



Congregation Beth Israel
חבורת בית ישראל

CBI NEWSletter Jan/Feb 2014 - Shvat / Adar I 5774

From the Rabbi

Holy friends,

Welcome to 2014, which we begin with the Jewish month of Shvat! When the Shvat moon is full we'll reach one of my favorite minor holidays: the festival of **Tu BiShvat** (the 15th of Shvat), the **New Year of the Trees**.

In antiquity, Tu BiShvat was a tax day, the day when young trees were counted as a year older for tax purposes (which meant that their fruits could be tithed to the Temple.) In the medieval era, the kabbalists (mystics) of Tzfat developed a new way of understanding the holiday: as the day when the sap begins to rise to feed the fruits of the coming year, and the day when we can help the sap to rise in the cosmic tree of creation. Those same mystics established the practice of the Tu BiShvat seder.

As we celebrate Tu BiShvat through the practice of eating fruits and nuts with mindfulness, we can effect a *tikkun* (a healing) in the earth and even in God's own Self. We'll celebrate Tu BiShvat here at CBI on the Shabbat following the holiday, on January 18. (More details elsewhere in the newsletter.)

This year (5774, not 2014) is a leap year on the Jewish calendar. Unlike on the secular / Gregorian calendar, where a "leap year" means one extra day (February 29th), in our calendar a leap year means there's a whole extra month inserted. We do this in order to keep our calendar more-or-less in synch with the solar calendar. Our calendar is lunisolar, which means it operates according to both the sun and the moon.



*"When the Shvat moon is full
we'll reach one of my favorite
holidays..."*

Service times

Periodic Friday nights
(check our website)

Every Saturday
9:30 a.m. Shabbat Service
11:00 a.m. Kiddush &
Torah Study

Meditation minyan
Friday mornings, 8:15 a.m.
No experience with
meditation is required; all
are welcome!

(Please see "From the Rabbi" continued, on p. 2)

A calendar which was purely lunar would shift, on the solar calendar, by about 10 days each year. That's how the Muslim calendar works. One year Ramadan might begin on September 1, the following year on August 20, the following year on August 10, and so on. As a result, their holy days move all the way around the year; Ramadan falls sometimes in summer, sometimes in winter. But ours is different.

The sages who instituted our calendar felt strongly that Pesach needed to stay in the spring, and that Sukkot needed to stay in the fall. (They lived in the northern hemisphere, of course, and had no idea of the existence of the southern hemisphere where the seasons operate on an inverse calendar.) So they made our calendar lunisolar (also called metonic), and adopted the practice of inserting an extra month in 7 out of every 19 years.

Since 5774 is a leap year we'll have two months of Adar instead of the usual one. So we'll go from the month of Shvat to the month of Adar I (also called Adar א), then Adar II (a.k.a. Adar ב.) Purim, which takes place on the full moon of Adar, will be during the second Adar.

At first glance, Adar I is an empty month. Usually Purim is the defining feature of the month of Adar, but Adar I is an Adar with no Purim; how odd! Then again, Purim is our festival of masks and disguises, when nothing is as it seems. God is never mentioned in the Scroll of Esther, but God's presence is manifest throughout the book. Perhaps this Adar which is "disguised" as an empty month will prove to be full of holiness and surprises. May it be so for all of us!

Wishing you every blessing, always —

Rabbi Rachel

Rabbi's Prayer, Annual Meeting 5774

Holy One of Blessing!

Open our hearts to Your presence

in this room as we convene

this congregation's annual meeting.

Help us to see Your face

in the faces of everyone present tonight.

Guide us to honor all of those

who helped us reach this moment.

Inspire us to look forward

to the future we will create here together.

May the work we do tonight

bring us closer to our ideals

of holy community.

And let us say together: amen.

Rabbi's Report, Annual Meeting 5774

In this week's Torah portion, Jacob camps a night alone by the river Jabbok. A mysterious stranger -- according to our tradition, an angel -- wrestles with him all night until day-break. In the morning, the angel blesses him: your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel — Yisra'el, one who Wrestles With God.

We hint at this story every time we gather for morning prayer here, as we sing *Mah tovu ohalecha ya'akov, mishk'notecha Yisrael*: how goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling-places, O Israel. Most of you have heard me say that it is our task, as we daven here, to transform this beautiful ohel, this beautiful tent, into a mishkan: a dwelling-place for God, a place where God can dwell among and within us.

(continued on p. 3)

Over the last year, we have often lived up to that ideal. When we have gathered faithfully for Shabbat prayer, and whether we are a crowd of four or a crowd of thirty-five have sung and prayed and rejoiced with fervor. When we have gathered one Sunday a month to prepare hot, nutritious meals for those who would otherwise go hungry. When we've fed our own beloved elders during Senior Lunch Bunch. When we have participated in High Holiday services, Yom Kippur yoga, b'nei mitzvah celebrations and funerals.

We've made this place a holy place when we've gathered to watch Mexican Jewish movies and to remember that Jewishness takes many forms in many lands. When we've met to talk about Anzia Yezierska's 1925 classic *Bread Givers*, or Rebecca Goldstein's *Betraying Spinoza: the Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity*. When we have come together to learn about kaddish and minyan and Jewish mourning customs, or to begin delving into the poetry of Jewish prayer.

Here's the secret to making an *ohel* into a *mishkan*, a worldly building into a sacred space: what makes the space sacred is our connection to each other, our coming together to sanctify our lives and to offer praise and thanks together, our accompanying each other on the journeys of education and b'nei mitzvah — chuppah and parenthood — grief and mourning.

Others can share statistics: how many meals we've made for Take and Eat, how many people attended this year's services during the Days of Awe, how our annual appeal is doing. And let me be clear: all of those numbers are awesome! But for me what's most awesome, in the original sense of the word, is how we create this community together, and how we connect with holiness when we notice and lift up and love the spark of God in each other.

May we go from strength to strength!

Don't Miss Tu BiShvat: January 18

On Saturday January 18, after Shabbat morning services (11:30am), we'll celebrate Tu BiShvat with a **Tu BiShvat seder**, eating symbolic fruits and nuts as we journey through the four seasons, the Four Worlds, and from roots to crown of the divine tree!

Bring a vegetarian / dairy dish to share; please RSVP to the synagogue office.

Hebrew School Update



Ne'arim students celebrating Chanukah.

Our Hand in Hand students (preschool children and their families) have been enjoying monthly classes focusing on subjects ranging from Shabbat (we studied the custom of blessing the children) to dedicating a home or building (we decorated *mezuzot*.) We've also done some Hebrew letter yoga, making letter shapes with our bodies.

Our Aleph-Tav students (first through fourth graders) have been working on decoding the alef-bet and studying a variety of Torah stories, holidays, and Jewish values.

(continued on p. 4)

Our Ne'arim students (fifth through seventh grade) spent the fall studying the mitzvah of *tikkun olam*, healing the world, through the lens of Judaism and the civil rights movement. They also made their first video podcasts in which they related Judaism and civil rights to their favorite books or movies. This winter they'll enjoy visits from several guest teachers as they move into a unit on religious identity.

Chanukah Party



Storyteller Jane Shiyah at our Chanukah party.

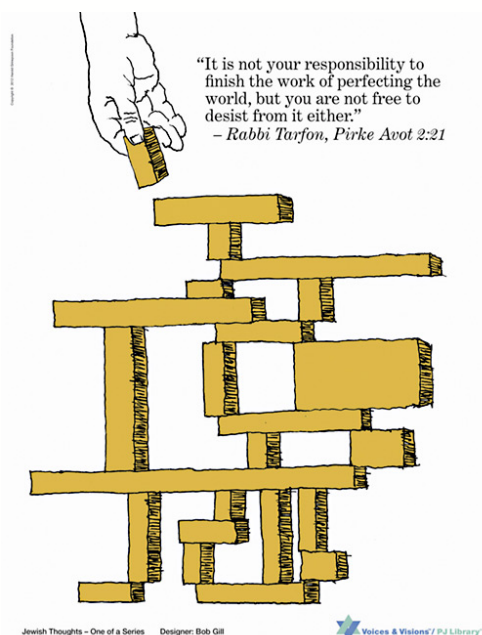
On the day after Thanksgiving, we held a wonderful Chanukah party at CBI, which featured Chanukah songs led by Rabbi Rachel, the lighting of many many *chanukiyot*, and delicious latkes made by Tim Herrmann (with assistance from Ethan Zuckerman.) Thanks to everyone who came, brought their menorahs, and added some joy and light to our holiday!

New Member Welcome

Welcome to CBI's newest member families, Kayla Rooney and son Sasha, and Beth and Jim Callahan and their sons Jackson and Jordan! We're so glad to have you aboard!

Voices & Visions

You may have noticed the new framed posters in the social hall (in the classroom area of the library) or the one currently posted on the corkboard in the coat closet hallway.



These are a gift from PJ Library and the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, part of a set of 18 posters called *Voices & Visions*. Each one depicts a quotation from a great Jewish thinker (historical or contemporary), paired with a new piece of art which illustrates that quotation. Over time we will rotate which ones are framed in the classroom area; please come and explore this new art!



D'var Torah: Rabbi Wax on mourning & *chesed*

Delivered at CBI on October 26, during our special service honoring chevra kadisha and cemetery committee members.

We just concluded our Amidah with the Sim Shalom prayer. Its first line reads, “Grant us peace, goodness and blessing, grace, kindness and mercy.”

It seems to me that blessing, grace and mercy and maybe even peace might be granted by God, if we are so fortunate to be the recipients, but that goodness and kindness are not gifts from on high. Rather, they must be actively cultivated paths for each of us as individuals. We must want to be good and kind and we must practice being good and kind.

Our tradition has a category of what we call *G'milut Hasadim*, acts of lovingkindness, which are both obligations as well as spiritual practices meant to open our hearts, to help us in this practice of becoming kind. They include acts like visiting the sick, helping a needy bride, hospitality, comforting mourners, honoring and burying the dead, clothing the naked, etc. I entitled today's theme *Chesed + Chesed + Chesed*.

The first *chesed* of this Torah portion is Abraham's *chesed* of burying his wife Sarah. He went to great pains and paid a pretty price to do so.

The second *chesed* of the Torah portion is Rebecca's generosity of spirit to Abraham's servant Eliezer by offering water not only to him but also to his camels. In the desert, that is a great *chesed*, indeed. Finding a woman of extraordinary character was, after all, Eliezer's mission. And Rebecca passed the test with flying colors.

Alternatively, we might consider the *chesed* of this section to be Abraham's desire (Abraham who is still a mourner himself) to

find an appropriate wife for his son Isaac, whom he knows to be mourning still for his mother Sarah. If so, Abraham's *chesed* is that of comforting a mourner who also happens to be his own son. Not all mourners are able to see beyond their own pain as Abraham was. We already noted that Isaac, in his grief, was unable to see Rebecca approaching on her camel – he only saw camels. In contrast, Rebecca saw Isaac so clearly and fell in love so instantly that she, notably, fell off her camel! Mourning is a process, a longer process for some than for others, and often our perceptions are blurred, our vision complicated by our grief, as Isaac's was.

I believe that our Torah portion is trying to teach us that Abraham, now bereft of his wife Sarah and grieving alone, compassionately “matchmade” for his son, so that Isaac would not, too, grieve alone. If that indeed is the message, how important it is for us, as a community to reach in and be there for those in our community who are in mourning, especially if they are alone. We need not be close to the mourner; we need not even know the mourner personally. But we are part of a small Jewish community in which it is incumbent upon each of us to step up to the plate and say “I care” to fellow members in their time of need. And members, in turn, have a right to expect that their Jewish community will embrace them in their time of need

The third *chesed* of our Torah portion is God's blessing Isaac after Abraham's death. What is the content of this blessing? The tradition teaches that God comforted Isaac after his father died, that it was the act of comforting a mourner. When we, in turn, offer comfort to a mourner, we are to feel that we are literally walking in God's ways, doing something that God had deemed important enough to perform directly – not by email, not even via a condolence note (though that, too, is a lost art) – but face to face. This also teaches us that comforting a mourner is equivalent to offering a blessing, and to being a blessing to the mourner.

(continued on p. 6)

Over generations, Judaism developed a powerful and healing ritual system within which mourners have been able to express their grief. In so many ways, however, the art of comforting mourners, so central to our tradition, to our understanding of what it is to be a Jewish community, has been eroding. But we need those things. We need to know that our community will be there to support us, to share our grief, to reaffirm our sense of hope in the face of death, simply by their presence. When we are the mourners, we need to publicly and privately acknowledge our loss by interrupting the routine of our everyday life, and we observe a period of mourning – which is not merely an emotional/spiritual state of being, but a religious obligation in which one comes to the synagogue to have our status as mourner acknowledged and to have an opportunity to say the Mourners' Kaddish prayer which reconnects us to our tradition, to our people, and to truths that speak louder than the literal meaning of the words could ever possibly say. We need to acknowledge that there is some Power and some Mystery greater than ourselves, and that Death is part of that Mystery and that Community is part of that Power.

We need, as individuals and as a community, to honor the anniversaries/yahrzeits of our beloved dead, and we have the right to expect that the community will be there to support us in that time of remembrance by surrounding us as a community so that we can recite kaddish, and so that we might feel the Power of Community.

We need, as individuals and as a community, to honor the four set occasions our tradition has given us throughout the year to contemplate that Mystery of Death, at our times of Yizkor, not only on Yom Kippur, but also on Shemini Atzeret, Passover and Shavuot, each with its own flavor, its own take on the relationship of us with our beloved dead and of us with the idea of Death itself.

The commandment to Remember is a central one in our tradition. Remember the Sabbath Day. Remember the stranger for you were

strangers in the land of Egypt. Remember/Zachor your dead.

Remembering the dead in our tradition is the loving way the members of our Chevra Kaddisha wash and prepare the dead for a dignified burial.

Remembering our dead is the work of the Cemetery Committee, transcribing dates and translating old tombstones, organizing records of our burial sites at our beautiful cemetery, so that this history can be passed down generation to generation and teaching us about these traditions of death and mourning through our synagogue's Book of Life. Its work also consists of creating fair and equitable policies so that when Abraham comes to bury his beloved wife, he isn't gouged in the process.

I am not sure if you all realize how unique it is for a congregation to have a chevra kaddisha or its own cemetery. We should be so proud.

Our Torah portion today is both about honoring the dead, comforting the mourners, and about practicing chesed/lovingkindness.

We are blessed with such a wise and compassionate religion when it comes to responding to death and bereavement. But it is only as compassionate as its practitioners. I pray that should we be bereaved, that we are each blessed as Isaac was blessed by a community that carries on God's act of blessing the bereaved and that practices chesed as a supreme value.

And I pray that when we die, we have a loving Chevra Kaddisha and Cemetery Committee to accompany us on our journey from this world to the next.

May it be/*Kein yehi ratzon*.
Shabbat shalom.

Cemetery Committee End-of-year report

from Jane Miller

Since the publication of our “Everlasting Life” booklet, which is a comprehensive guide to Jewish death and mourning customs, the cemetery committee has been very busy and extremely productive.

I am pleased to inform our congregation that the entire cemetery has been mapped. This was done by walking row-by-row, plot-by-plot, and cataloguing the information on each headstone. The process was a long and tedious one, taking several visits to the cemetery to complete.

We started by compiling an excel sheet with the name of the deceased, the location which includes row and plot number, along with the year of birth and the year of death from each headstone. From there we added, exact date of death, Hebrew name with next of kin, and known address at time of death.

Now, on our synagogue computer system we have the excel sheet by listing those interred by name alphabetically, with all information stated above, and a separate sheet listing by location. This list also shows the exact row and location of any reserved plots by family name.

During the mapping process we noticed that there were several headstones that over the years had toppled or had foundation issues that needed repair. As of this date all repairs have been completed. The headstones that needed repair were very old, and due to the fact that we had no information as to next of kin, our perpetual care account funded the work.

We are in the process of hiring a contractor to build the separation walkway between the interfaith section of our cemetery from the Jewish section. Our entire congregation in the early 90's voted the inclusion of this interfaith section. The separation needed is

mandated by both the reform and conservative Jewish cemetery rules and regulations. This will hopefully be done in the springtime, as soon as the weather permits, board approval still pending on the funding of this project.

Our next project involves the creation of a physical map. This will aid family members to the set up of the rows, to aid in easily locating where there loved ones are interred.

Thanks go out to Chaim Bronstein, Susan Hogan, Robert Miller, Pam Wax and Paulette Wein, for their help with the Everlasting Life Book and the mapping process, and to David Towler for his incredible knowledge of Jewish history of North Adams, which enabled the compilation of the information on the almost 600 interred in the Beth Israel Cemetery.

Personally, this effort has been one of the most rewarding and spiritual endeavors I have ever been a part of. I look forward to continuing this important work.

Lunch Bunch Dates January-July 2014

All luncheons are held on Thursdays and start promptly at noon.

January 16
February 13
March 13
April 10
May 15
June 19
July 17

RSVP for luncheon must be received by the Monday before to CBI @ 413-663-5830 so we can plan accordingly.

Rosh Hashanah Remarks

from Bill Levy

I want to start with a familiar piece of Torah:

*Mah tovu ohalecha, Yakov,
mishk'notecha, Yisrael.*

How lovely are your tents, O Jacob;
your dwelling places, O Israel.

I learned this year from Rabbi Pam Wax that it is traditional to say this phrase as we enter our synagogue. We do in fact have a beautiful tent here at CBI, a beautiful structure in the Berkshires. But what really allows our tent to reach its full beauty and potential is when it is full of people as it is today: our CBI community, visitors and guests.

I have the honor of welcoming all of you to our tent! Only here in America and at CBI can a humble parking attendant have the opportunity to address you today as the representative of the board. And all at the same salary!

This has been a good year at CBI. It has been our first year of having Reb Rachel as our duly elected, non-interim, official rabbi and she has done a wonderful job filling our tent with music, poetry and Torah. We also again welcome David Curiel as our friend and cantorial soloist.

One Sunday a month our tent is filled with cooks, organizers and drivers gathering to prepare from scratch and deliver 100+ meals to shut in seniors in North Adams. Every week our younger members fill the tent for interactive religious education. And once a month our more senior members are invited in for the senior lunch bunch.

We have had some special events such as a book reading by Reb Rachel celebrating the publication of her new book of poetry and a musical talk on the Jewish contributions to Broadway musicals. We continue to have an active adult education program book group and intermittent Sunday movies. Thanks to

all the volunteers who pitch in to make these things happen!

So what do we need at CBI looking forward? We need more folks to fill our tent for these events. We need a more reliable minyan for Shabbat services, a community of friendship and study and support for those of us who are remembering loved ones.

We need volunteers! If you have some time we have a job or committee for you to serve on. We need folks to serve on the Chesed committee to call or visit members with health issues. We always need drivers for Take & Eat.

Finally we need financial support. Our HHD appeal allows us to provide an open tent without tickets for these services. For those of you who have given already, we thank you for your generous donations. For guests and members who can, I encourage you to use the envelopes that you will receive on leaving to help us support our costs.

Most importantly, I again want to welcome members, visitors and guests to our beautiful tent and to invite you to come back often. Think of Mah Tovv as you enter the synagogue. May you all find meaning in our services and have a sweet new year. L'Shanah Tovah!

Human Rights Shabbat

On Saturday, December 7, Congregation Beth Israel participated in Human Rights Shabbat, a program created by the international organization *T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights*.



continued on p. 9

Now in its 6th year, Human Rights Shabbat is an initiative to commemorate International Human Rights Day by educating Jewish communities about the intersection of Jewish values and universal human rights. Nearly 150 communities around the world came together and pledged to manifest the value of *k'vod habriot* (human dignity) in our synagogues, schools, and homes.

"Human Rights Shabbat gives synagogues across the nation the opportunity to shine a light on some of the most pressing human rights issues of our time, through prayer, sermons, educational panels and more," said Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Executive Director of T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights. "These communities are committed to the shared value that all of us are created in the image of God, *b'tzelem elohim*, and that this fundamental human equality requires us to work for human rights both around the world and in our own backyards."

Congregation Beth Israel took part in Human Rights Shabbat by sharing new liturgy, readings, poems, and prayers during our Shabbat morning service and studying texts relating to human rights during Torah study.

T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights is an organization led by rabbis from all streams of Judaism that acts on the Jewish imperative to respect and protect the human rights of all people. Grounded in Torah and our Jewish historical experience and guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they advocate for human rights in Israel and North America. T'ruah continues the historic work of Rabbis for Human Rights-North America, which was founded in 2002 and renamed T'ruah in January 2013.

Shabbat candle and Havdalah times, Jan/Feb



If you want to light Shabbat candles and make havdalah at the halakhically-accepted times, here they are:

1/3 candles 4:13pm, 1/4 havdalah 5:19pm
 1/10 candles 4:20pm, 1/11 havdalah 5:25pm
 1/17 candles 4:38pm, 1/18 havdalah 5:33pm
 1/24 candles 4:36pm, 1/25 havdalah 5:41pm
 1/31 candles 4:46pm, 2/1 havdalah 5:49pm
 2/7 candles 4:55pm, 2/8 havdalah 5:58pm
 2/14 candles 5:04pm, 2/15 havdalah 6:06pm
 2/21 candles 5:13pm, 2/22 havdalah 6:15pm
 2/28 candles 5:22pm, 3/1 havdalah 6:23pm

Hooray for sundown coming later each day!

Interview with David Curiel

from Joanne Ranzer

David Curiel, our cantorial soloist for the past two High Holiday Services, is a busy man. He is the husband of Amberly and loving father of a 14 month old daughter, Dafna. He is a Jewish educator at an after school Hebrew School in the Boston area and a rabbinical student with the Jewish Renewal movement.

(continued on p. 10)



David leads meditative prayer at the 2013 ALEPH Kallah (Jewish Renewal Biennial.)

David was born in Venezuela, of a Venezuelan dad and an American mom. His Mom was raised in Michigan. The family lived in South America till David was 11. His paternal roots go back to the Jewish expulsion from Spain. His great grandfather was a *schochet* (butcher), a *mohel* and an MD in Venezuela. David remembers some Jewish education during that time but the majority of his Jewish upbringing took place in the Detroit area, where his family relocated when he was 11. Mom's immediate family immigrated to Canada before the Holocaust and he still has family in Toronto. He has a sister in Maine (who attended one of our High Holiday services) and 3 half siblings living in Florida, as does his Dad. His mother passed away in 2011.

David's Jewish journey continued as he went to Hebrew school at a Conservative shul and belonged to BBYO in high school. His summers at Jewish camps had a big impact on his positive sense of Judaism.

David graduated from University of Michigan and received his MBA at University of Indiana. During college and until he moved to San Francisco years later, he had little in-

volvement in Judaism. He states, "As a former non-religious Jew, I'm not as caught up in the hysteria (by some) around the recent Pew Report, or the hopelessness some feel about young Jews."

He met his wife, Amberly, in San Francisco. Though she wasn't Jewish, she was spiritual and pushed for shared spirituality in their home. At this point, David felt the need to go "shul shopping" and discovered Beit Tikkun and Rabbi Michael Lerner. Rabbi Lerner was a leader in the Renewal movement.

When I inquired how David could best describe what the movement stands for, he replied, "Renewal integrates spirituality that feels real and relevant within the context of Jewish practice and within the real world". He also considered Renewal appealing as Amberly was accepted into the community without judgement.

I asked David when he discovered he was gifted with a beautiful singing voice. He relates that his grandmother told him she sang to him in the crib and he hummed back. He always loved to sing and was part of choirs in both high school and college.

Sharing what might surprise people about him, "I've travelled extensively throughout the world, in five of the seven continents. The most far-flung journey was a hiking trek in the Tien Shan mountain range of Kyrgyzstan in 1994, which involved a 36-hour train ride from Moscow across Kazakhstan to get there, drinking fermented horse's milk, and being hosted for tea by shepherds in their yurt".

Presently, he davens at a traditional egalitarian *shtiebl* (little synagogue community) hosted in a Rabbi's home. That Rabbi was trained in the Reform movement and is presently a member of the Conservative movement.

(continued on p. 11)

It was lovely getting to know David. To me, all these paths within Judaism, enrich our heritage and bring choices to both Jews and those looking for a rich, spiritual direction.

Update from the Co-Pres.

from Pattie Lipman

CBI's 2013 Annual Meeting saw a good turnout of congregants. Much was accomplished that evening and it was, as always, good to visit with old friends and meet new ones. Overviews of the year were given from the perspective of our Rabbi and from the lay perspective of Bill Levy, Co-President; we heard committee reports from Liz Miller of Membership and PR, Sue Hogan of Finance, Jane Miller of Cemetery and Erin Casey of Education. These reports illustrated the dedication and hard work of current committee members and painted a positive and dynamic picture of the state of CBI. We voted in the new membership category of Student Member, and we elected the 2014 Board of Directors. The Jewish Star Award was presented by Susan Hogan and Darlene Radin to outgoing President Grace Bowen. Grace, you have been an inspiration to me and to many others. *Kol HaKavod*.

New to the Board are Attorney, Erin Casey and Anesthesiologist, David Pomerantz. Erin has been and will continue as Education Committee Chair and David and his wife Mary Beth have been great supporters of CBI over the years. Mary Beth was the former Education Committee Chair. Returning to the Board after time off is Heather Levy who is also a teacher in the Religious school.

We have to say farewell and offer our sincere thanks to Marc Gotlieb and Grace Bowen for their great service on the Board.

Two days after the Annual Meeting the Membership and PR committee along with volunteers served up a wonderful New and Prospective Members Brunch. Months in the planning, the committee reached out to

members who joined CBI in the last five years, to prospective members and to the entire congregation inviting them to a scrumptious Oneg after services. From what I could see a good time was had by all and we agreed that more events of this kind, where we could get together to shmooze and nosh and enjoy each others company would be very welcome.

Since last spring, Bill and I have been acting co-Presidents. It has been great for me to be working with Bill, with congregants and the Board and our committees and with Rabbi Rachel and Jack. Everyone has been helpful and patient and good humored. Many thanks from this novice co-President.

Please remember that it's important to us to hear from you and find out how things are going for you at CBI – don't be a stranger - let us know when things need work and also, let us know when things are going well.

Lastly, at this time of year, calendars across the Berkshires and the Northeast are starting to get settled. We at CBI need to think about what events and activities would be great to have in our shul. The sooner we know, the better we'll have a chance at scheduling events that won't conflict with the other vibrant happenings around the Berkshires.

What would be interesting to you? Or what would you be able to offer? Whether a lecture series, music, folk dancing, cooking classes, readings or learning to chant Torah for the next High Holidays, or something completely different, let us know. Drop us a line, give us a call.

Grace Bowen: our "Jewish Star"

from Joanne Ranzer

Grace Bowen, immediate past president of CBI, was presented with the "Jewish Star"

(continued on p. 12)

award at the Annual Meeting in November. This award is given to members who have gone above and beyond in their service to Congregation Beth Israel. Past recipients are Chris Kelly Whitney, Len Radin, and Bob Bashevkin.



Photo by Len Radin.

Grace is a Jew by choice, who underwent conversion after studying with Rabbi Goldwasser. She wasn't moved by Catholicism but was a spiritual person, so conducted an exhaustive search for a religion she felt was a "good fit." After much searching, she chose Judaism and hasn't looked back since.

Grace was a dedicated board member and president, who gave of her time and expertise selflessly in so many ways. She was forced to step down from her position due to a serious and prolonged illness.

I had a chance to talk with Grace as I prepared this article. We talked about her life both within CBI and outside of her congregational responsibilities.

Grace was raised in the Albany area, the eldest of four children, and was often in charge

as both of her parents worked. She was preparing dinner for the whole family by age ten. She graduated from Southern Vermont College with a degree in Liberal Arts and Management and received her MBA from University of Phoenix. Grace relates, "the challenge of school and needing to support myself had me working full time and more and then studying at night, often til 2am." She wanted to augment what she called her "own natural business sense" with an advanced degree.

Grace enjoyed taking classes through U of Phoenix, as she studied under prominent professors, including an attorney with the Federal Reserve. She also liked the diverse student body, many of whom worked for well-known companies. She shared, "I felt like I could hold my own with experienced and bright fellow students, and that helped raise my confidence level."

In addition, Grace states having in-depth knowledge of people like Max Planck, and could calculate $E=MC^2$ and understand a lot of physics. On the flipside, she considers herself quite artist, having had her own pottery studio and darkroom.

She states, "I have a keen mechanical ability. As a child, my father's hand tools were my favorite toys. Later, I tackled all kinds of projects including electrical, plumbing, even the brakes on my car."

Grace's most gratifying accomplishments at CBI, in her words: "For me, the most gratifying areas involved successfully dealing with change and helping to provide a positive attitude and calming influence. In managing change here at CBI, I looked at not only internal but external forces that might have caused damage to our congregation. Being President during a move from full time to part time rabbi took a lot of energy in keeping people both calm and thoughtful.

(continued on p. 13)

Lots of the work was helping people see that a serious fiscal crisis was upon us, as opposed to this being an emotional choice of one Rabbi over another."

When I asked Grace how she managed all the diverse opinions and complaints, she replied, "I would listen to everyone and try to see it from their perspective. Most importantly, I would try to do what was best for the congregation, for the majority of people, and not be radical but more of a centrist."

When asked what strengths she brought to the job, she reported, "I was a Quality Assurance Manager who was accustomed to dealing with change in a very fast-paced environment. If you do not change, you die. One of the things I tried to do was to understand who we were as a congregation and what we *needed*, not so much what we wanted. We were living on a filet mignon appetite with a hamburger budget. One of the skills I brought in my tool bag was understanding budgets. You have to follow basic good business practices or you will find yourself closing your doors, like many other local religious organizations. I love CBI and I was not going to let that happen. I think we were coming up on the date that if we did not make drastic changes, the doors to CBI were projected to close in Feb 2014. Now I am happy to say that won't happen, since we are operating in the black and have a healthy balance sheet with costs in line with our income."

I stated that we knew Grace had serious health and personal issues and that CBI struggled to fill the huge void created by her absence. She was forced to step down from the Presidency and chose to leave the Board. I asked how she feels looking back and what part she might play in the future.

"No one was more shocked than I was that I ended up in the hospital and was so ill. Thankfully, Pattie and Bill have done a wonderful job, and they and the Board have my

full support. CBI is and will continue to be a wonderful Jewish center in the Northern Berkshires thanks to everyone's help and support in my time of need. I am not one to throw in the towel, but I had no choice as physically, mentally, and emotionally I needed to concentrate on getting well again. It's premature to consider what the future holds, other than keeping my Take and Eat role (head chef.)"

When asked what people might not yet know about Grace, she replied, "I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up! I am pretty funny, once you get to know me. Cooking and baking is an off-shoot of chemistry and cooking for 100 is not a big deal to me as I like to feed people -- it's the Italian / Jewish thing. That's what I like about Take and Eat."

Our 2013 "Jewish Star" had a lot of meaningful history to share. Mazal tov again to Grace Bowen, and we wish her good health in the future!

Happy Occasions!

We wish happy birthdays and anniversaries to our members who have simchas during January and February:

Happy Birthday!

Chaya Radin
Michelle Radin
Roberta Sullivan
Ethan Zuckerman
Ruth Ginsburg
Anna Kronick
Molly Howard
Emma Sandstrom
Richard Taskin
Faia Sarah Kronick
Alice Cande
Amy Filson
Jesse Cohen
Steven Miller
William Sands

(continued on p. 14)

Peter Murphy
 Matt Levy
 Howard Wineberg
 Rabbi Pamela Wax
 Emily Levy
 Patricia Reichler
 Gabriel Gerry
 Lyra Marshall
 Ellen Deibert
 Eugene Wein
 David Thier
 Allen Kushnet
 Katie Lynn Sann
 Judith Weber
 Dustin Weeds
 Karol White
 Jonah Kelly-Whitney
 Heather Levy
 David LaChance
 Rose Rudin
 Warner Smith
 Lillian Glickman
 Cheryl Sacks

Happy Anniversary!

Vivienne and Marc Jaffe
 Jane and Robert Miller

Many thanks

We offer gratitude to members and friends for their fiscal support of CBI.

Generations Campaign Contributions

Marc & Lauren Gotlieb

High Holiday Appeal

Stuart & Helene Armet
 Robert & Barbara Bashevkin
 Robin Brickman & Jefferson Strait
 Milton/Martha Dalitzky Family Foundation
 Adam & Amy Filson
 Marc & Lauren Gotlieb
 Michael & Barbara Kaplan
 Howard & Dale Levitz
 Patricia Anne Lipman
 Michael & Shoshanna Ridberg
 Howard & Roberta Saunders
 Morton & Evelyn Slapin

Take & Eat Program

George & Dena Drasin *in honor of Diane Bleau*

Cemetery Donation

Linda & Steve Desatnik *in memory of Bessye and Samuel Greenberg*

Other Donations

Mitchell Burgin, *in memory of Joan Green Gardner*

Alan Bashevkin & Nancy Pearlman *In memory of Edith Bashevkin*

Alice Cande, Pattie Lipman & Liz Miller *for the 10 Anniversary of Chaim and Pam*

Richard & Anna Jo Dubow *in memory of Beatrice Renfield*

Lillian S. Glickman *in honor of Jane Miller's birthday with thanks and appreciation of the enjoyable senior lunches.*

Michael & Carol Hirsh, Jordan & Sandra Hirsh *Golding in memory of Samuel U. Hirsh*

Marilyn Less *in memory of William Less*

Frances Licht *in memory of Anne Wolkin*

Richard & Elaine Parmett *in thanks for CBI being so welcoming*

Ellen Schiff *in memory of Morton Schiff*

Leonard & Lois Waldman *in memory of the Salkin family*

In memory of Adrienne Apkin

Alice Dydowicz
 Bernie Pinsonnault & Dianne Cutillo
 Michael & Sally Ginsburg
 Mark Gold & Ellen Kennedy
 Myrna Katz
 Carol & Edward Oshinsky
 Franklin Risatti
 Howard & Roberta Saunders
 Warner & Amely Smith

(continued on p. 15)

Susan Gold
Florence Wineberg
Lillian Glickman

Donations Welcome

Donations to CBI are always welcome, and may be directed to:

Cemetery Fund
Education Fund
Building Fund
Krizack Scholarship Fund Frank Bequest
Ramah Endowment Fund Torah Fund
Event Fund
Senior Lunch Fund
Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
Take & Eat
Program Fund
Gemilut Chasadim (Acts of
Lovingkindness)

The *Gemilut Chasadim* ("Acts of Lovingkindness") Fund (also known as a *gemach*) will help to support acts such as cooking meals / buying groceries for those who are in fiscal need or who are too ill to shop/cook.

Seeking Shamashim

The Shamashim are the people who facilitate the Saturday morning services, set out kiddush and bring some snacks for after services. The group is named after the *shamash*, the "helper candle" which lights the candles on a Chanukah menorah.

We are in need of additional Shamashim to help with our Shabbat services each Saturday morning and on periodic Friday nights.

The Shamashim have been faithfully hosting our services for years but we need to expand that group by a few. It takes a Saturday morning, from about 9 to noon, once or twice

in a 4 month time period.

Hosting services is an honor. It is also a joy, a way to meet members and welcome potential members and visitors. Bringing your children or spouse is welcome, and they can help or just relax and enjoy the service and the beautiful light streaming through the sanctuary windows. That's up to you.

Helping at services is a way to teach children about serving the community and performing a mitzvah.

Pattie Lipman makes a 4 month schedule using the possible dates people provide, and it has worked out well for years now.

If it is something you would like to try, Pattie can match you with one of our hosts for your first hosting experience. If you have questions, ask away!

All are welcome!

Next Newsletter...

If you have items to submit for the March/April newsletter, please submit them to rabbibarenblat@gmail.com by **February 15, 2014**.

Thanks!

Congregation Beth Israel
53 Lois Street
North Adams, MA 01247
www.facebook.com/CBINorthAdams
www.cbiweb.org

Congregation Beth Israel
53 Lois Street
North Adams MA 01247

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
North Adams, MA
01247
Permit Number 56

SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS & PHONE NUMBERS

Office:

Monday - Friday
9am - 1pm

Phone & Fax (413) 663-5830
E-mail cbioffice1@verizon.net

Rabbi's Study:

Mondays 8am-3:30pm
Fridays 9am-4pm
(meditation minyan 8:15am)
other times by appointment

Phone (413) 822-5267
E-mail rabbibarenblat@gmail.com

Rabbi: Rachel Barenblat
Co-Vice Presidents: Pattie Lipman & Bill Levy
Synagogue Administrator: Jack Hockridge
Temporary Newsletter Editor: Rabbi Rachel Barenblat