The Blessing of Our Interfaith Clergy Partnerships

by Rabbi Andy Vogel

It was the first time I had ever received a blessing in a church. At lunchtime in a local church’s social hall, more than a dozen local members of the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faith leaders from around Brookline had gathered for our monthly meeting to discuss important issues of the day. Before beginning our group’s business agenda, as part of our “check-in” with each other on that November Thursday in 2018, sharing an important bit of news from each of our lives, I announced to the group that in a few days I was about to begin my three-month Sabbatical from Temple Sinai and begin a period of reflection, renewal and relaxation … and to my surprise, the group burst into applause with joy for me.

That’s when one of the Protestant ministers, a good friend, asked me if it would be okay with me if all the members of the Brookline Interfaith Clergy Association together offered a blessing for me, as I began my Sabbatical. This group, which has been gathering each month for over 15 years, has been a source of beautiful interfaith friendships and trust. Leaders from a variety of Protestant denominations – Episcopal, Unitarian, Church of Christ, United Methodist, liberal Evangelical, and more – as well as from the Catholic church, and rabbis from all the liberal streams of Judaism that are found in Brookline – Reform, Conservative, Jewish Renewal – have built over the years a shared vision for religious pluralism within the Town of Brookline, in addition to forging long-lasting personal friendships.

The relationships among us have deepened our connections, strengthened Brookline’s faith

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Members of the Brookline Interfaith Clergy Association posed for a photo following this year’s Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, on Sunday, November 24, 2019.
community, opened new windows into the meaning of faith and tradition, created a strong foundation for interfaith collaboration, and provided inspiration for building a better world starting right here in our town. I am deeply grateful for my colleagues in the Brookline Interfaith Clergy Association, and for all I continue to learn from them.

Through the years, we have discussed and taken action on issues related to the well-being of teens in our own communities, racism in Brookline, the relationship between minorities and the local police, the need for better services for the aged in our town, speaking out against xenophobia, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim proclamations from Washington, and much more. When times of joy or tragedy have fallen upon our communities, we have been present for one another.

We have shared our personal spiritual stories with one another, as listening witnesses to the wide variety of spiritual journeys and faith discoveries that are part of the human experience. We have heard how each one of us found our way to become a priest, rabbi, minister, or Muslim leader. Through the years, as we’ve gathered to hear each other’s stories, I am continually amazed at the depth of faith among my colleagues and the beauty in which each one of us practices our traditions and finds meaning in the search for faith.

Most visibly, for more than ten years, the Brookline Clergy Association has planned and held a beautiful Interfaith Thanksgiving Service for the community each year on the Sunday before the American Thanksgiving holiday, with music, prayer, and reflection, as well as readings from the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible, and the Koran that express and inspire gratitude from within each tradition. This year’s service featured Klezmer music, a moving sermon by the minister from the Church of Christ, chanting from the Koran, singing the Thanksgiving hymn “We Gather Together;” and an appeal for support for the Brookline Food Pantry, which serves the needy in three different locations around town.

In honor of this year’s Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day this coming January, Temple Sinai will partner with the Brookline Interfaith Clergy Association for the first time to hold an Interfaith Shabbat service, held in our Sanctuary, to honor the legacy of Dr. King, and to focus our attentions on the important work that is still needed to combat the racism that continues to plague us. (Please save the date for Friday, January 17, 2020, at 7:30pm, for this important event.) Thank you to Temple Sinai member Tammy Kallman for suggesting this new interfaith initiative and for taking the lead on the organizing.

On that Thursday a year ago, just a few days before I would begin my long-awaited Sabbatical, I accepted the interfaith blessing of these many friends. We all walked from the social hall into the sanctuary of the church, and there I stood, underneath the stained glass windows in one of Brookline’s dark, beautiful, old churches, surrounded by a circle of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faith leaders who each placed a hand gently atop of my head. I welcomed their blessing, a blessing of friends, each speaking in his or her own religious voice to ask God for my well-being. I was surrounded by friends, and this was, indeed, a great blessing. “Hineh mah tov u’mah na’im, shevet achim gam yachad” – “How good it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in peace” (Psalm 33:1-2).

Mark your calendar: The Interfaith Shabbat service honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will be at Temple Sinai on Friday, January 17, at 7:30 p.m.

Temple Sinai’s Vision Statement:

Temple Sinai honors individual journeys of Judaism, joyfully embracing and connecting our members in community. We are enriched by engaging in lifelong study of Torah, seeking holiness through meaningful worship, and bringing justice, healing and caring to our world. We each aspire to deepen communication, broaden commitments, and gain inspiration bound only by the limits of our dreams.
Tzedek@Sinai is a congregation-wide effort to center social justice in our Jewish lives at Sinai. Tzedek@Sinai is a platform for communicating and organizing around the issues that matter to our community, from prison reform to food and environmental justice. At its most instrumental, there is a small team of people working to connect people to causes to maximize our power and our voice for direct action.

Additionally, Tzedek@Sinai seeks to weave a narrative of social justice with the threads of our community, specifically the work that many are already doing in their personal or professional lives. For Temple Sinai to be one community committed to justice, we need to understand how causes are interconnected, and how a shared sense of justice binds us together.

These questions animated our workshop on the afternoon of October 6. About 35 people from the Sinai community, ranging in age from 8 to 80, gathered to explore the common narrative of social justice at Sinai. What are the issues that people care about? And what are the values or promises that connect those issues? The two-hour workshop was designed as a playful exploration that could give people the freedom to explore these questions in new ways and to discover new connections.

The first part of the workshop asked people, in small groups, to identify all the issues that motivate them to take action. These included LGBTQ rights, climate change, nuclear disarmament, prison abolition, and many more. These were all written down and shared on a central board.

Then it got fun. Each small group was asked to go to the board and select two seemingly disconnected issues and give them to another group. For example, one group received pollution and gun violence; another received mental health and refugee sanctuary; and another received climate change and food insecurity. The groups then explored the connections between these disparate issues. What resulted were conversations about fairness, access, voice, and care. People began to explore the underlying connections of social justice, and not only the symptoms manifested in the world.

The same groups were then asked to create a supervillain, whose main goal in life is to make the problems worse. “Blackout” has the ability to create fire, and he uses his power to destroy food and create massive black clouds. He is motivated to be destructive because “when he was a child, he often went to bed hungry, and he currently lives in a very hot and dry place and wants people to feel his pain.” Another villain, the “Mean Man,” is hellbent on destroying sanctuary and mental health, and his power is simply to make people feel sad, unsafe, and alone. His motivation stems from being left alone as a child and never feeling loved. This rather straightforward villain actually sheds light on the underlying issues that motivate us to action — lack of understanding, isolation, and resentment.

The last part of the workshop asked people to defeat another group’s villain. Framing the connections between problems in the form of a villain clarified how we came to think about solutions. Changing opinions about climate change is not unlike changing opinions about food insecurity — each problem is exacerbated by lack of empathy, structural ineq-
Happy to Be Journeying with You

by Student Rabbi Talia Stein

Student Rabbi Talia Stein is in her fifth and final year at Hebrew College. She supports the activities of Tzedek@Sinai, focuses on community organizing and social justice, deepens the engagement of our members with each other and with Judaism, and participates in the leadership of Shabbat and holiday prayer and ritual.

I’m so happy to have joined the community at Temple Sinai and have been honored by our journey together thus far. I want to share with you three moments in my journey that have led me here, to this moment with you.

In college, I led an interfaith service learning trip where we spent a week volunteering and learning about different religions. My co-staff was a Christian from Cameroon, and we learned so much about each other’s cultures, values, and faith. Towards the end of the trip, she said to me, “I always thought Jews just cared about themselves and did things for themselves, but I realized on this trip that’s not true. Thank you for changing my perception.” That shook me. I realized how important building partnerships is, as well as learning about others and listening. I also realized the incredible role social justice work can play in building bridges and deepening relationships.

Following college, I participated in a program called Avodah: The Jewish Service Corps, like a Jewish Americorps. I worked in organizing clergy around workers’ rights issues. During that year, it was obvious to me just how hard so many people work, yet they are completely undervalued for the work they do. They are often not paid enough, their wages are stolen, and they cannot afford to have their basic needs met. Furthermore, so many employers do not treat their workers with dignity. I realized what a powerful role clergy can play in supporting these workers and making sure they know they are respected and honored in their community, despite their employers trying to tell them otherwise.

Finally, I want to share a story about a powerful experience I had while leading a group of Hillel students on a Birthright Israel trip: David, an involved student at Hillel and vice president of the Jewish fraternity AEPi, had a painful experience at the Western Wall. One of the men encouraging Jewish men to put on tefillin told him he could not partake in the mitzvah because his father but not his mother is Jewish. After a long argument with the man, he left, saying, “I am never going to do that again.” We discussed and processed this encounter for a long time afterwards.

After hearing his story, I asked him if he’d like for us to learn how to wrap tefillin together. I had never done it before and was eager to explore a new ritual. I asked my colleague, Hillel’s rabbi, to teach us how to wrap tefillin; the next morning David and I learned about this ritual, learned how to wrap tefillin, and had a powerful experience participating in this ritual in an accessible and inclusive setting.

Several months later, I received a phone call from David asking to bring a few AEPi brothers to Hillel to wrap tefillin in memory of the victims of the terrorist attack at a synagogue in the Har Nof neighborhood of Jerusalem. He had heard from another rabbi that this was an initiative that some were doing in memory of those people and thought that this would be a powerful way to express his Judaism and memorialize these individuals.

Through this experience, I was able to try something new and claim a bit of my tradition. Furthermore, David was able to find meaning and acceptance in a place where he once felt rejected and discovered ritual as a way to connect with his Jewish identity. It is moments like this one that led me on my journey to becoming a rabbi. Judaism has played such a valuable role in my life, and I am passionate about building Jewish community that is accessible and inclusive and empowers people to live a meaningful Jewish life that works for them.
Building a Community with Love

by Charlie Homer
Temple President

When I mention to friends or acquaintances that I am the president of my temple, the reaction is consistent. “Oh, I’m sorry,” they say. Or “Why would you want to do that?” I’m not surprised to hear these reactions, because at new Temple President school (yes, there really is such a thing, called the “Scheidt Seminar”), we were warned by Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the Executive Director of the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ), that “my condolences” is indeed the most common reaction people have.

And when I speak with my fellow Presidents, or friends who are on the Boards of other Temples, I begin to understand why. I hear about intense conflict between the rabbi and the lay leadership. I hear about factions on the Board. I hear about inattention to the fundamentals of financial management.

And I am thankful that this is not the case at Temple Sinai.

Now I know that Temple Sinai hasn’t always been peaceful, with perfectly managed finances (although we’ve been fortunate in this respect for quite some time), but so far, the first six months of my presidency have been joyful and enriching. Why?

The URJ has a term for what the relationship between the Temple’s lay leadership and professional staff should be like—especially between the president and the (senior) rabbi. They call it a “sacred partnership.” Unlike a typical business relationship, the relationship between lay leaders and professional staff is focused on advancing the spiritual Jewish lives of Temple members.

At Temple Sinai, this indeed is the approach. Communication is open and frequent. I have the privilege of meeting with Rabbi Vogel each week to review what has happened and to plan. The Board and executive committee have long started meetings with Torah study to remind us that these aren’t just typical meetings. Since this Spring, our meeting agendas also remind us of Temple Sinai’s vision: “Temple Sinai honors individual journeys of Judaism, joyfully embracing and connecting our members in community. We are enriched by engaging in lifelong study of Torah, seeking holiness through meaningful worship, and bringing justice, healing and caring to our world. We each aspire to deepen communication, broaden commitments, and gain inspiration bound only by the limits of our dreams.”

I am also surprised when I hear about dysfunctional Boards in other Temples. Of course people disagree—they should. That’s why we have many voices in leadership groups. And of course we Jews have different opinions. That’s what the Talmud is all about. But in my years on the Board and in my first few months as president, it is clear that everybody on Temple Sinai’s Board has one interest in mind ... that of our community. Indeed, last year, immediate past president Nora Abrahamer led the Board to adopt a covenant, a B’rit, that articulates the responsibilities of Board members to act solely on behalf of the Temple.

This spirit of commitment to our community is also embodied by our approach to finances. We’re neither stingy nor profligate. Prior leaders made sure we have reserves not only in the event of difficulties or unexpected occurrences—like a leak in our roof last year, or the need to cover security costs after the tragic events of the past year—but also to provide steady income from interest to help support our regular operations. Lay leaders, like our treasurer and assistant treasurers, devote countless hours—working with executive director Linda Katz—to make sure all members are treated fairly and with respect in terms of membership support (aka dues), and that we can honor our commitments to each other.

I am sure challenges will arise. And while there is a great deal to celebrate about Temple Sinai, there are also areas that need be improved. But for now, with all of the pain and dysfunction outside the walls and world of Temple Sinai, I am grateful that within it, we are indeed building a world from love.
This past summer Temple Sinai won an award for having the largest number of participants per capita in the Northeast attending URJ summer camps and trips to Israel. Two of Sinai’s 39 campers were my children: Ruben, currently a high school sophomore, spent his last summer as a camper at Eisner Camp in Great Barrington, MA, and Zoe, a junior, went on a five-week NFTY trip to Israel and Eastern Europe.

Ruben was a shoo-in for Jewish sleepaway camp. While he may not admit it, he always participates wholeheartedly in Jewish activities. When his Hebrew school class was assigned to sing songs at Shabbat services, he was often in the front, singing away unabashedly. Sure enough, he loved Jewish camp. What was not to love? Playing games, goofing off in the pool, participating in sports and perpetual gaga, spending all day with his friends.

URJ posts a lot of photos on the Eisner website, and I would spy his big smiling face eating beef ribs at barbecue night. While his letters to us were scant, I could not have been more proud when he sent a letter to his grandmother stating that the best thing about camp was Shabbat. Indeed the Shabbat photos (again, a lot of them) would show kids dancing, sweaty, and smiling, participating in what looked like a rave but with 10- to 15-year-olds and presumably with Jewish music and prayer.

Camp Eisner raises the bar for its oldest campers in its Olim unit. This was the only year that Ruben decided to stay at camp for the full summer—seven weeks as opposed to his usual three. Along with the usual Shabbat mosh pit and gaga tournaments, Ruben enjoyed all of the privileges and responsibilities that are offered to the Olimers—traveling on a four-day trip to Montreal, having a little buddy, and leading color war. While seven weeks was a long time for this mother bird to have one away from the nest, knowing he would spend most of his summer in the Berkshires without electronic devices was nothing less than parental bliss.

Zoe’s decision to go to Israel surprised us a bit. Sure, we had participated in the Passport to Israel program since she was in 3rd grade and had heard first-hand from her cousins about their amazing trips to Israel several...
years earlier. But after her bat mitzvah, Zoe was not particularly involved with temple activities or Jewish life. She didn’t go to a Jewish sleepaway camp. Neither I nor my husband have ever been to Israel, so it was not a trip that we pushed her into. Perhaps the cousin trip normalized it for her, or maybe it was the traditional check given to Zoe at her bat mitzvah by the rabbi that, while it didn’t quite get her all the way to Tel Aviv, “at least got her to New York.”

Zoe signed up to go to Israel on a NFTY in Israel “National” tour group – meaning that it was not affiliated with any Jewish summer camp and the kids on the trip were from all over the country. When we received the roster, she was excited to see that she was the only one from New England; she had already made it a goal that this would be an experience that would force her out of her comfort zone, and she was prepared to take full advantage of all it had to offer. And that she did. From riding camels, “swimming” in the Dead Sea, sleeping under the stars in the desert, to rolling down sand dunes, Zoe squeezed all she could out of her experience. She took in all of Israel’s landscapes—deserts, beaches, cities, forests—all within an area roughly the size of New Jersey. We felt we went right along with her. (Remember those URJ camp photos? Same thing for their Israel trips!)

But the biggest impact on her were the social connections she made. She returned with 20+ new best friends from around the country, already working on plans for how she was going to see them again. She excitedly told us about her new Israeli friends whose homes she visited and stayed in, noting the differences between her everyday urban life in Brookline and life in a beautiful countryside with chickens in the yard and fig trees she could eat from. With social media, these are relationships that are easily maintained and will continue long after the trip has ended.

Zoe and Ruben both returned from their summer adventures filled with stories and memories, new and continued friendships, all the while forging a deeper relationship with their Jewish identity. These are the seeds that I hope will become fruitful for them as they grow into adults and seek out meaningful Jewish lives. I know that, for Ruben at least, his Jewish spiritual life will again be fortified and strengthened in the more immediate future, as he is already signed up for his trip to Israel next summer.
reserved for ads
Temple Sinai Gathers at Sukkot

Rabbi Andy Vogel and Martha Hausman hosted their annual “Open Sukkah” to celebrate Sukkot.
Daf Shevui: Studying Berakhot together, one page a week

by Karen A. Keely

On January 5, 2020, Jews around the world will embark on the 14th cycle of Daf Yomi, studying “a page a day” of the Babylonian Talmud. It’s a wonderful practice, instituted by Rabbi Meir Shapiro in 1923 in Poland … and it’s also an arduous undertaking! It takes almost 7½ years to work one’s way through the Talmud by reading one page (both sides) every day, a practice that takes 45-60 minutes daily. Most of us don’t have that kind of time in our daily lives.

Temple Sinai is therefore going to host a gentler practice: Daf Shevui (a page a week) rather than Daf Yomi (a page a day), focusing on the tractate Berakhot. This is the first tractate of the Talmud and is about prayers, blessings, and faith. Student Rabbi Talia Stein says that it is the perfect “beginner” book of Talmud: interesting material and reasonably accessible for those without a history of Talmud study.

Our plan is to start our study on Sunday, January 5, the same day as the Daf Yomi schedule begins, so that we can share our beginning study with Jews around the world. We will gather at 9:45 a.m. in a small group and learn with and from each other for an hour. This will be a drop-in/drop-out weekly gathering; come when you can, and don’t worry about it when you can’t. We’ll use volume 1 of the Koren Talmud Bavli (the Steinsaltz edition in English translation), although we’ll make photocopies for participants.

This more relaxed schedule for Talmud study is a part of 20th-century Jewish history, just as Daf Yomi is. “Daf Hashovua” was the name of a Yiddish radio show that ran weekly from 1953 to 1988 on New York City’s WEVD. This innovative program, in which Rabbi Mordechai Pinchas Teitz taught a page of gemara every week, eventually reached an expansive audience, one that included many women, who would have been excluded from more traditional study.

Although Talmudic study has historically been an Orthodox practice for men (with some separate study groups for Orthodox women), we can embrace our study of Berakhot as a Reform practice. In the words of Rabbi Benjamin David, reflecting on his own Daf Yomi study, “The Talmud, to me, is the quintessential Reform document. In ways that are both overt and less obvious, it recounts the many ways that Judaism changed and evolved in the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple. It also reminds us that we can disagree with one another without becoming enemies of one another, a lesson the world very much needs these days. The Talmud shows us that there are multiple pathways to God and Torah.”

Poet and literary critic Adam Kirsch, who has written weekly about the Talmud throughout the thirteenth Daf Yomi cycle for Tablet magazine, argues that “there is no real way of understanding what Jewishness means unless we understand what it meant; and for that, the Talmud, the text that stood at the center of Jewish life for more than a thousand years, is essential.” If you’re at all interested, please consider dipping your toes into “the sea of Talmud” with other Temple Sinai folks this year.

Mark your calendar: Daf Shevui runs Sunday mornings at 9:45 in Java Nagila Café, beginning on January 5. Join us!
Abraham and the Power of Faith: Parashat Lech L’cha

by Tade Sullivan

This is an excerpt from the D’var Torah delivered by Tade at his Bar Mitzvah at Temple Sinai on Saturday, November 9, 2019. Tade is the son of Jennifer and Timothy Sullivan. Mazel tov!

My Torah portion begins when G-d says to Abram, “Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.”

G-d tells Abram all of the great things he will do for him, but to earn these privileges Abram has to wander through the desert and test his faith. There are many times when Jews have been attacked and targeted when our faith is tested. I believe that if we don’t lose our faith in such difficult times, we will be blessed. I think that Abram must feel very uncertain after hearing G-d’s command because Abram has no idea where G-d is leading him.

There are many times when we feel uncertain. I think this is how Abram must’ve felt during his journey. Abram is asked to leave behind all of his belongings, and his only map towards his destination is his faith in G-d.

I think that faith can be a great source of inner strength for people. In Abram’s case, he has an uncertain future. Abram uses his faith in G-d as a way to protect himself on his journey. As I studied this Torah portion, I reflected upon times of uncertainty in my own life. I was one of the Jews who were scared for our safety on October 27, 2018, after the terrible shooting at Pittsburgh synagogue that took the lives of a number of people that day. Being Jewish made me scared during this time, but, surprisingly, it also gave me inner strength. The history of Jews and Judaism let me know all of the struggles and challenges Jews have faced for who they are. Knowing that we had survived for so long gave me comfort, as I knew that I was a part of something bigger than myself that let me call upon a larger source of courage. Faith had protected me by giving me inner strength.

I believe that even for people who don’t practice religion, faith can give them strength. Faith is often described as a product of religious belief, but it doesn’t have to be. Faith is to trust or believe in someone or something. Faith can mean believing in yourself. Faith is when you give someone your trust and believe that they will not take advantage of you. Faith is when you persevere against injustice in order to make the world a better place. Faith is when you continually put in effort towards reaching your goal and being able to act accordingly if your plan doesn’t work. Faith is reminding yourself that you’re human and deserve to be happy even when the world tells you differently. And faith is being able to redeem yourself after you make a mistake because you know you can be a better person. Facts are questions that we’ve already answered, but faith is believing that we will answer the rest.
We are off to a great start in the religious school. Our year began with a sunshine-filled back-to-school family picnic at Larz Anderson Park. Rabbi Vogel and shira teacher Yoni Bat-tat started us off with some singing and shofar-blowing, after which the teachers played get-to-know-you games with their students. We offered sack races, soccer sweep, kickball, face painting, origami, bubbles, bean bag toss, and more. Together we enjoyed a family picnic on the lawn, and what a joy it was to reconnect with everyone after the summer. These moments of community-building are what Temple Sinai Religious School is all about.

Our sixth graders have embarked upon a new social justice curriculum. Recently, the students learned about hunger and food justice in the United States. In addition to exploring some Jewish teachings, the class was presented with situations that Americans who experience food insecurity face. Then, with a few dollars in hand, they walked next door to Trader Joe’s and were tasked with buying a week’s worth of groceries for their “family’s” scenario. The goal was to learn about food insecurity first-hand and to think about it in light of Jewish values, including how we as Jews can address this issue. The non-perishable groceries they collected were donated to a local food pantry.

Our seventh graders, whom we refer to as Taglit, meaning discovery, are engaging in a new, interactive curriculum that is split into three sections: Jewish diversity, religious diversity, and a Tzedakah/chesed project. This year, Taglit will be visiting and curiously interacting with Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Sephardic, Christian, and Muslim houses of worship. In addition, the students will visit the Vilna Shul, tour Levine Chapel, examine the history of B’nai Mitzvah, and engage in an exploration of Jewish weddings.

Inclusion is an important topic that we are tackling this year. In February, Jared Matas, Director of STEAM Innovation at the Jewish Community Day School, will visit Temple Sinai to do a mini make-a-thon for students in Grades 3 – 7. This project will match our students with “need knowers”—defined as experts who have challenges—and with makers to help them problem-solve and do a design project. Next year we may do something on a larger scale with our Sinai U teens. Stay tuned!

Soon our fifth graders will be embarking upon their arts-based learning project centering on Jewish values. Thanks to a grant from Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the students will be able to experience the power of Jewish learning and the arts while exploring their own creativity. Working with local artist and community muralist Tova Speter, the fifth graders will bring key Jewish values to life by creating artistic panels to adorn the corridors of our school building. In the past, our students have depicted such values as “Ahavat Ger” (love the stranger), “Ba’al Tashchit” (do not waste), and “Lo Ta’amod” (do not stand idly by).

Our theatrical crew of fourth graders will surely benefit from the five-week Haggadah curriculum planned continued on page 15
Temple Teens, Representing

by Student Rabbi Sam Blumberg

On November 8-10, eight teens from Temple Sinai (along with our fabulous youth advisor, Juliadele Male) attended the URJ Youth Northeast Homecoming at Camp Eisner, joining nearly 300 teens from across the New England and New York region. Our Temple Sinai teens celebrated Shabbat with friends new and old, participated in teen-led activities, sang and danced, and served as delegates from our local TSIPPY (Temple Sinai Passionate Proactive Youth) chapter by voting on regional initiatives for NFTY Northeast.

Back in Brookline, teens are participating in so many great Sinai U activities this year! Our TSIPPY youth group has been off to a great start this year, with our teens planning activities such as going to a local Escape Room and relaxing board game nights. Whether it's engaging with Jewish learning at The Tent, attending fun TSIPPY programming, serving as social justice liaisons with Tzedek@Sinai, or making coffee for our Temple Sinai community as baristas at our Java Nagila café, there is a way for every Temple Sinai teen to make connections and find their own Jewish path with Sinai U!

Pictured are Temple Sinai teens (L to R, back row): Luca Liebow, Dominic Salamone, Ruben Mendoza, Lucy Waldorf, Jenna Lazowski; (front row) Gilda Gilbert, Rachel Ford, and Hallel Vogel.
Thank you to the Library Committee who have been quietly updating and improving Larkin Library: Merry Arnold, Dorothea Black, Pam Pacelli Cooper, Jane Ellin, Laurie Ferrell, Marvin Kabakoff, Marj Radin, Judith White. Special thanks to Library Chair Karen Keely who is spearheading the effort.

Thank you to Eric Gordon, Justeen Hyde, Mike Toffel, and Erin Deemer for hosting Shevet sessions at their home.

Thank you to Paul Rosenstrach and Julie Bruno for serving as head ushers for this year’s High Holy Day services. The sanctuary was full for all services, and they ably handled the many challenges they faced. They were assisted by more than 25 members of the Sinai community who served as usher/greeters this holiday.

Thank you to Betty Canick and Elynn Finkelstein, who ushered at the High Holy Day children’s services.

Thank you to the many people who helped purchase, set up, and arrange food after Rosh Hashanah services and for Yom Kippur break fast: Nicky Breitstein, Betty Canick, Marsha Canick and Ron Schlorack, Roberta Fried, Ronna Fried, Marie-Paule Bondat, Liora Nielson, Dominic Salamone, Harry Shulman, Josh and Anne Tolkoff, and Joe Tulchin. Thank you, too, to staff members Kathy Arnstein, Paul Kelly, and Terry Goldzier for their help.

Thank you to Stephanie Erber for – once again – beautifully decorating the Temple’s Sukkah this year.

Thank you to Martha Hausman, Megan Macgarvie, and Marva Tomer for hosting Rosh Hashanah gatherings at their homes.

Thank you to Judith Caplan, Barry Schwartz, Merry Arnold, and Deb and Michael Nam-Krane for their work on planning the annual Cohon Lecture. This year’s event, which featured Rabbi David Jaffe, was a huge success.

Thank you to Mike Toffel and Erin Deemer for hosting the November Shevet session at their home.

Thank you to Robin Orwant for conducting a tour of the sanctuary for a group of students from Bunker Hill Community College.

Thank you to Cynthia Bell for creating Consecration certificates for our brand-new students.

Thank you to Merav Socolovsky for her many years of service as chair of the Education Committee.

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Thank you to Martha Hausman and Kelly Knopf-Goldner for preparing and sending Chanukah packages to our Temple Sinai students who are away at college.

Thank you to gardeners Nora Abrahamer, Jackie Borck, and Sharon Hessney for their work in sprucing up the shrubs and plantings around our Temple building.

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Thank you to Rose Mandelbaum for preparing the “About Our Synagogue” booklet and the Yom Kippur Scroll of Remembrance—as she has done for many years in the past.

Thank you to Nora Abrahamer and Cathy Cotton for organizing and planning special events.

Thank you to Dan Beck and Deborah Fischer for hosting a Shabbat dinner for Grade Two families.

Kolot (Voices)

Kolot is a publication of Temple Sinai of Brookline, MA. The journal is published three times yearly by our staff and the Temple Sinai community. Submissions are welcome! Send news, first-person essays, poetry, reviews, photographs, and artwork to kolot@sinaibrookline.org.

Andrew Vogel, Rabbi
Charlie Homer, President
Frank Waldorf, Rabbi Emeritus
Heidi Smith Hyde, Director of Education
Linda Katz, Executive Director
Karen A. Keely, Editor
Wandering in the Desert ... Until Now

by Sarah Dylan Breuer

Dylan Breuer converted to Judaism on June 26, 2019, and read the following statement at Temple Sinai’s Shabbat service on July 26.

As a child, when I was scared, I’d curl up tightly in the smallest place in the house where I could fit, where I’d read scriptures — stories of struggle and visions of peace, of faith and doubt, of pain and healing. They made me feel less alone. They gave me hope of some day belonging with others and for others. Isaiah was my homeboy, and the God of Israel felt like my only lasting refuge.

I studied for two years in my first conversion process before becoming discouraged from entering the Mikvah. And then, for twenty years, Judaism was like the well-lit houses I walked past as a homeless teen — I couldn’t turn away from the beautiful vision of gathering at the table around which families feasted, but I couldn’t help but feel that the closest I would ever get to that table and those people was looking in from outside. I prayed, but for years prayer felt as dry as desert sand.

For over twenty years I’ve felt that way, wandering in the desert. I have this congregation and Rabbis Neal, Shoshana, and Andy to thank for ensuring that it was twenty and not forty years before I stand here, at Sinai.

And here I am, at last, humbled and proud to be part of your family as a member of the Jewish people. Thank you all.

The welcome gates at Mayyim Hayyim Mikveh in Newton.

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for this winter. Together they will engage deeply in the Passover Seder as a ritual over which they feel a sense of personal ownership. As a class, they will explore key passages from the Hagaddah, all the while focusing on the national story of the Jewish people once enslaved and now free. Their studies will culminate in a musical presentation in the spring, during which they will sing, share wisdom, and present their own personal Midrashim.

New this year are Chugim (electives) in Grades K – 3. On days when we don’t have B’Yachad Havdalah or a family program, students in these grades can be seen engaging in Israeli dance (rikud) with Pazit, Hebrew conversation (sicha) with Yana, or Judaica Art (oma-nut) with Rohan. In addition, our third graders will celebrate their Hebrew learning with a milestone Siyyum Ha Sefer celebration in the spring. Ask your child about it!

We are looking forward to a meaningful 5780 filled with learning, community-building and fun.
Embodied prayer: liturgical meditation

The morning liturgy for both Shabbat and weekdays include Talmudic prayers about the body—about its “many pathways and openings,” about “our steps” being “strengthen[ed],” about “being made ... in the image of God.” Jewish prayer cares deeply about bodies ... but how often do we think to embody that prayer?

Originally, many of these prayers were said at home in the course of preparing for the day. So as one wakes up, stretches, stands up, goes to the bathroom, gets dressed, and goes about one’s day, there are blessings for each step of the way. But many of us forget to say those prayers and to feel blessed in those moments, which puts us in good historical company; by the 9th century, Babylonian rabbis had moved these prayers into the synagogue so that everyone (or, rather, all men) would say them together. These prayers for the body have over the centuries been distanced for many of us from the very bodily movements that inspired them.

The Saturday morning Community Minyan service is this year including body-scan meditation and movement to accompany these prayers. As we recite the Asher Yatzar (page 32 and 194 in Mishkan T’filah), we pause and become aware of our bodies, which have been “formed ... with skill.” The Elohai N’shamah (page 34 and 196), in which we give thanks for the soul that God has “breathed into [us],” is a perfect moment to reconnect with our breath. And with the Nisim B’chol Yom prayers (pages 36-40 and 198-202)—blessings for “daily miracles”—we can move as inspired by words: bending down and straightening back up as we praise God “who lifts up the fallen,” or flexing and stretching our muscles as we thank God “who gives strength to the weary.”

Jewish prayer is deeply embodied, and it can thus remind us to reconnect with our bodies and our breath, to give thanks for the many blessings of our bodies.

Mark your calendar: Please join us at 9:30 a.m. on the first Saturday of each month for guided meditation, silence, singing, and prayer for Shabbat.