

The Beth El Bridge

Keeping the Jewish Community Connected

Beth El Congregation

Harrisonburg, VA

September 2005

From Rabbi Joe

My dear fellow Valley Jews and Friends:

Shalom! Welcome back!

I hope your summer has been refreshing and a relaxing change of pace. I have had a busy but rewarding summer, and I hope that you feel similarly. I am ready to jump back into congregational life (and finish painting already!).

The congregational year is about to take off again! Summer is ending, and the excitement and activity of the fall and our more regular schedule are just ahead.

I am writing this in August. The annual congregational calendar has already been distributed, and you can see the outline of a busy year ahead of us. In addition to our usual activities that appear on the calendar, there will be some additions, a few changes to things we have done previously, and a few new events that we will add to the calendar to see if they are of interest and worth pursuing.

Looking ahead to the major milestones for this year, we are looking forward to three B'nei Mitzvah (Bar and Bat Mitzvah); three adult B'nei Mitzvah; an active youth group and Confirmation program; adult education, including Hebrew classes, Limud Torah (Learning), Lectures, Discussions, and an Introduction to Judaism course; a very busy Religious School year, including implementation of a new curriculum in both Judaics and Hebrew; observance of the Holidays and Shabbatot (Sabbaths); Sisterhood/Women of the Temple activities; the Beth El Men's Club programs; Interfaith activities; and so much more. 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 me add, please feel free to let me know.

From the Rabbi's Desk:

Last year in my articles I walked through the calendar month by month, describing the cycle of months, when the Holidays fall, and how the Jewish luni-solar calendar is reconciled with the secular solar calendar. This year I plan to change the focus of my articles and look primarily at life cycle events. I will certainly point out the upcoming holidays and special calendar events, but will not spend much space on explanations of calendar items.

Potluck and Shabbat Service — Friday, Aug. 26

Dinner at 6:30

A-K bring main dish; L-Z bring salad.
Desserts and drinks provided.

Service at 7:30

The Calendar and Holidays: Rosh Chodesh for the month of Av fell on Aug. 6. On July 24, we observed the fast of Shivah Asar Be'Tamuz (Tammuz 17), which kicked off the “three weeks” – a period of mourning-like behaviors during which we traditionally hold no celebrations or weddings and do not cut our hair. The three weeks ended very recently with the arrival of Tisha Be'Av (the 9th of Av) Aug. 14. Tisha Be'Av is the saddest day in the Jewish calendar. The traditional practice for Tisha Be'Av is to gather late in the evening, often at midnight, sitting on the floor or on low stools as in a house of mourning, and to read the book of Eicha (Lamentations).

Over Labor Day weekend, we will arrive at Rosh Chodesh for Elul. Elul is the last month of the year before we come to Rosh Hashanah. Elul is the month in which we are encouraged to take time to do some introspection 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.

Rosh Hashanah is Rosh Chodesh for the month of Tishrei, which this year falls on the Oct. 4 (meaning that Erev Rosh Hashanah is the evening of the 3rd). Tishrei is our most intense month of holidays with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Simchat Torah. We will talk more about the holidays next month. For the time being, mark them on your calendar!

Jewish Lifecycle: Birth

We begin our look at lifecycle events as we began life: with birth. Birth is a momentous event, both for the child and for the parents. The child is unable to make choices or take action, so all the ritual activity is done by the parents on behalf of the child, or for themselves.

There is great joy at news of a birth. Historically, birth was a terribly dangerous passage, both for the mother and the child. Maternal mortality was high, but nowhere near the rate of infant mortality. A healthy child being born and the mother surviving was a cause for a double dose of joy and celebration.

Many minhagim (customs) are associated with birth, often absorbed from the surrounding cultures. Here are a few of them.

One of the oldest of the practices surrounding birth was that the father was not present at the birth in many cultures. It was generally thought that it was unseemly for a man to be in the room, and in the Jewish world this was reinforced for reasons of modesty. In addition, for Jewish men, the fact that there was blood involved in a birth meant that those present were rendered ritually impure, and most Jews would avoid this if possible. Cohanim (The male Cohens, those of priestly descent) especially, were forbidden to have contact with such an event, just as they could not be in contact with the dead or enter a cemetery. The upshot was that women attended the mother through the birth, and the father would only see the child later, after it had been cleaned and dressed. This may be part of the background for the old-style hospital deliveries, earlier last century, when the father would be allowed to view the child after it had been taken from the mother and prepared, through the window of the nursery, but not hold the baby and certainly could not be present for the birth. It is a little different today, with the father in the delivery room, and in some instances taking an active role by coaching or even cutting the umbilical cord!

Another such minhag is that for children born with a crown (a segment of the amniotic sack remaining on the head) the crown was removed, saved, and later burned to ashes, and then the ashes were buried in the soil, often where a tree was planted in honor of that child. A crown was thought to be a very good sign for that child, indicating that this child would be blessed with the crown of Torah, the crown of a good name, the crown of leadership, or perhaps all three!

The planting of a tree at the birth of a child was a general custom, and some families continue it today. Some had the tradition of planting different kinds of trees for male and female children. Often the thought in Jewish families was that the tree planted at the birth of a child would be the source of the limbs and branches that would be used to make up the poles and supports of the Chuppah (wedding canopy) for that child (of course, mingled together with the parts of the tree planted for the betrothed other child!) when the time came.

The Rabbi's message continues on Page 4

Beth El Congregation

September 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Friday, August 26: Potluck, 6:30 p.m.; Service, 7:30.				1	2 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m. Michael White Bar Mitzvah.	3 Michael White Bar Mitzvah, 10 a.m.
4	5	6 Board Meeting, Temple, 7:30 p.m.	7	8 Rabbi's office day, by appointment. Men's Club Picnic, 6:30. Hillandale Park.	9 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	10
11 First Day Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11. Rabbi's office day, by appointment.	12	13	14	15 Rabbi's office day, by appointment.	16 Torah Study/Potluck, 6:45-7:30. Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m.	17
18 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11. Rabbi's office day, by appointment.	19	20	21	22 Rabbi's office day, by appointment.	23 Lay Service, 7:30 p.m.	24 Selichot Service, 7 p.m.
25 Religious School, 9:30-12:30. Bagel Bar, 9-11. Rabbi's office day, by appointment.	26	27	28	29 Rabbi's office day, by appointment.	30 Rabbi Service, 7:30 p.m. Justin Goldberger Bar Mitzvah.	

Rabbi's Availability and New Office Days

Rabbi Joe will back in the office regularly beginning in September. In the event of an emergency before then, please contact the rabbi at home.

To better match the needs and schedules of congregants, the Rabbi's office days will change starting in September. He will be available **by appointment**, with scheduled days to be "in the office" on **Sunday** and **Thursday** in Harrisonburg, and Monday and Friday in Staunton. Meetings on other days may be scheduled by prior arrangement. There are no fixed office hours. Please feel free to email or call for a meeting time, or stop by to see if the Rabbi is in.

Email address:	RabbiJoeB@hotmail.com
Beth El Congregation	540-434-2744
Temple House of Israel	540-886-4091
Home (emergencies only, please)	434-971-4741

Another birth custom that is sometimes still observed was that the swaddling cloth for the child would later be recycled into a wimpel (a long strip of cloth which is decorated with information about the child and sometimes with wishes or hopes for that child, along with verses of prayers and quotes from the Tanakh), which might later be used as a Torah binder, especially when that child becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Later, the wimpel might be incorporated into the Chuppah as part of the canopy for that child's wedding, or used as part of the material for a Tallit (tallis – prayer shawl).

The most consistent minhag has been that the father, on behalf of his family, would donate Tzedakah (funds used for support of charitable and communal needs) in honor of the child's birth.

Next month, we will look at the topic of Covenant and Naming.

Jews Online: An extremely useful website that I recommend wholeheartedly is www.hebcal.com. This site provides a perpetual Jewish calendar, with the ability to convert back and forth to Gregorian (secular) dates. In addition, it lists Shabbat candle lighting times and times for Havdalah (the ritual of separation between Shabbat and the secular weekdays) specifically by zip code areas. The site also shows the Torah reading and Haftarah for the week, with links to see the text online. Overall, this is a really useful site to add to your Jewish favorites!

Jewish Humor: How The Rules Of Kashrut Came About

A brief dialogue between G-d and Moses.

G: Moses, in keeping Kosher, never cook a calf in its mother's milk. It's cruel.

M: Lord, are You saying we shouldn't eat milk and meat together?

G: I'm saying never cook a calf in its mother's milk.

M: Lord, is what You are saying that we should wait after eating meat to take milk?

G: Moses, listen. What I am saying is don't cook a calf in its mother's milk!

M: Lord, You mean we should keep separate dish sets for milk and meat, and separate utensils?

G: Oy! Moses, do whatever you want!

Jewish Trivia: Asser Levy and Jacob Barsimon, two of twenty-three Jews who arrived in the New World from Holland on the Sainte Catherine in 1654 were anticipating equality, but Jews were not allowed to become burghers (citizens), nor guard the stockade of New Amsterdam (now known as New York). In 1655 Barsimon demanded to do so, but Dutch authorities refused. Levy stood guard but was denied acceptance. Upon appeal to the director-general of the colony, he was finally admitted to the Burgher Rite, becoming the first American Jewish "citizen" on April 27, 1657.

Religious Services

You should already have received the congregational calendar, listing services and events for the upcoming year, 5766. The first Rabbi services scheduled at Beth El are Sept. 2-3 with the Bar Mitzvah of Michael White. Please also note that the Bar Mitzvah of Justin Goldberger will be Sept. 30 and Oct. 1.

Confirmation Class and Youth Group

The Youth Group, SHORTY, had a busy year last year. This year looks to be even more so!

Our first meeting for the year will be Sept. 11 at Beth El from 4 to 6:30 p.m. At that time we will make plans for the year and hold our first Confirmation discussion. Please remember to bring \$21 to that meeting for Shorty dues, and \$5 cash for food. More information will be sent out by email. Please be sure Sheri and the Rabbi have your current email address!

Possible activities we can talk about are: visits/trips to a Chabad Orthodox service, to one or two churches, to the Holocaust museum, to shul-ins, to Jewish N.Y. City, and to Cosmic bowling (especially now that Sheri's knee is healed!); Kallot (LTI, Fall, WLI, Winter at Harlam, Convention; The VENT,

Spring Kallah, Summer Kallah, Camp); Services and spaghetti dinners (Fall at THOI and BE), Confirmation and Youth Shavuot Service, Youth Group service and Ski Weekend; volunteering to work with the Special Olympics; cleaning up in the Cemetery; preparing a meal for the soup kitchen; and anything else you would like to add to the list. Confirmation programs may include discussions of Jewish thought on various topics such as prayer, the importance of ritual, the meaning of community, differences between Judaism and Christianity, differences between Judaism and Islam, interacting with those of other faiths, dealing with missionaries, Eco-Kashrut, Jewish views on the death penalty, a taste of Torah, a taste of Talmud, the Torah of money, business ethics, and any others that interest you.

Looking ahead slightly, SHORTY may be taking their first road trip in early October. We are looking at a day trip to Busch Gardens, and perhaps inviting other youth groups to meet us there. You will hear more soon from Sheri when this is finalized.

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	(6 weeks)
Intermediate Hebrew	(10 weeks)
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 weeks)

Seminars and Workshops (periodic)

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

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.

B'virvat shalom (with Blessings of Peace),

Rabbi Joe Blair

Donations

Beth El Congregation gratefully acknowledges the following generous donations, received during June, July and August:

To the General Fund

In memory of Myrtle H. Cohen, Ralph Cohen's Mother: Alan and Kate Neckowitz.

With get well wishes for Harry Clayman: Dave and Shirley Merlin.

In honor of the marriage of Rachael and Aaron Neckowitz: Alan and Kate Neckowitz.

With thanks to Rabbi Joe Blair: Ritanna M. O'Brien.

To the Building Fund

In honor of the confirmation of Eli Giovanetti and Gabrielle Kalman: Dave and Shirley Merlin.

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

Sherri and Bruce Alt, Bary and Ruth Berger, Franklin Blatt, Dan Bly, Judy and Ralph Cohen, Janet and Ronn Daniel, Lenore Dowds, Judy Freudenthal, Lisa and Kevin Giovanetti, Maureen and Mike Goldberger, Valerie and Eric Kramer, Rabbi Lynne Landsburg, Bob Lantz, Shirley and Dave

Merlin, Julie and Dave Miller, Jerry and Esther Minskoff, Roberta and Marvin Mondres, Gene and Irma Nemoytin, Bill and Leslie Ney, Eddie Ney and Frances Stewart, Michelle and Ron Ornstein, Milton Perlman, Joshua and Estelle Robinson, Bo and Sandi Rose, Mike and Carol Schikman, Chuck Slott, Karen and Steve Sodikoff, John and Nancy Stewart, Allan Tischler, and Michael White.

To the Yahrzeit Memorial Fund

In memory of Carol Ney, Bill's mother: Bill and Leslie Ney.

In memory of his brother, Fred Bersson: Bob Bersson.

In memory of her mother, Hana Shaw: Elizabeth Adams.

To the Anne Mintzer Window Fund

With wishes for a speedy recovery for Franklin Blatt: Andy and Janet Kohen.

In honor of the birth of Natalie Rose Singerling, Jerry and Esther Minskoff's granddaughter: Andy and Janet Kohen.

In memory of Marcy Zohn, Karen Sodikoff's mother: Andy and Janet Kohen.

With wishes for continued good health for Steve Zorn: Andy and Janet Kohen.

In memory of Myrtle H. Cohen, Ralph Cohen's mother: Andy and Janet Kohen.

News and Notes

Religious School

We're really looking forward to the religious school year. New Hebrew (the Mitkadem series) and Judaica (the Chai curriculum) resources have been ordered, and are fun, age-appropriate, and state-of-the-art materials from URJ.

Linda Kohn and Laura Jean Brand are returning teachers in Kitah Aleph and Bet, along with Roberta Stein in music, and we welcome Sarah Stein and Lisa Solad in Gimel and Daled. At

the moment, it looks like we have 18 or 19 students. I'm still awaiting confirmation from several families.

The first day of religious school will be Sunday, Sept. 11, at 9:30 a.m. On that morning, and on every religious school morning, we invite everyone (whether or not you have children participating) to join us for bagel bar, beginning at 9 a.m. (until about 11). — *Margee Greenfield*

YAHREZITS FOR SEPTEMBER

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 2 | Lena Paul Miller | 18 | Solomon Loewner
Gladys Wise
Joseph Ney |
| 5 | Rose Minskoff
Edythe Sanders | 20 | Simon Marrick
Samuel Rubin Nebelkops |
| 6 | Arthur H. Hirsch
Thomas Blatt | 21 | Kattie Ney |
| 8 | Rabbi Stephen Levinsohn
Norman Kaiser | 23 | Kalman Meyer |
| 10 | Lee G. Loewner | 25 | Berdie Frank Ney
Kattie Iseman
Nettie Berney
Theodore Weiss
Ben Handler
Sara (Sissy) Loewner |
| 11 | Alfred Raff
Gilbert Litvin | 27 | Samuel Fisher
Alexander Nemoytin |
| 12 | Sidra Nemoytin Dubel | 29 | Belle Neckowitz
Julius Berman
Charles Rodbell |
| 16 | Fannie Myerberg
Harry Blatt
Bertha Brooslin Kaye
Barbara Clayman Callihan
Beth Ash Ney | | |
| 18 | Rosalyn Loewner | | |

More News and Notes

From Our President

Please notice the artistic arrangement of pictures in the social hall — thanks to the “plaque” committee. Hopefully, by this time, the outside and foyer have been newly painted.

Many thanks to all who helped this summer to clean up the many, many years of stored shmutz in the Temple closets and storage areas. What an improvement!

If you store something in the freezers, please label and date it so that we can keep current with cleaning out old stuff.

We are happy to have Rabbi Sue Elwell leading alternate High Holy Days services again this year. We look forward to ushering in the New Year with Sue and Nurit.

Janet Kohen was invited to lead services for a brand new congregation in Myrtle Beach on Aug.

12. They are 16 families and looking forward to growing and having their own Rabbi some day.

— *Janet*

Men's Club Picnic

The Men's Club barbecue picnic and meeting is scheduled Thursday, Sept. 8, at Hillandale Park, Shelter 10, at 6:30 p.m. Members will discuss plans for the year. Please RSVP to Mike White, and plan to bring a salad or other side dish.

Thoughts of the Congregation

The thoughts of the Congregation are with Ralph Cohen and his family, on the recent death of his mother, Myrtle H. Cohen.

The thoughts of the congregation also are with Karen Sodikoff and her family, on the recent death of her mother, Marcy Zohn.

From the Religious Action Center:

Reform Jewish Movement Taps Rabbi Lynne Landsberg as Disability Issues Liaison

Washington, July 8, 2005 — The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism today announced that Rabbi Lynne F. Landsberg will be joining the RAC staff as the organization's Senior Advisor on Disability Issues. In this capacity, Rabbi Landsberg will work within the RAC and with other Jewish organizations to increase the Jewish community's involvement in the ongoing struggle for civil rights protections for people with disabilities. She will also represent the Union for Reform Judaism's Department of Family Concerns to increase awareness of and access for people with disabilities and to combat discrimination against people with disabilities.

"We're excited that Rabbi Landsberg has agreed to take the lead on this important project," said Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center. "Lynne's leadership, passion, and determination will ensure that the Jewish community and the broader American community give disability rights the attention it deserves."

Rabbi Landsberg's new role at the Religious Action Center will allow the Reform Jewish Movement to build on its history of advocacy on disabilities issues. Jewish tradition teaches that we are forbidden to "insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind," (Leviticus 19:14). Acting on this Biblical principle, the Reform Jewish Movement has worked to make its synagogues and office buildings accessible to all. The Reform Jewish Movement has also worked in coalition with civil rights and disability rights advocates to ensure that all Americans have equal access to civic life and public accommodations.

Rabbi Landsberg is a former Associate Director of the Religious Action Center and a former Union for Reform Judaism Regional Director. She is a graduate of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's Rabbinical School program and received her Masters of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School. Rabbi Landsberg currently serves on the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. In 1999, Rabbi Landsberg was in a devastating car crash. As a result, she lives with a traumatic brain injury.

"Before my injury," said Landsberg, "I belonged to one minority that was cohesive, strong and articulate — the American Jewish community. Now I belong to a second minority that is often unseen and unheard — persons with disabilities. I am excited to be working to strengthen the role of the Jewish community in the fight for the rights of people with disabilities, but I see my role as going beyond political advocacy. The ADA guaranteed accessibility to public places. But nothing demands accessibility to the human heart. In addition to working on legislation, I want to help the Jewish community and others do more than fight against discrimination. I want to work hard to help them emotionally understand that people with disabilities are people first, and disabled, second. I want to change the way the able-bodied perceive disability."

***— Well wishes from Beth El Congregation to Rabbi Lynne Landsberg in
her new endeavors fighting for the rights of people with disabilities!***