

Kayruv



קירוב

“Judaism for Today In a Warm and Caring Environment”

June 2017

Sivan/Tammuz 5777

FROM THE RABBI



Dear Friends,

Many years ago, a teacher of mine related this dialogue, which happened during a *beit din* for conversion. JBC here means Jew by Choice and JBB means Jew by Birth.

Both are female, just to help you visualize the scene.

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Kayruv means “Welcoming.”

JBB – So, tell us, what *mitzvot* (practices) have you adopted to know what Judaism feels like?

JBC – Well, I became kosher.

JBB – Wow, that must have been hard.

JBC – Not really, I began slowly, you know, doing it outside of the house and then after a few months I koshered my kitchen too.

JBB – Really? You koshered your kitchen!? Really! That must have been REALLY HARD!

JBC – Well, not really, you know, I began slowly. It took a few weeks practicing but now it is like driving a bicycle, I rarely think about it.

JBB – (sounding exasperated) You DON'T think about it? Impossible, it is SO HARD to keep kosher...

JBC – I don't find it so hard, it is a question of becoming used to it...

JBB (sounding exasperated and very defensive by now) – NOW, you clearly don't UNDERSTAND! Being Jewish IS hard! Keeping kosher IS hard! If you DON'T find it HARD, YOU must be doing something WRONG!!

It turns out that the Jew by Choice was doing everything right, she just didn't have the idea that “it is hard to be a Jew” yet. But let us give her time.

Meanwhile, I want to say that two families have recently embraced the idea and the practice of koshering their homes. And even though the process does disrupt a kitchen and a cook, it has a side of happiness, fun and fulfillment that only those who go through it can explain. And

despite what our friend JBB said during that *beit din*, most families are shocked to realize that lots of the products they already use are kosher – and it is much less hard than it looks.

So, for those considering whether it would be worth exploring, I want to point out that there are many things that you buy that either have a *hechsher* (a kosher symbol) or don't need one. A cautionary note: a simple K stamped on the product is not a kosher symbol.

Let's consider the easier side first: things that do not need a kosher symbol. All fresh fruits and vegetables, canned or frozen fruits and vegetables (without additives, colorings or flavorings). Factory pre-cut fresh fruit and vegetables, whole, unprocessed grains, raw unprocessed eggs, raw or salted nuts, molasses, sugar, vegetable oils, unmixed spices do not require a *hechsher*. Spices that are a combination, such as "Asian flavor" and the like do need a *hechsher*.

Plain fresh or frozen fish does not require a *hechsher* as long as it has the required fins and scales. Common fish that are acceptable are: salmon, tuna, halibut, cod, red snapper, trout, mahi-mahi, etc. Needless to say, shellfish (shrimps, lobsters, crabs, scallops, clams, oysters, squids and octopi) or any products containing these as partial ingredients are unacceptable. Catfish, monkfish, and eel are not kosher.

All unflavored beers, domestic and imported, with no additives don't need a *hechsher*, the same goes for all straight bourbon, all unflavored vodka, all Coca-Cola Company products, all seltzers and any 100% juice.

What definitely needs a symbol? Any meat, obviously. Any cheese, yogurt (particularly light or diet yogurts, which contain gelatin) and any baked products. Any grape derivative (such as vinegar, wine, brandy, cognac, grape juice and grape flavored candy), dried fruit or flavored nuts, liqueur, rum, sake, tequila, vermouth, blended whiskey. Any product derived from vegetables (prepared or manufactured) even if labeled "vegetarian" or "100% natural", needs a kosher symbol due to the possible presence of insects or by-products of insects. This is especially the case with organic foodstuffs and products with food coloring (several of the food colorings on the market are produced from the innards of insects, particularly the cochineal. Google it at your own risk.) Sodas, because of the coloring, fall in this category.

One last word about kosher symbols. Every so often someone asks if this or that symbol is good enough. I usually tell them that if the rabbi behind the symbol thinks he (it is usually a he) has shoulders large enough to bear the responsibility, then I'm with him. After all, it is his job. So, yes, I accept all kosher symbols as kosher enough.

Warmly,
Rabbi Nelly Altenburger

RABBI'S OFFICE HOURS

Rabbi Altenburger invites you to meet with her and will be available any day except Wednesday and Shabbat. Please feel free to call or stop by.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe that it's been three years since I volunteered to serve as president of Congregation B'nai Israel, and although everyone looks at me funny when I say it, the experience has truly been an honor and a privilege. I've been reading through all of my previous Kayrux letters looking for a common thread, and in a word, it's "WOW!" We consistently accomplish so much with so little that it's absolutely remarkable—every day I'm filled with wonder and gratitude, and that has been an incredible blessing.

Speaking of both wonder and gratitude, I'm still agog at how Isabel Kaplan and more volunteers than I have the space to name here manage to improve on Touch-A-Truck every single year. How is that possible? The weather this time may have been a bit chilly, but the real, live electric train was sizzling, and we owe a big thank-you to John from All Star Demolition in Danbury for donating his time and the use of the train and track to the cause, along with all of the other businesses, EMTs, policemen, and firemen who generously displayed and explained their remarkable equipment. *Kol hakavod!*

Looking down the road a bit, our annual meeting will be on Sunday evening, June 25 at 6:00 pm. This strikes me as a particularly crucial meeting, because it comes at a pivotal moment in the life of our congregation. This fall will be our 120th anniversary, an extraordinary milestone that exemplifies our strength and vitality as a congregation, yet I have increasingly felt that we have been losing sight of what we could be and why we matter, not just for ourselves but most critically for others.

The difficulties we face (as I wrote in these pages two years ago) seem to be pressuring us into channeling our efforts into mere survival, while dissuading us from thinking deeply about who we are, what we treasure as a community, and how we want to change the world. It is my deepest regret as president that during my tenure I was able to sound the alarm, but ultimately failed to navigate us through these challenging and controversial questions.

The good news is that we have finally started to address these issues as a community. I am certain that we will choose to make some agonizingly difficult decisions over the next few years, decisions that will require creativity, *chutzpah*, and tenacity—all of which we are luckily blessed with in abundance! I am overjoyed to see (as I wrote last year) that adversity is bringing us closer together, encouraging us to strengthen our ties to each other and remember why we are so important to each other. This bears repeating, so I'll say it again: whatever the future holds, there's no better way to meet it.

Finally, rather than my usual closing line, I'd like to leave you with a "word cloud" of every closing line I've written in every one of my Kayrux articles, in which the size of each word is related to the number of times I used it. This is how I see Congregation B'nai Israel, and if all of you do too, then I have no doubt that B'nai Israel will thrive for at least another 120 years.

Please see next page.

Kennis Koldewyn



**CONGRATULATIONS TO
OUR HIGH SCHOOL AND
COLLEGE GRADUATES**

Hannah Hirsch, daughter of Vanessa and Peter Hirsch graduates from Danbury High School on June 19th. She has been accepted to Western Connecticut State University where she plans to study a dual major in Biology and Computer Science.

Isaac Ohring, son of Mary Ohring graduated from Western Connecticut State University with a Bachelor of Music Degree in Violin.

**Jewish Family Services of Greater
Danbury/Putnam**

Donna Prywes M.S.W., Administrator

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- *Normal life transitions or stressful, traumatic life events

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If you or anyone you know is ill or in need of support, please call our **Bikur Cholim** (Caring) Committee at 203-792-6161.

JUNE EVENTS

Sunday, June 25th at 6:00 P.M. Annual Congregational Meeting

Please plan to attend our annual congregational meeting scheduled for June 25th at 6:00 P.M. We need one-third of our membership present in order to pass our slate and our budget. Our president, Kennis Koldewyn, will present the State of the Synagogue report, the budget for fiscal 2017-18, as well as sharing our accomplishments, successes, and the stumbling blocks we face.

The annual congregational meeting is also your opportunity to be heard. Let us know what's on your mind. We need to hear what you can suggest on how to build the best possible synagogue community. Help us to keep on growing and advancing as the vital, stimulating, exciting religious "home" we have become for our members.

Slate of Nominees for Election to positions of Officers and Trustees of Congregation B'nai Israel presented by the Nominating Committee at the Annual Membership Meeting to be held on June 25, 2017:

OFFICERS

President: Paul M Simon
1st Vice President: Barbie Steinberg
2nd Vice President: Barbara Levitt
Recording Secretary: Asya Takken
Corresponding Secretary: Nada Adler
Treasurer: Lois Stein
Financial Secretary: Peter Hirsch

TRUSTEES

Pamela Lampell
Glen Lebetkin
Barbara Levitt
Eliezer Rabinovich
Susan Tritter
Barbara Weisblatt

GOOD TIMES WE SHARED

CBI's TOUCH A TRUCK EVENT

We had a beautiful, albeit somewhat chilly, day for this year's **Touch A Truck** event.

The Touch A Truck fundraiser takes lots of time, energy and coordination. A **BIG THANK YOU** to **EVERYONE** who helped. We have pulled off yet another "funraising" event for CBI.





Photos courtesy of Nadja Raver and Kennis Koldewyn

KASKESET A CAPELLA PERFORMANCE

On Sunday, May 21st, 2017, a concert performed by Kaskeset A Cappella was hosted at B'nai Israel by Asya and Todd Takken, in honor of their son Mark's *Bar Mitzvah*.

Kaskeset A Cappella, founded in 1996, is an a cappella group from SUNY Binghamton. A cappella is a kind of music that is done without instruments. In Italian, a cappella literally means "in chapel" or "choir style." Singers rely solely on their voices to provide the main song, and the background music. The result is a surprisingly full musical experience.

Today, many colleges have a cappella groups. In fact, there are over 400 colleges listed as having them at www.collegiate-acappella.com. Many of these colleges have multiple groups, and Binghamton is no exception. According to Alison Stiel, Music Director of Kaskeset, SUNY Binghamton has nine, "each with its own shtick." She mentioned that there is an all boys a cappella group, an all girls a cappella group, an alternative a cappella group, and a few others. "We just happen to be the Jewish group."

So, what does it mean to be a Jewish a cappella group? Kaskeset sings songs from three genres: Israeli Pop, secular pop, and Jewish liturgical music. For their concert at B'nai Israel, Kaskeset sang ten songs, and only one of them qualifies as "secular pop." It would seem that what makes them Jewish, for the most part, is their song choices. The group welcomes members from all denominations of Judaism. They've had religious members, and non-religious members. Currently, all members are Jewish, but over the years, Kaskeset has had members that were not Jewish at all.

Since their songs are mostly in Hebrew, some might think it would be daunting for the non-religious members. According to Stiel, the levels of fluency fluctuate. "A lot of members came in and didn't really grow up with any Hebrew; maybe they had a Bar Mitzvah. They learn it's not as hard as they think." Perhaps song is the best way to learn a new language. It probably helps that they practice for six hours every week. Stiel claims proudly that she is "almost fluent."

There is more to the group than just singing. There is figuring out how they will look and how they will move. Tali Laserson is responsible for the choreography, and personally, I think she did a magnificent job. Both the music and the movements were rhythmic and coordinated. During one song, some of the members

mimed holding instruments. They made jazzy movements to go with the jazzy feel of the concert during songs such as the classic "*Bei Mir Bist Du Shein*" by The Andrews Sisters. During the song "*B'tzelem Elokim*," the group brought up audience members to sing some of the chorus with them. This added a sense of interactivity to the show.

Isaac Kochman said, "It was amazing," and Caleigh Waskowicz said, "Oh my gosh. It was awesome."

The members also introduced themselves to the audience. There was Alison Stiel, Abby Spilky, Ari Massias, Yair Farkas, Tali Laserson, Rachel Greenspan, Tamar Ashdot-Bari, Ezra Goldmeer, and Allen Saltzman. These nine college students seemed to have a great time performing at our synagogue. And our members seemed to have a great time hearing them.

"It was beautiful and fun." Said Heather Walter, "Thank you to Asya."

"I thought it was wonderful," said Barbara Levitt. "Very nice kids, very good songs, and very different kind of entertainment for a bar mitzvah."

This was a wonderful program for our synagogue, and hopefully there will be more like it in the future.

Leora Waltuch



BEYOND B'NAI ISRAEL



Last summer, I moved 3000 miles away to California in order to begin rabbinical school at American Jewish University. It was a huge adjustment. I knew not a soul in Los Angeles and had to

transport my things and my car, furnish an apartment, feed myself, and find community. There were lots of ups and downs. I spent my first two nights here sleeping on a yoga mat and a neck pillow. Eventually, however, I found my rhythm, made friends, and immersed myself in my studies.

This past year I took Modern Hebrew, an Introduction to Mishna class, and an Introduction to Jewish Philosophy class. I really enjoyed studying Mishna and learning how to translate Mishnaic Hebrew into English. I spent endless hours, with a *chevruta* or alone, with several dictionaries in front of me trying to make heads or tails of *mishnayot* and commentaries.

This summer, I will be living on campus and working as an assistant helping with conferences on campus. I will also be *leyning* several times this summer both for pay and as a volunteer. I plan on using my free time to brush up on my modern Hebrew and Mishnah skills. I'm hoping to find time to play basketball and practice yoga.

On Shabbat, you can find me *davenning* at one of the Los Angeles community's fine *minyanim*: usually at a joyful independent *minyan* called *Shtibl*; a progressive, ecstatic *davenning* experience at IKAR; or Temple Beth Am's Friday night singing service Shabbat Sovev. I often spend Shabbat evenings having dinner with friends and afternoons reading or napping.

I am very grateful for all my experiences at Congregation B'nai Israel. I am making good use of all the Torah and all the skills that I picked up during my time there. I hope to return sometime in the near future to share all I've learned.

Jason Mix

THROUGH A JEWISH LENS



In March of this year, I was sponsored to participate in a leadership conference for coaches in Warsaw, Poland. I was lucky enough to be able to extend my trip by two days on either side. Prior to going, I imagined gray block communist buildings and hang-overs of anti-Semitism and a Jewish graveyard. What I found was quite different.

Warsaw views itself as a phoenix which is rising from the ashes of Nazi occupation and Communist control. While in Warsaw, I went on at least four different walking tours and learned why this is a realistic image.

They are still recovering from Nazi devastation of Warsaw during WWII and, in Warsaw particularly, after the Polish Uprising of August–October, 1944. After initial success, the Polish resistance and general population of Warsaw were severely beaten down. The old town square and other valued areas were largely destroyed and the population that remained had few resources. The Russians sat on the other side of the river watching and waiting so that when they came in there would be little resistance. The Nazis punished Warsaw by destroying most of the city before they were forced to leave. Russian communists did little to rebuild the city other than block housing and several monuments.

Prior to visiting Warsaw I had a casual correspondence with another coach from Hungary. She asked me where my family was from and when I mentioned I'm Jewish and my grandparents were from Poland she wrote back something like, '*then it will be a sort of home coming.*' My initial unspoken response was, 'what are you talking about, that is an insensitive response.' Turned out, I felt quite welcome. Prior to going, I had read that Poles tend to be complainers and that often when two Poles are together there are three opinions. Sound familiar?

Jewish history is integrated into the history of Warsaw. All the tours we went on within Warsaw acknowledged that 25% of the population of Warsaw was Jewish in 1939. The population was mixed with assimilated, religious, educated, and newly arrived mostly poor Jews who had been

coming to Warsaw since the end of the 1800s looking for better opportunities. Or perhaps they had to leave their homes as my grandfather did when he was 12; he went to Warsaw by himself and worked in a shoe factory. The same type of move to the urban centers that has occurred as many countries industrialize.

The history of the Poles themselves is mixed regarding their role in the holocaust. There was a tendency to blame the Germans. Especially when it came to the events at Auschwitz there was a lot of distancing themselves from what occurred. Within Warsaw, the tours we were on highlighted righteous gentiles; there was no way to get around the destruction which occurred in their own back yards and the lack of protection for Jews. There was a bit of excuse-making that it was hard for everyone and that to help a Jew was to endanger one's self and family, but, mostly they avoided this aspect of history.

After my conference, Sam arrived and we went to Auschwitz with my local non-Jewish colleague. We took a private tour and were joined by three Swedes, a man 33 years old, and two women age 23 and 26, who came to celebrate the 26 year-old's birthday. Celebrating with a trip to Auschwitz, why? They considered it an important part of European history and while in Poland a responsibility to visit. At Auschwitz, you have to go on a guided a tour. There were many people present and from varied backgrounds. There was a young couple from Greece and I wondered again, what drew them to take this tour – a knowledge of the historical significance and a sense of responsibility to not overlook this when they are so close. We were impressed by the awareness and attitude of these young people.

In 2013, the POLIN Museum of History of Polish Jews opened on a site within the former Warsaw Ghetto. This is a modern interactive museum which reviews the 1,000 years of Jewish life in Poland. It is extensive, interesting and engaging, with exhibits such as one that allows visitors to follow the routes of traders by choosing the items which come from a certain place and identifying where it would go; learn about specific Jewish traditions; hear debates of the Vilna Gaon regarding Baal Shem Tov; view films; listen to recordings and more. I only got as far as the year 1800 after spending about four and a half hours in the museum, and the collection is much more extensive going forward in time.

I think that the opening of the museum has had a very positive effect on Jewish identity in Poland. This museum, the monuments to the fighters of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Auschwitz and other memorials drew many young Jews especially from Israel and France. The awareness of Jewish history and the presence of Jews coming to Poland somehow seems to allow more people to identify as Jews. I went to a Progressive synagogue with several colleagues on Friday evening. It was very moving. There were over thirty people who participated, some Jewish by birth, some converts and some in the process of conversion. The service was in Polish, Hebrew and English, with an American rabbi. Many of the congregants spoke English. A Torah from a congregation in Norwood, MA had just been donated and was being dedicated the night we were there. It was very moving to hear the story of the Polish Working Man's Torah, with heavy *eitz chayim* and distinct script. There was an easy *kesher* with these people. We stayed for dinner and learned about some of the congregants. We also learned that there are currently nine progressive congregations in Poland. I couldn't believe it. I'm sure many are struggling in ways that are similar to our own congregation, and they have only very part-time rabbis.

For my non-Jewish friends and colleagues the contribution of the Jews to Polish society and the long history was quite a juxtaposition to the level of destruction. Even though they knew about the holocaust, the exposure to the reality was overwhelming. Having grown up with the national trauma of the holocaust, I actually came away with hope. I was pleased that young people are interested in learning about the holocaust. I was glad to hear about the brave individuals who were righteous gentiles. I was pleased to see the wonderful and beautiful POLIN Museum that represents a thousand years of Jewish life in Poland, and I was impressed by the budding resurgence of Jewish life in Poland.

Oseh Shalom, May the One who makes peace in the heavens make peace for us and all of Israel. Then perhaps there will be peace in the world for all.

Dina Markind



At synagogue in Warsaw



The mermaid is the symbol of Warsaw. This was taken in the rebuilt Old Town square. The buildings were reconstructed based on blueprints of the buildings which were part of an architecture school project in the 1930s.



PLEASE SUPPORT OUR FRIENDS IN THE COMMUNITY

DONATIONS



FOR OUR LOCAL FOOD PANTRIES!

This is CBI's ongoing project to help our local food pantries. Items most in need are dried/canned beans, canned fish, peanut butter, jelly, fruit juice, sugar, flour, personal care items such as soap and shampoo.

CBI is a generous and caring community and as always, we thank you for your donations and support as they are truly appreciated.

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SCHEDULE OF SHABBAT SERVICES

☆ **Shabbat, 16 Sivan, June 10, B'Ha'Alotekha:**
The lighting of the Menorah each day in the Tabernacle by Aaron and his sons. The Israelites begin their travels and complaints through the desert, and Moses despairs in his burden of leadership. *Haftarah:* Zechariah 2:14-4:7

☆ **Shabbat, 23 Sivan, June 17, Shelah-Lekha:**
Scouts are sent out to the land of Canaan and bring back a fearful report which results in forty years of wandering in the desert. *Haftarah:* Joshua 2:1-24

☆ **Shabbat, 30 Sivan, June 24, Korah:** Korah and his band challenge the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The earth opens up and swallows them. *Haftarah:* Isa. 66:1-24, 23

☆ **Shabbat, 7 Tammuz, July 1, Hukat:** The death of Miriam and Aaron: Moshe leads alone. *Haftarah:* Judg. 11:1-33

☆ **Shabbat, 14 Tammuz, July 8, Balak:** King Balak unsuccessfully contracts Bilaam the prophet to curse Israel. *Haftarah:* Micah 5:6-6:8

☆ **Shabbat, 21 Tammuz, July 15, Pinhas:** In the fortieth year a census is taken of the Israelites and Joshua is appointed as Moshe's successor. *Haftarah:* Jer. 1:2-2:3

CANDLE LIGHTING

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| June 9, 2017: | 8:08 P.M. |
| June 16, 2017: | 8:11 P.M. |
| June 23, 2017: | 8:13 P.M. |
| June 30, 2017: | 8:13 P.M. |
| July 7, 2017: | 8:11 P.M. |
| July 14, 2017: | 8:08 P.M. |

YAHREZITS

19 Sivan, June 13, 2017

David Weiner (Jay Weiner)

21 Sivan, June 15, 2017

Martha Hindin (Allen Hindin)

30 Sivan, June 24, 2017

Harry Nackman (Joyce Shenker)

4 Tammuz, June 28, 2017

Harry Kaplan (Barry Kaplan)

7 Tammuz, July 1, 2017

Jacob Smeer (Dina Essinger)

Anne Kaplan (Donna Goodstein)

9 Tammuz, July 3, 2017

Yetta Horn (Roslyn Bank)

12 Tammuz, July 6, 2017

Leon Bank (Alex Bank)

Joseph Zimmerman (Shoshannah Zimmerman)

14 Tammuz, July 8, 2017

Louise Ellen Alpher (Harriet Lebetkin)

15 Tammuz, July 9, 2017

Claire Haller-Chwasky (Phyllis Cooper)

21 Tammuz, July 15, 2017

Kay Robinson (Barbara Levitt)

THANKS! THANKS!

For the General Fund

☆ Susan and Henry Tritter *mazel tov* to Mark Takken on his becoming a *bar mitzvah*

☆ Joyce and Martin Shenker *mazel tov* to Mark Takken on his becoming a *bar mitzvah*

☆ Pat and Alvin Goldman *mazel tov* to Mark Takken on his becoming a *bar mitzvah*

For Their Generous Kiddush

☆ Asya and Todd Takken in honor of Mark's *bar mitzvah*