



THE
STAR
NEWSLETTER

NISAN / IYAR / SIVAN 5779

May / June 2019

VOL. 22 NO. 3

TEMPLE BETH TORAH, 130 MAIN STREET
WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT

Message from Rabbi Seth Riemer

Terrorism has a paradoxical quality: the determination to target and violently wipe out lives other than one's own is an assault on human diversity, yet, how diverse are the followers of this vicious practice. It knows no social boundary, is partial to no creed and has no exclusive preference either in its perpetrators or its victims. As we have seen all too recently, even as recently as this past Winter and Spring, fanatics of various religious stripes have attacked synagogues, mosques and churches; and maniacs compelled by disparate ideologies and grievances have gone on the rampage and wreaked bloody havoc in schools, work places and public settings. There appears no end to the physical mayhem stirred up rhetorically through thousands of outlets and inroads on- and offline and leaving in its trail horror, grief and bafflement.

A supposedly unrelated issue:

We're on the verge of Summer (yes, it's finally here—we can smell it in the air and feel it in our bones!). The very anxious Spring that happened hesitantly, insecurely, by fits and starts, has finally given way to the full-blown luxuriance of Nature unrestrained, unabashed, energetic, confident. With that image juxtapose this May 6 National Geographic article title: "One million species at risk of extinction, U.N. report warns." At the very moment when we're basking in the teeming, fruitful, joyful glory of this world's physical environment reinvigorated by the warmth of sun and June solstice, forebodings of global ecological calamity cast their grim pall over our sense of summer delight.

The specter of terrorism and dread of environmental ruin appear at first sight to have little bearing upon each other. Yet, as we reflect deeper, we recognize that they're closely intertwined. Both involve human arrogance exponentially magnified. Both occur, that is, because people think they have a right to ride roughshod over the world and ignore other lives' needs in order to exalt their own narrow, misguided interests. Both are manifestations of that most horribly puzzling of contradictions: indiscriminate selfishness. Both are assaults on the diversity of life. However, if we link life with holiness, nature with spirituality, we might have reason to hope.

Then, instead of breakdown and catastrophe, we can break through to a place of healing where we become part of a bigger picture—participants in the Divine Whole. One purpose of Shavuot, the holiday approaching, is to enlighten and uplift our mortal selves by connecting them with the transcendent, all-embracing truth of God. We do so through study of holy texts; in my view those include whatever gift of insight or learning each of us has to share as access to ru'ah hakodesh / the spirit of Holiness exists in all people and every thing. This attitude helps overcome moral intolerance, transcend narrow dogma, bridge differences and realize harmony. This is what Jewish study is about...

Join us for our tikun leyl shavuot / Shavuot study session on the night of Saturday, June 8. Details of that event, which I encourage you to attend, are elsewhere in this edition of The Star.

News and Notes

■ TBT sends its sincerest condolences to **Debbie Ellenberg Gray** and her family, and her brother Brad and his family, on the passing of their beloved mother, **Marlene Ellenberg**. Marlene was a delightful, loving and wonderful soul who will be truly missed by the TBT community. May her memory be for a blessing.

■ We also send our deepest sympathies to **Ruth Brainin, her daughter's Janice and Ann and their families**, on the loss of their beloved daughter and sister Barbara, who passed away unexpectedly. May her memory be for a blessing.

■ Mazel Tov to **Kathryn Kenzel** on her conversion. We welcome her to a life rich in traditions, a life that celebrates the present, commemorates the past, and expresses hope for the future.

■ Thanks so much to Kathi Mag for the beautiful plantings in the front of the Sanctuary! Way to go, Kathi!

■ Our Israeli Pot Luck Supper was a big success with 20 in attendance. The food and company were great! Unfortunately, our Israeli emissary Nir, was unable to attend due to a back injury. Instead we celebrated Kathryn Kenzel's conversion and the birth of two new granddaughters to **Karen and Bob Klein**.

■ Congratulations to **Kayla Reuben, daughter of Susan and Jonathan Reuben**, who graduated from UConn in May 2019, with Bachelor degrees in Economics, Finance and Anthropology, cum laude!

D'var Torah on parshah Shelach

Rabbi Seth asked Fred Cohan to give a d'var Torah on June 28 at TBT and to preview his proposed comments for The Star. Fred is a member of TBT and a Professor of Biology at Wesleyan University.

Here are his comments:

I will give a brief d'var torah on the portion Shelach, in which the Israelites are kvetching in the desert about how they'd rather be back in Egypt—that their lives were so much better in slavery. Similarly, people today commonly believe that life was better at some point in the past than now. However, this pessimistic view does not align with real data. Compared to just decades ago, life today features lower mortality rates from violence and disease, fewer wars, greater wealth, and pretty much any measure of greater safety and comfort. Moreover, over the last two centuries, we have abolished slavery, torture, and cruel punishment. Life is better now! Like the Israelites pining away for their previous life of slavery, we should avoid yearning for some imagined, better world in the past. We'll discuss how day-to-day news of disasters fools us into taking a pessimistic view of our lives. We'll also discuss how embracing the goodness of life today might offer us greater opportunities to make our lives even better into the future.

PURIM

Our Purim celebration was a huge success. We had more than 25 in attendance! The Kids' Shpiel was just adorable and all enjoyed Rabbi Seth's parody song of "Killing Me Softly"! Refreshments provided by Cecile were delicious, as usual! Thanks so much to Cecile!



WE ARE GETTING PAINTED!

(well, what can be seen from the street anyway.)

Special thanks to **Dave Forrest** for organizing the scraping/painting of the front and sides of TBT.



Brighter lights for the Sanctuary canopy

Special thanks to Ralph Horowitz for installing, with help from Deb Hammer, new bulbs in the canopy in the sanctuary. Ralph generously donated them in memory of our Marlene Ellenberg. Every time we turn on those lights, we will remember Marlene's love for TBT and as the brightness of the lights shines down, we will be reminded of her infectious smile and laughter. She was a joy to know and may her memory be a blessing for all of us.

Ralph's notes: With the assistance of Deb Hammer we replaced the old incandescent spotlights with hi-efficiency low wattage LED Bulbs which change the energy usage from 1900 watts to 246 watts. Energy savings will have a payback within 18 months. More importantly, the lights are bright white and reach the first 2 rows. Additionally they make the bima much cooler.



Please join us for

Tikkun Leil Shavuot at TBT

Saturday, June 8 at 7:30 p.m. - ?

We will begin with Yizkor Service, please arrive promptly

Shavuot (“Feast of Weeks”) commemorates the time, 7 weeks after the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, when the Torah was received at Mount Sinai. We celebrate the covenant between God and the people Israel. Shavuot also has origins as the first of three Pilgrimage holidays, when the first fruits of the early summer harvest were brought to the Temple in Jerusalem.

A contemporary ritual on this holiday is to stay up all night studying Torah -- **Tikkun Leil Shavuot!** We study as a community on a wide range of topics. Participants are encouraged to bring “a teaching” to share with the group. This may include: midrash, history, art, poetry, philosophy, science and so much more! [We won’t stay up ALL night!]

It is customary to eat dairy-inspired foods on this holiday, a nod to “milk and honey.” Bring your dairy specialty to share!

Please be in contact with Rabbi Seth (sethriemer@aol.com) to let him know about the teaching you’d like to share (not a requirement). Please RSVP to Deb H. (dlh88@sbcglobal.net) if planning to attend.

* Note that this event will replace our June Shabbat morning Torah Study



Hesped / Marlene Ellenberg – *Malkah bat Miha'el veSarah* ***Rabbi Seth Riemer's eulogy at Marlene's funeral , April 14, 2019***



“I was blessed with the best parents.”

Those are Debbie's words.

I was not fortunate enough to meet Al, but I remember Marlene saying, “You would have liked Al. He was a great guy.”

As she spoke those words there was a certain enthusiastic, happy look in her eyes. I believed Marlene; who could ever doubt her truthfulness in anything? Brad told me his mother and father met when she was 16 or 17 and married at 19—“they truly were a couple.” Marlene herself was a magnet for goodness, so no wonder she and Al ended up finding each other and staying happily married for 53 years, raising two beautiful children,

Debbie and Brad, seeing them happily married to John and to Susan (for whom Marlene, more than being the “mother-in-law,” was a cherished second mother and close, close, deeply revered friend), and living long enough to be able to get to know her wonderful grandson Marc. Marc (I know you're listening!), you were “extra special” to your grandmother—she was a very proud grandma! Friends, you should know that Marlene's very last top-level international conference—it took place the Saturday before last—was when Marc facetedimed her from Vienna, Austria.

Continued on following pages

And to inject some affectionate humor in the spirit of Al and Marlene, we must also include, among beloved family members, her furry grandson, Debbie's dog Jackson. Marlene loved all of you "to pieces." For most of that time Marlene got to enjoy her fulfilling life in good health—into her mid-80s. So you see, on occasion the person who is "very kind and caring"—as Marlene unmistakably was—gets to have it all more or less—as Marlene surely did. Her loving nature was part and parcel of, in complete synchrony with, a deep rootedness in the joys of marriage and family, and that joyful worldliness, while grounded in this physical life, was also intellectual and spiritual in nature. So, if you believe in an afterlife, then you may surely contemplate the vision of Marlene reuniting with her soulmate Al, whom she missed terribly, and their being hand in hand again—the hope being, as Debbie expressed it, that "he's welcoming her to heaven with open arms and his crazy humor." There the family is slowly, very slowly reassembling (we don't want to rush the process!). Along with Al and Marlene are his beloved parents, Rebecca and Morris Ellenberg, and Marlene's, Sally and Milton Kamins. Having no siblings, Marlene nonetheless found her way into a rich, warm, deep family experience. As Debbie put it: "family was it"—the foundation, the most "important" element, in

her life—and Al shared that sensibility with her. Spending time with family mattered most. That joy expressed itself in some very classic, food-related ways, ones certainly familiar to those of us of Jewish background. "Ever since we were infants," Brad told me, "she would have the family over religiously every Sunday," and food was always a part of what the family was doing. They all cooked—cookouts, barbecues—and Marlene "cooked for everybody." Her two specialties: kugel and sweet-and-sour meatballs. Every time the family got together she would make those two dishes, which everybody loved. When they went up to visit Brad and Susan, Brad would hoard his mother's kugel, commandeering 3 quarters of it—by eminent domain—since it didn't come his way as often as he would've liked. Susan's brother Howard loved those two dishes—the joy of Marlene's cooking spilled over into extended family. The gentle excitement of Marlene's family life fanned out, like the delicious fragrant aroma from those scrumptious dishes heating up in her oven, beyond the immediate family circle, and drew her out into a wider world; one of dear friendships, social commitments, cultural activities, fashion pursuits, professional life, foreign travels and literary studies and current events:

Continued on following page

■ Dear friendships (with her mah-jongg partners—who were there at a moment’s notice to take Marlene wherever she needed to go);

■ Social commitments (as a school library volunteer; and as, with Al for over 50 years, a member of Temple Beth Torah—where she was an active Sisterhood member, and where I loved seeing her show up at services);

■ Cultural activities (theater—Playhouse on Park, Hartford Stage, Bushnell, Broadway—she kept all the playbills; sports—bowling with her father and then with Al; rooting for the Red Sox and UConn women’s basketball—less than a week ago the whole family was gathered by her side in the hospital to watch them win—and tons of conversations with Marc about teams: Marlene knew how to talk sports!);

■ Fashion pursuits (she loved to shop—clothes, shoes and especially jewelry—and would “squirrel away” money and with Debbie or her friend Stella or other friends go on shopping escapades down to the Diamond Distract to buy fancy jewelry, the price of which she would deftly, enterprisingly conceal from Al);

■ Professional life (at first a stay-at-home mom, Marlene decided, when her kids got to junior high school, to look for work and became, for many years, the bookkeeper in a dental office);

■ Foreign travels (first with Al and later with Debbie—resorts, cruises, drinking before noon, freedom and relaxation, Italy and more Italy, all of it providing memories to relive and cherish); and

■ Literary studies and current events—avid reader that she was, Marlene swallowed up

book after book from the Wethersfield library and read the Courant front to back religiously every day).

Through all of this swirl of physical, mental and social activity, Marlene maintained remarkable poise, a sense of unruffled calm, a serenity seeming to surround her wherever she was. Having been fortunate to get to know Marlene a little, I chime in with her son’s and daughter’s description of her as the “sweetest, kindest woman” one could “come across.” In her presence one felt a tremendous ease, a sense of reassurance; just being in her proximity made you feel better. Marlene’s kindness, cheerfulness and fun-loving, affectionate nature were palpable. Brad told me a story that makes those qualities of hers sink in. It’s about one of his “favorite memories.” Growing up, he was a huge baseball fan. One day his mother said, “Come on, I’ll play with you”—in the backyard. And so they tossed the ball back and forth. The point is, she knew how to be a parent. She knew what a home is for. She knew what a person—a mentsch—should do. Her children, reminiscing about their mother, look back to her example, along with their father’s, and are very comforted by the lessons of home and trust simply shared: the importance of knowing how to love and listen, how to care and communicate, how to see humor and speak with honesty. In the Ellenberg home people acknowledged disagreement—she “taught” her kids “not to run from that”—and there would be family meetings to sort things out. Lessons were best learned

Continued on following page

by example, coming while those two were growing up and well into adulthood. One thing “that really stood out” for Brad was his mother’s effortless patience, infinite supportiveness—her steady, listening, constant attentiveness—toward Brad’s father, Marlene’s beloved husband Al. During his times of illness, she was a wonderful caregiver. She was always, as one of her friends’ daughters called her, “Sweet Marlene.” “Just a joy to be with”—this “positive, upbeat individual.” She was a tranquil blessing we were fortunate enough to experience first-hand. I must tell you: Marlene impressed me as a person who knew what was going on around her and understood what being alive is truly about. She was fully alive in her mind. If you spoke with her for just a few moments, her enormous intelligence (with that huge vocabulary of hers) and ability to converse meaningfully and think deeply were at once recognizable. Quintessentially TBT in being a natural-born philosopher, she was first among equals in our little synagogue’s intellectual life. She was the one who would come up to me after the Shabbat service and comment on a phrase in the prayer “Shalom Rav”—she asked me why our edition of the prayerbook had added a phrase not in the traditional blessing, and when I explained in Rabbi lingo, she understood right away. We must agree, with Brad, that Marlene could “hold her own with anybody on any subject.” She honored all of us with her presence in our midst—first in her

heart came her family members, but her generous heart was able to extend honor to us all. “She was just a gift for all of us”—accepting, affirming, how a mom, a friend, a citizen should be. When, with the passing of your father, over the last decade or so, your mother’s strength began to ebb, you, Debbie, stepped in to care for her. You told me “it has been an honor for” you to do that. As your mother honored you, you’re returning the kindness—in her spirit. Brad, in telling me that you appreciate what your sister has done, in telling me you recognize the blessing Debbie was for your mother, you too are doing your mother honor for she was all about cherishing and nurturing the family. Both of you shared with me a kind of wild thought. Debbie, you started by saying, “Brad and I believe in all of our hearts...” and then you trailed off. I tried to get you back on the topic of what it is you believe in with all your heart. You talked about an astrologer. Some of you present may laugh when I bring in astrology, but do you know—I think Marlene might have known—that many synagogue sanctuary ceilings have painted on them the signs of the zodiac, and the 12 tribes of Israel are like the 12 constellations? A few of our greatest rabbis were astrologers. So, you were talking about an astrologer who said she believed we choose the time of our birth and our parents. In that case, Debbie and Brad, you chose well. You chose remarkably, amazingly well.

Recent TBT donations

IN MEMORY OF MARLENE ELLENBERG,
MOTHER OF DEBBIE ELLENBERG GRAY
& BRAD ELLENBERG

- Cecile and Barry Bronfin
- Maureen and Ralph Horowitz
- Rita and Harold Nevins
- Judy and Marty Gold
- Debra and Joe Hammer
- Kathi and Eliot Mag
- Mara Dressner

IN MEMORY OF BARBARA JOY ANGHEL,
DAUGHTER OF RUTH BRAININ

- Cecile and Barry Bronfin
- Diane and Ronald Salm
- Judy and Marty Gold
- Sallyanne and Barry Scott
- Debra and Joe Hammer
- Kathi and Eliot Mag
- Mara Dressner

IN HONOR OF THE BIRTHS OF
KAREN AND BOB KLEIN'S GRANDDAUGHTERS,
AUDREY GOLDMAN & MOLLY KRUGER

- Cheryl and John Hinze
- Kathi and Eliot Mag

WISHING CECILE BRONFIN A SPEEDY RECOVERY

- Debra and Joe Hammer
- Kathi and Eliot Mag

Temple Beth Torah

Rabbi Seth Riemer

Executive Committee: Sallyanne Scott, Kathi Mag,

Carol Gershenson Treasurer

and Memorial Park director: Barry Goldberg

Recording Secretary: Carol Gershenson

Corresponding Secretary: Kathi Mag

Financial Secretary: Sallyanne Scott

Membership and Publicity: Karen Klein, Carol Gershenson

and Helene Rosenblatt (FaceBook)

Friday Night Announcements: Deb Ehrlich

Conduct Board Meetings: Kathi Mag

Board of Education, Adult Education

and Book Club: Cecile Bronfin

Head Instructor: Rabbi Seth Riemer

Religious Studies Instructor: Michele Cyr

Building Chair: Gary Evans

Building Committee: Dave Forrest and Kathi Mag Gardening

The Star: Phil Lohman and Micki Bellamy

Torah Study, Building Rental, Webmaster: Deb Hammer

Ways and Means Chair: Judy Gold

Ways and Means Committee:

Rhoda London and Helene Rosenblatt

Receiving phone calls: Rhoda London

High Holiday Committee:

Rabbi Seth Riemer, Barbara Checknoff, Cecile Bronfin,

Carol Gershenson, Judy Gold, Kathi and Eliot Mag,

Fred London, Susan Reuben, Sallyanne and Barry Scott

Nominating Chair: Cecile Bronfin

Building Consultants and Miscellaneous:

Ralph Horowitz and Phil Lohman

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

MAUREEN HOROWITZ

ABR, GRI, SRES, REALTOR

Licensed in Connecticut since 2002



It isn't easy to find a real estate agent with Maureen's combination of skills, strengths and experience. You will want to call her whenever you or someone you know is considering buying or selling a home. Maureen is a full-time, hard-working professional real estate agent.

Maureen says, "The highest compliment you can give me is recommending me to a friend or family member. Your satisfaction is my top priority."

860.205.9678

MaureenHorowitz.Agnelli@gmail.com



411 Naubuc Avenue
Glastonbury, CT 06033

FIRST IRIS OF 2019!

