

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

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**A WORD FROM RABBI FELLMAN**



A few weeks ago I was listening to the banter on one of my favorite radio shows, NPR's "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me." Comedian Paula Poundstone was laughing in a self-deprecating way about how she had misunderstood the baseball controversy over the Houston Astros and sign stealing. Not familiar with the phrase "sign stealing," Poundstone had thought that the Astros had stolen the physical logos and posters of the opposing teams.

I started laughing because of the absurdity of it, but also the familiarity of that sense of misunderstanding. I was raised a few miles away from Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary which sits on the Western border of Philadelphia. I remember being rather young, riding in the car, and asking my mother about the large cross, looming over the corner of the property and sitting upon a giant stone base. She told me that it was a "marker, it marks the property." For an embarrassingly long time, I pictured priests who had dragged this gigantic felt-tipped marker around the property line physically marking the property and it was now waiting in its cap (the stone base) until the next time it was to be used. Years later it hit me, "OH! Marker as in it 'marks' the property! Not marker, as in felt-tip..."

How many times has this happened? How often have we misunderstood something or have come back to it and seen it in a completely different light?

Later this month, from the evening of May 16<sup>th</sup> through May 18<sup>th</sup>, we will be celebrating the holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot, the "Feast of Weeks," is at its core, a holiday of juxtapositions. It is full of multiple meanings. Shavuot celebrates the grain harvest of the early summer, is one of the three pilgrimage festivals of ancient Israel, AND it marks the moment of revelation- the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt. The juxtapositions of this holiday go even deeper as the holiday is about God and Israel, harvest and law, community and personal identity, physical pilgrimage and intellectual/religious text.

In Judaism, the Torah is, in the broadest sense, the substance of divine revelation to Israel, the Jewish people: God's revealed teaching or guidance for humankind. Over the course of the year, we read through the entirety of the Five Books of Moses. Each year we revisit the same texts, yet each year the Torah is different. We have changed; we are different; our eyes are older, more experienced, and we hope, wiser. Revisiting these stories, laws, and texts each year is the essence of continued revelation.

This past year, the experience of reading the Torah through the lens of a pandemic has led to my seeing passages in a new light and with appropriate relevance that makes them seem to be revealed anew. Reading through stories of our Biblical ancestors leaving their homes and saying goodbye to their families has helped put a year of not seeing and hugging family for fear of disease into perspective. Passages in Exodus and Leviticus about the special clothing reserved for the priests in light of the holiness of their jobs made me think about the importance of PPE for frontline workers doing their holy work. Laws about impurities and disease spreading between people and even to the physical walls of homes made me think about how our understanding of the spread of COVID was evolving. Passages listing blessings and curses have encouraged me to look for the blessings and positive moments in times where there was so much palpable loss and pain.

Any event can open our eyes to see and renew the meaning and relevance of this ancient text. The plague of darkness listed in Exodus took on a new meaning as rolling blackouts hit Texas this past February. And both Leviticus (23:22) and Deuteronomy (15:7-10) speak about feeding those among us who are hungry and helping those who are in need, mitzvot which are put into action as we work to keep the local community refrigerators and pantries full.

Our lives stand to be richer when we revisit our old assumptions and are open to ongoing revelation. Same and different, personal and communal, physical and intellectual, spiritual and practical - the changing balance of all these juxtapositions can enrich our continued revelation. Sometimes our previous (mis)understandings may be comical and sometimes we might not always get them “right.” Still, there is nothing lost and much to be gained in coming back to texts, poetry, scripture, law again and again. The words might be the same, but we should certainly be different. That fact alone makes it worth taking another look.

## ***REVELATIONS AND JOURNEYS***

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

Last month in Torah, we survived the historic physical dangers of a chasing army of Egyptians and a wall of water. This month in Torah, we continue our journeys, toward Sinai and revelation. Today, we face our own uncertain journeys: the COVID armies arrayed against us, the walls of masks and social distancing, abundant precautions, possible vaccinations, and general consternation.

What are our new journeys? What can we build from these challenges?

Revelation is an important concept in Judaism. What does it mean? One meaning of revelation is when God revealed Her teachings to Moses. It can go beyond that, to meanings for all times and for all of us. As we look past the worst of the pandemic, what has been revealed to us now that we did not notice before?

I am comforted to learn how flexible and resilient we are. Thanks to our use of new technologies, people are finding and creating new ways to connect and support each other in adversity. We keep building our community, expanding global opportunities to join our services from great distances. With this new geographic freedom, we can range afar, join with friends, sit in on lectures, attend life cycle events, and visit museums from almost anywhere. I hope this connection from a distance continues, even when we can travel freely again.

As a society, we have turned our challenges into opportunities. Health system flaws combined with pandemic restrictions led to more telemedicine. School building deficiencies that prevented continuous safe in-person learning during this hard time led to partial homeschooling or online learning. Work from home has exploded. Many meetings, doctors’ appointments and classes always could have been replaced by an email — and now, often they are. While we look for new ways to connect, we also recognize that some of our old ways of meeting and communication were driven by inertia, not effectiveness.

For all that many of us have become more proficient in technology, some of the opportunities we’ve seized have nothing to do with computers or Zoom. Most of us have found in this constrained time some areas of life we can explore with fewer constraints. So many of us have found a renewed or expanded interest in enjoying the world that God created around us, a new appreciation for the outdoors.

I look forward to joining communal hikes in better weather, to sharing our sense of wonder and revelation in the natural world. Please think of some of your favorite local places we could explore together. It is time to move forward together to our next journeys and revelations.



***VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ALAN HARRIS***  
***PAULA SOMMER, BI PRESIDENT***



It is my pleasure this month to spotlight volunteer Alan Harris. A former president of the shul, and our long time Ba'al Tekiah (shofar blower) and mentor to The Club, Al has also enjoyed leading learners' minyans and Torah study groups. However, he earns the spotlight this month with a more current initiative, based on his vision for leading our congregation to an increased awareness of racial inequities.

Alan recognized the need for an initiative designed to improve our understanding of racial injustice here and now, and to explore ways we as individuals and a community can work to lessen the inequities. His passion and commitment inspired many people to jump at the chance to be part of our newest committee, the Racial Justice Initiative. Since its founding in November, the Racial Justice Initiative Committee has provided varied programs, from watching videos featuring Rabbi Buchdahl and James Baldwin, to encouraging extra participation in the Unity Seder of the Black Jewish Alliance. As Alan often says, this is a long-term project. We can expect Alan to stick with it.

Thank you, Alan, for helping our community grow.

*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.*

***GARDENING AND SUPPORTING BETH ISRAEL: THEY GO TOGETHER!***  
***ELAINE BASKIN***

Do you love planting flowers and veggies? I'll give you several easy to grow forsythia branches for your garden and then you make a contribution to BI. Would you rather plant something to eat? How about I give you surplus tomatoes and you make a contribution to BI?

Did you know that you can bury old potatoes and a few months later, you will have more potatoes? This and other hints can be shared through connections with Beth Israel. Let's do it. I've learned so much from others.

Email me at [ehkb1234@gmail.com](mailto:ehkb1234@gmail.com) to share your thoughts and ideas while making donations to BI. Easy. No meetings. No Zoom. Just BI people helping other BI people and making donations to BI in gratitude. Sun, gardening, information you can use, and a chance to support our synagogue. What could be better?



## ***BING HAS PLANS!***

Beth Israel Next Generation – our young adults affinity group usually abbreviated as BING – has several interesting events coming up.

- On May 12, join BING for Make Your Own Ice Cream with Rabbi Fellman.
- On May 15 at 9:00 p.m. BING will host another in its Havdalah Happy Hour series. In this event, Azaria Kurlantzick will lead a text study on the connection between Shavuot and Dairy.
- On May 16, at noon, BING will join Rimon and Tot Shabbat in Elm Park for a hike and picnic (as described elsewhere in this issue). It's also a chance to pick up your wine bottle if you joined in the fruit winemaking activity.

Want more information on these and other BING activities? Watch your weekly email and/or join the BING Facebook group.

## ***SHAVUOT – SERVICES, LEARNING AND PARTNERSHIP***

This year, Shavuot begins on Sunday night, May 16 and finishes on Tuesday, May 18 at sundown. Our usual practice is to have a Tikkun Leil Shavuot on the first night, along with a dairy potluck. As with so much, our plans have been adjusted due to the pandemic.

Since Zoom fatigue is very real, we've decided not to have a long Tikkun going well into the night. Instead, we will spread out our Tikkun over several days, giving shorter opportunities to learn. Starting with Kabbalat Shabbat on the Friday before, and extending through Shavuot, there will be chances to experience short learning sessions as part of our Zoom services. These "small bites" spread out over the long weekend should ensure everyone can learn without becoming overwhelmed.

And if you'd still like a marathon learning session, the international Masorti/Conservative movement is planning one. It will present 24 hours in a row of learning, starting at noon on May 16, EDT. Beth Israel is proud to be a supporting organization for this effort. You can watch a little or a lot of this gargantuan Tikkun, designed to go all night everywhere in the world. You can also see the parts you missed afterwards, should you fall asleep somewhere during that 24-hour period. Watch your emails for links to the schedule and information on how to join.



Shavuot services at Beth Israel will be on Zoom, including Erev Shavuot services and morning services on both days. On Tuesday (Day 2) the service will include Yizkor. Questions about Shavuot services or the Tikkun? Contact the office.

## ***PROJECT ZUG – LOOKING FOR A STUDY PARTNER?***

***DALE ROSENBERG***



Our partnership with Project Zug of Hadar Institute continues through spring and summer. Whether you are someone who has taken all of our group classes, someone who hasn't even looked at the Project Zug website, or somewhere in between, it's not too late to sign up for partnered learning with Project Zug. You can partner with someone at BI, or have the Project Zug staff find a chevruta for you. They will match you with someone with similar interests and time constraints. Close friendships have been formed through study partnership! Go to the Project Zug website ([projectzug.org](http://projectzug.org)) or contact Dale Rosenberg, Director of Learning and Engagement, if you want to know more.

## ***SPECIAL SHABBATOT: SISTERHOOD, LIFE AND LEGACY, BROTHERHOOD***

This year's Youth Shabbat in March was a wonderful time to celebrate a key constituency of our shul community: the youngest generation. We have three more special Shabbatot coming up in which different groups within our shul family will be honored and given a chance to shine. Mark these dates on your calendars now:

**May 8 is Sisterhood Shabbat.** Members of BI's Sisterhood have been instrumental in developing and supporting a huge variety of shul activities. During the pandemic, the Sisterhood has provided opportunities for learning, entertainment, and connection. Join us for Shabbat morning services on May 8 when Sisterhood members will lead prayers and readings, chant Torah, and share Torah learning in the Dvar Torah for the day.



**May 22 is the Shabbat when we honor our Life and Legacy members.** This cadre of BI members have all made a pledge to support Beth Israel's endowment through a bequest/will, charitable gift annuity, life insurance benefit or other posthumous donation. These generous folks are in many ways the key to our future as a synagogue. Come honor them at Shabbat morning services as they lead portions of the service and accept other honors. It's not too late to join Life and Legacy. There is no threshold amount – you pledge what you are comfortable with. For more information, call the BI Office.

**June 19 will be our annual Brotherhood Shabbat.** What would Beth Israel be without the Famous Brotherhood Breakfasts, the World Wide Wrap, and other programs created and populated by our Brotherhood members? Honor them at Shabbat morning services as Brotherhood leads prayers and readings and takes on Torah reading and other responsibilities.

All these special Shabbat services will be shared with the community via Zoom. Only service leaders will be in the sanctuary. The other honored participants will do their parts remotely. They are planning very special Shabbat services. Make the services even more special by showing up in force (remotely) to honor them.

### ***OUTDOOR KABBALAT SHABBAT***

As of this writing, we have managed to hold Kabbalat Shabbat/Ma'ariv services outdoors, twice. Once was with congregants in the back parking lot, with the service led from the portico at the chapel side. The other was in our courtyard. Both were simulcast on Zoom for those who cannot or choose not to attend in person at this point.

Dr. Jeremy Golding, our synagogue medical advisor, tells us – based on the best available information – that outdoors is safe, very safe. When we gather for Kabbalat Shabbat Together outdoors, everyone remains masked except for the service leaders, and they lead from a distance. The congregants sit in single-household pods, apart from one another. Those who have attended report a strong feeling of community. Many have also expressed gratitude at the opportunity to sing together, something which is so much part of our BI community culture. With a minyan in person, we also do a complete Ma'ariv service after Kabbalat Shabbat.

Look for emails saying what the plans are for each Friday night. We hope to have many more outdoor opportunities. In the event of bad weather after an outdoor service has been announced, an additional email will be sent out on Friday about the change of plans.

## ***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. We have some fascinating programs planned for the next few months. Here is some information on upcoming Members Together Meetings:

### **Scientists in Synagogues: The Six Days of Creation, the Big Bang, and Some Tidbits of Physics with Elliott Krefetz**



On May 2, Elliott Krefetz will speak to Members Together as part of our Scientists in Synagogues series of lectures. Elliott, longtime BI member and longtime scientist will give insights on various topics in a lecture entitled “The Six Days of Creation, the Big Bang, and Some Tidbits of Physics.” Are religious and scientific views on the creation of the universe compatible? Zoom in on May 2 and see what Elliott has to say.

### **A Physician’s Personal Account of the Yom Kippur War with Dr. Itzhak Brook**

On May 23, Dr. Brook, professor of Pediatrics at Georgetown University School of Medicine, will talk about his experiences during the Yom Kippur War. The presentation includes a description of the historical background of the Yom Kippur War and its effects on the Israeli society, as well as Dr Brook’s personal experiences and challenges as a battalion physician in the Sinai. He will address the physical and psychological traumas his soldiers had to cope with, the effect of religion on them, the cost of war in human life and suffering, and the daily struggle for survival in the difficult war which threatened Israel’s existence.



Looking ahead, we will have the rescheduled presentation on Sustainability and the Torah with new dad Noah Slovin on June 6.

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.

## ***SHALOSH REGALIM THEN AND NOW WITH RABBI FELLMAN MONDAYS: LAST SESSION MAY 10 AT 7:45 P.M.***

The Shalosh Regalim, or Pilgrimage Festivals, are a major focus of religious practice as described in the Torah and Rabbinic texts. Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot were all harvest holidays. They were all also occasions of pilgrimage to the Great Temple in Jerusalem, when it stood. What is the textual basis of these holidays? What meaning do they have for us today? Join us for this last in Rabbi Fellman’s series of classes on the pilgrimage festivals.

This is a standalone class. So come even if you didn’t make it to the other two sessions. We’ll be meeting on the same Zoom link as evening minyan.

## ***RACIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE – BOOK TALK ABOUT MUSLIM/JEWISH CONNECTIONS***

The Racial Justice Initiative Committee is planning a book talk in June. On Wednesday, June 23, at 7:30 p.m. we'll have a presentation by Sabeeha Rehman and Walter Ruby, authors of the new book: *We Refuse to be Enemies: How Muslims and Jews Can Make Peace, One Friendship at a Time*. As the publisher (Simon and Schuster) says in the press release for the book, "*We Refuse to Be Enemies* is a manifesto by two American citizens, a Muslim woman and Jewish man, concerned with the rise of intolerance and bigotry in our country along with resurgent white nationalism. Neither author is an imam, rabbi, scholar, or community leader, but together they have spent decades doing interfaith work and nurturing cooperation among communities. They have learned that, through face-to-face encounters, people of all backgrounds can come to know the Other as a fellow human being and turn her or him into a trusted friend. In this book, they share their experience and guidance."

The presentation will be done via Zoom (so sorry, no book signing that evening). Mark your calendar now. You can read the book ahead of time, or get excited to read it at the book talk. We'll be inviting local Muslim communities to join us, as well as other synagogues.

If you attended services for Parashat Acharei Mot/Kedoshim, you heard Rabbi Fellman's extraordinarily moving Dvar Torah on the topic of our responsibility not to stand idly by at the blood of our neighbors. She exhorted us to all kinds of action, including a shout out to join the Racial Justice Initiative Committee in its efforts to highlight this important area of inequity in our society. If you have an idea for a Racial Justice Initiative program or would like to join the Committee, contact Alan Harris.

## ***RIMON UPDATE: LEARNING REMOTELY, LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING IN PERSON***

***DALE ROSENBERG, DIRECTOR OF LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT***



As is true of Beth Israel in general, Rimon Religious School and Rimon Preschool/Tot Shabbat are carefully looking to move away from exclusively meeting via Zoom and towards in person events and learning. We all miss meeting together in the chapel on Shabbat mornings and in our classrooms on weekday afternoons. We miss Snack in Hebrew, head-to-head chavruta learning, physical games, outdoor activities, and all the fun and engagement that goes with physically being together.

Throughout this school year we have been meeting on Zoom: Monday and Wednesday afternoons for Rimon and two Fridays a month for Tot Shabbat. We do the best we can to offer a rich Rimon experience online, using multiple media, interactive exercises, packages delivered to students' homes, and recommended family engagement activities for the weekends. However, as the weather becomes warmer, some in-person outdoor activities are now becoming feasible.

As I write this, our Early Childhood Educator Rowan Mason and I are planning activities for the upcoming Lag B'Omer Family Picnic. Howard Fixler and an ad hoc committee are working on the food side of the event: a hot dog and hamburger barbecue and roasting marshmallows over a firepit. Rowan and I have been excitedly making plans for archery and bubbles and sidewalk chalk and crafts and more.

Of course, planning for the outdoors means we have to contend with the vagaries of weather. As Mark Twain said, "If you don't like the weather in New England, wait a minute." We can't know for sure what will happen when we plan outdoor events. In the case of the Lag B'Omer barbecue, we will – in the event of rain – have a

drive by event. By the time you read this, it will be over. I hope the weather will cooperate with us and we will have a socially distanced, masked event where we can eat and play safely and see one another in person for the first time in over a year!

We're also planning an event jointly with BING (Beth Israel Next Generation) at Elm Park in Worcester. At noon on May 16 (Erev Shavuot) the Rimon and Tot Shabbat children will go on a "hike" in the park with whichever parents and BING participants want to join in. There will be a craft activity during the hike and ice cream afterwards. BING is following up with a picnic afterwards, as well as distribution of fruit wines that were a previous BING project.

At this point, all of Rimon in-person activities are planned to be outdoor, masked (except when eating), and socially distanced. We are consulting with our Medical Advisors in planning in person activities. We will continue classes remotely through the end of this school year. We hope to be able to meet in person for the 5782 school year. We will proceed with caution as we plan.

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**Office Hours: 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.**

