

# ***The Beth El Bridge***

## Keeping the Jewish Community Connected

Beth El Congregation

Harrisonburg, Virginia

March 2006

*My dear fellow Valley Jews and Friends,*

*Shalom!*

Tu Bi'Shevat has come and gone, and we are rushing towards Purim in the middle of this month! ☺ Can Passover be far behind? Be Happy – It's soon Adar!

### **From the Rabbi's Desk — The Calendar and Holidays:**

Adar is considered the month of great joy and celebration. Rosh Chodesh for Adar is Feb. 28 and March 1, and Rosh Chodesh for Nisan is March 30. The holidays in this month are Ta'anit Ester (the fast of Esther) observed the day before Purim, Purim (the Feast of Lots), which falls on Tuesday, March 14, and Shushan Purim (Purim as celebrated in walled cities, a day later than Purim is noted elsewhere). A time of great joy to you in this month of Adar! The Purim service is scheduled for March 10.

### **Jewish Lifecycle: Marriage**

Our abbreviated discussion of Jewish Lifecycle continues this month with the most widely celebrated ceremony, Marriage.

Most of us have attended at least one, and think we know about Jewish weddings and marriage. As with so many things, however, there is much more to it than we are often aware. This is a very short listing of a few aspects, some widely known, some less so.

In the background, we often have an overlay of westernized thought, which includes the concept of romantic love. Not specifically eschewed by Judaism, this sensibility is not seen as a necessary component for marriage in Jewish thought. If you wonder at it, recall that it is only after twenty-five years of marriage that Tevye asks Golde if she loves him in *Fiddler on the Roof!* That said, we can begin our examination of Jewish marriage.

The Talmud describes three forms of establishing a marriage. All require reliable witnesses.

The first is "bi'ah" or cohabitation, with no formal act. This was not viewed favorably by the rabbis, though one might argue that it is the basis for palimony in community property states such as California. It involves the couple placing themselves in the position to hold themselves out as a couple in the eyes of others, and to act as a couple.

Second was the formal act of delivery of a document by a man to a woman, and her acceptance of it. This might be seen as the marriage contract or wedding license being signed and given to the woman.

The third method was the giving of an article of some value (usually ascertainable) by a man to a woman, and her acceptance of it. A wedding gift is not uncommon even today.

A Jewish wedding ceremony today goes one better, and incorporates all three! First, we have the document of the Ketubah, the marriage contract. Second, there is the article of value – the ring. And third, from their symbolic home, the Chuppah (marriage canopy), the couple retire together in private in Yichud (a time alone) after the ceremony.

But before we get there....

When the bride- and groom-to-be decide that they will marry, they may introduce their families and engage in a ritual known as Tena'im (conditions). This is a drawing up of the conditions for the marriage to take place. Some of these conditions are carried over to the Ketubah. One of the customs is that at the end of the meeting, to seal the agreement, a plate is smashed, and the pieces are often kept and displayed in an ornamental fashion, such

as in a shadow box. The scene in Fiddler where Tevye and Lazer Vulf agree (and drink), and throw a glass against the wall, is reminiscent of this custom.

Later, the actual conditions and agreements are finalized and set down in writing in the Ketubah (marriage contract). Traditionally, this set forth the bride price, the dowry, the responsibilities of the bride and groom, and the financial penalty to the groom if he later chooses to divorce the bride. This contract is not signed until the wedding.

Sometime before, usually the Shabbat preceding the wedding, the groom (and nowadays the bride) may be called up to an aliyah at the Torah, which is called an Aufruf (sounds like oof-roof, Oyfrufn in plural). At the conclusion of the blessings after the Torah reading, it is the custom to throw candy to wish them a sweet life. This is the source of the custom we occasionally see at B'nai Mitzvah. The custom of Oyfrufn is so old that Solomon included a gate for bridegrooms in the original Temple design. With the destruction of the second Temple in the year 70, the practice moved to the synagogue.

The wedding usually takes place in two locales, one private, and one public. The signing of the Ketubah is often done in private, as this is in part a business agreement, and the terms are not necessarily public. The public ceremony is the wedding itself.

The private ceremony can take two flavors. If the couple have chosen not to see each other before the wedding, this can be done in two parts, with only the witnesses and officiant required at both. The basic ritual is that the Ketubah is signed and witnessed.

The witnesses are to be two persons, Jewish, not related to the bride or groom, who can sign their Hebrew and English names.

If the couple are to see each other, the groom may veil the bride; if not, either she is already veiled in a prior ceremony before she enters, or they are not in the room at the same time. The veiling ceremony is called Bedeken. Either the groom veils the bride to assure that a fast one isn't pulled on him, as happened to Jacob with Leah; or the groom may send a representative to the bride to question her after she is veiled, to assure that this is the woman he has chosen to marry.

What the public sees is the wedding. A wedding is more or less evenly divided into four segments. After the procession, when the bridal party is at or under the chuppah (canopy), the first portion of the ceremony begins. The officiant welcomes the guests and bridal party, and calls upon them to come together as a kehillah, a sacred congregation to witness this religious ritual. The officiant recites the blessings of Erusin (betrothal), and the bride and groom sip from the wine. They then exchange rings, and recite the formulaic Hebrew phrases that make this a legal ritual for Jewish purposes.

The custom is that the ring will be a plain band of precious metal, without stones or incisions, something that has an easily ascertainable value, and which can be seen by the witnesses at a distance.

The second segment of the ceremony is a brief separation of the Erusin from the next major section. It often includes the reading of parts of the Ketubah, offering of vows to each other, addresses to the couple by friends and/or the officiant, readings, or other insertions that help the couple make this a more personal moment.

Third, the second half of the wedding ceremony, Nisu'in takes place. Again, there is a cup of wine, and the Sheva Berachot (seven blessings) are recited.

The final segment of the ceremony is the legal pronouncement, kiss, threefold priestly benediction, breaking of the glass, shouts of 'mazel tov', and recession.

All together, Erusin and Nisu'in, with the optional additions, form the ceremony of Kiddushin, the sanctification of the union.

Often the couple will go into seclusion for a short time, which is called Yichud (aloneness). There it is common for them to share a small meal – all too often they don't get a chance to eat at their own wedding! This is all the more important when they have chosen to fast for the day. This is in recognition that one's wedding day is viewed as a private Yom Kippur for the bride and groom. It is also true that we don't like to see brides and grooms fainting at their receptions!

We have not mentioned the Chuppah (bridal canopy). This is a symbolic dwelling under which the ceremony takes place. It represents the new home being created, reminds us all of what is above us and that G-d is a part of this union, and helps us to see these two people as a unified couple, and a sanctified family. The Chuppah can be made of many things. Often it is a beautifully decorated and artistic piece of sewing or embroidery, but some use a special Tallis, others make it from flowers and growing things, still others use articles that have meaning to them. It is a personal statement that enhances the moment for this couple.

# Beth El Congregation

# March 2006

| Sunday  | Monday   | Tuesday  | Wednesday   | Thursday  | Friday  | Saturday   |
|---|--|--|---|---|---|--|
|   |  |  | 1   | 2<br>Rabbi's office day.<br><b>Torah Study</b> , 6 p.m., bring your own meal. | 3<br>Rabbi Service, <b>Religious School Shabbat</b> , 7:30 p.m.                             | 4<br><b>Youth Group</b> , TheVent, Raleigh, N.C., March 3-5. |
| 5<br><b>Religious School</b> , 9:30-12:30.<br>Bagel Bar, 9-11:30.<br>Rabbi's office day.  | 6  | 7  | 8   | 9<br>Rabbi's office day.  | 10<br><b>Lay Service</b> , 7:30 p.m.<br><b>Purim Celebration</b> , THOI.                    | 11   |
| 12<br><b>Religious School</b> , 9:30-12:30,<br><b>Purim Celebration</b> .<br><b>Adult Hebrew</b> , 2:30-3:30.<br><b>Mystical Judaism</b> , THOI, 7 p.m. | 13<br><b>Board Meeting</b> , Temple, 7:30 p.m. | 14   | 15  | 16<br>Rabbi's office day.   | 17<br><b>Rabbi Service</b> , 7:30 p.m.  | 18   |
| 19<br><b>Religious School</b> , 9:30-12:30.<br>Bagel Bar, 9-11:30.<br><b>Rabbi's Reminisce</b> , 10:45.<br><b>Adult Hebrew</b> , 2:30-3:30.             | 20   | 21<br><b>Men's Club</b> serves Lions Club — <b>help</b> needed at 5:30.<br><b>Meeting follows.</b> | 22<br><b>Sisterhood Meeting</b> , 6 p.m., Temple. | 23<br>Rabbi's office day.   | 24<br><b>Lay Service</b> , 7:30 p.m.  | 25   |
| 26<br><b>No Religious School</b><br>Rabbi's office day.<br><b>Adult Hebrew</b> , 2:30-3:30.<br><b>SHORTY</b> , THOI, 5.                                 | 27   | 28   | 29  | 30<br>Rabbi's office day.   | 31<br><b>Torah Study</b> , 6 p.m., bring your own meal.<br><b>Rabbi Service</b> , 7:30 p.m. |  |

## Jewish Lifecycle (Continued from Page 2)

Some grooms have the custom of wearing a Tallit (prayer shawl) during the ceremony. A Sephardic (Jews of Spanish descent) custom is to enwrap the bride and groom in the tallis during part of the ceremony.

Not too common nowadays is the wearing of a kittel (a white robe) by the groom, similar to the custom for Yom Kippur.

One of the customs that is shrouded in ancient mystery is the circling of the groom by the bride. The number of circles varies with custom and the nature of the symbolic aspect one chooses to follow, from zero to thirteen times, with seven being the most well-known number, though not necessarily the most often chosen. There are connections to each number for various reasons, and it is up to the couple to decide what they will incorporate into the ceremony.

The ceremony can be as plain or as elaborate as the couple and the family may choose. The key elements being present, a small ceremony is no different than a large one, and each is spiritually the same.

*Next month, we will continue with the topic of Death and Burial.*

*— Rabbi Joe Blair*

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## Donations

Beth El Congregation gratefully acknowledges the following generous donations, received in the past month:

### To the General Fund

A generous general fund donation was received from Jessica MacWilliams.

### To the Building Fund

Get well wishes for Harry Clayman and Sherri Alt: Eddie Ney and Frances Stewart.

### To the Yahrzeit Memorial Fund

In memory of his father, Ivan Lantz: Bob Lantz.

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

In memory of Eddie's family members: Eddie Ney and Frances Stewart.

### To the Anne Mintzer Window Fund

In honor of Anne Mintzer: Irma and Gene Nemoytin, Allan Poster, Milton Perlman.

In honor of and with thanks to Sherri Alt for our ski weekend: Lisa Stern.

### To the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

A generous donation to the Rabbi's discretionary fund was received from W. A. Hartman Memorials.

### To the Beth El Men's Club

Thanks for the dinner: Harold Smuckler and Naomi Sato.

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## Yahrzeits for March

|    |   |    |  |    |  |
|----|---|----|--|----|--|
| 1  | Ivan Lantz  | 14 | Nathan Minskoff                                      | 23 | William Friddle                                      |
|    |   |    | Anna Rodbell   |    | Michael Mintzer                                      |
| 3  | Julius Wise<br>Mary Frank Loewner                               |    | Lenore White   |    | Aaron Sissman  |
|    |   |    |  |    | Cornelia Oestreicher                                 |
| 4  | Joshua Rabinowitz   | 15 | Jonathan Freudenthal                                 |    |  |
|    |   |    | Mary Blatt   | 24 | Esther Miller  |
| 5  | Bertha Ney<br>Lilly Schwartz<br>Shirley Dobin<br>Rosalie Hirsch | 16 | Louis Amberg   | 25 | Charles Schwalb<br>Lilly Schwartz                    |
|    |   | 18 | Rose Solomon   |    |  |
| 6  | Joseph Berney<br>Hetty Marrick                                  | 19 | Joseph Huffman<br>Louise Perlman                     | 26 | Phillip Feig   |
|    |   |    |  | 27 | Beatrice Schwalb                                     |
| 7  | Maurice Scheuer   | 20 | Augusta Loewner<br>Rabbi Bernard Bloom               | 29 | Fanny Spivack<br>Max Sissman                         |
| 9  | Rae Slater  |    |  |    |  |
|    |   | 21 | Morton Nusbaum<br>Flossie Hollander                  | 31 | Rabbi David Fazon<br>Margot Stein<br>George Goldberg |
| 10 | Baruch Ney<br>Phyllis Rodbell<br>Merwin Kalman                  |    |  |    |  |
|    |   | 22 | Sigmund Wise<br>Esther F. Clayman<br>Abraham Bersson |    |  |
| 12 | Joe Kimmel  |    |  |    |  |

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## News and Notes

### Rabbi's Office Days

Rabbi Joe's office days in Harrisonburg this year are **Sundays** and **Thursdays**. Please call ahead (434-2744) or email [rabbijoe@hotmail.com](mailto:rabbijoe@hotmail.com) to arrange an appointment.

### Sisterhood

Sisterhood is busy planning the interim **district board meeting**, District 8 L.I.V.E. (Leadership, Inspiration, Vitality, Empowerment), which will be held in Harrisonburg April 21 to April 23. The meeting will begin with dinner before Shabbat services on Friday and continue through lunch on Sunday, and will be filled with stimulating workshops, interesting activities, and opportunities to meet and talk with women from our own and other sisterhoods.

**Rabbi Elissa Kohen** will conduct Shabbat services, both Friday evening and Saturday morning.

It's a wonderful chance to participate in these activities without leaving home. Members of our sisterhood who register to attend the weekend will be given a discounted price. More information will be coming soon.

The next sisterhood meeting will be held at the Temple on Wednesday, March 22, at 6 p.m.

### "Reminisces of Beth El Rabbis"

On Sunday, March 19 at 10:45 AM, Justin Goldberger will show his entire video, "Reminisces of Beth El Rabbis," in the Temple social hall. Come see Rabbis Landsberg, Biatch and Friedlander answer questions as they remember their days at Beth El.

Anyone wishing to can make a donation of \$18 and receive their very own copy of the videos on DVD. Donations can be designated for the General Fund or the Anne Mintzer Stained Glass Window Fund.

### Youth Group

The Youth Group met at Beth El Feb. 26 to visit the "Felafel Stand of Faith and Religion," and to plan for the coming months. After the full month of January, the youth needed a little bit of a break!

Next up: March 3 to 5 is TheVent, this year in Raleigh. Of all the Kallot, this is the one *not to miss!* Sign up *early!* Applications are already on the NFTY-Mar website!

They come back from that Kallah only to do more: On March 12 they will work with the Religious School to put on the annual Purim Carnival. Then, the monthly meeting will be at 5 p.m. March 26 at THOI.

Don't forget to bring children's books as donations to help SHORTY with its Tzedakah efforts for the Reach out and Read project. You can leave these donations in the office or the social hall. SHORTY will continue this project until June.

### Men's Club

We need a **big turnout** to help prepare dinner for the Lions Club on Tuesday, March 21. We'll need volunteers starting at 5:30 p.m. Serving time is 6:30.

We'll have our monthly meeting after the Lions Club is done.

### Religious School

The Religious school had a lovely Tu Bi'Shevat seder Feb. 19. Thanks to all who participated. In celebration of the holiday, trees were planted in Israel and we ate lovely fruits and nuts.

In March we look forward to two big events: our **Religious School Shabbat** March 3 at Beth El, and our **Purim Celebration** March 12! Be sure to come for both. Mark your calendars — *no religious school* March 26 or April 2 for Spring Break.

## Bar Mitzvah Invitation

*Please join us as our son, Devin Oberdorff, becomes a Bar Mitzvah, on Saturday, April 8, at 10 a.m.*

Juli and Troy Oberdorff

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## **Adult Education**

### **Adult Hebrew Classes**

Intermediate Hebrew is moving along well. This course is a chance to practice reading Hebrew, to improve prayer service skills, and to build Hebrew vocabulary to better understand the liturgy. Our textbook is the Siddur – our regular prayerbook! In March We will meet at THOI March 6, 20 and 27, 6 to 7 p.m., and at Beth El March 12, 19 and 26 from 2:30 to 3:30. It is not too late — you can still join the group! There is no cost to members for this course. Please see me to sign up or for more information.

### **Re-Introduction to Judaism Course**

This course began Jan. 30, and will meet for fifteen sessions (ending June 26) at 7 p.m. at THOI in Staunton. The full schedule and list of topics we will address, textbooks, and materials was provided at the first class. It is still not too late to join this class, but hurry! After the fifth session, I will close further entry to the class. We have a really wonderful group – come join us and learn!

This course is intended to offer an overview of Judaism in a conversational and welcoming setting. It can serve as a reminder or as a first introduction. This course is also a prerequisite for anyone who may wish to convert to Judaism. This course is generally only offered every other year, based on the level of interest.

The course is open to all congregational members, and to members of the public with permission of the instructor (Rabbi Joe). There are several textbooks to be purchased for the course (generally available at local bookstores), and homework and several “field trips” will be assigned. So you are aware – this is a real bargain. The URJ recommended fee for this course is \$300 a person, PLUS textbooks and materials.

Please call for further information or to register at 540-886-4091.

### **Jewish Lecture and Discussion Series**

Our postponed discussion of The Zohar and Kabbalah will take place March 12, Sunday, at 7 p.m., at THOI. There is no prerequisite. All members of the congregations are invited.

### **Parashat Hashavuah**

The weekly Parashat Hashavuah (Torah portion) discussion continues at noon on Fridays at THOI on days when the office is open. All members of both congregations are invited to bring your lunch and join the discussion. No prior knowledge or experience required.

### **Limud Torah**

At Beth El there will be a Thursday evening Torah Limud on March 2, and April 6, and a Friday Torah Limud on March 31. (The session scheduled for April 21 is cancelled due to the Board of the Women of Reform Judaism being our guests that weekend.) Please mark these dates on your calendar and plan to attend. All members are invited to join in to share opinions and talk about matters of Torah over a BYO meal. No prior knowledge needed, and no preparation on your part, other than your meal! ☺

### **Israel Trip Update**

I have asked for responses concerning a possible Israel trip in the last several newsletters. I have received some responses, and there is interest in going.

Also, I was contacted by someone from the UJC, who offered to let us tie our trip into theirs, if we wish, with some separate activities possible, but assuring us of reaching the numbers we need to get the group rate. That makes this a very real prospect, and much of the logistical and legwork would be done by UJC, bringing this much closer to a realistic possibility.

**A note to families of upcoming B'nai Mitzvah:** one of the suggestions offered by the UJC was to make this a B'nai Mitzvah trip, if anyone wishes to do so. They will help us to plan and execute a B'nai mitzvah celebration there, so that is also an option available.

We are now in the position of needing to decide how soon we would want to plan such a trip. The earliest date would be July or August of 2006 for 10 days. That seems awfully soon (4 or 5 months out), given all the planning and preparation that is needed. I am inclined to aim at a later time, perhaps May or June of 2007, giving us time to plan ahead, make preparations, and be ready, rather than rush.

If you are interested in going to Israel on a group trip, please contact me (again, if you have) and let me know if you could come at any of these times. I will begin to collect the answers and make some initial plans.

*Rabbi Joe*

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