As we live through the collective trauma of the COVID-19 crisis, one of the ways that so many people are suffering is in the area of mental health. Enduring a major world pandemic is stressful and anxiety-provoking, and that is no surprise. Many people in our congregation are dealing with serious challenges as a result. So, we are taking action at Temple Sinai to help with these mental health challenges.

During my conversations with many members of our community, of all ages, I continue to hear about the fear and anxiety the COVID-19 pandemic is producing, about the economic and job losses that are causing great stress for many people, and about the isolating effects of the social distancing required for us all to stay physically healthy. And this is on top of the loss, grief, and mourning that many others are experiencing.

I am seeing that many older adults and people physically vulnerable are isolated, in need, feeling lonely and alone, and struggling to find daily joy. I have spoken with Temple Sinai members who are now unemployed, struggling with self-esteem issues, and having a hard time finding hope.

I am especially concerned about the mental health of our teenagers, who are being deprived of important social connections with their friends, and who have lost normal activities that would otherwise give them joy (summer camps, clubs and sports, even school). Many teens by default are withdrawing into their video screens, which further isolates them.

Before I go further, let me emphasize: If you or anyone in your household is dealing with any of these symptoms that are warning signs for mental health issues, I urge you to reach out to someone for help. Rabbi Stein and I are available, and we are eager to help you. Please call one of us on our cell phones or send an email; we will be happy to talk with you and support you. Or please consider calling your doctor or someone your trust, or get a referral for a therapist. If you feel you are in a serious crisis, call 911 for immediate help. There is no shame in seeking help during this time that is difficult for us all.

Pursuing strong mental health is part of Jewish tradition. Although the Bible and the ancient rabbis may have used slightly different terminology (they lived centuries before Freud, who was also Jewish, of course!), they saw that our inner lives are a spiritual matter. For Jews, finding faith is about our mental and emotional state (and not belief in a dogma or catechism). Prayer, ritual, singing, meditating—these are all traditional Jewish ways of strengthening our emotional lives. Finding healthy ways to cope with this pandemic and the stresses related to it will leave us stronger.

That’s why I’m pleased that this summer Temple Sinai is now creating our own Mental Health Task Force, to support strong mental health of members of our community. This group will work on an ongoing basis to develop programs, welcome speakers, and continue on page 13.
President’s report: “My, what a year this has been”

by Charlie Homer
Temple President


We started the year with enormous optimism about our community—an awareness of our strengths, a focus on the real challenges at our doorstep and energy and creativity about how we could tackle them.

Our URJ benchmarking work—when we collected data from members, from the Board and our financial data—reaffirmed that we have a high functioning board, strongly positive relationships between clergy and lay leaders, and membership deeply engaged in and appreciative of programming and educational opportunities as well as extremely supportive of our clergy.

While we were greatly encouraged by this, we were (and are) concerned about a relative decline in our school population and population of younger adult members, about the diversity and inclusiveness of our community, about the level of spiritual engagement to complement the intellectual involvement, and, as always, about our finances being able to support our vision. These were and, in many ways, still are our strategic priorities:

1. Growing and supporting the diversity of our community, particularly younger adults and families.
2. Stabilizing our finances.
3. Building even greater engagement of community members with each other and their Judaism.
4. Deepening the spiritual dimensions of our community, in the awkward language of the URJ, “to God however we understand that word.”

So we chartered teams, were inspired by new ideas from the Biennial, developed strategies to learn, planned outreach into new places in new ways, successfully fundraised to replenish our engagement fund so we could happily support our wonderful new Assistant Rabbi, Talia Stein, and began to explore new approaches to how our members support the Temple’s financial well-being. We were moving towards transformational change, but at a measured pace.

And yet, while we were energized by the challenges and confident in our strategies inside our walls, the outside world was discomfiting from the start, and has become increasingly so since. The ongoing hostility to immigrants—so crucial to our identity as American Jews—continued and escalated, against which Temple members continued to rail and resist. And while the economy in the fall and early winter appeared to be remarkably stable—with record low unemployment—the widening chasm in income and wealth, most obviously manifest by the housing shortage, made clear to many of us that structural change needed to come. And the more blatant racism in our society, as well as the violent antisemitism that accompanied it, that has been unleashed in our nation prompted our hosting a beautiful MLK Shabbat, followed by a deep conversation about race and racism—which led as well to our engagement with efforts to promote affordable housing and engage with broader anti-racist coalitions in our community and planning for more. In the face of climate change, our Temple also began to look at our energy use and is developing plans to decrease our carbon footprint. The Temple took a stand against gun violence and engaged in actions in support of broader criminal justice reform.

And then ... of course, and then came the COVID-19 pandemic. And Temple life changed on a dime...transformational change, but not at a measured pace. I am proud of how our Temple responded, clergy, staff and lay leaders alike. The Rabbi and Paul made a near seamless transition to online services, and the Rabbi conducted virtual life event rit-
uals—B’nei Mitzvahs, weddings, funerals and shivas—in ways that despite physical distance kept us socially and spiritually connected. Heidi heroically transitioned from in class to online education, Linda made sure our office continued to function and—working with Rose Mandelbaum and Alex Cooper—completed the massive transition to our new CRM system. Our adult learning committee similarly converted our outstanding programming to online...and all of these programs and activities have seen an increase in participation, because of the need for community and the ease of participation without travel! Our lay leaders and clergy reached out to see who needed help and support, and we have provided that. Thank you, especially to our caring committee.

When Passover arrived—as it does every year—Rabbi Stein helped arrange pick up and drop offs of dozens of seder plates and Passover meals. And Jeremy Wolfe innovated and led a warm and meaningful second seder. Our Temple community has responded to this crisis with love, with more connections than before.

And while all this was happening in the foreground—visible to membership as it should be—in the background we needed to consider what the economic downturn (talk about under-statements) would mean for the financial well-being of our Temple. We began to plan and we had difficult conversations with our beloved staff laying out different possibilities. We immediately recognized that we could not raise dues or tuition. So, following Yuval’s leadership working together with Linda, we successfully obtained a SBA loan to grant (Paycheck Protection Program) which together with an unexpected anonymous gift puts us in a much better position than we could have imagined just a month ago. So, while we need to be cautious, we can be cautiously optimistic that we can get through this financially without undue harm.

And then our country witnessed the murder of George Lloyd and the just reaction to the pain of that and so many other injustices. It is still too raw and too early to know what will happen, but we do know that we cannot stand idly by. Our anti-racism team has sprung into action, with threads working on self-education, on external activism and on activism within to make our Temple welcoming and just for all.

So, our “year” of Temple life comes to a close, but in truth we are in the middle. We don’t know what will happen with the pandemic. Will we have a second wave? Will the protests lead to a new surge? Will the economy rebound? And, if so, for whom? Will we have democracy and the right to assemble? To vote? But, then again, we never know what tomorrow will bring.

But despite this uncertainty about the world outside, I have great confidence in our community, our Temple Sinai. We are led by remarkable rabbis, supported by amazing staff, under the stewardship and care of wise and thoughtful lay leaders, and with a community of members who are caring and decent, energetic and engaged. And we have a great tradition and accumulated wisdom of Judaism to guide us, and the example of our ancestors who have seen far more difficult times and, our people have come through. So, let us not shrink from the task before us—to stay whole ourselves, to support each other, to use these times as an opportunity to create a new and even better Temple Sinai—more open, more inclusive, more engaging—while keeping our core. And let us also work to repair the world.

We don’t know what will happen with the pandemic. ... But, then again, we never know what tomorrow will bring.
Poetry by Mort Brenner z”l

Temple Sinai member Mort Brenner passed away on April 27, 2020, at age 87, after a long struggle with metastatic cancer. He was a poet. May his memory, and his poetry, be for a blessing.

Unveiling At Lake Quannapowitt

Hot and still
The rabbi chants
We mumble ancient prayers
Exotic Hebrew
Incomprehensible as life
Names and dates in somber stone
In a congregation of the dead
Silent, they talk now, my mother to my father
My father to my mother, in love’s compassion now

Look across at Lake Quannapowitt
Across the lake is where we lived
White clapboard house across the lake
The journey from Zville begun as Jew necessity
A house that looks across the lake

When leaves drop
When the Massachusetts winter stings
When trees are barren stark and sturdy
See our house across the lake
Listen
The wind will lift unsilenced voices
Think Again

It turns out, young man
Yes I mean you, young rifleman
That the Kipoh on your head
Is inconsequential

You see, young man
You with fringes hanging below your shirt
The practiced piety of your uniform
Could well be your undoing

My guess, young man
You with songs of Sabbath joy
The tune is not atonal anymore
It’s stale and flat

My wish, young man
You with rhythmic davening to advertise your piety
You advertise to yourself and hangers on
The message of blind rage is obscene

My hope, young man
You who heedlessly taunt your Arab neighbor
You who will build a wall to hide and taunt
The land is not yours alone

My fear, young man
You who mouth the prayer. Your daily mantra.
You may find you have built yourself an effective ghetto
The ghetto of your mind

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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.
The Urim and Tummim: A Reminder of Human Fallibility

by Rich Marsh

This is an excerpt from Rich’s March 7 d’var Torah on Parashat Tetzaveh (Exodus 27-30).

I would like to focus on the Breastpiece of Decision (or Breastplate of Judgement) and especially the Urim and Tummim mentioned in verse 30. Chapter 28 of Exodus describes in great detail the making of the vestments for Aaron, the first high priest, including the ephod, a sleeveless tunic, and the breastpiece of decision mounted on the ephod. Both of these have stones or jewels mounted on them containing the names of the 12 sons of Israel.

Exodus 29 and 30 says: “Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel on the breastpiece of decision over his heart, when he enters the sanctuary, for remembrance before the Lord at all times. Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Tummim, so that they are over Aaron’s heart when he comes before the Lord. Thus, Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord at all times.”

First, what physically were the Urim and Tummim?

That’s easy to answer—we have no idea! Verse 30 indicates that they were objects placed in the pocket formed by the folded breastpiece. In stark contrast to the detailed description of other aspects of the vestments, neither Exodus nor Leviticus describes the Urim and Tummim. The writers seem to assume that they are well known objects that need no description.

Trying to deduce what the objects were from the Hebrew roots does not get us too far. Urim may derive from a root meaning light, and Tummim from a root meaning perfection or truth. Unfortunately, although these derivations are useful if we are looking for a metaphorical interpretation, this etymological analysis does not advance us very far if we are seeking to know what the objects were physically.

Second, how were they used?

The Urim and Tummim were used in some manner to make decisions. This role is described by Numbers 27:21 when speaking of Joshua: “he shall present himself to Eleazar the priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim before the Lord.”

Traditional Jewish sources describe the manner of their use in a definitely mystical or miraculous way. Modern scholarship has centered on the use of the Urim and Tummim as a form of divination referred to as “cleromancy,” perhaps by the casting of lots or manipulating the objects in some other way. A number of examples in the Hebrew Bible refer either directly or indirectly to decisions made using the Urim and Tummim. I suspect that the Rabbis of the Talmud, who described the divination process in a more miraculous way, were very uncomfortable with inquiries to God being mediated by casting lots, even with the assumption that it was God that determined Urim and Tummim.

Finally, why were the Urim and Tummim used to make decisions, and how does this use speak to the dilemmas we face in our personal and communal lives?

I suggest that the use of the Urim and Tummim was fundamentally a recognition of the fallibility of human judgement. By assigning the decisions to God, the leaders of Israel were relieved of the burden of this fallibility. The presence of the high priest with impressive robes and a bejeweled breastpiece must have lent a particular air of authority.

And many religious individuals still seek authority from God in the face of the known fallibility of themselves and others. They look to their religious leaders to provide decisions on many aspects of their lives, because they assume that these leaders convey in some way the authority and judgment of God. Others of us must muddle through recognizing that even our religious leaders are fallible.

An essential quality in our leaders is that they recognize their fallibility and conduct themselves in ways that improve their judgments. In the United States, aspects of our political system are well designed to remind our leaders of their fallibility, if only we can preserve these aspects and use them effectively.
I can’t believe that it has already been about seven years since I started my involvement with Tzedek @Sinai and GBIO (Greater Boston Interfaith Organization)—first with Sinai’s house meetings to determine new directions for our social justice work, then joining the Tzedek committee, and then attending a three-day GBIO training along with my Tzedek co-partners, Amy Weinberg, Felice Mandell, and Zippy Ostroy. All four of us left that training practically giddy with excitement to bring Sinai and GBIO together.

Sinai became a member of GBIO at that time, and we have been very involved with GBIO’s various campaigns since. I chose to become involved in the healthcare team, because, while I cared deeply about all of the issues that GBIO was involved with, access to affordable healthcare was and remains an issue that directly impacts my family. So that is where I have been involved ever since.

What could be more relevant today, in this time of a global pandemic, than healthcare access and affordability?

But this is not the only issue that GBIO is working on during this crisis. GBIO, which has 41 member institutions throughout the Greater Boston area, is currently focused on three issues impacted by COVID-19: affordable and accessible healthcare; housing security; and decarceration efforts for the safety of both incarcerated folks and the employees of prisons and jails.

GBIO has been meeting with Massachusetts’s leadership, including with Governor Baker, to discuss all of these issues. And we were very satisfied to see the passage of the Emergency Moratorium on Evictions & Foreclosures bill. But more work still needs to be done on this, and on the emergency reduction of individuals being incarcerated in order to reduce the spread of the virus and to save lives.

Unfortunately, we have not seen enough movement on healthcare reform despite this public health crisis. For the last year, GBIO has been working to get legislation passed to reduce the costs of prescription medications; to eliminate surprise out-of-network bills; and to increase access to affordable mental healthcare services. These are all items that the Governor included in his Healthcare Reform legislation that he put forth in the fall; we have worked successfully with the MA Senate to get bills passed on both pharmaceutical costs and mental health care accessibility, and we expect a bill eliminating surprise out-of-network bills to pass soon as well. However, the Massachusetts House of Representatives needs to pass a bill, and come together with the Senate to pass joint bills that the Governor signs!

COVID-19 is not only directly causing a health crisis, but it is also bringing to light many of the ongoing cracks in our healthcare system, and making them worse. First, the pandemic is disproportionately affecting poor
communities and communities of color, the same communities who are vulnerable to the very issues GBIO has been fighting against. We have also been hearing about the cost of treating Covid patients and the challenges healthcare providers are facing as a result of coronavirus.

The coronavirus pandemic has made affordable, accessible healthcare less available for everyone. First, many people have been furloughed or laid off, and still have the same healthcare and medication needs, but are without income. Second, many healthcare providers, including hospitals, have stopped or limited the services they are providing, so more people are going to be receiving care from providers that are not part of their insurance networks. This means more out-of-network surprise bills ... and no way to know in advance how much these bills will be. Finally, this virus is exacerbating a crisis around mental health illness and care. We are very lucky that there is a temporary emergency executive order for the insurance coverage of telemedicine care, but we do not know how long that will last, and we know that the need for affordable mental health services will continue to grow.

GBIO is going to be engaging with our legislators in a very serious campaign to bring about action on all three of these issues. This will likely include in district meetings with Representatives over Zoom as well as other actions.

If you want make sure that changes are made in any of these areas, please contact me through Tzedek@Sinai or bonnyg@fairwaymc.com. Are you ready to join me in this campaign?
When Life Gives You Lemons ...

by Heidi Smith Hyde
Director of Education

In March, at the start of the pandemic, we quickly converted our religious school to an online learning community. Our students delved into ‘Shalom Learning,’ an innovative and interactive program focusing on Jewish values and Hebrew. Our virtual lessons took place on Sunday mornings and Tuesday afternoons, and attendance was consistently high. It felt good to foster a sense of community among our families during a period of intense isolation. Rabbi Vogel led a number of family Havdalah services, along with Yoni Battat and Rabbi Talia Stein. Student Rabbi Sam Blumberg and Youth Advisor Juliadele Male organized virtual gatherings for teens, while our Rosh Hodesh and Shevet groups continued uninterrupted.

I am enormously proud of our resilient students, who showed up for Zoom Hebrew school each week with smiles on their faces. Watching them engage with their classmates and teachers, exploring Hebrew and holidays and Jewish values, was a joy to witness. Despite everything, our students chose to stay involved in their Jewish community. Someday when they look back upon this year, I hope they will remember all the good things we experienced together.

This summer, we are continuing to offer activities for students as a way of keeping them connected. Our club-style program includes such offerings as scavenger hunts, arts and crafts, graphic novel writing, interactive games, and more. Children also have the opportunity of being matched with a teen buddy. It is our hope that Club Sinai will help soften the blow of so many summer camps being canceled. It is crucial that we remain connected as best we can during this time of uncertainty and change.

In the year 586 BCE, Jewish life was changed forever when invaders destroyed the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, built by King Solomon. While in exile in Babylonia, the Jews had nowhere to gather—or so they thought, at first. In the absence of their beloved Temple, they gathered in outdoor spaces or in private homes to study Torah. They created their own Bet Knesset, or synagogue, or meeting place. They learned from that harrowing experience that what is most important about a Bet Knesset is the people who gather there.

Now, of course, we can’t wait to return to our beautiful Temple again. But until then, we must remember that, no matter where we gather (even if it’s on Zoom!), we are still a community, a kehillah shel chesed. Let us continue to stay connected until, at last, we can be together again in person.

Students posing with Marvelous Marvin on Purim, the last time we were together in the building on a Sunday morning.
There is an expression among camp people: 10 for 2. The expression means that campers live 10 months at home looking forward to the two months they will be at camp. Campers have many opportunities to stay in touch with each other during the school year: virtually via social media, and in person at NFTY events. But nothing takes the place of spending the summer with your best friends 24 hours a day.

Sadly (but understandably), the Union for Reform Judaism’s Youth Department (locally Eisner, Crane Lake and 6-point Sci-Tech Camps) cancelled all summer programs due to the pandemic. Also cancelled are all URJ youth programs in Israel. The leadership at The Cohen Family Camps (Pembrook, Tel Noar, and Tevya) similarly cancelled their programs.

As soon as schools started closing, the URJ camp staff began doing everything imaginable to fill the void created by the kids being house bound. Online activities have included Erev Shabbat and Havdalah Services using camp songs and rituals familiar to the campers, as well as song sessions and story time.

When the decision was made that there would be no summer programs, the Camp leadership hosted town meetings to explain this difficult decision. Debby Shriber, Executive Director of Northeast Camps and Youth, led the Crane Lake Zoom meeting. James Gesley led Eisner’s town Hall, and Jayme Dale Mallindine did the same for 6-Point Sci Tech. These town meetings were avidly and anxiously watched by campers, parents, councilors, rabbis, cantors and temple educators.

Families understood, but there was a great deal of sadness. This decision was made by a partnership of URJ leadership, professional and lay camp leadership.

As soon as the decision was made, the Camp staff geared up again to try to do everything possible to fill the void. Bunk parties are planned by Zoom, arts and craft projects are going to be hosted by age group, and much more will occur as the summer progresses.

The summer of 2020 promised to be a banner year for Temple Sinai. We had a record number of kids signed up. For the first time, we proudly had eight teens getting ready to spend five weeks in Europe and Israel. We even had one of our youth thinking about 6-Point Sports Camp for the first time ever in our congregation. All on hold.

This spring, people who love camp from around the world are thinking 22 for 2.
Behar: Sabbath Year, Sabbath Rest

by Sam Olken

Sam became a bar mitzvah on May 16, 2020. This is an excerpt from his d’var Torah from that day.

In Behar [Leviticus 25-26], God explains the rules and importance of the sabbath year and the jubilee. God says to Moses that “for six years you shall sow the land and reap its bounty, but on the seventh year, the land will get a rest and anyone can eat from whatever happens to grow on the land.” God promises the Israelites that in the sixth year, God will cause a crop to grow that will last them three years, until the time when they are ready to harvest a new crop, so that they can feed themselves during the sabbath year ...

God promises the Israelites a harvest in the sixth year that will last them for three years, until they can harvest crops again in the ninth year. One of the main things I wondered when I first read my Torah portion is: “Well, what if there isn’t a plentiful harvest in the sixth year?”

If the Israelites run out of food, all is not lost. The Torah states that anyone is allowed to go out into the field, pick food, and eat it there, so every day people could have a picnic for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Another way the Israelites could get food is that they could store food and ration what they eat, although the Torah states that they must share their stored food with the poor so that no one goes hungry. This is similar to the fact that we are storing toilet paper and hand sanitizer and that we should share it, so no one is in a place where they don’t have the materials to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

One more imperfect solution to this problem is that the Israelites could trade food for other goods with neighboring tribes and villages. However, I think that this plan could backfire, because, if the neighboring tribes and villages found out the Israelites wouldn’t grow their own food and desperately need food, they could set food prices very high. (When I first wrote this I thought, “God, I really am the son of two economists.”)

We know that giving the land a rest makes crops grow better, and by requiring communities to share resources with each other during the sabbatical year, the Torah is promoting friendship and bonding between communities. In fact, Maimonides, who lived in Spain in the 12th century, says that one of the goals of the sabbatical year is to get people to show empathy towards one another. He claims that even though sharing resources can be a burden on some people during the sabbatical year, it helps others who have to deal with the burden of not having enough food every year.

My Torah portion talks a lot about the differences between Israelites and non-Israelites. The Torah’s teaching states that when Israelites and non-Israelites are both in trouble, it is our duty as Jews to help everyone, but the needs of Israel and the Israelites come first. This teaching marks a dividing point between Jews who are particularists, who believe helping Jews should get priority, and universalists, who believe that everyone’s needs are equal. I consider myself a universalist because everyone’s needs are important. However, if I had to choose between helping a random person on the street or a family member, I would put my family first. I think that when the Torah was written it assumed that Israelites were only inter-
acting with other Israelites, so that when both Israelites and non-Israelites needed help, the Torah would want people to help the Israelites because they were considered family.

As I mentioned before, God decrees that every seven years there will be a year of rest, which is where the modern-day idea of having a sabbatical comes from. When I was hoping to find out more about these comparisons, I talked to my mom who told me about her own sabbatical year. She told me that for her it was a time to learn and try new things, both at work and outside of work, including having an adult Bat-Mitzvah. It was also the year that my dad became a serious cook. She told me that her sabbatical year was a time when she got to meet new people and got a break from the regular routine of her life, and how she can’t wait for her next sabbatical. This theme of a break from everyday life and a time to relax ties in with the theme of the sabbatical year and Shabbat, a time that allows us to rest every week. Just like the land does better after a rest, we all do better with a rest.

Sometimes, I feel like I never get a break. I feel like I am always doing something and I spend most of my day staring at a screen. All of the days now seem monotonous. I always have 2-4 hours of homework, and one or two online classes. There is only one break every day to get off the screens during the time period of 8:40 am to 3:00 pm. The best thing about these days is knowing that when I’m done with all that I can relax in my bed and pretend that I can’t hear my parents telling me to do things—my personal sabbatical time. My Torah portion reminds me that this down time I spend is important and necessary because it allows me to be my best self.

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**Mental Health, a Jewish Tradition, continued from page 1**

train our staff and members, create referral lists, and more to support mental health at Temple Sinai and also to de-stigmatize the struggle with mental health issues. We often joke at Temple Sinai about how many members we have who are therapists, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists. That means we have many resources from whom to draw for this work! I want to thank them, and thank summer rabbinic intern Naomi Gurt Lind, who will help the Task Force get organized. If you want to be a part of this work, please let me know, and I’ll connect you.

Meanwhile, I pray that you, along with everyone in our community, will find strength and hope during these challenging times. Please let us know how we can support you.

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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
Talia Stein, Assistant Rabbi
Charlie Homer, President
Frank Waldorf, Rabbi Emeritus
Heidi Smith Hyde, Director of Education
Linda Katz, Executive Director
Karen A. Keely, Editor
Todah Rabah

Thank you to the many individuals who participated in Temple Sinai’s Day of Chesed, including Leah Carnow, Rose Mandelbaum, Anna Kaplan, Sam Blumberg, Daria Cohen, Jen Katz, Beverly Zibrak, Jane Silberberg, Elynn Finkelstein, Lisa Pemstein, Zippy Ostroy, Deena Blau, Caroline Potter-Ng, Bella Cameron, Heidi Smith Hyde, Roberta Falke, and members of the TSIPPY youth group.

Thank you to Alex Cooper and Rose Mandelbaum for the many hours they worked and the expertise they provided to help launch the new ShulCloud customer relations management system for the congregation.

Thank you to Sharon Hessney, Marj Radin, and Jackie Borck for their work in pruning, cleaning and beautifying the Temple grounds and garden.

Thank you to our religious school families who donated 30 bags of canned goods and past for the Brookline Emergency Food Pantry.

Thank you to the members of our Board of Trustees and to all of the chairs of Temple Sinai’s committees for their work throughout the year.

Thank you to Michele Mendoza for her service on the Temple Board. She stepped down in June.

Thank you to Yuval Gilbert for creating many, complicated spreadsheets and scenarios enabling the Budget Committee and Board to arrive at a prudent budget for the coming year.

Thank you to Tracy Hyams and Nora Abrahamer for their important work on our Free Will campaign over the last year.

Thank you to Mel Stoler and Jen Katz for their compassionate service as Assistant Treasurers. They have come to the end of their terms and stepped down at the end of June. Welcome to Elynn Finkelstein and Laurie Ferrell who will be joining Zippy Ostroy as Assistant Treasurers over the coming year.

Thank you to Jon Katz for his capable leadership as chair of the Nominating Committee.

Thank you to Jill Winitzer for designing the Club Sinai logo for the religious school.

Thank you to Cynthia Bell for designing Siyyum ha Sefer certificates for Grade Three students.

Thank you to Michael Shulman, who is retiring after serving as Temple Sinai’s stock broker for many years. Michael and his family are long-time members of Temple Sinai, and he also served as a member of the Temple’s Board of Trustees for many years.

Thank you to Rena Sokolow and Sam Blumberg for updating the Sinai U brochure.

Thank you to Janet Fine and Larry Hardoon of Kolbo Fine Judaica for ordering and hand delivering gifts to our graduating twelfth-grade students.

Thank you to Rose Mandelbaum for her leadership as Chair of the Distinguished Service Committee. She is being succeeded by Cathy Cotton, who will take over in 2020-2021. This year’s recipients are Jill Anne Winitzer and Mel Stoler.

Thank you to Cynthia Bell who did the calligraphy embellishing the Distinguished Service Award plaque and also created a plaque for our Honorary Trustee for Life, Arlene Weintraub.

Thank you to Deb Nam-Krane, who is stepping down from her role as Content Editor for the Lu‘ach Newsletter, a position she has ably held since 2015. Thank you to Jane Ellin who will be taking over as Content Editor, serving with Production Editor Beth Winickoff.

Thank you to Jeremy Wolfe and Robin Orwant for teaching this year’s summer class for adult learners.
Talmud Study: One of the Fun Parts of Being a Jew!

by Karen A. Keely

For six months now, a group of Temple Sinai folks have been reading our way through the first tractate of the Talmud, Berakhot (“blessings”). We read one page a week (“daf shevui”), although that “one page” of the original Talmud is actually five or six pages in the modern edition we’re using. Once the pandemic hit, we switched to Zoom, where we meet every Sunday morning, 9:45-10:45, to discuss the latest “page” that we’ve read.

So what is a bunch of Reform Jews doing reading the texts from which the laws of halakha are formed, halakha that most of us don’t follow? We put our heads together to figure out why we were enjoying the experience so much and perhaps to entice some of you into joining us.

First, as with any group from Temple Sinai, there is the community aspect of gathering in a shared project, which has been more important than ever these last months. Judith Jaffe calls the group a “community of warm and wise fellow learners,” which is key to our conversations; none of us is learned in the Talmud, and we are all exploring the text together.

Plus, we’ve also come to appreciate the rabbis who essentially created Judaism as we know it today, after the destruction of the Temple. They are so human, in all of their flaws and generosities! In Marvin Kabbann’s words, the Talmudic Sages often bumbling in their thought process, and could rationalize really well. In short, they were not that different from us. And that is comforting to know.

You know the joke “two Jews, three opinions”? Argument is woven into the fabric of the Talmud. The Sages often don’t come to an agreement, or they will mostly agree on a topic but include one rabbi’s dissenting opinion. Lines such as “Let us say they disagree about this” (Berakhot 22b) or “Nevertheless, it remains difficult” (23b) are common. Here’s a great example of two rabbis disagreeing: “Abaye said: It is prohibited; the Torah was not given to the ministering angels” (25b). That recognition that the Torah was given to flawed humans means that the Rabbis who created halakha are actually quite forgiving. They will explain what should happen under ideal circumstances, but then they’ll follow this up immediately with what people should do in real life, in less than ideal circumstances.

The Sages are clear: Human dignity is more important than any rabbinic decree.

Plus, even though most of the Sages’ arguments—about how to make sure you’re ritually pure, about how late in the morning you can say the Shema, or about what you should do if you’re praying and suddenly see or smell something disgusting near you—don’t directly affect the behaviors of those of us in the group, the underlying questions of those discussions are deeply important. As Paul Rosenstrach notes, “One thing I like about studying Talmud is that it makes us think about these questions—what is the meaning of prayer, what’s the purpose of a blessing—so that it keeps us from a numb roteness.”

We’ve had wonderful conversations about our own ethical and spiritual lives, about our evolving understandings of the individual and community, and about our many, many questions for which there are no clear answers. We’ve discovered that Talmudic study is one of the really fun parts of being a Jew!
At the Annual Meeting in June, the following announcement was made:

The Board of Trustees of Temple Sinai hereby appoint Arlene Weintraub as Honorary Trustee for Life on account of her having rendered faithful and exceptional service to the Congregation for many years, so that our community may continue to benefit from her wisdom and good judgement.

Mazel tov, Arlene!