



# The Menorah

## Inside This Issue\*

<a href="#">New Members</a>	3
<a href="#">Sukkot in Spring</a>	3
<a href="#">Kolot HaLev Concert</a>	4
<a href="#">Social Action Contest</a>	4
<a href="#">From the Photo Editor</a>	4
<a href="#">Adult Education</a>	5
<a href="#">Passover Volunteers</a>	5
<a href="#">Social Action</a>	6
<a href="#">Nayes un Mekhayes</a>	7
<a href="#">Kol Nashim</a>	8
<a href="#">Equal But Different?</a>	9
<a href="#">Friday Night Minyan Assignments</a>	11
<a href="#">Fingerhut Bar Mitzvah</a>	12
<a href="#">May Highlights</a>	12
<a href="#">Donations</a>	13

\* On-line readers can move directly to any page by clicking on the desired article title.

## President's Column: Jeff Davidson

### The Burden and Benefits of USCJ Dues

At the graduation ceremony when our daughter, Naomi, received her doctoral degree, a vast stentorian voice recited a medieval formula about honorable rights and privileges complete with all the authorities at the university that had approved the degree.

Held at one of the gothic buildings of the University of Chicago, it was a most impressive piece of pageantry. It also made us grateful she graduated in the winter ceremony and not the main one in June.

The speaker that day, the Dean of the Medical School, commented that people always asked why the same repetitive formula was read aloud for every single graduate. He replied that all had worked hard and deserved individual attention.

He also talked about *Parashat Naso*, even though he did not mention it by name. Although each tribe brought the same gift for the *Mishkan*, the gifts are described in identical detail. *Parashat Naso* is the longest *parashah* in the Torah, due in part to the description of these gifts.

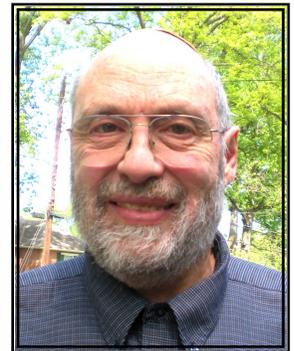
The purpose of this column is to discuss a census and gifts that we make as contemporary diaspora Jews. For TI, these gifts include significant dues to the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. I have been attending General Assembly Meetings to discuss changes in dues amounts and the way dues are configured. When I told the Board about these proposed changes, I was asked to write a column about just what in the world we are paying for.

#### A Difficult Question

The Board asked a good question, and the answer is not as simple as you might suppose. In checking with my contacts at the USCJ, I naively thought there would be a prepared response to this question, but no such document exists.

I was referred to the USCJ strategy document, which emphasizes a number of things, including:

1. *Kehillah* strengthening and transformation (KST)
2. a renewed emphasis on USY and Kadima-related activities
3. a series of educational initiatives including consulting services for early childhood education.



#### Other Movements' Dues

We pay significantly *less* in dues to our national body than our Reform brethren, because Hebrew Union College is supported by congregational dues and the Jewish Theological Seminary is not supported in this way. We pay significantly *more* than our Orthodox brethren because the Orthodox Union *hechsher* is the closest thing in denominational Judaism to a goose that lays the golden egg.

(Continued on page 2)



## President's Column (continued)

Dues for the USCJ are assessed on the basis of a head count census and we are currently charged \$70.50 per adult member. The General Assembly is being asked to raise this amount by four dollars a year. Included in the proposal are a series of technical fixes to equalize the fees charged in different regions of the country.

### The Value of USCJ Services

It is hard to monetize the value of some of the services that the USCJ offers. For example, one can walk into any Conservative or Masorti synagogue around the world and use the known and familiar prayer books and *humashim*. What is the value of this? If we were not paying for our book service, we would pay some other Jewish publisher. Other Jewish camps could be used instead of the Ramah system and there are many other alternatives to a wide range of USCJ services. All would carry costs and I have

not seen any data which indicate there would be significant savings if alternative services were used. The question becomes more complicated because some services that we enjoy are provided by the Rabbinical Assembly or the Seminary. These institutions have their own sources of revenue and fund-raising activities.

In writing this piece, I thought of my physicist friends who spend their time looking for a grand unified theory, which could explain almost everything. It would be nice to say that the USCJ meets all our needs and is indispensable, but that would not exactly be true.

### Rabbi Steinsaltz' Theory

In Judaism, Rav Steinsaltz has suggested the following as a mystical construct to encompass a grand unified system: "The system of the *mitzvot* constitutes the design for a coherent harmony, its separate components being like the instruments of an orchestra. So vast is the harmony to be created by this orchestra that it includes the whole world and promises the perfecting of the world.

"Seeing the *mitzvot* in this light, one may understand on the one hand, the need for so great a number of details and, on the other, the denial of any exclusive emphasis on any one detail or aspect of life. The *mitzvot* as a system include all of life, from the time one opens one's eyes in the morning until one goes to sleep, from the day of birth to the last breath (*The Thirteen Petaled Rose*)."

### USCJ Helps Advance this Vision

In our world of diaspora Jewry, the USCJ serves a useful and honorable position in allowing us to move towards this grand vision. At various times over the past year, different friends and congregants have suggested looking to see if we could withdraw from the USCJ and how this would affect us as a community.

At this point in time, there appears to be no viable alternative. Although the dues we pay are a significant expense, I am not sure there would be the equivalent net economic benefit because so many of these goods and services would have to be made up elsewhere.

### Continued Effort to Control Costs

I believe that the Board and TI's professional staff are acutely aware of the burden that our dues put on our members, and we try extremely hard to control costs. Working through an international union of like-minded Jews appears to be the best way to achieve Steinsaltz's mystical vision of unity and progress..

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## New Members

### Jared Garelick

#### Elaine and Jacob Mondschein

The Mondscheins moved to Silver Spring last summer from Kansas City, Missouri. They are part of the growing number of TI'ers who moved to the area in retirement to be closer to children and, especially, grandchildren.

Their daughter and son-in-law, **Emily** and **Adil Moiduddin**, and their two sons, are TI members. This makes the Moiduddins the TI Magnet Family of the Month. What makes the area even more attractive is that the Mondschein's son and granddaughters also live relatively nearby in Charlottesville.

Elaine, who grew up in Kansas City, was a teacher and educational administrator there. She still does educational consulting, for which she frequently travels back to KC.

Jacob was a budget analyst for the Missouri Department of Mental Health before retiring last year. He was born in a Displaced Persons camp in Austria and moved to Kansas City at the age of two.

The Mondscheins are greatly enjoying their new life in this area, exploring the city and its museums by Metro as well as spending time with grandchildren. They enjoy music, movies, and reading, as well as synagogue activities.

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### Sukkot in Spring

#### Larry Baizer

Please join members of Tifereth Israel and Fabrangen in a Yachad Sukkot in Spring project on Sunday, May 18. We will be working at the St. Paul AME church at 4901 14th St., NW with shifts either from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. or noon to 4:00 p.m.

We will be making minor repairs and mostly cleaning and painting the interior of the house next to the church that is used for their religious school and for clothing drives.

Many members of TI have worked on similar projects in the past and appreciate how much can be accomplished by a group of determined volunteers in just one day. Please let me know, at [lbaizer@yahoo.com](mailto:lbaizer@yahoo.com), if you are interested in participating. Children are welcome but must be at least 14 years old.

#### Adrienne Torrey

Adrienne, a native of Springfield, Massachusetts, works as an art teacher at a Montgomery County public school in Bethesda. She moved to the Washington area soon after college when she worked in educational programming at the Smithsonian. Her move to teaching came after spending two years in the Peace Corps in Ghana, teaching at a Catholic girls boarding school. She returned to the States, obtained a master's degree in education, and continued teaching.

Adrienne and her husband, **Joel Coffidis**, live in the co-housing building on Eastern Avenue, along with their daughter, **Miriam**, who looks forward to starting kindergarten at JPDS next fall. Joel is a writer who does communications work for the Teamsters. The family has been enjoying the TI Tot Shabbat scene as well as other activities. Adrienne also does yoga and maintains a garden at a nearby community garden.

Welcome to this month's featured new members!

### **Funeral Practices Committee** **Always On-Call**

Haverim of the Funeral Practices Committee are on call to provide counsel and services to synagogue members and their dependents.

In the event of a death, prior to contacting the funeral home, please contact one of the following haverim, Rabbi Seidel, or the TI office (202-882-1605).

**Shelly Heller** h: 301-942-1836  
w: 202-242-6698

**David (Judy) Cohen** h: 301-652-2872

**Marcia Goldberg** h: 301-589-0352

**Marcia Goggin** h: 301-593-8480  
w: 301-754-1963

## Kolot HaLev Annual Concert

Kolot HaLev (Voices of the Heart), a Jewish community choir in the greater Washington area, will present its annual concert on **Sunday, June 8**, at 4 p.m. at Ohr Kodesh Congregation, 8300 Meadowbrook Lane in Chevy Chase.

The concert is entitled *My Soul Longs for You; Melodies of the Russian Jews*. Before the crossing to America, before Israel, there was the Russian Pale, a place of faith, family, longing and adversity.

Memories of that time and place are preserved in Russian Jewish

melodies that have been sung around the world.

Kolot HaLev will introduce these melodies to you along with others from the Shoah, Israel, and modern Russia that echo the heart and soul of the Jewish people. These songs traversed cultures and geographical boundaries, and in the process took on an entirely new identity, came to serve a new purpose, and inspired new, very different generations of people.

Joining Kolot HaLev are **Cantor Natasha Hirschhorn** and an array of virtuoso instrumentalists.

Admission to the concert is \$18 for adults (\$20 at the door) and \$6 for students and children. Tickets can be purchased on the group's website at [www.KolotHaLev.org](http://www.KolotHaLev.org), or by email at [concert@KolotHaLev.org](mailto:concert@KolotHaLev.org).

Kolot HaLev has appeared at the Shalsholet International Festivals of New Jewish Liturgical Music. It has also performed at the Heritage Museum (in New York City, Arlington National Cemetery and other venues.

For additional information, including donor opportunities, visit [www.KolotHaLev.org](http://www.KolotHaLev.org).

## Social Action Committee Contest

Each fall, TI members deliver Rosh Hashanah food baskets to elderly members of the Jewish community.

The Social Action Committee is holding a contest to design a card to include with our baskets this year making clear they come from Tifereth Israel.

**What:** Decorate a Rosh Hashanah Card for the Rosh Hashanah Food Project.

**Who:** All TI members' children under the age of 13 are eligible to submit an entry.

**Where:** Pick up the card format in the TI office or on-line at <http://>

[tinyurl.com/RHCard](http://tinyurl.com/RHCard). Turn in entries to the TI Office.

**When:** Contest runs from May 1 to June 1 at 12:30 p.m.

Each card should be half a page and the provided text should be clearly readable.

Each contestant can submit two designs on each page. The name of the artist should not be on the front of the card.

Judging will be arranged by the Social Action Committee. The winner will be announced at the Summer Celebration on June 8.

The prize is a gift certificate to Moorenko's Ice Cream.

The winning design will go to the recipients of the holiday food distributed through the Rosh Hashanah Food Project in 2014!

## From the Photo Editor

Jeff Peterman

As many of you know, I have been the "official" TI photographer over roughly the last 15 years, and I have been happy to take photos at many TI events and make them available to the community.

These days, I am travelling much of the time for my work, which means I am not around to cover as many events as I have in the past.

So, if you're attending a TI event and feel like taking some snaps, please send the photos along to me for consideration to be published in *The Menorah* and for inclusion in the photo archives on the TI photo site.

If possible, make the photos available at a resolution of at least 1200x800 so that we have cropping options (the final images will be at 800x600 resolution).

## Adult Education

Jessica Weissman

April saw the conclusion of **Cynthia Peterman's** popular class on Jewish history, and rumor has it that **Rabbi Seidel's** class on the laws of gossip has been meeting as well.

The SHALEM series of Shabbat after-Kiddush talks continues on **May 3** with **Mark Berch's** presentation on *Hatikvah, the Enduring Controversy*.

Hatikvah has been controversial for decades in Israel. Arabs, *haredim*, some other religious Jews and even some ordinary Zionists each have

their own objections. We'll look at the history of the song's lyrics, the assorted criticisms, the flare-ups of controversy, some suggested changes and solutions, and the defenders of the status quo.

Planning starts this month for our fall and winter programs and classes. If there is a topic you would like to present as a SHALEM talk, or if you have an idea for a class or educational program, please contact Jessica Weissman.

## Passover Food Delivery Volunteers

We had a great turnout April 6 for this year's Passover Food Delivery Project, which was conducted under the auspices of B'nai B'rith's Project H.O.P.E. Here are the TI members who participated:

Wilma Brier/Jack Stone  
 Joel Coffidis  
 Jeffrey Colman  
 Miriam Davidson  
 Earl Dotter  
 James Ehrman  
 Ernie Englander  
 Varda Fink  
 Anita Finkelstein  
 Adena Galinsky  
 Mikah Goldman/Alex Berg  
 Mike/Sam Heimowitz  
 Sylvia Horwitz  
 Josh Kefer  
 Andrea Kline  
 Roger Kohn  
 Michael Kraft  
 John List  
 Paula Martin  
 Sarah Meytin  
 Barbara/Michael Milton  
 Sarah Osborne  
 Judy Rodenstein  
 David Rubin  
 Loretta Saks  
 Larry Schainker  
 Richard Siegel  
 David Silber  
 Deborah Stern  
 Rachel Tickner  
 Lisa Traiger  
 Susan Vitale  
 Alan Weitz  
 Dorothea Wolfson

### Please join us for the Spring Fling Tifereth Israel's Signature Fundraiser!

*"A Night in Wine Country, DC"*

7:30 pm, May 4

*Silent & Live Auctions*

*Kosher Wine, Craft Beer and Local Spirit Tastings,  
 Gastropub-Style Snacks, Wine Country Small Plates  
 and Desserts Galore!*

*Tickets are \$54 and include one wine or beer tasting flight  
 (three pours) and a souvenir wine glass.*

*Additional tastings and full glasses of wine, beer  
 and signature cocktails can also be purchased.*

*Is this your first Spring Fling?  
 Tickets for first time attendees (members or non-members)  
 are only \$36!*

## Social Action at TI: Stephen Nelson Volunteer Tutoring Organizer Needed

It all started 16 years ago at one of the early Social Action Shabbatons, when the theme was how to give back to the immediate community surrounding Tifereth Israel.

**Dan Nathan** decided it was time to volunteer, and took on the responsibility to found and run a new program tutoring students from nearby Shepherd Elementary School on 14<sup>th</sup> Street between Jonquil Street and Kalmia Road. Dan, a nearby resident, had two young daughters at the school, so it seemed like a natural project for him. He never thought he would still be coordinating the tutoring activities 16 years later.



Dan Nathan

### Changes Over the Years

The program has changed somewhat since those early years. At the outset, most of the volunteers were adult members of TI, but through the years, the volunteers became predominantly teenage members of the Congregation. There are still a handful of adult volunteers in the program, including Dan

himself, who has always found time to tutor a student each year. All the members of Dan's family have taught in the program at various times.

As the program received widespread attention, tutors were no longer limited to TI family members. Students from Georgetown Visitation School and some public schools in Montgomery County, among others, have become active through the years.

Changes have occurred in the student population as well. While most of the children are from Shepherd School and the nearby neighborhood, students have come from as far as Capitol Hill and even Prince Georges County.

### Pairing Tutors and Students

At the beginning of the school year, Dan sets up the pairings, so that the students can be assigned to an individual tutor for the entire year. Each Sunday, between 5 and 6 p.m., approximately 15-20 students (usually from grades 2-6) come to TI and meet with their tutors.

Space is provided throughout the synagogue, in classrooms, in the Library, and in the Cherner auditorium. Obviously, substitute tutors are occasionally needed, so Dan has to keep track of schedules throughout the year.

Dan sees great benefits, not only for the students, but for the tutors as well, particularly the high-school students who participate. "For many, this is the first experience in what could be called a leadership position," he says. "In many instances, they have to figure out a different way to teach than what the students are used to."



### Dan Now Stepping Down

After all these years, Dan has decided to step down from his leadership role. "This has been highly satisfying to me, but it has become very time-consuming and somewhat demanding," particularly given that Dan, an attorney, has taken a new position in private practice.

TI's Social Action Committee and the TI community owe Dan a debt of gratitude for creating and maintaining this important program that benefits so many young people. We're hoping we can find someone to take over the mantle for the future.

Dan has volunteered to do everything he can to pass the torch, training the new program coordinator and remaining available as a consultant.

### Monday Evening Minyan

Tifereth Israel now offers a regular weekly minyan every Monday evening at 7:30 p.m.

All are welcome. Contact Joshua Furman for further information.

# Nayes un Mekhayes for TI'ers

Barbara Raimondo

**Shalom, y'all!**

**Jessica Weissman** spent a happy long April weekend in Savannah, Georgia with her sisters. They ate, walked, ate, talked, ate, etc., and toured the Savannah synagogue, where they heard about interesting new research concerning the congregation's Holocaust Torah.

Speaking of interesting, **Cynthia Peterman** is now a volunteer researcher at the National Archives, College Park. She is indulging her passion for digging into yellowed papers while helping to make a contribution to our nation's history. She is also looking forward to lunching there with **Naomi Revzin**.

In other historical news, **Simcha Kuritzky's** exhibit on Henrietta Szold (founder of Hadassah and head of Youth Aliya) coins and medals won first place at the Baltimore coin show in March.

**We're mad as he\*\* and we're not going to take it anymore!**

A big blow-up of the cover of **David Levy's** animal fantasy novel, *Revolt of the Animals*, was carried by kids on a tall stick in the annual Hyattsville parade on April 5 featuring "Hyattsville authors." The book is available at Franklin's, Busboys and Poets, and Politics and Prose, or order from David, and he will give you a discounted, autographed copy.

**Ben** "it's 'Doctor' to you" **Dreyfus** successfully defended his dissertation in Physics ("Interdisciplinary Reasoning About Energy in an Introductory Physics Course for the Life Sciences" – got it?) and is set to graduate with his Ph.D. in May. Your faithful columnist says that any time interdisciplinarians are reasonable is okay with her.

**Claudine Schweber** and **Ed Koren** just returned from a visit to Claudine's family in Bordeaux and Paris--a perfect time, spring and just before the tourist (i.e., American) explosion. (Those My Little Pony T shirts and sneakers are a dead giveaway.)

While there, Claudine spent two days in the nearby town of Pau (on the Spanish border) at the Business School teaching about crisis management and communication. Good to know that business crises are an international phenomenon. And that they keep Claudine busy.

Former member **Devorah Schoenfeld**, who joined TI briefly when she taught at St. Mary's College (part of the UM system), is now teaching at Loyola in Chicago and has received tenure. Congrats!

**It doesn't add up**

**Les** and **Judith Turner's** grandchildren got together as a group this Pesah, some meeting for the first time. Three girls came from out of town with their parents: **Batya**, 3 months old, daughter of **Martha** and **Neil Fein**, from New Jersey; and **Annabelle**, 4.5 months old, and **Ruby**, 2 years old, daughters of **Carol** and **Avi Klein**, from California. They all stayed at Grandmother and Papa's house.

They went to **Daniel** and **Allison Turner's** house for the *sedarim* to be with **Miriam**, 5; **Nathan**, 3; and **Samson** and **Benjamin**, 2. **Avi Solomon Dulitzky Tenner**, 4, one of Les and Judith's housemates, also participated with his parents, and his grandma who came in from Florida. Daniel did all the cooking for both *sedarim*.

**Loretta Vitale Saks** will begin working as a part-time geriatric care manager for Debra Levy Eldercare Associates in April. She is very excited about this "encore career" opportunity.

Other half **Bob Saks** was one of several honorees at the recent Chesapeake Reconstructionist Annual Celebration. He will be honored by Columbia Jewish Congregation on June 1 for his service as Associate Rabbi since 1991.

Son **Joshua** and daughter-in-law **Rachel** recently began working at Chestnut Hill College outside of Philadelphia. Rachel is a faculty member in the psychology department, and Josh is director of the college's Psychological Services Clinic.

Younger son **Daniel**, wife **Nikkia**, and one-year-old **Joni** recently moved to New York after 2 1/2 years in Mexico City. Grandparents Bob and Loretta are digging having children and grandchildren just around the block, relatively speaking.

**Marc** (son of **Madeline Nesse** and **Steven Schlesinger**, both of blessed memory), **Robin**, and **Max Schlesinger** welcome **Baby Seth Gabriel**. He is named after his Grandpa Steven and Great Great Aunt Gertie, so it is anticipated he will be a wild and crazy guy in the finest family tradition.

**Alan** and **Cyndy Weitz** are thrilled to announce the birth of their new grandson to **Bethanie Weitz** and **Josh Costa**. Crazy factor is yet unknown.

**Rebecca Neimark**, daughter of **Dana** and **Sheridan Neimark**,

*(Continued on page 8)*

## Kol Nashim

Margie Odle



We invite the TI community to join us for two special Kol Nashim activities taking place the weekend of **May 31-June 1**.

We will celebrate May 31 as **Kol Nashim Shabbat** with service participation, member recognition, and kiddush sponsorship. If you are interested in participating in the service, please contact **Pearl Schainker**. We will be cooking for the kiddush on Thursday, May 29 at 7 p.m. and welcome any KN member who would like to help with the preparation.

At 10:15 a.m., Sunday June 1, **Rabbi Sarah Meytin** will speak in the Mollie L. Berch Library as part of KN's Women Rabbis of TI series. She will talk about Rockville Open House (ROH), a group she started for gay teens at the Rockville JCC.

ROH is a supervised, safe gathering space for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or intersex (LGBTQQI) Jewish teens, ages 13-18, and their straight/non-Jewish friends and allies.

Finally, May is program planning month for Kol Nashim. We have two

board meetings scheduled, one on May 7 and another on May 21. These will be devoted to brainstorming and planning next year's programming, as well as one or more get-togethers during the summer.

All KN members are welcome at either or both meetings. Please contact **Pearl Schainker** if you would like to participate.

## Nayes un Mekhayes (continued)

recently designed another *haggadah* for the Reform movement, *The New Union Haggadah*, Revised Edition.

### Sad News

It is with the heaviest of hearts that **Larry** and **Pearl Schainker** share that their granddaughter **Lillian Eve Kline**, daughter of **Mira Schainker Kline** and **Marc Kline**, died on February 20, the day of her birth. She was buried at Mt. Lebanon Cemetery next to other Children of Tifereth Israel on March 10.

**Daniel Anker**, son of **Charlotte** and the late **Jerry Anker**, died in April in New York. He was 50 and had lymphoma. The funeral was held in New York.

**Dr. George H. Wall**, father of TI member **Shelley (Sanford) Reback**, grandfather of **Dana** and **Samantha**, passed away in April. Funeral and Shivah services were in Baltimore.

**Elizabeth McDonald**, mother of TI member **Joseph (Paula) Martin**, grandmother of TI member **Rachel (Sarah) Meytin** and great-grandmother of **Coby** and **Ruthie**, died in Florida in April after a long illness. She was 79.

**James L. Anderson**, father of TI member **Laurie (Bruce) Berger** and grandfather of **Martin** and **Jean**, died in April. He was 86 and had been suffering from Parkinson's disease for some time. Mr. Anderson built the rabbi's podium and reader's table now on the TI *bimah*. The funeral was held in Madison, Wisconsin.

**Jeanne Clare Feron**, mother of TI member **Robert Feron (Dione Pereira)** and grandmother of **Gabriella** and **Esther**, passed in March in California. Jeanne Clare Feron lived in this area for a few years and often came to TI. Prior to that she was a long time reporter for the New York Times -- there are 13

pages of articles she wrote on the Times website -- and was married to the late James Feron, a Times foreign correspondent.

May the families be comforted among those who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem.

And now for the meaning of last month's word, *copacetic*: "very satisfactory" (Merriam-Webster Online).

Thanks to all who sent me news, sent me to others who sent me news, or otherwise helped sniff it out. Please send information for next time to [baraimondo@gmail.com](mailto:baraimondo@gmail.com), with "Nayes un Mekhayes" in the heading, or to P.O. Box 466, Washington Grove, MD 20880.

This brings to a close this column cycle (yes, cycle!) Nayes un Mekhayes for TI'ers.

## Equal But Different?

Frank Solomon

The majority of Jews-by-choice at Tifereth Israel feel they are treated “very well” by clergy, staff and members. At the same time, according to a recent survey, most converts at TI feel they are “different” from born Jews even as they feel they are treated with respect and as equals.

Just about all of them attribute this feeling to their own mental state rather than any different treatment from born Jews. Because of confidentiality promised for the survey, all those interviewed here have been given aliases.

### Jewish in a Different Way

“There is something valid to the argument that Jews-by-choice are not necessarily Jewish the same way as Jews-by-birth because being Jewish is about ethnicity as well as religion,” says Naomi. “Jews-by-choice can change their religious identity, but not our ethnic or racial background. When it comes to being in services or observing holidays, I feel like a regular Jew. But when it comes to connection to the Jewish culture or experience, I sometimes feel ‘less Jewish’ than others.”

“I have a feeling of inferiority since there are so many things I do not know,” says Shira. “For example, being able to follow the prayer service, reading Hebrew. Those things are a struggle still.”

Another convert, Mia, said she feels both like “a regular Jew as well as a different Jew. In terms of how people regard me, I feel completely a member of the tribe. However, I am always aware of huge gaps in my Jewish knowledge, which I imagine would not exist were I born and raised as a Jew.”

This feeling of “both” permeates Eti’s response: “I feel a hundred percent Jewish, but because of my background, I have a somewhat different perspective from born Jews. I think my conversion also has given me a stronger desire to learn more.”

Avi says he feels “pretty much like a regular Jew, except that I still look at the world with a somewhat Christian perspective. My entire education was in the Catholic schools.”

Despite this different feeling, one convert says she feels both equal to and the same as Jews-by-birth in at least one thing. “Definitely different in feeling,” says Dalit. “But I take comfort in that if the anti-Semites go after us, they will not distinguish between those born Jewish and converts. So insofar as persecution goes, I am completely equal.”

For this survey, twelve TI members who are known Jews-by-choice were approached. Out of that number, eight agreed to answer twenty-nine open-ended questions. Two declined the invitation, and two did not respond. Those who responded have been members of TI ranging as far back as 33 years to about a month.

The purpose of the survey was to find out how converts relate to Judaism, the TI community, and the clergy and staff, and how they came to Judaism, as well as to help TI Jews-by-birth better understand their convert friends.

### Highly Active in Community

It is probably no surprise that most of the converts are highly active in the TI community. Most of them attend services more frequently than many born Jewish members, many of

whom appear only during High Holy Days or during their parents’ *yahrzeits*.

The majority of the Jews-by-choice converted either shortly before or after they married a Jew. Historically in the United States, having a committed Jew in one’s life is the most common way a gentile becomes a Jew.

### Others Were Drawn To Judaism

Still, several members followed the road less traveled. Shira said she had been interested in Judaism long before she converted, but “it was only when thinking about having children that I felt a need to raise them in a religion, which I wanted to be Judaism, which meant that I would have to convert.

“I was always drawn to Judaism, but didn’t know for many years that conversion was possible. It became an imperative—the more I learned, the more I wanted to be Jewish. The thing I like about Judaism is the day-to-day life experience—the wrestling and the striving for improvement and learning. Judaism is a constant source of joy and meaning for me.”

For Benjamin, it was his late adolescent quest for personal spiritual identity and meaning in life that led him to Judaism. “I spent my high school years in a small town where almost everyone had strong ties to various churches. I admired the networks in my friends’ Catholicism, Mormonism, evangelical Protestantism, etc., but there was no way in a million years I could accept all that came with any of their teachings.

*(Continued on page 10)*

## Equal But Different? (continued)

"I was close friends with one of the two Jewish families in my town. I looked at their Jewish life and what it offered, and still remember thinking to myself, 'Wow! This makes a lot of sense.' I followed that up with some serious study of Judaism in college, and now you can see what happened."

On the question on how her (would-be) spouse treated her before she converted, Dalit said that her not being Jewish was "sometimes a source of tension. However, it was never stated, nor did I feel that I had to convert so that we could marry."

On the other hand, she says that their wedding ceremony would be Jewish "was non-negotiable [for her would-be spouse]. If I had not converted, there would not have been any interfaith ceremony," she says. "If we had had one, my spouse would not have considered us truly married, but 'sort of married, nice-try category only.'"

### Varied Experience Outside TI

Outside of the TI community, converts have experienced varying treatment from the greater Jewish world. "[They are] mostly accepting, with an occasional sneer, and sometimes shock," says Dalit. "Frequently, Jewish friends tell me that I know more about Judaism than they do. Oddly, I went to a Reform congregation in Baltimore for a short time, and they were far less accepting."

"There are certain times when I can tell that someone [in the larger Jewish world] doesn't see me as quite equally Jewish as they are, but the TI community has embraced me fully," says Naomi.

Another hot topic was family ties. Most converts say their families were

accepting of their new faith; a few say that being a Jew has improved their ties with their families. "My family of origin has been very supportive, although a bit bewildered at times," says Shira.

"My conversion decision was difficult for my mother, but less difficult for my father and sister," says Naomi. "My mother was hurt in some ways by my decision and there have been some awkward moments in Judaism-related conversations since. It is interesting to note that it seemed easier for them to engage with our family taking part in Jewish holidays before I converted—even though I was already an active participant [as a non-Jew]."

Benjamin says his family viewed his conversion positively. "A few family members found the conversion threatening, but my extended family, although largely Christian in identity, was not zealously so, and I suspect that most relatives were delighted to see me land in a faith tradition, even if it wasn't necessarily theirs."

Dalit says three members of her family—a born-again Christian and two devout Catholics, including a brother—do not accept her Judaism.

### What Do They Miss?

One question evoked strong emotions, some yearning and some recoil. It is whether converts miss any aspects of their former religion. Yes, holiday dinners. Sarah cited holiday dinners with families as one thing she misses in her former religion.

(None of the converts noted that as Jews, we have way more holiday celebrations and dinners in a family setting than Christians. After all, Jews enjoy good food. Lots of it.)

Others say they miss the music. "Such as *Ave Maria*, *On Eagle's Wings*, *Hail Holy Queen*, *Amazing Grace* and the full-blown pageantry of a High Mass," says Dalit.

"I still like Christmas carols and Christmas movies when I come across them, and I have great memories of singing religious music in church and college choirs," says Naomi. "But I don't really miss anything much. Judaism just feels like the right place for me."

"I miss the experience of attending Mass," says Eti, "although this is not something I now want to do. I miss the way I used to react to certain religious music, such as the Gregorian chant."

But at least one convert does not miss anything about her former religion. "Absolutely not," says Shira, "I don't like services that incorporate elements that remind me of Christianity. For example, Reform services that use an organ, or the repeated musical 'Amen' that sometimes occurs at the end of the *Aleinu*."

*Next: Jews who are married to non-Jews.*

### Legacy Shabbat

At Shabbat morning services on May 3, Tifereth Israel will be honoring our longtime members who joined in 1982 and earlier.

Please join us to celebrate with those whose commitment to TI has helped to make our congregation stable and strong.

## Upcoming Friday Night Minyan Assignments

### May 2

Steve & Shannon Rozner  
 David & Stephanie Rubin  
 Howard & Hannah Rubin  
 Stephen & Jill Saletta  
 Mark & Diann Saltman  
 Lawrence & Pearl Schainker  
 Eric & Shira Schechtman  
 Daniel Schiff  
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 Paul Seltman & Jeanne Ireland  
 Hershel & Judith Shanks  
 Phillip & Ruth Shapiro  
 Yvonne Shashoua  
 Scott Shoreman  
 Nathaniel Shyovitz  
 Richard & Marjorie Siegel  
 David Silber & Eileen Rose  
 Yochanan Sullivan

### May 9

David Wachtel & Jennifer  
 Goldstein  
 Harry Waldman & Susan Morse  
 Marc Warshawsky & Vivian  
 Seidner  
 Matthew Watson & Ellen Cabot  
 Marc & Deborah Weinberger  
 Eric Weiner & Sharon Moshavi  
 Jon Weintraub & Judith Heimlich  
 Michael Weiss & Phyllis Stanger  
 Jessica Weissman & Louise  
 Kelley  
 Dov Weitman & Sylvia Horwitz  
 Alan & Cynthia Weitz  
 Howard & Barbara White  
 Louise Wiener  
 Peter Winch & Denice Zeck  
 Adam & Dorothea Wolfson

Ariel David Wolsztijn & Karen  
 Lisa Silberstein  
 Christopher Zeilinger & Ann  
 Baker  
 Benjamin & Monica Zeitlin  
 Yonannes Zeleke  
 Diana Zurer  
 Ellen Zwibak

### May 23

Luis & Karen Acosta  
 Andrew Afflerbach & Joanne  
 Hovis  
 Seth & Elaine Akst  
 Miriam Alpern  
 Jon Alterman & Katherine  
 LaRiviere  
 Robyn M. Altman & Brendan J.  
 Doherty  
 Timothy Anderegg & Lisa Fogel-  
 Anderegg  
 Leonard Bachman  
 Sidney & Heike Bailin  
 Lawrence Baizer & Elaine Lewis  
 Justin Bank  
 Paul & Esther Bardack  
 Burt Barnow  
 Mae Cooper & Gideon Bass  
 Charles Baum  
 Leonard & Joy Baxt  
 Joshua & Dinah Berch  
 Mark & Mona Berch  
 Alex Berg & Mikah Goldman  
 Bruce & Laurie Berger  
 Carl Bergman & Margie Odle

### May 30

Judi Berland  
 Joe Berman & Marsha Gentner  
 Barbara Beuchert  
 Dana Beyer  
 Sean Blake & Larisa Aranbayeva

Sheri Blonder  
 Gideon & Lisa Blumenthal  
 Ron & Dina Borzekowski  
 Larry & Lise Bram  
 Brad & Liana Brooks-Rubin  
 Sharon Brown  
 Stephen Burd & Laura Schiavo  
 Harold Burgess & Shoshana  
 Eisenberg  
 Joel & Alice Burton  
 Daniel Byerly & Katharine Clark  
 Susan Chapin  
 Daniel Chazen & Ronit  
 Eisenbach  
 David Cohen  
 Joel Cohen  
 Susan Cohen

### June 13

David & Judy Cohen  
 David & Elana Cohen  
 Raymond & Rebecca Coleman  
 Jeffrey Colman & Ellen  
 Nissenbaum  
 Nataliya Chernyak Cowen  
 Merry Danaceau  
 Jeffrey & Miriam Davidson  
 Ronni Davis  
 Adam Diamond & Rabbi Jane  
 Berman  
 Helen Disenhaus  
 Allan & Vered Drazen  
 Stan Dorn & Carla Ellern  
 Earl Dotter & Deborah Stern  
 Desirée Douglas  
 Lisa Drazin  
 David Drelich & Rabbi Gilah  
 Langner  
 Susan Dreiband & Jackie  
 Urbanovic  
 Benjamin Dreyfus & Rabbi  
 Elizabeth Richman

## Bar Mitzvah

My name is **Ethan Fingerhut**. My bar mitzvah is on May 17, *Parashat Behukotai*.

I live in DC and am in the 7th grade at Alice Deal Middle School. At school, I am in Model UN and on the student council. My favorite subject is history.

In the summer, I go away for a month to Kenmont camp in Kent, Connecticut. This will be my fifth summer at sleep-away camp. My younger cousins from Miami also go to camp with me, and it is great to spend a month with them. Color war is my favorite part of camp.

My parents are Karen Beiley and Eric Fingerhut. I am the youngest in my family. I have an older sister, Jordan, and an older brother, Adam. They are both in high school.

For my mitzvah project, I help teach knitting to students at my old elementary school. My third grade teacher runs the club, and I go weekly to assist her.



## May Highlights at Tifereth Israel

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>May 3</b>                  | <b>Learners' Minyan, 10:00 a.m</b><br><b>Family Service, 10:30</b><br><b>SHALEM: Mark Berch, <i>Hatikvah, the Enduring Controversy,</i></b><br><b>after Kiddush</b> |
| <b>May 4</b>                  | <b>Spring Fling, 7:30 p.m.</b>  |
| <b>May 5, 12</b><br><b>19</b> | <b>Monday Lunch &amp; Learn</b><br><b><i>Parashat HaShavuah</i>, 11 a.m.; Lunch 12 noon</b>   |
| <b>May 16</b>                 | <b>Carlebach Friday Night Service and Dinner, 6:30 p.m.</b>   |
| <b>May 17</b>                 | <b>Ethan Fingerhut Bar Mitzvah</b>  |
| <b>May 31</b>                 | <b>Kol Nashim Shabbat</b>   |

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(Continued on page 14)

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