

FROM RABBI ZEMEL

A CULTURAL IDENTITY IN SEARCH OF THEOLOGY

DEAR FRIENDS,

As one might imagine, I think a great deal about religion, Jewish identity, and the relationship between the two. For the vast majority of American Jews, Jewish identity is ethnic or cultural. We might identify our religion as Jewish, but the primary manifestations of our Jewishness are not conventionally religious.



The meanings of “cultural” and “ethnic” overlap. “Ethnic” is more connected to the past – via nostalgia and memories — while “cultural” is an active connection to literature, art, music and even modes of thinking. Food, cooking and recipes are areas in which the two terms overlap. One may actively search out new Jewish recipes and cookbooks, for example, while retaining deep feelings for those passed down by beloved family members.

While American Jewish identity is primarily ethnic or cultural, there remains in most of us a religious drive. It is that drive that leads me to believe that American Jewish religion is a cultural identity in search of a theology.

I was pleasantly surprised when I came upon this sentence in Marilynne Robinson’s recent work, “What Are We Doing Here?”:

“By religion I mean the individual and communal embrace of the particulars of a faith, or loyalty or affinity to it that might not involve thoroughgoing belief in every article of its creed, that might be exclusively aesthetic, ethical, or social, but is in any case important to one’s self-definition.”

In this passage, Robinson explicitly

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5 ►

Cantor Meryl Weiner A Journey that Was Meant to Lead to Temple Micah

BY FRAN DAUTH

IT HAS BEEN quite a journey: A career that began with stints as a learning disabilities specialist, a mental health caseworker, and the owner of a public relations firm.

Along the way there was always music – music at Jewish retreats, music in coffee houses, music in synagogues.

“Becoming a cantor happened by chance and has truly been the profession that I was destined to pursue,” Temple Micah’s Cantor Meryl Weiner now says.

Two seemingly conflicting statements are both true about Cantor Weiner’s impending June retirement: Temple Micah is preparing to mark the event in several ways that celebrate her work. At the same time, no one at Temple Micah is prepared for her to retire.

Those celebrations include a Farewell Kabbalat Shabbat Service on May 31 and a Farewell Concert featuring Merri Arian and Doug Mishkin on June 2.

“Meryl has been our wondrous musical prayer leader for over 20 years,” Rabbi Zemel said recently. “She is a spiritual poet who led our prayer with beauty, grace and compassion. It is her soul that guides her voice.

“Within the inner circle of our staff, Meryl has been an invaluable source of wisdom, a calming presence in what can be an overly busy and hectic Micah office. She will be sorely missed.”

In the words of Micah Board President Marcia Silcox, “Meryl is so deeply woven into the fabric of Micah that we unravel a little at the thought of finding someone new.”

A cantor search committee, led by



Jodi Enda, has been named and is in the process of soliciting resumes and recommendations, Silcox said, adding “but Meryl is very hard to replace.”

Meanwhile, Micah members Marina Fanning and Larry Cooley are chairing the events marking Cantor Weiner’s retirement.

Cantor Weiner’s journey to Temple Micah begins 11 years before she joined the staff in 1998. Here is how she explains it:

“In the fall of 1987 my husband George had just gone back to teaching. He was a teacher when I met him, in law school the first three years of our marriage and then practiced law for 10 years in northern Virginia. But, like me becoming a cantor, he had a calling and that was teaching.

“A local religious school principal needed a music teacher and a mutual friend guessed that I needed a job because of George’s career change. I had a history of being a song leader and a

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"Every person shall sit under
his grapevine or fig tree with
no one to make him afraid."
MICAH, CHAPTER 4, VERSE 4

Vine

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A ROADMAP FOR TEMPLE MICAH AT AN INFLECTION POINT

BY MARCIA FINE SILCOX

Organizations grow, shrink, change, evolve, recede, and even cease to exist due to varied internal and external factors. Temple Micah has been fortunate to participate primarily in positive change and growth.



The question before us now is how do we respond to our growth or other change?

We know that our growth has been steady, and that we have driven the change, rather than having change drive us. We were a small congregation, but now we are a medium-sized con-

gregation. We have embraced innovation and seek more. We are able to jettison unworkable practices and would like to be nimble in adapting to external pressures (demographics, the economy, participation in religious life).

Much of this conversation started when the house next door became available for sale. The board, senior staff, and committees attempted to describe how we would use additional space. But it became apparent that there were broader questions than those of physical space (and parking). We were probably lucky to be outbid for the property. We set up some working groups to talk about "Future Micah."

But we found it frustrating to try to anticipate change so abstractly. We interviewed people who have done strategic planning in the Jewish world, but their suggestions were disengaged programs that they seem to use with every synagogue or Jewish Community Center they meet. We hired a strategic planning group to work with the board and senior staff at our retreats, and came away with suggestions, but no real path forward.

But our discussions with consultants suggested an important conclusion. We are at an inflection point in the life of our organization, and that the time is right to deeply describe who we are, who we can be, and how to make choices consistent with "the Micah Way" whatever that may be.

We then talked with one other organization, The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, founded by longtime Micah member Rich Harwood. We realized that this organization was uniquely positioned to help us move forward.

After several meetings with Rich and his staff, the board's executive committee requested a proposal. When it came, it was not a strategic plan or a series of business analyses, but was instead called "Creating a Roadmap for Micah's Future." It calls the Roadmap a "... forward looking framework grounded in the vision and voices of the congregation...used to enable Micah to serve the evolving needs of the Micah community, the broader local Jewish community and American Judaism."

I am pleased to tell you that the board voted in February to accept this very thorough proposal. Rabbi Zemel called it, "The most exciting opportunity for growth and self reflection since we bought the land on Wisconsin Avenue to envision our future."

In discussion at the board meeting, Rabbi Zemel began with a potent biblical scene. Moses sent a scouting party into the new land. And with the Roadmap project, Temple Micah creates guidance for our congregation to navigate the future and its unknown territory. Rich Harwood added, "Micah is rooted in authenticity, and congregant-led action. It is conversation driven and transparent." When pressed to describe what a roadmap is, he said, "A roadmap is a framework for how we think about moving forward and making judgments. As a living document, it is an ongoing topic of conversation."

This effort is an ambitious, year-long process of conversations with members, and investigation of external data about the broader Jewish community in our area. If you are curious about the Harwood Institute, take a look at their website: TheHarwoodInstitute.org.

There's no doubt that you will be hearing more about our Roadmap effort. It is deep and wide. But we are hopeful that it will provide the type of guidance that reflects our Micah selves as we embark on this journey together.

The Feast

THE BREAD AND BUTTER
PUDDING EDITION

BY ALEXANDRA WISOTSKY

“Cooking is about taking a chance and seeing if it works,” says Nick Brooke, a Micah member and professional chef who works for Wolfgang Puck Catering at the Newseum.

“Not everything is going to be perfect, but once you know how, you can take a basic sauce, add something to it, and make something else.”

That statement by Nick justifies every disaster and every success I have ever had in my own kitchen.

Nick began cooking very early. At 16 he was in culinary school in his native England. Upon graduating, Nick started cooking in restaurants, pubs, and hotels in the United Kingdom.

To get different culinary experiences, Nick travelled throughout Europe, Australia and the United States. Once in the U.S., he worked for a catering company as the sous-chef at the National Gallery of Art and the National History Museum. It was through this job that he met the celebrity California chef Wolfgang Puck, who also has a restaurant at the Newseum. The catering company is a separate enterprise from the restaurant. The future of the restaurant and the catering company, however, are uncertain given the recent sale of the building housing the Newseum.

Nick and his wife Lisa Gordon are relatively new members to Micah. Right away Nick and Lisa became involved with Micah Cooks. Lisa, by the way, has been instrumental to the success of Micah’s annual auction.

“Micah Cooks is a great community of people who just want to talk about their lives and talk about food. It’s a great couple of hours on a Saturday morning. I enjoy it a lot,” Nick said.

Nick wanted to share a recipe from his own background, so he chose his version of one of the most traditional of British desserts, although he did Americanize it a bit by suggesting serving a scoop of ice cream on the side. In England, he said, it would never be served with ice cream, but rather with custard, much like a *crème anglaise*.

You, however, can add just about anything you like to it, he said. Nick sug-

gested chocolate chips, marmalade, Cointreau, white chocolate, or just about anything you like.



BREAD AND BUTTER PUDDING

- 5 tablespoons butter, softened
- 10 thin slices white bread, (traditional, challah, brioche, croissant, etc). Need not be stale bread. Do not use brown bread; it will make the pudding bitter.
- 1/3 cup golden raisins
- 1/4 teaspoon fresh grated nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 cups milk
- 3 large eggs
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1-1/2 teaspoons vanilla

Time to prepare: About 20 minutes, plus 30 minutes resting time.

Time to bake: 40 to 45 minutes, plus 15 minutes of resting after pudding comes out of the oven.

Total time: Nearly two hours.

Makes about 4 servings.

STEP 1. Heat the oven to 355 degrees F. Grease a 4-cup shallow baking dish with a little of the butter.

STEP 2. Spread each slice of bread with butter and cut diagonally into triangles. (Bread may also be cubed and put in individual ramekins for single servings.)

STEP 3. Cover the base of the baking dish with half of the bread triangles. Overlap them with the buttered side up. Sprinkle half the golden raisins evenly over the bread, then lightly sprinkle with a little nutmeg and cinnamon. Repeat this layer one more time, finishing with the raisins on top.

STEP 4. In a large bowl beat the eggs with 3/4 of the sugar and all the vanilla extract until they are light and airy and pale in color. Gradually add the milk to the eggs, continuing to beat them until all the milk is added.

STEP 5. Pour the egg-milk mixture slowly and evenly over the bread until all the liquid is added. Gently press the surface with your hand to push the bread into the liquid. Sprinkle the remaining sugar over the surface then set aside at room temperature for 30 minutes.

STEP 6. Bake the pudding 40 to 45 minutes until the surface is golden brown and the pudding has risen. The egg mixture should be set but still a little wobbly. (The center should reach 165°F on an instant reading thermometer, or use a toothpick to see if the liquid is fully set into a custard.) Do not overcook.

STEP 7. Let rest at least 15 minutes once it’s out of the oven. Serve warm, or at room temperature with a generous serving of ice cream on the side.

SPEAKING AT MICAH

Micah features two monthly lecture series—on Sundays and Wednesdays. For more information, go to templemicah.org.

SUNDAY SPEAKER SERIES



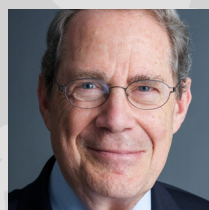
April 28 at 10:15 am – Robert Schenck on “Evangelical Christianity in America Today.”

Schenck is an ordained evangelical minister, former chairman of the Evangelical Church Alliance and the president of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute that continues Bonhoeffer's work to reform the evangelical church.

LUNCH & LEARN

Wednesdays from noon to 2 pm

A monthly program sponsored by the Aging Together Team. Reserve online at templemicah.org. For details, contact Robin Stein at lunchandlearn@templemicah.org or the temple office at 202-342-9175.



March 13 – Peter Edelman on his new book, “Not a Crime to Be Poor: The Criminalization of Poverty in America.” A senior official in the Clinton administration, Edelman is the faculty director of the Center on Poverty and Inequality and professor of law at Georgetown University. In his latest book he examines the impact of court imposed fines and fees, money for bail, and how state and local governments have criminalized being poor.



April 10 – Carla Peterson on her book “Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in 19th-Century New York City,” which chronicles her family's history from the 1820s to the rise of Jim Crow. Peterson is professor emerita in the English department at the University of Maryland with an expertise in nineteenth-century African American literature, history, and culture.



May 8 – Marianne Szegedy-Maszak on “Charmed Lives: History, Family and Fate during Hungary's Holocaust.” A journalist for 30 years and currently senior editor of Mother Jones magazine, Szegedy-Maszák tells her family's story in pre- and post-World War II Europe, captured in her 2013 book “I Kiss Your Hands Many Times: Hearts, Souls, and Wars in Hungary.”



June 12 – Juliet Eilperin on “Has Barack Obama's Environmental Legacy Unraveled? A Look at America's Climate and Public Lands Policy.” Formerly the Washington Post's national environmental reporter, Eilperin now serves as the Post's senior national affairs correspondent, focusing on the environment and other domestic issues that shed light on how President Trump is transforming the federal government and many of the policies instituted by former President Obama.

REMEMBERING SUSIE BLUMENTHAL

Susan Goldberg Blumenthal, known to the Temple Micah community as Susie, died Feb. 4. She was the synagogue administrator for nearly two decades, only retiring in 2008 when she became ill with multiple myeloma.

Many members of Temple Micah recalled her warmth and style even when she was very ill.

In noting her passing, Rabbi Zemel said he had received many, many messages from congregants commenting on her importance to Temple Micah. Among them were these:

"I remember being shocked several years ago when I found out

that our beautiful, lively, and lovely Susie was ill and I can only hope that these last few years were not painful for her."

◆ ◆ ◆

"I just loved her. She was the heart and soul of Micah."

◆ ◆ ◆

"We all feel we belong to Temple Micah, but Susie, forgive me, felt Temple Micah belonged to her. She cared for the temple the way she cared for her children. She guarded the door but always kept it open. I'm thinking of all my happy warm memories of coming through that door on Susie's watch."



Susie Blumenthal was the wife of Harvey Blumenthal and the mother of Laura Tobin and Michelle Abramowitz. She had six grandchildren.

Temple Micah will honor her at a memorial service Sunday, April 14 at 4 p.m. A reception will follow the service.

Rabbi's Message FROM PAGE 1 ►

notes that religious identity can rest on fidelity and allegiance or familiarity and comfort and not only on faith. So it is with American Jews. We feel a loyalty to what I call an imagined past, to the saga of Jewish history, to formative memories. We have an affinity for certain behaviors, or simply for other Jews.

Robinson goes further. She seems to stretch the category of religion. Jewish life, Jewish engagement, Jewish being incorporate the aesthetic, the ethical and the social. Defining precisely what a Jewish aesthetic in America is might be near impossible. The range is too broad. But we all know what klezmer is, we recognize the writings of Woody Allen and Philip Roth as Jewish even if we cannot pinpoint how, and we recognize the sacred in a beautiful chanting of Kol

Nidre, even if we do not know the meaning of the words.

Jewish ethics also are a part of our religious identity. As Bret Stephens wrote in a recent review of "Antisemitism Here and Now," by Deborah Lipstadt, "most Jews...can be said to stand for certain ideas and attitudes. A particular concept of morality. A reverence for law founded on the idea of truth. A penchant for asking nettlesome questions. Skepticism toward would-be saviors. A liberal passion for freedom."

Finally, I believe we both implicitly and explicitly view social relationships as a Jewish religious value. Witness our yearning for a sense of community in our synagogue life.

What then of theology?

I believe that there are essentially two kinds of Judaism present in the world today. I will call them pre-modern and modern, and

deliberately avoid the labels Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist because such institutional words do not advance our understanding.

Pre-modern Jews believe that observance of the mitzvot (commandments) counts for something on a mystical, transcendent scale, that God is keeping count and that the condition of the world depends in some cosmic way on the quality of Jewish religious observance. This is the Judaism of the ancient world described by the historian Yuval Noah Harari in *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*: "Up until modern times, most cultures believed that humans played a part in some great cosmic plan... The plan was devised by the omnipotent gods...and human-kind could not change it...It really mattered whether they... ate forbidden foods..."

Modern Jews live their Jewish lives by choice. Their Jewish behaviors and observances are matters of aesthetic preference, social choice or convenience, habit and personal taste. "I like doing X or Y. I choose to believe that." This is what Robinson terms "loyalty and affinity." This, I believe, depicts the vast majority of American Jewish life, no matter which denominational label is attached to it.

Loyalty and affinity in search of a theology.

I am beginning to think that all human beings are, to some extent, wired for faith. We seek to understand why we do what we do.

We look for meaning to explain, even to ourselves, why we follow the path we walk, the path we inherited or the path we selected. This is the beginning of religion.

Shalom,
Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel

Cantor Weiner FROM PAGE 1 ►

choral director at the JCC of Northern Virginia so a match was made.”

Two months after she began teaching music at Temple B’nai Shalom, the rabbi there asked Weiner to join her on the bimah to lead services and to direct a new choir.

“I gladly accepted and then took classes, found mentors, joined professional organizations, and learned on the job. I loved the position in which I found myself,” Cantor Weiner explained.

Then in 1998, Temple Micah began looking for a new music professional. Doug Mishkin, a lawyer with a substantial reputation of his own as a folk singer and music producer, suggested Rabbi Zemel talk to Weiner. Weiner and Mishkin had known each other since high school when both played guitar and led song sessions, and had recently reconnected.

Cantor Weiner remembers that first conversation with Rabbi Zemel very

well: “He asked me some questions about my repertoire and about my ability to work in a collaborative way. We talked about prayer and worship, and about my life as a Reform Jew. He then invited me to meet with and sing for the search committee,” and she, as she puts it, “was lucky enough to get the job.”

“What a wonderful and fulfilling experience it’s been to serve this community. A true honor. At the outset I thought this job would be one thing but being the cantor at Micah turned into so much more. I didn’t realize when I was hired to help lead services that the congregation would appreciate my background in folk music as much as it does or that I would find my way into so many other facets of leadership.

“Singing songs and prayers that speak to what’s going on in the world is such a privilege. It brings me back to my coffee house days and also to the changing musical sound that I and other teens in the sixties were bringing to summer

camps and Shabbat services in our congregations.

“We were changing the face of Jewish worship then and being at Temple Micah has allowed me to continue to help change the face of Jewish worship. My 21 years here has also allowed me to teach, build community, and broaden the congregation’s view of the Jewish experience.”

As you might expect, Cantor Weiner’s retirement plans include more time with her grandchildren in northern New Jersey. What you might not know is she wants to write books for very young children. She wants to learn to paint in watercolors. She wants to audit university classes and travel with her husband, and they both want to help support Planned Parenthood and Democratic politics in northern Virginia. And as for music in her life, she wants to learn to play the violin, cello, ukulele, and washtub bass. Not that any of this surprises any of us. ♦

What Will She Miss Most? Everyone and Everything

Cantor Meryl Weiner was asked what she will miss the most after she retires. Here is her response:

“Most of all I will miss interacting with and getting to know the members of this community. Each relationship has enriched my life tremendously. Each person has taught me something about life’s complexities.

“My relationship with Rabbi Zemel has grown much deeper over the years. I’ll miss his daily doses of humor but I look forward to continuing the very close and trusting friendship that we’ve enjoyed.

“I hope all of my colleagues will email me periodically because I’ll be looking for their correspondences every morning, as I’ve done for the past 21 years. I won’t see their smiles, hear their comforting words, or enjoy their laughter on a regular basis but I’ll just have to stop in occasionally.

“I’ll miss collaborating with the Micah team, learning from them, being engaged in their lives, and making my way through staff turnovers, which always culminated in finding wise and engaging new colleagues.

“Being able to call so many people to the Torah as a result of 16 years of Adult B’nai Torah cohorts brings me a great sense of pride. I’ll miss teaching that class, the Beginning Hebrew classes and the Haftarah chanting classes I’ve taught over the years.

“I’ll miss teaching and inspiring b’nai mitzvah students and their families, and mentoring our student cantor and other young adults who were interested in Jewish prayer.

“I’ll miss working with and being with Liz Lerman and the Yom Kippur afternoon service “dancers,” members of the choir, the Pick Up Band, the Musical Ensemble, the women and men of Kol Isha, and the parents who engaged in discussions on Sunday mornings.

“I’ll miss the opportunity to organize other important discussions and marches when the actions of our country and the world demand them.

“And I’ll miss being with you in hospital rooms, at funerals, at shivas, at baby namings and weddings.

“But most importantly I’ll miss the role for which I was initially hired – leading worship – to lift up prayer and create a meaningful sense of Shabbat and the holidays. I’ve learned the most enriching, beautiful, joyful Jewish music that exists, brought professional musicians to our services, and I’ve been able to engage many of you in discussions about our liturgy. I’ve helped create the space for all of us to worship together. I’ll miss being a leader of this special community and sharing celebratory, thoughtful, healing moments together.

“I will miss it all.”

Cantor Weiner's Adult B'nai Torah Classes over the Years ...



TZEDAKAH

BUILDING IMPROVEMENT FUND

IN MEMORY OF

Susie Blumenthal, by David and Barbara Diskin, Lisa Saks and Lawrence Lynn
Harvey Goldberg, by Susie(z'l) and Harvey Blumenthal

ENDOWMENT FUND

IN HONOR OF

Rabbi Zemel for performing the marriage of Noah
and Emily Simmons, by Brenda Levenson

IN MEMORY OF

Rosette Herschkovitz, by Brenda Levenson
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The marriage of Rabbi Danny Moss and Rabbi Susan
Landau, by Ed and Bobbie Wendel
Ann Sablosky for a wonderful tour of the Supreme
Court, by Nan, Josh, and Aaron Kaufman
With thanks to Rabbi Zemel and Temple Micah for their audacious
hospitality, by Susan Freedman and Rabbi Rick Jacobs
The engagement of Ronit Zemel and Ethan Porter,
by Richard Fisch and Sue Alpern-Fisch

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IN MEMORY OF

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Maxine Sablosky, by Muriel Wolf

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Rachel Gross and Rhiannon Walsh, in appreciation for their
kindness, encouragement, and support as Micah colleagues
and friends, by Sue Alpern-Fisch and Richard Fisch
Cantor Meryl Weiner, by Muriel Wolf

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With recognition and thanks to Rabbi Josh Beraha, by Louis Kolodner

IN MEMORY OF

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Rabbi Crawley, by Susan and Allan Abravanel
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The naming of Lyla 'Yochanna' Jasper, by Todd Jasper and Emma Spaulding

RABBI ZEMEL'S DISCRETIONARY FUND

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Morris Wisotsky, by Ed and Shelley Grossman

SUKKAT SHALOM

IN MEMORY OF

Shigemitsu Nakashima, by Ellen Nakashima

THE RABBI DANIEL GOLDMAN ZEMEL FUND FOR ISRAEL

Attendees of the 2018 Temple Micah Israel Trip

Peg Blechman and Paul Shapiro

IN HONOR OF

The 2018 Temple Micah Israel Trip, by Steven and Sara Just

IN MEMORY OF

Genie Blechman, by Peg Blechman and Paul Shapiro
Mildred Kiggins, by Kate Kiggins
Mary Elizabeth Peters, by Peg Blechman and Paul Shapiro
James (Jim) Sender, by Michelle Sender

*This list reflects donations received December 10, 2018–
February 21, 2019. Every effort has been made to ensure its
accuracy, but if there are any errors or omissions please
accept our apologies. For corrections or clarifications, please
contact Rhiannon Walsh in the temple office. Thank you.*

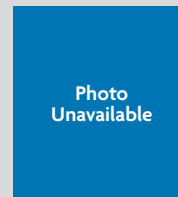
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FEBRUARY 2 / 27 SHEVAT
PARENTS: David and Kelly Baron
TORAH PORTION: Mishpatim



LEONE ROSSOTTO
MARCH 30 / 23 ADAR II
PARENT: Karen Rossotto
TORAH PORTION: Shmini



MAISIE WATTENBERG
MAY 4 / 29 NISAN
PARENTS: Cinnamon Balmuth and Daniel Wattenberg
TORAH PORTION: Kedoshim



LEVI EDELSTEIN
MARCH 6 / 2 ADAR II
PARENTS: David Edelstein and Robin Peck
TORAH PORTION: Pekude



PARKER MCFARREN
APRIL 6 / 1 NISAN
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TORAH PORTION: Tazria



NATHANIEL JACOB RUBENS GOLDFARB
MAY 11 / 6 IYAR
PARENTS: Brent Goldfarb and Beth Rubens
TORAH PORTION: Emor



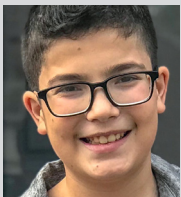
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LEILA BODNER
APRIL 13 / 8 NISAN
PARENTS: Jim Bodner and Victoria Greenfield
TORAH PORTION: Metzora



MAIA SOFIA MANCUSO
MAY 18 / 13 IYAR
PARENTS: Leesa Klepper and Mario Mancuso
TORAH PORTION: Behar



GABE KALMAN SHANOFF
MARCH 23 / 16 ADAR II
PARENTS: Dan and Margery Shanoff
TORAH PORTION: Tzav



RUBY KODIS
APRIL 27 / 22 NISAN
PARENTS: Deborah Ben-David and Martin Kodis
TORAH PORTION: Achrei Mot

ADULT B'NAI TORAH – MAY 25

CONDOLENCES

The Temple Micah community extends its deepest condolences to:

ANDY BRESSLER, on the passing of his father, Ronald Bressler

HARVEY BLUMENTHAL, on the passing of his wife, Susie Blumenthal

STUART BROWN, on the passing of his wife, Margaret Siebel

MARK LEVINE, on the passing of his grandfather, Harry "Poppy" Roth

DAVID MERRILL, on the passing of his mother, Andrea Merrill

JIM STEVENSON, on the passing of his mother, Evelyn Anne Stevenson

TESS WALD, on the passing of her uncle, Dale Zingg

ALEXANDRA WISOTSKY, on the passing of her father, Morris Wisotsky

May their memories be for a blessing.

MAZAL TOV!

Meryl and Michael Chertoff, on the engagement of their daughter, Emily, and Adam Bradlow

Linh Cunnion and Leah Kaplan, on the birth of their son, Meir Cunnion Kaplan

Elyse Greenwald and Matthew Kaplan, on the birth of their daughter, Miriam Rose Kaplan

Jennifer Gruber and Eric Rosenberg, on the marriage of their daughter, Lina, and Alex Foley

Reena Nadler and Jacob Ross, on the birth of their son, Benjamin Andrew Ross

Jane Yamaykin and Eatay Schechter, on the birth of their son, Eli Schechter

TWO WAYS TO SUPPORT SUKKOT IN SPRING THIS YEAR

BY SHELLEY GROSSMAN

FOR 27 YEARS, Temple Micah members have spent one Sunday repairing the home of a low-income area resident as part of Sukkot in Spring. That day, this year, will be May 19.

There's another date important for Sukkot in Spring this year. It is April 27 when the Georgetown Chorale performs the concert version of Ernest Bloch's *Avodat HaKodesh*, the 20th century composer's rendition of the Shabbat morning service. Concert proceeds will go to Yachad, the local Jewish housing and neighborhood development organization that operates Sukkot in Spring.

This year members of the B'nai Torah class plan to join other Micah volunteers in rolling up their sleeves and getting to work. DIY skills are welcome but unnecessary. Those who aren't confident with a hammer or saw can clean, paint or garden. This year, the Micah team will work on the home of a single mother in Prince Georges' County who is raising four teens while on disability due to chronic kidney disease. The house needs plumbing and roof repairs as well as work on an old unsafe deck.

The mission of Yachad, which means "together" in Hebrew, is to work together with community organizations

and across faith groups in the metropolitan area to make homes of lower-income residents healthy and safe, not only improving the lives of these families, but preserving Washington's diminishing stock of affordable housing and revitalizing its neighborhoods.

Yachad must rely on construction professionals to accomplish the extensive skilled work on the 100-plus residential units it renovates each year. That costs money. Yachad therefore relies on volunteers to do much of the unskilled and semi-skilled tasks. Plus, Sukkot in Spring involves members of the Jewish community in the fundamental Jewish obligation to provide shelter for the poor.

The reviews by both homeowners and volunteers are always positive. "At the end of the day's work, the house is transformed and the homeowner is always so grateful," Roberta Goren, co-house captain, said. "I can't fully describe how satisfying it is to perform this mitzvah every year." For more information and to sign up, contact Goren at sukkotinspring@templemicah.org.

The second, correlated mitzvah that Micah community members can assume this year—one at least equally rewarding

that won't involve getting dirty—is the Georgetown Chorale's concert.

Temple Micah Music Director Teddy Klaus called *Avodat HaKodesh*, "one of the greatest pieces of Jewish music ever crafted, which unfortunately isn't often performed, so this is a rare opportunity to hear it." He noted that the late Herman Berlinski, an eminent Jewish composer and Washingtonian, called the Bloch Sacred Service, "the culmination of centuries of Jewish music."

Seven Micah members, Barbara Diskin, Genie Grohman, Jan Greenberg, Ed Grossman, Jennifer Gruber, Rabbi Tamara Miller and Ken Schwartz, sing in the 100-member Georgetown Chorale. The mission of the Chorale, now in its 30th year, is to provide community service through music.

The Chorale's 2017 spring concert benefited Micah House. Those funds helped pay for a badly needed new roof for the house.

The concert will take place at 8 p.m. on April 27, at the Church of the Epiphany, 1317 G St., NW. (Advance tickets are available for \$25 for adults/\$15 for students/children on line at www.georgetownchorale.org, or at the door for \$30. Additional donations also directly benefit Yachad.) ♦

SUKKAT SHALOM EXTENDS REFUGEE HELP BEYOND ONE FAMILY

Tax season can be daunting for many of us. But imagine you are a refugee recently settled here and filing income taxes for the first time.

Janet Gordon, a Sukkat Shalom volunteer, who had been helping the Rasooli family with their finances after they resettled here from Afghanistan, recognized early on they would have to confront IRS forms for the first time.

"I realized early on that I was going to have to explain it to them," she said recently. Then she realized there were many refugee families in our area in the same spot.

After talking to Lutheran Social Services, the official refugee resettlement agency in this area, Gordon, a professional financial planner, and David Wentworth, a taxation expert, recently conducted two tax workshops for 38 refugee families from throughout

LSS advertised the workshops and hosted the sessions

at its headquarters in Hyattsville. Most of the families, Gordon said, were from Afghanistan although several were from Africa as well. The International Rescue Committee, which has worked with Sukkat Shalom from the beginning, provided translators for the workshops.

The goal of the workshops was to help people do their taxes right at the lowest cost to them and to take advantage of all the refund opportunities available to them, Gordon said.

What surprised the refugee families the most, she said, was that they would probably be getting back money, "quite a bit of money," because of credits due them.

"We gave them all the information they needed to make appointments for free help," she said. "We wanted to make sure that refugees don't get taken advantage of and get refunds to which they are entitled."

BERAHA'S BLACKBOARD

AN OLD BOOK, A BURIED TREASURE FOR ALL AMERICANS

BY RABBI JOSH BERAHA

I recently had the occasion to act on the advice of a respected teacher of mine who said, “For every *new* Jewish book, read an *old* Jewish book.” But before I tell you about the *old* book I recently discovered, a few brief thoughts on the *new* books, of which there are certainly no lack, and I only wish I had enough time, not to mention the stamina, to read them all.

A cursory look through the magnificent *Jewish Review of Books* for example—a quarterly publication available in the Temple Micah library—quickly illustrates the flourishing of the modern Jewish academy. In a past issue alone I found new books on Spinoza, Maimonides, Zionism, and Hungarian Judaism; new books on Jews during the First World War and, of course, World War II.

As a lover of early 20th century Jewish American history, I’m always drawn to new research and opinion on the early years of our people in this country when the Lower East Side of New York was full of immigrants’ pushcarts and fresh hope for a more prosperous future. New books on the topic appear regularly. If you’re interested in Jewish thought, there is no lack of new research into even the most obscure reaches of the Jewish past. But what else should we expect from the People of the Book?

The new Jewish books from the last year you’ll find on my bedside table include Steven R. Weisman’s “Chosen Wars: How Judaism Became an American Religion,” Robert Mnookin’s “The Jewish American Paradox: Embracing Choice in a Changing World” and Shachar M. Pinsker’s “A Rich Brew: How Cafes

Created Modern Jewish Culture.”

A book I finished and then promptly ordered copies for all of Temple Micah’s middle schoolers is Erica Perl’s tween novel, “All Three Stooges,” a story about best friends from Hebrew school who go through all the ups and downs of their Bar-Mitzvah year together. Other titles include the children’s book “Write On, Irving Berlin,” by Leslie Kimmelman, and the wonderful compilation of Jewish sources on music in Joey Weisenberg’s “The Torah of Music.”

While all these reflective, thought-provoking books have shaped my year and thinking, I am most excited by the buried treasure I recently stumbled upon by chance in a footnote somewhere I can no longer remember: “The Faith of America: Readings, Songs, and Prayers for the Celebration of American Holidays” by Mordecai Kaplan, J. Paul Williams and Eugene Kohn.

The original edition of “The Faith of America” came out in 1951. A second edition was published in 1963. (My copy was a gift purchased after the second edition was released, I presume, as the inscription reads, “To Ettie and Otto, Dec. 63”). In the preface to the book, the authors state “the purpose of this book is to help give meaning to the most important American holidays by associating them with the ideals appropriate to them, ideals that have gone into the making of the American consciousness.” What follows are 13 chapters—from New Year’s Day through Thanksgiving—complete with all the great American holidays in between. For each, the authors provide various readings that they suggest can be “used by public assemblies, patriotic society, schools, civic



centers, churches, and synagogues to celebrate these holidays in a religious spirit.”

The book is not specifically Jewish, and in fact the authors point to their desire to bring forth a kind of civic religious spirit to American holidays. Kaplan and his fellow authors note that most American holidays are “treated merely as occasions for recreation” and “their deeper meanings are seldom adequately expressed.” How true, and a reminder of the impetus for Temple Micah’s Arlington National Cemetery Service, held around Independence Day every year.

In a time of bitter political divide, of apathy and anger, when news headlines read like *The Onion*, when a Gallup poll finds that nearly three quarters of people in our country say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going—a fairly consistent trend, actually, since 2008—“The Faith of America” feels like the kind of book I’d like to send to every one of the 325 million Americans.

I know I’m naive, but imagine if President Washington’s birthday (Feb. 22), for example, was accompanied with readings like the following on public radio or published in the newspaper: “On this day, sacred to the memory of George Washington, we gratefully renew our loyalty to our nation, of which he was the foremost founder... God grant that this day arouse in us the will to make of this nation the best that it can become, to justify the faith which the Founding Fathers reposed in it. May the ample resource with which nature has blessed our country nurture a nation of men and women strong, self-reliant, generous, and free.”

While I understand that the challenges our country faces will not be solved simply by a book, I am inspired nonetheless by the authors’ attempt to elevate our civic faith. Part of the tikkun, repair of our country, will begin, I believe, with the recognition that as Americans we can indeed be “self-reliant, generous, and free.”

OUR AMBASSADORS IN ISRAEL IN DECEMBER



Micah kids join children from the Arab village of B'aarta for a game of soccer.

THE LIFE OF TEMPLE MICAH

ONE COFFEE CUP AT A TIME

BY RABBI STEPHANIE CRAWLEY

The call went out shortly after I began my new job at Temple Micah:

"Rabbi Stephanie Crawley, our new Assistant Rabbi, wants to talk with you! Her goal? To connect (and re-connect) with as many people possible in the Temple Micah community during her first 40 days and 40 nights! What about? You! What you care about, why you keep coming back to Temple Micah, what keeps you up at night, your hopes for the Jewish future... and more! Let's start the conversation!"

We talked for 40 days and 40 nights, chatted over 40 cups of coffee, at lunch dates, in office meetings, in Glover Park, Dupont, Southwest, and downtown. And when 40 days and 40 nights weren't enough, we kept going.

In my first six months at Temple Micah, I have had over 75 of these meetings. I spoke to people who have been part of this community for nearly all of Micah's history, and people who have recently joined. I listened to your stories and shared my own. I found out what you love about Temple Micah, and where you think there is room for growth.

In these first few months as a rabbi at

Temple Micah, I have found myself frequently reflecting back on these conversations. There was not a single meeting where I did not learn something new, and I often felt inspired and moved by the depth of your stories.

Alongside my work to see the long view of Temple Micah (learning about our spiritual vision, values, and the pillars which support our community), these conversations helped ground me in the lives of our members. What Martin Buber says in his *I-Thou* - "All actual life is encounter," - felt especially true. It can be easy to get lost in the philosophical clouds, but each encounter with you helped give me a better sense of the actual life of our community members, and of what the life of Temple Micah is.

In these conversations, I also discovered the vastness of the Temple Micah ecosystem. I found myself thinking about the following Midrash, told about the moment the Israelites receive the Ten Commandments. The Midrash is commenting on an oddity in the Hebrew, asking why the Hebrew words for "thunder" and "lightning" appear in the plural:

"And all the people saw the thunder-



ings and the lightnings.' (Exodus 20:15)...

How many thunders were there and how many lightnings were there? It is simply this: they were heard by each person according to their capacity."

Temple Micah is a place that also exists in the plural. Each person experiences Temple Micah in their own way, and according to their capacity. I have only begun to hear what each person's experience of Temple Micah is and how each different member of our community understands their time here.

I want to thank each person who answered my call, who helped me start to see all of Micah's "thunders and lightnings." Although my formal 40 days and 40 nights are over, the invitation is always open.

Please, come tell me your story.



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