

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

***A WORD FROM RABBI FELLMAN***



During the middle of Hanukkah, my kids received packets of seeds from PJ Library. I experienced emotional whiplash of being upset that PJ Library seemed to be rushing the holidays, then relieved that this was a reminder that “2020” was almost over, then panicked about the thought of having to try and keep alive something else in our family. After all those feelings in rapid succession, I could smile and even laugh, because there was such a miniscule chance that my kids would eat the arugula micro greens that they sent, even if they helped grow it.

Some of my fondest memories growing up were of planting parsley on Tu B’shvat and harvesting it, two months later, to serve as part of our seder plate for Passover. In this way, we were intentionally preparing for the next holiday as part of the celebration of the prior one or in this case, two holidays prior (don’t forget about Purim). As the years flow from one into another, our calendar and holidays keep flowing, as do our observances.

Planting seeds for the future is a central value that we hold in Judaism. It is even the source of the quote from the Talmud (BT Taanit, 23a) that adorns the wall of our synagogue lobby. “Just as my ancestors planted for me, so will I plant for my children.” Whether it is arugula or parsley that we are planting becomes irrelevant when we teach our children the value of planting and the patience to see what or even if anything will grow.

This is true for actual plants and it also extends beyond. When we care for the environment, we help to ensure that there will be a world for our children but we also have to teach our children the value of caring, otherwise they might not leave it to their children. *Shmirat Hateva*, protecting the environment, is so much more than just planting. In a way that works *m’dor l’dor*, from generation to generation, when we demonstrate that we are willing and able to care for the environment, when we also show compassion, concern, care, appreciation, and love to others, we are demonstrating and teaching through action.

During Hanukkah, Ari and I rolled up our sleeves, grabbed a handful of rags, and planted an arugula micro garden with our children, because this is something that we should and need to do together. I encourage you to plant something with your families - even if on Zoom. It should also help that seeds are easy to send in the mail, plants not as much.

Happy Tu B’shvat!



## ***TU B'SHVAT HIGIYA (TU B'SHVAT IS COMING)***

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

This month features Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees. In Israel, the almond trees will soon be blossoming. Do you have a favorite tree? We had a wonderful backyard crab apple tree when I was growing up, although I enjoyed the blossoms more than the wormy fruit.



The Torah is clear that we are created to be stewards of the land. Even in time of war, we should be protecting fruit trees. It is wonderful to plant a tree (perhaps in Israel through JNF, or at BI through our own Tree Fund), but they do take a long time to mature. If you are looking for a quicker reward, it is easy to find.

During this past summer with COVID keeping so many of us at home, many spent time in the outdoors, and tried to get closer to the earth. Some of us have planted gardens. Even some of us who have previously not been gardeners have tended to plants tenderly.

People without gardens have been trying to have a closer connection with the produce of our earth, as well. Many visit farmers' markets in season, and know that their food is fresh and local. Some go to a farm with pick-your-own options.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is another option to feel closer to the land and good about the food we eat. CSA allows consumers to buy local seasonal food directly from a farmer by contracting at the beginning of a season, and then sharing in their harvest with weekly portions all season long. The contents of your weekly share – a variety of beautiful vegetables at their peak – will depend on the harvest each week. If you like to cook, are happy to consider vegetables that are new to you, and can handle a large box of vegetables every week (or can plan to split a share with a neighbor) you might want to consider a CSA share. There are several CSAs in the area.

It was my daughter who told me about CSAs several years ago, and I am following her lead in supporting a CSA. I love that my younger generation was so attuned to the rhythms of the earth and the growing season. It just made sense to get better food and help a local farmer at the same time.

Buying through a farm share increases my awareness of the bounty of the earth, as well as the disruptions of nature. Even though drought made last summer a tough growing season, my farmer was able to coax an ample harvest from her fields. From the farmers' point of view, having a set of customers committed at the beginning of the season ensures that they are selling their harvested produce and that they know what the price will be. That's the "supported" part of the CSA. We can feel good not only about the quality of the food we eat, but also about our interdependence with local growers.



We will end this month with Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees. When I eat fruits and grains native to Israel, dried fruits, nuts, figs, dates, olives, or pomegranates, I feel linked to the promised land, flowing with milk and honey. May we all be able to maintain and increase our connections, during COVID and beyond, at this new year!

## ***HANUKKAH RECAP – THANKS TO ALL WHO MADE IT HAPPEN!***

It was wonderful to see so many BI-ers in our variety of Hanukkah events this year. Our Eight Days and Nights of Hanukkah programming highlighted the variety of groups and activities in our congregational community, from Social Action to Sisterhood to Brotherhood to Educational activities for children and adults, and much more. Our Saturday night concert with singer Neshama Carlebach was enjoyed by close to 100 people. Special thanks to our volunteers and to professional staff who worked to plan and implement this special Hanukkah programming. We hope it filled your homes with light and joy!

## ***VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: EVELYN HERWITZ HARRIS PAULA SOMMER, BETH ISRAEL PRESIDENT***

It is my pleasure to spotlight a congregant who has quietly performed an extraordinary amount of work since COVID started. It's time to acknowledge what has been up until now a flurry of behind-the-scenes efforts.

Evie Herwitz Harris has done monumental work for our community throughout this difficult time. She started by launching our successful Voter Registration Initiative in the summer. Through Evie's efforts, we were able to highlight the importance of registering to vote, and we managed to spread the message through social media.



Evie's work on this project revealed a need for some improvements in our electronic communications, which are becoming more important in keeping us connected as a congregation. With that in mind, she has been instrumental in designing publicity, keeping us informed with engaging and informative weekly emails, and even the special daily Hanukkah activities. Evie is also heading two working groups, keeping our technology upgrades moving forward, and streamlining communications. In addition, in 2021, look for a new look for the BI website.

Taking a break from screen time, on a beautiful Shabbat afternoon in October, Evie led an autumn tree exploration around Elm Park, and showed us the one elm tree still thriving in the area. Evie, thank you so much for your tremendous support of BI.

*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)*

## ***CELEBRATE TU B'SHVAT WITH A BOTANICAL PRINTMAKING WORKSHOP WITH ROWAN MASON – JANUARY 31***

We have a special opportunity coming up for Jewish learning combined with artistic expression, and you don't need to be an artist of any kind to participate! On January 31, from 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. our own Rowan Mason will lead a nature-based workshop. Rowan will teach us about the long time practice of illustrating psalms and about the ancient text Perek Shirah. Participants will then illustrate a verse from Perek Shira, under their direction, using techniques of botanical monoprinting. Materials will be provided in advance for pickup at BI. Mark this date on your calendar now, and watch your weekly emails for information on how to register.

## ***BI EXPRESS DELIVERED HANUKKAH HAPPINESS***

Did you receive a Hanukkah goody bag brought to your house? Who was that masked (wo)man? Our intrepid delivery squad, Kathy and Jerry Krieger, and Ellen McShera, attempted to deliver to all the local members who were not able to come to the office. It was an intense effort. If you see them on Zoom, thank them for spreading holiday light and cheer, and helping to keep us connected.

## ***TORAH/KEMACH COLLABORATION***

The Talmud teaches, "Ein kemach, ein Torah; ein Torah, ein kemach; If there is no food, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no food." We invite you to join us on Friday mornings as we do both.

Start with 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!

Immediately following TGIF, log off and click the Zoom link for Kemach with Rabbi Eve Eichenholz of Congregation Agudat Achim— a weekly cooking class. Rabbi Eichnholz's class will start at approximately 11:15, to allow participants to finish TGIF. Links for both programs are in the weekly emails.

## ***MEMBERS TOGETHER UPDATE***

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 December, we learned about how IsraAID supports women's empowerment in Nepal with Rebecca Shirazi, who went on a Project Inspire trip there. We also heard former Young Emissary Dror Ben Ami compare of growth milestones in Israel and the United States, from a psychological perspective.

In January, we have one Members Together Program, since there are two other Sunday morning experiences planned (see elsewhere in this edition for specifics). It's brought to us by Beth Israel's Brotherhood.

### **January 10 – Brotherhood Presents: Wine on the Vine with Steve Wolfe**



The Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs (FJMC) has just launched a new initiative called *Wine on the Vine (WOTV)*. This program brings us closer to Israel by supporting their emerging wine industry and underwriting several Israeli youth cultural programs yet environmentally sustainable.

Since the 1920s, Jews have helped Israel by planting trees so that the barren hillsides could, once again, become rich and fertile. Now the FJMC has taken this type of proactive Israeli support to the next level. Commemorate a simcha, graduation, bris, or someone's passing, or send a thank you by planting a vine in Israel with WOTV. The FJMC also realized that a younger generation wanted to help Israel take its 'rightful place' in the wine world. Growing grapes is "green" friendly and sustainable. Planted vines will grow the grapes to make delicious kosher wine for generations.

Join us at 9:00 a.m. on January 10, right after morning minyan. Bring coffee and breakfast, if you like (Wine would be thematic, but it's a little early in the day for that). We'll have half an hour of schmoozing, breaking into smaller groups if there is a large turnout. Then at 9:30 Steve will tell us all about how we can be part of this new initiative.

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

## ***ZOOM WITH BI ON SHABBAT***

Shabbat morning services via Zoom are attracting lots of participation. Moving our minyan to Zoom has allowed participants to see the service leaders' faces and to see one another while maintaining health and safety. With the move to Zoom, there are also opportunities for more congregants to participate in the service – reading Torah, leading the congregation in readings from the Siddur (both English and Hebrew), leading kiddush and motzi at the end. 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.

On Shabbat Hanukkah we also had a Kabbalat Shabbat service via Zoom. It was musical and spiritual and felt almost like we were physically together to welcome Shabbat. The Ritual Committee is working to determine other opportunities for Shabbat congregational experiences.

Watch your weekly email for more details on the BI Shabbat Zoom experience and for information on how you can participate in the service by reading selected prayers or reading Torah.

## ***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! The Zoom link is in your weekly emails.



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

In keeping with the focus on fruit trees this time of year, it's worth reflecting on how fruitful Beth Israel's year-long partnership with Hadar Institute's Project Zug has been so far! Thanks to the generosity of Barry Aframe, all BI members have unlimited use of the whole Project Zug catalogue of courses for all of 5781. Many of us are learning on our own, with a partner of our own choosing or one chosen by the Project Zug staff for us. Many Beth Israel congregants have also participated in the two group learning opportunities we have offered. Just prior to the High Holy Days, we offered the course "Unlocking the Machzor." More recently, we taught "Everyday Moral Dilemmas." Now we are ready for a third group class.

Our new 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](mailto: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* 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.

## ***SHMIRAT HA-TEVA AT RIMON***

### ***Dale Rosenberg, Director of Education/Programming***



With Tu B'Shvat – the New Year of the Trees – coming up, Rimon will be focusing on the Jewish principle of *Shmirat HaTeva* – our obligation to protect the environment. As is true with so much Jewish learning, our study of *Shmirat HaTeva* is both old and new, timely and timeless. Jewish environmental consciousness is as ancient as the Torah's prescriptions about protecting fruit trees in time of war, and as current as concern about climate change.

The holiday of *Tu B'Shvat* has been invented and reinvented multiple times. It appears in the Mishneh as the New Year of the Trees, a marker of a tree's age, which was necessary to fulfill mitzvot concerning sacrifices of fruit and nuts in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. With the Temple destroyed in 70 CE, the holiday was studied through our texts but not observed for hundreds of years. Then, during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Lurianic Kabbalistic Revival it was reimagined as a mystical holiday. The first Haggadah for a Tu B'Shvat Seder, patterned after the Passover Seder and focusing on the mystical significance of trees, was written by Isaac Luria himself. More recently, mid-twentieth century Jewish communities began celebrating Tu B'Shvat as a conservationist holiday.

Every year for Tu B'Shvat, Rimon holds a fruit-filled seder that melds the conservationist and mystical elements of Tu B'Shvat. As we eat fruit and nuts and drink grape juice, we learn about trees and their mystical import, as well as their importance in the health of our planet. Students participate in tree-related crafts, as well.

This year, our seder will occur via Zoom on January 27, Erev Tu B'Shvat, led by guest teacher Rabbi Ahuvah Loewenthal. Materials will be delivered to students' homes in advance. The congregation is invited to join us and learn more about this ancient, new holiday and its many meanings.

Would you like to learn more about Rimon? Do you have a topic you'd like to share with the children of Rimon as a guest instructor? Do you know a family looking for a fun and inclusive religious school experience? Contact me at [rimon@bethisraelworc.org](mailto:rimon@bethisraelworc.org)

## ***JOIN BI FOR A (VIRTUAL) TRIP TO PARIS ON JANUARY 24***

Ah, Paris! The City of Lights. It's known for food, romance, art, architecture – and also Jewish history. Take a virtual walk around Le Marais, the historically Jewish neighborhood in Paris. See Hotel Sully, the Place des Vosges, the famous L'As du Falafel, the oldest synagogue in Paris, shops, bakeries, Shoah memorial, and more.

Join us Sunday morning, January 24 at 9:30 for a virtual tour of the Jewish neighborhood of Paris. Bring your quiche and baguette. Sip your cafe au lait in comfort as our wonderful guide shows us all the sites and tells their stories. Tour lasts one and a half hours with a Q&A after. Recipes provided to registrants, or make up your own. This tour, organized by Bunny Callahan, is being offered as a fundraiser for Beth Israel's future programming. The cost is just \$10 per screen. Watch your weekly email for instructions on how to register.

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

The Racial Justice Initiative Committee, led by Alan Harris, had its first event on December 27. Alan introduced the event, talking about the goals of the Committee and giving an overview of the African American holiday of Kwanzaa. Then we viewed a video of Rabbi Angela Buchdahl calling for a new approach to Jewish peoplehood, one based on concepts of family rather than race. This was followed by a lively discussion of the issues Rabbi Buchdahl raised, ably moderated by Martha Hurwitz.

The goals of the Racial Justice Initiative Committee are:

- To learn and share with the Beth Israel Community the experiences of African Americans and other People of Color here in Worcester and across the United States.
- To learn and share how African Americans experience words of prejudice and/or experience racism, both personal and systemic, in the Jewish community as well as in the country at large.
- To learn and share what Systemic (Institutional) Racism means and how it is differentiated from personal racism.
- To learn and share what the many terms related to racism mean and how they are used, understood, felt and interpreted.
- To learn and share how we as a community can develop ideas and projects to enhance racial equity and inclusion in our Worcester community and/or the country at large.

To this end, several of the members of the Committee are attending a four-part course offered by the Conservative Movement in January: Race-Consciousness Training for Synagogue Leaders. We are also planning events for the congregation, including one honoring Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to be held on the holiday commemorating his birthday, Monday January 18. Look for details in your weekly emails. Future events may include congregational reading and discussion, guest speakers, other film viewings. There is 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](mailto:alwharris@aol.com) or 508-757-5305) if you are interested in joining the BI Racial Justice Initiative Committee.

## ***COMMUNITY ZOOM WITH FORMER YOUNG EMISSARY RON MAROM***

On Sunday, January 17, at 9:00 a.m. one of our former Shinshinim (Israeli Young Emissaries) is giving a presentation for the Central Massachusetts Jewish Community. Ron Marom, Shinshin during 2006-2007, will talk about "Following Values vs. Life Challenges." Ron has started a new career as a software architect after 10 years of working in software development in the Israeli Air Force. Watch your weekly email for the Zoom link. In this time when we are unable to have emissaries on site, it's so enlightening and enjoyable to keep touch with our former emissaries through Zoom. Thanks to Liz Baker for keeping in touch with them and arranging these opportunities!



## Pernet Family Health Service

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December 1, 2020

Congregation Beth Israel  
15 Jamesbury Drive  
Worcester, MA 01609

Dear friends at Congregation Beth Israel,

Your donation has helped to provide over 9,200 pounds of food to over 260 families in the Worcester County area. It warms our hearts, and we are grateful for your donation of \$90 worth of gift cards in support of the Pernet Thanksgiving Holiday Program.

During this pandemic, many families continue to have tough times and difficulty putting a Thanksgiving meal on the table. The contributions of kindhearted donors such as you brings much needed support to the people we serve.

There is no way to fully express our gratitude for your loyalty. We are continually inspired by the dedication and generosity of donors like yourself who answer the call to give because you believe, as we do, in the dignity and worth of each individual.

Thank you again for making this year's Thanksgiving Holiday Program a success! Our warmest wishes for a happy holiday season!

Sincerely yours,

Sheilah Dooley  
Executive Director



*Pernet Family Health Service, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charity. In accordance with IRS regulations, no goods or services were provided to the donor in consideration of this gift. This gift has helped us carry out our mission of improving the lives of people in our region.*



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## ***NEWS FROM THE SHARING/CARING NETWORK***

### ***Crafts Thursday Continues – and It's Not Just for Crafty Folks!***

Since November, we've been getting together weekly on Thursdays under the able direction of Hostess with the Mostess Michelle Cochran. Meeting via Zoom, some of us are crocheting and knitting blankets for Habitat for Humanity clients, or doing other crafts.

You don't need to be a knitter or crochet-er to join. We love company when we're crafting! It's a chance to have fun and socialize weekly, whether you are "crafty" or not. Use Crafts Thursday as an opportunity to check in on some old friends, or make some new ones.

Join us each Thursday at 1:00 as we spend an hour together crafting and chatting. Just email the office to get the Zoom link, or find it in your weekly email.

### ***Textiles Drive for Habitat for Humanity***

If you missed our Thanksgiving Weekend winter accessories donation day, or if you still have materials you'd like to donate, there's a new opportunity. On January 3, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, Habitat for Humanity invites you to participate in a Clothing FUNDrive. It will be held at the ReStore Parking Lot, 640 Lincoln Street, Worcester, MA. Look for the MI-BOX Trailer to deliver your clothing! When you pull into the parking lot, the storage trailer is immediately on your left. Someone will be at the MI-BOX trailer to help!



They will be collecting and storing donations of textiles to benefit their mission to build homes, communities and hope. You may drop off on Sunday, January 3rd from 9 AM to Noon with no appointment. They welcome clothing of all types and for all sizes, ages, and seasons.

Donations must be placed in large trash bags and tied shut. Clothing should be gently used – no stains or rips. Please do not include hangers.

For more information, contact [erin.sullivan@habitatmwgw.org](mailto:erin.sullivan@habitatmwgw.org)

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

