



# THE STAR

**NEWSLETTER**

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TEMPLE BETH TORAH, 130 MAIN STREET  
WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT



## Tu biShvat Message from Rabbi Seth Riemer

Will you and I listen to Greta Thunberg's vehement declaration, "Our house is on fire"? She is stating the obvious. Australia is literally burning, and you surely have observed, here in Connecticut, the freakish occurrence of people walking around in shorts and tee-shirts in January. Profiting in the moment from our contemporary "throw-away" culture's shortsightedness, we seem to be letting the world slip away. Thoughtful Millennials and Generation Zs are nervous about getting married, having children and planning for the future because no future seems workable; they assume a realistic attitude is a pessimistic one—they wonder whether or how long the civilization we have can survive. Has the present day completely brushed aside, discarded, age-old environmental wisdom rooted deeply in religious traditions such as our own? Picking up and dusting off that ancient Jewish teaching, Tu biShvat, the New Year for Trees, can help light a way forward so that, instead of doing nothing, we act to keep the planet habitable.

As the young Swedish prophet dramatically points out, fire is deadly, but our Hebrew prophets, beginning with Moses, know fire also has a divine potency that is healing. Moses witnesses God's saving presence in a burning bush: "An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a flame of fire amidst the bush. [Moses] saw—behold, the bush burns in the fire, and the bush is not consumed." Moses further asks, "Why doesn't the bush burn up?" (Exodus 3:2, 3). God's omnipotent voice leaves no carbon footprint; God is an inexhaustible, eco-friendly—perpetually renewable—power source. Tu biShvat symbolism elaborates on the Torah's association of fire with holiness or divinity.

Kabbalists who designed the Tu biShvat seder (please

come to the one we're holding on Sunday, February 9 at 10:00 am) conceived of four worlds: earthy (physical), watery (emotional), airy (mental) and fiery (spiritual). Greta Thunberg's passionate delivery channels some of the same fire that inspired Moses, but she might not recognize her fire as an ultimate well-spring—a river of light—behind spiritual devotion that can transform destruction into creation as God continually does in creating this physical universe out of *tohu vavohu* / watery chaos. The engulfing flood can turn into a productive millrace if, instead of letting ourselves drown in feelings of gloom and doom, we channel them purposefully—thoughtfully—as did my miller ancestor in Lithuania (I have distant relatives with the surname "Milner"! ) in using a stream to power his mill wheel. In turn, thinking doesn't have to be a dry, sterile intellectual exercise. Our mental activities can be constructive and fruitful if there is spiritual force—a fire of holy commitment—driving them. Where that creatively divine impetus drives human intentions, there's reason to hope. Instead of incinerating our planet, solar energy can be a catalyst that helps us repair the world. On Tu biShvat we celebrate trees that provide fruits, seeds and nuts. Our job, in a nutshell, is to turn humankind's apparently dim prospects into a bright future.

Yes, our house is on fire. No one seems to be doing anything about it. Is anyone in charge? But, as the midrash on Parshat Lech Lecha, teaches, God is peering out a window in that house and declaring: "I am the Master of this castle!" If we act, the burning house can become God's burning bush.

Keep prophesying, Greta Thunberg and the rest of Generation Z, but remember to hope—and move forward.



## Co-Presidents Message

Hello TBT family and a very Healthy and Happy New Year to all of you! Lots of events are on our calendar for the coming year.

We ended 2019 with our very successful Chanukah Party. 31 people joined together to feast on latkes, egg and tuna salad, home-made challah, and a plethora of desserts! Special thanks to all who helped with the food preparation, set-up and clean-up. The Menorah lighting was lovely. So many families joined together to light their menorahs. It was wonderful to see the Chanukah lights reflecting on so many happy faces! It was also nice to see our TBT menorah built by Ralph and Phil up close! The kids loved the piñata and all the candy it contained, thanks to Cecile!

On Sunday, February 9th at 10:00am, we will be having our Tu B'Shvat Seder. By having it during Religious School, we make sure our students can participate in this wonderful coming of spring celebration! Please check your emails for the sign-up list!

Sunday, March 8th at 11:00 am is our Purim Celebration. We will have a Purim Sing-Along instead of a kids and adult spiel. Everyone is invited to come in costume and we will have hamentashen and other refreshments to celebrate!

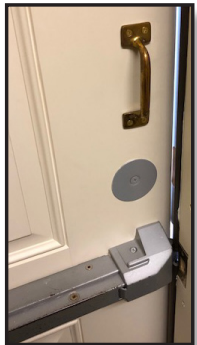
Thanks to Dave Forrest and crew for installing and painting our new Social Hall door! It is truly weather-tite and keeps the cold out! A special handle was installed on the inside to aide in closing the door. Driveway reflectors were also installed to help with entering and exiting our driveway!

We hope to continue our building repairs by having the rest of the building scraped, primed and painted. So please start saving your pennies for the completion of the exterior repairs!

Please note that after careful discussion of the plumbing issues associated with the front restrooms, the board has decided to permanently close them. We are so sorry for this inconvenience, but unfortunately, the mechanics are beyond our control. Also, The bathrooms by the social hall are now gender neutral. That means both bathrooms are available for everyone to use!

The board has been thinking about having a pizza and bowling night and perhaps a movie night as well. We certainly hope this appeals to your entertaining pleasure and you will plan on joining us at these events. If you have any other ideas to share to help create a more lively social life at TBT, please let your board know! Spring will be here we know it, so stay cozy and keep thinking that it will be warmer before we know it!

Sallyanne and Kathi, your Co-Presidents





## This year's Chanukah party a huge success



We had 31 people attending. The family menorah lighting was so much fun. What a great assortment of menorahs we had! Special thanks to the latke team Kathi Mag, Karen Klein and Sallyanne and Barry Scott. Thanks to Elisha Rose and the rest of the gang for bringing dessert. Thanks to Cecile Bronfin for the piñata, candy, candles, and dreidels. Cecile your Chanukah Goodie Bags were a huge success! Thanks to Carol Gershenson for the apple sauce, Helene Rosenblatt for the egg salad, and Barry Scott for the tuna. Thanks to the set-up and clean-up crews. And if we missed anyone else, sorry, and thank you as well! Great food, great friends, a great day! Thanks to all who came and shared in the festivities!





**The First Interfaith Thanksgiving Service at Trinity Episcopal Church in Wethersfield on Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2019 was a lovely ending to a long day.**



The folks who attended were all very friendly, very diverse and welcoming. All of the presentations and prayers were thoughtfully presented with readings and prayers in English, Spanish, Arabic and Hebrew, along with music from the different faiths and a wide cross section of peoples and traditions. The music was lively and songs a nice way to pray together sharing common values. The reception had lots of goodies and was a good way for people to socialize and get to know one another. Altogether a pleasant experience and one I hope is repeated next year reported Helene Rosenblatt. “It’s not like any particular service from any of the houses of worship,” said Rose Riley, senior warden at Trinity. “It’s a lot of readings and prayers in the different languages with opportunities to sing.”

The service brought members of Trinity Episcopal together with the Wethersfield United Methodist Church, St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Baitul Aman “House of Peace” Mosque in Meriden, The Church of the Good Shepherd in Hartford and Temple Beth Torah in Old Wethersfield.

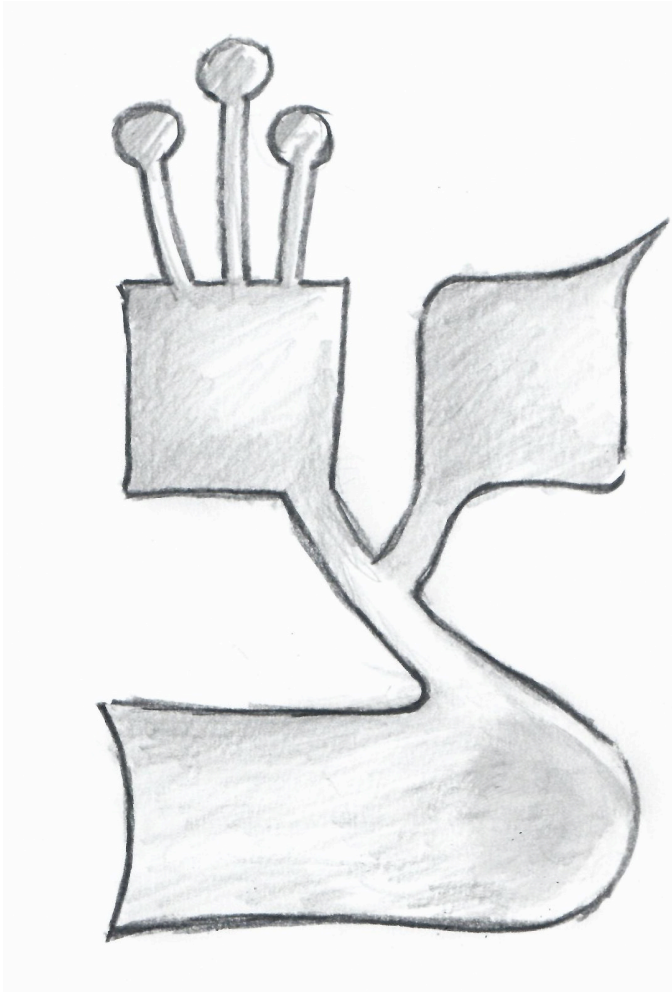
The idea for the interfaith service grew as Trinity Episcopal developed a relationship with Temple Beth Torah and Rabbi Seth Riemer. Last year, in the wake of the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Riley said the two congregations began discussing hosting services together. Thanksgiving presented the perfect time for the congregations to gather. The holiday is not religious, but widely celebrate across different faith groups and cultures in America, “It’s a good holiday to come together on and hope that the service will strengthen the community and bring people together regardless of their differences.

“I think that anything that brings us together simply as neighbors and people, ultimately makes it easier for us to be a cohesive neighborhood and town,” she said. “It’s harder to hate someone when you’ve shared a cup of coffee with them. I know that’s a simple answer, but I think it’s a good one.”



# Take a Look at Tzadi

The letter Tzadi is the eighteenth letter of the aleph-bet, a providential position to occupy.



The mystics tell us that God created the world with the Hebrew letters. Indeed, the Hebrew letters have such power and significance in our tradition, that when Moses broke the first set of tablets, it is said that the stones shattered on the ground, but the Hebrew letters took flight.

Most Hebrew words are built upon a three-letter foundation called a *shoresh*, or root. A family of related words branches out from the shoresh, formed through variations of vowels, prefixes and suffixes applied to the three consonantal root letters.

Tzadi is the first letter in the Hebrew root *Tzadi-Dalet-Kof*, meaning “righteousness,” or “justice;” It is fitting that the arms of the letter Tzadi reach upwards towards heaven, as if in prayer.

A righteous individual is called a *Tzadik*. Maimonides explains that a Tzadik is one whose merit exceeds their iniquity. Legend has it that thirty-six *Tzadikim Nistarim* (hidden righteous ones) exist at all times. Their identities are concealed—unknown to themselves and all others, but by virtue of their righteousness, God spares the world. This concept of the existence of righteous individuals who shoulder the burden of humanity’s iniquity has its origin in the biblical story of Abraham, who challenged God’s intention to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-33). How, argued Abraham, could the judge of all the earth destroy the righteous along with the wicked? Abraham tenaciously haggled God down to a promise to spare the cities if even ten righteous souls could be found within; (there were not even ten and Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with fire and brimstone).

The number thirty-six was fixed in Talmudic times. Rabbi Abbaye (who lived in Babylonia in the fourth century CE) offered a verse from Isaiah that reads, “happy are those who wait *for Him*.” (Isa.30:18) The Hebrew construction *for Him* is formed from two letters – Lamed-Vav, whose numerical value totals thirty-six, and so the thirty-six Tzadikim Nistarim are also known in Yiddish as the *Lamed Vovniks*.

“*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof!*”  
insists the Torah-  
”Justice, justice shall you pursue!”



This word family includes *Tzedakah*, most often translated into English as “charity.” The concept of charity, however, contains a nuance of generosity, an above and beyond act of beneficence.

In contrast Tzedakah is not exceptional, but rather our duty to others. To be righteous is to act in accordance with God’s expectations. Not only is Tzedakah an obligation, it is equivalent to all the other mitzvot combined. To quote the Psalmist, we must “*Defend the poor and the orphan; deal justly with the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked*” (Ps. 82:3-4).

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**Note:**

This Tsadi graphic was assembled from various sources for **The Star**  
By Micki Bellamy and Phil Lohman

# Remembering Andie Goldberg

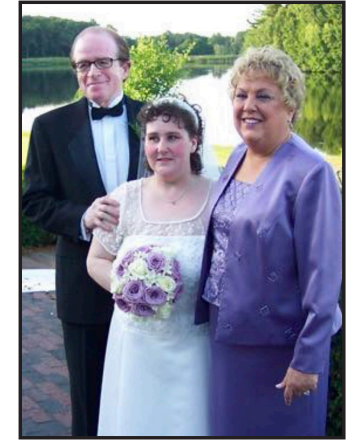
**Sallyanne Scott writes:** Andie Goldberg was a force to be reckoned with! “NO” was not a word in her vocabulary. If she wanted something she went after it and usually got it! Andie loved TBT and was always ready, willing and able to help. I remember how she and Judy Gold would round up prizes for Game Night. The tables were groaning under the weight of all the fabulous merchandise they were able to procure. The little dynamo who loved purple is truly missed by her family and friends. My granddaughter’s favorite color is purple and whenever she tells me so, it makes me smile and I remember Andie. It’s hard to believe she’s gone almost 5 years.

**Susan Reuben writes:** Andi always remembered Kayla’s birthday and would say, “How is Kayla? She is \_\_\_ years old now. Right?” She was always right.

**Judy Gold writes:** Andie was my partner for many terrific fund raising projects. I first met Andie when she had the idea for a TBT calendar about 30 years ago. She convinced me to “help”!!! She explained the idea and off she went knocking on lots of doors for ads. Boy did she get ads to fill twelve months of space. We did that for many years. Next was our game night. It started very simple until once again she gathered too many gifts. Game night was very successful and we were asked to repeat it for 5 more years. She and I chaired a huge plant sale for Mother’s day in the driveway of TBT. Shopping for the plants was an adventure! Chanukah latke-making was a big project but very rewarding. Harold Nevins would show up with 40 pounds of potatoes. Andie, Mira and Barry Schlein, and me along with the famous chef Marty would make over 500!!! This is just to name a few of the many many fund-raisers. Of course we had help from many, many TBT members. Andie was a very hard worker for TBT. She enjoyed the camaraderie of the friends she had made through the warmth TBT offered. Andie was a very giving, loyal and thoughtful person. She loved helping. I truly miss her friendship .

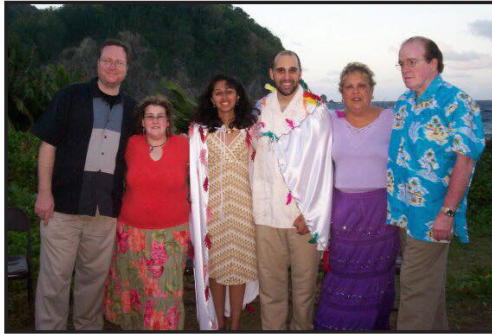
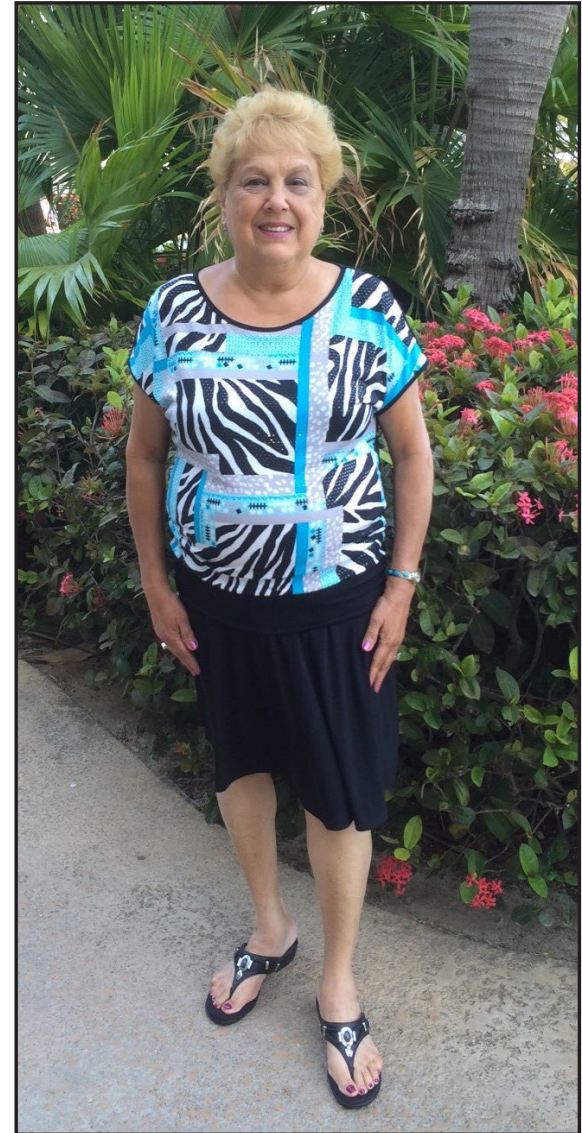
**Michelle writes:** My mom was a wonderful mom who is missed every single day. I miss her smile, her laugh, her hugs but most of all I just miss her so much.

**Rabbi Seth Writes:** My strongest memory of Andie is really a composite of occasions when I experienced her habit of being very direct. She would make a beeline and come right up to me after the service or at the event, greet me politely and warmly, shake my hand and--without further ceremony and holding back nothing--communicate exactly what was on her mind. Andie was not one to pull her punches, and I was fortunate in never being scorched by her powerful flame but always receiving a communication at once intense, humorous, gracious, encouraging and informative. With Andie’s passing the world lost one of the world’s greatest and most ladylike paragons of no-nonsense truth-telling--a class act in decency and honesty. I miss her.



**Deb Hammer writes:** Andie was a heart-on-her-sleeve, direct, honest and loving friend. She cherished special people and events in her life — many of my conversations with her included fond reminiscing about such things, followed by, “... and can you believe it’s been XX (insert #!) years since then?!” TBT was so important to her, and she put tremendous energy and spirit into any project she took on for the benefit of the Temple and congregation. I loved her sotto voce asides from behind her hand, that always evoked a laugh! Such a great person, I feel fortunate to have known her.







DEAR READERS,  
13 YEARS AGO RALPH HEROWITZ,  
TIM SPRATLIN AND I MADE THIS  
MENORAH AT TIM'S NEW BRITAIN  
WORKSHOP. WE TOOK PICTURES  
AND KEPT SKETCHES & PAPERWORK.  
AND PUT ALL IN A BLACK BINDER  
WITH ACETATE PAGES.

SOMEWHERE OR SOMEHOW I HAVE  
LOST THIS ALBUM. DID I LOAN IT  
TO SOMEBODY IN THE TBT FAMILY?  
A GREAT LOSS. PLEASE TEST YOUR  
MEMORY, LOOK AROUND, LET ME KNOW.

AT: PJLOHMAN@ATT.NET.

THANKS

PHIL





# US

**Rabbi:** Seth Riemer

**Co-Presidents:** Sallyanne Scott and Kathi Mag

**Executive Committee:** Sallyanne Scott, Kathi Mag,  
Carol Gershenson, Barry Goldberg and Karen Klein

**Financial Secretary, Lead Person for board meetings:**  
Sallyanne Scott

**Corresponding Secretary for Donations,  
Co-President, Gardening:** Kathi Mag

**Recording Secretary:** Carol Gershenson

**Membership and Publicity Chairperson:** Karen Klein

**Treasurer and Memorial Park Director:** Barry Goldberg

**Nominating Chair and Board of Education**

**Chairperson:** Cecile Bronfin

**High Holidays Committee:** Rabbi Seth Riemer, Barbara Checknoff,  
Cecile Bronfin, Fred London, Carol Gershenson,  
Susan Reuben, Sallyanne and Barry Scott, Kathi and Eliot Mag

**Friday Night Announcements:** Deb Ehrlich

**Head Religious School Instructor:** Rabbi Seth Riemer

**Religious Studies Teacher:** Michelle Cyr

**Adult Education and Book Club:** Ellen Sue Moses

**Receiving phone calls:** Rhoda London

**The Star Newsletter:** Phil Lohman, Micki Bellamy, Deb Hammer

**Ways and Means:** Kathryn Kenzel

aided by Judy Gold and Helene Rosenblatt

**Building Consultants:** Ralph Horowitz, Dave Forrest,  
Phil Lohman, Kathi Mag and Gary Evans

**Torah Study, Building Rentals, and Webmaster:** Deb Hammer

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## MAUREEN HOROWITZ

ABR, GRI, SRES, REALTOR

Licensed in Connecticut since 2002



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