

FROM RABBI ZEMEL

FINDING THE HEART OF OUR ETERNAL COVENANT

DEAR FRIENDS,

As I write this, we are in the period following Passover during which we count the days of the Omer until we get to Shavuot, the Sinai moment of revelation. In my last column, I wrote that American Jewish identity is a cultural phenomenon in search of a theology, a religious underpinning.

Judaism as an aesthetic, social and ethical framework is self-evident for most of us—or so I imagine. But what about the role of faith, covenant and God? How are they part of our contemporary American Jewish self-understanding? What clues do the Sinai encounter offer?

To understand more fully the Sinai moment, let us first turn to Genesis 18 as God reveals God's plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because they are overwhelmed by evil. Abraham argues on behalf of the righteous and cries out words that are forever etched into the Jewish understanding of the world: "Will the Judge of the entire earth not do justice?" In doing so, he establishes that the venture — for which he left his home and family and set off for the unknown — was eternally bound in the pursuit of justice. No justice, no new religion.

The Sinai moment offers yet another challenge. In Exodus 32, Moses challenges God on top of the mountain as the Israelites worship the Golden Calf down below.

"I have seen these people," Adonai says to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will

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Welcome

Debra Winter Named Micah's New Worship Music Artist

BY FRAN DAUTH

FAMILY VIDEOS RECORD Debra Winter playing a toy piano at age 3. By age 6 she had discerned musical patterns on her own, and eventually she, naturally, made music her career. Since then she has added guitar, mandolin and ukulele to her repertoire.

Is it any surprise then that Winter has been named Micah's worship music artist to succeed Cantor Meryl Weiner who is retiring after two decades of service.

In announcing Winter's appointment, Rabbi Zemel said the search committee was impressed by the "warmth and soulfulness of her voice, by her ability to create an uplifting worship experience and by her engaging presence on the bimah and off.

"Debra plays the guitar beautifully and enjoys singing a wide variety of music. She also has a sharp sense of humor and an eagerness to try new things. In short, we think she will fit in well at Temple Micah," Rabbi Zemel said.

In a later interview, Rabbi Zemel said he believes the title "worship music artist" is an apt description of the post and is a true translation of the Hebrew word hazzan for the person who leads the congregation in songful prayer.

Winter currently is the associate music director for the Biennial Convention of the Union for Reform Judaism. She lives in Denver and will move here this summer, joining the Micah staff in late August.

In a telephone interview, Winter, who is 32, revealed that she has visited 22 Major League Baseball parks.



No, she is not a White Sox fan, but has nothing against the team, she wisely says. She also is an avid skier and hiker, or was, until a recent injury in December.

She grew up in Cherry Hill, N.J. Her high school, Cherry Hill East, was known for its musical theatre, she said. She graduated with a degree in music from Rowan University in New Jersey. Her father, who died last year, was a college math teacher. Her mother is a social worker at Thomas Jefferson Hospital in Philadelphia, working primarily in the neonatal care unit. A younger brother is a lawyer in New York City.

In announcing Winter's appointment, Rabbi Zemel, Board President Marcia Silcox and Jodi Enda, the search

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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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TEMPLE MICAH—
A REFORM JEWISH CONGREGATION
2829 Wisconsin Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20007
Voice: 202-342-9175
Fax: 202-342-9179
Email: info@templemicah.org
vine@templemicah.org
Web: templemicah.org

Daniel G. Zemel
RABBI

Josh Beraha
ASSOCIATE RABBI, DIRECTOR OF
CONGREGATIONAL LEARNING

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KNITTING TOGETHER THE STRANDS OF A JEWISH LIFE

BY MARCIA FINE SILCOX

You may think of knitting as an old fashioned pastime, or a lady's hobby, or maybe as the source of misshapen sweaters or a finicky tangle you tried once to coax into a scarf.



I find that knitting is all of those, but indeed something much more, and in fact, something that parallels many of the joys and quandaries of a Jewish life. Okay, maybe a stretch (knitters use a "tubular cast-on" for a stretchy edge), but hear me out.

Judaism is a bit older than hand knitting. Semi-reliable Internet sources place its origins in the Bronze Age, with our own prophet Micah in the 8th century. Knitting (according to the Victoria and Albert Museum), also originated in the Middle East, probably in 11th century Egypt, although single needle garments such as socks existed even earlier. So Micah could have worn sort-of-knitted socks or vests. Knitting and Judaism are ancient practices from the same region.

Knitting, like Judaism, moves from right to left. Following a knitting chart is like reading Hebrew, right to left, and the yarn flows that way as well.

Knitting starts with a simple concept, a loop within a loop. Judaism also has a "simple" core concept, the Shema. But neither practice remains simple. Some practitioners stick with the basics. Most however, want to strike out on new paths and learn new skills for incorporation into next efforts. Knitting and Judaism each encourage lifelong interpreting, creating, connecting, and solving.

Judaism is built on 10 basic rules, the commandments. We all know, and try to follow them. The only knitting rules I know are: Do not drop stitches, check your gauge (size of a sample), and block (steam and fit) finished garments. Others suggest rules such as "don't knit a garment for your partner." Okay, the Judaic com-

mandments for the win here.

Knitting often has repetitive and contemplative rhythm. For me, it is very like prayer. Sometimes it requires intense concentration, admitting mistakes, attempting to repair them, moving forward, then backward, then haltingly, forward again. Other times, it just flows and creates uninterrupted joy.

Often, knitting publishers announce Mystery-Knit-Alongs, where you are given pattern clues without a picture of the finished item. Are you willing to take a journey of time and investment without knowing where you are going, or what the result will be? Prayer has similar characteristics, albeit with a deeper outcome than a shawl.

Speaking of shawls, you can be a Jewish knitter! I once knit a tallit for my son's bar mitzvah, having to chart and knit the Hebrew letters of the prayer sideways. You can knit a kippah or a chuppah cover. I offered the latter to my daughter, who rejected it outright, suggesting it might be a little too "granny style."

You can knit in acts of tikkun olam! There are many opportunities to provide needed items for preemies, veterans, immigrants, foster children, or those who just need a warm hat or soft blanket. Last year, friends and I participated in the Welcome Blanket Project, providing hand-knit blankets to newly arrived refugees and immigrants (welcomeblanket.org). The thousands of blankets were displayed in museums, and then distributed through relief organizations. Each blanket was the product of many hands that together sent a message of love and welcome, as does Temple Micah through Sukkat Shalom.

Knitting and Judaism. Always learning and creating, making mistakes, finding community, seeking something more than where you started. You may never know these practices fully, but they accommodate where you are, and if all is right for a few rows, and over many hours, they envelop you in a shawl you will have for life.

The Feast THE BABKA EDITION

BY ALEXANDRA WISOTSKY

I STILL HAVE the Micah auction on my brain. Those of you who attend the auction will know that Jeannelle D'Isa's babka is one of the most popular baked goods sold. It seemed fitting to me then that I should feature her recipe. To keep you bidding on her chocolate babka, Jeannelle decided to give me the recipe for a savory babka. If you want the chocolate one, you are just going to have to come to the auction, as she is not giving up the recipe!

Jeannelle has been baking since she was 9, having learned from her grandmother. She passed on the tradition of

baking babka to her child, Noel, about five years ago. "Now Noel is just as good at making it as I am."

Jeannelle, the office administrator at Temple Micah, invented this cheese and onion babka for cantor Ilana Goldman's birthday. Ilana mentioned to Jeannelle that she prefers savory to sweet, and since Ilana's husband, Alex, is English, Jeannelle went with a flavor combination that honored his food traditions. "I was thinking



of Walker's cheese and onion crisps when I came up with this," she said, referring to a popular brand of British potato chips. See if you think it is better than the chocolate one. ♦

See page 5 for Jeannelle's babka recipe.

Meet Micah's Summer Intern With a World of Experience

BY FRAN DAUTH

DON'T LET THE word intern fool you. Thalia Halpert Rodis, Temple Micah's rabbinic intern for the 2019 summer, has a resume that runs to four pages.

"Temple Micah's tremendous commitment to social justice work and its commitment to the inclusion of families who come from all walks of life is really exciting to me," Halpert Rodis, who grew up in Brooklyn and Glen Rock, N.J., told the Vine.

"As someone who comes out of a multi-heritage, interfaith home, I was moved to learn about the ways that Temple Micah cultivates a culture of inclusion and openness," she said.

Halpert Rodis, a student at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, was awarded a Daniel & Bonnie Tisch Fellowship to learn about congregational leadership. Halpert Rodis expects to be ordained a rabbi in May 2020.

She graduated from the University of Mary Washington in May of 2011 with a bachelor's degree in anthropology. She spent one semester while an undergraduate studying at the American College of Thessaloniki in Greece.

So what did she do between college graduation and entering HUC in 2015?

Well, Halpert Rodis taught English as a second language to third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade Korean students in two public schools in Gwangju, South Korea, for a year.



And she taught students at Barnert Temple, Franklin Lakes, N.J., how to read and write Hebrew for a couple of years. She also led services there each week for children, guiding grades 3–6

through Shabbat prayers.

While at HUC Halpert Rodis served as an intern on the interfaith American Values Religious Voices campaign, and was rabbinic pulpit intern and community organizing intern at Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn.

She also has taught sixth graders at Brooklyn Heights Synagogue in New York as a teacher and b'nai mitzvah tutor.

She was a volunteer with a group that helps Israelis transitioning out of the Haredi world to strengthen their English skills.

Last September she was a student rabbi in Oxford, Miss., where she planned and led all High Holy Days services for the Jewish community there.

She was a chaplaincy intern last summer at the famed Cleveland Clinic providing spiritual and emotional support to patients and their families.

Meanwhile she has been active in a number of social justice pursuits. They include an organization called Jews in All Hues that promotes inclusion of Jews of color, multiple-heritage Jews, Jews by choice and adopted Jews.

All of this sounds like a great fit for Temple Micah, doesn't it? ♦

SPEAKING AT MICAH

Micah features two monthly lecture series — on Sundays and Wednesdays. For more information, go to templemicah.org. (Sunday Speaker series is on a summer hiatus.)

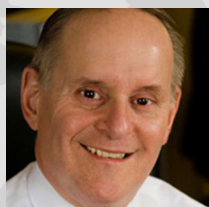
LUNCH & LEARN

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.



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.



July 10 – Al From on “Will the Democrats Create a Path to Re-election for Donald Trump.” Al From is the founder of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), which played a key role in the resurgence of the modern Democratic Party in the ‘90s. From is currently an adjunct professor at the Johns Hopkins University Krieger School of Arts and Sciences Advanced Academic Programs. He will discuss whether a tilt to the left by Democratic presidential contenders will scare off enough moderate swing voters to clear a path for Trump’s re-election.

Rabbi’s Message FROM PAGE 1 ►

make you into a great nation.” But Moses seeks the favor of Adonai, his God. “Adonai,” he says, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?’ Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your

descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.” Then Adonai relents and does not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

If Abraham’s charge to God is about justice, we might say that Moses reminds God of the eternal, covenantal connection God had forged ages earlier with Abraham.

My theological takeaway is that Judaism, as seen through these two texts, is about justice and peoplehood. These are the two values that Torah’s two greatest heroes go to the mat for by challenging God.

These “red lines” are inviolable. They cannot be crossed.

Abraham’s argument is for justice. We easily rally to that. Abraham is arguing for justice for strangers, the residents of foreign cities where he does not reside. This Judaism comes easily to us. We see our own Jewish commitments and activism rooted in Abraham’s words.

What about Moses? In arguing for God to remember the covenant God swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses is arguing on behalf of a particular tribe. The Israelites at the foot of the mountain are the holders of a particular covenant from which God cannot stray. God understands

this. Do we? Do we feel bound by covenant to God, to each other, to the message of Torah as a people?

We live in an era in which Jewish peoplehood can be misunderstood. The term “tribe” has negative connotations. We are also the heirs of a living, breathing, evolving tradition and creators, therefore, of new ways of thinking and understanding. Perhaps modern America has given us the opportunity to expand our understanding of what tribe can mean. Our teacher, Rabbi Larry Hoffman, suggests that to be Jewish is to participate in “the Jewish conversation.”

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JEANNELLE D'ISA'S CHEESE AND ONION BABKA

For Dough:

- 530 grams or 4¼ cups unbleached all-purpose flour such as King Arthur
- 60 grams of sugar or ½ cup
- 7 grams of yeast, preferably instant or double acting, or 2 teaspoons
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- 118 grams of water or ½ cup
- 150 grams of salted butter or 10 tablespoons (2/3 cup) at room temperature
- 5 grams or about ¾ teaspoon table salt

For Filling:

- 1 bunch green onions, trimmed of roots and thinly sliced
- 2 shallots, each about thumb size, peeled and finely diced
- 2 tablespoons neutral oil (such as vegetable or canola)
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 8 oz. bag pre-shredded sharp cheddar cheese (Get pre-shredded. You want the cornstarch coating.)
- 20 grams of butter or 1 ½ tablespoons, melted

Time to prepare: Two days. Dough needs to rest overnight.

Time to bake: 28 to 32 minutes.

Equipment: A stand mixer equipped with a dough hook is best. You will need to two 9-inch loaf pans.

Note: Jeannelle says measuring ingredients in grams rather than cups is more accurate because flours differ.

Makes two loaves

To Prepare Dough

Step 1. Combine flour, sugar and yeast in the bowl of a stand mixer or a large shallow bowl. Add the eggs and water, then the salt, then the butter, running the mixer with the dough hook on low speed to combine, or using your largest, sturdiest spatula as a paddle to work in the butter. (If you use non-instant yeast, proof it by mixing it with the water before you add the water to the dough.)

Step 2. Knead 7 minutes in a stand mixer, 15 minutes by hand (this is sticky, but not impossible).

Step 3. Turn the dough out into an oiled bowl, cover, and refrigerate overnight. You don't want to work with this dough when it's not cold.

To Make the Onion Filling

This can be made on the first day or on the second.

Step 1. Heat the vegetable oil in a skillet. Stir in the shallots and a pinch of salt. Cook over low heat for about 20 minutes, until the shallots are uniformly caramelized. Add the green onions and cook for 5 minutes more, until they've given up any liquid. Add salt and pepper to taste and let the mixture cool/store it until you're ready to finish the bread.

To Finish the Babkas on Day 2

Step 1. A few hours before you want babka, take the dough out



Also delicious: Jeannelle's chocolate babka, shown above

of the fridge and divide it in half. You should have two roughly 550-gram pieces (each about a 1¼ pound). Put one half back in the fridge, and one on a generously floured surface. Flip it a few times to flour both sides to prevent sticking when you roll out.

Step 2. Roll the dough into a 9 x 15 inch rectangle, about 1/5 inch thick (thicker than pie crust, thinner than cinnamon roll dough). If the dough starts to pull back, let it rest for 5 minutes before you keep rolling it.

Step 3. Evenly spread ½ of the onion mixture over the dough rectangle. Sprinkle extremely generously with about ½ of the pre-shredded cheddar cheese. Use the back of a fork to lightly mash the cheese onto the dough.

Step 4. Roll the filled dough into a log. Make sure the seam of the log is on the underside. Cut the log lengthwise down the center — you're not making it into two short logs; you're splitting a snake into half snakes with the filling exposed. Take your two snakes and twist them around each other, like braiding a two-strand challah. (Some filling may escape, but not much, it's thick.) Then put the twisted braid into the loaf pan. The twist will be stripes of dough and filling.

Cover and let rise for an hour while you repeat the process with the second loaf. Let the second loaf rise, too, also covered, also about an hour.

While the loaves rise, preheat the oven to 350F. Bake the loaves 28-32 minutes, until evenly golden and with slightly burned bits of cheese. It is really difficult to tell if a babka is done through. If you have a cake tester or other long thin metal implement, poke the center of the loaf all the way through and give a slight twist — you should be able to remove the skewer or cake tester without it feeling gummy or rubbery inside the loaf.

Brush the hot babkas with the melted butter. Cool and serve.

SAVAGE-NARVA WINS PRESTIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP

Micah member Yolanda Savage-Narva has been awarded a fellowship from the Schusterman Foundation. The foundation describes the fellowship “as a highly selective leadership development program for exceptional leaders committed to driving change in their organizations, the Jewish world and beyond.”

Savage-Narva is the executive director of Operation Understanding DC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting understanding, cooperation and respect while fighting to eradicate racism, anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination.

“Receiving the honor to be a part of the 5th cohort of Schusterman Fellows goes beyond the prestige of the fellowship, but gives me an opportunity to represent an intersectional Jewish identity to an international Jewish audience. As a member of the cohort, I look forward to the opportunity to broaden my network of Jewish professionals working to achieve similar goals as well

as further develop my leadership skills.

“I am always excited about the chance to learn, evolve and grow as a Jewish leader and as a person as well,” Savage-Narva said.

The 18-month fellowship focuses on strengthening each fellow’s “personal capacity, as well as their ability to foster collaboration and drive sector-wide change.” Each works with an executive coach to develop a customized-leadership plan.

Savage-Narva said she would continue to work full-time at Operation Understanding. “I

am honored to be selected as a fellow in the Schusterman program; I will find a way to creatively and strategically manage the demands.”

Savage-Narva has a master’s degree in education and a bachelor’s degree in sociology, with certification in gerontology. She is married and the mother of a 9-year-old son.

The others awarded fellowships come from elsewhere in North America, Israel and Africa.

— Fran Dauth



Debra Winter FROM PAGE 1 ►

committee chair, noted that she has worked as a Jewish music educator, music director and prayer leader in a variety of settings, including the North American Federation of Temple Youth, United Synagogue Youth, B’nai B’rith Youth Organization International, and various Jewish summer camps. She also served as youth engagement coordinator for two years at Temple Emanuel in Kensington, Md.

That last post provided a connection to Temple Micah that Winter didn’t realize she had until she called the

Micah office early on in the candidate search. It was when Jeannelle D’Isa answered the phone with “Jeannelle, how may I help you,” that Winter realized she already knew someone at Temple Micah. She had shared an office with D’Isa’s wife Nicole who is the bookkeeper at Temple Emanuel. ♦

Debra Winter performed for the kids at Harlam Day Camp in the summer of 2018.





Temple Micah Supports Refugees, Opposes Closed Borders

"Welcoming the stranger, the refugee, is a moral imperative imprinted deeply into the Jewish story," Rabbi Zemel declared in an email to the Temple Micah congregation a few days before the start of Passover this year.

"We know closed borders," he wrote. "Closed borders led to the extermination of European Jewry," he continued in criticizing the Trump administration's refugee policy.

To "show what Jews stand for, to reject the evil and to scorn the evildoer," Rabbi Zemel proposed congregants come early to Shabbat morning services to stand outside with signs proclaiming solidarity with refugees. And they did.

— Photography by Shira M. Zemel



B'NAI MITZVAH



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



SADIE MARVIN
JUNE 1 / 27 IYYAR
PARENTS: Lucille and
Robert Marvin
TORAH PORTION: Bamidbar



ELIJAH SINCLAIR
JUNE 8 / 5 SIVAN
PARENTS: Joan Sinclair
and Brandon Hoffman,
and David Sinclair
TORAH PORTION: Nasso

MAZAL TOV!

Jennifer Kaplan and Tom Trendl, on the
naming of their son, Devin Trendl

CONDOLENCES

The Temple Micah community extends its deepest condolences to:

DOUG BARRY, on the passing of his sister, Claudia Lesnick

HAROLD CLOSTER, on the passing of his mother, Rose Closter

ELYSE GREENWALD, on the passing of her father, Howard Paul Greenwald

JUDITH LEVIN, on the passing of her husband, Robert Levin

LESLEY LEVIN, on the passing of her grandmother, Arlyn Silverman

DIANA SEASONWEIN, on the passing of her uncle, Leonard Schwall

May their memories be for a blessing.

TZEDAKAH

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IN MEMORY OF
Susie Blumenthal, by Milton
and Marlyn Socolar

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Kodis and Deborah Ben-David
Meryl Weiner, by Mark Gruenberg

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by Kate Kiggins and Jared Blum
Susie Blumenthal, by David and
Livia Bardin, Norman Blumenfeld,
Betsi and Harold Closter, Lora
Ferguson, Mark Gruenberg, Kate
Kiggins and Jared Blum, Deborah
and Alan Kraut, Gerald Liebenau,
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Kerschner, Harriett Stonehill,
Harriet Tritell, by Nancy Piness
Harriette Kinberg's birthday, by
Richard Fitz and Kathy Spiegel

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and David Wentworth
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Helene Granof, Lora Ferguson

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Blumenfeld, Burton Greenstein
Chip Broder, by David
Wentworth and Betsy Broder
Samuel Iker, by Jean Iker
Margaret Siebel, by Sonia White

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Mitzvah, by Carolyn Shanoff

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and Harlan Sherwat
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Vivian Liebenau, by Betsi and
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IN MEMORY OF
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Wentworth and Betsy Broder

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but if there are any errors or
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apologies. For corrections or
clarifications, please contact
Rhiannon Walsh in the
temple office. Thank you.*

THE LIFE OF TEMPLE MICAH

A NAMESAKE WHOSE WORDS
COMMAND US STILL

BY RABBI STEPHANIE CRAWLEY

Several months ago, a friend sent me a link to a satirical online site, the “Synagogue Name Generator.” Someone had taken the time to create an algorithm and input common elements of congregational names. All I had to do was click the “Name My Shul!” button, and presto! Out popped the randomized suggestions:

Click: “*Kehilat Shalom/Community of Peace.*”

Click: “*Shaare Tzedek/Gates of Righteousness.*”

Click: “*Temple Beth Gesher/House of the Bridge.*”

Clearly, the randomizer doesn’t quite fully take into account the power of Jewish symbolism, but you get the idea.

My amusement at this clearly niche website quickly turned into curiosity. How many other actual “Temple Micahs” are there? I knew about one in Denver, because we occasionally get an errant piece of mail or phone call intended for it, but I have never heard of any other Temple Micah, or Congregation Micah, Kehilat Micah, or any other variant. A cursory Google search uncovered only two other Temple Micahs— one in New Jersey and another in Tennessee.

What’s so unusual about Micah? Some history, with gratitude to the Micah Living History Project: Our congregation began in 1963 as the “Southwest Hebrew Congregation.” When the need arose to pick a new name, the choices were “Temple Micah” or “Temple Isaiah.” Now, Isaiah is clearly the prophet of choice when it comes to temple naming. He has, by my limited research, at least 12 synagogues named after him.

Our rabbi at the time, my teacher, Rabbi Bernard Mehlman, apparently preferred the name “Micah” for two reasons: First, the prophet Micah’s words: “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they study war any more,” (Micah 4:3) seemed particularly appropriate within the context of the Vietnam War and the values of the congregation. However, given that this verse also appears, identically, in the book of the prophetic contemporary, a second explanation is also possible: Micah was simply a more original name.

Knowing Rabbi Mehlman as I do, I am compelled to believe his vote was not simply a preference for a less common name. In a world that desperately needed prophetic leadership, our congregation needed the voice of Micah. Through the choice of his name, 51 years ago, our community’s leaders bequeathed to us an ongoing task. Our work is to be “involved in the prophets,” as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel puts it, since without a dialogue with prophetic texts, “the Bible ceases to be scripture.” (God in Search of Man, 251-252)

What does it mean to be in dialogue with the prophets? Heschel writes that when we are immersed in the prophets’ words, we are “exposed to a ceaseless shattering of indifference... Their words are onslaughts, scuttling illusions of false security, challenging evasions, calling faith to account, questioning prudence and impartiality.” By reading the prophets, we allow ourselves to be made uncomfortable, to question inequality, to hold ourselves accountable.



The gift of our name is complex. Micah lived when institutional trust was at an all-time low due to corruption in government, religion and business. Starvation and homelessness was rampant.

Micah demanded responsibility be taken. He could have spoken out against foreign enemies, but instead he looked at what was wrong in his own community. Yet even as he saw the depths of immorality around him, Micah had hope. He shared with us these words: “When I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, The Eternal will be a light to me.”

Micah’s messages are often pithy; their brevity belies the depths of their wisdom. There is the one we know well: “Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8) Others respond immediately to the social demands of his day, as we have seen. Still others offer an eternal vision for a peaceful future: “Every person will sit under their grapevine or fig tree with no one to make them afraid.” (Micah 4:4)

Micah is our namesake. He left us only seven chapters, with many dark and dense verses. But within them, he embodies the ongoing message of our prophets, that demands we hear his words as not simply words, not only songs and prayers, but as calls to action.

Micah is more than just a rare name for a synagogue, it is a commitment to embody the very character of our namesake.

Rabbi’s Message FROM PAGE 4 ►

He writes, “The proper question is no longer ‘whether,’ but ‘how, when, and to what extent’ someone is Jewish.” He then answers his question: “We are Jews to the extent that we engage passionately in the Jewish conversation.”

In other words, anyone who participates in the life of the synagogue is participating in the “Jewish conversation” and is to some extent “Jewish,” part of our

covenantal inheritance.

This suggests the very idea of Jewish peoplehood can be expansive and inclusive. It also creates the challenge for Jewish institutions to respond to this new reality, to make it feel alive and to infuse it ritually. This understanding offers a conceptual underpinning for our Yom Kippur prayer for what we have called the blessing for non-Jewish spouses — but could easily be renamed the “Expanding the Conversation Blessing.”

We stand with Abraham when we stand for justice. We stand with Moses when we open wide the doors of the covenantal conversation.

We are a people who are passionate for justice. That is the heart of the Jewish conversation. It is the heart of our eternal covenant with God.

Celebrate all this on Shavuot at Temple Micah at 8:30 p.m., Saturday, June 8.

Shalom,
Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel

Making a Plan to Give Back to Temple Micah

By JIM HAMOS

TEMPLE MICAH BEGAN more than 50 years ago with a group of dedicated visionaries whose common desire was to create a spiritual home for a community of committed Jews leading deeply passionate and deliberate American Jewish lives for themselves and their children. This founding generation contributed to Temple Micah by weaving together a tapestry of Jewish values, Jewish practices and Jewish experiences to create the rich Micah community of today that endeavors to create a Judaism infused with meaning and relevance.

An important task for today is to ensure that this journey endures for future generations. We have always been fiscally responsible and are operating within a balanced budget with revenues coming from a combination of dues pledges, fees and annual fundraising. In addition, members generously give tzedakah to add to the various Micah funds that support worship, activities and infrastructure. When we have had major capital needs such as the construction or modification of our building, we have engaged in larger fundraising campaigns.

The future is hard to predict, but one thing we do know is that we will need resources to fuel the Micah vision in

years to come. With this in mind, one significant approach is the opportunity to work with congregants on planned giving and to grow what is received from legacy gifts. The Micah Board of Directors envisions that planned giving gifts will generally go to one of three funds: a permanently restricted Endowment Fund, a quasi-endowment called the Legacy Fund or an Innovation Fund, and we gratefully acknowledge gifts that have gone to these funds during the past five years from the estates of Sara Ehrman, Jeanne Mallett and Gruine Robinson as well as additional gifts by current congregants. It is through the generosity of these donors that the three funds have just recently begun to grow significantly.

The Endowment Fund and the Legacy Fund are specifically designed to ensure that in the years ahead we have the income necessary to support all that we are and all that we hope to become. The Innovation Fund supports opportunities that expand the Micah vision while seeking to enrich the American Jewish experience. This relatively new fund has already seeded the creation of a new cycle of haftarat readings to reanimate the prophetic voice in our Shabbat worship and is supporting “the Storefront

Project” that will bring Temple Micah outside the walls of the synagogue building in a new way to provide a provocative Jewish presence on the street.

We are all concerned in our estate planning about the needs of those we will leave behind and including Temple Micah in your estate plan is your commitment that the Jewish values embodied by Temple Micah continue for you and yours, now and in the future. There are numerous ways to make a legacy gift including through a bequest in your will, giving gifts of stocks, or naming Temple Micah as the beneficiary of a retirement plan, pension or life insurance policy. A legacy gift to Temple Micah is your investment that the Micah of today will be strong for future generations.

For more information on the Endowment Fund, the Legacy Fund and the Innovation Fund as well as how to include Temple Micah in your estate plans, please contact Executive Director Rachel Gross in the Micah office. In the coming months, you will also receive a brochure with additional details and we expect to host estate planning sessions in the fall. ♦

Jim Hamos is a member of the Micah Board of Directors and on the board's development committee.



Of course, there was food at the Annual Micah Auction.

BERAHA'S BLACKBOARD

BEYOND THE BINARY OF JEW AND NON-JEW

BY RABBI JOSH BERAHA

I'm not a priest, but people still confess to me. "My husband's not Jewish," they say, quietly, often without me inquiring at all. "I am, but he's not really anything." Or "My mom was Jewish, so legally I am — I think — but I married a non-Jew. I don't know, I guess we're Jew-ish?" Or even, "I never converted, but I'm not anything else, and I come to Micah all the time."

What to make of these comments, of which these are just a small sample? I understand from them what we all know to be true of modernity—that identity is complicated, specifically *religious* identity. I wonder, therefore, in an age of unparalleled religious switching and mixing, in which identity is fluid and self-constructed, how are we to understand the boundaries between Jew and non-Jew?

This question goes back to Abraham and Sarah, and much of the Bible is about how the Jewish people became just that — a people, separate from the rest.

"For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God," we read in the book of Deuteronomy, "of all the peoples on earth, the Lord your God chose *you* to be His treasured people." And for much of history through food, dress, language and communal structures, the Jewish people have defined themselves in contrast to others. Until today. Today is different. As Jacob Neusner wrote in *Commentary* magazine in November 2015, "nothing in my scholarship — not the history of the Jews of Babylonia or the sages of Yavneh — speak meaningfully to the context of the United States."

In early May, Robert Mnookin spoke at Temple Micah about his new book, "The Jewish American Paradox: Embracing Choice in a Changing World," a book in which he takes on the complex predicament of American Jewish identity. Mnookin argues for what would be the most inclusive version of Judaism ever. Dismissing what he considers old standards of Jewish identity like Jewish ancestry and strict Jewish legal definitions, Mnookin concludes "the standard (for Jewish identity) should simply be public self-identification." Basically, he says: You want to be Jewish, go ahead. It's up to you.

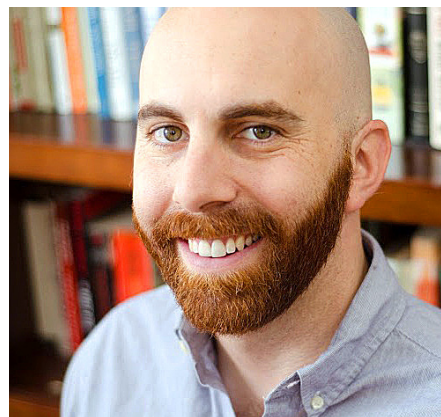
Mnookin's perspective recalls a singular, joke-like argument from Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger who write, "any human being crazy enough to call himself a Jew is a Jew."

The New York Times notes Mnookin's big tent Judaism is "revolutionary" and adds, "some would say heretical," and I agree. But I like heretics, or dissenters at least, and maybe this is why Mnookin's thinking appeals to me so.

We need radical thinkers who push the boundaries of Jewish thought. Radical thinking, or new, different thinking, might be the only way forward for our liberal, American Jewish experiment. As I see it, if we maintain strict notions of Jewish identity in an age of fluidity, we will cut ourselves off from the rest of society, or, more likely, leave our Jewish identities behind and simply blend in with the rest of secular America.

I wonder, how can we continue to think beyond the binary of Jew/non-Jew and really push the outer limits of Jewish identity? When I look at our beautiful, diverse Micah community, I see all types of people and I know that what ultimately brings us together is the desire to congregare, to do Jewish together, or better, to be human together through telling the Jewish story. For most of life at Micah, it shouldn't matter how you grew up or how you define yourself now. I want our community to have the broadest appeal possible. Anyone who seeks the wisdom and complexity of Jewish tradition is welcome to be part of our mighty community. Imagine—just like a curious soul might wander into a yoga class, a self-help section of a bookstore, a neighborhood affinity group, a bowling league or a Christian Science Reading Room, anyone who seeks something more from life should be able to walk through our doors and immerse themselves in Jewish living, Micah style.

An open, inclusive approach suggested by Mnookin doesn't mean that everyone who wanders through our doors will necessarily *want* to be considered Jewish. But I have a sneaking suspicion that we would do well for our people, and for humanity, if we could think beyond the binary of Jew and non-Jew and at least begin to dismantle the



centuries long project of building walls around our community. In this way, no one will have to defend or contextualize their Jewishness, at least not in a confessional, guilt-ridden way.

The historical precedent for more porous boundaries is clear. Jewish communities thrive, grow, become richer and smarter, when a host nation welcomes us and accepts us fully. Again, Neusner: "Judaism as a system always finds a home wherever it answers the urgent questions of humanity."

There is no question that we have gained full acceptance in America, despite recent tragedies. But what if instead of quietly blending into America and forgetting who we are, we re-commit to our religious principles of answering "the urgent questions of humanity" and *invite others to join us as we do so*?

The biblical precedent for inclusivity is clear as well. A *ger toshav*, meaning roughly, "a resident alien," is a designation in the Torah for someone who follows the basic Noahide laws but is not a full Israelite. We could use this category as grounds for future discussion, of course, but do we even need biblical precedent on this matter, or historical precedent, or any precedent at all?

Increasingly I sense that my role as a rabbi is to be in community with anyone who wants to be in community with me. Anyone. Period. I'm always interested in hearing about people's religious journey, how they define themselves. But what if we could shift the conversation from *who* is a Jew, to *why* be part of a Jewish community? And what if this shift was a public conversation, open, inclusive to all? In opening our arms, lifting our voices and sharing our message with anyone who wants to listen, we might just write the next chapter of Jewish history. Join us.

Purim puzzle: Who is that supposed to be at the far right?



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