

# ***The Beth El Bridge***

Keeping the Jewish Community Connected

Beth El Congregation

Harrisonburg, Virginia

May 2006

*My dear fellow Valley Jews and Friends,*

*Shalom!*

Good grief! Passover is done already? What a month we have had! April was a very busy and full month for our community. Our first events were Torah Limud – March 31 and April 6. We had 60 people attend the Chocolate Seder at Beth El April 6. Devin Oberdorff had his Bar Mitzvah April 7 and 8. Passover and the seders fit in there somehow. ☺ The second session of the Jewish Lecture and Discussion Series on Kabbalah met April 16. The WRJ women's board met April 21-23. The Brotherhood-Sisterhood dinner is scheduled April 30. Regular classes and tutoring continued throughout. Whew!

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

Iyar began April 28-29, and the month continues until May 28, which is Rosh Chodesh for Sivan. May 2 is Yom Hazikaron, similar to Memorial Day. May 3 is Yom Ha'atzma'ut, Israel's Independence Day. May 12 is a little-known event, Pesach Sheni (Second Passover). Based on the biblical text, all those who were unable to celebrate Passover are given a second chance to do so! If you didn't have your fill of Matzah and Maror, this is for you! ☺

May 16 is Lag Be'Omer, the 33rd day in the count of the Omer, or Barley harvest, during the 49-day period from Passover to Shavuot — marking the movement from Redemption-Liberation-Exodus from Egypt to

## **COMMUNITY AWARENESS SHABBAT**

THE SHABBAT EVENING SERVICE FOR FRIDAY, MAY 5 WILL BE OUR ANNUAL COMMUNITY AWARENESS SHABBAT. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO INVITE FRIENDS OR NEIGHBORS WHO WISH TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JUDAISM. IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, LET US KNOW HOW MANY GUESTS YOU ARE INVITING SO SISTERHOOD CAN PLAN AN APPROPRIATE ONEG.



**SEE YOU THERE!**

Revelation-Torah at Mount Sinai. May 26 is Yom Yerushalyim, a commemoration of the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967.

June 1 is Erev Shavuot, and Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) is June 2 and 3. We will celebrate Shavuot at Beth El June 2, led by SHORTY, and including the Confirmation of Joel Ornstein.

### **Jewish Lifecycle: Taharat HaMishpachah – Family Purity**

Our abbreviated discussion of Jewish Lifecycle continues this month with one of the least known practices among non-Orthodox Jews. This is based on the concepts of Tumah and Taharah (ritual impurity and ritual purity).

Recall that we are to be a ‘nation of priests and a holy people.’ Cohanim or priests were enjoined to be ritually pure when they came to serve God. The two states (Tamei – impure, and Tahor – pure) are established by actions and contact with things that are ritually impure.

We all move in and out of these two states. Our condition with regard to them is changeable. We become impure, usually by contact with a ritually impure person or item, and we become pure through rituals of separation, often followed by actions such as washing and visiting a mikvah (a ritual bath) which allows us to ‘wash away’ the impurity. An example of this is that we wash our hands when we leave a cemetery.

Purity and impurity are related to the concept of boundaries. Things naturally are within a category, and pure. They become impure when the boundaries are breached, and they cross over into another category. For example, if a person starts the day in the category of pure, but bleeds due to a cut, the blood which is supposed to be inside, but now is outside, causes that person to become ritually impure. The blood has crossed the boundary and changed categories, rendering that person impure for ritual purposes.

One of the largest boundaries we have is that between life and death. When someone crosses the boundary and dies, their physical body becomes ritually impure, and anyone coming in contact with that impurity is also affected by it. This does not imply that we can’t approach or come in contact with the bodies of the dead – we are obligated to do so in many circumstances, and it is a mitzvah to do so in some cases, no matter that we become ritually impure for a time.

In Judaism, everyone is subject to this process, but many people think of it as a particular problem for women. It has acquired that reputation because of the normal menstrual cycle of women (where blood crosses the boundary), which is fairly regular and frequent, so that is the context which most people associate with this idea. In fact, however, men become ritually impure as often as women, though often not precisely in the same way. The other common recollection of the use of the mikvah is in preparation for marriage and other religiously significant events, and for purposes of conversion, all of which can be seen as a crossing of boundaries/changing of status.

The term Taharat Hamishpachah (family purity) has to do with the family unit and ritual purity. A person who comes in contact with a dead body is ritually impure. If that person then comes in contact with another person, the ritual impurity is shared and transferred. If an undertaker or gravedigger, for example, on leaving the cemetery does not perform the ritual of washing his hands, he carries the ritual impurity of his work with him. On returning home, he renders his wife and children and home ritually impure by contact with him. The family unit and its possessions becomes ritually impure. Only people and manufactured articles can take on ritual impurity, so the pond, dog, cow, flowers, grass, etc. are not affected.

This is why the issue of women using the mikvah came to be seen as so important. Because the woman would also cause her family to become ritually impure by her normal activities in the home if she did not take special precautions, and her family might not even know it, it was seen as a hidden source of spreading impurity without awareness. Adding the ‘taboo’ aspect of sexuality on top of this simply made it more overwhelming. That is why the issue of ‘family purity’ took on such a sense of importance for many, and why it is seen by some today as a negative for women, though that was never the idea or intent.

Ritual impurity also diminishes with distance from the source. The family of the gravedigger is impure for a lesser amount of time than the gravedigger; you can think of it as being diminished with distance from the source and with intentionality of contact. The gravedigger has knowingly come in contact with the dead to earn his living. His family knows what he does, but they don’t actually see or touch the dead.

The lowest level of ritual impurity lasts from the contact until one washes. This would be visiting a cemetery where one has relatives buried, for example. The next level of impurity lasts from the contact until sundown, with

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4 <i>Absentee Ballots for Beth El officers DUE by tomorrow, May 5.</i>	5 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m. <i>Community Awareness Shabbat</i>	6
7 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. <i>Congregational Meeting, 7 p.m.</i>	8	9	10	11 Rabbi's office day.	12 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	13
14 No Religious School. Rabbi's office day.	15	16	17	18 Torah Study, 6 p.m., bring your own meal. Rabbi's office day.	19 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m.	20
21 Religious School Picnic, 9:30-12:30. Rabbi's office day.	22	23 Men's Club Meeting, 6:30, location TBA.	24 Sisterhood Meeting, 6 p.m., Temple, Lox and bagels.	25 Rabbi's office day.	26 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	27 <i>Minchah Service, 5 p.m., Baby Naming, Minskoff Grandchildren.</i>
28	29	30	31			

## Congregational Meeting: Sunday, May 7

### Election of Officers

**Our annual Congregational Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, May 7, at 7 p.m. All members should have received a Ballot for the election of Congregation officers.**

On the recommendation of the nominating committee, the Beth El Board has presented the following slate of candidates:

- President, Margee Greenfield; Vice President, nominations from the floor; Treasurer, Bill Ney; Secretary, Gary Stein.
- Trustee (two years): Gerry Minskoff, Alan Neckowitz — vote for one.
- Members at Large: Ronn Daniel, Thea Golub, Linda Kohn, Becky Mintzer — vote for two.
- Previously determined officers: Sisterhood President, Sherri Alt; Men's Club President, Michael White; Trustee (Life), Andy Kohen; Immediate Past President, Janet Kohen.
- Nominations will be accepted from the floor for all open positions.

**Absentee ballots must be signed and received by May 5.**

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a change of clothing and an immersion to wash the impurity away all that is needed. At ‘higher’ levels of impurity it can take longer. For example, Moses’ sister Miriam had to remain outside the camp for a week to become ritually pure again when she was struck with ‘leprosy’ after committing lashon hara (evil speech). A person who lies in wait in hiding and commits murder by stealth is rendered ritually impure and cannot become ritually pure again until they at least confess the crime and attempt to make amends (if even then). Ritual impurity has nothing to do with guilt or with committing crimes – it is related to fitness to approach G-d.

The most common ‘cure’ for any form of ritual impurity of a person was to wash, change clothes, and after an appropriate time passed, near the boundary of day and night (evening), visit the mikvah (ritual bath).

The procedure in a mikvah is simply to immerse oneself completely, with no barrier between the water and your body. There is a blessing for immersing (Rabbi, is there a blessing for everything? – Of course, my son!), which concludes, ‘al tevilah’ (on immersing). Virtually the same process is used, by the way, for assuring the kosher status of new cooking and serving utensils!

The mikvah is an interesting artifact. It can be of many designs, from the most primitive to the most sophisticated, but the core requirements are that it be a body of water of sufficient size to completely immerse a person, and that the source be of natural ‘living waters’. This means most of you have gone to perfectly good mikvaot (plural of mikvah) if you have ever swum in the ocean or a natural lake or river! Manufactured mikvaot usually include a pool area in which one can immerse, with steps or other means to get in and out more easily. That pool is connected to a secondary pool (which can have a much smaller physical size so long as the total volume of water meets the requirements), usually by a small opening between the two so that the water can mix, but with a means to close that opening available. The secondary pool is usually filled from a natural source such as a spring or rainwater. That is actually the mikvah water. The immersion pool may be filled from any water supply. After both are filled, the connection is opened, and the waters mix, making all of the water ‘living water’ and pure. The connection is closed, and then people can use the immersion pool part of the mikvah. When it comes time to drain the water to clean and refill the immersion pool, the same process is used again.

The term ‘mikvah’ is from the same root as ‘tikvah’ or hope, as in the Israeli anthem, HaTikvah. In a lovely play on words, the rabbis have maintained that G-d is the ‘mikvah’ of Israel – God is Israel’s hope.

If you are interested, there is a great deal written on the mikvah; design, operation, costs, spirituality, and so on. Let me know and I will see if I can recommend a good book for your interests.

*This concludes our traversal of the most common and major of the Lifecycle events. Next month, in the last regular bulletin for this year, I will wrap up this two-year series on Lifecycle and Calendar, and offer a few stray thoughts.*

– Rabbi Joe Blair

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## Mid-Atlantic Council E—newsletter: Your Link to the Union

What is new from the Union for Reform Judaism? How are other Reform congregations in our community handling current issues in our lives? What are the members of our Mid-Atlantic Council staff doing this month? What is the Mid-Atlantic Council? All these questions are easily answered in the *Mid-Atlantic Council E--newsletter*. This electronic newsletter is sent out quarterly to members of affiliated congregations who *subscribe* to it. Your e-mail address will not be given out and you can unsubscribe at any time.

We hope this E-newsletter will help congregants in our region (which includes Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and cities in Ohio and Tennessee) feel more connected to what is going on in the Union for Reform Judaism on the regional and North American level. You need not be a lay leader or a professional in your congregation to subscribe; you just need to be interested in Reform Judaism. You will gain information about how our regional Union staff helps congregations, successes at other regional congregations, upcoming events and resources available from the Union for Reform Judaism. If you would like to subscribe, please contact Lisa Helfman, Assistant Regional Director, at [lhelfman@urj.org](mailto:lhelfman@urj.org) or toll free at 1.888.842.8242, ext. 13.

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## Donations

*Beth El Congregation is grateful the following generous donations, received in the past month:*

### To the General Fund

In honor of Elissa Sachs Kohen in leading services at the Sisterhood's District 8 Board Meeting: Judy Freudenthal.

In honor of Sherri Alt, Janet Kohen, Marlene Brumbaugh and all the women of the sisterhood for a very successful District 8 Board Meeting: Judy Freudenthal.

### To the Yahrzeit Memorial Fund

In memory of Henia Schikman, Mike's mother: Mike and Carol Schikman.

In memory Vera Nemoytin, Gene's mother: Gene and Irma Nemoytin.

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

### To the Religious School

A generous Religious School donation was received from Dr. Phil Renick.

### To the Building Fund

In honor of Andy Kohen's 30 years of dedicated service to JMU: Marshall, Lynn, Jacob, and Rachael Kohen.

### To the Anne Mintzer Window Fund

In honor of the bar mitzvah of Devin Oberdorff: Julianne and Troy Oberdorff.

In honor of Rabbi Joe, with thanks for his teaching Devin: Julianne and Troy Oberdorff.

In honor of Janet Kohen for helping Devin with his Bar Mitzvah: Julianne and Troy Oberdorff.

In honor of Anne Mintzer: Estelle and Joshua Robinson; Linda, Peter and Max Kohn.

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## YAHREZEITS FOR MAY

3	Max M. Joseph	12	Lillian Coxe	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		
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

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**TZEDAKAH (Righteous Action)** — Passover is a time of great need in the Jewish world, and many answer that call. But after the holiday is over, the need continues. Please give as generously as you can to those in need by going to [www.jdc.org](http://www.jdc.org), [www.ujc.org](http://www.ujc.org), [www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org), or [www.urj.org](http://www.urj.org), or send your donations by mail. Please don't forget to support First Step, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, the Free Clinic, and the many other worthwhile organizations that help those in need in our own area. Needs are very great, and resources are scarce. If you wish to donate to other Jewish organizations, please be in touch and I can provide you with contact information and often some suggestions as to worthwhile organizations. *From Rabbi Joe*

## Religious School – Principal Needed

As we wind down the religious school year, I want to again *thank all of the parents* who pitched in to make our special events happen. Most recently, Dara Hall (with the help of husband Michael) led our model Passover seder, complete with a crafts project.

Since I am a candidate for president of the Congregation, I want to remind you that I will be unable to continue as religious school principal. I hope that you will consider taking part in this amazing opportunity to assist in directing the Jewish education of our Beth El and THOI children, and step forward in this leadership role.

If you are interested, please contact me, or Janet Kohen, as soon as possible.

*Thanks, Margee*

### YOU ARE INVITED!

Jerry and Esther Minskoff would like to invite members of the Congregation to the double **Simchat Banot (baby naming)** for their newest granddaughters at a Minchah service on **Saturday, May 27, at 5 p.m.** We will be honoring Lilly, the daughter our son Rob and his wife Dottie, who was born Nov. 25, 2005; and we will be honoring Natalie, our daughter Sandy's daughter, who was born April 15, 2005.

Following the service we will be having a light supper. **Please RSVP** by Thursday, May 25, so we know how much food to prepare (434-6973 or [minsloed@jmu.edu](mailto:minsloed@jmu.edu)). We hope you will join us in this joyous celebration.

## A Letter to Sisterhood, from Our President

*Dear Fabulous Sisterhood "Sisters,"*

What a magnificent weekend many of us spent together at the Interim Board Meeting of District 8 that we hosted. I wish that each of you had been there at the ending friendship circle to hear the compliments that the women of visiting sisterhoods showered us with. They were so complimentary that it was almost embarrassing.

Marlene, Sherri, and I accepted all the gratitude and compliments in your names as well as our own. We were so proud of all that our small sisterhood had accomplished in making a three-day event truly memorable for 80 women. We realize, full well, that we three could not have done such a magnificent job if it were not for our combined efforts. So many of you made direct contributions to this project, some large, some small, that I don't want to mention names for fear of omitting someone. You know who you are!!! No job was too small or too unimportant: baking, shlepping, setting up and tearing down, creating, "hammering," punching holes, reading prayers, running a sewing machine, being supportive, making breakfast, cleaning up, kvelling, handing out, collecting, greeting and schmoozing with our visitors, blowing silly horns, doing workshops, selling and registering and hugging. Even if you didn't specifically contribute to this event you are a member of sisterhood and supported us in that way and we needed that.

All of the women who attended expressed the feeling of being warmly welcomed as if they were in someone's private home. They all said, "You, obviously, all like being together and that made us feel good about being with you." In the friendship circle they complimented us on this meeting, on the one we had hosted 15 years ago, and one woman even mentioned the one that was hosted by our sisterhood in the 1960's.

So I could go on forever...but I won't. Just know that you are loved and appreciated.

*Janet*

## ISRAEL TRIP UPDATE

*There is definite interest in an Israel trip! I am planning for a mid-June 2007 timeframe. So if you are interested in going to Israel on a group trip in June of 2007, and you have not told me so specifically, please contact me and let me know of your interest. I am already working on plans!*

*Thanks, Rabbi Joe*