



THE STAR

TuBshvat Celebration Issue

MARCH / APRIL 2022

SH'VAT / ADAR I / ADAR II / NISAN 5782

VOL. 25 NO. 2

**TEMPLE BETH TORAH, 130 MAIN STREET
WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT**

Contents

- **Message from Rabbi Alan**
- **Messages from the Co-Presidents**
- **News and Notes**
- **Paid Advertisement**

■ Rabbi Alan's words

PURIM: WHAT IS IT? WHY IS IT?

Purim begins on Wednesday evening March 16. On Sunday March 20 at 1:00 PM, we will joyously celebrate, the survival of the Jewish people, who almost perished because of one person's hatred. Purim is a holiday in which we celebrate our connections and survival. We are obligated to fulfill mitzvot on this holiday. What connects each of these mitzvot to one another is their relationship to the unity of the Jewish people. I shall explain. Come and learn...

A mitzvah is the obligation to hear the megillah. In the Scroll of Esther, we learn of Haman's intent to destroy the Jewish people, whom he describes as "scattered and dispersed" among the peoples of the land. Through his hatred he connivingly convinces the king that even though the Jews may be separated from one another, their influence should not be underestimated. Perhaps their power is a result of their distance from one another. Does any of this sound familiar? It is an old song that gets sung in every generation when someone feels threatened by the presence of the Jewish people. So, on Purim we gather together as a means of preserving our unity. We listen to the tale as a community, in the same way that we come together for services so that those who are reciting Kaddish are supported by community. We connect to one another physically.

Although the events of the Megillah that we read may seem far-fetched, what might others say when they read the chronicles of our own generation about events in Israel, here in America and in other parts of our world where Jews are vilified? As we remember the attacks in the past few years on American synagogues, including Colleyville, Texas, a few weeks ago.

You can put a little excitement into your life by reading the Story of Esther. The Megillah (the Book of Esther) is an extraordinary book to be in the Bible because there is no mention of God in the book. The traditional interpreters of the Bible explain this omission as related to the name Esther which comes from the Hebrew word "hestair" which means hidden.

In this world, nature not only points to the existence of God as Manifested through the laws of nature; but nature also masks the existence of God as we attribute all events to natural phenomena.

For the rabbis of old, the fall of Vashti, the elevation of Haman, the elevation of Esther, Haman's determination to kill off the Jews and Esther's ability to save them, Achashverosh's insomnia, and the elevation of Mordechai - all were orchestrated by God in a subtle, hidden way to redeem the Jewish people by apparently natural means. One must look very deeply to discern the hand of God in the story.

And so it is in our very own lives, as Purim reminds us to take the time to look back at our lives, so that we can see many extraordinary coincidences" that enabled us to get to where we are today. Recall those unlikely meetings with just the right people, being in just the right place at the right time, seeing a great opportunity in

the most unexpected fashion.

Judaism urges us to see all these events and relationships as examples of God's providence in our lives, an expression of God's infinite love for each of us, enabling us to fulfill the special task which was to given us. And if we can honestly view life in this way, our lives can be enriched many-fold and every day is seen as an opportunity for greatness - by God's standard. Let none of us be guilty of missing such moments. Let us open our eyes and revel in having been given the gift of life and the special task which God has placed upon us.

Another mitzvah is the obligation to have a "drinking" party (Mishteh in Hebrew. The joy that is inherent in the celebration of Purim can only be felt when we are in the presence of others. There is little joy in being alone. "Drinking" does not mean losing one's faculties by drowning one's sorrows in a pool of alcohol. Rather, drinking in moderation is meant to connect us to the joy that is in our hearts when we reach out to others in recognition of the good things in life. Coming together provides us with strength of purpose, connecting us to one another on a higher level. On Purim we drink - as yet another way to let down our defenses. As the Talmud says, "Nichnas yayin, yatza so-de" - when the wine goes in, the secret comes out. ("Wine" and "secret" have the same gematria, 70.)

Also, as we celebrate the most joyous Jewish holiday of Purim, this is our time when we dress up in costumes.

At first glance, wearing costumes seems contrary to the concept of clothes as self-revelation. After all, are not costumes a false reflection of our inner identities?

The truth, however, is that many people are confused about who they really are - and in effect wear a mask all year round. Therefore, on Purim, we "drop our daily masks." The costumes we wear do not hide our true selves, but rather reveal an even deeper degree of self-image!

Purim is also our time to send gifts, which are usually sending gifts of food to family and friends called Mishlo'ach Manot.

Upon entering the synagogue on Purim, let us collect money as gifts for those who do not have, (as Matanot) which will be donated to Mazon: A Jewish Response for Hunger, that will be used to feed the hungry. Thank you for your support in our communal effort to nourish all those who are hungry.

At our Tu B'shevat Seder, one of our member participants asked why don't we do more joyous events? Well, we do and here comes Purim. All are welcome to join our joyous festivities.

Happy Purim!
Rabbi Alan

■ Co President Deb Hammer remarks Zoom Shabbat gaining in attendance



Zoom Shabbat is not the favorite of everyone, but it has certainly “opened doors” for those who are living a distance away, nursing an injury, not comfortable driving at night, or are simply not ready to mingle with others while COVID is still a thing. In the past, we used to have to cancel services any time there was inclement weather. Now, as pictured here, we can gather virtually rather than cancel a Friday evening service (note the rabbi is in his home office)! At least 20 folks joined in on this particular snowy evening, and many hung out in the Zoom space after the service to chat and catch up! Ruth joins in just about every Friday by phone. On this evening, one of Ruth’s daughters helped her link in by phone to our Zoom. Zoom is an option we would never have imagined 2 years ago. Now... I’m so appreciative of how it helps us connect with one another in ways that weren’t possible before. Just recently, I was filling in for Rabbi Alan while he was traveling. I invited my group of family to attend -- about a dozen of us that have had weekly Zoom gatherings ever since the early isolation days of COVID. How fun that, in addition to our “TBT family” in the sanctuary and on Zoom, I also had family from New York City, Hudson Valley, NY, New Jersey, Utah and California in the mix!

■ Co President Dave Forrest reports: Eagle Scout Project tackles TBT basement

What's been happening over these cold winter months to update and improve our Temple. The following pictures begin to tell the story. Hopefully, you will stop by during a Shabbat service or Torah Study (as we are emerging from the grips of the corona viruses) and discover for yourself.

Victor Gianfaglione, a Wethersfield resident and Wethersfield High School student, is an Eagle Scout Candidate with Troop 85 Connecticut Rivers Council. He chose Temple Beth Torah for his Eagle Project as he thought it would be a good fit to fulfill the rigid Scout requirements. Over many months he completed a 32 page Eagle Scout Service Project Workbook which then was approved by his District and Council representatives in late December.

The project goal was to give our temple a new and improved future of education and enlightening minds. In order to do that, he organized and executed a very valuable and worthwhile project. The project involved removing old furniture, equipment, and teaching supplies to make room for new equipment that will improve the worship and educational needs of the temple. Victor and his scouts completed painting and cleaning that provided a face-lift to the overall appearance of the building. Victor oversaw and helped with the tasks which included cleaning out multiple areas and selected areas for painting. He led by deciding who did each job, what skills were needed, and getting the project completed.

In addition to providing service and fulfilling the part of the scout oath, “to help other people at all times”, one of the primary purposes of the Eagle Scout service project is to learn leadership skills, or to improve or demonstrate leadership skills you already have. Related to this are important lessons in project management and take a responsibility for a significant accomplishment.

Victor and his team of fellow scouts along with his supervising Scout Master, Eric Powers, accomplished what they set out to do. They spent the weekend of January 22/23, 2022 cleaning and hauling and painting. And eating. The accompanying pictures demonstrate the efforts that were put forth.

Temple Beth Torah was pleased to be the project beneficiary and be able to support Victor's endeavor by making the facility available to him and his team. Victor is a respectful young man, skillful in his approach and in command of his leadership skills. He will be awarded is Eagle Scout rank during the month of March 2022. Congratulations to him on his accomplishment.

In the coming months, stay tuned for other improvements.
TBT is your house of worship. See you there.

Scout Master, Eric Powers, supervises Scout Troop 85!









Scouts at work.

Two dumpsters full of stuff!





Co-President Dave Forrest





Cleaned out!

■ Letter from Janet

Dear TBT members,
January 28, 2022

Our zoom Tu B'Shvat Seder on Sunday, January 23rd was a delight as delicious as a date! This sentiment, in a nutshell, describes our collective, positive personal experiences! We all enjoyed dreaming of the outdoors - warm spring rains and pink blossoms on almond trees in Israel, as well as renewing our interest and need to take care of our land. As Deb aptly pointed out, Tu B'Shvat reminds us of how Native American Tribes are stewards of the earth, respecting all living things. We heard a plea to plant trees, and join one another, "...to every purpose under heaven." (Pete Seeger)

Rabbi's "Lessons in honor of Trees," and "Trees are our great teachers" in his excellent Tu B'Shvat message on January 20th is included on the next page here.

We appreciated this service greatly, Rabbi!
With flowers in the spring, and buds on the trees,

Cheers,
Janet Rosenblatt



■ Rabbi's Tu B'shevat message from Jan. 20, 2022

Let us Grow and Be like the Trees

Lessons in honor of Tu B'shevat the birthday of the trees.

We recently celebrated Tu B'shevat-the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat.

This began the growing season in Israel with the Almond tree showing its first buds.

So, what does this have to do with us, as some of us dread going outside in this freezing dead of the winter?

Trees are our great teachers -- they use their roots for sustenance, while their branches reach up into the sky as if they are praying, and serve to protect themselves from harm, give shade, and provide a home.

1. Let go of the past: Trees let go of their dead leaves. Evaluate whether our choices today are being made with our present set of values and beliefs or whether we are holding onto ideas that no longer help us grow.

2. Growth takes time: The greatest oak was once just a little nut that held its ground. Sometimes it seems like we aren't moving forward despite our efforts to grow. Yet growth is often subtle and slow. Consistency and courage nurtures our growth even when we can't see any progress. Hold your ground, one day we will reach further than we can imagine.

3. Plant today: The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second best time is now. It's never too late to begin something new, every seed we plant counts and is a gift to the next generation.

4. Give life: Imagine if trees gave off Wi-Fi signals; we'd be planting them without stop! Trees produce the oxygen we breathe and give us life. We can also give life by teaching others what we learn, by inspiring each other and by choosing to use our resources to give.

5. Reframe darkness: Seeds are buried deep beneath the earth's dark surface. They shiver in the frozen soil, their shells break apart, leaving them open and exposed. But the seed wouldn't grow if it was cradled in the light or if its shell was encased in armor. Darkness and brokenness often surround us before we can break through the surface. Sometimes the worst moments come before the greatest light.

6. Reach for the sky: New trees are fragile, they can't reach very high. But even the smallest tree looks like it's reaching to touch the sun. Reach for the sky.; the higher we aim, the more motivated we will be to reach for greatness.

These are the items needed for a virtual Tu B'shevat Seder:

Fruits/nuts that are...

...Hard outer-soft inner: such as pomegranate, walnut, coconut or pineapple

...Soft outer-Hard inner: such as olive, avocado, cherry, peach or date

...Soft throughout: such as strawberry, fig, raisin or grape

2 types of wine or grape juice: one white and one red

Please join us when we celebrate again next year!
Rabbi Alan

Paint Night TBT Style!

It's time to complete the exterior painting of our beloved TBT. As you all know, we have undertaken this job in two parts because of the cost. Now, this last phase and some touch-up work on the front is about to begin.

Our trusty painter, Dom Antonucci will complete the task. Dom will be using the actual paint brushes, so no need for you to get dirty, but we do need you to "paint" a check to help cover the expenses!

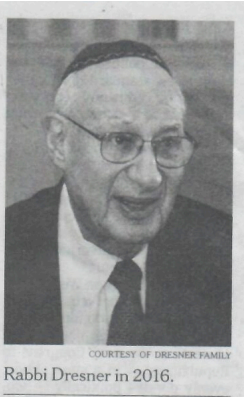
We ask you to send whatever you can to help finance TBT's facelift. We all know what a little Botox can do for wrinkles and believe me, TBT has lots of them. After all, the building is almost 200 years old!

Please make your check out to Temple Beth Torah and mail to:

Sallyanne Scott
105 Sunmeadow Drive
East Berlin, CT 05023

We will be celebrating the completion of this project when the weather warms up!
More information to follow.

A clipping from The New York Times



Dear Star Readers... Your editor takes the liberty of including this inspiring obit for your interest. Please note that the rabbi is NOT a relative of our long time friend Mara Dresner.

Rabbi Israel Dresner, 92 Civil Rights Champion

By Sam Roberts New York Times

Israel S. Dresner, a New Jersey rabbi who ventured into the Deep South in the 1960s to champion civil rights, befriended the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and was jailed multiple times for demonstrating against racial segregation, died on Jan. 13 in Wayne, N.J. He was 92.

His death, at a senior living center, was caused by colon cancer, his son, Avi, said.

By the time Rabbi Dresner joined the civil rights movement, he was already a veteran of political protests, having been arrested at 18 in 1947 outside the British Empire Building at Rockefeller Center in Manhattan in a protest against Britain's refusal to let the Exodus, a ship loaded with Holocaust survivors, land in British-controlled Palestine, an incident that inspired the novel of the same name by Leon Uris in 1958 and a subsequent film.

In 1961, as part of the first Interfaith Clergy Freedom Ride to the South, Rabbi Dresner and nine others, known as "the Tallahassee Ten," were charged with unlawful assembly in trying to integrate an airport restaurant in Tallahassee, Fla.

They were released on bond following their convictions and, with Rabbi Dresner as the lead plaintiff, pursued appeals all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which remanded the case to the Florida courts. He and the others then returned to Florida to serve brief jail terms.

In 1962, in Albany, Ga., he was booked in what was described as the nation's largest mass arrest of religious leaders, during a march demanding desegregation. It was there that he first met Dr. King, shaking hands through the bars of the cell in which Dr. King, too, had been jailed with hundreds of other protesters.

In 1964, Rabbi Dresner led 16 fellow clergymen, including other rabbis, in a protest outside a segregated motel in St. Augustine, Fla. During the demonstration, five Black protesters plunged into the whites-only swimming pool and were clubbed by the police.

"We came as Jews who remember the millions of faceless people who stood quietly, watching the smoke rise from Hitler's crematoria," the rabbis said after their arrest. "We came because we know that, second only to silence, the greatest danger to man is loss of faith in man's capacity to act."

Dr. King wrote to Rabbi Dresner that year, saying: "It is your valiant act that touches the conscience of Americans of good will. Your example is a judgment and an inspiration to each of us."

In 1965, at Dr. King's behest, Rabbi Dresner delivered a prayer in Selma, Ala., two days after marchers were brutally attacked by law-enforcement authorities in what was immortalized as Bloody Sunday as the protesters tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge on their way to Montgomery, the state capital, to demand voting rights.

Dr. King reciprocated by preaching twice at Rabbi Dresner's synagogue, Temple Sha'arey Shalom, in Springfield, N.J.

All told, Rabbi Dresner was convicted in three civil rights cases, his son said. His last arrest came in 1980 outside the South African consulate in New York City in a protest against apartheid.

In 2015, he told the St. Augustine Record that Jewish doctrine had persuaded him to follow his conscience to take action in the cause of civil rights with the conviction "that racism and slavery in America was wrong, and segregation in America was wrong."

After he received a colon cancer diagnosis, he told NPR late last year, "I feel a little guilty leaving the present world where the forces of hatred and discrimination seem to be on the rise and democracy seems to be in danger."

He was able, at least, to complete his personal agenda, his son said. He visited the graves of his parents and grandparents with his children, went to a Broadway show ("The Book of Mormon"), attended services at Central Synagogue in Manhattan, and ate a pastrami on rye at Katz's delicatessen on the Lower East Side.

Israel Seymour Dresner (known as Sy, or Si) was born on April 22, 1929, on Manhattan's Lower East Side to immigrants from Eastern Europe. The family moved to Borough Park in Brooklyn, where his father, Abe, owned a delicatessen not far from Ebbets Field. His mother, Rose (Sternchos) Dresner, was a homemaker.

After going to Orthodox Jewish schools and graduating from New Utrecht High School in Brooklyn, he went to Brooklyn College, attended the Habonim Institute to become an organizer for the Labor Zionist Youth Movement and earned a master's degree in international relations from the University of Chicago in 1950.

He hitchhiked through Europe and was working on a kibbutz in the Negev Desert when he learned in a telegram from his mother that he had been drafted. He served in the Army from 1952 to 1954 in Indiana, where he became a chaplain's assistant.

Rabbi Dresner was in his mid-20s when, in 1954, he enrolled at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Reform rabbinical seminary in Manhattan. He was ordained in 1961.

"I think becoming a rabbi was his way to meld his Orthodox education and background with his Zionist political activism and passion for social justice," Avi Dresner said of his father.

Israel Dresner served as a student rabbi to a congregation in Danbury, Conn., and then to the Reform congregation Temple Sha'arey Shalom in Springfield from 1958 to 1960, after which he became its first full-time rabbi.

His marriage to Toby Silverman ended in divorce in 1991. In addition to his son, he is survived by their daughter, Tamar; his sisters, Phyllis Meiner and Eileen Dresner; and two grandchildren.

His son served in the Israeli Defense Forces, and his daughter volunteered on a kibbutz in Israel. They are producing a documentary called "The Rabbi and the Reverend," about their father's role in the civil rights movement and his relationship with Dr. King.

Rabbi Dresner was an early supporter of Soviet Jewry, opposed the war in Vietnam and supported the rights of the poor, women, immigrants, religious and ethnic minorities, disabled people, and gay men and lesbians. He was president of the Education Fund for Israeli Civil Rights and Peace (now Partners for Progressive Israel) and favored a two-state solution to the Palestinian conflict.

He was honored by President Barack Obama at the White House on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, which he attended. While he remained an optimist about race relations, told NPR, "we have a long way to go."

He retired as a rabbi in 1996 but never quit being a public citizen. His last public protest, in Trenton, N.J., was on Jan. 20, 2017, the day President Donald J. Trump was inaugurated. Rabbi Dresner was 87 at the time.

"A few years ago," Avi Dresner said, "when I called my dad for one of our twice weekly phone conversations, I asked him how he was doing, and he said, 'Well, I haven't lost my sense of righteous indignation, so I guess I'm doing OK.'"

"I think that pretty much tells you everything you need to know about him," his son added.

Last month, in an interview with WCBS-TV in New York, Rabbi Dresner said, "I want to be remembered as somebody who not only tried to keep the Jewish faith but to invoke the Jewish doctrine from the Talmud, which is called 'tikkun olam' — repairing the world — and I hope that I made a little bit of a contribution to making the world a little better place."

Donations

**From an anonymous member
and another from
Hartford Community Dance**

■ TBT's First Ever Belly Dance Workshop!

Our very own Yoelit Hiebert has graciously offered to lead this 90-minute workshop on Sunday, May 1, 12:00-1:30pm in the TBT Social Hall!

This program will include:

an overview of the history of belly dance,
demonstrations of typical props,
a "class" segment to try some steps out,
and culminating with the instructor dancing a number for the group

Cost is an \$18.00 donation to TBT

Wear comfortable clothes, such as yoga pants and a T-shirt. Men can attend as long as they're willing to participate.

Yoelit was recently featured in an article in the Jewish Ledger [Southern New England Jewish Ledger Online/Nov. 30, 2021, by Stacey Dresner]. As the article details, Yoelit discovered her passion for belly dancing 20 years ago. Since then, she has studied, performed, and taught the art of belly dancing to hundreds of women. To read the full article, please use your web browser and search "Jewish Ledger Yoelit Hiebert" and it will be the first result (sorry, we aren't able to put hyperlinks in our PDFs!).

Attendance will be limited to provide appropriate social distancing. You won't want to miss out, so sign up now by contacting TBT.W.CT@gmail.com !



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Hey Ceil, How ya doing?

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.

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