Imagine walking into a service for 5th graders and hearing the students singing at the top of their lungs with huge smiles on their faces. That was my experience every week when I attended my son Yaniv’s Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday afternoon at the Hausner Jewish Day School. What was the reason they were so “into it”? Three words: Rabbi Josh Warshawsky (See box below). Every time they had the chance to sing one of Josh’s melodies, they went crazy. And so did their teacher Aviv Matzkin! They were all having a blast singing together and welcoming Shabbat with joy.

On January 26-29, Etz Chayim will have the privilege of hosting Rabbi Josh Warshawsky for the weekend. Josh is truly one of the leading singer-songwriters of this generation and I can’t wait for you all to meet him and experience his music. While I have been listening to his melodies for the last couple of years, I met him for the first time when I was in LA last year for the Kol Tefillah conference. Dave Rosen, Cassidy Crawford and I all attended the conference which brought together seven of today’s leading singer-songwriters, Josh among them. I was very moved not only by Josh’s musical talent but also his gift to educate and connect with others.

As a congregation that loves to sing and learn, I thought Josh would be a perfect fit for our community. Thanks to the leadership of the SULAM Project (a project that explores prayer and musical innovation at Etz) there will be many opportunities that weekend to experience Josh and his music. On Thursday evening, Josh will host a gathering for anybody who wants to come and get a preview of the melodies he’ll be teaching over the course of the weekend. On Friday evening and Shabbat morning he will be co-leading the services with me. On Saturday morning he’ll also lead Torah study, offering us insight into how he writes new melodies for prayers. Saturday evening will be a family style concert at the JCC (Etzniks get a special discount!) and on Sunday morning he'll be leading a program for our religious school students and parents.

It’s not every day you get to experience a rising star. Rabbi Josh Warshawsky’s melodies are inspiring the next generation of Jews to not only sing out with all their heart, but also to deepen the joy of the prayer experience. May we all have this experience very soon at Etz Chayim.

Rabbi Josh Warshawsky is a nationally touring Jewish musician, songleader, and composer. Originally from Chicago, Josh has shared his original melodies with over 100 Jewish communities throughout the US, Canada, the UK, and Israel. He has released four albums of Jewish music with a fifth on the way, and he has been featured on six Jewish music anthology publications in the last six years.

In addition to his work with communities worldwide, Rabbi Warshawsky currently serves as the rabbi-in-residence of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Metropolitan Chicago. Josh was ordained as a rabbi in May 2019 from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles. He serves on the faculty of Songleader Boot Camp where he also leads the Ramah Shabbaton and Chavurah. Josh has spent the past 20 summers at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, and the last 9 summers also teaching and performing at Ramah camps across the country.

Josh now lives in Columbus, OH with his wife Adina Allen.
A few weeks ago, I sent out an appeal for a few volunteers to help straighten out our member name tags which had devolved into a tangle of strings. I heard from a few Etzniks right away and, by the following Shabbat, it was possible to find one’s name tag again.

But a comment I heard afterward shook me. “I noticed how bad they were,” a former Board member said to me. “And I had the urge to take a box into the Beyt Knesset with me and straighten them out.”

“Why didn’t you?” I asked. “I wasn’t sure it was my place,” she answered. I almost cried.

I’ve read endless articles about how the isolation of Covid has changed social gatherings. People are having trouble remembering how to behave in groups, how to chitchat, how to put some hummus on a plate and only then feeling free to double-dip their baby carrot.

So it looks like Etzniks are having trouble remembering, as Rabbi Emeritus Ari Cartun once put it, that we are people who “pick up the first chair.”

It’s one of our congregational metaphors we may have forgotten. Just as we are the choir at services, we are much more. Etzniks have always seen what needed to be done and done it. If you see something that needs to be straightened up, feel free to double-dip your baby carrot.

If you notice a project that is beyond your reach (literally because it needs a ladder or metaphorically because you don’t know how to reset the timer for the patio lights), ask for help from another Etznik or send me a message so I can find someone who can do it. I often only see things that need fixing when someone points them out to me. If you are hankering for a project, I can usually find one that suits your skills.

Our mission statement says our community is driven by members. Next time you are in the building, please remember that we are all in the driver’s seat and be sure to keep your hands on the steering wheel (or the name tags, chairs, or plates) and look around to see what might need to be done. And do it.

How to Act Like an Etznik
by Ellen Bob
Executive Director
Pirkei Avot in a Box

by Abra Greenspan
Director of Learning

Pirkei Avot (variously known as Chapters of the Fathers, Sayings of the Fathers, Wisdom of the Sages, or Ethics of the Fathers) is a small and pithy collection of short statements of advice, ethics, and wisdom. These sayings come from the Mishna and have been a part of Jewish life since the 3rd century CE.

For years, it has been a core text of our Bar/t Mitzvah Family Class and B’nei Mitzvah experiences at many synagogues. I remember receiving a copy from my rabbi at my Bat Mitzvah; I still have it with his inscription. Both of my sons received copies (a different translation and edition than mine) at their Bar Mitzvah services, inscribed by all of the rabbis at that synagogue at that time.

At Etz Chayim, for years we have struggled to find just the right translation/edition and which 10 or so selections to include in the curriculum. Each edition has something about it that we like and yet it is not quite right for our purposes. Our Emeritus Rabbi Ari Cartun eventually chose to do his own translations.

For Chaim, Vicky, and me, it has been an iterative process. As the families encountered the text, their questions often pushed us to look again at the translation. This year, we selected a few sayings to include in the class. Why did certain phrases seem inauthentic to our Etz values? How could we retain the essence of the original yet put it into language that better reflected what our families experience?

At the end of the Family Class in December, we were looking for a way to seal the Pirkei Avot learning for the participants. On a whim, we hit upon the idea of Pirkei Avot in a Box. Even then, as we assembled the box for the families, we wrestled with some translations that we had used during the class and reworked them with Ari’s translations.

Upon reflection, this process is a strong demonstration of the power and depth of these sayings: the advice, ethics and wisdom from more than two thousand years ago still resonate so strongly that we feel compelled to find ways to understand and express them in our time.

Why I’m Excited to Read this issue

by Preeva Tramiel
Connections Editor

This issue covers elements of the past, present, and future and how they relate to our community. Karen Bergen, leader of the Yiddish Choristers and co-leader of the Mitzvah Singers, and Abra Greenspan, Director of Education, talk about two old and ancient influences on our congregation; Yiddish, and Pirkei Avot, an ancient piece of our Jewish wisdom that is still relevant. It is in the spirit of Pirkei Avot that Ellen Bob recalls the congregational value of “Moving the First Chair,” in her column.

The present events are coming right up! Rabbi Chaim introduces our Artist-in-Residence, Rabbi Josh Warshawsky, who will be here for four days near the end of January. See more about his visit on the back cover.

And there are two pages about our new HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) system. As someone who shvitzed through many a warm Shabbat in the summer and cringed when the blowers of the old heating system thundered into action in the winter, I’m SO pleased with the improvements! There are two articles on the new system—a box on the bottom of page 5, with content contributed by James Baloun, and an article written by Jeff Weitzman our Building Committee Chair. Jeff’s article answers the question of “what took so long?” and explains how this major improvement is part of the vision of Etz 3.0.

And there are 5 Bar/t Mitzvah profiles.

Enjoy!
November at Etz Chayim has traditionally been the time when a small group of Etzniks gather in a dark corner of the building, recite a few ancient prayers, and fire up the 60 year-old boiler to reanimate our heating system. When it worked, the high priest of Facilities, James Baloun, would declare “We have made fire!” and there would be much rejoicing. This November, with the touch of a finger on a control pad, a brand new heat pump-driven HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning) system went live, and Etz Chayim entered the modern age of energy-efficient building conditioning systems.

Construction of the $1.35 million system started in June and is finishing up in January with final inspections and adjustment of controls and schedules. It was designed and engineered by ABBAE, a local engineering firm where one of the “B’s” is congregant Gerson Bers. The general contractor was a small local firm, MidGlen Studio Associates, with major HVAC subcontracting by Bayside Mechanical. We continued to use the facility during the work. The system was finished on time (allowing for a few pandemic supply-chain issues) and a bit under budget, and is, in a word, wonderful.

The new system is a heat pump Variable Refrigerant Flow system. Heat pumps are a highly efficient way to move heat from one space to another, versus generating it from combustion or resistance. This all-electric system can both heat and cool, using outside heat pumps that send hot or cold refrigerant through pipes to individual fan coils (the white boxes you’ll now see near the ceiling) in each room. Every room has its own thermostat, and every room can be heated or cooled to its own set temperature, or follow one of the building-wide schedules we can now program centrally. If necessary, some rooms can be heating and others cooling at the same time! In the Beyt Knesset, additional ducts and vents were installed in the floor to even out the air flow and reduce noise. The existing duct work was repurposed as a fresh-air intake and ventilation system, which is coordinated with the heating and cooling system. The system ensures that we have a proper amount of air exchange at all times. There is even a CO₂ sensor that can adjust the fresh air flow as needed, to save energy. While a bit more expensive to design and install, the system is ideal and energy-saving for a building like ours, where much of the time only a part of the building is in active use and needs to be conditioned.

The new HVAC system will keep everyone comfortable year-round while saving us money and taking advantage of the solar power we're generating from our roof panels. Since we replaced the gas water heater with an efficient hybrid heat pump model as well, we can now turn off the natural gas in the building. This is in line with our congregational values of environmental sensitivity and tikkun olam; a way of getting our house to conform with our values while dealing with a warming globe.

As you can imagine, construction that touched every room in an old building was a big job. We had to undertake asbestos abatement to remove the old boiler and pipes and drywall in the mechanical room and elsewhere in the building. A new mezzanine level was constructed above the old mechanical room space so all the new air handling equipment for the Beyt Knesset (and the new hot water heater) could be moved above an expanded kitchen. The several large outdoor heat pumps were installed on new concrete pads enclosed in acoustically-treated enclosures to keep the fan noise from bothering our neighbors, and ensure our own pleasant use of the patio and yard. Along the way we discovered related problems that were, or will be, repaired as well: all of the bathroom exhaust fans had stopped working and will be replaced, and many of the roof drains were completely clogged and overflowing the roof. The hot water recirculating system was also repaired to finally bring hot water to the women's restroom.
While this was a big project, it will likely “disappear” for most of us, and we’ll just be happy and comfortable every time we visit Etz. The more visible changes to our building are yet to come.

The HVAC system is Phase 1 of a larger project to renovate our facility. The investment only made sense if our building would continue to be our long-term home. In 2019 and 2020 a task force developed a strategic plan for facilities, taking into account our membership objectives, programmatic uses, and the realities of the real estate market. That process resulted in a decision to stay and renovate our facility to meet our needs for many years to come, and the vision for Etz 3.0 was formulated. The plan includes the new HVAC system (phase 1), new and renovated spaces (phase 2), and general upgrade and maintenance of the entire building and grounds. The second phase, which is planned to include construction of a new outdoor pavilion and patio, an expanded and renovated kitchen, and a new lounge off the lobby and upgraded building entrance, is underway. The design has been submitted to the City of Palo Alto, and we hope to start construction this year or next. A Building Committee (Jeff Weitzman (Chair), Ellen Bob, Jon Kaplan, Rob Rubenstein, Ellen Siminoff, Janis Zinn) is working with our architects from Studio Bondy Associates on the design.

It’s all part of ensuring that Etz continues to be neither fancy nor falling down, a warm, welcoming home for our community that we all love and respect.

Old VS. New Systems

**Old system:** • Heated hundreds of gallons of water behind the kitchen. • Hot water was circulated 24 hours a day for six months all the way to the office wing. • Furnace burned 16 hours a day, off 8 hours every night. Means needing to reheat the water every morning. • The 55 year old furnace was inefficient. • The hot water pipes radiated and wasted heat. • The thermostats were very crude and heated rooms which did not need heat or worse, did not function correctly and left the room cold. • The system was controlled by air pressure which required an air compressor that burned energy and made noise. • No A/C!! Hot days were very hard for our staff. • The old air ducts hadn't been cleaned of dust for 55 years.

**New system:** • Split refrigerant system with individual units in each room. • Outdoor compressors are efficient and quiet. Outdoor units are mounted on the ground and not the roof so we avoid noise in the building. • We only heat or cool occupied rooms. • Fully computer controlled. • Includes potable water heater. • We removed all natural gas units so we were able to disconnect utility gas service (saves $160/month plus cost of gas used). • We are now all electric, so we take advantage of existing wind, hydro, and solar power across the western states. • Split system includes distribution units that allow a room too hot to transfer heat to a room too cold. • Moving heat is much more efficient than creating heat. • The new system has a carbon dioxide sensor. When the BK is empty the air circulation runs at a lower level. When there are 200 people attending a Shabbat service and the CO₂ level rises, the system automatically increases the airflow.
Why do People Argue Over Yiddish?

by Karen Koppel Bergen

Etz’s Yiddish Enthusiast

Here’s a brief true conversation from a Yiddish Choristers rehearsal at Etz Chayim a few years ago. (Names have been changed to protect the fiercely protective disputants in a discussion about the pronunciation of a word.)

Yonkel: I know it’s pronounced the way I said it. My bubbe (grandma) said it that way.

Reizele: Okay. But I know it’s pronounced the way I said it. My zeyde (grandfather) said it that way.

And you know what? They’re both right! Welcome to the world of Yiddish!

Yiddish began in Germany, about 1000 years ago. As Yiddish speakers moved to various parts of Eastern Europe, from up north in Lithuania to down south in Hungary, the language has grown, added and subtracted elements, grammar, syntax and sentence structures and changed certain vowel sounds. Yiddish differences are similar to sound differences in the USA, such as “park” in California, compared with “pahk” in Boston.

About 25% of the Yiddish speakers living in Eastern Europe before World War II spoke the northern dialect, called Litvish, and the rest spoke the southeastern dialect, called Galitsish. (Even Galitsish had local variants.)

To complicate the situation even further, in the early 1900s an effort to standardize the way Yiddish is transliterated using English letters was undertaken and adopted by the Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO). This system relies heavily on Galitsish elements from the southern range of Yiddish speaking Jews, but the system’s sound preferences leaned toward the northerly Litvish sound system.

In other words, if one learns to pronounce Yiddish according to the YIVO-approved transliterations, one will use vocabulary and grammar from the southern parts of the Yiddish-speaking world, and the sound system from the northern part. No one who learned as a child to speak either dialect will be happy.

But isn’t that about as good a compromise as one can hope for?

So, now we have the answer to the question, “Why do people argue over Yiddish?” They argue about it because they defend what they grew up with, for instance:

Rabbi Emeritus Ari Cartun: “My dad and his brothers spoke Yiddish, and when my dad was in the army in WW2 he was asked to be a translator for German prisoners. That both got the intel the U.S. was seeking, as well as insulting the Germans by being interpreted in a Yiddish accent. When I went to Germany for the first time, I knew German from the Yiddish I learned, and people asked me what part of Germany I came from. I just smiled.

“My family is Litvak, so we said sheel instead of shul, sheifer instead of shofar, etc.”

From anonymous: “my mother…was not a native speaker, but her parents were immigrants and her bubbe never learned English.” (She spoke Litvish.) “It’s surprising how Yiddish comes out of my mouth with my grandson. I told him to "gai shlu"f when I was trying to rock him to sleep. ("Go to sleep.")

“My husband and I had trouble communicating — his family is from the Polish Yiddish region (Galitsish). I asked if he wanted to send out shanah tayvas (new year’s cards), he had no idea what I was talking about. but it wasn’t a serious problem. He grew up with four yiddish speaking grandparents living nearby. When my husband was a kid he thought people developed Yiddish accents as they aged. He didn’t know any old people who spoke with an American accent.”

Both of Ruth Lowy’s parents "grew up in Yiddish speaking households and both spoke Yiddish very well. My father spoke Litvak; my mother spoke Galitziana. I learned Yiddish from my mother and all my grandparents on both sides. My father would joke with my mother (in a nice way) about being a Galitziana because of her and her mother’s accents.

“To this day when I speak Yiddish I will use both pronunciations for words interchangeably without thinking about it. e.g. ‘pitter’ or ‘putter’ = butter no matter how you say it.”

Both of Ron Shipper’s parents spoke Galitsish (or Galitzianer) Yiddish. They conversed with others who spoke the same dialect so didn’t experience misunderstandings. He continues, “My dad experienced problems being understood here in California, on one occasion he kept asking at a medical office for the noice and it took some time for them to realize he was asking for the nurse.”

Want to hear more? You can point your cellphone camera here and listen to Karen Bergen demonstrating Yiddish!
Caleb Swartzberg, September 10, 2022 (he/him) is an eighth-grader at Hillview Middle School. He has three brothers, Aden (16), Cole (10) and Kai (7). Caleb’s interests include baseball (playing and umpiring), skiing, art, history, science, math and… video games. For his Tikkun Olam Habit, Caleb has worked with local organizations that focus on helping people in need of housing and food.

Seth Wiesner, November 5, 2022 (he/him), son of Leland Wiesner and Maricar Horton, is a sophomore at Palo Alto High School (Paly). He enjoys hanging out with his older sister Fiona and younger brother Lev. Since he was 4 years old, Seth has swum on the Palo Alto Stanford Aquatics (PASA) Rinconada swim team and now also swims and plays water polo at Paly High School. He raced on Squaw/Palisades Far West ski team for several years and also enjoys hiking, biking, trying new foods, gaming and playing with his two dogs Simon and Frasier. For his Tikkun Olam Habit, Seth is volunteering to mentor in the 5th Grade Class at Etz. Seth enjoys computer technology and discussing social issues impacting people less fortunate in the world.

Lexi Stanford, November 12, 2022 (she/her) is a tenth grader at Waldorf School of the Peninsula. She has a younger sister who is also at Waldorf. Her interests include sailing, playing saxophone, playing board games, traveling, hanging out with friends, and listening to music. Lexi especially loves the ocean where she enjoys scuba diving and looking for nudibranchs, octopi, and eels. For her Tikkun Olam Habit, Lexi volunteered with the California State Parks Foundation to restore coastal habitat at Half Moon Bay State Beach. She worked with the foundation to remove invasive plants, prepare the land for native plantings, and create inviting habitats for local birds, animals and insects.

Ronan Laughlin, February 4, 2023 (he/him) son of Neil and Stacy Laughlin and younger brother of Asher Laughlin, is a seventh grader at Union Middle School in San Jose. His interests include electronic music production, piano, camping, geocaching, biking, world travel, and computer gaming. He is a percussionist in Symphonic Band and Percussion Ensemble at school and is very active in his local Boy Scout Troop. For his Tikkun Olam Habit, Ronan participated in a variety of Community Service Projects through the Boy Scouts, Etz, and on his own. One of his favorite projects was fixing up old bikes for donation to Good Karma Bikes, a non-profit bike shop in San Jose that provides refurbished bikes to people in need.

Leah Telyaz, February 11, 2023 (she/her) daughter of Yelda & Leon Telyaz, is a seventh grader at JLS Middle School. She has a human brother Isaac and a dog brother Simba. Leah loves food, manti (Turkish ravioli) is her favorite. Leah plays volleyball and does gymnastics. For her Tikkun Olam Habit, Leah gathered over 50 books of her own and from her friends, and donated them. She also raised funds from her friends & family for the World Food Programme organization.
Dates to Remember!

Artist in Residence: Rabbi Josh Warshawsky  
A Song Circle with Rabbi Josh (Beyt Knesset and online)  
Kabbalat Service with Rabbi Josh (Beyt Knesset and online)  
Torah Study with Rabbi Josh (Beyt Knesset and online)  
Morning Service with Rabbi Josh (Beyt Knesset and online)  
Rabbi Josh and the Chaverai Neverach Band (JCC, see email)  
Rabbi Josh Magical Musical Tour (Etz Religious School, BK)  
ETZ Talk: Arabian Judaism and the Early Muslims with Professor Hamza Zafer  
Purim ETZtravaganza  
Purim Spiel

Thurs, Jan 26 - Sun, Jan 29  
Thurs, Jan 26, 7:00 - 9:00 pm  
Fri, Jan 27, 7:30 - 9:00 pm  
Sat, Jan 28, 9:00 - 10:00 am  
Sat, Jan 28, 10:15 am - 12:00 pm  
Sat, Jan 28, 7:30 - 8:30 pm  
Sun, Jan 29, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm  
Sun, Feb 26, 10:00 am  
Sun, Mar 5, 9:30 am - 12:00 pm  
Mon, Mar 6, 7:00 pm