

BI@Home:
News from your home away from home

A WORD FROM RABBI FELLMAN



When I was little, I was taught that the Hanukkah story was about the miracle of oil that lasted for eight days in the rededication of the Temple. That was the amount of time we were told that it took to press more pure olive oil and get it to the Temple for use.

When I was older and read through the First and Second Books of Maccabees in the Apocrypha, I learned that Hanukkah was based on the holiday of Sukkot. Because the Jews were busy fighting and the Temple was desecrated, they could not celebrate the fall pilgrimage festival. When the Temple was once again in their hands, they celebrated the last holiday that they had missed, and that is the reason that Hanukkah is eight days.

Recently, I read a story in the Talmud about the first winter after the creation of the world: “When Adam, the first human being, saw that the days were getting shorter and shorter, he said, ‘Oy! Woe is me; maybe because I have sinned the world is getting dark and is going to return to chaos!’ ... He got up and spent eight days in fasting and prayer. When he saw that the winter solstice had arrived, and that the days were getting longer again, he said, ‘This is just the order of the world.’ He went and celebrated a holiday for eight days.” (BT Avodah Zarah 8a)

The Talmud then tells us that the next year, he celebrated this ritual again. We know that the winter is cold, long, and dark and that it is easy to give up hope. We also know what Adam learned – just as soon as the days reach their shortest and darkest, they start getting lighter and longer.

Regardless of the reason that we celebrate, every major religion has a winter holiday that centers around light and hope. Hanukkah seems to be no different. This year, when there is much to hope for and it seems not as much to celebrate, we can reach within and find that light, that patience, that joy and bring it out into the world.

Maybe when we light one additional candle, the shamash, on each night of Hanukkah, it brings just a little more light into our lives. It helps us to acknowledge that there is light out in the world too; there is reason to hope. May our lights, our hope, our celebrations, and our hearts be open and bring joy to our lives and the lives of those in our community and our world.



A MONTH OF GRATITUDE

PAULA SOMMER, BETH ISRAEL PRESIDENT

December is a special month for me, personally. It's my birthday month, to start with. I am a twin, and was born prematurely. I was not supposed to be born in December at all, yet my sister and I were born in December, on the 5th day of Hanukkah.

In those pre-ultrasound days, it wasn't always clear when a woman was having a twin pregnancy. As the younger baby, I was a surprise Hanukkah present for my parents. My twin and I were together an unexpected boon in the form of two surprise tax deductions for the whole year, even though we were born during that last month.

My wedding anniversary is in December. A holiday break is a good time to schedule an event for two students.

My granddaughter was also born this month. Her birthday is a different day on the secular calendar, but she was born on my birthday on the Jewish calendar. So we get to celebrate a triple birthday on the fifth day of Hanukkah in our family: my granddaughter, my twin sister, and me. How memorable is that!

As you can see, although December is the darkest month, I have many personal reasons to lighten it. I add to those our communal reasons for light. Our Festival of Lights brightens this time of short days and long nights for us all, reminding us to count our blessings. Whether we claim a military victory of outmatched Jews against the Greek-Syrians, or a spiritual victory against assimilation into the dominant culture, we have great reasons to brighten our hearts. We rededicated the Great Temple in Jerusalem, and kept the celebration going for eight days.



The Talmud records a dispute between Beit Shammai, who said we should light eight candles on the first night and decrease by one each day, and Beit Hillel, who said we should light one candle the first day and two the second, and so on. We follow the tradition of Hillel, to increase the light as the holiday progresses. May our joy, light, and gladness also increase, as we are mindful of the blessings we enjoy – blessings of community, of holidays to celebrate, and of Hanukkiyot to light together.

BI OFFICE CLOSED WEEK OF 12/21

The Beth Israel office will be closed all week beginning Monday 12/21 this year. Daily Minyanim and other activities will continue as listed in the calendar. If you have questions for the office staff, though, ask them before or after that week. The office is also closed on New Year's Day 2021.

TGIF IS BACK!

Looking for a lively and thought-provoking lead in to Shabbat? Join Rabbi Fellman's weekly program "Torah Goodness It's Friday" also known as TGIF. We meet at 10:00 a.m. on Fridays via Zoom. Under the rabbi's able guidance, we discuss the parasha of the week, often connecting the weekly text to other parts of the Torah and to our own experiences. Torah study in general and TGIF in particular can help you get into the Shabbat mood!

Please note: there will be no TGIF on December 25 or January 1.

MEMBERS TOGETHER UPDATE

On two 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 November, we had a great time learning to bake apple pie with USY, and heard what's going on in the wider Jewish world from our local Federation's Executive Director, Steven Schimmel.

Here are the upcoming Members Together Programs for this month:

December 6 – Project Inspire: Seeing Israel's Global Efforts Up Close in Nepal with Rebecca Shirazi



Project Inspire offers young adults from the Boston area the opportunity to witness first hand what Israel is doing to provide support, innovation, and technology in the developing world. Rebecca Shirazi, daughter of Pavel and Janet, will focus on what she learned on a Project Inspire trip to Nepal, seeing how IsraAid and NGOs support women's empowerment in Nepalese communities.

December 13: A Psychological Comparison of Israeli and American Upbringing with Dror Ben Ami

Former emissary Dror Ben Ami will compare child rearing in the U.S. and Israel. He will interweave personal experiences and psychological insights to illuminate similarities and differences in parenting practices.



Join us at 9:00 with coffee and breakfast and we'll schmooze for half an hour. The presentations start at 9:30.

PROJECT ZUG AT BI – A YEAR OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

We've now finished our second Project Zug group class: Everyday Moral Dilemmas. Many of our congregants are enjoying learning together in a group, with hevruta (partnered learning) as part of each session. Others are learning in hevruta through Project Zug on their own. Thanks to the generosity of Barry Aframe, all BI members have unlimited use of all the Project Zug curricular materials for all of 5781.

Our next group course is called "Shabbat Rituals: the Oldest New Way to Friday." Rabbi Jessica Minnen of OneTable has assembled study materials for us to better understand and more deeply experience Friday night home rituals: candle lighting, sanctifying wine and bread, and Shabbat hospitality. We will use Rabbi Minnen's texts and questions and also include some additional material and discussion questions about the impact of the pandemic and ways to adapt our Shabbat practices in these difficult times.

The Shabbat Rituals group course will start on Wednesday, January 13 at 7:30 p.m. and will continue for four successive Wednesday evenings. If you are interested in registering, all you need to do is email Dale Rosenberg at dale.rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org any time before January 7. Also beginning in January, we are providing a Project Zug group experience for the older Rimon children and USY members. It will be a slightly adjusted version of the Everyday Moral Dilemmas program that was recently presented to BI's adult membership.

If you are interested in studying with Project Zug with a hevruta before January, sign up for a course! If you have questions about registering with Project Zug or enrolling in courses, email Dale.Rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org or call 917 292-4552.

ZOOM WITH BI ON SHABBAT

On Shabbat mornings we are now offering services via Zoom. Moving our minyan online allows participants to see the service leaders' faces and to see one another while maintaining health and safety. We begin at 10:00 a.m. and finish by noon. Service is followed by a kiddush lunch (Bring your own kosher lunch) and opportunity to chat. Watch your weekly email for more information.

NEWS FROM THE SHARING/CARING NETWORK

Greeting Cards Project

Elder Services of Worcester Area (ESWA) is sponsoring a holiday letter and card writing campaign: Holiday Cheer for Isolated Older Adults. You can participate and uplift an older person in the Worcester Area. Write a few lines on paper or a card; tell a joke; draw a picture; reach out to someone who's feeling alone.

Here are the ESWA guidelines for participation:

1. Letters must be legible (large print) and handwritten. If you're sending a card, write something in large print on it.
2. Keep your message non-denominational. Wish the person well, but make sure your message works for anyone.
3. Don't write a date on the card or letter.
4. Begin with a generic salutation that could work for either a woman or a man, like "Dear Friend" or "Hello Neighbor" or just "Greetings!"
5. Embrace creativity. Use different colors; doodle; write something personal and heartfelt.
6. Be kind and thoughtful. You won't get a response in this program. You are sending kindness and good wishes with no reciprocity.
7. Put the card or letter in an envelope if you like but do not address the envelope or seal it.
8. Share your act of kindness on social media, if you like. Take a picture of your card or letter and use the hashtag #ESWAHolidayCheer.
9. Write as many letters as you want to! Send them in by January 31, 2021.
10. Put your letters in an outer envelope and mail to:

Elder Services of Worcester Area
Attn: Holiday Cheer
67 Millbrook Street, Suite 100
Worcester, MA 01606

Crafts Thursday

We're trying something new! Last month we began to get together weekly on Thursdays and engage in crafting for a cause. Meeting via Zoom, we crochet and knit blankets for Habitat for Humanity clients, or to do other crafts of a Tikkun Olam nature.

It's a chance to have fun, socialize, and do something for others – all at the same time. Each Thursday at 1:00 we spend an hour together crafting and chatting. Join us! Just email the office to get the Zoom link, or find it in your weekly email.



RIMON 5781 UPDATE

Dale Rosenberg, Director of Education/Programming



Rimon is a fruitful school, even during a pandemic! We are meeting remotely via Zoom on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. Each child is also offered half an hour of individualized Hebrew teaching at a time convenient for the family. Zoom classes cover tefilah, text study, Jewish values, holiday lessons, folklore, and more. Games and crafts are included in the class lessons and children receive craft materials in the mail.

A multi-session unit on bar mitzvah led up to Isaac Shertzer's bar mitzvah, which all the Rimon students were encouraged to "attend" via livestream. In a lesson on the history of bar/bat mitzvah, the students looked at photographs of b'nai mitzvah over the past 100 years and used their detective skills to try to figure out where and when the photographs were taken.

We look at the parasha of the week in class, as well. As we read the family stories that are a big part of the first book of the Torah, we discuss family dynamics in the text and in real life. We also look at different ways to interpret the stories and read or view different commentaries.

Rimon is participating in the BI "Eight Nights of Hanukkah" program. On Wednesday, December 16, we'll share two Hanukkah related games with the congregation.

Our Rimon Preschool Program has also adapted to the current circumstances. Rowan Mason has continued to produce short videos each week for the preschool crowd. On alternate weeks, these are a Tot Shabbat program, focused on home rituals. The other weeks are a continuation of "Story and Craft Corner" using public domain stories with a related craft.

We look forward to meeting in person again when it's safe to do so. If you'd like to learn more about Rimon, contact me at rimon@bethisraelworc.org.

TORATHON 2020 WAS A GREAT SUCCESS!

Every year, the Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts sponsors Torathon – an evening of Jewish learning. This year's Torathon was necessarily an online event. Hundreds of participants learned all evening. Yasher Koach to members of the Beth Israel community who taught this year: Elena Blotcher, Rabbi Aviva Fellman, Rabbi Amy Loewenthal, Dale Rosenberg, and Marcia Tannenbaum. And kudos as well to Debbie Fruchtman who masterfully managed this most unusual Torathon with all its attendant technical issues.



May we be blessed to meet for many more Torathons. Next year in person!

CHINESE FOOD AND A MOVIE – PANDEMIC EDITION

The long time American Jewish custom of eating Chinese food and watching a movie on Christmas originated when movie theaters and Chinese restaurants were the only things open in many locales on Christmas. This year we'll have a modified get together for those who would like to observe this custom in community. Order Chinese take-out or get out your wok and plan a Chinese meal for dinner on Thursday, December 24. At 7:30 p.m. we'll show a movie via Zoom after evening minyan. The movie will be announced later, but we can guarantee it will be family friendly. Suggestions for movie choices can be sent to

dale.rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org

RACIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE

The BI Task Force on Racial Justice had its first meeting. The Task Force is planning a variety of activities to raise our community's awareness and make sure we are thinking about how to bend the arc towards justice, to paraphrase Dr. King.

Our first activity will be on December 27, at 7:30 p.m., after minyan. We'll be showing the video of Rabbi Angela Buchdahl's Yom Kippur Sermon this year. Rabbi Buchdahl, the senior rabbi of Central Synagogue in New York City, is both an ordained rabbi and an invested cantor. She was the first Asian American to be ordained as either rabbi or cantor in the United States. Her sermon this year, which dealt with current racial issues, has gotten a lot of well-deserved attention. We'll show a video of the sermon and then have a discussion about it.

There are more events planned and also much more planning to be done. We have an enthusiastic group and are happy to increase its membership. Please contact Alan Harris (alwharris@aol.com or 508-757-5305) if you are interested in joining the BI Task Force on Racial Justice.

MEDITATION IS BACK!

Pat Bizzell, VP for Education

I'm delighted to announce that Elena Salmoirago-Blotcher will resume weekly meditation classes on Thursday 3 December, from 6-6:45 p.m. I participated in her spring meditation sessions and they felt essential to my mental health! Not surprising, since Elena is studying the effects of behavioral changes on preventing or mitigating cardiovascular disease. 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. The distinctions on her c.v. are too numerous to list! In addition, 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. A zoom link will be sent out as we get closer to the first class.

THE 100 WORDS PROJECT – WHERE IN THE WORLD DID YOU GROW UP JEWISH?

A recent Sunday morning program featured a panel of BI members who grew up in places with small Jewish communities talking about their experiences. As a follow-up, we've asked a few people to see if they can summarize their own Jewish upbringing, but do so in 100 words. Here are two more responses:

Deb Fins I grew up on Long Island, NY where the school district had a large percentage of Jewish students. No classes on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, and no tests or labs were allowed on other major holidays. Our religious school had double sessions for all grades. There were still elements of antisemitism that I encountered. I then went to Brandeis so still lived in a pretty Jewishly-oriented world. My first recognition of having to live in the "real world" was when Columbia University School of Social Work started on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. I thought it was a typo!

Paula Sommer Hackensack NJ was home to a YMHA (forerunner to JCC), so there must have been a thriving Jewish community at one time. However, not at all when my twin sister and I arrived as kindergarteners. We went to the Y for High Holidays and Sunday School. That petered out by junior high. There was no strong Jewish youth group. Although the dozen Jewish kids in high school didn't socialize much, we were very proud that six of us graduated in the top ten of our class of 350. Most of us went out of state for college. NJ will always be my Garden State, but no longer my home.

FINANCE UPDATE

ANDREA GOODMAN, VP FINANCE

Editor's Note: In this time of Thanksgiving and light, all of us at BI are so grateful for the contributions members of our community make to our shul – contributions of money, of time, of spiritual and social energy. Please know how much you are appreciated by all of us. An update on financial matters follows. – DQR

Hi everyone from your VP of Finance. I want to let you know what's going on in the finance world at BI. I'm a no-nonsense person, so here are the facts – not sugarcoated.

- **Monthly reminder emails.** If you still have a balance on your bill, you will get a monthly email that just gives you the facts: "You still owe \$X. Please pay at your earliest convenience." This isn't unkind. It's just what it is. You used to get a monthly bill in the mail. We are saving on postage by sending emails. Don't take offense, just pay as you usually do. I pay in installments, so I get one every month too.
- **Kiddush fund and other optional donations on your bill.** We are using some of the Kiddush Fund money that we have to pay for things like the ice cream truck in September and the Hannukah goodie bags. These are opportunities to get together and schmooze in the parking lot, so I am treating them like a Kiddush from a financial perspective. I hope that helps you feel better about donating. If you still don't want to donate to the optional Kiddush fund or whatever else is optional on your bill, call the office and have it taken off your bill. That's the way we have always worked and we still do work this way.
- **Technology.** We put a technology assessment on your bill. We have been using that money to do the live streaming and now Zoom on Shabbat. There are ongoing technology expenses now such as the annual Zoom subscription and the increased internet expense. So feel free to donate more here if you have it.

Being VP of Finance is not easy. I have to weigh what the synagogue can afford with what we need as a congregation. It's my job to try to get your dues money and donations in so the synagogue can pay its bills and keep the doors open. I will take all the help I can get.

KUDOS TO ALAN HARRIS

On November 1, over 300 people participated in the annual "Keeper of the Flame" Awards ceremony from the Northeastern Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs. Alan Harris received one of the awards, an achievement touted in several congratulatory advertisements in the accompanying booklet. For those who did not see the booklet, we are reproducing an ad that was funded by friends of Alan.

"Chazak, Chazak, V'Neetchazek"

ALAN HARRIS

With appreciation from your friends

for your devotion to

Brotherhood and



Welcome Engage Inspire Grow

MEMBERS IN THE NEWS – SHERRI SIGEL

BI's own Sherri Sigel was one of the Keynote speakers at the National Tay Sachs and Allied Diseases (NTSAD) Annual Gala. The gala this year, titled "Imagine and Believe" was remote due to COVID-19. Sherri spoke along with Dr. Guangping Gao, the Father of Gene Therapy, on the journey to finding a cure for Canavan Disease.

They hope to begin phase 1 Clinical Trials on a new treatment next spring, pending FDA approval. If you go to www.NTSAD.org you can watch all or some of the event.

BI AND BEER

Friends from before their BI b'nai mitzvah, Brian Goodman (son of Andrea and Dick) and Eric Martin (son of Ellen and Jerry) are opening a new nano brewery in Upton on Dec 3, with their longtime friend Mike Rushford. Called Rushford & Sons Brewhouse, the brewery is located at 8 Grove St, Upton. You can buy beer online for curbside pickup or buy cans inside. The website is www.rasbrewhouse.com and you can sign up for their newsletter there. If you enjoy beer, please consider trying this new business within our BI family.

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

