

**BI@Home:**  
**News from your home away from home**

*A WORD FROM RABBI FELLMAN*



thereof) throughout the story; Queen Vashti wearing (only) the royal diadem (ch 1), or Queen Esther dressing in royal garb for her audience with the king (ch 2), or Mordecai tearing his clothes and wearing sackcloth and ashes after Haman's order against the Jews is signed (ch 4).

While these are all great possibilities, the most prominent explanation is that it is because God is hidden in the story. Not explicitly mentioned in any of the ten chapters, God is in the background, or behind a mask, seen through the actions of the brave and courageous heroes of the narrative. These heroes are protagonists who are afraid, who admit to doubt, and whose lives are at great risk for speaking up and doing what is necessary to save lives and protect the innocent.

The Purim story holds tension between the external, physical masks and costumes and the internal mask, the sense of a hidden God. In many ways, this too speaks to where we are right now, with our true selves hidden behind a sense of the unknown. We find we are wearing masks out of a fear for our safety but also, some times and for some of us, masks are ways to hide who we really are.

It has been almost a year since we were able to gather in person. In fact, Purim this year will bring us to the close of a full year since we have gathered as a community. We last opened our doors to the community when we celebrated Purim and then closed the building before the following Shabbat. We long for a day where we can strip off our masks and emerge to gather again and offer gratitude. Sometimes it feels like every day could be Purim, as we actively change out of sweats and yoga pants (maybe) and put on a mask (definitely) to engage in the world beyond our homes. And yet internally, many of us walk around in a disguise on a regular basis, hiding our feelings and our challenges – concealing our imperfections.

I hope that soon, with a bit more patience and perseverance, more mask wearing and distancing, more opportunities to get immunized, we too will emerge from our story, victorious and stronger, more united and closer than we were before. Not only because we were saved, but because we were not afraid to take off our invisible masks and show who we truly were. My hope is that we'll look back and see that in this time of adversity we looked into our souls and found the very best of ourselves and each other.

Contact Congregation Beth Israel  
508 756-6204  
[info@bethisraelworc.org](mailto:info@bethisraelworc.org)  
15 Jamesbury Drive Worcester 01609  
[www.bethisraelworc.org](http://www.bethisraelworc.org)



## **REFLECTIONS ON WEARING MASKS**

### **PAULA SOMMER, BETH ISRAEL PRESIDENT**

Hiding or denying identity goes back a long time in Jewish tradition, as far as the Torah in the story of Jacob impersonating his brother Esau. Still, the tradition of masks is not so old.

One famous person, Esther, hid her identity as she became a public person. Esther didn't require any cosmetics or ornaments, and did not hide her face at all. She used a sin of omission in concealing her identity. Don't ask, don't tell. She did not reveal that she was Jewish until it was imperative that she tell the king. This was a self-protective act which enabled her to save the community and stop the plague of antisemitism.



When did Jews start wearing masks? To obscure images of the human body, one of the earliest medieval *haggadot*, the Birds' Head Haggadah, features Jews with human bodies and bird beaks. However, this mask is ambiguous. It includes visible ears, and some commentators think it is not a bird at all. It may instead be a griffin: a mythical creature who is half eagle, half lion, a majestic combination indeed. In modern-day Israel, before the pandemic at least, children would throng the streets on Purim wearing all sorts of masks - animals, superheroes, even Mordechai and Esther.

Full face masks can be uncomfortable, so most masks cover only half the face. But which half? That is what is interesting, particularly now. A half mask for the top of your face can hide your identity by covering your eyes, gateway to your soul. A half mask for the bottom of your face can protect against pandemics by covering your nose and mouth.

Fast forward to 2021. The masks we are wearing now, covering our mouths and noses, are not meant to hide our identity. COVID masks protect ourselves and others from danger. Whether or not we are in a position of great responsibility, we all are responsible for keeping our community as strong and healthy as it can be. I hope you are joining me in wearing your protective mask in any communal situation. In addition, consider wearing a costume mask on Purim as we celebrate during the megillah reading.



This year I will continue to wear a mask to protect myself and my extended family and friends. On Purim, I can also wear a mask allowing me to be someone else, if I choose to do so. Perhaps an eagle or a lion of Judah. Look for me on Zoom.

## **GO RED SHABBAT**

American Heart Association®



Saturday, February 6 will be Beth Israel's 12<sup>th</sup> annual Go Red Shabbat in support of the American Heart Association. GO RED for Women is a national campaign of the American Heart Association. Its aim is to raise awareness of a woman's number one killer: cardiovascular disease.

When you come to Zoom services on February 6, wear something red! And even if you don't usually keep your video on, at least take a moment to show your red kippah, tie, shirt, dress, or suit to the congregation. Before or after Shabbat, make a donation to the American Heart Association (details on how in your weekly email). We have a goal of raising \$250 for this important initiative. If you have any questions about the event, email [Lydia\\_borenstein@yahoo.com](mailto:Lydia_borenstein@yahoo.com) or call the BI office to arrange to speak with Lydia.

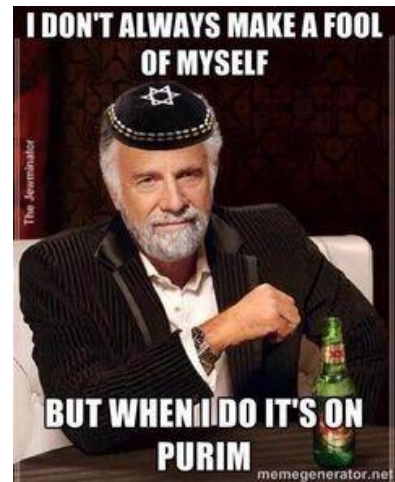
## ***DON'T MISS PURIM AT BI!***

As Megillat Esther tells us, the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's plot was occasion for light and gladness and joy and honor. Is Purim a revenge fantasy? A celebration of the many times we've escaped tyranny and oppression? A chance to dress up in costumes, drink, and make fools of ourselves? An opportunity to showcase our creativity in the costumes we wear and the shpiels we perform? An occasion of giving gifts of hamentaschen and other treats and of providing for the poor? It's all of those things and more.

We'll be reading Megillah on Erev Purim, Thursday, February 25. We'll begin at 7:00 p.m. with Ma'ariv, followed by the Megillah reading and the raffle drawing. For laughter and edification, we'll be hosting our 3rd First Annual "24/6 Lecture Series" between the chapters of the Megillah.

Inspired by the IG Noble Awards, the lecture series features speakers who attempt to offer a complete technical description in 24 seconds of an area of expertise/profession, hobby, grandchildren, favorite Jewish holiday or food, life passion, etc. After a brief pause, they will follow up by offering a clear summary, that anyone can understand, in 6 words (IG Noble gives their presenters 7 words but God rested on the 7th day and thus...)

So plan your costume, plan your drinking (no designated driver needed – it's on Zoom) and join us for a Very BI Purim this year. If you miss the chance to hear the Megillah – or just want a repeat opportunity - it will be read again at Shacharit services, but with less hilarity and hijinks.



## ***VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: REENA AND SAUL SLOVIN PAULA SOMMER, BETH ISRAEL PRESIDENT***

It is my pleasure to acknowledge a family who has been doing so much for our synagogue during this extraordinary year. If you were on the Sunday morning Community Breakfast with former Israeli emissary Ron Marom, you learned that he stayed with the Slovin family for half of his year here (2007), and heard him talk about their extraordinary energy. It would seem that this energy hasn't flagged and that BI continues to be a beneficiary of it.



Reena and Saul Slovin are longtime members of Congregation Beth Israel, and have been involved in various volunteer capacities. Saul has served on the Board of Directors and chaired the Youth Committee for several years, and Reena has served on the Education and Ritual committees as well as several Rabbi and Cantor search committees. They've volunteered in many other capacities in areas ranging from worship to education to dance.

For many of BI's community, Saul's and Reena's presence is most keenly felt on Shabbat mornings. They both regularly lead services and read Torah and Haftarah. Saul finds and assigns Torah readings for Shabbat morning services, a task made slightly easier now that we are following the Triennial cycle and reading from a Chumash instead of a Torah scroll. He has always made an extra effort to bring in post-B'nai Mitzvah youngsters and other less experienced readers, helping those who need some extra coaching.

During COVID, Saul's working at home and Reena's leave of absence from work has enabled them both to broaden their involvement. Even a cursory glance at the weekly email shows Slovins volunteering in so many ways. We need their skills at all times, but their knowledge, diligence, and commitment to the community are particularly welcome during this difficult time.

Thank you so much to the Slovin family for your dynamic commitment to BI and for your help in keeping our congregation vibrant during this long period of joining together while remaining apart.

*Note: Future editions of BI@Home will spotlight others of our unsung heroes, volunteers at BI working mostly behind the scenes. If you have ideas of whom to profile, contact Paula Sommer at [psommer2012@gmail.com](mailto:psommer2012@gmail.com) or call the BI office to arrange to speak with Paula.*



## ***JOIN BI FOR FUN AND LEARNING WITH MEMBERS TOGETHER PROGRAMS***

On select Sunday mornings each month, we meet for a presentation, breakfast, and a chance to hang out with other BI members and their friends, all safely accomplished via Zoom. In January, Steve Wolfe represented the BI Brotherhood, teaching us about Wine on the Vine. We have some fascinating programs planned for the next few months. Here is some information on the upcoming Members Together Meetings:

### **February 7 – Aging and Late Onset Maladies with Lidor David**

Former Central Massachusetts Young Emissary Lidor David will present on the aging process, exploring why neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's afflict some people as they age. Now a graduate student at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Lidor works and studies in the Department of Biochemistry. She will talk about the work going on in the lab where she is employed, share their research model, and tell a little bit about her own research project. There will be time for questions afterwards. It will also be a chance for those who know Lidor to catch up with her, and for those who don't get to know her.



### **February 14 – Youth Aliyah - The Ultimate Zionist Project: Rescuing Jewish Children with Carol Goodman Kaufman**



Hadassah's Youth Aliyah program rescued Jewish children during World War II, but its mission did not stop with the end of the war. Youth Aliyah continues to serve the needs of Jewish children in crisis through their Youth Villages in Israel.

As difficult as it is to accept, over 400,000 children in Israel today are registered with municipal social services, suffering from physical and sexual abuse, neglect, substance abuse, and the effects of prostitution. These youth engage in high-risk behaviors, have low educational achievements, and suffer from emotional or social problems. At Hadassah's Youth Villages, the children and youth don't just receive food and shelter. They are provided with academic education, vocational training, counseling, therapeutic programming, and other support services.

The work of Youth Aliyah is critical. Failure is not an option. Israel needs physically and emotionally healthy adults to ensure a safe and secure future for all within her borders. Join us when Carol Goodman Kaufman tells us about this important work and how we can support it.

And mark your calendars now for our March Members Together Programs:

**March 7: MLK and Heschel with Pat Bizzell**

**March 14: Sustainability and the Torah with Noah Slovin**

Join us at 9:00 a.m. on these Sundays, right after morning minyan. Bring coffee and breakfast, if you like. We'll have half an hour of schmoozing, breaking into smaller groups if there is a large turnout. Then at 9:30 our guest speakers will present, leaving time for Q&A at the end.

Do you have ideas for future Members Together programs? Email [dale.rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org](mailto:dale.rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org) or call the BI office and let's set up a time to talk.

## ***SHABBAT PLUS WITH FORMER EMISSARY AVIV LAITMAN ON FEBRUARY 20***

Remember those wonderful Shabbat Plus programs we used to have after services? Well, they are back in a slightly altered form on February 20. One of our former young emissaries, Aviv Laitman, will be Zooming in from Israel right after kiddish and motzi. She'll teach us about Purim in Israel. It's a great way to get in the Purim spirit. Costumes optional.

## **RIMON UPDATES: CLASSES, GUEST SPEAKERS, A SEDER AND SOME SPECIAL SHABBAT OPPORTUNITIES**

**DALE ROSENBERG, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND PROGRAMMING**



Rimon, BI's religious school, continues to meet via Zoom twice a week as a group, supplemented by individual Hebrew reading tutoring sessions. In class, we study a variety of Jewish topics – holidays, text, Tefilah, Jewish history, Israeli culture. We look at the Parasha of the Week and consider how midrash supplements and complements the story told in the Torah. We think about contemporary issues, as well. On Inauguration Day we looked at a letter the first U.S. president sent to the Jewish community of Newport, RI, with a message that still resonates today. We've had guest teachers from Camp Ramah lead lessons on nature and play camp-themed Zoom games. Rabbi Ahuvah (Amy) Loewenthal led our annual Tu B'Shvat seder, this time via Zoom (with packages containing fruits and nut platters, juice, texts, and craft materials delivered to students' homes in advance). We will have a Zoom Purim party on February 24, with mask making and other special Purim activities.

We continue to long for a time when we can safely meet in our classroom, start the session with snack in Hebrew, play physical games, and argue over who gets the couch in my office during hevruta learning (a dispute that has always been resolved amicably, or at least without bloodshed). In the meantime, we play games on Zoom and use breakout rooms and lessons are lively and varied, albeit physically apart.

We have some special Shabbat opportunities coming up for BI youth, from babies through teenagers. First of all, Rimon's Early Childhood Educator, Rowan Mason, is resuming "live" (on Zoom) Tot Shabbat sessions twice monthly, now that we are settled into Shabbat services via Zoom. This "Tot Shabbat Oneg" program is held at 5:15 p.m. on select Fridays.

Rowan opens with songs and then invites parents and their children to take turns leading *brachot* over grape juice and challah. This is followed by a story or Shabbat-friendly activity. The program is short (30 minutes), sweet, and helps families connect with one another and transition into Shabbat evening in an exciting way. The program is geared at families with children 7 and under, but all are welcome to join in this heimish and joyful lead in to Shabbat.



Our first Tot Shabbat Oneg was held on January 29. In February we will meet on Zoom for Tot Shabbat on February 12 and 19. We are using the same Zoom link that we use for Shabbat services Saturday morning, so you can stay logged in for all of Shabbat if you choose. On the weekends without Tot Shabbat Oneg, Rowan will continue to provide a fun and educational video to get ready for Shabbat.

Secondly, we are in the planning stages for a Youth Shabbat, which will be held on March 13. Our regular Shabbat morning service will include participation by Rimon and USY students from their homes. They will lead prayers, read Torah, and maybe even read some original writings. Be sure to "come" to shul on that Saturday to kvell in the accomplishments of our community's youngest generation.



## ***RACIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE UPDATE***

The Racial Justice Initiative continues in its mission to learn, teach, and advocate on this important issue. Led by Alan Harris, this ad hoc committee is engaged in learning more about racial inequity in our society and seeking avenues for advocacy to work towards racial justice. In January, we distributed a link for a recording of a Martin Luther King Day presentation and many of us found it enlightening and inspiring.

Watch your email for selected readings to be distributed in February. In March, we'll have a Racial Justice themed Members Together program and BI will work collaboratively with the Black Jewish Alliance to host a Unity Seder. In April we're planning a watch party for a documentary about James Baldwin. Watch your weekly emails for updated information. And if you would like to join the group, contact Alan Harris at [alwharris@aol.com](mailto:alwharris@aol.com) or call the BI office to arrange to speak with Alan.

## ***WHAT'S NEW WITH PROJECT ZUG AT BI***

We are nearly done with our Shabbat Rituals Project Zug class and well into our USY Project Zug class. We are so fortunate to have unlimited access to this great resource for all of 5781, thanks to the generous Barry Aframe who sponsored Project Zug for us.

Now it's time to sign up for a special offering – a Pesach “Cycle.” Project Zug will be looking at the Pesach story through the lens of *Shir HaShirim* – the Song of Songs. Have you ever thought of the Passover story as a love story between the Jewish people and God? Rabbi Aviva Richman has. She will lead us through texts, prompting us to explore the connection between the Maggid (story) we tell at the seder and the biblical love poems traditionally read on Passover.



The program is called “The Seder and the Song of Songs: A Love Story in Four Scenes” and it looks to be something very special. As with our first Project Zug group learning on the Machzor, this program will begin and end with a live (on Zoom) lecture by Rabbi Richman, and we will do group and *hevruta* study in between. Rabbi Richman's opening lecture is scheduled for Monday, March 1. We'll study together on Wednesdays: March 3, 10, and 17. Her final virtual lecture will be on Wednesday, March 24. All sessions will start at 7:30 p.m. If you can't attend one or both of the live virtual lectures, they will be recorded.

If you want to enroll in this special Pesach offering, email **Dale Rosenberg** or call the office and leave your name, by **February 15**.

If you are interested in studying with Project Zug with a *hevruta* outside of these group courses, sign up for a class at [www.projectzug.org](http://www.projectzug.org). Do you have questions about how to enroll? Are you having difficulty choosing a course? Email [Dale.Rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org](mailto:Dale.Rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org) or call 917 292-4552 for assistance.

## ***IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO JOIN THURSDAY MEDITATION***

Elena Salmoirago-Blotcher has resumed weekly meditation classes on Thursdays, from 6-6:45 p.m. A cardiologist who practiced in her native Italy and in Israel, Elena now serves as Senior Research Scientist at the Centers for Behavioral and Preventive Medicine at the Miriam Hospital. Elena has trained in mindfulness stress reduction since 2003. She is a wonderful group leader, so don't miss this opportunity to add some peace and clarity to your world. Newcomers are welcome! Feel free to share this information with friends who may be interested. The Zoom link is in your weekly emails.



## ***BEHIND THE SCENES: BRINGING ZOOM SHABBAT SERVICES TO YOU*** **EVELYN HERWITZ HARRIS**



How long should Zoom Shabbat services be, and what should be included? Where do we broadcast from? How is *halakhah* being interpreted to use computers for worship during a pandemic? Can we ensure that those leading services and running the technology will be safe from COVID? How can we shorten lag time between audio and video signals? Can we use break-out rooms during the Kiddush Schmooze? Who will coordinate readers?

These are just a sampling of questions that the Streaming Services Working Group (SSWG) has tackled since this group of volunteers and Rabbi Fellman first convened at the end of October to plan to shift our online Shabbat worship to a participatory Zoom format. Now that we are on Zoom, we meet each Monday to review the weekend's service, plan for the next week, and figure out what worked and what needs improvement. It's an energetic, creative process, with each member bringing expertise to the group effort.

### **An Interdisciplinary Team**

The SSWG includes Rabbi Fellman, BI President Paula Sommer, Ritual Committee Chair Victor Saffrin, Ritual Committee Members Jeremy Golding and Reena Slovin, tech guru Howard Drobner, and myself. Jeremy, a physician, is also co-chair of the shul's Medical Task Force, formed in response to the pandemic. Rabbi Fellman, Victor, Jeremy, and Reena (along with husband Saul) are our core team of service leaders, and Howard runs the broadcast. Reena reaches out to members to participate in the service from home. Paula authorized the team and represents synagogue leadership. I have been chairing the SSWG since its inception, keeping us on task and also providing communications support, with help on emails from Caroline Aboody, BI Director of Operations.

Each week, once we've identified who will be leading for the following weekend, Rabbi Fellman selects the special readings for the service. These are tracked in two master spreadsheets by Victor, to manage multiple facets of the process. This information is shared with Reena, who contacts dozens of congregants to find available and willing readers, as well as those who will lead other parts of the service from home (such as Ashrei or Kiddush), and the Kiddush Schmooze leader. Other congregants provide additional support, including Saul Slovin, who coordinates Torah readings, and Judy Wolfe, who is the contact for individuals who wish to read a Haftarah to mark a special occasion.

Printouts of the master service spreadsheet go to Howard and Scott O'Toole, BI's Facilities Manager, who run the tech side of the Zoom service. The spreadsheet is key to switching views from service leaders in the sanctuary to members participating from home. Howard has been working with Jeremy for months on BI's Tech Committee to figure out the myriad issues of purchasing and operating cameras, TV monitors, audio systems, and computers, as well as managing the online interface, to bring services to our members. We've also had help from congregants Adrian Zeffert to improve the audio system, and from Dick and Andrea Goodman, who have donated a second computer that Dick has built to give us extra bandwidth to run services.

We're very grateful for donations to the BI Tech Fund, which is providing resources for all of our equipment and related expenses. This is an essential investment for the shul, given the persistence of the pandemic. Please consider contributing when you have a person or event to honor!

### **Ongoing Process of Review and Refinement**

Throughout the past few months, we have heard from a number of congregants, taking your feedback and suggestions to heart as we review and evaluate our Shabbat Zoom services. In January, we also emailed a

survey to all members, soliciting your thoughts and input, with a **February 3 deadline**. Thanks to Deb Martin for setting up the survey for us and monitoring results. We are reviewing your ratings and comments, which will also be shared with the Ritual Committee at their February meeting.

It's an extremely rewarding experience, watching our ideas become our new online reality, bringing us closer together as a sacred community each week. Your heartfelt participation, from earnest readings of poetry and prose to thoughtful comments during the Kiddush Schmooze discussions, are helping us all to create a soulful Shabbat community online. We welcome your feedback as we continue to learn and improve, and expand our offerings. **Watch for weekly Kabbalat Shabbat Zoom services starting February 5, with login details in the Friday email, plus bimonthly Tot Shabbat services, beginning January 29.**

We encourage you to **acquire a *Lev Shalem* siddur for home use**. You may borrow a copy from the shul (a modest, voluntary "rental" contribution is suggested), purchase your own at discount via BI (\$30 apiece), or, if cost is an obstacle, request a complimentary copy with help from the Rabbi's Sunshine Fund.

Given the unpredictability of the pandemic's duration, we expect to continue our Zoom services for months to come, until vaccines are widely available and public health guidance deems larger indoor gatherings safe. But even as we "welcome, engage, inspire, and grow" online for now, we all look forward to the day when we can disband the SSWG and worship together in person, once again.



**Congregation Beth Israel  
15 Jamesbury Drive  
Worcester, MA 01609**

**Phone: 508-756-6204; email [office@bethisraelworc.org](mailto:office@bethisraelworc.org)**

**Office Hours (Phone only): Monday thru Friday 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**

**Our staff are now working on site as well as from home. As we continue to practice careful social distancing, the staff is available to you via email and phone. If you need to stop by in person, please call ahead. Do not hesitate to call if you need any information or need to get in touch with someone.**

