

The Beth El Bridge

Keeping the Jewish Community Connected

Beth El Congregation

Harrisonburg, VA

November 2005

My dear fellow Valley Jews and Friends:

Shalom!

I am writing this in mid-October. The High Holidays have just concluded, and we are entering into the cycle of the Shalosh Regalim (the three pilgrimage Festivals) with the first one now being celebrated, Sukkot. Our congregational year is in full flight. Look out below!

From the Rabbi's Desk:

It is truly Autumn! The temperatures have (finally!) fallen, the leaves are changing, and there is a nip in the air — I can even see my breath in the morning. What a glorious season!

The Calendar and Holidays:

The month of Cheshvan begins the evening of Nov. 2 and runs until Dec. 1. The month is often referred to as Mar-Cheshvan /bitter Cheshvan because there are no holidays in it, especially after Tishrei, a month full of holidays. The only holidays in Cheshvan are Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and Thanksgiving. Of course, Thanksgiving was modeled after the Biblical holiday of Sukkot, our Harvest festival, by the Pilgrims, so we are just taking advantage of this additional secular opportunity to offer our thanks to G-d, and to have a great feast!

Jewish Lifecycle: Bentsching Gomel, Pidyon Haben/Habat

We continue with our brief overview of the Jewish lifecycle. For more information, since it's impossible to cover everything that could be said in the confines of an article, I urge you to come to an adult education class, or contact me for more details. This month, following Covenant and Naming, we look at Bentsching Gomel (praying the prayer acknowledging and offering thanks for being spared), and Pidyon Haben and Pidyon Habat (Redemption of the child).

Gomel:

Historically, childbirth was a very dangerous event. Infant mortality was extremely high, but just as terrifying was the fact that women often died in or just after childbirth. Given the lack of knowledge concerning microorganisms, and the dearth of resources such as antibiotics and sterile dressings, anything that went awry during a delivery could be deadly.

Consequently, when a woman gave birth, and survived, it was seen as an event for which thanks should be offered to G-d, just as for someone who survived a physical attack, a serious illness, or a long (and dangerous) journey. The Gomel prayer is recited when one is called up to the Torah for an Aliyah (going up). At the end of the blessing after the reading of the Torah, Gomel is added. It is very short, and the text of the blessing and the response by the congregation read as follows:

Person having the Aliyah:

Baruch Atah adonay eloheynu melech ha'olam shegomel lechayavim tovot shegmalani kol tov.

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, who bestows good to the living and who has dealt great goodness upon me.

Baruch atah adonay eloheynu melech ha'olam shehechyanu vikiyamanu vehigianu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this day.

Congregational Response:

Mi shegmalcha kol tuv hu yigmalcha kol tov selah.

May the One who has been gracious (or shown kindness) to you continue to favor you with all that is good (show kindness to you) forever.

Traditionally, the husband or father of the woman would be the one called up and he would recite the blessing. Today, in our egalitarian approach to services, a woman is empowered to recite Gomel for herself. This is a lovely custom, a way of expressing gratitude on the part of the person reciting Gomel, and an acknowledgment of that person's experience by the congregation.

Pidyon Haben or Habat (Redemption of the Child):

We should remember that G-d declared that all first-borns belonged to G-d in the Torah when the firstborn of the Israelites were spared from the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn in Egypt (Bamidbar/Numbers 8:17). Later, the privilege of serving G-d was removed from the firstborn and given to the Levites, after the sin of the golden calf. Still, the firstborn "belong" to G-d, so it was necessary to "redeem" them from this requirement of Temple service by purchasing their "freedom" from it.

According to the Torah, one was to pay five shekels of silver to redeem a child, by paying a Kohen (one of the priests, a descendant of Aaron, and therefore a Levite) to take the child's place. The ceremony usually was to take place on the thirty-first day of life (or later — children are not a fully viable human beings until they live thirty days in Jewish tradition). The ritual is a formal declaration by the parents that they wish to redeem the child from service, and in place of the child offer the money stated in the Torah. The Kohen accepts the money and releases the child to the parent, then offers a blessing for the child. It is a very brief ceremony, but longer than can be included here in full. I think it can be a very moving ritual as the parent in effect acknowledges that this child, the first born, is a gift from G-d, and acts to acknowledge that gift, and seeks to take "responsibility" for the child.

Traditionally, only a firstborn male was redeemed, and only if it was the first born child to that mother. Today, some choose to redeem firstborn female children as well. Only a child that is born naturally is considered firstborn — one born by Caesarean section is not. Only the first child of that mother can qualify — later born children, even in the case of an earlier miscarriage or a stillbirth, are not considered firstborn.

Five silver dollars are generally considered the equivalent of the five silver shekels, though some use a five dollar bill or five one dollar bills, or other silver coins. If the parent does not redeem the firstborn, the firstborn child may choose to redeem him or her self when the child comes of age. Firstborn children of a Levite or Kohen mother or father are exempt from redemption — they are dedicated to service to G-d and are not allowed to "buy" their way out.

Next month, we will look at the topics of the Wimpel, Upscherenish, and some thoughts on Education of the Child.

Rabbi Joe Blair

Rabbi's Availability and Office Days

Rabbi Joe is in the office on Sundays and Thursdays, and is available by appointment. Simply leave a message at the congregation, or email him to arrange a time to meet. In the event of an emergency, if you can't reach him through the synagogues, please contact the rabbi at home by phone.

Email: RabbiJoeB@hotmail.com

Beth El Congregation: 540-434-2744

Temple House of Israel: 540-886-4091

Home (Emergencies only, please): 434-971-4741

Beth El Congregation

November 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3 Rabbi's office day.	4 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	5
6 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Adult Hebrew, 3-5. Youth Group, 4 p.m.	7	8	9	10 Rabbi's office day.	11 Torah Study, 6 p.m. Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m.	12
13 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Rabbi's office day. Adult Hebrew, 3-5.	14	15 Men's Club serves Lions Club, 6:30 p.m. Meeting follows.	16	17 Rabbi's office day.	18 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	19
20 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Adult Hebrew, 3-5. Adult Ed: "Death and Dying," 7 p.m.	21 Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.	22 Sisterhood Meeting, Temple, time to be announced.	23	24 Thanksgiving.	25 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	26
27 No Religious School.	28	29	30			

News and Notes

Rabbi's Office Days

Rabbi Joe's office days in Harrisonburg this year are Sundays and Thursdays. Please call ahead for an appointment (434-2744), or email him at rabbijoeb@hotmail.com.

Men's Club To Serve Lions

The Men's Club needs many volunteers to prepare and serve dinner to the Lions Club.

The dinner is Tuesday, Nov. 15, at the Temple. Serving time is 6:30 p.m., but we'll need people throughout the late afternoon hours to cook and set up. We'll have drinks and snacks for the volunteers.

A men's club meeting will follow.

— Mike White

Sisterhood Meeting

Sisterhood will meet Tuesday, Nov. 22, at the Temple. We are trying to arrange a Tai Chi session for members — time to be announced.

Beth El Board

Our next Beth El Board meeting is Monday, Nov. 21, at 7:30 p.m.

The Board welcomes **new members** Elliott and Thea Golub — email: elgolub@msn.com.

Thoughts of the Congregation

The thoughts and prayers of the Congregation are with the friends and family of Marilyn Goldenthal, who passed away Oct.

Religious School Report

Religious School is barreling along. The students and teachers seem to have embraced the Chai (Judaica) and Mitkadem (Hebrew) curricula. Music is rousing and services are inspiring. There is such an energy in the Temple on Sunday mornings! Why not stop in for a bagel and coffee and join in the fun?

Our Sukkot celebration was fun and exciting. We thank Kevin Giovanetti for constructing the sukkah and covering it with pine branches. Juli Oberdorff and Sue Johnson coordinated the creating of decorations and a yummy snack. The rabbi gave everyone a chance to shake the lulav and sniff the etrog. The kids were very involved and they really "got it."

Pretty soon we're gonna blink and it'll be Chanukah!

Please plan to join us on Friday, Nov. 4, at Temple House of Israel, as our newest religious school students are consecrated.

— *Margee Greenfield*

Todah Rabah

On my own behalf and on behalf of the Jewish students at JMU, I extend a huge **Todah Rabah** to a number of Beth El families for once again graciously responding to my efforts to arrange home hospitality for dinners prior to Erev Rosh Hashana and Kol Nidre services. This year I am especially grateful because we labored under very short notice time. The families who served as host for one or both dinners were: Mo and Mike Goldberger; Joyce and Erwin Helbraun; Arnie Kahn; Janet and Andy Kohen; Esther and Jerry Minskoff; Anne, Becky and Les Mintzer; Kate and Alan Neckowitz; Michelle and Ron Ornstein. All of them have done genuine mitzvot to begin 5766. My link with Hillel at JMU was Sara Lewis, who did the front-end work of gathering the names and contact information of the students.

I end this expression of gratitude by announcing my retirement from this "job" as liaison for home hospitality. More than two decades of doing it has persuaded me that it is time to pass the mantle. I will be happy to share with whoever replaces me whatever knowledge I've accumulated about it. All volunteers are requested to contact Janet, who will be in charge of the "vetting" process to select the next holder of the position.

— *L'shalom, Andy Kohen*

Youth Group Report

SHORTY is working on a social action project for victims of Hurricane Katrina. We are asking for donations of cleaning items — cleanser, brushes, etc., to remove germs and mildew for homes and businesses. There will be a box in the social hall for items.

Sherri, Joel and Riff attended a Leadership Training weekend in Chevy Chase, Maryland for the weekend of Oct. 14. We had a wonderful weekend, where 120 teens all worked together to learn, problem-solve, and amend their constitutions — a very lengthy process!

I want to congratulate and thank Joel and Riff for their hard work and dedication to SHORTY! I hope we have more teens able to attend the Fall Kallah in November.

The Youth Group will meet Sunday, Nov. 6, at 4 p.m., in Harrisonburg. Please bring \$5 for dinner.

Thanks SHORTY, for all you do!

— *Sherri Alt, Youth Advisor*

Donations

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

To the General Fund

In honor of Rabbi Sue Elwell's 10 years conducting High Holy Day Services at Beth El: Ron and Michelle Ornstein.

In honor of the choir, with thanks for their beautiful music for the High Holy days: Dale Brothers.

With best wishes for a speedy recovery for Dave Merlin: Bill and Leslie Ney.

In memory of Ruth Brothers, Monty's Mother: Bill and Leslie Ney, Ron and Michelle Ornstein.

In memory of Rose Poster Carr, Allan Poster's mother: Anne Mintzer.

In honor of Franklin Blatt, who was named to *Best Lawyers in America 2006*: Bill and Leslie Ney.

With best wishes for a speedy recovery for Dave and Shirley Merlin: Ron and Michelle Ornstein.

For the Religious School: Asher and Laura Jean Brand, Marie and William Landes.

To the Building Fund

In honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Mike White:

In memory of Ruth Brothers, Monty's Mother: Eddie Ney and Frances Stewart.

To the Yahrzeit Memorial Fund

In memory of Sarah Lovinger: Mitchel and Valerie Lovinger.

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

To the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

In honor of Justin's Bar Mitzvah: Mike and Maureen Goldberger.

To the Anne Mintzer Window Fund

In memory of Ruth Brothers, Monty's Mother: Janet and Andy Kohn.

With best wishes for a speedy recovery for Dave Merlin: Esther and Jerry Minskoff.

In honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Justin Goldberger: Bishop and Laura Dansby.

Donations — High Holy Days

The Congregation is grateful for the generous Yom Kippur Yizkor donations and pledges from members and friends of Beth El:

Sherri Alt, Cindy Baron, Bob Bersson, Sadie Bialock, Rabbi Joe Blair, Franklin Blatt, the Brothers family, Marlene Brumbaugh, Harry and Ruth Clayman, the Clemons family, Ellen DeFriece, Judy Freudenthal, Joan Funston, Margee Greenfield, Erwin and Joyce Helbraun, Marjorie Husinga, Karen Jackson, Arnold Kahn, Andy and Janet Kohen, Linda and Peter Kohn, Robert Lantz, Jerry and Esther Minskoff, Anne Mintzer, Les and Becky Mintzer, Alan and Kate Neckowitz, Ruth and Bill Newman, Bill and Leslie Ney, Eddie Ney, the Ornstein family, Shelia Padoll, Milton Perlman, Allan Poster, Estelle and Joshua Robinson, Brian and Yvonne Rodbell, Herb Rodbell, Sandi and Bo Rose, Gary and Roberta Stein, John and Nancy Stewart, Marc and Suzi Trubitz, Michael White, Beverly and Leo Zindler.

The Congregation also is grateful for the generous donations and pledges from visitors who participated in our services during the High Holy Days:

Robyn and Stephen Atwell, Duffy Baum, Sadie Bialock, David Andrew Glazer, Elliott and Thea Golub, Lesley Kipling, Barrie Mathason, Aaron Neckowitz, and Sulamith Shoemaker.

Yahrzeits for November

1	Selma Miller Sadie Spiro Fredrick Nessen Samuel Freed	15	Dr. Henry Helbraun
2	Selina W. Ney Lawrence Loewner Bruno Freudenthal Jack Stein	17	Rose Hirsch
		19	Sybil Rose Baby Ney
		20	Caroline Ash Sophia Wuzburger
3	Louis Perlman	21	Ida Miller Monroe Nusbaum
4	Albert Lubman	22	Kattie Ney
5	Gussie Meyers Sam Hirsch Louis Wides	23	Albert Wise David Myerberg Dave Levy Doris Freed
7	Eva Brooslin		
9	Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath Annie Ney	25	Isaac Ney
		26	Sam Fishman
10	Nathan Ratner	28	Sam Blatt
12	Irene Nusbaum	29	Edward Poster
15	Minna Mintzer Ada Krim	30	Sylvan B. Ney

More News and Notes

Disposal of School Books

During the major clean-up of Beth El that took place in the late summer of 2005, it was decided that many of the texts and workbooks that were in storage were no longer of use to our Religious School. After culling out those that were unusable and depositing them in a recycling bin, the availability of the rest (for the cost of shipping) was advertised on Kol Katan — the internet listserv for small congregations in the URJ. There were many requests, and decisions were made basically on a first-come, first-served basis.

The final distribution of 157 books among the recipients included congregations in

California, Michigan and Massachusetts, and a family that is home Jewish-schooling their daughters in Germany. It should be noted that Beth El paid the shipping cost only to the family in Germany. The recipient congregations reimbursed us for the shipping costs. About 10 congregations responded too late to receive any books, and an email message of regret was sent to each of them.

Wishing a Speedy Recovery

The Congregation wishes full and speedy recovery for Gene Nemoytin, who recently was involved in an automobile accident. Gene is recuperating at home.

Adult Education

Adult Introduction to Hebrew Class

A five session Introduction to Hebrew course will begin in November. The purpose of this course is to learn or brush up on the AlefBet in order to be able to sound out/read Hebrew. We will have classes at Beth El Nov. 6, 13 and 20, and Dec. 11 and 18, from 3 to 5 p.m. There is no cost to members to take these classes. The goal is for those taking this short course to be able to enter an Intermediate Hebrew group, learning to read more fluently and gaining some vocabulary towards understanding the prayers.

Jewish Lecture and Discussion Series

On Nov. 20 at 7 p.m. at Beth El, we will have the first in a three-part series of workshops as part of the Jewish Lecture and Discussion Series. The topic is “Planning Ahead: Jewish Thoughts on End of Life Preparations – Planning for One’s Own Death, Funeral, And Legacy.” The first session will cover pre-planning and Jewish laws and customs around death and dying. Those attending will be given a checklist/form they can use to write directions to their loved ones for the type of funeral arrangements they wish to have followed.

The second session will be on Dec. 11 at Temple House of Israel from 7 to 9 p.m. and will focus on end of life issues and include such things as durable powers of attorney for medical issues and living wills, with the intent that those attending will be able to make some choices and have the means to convey those choices to their loved ones.

The third session will be at 7 to 9 p.m. at Beth El on Jan. 15, and will cover the concept of Ethical Wills. We will discuss the sorts of things that might be included, and try to provide a format for those attending to use in writing their own ethical will.

Parashat Hashavuah and Limud Torah

There is a weekly Parashat Hashavuah (weekly Torah portion) discussion at noon on Friday at THOI. All members of both congregations are invited to bring your lunch and join in. Approximately once a month at Beth El there is a Torah Limud (Torah learning) session at 6 p.m. prior to services. The first one took place Sept. 16 and we talked about the ethics of speech; the next one is scheduled for Nov. 11 (those silly High Holidays got in the way in October!). Again, all members are invited to bring dinner and join us.

Upcoming planned classes include:

- ▶ Intermediate Hebrew (to begin in January).
- ▶ (Re-) Introduction to Judaism (to begin in January).
- ▶ Jewish Lecture Series (periodic, to begin in February): Possible topics, Liturgy and Lifecycle; Judaism and Christianity – Differences; The Radiance: A Dip into the Zohar.
- ▶ Jewish Literature and Film Discussion (periodic): Possible topics, Specific Yiddish or Hebrew stories; Films with Jewish themes or content; Jews in Hollywood; Jews in theatre; Television Jews; Images of Jews in popular culture.

I sincerely hope that you will find something of interest among these, or will help me to find a topic in which you would be interested.

B’virkat shalom (with Blessings of Peace),

– *Rabbi Joe*



If you've been thinking about attending the Union for Reform, Judaism Biennial in Houston (Nov. 16-20), it's time to register!

You won't want to miss:

- Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright
- King Abdullah of Jordan
- Robert Reich, Former Secretary of Labor
- HUC-JIR Scholar Rabbi Eugene Borowitz
- Amazing Shabbat WORSHIP Experiences
- The Best of Jewish Entertainment:
 - Craig Taubman
 - Neshama Carlebach
 - Doug Mishkin
 - Jeff Klepper

And many more...

- The premier of the Reform Movement's New Prayer Book
- The Largest Jewish Shopping Mall in North America
- Workshops on every aspect of your congregation's life
- The opportunity to meet your colleagues from Reform congregations throughout North America and around the world.

Hotel rooms are limited and a late fee applies after Oct. 25. So ...
Register as soon as possible!

Space is limited! Plan to be in Houston with 4,000 Reform Jews to sing, pray, learn and celebrate our Reform Jewish community.

Register today at www.biennial.urj.org

You won't regret it!

Jane Rips, Biennial Chair
Jay Geller, Biennial Vice Chair