

## FROM OUR RABBI

What is spirituality and are we Jews interested in it?

Many of us are looking for a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life beyond our self-interests. Many of us are seeking a way to understand how the world works and how we can experience life in a meaningful way. Many of us are trying to quiet the noise and listen to our inner voice or explore what it means to have a relationship with God. This is what it means to be engaged in spiritual pursuits.

And many of us say, “I don’t know what you are talking about when you say ‘spirituality.’ Judaism is a religion of practices and traditions. I might be religious, but I don’t have any interest in that spirituality stuff!”

I think one of the greatest challenges in the spirituality debate is the failure of language. We are not used to speaking about spirituality, faith, or even God. Words fail us and often sound Christian because in the larger American context the religious and spiritual terminology has often derived from Christian discourse.

However, I do believe that spirituality is what animates our religious practice and elevates it beyond rote repetition and meaningless action. Spirituality helps us practice Jewish tradition with an engagement of our hearts as well as our minds. We Jews are very good at the thinking part of Judaism. Spiritual practices are meant to engage our hearts, souls and passions. In my opinion, we need more of it nowadays.

In March 2009, the Synagogue 3000 Synagogue Studies Institute released a study by Steven Cohen & Lawrence Hoffman titled: “How Spiritual Are America’s Jews: Narrowing the Spirituality Gap Between Jews and Other Americans.” In this study they tried to measure the spiritual interest, expression and experience of American Jews and suggest the implications for synagogues’ policies and practices. You can find a copy of the report at <http://www.synagogue3000.org/files/S3KReportHowSpiritual.pdf>. I encourage you to read it and share your thoughts and observations with me.

Cohen and Hoffman would agree with me that spirituality deserves an important place in synagogue activity. While it is “but one of several gateways into meaningful Jewish life; [i]t is, however, such a gateway; it deserves its place.” While spirituality is often defined as separate and distinct from social action or a life of mitzvot and Jewish practice, there are many of us who would say our spiritual experiences of the past year have taken place while serving in the soup kitchen or homeless shelter and during morning minyan or singing with everyone during services or around the Shabbat table.

The study found a general resistance to “spirituality language” amongst Jews as well as a higher interest in the exploration of faith, God and spirituality in the NextGen or young Jews, the Orthodox and what they called Extended Jews-By-Choice. These Jews, who had one parent who

was Jewish, scored higher in spiritual interests than Jews with two parents who were Jewish. Cohen and Hoffman understood this to occur because the non-Jewish parent or family could have a greater acceptance of and familiarity with spiritual language.

The study reveals a significant interest in spiritual issues in the Jewish community. We certainly “lack a native Jewish language to describe spirituality” and yet our liturgy and holiday cycles speak to the greatest spiritual issues that exist: What is our place in the world? How do we live a good life? How do we perfect our selves and correct our shortcomings? How do we deal with our mortality and our inability to control the world? What does God control? What role does God play in our lives?

This holiday season, and throughout the year, it is my goal to engage our congregation in discussions and practices that strive to develop our sense of spirituality. We will use traditionally Jewish approaches to spirituality such as study of texts and chanting of prayers and we will engage in new practices such as meditation, drumming and drama to open our ears, hearts and souls to the beauty of our traditions. During the High Holy Days, the festivals and every Shabbat, we will engage in discussions and practices that will address our spiritual questions.

We are a Conservative congregation that values egalitarian, traditional Jewish practice. We are guided by Jewish law, or halakhah, and we are committed to interpretation and practice of Jewish tradition. We also know that Jewish practice cannot become stagnant or else it becomes irrelevant and rather than drawing people near it keeps people away. We will engage in spiritual exploration so that we can rediscover the beauty of our tradition and the profound ways Judaism can guide us to creating meaningful lives and dynamic communities.

I hope you will join me in talking about God, exploring our relationship with God and Jewish tradition, and delving deep into our Jewish texts to engage spiritual values and concepts. For the High Holy Day services we will be providing a set of readings to help you focus on the meaning of the prayers and the greater spiritual issues of the holy days. I hope you will take some time this Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur to address spiritual matters and explore your belief in God. *What images in the prayer book resonate with you? When do you feel God's presence? When are you inspired to believe in God? What lessons can you take from the service to guide your life in the upcoming year? What is spiritual about the holiday for you? It might not even be during services...*

Ask the questions. Spend some time quietly thinking about them. And then join the congregation in singing and worship. To answer my original question: We Jews should be interested in spirituality. Spiritual experiences are there for all of us and offer us a greater sense of engagement, energy and focus.

May we all be blessed with a new year filled with health, happiness and spiritual fulfillment. With best wishes from me and my family,

*Rabbi Francine Roston*

*If you know of a Beth El member who is ill, hospitalized, or homebound, please call Rabbi Roston to let her know. Beth El members are our source of information.*

## A NOTE FROM THE HAZZAN

Several years ago, when Miki and I were looking to purchase a home together in South Orange, two unmistakably Jewish signs came from above, cinching the deal: our prospective home had a built in sukkah frame on the deck and the house address number was a multiple of chai! Does it get any better than that? I want to spend some of my article with this theme of *chai* and *chayim*, the Hebrew word for life.

*Chayim*, life, is also one of the central themes of the High Holy Day season. Our prayers over the holidays ask God to remember us for life, *zochreinu l'chayim*, O king who delights in life. Inscribe us in the book of life, for your sake O God of life, write us in the Book of Life.

*L'chayim* is the Jewish toast to life and good fortune. Its root comes from the number whose value equals 18. It is also a word almost always referred to in the plural. The Rabbis explain that a good life is measured not alone but by friends and family, the people whose lives you have touched and who have been fortunate to be part of your life.

This year also marks my "l'chayim" year at Beth El, my 18<sup>th</sup> year here since I graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary. I have been fortunate that Beth El has been my first and only pulpit as an invested cantor.

In May, we are going to celebrate this anniversary together with a concert, "Cantor and Friends: A Celebration of Music and Community." Joining me will be some of my dear friends and colleagues as well as the choruses and instrumentalists with whom I have collaborated along the way.

It should be an exciting year filled with transition as the building undergoes transformation but whose life within these walls will express joy and creativity. Stay tuned and fasten your seat belts. It should be a year to remember!

Miki and I wish you a wonderful year, filled with blessings and good health for you and your loved ones. May we celebrate together a year of life, of *chayim*,

*L'shana Tova Tikateivu,*  
Perry and Miki

*If you wish to leave a message for Cantor Fine, please call his office answer machine at 973-763-6447.*

## From Our Synagogue President

The High Holy Days are always an exciting time, all the more so this year as we get ready to celebrate them at the South Orange Middle School. Personally, I am excited about the change in location. Although we are praying at the South Orange Middle School this year because our sanctuary is undergoing renovation, I think the change in venue will add meaning to the holiday. After all, the High Holy Days are a time when we step outside of ourselves and take a look at our lives from a new perspective, appreciating what is truly important. I think being in a new location will give us all an opportunity to appreciate what makes Beth El unique. After all, a synagogue is just a building; the people make it a community.

Very soon, if not already, you will receive your High Holy Day tickets in the mail. Although tickets are required every year, we have asked our ushers to be particularly vigilant in checking tickets this year, since this is one of the most effective ways we have to provide a safe holiday experience in what is normally a public building. Please remember to bring your tickets with you and present them if asked. We thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Also with your tickets, you will receive a Mitzvah Pledge Card. We initiated this program last year, and the response was overwhelming. Many of you volunteered to perform one or more mitzvot, and the Beth El community was made richer because of it. Once again, we are asking you to take a moment and think about making a contribution to our community through personal effort. Visiting the ill, comforting the mourners, or feeding the hungry are but a few of the several ways that you can make a difference this year. Please fold down a tab or two, and bring the card with you to services at the South Orange Middle School. We will then make sure that the appropriate committee contacts you.

Johanna, Ezra, and Amy join me in wishing all of you a sweet, healthy, peaceful new year. May all of us at Beth El go from strength to strength.

*Shana Tova,*

**Mark Brownstein**  
[president@bethelnj.org](mailto:president@bethelnj.org)

## **EDUCATION**

**Sherri Morris, Director of Congregational Learning**  
**973-763-0119** [smorris@bethelnj.org](mailto:smorris@bethelnj.org)

Shalom! I hope that everyone enjoyed a restorative summer and looking forward to another year of learning and growth. This year will be especially exciting at Beth El because, as I am proud to report, Beth El has been selected as one of 15 synagogues of all denominations across the United States to receive a Legacy Heritage Innovation Project Music grant. This is a new initiative that encourages the integration of music into all aspects of Jewish life (learning, prayer and social action) and throughout all age groups. I look forward to sharing further details with you about the grant and our programming as the year progresses.

Right now, of course, my focus is on the upcoming holidays and, our children's participation in them. For all the holidays, children should seek out their familiar age-appropriate services. As a reminder, these are: "Tent" Service with Treasure and Rich Cohen (ages 2-6) – obviously, we won't be able to hold these in a tent this year since we'll be at South Orange Middle School, but we will continue to call this our tent service; K'hillah Kids (ages 7-9), T'fillah Troupe (ages 9-12), and Teen Talk (post-bar/bat mitzvah). Services will follow their usual format for Shabbat morning, although the content will be tailored to the holiday we're celebrating that day.

Every child's favorite holiday, of course, is Simchat Torah! The entire congregation will be dancing with the Torah and enjoying sweet treats on Saturday night, October 10. Please make sure your children are part of this community celebration. The fun continues on Sunday morning with a family program for Beth El children of all ages from 10:30-12:30. (Please note: Jewish Learning Center students are expected to attend this event as part of our regular curriculum). We have a full morning of fun and educational activities planned, including unfurling an entire Torah! All children in attendance will be called to the Torah for an aliyah during the adult service. It will be a great way to kick off our year!

See you in shul! I look forward to seeing everyone rested and ready to learn.

B'Shalom,

Morah Sherri

## EDUCATION

Sandy Sachs, Director, Thelma K. Reisman Preschool  
973-763-0113 [sandysachs@bethelnj.org](mailto:sandysachs@bethelnj.org)

Another summer has flown by! Beth El Summer Fun Camp was fabulous and it was possible because of our terrific staff. We're fortunate to have them work with our children. Thanks to Judith Falkin, Rose Arondale, Louise Gantman, Jill Barouch, Fran Nelson, Beth Mahoney, Kiera Kenniff, Isabel Reckson, Brittany Joseph and Andrew Hirschorn for making this summer so great.

The start of the school year is an exciting time. I enjoy watching the staff members return to their classrooms, preparing and decorating as well as refining the curriculum. Every year the teachers assess what has worked well in the past and what can be improved or enhanced. They meet each student and their families during home visits. I look forward to this year with great enthusiasm. I want to highlight two special areas of our programming: **afternoon enrichment and toddler classes.**

Our afternoon enrichment programs are well attended – we offer everything from cooking to sports to art to Kabbalat Shabbat. Because of its popularity, we've expanded our art exploration class to include kindergarten students. Designed to encourage the creative side of the kindergartner with clay, watercolor, wood sculpture and more – this class will be taught by Judith Falkin who loves putting her fine arts degree to use. Children learn about great artists by creating work inspired by people like Marc Chagall, Mary Cassatt, Henry Moore and Andy Warhol. The class runs for 10 Mondays beginning September 28.

Our toddler program enables parents and caregivers to join their children, ages 16-24 months in hands-on activities like singing and dancing, arts and crafts, or storytime. Classes are held every Tuesday for 13 sessions beginning September 29.

If you are interested in learning more about any of our classes, please contact me at 973-763-0113 or [sandysachs@bethelnj.org](mailto:sandysachs@bethelnj.org). I look forward to hearing from you. I wish everyone a sweet, healthy and peaceful New Year.

*L'shanah tovah tikatevu,*  
Sandy

**CONGREGATIONAL NURSE**

Karen Frank

973-763-0111, x30    [kfrank@bethelnj.org](mailto:kfrank@bethelnj.org)

A truly successful synagogue provides for its members throughout the life span. Beth El is one of those congregations that does exactly that. From the *brit milah*, ritual circumcision of the newborn, to *taharah*, ritual cleansing of the dead, we offer sustenance and support at every rite and milestone.

I am now forming a caregivers support group. For adult children or spouses who are serving as caregivers for loved ones, it will offer participants a forum to discuss common problems and find solutions. We will hear from experts in the fields of elder law, medicine, and share community resources.

Please let me know if there is any way I can help you or your family.

*L'shana tova,*

Karen Frank

## SISTERHOOD

We hope that you have had a relaxing summer. School is back in session and the High Holy Days are rapidly approaching. As we enter this time of personal reflection, it is also time for Sisterhood to spring into action. We invite you to join Sisterhood and participate in our many exciting events for the upcoming year.

Yasher koach and many thanks to Miriam Lefkowitz for chairing our annual apples and honey fund raiser. This is and will continue to be a wonderful way to extend wishes for a sweet New Year to family and friends.

In addition to sharing Shabbat bima flowers with the community and the Mishloach Manot fundraiser, we have a few exciting events to share. We are proud to announce that our very own Beth El member and author Claudia Trupp will be our speaker at the Paid-up Membership Brunch on Sunday, November 1. You have received the Sisterhood membership invitation in the mail. **Please complete it and return it with your dues to Janet Fine , 51 Curtiss Place, Maplewood, NJ 07040.**

Also, it is not too early to plan for Purim. Along with our neighboring Sisterhoods, on February 28, 2010, Sisterhood members will be invited to Vashti's Banquet to be held at Oheb Shalom. Put the date on your calendar. Further information will be mailed as we get closer to this date.

*L'shana tova,*

*Ellen Tamaroff and Nancy Isaacson*

[etamstat@comcast.net](mailto:etamstat@comcast.net) and [nisaacson@greenbaumlaw.com](mailto:nisaacson@greenbaumlaw.com)

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## Bar Mitzvah

### September 12: Noah Hessdorf



My name is Noah Hessdorf and I will celebrate becoming a bar mitzvah on September 12. I am in the eighth grade at the Solomon Schechter Day School and I enjoy playing baseball, basketball and spending time with my family and friends. I have been attending services at Beth El regularly since I was two years old and look forward to sharing my bar mitzvah with the Beth El community.

The Congregation gratefully acknowledges the following contributions.  
Thank you for caring.

**DOUBLE CHAI FUND**

*IN MEMORY OF*

**Israel Baime** from Harriette and Richard Baime  
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**Stuart Rothenberg** on his special birthday from Jan and Howard Hoffman  
**Daniel and Ian Chesir-Teran and family** on their good trip from Rich and Treasure Cohen

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*IN HONOR OF*

**Joan Bucholtz** on her special birthday from Treasure and Rich Cohen

**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary from Margie Freeman

**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on the birth of their grandsons, Gabriel William and William Seth Levy, from the Aden family, Margie Freeman

**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on the birth of their grandchild and their wedding anniversary from Richard and Barbara Lander

**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on the engagement of their daughter, Shira, from Sharon and Steve Seiden

**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on the birth of their newest grandson from Sara Mellk-Rose

**San Convissor** on the birth of his granddaughter, Galayna, from Bambi and Bob Granovsky

**Howard Cooper** on successfully becoming a pilot and from Laura and Stephen Sacks

**Morah Miki Fine** with many thanks for another wonderful year from the Advanced Hebrew Class

**Mattye and Bob Gandel** on the birth of their new granddaughter from Debbie and Max Lebersfeld, Sharon and Steve Seiden

**Dan Green** on his high school graduation from Cindy and Rob Aden and family

**Harriett and Michael Hessdorf** on the bar mitzvah of their son, Noah, from Debbie and Dave Rubin

**Molly Hoffman** on her high school graduation from Cindy and Rob Aden and family

**Kasey Levine** on her high school graduation from Cindy and Rob Aden and family

**Ron Meier** on his speedy recovery from Mattye and Bob Gandel

**Rabbi Jehiel and Sylvia Orenstein** on their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary from Ruth and Jerry Demel, Mae and Ray Gorman

**Sanford and Ellen Oxfeld** on the engagement of their son, David, to Alana Radmin, from Les and Leslie Blatt

**Andrew Radmin and Adrienne Bzura** on the engagement of their daughter, Alana, to David Oxfeld from Les and Leslie Blatt

**Selim and Christine Rakib** on the bar mitzvah of their son, Aaron, from Stuart Skolnick

**Nikki Pusin and Steven Sklar** on Molly's Bat Mitzvah from Ben and Ruth Perlmutter

**Jimmy and Sharon Schwarz** on the birth of their granddaughter, Rowan, from Mattye and Bob Gandel, Sharon and Steven Seiden

**Debbie Rubin** for doing a great job reading the Haftorah from Laura and Stephen Sacks

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**Miriam Adelsberg** on the birth of their new granddaughter, Rosa, from Joan and Harvey Bucholtz  
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**Norman Aronson** on a spectacular, successful Bargain Barn from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz  
**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on their daughter's engagement from Joan and Harvey Bucholtz, Shari and Erwin Mevorah and family  
**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on the birth of their grandson from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz, Shari and Erwin Mevorah and family  
**Sam Convissor** on the birth of his new granddaughter, Galayna, from Joan and Harvey Bucholtz, Brenda and Jerry Deener  
**Brenda and Jerry Deener's** new granddaughter from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz, Mattye and Bob Gandel, Shari and Erwin Mevorah and family  
**Bob and Mattye Gandel** on the birth of their new granddaughter, Caroline, from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz  
**Bob and Mattye Gandel** on the birth of their new granddaughters, Caroline and Aliza, from Brenda and Jerry Deener  
**Yochi and Eytah Gold** on the birth of their newest grandson, Caleb Gold, from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz  
**Dr. and Mrs. Harold Horwitz** on the birth of their new grandson, Elijah, from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz  
**Terry Jacobs** on producing an outstanding video of the groundbreaking ceremony from Joan and Harvey Bucholtz  
**Mark and Ronni Lederman** on Jodi's graduation from Solomon Schechter Day School from Golda and Michael Och  
**Samantha Nelson** on passing her RN exam from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz  
**Stuart and Marianne Sender** on Ben becoming a Bar Mitzvah from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz  
**Jimmy and Sharon Schwarz** on the birth of their new granddaughter from Joyce and Neil Goldstein  
**Dr. and Mrs. Bernard Robins** on the birth of their new great-granddaughter, Ayelet, from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz  
**Gail Roth** on a spectacular, successful Bargain Barn from Harvey and Joan Bucholtz  
**Neimah and Paul Tractenberg** on the birth of their grandson from Brenda and Jerry Deener

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**Sam Convissor** on the birth of his new grandchild from Irwin and Blossom Primer

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**Norman Aronson** on her speedy recovery from Gail and Dennis Roth

**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on the birth of their new grandsons from Natasha and Motti Benisty

**Joanne Doades** on her speedy recovery from Cheryl and Marc Slutzky

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**IN HONOR OF**

**Sam Convissor** on the birth of his granddaughter, Galayna Chloe Convissor, from Cheryl and Marc Slutzky

**Jimmy Schwarz** on the birth of his granddaughter, Rowan Orli, from Cheryl and Marc Slutzky

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*IN HONOR OF*

**Mattye and Bob Gandel** on the birth of their granddaughter, from Ronnie and Jeff Weinstein

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**PRESCHOOL PLAYGROUND FUND**

*IN MEMORY OF*

**Mary Feinberg** from Julius Feinberg

*IN HONOR OF*

**Norman Aronson** on her speedy recovery from Ellen Tamaroff and Peter Leepson

**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and the birth of their grandsons from Eva Samo

**Treasure and Rich Cohen** on the birth of their grandsons, Gabriel William Cohen and William Seth Levy, from Francine Levine

**Sam Convissor** on the birth of this granddaughter, Galayna Chloe, from Francine Levine

**Mattye and Bob Gandel** on the birth of their granddaughter, Caroline, from Sharon and Jimmy Schwarz

**Blossom and Irwin Primer** on the birth of their granddaughter, Talia Rose, from Francine Levine

**Sharon and Jimmy Schwarz** on the birth of their granddaughter, Rowan Orli, from Francine Levine

**RABBI'S DISCRETIONARY FUND**

*IN MEMORY OF*

**Herbert Eisenstein** from Ellen and Richard Goldstein

**RENOVATION FUND**

*IN MEMORY OF*

**Shirley Lasky Chase** from Susan and Mitchell Lieberman, Eva Samo

**Carol Lax** from Oscar Lax

**William Lax** from Oscar Lax

**Bertha Rudd** from Eva Samo

*IN HONOR OF*

**Mattye and Bob Gandel** on the birth of their new granddaughter, Caroline, from Susan and Mitchell Liebermann

**SAMUEL RINGEL YOUTH ENRICHMENT FUND**

*IN MEMORY OF*

**Shirley Laskey Chase**, mother of Cheryl Slutzky, from Bryna and Ossie Lax

**Bess Leibel** from Dorothea Klein

**Samuel Novy** from Evelyn Moscovitz

**Chuddy Polk** from Bryna Ringel and the Lax family

*IN HONOR OF*

**Bryna Ringel Lax and Oscar Lax** on the wedding of their granddaughter from Madeline and Philip Lax

**Bryna Ringel Lax and Oscar Lax** on Sarah's marriage from Golda and Michael Och

**ZELLER LIBRARY FUND**

*IN MEMORY OF*

**Jerome Zeller** from Sarah Zeller