the Torah tradition was repeated by word of mouth, and only after many generations set down in writing. In those years that it was mainly an oral tradition, bible stories were the subjects of years of retelling in sermons. Rabbis or their ancient counterparts modified these stories as they chose in order to make a particular point, teach a lesson, rationalize actions, or change the course of events according to the morals, politics, and exigencies of the time and place in which they were living.

In every age the search for understanding goes on. Again, I refer to Rabbi Plaut, who says: “... despite the enormous and imaginative scholarship — archeological, linguistic, anthropological and other — that has been lavished on the Torah we still must often conclude that we do not know how to

interpret a word, or passage, or do not understand the original text.” In studying Torah, we need to keep in mind that what the authors of the Torah said to their contemporaries was pertinent to their time and that what later generations did with it, how they altered it, however subtly, was another. Thus we should not look at the reading of the Bible as an exercise in literalism. We must look beyond the words of the texts without preconceived explanations and let those words speak to our hearts. We need to reclaim our stake in the covenant and make the biblical text live for us. As an example of the validity of conflicting opinions the Union for Reform Judaism is expanding its 10 Minutes of Torah internet program to include Eilu V'Eilu, “these and those” debates between at least two Jewish Scholars on various questions every month.

We most often think of Midrash as a story told between the lines of the text. Every Midrash begins with a question or problem discovered in the biblical text. A Midrash comes into being because someone discovers something that needs clarification, interpretation, or explanation. In addition, most Midrashim also contain a core Jewish value message or ethical lesson.

Let's look to a Rabbinic Midrash about Abraham (then known as Avram). When we meet him he is already an adult, married, has left his original home in Ur and gone to Haran, and further when God speaks to him he listens and obeys immediately without questions.

So the Rabbis wonder: Why did his family leave Ur? Why did Abraham follow God's orders without question. Something is missing from the story that would explain these apparent discrepancies. So comes the Midrash of Abraham smashing idols in the land of Ur, in his father's store. I remember that one from my childhood storybooks. This one little story seeks to explain by suggesting that he must have had prior knowledge of a single God that led him to smash idols in Ur in order to teach this lesson of Monotheism and because of his activities he and his family had to leave. Two unanswered questions from the text that the Rabbis attempted to solve with one Midrash.

On to other imponderables: Why is it that in tonight's parashah Mrs. Noah and her daughters-in-law have no names? Mrs. Noah was named later in Rabbinic writings, but not in the Torah. The rabbis said her name was Naamah (pleasant). What did Mrs. Noah think about all this flood business and ark building? Penina Adelman in *Praise Her Works* gives Mrs. Noah a voice as her way to answer these questions. Here is an excerpt of The Wife of Noah Speaks:

“You found me. How many thousands of years it has taken, but you found me. I'm not asking why or how. That you did it is a miracle. I've learned you can't force things, just like we couldn't force God to stop the rain. I had hoped that one day someone would come and want to know more.

“Survivors need to tell their tales of survival, but there must be willing listeners. Sometimes the silence between words is all there is. Listening requires waiting. Not many have the time or the patience. You do, and so your energetic listening will draw my story out like water from a well where the pump needs a little priming.

“Rain seeped into us day and night. I'm not a water creature, so it wore me down. Nor could I fly away like the free birds above us. The animals minded the water too. They were trembling bundles of wet fur and feathers.

“Our food was soaked through. Nobody felt like eating. I tried rolling up cakes of flour and rainwater. Tasteless crumbles. At night in the deluge, Noah turned to me as we huddled together in our soggy straw bed. He cried, How can we survive another day of this?... I don't know, I told him but we will get through this. We will survive this flood. Comforting him, I felt better. Of course we did make it off the ark onto dry land in due time.”

In this Midrash Mrs. Noah speculates as to why she was so sure that they would survive and she attributes it to a dream in which she saw herself as a young woman dancing at a friend's coming of age ceremony. It thundered and rained and then, “just as quickly the skies cleared and there was a bow in the cloud. In the dream an invisible hand pulls back the bow and releases an arrow of many shimmering colors that fly across the sky...

“Whenever I would envision those colors leaping across the sky in this seascape of no color...my heart would lift, too.”

Janet's sermon continues on Page 9

THE RABBI'S DESK

My dear fellow Valley Jews and Friends, SHALOM!

I am writing this article in mid-November, as we feel the cold of Fall at night. Although there are no Jewish holidays other than Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, it is a time of secular holidays and events. In just a short time in America we will all be celebrating Thanksgiving. As you will read this message after that day, know that I wish(ed) each of you a lovely time full of good food, fun, family and lots of love. I will be enjoying the opportunity to visit with my family and to share with them a day on which we recall all our many blessings.

THE CALENDAR and HOLIDAYS

As I write this, we are in the midst of the month of Cheshvan, which runs until Nov. 20, and Nov. 21-22 is Rosh Chodesh for Kislev. Kislev is a much-anticipated time for most children: the Kislev 25 is the beginning of Chanukah, the next holiday on our calendar. A time noted for the giving of presents in America, Chanukah falls this year on the evening of Dec. 15 through sundown on Dec. 23. Get ready: get out your dreidels, chanukiah menorahs, and Chanukah gelt (chocolate coins used to play dreidels), and get ready to play, give and receive gifts, and enjoy latkes (oil fried potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (oil fried jelly donuts)!

Kislev ends during Chanukah. Dec. 21-2 is Rosh Chodesh for Tevet, which continues until Jan. 19. Jan. 20 will be Rosh Chodesh for the month of Shevat.

During Tevet, we have a fast day on Dec. 31. It is Tzom Asarah BeTevet, the fast of the 10th of Tevet.

Looking ahead, in the month of Shevat, we will celebrate Tu Bi'Shevat the 15th of Shevat. This year Tu Bi'Shevat falls on Feb. 2-3. This is the new year for the Trees, sort of a Jewish Arbor day, and we have a seder to celebrate the fruits of trees. This celebration has come to have ties to the environment and ecology over the years, as well as gaining an understanding in terms of mysticism and Kabbalah. We will certainly talk more about it closer to that date.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CALENDAR

Allow me to point out some of the many things coming up on our calendar:

- Dec. 1-2 we have a **Bat Mitzvah at THOI**. Riff Blair will be called to the Torah and hopes you will celebrate with her. Please RSVP by Nov. 25 to Rabbi Joe.
- On Dec. 8 our Shabbat service will be enhanced by the **participation of the Youth Choir** for a portion of the service. Come and hear them!
- Dec. 9 from 5:30 to 11 Shorty will offer a **Parent's night out!** Shorty will be available for childcare: children can be dropped off at Beth El, and will be fed, entertained, and cared for while parents take a night off. This will take place at Beth El, for a **very** reasonable price! Watch for more information!
- On Dec. 10 at Beth El, and Dec. 14 at THOI, there will be an initial meeting of those interested in our **Israel Trip**. We will talk about the options, plans, itinerary, and some background. You can attend at either location: both meetings will be at 7 p.m. We are having two meetings for the convenience of participants, and so no one will be unable to attend due to another commitment on one particular evening.
- Dec. 11 is the Beth El **Board meeting**.
- Dec. 16 is **Tot Shabbat** at THOI at 10 a.m. Contact Shelby at tot-shabbat@thoi.org for info or to RSVP.
- Sunday, Dec. 17 is the Beth El **Chanukah dinner**. More information will follow.
- On Monday, Dec. 18, at 7 p.m., we have **Talmud Torah Limud** (Torah Learning) at Beth El. Bring a meal, and eat while you learn and talk!
- Thursday, Dec. 21, at THOI, there will be a second session on the **Chevrah Kadishah** (the 'holy society' that deals with preparation of the dead) at 7 p.m. This session will focus on some text studies and background readings. All are welcome. I am working on arranging a practical training session (a what-and-how-to session) in January or February, bringing in some of the individuals who helped to establish the Chevrah in Charlottesville. If you have any interest in learning about the Chevrah, or might be interested in participating, please put this session on your calendar and make every effort to attend.
- The **office will be closed** Dec. 23 to Jan. 1.

The Rabbi's message continues on Page 10

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|--|-----------|-----------|---|--|
| | | | | | 1 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m. | 2 <i>Riff Blair Bat</i> <i>Mitzvah, THOI,</i> <i>10 a.m.</i> |
| 3 Religious School, 9:30-12:30 Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Rabbi's office day. | 4 <i>Crash Course in</i> <i>Hebrew, 7 p.m.</i> Rabbi's office day. | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m. Youth Choir will participate. | 9 |
| 10 Religious School, 9:30-12:30, Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Rabbi's office day. Israel Trip Info, 7 p.m. | 11 Board Meeting, Temple, 7:30. Rabbi's office day. | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m. | 16 Tot Shabbat in Staunton, 10 a.m. |
| 17 Religious School, Chanukah Party 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. <i>Chanukah Dinner,</i> 6 p.m. | 18 Torah Study, 6 p.m., bring your own meal. <i>Crash Course in</i> <i>Hebrew, 7 p.m.</i> Rabbi's office day. | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m. <i>Joshua and</i> <i>Estelle's sixtieth</i> <i>anniversary</i> <i>celebration.</i> | 23 |
| 24/31 <i>No Religious</i> <i>School today.</i> No Rabbi office hours this week. | 25 | 26 Dec. 26-29, NFTY Winter Kallah. | 27 | 28 | 29 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m. | 30 |

Carol R. Schepp and Eliot W. Robinson
invite the Congregation to join them
at an Oneg Shabbat following services
on December 22, 2006

honoring

Joshua and Estelle Robinson
on the sixtieth anniversary of their marriage

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|---------|--|----------|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m. Anne Mintzer's birthday. | 6 |
| 7 Religious School, 9:30-12:30 Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Rabbi's office day. Israel Trip Prep, 7 p.m. | 8 Board Meeting, Temple, 7:30.. Rabbi's office day. | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m. Anne Mintzer windows dedication. | 13 Religious School Field Trip. |
| 14 Religious School, 9:30-12:30, Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Intermediate Hebrew, 2 p.m. Rabbi's office day. | 15 Torah Study, 7 p.m., bring your own meal. Rabbi's office day. | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 SHORTY Service/ Ski Weekend, 7:30 p.m. | 20 SHORTY Service, 7:30 a.m. Ski weekend activities. |
| 21 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Adult Ed film and discussion, 6 p.m. Rabbi's office day. | 22 Rabbi's office day. | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m. | 27 Rachel Berger Bat Mitzvah, 10 a.m. |
| 28 Religious School, Tu B'Shevat Seder 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Intermediate Hebrew, 2 p.m. Rabbi's office day. | 29 Rabbi's office day. | 30 | 31 Sisterhood meeting, Temple, 6 p.m. | | | |

Please join us as our daughter

Rachel Lee

is called to the Torah as a Bat Mitzvah

Saturday, the Twenty-Seventh of January, Two Thousand Seven

Ten O'Clock in the morning

at Beth El Congregation

Ruth and Bary Berger

Kiddush luncheon to follow

YAHREITS FOR DECEMBER

| | | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|----|--|
| 1 | Sadye Spiro | 14 | Simon Z. Wender | 25 | Theresa Hirsch |
| 3 | Alfred Ney | 16 | William Austin Loewner | 26 | Amelia Lowener Figgatt |
| 5 | Anna Bloom Elizabeth Levey | | Agnes Moore Simon Ostreicher | | Mal Mintzer Joshua Rader Stein |
| 6 | Sabastian Goldsmith Albert Klingstein | 17 | Carl Ney | 27 | Anna Robinson |
| 8 | Mollie Katzen | 18 | Louis Hamburg Rhoda Mintzer | 28 | Josephine Metzger |
| 9 | Max Frankel Elaine Trubitz | 21 | Esther Derechinsky | 29 | Pearl Rachel Katzen |
| 12 | Rabbi Jacob Schvanenfeld Barnett Nelson Mollie Feig | 22 | Gladys Ney Rabbi Burton Padol Sarah Rabinowitz | 30 | Eddie Ney Doris Kalman Sarah Miller Bertha Hammer |
| 13 | Roselea Kohen Bertha Schvanenfeld | 23 | Albert H. Ash | 31 | Lenora Myerberg Sarah Miller |
| | | 24 | Nace Cohen | | |

YAHREITS FOR January

| | | | | | |
|---|--|----|---|----|---|
| 1 | Bertha Hammer Margaret Stein Isadore Pfeffer Dora Brill | 9 | Shirley Baron Baby Spiro | 19 | Harry Weiss |
| 2 | Bertha Wise Samuel R. Clayman Eleanor Stoloff | 10 | Paul Miller Anna Weiss | 20 | Sophia Wurtzberger |
| 3 | Lester Kahn Samuel Ney | 11 | Pearl Loewner Gravely Isadore Iseman Verne Slater | 23 | Beulah (Bootie) Klingstein |
| 4 | Mary Helbraun | 12 | Baby Klingstein | 24 | Fannie Wise Nathan Gelman |
| 5 | Emma Hirsch Isaacs | 13 | Bruno Stein Gerald Greenfield | 26 | Leroy Loewner |
| 6 | Leopold Wise Max Hirsch Elsie K. Cohn Richard Banker | 14 | Rose Levine | 27 | Henry Robinson |
| 8 | Leonard Hirsch Rosa Isaacs Lillian Hamburg | 15 | Hulda Iseman Sam Weiss | 28 | Abe B. Zindler, Sr. Jay Funston |
| | | 16 | Sadye Robinson | 29 | William Stein Minnie Zindler Finger |
| | | 17 | Beatrice Winoker Marjorie Lichtenstein | 30 | Vera Levine |
| | | | | 31 | Lessie Hirsch Baum Shirley Goodman Saletan |

A Message from Our President

Is it time for the next *Bridge* already? Didn't we just have one? We were saying "Shana Tova" just "yesterday," and "tomorrow" we'll face the secular new year. Is it an age thing? Can we slow the merry-go-round a notch?

What a dynamic and active congregation we are!

It was a pleasure and a privilege to attend the MAC Biennial in Gaithersburg. Six of us attended from Beth El, and we pointed out to anyone who would listen that there was no other congregation there with as high a percentage of members in attendance. Among many other opportunities that weekend, there was a huge range of "learnshops," a Shabbat service on Friday night that rocked the house, and Rabbi Eric Yoffe, who was honest, inspiring, and wise. We sang, we prayed, we listened, we shared, we laughed, we cried, and we met wonderful people. I will be encouraging you, at every opportunity, to attend one of these events. I want you to experience what I learned, observed and felt.

On Wednesday, Nov. 15, a number of Beth El women gathered (as did women all over the country) to participate in a special Women's Torah Study. Suggested by Women of Reform Judaism and with a sample of the preview edition of the new *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, our discussion of Parashat Chayei Sarah was organized and led at Beth El by Janet Kohen and Sherri Alt. The event was inspiring and spiritual, not to mention fun and calorie-laden. I hope we'll be able to continue to examine midrash created by women, in this type of setting.

On Saturday, many of us ventured south to Temple House of Israel to listen to the holocaust described by a survivor who was visiting the area. It was an amazing experience; we cried, we laughed, we learned.

Sunday morning, the religious school families participated in a family education program on Shabbat. Students, their siblings and parents sang, created, prayed and ate together. It was a delight for all. Mazel tov to our principal and teacher team, and to our parents, for a wonderful event.

And more: 29 members have replied to my request for committee participation. Eleven of them volunteered to serve on two, three, even four committees. Thanks to you all! We're getting under way.

We have b'nai mitzvot and other simchas coming up.

When I described our congregation to other presidents at the biennial, it was difficult for them to believe that we didn't have hundreds of families and multiple rabbis. Proud? You betcha!

Margee

Greetings from our Religious School!

November was a quick, but very busy month.

Two of our Daled students, Rachel Berger and Jacob Stein, went to MAJYK (NFTY's Mid-Atlantic Junior Youth Kallah) in Roanoke, Nov. 10-12. Reform Jewish teens came together for learning, fun, and a chance to get to know one another. Our students spoke very highly of the Kallah — ask them about it when you get a chance!

On Nov. 19, Religious School hosted a Shabbat Family Education program. Members from Beth El and THOI, as well as the religious school families, joined together to discuss our weekly holiday — Shabbat. The Rabbi led a discussion, Roberta Stein led the children in song and dance, and our principals and teachers helped everyone with wonderful crafts, including painting glass Shabbat candlesticks, creating a family Challah cover with handprints, painting tzedakah boxes, rolling our own Havdalah candle with beeswax, and painting a spice box. We all came together at the end for a mock Sabbath meal, Zemirot, and then a discussion and celebration of Havdalah. In addition to their crafts, everyone received a booklet of Shabbat blessings for use at home. The take-home message was that we can all find ways to make the Sabbath day special for each of our families.

This December and January, we hope you will join us for the following Religious School events:

Sunday, Dec. 17 — Chanukah Celebration.

Sunday, Jan. 28 — Tu B'Shevat Seder.

We thank the congregations for their support of the Religious School and we wish everyone a Happy Hanukkah. And all good things - good health, happiness, and peace in the New Year!

Chag Sameach!

Dara, Linda and Ruth

Donations

Beth El Congregation is grateful for the following generous donations, received during the past month:

To the General Fund

Thank for the inspiring holiday services: Sheila Padoll, Phil and Pam Unger.

Thank you to all: Rabbi Sue Elwell.

Thank you for the Bridge: Jack Marmorstein, Steve and Kathi Stein.

Generous donations to the general fund also were received from Jessica MacWilliams, and Michael and Barbara Rocklin.

To the Yahrzeit Memorial Fund

In memory his grandmother, Carrie Ash: Eddie Ney.

In memory of his brother, Louis Perlman: Milton Perlman.

In memory his father, Zwi Hirsch Derechinsky: Max Derechinsky.

In memory of his father, Allan Poster: Edward Poster.

In memory of Bill's grandfather, Alfred Ney: Bill and Leslie Ney.

In memory of his mother, Edith Bersson: Bob Bersson.

In memory of his grandfathers, Albert Ash and Eddie Ney: Eddie Ney.

To the Building Fund

In honor of Shirley and Dave Merlin's 60th anniversary: Anne Mintzer, Bill and Leslie Ney.

In honor of Joshua and Estelle Robinson's 60th anniversary: Bill and Leslie Ney.

Toward a handicap lift, in honor of Roberta Stein's Bat Mitzvah project: Bill and Leslie Ney.

To the Anne Mintzer Window Fund

In honor of Shirley and Dave Merlin's 60th anniversary: Janet and Andy Kohen, Esther and Jerry Minskoff, Chuck Slott.

In honor of his 60 years of marriage to Estelle: Joshua Robinson.

Wishing continued good health for Marlene and Blaine Brumbaugh: Janet and Andy Kohn.

News and Notes

Youth Group Ski Weekend

Youth Group: Once again, it's time for our annual youth ski weekend. Housing will be needed for visiting youth group members on Friday, Jan. 19. Please join our youth group for Shabbat services that evening, which will be led by SHORTY members.

Men's Club Notes

The Men's club reports that their recent spaghetti dinner was a great success.

The next meeting will be in January. Place, date, and time will be announced by email.

Sisterhood Notes

The Sisterhood Chanukah Gift Shop will be open on Dec. 3 and 10 from 9:30-12:30. Come buy your dreidls, candles, and other Chanukah goodies.

Save the date for the Chanukah dinner, which will be held on Sunday, Dec. 17. A flyer will be coming out with details soon.

Many thanks to Dave and Julie Miller who donated gift certificates for dinners (or lunches) at Dave's

Taverna. These will be used as part of our fundraising for Sisterhood. The January sisterhood meeting will be Wednesday, Jan. 20, at 6 p.m.

A Message from Our Treasurer

From Bill Ney:

Thank you to everyone who responded so generously to the letter requesting money for our Annual Building Fund Drive.

Recent repairs to the sanctuary, however, have resulted in a need for more donations. Please help replenish this fund, which is essential to enabling us to maintain our building.

New Members

Please welcome new member Julia Sweeny, who lives at 509 East Rock Street, Harrisonburg, 22802. Phone: 271-1264, email: sweenyjd@jmu.edu.

Also please add to your list Mitch and Valerie Lovinger, who live at 605 College View Drive, Bridgewater, 22812. Their phone number is 828-0270, and their email address is mitchval3@adelphia.net.

Empowering women of Reform Judaism (continued from Page 2)

A foretelling of the rainbow that God sent as a promise?

The last message from Mrs. Noah contains the lesson that we expect in a Midrash.

She says, "The flood sobered me. It put me on notice that life is not going to wait for me to wake up. That I'd better recognize what I have to be grateful for. Noah. My children. Clear sky. Sunshine. My life. A new earth. No more do I take any of these things for granted."

By the way, she says, "I do appreciate your listening. And please call me by my name. It was never recorded in the Bible; it only appears later, in the Rabbinic writings. I am called Naamah, which means pleasant."

Through these excerpts from Adelman's Midrash we learn many things about Mrs. Noah. She is no longer the nameless characterless creature of the flood story.

Perhaps the most well known contemporary Midrash is the book the *Red Tent* by Anita Diamont. Many if not most of you have read this wonderful novel that seeks to provide a new view of biblical women's society seen through the eyes of Dinah, daughter of Jacob.

In the bible Dinah is ostensibly raped by Schechem. He falls in love with her and wants to marry her. Jacob instructs him to circumsize himself and all the males in the tribe and when they are at their weakest Dinah's brothers destroy them. Nothing more is ever said about Dinah. Anita Diamont provides us with a tremendously satisfying interpretation of the society of Dinah's time and her place in it.

Now I can hear you thinking, "She wants us to write a book?" If you have it in you to do it I would encourage you to do so. Most of us, however, do not have that unwritten book waiting in the wings. Creating Midrashim isn't nearly that difficult.

First, we read. Then we ask questions. Were there gaps in the text? Were there inconsistencies? Were there questions left unanswered? Was there a moral to the story?

What does this portion say or not say to me as a person, a Jew, a woman? What would I have said or done? The answers to those questions are our own Midrashim. Our personal meaningful Midrashim. The form of your Midrash can be almost anything you can create.

Are you a painter? Paint your Midrash. Do you write music? Create a Midrash in song. Are you a poet, a dramatist, a storyteller? Any medium can be used to tell your Midrash.

I know of a woman who quilted her Midrash.

If this all seems overwhelming there are many resources available to help you begin. Not the least of which are your clergy. What clergy person worth his or her salt would turn away a serious student of Torah.

Your sisterhood may have participated in a Torah Study program designed specifically for women in November. The study was based on the Parashah Chayei Sara, the life of Sarah, which was read Nov. 17 or 18. Your President, if she hasn't already done so, can request copies of the study guide from the office in New York.

We can read Bible text alone, with other women, with our Rabbis, educators, cantors. And give them meaning. We can re-examine our sacred texts and prayers and create midrashim — meaningful interpretations appropriate to us. But it does require thought and study. Why bother? Because each time we attempt to read and understand we are standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai receiving the words ourselves.

Collectively, the Women of Reform Judaism are saying, "Give us a share of our Torah. The result will be a Torah commentary to be revealed in December 2007 that will benefit all of us. With this commentary we will continue as sisters to empower the women — and men — who come after us for generations to come.

In conclusion, to quote Lawrence Kushner quoting Talmuch: Berachot 17b: May your eyes shine with the light of holy words and your face reflect the brightness of the heavens.

May your lips ever speak wisdom and your fulfillment be in righteousness.

More News and Notes

Bat Mitzvah Project

For her Bat Mitzvah Project, Rachel Berger is raising funds for the Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Center. She is selling sterling silver charms that are designed to look like a suitcase with a cut-out heart, in memory of the young Jewish girl named Hana whose experiences during the Holocaust inspired the founding of the museum. Please email Rachel at charms4hana@adelphia.net for more information.

Beth El Surveys

By now, all members have received their surveys (via email or snail mail). Please take the time to answer the questions in order to help the board understand your needs and try to fulfill them. If you have not received yours, please contact Gary Stein. Remember that every adult member in the household should fill out her/his own form.

Robinsons Anniversary

Please plan to join us for services on Friday evening, Dec. 22, as we celebrate with the Robinson family on the occasion of Joshua and Estelle's 60th wedding anniversary.

Anne's Birthday Celebrations

We will have two celebrations related to Anne Mintzer's birthday. On Jan. 5, Anne's actual birthday, please join us for lay services, followed by a birthday oneg. On the following Friday, Jan. 12, there will be a rabbi-led service (This is a change on the annual calendar), during which we will dedicate our new stained glass windows.

Please plan to participate in these two wonderful celebrations of life.

A Lift for the Bimah

For her bat mitzvah project, Roberta Stein and her husband, Gary, have committed to purchasing a lift in the front of the sanctuary. This will make the bimah accessible to those who use wheelchairs or have difficulty with the stairs. The board has approved this modification, to be placed at the west side (on the right, facing the bimah).

This is a major financial expense and the Steins would appreciate any contributions. They will be holding some entertaining fund-raising events. Watch for more information.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CALENDAR *(continued from Page 3)*

- On Jan. 7 at Beth El, and Jan. 4 at THOI, will be a second meeting for those interested in our *Israel Trip*. We will cover updates, expectations, customs, and some of the locations we plan to see. You can attend either location: both meetings will be at 7 p.m. We are having two meetings for the convenience of participants, and so no one will be unable to attend due to another commitment on one particular evening.
- On Jan. 5 at THOI at 6 p.m. *SHORTY* will be serving a dinner as a fundraiser, then leading services.
- Jan. 12 we will be honoring *Anne Mintzer's birthday*. Come help wish her *ad me'ah ve'esrim*, until 120, at Shabbat services!
- On Jan. 14 and 28 at Beth El, from 2 to 3 p.m., we will begin our class in *Intermediate Hebrew*. If you are comfortable with decoding/sounding out Hebrew, and want to gain more fluency, please join this class. More information will be provided when we meet. Free to members.
- On Monday, Jan. 15, at 7 p.m., we have *Talmud Torah Limud* (Torah Learning) at Beth El. Bring a meal, and eat while you learn and talk!
- Jan. 19-21 is *Ski Weekend*, when Shorty will host a large group of youth from around our region. Come enjoy a NFTY style service on Friday evening.
- Jan. 20 is *Tot Shabbat* at THOI at 10 a.m. Contact Shelby at tot-shabbat@thoi.org for info or to RSVP.
- Jan. 21 is our second *film and discussion* evening. A recent Israeli film will be shown, and it's quite a wonderful story. We will start at 6 p.m., and be done by 9.
- Jan. 26 and 27 we have a *Bat Mitzvah*. Rachel Berger and her family will be celebrating this simchah.

B'virvat shalom (with Blessings of Peace) and best wishes for the new year,

Rabbi Joe
