

BI@Home:
News from your home away from home

A Word from Rabbi Fellman



In the Book of Ezekiel, we read “Thus said the Lord God: I have indeed removed them far among the nations and have scattered them among the countries, and I have become to them as a *Mikdash Me’at* in the countries where they have gone.” (Ezekiel 11:16)

Mikdash Me’at literally means “little sanctuary.” Ever since the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE, our sages have regarded the home as a primary worship environment for Jews, as the location of the *Mikdash Me’at* promised to us in the prophecy. The word for “house” in Hebrew is *bayit*. This is directly related to the word for synagogue, *beyt kneset* (House of Gathering).

We so want to be physically together now. We long to send our children to school, to gather with our friends, to raise our voices together in song. It is painful to know that those longed for activities will not be possible for some time. We have lost so much in the past few months and we all feel that loss. Yet we have gained so much too – learning to embrace technology, joining minyanim from home, making the effort required to stay connected.

Ezekiel, in response to those who mourned the loss of a physical Temple while in exile responded that the only thing that was lost was a physical structure. He exhorted the people to conduct for themselves a *Mikdash Me’at*, a version of the sanctuary in their own homes. This is what we are called on to do now.

This year, each of us needs to create a *Mikdash Me’at* – a sacred space in our own homes. We need to build a model of our sanctuary at home. We will have to turn our living rooms, dens, dining rooms, and offices into sacred space: space where we can let the sounds of the prayers wash over us. A space where we can let the words of the prayers infuse our souls. A space where our voices can rise in prayer and no one shushes us but ourselves. This year, it will take more of an effort to get ourselves ready for the holidays, but we are not left alone to make that effort.

We are fortunate to have a beautiful and inspiring sanctuary, but this year it will not serve the same role of gathering space for the holidays. We will not be gathering as a robust community in person to sing the songs and celebrate the New Year together. There will be opportunities to have a few meditative moments with the Torahs as part of the Ark Visits that are already happening. There will be opportunities for a limited number of congregants to register to attend in-person services. Still, for most of us, much of our holiday experience will be at home. To make the most of that experience, we need to bring the sacred home, to create that sense of gathering and of sacred space within the walls of our individual homes. We are trying to help you create this space by offering BI-DIY bags and *machzorim* at our September 7th Drive-thru (details later in this issue.)

Even without full access to the physical building that is our spiritual home, we want you to always remember that this shul and this community are here for you. The Talmud teaches that the *Shechinah*, the

Divine Presence, went with the Jews into exile. In Megillah 29a, we read Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: “Come and see how beloved the Jewish people are before the Holy One, Blessed be God. At every place they were exiled, the Divine Presence went with them. They were exiled to Egypt, and the Divine Presence went with them.”

Ezekiel told his community that despite the incredible loss, there was much that they had not lost. So it is with us. We have not lost each other; we have not lost our faith; we have not lost our connection to the Divine. We have not lost our hope, and we have not lost that powerful sense that blessings live within us and among us.

By creating and carving out space as a *Mikdash Me'at* this year in our homes, we are ensuring that we are making space for the blessings and presence of the *Shechinah*. As we light the holiday candles, eat our round challot, call our family and friends to wish them a *Shanah Tovah*, may we remember that this past year, for all we have lost, we are not lost.

May 5781 bring us, our families, our neighbors, and our world healing, blessings, and deeper connections.

Interesting Times: Curse or Blessing?

Victor Saffrin, Ritual Committee Chair

We have all heard of the (supposedly ancient) Chinese curse “May you live in interesting times.” These interesting times we're living through are indeed a curse. Are they also something else?



Indeed, many of us have faced challenges with illness, death of a loved one, loss of a job, loneliness, isolation, financial insecurity, fear, anxiety, and a whole host of issues that pile on because of those challenges. Focusing on these, interesting times are indeed a curse.

But many have also discovered that the challenges have unleashed a well of resilience and creativity that was previously hidden. Parents have become de facto teachers and tech support staff; workers have learned new skills in setting up home offices and discovered the unanticipated benefits of having a walk-to-the-dining-room commute instead of I-290; children have discovered their neighborhoods and neighbors by virtue of the sheer amount of time they spend at home. We have all learned painful lessons of history, civics, and epidemiology. At the same time, we are grappling with the meaning of the implied social contract by modifying our behavior when necessary, to ensure the safety not only of ourselves but of others we encounter. We now have an intuitive sense of how far 6 feet is! Focusing on these effects, interesting times have a sort of silver lining of blessing as well.

So, it is with our communal lives at Beth Israel. Zoom minyans, parking lot mourner comfort, on-line social and educational programs, live streamed b'nai mitzvah have all appeared as if out of thin air (but behind the scenes they took a lot of people doing a lot of work). And there's more to come over the High Holidays: individual ark visits, high holiday goodie bags, mobile shofar blowing, and more. The old saying goes, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade!” Beth Israel has shown that we are lemonade makers *par excellence*.

May we all be inscribed for a coming year of health, love, and supportive community, with a swift return to a “new normal,” enhanced by what we have learned in the interim that will make all of our lives richer.

Complete Pre-recorded Worship

Although the current pandemic crisis is preventing us from holding the complete services we all look forward to each year in our sanctuary, we do have an alternative for those who want a more expansive liturgy than we can make available through livestream. Beth Israel will be making pre-recorded, complete liturgy available online prior to the start of the Holy Days so that you can engage with your favorite tunes including hearing our BI HiHo Quintet at your convenience.

Visiting the Ark in Elul



At BI it has long been our custom during Ne'ilah, at the end of Yom Kippur, for families to visit the open ark and have a moment with our beautiful Torah scrolls, dressed in their white finery. It's a moment for prayer, reflection, and family togetherness.

This year, because of the pandemic, we've moved this custom to Elul and made it a socially distanced event. Throughout Elul, BI member families are invited to reserve a time to come and spend a few minutes in front of the open ark. See your weekly email for information on how to register online, or call the office for help with reserving a time.

You will be greeted at the door at your appointed time. Only one individual or family will be scheduled at a time. A volunteer or staff member will take your picture (from behind, with the ark in view) and put together a slide show of congregants spending time standing close to our Sifrei Torah.

All safety precautions will be followed: handwashing/disinfecting, mask wearing at all times in the building, canceling and rescheduling if anyone in your party is not feeling well.

Labor Day Drive-Thru High Holy Day Prep September 7 from 4:00-6:00 p.m.

Beth Israel staff have been busily preparing Beth Israel Do It Yourself High Holy Day Resource Kits to help you create and enjoy sacred space within your own homes this High Holy Day season. These bags are full of spiritual aids, instructions, ritual objects, yizkor booklets, and fun extras for all Beth Israel member households. We will be distributing them during a drive-thru event on Labor Day, September 7, from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m., in the back parking lot, by the chapel.

Bring your mask and your shelf-stable donations for Rachel's Table, and drive on over to Beth Israel any time during that two-hour block. In addition to picking up your DIY Resource Bags and contributing to our Food Drive (if you choose to), you'll get to hear shofar blowing, pick up your challot pre-ordered from USY, borrow *machzorim* for the High Holy Days (including youth *machzorim* for those with children or grandchildren or just young at heart), and cool off with a frozen novelty from the ice cream truck. You will be greeted by Rabbi Aviva Fellman, Beth Israel President Paula Sommer, and Education/Programming Director Dale Rosenberg.

If you're not a member yet, come by and pick up a membership application and have any questions about Beth Israel answered by our clergy, lay leadership, and/or staff. You can even join on the spot! You can also register your children for Rimon Religious School, BI's innovative approach to interactive Jewish learning.

If you can't make it to Beth Israel on Labor Day, we'll arrange to get your DIY Resource bags to you. We can't promise an ice cream truck coming to your house, though!

Streamed High Holiday Services

Our wonderful clergy, staff, and lay leadership have been working hard to make worship services accessible to all of Beth Israel during this difficult time. We now have a livestreaming capability that allows us to safely have a minyan in the building, while making the services available to all through livestreaming. Careful precautions are being taken to ensure the health of those in the building. Among those precautions are pre-registrations, health screening, physical distancing, universal mask-wearing in all areas of the building, and plexiglass coverings on the podium. Many of you experienced BI via livestream during August when we all kvelled as Kenny and Andy Kalvinek celebrated their b'nai mitzvah.

Services will of necessity be shorter than usual this year. Morning services for Rosh Hashanah will be held from 9:30 – noon both days – September 19 and 20. Kol Nidre will be held on Sunday, September 27 at 6:15 p.m. and Yom Kippur daytime services will occur at 9:30 on September 28. Livestreamed Ne'ilah services are also planned. Watch your email for information on how to register to be part of the minyan in the building and how to access the livestream from your home. Please note: for all those participating in services in the building, if you want to use the assistive listening system, you must bring your own headphones.

Membership Renewal – Make Sure You are Counted!

Beth Israel runs on community participation. Our members teach and learn and pray and lead and chant and schmooze and discuss and laugh and condole and care for one another. By now, all should have received membership renewal notices. If you haven't renewed yet, please do so as soon as possible. It's easy to do! You can log into the Shulcloud website and renew there, fill out physical forms, or call or email the office.

Make sure you renew your membership by Labor Day weekend, and then participate in our Members Labor Day Drive-Thru Event described elsewhere in this issue. We are trying to ensure that our members have everything they need to observe the fall holidays in this most unusual year.

Please note: the COVID-19 crisis has affected our community in many ways, including financially. If you need to renew with reduced membership dues this year or an adjusted payment plan, call Director of Operations Caroline Aboody to make a confidential arrangement. We are here to help one another.

Members Together on Sunday Mornings – Coming in September and October

Our Sunday morning "Members Together" programs remain very popular. After morning minyan on Sunday, we gather via Zoom at 9:00. There's half an hour of schmoozing (in breakout rooms with an icebreaker prompt, if there's a large crowd) followed by a presentation at 9:30. Enjoy Sunday breakfast while learning about all manner of things, leveraging the knowledge of our members and the people they know.

For September we have two programs planned:

On September 6 (Sunday of Labor Day Weekend), we'll have "Why Labor Day Matters" with Labor Organizer Micah Klayman.

September 13 our own Lydia Bornstein will present "The History of Mah Jongg in Jewish America and Why We Love It!"

In October we're planning on programs on October 18th and 25th. The October 18th program will feature BI members who grew up in places with low Jewish density talking about childhood in a community with very few Jews. We're working on a program on nutrition for 10/25.

Do you have a topic you'd like to present for a Members Together morning? Do you have a topic you'd like to see someone else present? Do you know of a particularly good speaker? Contact dale.rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org with your ideas.

News from the BI Sharing/Caring Clearinghouse: Blankets for Habitat for Humanity
Michelle Cochran

We have a new initiative we hope will catch on with BI members. It seems clear that the pandemic will be going on for some time and many of us will be spending more time at home than we used to. This new project is something you can do at home this fall and winter and contribute to the well-being of people in our larger community.

Some of our BI members are very active in Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit organization that helps families build and improve places to call home. This great organization believes – as do I – that affordable housing plays a critical role in strong and stable communities.

Not all of us can participate in Habitat for Humanity by building and renovating houses. However, I am suggesting that some of our members make blankets from our own homes. That way, when people move into their newly built Habitat for Humanity homes, they can have a handmade blanket as a housewarming gift from Beth Israel. The blankets can be knitted, crocheted, quilted or fleece (Joanne's in Shrewsbury has a wide assortment of no-sew fleece blankets). They can be any size from baby up to king size.

Due to COVID restrictions, Habitat will not have any new houses built before January. This gives us time to work on our projects and puts us in a position of providing new blankets at just the right time for those moving into new homes. If you do have any that are already completed, they can be given to people who have already moved into their new or newly renovated Habitat homes.

If you already have blankets to give, or have questions about this initiative, email Michelle Cochran at weefishe@charter.net.

High Holiday Services/Activity Sessions for Children and Families
Dale Rosenberg, Director of Education/Programming



Most years we offer youth services in the chapel at the same time as the main service in the sanctuary, as well as babysitting in the library, with a Tot Service component. This very different High Holy Day season requires a different approach. We have chosen not to stream children's services, because we want the services to be interactive.

Instead, we are offering several sessions via Zoom during the days surrounding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. On Friday, September 18, at 10:00 a.m. our weekly Tot Shabbat, led by Rowan Mason, will focus on the High Holy Days. Rowan will read a Rosh Hashanah story as part of the mini-service and help children 5 and under with an accompanying adult get ready for the upcoming Days of Awe.

On Tuesday, September 22, at 4:0, I (Dale Rosenberg) will lead a program focusing on Rosh Hashanah. The session will include stories, poems, prayers from the youth machzor, a modified tashlich and Shofar blowing. At 4:00 on Thursday, September 24, we'll have another session, this one focusing on Yom Kippur. The programs will be interactive with options for discussion and for children leading some of the prayers. All are welcome to attend these sessions. They are designed primarily for elementary and middle school aged children.

Watch your email for Zoom links for these programs and look for more information about youth services in your High Holy Day DIY Resource bags.

Note from Pat Bizzell, Vice President for Education: Our own culture maven Reena Slovin is selecting opportunities for you—a concert, lecture, art show, and more—to supplement Beth Israel's wonderful offerings and to help you navigate among the many notices popping up in your in-box.

Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center/Conservative Yeshiva: V'samachta B'veitecha: Rejoicing at Home

September 10-17, 2020

Learn some classic selichot; Experience fresh, uplifting music; study Talmud about Judgement and Repentance; Explore the humor of The Book of Jonah; Workout with some spiritual calisthenics

Reena's Recommendations:

- Thursday, 9/10 5:00pm Tandu in Concert
- Wednesday, 9/16 1:30pm: Ilana Kurshan - Judgement and Repentance in the Talmudic Imagination

These programs can be found at:

<https://conservativeyeshiva.lpages.co/vsamachta-bveitecha-elul-program>

Hebrew College: Preparing for the High Holidays in a Time of Upheaval

Hebrew College has launched Elul Together bringing teachings, music, and the sound of the shofar into our homes with multiple sessions by Hebrew College ordained rabbis and teachers. Each Monday of Elul, they will post videos, art and journal prompts to accompany you through the next week of High Holy Day preparation. Find the details at <https://hebrewcollege.edu/elultogether>

Hadar's High Holiday Derashot (Teaching) Series

Join Hadar's Faculty for a series exploring what we're thinking about as we prepare for the holidays. Each Derasha will be offered the evening before the holiday begins.

Go to <https://www.hadar.org/virtual-beit-midrash> and scroll down to register for specific sessions.

Reena's Recommendations:

- Shabbat Shuva Derasha with Rabbi Ethan Tucker Thursday, September 24; 8:00 PM
- Yom Kippur Derasha with Rabbi Avi Strausberg Saturday, September 26; 8:00 PM

Slichot with the Conservative Movement: Hours of Programming Coast-to-Coast

Slichot – penitentiary piyyutim (liturgical poems) – are sung, in Ashkenazic tradition, on the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah. This year, the Conservative Movement is offering a special slichot program. On September 12, 2020, following Shabbat, the Rabbinical Assembly will provide seven hours of learning sessions, musical moments, and Slichot services. This coast-to-coast Conservative Movement experience will start with Havdalah on the East Coast and end at midnight on the West Coast.

Watch your weekly email blasts for information on how to join in to this unique Slichot experience.

The BI Voter Registration Challenge Is Here – Check It Out on Instagram

Our BI Voter Registration is live. We are using the hashtag #bivoterreg on Instagram. You can see the smiling faces of your fellow Beth Israel members as they demonstrate their voter registrations at <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bivoterreg/>.

You do not have to have an account on Instagram to see the photos or to participate. Here, once again, is Evelyn Herwitz Harris's instructions for the challenge:

There's a big election coming this November. How you vote is your choice. But in order to vote, you have to register!

Take the BI Voter Registration Challenge!

Our goal: By October 15, every eligible voter in the BI Community is registered.

Here's how:

Step One: Check to See if You're Registered

It's easy to do with Massachusetts's online voter registration system. Have you moved recently? Is your information up to date? Click here to find out:

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/VoterRegistrationSearch/MyVoterRegStatus.aspx> If you are registered, go on to Step Three.

Step Two: Register to Vote

If you're new to Massachusetts or not yet registered, just click here and follow the easy directions:

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/OVR/Pages/CheckEligibility.aspx?&Action=Register> Please note: You need a valid Massachusetts driver's license or ID to use the online system. You may also register by mail or in person, as described here: <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleifv/howreg.htm>

Step Three: Tell Us About It!

- 1) Take a picture or selfie of yourself showing that you've registered. Be creative! (But no partisan politics, please.)
- 2) If you're comfortable doing so, share to your social media with #BIVoterReg.
- 3) Email your picture to Dale Rosenberg: dale.rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org. Dale will ensure that the picture meets our requirements and Naomi Shertzer – our USY contact – will add it to Instagram.



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

**Phone: 508-756-6204; email office@bethisraelworc.org
Office Hours (Phone only): Monday thru Friday 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**


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Sukkot is Coming!!
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