



The STAR (light!)

A Temple Beth Torah Newsletter
January-February-March 2025:
Tevet-Shevat-Adar 5785

Rabbi Alan's Message...

Don't Tell Me What to Do!

We live in an age of radical autonomy. We zealously guard our own independence from everybody else. We resent it when someone presumes to tell us what is right or wrong, seeks to impose external limitations to our discretion or our behavior. In the words of a popular song, we assert, "It's my prerogative!"

There is much to be said in praise of this enthusiasm for independence.

America has succeeded in molding a population that cherishes individuality (within limits) and free thought. Art, democracy, science, and spirituality all blossom with thousands of different faces because of the lack of central controls or direction. Surely that pluralism of expression is a precious heritage.

Yet we also pay a price for our autonomy. All this freedom, lack of direction or discipline also produces tremendous loneliness, drifting, and superficiality. Pop psychology has taken the place of true understanding, and pop spirituality has replaced true religion. Rather than letting God into our hearts, rather than molding our behavior to conform to God's will, we prefer instead to construe God after our own image, to expect God to accede to our own preferences or whims.

Small wonder, then, that Judaism has such a difficult time in contemporary life. Based on the premise that all human beings must become slaves to something, Judaism asserts that we become either slaves to the Holy One, or else we become slaves to some lesser tyrant; -our drives, our work, our guilt, or some other human being. Only in the service of God, in the yoke of the mitzvot, are we able to find the antidote to human bondage.

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Rabbi Alan's Message... cont'd.

In the Torah, there is the expression of that assurance, as it lists a variety of laws and guidelines meant to shape Israelite life to conform to the lofty ethics and pervasive holiness of God's will. Rather than perceiving those laws as oppressive restrictions and burdensome obligations, our ancestors exulted in their newfound ability to grow spiritually and morally as agents of God in the world.

The Midrash celebrates these laws: "Observe how much God gave commandments on every detail...the Torah gives injunctions to Israel on everything. It can be compared to a prince whom his father exhorted to be careful not to stumble over anything and hurt himself because he was as dear to him as the apple of his eye. God, likewise, exhorted Israel concerning the commandments, because they are more beloved to God than the "angels."

Judaism celebrates the love between God and the Jewish People, viewing the myriad laws and mitzvot (commandments) as confirmation of that abiding passion and devotion. Parents who don't tell their children what to eat, what to wear, and when to sleep, don't really love their children, regardless of how much they speak of their affection. True love is the kind that nurtures independence of soul and depth of personality, requires attention to detail.

True love requires guiding the young child on the paths of goodness, restraint, intelligence, and persistence. Each of us has a young child inside, some part of ourselves is still in need of guidance, nurturing and caring. The mitzvot speak to that deeper part of our own personalities, summoning us to a life of holiness and belonging, shaping our communities to reflect God's love and concern for all of Creation. Rather than being shackled by these laws, we Jews have celebrated the opportunity to use these guidelines to infuse our lives with spirit, passion, and depth. The Mitzvot remain a source of growth, discipline, and identity. They remain our pathways to our truer self; and as well to God.

May we continue to be safe during these winter months.

With my honor to serve our families.

Rabbi Alan



NEW MEMBERS:

JEFF AND KATE GAZSO AND SON ALEXANDER

DESIREE GRAFF AND SON LIAM

A Message from the Co-presidents...

There's been a lot of "warmth" lately at TBT, to balance out the Winter cold! You'll see evidence of that through the following pages...

- A (fortunately!) warm gathering for our Hanukkah-themed brunch in December,
- Warmth and joy at Rabbi Alan's Bar Mitzvah Anniversary celebration in January, and
- A delightful Tu B'Shevat Seder in February to commemorate the start of the Spring – think "warm"! – growing season in Israel (to be featured in the next Star!).

That is all in addition to the weekly interactive Shabbat gatherings filled with song, prayer and even dance, along with social onegs following services!

We are excited to welcome several new members to the TBT family (in this issue!), and also several newer friends who have recently chosen to attend and enrich our services and events!

See you soon! ~ David and Debra



**Our Donations to
the Wethersfield
Food Pantry**

**Thanks to all who
donated so
generously during
the High Holiday
season!**

**We filled 4
shopping carts!**

In Memory... Ruth Brainin, z"l



Donations to TBT In Memory of
Ruth Brainin, z"l by...

Judy and Marty Gold
Debra and Joe Hammer
Janis Homar
Maureen Horowitz
Karen and Bob Klein
Kathi and Eliot Mag
Phyllis Nackman
Helene Rosenblatt
Sallyanne and Barry Scott
Richard Waldman

Ruth (on right) passed on in mid-December, at 96 years young. Her daughter Janis (also pictured) shared that the Brainin family had been members of TBT since moving to Wethersfield 50 years ago! Janis taught in our Sunday School, and was married by TBT Rabbi Rosenthal (and B'nai Shalom Rabbi Schwartz).

Ruth participated actively in our Shabbat services and holiday observances, most recently by Zoom. She is so very fondly remembered by her many friends at TBT.

Our Hanukkah-themed Brunch!

With barely an hour before the start of our brunch, the temperature in the Social Hall was in the mid-40s and the furnace was definitely not firing! Between a quick rescue from our HVAC contractor and some creative “alternative heating strategies,” we were up to a cozy 60 degrees or so by the time folks began arriving. Lots of hot latkes, our lit candles and a restarted furnace kept things comfortable and happy! A wonderful time was had by all! It was our own little...

Hanukkah Miracle!!!

More pics on the following pages!





Kate and Jeff

Desiree and Liam,
Helene, the Hanukkah Queen, and
Jody





Bob and Karen, Barry and Sallyanne



TBT new friends Ingrid, Barbara and their guests



Deb, Joe and Sam

Honoring Phil's Memory - Nov. 9



TBT Members Celebrate Phil - it was such a moving tribute.

This was the full group pic that could not be found in time for the last Star!

The Klein Challenge Fundraiser!

Bob and Karen challenged the rest of us to raise \$7,500 by March 1st to be put toward a new accessible entryway to the Social Hall. They will match donations dollar for dollar up to \$7,500! WE ARE ALMOST THERE!!! Our current total is just over \$6,000... LET'S GO!!!!



A huge Todah
Rabah to
Karen and Bob!



The Klein Challenge Fundraiser!

Our incredibly generous donors, to date...

Carol Gershenson	Judy and Marty Gold
Alice Burstein	Debbie Ehrlich
Susan James	Jody and Alan Lefkowitz
Rhoda and Fred London	Kathi and Eliot Mag
Wayne Silver	Barbara Wolfe-Smolín & Hugh Smolin
Harriet Rosen	Susan and Jonathan Reuben
Helene Rosenblatt	Debra and Joe Hammer
Karen and Gerald Waltman	Ellen Sue Moses & Mark Gould
Susan Matthews	Janet and Joe Rosenblatt

... in no particular order. If we've inadvertently left you off this list and you sent a contribution, please let us know! We want to be sure to acknowledge ALL donations!!!



Other Donations to TBT, gratefully received

In HONOR of RABBI ALAN's BAR MITZVAH 60th ANNIVERSARY

Ingrid Chorchos

Judy and Marty Gold

Debra and Joe Hammer

Janet and Joe Rosenblatt

Sallyanne and Barry Scott

In HONOR of LEO, new grandson of Janet and Joe Rosenblatt

Debra and Joe Hammer

In APPRECIATION of JODY and RABBI ALAN LEFKOWITZ, for their gift of a beautiful MANDALA (see next page!) for the TBT Sanctuary

Debra and Joe Hammer



**A New
Mandala
Designed
for the
TBT
Sanctuary!**



A New Mandala Designed for the TBT Sanctuary!

In a very moving tribute by Jody Lefkowitz on the occasion of Rabbi Alan's Bar Mitzvah Anniversary, Jody presented the mandala to the congregation. She spoke of how she and Alan felt they had found a new home, in every sense of the word, when they connected with the folks at TBT.

This beautiful piece was designed and hand-painted by artist Rachel Sanborn, whose pieces were shown at a fundraiser to benefit IDF soldiers and their families. The event showcased several local artists connected to the Grassroots Jewish Women of CT. Along with this artists collective, the event was cosponsored by Young Israel of West Hartford and Greater Hartford for Israel.

The phrase on the mandala, in Hebrew and English, comes from Exodus 25:8, parsha Terumah. In this parsha, God is asking Moses for there to be a Holy Place to experience the feeling of connectedness with all of creation. (Fleischman, S., Congregation Dorshei Tzedek)

The Mandala will be proudly displayed on the Southern wall of the TBT Sanctuary.



Front Door



**The View from our front door Ring Doorbell on New Year's
Day/Hanukkah!**

6:40:13 PM