

THE STAR

NEWSLETTER

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TEMPLE BETH TORAH, 130 MAIN STREET
WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT

Dear Members of our TBT Family,

*In case you missed my recent email blast,
I'm resharing a version of it here...*

Although the times are uncertain, my affection and concern for you are certain. I am keeping you in my daily prayers for health and well-being, and I wish you safe passage through the Coronavirus crisis.

Please feel free to email me at
olamhaba18@gmail.com

or call me at my cell
860-918-0213

if/when you have pastoral or other spiritual concerns for which you feel I can be of help...or if you simply wish to talk.

I'm keeping you in my prayers!

In shalom,

Rabbi Seth

Rabbi Seth's reflection on Torah wisdom in this challenging time

From the Rabbinic text Pirkey Avot: *eyzehu mehubad hamehabed et haberiyot* / “Who is honored? One who honors other people” (4:1). The passage employs verbs (*mehubad* and *me-habed*) relating to the concept of *kavod*/honor. The related Jewish expression is *kovid*, which Leo Rosten (in *The Joys of Yiddish*) translates as “Honor, glory.” It also means “respect.” When you give someone *kovid*, you’re respecting that person’s human dignity; in doing so, you become a *mentsch*—someone worthy of notable respect.

Pious Jews daven/pray the Amidah / Standing Prayer 3 times daily. It goes by several names, for example, *Shemoneh Esrey*—literally, “18,” referencing the Amidah’s 19 blessings—how a 19-blessing prayer ended up being called “18” is another story, a weirdly fascinating bit of historical detective work! Together “k/covid” and “19” conjure unnervingly jarring images: a novel lethal virus wreaking havoc on today’s world juxtaposed with our people’s ancient, steady, comforting, honorable prayer life.

At this point of history, the whole world is at a tipping point as it contends with the COVID-19 pandemic (COVID being an acronym for “Coronavirus”), 19 being a reference to 2019, the year the virus surfaced. To be honorable under these trying circumstances, we must, as the medical experts—whose wisdom we should honor—keep telling us, practice social distancing.” We do so for two interrelated purposes: to protect ourselves from the virus others might be carrying, and to protect others from that same virus we might be

carrying. To be worthy of honor, a person has, Pirkey Avot reminds us, to honor others in turn. To be a genuine, productive community, people have to respect each other, which means (under any circumstances and not only in a state of emergency such as this) to respect personal boundaries. The modern Jewish philosopher Martin Buber wrote, in *I and Thou*, about the holiness of human social encounter.

He saw it as holy in that each person standing *panim el panim* / face to face with another is, in a way like Moses during his meeting with God at the Burning Bush, standing in the presence of the Ultimate Unknown. Each of us, Buber meant, is finally unknowable to the other. Recognizing this awesome fact—seeing how an infinite, mind-boggling chasm separates one soul from the next—is, strangely, a helpful starting point for meaningful human engagement, reconciliation and healing. To respect another person is first of all to honor that person’s uniqueness and boundaries—not to trample on another’s rights, not to demean or disparage another’s preferences—but to be respectful of human diversity in all its manifestations. To honor other people is to feel infinite concern for the sacredness of each one’s essential being in the same way that we honor God’s Oneness.

The Hebrew word for “sacred” or “holy” is *kadosh*. In both Hebrew and English language the connotation of holiness is of being set apart for a specific and unique special purpose.

continued on next page

Continued: Torah wisdom in this challenging time

When you look upon the face of another person, remember the vast difference in experience, perspective and inclination that separates you from each other, and celebrate, cherish, that difference! (Mr. Rogers was right: you are special!) Here's where a strange, paradoxical truth sets in.

All assumptions we held about the value of our traditional forms of social engagement—involving as they did a craving for geographical proximity, physical engagement and sensate immediacy—are now (I mean, in this frightening historical moment) dangerous, even lethal to act on. We have to weave a new fabric of togetherness from virtual threads. Yet, I tell you that things were always this way, only, like even our wisest teacher, Moshe Rabbenu himself, we weren't paying very close attention.

Upon encountering God at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3), Moses wants to “turn aside” to “see” the wondrous spectacle (verses 3-4), but God tells him to back off: “Don't come close!...The place on which you're standing is holy ground” (verse 5). God is telling Moses to practice social distancing—to step back and away from his most intimate friend, God! Here's the paradox: in order to be close to God, Moses must step back; in order to be close to each other, we too must step back.

If we do so, our doctors and scientists (I picture them as faithful servants of Rofey Hol Basar / the Healer of All Flesh) are all

telling us—I repeat—that the plague will abate and life, with lessons learned and perspective altered from this sobering trauma, will be able to resume. COVID-19 is a dreadful burden we don't wish on ourselves or anyone, yet here it is to teach us an important, often forgotten fact about what being human within the larger orbit of our social affections and commitments (the big picture, the cosmic view) has always meant, that teaching in our time being a matter of global urgency. The disease is reminding us, with painful irony, to respect each other by honoring the distance between one living soul and another. When we practice social distancing, we're preserving precious human life, and we're also living out Torah's holiest lesson *lehavod ultifaret* / “for honor/kavod and glory” (Exodus 28:2). That way, we honor the *tzelem elohim* / image of God, a spark of divinity we share.

Although you and I are not physically in the same space, we are a phone call, an email away. And we are spiritually connected by our ability to cherish each other from a distance and with respect, honor/kavod, for our individuality, our holiness. I will keep praying for your health and safety. May The Healer of All Flesh heal the sick. May the Shield of Abraham guard us all. May the Divine Shepherd guide us through this darkness to a place of light and hope.

Shalom.

and Rabbi Seth's Passover Message

We are turning toward Pesah/Passover, in whose hagadah/narrative the figure of Paro/Pharaoh looms large as a foil to the Divine Liberator. Our Exodus story tells how God unshackles Hebrew slaves from the oppressor's tyranny. Pharaoh is first in a long line of real-life villains who aimed to thwart Israel's worldly aspirations and crush its free spirit. Over the centuries, resistance to brutal authorities became more difficult; through the long Rabbinic epoch (lasting from the dawn of the Common/Christian Era till the 19th century), our people retreated inward—shrinking from social activism on the historical stage—and a medieval mindset followed suit.

It reoriented us to think of Pharaoh not as a flesh-and-blood slave-driver but as a mental despot evilly tyrannizing over the human soul. A typical moralistic motif rabbis preached from the bimah/pulpit was this sort of chastisement: "Jews, discipline your hearts not to slip into hedonistic self-indulgence! Avoid the impulsive, immoral temptations of this fleeting world! Bind yourselves instead to the everlasting verities of God's holy Mitzvot/Commandments!" That preachy attitude is a distortion of our tradition's moral outlook since Judaism carries an innate enthusiasm for physical life and the delights of mortal existence. Still, these puritanical platitudes were long widespread within the Jewish community. There are nonetheless two potent grains of truth to such thinking...

The name "Paro/Pharaoh" comes from a Hebrew verb meaning to "let go/let alone/let loose." I think of the teenager who sullenly slams her door in her mom's face or who comes in at one in the morning and insolently brushes off his dad's demand for accountability: "Leave me alone! Fine, ground me for a month—see if I care!" Who defiantly screams, "I'll do whatever I want! What are you gonna do about it?" The Pharaoh of our Torah story is a grown-up version of this sort of out-of-control adolescent.

Ignoring social constraints, Pharaoh insists on being left alone to do whatever he wants, no matter the cost; insists, moreover, that others bow to his rampant will. Sooner or later that reckless approach toward living runs smack into a brick wall: someone else is bound to disagree, object, push back. All of us should behave respectfully toward others and be responsible for our own conduct; mature behavior does require self-restraint, which is healthy and good—that's one grain of truth. How, though, does self-restraint blossom into a religious ethos/value system we all can happily, wholeheartedly agree to live by? Being good shouldn't squelch your individuality and regiment your spontaneity.

As Jewish thinking on Pharaoh and what he represents evolves, we discern the inner tyrant who oppresses our creative capacities. The second grain of truth in our ancient rabbis' sermonizing is thus their insight that the human spirit can find itself enslaved. Not all expression of our natural instincts is rampant, vicious, addictive self-indulgence, however. The Evil Inclination is not necessarily lurking in those instincts. To repress them is harmful, cruel. (Teenagers have a right to rebel.)

Each person's path forward requires cooperation but also self-affirmation. What can liberate is a prosocial, consensual vision allowing for individual empowerment—a way to channel our personal choices and private passions into our shared aspiration for the Greater Good. By way of our Rabbis' emphasis on disciplined self-reflection, we return to the Torah tradition's activist vision and mission (dramatically represented through the Exodus story that has inspired liberation movements down through history). Our commitment to freeing humanity from tyranny in the social realm begins, then, with reflecting on who we are as individuals seeking fulfillment.

I wish you and all your loved ones a completely fulfilling, purely joyful Pesah!

Co-Presidents Message

Hello TBT family. Just wanted you to know how lucky we have been to have had such a mild winter, which helped to keep our TBT heating expenses down and your own as well!

On Sunday, February 9th, we had our Tu B'Shvat Seder, which was a big success, with about 15 in attendance. We had a lovely gathering for a beautiful event ushering in the coming of spring to Israel!

Sunday, March 8th was our Purim Celebration. We had a Purim Skit put on by our Religious School students and their teacher, Michelle. We also had a Sing-Along lead by Rabbi Seth! Cecile Bronfin, our hamentashen queen, brought the yummy hamentashen, Kathi Mag brought delicious brownies, bagels with a smear, and fresh fruit! See photos that follow here. As usual our set-up/clean-up committee, who are the backbone of TBT, were on hand to help out as well! About 20 party revelers were in attendance and all had a wonderful time eating and shmoozing!



As stated before, we hope to continue our building repairs by having the rest of the building scraped, primed and painted. We also need to look into insulating the complete basement, as it is a huge detriment to our heating bill! We are waiting on an estimate for that cost so please start saving your pennies for the completion of these repairs.

Just a reminder that the bathrooms at the front of the Sanctuary are now permanently closed. The bathrooms by the social hall are now gender neutral, which means both bathrooms are available for everyone to use!

Spring is surely on the way, so let's have positive thoughts about the greening of our neighborhoods, the warming of the weather, and of course, preparing for Passover! In case you forgot, the first seder is Wednesday, April 8th!

Sallyanne and Kathi, your Co-Presidents

Purim 2020

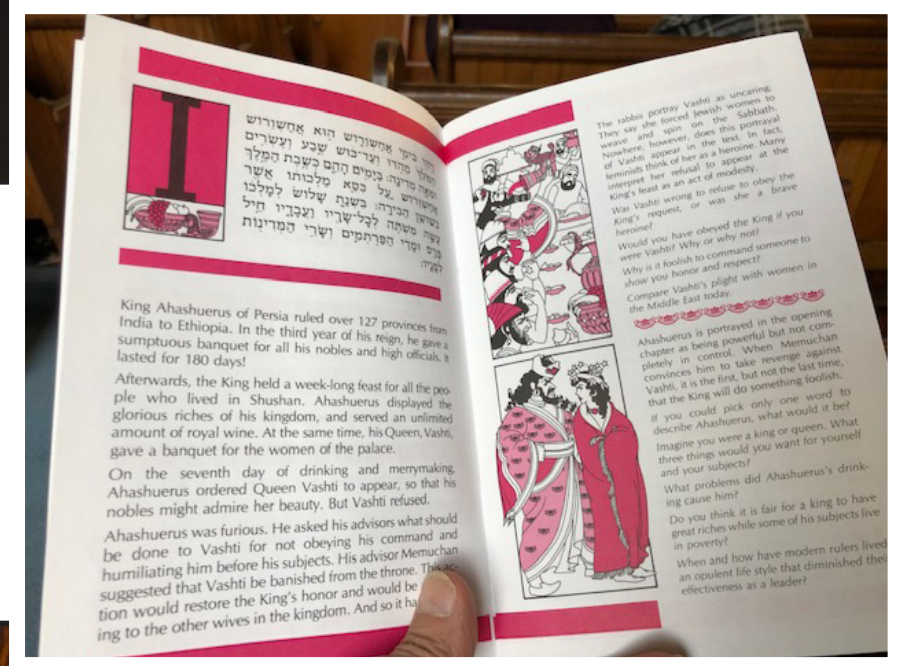


Cecile Our Hamantaschen Queen

Purim Shpiel...Megillah and song!







And Our Rocking Rabbi!



SHERLEY ROSE DOBKIN 1921-2020



Sherley & Jerry Berg c. 1936



Sherley and Jerry taken in 2015 when she was 94 and he was 88.

Sherley Rose Dobkin, 98, beloved wife of the late Samuel “Mully” Dobkin died on Saturday February 1, 2020 at her residence in Sarasota, Florida. Sherley was born on March 16, 1921 in the Bronx, New York to the late Julius and Bertha Richman Berg. Though an Honor student, the Depression forced her to put off further educational pursuits until later in life. She received her Associates Degree with honors from the University of North Florida in 1980. On November 3, 1940, she married Mully, the love of her life. Their life together was a great adventure for the next 45 years until his passing in 1985. Following the path of Mully’s career, they made their home in Middletown and Wethersfield, Connecticut, Acton, Massachusetts, Bath, Ohio, Saginaw, Michigan, and Jacksonville, Florida. In 2012 she made her final move to Sarasota. Despite all of the stops on their journey, she always considered her beloved Wethersfield to be home. In Wethersfield, she participated in many community activities such as the Little League and the Cub Scouts.

She was a Founding and Lifetime member of Temple Beth Torah. She dedicated most of her

non-working hours to the Temple. She taught Religious school, chaired committees, and was a member of the Board of Trustees for many years. Sherley is survived by her two sons, Neale and his wife Barbara of Sarasota and Barry and his wife Maryanne of Poplar Grove, Illinois., her grandchildren Marcy (David) LeLacheur, Leigh (Jennifer) Dobkin, Brian Dobkin and Sarah (Jeffrey) Budrovic, and great grandchildren Samuel LeLacheur, Gwentyth LeLacheur, Elliot Budrovic and Max Budrovic. Neale’s stepchildren Jacquelyn (John) Guiel, Mary (Michael) Fiorini, Barbara(Michael)McCormick, their eleven children and ten grandchildren. Other survivors include nephew Jeff (Debra) Berg and niece Michele(Rene)Lerer. She was predeceased by her brother Jerry Berg and sister-in-law Joan Fields Berg, stepson Mark Lines and a lifetime of friends in Wethersfield. A graveside celebration of Sherley’s life and her interment was held February 9th at the Emanuel Cemetery, 1361 Berlin Turnpike, Wethersfield Weinstein Brothers Mortuary was in charge of the arrangements.

Thanks to the Dobkin family for photos.

Donations as of 2/28/2020

In Memory of David H. Goldberg,
father of Rhoda London
Rhoda and Fred London
In Memory of Sherley Rose Dobkin
Jeff Berg
Rene and Michele Lerer
(for the Torah Repair Fund)
Elayne Cantor
Scott Michaels and Cara Kraus
James J. Murphy
Eileen M. Patnaude
Stuart and Estelle Beckerman
Robert and Elaine Bartels
Amy S. Lokrantz
Eugene and Penny Richman
Eliot and Kathi Mag

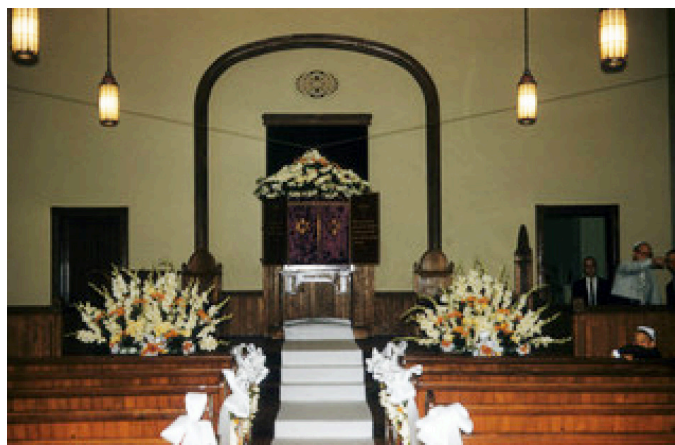
Wethersfield Weddings Exhibit

The Wethersfield Historical Society recently held an exhibit at the Keeney Memorial on Main Street on Wethersfield Wedding history and practices. Wedding dresses loaned from residents were displayed. The Society noted that the common threads that tie all weddings together are love, family and hope for the future. In this community collaborative exhibit, wedding gowns and accessories from the historical society's collection and a variety of clothing and mementos on loan from community members celebrated traditions surrounding the weddings that have built new families for our community.

Our own Lynn Kaplan and Barry Goldberg loaned a Katubah and Jewish wedding artifacts for the exhibit. Phil Lohman designed the graphics seen in the photo. Though the show is now over, we will keep the graphics and move them to to be displayed on the TBT social hall's noticed board.



The Exhibit included photos from the Kessler /Carlin wedding on August of 1960, TBT's first.



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

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Recording Secretary: Carol Gershenson

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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

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."

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TBT's Religious School