

The Beth El Bridge

Keeping the Jewish Community Connected

Beth El Congregation

Harrisonburg, VA

October 2005

My dear fellow Valley Jews and Friends:

Shalom!

I am writing this in mid-September. Our congregational year has begun, and we are already rushing headlong to keep up with all that is planned! Please be sure to read the monthly newsletter regularly to keep up with all that is going on! And, as always, if you have ideas for things that you would like to see tried, please feel free to let me know.

From the Rabbi's Desk:

As I write this, the Religious school is already in session and has met, with an influx of new students joining our returning students. The new curricula are being implemented, and our teaching staff is enthusiastic and upbeat! We have already had one adult Bar Mitzvah (Mazal Tov, Mike!), and another Bar Mitzvah is coming up very shortly (Sha'ah tovah, Justin!). We are looking ahead to two (maybe three!) more adult B'not Mitzvah (Sherri Alt and Laura Jean Brand for sure) and a Bar and a Bat Mitzvah (Devin Oberdorff and Grace Lambeth) in the course of this year. Holiday celebrations, adult education classes, Mitzvah days, and social events are in the planning and preparation stages now. Most immediately, we are rushing towards the High Holiday season!

The Calendar and Holidays:

As you may recall, over Labor Day weekend we arrived at Rosh Chodesh for Elul. Elul is the last month of the year before Rosh Hashanah, during which we are encouraged to take time for introspection and self-examination in preparation for the Yamim Noraim (days of Awe). This is known as a Cheshbon Nefesh (accounting of the soul). If taken seriously, this is a powerful practice, and one that can enhance the effort to perform true Teshuvah (Return/repentance).

High Holy Days Services

- **Erev Rosh Hashanah, Monday, October 3, 8 p.m.**
Rabbi Joe Blair
- **Rosh Hashanah, Tuesday, October 4, 10 a.m.**
Rabbi Sue Elwell
- **Shabbat Shuvah, Friday, October 7, 7:30 p.m.**
Lay Service
- **Memorial Service, Cemetery, Sunday, October 9, 1 p.m.**
Rabbi Joe Blair
- **Kol Nidre, Wednesday, October 12, 8 p.m.**
Rabbi Sue Elwell
- **Yom Kippur, Thursday, October 13, 10 a.m., 3 p.m.**
Rabbi Joe Blair

The term 'Yamim Noaraim' (Days of Awe) refers to the period of ten days starting with Rosh Hashanah and ending with Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah is Rosh Chodesh for the month of Tishrei, which this year falls on Oct. 4 (Erev Rosh Hashanah is the evening of Oct. 3, Kol Nidre is the evening of Oct. 12, and Yom Kippur is Oct. 13). Oct. 6 is Tzom Gedalya (the fast of Gedalia). Tishrei is our most intense month of holidays with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Tzom Gedalya, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah.

Tashlikh (the casting away of sins ritual) will be at 1 p.m. Oct. 4 at Purcell Park in Harrisonburg and Gypsy Hill Park in Staunton, weather permitting. If we cannot perform Tashlikh together, then, I invite each of you to find a time to perform this ritual on your own sometime before Sukkot. All you need are breadcrumbs, a body of living water, and the simple liturgy for the ritual. The Yizkor (memorial) service will take place at the Beth El cemetery Oct. 9 at 1 p.m. Please look for more High Holidays information in the coming days.

Hard on the heels of the Yamim Noraim comes Sukkot. This year Erev Sukkot is Oct. 17, and the holiday period runs until Oct. 26, including Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah. We will celebrate Sukkot and Simchat Torah at Shabbat services Oct. 21 and 28 at THOI and Beth El, respectively. The Religious School will hold its own celebration of Sukkot and Simchat Torah during school hours Oct. 16 and 23 — watch for more detailed information from the Religious School.

Jewish Lifecycle: Covenant and Naming

We move on in our overview of the life cycle. Of course, it is impossible to cover everything in the confines of an article. Come to adult education or contact me for more details.

Following Birth, we next look at what to do with this new child! After the joyous event of birth, we want to welcome this soul into the Jewish people, and give this new person a name by which he or she will be known.

Some Customs: Historically, just prior and immediately following the birth of a child, there were many customs and superstitions that concerned Lilith, the feminine evil spirit. Amulets, talismans, magic circles, sounding the shofar, not telling the real name of the child, all are protections of the mother and (about to be) newborn from the evil Lilith. Some of the talismans used include: a red thread or string worn around the wrist or waist; a hamiksah (sometimes called Hamsah), a medallion or amulet shaped like an outstretched hand, sometimes with an eye in the palm or fish dangling from the fingers, frequently with Psalm 121 verse 6 incorporated in some fashion, often hung over the crib to indicate that the hand of G-d is above this child as a protection. Similarly to not telling the name of the child, many have the custom of not acquiring clothing, toys, or furniture until after the child is safely brought home. There are many variations on these superstitions, customs, and traditions.

Mikvah: Once the child has been born, we find in Vayikra (Leviticus) 12:1-5 instructions concerning the use of a mikvah (ritual bath) by the mother to return to the state of ritual purity following the delivery. There is a distinction made between a male and a female child, and there is no clear reason given for that distinction. Although many attempts have been made to reconcile the difference, I am not satisfied with any of them, and continue to hope to find some explanation that will make sense to me.

Names: The child cannot go through life without a proper name! We have two major bodies of minhag (custom) regarding names. The Ashkenazic minhag (Germanic/Eastern European descent) is to name in memory for a deceased relative. The Sephardic (Spanish descent) minhag is to name for a living relative. There is no Halakhah (Jewish law) about this - it is ALL custom. Some use the specific name, some use a derivative, some use a name with the same initial letter sound. Some choose names based on the character or traits of those who bore the name, some choose names based on how euphonious they sound. There is no wrong way to choose a name. Some names, however, are generally avoided due to negative connotations or non-Jewish associations. Not many parents would name their child Job, Esau,

The Rabbi's message continues on Page 4

Beth El Congregation

October 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Justin Goldberger Bar Mitzvah, 10 a.m.
2 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Rabbi's office day.	3 Erev Rosh Hashanah, 8 p.m., Rabbi Joe Blair.	4 Rosh Hashanah, 10 a.m., Rabbi Sue Elwell. Tashlich Service, 1 p.m.	5 Board Meeting, Temple, 7:30 p.m.	6 Rabbi's office day.	7 Shabbat Shuvah, Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	8
9 Religious School, 9:30-12:30, Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Book Club, 11 a.m. Memorial Service, Cemetery, 1 p.m.	10 Rabbi's office day, 11 to 7.	11	12 Kol Nidre, 8 p.m., Rabbi Elwell.	13 Yom Kippur, 10 a.m., 3 p.m., Rabbi Blair. Break-the-Fast after service.	14 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m.	15
16 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Sukkot Celebration. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30. Rabbi's office day.	17 Rabbi's office day, 11 to 7. Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.	18	19	20 Rabbi's office day.	21 Sukkot, Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	22
23 / 30 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Simchat Torah, Oct. 23. Bagel Bar, 9-11:30.	24 / 31	25	26 Men's Club Meeting, 6:30. Sisterhood Meeting, 6 p.m., Temple.	27 Rabbi's office day.	28 Simchat Torah, Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m.	29

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 (rabbijoeb@hotmail.com) for an appointment.

Book Club

Alas! We need folks to **show up** if the Book Club is to continue!

We will try once more to review *A Changed Man*, by Francine Prose, on Sunday, Oct. 9, at 11 a.m. This is an interesting and easy read; a very timely subject. I know you **all** read great books because I'm continuously stopped and told about the books you've read or are currently reading. So please come join us Oct. 9 to discuss this book and bring **your** suggestions for ones you would like to review.

Sisterhood Meeting

Sisterhood will have a dinner meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 26, at 6 p.m., at the Temple. Salad bar with chocolate fondue for dessert will be served.

Whether you are a member who hasn't been to a meeting in a while or someone who has yet to become involved, please join us for this meeting. We're looking forward to seeing you there!

Men's Club Meeting

The Beth El Men's Club will meet on Wednesday, Oct. 26, at 6:30 p.m., at Bill Ney's house. Dinner will be served.

Please contact Mike White or Bill Ney to RSVP.

Please note the new address for Steve and Karen Sodikoff, 2277 Pearl Lane, Harrisonburg, 22801.

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Cain, or Hagar, due to the stories that come to mind, just as few parents would choose to name a child Adolph, Luke, Judas, Jezebel, or Christina, due to the negative traits that are often tied to these names in many people's minds.

Some choose to give the child both a Hebrew or Yiddish name and an English or secular name, which may be unrelated. This custom began in the 13th Century in Europe. That is how we often find that someone is named something like Alfred William for all secular purposes, but is called to the Torah as Avraham Ze'ev, for example.

Names can be meaningful, as we see exemplified by many Biblical names. Joseph is Yosef (which is from the Hebrew word 'to add'); Elijah is Eliyahu, which means 'the Lord is my G-d', Leah is 'wild cow', Devorah means 'bee', and Sarah means 'princess or high officer'.

Another source of names is as a way of preserving a family name or ancestor, which is a Semitic custom in origin, dating back to the 4th Century B.C.E. Some common examples of this are Moshe for Moses, Shmuel for Samuel, and Rivka for Rebecca.

In a sense, this custom also migrated into last names when it was decreed that they must be taken in Europe, so that many families are named for the place they lived (Hamburger, Berliner), or the trade of their ancestor (Goldschmidt, Tanner, Sandler).

A third source of names is a hybrid combination of modern names and biblical or Yiddish equivalents. One example is Ze'ev for Vulfe or Elishevah for Elizabeth. We also have the combination of English and Hebrew, in which we get Alex as Aharon, or Steven as Shmuel.

A complete Hebrew name takes the form of First-name Middle-name son or daughter of father's first and middle name and mother's first and middle name. In my own case, this formula yields Harav Yosef Menachem ben Binyamin Moshe ve Rachel Leah, while for Riff, it yields Kitra Alexandra bat Harav Yosef Menachem ve Shoshana.

In past there was a disparity in the way the naming ceremony was performed for male and female children. Males were named as a part of the Brit Milah (covenant of circumcision, also called a Bris, held on the eighth day of life) ceremony, while female names were simply announced within the context of an aliyah (going up) to the Torah at any service, with little fanfare, by the father or grandfather. The thought was that the boy child was being brought into the covenant by way of the circumcision, and no equivalent ceremony existed for girls. That has changed, I am happy to say!

Nowadays, the naming ceremony is a significant event, whether for a boy or a girl, and both are treated with equal solemnity and weight. The naming is often combined with a Brit (covenant) ceremony, whether for a boy or girl, in which this new soul is brought into the covenant between G-d and Israel as a part of the Jewish people. The Bris for a male includes circumcision, while the Bris for a female is not as firmly fixed in form, and there are a variety of ritual liturgies that can be used for this purpose.

In some cases, particularly when the Bris is held in the shul, the naming ceremony is combined with it, as was traditional when the ritual was conducted by a Mohel (a person trained to perform circumcisions and conduct the religious ritual) but probably as often today the Bris is done at home, or in the hospital or the doctor's office with the rabbi conducting the religious ritual and the doctor doing the actual procedure. The naming and welcome ceremony takes place later at a convenient time.

There is much more to be said about both naming and Brit, but space does not permit me to continue. I hope to hold a course that will go into much more detail about this during this year, titled something like the (Re-)Introduction to Judaism. Please consider attending either the entire series of classes, or those meetings when we cover topics that are of interest to you. More information will be forthcoming.

Next month, we will look at the topics of Bentsching (praying) Gomel (the prayer acknowledging and offering thanks for being spared), Pidyon Haben and Pidyon Habat (Redemption of the child).

Rabbi Joe Blair

Donations

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

To the General Fund

With get well wishes for Dave and Shirley Merlin: Anne Mintzer.

With get well wishes for Franklin Blatt: Anne Mintzer.

In honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Mike White: Bob and Cathy Brookshire, Arnie Kahn, Alan and Kate Neckowitz, Bill and Leslie Ney, Michelle and Ron Ornstein, Chuck Slot, Mona Wolf.

In honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Justin Goldberger: Bob and Cathy Brookshire.

In memory of his mother, Rose Poster Carr: Allan Poster.

In honor of the appointment of Rabbi Lynne Landsberg as Senior Advisor on Disability Issues for URJ's Religious Action Center: Alan and Kate Neckowitz.

To the Temple Youth Group

In honor of her grandchildren, Naomi and Joel Ornstein: Margene Ward.

To the Building Fund

In honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Mike White: Cindy Baron, Eddie Ney and Frances Stewart.

In honor of the conversion of Lois Poster: Eddie Ney and Frances Stewart.

*The following have made **generous donations** and pledges in response to our recent **emergency building fund drive**:*

Dale Brothers, Herbert and Elizabeth Karp, Julianne Oberdorff.

To the Yahrzeit Memorial Fund

In memory of Kalman Meyer, Joyce's father: Joyce and Erwin Helbraun.

In memory of Sarah Lebin: Shirley and Dave Merlin.

In memory of Shirley's father, Samuel R Nebelkopf: Shirley and Dave Merlin.

In memory of Belle Neckowitz, Alan's mother: Kate and Alan Neckowitz.

In memory of Dr. Joseph Ney, Bill's father: Bill and Leslie Ney.

In memory of Beth Ney and Irving Ney, Eddie's mother and father: Eddie Ney.

In memory of his brother, Marvin Poster: Allan Poster.

In Memory of David I. Robinson, Henry Robinson, Ada Robinson, Marie Good, A David Good, William Robinson, Annie Robinson, Sarah Rabinowitz, and Joshua Rabinowitz: Josh and Estelle Robinson.

In memory of his sister, Suzanne Glaser: John Stewart.

To the Anne Mintzer Window Fund

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

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

The Window Fund also received a generous donation from Andy and Janet Kohen.

Donations through URJ for Victims of Hurricane Katrina

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all who have been affected by Hurricane Katrina's destructive force. While the full extent of the damage will not be known for some time, it is anticipated that the damage will be substantial, affecting large parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. The Union for Reform Judaism has therefore opened its disaster relief fund to aid both our congregations and the general communities affected by the hurricane. You may donate now at <http://urj.org/give/>

Yahrzeits for October

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|----|---|----|--|
| 1 | Carrye Kohen
Annette Biatch | 17 | Rosa Wise |
| 2 | David Rubin | 18 | Harriet Gould |
| 5 | Jack Lichtenstein | 19 | Rabbi Edward L. Israel
Mabel Rodbell |
| 7 | Paige Nash | 20 | Barbara M. Levin
Ruth Shwayder |
| 8 | Leonard Raff | 22 | Ida Zindler
Dorothy Donner Kaiser |
| 9 | Samuel Metzger | 25 | Leon Hirsch
Helen Wise
Sarah Lebin |
| 12 | Betty Nemoytin | 26 | Rosalie Amberg |
| 13 | Israel Smith
Harry Katzen | 27 | Oscar Rodbell |
| 15 | Hattie Hirsch
Milton Trubitz
Sarah Lovinger | 31 | Amalie G. Wise |
| 16 | Miriam Brooslin Cohen | | |
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More News and Notes

Youth Group Meeting

The Youth Group — SHORTY — will meet Sunday, Oct. 9, at 4:30 p.m., in Staunton. Beth El members will meet at the Temple at 4 to ride over together.

Please bring \$5 for dinner! Call Sherri to let her know if you need a ride.

Address, Email Check

Please check the mailing label on this newsletter. Are your address and zip code current and accurate? Also, let me know if you have a new email address. Email has proven to be a very quick and convenient way for temple communication to take place.

Your email address is used only for temple communication, so please share it with us. If you have college age student, I need his/her current address. Please let Judy Freudenthal know of any changes you wish to make. Call 867-5648, or email jfreudy@aol.com. Thank you.

End Discrimination Now

People of Faith for Equality in Virginia, a new interfaith organization, needs your help now. They are writing an open letter to all candidates for Virginia State Office asking them to refrain from anti-gay rhetoric during their campaign.

By reading and signing this letter, you can show our future leaders and legislators that religious faith and intolerance need not be equated. All you have to do is visit our website: <http://www.faith4equality.org> and click on the Take Action Page. You can make a difference!

Wishing Speedy Recoveries

The Congregation wishes full and speedy recoveries for Shirley Merlin, who is recovering from surgery, and for Dave Merlin, who is in rehab recovering from a broken hip.

From Rabbi Joe –

Adult Education

During the past year I attempted to present classes and lectures that responded to the requests and interests of congregants, and was able to offer something in response to each request I received. If you have any particular requests for lectures, classes, or discussions, please let me know so I can try to incorporate them into plans for this year.

At this point, I am considering the following classes, courses, and programs, depending on the level of interest. This list includes offerings at both congregations:

Introductory Hebrew	(5 to 6 sessions)
Intermediate Hebrew	(10 sessions)
Adult B'nai Mitzvah	(ongoing as needed)
Conversion Training	(as needed)
B'nai Mitzvah tutoring	(ongoing as needed)
Parashat Hashavuah	(weekly)
Limud Torah	(monthly)
(Re-) Introduction to Judaism	(20 sessions)

Seminars and Workshops (periodic)

Possible topics include: My Spiritual Autobiography; Introduction to the Enneagram; Preparing for the End of Life.

Jewish Lecture series (periodic)

Possible topics include: Death and Dying; Liturgy and Lifecycle; Judaism and Christianity – Differences.

Jewish Literature and Films (periodic)

Possible topics include: 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.

Sukkot: A Season of Gathering and Giving

Interested in weaving social justice into your family Sukkot observance?

The Commission on Social Action has a program guide highlighting the social justice themes of Sukkot, including activities and programs for individuals and families. Highlights include social justice readings and rituals to be performed in the Sukkah, and links to websites that offer more information.

To view the guide, please visit www.rac.org/pubs/holidayguides and click on Sukkot: A Season of Gathering and Giving.

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A bit of history from the Beth El archives:

Hebrew Friendship Congregation Dedication Ceremony, 1891

The first Jewish families that settled permanently in Rockingham County came from Austria in 1859. Messrs. Leopold Wise and Herman Heller settled in Harrisonburg, Samuel Loewner settled in Dayton, and Jonus Heller in Mount Crawford. There may have been a few Jewish settlers previous to those mentioned above, as early court records of Rockingham County disclose a certain transaction in which is expressly mentioned that one of the parties thereto was a Jew, but as to when and where they may have settled, we have no accurate knowledge. When the civil war broke out Messrs Albert and Adolph Wise, Emanuel Loewner and Jonas Heller enlisted in the confederate army, serving under general Jackson. After the close of the civil war the community was increased by a number of Jewish immigrants from Germany, among whom were Messrs. B. Ney and Joseph Ney, Oestreicher, and Mr. Loeb.

These few settlers met from time to time for divine services at 177 W. Market St. The services being conducted by Samuel Loewner, Adolph Weise, and H. Oestreicher, according to the orthodox ritual. As the community grew in numbers, they organized themselves under the name of the Hebrew Friendship Congregation of Harrisonburg and rented a room in the Liskey building on W. Market St., which was used for a temporary place of worship as well as for a Sunday school for the young. As the Congregation grew in numbers and became more prosperous, more desirable quarters were secured in the Sibert Building on Main Street. The ladies began to take an active interest in the congregation by organizing themselves into an auxiliary society and helping to establish a permanent choir with the result that the services became more impressive and modern in spirit. The first class was confirmed by Major Hart of Staunton in this new place of worship. Thus were the activities of the Congregation continued for two decades, Messrs. Samuel Loewner, Adolph Wise, and Simon Oestreicher devoting their time and energy to format the spiritual welfare of the Congregation. In 1890 the Congregation began devising ways and means to erect a permanent House of Worship, and with that end in view a lot was purchased on North Main Street and a building committee was appointed with Mr. B. Ney as chairman of the committee.

All the members were enthusiastic over the new undertaking and through the indefatigable labors of the Building Committee and the Ladies Auxiliary Society funds were realized from the proceeds of a fair given. The ritual used by the American Hebrew Congregation was introduced, a new Constitution and bylaws were adopted similar to those in vogue in the modern American Congregations.

The entire Congregational machinery was reorganized with the result that the religious life of the Congregation has been reawakened.

The Congregation is conducted by a Board of Directors consisting of Messrs. Adolph Wise, president, Herman Oestreicher, vice-president, Joseph Ney, treasurer, B. Ney, Bernard Bloom, Abraham Miller, Herman Wise, and Charles Loewner, directors, and Mr. Slater. secretary. The president appoints the various committees to look after the material welfare of the Congregation.

The Rabbi looks after the spiritual welfare of the Congregation by conducting services on Sabbath and Holidays, preaches to the old and teaches the young.

The Ladies Auxiliary Society are also active in commendable work by having an outstanding committee to look after the poor and the stranger to whom financial aid and advice is given irrespectively of race or creed. The Auxiliary Society also shows its usefulness in decorating the Temple on special occasions and providing the children with entertainments.

The above speech from the ceremony dedicating the old Temple building in downtown Harrisonburg was prepared for The Bridge by Bill Ney.