

The Beth El Bridge

Keeping the Jewish Community Connected

Beth El Congregation

Harrisonburg, Virginia

May 2007

In the Wake of Violence...

By Rabbi Joe Blair

Editor's Note: Following are the inspiring words Rabbi Joe offered the Congregation during Shabbat services on April 20, soon after the mass killings at Virginia Tech —

Today, April 20, sadly, marks the eighth anniversary of the Columbine school killings, and less than a week after the horrific massacre at Virginia Tech. The airwaves, print media, and cyberspace are all filled with discussions of this most recent tragedy: could it have been prevented, what do we do now, what mental health services are needed at universities, should we try to institute gun control in light of this tragedy, what is needed for school and campus security, who is to blame, will this affect the upcoming elections: a myriad of questions about the world around us, practically all without answers. Issues, in the words of Tevye the dairy man, that would cross a rabbi's eyes — and they do, between my tears.

But right now what is weighing on my mind and spirit has more to do with the unasked religious questions, and less to do with the secular culture that surrounds us in America and in the world. It is more about those large, looming and unanswerable questions of meaning and values, called to our attention by tragedy and sorrow.

In some ways, the horror in Blacksburg Virginia was an aberration and a 'first.' In other ways it was simply one more eruption of violence, a plague with which we are assaulted and struck daily, at least by reports — from the streets of Washington DC, to the marketplaces of Baghdad, to the countryside of Israel.

In the midst of all the suffering and pain, I was intrigued to read these moving words, spoken in response to the Virginia Tech killings:

It's impossible to make sense of such violence and suffering. Those whose lives were taken did nothing to deserve their fate. They were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now they're gone — and they leave behind grieving families, and grieving classmates, and a grieving nation.... In times like this, we can find comfort in the grace and guidance of a loving G-d. As the Scriptures tell us, "Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Those words were spoken by President Bush. I am not usually noted for quoting politicians, but in this instance I resonated deeply with the Scriptural message he offered in his speech — a quote from the book of

Congregational Meeting: Wednesday, May 30

Annual Congregational Meeting is **rescheduled** for Wednesday, May 30, at 7 p.m.

Election of Officers,
And other business of the Congregation...

All members will soon receive ballots for the election of Congregational officers.

Mark your calendars. This is a change from the original date.

Romans in the Greek Scriptures (often called New Testament), itself quoting the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures, our Bible), from the book of Proverbs. A very Jewish sentiment, and one that seemed appropriate and timely...

We all have been inundated with reports of what happened in Blacksburg. No doubt we are all sickened, saddened, and shocked. Though I, as many of you do, have some personal connection with the victims or with their families, what has jumped out to my attention and causes me to take special note is one story in particular.

Perhaps you, too, heard of engineering Professor Liviu Librescu. A Romanian Jew by birth, he suffered terribly under the Nazi sympathizers in his nation during the Holocaust. He survived. After that horror ended, he returned to live a normal life, only to suffer again under the repressive rule of Ceaucescu and the Communists when he would not join the party, and even more so when he declared that he wished to make Aliyah to Israel. He survived that, as well, and made his way to Eretz Yisrael, and the Technion. From there he was recruited to Virginia Tech, and he had been teaching at VT for the past 20 years.

When the gunman came near his room, Professor Librescu recognized the sound of gunfire. He told his students to flee out the windows, and without hesitation, he ran the opposite way, towards the door, to block it against the gunman. The gunman was prevented from entering, and in frustration, shot through the door, striking Professor Librescu fatally, but leaving without entering and without injuring any student in that classroom. Professor Librescu saved all of the students in his class, at the cost of his life.

We see that Professor Librescu puts the lie to the words of President Bush. He was not simply "in the wrong place at the wrong time." By his actions and choices, Professor Librescu proved that EVEN IF we are in the wrong place at the wrong time, we are not simply pawns in the hands of fate: we have a choice in how we react. We can take to heart the instruction, the Mitzvah drawn from the Tanakh, with which President Bush concluded — "don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Professor Librescu did just that.

It does not change the fact of his death. It does not alleviate the loss and suffering of his family and friends. It does, however, change the character of his death, demonstrating nobility, humanity, and compassion, and elevating him beyond the stats of a victim to one who overcame evil with good. The outpouring of love and affection for Professor Librescu is no accident. By his actions he teaches us a deep and abiding lesson in love, faith, ethics, and morality. He shows us a way to elevate our lives.

Despite all the evils that befell him throughout his life, Professor Librescu was not bitter or hate-filled. By his actions he teaches us the inherent goodness that we can choose to live out, and he gives us renewed hope for humanity and for the future. As sad and as tragic as his death is, he is elevated, and his choice and his actions give meaning to his life, and to our world. This is his lesson and his legacy to us.

Yehi zichrono tzadik livrachah – may his righteous memory be for a blessing. May we remember him, along with all the other victims of this terrible event, and all other innocent victims, for good and with love...

Let us all say, Amen.

** With appreciation and acknowledgement of my colleague and friend, Rabbi Toba Spitzer, for some of the language and ideas contained herein.*

Rabbi Joe Blair

A Message from our president

I had written some pretty "fluffy" comments for the May Bridge, but the events at Virginia Tech are still pounding in all of our minds, and the fluff can wait.

Our service on the Shabbat after the Tech event was a combination of poignancy, celebration and humor. It wasn't always easy to segue, but it was good to all be together. The poignant moments were provided by a prayer, with which the service began, written by Rabbi Marc Gellman, from New York, and by a moving d'var Torah by Rabbi Joe.

The celebration was of Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day and we closed the service with Hatikvah. Rabbi Joe and I made a quick choice to go ahead with the first two installments of "Meet the Mishpocha," which included sometimes unexpected and sometimes humorous looks at both of our journeys to Beth El. There were lots of questions for us both, at the oneg, and lots of anticipation of future installments. Please let me know when you would like to participate. We'll include a few members during lay services over the summer.

One more time, I ask you to consider serving on a committee at Beth El. Whatever your interest/talent, there is a place for you. If everyone will step up, each person's time commitment will be minimal. We need you.

Spring has (finally) sprung. Enjoy it!!!

Margee



Sisterhood members participated in a special service April 13 developed by Sherri Alt and Janet Kohen. Janet's reading from the Torah, Sherri's drash, and the readings by the many women gathered at the service made it an especially meaningful celebration of Shabbat for those in attendance.

Sisterhood hosts speaker on nutrition for healthy hearts

Sisterhood hosted a speaker from Women's Health Focus April 18 on the topic of having a healthy heart. Following the heart-healthy dinner, the speaker discussed the importance of reducing the intake of trans-fats, and explained that it's necessary to read labels carefully to avoid them. After the meeting, many sisterhood members returned to their homes to check the food labels in their own pantries.

Sisterhood members **Sherri Alt, Janet Kohen, Marlene Brumbaugh, and Margee Greenfield** attended a district meeting in Maryland the last weekend in April, where **Janet** was installed as **first executive vice president** and **Sherri** was charged with the **oversight of six sisterhoods** in our region. In addition, the meeting was at the Temple where **Elissa Sachs-Kohen** is a rabbi. Our congregation should be very proud of the accomplishments of our women.

The May **sisterhood meeting** will be held **May 9, at 6 p.m.**, at the Temple, and will include dinner. Plans were also made to meet on June 13 for a dinner meeting at a local restaurant.

Baby Changing Table

Please note, especially those of you with young children or grandchildren, that a baby changing station has been installed in the handicap-accessible restroom in the social hall.

This important addition to our Temple is due to a special donation from a group of Beth El members.

Religious School Report

The end of the 2006-07 Religious School year is nearly here. We can hardly believe it flew by so quickly!

We have been very busy celebrating the many holidays that occur this time of year. At the end of March, we all enjoyed a delicious Pesach Model Seder. We were pleased to have to add an extra table with chairs because of the great turnout. Thank you so much to Ronn Daniel and Hillary Gerson-Krohn for helping to organize the Seder, as well as set everything up and clean up at the end! Thanks also to all of the religious school families that brought all of the delicious foods that we shared! I was personally impressed with the number of hardboiled eggs and pieces of gefilte fish that were consumed! And many thanks to Jesse Brand for locating the afikomen, otherwise we'd all still be at Beth El waiting to complete the Seder...

After everyone recovered from Passover and Spring Break, we returned to Religious School in time to observe Yom Hashoah on April 15th. The Daled students braved the miserable weather and joined the Rabbi at the Holocaust Museum. Kitah Bet and Gimmel students watched and discussed the documentary *Paper Clips*, which follows the children of Whitwell MS in Tennessee who collected 6 million paper clips to visualize the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust. The Alef students observed the day by learning about how differences make each person special and that actions affect others and ourselves.

The following week is the celebrations of Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, which commemorates the declaration of independence of Israel in 1948, as well as, Yom Hazikaron, Israel's National Memorial Day. This family education experience will surely be a lot of fun with crafts, music, dance, and food.

For our last month of instruction we hope you will join us for the Religious School Shabbat Service at Beth El on Friday, May 11. We will be ending our school year with a picnic and Lag Be'Omer Maccabi games at Westover Park on May 20.

If you know of any new students for next year, please be sure to contact Linda Kohn (540-269-2213 or lin5ko@aol.com) or Dara Hall (540-433-5596 or mddmhall@verizon.net) so we can be sure to send them an application packet.

Cheers to all!

B'shalom, Linda, Ruth, and Dara

Get Ready for the Annual Sisterhood Yard Sale

The annual sisterhood yard sale will be held this year on Sunday, June 3. This is a great opportunity to let Beth El help you get rid of your castoff household goods, books, and clothing, while benefiting our bottom line. If you would like to donate your goods, you may begin leaving them in the second classroom (the one next to the library) starting May 14.

Please do not leave items in the social hall in advance. Also, if you are donating an appliance, TV, computer or other electric item, it would be very helpful if you could attach a note specifying if it works or, if not, what does not work about it. We are often asked this at the sale by potential buyers and it would be helpful to have this information. If you have any questions, please contact Lisa Giovanetti, 434-6515, or giovanetti@juno.com.

Youth Group Planning for May

Please be watching for fliers for our annual fundraising dinner, which will be held Friday, May 18, at 6 p.m.

We will be serving from a new menu this year, including rotisserie chicken, roasted potatoes, and salad. Mark your calendars!

That evening also will be confirmation. Michael Kalman will be confirmed and SHORTY will be leading services.

We will continue with our traditional cosmic bowling and shul-in.

Saturday morning we are signed up for social action with planting sweet potatoes for the Food Bank. We will finish with lunch together and go home and go to sleep!!!!

If you have any questions, call Sherri at 249-5463.

Beth El Congregation

May 2007

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3 Adult Ed Basic Judaism 7 p.m. THOI.	4 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	5
6 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Interfaith Dialogue, 2 to 5 p.m.	7	8	9 Sisterhood meeting, Temple, 6 p.m.	10	11 Rabbi Service, Religious School Shabbat, 7:30 p.m.	12
13 No Religious School.	14 Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Begin bringing Yard Sale items to Temple.	15	16	17	18 SHAVUOT: Youth Group fundraising dinner, 6 p.m. Youth Group Service and Confirmation, 7:30 p.m.	19 Tot Shabbat at 10 a.m., THOI tot-shabbat@thoi.org to RSVP. Youth Group, planting project for Food Bank.
20 Religious School, Year End Picnic and Maccabi Games, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Film Series, 6 p.m.	21 Torah Study 7 p.m.: bring your meal and join us for discussion.	22	23	24 Adult Ed Basic Judaism 7 p.m. THOI.	25 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	26
27	28	29	30 Congregational Meeting, 7 p.m.	31		

RABBI'S AVAILABILITY

Rabbi Joe Blair is available this year on Sundays and Mondays in Harrisonburg, and Thursdays and Fridays in Staunton. The rabbi is out and the office is closed for all Jewish holidays, for Shabbat, and for some secular holidays. The office is closed as well as during those times the rabbi is out of town or otherwise unavailable. You may leave a phone message at 540.434.2744. Rabbi Joe checks his messages on a regular basis.

If you wish to meet or speak with the rabbi, please email or call for an appointment to be sure that Rabbi Joe will be able to give you his undivided attention, as you deserve.

Email: RabbiJoeB@hotmail.com

Beth El Congregation: 540-434-2744

Temple House of Israel: 540-886-4091

Home [Emergencies only, please]: 434-971-474

The Beth El Bridge

Beth El Congregation, Harrisonburg, VA 22803

President, Margee Greenfield: 540-433-0977

Donations

Beth El Congregation gratefully acknowledges the following generous donations:

To the General Fund

In memory of Harry Clayman: Lynne and Marshall Kohen.

In honor of Roberta Stein's Bat Mitzvah: Joyce and Erwin Helbraun.

In honor of Marlene Brumbaugh's birthday: Ruth Clayman.

To the Yahrzeit Memorial Fund

In memory of Benjamin Kohen, Andy's father: Andy and Janet Kohen.

In memory of his wife, Louise Perlman: Milton Perlman.

In memory of his grandmother, Edna Ash: Eddie Ney.

To the Religious School

In honor of Roberta Stein's Bat Mitzvah: Lisa and Kevin Giovanetti, Gary and Roberta Stein.

To the Building Fund

In honor of Roberta Stein's Bat Mitzvah: Eddie Ney and Frances Stewart.

In memory of his father, Louis Slott: Chuck Slott.

In honor of Marlene Brumbaugh's birthday: Eddie Ney and Frances Stewart

To the Building Restoration Fund

Claire and Tom Aycock, Dale Brothers, Joan Funston, Lisa and Kevin Giovanetti, Elizabeth and Herbert Karp, Arnie Kahn, Judith and Stuart Liss, Valerie and Mitch Lovinger, Shirley and Dave Merlin, Julie and Dave Miller, Bill and Leslie Ney, Milton Perlman, Bo and Sandi Rose, John and Nancy Stewart, Evelyn and Larry Williams.

To the Handicap Lift Fund

In honor of Roberta Stein's Bat Mitzvah: Judy Freudenthal.

To the Stained Glass Window Fund

In honor of Roberta Stein's Bat Mitzvah: Janet and Andy Kohen, Shirley and Dave Merlin, Esther and Jerry Minskoff, Chuck Slott, John and Nancy Stewart.

In memory of Jack Stein, Margot Stein and Richard Banker: Gary and Roberta Stein.

In honor of Marlene Brumbaugh's birthday: Shirley and Dave Merlin.

In honor of Anne Mintzer: Anne Swartz.

In memory of Harry Clayman: Ruth and Bary Berger, Deanna and Paul Frankel.

Yahrzeits for May

3	Max M. Joseph	12	Lillian Coxé	23	Rabbi Seldon ben Zvi Fleming
4	Bruno Hirsch	13	Paula Kaiser		
5	Ella P. Blatt	14	Edna Ash	26	Heinz Wallach Mildred Greenfield
6	Rose Gelman	16	Sophia Blatt Lynn Miller	27	Charles A. Hammer Abe M. Loewner
7	Julia S. Ney Maurice Scheuer		Louis Scheuer Sylvia Minskoff		
8	Theresa Hirsch	19	Minnie Wender	28	Ludwig Hirsch David Kohen Richard Kohn
9	Henry Myerberg Lillian Tassle	20	David Frankel Augusta Loewner		
10	Bob Nemoytin	21	Arnold Abriss	30	Jay Nusbaum Molly Huffman

FROM THE RABBI'S DESK

My dear fellow Valley Jews and Friends, Shalom!

Pesach (Passover) is over, Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) has passed, Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Israeli Independence Day) has come and gone, Religious School is drawing towards a close for the year, and Confirmation and Shavuot are on the horizon.... WOW! Where did the time go? ☺

THE CALENDAR & HOLIDAYS

Beginning the 14th of Nisan (April 2) we celebrated Pesach (Passover), the Chag Hamatzot (Holiday of Unleavened bread), also known as Chag HaAviv (the Spring holiday). Pesach concluded on April 10 at sundown. The 27th of Nisan (April 15) was Yom Hashoah. Nisan concluded April 18, and Rosh Chodesh for Iyar was April 18 and 19. Iyar 5 (April 23) was Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Israeli Independence Day).

Iyar 18 (May 6) will be Lag Be'Omer (more on that in a moment).

May 17 is the end of Iyar, and May 18 is Rosh Chodesh for Sivan, which continues until June 16. June 16 and 17 are Rosh Chodesh for Tamuz.

The 6th and 7th of Sivan (evening of May 22 through sundown on May 24) is Shavuot (Holiday of Weeks, sometimes called the Feast of Tabernacles).

Throughout most of this month, we are in the middle of counting the Omer, which began on the second day of Pesach. An omer is a measure, something like a small basket, in volume perhaps a cup or so. In the past, the 'omer' referred to the harvesting of the barley grain crop, which begins at this time of year in the Middle East. Barley does not ripen all at once, so it is collected over a period of time. In accordance with the command to offer first 'fruits' as a form of thanks, it became the custom to set aside a portion of the grain collected each day during the 49 days of the barley crop harvesting, and to keep it separately, to be taken all at once to the Temple as an offering to G-d. Thus, we have the counting of the Omer – a seven week, or 49 day period during which the barley would have been set aside. Since the barley crop was what sustained the people until the much later wheat crop would grow, ripen, and be harvested, it was imperative for survival, and the period of harvesting took on a solemn and awesome note. It became the custom to treat it as a period of semi-mourning, in order not to act inappropriately. That is why it is traditional not to have any weddings or other public celebrations/parties during this time. Starting the evening of Nisan 16 (the evening of April 3rd, day 2 of Pesach) we began to count the Omer. The Omer continues to be counted for forty-nine days, until May 22nd, on which evening after sundown we begin our celebration of Shavuot, the giving of the Aseret Hadibrot (the Ten Sayings or Ten Commandments) on Mount Sinai. In this way we demonstrate the link of the liberation from slavery and Redemption of Pesach to the giving of the commandments and Revelation of Shavuot at Mount Sinai.

It is a custom to count the omer each evening. Of course, if one skips a day, the count is broken, and it is not a continuous action, so it is often seen as a challenge to remember to do so each night. One of the fun ways to remember that I have used is to look for the online printable calendar of the counting of the **Homer** – based on the cartoon character Homer Simpson. This includes the appropriate blessings and the actual count for the entire time. You can find it at <http://www.jvibe.com/homer/Bart.html>. Take a look and enjoy it!

THE CONGREGATIONAL CALENDAR: THINGS TO DO

Allow me to point out a few of the many things that are upcoming:

- May 3rd will be the fourth of five Adult Education sessions on Basic Judaism. These sessions meet at 7 p.m. at THOI over a seven week period. You can attend any of them: they are not planned as a single unit. The remaining topics are Jewish Observance, and Jewish views on Sexuality. No homework, no required reading, and no pop quizzes! Open to members of both congregations.
- May 6th we will be commemorating Lag Be'omer (33rd day of the omer count) during Religious school.
- ***Also May 6: The three dates for the Adult Education Interfaith Dialogue progra.m. are now fixed, and will be May 6th from 2 to 5 p.m. at Beth El, June 3rd from 2 to 5 p.m. at Otterbein United Methodist Church, and June 24th from 2 to 5 p.m. at Beth El.***

The sessions are planned as three hours each, including time for snacks and to eat a light meal together towards the end. Up to ten members of the congregations who would like to engage in a

meaningful dialogue with a similar number of Christians from the Otterbein United Methodist Church will participate. If you wish to take part, we still have a couple of openings, so please call or write me (Rabbi Joe). We have adapted the Open Doors, Open Minds curriculum from URJ, which helps us to explore similarities and differences, and how each faith community uses their sacred text. We will use the Aseret Hadibrot (the 10 sayings, which are often called the Ten Commandments) as the major text, particularly for the third session. For more information, please be in touch with Rabbi Joe.

The first session will focus on the history and development of each participant's beliefs, and on the historical context of the Biblical text. Session two will look into how we read and use scripture and liturgy in each tradition. Session three will focus on the actual text and how it is read, including the significant differences in each of our traditions. In all sessions it is planned that there will be an opportunity for significant conversation and dialogue among the participants.

- Friday, May 11 will be Religious School Shabbat at Beth El. Come and shep nachas (take pleasure) in the accomplishments of our religious school students.
- May 17 at 7 p.m. at THOI there will be an adult education session on the holiday of Shavuot. Members of both congregations are welcome.
- Friday, May 18 there will be a meal served by SHORTY as a fundraiser, followed by Shabbat services, which Shorty will lead. All are invited to join our youth as they demonstrate their liturgy skills.
- May 18 after services Shorty will go Cosmic bowling, then hold a shul-in.
- May 19 from 8 to 12 Shorty (and anyone who wishes to join them to do this mitzvah of weeding and planting food that will be given to the food bank) will go to the Volunteer Farm in Woodstock.
- May 19 will be the next Tot Shabbat at THOI at 10 a.m. RSVP to Shelby at tot-shabbat@thoi.org.
- On May 20, the Religious school picnic is scheduled.
- Also on May 20, we are scheduled for the next in our film series at Beth El. It will be 6 p.m. – bring a meal and watch a movie, then talk about it afterwards.
- May 22 will be a Tikkun Leil Shavuot. It will begin at 7 p.m., at THOI. Members of both congregations are welcome to come and study Torah as a way of celebrating Revelation.
- May 24 is the final Adult Education session on Basic Judaism. The topic is Jewish Views on Sexuality.

TORAH PARASHIOT

Torah parashiot (weekly portions) for this month include: Emor, Behar-Bechukotai, Ba.m.idbar, Naso, and the reading for Shavuot. This includes Vayikra (Leviticus) 21:1-27:34, Bamidbar (Numbers) 1:1-7:89, 28:26-31, Shemot (Exodus) 19:1-20:23, Devarim (Deuteronomy) 14:22-16:17.

Haftarot include readings from Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Judges.

Included among these readings are the topics of: the levitical code, the laws of offerings, the Sabbath, the period of the counting of the omer, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, rules on blasphemers, the Shemithah year and the Yovel, indentured servitude, the covenantal blessings and curses, mortgages, tithes, the census, the order of camp and travel, the census of the Levites, rules on Tzara'at, restitution, the Sotah ritual, Nazirites and vows, the priestly benediction, the dedication offerings of the tribes for the Mishkan, and the purification of the Levites (to briefly list some of the highlights!).

Rabbi Joe

The thoughts of the Congregation are with Charles and Gale Clemons and family, after the recent death of Charles' father, Frank Clemons.

The Beth El Bridge

c/o Kate and Alan Neckowitz
neckowax@jmu.edu