



The Shofar

Temple Beth El • Bakersfield, CA
Where Judaism Lives

February 2022 • Shevat/Adar-I 5782



Tu B'Shevat 2022

Panorama Park
(at Loma Linda Dr.)



Thank you, everyone who came out to celebrate Tu B'Shevat and Martin Luther King Day by planting a beautiful Live Coastal Oak.

Special thanks to:

Melissa Iger and the Kern Tree Foundation

Kern County Parks and Recreation Dept.

Lowe's Home Improvement

HomeDepot





The President's Perspective

Dear Chevrei,

Saturday the 15th of January brought the most powerful pictures on tv about Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker and three of his congregants from Temple Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas. They were taken hostage by a person who made his way in with guns during Shabbat services. The hostages were freed after 11 hours unharmed!

Rabbi Klein led Pirkei Avot so that the community was able to voice what they were feeling. The session allowed us to express the fear and anguish we were feeling and complete helplessness. Yasher Koach Rabbi!

A prayer vigil was later attended by 1000 windows on Zoom with countless others in those windows through the URJ. It was uplifting and awesome to be with all these caring, loving and spiritual people.

I remember when an anti-Semitic incident in Thousand Oaks happened several years ago, Rabbi Rosenstein told me that we can't let fear take us to the point that we do not leave the house. We need to rise above our fear and take action!

As we go forth in the coming weeks, please take into account what is important to you, your family and your community. Find ways to be able to live with our community and appreciate all the differences that make us part of this world and humanity.

On a positive note, Temple Beth El applied for a Security Grant for the purposes of offering security for all our Congregants. We were approved for the grant so the next two years will bring exciting changes! Yasher Koach to our team - Rabbi, Dawn Baron, Irvin Pike, Larry Saslaw, Ilene Schechter and Laura Wolfe!

On Tu B'Shevat, we planted an Oak Tree at Panorama Park brought there by Melissa Iger of the Tree Foundation of Kern. There were boxes of fruits, nuts, olives and a package of seeds to plant vegetables along with a postcard about Martin Luther King Jr in them. I hope everyone got a chance to look at the pictures on Facebook! Yasher Koach to Jill Eglund and Larry Saslaw for organizing this outstanding event!

Kyle Malicdem celebrated his Bar Mitzvah on January 22, 2022. He did an outstanding job. Yasher Koach!

Yasher Koach to all the Congregants of Temple Beth El for all you do to keep us thriving!

"More than the Jewish people have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people!"

Temple Beth El where Judaism lives!

Ilene Schechter, Temple President



The Rabbi's Ruminations

Empathy in an Age of Enmity

“You shall not wrong a Ger or oppress him, for you were Gerim in the land of Egypt” (Ex.22:20).

“You shall not oppress a Ger for you know the soul of the Ger for you were Gerim in the land of Egypt” (Ex.23:9).

“The Ger who resides (Gar) with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were Gerim in the land of Egypt” (Lev.19:34).

“You too must befriend the Ger for you were Gerim in the land of Egypt” (Deut.10:19)

“You shall not abhor an Edomite for he is your kinsman; you shall not hate an Egyptian for you were a Ger in his land” (Deut.23:8).

“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment” (Deut. 24:22)

During our Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe, i.e. High Holy Days), all of our shortcomings—sinful behaviors—are discussed in the collective “we:” “For the sin that WE have committed before You...” Some argue that we do not want to embarrass the individual penitent, so we list an array of transgressions to both name them and also protect anonymity. Others would assert that we do it this way because we need t’shuvah (repentance) whether or not we acknowledge the moral failing in real time; by ensuring that others acknowledge our individual limits, we collectively create “good karma” for the community. Still others point to the idea that the sin of one is the sin of all, that we cannot just accept the sinful tendencies of others, we must work together to create a Tikkun. For all these reasons and more, rabbis claim, we speak of our collective culpability during the Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe).

When it comes to our attitude toward foreign-born people, we are asked both singularly and collectively to remember our history as former immigrants ourselves. Over and over again, we are told both in the singular and in the plural of our obligation to not become hardened to the struggles of immigrants. We may not rationalize any disdain, we may not define their intentions for being here, we must simply not oppress, pressure, coerce, or abhor them, we must simply befriend (Deut 10:19) and love them (Lev. 19:34). We are reminded of our humble beginnings, for we were “slaves” (Deut. 24:22) and Gerim (sojourners, often translated as “strangers” or “dwellers”) “in the land of Egypt,” “in his land” (Deut. 23:8). The focus on both our singular and communal diasporic experience of living in Egypt is in most cases disconnected from our suffering there; it was enough to be living outside of our lands to require us to pay attention to our experience. Add on top of the ordeal of living outside our land the enslavement that came, and the Torah tells us over and over again to be empathetic toward those surrounding us who may not speak our language, may not own real estate, may live in the margins, and may even experience implicit biases that undermine their and their families’ futures.

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Kern County Point-In-Time

HOMELESS COUNT — Thursday 24 February

For many years now, Temple Beth El has participated in the Kern County Point-in-Time Homeless Count. This is an annual event that takes place around the country on the same day. This year, the Point-in-Time Count will be taking place on **Thursday morning, 24 February**.

The goal is to get a snap-shot of the condition of the homeless at the grassroots level. This snap-shot then in-forms HUD of the amount of money it should allocate to communities to address both the immediate needs of this population, as well as the longer-term infrastructural needs that will eventually bring the count to “net zero”.

Be part of the TBE team that goes out and interviews homeless men and women in our community. There is a training session that takes place a few days prior to the count, so teams that go out are prepared.

Questions? Contact either Larry Saslaw or Jill Egland, Social Justice Committee co-chairs.

Sign up here: <https://bkrhc.org/2022-pit-count/>



Support Temple Beth El

Help us sustain our robust vision for Jewish life by contributing to any of the following funds:

General Contributions:

- Tree of Life
- Prayer Book Plates
- Memorials
- Memorial Book
- Kol Nidre
- High Holy Day Seats
- Caring Committee

Specific Funds:

- Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
- Camperships

To contribute online:

<https://templebethelbakersfield.org/donation/>

Changes?

Please notify the Temple office with your membership information — addresses (including email), phone number(s), births, marriage, yahrzeits.

Please help up keep our data base and membership directory updated.



Happy Birthday!

February 2

Ella Abrams

February 3

Eli Raymond Seibert

February 4

Michael Marcus

February 8

Martin Kessler

February 9

Ali Moore

February 11

Hunter Rittenberg

February 13

Karen Briefer

February 15

Isabel Theron

February 16

Paige Hilton

February 17

Henry Wainwright
Matthew Wolfe

February 19

Shelby Rothberg

February 21

Joshua Rudnick

February 22

Rose Blatt

February 24

Zachary Kay

Goodness Gracious!

You know who else
had a birthday in January?

Adison Gartenlaub!

She turned 15 on January 17th.
Happy birthday, Adison!
(...and happy birthing day, Marianne!)

Welcome to Bright Beginnings Learning Center

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Hours: 6:30a.m. to 6:00p.m.

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For more detailed information, contact **Bright Beginnings** at (661) 324-1253

or email: tonibblcdirector@gmail.com



Reminder!
Book Club meets
Sunday, January 30
at 1pm to discuss
The Matzah Ball
by Jean Meltzer!

SISTERHOOD CHAI•LIGHTS

Sisterhood members continue to participate in many exciting and interesting activities! **All activities have been via Zoom and will continue to be in accordance with the temple's opening status!** All activities can be started at any time and no prior attendance is needed. The following is a list of activities coming up in February:

Sunday, February 13th at 1pm

Cooking classes via ZOOM

Sunday, February 20th at 1pm

Legacy Writing Class

Sunday, February 20th at 3pm

Regular monthly Sisterhood meeting

If there is a change due to a conflict we will advise prior to the meeting/activity!! If you have any questions please feel free to email me!!

We hope to see you all at future meetings!

Helen Armistead - Secretary; armisteadlmft@gmail.com

LIZ SHERWYN

Freelance Designer for Projects Large & Small

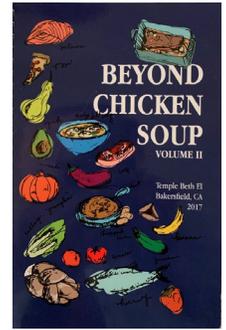
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Yair Emanuel Shalom Metal Wall Hanging

WOMEN OF TEMPLE BETH EL presents COOKING CLASSES via ZOOM



A once-a-month cooking class at **1 pm on special Sundays** featuring Legacy recipes from the cookbook **BEYOND CHICKEN SOUP VOL II**, and an additional recipe of the cook's choice. The cookbook is on sale in the **Temple Beth El Gift Shop** if you don't have one already.

February 13, 2022: It's almost Valentines Day! We are inviting you to **come for the dinner recipes but stay for the dessert.** We'll be featuring **Salmon Cakes** (p. 75) credited to the late **Rose Seide, z"l**, and making a green salad with **Antoinette Hatfield's Papaya Seed Dressing** (p. 31). Since we like to give credit where credit where credit is due, we would love to hear if anyone remembers Rose Seide and Antoinette Hatfield. (Contact Pamela Elisheva if you have information on either ladies and we will mention it in class.) And what would **Valentines Day** be without... **CHOCOLATE?** We'll be demonstrating **Michael Solomonov's Chocolate Almond Situation**, which is flourless chocolate-to-die-for cake which uses almond flour for its secret ingredient. The Not So Secret ingredient being **CHOCOLATE.** We'll provide the recipe to you all, our cooking class **SWEETHEARTS.** Our Cooking class will definitely put you in the mood, even if it is to just love your neighbor as yourself (you can share these delights with the one you love, the one next door or just love yourself because **you are definitely worth it!**)

TO PARTICIPATE: We will send you a Zoom link and the ingredient list (if you want to cook along with the cook) the week before the class.

Questions? wotbesisterhood@gmail.com

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Temple Contributions

Kol Nidre Donation

Leonard and Carla Epstein
Marc Schulman

Tree of Life

Gretchen Bloch, in honor of the birth of Marcus Magnus
Stacy and Mark Davis, in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Kyle Malicdem
Larry Saslaw, in honor of Steve and Gail Magnus
Ilene Schechter, in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Kyle Malicdem
Marc Schulman, in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Kyle Malicdem

Caring Committee

Philip and Deborah Rosenthal
Miriam Stull, in memory of Diane Rudnick
Eytan Wallace, in honor of Rabbi Klein, Phil Rudnick,
Tim Fromm and Irvin Pike

Rabbi Discretionary

Andy and Ella Abrams
Miriam Stull, in memory of Thomas Stull
Lawrence and Karen Zanoff

Memorials/Yahrzeit

Etta Robin, in memory of Michele Kleiman

February 2022 Yahrzeits

2/04 Shabbat Service Yahrzeits	
Harvey Abarbanell , father of Ross Abarbanell	2/1
Meredith Blaustein , cousin of Sylvia Neal z"l	2/1
Lillian Bridges , aunt of Karen Briefer	2/1
Loretta Mae Tackett , mother of Gene Tackett	2/1
Barnett Larks , uncle of Anita Singer	2/2
Francisco Reyes , father of Ricardo Reyes	2/2
Ira Schenkman , father of Richard Schenkman	2/2
Yehudit Sheriki , mother of Haya Klein	2/2, Adar-1 1
Risha Grosberg , remembered by TBE	2/3, Adar-1 2
Bessie Jenkins , grandmother of Terry Skinner	2/3
Frances Bregman , step-mother of Irene Christenson	2/4
Rosa Maria Cohen Arazi , sister of Ana Genel z"l	2/4
Milton Rudnick , brother-in-law of Marcia Rudnick; husband of Diane Rudnick z"l; uncle of Joshua Rudnick, Libbie Mahan and Daniel Rudnick; brother of Phil Rudnick and Miriam Stull; father of Melanie Rudnick	2/4
Sophie Rudnick , sister of Marcia Rudnick, Milton Rudnick z"l, Phil Rudnick and Miriam Stull, aunt of Joshua Rudnick, Libbie Mahan and Daniel Rudnick	2/4
Warren Gold , friend of Leonard and Carla Epstein	2/5
Marty McNeill , friend of Karen Briefer	2/5
Jeanne Zeidman , grandmother of Joy Byrom	2/5
Jerry Goldberg , brother of Donald Goldberg	2/6
Gertrude Gubits , aunt of Lynne Rosenstein, great-aunt of Rabbi Cheryl Rosenstein	2/6, Adar-I 5
Selma Meyer , sister of Ella Abrams	2/6
Saralee Rudnick , mother of Joshua Philip Rudnick	2/7
Yvonne Bitton , mother of Dorise Bitton	2/8, Adar-I 7
Kenneth Carraway , step-father of Connie Wellman, z"l	2/8
Clarence Dorris , father of Gail Magnus, grandfather of Elliott Magnus	2/8
Louis Krute , grandfather of Jackie Rudnick z"l	2/8
David Pike , brother-in-law of Arline Pike z"l, uncle of Irvin Pike	2/8
Jennie Bregor , grandmother of Jackie Rudnick z"l	2/9
Mary Egland , mother of Jill Egland, grandmother of Amelia Egland	2/9
Thomas G. Lauria Jr. , brother of Ronald Lauria, uncle of Amanda Garza	2/9

Sherman Klein , father of Rabbi Jonathan Klein	2/10, Adar-I 9
Sally Yagan , aunt of Irene Christenson	2/10
2/11/2022 Shabbat Service Yahrzeit	
Rabbi Israel Neuman , brother-in-law of Shirley Ann Newman z”l, uncle of Heidi Allison	2/11 Adar-I 10
Ellen Abrams , daughter of Al z”l and Charlotte Abrams, sister of Andy Abrams	2/12
Harold Berman , uncle of Lisa Levine	2/12
Edward Bishop , father of Linda Hakimi	2/12
Herbert Blatt , father of Barbara Kessler, husband of Rose Blatt, grandfather of David Kessler	2/12, Adar-I 11
Rose Diamond , mother of Jess Diamond z”l	2/12
Adele Jaffe Leventhal , mother of Howard Leventhal	2/12
Esther Fenig , grandmother of Barry Goldner, great-grandmother of Rachel Goldner	2/13
Zina Lekht , niece of Etel Lewis	2/13
Dorothy Levey , mother of Muriel Vekas z”l and Arline Pike z”l, grandmother of Irvin Pike	2/13
Sophie Rudnick , stepmother of Marcus Rudnick z”l, Milton Rudnick z”l, Miriam Stull and Phil Rudnick, grandmother of Joshua Rudnick, Libbie Mahan and Daniel Rudnick	2/14
Valerie Segil , sister of Selwyn Kay	2/14
Yetta Davis , mother-in-law of Pearl Davis	2/15
Rose Pink , great-aunt of Susan Cohn, z”l	2/15
Herbert Baron , remembered by TBE	2/16, Adar-I 15
Elbert (Bert) Kantor , brother of Bob Allison	2/16



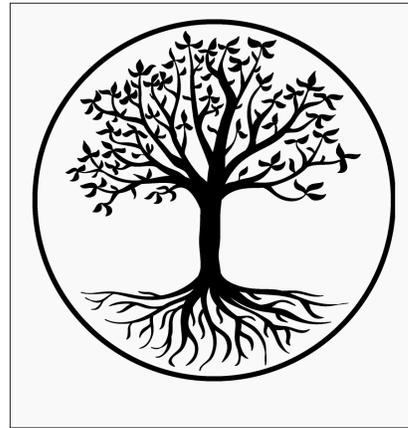
Judaism requires those comforting mourners to provide meals following their loved one's funeral. Temple Beth El's Caring Committee provides these Meals of Condolence, Se'udot Havra'ah. Please donate, <https://templebethelbakersfield.org/donation/> to the Caring Committee so that we may continue to support our mourners in their time of need.

2/18/2022 Shabbat Service Yahrzeit	
Herbert Nathan David Cahan , father of Susan Ferguson z"l	2/18
Irving Goldberg , father of Donald Goldberg z"l	2/18
Harvey W. Goodman , father of Marsha Greenstein	2/18
Joseph Levey , uncle of Muriel Vekas z"l and Arline Pike z"l, great-uncle of Irvin Pike	2/18
Betty Stolpen , aunt of Ethel Cohn Katz	2/18
Anita Balzac , aunt of Irene Christenson	2/19
Elchanan Bronstein , cousin of Sylvia Neal z"l and Laurie Henderson	2/19
Harold Redding , father of Jeanne Moore	2/19
Irwin Lewis Sacks , brother-in-law of Dan z"l and Mary Speare	2/19
Suzanne Shelton , friend of Irvin Pike	2/19
Jessie Grosher , aunt of Sonia Simrin z"l, great-aunt of Marty Weinberg	2/20
Daniel Speare , husband of Mary Speare	2/20
Helen Goldberg , sister of Risha Goldberg z"l	2/21, Adar-I 20
Jess Leighton , father of Jan Rockoff z"l	2/21, Adar-I 20
Fannie Rosenberg , mother of Dan Speare z"l	2/21
Ann Rudley , great-grandmother of Julia Brennan	2/21
Frank Russinsky , father of Jeff Russinsky, grandfather of Sage and Laura Russinsky	2/22
Margaret Miller , aunt of Merriem Palitz	2/22
John Neal , brother of Dan Neal z"l	2/22
Moshe Eliezar Neuman , father-in-law of Shirley Ann Newman z"l, grandfather of Heidi Allison	2/22, Adar-I 21
Shifra Neuman , mother-in-law of Shirley Ann Newman z"l, grandmother of Heidi Allison	2/22, Adar-I 21
Rifka Rubenstein Sprung , grandmother of Maxwell Newman z"l, great-grandmother of Heidi Allison	2/22, Adar-I 21
Libbie Berman-Rudnick , grandmother of Joshua Rudnick, Libbie Mahan, Daniel Rudnick; mother of Phil Rudnick and Miriam Stull	2/23
Irving Weisman , father of William Weisman	2/23



2/24/2022 Shabbat Service Yahrzeit

Stan Simrin , husband of Sonia Simrin z”l, grandfather of Echo Kniffen, great-grandfather of Peyton and Emerson Kniffen, uncle of Marty Weinberg, great-uncle of Adam Rodriquez, father of Susie Simrin and Amy Knight	2/24
Christopher Chavez , son of Rudie and Maria Chavez; brother of David, Jacob and Rachel Chavez	2/25
Rae Cherry , aunt of Helen Armistead and Jeff Schwartz, great-aunt of Rachael Sheeter, sister of Norma Schwartz z”l	2/25, Adar-I 24
Edward Dyer , grandfather of Connie Wellman z”l	2/25
Celia Herowitz , aunt of Sonia Simrin z”l	2/25
Betty Crane , grandmother of Shyanne Southern	2/27
Ralph Farbman , great-uncle of Debi Hazel	2/27
Stanley Schwartz , father of Helen Armistead and Jeff Schwartz, husband of Norma Schwartz z”l	2/27, Adar-I 26



Prayer Book Bookplates In Honor or In Memory of...

Bookplates are available for only \$18 each.

To order, make check payable to Temple Beth El, “attention: Bookplates.”

Please include any special wording and the manner in which you wish your name to appear.

Questions? Contact the office at (661) 322-7607 or tbebakersfield@gmail.com.

Memorial Plaques

Temple Beth El provides a sanctuary for your sacred prayers, a social hall for special celebrations, a library to study our heritage, a school to teach our eternal values and ways to remember ones who are no longer with us.

One way we honor those who helped shape our lives is by adding a made-to-order bronze Memorial Plaque to the walls of the Temple foyer.

Contact Andy Abrams:
aabrams@bak.rr.com



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February 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 9am Prayer Class 6:00pm Religious Practices Meeting via Zoom	2 Midweek Hebrew Rosh Chodesh Adar	3	4 6:00pm Shabbat Sha-ZOOM 6:30pm Shabbat Schmooze via ZOOM 7:00pm Shabbat Service via ZOOM	5 4:30 Pirkei Avot via ZOOM 5:30 Community Havdalah in TBE courtyard
6 10:00am Religious School via ZOOM	7	8 9am Prayer Class 7:00pm Board Meeting via Zoom	9 Midweek Hebrew	10	11 6:00pm Shabbat Sha-ZOOM 6:30pm Shabbat Schmooze via ZOOM 7:00pm Shabbat Services via ZOOM	12 4:30 Pirkei Avot and Havdalah via ZOOM
13 10:00am Religious School via ZOOM 1:00pm Cooking Class via ZOOM	14	15 9am Prayer Class Purim Katan	16 Midweek Hebrew	17	18 6:00pm Shabbat Sha-ZOOM 6:30pm Shabbat Schmooze via ZOOM 7:00pm Shabbat Services via ZOOM	19 Presidents Day Weekend - no Pirkei Avot or community Havdalah
20 <i>no Religious School</i> 1:00pm Legacy Writing Class 3:00 Sisterhood Meeting	21 Presidents Day	22 9am Prayer Class	23 Midweek Hebrew	24 3:30am Kern County Point-in-Time Homeless Count	25 6:00pm Shabbat Sha-ZOOM 6:30pm Shabbat Schmooze 7:00pm Shabbat Services via ZOOM	26 4:30 Pirkei Avot and Havdalah
27 10:00am Religious School via ZOOM	28					

Shalom Y'all!

Our religious school teachers and families have been learning virtually together for many months now and I want to share some highlights and shoutouts with you.

- Kyle Malicdem became a Bar Mitzvah!
- Our 6th grade class hosted a tree planting at Panorama Park.
- Reece Garza and Hendrix Mawhirter play guitar and sing Mah Tovu every Sunday morning.
- The Theron siblings, Lizzy, Isabel and Gabriel, log in bright and early from Alaska!
- Last week, Avett was Ms. Irene and Bailey's teaching assistant.
- Alexander Anaya has made so much growth reading Hebrew.
- Tim Fromm continues to keep his Hebrew students sharp!

We have so much to be proud of!

Learning and Growing with you,

Sage Russinsky

TBE Religious School Principal and Alumni



Why Advocacy is Central to Reform Judaism

Rabbi Marla J. Feldman

Social justice is an essential component of Reform Judaism. To be a Reform Jew is to hear the voice of the prophets in our head; to be engaged in the ongoing work of tikkun olam; to strive to improve the world in which we live; to be God's partners in standing up for the voiceless and fixing what is broken in our society.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president emeritus of the Union for Reform Judaism, explained: "Reform Jews are committed to social justice. Even as Reform Jews embrace ritual, prayer, and ceremony more than ever, we continue to see social justice as the jewel in the Reform Jewish crown. Like the prophets, we never forget that God is concerned about the everyday and that the blights of society take precedence over the mysteries of heaven."

Our passion for social justice is reflected in the ancient words of our prophets and sages and in the declarations of our Reform Jewish leaders throughout our history. The ancient command "Tzedek, tzedek tirdof!" or "Justice, justice shall you pursue!" (Deuteronomy 16:20) has led the charge in a long and proud tradition of political activism by Reform Jewish.

We are challenged by an overwhelming number of issues, each one central to our understanding of the prophetic message of our faith and critical to creating the kind of society we wish to bequeath to those who follow us. We are also confronted by those who claim to speak in the name of faith but who offer a different version of what God expects of us – those who proclaim themselves the upholders of "family values" yet who do not value individual rights or personal autonomy, and who have little respect for Constitutional principles.

Ours is a different message. We proclaim that maintaining a strong safety net for those who are most vulnerable is the modern manifestation of our obligation to "leave the corners of our fields for the poor and needy" (Leviticus 19:9). We believe that family values include supporting public schools so that every child in America has access to a free and appropriate education and paying workers enough to support themselves without having to choose between shelter and food, medication or heat. If we don't bring these progressive religious values into the public arena with us, we will abandon the public square to those offering a different view of religion and values.

Reform Judaism stands for certain principles, and Reform Jews take pride in our long history of "speaking truth to power." Active commitment to social justice is a hallmark of Reform Judaism, and that commitment inspires Reform congregations across North America to pursue a wide range of activities designed to t'aken et ha'olam, to mend the world. Just as a key tenet of Reform Judaism is an openness to the "other" – whether lesbian or gay, interfaith families, or those with special needs – so do we value

Your URJ

Jill Eglund and Larry Saslaw officially represent Temple Beth El in the Union of Reform Judaism General Assembly, part of the decision-making structure of the URJ. Each month we will be sharing news, resources and learning opportunities our entire congregation has access to, as members of the URJ.

strong social action components such as synagogue Mitzvah Days, collection drives, social justice sermons, and education about current issues of concern.

Writes Rabbi David Saperstein in his book *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time*: “The core of our insight [as Reform Jews] is that serious Jewish study inevitably leads to the soup kitchen; that serious prayer, among other vital things, is a way of preparing to do battle with injustice, that social justice without being grounded in text, without a sense of God’s presence, is ephemeral and unsustainable. The heart of the argument is that there is no such thing as ‘Social Action Judaism,’ that the thread of social justice is so authentically and intricately woven into the many-colored fabric we call Judaism that if you seek to pull that thread out, the entire fabric unravels, that the Judaism that results is distorted, is neutered, is rendered aimless.”

As Reform Jews, we make a collective effort to bring our progressive, values to bear in the community at large. We engage on issues of local, national and global concern. We participate in interfaith coalitions and activities. We speak out on behalf of the vulnerable. And we seek justice for all. This is who we are.



Rabbi Marla Feldman is executive director of Women of Reform Judaism and the former director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism.

Rabbi: Continued from page 3

Lady Liberty says to the seas:
“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless tempest-tost, to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door”

Undoubtedly German Jew Emma Lazarus wrote these words for the Statue of Liberty with Torah in mind; despite her upper social class status as a landed wealthy Sephardic Jew, she knew her people, she knew their struggle, and she knew that the Ostjuden (Eastern European Jews fleeing Pogroms at the hands of Cossacks and other anti-Semites) were facing exclusion, xenophobia, and disenfranchisement. Contrary to her wealth and means, she remembered that she was a Ger in the Land of Egypt.

Ever since we read of our liberation from Egyptian bondage, we are reminded of our obligation to empathize with the struggles of others. Our approach to hardship is not a pharaonic “hardening of our hearts,” ours is to “Welcome the Ger,” to “Love the Ger,” to recognize that the Jewish holy trinity is ger, yatom, v’almanah—the foreigner, orphan, and widow, the three most defenseless, marginalized classes of people in the days of the bible.

So how do you empathize with those who are struggling around you? The restaurant server? The hotel housekeeper? The fruit peddler on the side of the road? Despite the rhetoric of anger and our outrage culture, these folks are struggling, they are today’s ger, yatom, v’almanah, the immigrant (no social network), child (a dependent without a parent), and widow (no husband-breadwinner).

Turn your hearts from enmity toward others toward empathy for all.

As I say to my kids every day: Be a Mensch!

Blessings,

Rabbi Klein



Jew with Torah, Marc Chagall, 1925

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